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Filozofski vestnik

p. p. 306, 1001 Ljubljana

Tel.: (01) 470 64 70

filozofski.vestnik@zrc-sazu.si | <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/>

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Tel.: (01) 470 64 65

E-pošta: narocanje@zrc-sazu.si

Orders should be sent to

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P.O. Box 306, SI-1001 Ljubljana, Slovenia

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**Rethinking Institutions:
Heterodox and Critical Perspectives**

Werner Bonefeld*

Notes on Wealth as a Real Abstraction and the Critique of Suffering

Keywords

critical theory, real abstraction, critique, suffering, wealth, economic compulsion

Abstract

The object of a critical theory of society is Man [*Menschen*] in her historically specific forms of life. The article argues against ontological conceptions of social labour and of economy. Instead it insists that historical materialism far from being a materialism of nature and history, is fundamentally a critique of the objectivity of the capitalist economic categories. For a critical theory of society, the economic concept, capital as a process of the valorisation of value, is not a natural thing but a social relationship between persons that is mediated through things. The fetishism of commodities is real. In the mediated world the social individuals appear as personifications of the economic object; and yet there would be nothing without their social practices—of self-preservation. Human suffering is objectively mediated. The article concludes that suffering is the non-conceptual content of the concept of society as a process of valorisation. The sheer unrest of life is the social constituent of the economic object.

Beleške o bogastvu kot realni abstrakciji in kritiki trpljenja

Ključne besede

kritična teorija, realna abstrakcija, kritika, trpljenje, bogastvo, ekonomska prisila

Povzetek

Predmet kritične teorije družbe je človek-bitje [*Menschen*] kot proizvajalec zgodovinsko specifičnih oblik življenja. Prispevek se zoperstavlja ontološki konceptiji družbenega dela in ekonomije in zagovarja tezo, da historični materializem nikakor ni materializem narave in zgodovine, marveč je v svojem temelju kritika objektivnosti kapitalističnih

* University of York, United Kingdom

werner.bonefeld@york.ac.uk | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6709-5313>

ekonomskih kategorij. Za kritično teorijo družbe ekonomski koncept – kapital kot proces valorizacije vrednosti – ni preprosto neka »naravna« reč temveč družbeno razmerje med osebami, ki je posredovano kot razmerje med rečmi. Blagovni fetišizem je realen. V posredovanem svetu se posamezniki v družbi prikazujejo kot posebitve ekonomskega objekta; in vendar ne bi bilo nič brez njihovih družbenih praks – samo-ohranitve. Človeško trpljenje je objektivno posredovano. Prispevek podaja sklep, da je trpljenje ne-konceptualna vsebina koncepta družbe kot procesa valorizacije. Gola nemirnost življenja je tako družbeni gradnik ekonomskega objekta.



Given the current state of technical development, the fact that there are still countless millions who suffer hunger and want must be attributed to the forms of social production, the relations of production, not to the intrinsic difficulty of meeting people's material needs.
 –Theodor Adorno, *On Interpretation: The Concept of Progress*¹

Immanuel Kant's conception of Enlightenment as humanity's exodus from self-imposed immaturity still possesses subversive cunning. Not only does he speak about self-imposed immaturity, that is Man-made immaturity, but he also sees humanity as a subject that can free herself from the immaturity of her social condition.²

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The notion of Man emerging from self-imposed immaturity presupposes opposition to the existing social relations. Kant's determination of the role of the scholar acknowledged this. He argued that only that science is true which helps the common Man to her dignity.³ Kant therefore demanded from scholarly work that

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "On Interpretation: The Concept of Progress (II)," in *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964–1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedermann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 144.

² Man, with a capital "M," is used here and throughout in the combined sense of *Mensch*, *Menschheit* and *Menschlein*—he/she/it or humanity as a concrete universal.

³ See Immanuel Kant, "Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse," in *Immanuel Kant's sämtliche Werke*, ed. G. Hartenstein (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1868), 8:625.

it reveals the true character of the political constitution and that failure to do so amounts to a deceitful publicity.⁴

Marx echoed Kant's idea of Enlightenment when he argued that human history would begin once social relations existed in which humanity would no longer be held in bondage as a living means for the accumulation of capitalist wealth, but in which humanity would be an end in itself. Against the bourgeois ideal of abstract equality, which recognizes rich and poor as equal partners in wealth regardless of their inequality in property, Marx argued for an equality of human needs. He went further than Kant by arguing that the unveiling of the true character of the constituted relations of human "immaturity" is not sufficient. In fact, Marx did not conceive of the existing social relations as "immature" in relation to the promise of their further development. Marx's critical theory sets out to show that the capitalist labour economy comprises definite forms of human social practice and that it is therefore the social relations themselves, not their labour economy, that require revolutionising for the sake of a society, he calls it communism, in which humanity is a purpose, not a means.

Towards a Critical Theory of Economic Compulsion: Wealth, Suffering, Negation

Critical theory thinks against the flow of the world, at least that is its intention. The opposite of a critical theory of society is not uncritical theory, however. It is traditional theory, at least according to Max Horkheimer who invoked the notion of a critical theory of society in his seminal essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" of 1937.⁵ If one were to summarise the difference between them, traditional theory, at its best, analyses the world of real (economic) abstractions to comprehend their political, economic, cultural, psychological, social, and historical truth from various standpoints, including the standpoint of labour. By arguing from the standpoint of labour, it establishes what society lacks in terms of

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⁴ See Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris, 1979). The inspiration behind this opening of my argument is Johannes Agnoli's "Destruction as the Determination of the Scholar in Miserable Times," in *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics*, ed. Werner Bonefeld (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 25–37.

⁵ Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: Continuum, 2002), 188–243.

the justice and rationality of its labour organisation, and what therefore needs to be done to overcome what it finds to be deplorable in the capitalist labour economy. In contrast, critical theory scrutinises the untruth of the economic abstractions. It asks about the social constitution of the relations of economic compulsion. Instead, then, of “stating what society lacks” with respect to the rational organisation of its labour economy and instead of asking “what praxis must realize” to achieve a more perfect “version of industrial society,”⁶ Adorno’s and Marx’s critical theory of capitalist political economy highlights “what is deplorable about society and has to be abolished.”⁷ What really is the social logic that holds sway in capitalist society? In their judgement, capitalist society does not promise a freedom from want. Rather, it promises that the dispossessed, free traders in labour-power, will have to work for the profit of the buyer of their labour-power to make a living as exploitable human material. Indeed, they understand that both the capitalist and the labourer are subject to the relations of economic compulsion, which under the threat of bankruptcy compels the employer of labour-power to make a profit from the living labour of its seller. What holds sway in capitalist society is the law of value, that is the law of the valorisation of living labour. The law of value posits the necessity of money to beget more money, on the pain of ruin. Marx thus conceived of the social character of capitalist society as an “abstraction in action.”⁸ It is, as Slavoj Žižek put it in the context of the anti-austerity struggles in Greece during the Eurozone crisis, the “real of capital,” one which turns counter-hegemonic struggles for progressive ends into alternative strategies of capitalist development.⁹

Herbert Marcuse articulated the critical meaning of society as an “abstraction in action” well when he argued that in capitalist society the world manifests itself

⁶ Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System* (London: Verso, 2016), 2.

⁷ Matthias Benzer, “Social Critique in the Totally Socialized Society,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 5 (June 2011): 588, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453710393317>. Benzer argues with reference to Adorno’s social theory.

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Two*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1978), 185.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, “Should the Left’s Answer to Rightist Populism Really Be a ‘Me Too’? Part I,” *The Philosophical Salon*, October 15, 2018, http://thephilosophicalsalon.com/should-the-lefts-answer-to-rightist-populism-really-be-a-me-too-part-i/#_edn1, para. 15.

“behind the backs of the individuals; yet it is their work.”¹⁰ On the one hand, the individuals owe their life to what society as a process of silent compulsion does to them. On the other, their endeavour to make a living furnishes society as a compelling abstraction with an independent consciousness and a will. The economic quantities move as if by their own volition beyond human control; and yet, their movement manifests the practices of the social individuals in the form of the economic object. With reference to the social classes, society as an abstraction in action entails, crudely put, that the social reproduction of the free labourers depends on how effective their living labour is exploited for profit by the buyers of their labour-power. Profitable employers hire workers; unprofitable employers go under. They shed labour. For those without independent means, free labourers, their access to the means of subsistence depends on achieving sustained wage income, the premise of which is the enrichment of the capitalist through the consumption of their labour-power, which they relinquished to him by agreeing on a contract of labour.

The money-form of capitalist wealth, money that yields more money, is the real power of society as a process of economic compulsion. Following Simon Clarke,

The drive to force down wages, intensify labour [. . .] is not a matter merely of the subjective motivation of the capitalist, but bears down on the capitalist with the objective force of competition [. . .]. Competition forces every capitalist to seek out means of reducing costs or accelerating the turnover of capital, the better to withstand immediate or anticipated competitive pressure. Thus, the individual capitalist is no less subject to the power of money than is the worker.¹¹

That is to say, exploiting labour for profit is the means of avoiding competitive erosion, liquidation, and bankruptcy. These outcomes are particularly painful for the workers who, left without employment, find themselves cut off from the means of subsistence. Profit is primary. The satisfaction of needs is a sideshow. For the sake of maintaining waged-based access to the means of life, the valori-

¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Negations*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Free Association Press, 1988), 151.

¹¹ Simon Clarke, *Keynesianism, Monetarism and the Crisis of the State* (Aldershot: Edward and Elgar, 1988), 100.

sation of capital is primary, making money out of money from the living labour of a class of people who make a living as free traders in labour-power.

What is “cannot be true.”¹² It is true that to reproduce herself, the worker “must produce surplus value. The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorisation of capital.”¹³ There is therefore a misfortune far worse than being a productive worker, and that is the misfortune of being a superfluous worker who, deprived of wage income, depends on the charity of others for her subsistence. It is because of their freedom as sellers of labour-power that the free labourers are prevented from “running away.”¹⁴ Following Herbert Marcuse, the “lash of hunger” compels them to “sell their services” for the profit of another class of Man.¹⁵ The class struggle is not about abstract ideas like socialism. It is a struggle for access to “crude and material things” and it is struggle over the labour process, effectively the conditions of exploitation.¹⁶

Forms of Critique: Forces of Production and Social Critique

The many variations in the Marxist tradition revolve around two contrasting readings of the critique of political economy. Commentators pose the critique of political economy as either a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour or a critique of *the* capitalist labour economy. According to the former, capitalism amounts to a historically specific mode of labour economy. This reading argues for a socialist mode of labour economy as the progressive alternative to capitalism. Its conception of socialism is programmatic in that it advocates for a perfected system of labour organisation by means of central planning. According to the latter, the critique of political economy does not argue from the standpoint of labour. On the contrary, it amounts to a negative critique of the capitalist labour economy. Its critique lacks in programmatic features. Instead,

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¹² Ernst Bloch, *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte Schriften, Band I*, ed. Johann Kreuzer (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1965), 336.

¹³ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 644.

¹⁴ Marx, 719.

¹⁵ Marcuse, *Negations*, 225.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 254.

it holds that the conceptual content of the society of the free and equal might emerge from the negation of the capitalist relations, that is, the struggle against the social conditions of suffering.

According to the standpoint of labour critique of capitalism, labour economy is an ontological principle. It holds that humanity has to exchange with nature to satisfy her needs. It rejects capitalism as a crisis-prone system of labour exploitation for private gain and demands the emancipation of labour from capitalist domination in socialism. Its argument for socialism is founded on a theory of modes of production as historically specific organisational forms of labour economy. According to this point of view, since “in any form of society human beings productively expend their corporeal powers,” the critique of capitalist labour economy has to differentiate between the “generic materiality” of human life as the transhistorical presupposition of the modes of production and the specific capitalist “historical form of wealth.”¹⁷ The analytical focus of this critique of capitalism falls on “the contradictory unity between the materiality of human life and its historically-determined social forms.”¹⁸ That is, it views as historically active the relationship between the transhistorically conceived forces of production and the historically specific social relations of production, as the decisive dynamic for the understanding of capitalism as a mode of production in “transition to communism.”¹⁹ Its conception of communism is founded on an ontological conception of the capitalist labour economy, that is, it argues that labour is the foundation of human existence. Therewith it supposes a transhistorical materiality of labour, and it thus ontologises labour activity in capitalism as an expression of human essence, abstractly conceived.²⁰ It ar-

¹⁷ Guido Starosta, “The Commodity-Form and the Dialectical Method: On the Structure of Marx’s Exposition in Chapter 1 of *Capital*,” *Science and Society* 72, no. 3 (July 2008): 31, 25, <https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2008.72.3.295>.

¹⁸ Alex Kicillof and Guido Starosta, “On Materiality and Social Form: A Political Critique of Rubin’s Value-Form Theory,” *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 3 (2007): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920607X225852>.

¹⁹ Paresh Chattopadhyay, “The Economic Content of Socialism: Marx vs. Lenin,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 24, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 1992): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/048661349202400306>; quoted in Kicillof and Starosta, 37.

²⁰ What comes to mind is Adam Smith’s conception of a human propensity to truck and barter that for him is the natural dynamic behind the growth in social wealth through the increase in labour productivity and the (technical and social) division of labour that it brings about. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed.

gues for communism as a morally rational organization of the natural necessity of labour. In short, the argument for a socialist labour economy recognises the capitalist mode of production as an historically overdetermined mode of labour economy, which through its development of the economic forces compels history forward as the unleashed forces of production come into conflict with the capitalist relations, which become too small and narrow for them, thereby creating the objective conditions for transition to socialism.²¹ As a critique of capitalist political economy, the argument about a transhistorical materiality of labour economy is as fruitless as the conception of the productive forces as a historical subject. The conception of labour economy as the “transhistorical essence of social life,”²² which will be perfected in socialism in the interests of the workers through the application of state-socialist reason, is illusionary in its grasp of capitalist political economy. However, as a dystopia, it is no less real. It replaces the semblance of freedom in market mediated forms of social coercion by the freedom of state socialism as an unmediated form of social coercion.

Following Adorno, the critique of political economy from the standpoint of labour perverts the critical intention of Marx’s historical materialism.²³ In his view, it ontologises the capitalist labour economy and naturalises the capitalist economic categories. The circumstance that Man needs to eat and has therefore to exchange with nature does not explain capitalism nor does capitalism derive from it. Man does not eat in the abstract.²⁴ Nor does Man struggle for life in the abstract. The struggle for life, invoked by Marx (and Engels) as a history of class struggle, takes place in definite forms of society. Instead, then, of transposing “every given struggle into the phrase ‘struggle for life,’” Marx’s critical theory

Edwin Cannan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 1:25. For an argument that Marxist economics derives from classical political economy, see Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology: From Adam Smith to Max Weber* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).

²¹ See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 43–4.

²² Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 167.

²³ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 335.

²⁴ As Georg Lukács put it, “existence can have no reality except [. . .] the reality of lived experience.” Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 179.

requires analyses of the “struggle for life as it manifests itself historically in various specific forms of society.”²⁵

Critically understood historical materialism is critique of capitalist society understood dogmatically as a historically overdetermined form of natural economic necessities and requirements. What appears in the appearance of society as a relationship between economic things is not some abstractly conceived economic nature. Rather, what appears in capitalist society as economic nature is Man in her historically specific social relations. The capitalist economic laws compel the social individuals as if they, the economic laws, were a person apart, and yet, their nature is a social nature. What compels them is their own social world. In the words of Marx, “it is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than to do the opposite, i.e., to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized. The latter method” he continues, “is the only materialist one, and therefore the only scientific one.” For him, the former method belongs to the “abstract materialism of the natural sciences, which excludes the historical process.”²⁶ There is only one reality and that is the reality of historically definite forms of life.

Marx’s point about the actual relations of life is key to social form analysis. It asks about the social constitution of the economic categories and expounds their “nature” as a social nature. For social form analysis, therefore, the forces of production and the normative categories are the forces and norms of the actual capitalist social relations. In the words of Moishe Postone, “Marx’s critique transforms the categories of political economy from transhistorical categories of the constitution of wealth into critical categories of the specificity of the forms of wealth and social relations in capitalism.”²⁷ Form analysis is critique of the economic categories as apotheosised forms of definite social relations. It conceives of historical materialism as critique of the existing social relations, including their normative values and forms of thought.

²⁵ Karl Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, June 27, 1870, in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2004), 43:527.

²⁶ Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 494n4.

²⁷ Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 56.

The social form approach to the critique of political economy emerged from the new left of 1968. It contains three overlapping methodological approaches. They are immanent critique, systematic dialectics, and *ad hominem* critique of the economic categories, which is decipherment of the economic abstractions as the apotheosised forms of definite social relations.

Immanent critique judges reality by the standard of its own claims. For example, it judges the reality of social equality by the standard of its normative claim to equality. By judging reality by its own criteria, it seeks to make the “petrified relations [. . .] dance by singing their own tune to them.”²⁸ Instead of criticising reality as failing to live up to its normative standards, it both demystifies the normative ideas of, say, freedom and equality as the pleasant norms of a dreadful contents, and retains a glimpse of what could be. Matthias Benzer makes this point about the double meaning of immanent critique well when he says with regards to Adorno’s critical theory, the “liberal category of freedom purports to yield the utopian image of a genuinely free individual” but “on closer inspection, it simultaneously depicts an individual released from feudal social structures who is granted the autonomy that the capitalist economy requires of ‘him’; a ‘mockery of true freedom [. . .] which compels the individual towards *ruggedness*.” At the same time, it critiques “society for failing to fulfil conceptual standards” which it “cannot avoid advocating” and which therefore lead to demands for “their social realization.”²⁹ Immanent critique interrogates the social coldness of the normative standard. There is a crack in everything. That is how the light gets in.

Systematic dialectics is associated with the work of Chris Arthur in the UK and the so-called New Reading of Marx of Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt in the former Federal Republic of Germany.³⁰ Systematic dialectics focuses on the categorical character of the capitalist political economy to under-

²⁸ Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction,” trans. Martin Milligan and Barbara Ruhemann, in Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 182.

²⁹ Benzer, “Social Critique,” 583–84.

³⁰ See Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Chris Arthur, *The Spectre of Capital: Idea and Reality* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Hans-Georg Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform: Untersuchungen zur marxischen Ökonomiekritik* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 1997); Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 2001); Helmut Reichelt, *Neue Marx-Lektüre: Zur Kritik sozialwissenschaftlicher Logik* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 2013).

stand the logic that holds sway in it. It recognises the social forms as real (economic) abstractions and argues that they establish the social framework within which, as Reichelt put it, the individuals encounter each other, “make contracts in the sphere of circulation, where they deal in mysterious economic forms with so-called ‘goods,’ and who have always already perceived each other as equal and free subjects of law, and, who, prior to this thinly veiled perception of themselves as independent subjects, experienced class society as one of inequality, exploitation and rule by an autonomised system.”³¹ Systematic dialectics elaborates the logic that holds sway in society as a process of real abstraction and expounds the categorical character of the relations of economic compulsion beyond the objective illusions of normative order thinking and the dogmatic materialism of a political left that deems itself capable of transforming the capitalist labour economy for the benefit of its surplus value producers.

Charlotte Baumann’s characterisation of systematic dialectics, the new Reading of Marx in particular, as a logicians’ account of the capitalist social relations is apposite.³² Although systematic dialectics delivers on the logic of the capitalist social nature, its concept of the social is tenuous. Systematic dialectics tends to take the identification of the logic of real abstraction as a goal, which entails the risk of falling back onto the (traditional) differentiation of society into system and lifeworld. Rather than conceptualising the capital relations with reference to the historical elements implicit in them, systematic dialectic posits capital as a conceptual totality akin to a Hegelian idea imposed on reality. For systematic dialectics the category of the free labourer is unsettling, to say the least. For Arthur “labour-power is not produced by capital; it is an external condition of capitalist production.”³³ In contrast Elena Louisa Lange argues that “labor power is [. . .] a capitalistically produced commodity.” She argues that capital produces the commodity “labour power [sic]” as “the direct source” of its “raison d’être:

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³¹ Helmut Reichelt, “Social Reality as Appearance: Some Notes on Marx’s Conception of Reality,” trans. Werner Bonefeld, in *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Routledge, 2017), 65.

³² Charlotte Baumann, “Adorno, the New Reading of Marx, and Methodologies of Critique,” in *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Chris O’Kane (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 55–76.

³³ Chris Arthur, “The Inner Totality of Capitalism,” *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 3 (January 2006): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920606778531752>.

profit.”³⁴ Her identification of the capital relation as a system that produces its own social premise conceives of the social relations in terms of their incorporated functionality. Postone’s account expresses the dualist conception of society as system and as lifeworld. He argues that capital “subjects people to impersonal, increasingly rationalized structural imperatives and constraints,” which “cannot be grasped adequately in terms of class domination.”³⁵ In his account, “capital” as system sets the objective framework within which the social conflicts unfold.

The identification of capital as an extra-social subject presumes what needs to be explained. On one hand, following Adorno, “the reality in which men live is *not unvarying and independent of them.*” On the other, following Clarke, the capitalist relations of production presuppose the historical emergence of a class of free labourers.³⁶ It is the case that a logic holds sway in capitalist political economy. It incorporates the individuals as its personifications. However, its shape remains human. That is to say, the individuals “live in social being, not in [economic] nature,” and their social being has not been given to them by the capitalist economic nature.³⁷ It is rather the historical result of their own—objectively compelled—social practices.

Discovering the untruth of the capitalist relations does not only entail discovery of the logic that holds sway in reified society. It also entails discovery of the simple fact that the capitalist “social order cannot exist without distorting men.”³⁸ The social individuals are not just cogs in a system of economic compulsion. As such cogs, mere human “instruments of production,” they are “possessed with consciousness.”³⁹ As Baumann puts it, they suffer “from the pressures” of their

³⁴ Elena Louisa Lange, *Value without Fetish: Uno Kōzō’s Theory of “Pure Capitalism” in Light of Marx’s Critique of Political Economy* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 47.

³⁵ Moishe Postone, “The Subject and Social Theory: Marx and Lukács on Hegel,” in *History and Heteronomy: Critical Essays*, ed. Koichi Maeda (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2009), 78.

³⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 28; Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology*, 118. See also Simon Clarke, “Class Struggle and the Working Class: The Problem of Commodity Fetishism,” in *The Labour Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work*, ed. Ana C. Dinerstein and Michael Neary, eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 50–69.

³⁷ Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 28.

³⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 194.

³⁹ Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 719.

own reified existence as personifications of the economic categories.⁴⁰ Society as a process of real abstraction does not suffer from the capitalist economic nature. It does not go on strike and does not struggle to make ends meet. The social individuals do, and they do so as personifications of their own social world that in the form of the economic object compels them into action.

On the one hand, the understanding of the mysterious character of the economic things, which “abound with metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,” rests on the comprehension of the human social practice that furnishes them with a will and a dynamic. The social individuals “do this without being aware of it” in the pursuit of their self-preservation.⁴¹ On the other, although society’s laws of motion abstract “from its individual subjects, degrading them to mere executors, mere partners in social wealth and social struggle, there would be nothing without individuals and their spontaneities.”⁴² Reification, society as system, “finds its limitation in reified Man.”⁴³ That is, the critique of reification amounts to the conceptualised praxis of the capitalist social relations. The preponderance of society as reified object entails the sheer unrest of life as its hidden, non-conceptual foundation and secret history. The need to make suffering speak, to “lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.”⁴⁴ In this context, suffering is not an existential term of pure subjective feeling, the mush of the soul. Rather, it is an objectively mediated term. It “is the weight of objectivity upon the subject, and because that which the subject experiences as its most subjective moment—the expression of suffering—is objectively mediated.”⁴⁵ While a definite logic holds sway in the social forms, the critique of political economy is decipherment of the social relations that constitute them. It is decipherment of the relations of economic compulsion as relations of the sheer unrest of life.

Concluding Remarks

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Social form analysis interrogates the economic categories as the objectified forms of definite social relations. Furthermore, it argues that the sheer unrest of

⁴⁰ Baumann, “Adorno,” 66.

⁴¹ Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 163, 166–67.

⁴² Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 304.

⁴³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 25.

⁴⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 17–18.

⁴⁵ Adorno, 18; translation modified.

life, the class struggle to avoid and alleviate suffering, is the hidden secret of the relations of economic objectivity.

The social mentality and the forms of thought of the acting individuals are incorporated in the spirit of money. However, money does not talk. It is rather the social individuals who speak in and through money as the independent power of their social relations. Money does not care about inflation or deflation, whether it belongs to the few or is desired by the many, or whether it yields living offspring or crashes. The validity of money is a social validity, and its power to compel the individuals to the point of madness is socially constituted. As the universal of the capitalist relations of economic compulsion, it “compress[es] the particular until it splinters, like a torture instrument.”⁴⁶ Yet, money does not care for the sacrifice of living labour on the altar of profit. The capitalist cares for profit – as he must – to avoid competitive erosion. The free labourers care for money, too. They struggle for money to make a living. In its entirety, the world of economic compulsion is a world of definite forms of human social practice, which endow society in the form of the “money subject” with a cold, calculating consciousness.⁴⁷ The defining character of bourgeois society is social coldness.

The critique of social coldness has to be more than just a normative argument about re-distributive justice, equality and freedom. Theoretical concepts and normative values “cannot be perceived without reference to the historical elements implicit in it.”⁴⁸ The history-making violence which divorced the direct producers from the means of subsistence imbues the bourgeois concepts of freedom and equality with a definite social content that appears in its civilised form as an exchange relationship between supposedly equal legal subjects—one trading her labour-power for a wage to “dodge the freedom to starve,” the other consuming the acquired labour-power for profit to avoid competitive erosion.⁴⁹

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⁴⁶ Adorno, 346.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 144.

⁴⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, ed. Christoph GÖdde, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 145.

⁴⁹ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 201. On law making violence and law preserving violence, see Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1986), 277–300; Amy Swiffen, “Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Law,” in *The SAGE*

The concepts of justice, humanity, freedom, and equality do *not* comprise a normative standard that remains somehow separated from an altogether disagreeable social content. Rather, they are afflicted with the injustice and inhumanity “under whose spell they were conceived.”⁵⁰ The truth of normative critique is the untruth of freedom as economic compulsion. It really is the case that the dynamic of the whole process of capital as self-valorising value is fed by the social practices of the class divided individuals who “owe their life to what is being done to them.”⁵¹ Clearly, the civilised regulation of social coldness is much preferable to its authoritarian conduct. Yet, by standing up for the free labourers the normative critique of capitalism endorses the system that compels them in their acquired freedom.

“Thinking means venturing beyond.”⁵² We know the bad; we should know how to avoid it, but we do not know the good. What a human freedom it would be to live life without anxiety and worry about the satisfaction of needs, and with time to spare for enjoyment. In the meantime, despite an immense accumulation of wealth, the poor and miserable continue to “chew words to fill their bellies.”⁵³

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- ⁵⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Samuel Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 66.
- ⁵¹ Theodor Adorno, “Society,” trans. F. R. Jameson, in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (London: Routledge, 1989), 275.
- ⁵² Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 2. For an appreciation of Bloch’s Marxism, see Cat Moir, “Ernst Bloch: The Principle of Hope,” in Best, Bonefeld, and O’Kane, *SAGE Handbook*, 199–215.
- ⁵³ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 102. On the lack of access to basic material things in our time, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). It now goes under the name of “cost-of-living crisis.” See “Cost of Living Crisis,” *Financial Times*, last modified June 19, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/cost-of-living-crisis>. That is, instead of a social condition of capitalist wealth, it is treated as an unfortunate social situation.

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Lorenzo Chiesa*

Badiou/Lacan-Badiou: Beyond Anti-Philosophy¹

Keywords

Badiou, Lacan, anti-philosophy, philosophy, *foliesophie*

Abstract

For Badiou, Lacan is not a philosopher. He is instead a *sui generis* anti-philosopher. Anti-philosophy is, in a complex manner but eventually by definition, against philosophy. I intend to dispute this reading of Lacan while also profoundly sympathising with Badiou's understanding of philosophy and acknowledging his extensive engagement with Lacan.

Badiou/Lacan-Badiou: onkraj antifilozofije

Ključne besede

Badiou, Lacan, antifilozofija, filozofija, *foliesophie*

Povzetek

Za Badiouja Lacan ni filozof, temveč antifilozof *sui generis*. Antifilozofija je na kompleksen način, vendar po definiciji, proti filozofiji. To branje Lacana nameravam ovreči, hkrati pa upoštevam Badioujevo razumevanje filozofije in priznavam njegovo obsežno ukvarjanje z Lacanom.

¹ This article is part of a much wider book project tentatively titled *Lacan-Badiou: The Letter and the Event*. I wish to thank Moritz Herrmann for his acute comments on an early draft. I have only very recently (mid-August 2023) received insightful comments from Paul Livingston (especially on Badiou's and Lacan's Wittgenstein) and Paris Lavidis (especially on Badiou's meta-ontological reading of Lacan), which I plan to incorporate and discuss in the book, and for which I warmly thank them.

* Newcastle University, United Kingdom
lorenzo.chiesa@newcastle.ac.uk



Philosophical Anti-Philosophy or the Destruction of Philosophy?

For Badiou, Lacan is not a philosopher. He is instead a *sui generis* anti-philosopher. Anti-philosophy is, in a complex manner but eventually by definition, against philosophy. I intend to dispute this reading of Lacan while also profoundly sympathising with Badiou's understanding of philosophy and acknowledging his extensive engagement with Lacan.

Badiou's general stance on the matter, especially as conveyed in the 1994–95 Seminar *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*, could be summarised as follows: Lacan is an anti-philosopher, because he sees philosophy as a “pretension of thought to dispense with the real.”² Save for the fact that he is not just like any other anti-philosopher, because he “restored and, in a certain sense re-established, the category of truth.”³ Save for the fact that he eventually falls back into an anti-philosophical position, because he misses “the being of truths” or, in a complementary fashion, “the truth of the real.”⁴ Save for the fact that philosophy should be relaunched on the basis of these passages and an overcoming of their final deadlock, because that is precisely what Badiou's philosophy does . . .

Let us patiently disentangle Badiou's line of reasoning. First, like other anti-philosophers, Lacan denounces philosophy's claim to be a self-sufficient discourse or, which is the same, that there is a meta-language—of Being as One.⁵ To this avoidance of the real, and in resonance with anti-philosophers such as Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, he would oppose:

1. A strong “*subjective* trait” whereby what I say, against philosophy's pseudo-truth as avoidance of the real, is conclusively true. And it is so pre-

² Alain Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*, trans. Kenneth Reinhard and Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), xxxix.

³ Badiou, 23.

⁴ Badiou, xl, 148.

⁵ See Badiou, 138.

cisely by eclipsing my own self for the sake of the non-self-sufficient discourse I serve.⁶ “I, the truth, speak,” or better, “I, the truth, speaks.”

2. The dimension of the *act* as necessitated by this saying the truth in vanishing, which, as an act, is itself vanishing and can only be apprehended retrospectively from the standpoint of its effects.⁷ The act happens when “there emerges a saying that does not always go so far as to be able to ‘exist’ [meta-linguistically] with respect to what is being said,”⁸ that is to say, a saying that fleetingly carries over with it a truthful un-said attached to what is being said.

According to Badiou, Lacan supplements these tenets—already debatable when applied to his work—with two additional—and textually far less defensible—leit-motifs shared by anti-philosophers:

3. The *prevalence* of the act over the truth it conveys, which unwittingly and contradictorily reiterates the—philosophical for the anti-philosopher—destitution of truth.⁹ Truth can at best only be half-said. Or also, in the act, (half-)saying the truth is favoured to the detriment of (half-)saying *the truth*.¹⁰
4. The final change of focus from truth to *knowledge*, which is in turn made possible by the emphasis on the act and reinforces the destitution of truth. The psychoanalytic act ultimately resolves itself into a “passing,” as transmission, of knowledge.¹¹

Yet, secondly, unlike other anti-philosophers, for Badiou, Lacan positively complicates this otherwise abortive scenario to such a degree that he also ends up

⁶ Badiou, 3–4.

⁷ See Badiou, 5–6.

⁸ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore, 1972–73*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 22; quoted in Badiou, *Lacan*, 60; translation modified.

⁹ See Badiou, *Lacan*, 22–23, 144, 7–8.

¹⁰ See Badiou, 19–20.

¹¹ See Badiou, 6–7, 23–26.

assuming an “anti-philosophical relation to *anti-philosophy* itself.”¹² This is the case insofar as:

1. Despite truth eventually giving way to knowledge, truth remains a “hole in knowledge”¹³ that knowledge can never fill in. More precisely, the kernel of truth is “stripped of all *meaning*”¹⁴—the meaning of knowledge. Truth can therefore *subtractively* be thought as the *truth* of the meaninglessness of knowledge. Knowledge becomes transmissible only on these presuppositions. Such a move challenges both Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s anti-philosophical subsumption of truth under meaning: for the former, meaning as the silent-unsayable sense of the world outclasses truth as reduced to an exact linguistic description of existing states of affairs; for the latter, meaning as a differential evaluation of vital forces exceeds truth as an evaluation of forces carried out by the reactive force.¹⁵
2. Despite its prevalence over truth, the act that tears a truthful hole in knowledge is an *immanent act*.¹⁶ This means that it has its own place—in the practice of psychoanalysis, on and behind the couch . . . —since it has already taken place—starting with Freud. The psychoanalytic act ceases to be merely programmatic. In not presuming to reveal a meaning, it no longer precludes an “ineffable” elsewhere to-come,¹⁷ whether in the guise of a “mystical element, the silent principle of salvation” (Wittgenstein) or of a fateful super-human transvaluation of all values (Nietzsche).¹⁸
3. Despite its undeniably subjective dimension, immanently half-saying the truth, in the act, does *not* demonise *science*. On the contrary, the psychoanalytic act is “archi-scientific.”¹⁹ As Jean-Claude Milner spells it out in dialogue with Badiou, this means that what first and foremost matters in the psychoanalytic act with regard to modern science is the latter’s math-

¹² Badiou, 2–3; emphasis added.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 511.

¹⁴ Badiou, *Lacan*, 95; emphasis added.

¹⁵ See Badiou, 74–75.

¹⁶ See Badiou, 88.

¹⁷ See Badiou, 81, 83, 151.

¹⁸ Badiou, 6.

¹⁹ Badiou, 2.

ematisation rather than its experimentations.²⁰ In Lacanese, the only access to the real is provided by the *matheme* and, as Badiou puts it, there is a “reciprocity” between the matheme and the non-transcendent act.²¹ However, crucially, the matheme is located at a “point of the real” precisely to the extent that this point coincides with an “*impasse* of the mathematizable”²²—which can as such be demonstrated by means of inscription/formalisation and thereby initiate the possibility of the transmission of knowledge. It is in this specific mathematical sense that the kernel of truth is stripped of the meaning of knowledge. At bottom, mathematics amounts to a “meaning-less saying” that renews what is being said (or known).²³ While mathematical (*matheme*-atical) meaning-less saying should not strictly speaking be associated with an “event,” it nonetheless indicates an “appearing.”²⁴ Such an appreciative assessment of mathematics diametrically opposes Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s identification of it with logic and its subsequent denigration as an alleged guarantee for the consistency of philosophy.²⁵

4. Despite his vehement attacks on philosophy, Lacan’s discrediting of it is not “frontal” but “oblique.”²⁶ He very much appreciates that philosophy is and has always been inherently *split*.²⁷ In tension with what Badiou says in *Being and Event* (Lacan would relegate philosophy as a whole to speculative totalisation and hence to the imaginary),²⁸ and pace Heidegger, for Lacan, “there is no single history of philosophy’s diversion of thought.”²⁹ There is bad and good philosophy, even in the specific sense of metaphysics. Bad philosophy leads us to the One as Being, since it always presupposes that being as such thinks.³⁰ Good philosophy instead treats the One as an operation without being—*il y a de l’Un*, there is something like/

²⁰ See Badiou, 212–14.

²¹ Badiou, 94, 34.

²² Badiou, 33–34, 95; emphasis added.

²³ Badiou, 97.

²⁴ Badiou, 96.

²⁵ See Badiou, 93–94, 30.

²⁶ Badiou, 68; translation modified.

²⁷ See Badiou, 64 (translation modified), 59.

²⁸ See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 2.

²⁹ Badiou, *Lacan*, 59.

³⁰ See Badiou, 55, 63, 140.

of the One, but the One is not.³¹ Good philosophy thus thinks being as a multiple without One and “it must be acknowledged that this distinction is a Lacanian one”: “Badiou could be said to have developed his ontology” on this basis, Badiou admits in passing.³² Lacan’s questioning of philosophy is “totally new” since, while anti-philosophy can obviously not do without philosophy as an object of scorn, he alone sees that ever since Plato, and in Plato himself, philosophy has *itself* been an “avant-garde of anti-philosophy” against the temptation of the One.³³ Here Lacan could not be further away from Nietzsche’s ambition to cure humanity of the Plato-disease or Wittgenstein’s aspiration to unveil once and for all the harmfulness of the senseless propositions of philosophy.³⁴

By relating anti-philosophically to anti-philosophy in various ways, Lacan would thus dialectically “close”—a period of—anti-philosophy and “open up” something unprecedented *for philosophy*.³⁵ Or better, I would add, his anti-philosophical relation to anti-philosophy would result into an *anti-anti-philosophy*, a *philosophical* anti-philosophy that would resume, reinvigorate, and finally put at centre-stage an anti-philosophical *philosophy* (namely a philosophy *anti-Being-One*) that has for the most part been latent or marginalised in the history of philosophy.

Still, for Badiou, Lacan somehow clings to anti-philosophy tout-court. What is at stake in this third major swerve in Badiou’s overall argument is, again, as a purported threshold dividing his project from Lacan’s, a residual yet resilient underestimation and misplacement of truth with respect to the act and knowledge.

In terms of the act’s alleged overshadowing of truth, Badiou could not be more adamant: “The analytic act is anything but a search for truth.”³⁶ Strangely enough, the immanence of the act that tears a truthful hole in knowledge and thus accesses the real, where the latter is for Lacan always translatable into the absence of the sexual relationship (in brief, the fact that there is no meaningful measure or

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³¹ See Badiou, 65.

³² Badiou, 56.

³³ Badiou, 57.

³⁴ See Badiou, 21.

³⁵ Badiou, 2–3.

³⁶ Badiou, 144.

mathematizable ratio between the two sexes; that truth is the not-One of sexual incompleteness), would end up installing the act itself as “the real of the real”³⁷—and hence, we are left to infer, as ultimately transcendent to the real.

Following from this, in terms of knowledge’s supposed replacement of truth, what the act as thus understood would instead search for is a “correlation” *between truth and sense/meaning* on which to then establish a “connection” *between sense/meaning and knowledge*.³⁸ Any “essential” link *between knowledge and truth* would therefore be ruled out.³⁹ To begin with, *sense* would be extracted out of the absence of the sexual relationship. As dubiously evidenced by some phrases from Lacan’s article *L’Étourdit*, the truth of the *non-rapport*, of the absence of sense (“ab-sense”) of the absence of the sexual relationship would be reduced to a “*sense as ab-sense*,” or “*ab-sex sense*.”⁴⁰ Subsequently, the mathemes that inscribe such an ab-sex sense could be arranged in a fully transmissible knowledge, albeit impersonal as purely formalised. Returning to the point we made earlier, where Badiou praised Lacan against the other anti-philosophers, the kernel of truth now turns out to be stripped of the meaning of knowledge only at the cost, exorbitant for Badiou, of re-founding knowledge on a—however paradoxical—meaning, *not on truth*.

To sum up, notwithstanding the convolutedness of his argumentative trajectory, Badiou’s conclusion on why Lacan would anti-philosophically abide by a destitution of truth is very clear: insofar as “the analytic act consists in a production of transmissible knowledge with regard to ab-sex sense,” “truth is [. . .] in a position of eclipse between supposed knowledge”—as truthfully holed by the act—“and transmissible knowledge.”⁴¹ All in all, the key outcome of the act amounts to a *registration* of sense (as ab-sense),⁴² for the benefit of both the end of the treatment and the knowledge of the psychoanalyst. On the one hand, the math-

³⁷ Badiou, 31–32.

³⁸ Badiou, 79; translation modified.

³⁹ Badiou, 78.

⁴⁰ Badiou, 76–78, 84. As Badiou puts it even more unequivocally in “Formules de ‘L’Étourdit,” “absence of sense *positively* means ab-sex sense”; the latter would be a “*non-negative formula*.” Alain Badiou, “Formules de ‘L’Étourdit,” in Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel: Deux leçons sur “L’Étourdit” de Lacan* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 111–12; emphasis added. All translations of references in French are my own.

⁴¹ Badiou, *Lacan*, 81 (translation modified), 76.

⁴² Badiou, 77; translation modified.

eme is *integrally* transmissible; on the other, truth can only be *half-said*.⁴³ To cut a long story short, truth recoils into a predictable function of unveiling-veiling and Lacan reverts to Heidegger.⁴⁴

Adopting the terminology of *Being and Event* we could thus suggest that, for Badiou, while Lacan is one of the few thinkers in the history of philosophy who initially thinks truth as a hole in knowledge, he subsequently does not raise this thinking to the level of a “generic thought” that sees “the place of truth” (however unnameable and indiscernible it is in Badiou’s meta-ontology) in “parts” of being.⁴⁵ As seen, unlike in other anti-philosophies, in Lacan, an act that tears a truthful hole in knowledge has its—at first sight immanent—place, but the fact that the act has indeed taken place “must be confirmed in knowledge,”⁴⁶ through the latter’s transmissibility, not in truth. Juxtaposing *Being and Event* with the Seminar on Lacan, at the risk of some oversimplification, I would suggest that, in Lacan, for Badiou, truth does not really have a place—to be—through the act’s taking place as attested by knowledge. *This* would be his quintessential limit. To put it even more simply, thinking truth as a hole in knowledge would, again, not pave the way for thinking an “essential”⁴⁷—the words Badiou uses are never random—link between knowledge and truth, through which a renovation of knowledge could not but depend on a truth *procedure*. Generic thought would be occluded by, again, the correlation between truth and sense and the ensuing connection between sense and knowledge.

This highly abstract pattern has wider implications for the status of Lacan’s anti-philosophy in general, which can no longer be considered as just having an anti-philosophical relation to anti-philosophy itself. It is still a full-blown anti-philosophy, according to Badiou, not an anti-anti-philosophy or philosophical anti-philosophy. Lacan would definitively be consigned to *anti*-philosophy, despite all the oscillations I described and Badiou hardly manages to keep under control. Another way to phrase the point above about the placelessness and lack of being of truth from a slightly different perspective is to say that—as Ba-

⁴³ See Badiou, 78.

⁴⁴ See Badiou, 78–79.

⁴⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 510–11. A discussion of indiscernibility and unnameability regarding truth is beyond my remit here.

⁴⁶ Badiou, *Lacan*, 88.

⁴⁷ Badiou, 78.

diou says in his Seminar—in Lacan, there would only be the “triad” truth, real, knowledge “which cannot be divided into parts” and as such coalesces exclusively into *knowledge*.⁴⁸ In other words, there allegedly would be no knowledge of the real, no knowledge of truth, and no truth of the real.⁴⁹ These pairs instead determine the field of philosophy (“good” philosophy, of course): under the aegis of a search for truth, philosophy “assumes that there is a truth of the real” and thereby conveys it as a “knowledge of this truth.”⁵⁰ After all, Lacan’s apparently philosophical anti-philosophy is not philosophy because while the latter “claims to arrange a truth of the real as knowledge,”⁵¹ for him, there is only a “function of the real *within knowledge* that enables a *situation* of truth.”⁵²

For a reader unfamiliar with Badiou’s jargon in *Being and Event*, this could seem a minor, almost sophistic, distinction, but it is not. Again, Badiou always chooses his words very carefully. To put it simply, a *situation* of truth is not what truth is about, for Badiou. Or also, constraining truth to a situation of truth denotes precisely the fact that truth does not really have a place to be—again, there is no “being of truths” in Lacan. In more technical terms, a situation of truth confines truth to a presentation of being as “consistent multiplicity,” namely, to the “regime of the count-as-one,” namely, to *structure* (in passing, on the contrary, for Badiou, truth *will have been*—as a, now indiscernible, infinite part of the situation—the truth *of* the entire situation, of the being of the situation, following a truth procedure).⁵³ All in all, in Lacan, *truth has no place to be because it is too structurally placed*.

We are thus back to square one, or quite literally, ground zero *as square One*. Badiou’s last take on Lacan in the—at first sight largely sympathetic—Seminar is the same as and as critical as in his major works: in Lacan truth is simply a structural truth, a truth *of knowledge* (which Lacan constantly and most emphatically rejects).⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly at this stage, according to the Seminar, his

⁴⁸ Badiou, 148.

⁴⁹ See Badiou, 148. See also Badiou, “Formules de ‘L’Étourdit,’” 121–22.

⁵⁰ Badiou, *Lacan*, 149.

⁵¹ Badiou, 144; translation modified.

⁵² Badiou, 148; translation modified, emphasis added.

⁵³ See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 522, 525.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Jacques Lacan, . . . or *Worse*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 171.

very discernment of a “good” philosophy that subtractively tears a truthful hole in the presumed Oneness of Being and concomitantly understands the One as an operation without Being—*il y a de l’Un*—ultimately only serves the identification of “the One as an empty place”⁵⁵—*il y a de l’Un*—to which being as such is wrongly restricted. That is to say, all things considered, for the Seminar, Lacan’s *il y a de l’Un* means nothing other than that there is the void yet truthful subject, attacked in *Being and Event* since the subject cannot be reduced to the void according to Badiou (and to Lacan), as contained within the “circular closure” of structure, castigated in *Theory of the Subject*, and as such unable to respond to the event.⁵⁶ Lacan’s subtractive ontology is merely an ontology of “dis-being”⁵⁷ that contradictorily leads us to the Being of the One as an empty place, the Being-One of the empty place, and therefore back to “bad” philosophy, at best. Or, at worst and however unintentionally, as Badiou seems to insinuate at one point, precisely due to this relapse the “ultimate aim” of Lacan’s seemingly non-frontal attack on philosophy is, beyond any kind of dialogue, “to *destroy* [good] philosophy.”⁵⁸ According to Badiou, and leaving aside his unfailingly respectful tributes to Lacan, he finally stands out as the most effective and intractable anti-philosopher.

I think this final round of twists in Badiou’s reading of Lacan, as eventually falling back into utter anti-philosophy, is incorrect and can textually be disproved. They all fundamentally derive from and revolve around a presumed detection of “sense as ab-sense” and then *sense* as ab-sense—both of which Lacan never speaks about—in “ab-sense”—on which he insists.⁵⁹ In *L’Étourdit*, Lacan even warns the reader not to “force” the “ab-sense”⁶⁰—in the direction of sense, I would add. Lacan does mention, once, “ab-sex sense” (*sens-absexe*) yet clearly

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Lacan*, 56; emphasis added. Strangely, Badiou does not openly criticise Lacan on this point in the Seminar but he vehemently does so in *Being and Event*: Lacan would thus “concede a point of being to the one.” Badiou, *Being and Event*, 24.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Badiou, *Being and Event*, 432–33; Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), 54. A detailed unravelling of why Badiou is mistaken on this series of points, and why Lacan’s stance on them is far more similar to Badiou’s than Badiou acknowledges, is one of the leitmotifs of my current project.

⁵⁷ Badiou, *Lacan*, 55.

⁵⁸ Badiou, 149.

⁵⁹ Jacques Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” in *Autres écrits*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 452, 458–59, 463, 469, 477.

⁶⁰ Lacan, 463.

refers it to a “swelling,” an abscess of the “ab-sense [that] designates sex,”⁶¹ or, in other words, and moving quickly, to the (phylo- and ontogenetic) emergence of the phallic function as a transcendental species-specific invariant which indeed produces sense/meaning by “warding off the absence of the sexual relationship.”⁶² *But* there is here absolutely no “correlation” whatsoever between truth and sense, no sense of the absence of the sexual relationship. The absence of the sexual relationship remains an unredeemable ab-sense. A fortiori, the phallic function’s production of (imaginary and always precariously patched-up) sense has nothing or very little to do with the question concerning the transmissibility of knowledge following an act that tears a truthful hole in knowledge, which instead aims at, at least transiently, draining the abscess of everyday sense in a formalised fashion.

More in general, and from a slightly different angle, Badiou’s basic mistake with “ab-sex sense” is to assume (like other, even refined, commentators do) that, in Lacan, “there is no sexual relationship”—which for Lacan *is*—can be reversed into and domesticated as “the sexual non-relationship is”—which for Lacan is *not* really, for all the pertinent meta-ontological reasons adduced by Badiou himself.⁶³ Including in the Seminar, which otherwise excels in exegetical acumen, when taking some distance from Lacan becomes mandatory, Badiou thus fabricates a threshold that can be upheld only through very selected, decontextualised, and often extremely circumstantial statements made by Lacan, which are altogether coerced from him.

Furthermore, the fabricated threshold also receives and inconsistent treatment across Badiou’s works. This already begins to transpire by comparing the Seminar with *Being and the Event*. While the former ends up embracing the latter’s condemnation, whereby in the end it is entirely up to *Badiou* to rejuvenate philosophy *through* Lacan yet *against* Lacan (Badiou’s final change of course), it does so only after adopting a much more appreciating stance towards Lacan and thus—temporarily—moving the threshold. To recapitulate, in Badiou’s Seminar,

⁶¹ Lacan, 452.

⁶² Lacan, 458.

⁶³ Although Lacan is at times very ambiguous on this in his late and latest Seminars, after a renewed and closer scrutiny of them, I here retract my previous claim that, after Seminar XX, he would privilege “there is a nonrelationship.” Lorenzo Chiesa, *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), xx.

for Lacan, philosophy is inherently split, namely, not wholly devoted to the Being of the One; Lacan's anti-philosophy can relate anti-philosophically to anti-philosophy itself; and, thanks to Lacan, this at least potentially philosophical character of anti-philosophy, mirrored by a positively anti-philosophical character of philosophy, opens something new for philosophy—thanks to Badiou.

Lacan the Philosopher: The Torsion of Anti-Philosophy

In opposition to Badiou, we can initiate a dismantling of his threshold as set up in the Seminar precisely by means of the notions he uses to erect it in the same work. According to Lacan, most definitely, there is a *knowledge of the real*; there is a *knowledge of truth*; and, albeit in a more complex manner, there is also a *truth of the real*. The sources speak for themselves. I will here only outline these three issues.

1. Modern *science* is a knowledge of the real: “There is a knowledge in the real. [. . .] [It is] the scientist who has to accommodate it.”⁶⁴

Science seizes or at least “bites” the real.⁶⁵ In suspending the alleged correspondence between thinking and what is being thought, and hence the fantasy of a Oneness of being, the real remains a meaningless impasse of formalisation that, however, as such *promotes* further formalisations (knowledge). Although scientific knowledge inherently tends to reduce these formalisations to the level of meaning, its tangible—technological—effectiveness necessarily rests on repeated encounters with the meaningless real. Since his early Seminars Lacan insists on how the real should not only be located “at the limits of our experience” for it is precisely as an impasse of formalisation that it “involves in itself any possibility of effect.”⁶⁶ Through scientific knowledge the real as what “does not work”⁶⁷ in everyday reality also becomes what is eminently effective and actual

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⁶⁴ Jacques Lacan, “Lettre de Jacques Lacan à trois psychanalystes italiens,” *Spirales* 9 (1981): 60. I acknowledge that this is not exactly the same as a “knowledge of the real,” but I think the two phrases can quite easily be reconciled via Lacan's treatment of science. I will address this in the near future.

⁶⁵ Jacques Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 1971 (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 43.

⁶⁶ Jacques Lacan, *La relation d'objet, 1956–1957* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 31.

⁶⁷ Jacques Lacan, “The Triumph of Religion,” in *The Triumph of Religion, Preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 61.

in it. Through scientific knowledge the real is *in Wirklichkeit*, namely—playing along Lacan on the polysemy of the German phrase—it “really” is as an “in fact” only insofar as it is “in effect.”⁶⁸

2. *Psychoanalysis* is a knowledge of truth: “If analysis rests on a presumption, it is that knowledge of truth can be constituted on the basis of its experience.”⁶⁹

Lacan indeed inscribes this *savoir sur la vérité* in his matrix of the discourse of the psychoanalyst as a knowledge in the position of truth.⁷⁰ Revolving around the absence of the sexual relationship, the psychoanalytic knowledge of truth should diametrically be opposed to any “truth of knowledge” (*vérité sur le savoir*) as a final truth, including and most insidiously the truth about (the knowledge of) truth we might be tempted to derive in extremis from the very absence of the sexual relationship—whereupon the absence of the sexual relationship turns into the sexual non-relationship as *One*. The knowledge of truth is thus strictly connected with the *Il y a de l’Un*, or better *Yad’lun*, Lacan says, as a mere operation “. . . and nothing more” that refutes the Oneness of being (“The knowledge of truth is articulated from the tip of what I advance [. . .] about *Yad’lun*. [. . .] It’s an altogether particular One [. . .] and it’s an abyss”).⁷¹ For the same reason, the knowledge of truth is equally a development on and a rectification of science as a knowledge of the real that ultimately does *not* want to know what it already knows about the real. What both science and psychoanalysis know of the real “cannot but be attained by demonstrating that the real is that which does not have any kind of meaning.”⁷² But, on the one hand, the productivity of scientific

⁶⁸ “When one speaks of the real, one may intend several things. It is a question first of the set of what effectively happens. That is the concept implied by the German term *Wirklichkeit*, which has the advantage of distinguishing in reality a function which the French language does not easily allow us to isolate. It is what implies in and of itself every possibility of effect, of *Wirkung*.” Lacan, *La relation d’objet*, 31.

⁶⁹ Lacan, *Encore*, 91; translation modified.

⁷⁰ It is very strange that Badiou ignores this basic and well-known, even often abused, Lacanian mantra, which is moreover contemporary to *L’Étourdit* and pervasive in Lacan’s work of the early 1970s. “The Knowledge of Truth” also features as one of the titles appropriately given by Miller to one of the sessions of Seminar XIX.

⁷¹ Jacques Lacan, . . . or *Worse*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 171; translation modified.

⁷² Jacques Lacan, “De James Joyce comme symptôme,” *Le croquant* 28 (November 2000).

knowledge, its promotion of new formalisations starting from the formalisation of a previous impasse of formalisation antinomically advances hand in hand with a presumed accumulation of meaning (ideally aimed at absolute knowledge). Science embraces *sense* as ab-sense, which is now blatantly epitomised by chaosmotic yet all the more totalising paradigms of the universe. On the other hand, psychoanalysis's knowledge of truth—as a specification of the knowledge of the real indebted to modern science—deliberately dwells on the very level of the formalisation of the impasse of formalisation. What the knowledge of truth aims at *actively transmitting* is the irreducibility of ab-sense as such. This basically amounts to Lacan's so-called formulas of sexuation, namely, a mathematical formalisation of how the phallic function functions only against the background of the enduring truth of the absence of the sexual relationship⁷³—there is no other knowledge of the psychoanalyst outside of the formulas that is not a supposition of knowledge. The formulas are then in turn singularised by each analysand at the end of the treatment (terminable analysis as, so to speak, pre- or proto-procedural) who thereby sustains a truth-procedure in Badiou's specific sense of the term (interminable analysis as the field of a discourse of psychoanalysis, initiated by Freud, that surpasses that of the psychoanalyst and the psychoanalytic clinic).

3. The psychoanalytic *subject*, the subject of science betrayed by science as far from contained by and even less so identifiable with a structural void, embodies the truth of the real.

This is a subtle and difficult point. For Lacan, “there is no truth of the real, since the real is delineated as ruling out meaning. This is already saying too much because to say this one nonetheless supposes a meaning”⁷⁴—which is another way of saying that truth can only be *half-said*. *Yet*, without contradiction and very explicitly, “there are truths that are of the order of the real.”⁷⁵ On the one hand, there is no ultimate Truth of the real. If, in a certain sense, the truth of the real is quite plainly that the real of the ab-sense of the sexual relationship is what

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⁷³ For an in-depth reading of this, see Chiesa, *Not-Two*, especially chap. 4.

⁷⁴ Jacques Lacan, “L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile a mourre: Séminaire 24, 1976–1977” (unpublished typescript, March 15, 1977), PDF document.

⁷⁵ Jacques Lacan, “Conférences et Entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” *Scilicet* 6/7 (1975): 35.

remains meaningless,⁷⁶ then one can turn this into the Truth only by downgrading truth to a final meaning of meaninglessness—or, again, by misunderstanding the not-One of “there is no sexual relationship” with the *One* (not-One) of “the sexual non-relationship is,” like Badiou does with his sense as ab-sense. On the other hand, according to Lacan, it is not just that, famously, “the truth holds onto the real,”⁷⁷ precisely because of the impossibility of saying it all, of only being able to half-say it by always meaningfully saying too much of it, but that, less famously, this logical impossibility, which cannot be separated from the impossibility given as the ab-sense of the sexual relationship, stands as the starting point of a *subjectivized* truth of the real.

It is not enough to simply claim that the real is the impossible and hence truth can only be half-said. In order to really “introduce” the real as the impossible in the world, the subject of psychoanalysis needs to supplement this mere “enunciation” with “the most extreme tightening of saying,” namely, formalisation.⁷⁸ In other words, following the same temporality we have seen at work in science as a knowledge of the real that nonetheless avoids its truth, the real as cause—and as such always relatable to the ab-sense of the sexual relationship—retroactively becomes such when it passes through the subject’s formalising the real as the impossible. Conversely, it is only on this level, where the subject formalises the real as the impossible, that the subject really becomes a subject. At least initially, this formalisation first and foremost cannot but have to do with the subject’s formalisation at the end of analysis of how the ab-sense of the sexual relationship will have at that moment caused him/her (his/her sexuation) in a singular way. Lacan indeed speaks of truths of the real in the plural.

Anticipating Badiou’s own distinction between the human animal and the subject in the strict sense of the term, as a subject-to-truth, Lacan thus insists on the fact that, however much the “being that speaks” is an “effect of language”—or a void subtractively effected by the structural recurrence of language—“this pathos does not make, by itself, a subject.”⁷⁹ Not coincidentally, in the same con-

⁷⁶ See Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 97.

⁷⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 3.

⁷⁸ Jacques Lacan, *D’un Autre à l’autre, 1968–1969* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 66.

⁷⁹ Lacan, *D’un Autre*, 67, 160, 66.

text, in Seminar XVI, Lacan speaks of “the event of discourse,”⁸⁰ which here I am tempted to provisionally conceive of in terms of the subject’s retrospective *entrance* into analysis.

Lacan also contends that while truth, the truth of the real I would add, can still generally be considered with regard to the subject that actively embodies it as just a designation within saying of what cannot be said, as something lacking that merely “insinuates itself” (as what cannot be said in “truth can only be half-said”), thanks to formalisation, it can equally “be inscribed in a perfectly calculated manner.”⁸¹ Against Badiou, in Lacan there is not only a symbolic truth that always speaks the truth of structure—on close inspection always eventually in the guise of a totalising imaginary fiction as a by-product of the very fact that truth can only be half-said. Quite bluntly, “if I distinguish real, symbolic, and imaginary, it is clearly the case that there are real, symbolic, and imaginary truths.”⁸²

If these three overlapping points hold, and I think they do—based on textual evidence it is far easier to uphold them and unfold them than to refute them—then Lacan has a *philosophy* according to Badiou’s *own* standards.

In short, as we saw, for Badiou philosophy needs to assume a knowledge of the real, a knowledge of truth, and a truth of the real and thereby “arrange a truth of the real as knowledge,” that is, as a “knowledge of this truth.” In summarising what I have just covered, at the very minimum we can advance that Lacan assumes scientific knowledge as knowledge of the real, psychoanalytic knowledge as knowledge of truth, and the ab-sense of the sexual relationship as truth of the real and thereby arranges the latter as a formalised knowledge of this truth as embodied into a subject-*to-truth*. Or also, assuming that my reading is correct, Lacan does *not* constrict the real to a “function of the real *within knowledge* that enables a *situation* of truth,” namely, he does *not* situate the ab-sense of the sexual relationship precisely because, on the contrary, its inscription turns *knowledge* into a *function* of knowledge *within the real*.

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⁸⁰ Lacan, 83.

⁸¹ Lacan, 67.

⁸² Lacan, “Conférences et Entretiens,” 35.

With respect to Badiou's *Being and Event*, very roughly speaking, we are here already at the level of what he calls a post-evental "enquiry" as opposed to an "encyclopaedia of a situation."⁸³ Like for Badiou, the huge and open question for Lacan is then, of course: What is the status of—newly nascent—knowledge within a truth-procedure? And, in my view, this is a question Badiou himself never fully answers.

Another contiguous way to exegetically challenge Badiou's anti-Lacanian threshold as expressed in his Seminar is to question his claim that, in Lacan, the act overshadows truth, ultimately for the sake of the connection knowledge-meaning. Albeit perhaps less conclusively, on this front the sources seem again to contradict Badiou (recall that, for Badiou, "the analytical act is anything but a search for truth" because "an apparatus of transmissible knowledge must exist for the act to be confirmed").⁸⁴ For instance, in Seminar XV, devoted to the act as primarily the psychoanalyst's act—of subtracting himself from the position of subject-supposed-to-know—Lacan states that "in order to introduce what constitutes the psychoanalytic act as such," in psychoanalysis, on the side of the analysand, "there is only that which resists the operation of knowledge-making-a-subject, namely, this residue we call truth."⁸⁵ Truth has chrono-logical precedence over the act. I acknowledge that, with some twisting, this could still be accommodated by Badiou's interpretative framework. But Lacan then goes on to specify that, far more importantly, "the evocation of truth" as residual at play at the end of (the analysand's) analysis does not stop there: it continues as an "effect of loss"—synonymous with a "point of being" unconfined to a mere unicum of dis-being—"beyond the operation [of] the analytic act."⁸⁶ To cut a long story short, it continues through the analysand now turned into an analyst; it continues each time this analyst acts at the end of the analysis of another will-be analyst; and hence it continues both with regard to this analyst and the will-be analyst. Here truth clearly overshadows the act, in spite of its strict entwinement with it. In other words, quite explicitly, there are truthful "stumbling block[s]" (*achoppement*) "beyond an act supposed to put an

⁸³ See Badiou, *Being and Event*, especially 234–36, 328–38, 394–96, 406–9, 499, 506, 510, 513.

⁸⁴ Badiou, *Lacan*, 164–65.

⁸⁵ Jacques Lacan, "L'acte psychanalytique: Séminaire 15, 1967–1968" (unpublished typescript, November 29, 1967), PDF document.

⁸⁶ Lacan, "L'acte psychanalytique," December 6, 1967.

end” (*faire fin*).⁸⁷ Most crucially, I would add, these constructive *achoppements* need to be thought *procedurally*, not in isolation, as following the pre- or proto-procedural—yet post-evental—course of the treatment.

Here I will leave this complex and thus far unexplored set of issues aside. Let us instead dwell on the fact that Lacan’s thought would appear to comply with Badiou’s definition of philosophy and draw some broad conclusions out of it. After all, what does this tell us about his use of Lacan as an anti-philosopher and the alleged distinction between philosophy and anti-philosophy at large?

1. Lacan’s philosophical *anti-philosophy* and the tradition of anti-philosophical *philosophy* in general are one and the same.

That is, Lacan’s *anti-anti-philosophy*, his assumption of an anti-philosophical stance on anti-philosophy itself—because the latter makes the same mistakes it criticises in what it considers as philosophy, namely, it ends up proposing itself as a self-sufficient discourse—corresponds to anti-philosophical philosophy’s *internal* critique of any philosophy that presupposes and leads us to the One as Being.

2. Anti-philosophical philosophy, including Lacan’s, amounts to just (good) *philosophy* tout-court, anti-Being-One philosophy, as understood by Badiou.
3. *Badiou’s* own philosophy is as philosophical *and* as anti-philosophical as Lacan’s.

⁴² Obviously, Badiou’s philosophy vividly portrays itself as an insurrection against the philosophy of the One as Being. His very *Manifesto for Philosophy* cannot be separated from a call *against* philosophy.

More interestingly, note that even if we were to agree with Badiou that Lacan remains at bottom an anti-philosopher and even a “destroyer” of philosophy by Badiou’s standards of philosophy, this would paradoxically turn Badiou’s denunciation of Lacan as an anti-philosopher into a supremely *anti-philosophical*

⁸⁷ Lacan, December 6, 1967.

operation by the standards of anti-philosophy (as understood by Badiou). Lacan's eventual relapse into the One as Being—the Being-One of the empty place obtained via the subject as void—would need to be opposed by a critique of the spurious self-sufficiency of Lacan's discourse. Not only is Badiou's philosophy in a sense anti-philosophical insofar as it counters the philosophy of the One as Being, but also and especially, given that the future of philosophy must pass through Lacan,⁸⁸ it is such exclusively by means of an anti-philosophical denunciation of Lacan as, in the end, a *bad philosopher*. Badiou's philosophical denunciation of Lacan as an anti-philosopher cannot do without positing Lacan as a (bad) philosopher and Badiou as a (good) anti-philosopher.

4. Perhaps Badiou's very notion of anti-philosophy is *tautological* and *contradictory*—even when applied to anti-philosophies preceding Lacan's.

It is tautological because it seems to merely duplicate the distinction between “good” and “bad” philosophy. It is contradictory because *both* “good” and “bad” philosophy can be anti-philosophical. Perhaps there is instead just “good” (anti-Being-One) philosophy and “bad” (pro-Being-One) philosophy—with Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, the allegedly opposite epitomes of twentieth century philosophy, ultimately sucked into “bad” philosophy, as Badiou would fully concur. Or, perhaps, in a less dichotomic way, there structurally is “good” and “bad” philosophy in every philosophy worthy of this name. And, perhaps, as we will soon see, this is Lacan's final word about philosophy as such.

5. At the very least, Badiou's supposed philosophical “torsion” of the anti-philosophical schema,⁸⁹ built upon Lacan's own (anti-)philosophical torsion of previous anti-philosophy, becomes *redundant*, for Lacan already accomplishes it.

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Rather, Badiou operates within the outcomes of Lacan's torsion and systematically elaborates on them beyond Lacan.

In addition, regarding this last matter, it also remains unclear to me how, on close inspection, Badiou *himself* precisely conceives of what the required phil-

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 129.

⁸⁹ Badiou, “Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan,” in *Conditions*, 246.

osophical torsion applies to and who or what carries it out. Is it Badiou's philosophy with respect to Lacan's psychoanalysis as an anti-philosophy, a philosophy that would be needed notwithstanding Lacan's necessary but insufficient previous torsion of previous anti-philosophy, as suggested in the Seminar? Or, more sympathetically towards Lacan, is it Lacan's psychoanalysis with respect to *philosophy tout-court*, and *not* anti-philosophy, *yet* only by means of philosophy *itself*, as instead evinced in "Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan" (a hypothesis I would favour)? Or is it again Badiou's philosophy but now with respect to what a torsioned philosophy can do with itself only with respect to what Lacan does with philosophy, as also arguably insinuated in "Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan" (a hypothesis I am far from disdaining as I fully appreciate the brilliance of Badiou's appropriation of psychoanalysis, until it relegates Lacan to anti-philosophy)?

In *Theory of the Subject*, where the notion of torsion features prominently, it loosely indicates "the way in which a subject works upon the structure that determines it in the first place."⁹⁰ In *Being and Event*, in which "torsion" occurs very rarely, we are nonetheless accordingly told that a truth, a subject-to-truth, is a "torsion of being [. . .] within the perpetually total web of knowledges."⁹¹ Evidently, all this lies at the core of Badiou's relaunching of philosophy. To brutally simplify, and skipping several logical passages, a torsion is nothing less than *what* philosophy in the strict sense of the term thinks, as a meta-ontology of the subject-to-truth (in the same paragraph, Badiou indeed specifies that mathematical ontology only "sets off" the thinking of the torsion).⁹² But what happens to this complex yet linear scenario when the distinction philosophy/anti-philosophy is *in turn* understood as a torsion, a torsion whereupon philosophy proper *begins* to think the torsion, the subject-to-truth?

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I think Badiou provides us with conflictual answers to this question when dealing with Lacan. I also think this is primarily due to his a priori intention to preserve a threshold that would contain Lacan, separate him from Badiou's project

⁹⁰ Bruno Bosteels, "Translator's Introduction," in Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, xxxvi.

⁹¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 18.

⁹² Badiou, 18.

(“I agree almost entirely . . . Except that”),⁹³ and instead proves increasingly fragile.

In a first sense, as discussed in the Seminar, the torsion concerns Lacan’s “anti-philosophical relationship to anti-philosophy itself,”⁹⁴ namely, what makes him differ from other anti-philosophers, namely, the fact that he does not subscribe to their subsumption of truth under meaning and, concomitantly, their positioning of the act as transcendent to truth and thus open to an ineffable meaning. But, as we saw, Lacan would then *mutatis mutandis* fall into the same anti-philosophical trap. Hence, the torsion ultimately concerns Badiou’s rectification of Lacan’s mistakes.

However, in a second sense, as treated in the very dense conclusion of “Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan,” the needed torsion has unexpectedly to do with Lacan’s anti-philosophical relation to *philosophy* itself. Moreover, this is the case not simply in terms of some (good) philosophy constituting “an *avant-garde* of [good] anti-philosophy,”⁹⁵ as per Lacan’s maxim “Plato was [already] Lacanian”⁹⁶—which in Badiou’s Seminar could itself be taken as a sort of torsion—but also, and on the contrary, in terms of philosophy “*continuing* [Lacanian psycho-]analysis or fulfilling it.”⁹⁷ If we wish to be exegetically pedantic, it is actually only here that Badiou explicitly uses the phrase “torsion of the anti-philosophical schema.”⁹⁸ Let us look into such a juncture more closely.

In “Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan,” and especially in its conclusion, *like* in the Seminar, Badiou spells out the “duplicity” of Lacan’s stance on philosophy, that is, his acknowledgement of philosophy’s internally split status, now condensed by Plato himself. On the one hand, for Lacan, Plato’s theory of ideas would be a botched attempt at mastering “real being [. . .] at the level [. . .] of knowledge” (bad, pro-Being-One philosophy).⁹⁹ On the other hand, “Lacan is well aware that [. . .] Plato’s One fragments itself,” “is [. . .] incompatible with

⁹³ Badiou, *Lacan*, xl.

⁹⁴ Badiou, 2.

⁹⁵ Badiou, 57.

⁹⁶ See Badiou, “Plato and Lacan,” 236, and Lacan, . . . *or Worse*, 113.

⁹⁷ Badiou, “Plato and Lacan,” 246; translation modified, emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Badiou, 246.

⁹⁹ Badiou, 241; translation modified.

being,” and there is an “affinity with regard to [Plato’s and Lacan’s] doctrine of the One” (good, anti-Being-One philosophy).¹⁰⁰ Yet, *unlike* in the Seminar, for Badiou, the next step in such an alignment of (Plato’s) philosophy and (Lacan’s) anti-philosophy, which would accomplish the philosophical torsion of the anti-philosophical schema, is to follow *Lacan* in his exhortation to “push the [psycho-]analytic intervention” into Plato’s dialogues—and by extension philosophy at large. In other words, the task of the contemporary philosopher would not only be to work through Lacan’s anti-philosophy, singling out its fallbacks, and restarting from there, but also—or even instead—to reread and develop intra-philosophically the great history of philosophy with a, so to speak, Lacanian eye, *regardless* of Lacan’s anti-philosophy. Lacan’s (anti-)philosophical torsion of philosophy is a precondition for the philosophical future of philosophy, whereby *Lacanian philosophy* continues and fulfils psychoanalysis (although Badiou does not explain what this fulfilment would amount to). In passing, Badiou goes even as far as stating that, in this context, “Lacan identifies himself with [. . .] the very site of the philosopher.”¹⁰¹

The further specification—which is not as such in tension with the previous point while it reinforces the tension with the Seminar—is that, in the last two paragraphs of “Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan,” Lacan’s torsion of philosophy to be continued and fulfilled by Lacanian philosophy becomes Badiou’s *own* Lacanian torsion of philosophy. Badiou appoints himself in charge of pushing Lacan into philosophy. The language he adopts, which amalgamates his jargon from *Being and Event* with Lacan’s from *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, transparently reflects it: the mission at stake relies on “a sole imperative [. . .]. Endeavour to abide by the point where at least one truth proceeds. You will emerge there as this subject of which this truth is the stuff of being.”¹⁰² Beyond the programmatic imperative to which “Anti-Philosophy: Plato and Lacan” limits itself, for me, *Being and Event* conclusively proves that the psychoanalytic/(anti-)philosophical Trojan horse Lacan drove into the philosophical city is by now, with Badiou, already in the process of capturing it. *Being and Event* stands out as a chef d’oeuvre of Lacanian philosophy.

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¹⁰⁰ Badiou, 235–36; translation modified.

¹⁰¹ Badiou, 239; translation modified.

¹⁰² Badiou, 247; translation modified.

Still, in a final twist—in tension with what Badiou has in my view been delineating so far in this conclusion and more in tune with the Seminar’s line of reasoning—the “crossing in torsion” between anti-philosophy and philosophy would *not* give rise to a “unity of plane” between the two.¹⁰³ However much we could try to account for this twist topologically, its analogical message is adamant: for Badiou, the torsion still maintains a negative threshold between Lacan and Badiou. For me, the torsion thus gratuitously remains a dividing line and does not do justice to Lacan.

Good and Bad Philosophy, Lacanian-Style

Returning to our main conclusion that Lacan has a philosophy (even by Badiou’s own standards) and further, I’d be tempted to seriously add, that if “Plato was already Lacanian,” then Lacan was already Badiouian just as much as Badiou is still Lacanian, we should tackle an apparently naïve but instead by all means crucial rejoinder: Does Lacan not proudly and insistently present himself as an *anti*-philosopher? In spite of his frequent pedagogical and critical—pedagogical as critical—recourse to the great names in the history of philosophy (Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, first of all), does he not neatly demarcate his psychoanalytic discourse from that of philosophy? The quick answer is: Not really—and Badiou correctly senses it, but only in part . . . As a preamble, consider for instance the following, apparently innocuous, statement from Seminar X, arguably one of Lacan’s *less* theoretical and more clinical Seminars:

One segment of psychoanalysis, the one that’s being pursued here, has a more philosophical character than any of the others [. . .]. It’s not my fault, as one says, that psychoanalysis puts into question, on the theoretical plane, the desire to know [. . .]. This would justify in and of itself the questioning that lends a certain philosophical nuance to our discourse.¹⁰⁴

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Undoubtedly, Lacan *s’insurge* against philosophy, violently if not offensively, and this remains a constant throughout his oeuvre. His psychoanalysis is in

¹⁰³ Badiou, 246.

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 55; translation modified.

“rupture” instead than “in continuity” with philosophical interrogations.¹⁰⁵ He cannot see why he “would classify [himself] philosophically” since psychoanalytic discourse “is not philosophical discourse.”¹⁰⁶ Quite conclusively: “I am not at all a philosopher”; “I do not do any philosophy, on the contrary, I avoid it like the plague”; “I abhor philosophy.”¹⁰⁷ Philosophers are “people who are very much behind,”¹⁰⁸ even retarded, and there is more to be learnt from President Judge Schreber’s memoirs of his psychosis than in philosophical texts.¹⁰⁹ In short, the reason for such an abhorrence of philosophy and its identification with uninformative mental illness lies in the fact that “there is only one kind of philosophy and it is always theological,” namely devoted to the Being-One.¹¹⁰ Yet, at the same time—and not without numerous lexical contradictions—especially in his later and latest works Lacan also goes as far as understanding his psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis tout-court, as containing a full-fledged philosophy, and not just as assuming a “philosophical nuance” or “character”: “What I am doing here is philosophy. [. . .] It’s a philosophy that I have handled the best way I could following the current that results from Freud’s philosophy.”¹¹¹ Not only that, but, apologising for his “complacency,” Lacan states that his Freudo-Lacanian philosophy “is nothing less than the first philosophy that seems to me to be standing on its feet.”¹¹² In the same context, squaring the dialectical circle with mental illness, or better, menacingly re-opening the circle itself, Lacan presents his *philosophie*—that finally stands on its feet—as a “*foliesophie*,” namely, a “fool-osophy.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Lacan, “R.S.I.: Séminaire 22, 1974–1975” (unpublished typescript, February 18, 1975), PDF document. See also Lacan, *Encore*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Lacan, . . . or *Worse*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Jacques Lacan, “Conférence de presse du docteur Jacques Lacan,” *Lettres de l’École freudienne* 16 (1975): 26; Jacques Lacan, “Freud per sempre. Intervista con Jacques Lacan,” interview by Emilia Granzotto, *Panorama*, November 21, 1974.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls: A Series of Presentations in the Chapel at Sainte-Anne Hospital*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 39; translation modified.

¹⁰⁹ See Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, trans. Russell Grigg (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 55. The Staferla version of this passage is far more explicit on this point.

¹¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, “Réponses de Jacques Lacan à des questions sur les noeuds et l’inconscient,” *Lettres de l’École freudienne* 21 (1977): 473.

¹¹¹ Jacques Lacan, “Le moment de conclure: Séminaire 25, 1977–1978” (unpublished typescript, December 20, 1977), PDF document.

¹¹² Lacan, *Sinthome*, 125; translation modified.

¹¹³ Lacan, 108; translation modified. Adrian Johnston has incisively commented on some of these passages in “This Philosophy Which Is Not One: Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou,

Let us address these vertiginous oscillations step by step. Lacan's hostility towards philosophy indeed revolves around what, paraphrasing Badiou, we could refer to as its compulsive tendency towards imaginary totalisation. In this regard, Lacan continues and reinforces Freud's antipathy for philosophy. For Freud, philosophy "cling[s] to the illusion of being able to present a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent"; specifically, in this way, even "the philosophy of today has retained some essential features of the animistic mode of thought—the overvaluation of the magic of words and the belief that the real events in the world take the course which our thinking seeks to impose on them."¹¹⁴ Unlike psychoanalysis, philosophy thus at bottom cannot be separated from a religious *Weltanschauung*, in the sense that the latter "leaves no question unanswered and [. . .] everything that interests us finds its fixed place."¹¹⁵

Here Lacan develops Freud's critique of philosophical animism ontologically, epistemologically, historically, and even biologically. In brief—summarising a series of complex issues I have detailed elsewhere¹¹⁶—*ontologically*, philosophy believes that the real events in the world follow our thinking in the sense that it assumes a correspondence between thought and what is being thought—the "world" in Freud's parlance. That is to say, ever since Parmenides, in different guises, "being is presumed to think"; "what is thought of is in the image of thought, in other words, [. . .] being thinks."¹¹⁷ What is more, philosophy thereby "speaks of ontology as if being [as such] held together all alone"—as Being-One, as onto-toto-logy.¹¹⁸

Epistemologically, according to Lacan, philosophy does indeed overvalue words—what Freud also called "omnipotence of thought"—in the sense that it does not realise that "language proves to be a field much vaster [. . .] than

and Lacanian Antiphilosophy," in "Jean-Claude Milner," ed. Justin Clemens and Sigi Jöttkandt, special issue, *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 3 (Spring 2010): 137–58.

¹¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, "The Question of a *Weltanschauung*," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 22:160, 165–66.

¹¹⁵ Freud, 158.

¹¹⁶ Especially in Chiesa, *Not-Two*, chap. 2.

¹¹⁷ Lacan, *Encore*, 114, 105.

¹¹⁸ Lacan, "De James Joyce."

[. . .] the field in which philosophical discourse has inscribed itself.”¹¹⁹ That is to say, purporting itself as a discourse about discourse as such, philosophical discourse rests instead on its obliviousness of the fact that discourse, any discourse for that matter, amounts only to a semblance, a precarious stabilisation of language as an incomplete and overall entropic structure. This institutes, on top of the fantasy of a being that is presumed to think, that of a subject who is supposed to know. The “false position” of philosophy, its basic epistemological mistake, is “to define the conditions of possibility of a subject in the face of [a] knowledge that can be accumulated.”¹²⁰ Instead of conceiving of the subject as an effect of structure that thereby dialectically gives rise to discourse and an impersonal discursive knowledge, philosophy thus treats the subject as a “superimposed ornament, a joker convenient to the theoretical game.”¹²¹ Ultimately, the game at stake cannot but converge on the “God of philosophers,” an Other in whom absolute being and absolute knowledge equate and who externally guarantees the truth of knowledge.¹²²

Historically—resuming yet also problematising the linear chronology with which Freud sequenced the discourses of religion, philosophy, science, and psychoanalysis (in this order) as an increasing albeit hesitant distancing from the animism of any *Weltanschauung*—for Lacan, philosophical discourse “inscribes itself [. . .] in the discourse of the master.”¹²³ This does not only mean that, in arousing the master’s desire to know, philosophy enabled the theft of the slave’s knowledge and its transformation into the master’s knowledge.¹²⁴ It also and more disturbingly entails that the philosophical subject supposed to know, coalescing into a “tyranny of knowledge” starting from early modernity, is directly responsible for the contemporary emergence of “the most absolute masters.”¹²⁵ The onto-epistemologically based “I-crazy” of the subject supposed to know now determines the very conditions of possibility for the politics of the

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¹¹⁹ Lacan, *Encore*, 30; translation modified and expanded following the Staferla version.

¹²⁰ Jacques Lacan, “Les problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse: Séminaire 12, 1964–1965” (unpublished typescript, June 16, 1965), PDF document.

¹²¹ Juan-David Nasio in Jacques Lacan, “La topologie et le temps: Séminaire 26, 1978–1979” (unpublished typescript, May 15, 1979), PDF document.

¹²² See Lacan, *D’un Autre à l’autre*, 102.

¹²³ Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” 453.

¹²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 20–24.

¹²⁵ Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 32; Lacan, *D’un Autre à l’autre*, 396.

capitalist as a modern master engaged in a “curious copulation” with science.¹²⁶ The only master psychoanalysis actually ever confronts is the capitalist master as derived from philosophical-university discourse.

Biologically, Lacan anchors the kernel of philosophy’s delusion, its belief in the *m’être*—in being the master (*maître*) of myself, in being-me-to-myself (*m’être à moi-même*), and, by extension, in mastering the uni-verse as One¹²⁷—to what Freud referred to as “helplessness,” which he deemed to lie at the phylogenetic and ontogenetic origins of our propensity to create *Weltanschauungen*.¹²⁸ Lacan embryologically and physiologically complicates Freud’s account, by considering *Homo sapiens*’ helplessness as due to a species-specific prematurity of birth that leads to a prematurity of sexual maturation and is then retained as sexual neoteny in adulthood, but abides by his main assumption. The natural helplessness of the human baby who cannot satisfy its most elementary needs is partly remedied by the maternal figure’s care-giving role; following a protracted period of extreme dependence on the maternal figure, weaning thereby triggers a retrospective “nostalgia of the Whole” (which was never there) that leaves its trace, in a more abstract manner, in “the metaphysical mirage of universal harmony” and of a “perfect assimilation of totality to being.”¹²⁹

I think that this pivotal biological grounding, as evolutionarily contingent yet as such contingently necessary, by itself already moderates Lacan’s invectives against philosophy and promotes less unilateral considerations on it that more and more part ways with Freud’s unconditional scientific trust in the—*sui generis* anti-philosophical—progress of reason. *Homo sapiens* cannot not philosophise. *Foliesophie* is a structural condition of the biologically premature and thus mentally retarded animal that happens to speak. Lacan is vocal on this point: if philosophical discourse has enunciated “certain reference points [. . .] that are difficult to completely eliminate from any use of language,” if, that is,

¹²⁶ Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 63, 80, 110.

¹²⁷ See Lacan, *Encore*, 31, 39; Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 152.

¹²⁸ “The last contribution to the criticism of the religious *Weltanschauung* was effected by psycho-analysis, by showing how religion originated from the helplessness of children and by tracing its contents to the survival into maturity of the wishes and needs of childhood.” Freud, “Question of a *Weltanschauung*,” 167.

¹²⁹ Jacques Lacan, “Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu: Essai d’analyse d’une fonction en psychologie,” in *Autres écrits*, 36.

“we always do more philosophy than we believe we do,” this is the case because “the systems of philosophers [. . .] rest on the system everyone has.”¹³⁰ We should therefore not be “ironic” with philosophy, like Freud’s “wild” psychoanalysis instead was when he claimed that “philosophy falls under paranoia.”¹³¹

But, conversely, *foliesophie* could potentially “stand on its feet” if it starts out from the assumption that promoting, in various ways, more or less direct, a belief in the *m’être* depends on an unsurpassable transcendental invariant of the speaking animal—what Lacan also calls “the God hypothesis”¹³²—through which it thinks, in a compensatory manner, the otherwise phenomenologically self-evident non-correspondence between thinking and being.

On the one hand, psychoanalysis takes its cue from an empirical “experience,” namely the real of the absence of the sexual relationship, of there is no two sexes as One, which cannot be taken for a “philosophical enlightenment” for it gives itself as an impossibility, or “cluttering up.”¹³³ Philosophy has always found it difficult to approach this real, and its “extravagant opposition of realism and idealism” witnesses to that.¹³⁴ This real can instead be grasped numerically, not in the sense that it is “measurable” or “countable,” but in the sense that what founds the count, the “final resource” through which language is knotted to the real by means of impossibility, is the fact that, mathematically, “the number two truly is a problem”; “it is from there that the real enters the scenes”—that it *really* enters the scene, we should add, following the empirical evidence of the absence of the sexual relationships.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Lacan, *Encore*, 30–31; Lacan, “L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue,” January 11, 1977; Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls*, 44 (translation modified and expanded following the Staferla version).

¹³¹ Jacques Lacan, “Réponses à des étudiants en philosophie,” in *Autres écrits*, 210.

¹³² Lacan, *Encore*, 45. See also Chiesa, *Not-Two*, and Lorenzo Chiesa, “Psychoanalysis and Agnostic Atheism,” in Lorenzo Chiesa and Adrian Johnston, *God Is Undead: Psychoanalysis and the Case for Non-Belief* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

¹³³ Jacques Lacan, “Alla ‘Scuola Freudiana,’” in *Lacan in Italia, 1953–1978*, ed. Giacomo B. Contri (Milan: La Salamandra, 1978), 102.

¹³⁴ Lacan, 113.

¹³⁵ Lacan, 113. A thorough examination of this issue, countering Badiou’s claim that Lacan remains “pre-Cantorian” (Badiou, *Conditions*, 219), is central to my present project.

Yet, on the other hand, philosophy has and has always had something to say in this respect. No doubt, there is an allegedly enlightened *philosophy* centred on the idea that humankind is made for “wisdom,” which completely misses the dimension of “structure”¹³⁶—structure as the symbolic oscillation not-One/One (the God hypothesis), intrinsically giving rise to the imaginary semblance of the One (*m’être*), but actually resting on the not-One as real (the no-two-as-One of the absence of the sexual relationship). But, at the same time, there is also a *philosophy* friendly to psychoanalysis—and structure—that “can take charge,” and it can do so specifically in terms of truth, the real, and the non-correspondence between thinking—the One—and being.¹³⁷ Lacan here *defends* the philosophical tradition. In parallel, he scorns any presumed overcoming of its metaphysics as a disavowal of the latter’s structural presuppositions. Although it does not yet stand on its feet, *philosophy*’s philia as an incipiently cognizant *foliesophie* must be preserved: neither Plato, nor Descartes, nor Hegel, nor Marx, nor Freud—all labelled as “classical philosophers”—“can be ‘gone beyond,’ insofar as they carried out their research with the passion to unveil that has an object: truth.”¹³⁸ Insofar as, in the *Parmenides* and *The Sophist*, Plato already clearly perceives our predisposition “to turn the One into the supreme Being”¹³⁹ and tries to think the One differently through another kind of ontology (or even metaphysics), contemporary *philosophy*’s equally fashionable and moronic preaching about “the end of metaphysics”¹⁴⁰ can at best achieve an implicit and paradoxical metaphysics of the *m’être* in the guise of the *One* (not-One). All in all, however much philosophy tout-court goes round in—historical and logical—circles when it comes to thinking the being of the being that happens to speak, this failure nonetheless paradigmatically indicates that, for the speaking being, the real access to being is precisely nothing other than the fact that “he doesn’t come to [being], that he

¹³⁶ Jacques Lacan, “Conférences dans les universités nord-américaines,” *Scilicet* 6/7 (1975): 53.

¹³⁷ Lacan, *Sinthome*, 125 translation modified.

¹³⁸ Jacques Lacan, “Presentation on Psychical Causality,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 157. “One may find that I here deal a bit too much with what one calls—God-damned denomination—the great philosophers. The fact is that, not only them, but them especially articulate what we may well call a research [. . .] an unsurpassable research in the same sense I mean when I tell you that each of those we may call ‘great philosophers’ could never be surpassed on a certain point.” Jacques Lacan, “L’identification: Séminaire 9, 1961–1962” (unpublished typescript, February 28, 1962), PDF document.

¹³⁹ Jacques Lacan, *La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967* (Paris: Seuil, 2023), 303.

¹⁴⁰ Lacan, . . . or Worse, 18.

fails” to enter it.¹⁴¹ And *this* very predicament coincides with a “suddenly *open* dimension of *being*,”¹⁴² an ontological springboard so to speak.

Lacan does not stop here in his remarks in favour of philosophy, even and especially when at first sight he would appear to adopt a very antithetical stance to it. Specifically with regard to philosophy’s classical inscription in the discourse of the master and modern hijacking of it, philosophers at the same time “play the role of the fool,” the court jester who is the “place-holder of truth” without knowing it, and what they say as such is “more than usable.”¹⁴³ Hence, it is “not at all” the case that the question of philosophy can be solved as soon as we genealogically assume that philosophy has always amounted to discursive “ideology,” “the reflection of the superstructure of the dominant classes.”¹⁴⁴ Quite on the contrary, the history of philosophy has always also been a history of “devising the correct use of discourse,” or better, of understanding how “discourse [as an] operation” rests on “the difference there *is* between subject and substance”¹⁴⁵—the non-correspondence between thinking and being that philosophy contradictorily also masks.

If we carefully follow Lacan on this subtle dialectical point, we then grasp *his own torsion* (not Badiou’s) of psychoanalysis (as an initially anti-philosophical discourse, with Freud) not only into an anti-anti-philosophy but also into the future of philosophy. His converging comments in “Intervention sur l’exposé de J. Favez-Boutonier” (1955), “Psychoanalysis and Its Teaching” (1957), and a 1966 lecture given in Bordeaux in which he recalls a conversation he had just had with Derrida (“a very talented boy”)¹⁴⁶ are here very instructive. On a first level, Freudian anti-philosophical psychoanalysis already stands—*de facto* albeit retrospectively—as *anti-anti-philosophy*: Freud the anti-philosopher is in a sense equally “without doubt a philosopher” for the simple fact that his discovery that “the subject who speaks”—the barred subject of discourse—“is not the conscious

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¹⁴¹ Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls*, 44; translation modified.

¹⁴² Lacan, 44.

¹⁴³ Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” 453.

¹⁴⁴ Lacan, *D’un Autre à l’autre*, 242.

¹⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 2008), 72, 88; translation modified, emphasis added.

¹⁴⁶ Lacan, 87.

subject” belongs to “the order of truths.”¹⁴⁷ Yet, on a second and more important level, this first level should become the cornerstone of any (Lacanian) philosophy to come (not just Lacan’s). Philosophy is not dead. Philosophy is not surpassed. Lacan’s question to his philosophical audience at the Société française de Philosophie is: “What, in *their* view, does analysis teach us that is proper to analysis, or the most proper, truly proper, truly the most, the most truly?”¹⁴⁸ Adopting the philosopher’s perspective, his blunt answer is: “A certain relation between [hu]mankind and the signifier,”¹⁴⁹ namely, the fact that a subject is nothing but that which a signifier represents for another signifier in and for discourse and that this operation leaves an unassimilable real rest that renders discourse structurally incomplete while at the same time giving the subject access to the real only by means of an impossibility. Because of that, the most appropriate and concise reply Lacan can provide, in another instance, to Derrida’s partial perplexity—“All that’s very well, everything you say, I follow it [. . .] what you articulate as the unconscious structured like a language [a discourse], but why continuing to call that the subject?”—cannot but be “I preserve the subject . . . to get *you* talking” about it, to make you, a philosopher of the future, resume and complicate from the standpoint of the psychoanalytic unconscious what *philosophy* has always been putting forward by “separating in the most rigorous way the subject from substance”; it would be “sheer madness not to resume this term [the subject] [. . .] now that the time has finally come to turn/invert its use.”¹⁵⁰

I am of the opinion that such a turning should also potentially be understood in the specific framework of the “quarter turns” Lacan recurs to in his matrixes of the four discourses.¹⁵¹ Although in this context he never presents—any future—philosophy as an independent discourse, and it would be precipitous of me to attempt a matrixial algebraization of it, we are also clearly told that psychoanalysis “*extends*” philosophy, and it does so “very much beyond the point

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, “Intervention sur l’exposé de J. Favez-Boutonier,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 49, no. 1 (1955): 38–39.

¹⁴⁸ Jacques Lacan, “Psychoanalysis and Its Teaching,” in *Écrits*, 367; emphasis added.

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Lacan, “La psychanalyse et son enseignement,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 49, no. 2 (1957): 96. The discussion that followed Lacan’s lecture is not included in the *Écrits* version of “La psychanalyse et son enseignement.”

¹⁵⁰ Lacan, *My Teaching*, 87–89; emphasis added, translation modified and expanded following the version of the École lacanienne de psychanalyse.

¹⁵¹ See Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*.

at which” philosophy, as the discourse of the *m'être*, has been seriously disrupted—if not, too optimistically, “effaced”—by the very emergence of psychoanalysis (and set-theoretical mathematical logic).¹⁵² I do not think that what is at stake here is the *post-mortem* survival of philosophy, in a zombified state, although the text could also be tweaked in that sense. On the contrary, what is at stake is the fact that psychoanalysis “is philosophically so problematic,” whereby its “currency” remains all the same philosophical, despite there being two distinct discourses, psychoanalysis and philosophy—hence, strictly speaking, *psychoanalysis* “does not transform” philosophy.¹⁵³ The message seems clear: there is as much philosophical psychoanalysis as there is, or should be, psychoanalytic philosophy. I admit this partly clashes with Lacan’s more peremptory claim that “what I am doing here is philosophy,” full stop, but, on close inspection, very little changes here in respect to refuting an alleged relapse of Lacan into anti-philosophy.

Lacan’s insistence on a future discourse of psychoanalytic philosophy—again, not necessarily Lacan’s own philosophical discourse but necessarily a Lacanian discourse of philosophy for which Lacan does not fall back into anti-philosophy—is protracted and amplified in his latest works. In Seminar XXIV, for instance, his back-and-forths on what should be done with philosophy may seem disorienting at first, yet in the end combine in an unequivocal, and quite astonishing, conclusion. Lacan does not believe he is doing philosophy. But the Derridean philosophers who by then (1977) speak of a “*philosophie en effet*”—a real philosophy of *Wirklichkeit*, for what we said previously—all in all proceed *from* “something I have inaugurated with my discourse.”¹⁵⁴ But we should not “push too quickly the door of philosophy.”¹⁵⁵ But the right way not to do that is by dwelling on the level of the theory of discourses. But this makes Lacan “hit a brick wall” (since his matrixes do not really sort out the status of philosophical discourse?).¹⁵⁶ But what we should certainly avoid is Freud’s position, who did not face the same problem only because his anti-philosophical stance paradoxically coincided with a “philosophical order [for which] there was no [philosophy]”¹⁵⁷—namely, the negative

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¹⁵² Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 146.

¹⁵³ Lacan, 146.

¹⁵⁴ Lacan, “L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue,” January 11, 1977.

¹⁵⁵ Lacan, January 11, 1977.

¹⁵⁶ Lacan, February 8, 1977.

¹⁵⁷ Lacan, February 8, 1977.

Weltanschauung according to which there is no *Weltanschauung*, and the not-One unintentionally turns into a weakly atheistic *One* (not-One).¹⁵⁸ Hence, eventually, the only way out of this impasse cannot but be not only a reconsideration of philosophy—as *foliesophie*—in spite of its going in circles but also more strongly a “preserv[ation]” of the notion of a “system of the world,” where the system is exclusively based on the fact that concerning this world “we can say nothing of man except that he fell from it”—yet accesses it by means of this very fall.¹⁵⁹

We are left to assume that this minimal presupposition—the empirically derived yet axiomatic decision about the co-implication between language and the absence of the sexual relationship—paves the way to *any* “philosophy standing on its feet.”

As already anticipated in Seminar XV, we are equally left to assume that such an axiomatic decision necessarily involves a “philosophical *act*,” which should not be isolated as Lacan’s act for it pertains to “posterity,” which should not forcedly always be “the same” in the history of philosophy, but which “each time a renewal” of it takes place—from Plato to Lacan and his “successors,” passing through Descartes, Kant, and Hegel—always requires a “suspension of the subject supposed to know.”¹⁶⁰

We are moreover left to assume that one can speak of Lacan’s philosophy as “the *first* philosophy standing on its feet” only to the extent that, for the first time, it openly sequences a series of anti-epistemic and thus philosophical acts as a theory of the subject-to-truth.

What Lacan Said About Anti-Philosophy

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At this stage, we need to summon again our naïve interlocutor who could still very legitimately ask: What about Lacan’s own pronouncements in *direct* support of anti-philosophy? Leaving aside his claims against (bad) *philosophy* and how they are dialectically enmeshed with his claims in favour of (good) *philosophy*, are those pronouncements not indisputably partisan? The answer is again

¹⁵⁸ I develop this in Chiesa, “Psychoanalysis and Agnostic Atheism.”

¹⁵⁹ Lacan, “L’insu que sait de l’une bévue,” December 14, 1976.

¹⁶⁰ Lacan, “L’acte psychanalytique,” January 17, 1968.

negative. A close examination of the sources once more disproves both pro- and anti-Lacanian doxastic preconceptions on the matter.

There are only three short passages in which Lacan explicitly refers to anti-philosophy. The first is very well-known and unmistakably pro anti-philosophy, yet it does not add much to what Lacan already says in his critiques of *philosophy*. The second is less well-known, although quoted also by Badiou, and rather ambiguous if put into context. The third has so far, to the best of my knowledge, been ignored in discussions about Lacan and anti-philosophy and turns out to be patently opposed to anti-philosophy, to the point of ridiculing it. Let us scrutinise them.

In “Peut-être à Vincennes . . .” (1975)—note the conditional and the ellipsis—Lacan includes anti-philosophy among the disciplines that should be taught at the newly established Department of Psychoanalysis at Vincennes (the others being linguistics, logic, and topology). The entire text is two pages; the paragraph devoted to anti-philosophy is seven lines. We are just told that:

- a. Anti-philosophy refers to an investigation of what the university discourse owes to its “‘educational’ supposition.”
- b. This investigation could not be accomplished by a history of ideas, however critical the latter might be.
- c. This investigation will basically consist of a “patient collection of the imbecility” that characterises the university discourse.
- d. This investigation will hopefully highlight the “indestructible root,” which is also the “eternal dream,” of this imbecility.
- e. There are only “particular” awakenings from this dream.¹⁶¹

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What seems clearly under scrutiny here is *not* philosophy as such. The target of anti-philosophy is instead the university discourse and, specifically, its assumption that it can educate, namely, that it can transmit knowledge as *wisdom*. Even more specifically, the target of Lacanian anti-philosophy therefore amounts to nothing other than the *philosophy* of the *m'être* as taught at university (not only as part of the curriculum for will-be-philosophers but also and especially as the set of so-called “learning skills” imparted to all students). Against this back-

¹⁶¹ Jacques Lacan, “Peut-être à Vincennes . . .,” in *Autres écrits*, 314–15.

ground, the best Lacanian anti-philosophy can achieve as a discipline, beyond any genealogy of education, is an inventory of the imbecility of the university discourse—as a *discourse* far exceeding the boundaries of universities yet coalescing in an idiotic “‘educational’ supposition”—that also evidences the *structural* character of this imbecility. In spite of psychoanalysis, there is no universal remedy to the I-crazy of the fantasy of being-me-to-myself, of being a graduated subject-supposed-to-know.¹⁶²

Lacan stops here. He does not attempt to “destroy philosophy.” In the introduction to “Peut-être à Vincennes . . .” he even suggests that the disciplines he proposes to teach at Vincennes should make the disciplines they originate from “find in the [psychoanalytic] experience the opportunity to be renewed”¹⁶³—so however modest the actual aims of anti-philosophy at Vincennes turn out to be, they nonetheless contribute to building a new *philosophy*. And this is Lacan’s most extensive reference to anti-philosophy. One could only overlap it with Badiou’s definition of anti-philosophy—at bottom, a discourse against the pretence that discourse can be self-sufficient, that it can master itself by mastering the discourse of the *m’être*—in a roundabout way, by means of other isolated passages in Lacan’s oeuvre (in which, by the way, anti-philosophy is never literally mentioned, quite simply because what he is contrasting is, again, *bad* philosophy . . .). For instance, in Seminar XII, Lacan states that “I call ‘philosophy’ everything that tends to mask the radical character and originating function of [a] loss [. . .] that is produced every time that language tries in a discourse to account for itself.”¹⁶⁴ Interestingly though, he at the same time specifies that “every dialectic” that makes this mistake is a philosophy, which also implies that there are other dialectics which—potentially at least—do not make this mistake.¹⁶⁵

The second passage in which Lacan mentions anti-philosophy is in his last Seminar, *Dissolution* (1980) and is almost exclusively anecdotal but very telling. Badiou correctly reports that, recalling a Dadaist text by Tristan Tzara, “Monsieur Aa l’antiphilosophie,” Lacan adds “it is also my case,” that is, I am an anti-phi-

¹⁶² Hence, in this regard, “the subject is *not* wrong in identifying himself with consciousness [. . .] but, from there, in not being able not to miss the topology that tricks him in this identification.” Lacan, “Réponses à des étudiants,” 205; emphasis added.

¹⁶³ Lacan, “Peut-être à Vincennes . . .,” 313.

¹⁶⁴ Lacan, “Les problèmes cruciaux,” December 2, 1964.

¹⁶⁵ Lacan, December 2, 1964.

losopher too.¹⁶⁶ Lacan then states: “If I may say so, I rebel against philosophy. What is certain is that it’s something that’s finished, even if I expect some offshoots to sprout back from it.”¹⁶⁷ Badiou makes a lot out of this. However, what he strangely underplays is that, immediately after, Lacan relates this sprouting back precisely to his own *psychoanalytic* School, which he is about to dissolve, and adds “I am not at all intending to dissolve the École Normale Supérieure, where in the past I’ve been most welcome”¹⁶⁸—namely, the most authoritative establishment of academic philosophy in France . . .

If this were not enough to evidence the obvious ambivalence of Lacan’s “rebellion,” two further provisos can additionally challenge Badiou’s unilateral take on this passage. Badiou equally omits to specify that Lacan returns to Tzara’s “Monsieur Aa l’antiphilosophie” in response to a “Monsieur A., philosophe” who contested him a few days earlier. Put simply, here Lacan’s anti-philosophical stance limits itself to countering a philosopher’s, in his view, anti-psychoanalytic stance. This anti-psychoanalytic philosopher is, very surprisingly, none other than Louis Althusser, arguably one of the most pro-psychoanalysis and pro-Lacan philosophers up to that point, who, suffering from severe depression (another complication . . .), disrupted the meeting in which Lacan dissolved his School and, “in the name of analysands” (another complication . . .), accused Lacan of being a “pitiful Harlequin.”¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, and most significantly, we should not lose sight of the fact that, only two years earlier, it was precisely Althusser (“someone of good sense”) who, according to Lacan, told Lacan that what Lacan does is philosophy, which on the same occasion Lacan very gladly consents to (“What I am doing here is philosophy. [. . .] It’s a philosophy that I have handled the best way I could following the current that results from Freud’s philosophy”).¹⁷⁰ Again, we are here for the most part on the level of anecdotes but the negative bias that vitiates

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¹⁶⁶ Jacques Lacan, “Dissolution,” in *Aux confins du Séminaire*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Navarin, 2021), 60.

¹⁶⁷ Lacan, 60.

¹⁶⁸ Lacan, 61.

¹⁶⁹ See Louis Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, ed. Olivier Corpet and François Matheron, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 125–43.

¹⁷⁰ Lacan, “Le moment de conclure,” December 20, 1977.

Badiou's reading—who I suppose is acquainted with them—seems to me incontrovertible.

As for the third direct reference to anti-philosophy in Lacan's oeuvre, it has to do with Wittgenstein and the tradition of analytic philosophy he commenced. In Seminar XVII, Lacan provides an interpretation of Wittgenstein that in many ways anticipates Badiou's singling the latter out as a quintessential anti-philosopher—hence it could be made to correspond to what Badiou designates as the *anti-anti-philosophical* moment in Lacan—but he refrains from using this term with respect to Wittgenstein. In Seminar XIV, he instead uses it, very disparagingly, with respect to the Wittgensteinians. We need to tackle these passages in quite some detail.

First of all, let us recall that, for Badiou, (at least the early) Wittgenstein is an anti-philosopher since, in spite and especially because of his crusade against the pseudo-truth of philosophy as a self-contained discourse that would thus have an overarching meta-linguistic meaning, whereas for him philosophical propositions are actually senseless, he ends up submitting truth to meaning nonetheless, which is what characterises anti-philosophy at large. According to Badiou, for Wittgenstein, truth can only correspond to an exact linguistic description of existing states of affairs; meaning as the mystically unsayable sense of the world instead anchors truth.¹⁷¹

Lacan's assessment of Wittgenstein in Seminar XVII—which focuses on the *Tractatus* and whose complexity I will have to simplify—is overall similar to Badiou's: Wittgenstein's operation is, positively, “the detection of philosophical knavery” yet as such it remains, negatively, “an extraordinary parade.”¹⁷² First, for Wittgenstein, there is no meta-language (“there is no other meta-language than all the forms of knavery”).¹⁷³ Second, truth can thus only be inscribed in a proposition and as such be articulated as transmissible knowledge.¹⁷⁴ Third, more specifically, truth means propositional conformity to a grammatical struc-

¹⁷¹ I acknowledge that assuming there is a mystically unsayable sense of the world in the *Tractatus* amounts to an old-fashioned and by now largely discredited interpretation of it. I will expand on this in the near future.

¹⁷² Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 61; translation modified.

¹⁷³ Lacan, 61.

¹⁷⁴ See Lacan, 62.

ture.¹⁷⁵ Fourth, the world amounts to the grammatical structure and “all that is true is [. . .] a composite proposition comprising the totality of the facts that constitute the world”¹⁷⁶—for Wittgenstein, in his words, “the world is the totality of facts, not of things,”¹⁷⁷ namely, facts are not objects but structural relations between objects that language, as denotative, can “picture” as true. *But* fifth and crucially, according to Wittgenstein, the set of true propositions is “tautological” or “stupid,” Lacan says: to the extent that “whatever you enunciate is either true or false” (“it is day” is either true or false), “enunciating that [whatever you enunciate] is either true or false is necessarily true” (it is necessarily true that “‘it is day’ is either true or false”).¹⁷⁸ That is to say, sixth, there is a performative annulment of sense via tautology—and of the sense of the *Tractatus* itself.

Given that Wittgenstein refuses to solve this impasse by means of Aristotle’s solution of the problem of future contingents, the latter’s infamous “it is necessary that a sea-fight either will or will not take place tomorrow,” that is, given that, for Wittgenstein, truth should be internal to the proposition and not lie outside the set of true propositions (the truth that the sea-fight will or will not take place tomorrow is external to the proposition; future contingents are not propositions for Wittgenstein), his conclusion—which Lacan much appreciates—is brutally honest: due to the tautology “everything that can be said is only senseless,” including and especially what Wittgenstein has just said so far concerning the propositional status of truth; “nothing else is sayable” about the world; and silence thereby imposes itself.¹⁷⁹

Yet, according to Lacan, this is not Wittgenstein’s whole story. Indeed, this very predicament posits the world of *things* as “inaccessible”¹⁸⁰ beyond what we have just senselessly said about the world of facts. Or better, Wittgenstein’s pushing the absence of a meta-language to its extreme consequences—for truth can only be inscribed in a proposition—paradoxically leads him on the contrary to a propositional treatment of truth for which, against all our empirical evidence in

¹⁷⁵ See Lacan, 59.

¹⁷⁶ Lacan, 59.

¹⁷⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

¹⁷⁸ Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 59; translation modified.

¹⁷⁹ Lacan, 59.

¹⁸⁰ Lacan, 60.

everyday life, “we reject that the true [. . .] can have a false consequent”—a rejection that founds propositional logic—whereby “we end up with this curious fact that the true has a genealogy, that it always goes back to an initial truth, from which it is no longer able to fall.”¹⁸¹ As we just saw, this initial truth cannot but be the truth that stating that a proposition is either true or false is necessarily true. Thus, the fact that everything that can be said is senseless equates with the fact that everything that can be said is true as senseless *with respect to the ulterior transcendence of an ineffable “absolute sense.”*¹⁸²

Like for Badiou, for Lacan, Wittgenstein therefore sutures truth to sense. But pace Badiou (Lacan would consign truth to the “*sense as ab-sense*” of the sexual relationship on which the transmissibility of knowledge would itself depend; after all, Lacan would be a *sui generis* Wittgensteinian) what Lacan instead proposes about truth against Wittgenstein in the same passages of Seminar XVII is very different. For Wittgenstein, according to Lacan who now deconstructs Wittgenstein by also making him in part ventriloquise Lacan’s own stance, truth is already somehow not simply “internal” to the proposition—where only “the facticity of language” is announced.¹⁸³ Truth depends on my enunciation; it depends on whether my enunciation is appropriate; this appropriate enunciation does make it true that the facticity of language is a fact; but the fact that this is true “is not a fact, unless I explicitly add that, moreover, it’s true.”¹⁸⁴ As Wittgenstein would retort against this forced ventriloquising, such a step seems superfluous. But it is not. It is not superfluous, not even for Wittgenstein who affirms that “no sign of affirmation needs to be added to what is assertion pure and simple.”¹⁸⁵

Generally speaking, it is not superfluous because this addition invariably happens in everyday life (more or less explicitly); bluntly put, subjects always have a “reason” for saying what they are saying (even just “it is day”);¹⁸⁶ or better,

¹⁸¹ Lacan, 61.

¹⁸² Lacan, 62.

¹⁸³ Lacan, 60; translation modified.

¹⁸⁴ Lacan, 60.

¹⁸⁵ Lacan, 60.

¹⁸⁶ Explicitly: “Look, it’s day. It’s true. I told you it was late, let’s go home”; implicitly: “Come on, it’s day (I’ll never go out with her again, it’s so late).”

subjects of language are also subjects of desire and truth always has to do with what “desire hides of its lack.”¹⁸⁷

Reading between the lines of Lacan’s interpretation, with regard to Wittgenstein and his desire for a purely propositional truth, adding that “it’s true” to the fact that it is true is not superfluous because it is only by explicitly adding that it is true that we are “genealogically” taken back to the “initial truth,” the truth that, independently of whether a proposition I enunciate is true or false, it is always contained by the senseless truth that stating that a proposition is either true or false is necessarily true. The senseless truth that stating that a proposition is either true or false is necessarily true necessitates stating that a particular proposition is true and not false. Otherwise, without this—second-degree—performative dimension, we could not truly distinguish between true and false propositions (for they are both contained by the initial truth) and there would quite simply not be any propositional logic . . . Are the truth tables of propositional logic, which Wittgenstein invented, not a way of adding that “it’s true” to the fact that it is true? And, as such, are they not fragments of a genealogy of truth? Lacan claims that, unlike other philosophers, “Wittgenstein wasn’t interested in saving the truth” meta-linguistically:¹⁸⁸ he was not insofar as, for him, truth is ultimately senseless; but what he initiated in terms of the propagation of propositional logic into analytic philosophy certainly stands as a gigantic attempt at meta-linguistically saving the truth *within language* . . .

Finally, taking the perspective of Wittgenstein’s desire more comprehensively, the—first- and second-degree—performative dimension of truth—which Wittgenstein would like to expunge—is not superfluous because it is only through the *Tractatus* itself, as paradigmatically both an enunciation that it is true that whatever one enunciates is either true or false *and* a vade mecum for adding that “it’s true” that a given proposition is true, that the senseless truth negatively opens onto an ineffable absolute sense. Put simply, silence in the face of the latter requires an active detour by means of language. Indeed, for Wittgenstein’s desire, the impasse of the *Tractatus* has not been in vain.

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¹⁸⁷ Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 61; translation modified.

¹⁸⁸ Lacan, 63.

If we now specifically turn to Lacan's own stance, for him, truth is unequivocally not internal to the proposition. Like for Wittgenstein, "truth [. . .] is certainly inseparable from the effects of language taken as such," which in turn cannot be separated from a subject of enunciation—presupposed albeit overshadowed by Wittgenstein.¹⁸⁹ Yet, for Lacan, unlike for Wittgenstein, there is no genealogy of truth that takes us back to an initial truth, however senseless it may be. In other words, on the one hand, as the logicians of the Middle Ages already realised, *ex falso sequitur quodlibet*—that is, from falsehood anything follows, that is, "the false sometimes also entails the true" and therefore "the true can be about anything."¹⁹⁰ But, on the other hand, "that there is no false without the true"—as ultimately entailed by an initial senselessness of truth that opens onto an absolute sense—"that is false."¹⁹¹ This is Wittgenstein's error, the error of the non-dupped who err the most (*les non-dupes errent*). This is also very similar to the error made by those psychoanalysts (including Lacanian ones like Laplanche, according to Lacan) who advance that "the unconscious is the condition of language," and not vice versa.¹⁹² The unconscious itself amounts to the effects of language taken as such, Lacan insists. And if psychoanalysis were to posit the opposite, it would inevitably also posit "an absolute sense [that] answers to the unconscious."¹⁹³ Given these premises, we should then think the non-interiority of truth to the proposition not as its priority to the set of propositions (whether true or false but ultimately always true—as per a wrong understanding of "I, the truth, speaks") but instead as its being "*beside*" it ("But is it certain that we should find [truth] *intus*, within? Why not *beside*?"¹⁹⁴).

All in all, for Lacan, "we are *not without* a relationship with truth,"¹⁹⁵ but with the crucial specification that this is a *lateral* relationship, that truth is a *para*-truth with respect to (the effects of) language, which, I add, demands a *para-ontology*. Lacan already hints at this ontological dimension in the same pages of Seminar XVII we are scrutinising. In order not to capitulate to any, however paradoxical, "absolute sense" (*sens absolu*) and consequently also turn truth into an "*at-*

¹⁸⁹ Lacan, 62.

¹⁹⁰ Lacan, 61.

¹⁹¹ Lacan, 62.

¹⁹² Lacan, 62.

¹⁹³ Lacan, 62; translation modified.

¹⁹⁴ Lacan, 58; translation modified.

¹⁹⁵ Lacan, 58.

tribute” of knowledge;¹⁹⁶ in order, that is, not to repeat Wittgenstein error—and Badiou’s in his reading of Lacan as a quasi-Wittgensteinian—we need to put at centre stage the *not without* (*pas sans*) relationship with truth as a truth-beside. As Lacan already spelled out in Seminar V, sense (*sens*) does not go without a non-sense (*pas-de-sens*) that is also a step-of-sense (*pas-de-sens*).¹⁹⁷ Here Wittgenstein is, in a limited sense, not too distant. But Wittgenstein’s *non sequitur* is to still end up with a—ineffable—sense that is allegedly “being full sense” rather than search for “what of being there is in sense” starting from sense as “what escapes being” and, concomitantly, leaves truth *aside*.¹⁹⁸

What is now delineating itself on the horizon is not only the truth of the real in terms of subjectivized truths of the real but also, and without solution of continuity, a more daring para-ontological investigation into whether it is possible to approach a truth of the real tout-court that does not reabsorb the senselessness of truth into an absolute sense. This is a question—one of the key questions of the para-ontology I am pursuing, as, in my view, a prolongation of Badiou’s meta-ontology—with which Lacan flirts, repeatedly, but never thoroughly addresses.

For the time being, let us just stress that Lacan does *not* label Wittgenstein’s position as anti-philosophical but as that of “psychotic ferocity.”¹⁹⁹ In psychotic discourse, as “the most assured discourse,” there is indeed no false without the true.²⁰⁰ The psychotic position, Lacan says in the same pages of Seminar XVII, can briefly be defined as “not wanting to know anything about the spot where truth is in question.”²⁰¹ Senseless truth as initial truth does not really pose a problem to Wittgenstein: it instead marks the border of a, however much inaccessible, divine sense. At bottom, that border is where the truth of his desire lies. Like for President Judge Schreber, the Order of God turns against any alleged rational order of the world He has himself established, yet it remains an *Order*. (Badiou is thus right in highlighting a “*silent* principle of salvation” in Wittgen-

¹⁹⁶ Lacan, 62; emphasis added.

¹⁹⁷ See Jacques Lacan, *The Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. Russell Grigg (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 87–93.

¹⁹⁸ Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 57–58.

¹⁹⁹ Lacan, 62.

²⁰⁰ Lacan, 63.

²⁰¹ Lacan, 63.

stein's *Weltanschauung*, but he is wrong in referring to it as “mystical”;²⁰² while for the mystic the apparent disorder of the world can immanently give access to a transcendent order, for the psychotic the latter is given only as inaccessible.)²⁰³

Having said this, in a passage from Seminar XIV, which should be made to dialogue with Seminar XVII, Lacan instead refers to *Wittgensteinians* as anti-philosophers and resolutely opposes them to Wittgenstein himself: “Do not believe that since an entire school that is called logico-positivistic keeps harping onto us with a series of most insipid and mediocre anti-philosophical considerations that Wittgenstein’s step is nothing.”²⁰⁴ In other words, there is something to be learnt from Wittgenstein’s—psychotic and failed yet not anti-philosophical—attempt at reducing truth to the proposition and, more generally, promoting a logic that could do without the existence of the subject, since it goes together with an unprecedented upholding of senselessness. But there is nothing to be learnt from the Wittgensteinians who, as *anti-philosophers*, cannot even be considered as just ordinary bad *philosophers*.

Lacan does not name names nor explains further what the anti-philosophical position of the Wittgensteinians precisely amounts to, but we can try to unpack this briefly by profiting also from other occasions on which he attacks logico-positivism. In short, logico-positivists radicalise Wittgenstein’s treatment of truth as internal to the proposition in an effort to dispose of senselessness. Like for Wittgenstein, truth should be approached by means of an alternative between true and false propositions. But unlike for Wittgenstein, the enunciative truth that a proposition is either true or false should itself become internal to the proposition and thus no longer make truth senseless—for instance, and simplifying a lot, the senseless truth that it is necessarily true that “‘it is day’ is either true or false” turns into the sense of the proposition “it is necessarily true that ‘it is day’ is either true or false.”

From a certain perspective, there is here no meta-linguistic truth, yet concomitantly propositional logic becomes the true language of language that rules out senselessness. Hence, from another perspective, truth as the true language of

²⁰² Badiou, *Lacan*, 6; emphasis added.

²⁰³ See Chiesa, “Psychoanalysis and Agnostic Atheism.”

²⁰⁴ Lacan, *La logique du fantasme*, 140.

language also becomes the meta-linguistic referent of language. This leads to a “fabulous paradox,” Lacan says: if referring to truth presupposes a division between propositions that are in themselves true and propositions that are in themselves false with regard to state of affairs—since, unlike for Wittgenstein, for the Wittgensteinian anti-philosophers there is moreover no distinction between the world of facts and the world of things—then referring to truth unwittingly albeit necessarily also involves “positing an *absolute false*, namely a false to which one could refer oneself as such.”²⁰⁵ And, we could continue, perhaps this is the reason why Wittgensteinian logico-positivists are, strictly speaking, for Lacan, *anti*-philosophers: there where philosophers, as Badiou puts it, “assume that there is a truth of the real,” Wittgensteinian logico-positivists assume this only by not realising that, in parallel, they are also assuming a falsehood of the real . . . Lacan’s overall view does not leave room for doubt: “If we start from the principle that something that has no meaning cannot be essential in the development of discourse, we quite simply lose our bearings.”²⁰⁶

This is precisely what Wittgensteinian anti-philosophers start from. Senseless truth is dammed up, sense no longer hinges on an ineffable sense, but only at the cost of pretending to lose the subject (of enunciation)—including the subject-supposed-to-know of *bad* philosophers—which is instead preserved in Wittgenstein at least as awestruck silence. I would be tempted to add that the related cost to be paid here is also the relinquishment of the florid phase of psychosis; the question “What was Wittgenstein thinking of when he was keeping silent?” is very much worth asking . . .²⁰⁷ For Lacan, Wittgensteinian logico-positivism is an “insipid” and “mediocre” anti-philosophy also because, so to speak, it is a psychosis without psychosis.

The Future of *Foliesophie*

So, to conclude, where does this leave us regarding a—anti-psychotic and, especially, anti-psychosis-without-psychosis—*foliesophie* that as such refuses the very distinction Badiou draws between philosophy and anti-philosophy? Let us

²⁰⁵ Lacan, *D’un discours*, 84; emphasis added.

²⁰⁶ Lacan, 59.

²⁰⁷ Derek Jarman’s 1993 film *Wittgenstein* becomes a great film if it is taken as an attempt to answer this question.

recall that *foliesophie* has three inseparable aspects: the structural, that is transcendental, condition of the *Homo sapiens* species for which it cannot but *foliesophise*, namely, put forward the Being-One; Lacan's psychoanalytic theory as "the first philosophy that seems to be standing on its feet" precisely insofar as, by assuming this structural condition critically, it, like Badiou's philosophy, on the contrary revolves around the axiomatic decision that the One is not, it only exists as an operation, and, moreover, in doing so does not contradict itself; a future Lacanian philosophy (and Badiouian to the extent that Badiou is a Lacanian if and only if he no longer confines Lacan to anti-philosophy) that, by recuperating the anti-Being-One component of the (good) philosophical tradition, continues Lacan's philosophical psychoanalysis in the philosophical domain, up to the point of not falling short of proposing, as we saw, an alternative "system of the world" that is *not* a self-contained *Weltanschauung*.

Against doxastic interpretations, I wish to stress once again that this final aspect of *foliesophie* does not at all force Lacan's broad conclusions on the matter. Let me quickly further vindicate my assertion with some supplementary textual evidence and thus also highlight a series of key notions I will have to return to and delve into elsewhere—engaging and agreeing with Badiou yet also attempting to dismantle his anti-Lacanian threshold.

First, to clear the ground one more time, "psychoanalysis renews philosophy"; philosophy would demonstrate a "fundamental dishonesty" only if it ignored this.²⁰⁸

Second, on a related and still basic yet also massive level, in the future, "we have to begin to think up something that accounts for the fact that there are *unconscious thoughts*. The latter does not go without saying. Actually, no one has ever truly tackled this so far" as an "eminently philosophical question."²⁰⁹

Third, that there are unconscious thoughts cannot but lead to a philosophical appreciation of "substance as on the side of a shortage"; specifically, this

²⁰⁸ Jacques Lacan, "L'objet de la psychanalyse: Séminaire 13, 1965–1966" (unpublished typescript, March 30, 1966), PDF document.

²⁰⁹ Lacan, *My Teaching*, 8; translation modified, emphasis added.

is what “the *psychoanalytic act* could indicate.”²¹⁰ However, such an indication should not be unfolded in terms of psychoanalysis being aware of “the philosophical error”—not treating substance as on the side of a shortage—“as if, from there, philosophy should then be aware of it.”²¹¹ This naïve take on psychoanalytic discourse would turn it into a discourse of the *m’être about* the philosophical discourse of the *m’être*. Psychoanalytic discourse amounts to neither a conscious drainage of the unconscious that would allegedly make up for substance as a shortage (as per the infamous Freudian metaphor of the draining of the Zuider Zee) nor to a discourse of the Being-One veiled under an apparent discourse of the definitive *not*-oneness of Being, whereby substance as a shortage is meta-linguistically installed as a *One* (not-One). As Lacan glosses, imagining a superior awareness of psychoanalysis over philosophy “would be the philosophical error as such.”²¹² In other words, Lacan continues, psychoanalysis should absolutely not stand as a “hermeneutic”—a sense-provider—of philosophy, otherwise “it would take philosophy back to its ties to obscurantism”—and this is also the major risk for psychoanalysis’ own future.²¹³ To cut a long story short, the *philosophical act* that suspends not only the alleged self-sufficiency of substance but, together with it, also the subject-supposed-to-know needs to remain independent of the psychoanalytic act albeit indebted to it as the kernel of a practice of the unconscious.

Fourth, that the dimension of the act emerges as pivotal for a renewal of philosophy cannot but raise for philosophy itself the question of a *transmission* of knowledge that does not rely on the supposition of masterly teaching; “[Transmission] interests the philosopher in the sense that [. . .] a specific practice [psychoanalysis] raises radical problems” in this regard, but “the solutions that [psychoanalysts] provide to these problems” may well receive “singular applications at the level of other disciplines.”²¹⁴ Here philosophy should avoid founding the question of transmission on the wrong assumption that the fact that “there is no unity of the subject,” and hence no subject-supposed-to-know, could be

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²¹⁰ Lacan, “Réponses à des étudiants,” 205.

²¹¹ Lacan, 205.

²¹² Lacan, 205.

²¹³ Lacan, 210.

²¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, “Interview donnée par Jacques Lacan à François Wahl à propos de la parution des *Écrits*,” *Le Bulletin de l’Association Freudienne* 3 (May 1983): 7.

obviated by postulating that “there are two [unities],”²¹⁵ namely, that there is a unconscious subject-supposed-to-know. This move, “installing [in] the psyche a whole small population of unities,” Lacan says, “only redoubles the deadlock that the unconscious proposes to us.”²¹⁶

Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, what should nonetheless be involved in both psychoanalytic and philosophical solutions to the problem of transmissibility (with the former revolving around the formation of the psychoanalyst and the technique of the so-called *passe*) has to do with *formalisation*. As Badiou well sees, there is a strict connection for Lacan between the act that tears a hole in knowledge and the question of the transmission of knowledge, on the one hand, and the *matheme*, on the other (let us recall that, for Badiou, Lacan was the first in the twentieth century to put mathematics again at centre stage of *speculative* reasoning—against its anti-philosophical use in logico-positivism).²¹⁷ As Badiou equally well sees, for Lacan, transmissibility as formalisation is given only via the *matheme* as itself “the *impasse* of the mathematizable”/ formalizable—which *can* as such be formalised and thereby initiate transmission. Against this background, according to Lacan himself (who again does not refrain from openly speaking as a philosopher—“If you allow me to be a philosopher in my spare time”), the future of philosophy is adjudicated on whether it understands that “what [. . .] constitutes a concept is very precisely the function of a *limit*,” namely, of a *matheme*.²¹⁸ There will be philosophy as a philosophy that is “strictly speaking relating to the real” on condition that it constructs its concepts on an “indefinitely approachable limit.”²¹⁹

On the one hand, this might rightly give the impression that Lacan is here far too modestly limiting the future of philosophy to *this* side of the limit/*matheme*. On the other hand—and we have to admit that this remains a tension in Lacan’s arguments—he at the same time suggests that future philosophy can itself be a philosophy *of* the limit/*matheme* insofar as it can be—and in a sense has always been—a philosophy of mathematical *infinity* and the latter’s inherent *impasses*.

²¹⁵ Lacan, 7.

²¹⁶ Lacan, 7.

²¹⁷ See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 7.

²¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, “En guise de conclusion,” *Lettres de l’École freudienne* 8 (1971): 217; emphasis added.

²¹⁹ Lacan, 217.

Obviously, the tradition of *philosophy* rests on “the requirement of the One,” the Being-One.²²⁰ Yet *inasmuch as philosophy severs the link between the One and being in its ontological discourse, “where there is being, infinity is required.”*²²¹

We, Lacanian philosophers of the future, are therefore left with two—up to a point compatible—options: with Badiou, philosophy can turn into a meta-ontology of set-theoretical mathematics as ontology, where set-theory leads via—uncountable—infinity (as opposed to the bad infinity of an indefinitely approachable limit) precisely to the *matheme* as a productive formalisation—and then transmission—of the impasse of formalisation/mathematisation.²²² Better said, transmissibility as formalisation in *philosophy* is precisely what Badiou does *meta-ontologically* with regard to his use of ontological/set-theoretical formalisation as ultimately the latter’s formalizable impasse. With Badiou but also beyond Badiou, this very platform can subsequently promote a philosophical *para-ontology* for which the assumption that the One is not and only exists as an operation can be upheld practically—that is, ethically and politically—without contradiction only after contemplating the theoretically *undecidable* possibility of the One *as not-One as One as not-One* etcetera (what I have elsewhere called the self-deceiving God).²²³

In my view, this last passage is in the end mandatory, and the two options should merge into one, in order to prevent *Lacanian* philosophers of the future from themselves embracing a negative *Weltanschauung*. As Lacan lucidly warns us,

When one will make a course of philosophy . . . one will summarise my teaching and say: “What Lacan states is this—isn’t it?—he says that on the animal ladder [. . .] crack, eh! No more sexual relationship!” Which means the same thing as the origins of language—because philosophers are clearly not idiots. A speaking being has no sexual relationship! [. . .] It’s very funny as we will regain there the *totality of the world*.²²⁴

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²²⁰ Lacan, *Encore*, 10.

²²¹ Lacan, 10.

²²² Of course, for Badiou—and for Lacan—the productivity of the impasse of mathematisation first and foremost concerns Cantor’s theorem, specifically when considering infinite sets.

²²³ See Chiesa, *Not-Two* and “Psychoanalysis and Agnostic Atheism.”

²²⁴ Lacan, *Lacan in Italia*, 75.

Clearly, for Lacan, it is far from granted that “good” Lacanian philosophers are exempted from surreptitiously endorsing bad philosophy.

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Mike Grimshaw*

Radical Theology and the “Weakening” of Bourgeois Institutions

Keywords

radical theology, weak thought, Nietzsche, Vattimo, secularization, death of God, neoconservatism, neo-liberalism, the university, Ignazio Silone

Abstract

Radical theology offers a different way to interrogate and critique bourgeois capitalist society and its institutions. Almost always institutional in location and focus, radical theology recognizes that the traditional religious underpinnings of liberal bourgeois society and its institutions no longer continue to operate nor offer a workable foundational basis. We could say, *contra* Habermas, that there is more than “the awareness” of what is missing; rather, what is missing is what is *necessarily* missing because “the what” of God is dead. The crisis of contemporary institutions is that, founded implicitly or explicitly on bourgeois religion and its God, they now find themselves with an ontological crisis most do not even recognize. Or rather, they recognize there is a crisis of meaning and purpose but are unsure or unwilling or even unable to engage with its foundational causes. Drawing on the weak thought of Gianni Vattimo, radical theology is employed as a way of rethinking institutions from within, against both their foundations and their current expressions, articulating a set of “weak possibilities” for ways forward.

Radikalna teologija in »oslabitev« buržoaznih institucij

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Ključne besede

radikalna teologija, šibka misel, Nietzsche, Vattimo, sekularizacija, smrt Boga, neokon-servativizem, neoliberalizem, univerza, Ignazio Silone

* University of Canterbury, New Zealand
michael.grimshaw@canterbury.ac.nz | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8829-061X>

Povzetek

Radikalna teologija ponuja drugačen način preizpraševanja in kritike buržoazne kapitalistične družbe in njenih institucij. Radikalna teologija, ki je glede na svojo umeščenost in fokus skoraj vedno institucionalna, izhaja iz spoznanja, da tradicionalni religiozni temelji liberalne buržoazne družbe in njenih institucij ne delujejo več in ne nudijo delujoče temeljne podlage. V *nasprotju* s Habermasom bi lahko rekli, da ne gre zgolj za »zavest« o tem, kar manjka. Prej gre za to, da je tisto, kar manjka, tisto, kar *nujno* manjka, ker je tisto »kaj« Boga mrtvo. Kriza sodobnih institucij je v tem, da so se institucije, ki so implicitno ali eksplicitno utemeljene na buržoazni religiji in njenem Bogu, znašle v ontološki krizi, ki je večina niti ne prepozna. Ali bolje rečeno, priznavajo krizo smisla in smotra, vendar so negotove, nepripravljene ali celo nezmožne obravnavati njene temeljne vzroke. Opirajoč se na šibko misel Giannija Vattima, pričujoči članek obravnava radikalno teologijo kot način ponovnega premisleka institucij od znotraj, zoperstavljajoč se pri tem tako njihovim temeljem kot njihovim trenutnim pojavnim oblikam, na podlagi česar lahko zariše niz »šibkih možnosti« za pot naprej.



The death of God was famously proclaimed—albeit as a question—on the cover of *Time* magazine on April 6, 1966.¹ Given Nietzsche had already proclaimed it in 1882 in *The Gay Science* and his proclamation was not that it had just happened, but that it had happened and no one had really noticed, it may be said that *Time* was behind the times in raising it as even a question. Perhaps we could say that *Time*'s question was itself but a cave for the shadow of God? For Nietzsche also observed:

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After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may

¹ For the cover and a discussion of what was in the article, see Lily Rothman, "Is God Dead?," *Time*, 2016, <https://time.com/isGoddead/>; Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Is God Dead? A Time Cover Turns 50," Religion and Politics, April 5, 2016, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2016/04/05/is-God-dead-a-time-cover-turns-50/>. For my discussion and analysis of the wider "death of God" debate see Mike Grimshaw, "Did God Die in *The Christian Century*?" *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 7–23.

still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.²

As Graham Ward reminds us in *Cities of God* the question that theology “does not handle,” the question of “what God is in relation to the world” does become addressed in the question of “that relation and that world [. . . which . . .] is a question about history and salvation [. . .] the question becomes very specific; it becomes the question concerning ‘what time it is?’”³ Or in this case, what or who was the God of *Time*?

Sitting at the heart of the question, and indeed, the critique of radical theology, is a further question: What does it mean if God is dead in relation to the world? That is, if we exist in the time of the death of God, then is the answer that this is now the time of radical theology—after God? Moreover, is the task of radical theology—perhaps paradoxically for many—to vanquish the shadow of God . . .?! What do I mean by the shadow of God?

In 1946 in a broadcast to post-war Germany, T. S. Eliot emphasized that while the unity of European culture as expressed in arts and ideas arose out of a history of a common Christian culture, this did not necessitate or mean there was a contemporary, unified Christian culture in the modern world. Rather, as he observed, the acknowledgment of a shared heritage did not necessarily involve a shared belief:

It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has significance. An individual European may not believe the Christian faith is true, and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all spring out of his heritage of the Christian faith for its meaning.⁴

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What do we actually understand of that heritage? The death of Christ is, as Gianni Vattimo notes, “the mysterious event that lies at the basis of our civilization

² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109.

³ Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), 122.

and of modern calculation of time.”⁵ The death of Christ is the culmination of the incarnational event that inaugurated the death of God. Therefore, *contra* Eliot, what *actually* sits as the unacknowledged basis of both western civilization and of modern time is the death of God.

This is why radical theology is a critical engagement with the society of the death of God. Radical theology is the *gospel* of the death of God; that is, the proclamation of the good news of the death of God. While institutions and their representatives such as *Time* may wish to question, qualify, or moderate the death of God, reducing it to a question to be dismissed, radical theology *proceeds from* the death of God and so finds itself in an interesting position vis-à-vis those institutions that seek to maintain, return or resuscitate God.

Radical theology also has an ongoing alliance to critical theory as a different way to interrogate and critique bourgeois capitalist society and its institutions. What makes it of particular interest is that radical theology is almost always institutional in location and focus, arising from and engaging with the recognition that the traditional religious underpinnings of liberal bourgeois society and its institutions no longer offer a workable foundational basis. William Hamilton forcefully and thoughtfully articulates this protest in his outline of “The Shape of a Radical Theology.”⁶ In this confessional piece from 1965, being a radical is not enough for Hamilton. One can either be a soft radical or a hard radical. For soft radicals, the medium of expression is the problem, but not the central message. For Hamilton and other hard radicals the message is problematic and God is experienced as real loss; God is not just absent or hidden, but dead. What follows is therefore the expression of a “hard radical” theology.

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Radical theology enables us to understand that the crisis of contemporary institutions is that, founded implicitly or explicitly on bourgeois religion and its God, they now find themselves with an ontological crisis most do not even recognize. Or rather, they recognize there is a crisis of meaning and purpose but are unsure or unwilling or even unable to engage with its foundational causes. This results

⁵ Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D’Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 106.

⁶ William Hamilton, “The Shape of a Radical Theology,” *The Christian Century*, October 6, 1965, 1219–22.

in a society of non-Nietzschean nihilism and institutions that at most realizes there is a crisis but is not able to properly articulate or interrogate why.

The Role of Weak Thought

The framing of my discussion occurs in conversation with the weak thought (*pensiero debole*) initiated by Vattimo that combines, in particular, the influences of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer in a hermeneutic expression of a postmodern ethic. Weak thought aligns itself with radical theology in being a herald of the return of religion into philosophy, but a return that is anti-metaphysical, a return that is theological in basis. Yet, it is a theology that itself is situated against all strong expressions of theology, faith and Christianity and its associated institutions, both those explicitly Christian and those implicitly expressing a Christian-derived culture and tradition. For weak thought arises from Vattimo's engagement with the ongoing "profoundly Christian meaning of secularization"⁷ wherein Christianity itself needs to weaken in order to facilitate its vocation and its authenticity. My radical theology weakening of institutions proceeds from a critical reading of Vattimo's *After Christianity*, his text that lies closest to radical theology. What follows can be termed an annotative hermeneutics⁸ that in turn weakens Vattimo's thought and text in the process of an engaged weakening of institutions.

To begin, weakening is linked to belief and what Vattimo notes is "believing that one believes"⁹ wherein faith, conviction and/or certainty also includes "to think with a certain degree of uncertainty."¹⁰ As Vattimo clarifies, the first "believing" involves the uncertainty regarding the believing involving faith, conviction and/or certainty. Therefore, radical theology has within it a central uncertainty that in turn exposes the central uncertainty of contemporary institutions *after God*.

Such uncertainty is in fact the central event of Christianity, an uncertainty that the institution of Christianity—and then the institutions of Christian culture and

⁷ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 98.

⁸ See Mike Grimshaw, "Flanuering with Vattimo: The Annotative Hermeneutics of Weak Thought," *Critical Research on Religion* 2, no. 3 (December 2014): 265–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303214552574>.

⁹ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 1.

¹⁰ Vattimo, 1.

society sought—if not to undo, then at the very least—to ignore. This uncertainty occurs because of what I term the weak event of the incarnation. It is a weak event for in it lives the claim of weak thought, the weak event that acts against all strong thought; the anti-foundationalist event that acts against all claims for foundationalism. Therefore, to build Christian institutions and also institutions of Christian culture stands against the central claim and anti-foundational and anti-institutional act-event of the incarnation. For the incarnation is to be understood as the weak-event wherein the kenotic act, the self-emptying of God, what we will call the death of God, acts against all strong claims—and what is an institution but, from the start, a strong claim? Via Nietzsche, this means that the proclamation “God is dead” is the end of metaphysics as there is no longer an ultimate foundation and this also means that to claim “God does not exist” is to continue to participate in a metaphysical principle.¹¹ In other words, the death of God also ends both metaphysics and atheism. This is Christianity, but certainly neither in its common, foundational continuation nor in its institutions.

It is also important that the death of God is an announcement and not a claim. For the claim is the expression of metaphysics, while, in contrast, the announcement is that of “an event that transforms the existence of the person who receives the announcement—or which is entirely constituted by this transformation.”¹² This is why we can speak of radical theology as the gospel—the good news—of the death of god—for to receive such an announcement (god is dead) one entirely transforms oneself. So, if weak thought is announced, but not claimed, weak thought also transforms. Therefore, in regard to institutions, to announce the death of God to institutions is also to seek their transformation.

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How is this so? Firstly, the announcement of the death of God arises from that event which transforms God via the kenotic self-emptying. In other words, God stops being God and so transformed in turn transforms those who receive the announcement. Secondly, the death of God is the announcement that is heard, an announcement that is non-foundational but rather relational. Thirdly, the announcement of the death of God is political in that it proclaims against both what *was* metaphysics and what *is* the order of modern technological society.

¹¹ Vattimo, 3.

¹² Vattimo, 13.

Most centrally, the announcement of the death of God, if received, transforms all institutions built of or on the claim of God. The announcement of death of God is therefore doubly situated as the announcement *contra* metaphysics and *contra* what has, for many, been derived from metaphysics as “the *de facto* order of the rationalized world of modern technological society.”¹³

This transformation is a liberation that recovers the weakness of the kenotic event of love, of charity, of *agape*. Via Heidegger our *Geworfenheit* amounts to us being thrown into a world of the kenotic event because God was self-thrown as the event of death. This self-thrownness of God positions all claims to foundationalism as a lie seeking to limit or stop human relation in the name of love, which is liberation in the secular world, the *saeculum*, the world of shared human experience.¹⁴ A *saeculum* that the death of God enables. In this *saeculum* the issue becomes one of a “critical principle”¹⁵ to ensure that myths and ideologies and their institutions do not become uncritical expressions which can in turn become a normative metadiscourse.

Vattimo links weakening with secularization, describing it “as the paradoxical realization of Being’s religious vocation.”¹⁶ The weakening of Being is not only “akin to the secularization of the sacred in the western tradition;”¹⁷ it is also the announcement of the secularization of institutions. Secularization is, as Vattimo notes, “an occurrence within the history of Western religiosity” and also “characterizes it very deeply.”¹⁸ As such it is positioned (we could say, announced) not just against the return of overt “religion” which is actually the attempted return of metaphysics but also versus the continued metaphysical foundations and assumptions of institutions—whether explicit or implicit. The message of the Judeo-Christian heritage is still alive in institutions that have yet to hear the announcement of the death of God and be transformed in the process.

¹³ Vattimo, 14.

¹⁴ For discussion as to what this involves see Mike Grimshaw, “Gabriel Vahanian: From the Death of God to Wording and Worlding,” in Gabriel Vahanian, *Theopoetics of the Word: A New Beginning of Word and World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1–24; Mike Grimshaw, “‘In Spite of the Death of God’: Gabriel Vahanian’s secular theology,” *Palgrave Communications* 1, art. no. 15025 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2015.25>.

¹⁵ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 20.

¹⁶ Vattimo, 24.

¹⁷ Vattimo, 25.

¹⁸ Vattimo, 25.

What does this possibly mean? Reading via Vattimo, radical theology is an interpretive event in what we term the poetic and leads to salvation which is linked by Vattimo with emancipation. Therefore, radical theology—especially I would argue in relation to institutions—is *a poetic interpretative event in the name of emancipation; a secular emancipation in that it occurs within and for the world of shared human experience*. If the salvation of the Judeo-Christian heritage, after metaphysics, is understood as appearing “as the lightening and weakening of the ‘heavy’ structures in which Being has manifested itself throughout human civilization,”¹⁹ then radical theology is expressed and experienced as the lightening of those “heavy structures” in the name of emancipation. These heavy structures are nothing less than our religious, political, economic and social institutions.

Radical theology thus proceeds first from within Christianity yet against the institutions of Christianity and its culture that wish Christianity to continue as a metaphysical religion and not embrace its radical announcement of the event of the death of God. Radical theology identifies that in Christian institutions and the institutions of a Christian culture and society we sought to resurrect metaphysical Being and metaphysical God. Even as western society underwent secularization we did not seek to properly emancipate our institutions from their basis in metaphysical Being and metaphysical God, for to do so would mean a refocusing and rethinking of society as now composed of “a community of interpreters.”²⁰ Therefore, what continues is the seeking an authority over Being in the name of institutional power and tradition.

I now want to raise three different entry points for discussing radical theology, institutions and the death of God. I draw upon these because they occur outside

¹⁹ Vattimo, 53.

²⁰ Vattimo, 67.

Entry Point: Kristol's Neoconservatism

I admit it is not often that a neo-conservative thinker such as Irving Kristol²¹ is employed in a discussion of radical theology, which is perhaps a glaring oversight, when you consider the role and influence that Reinhold Niebuhr's neo-orthodox theology of *Krisis* played in his thought,²² especially in the articulation of what became known as Christian realism. Of course, Niebuhr was no death of God theologian, but he was a theologian who critiqued the failings of liberal bourgeois culture. This enabled Kristol to critically evaluate what was happening in liberal bourgeois society in his historical moment.

For the purposes of our discussion, I want to draw upon a statement made by Kristol in *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (1978).²³ Kristol positions his argument versus those "who indict bourgeois capitalism for not only failing to create a utopia for humanity to dwell in, but for even failing to try."²⁴ As an aside, we can see how neoliberalism attempted to answer this—you create *your* utopia by *your* agency: whether in a communal fashion/societally via what would become progressive neoliberalism or, economically—at the level of individuals and families or at state and globalized level—by neoliberal economics.

Kristol and neoconservatism are antiutopian, arguing for a capitalist order that "begins with the assumption that the world is full of other people, moved by their own interests and their own passions, and that the best we can reasonably

²¹ It was Kristol who coined the famous definition: "A neoconservative is a liberal mugged by reality." This has an often not quoted extension: "The reference 'mugged by reality' is from Irving Kristol's quote, '[a neoconservative] is a liberal who has been mugged by reality. A neoliberal is a liberal who got mugged by reality but has not pressed charges.'" Douglas Murray, *Neoconservatism: Why We Need It* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2006), 89; quoted in Lee Trepanier, "'Mugged by Reality': The Neoconservative Turn," Vogelinterview, July 15, 2021, <https://voegelinview.com/mugged-by-reality-the-neoconservative-turn/>.

²² Kristol lists Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Jacques Maritain, and later Martin Buber, Franz Rozenweig, and Gershom Scholem as his theological influences. See Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 5.

²³ Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978). For my discussion on Kristol, Foucault and neoliberalism see: Mike Grimshaw, "Is The Center Neoliberal?," The Philosophical Salon, August 22, 2022, <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/is-the-center-neoliberal/>.

²⁴ Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, ix.

hope for is a society of civil concord, not a community of mutual love.”²⁵ This means, in Kristol’s reading, that “Capitalism is the least romantic conception of a public order that the human mind has ever conceived”²⁶ and this needs to be remembered in his later critique of Milton Friedman as being “heir to modern romanticism.”²⁷

Kristol argues this from his conception of the central role of bourgeois virtue in bourgeois capitalism that began with “a kind of benign toleration of religion but a firm commitment to Judeo-Christian morality.”²⁸ In particular, bourgeois capitalism arose out of a protestant ethos and society that celebrated and endorsed “the domestic virtues” of “prudence, diligence, trustworthiness—and the ambition to better one’s condition.”²⁹ Kristol later expands this list to include honesty, sobriety and thrift,³⁰ all of which, in the Puritan-Protestant origins of bourgeois capitalism are connected to worldly success.

So, what has this to do with radical theology and its critique of institutions? It is here that Kristol provides a statement in line with radical theology. The trouble is that late twentieth century bourgeois capitalism was, for over 150 years, “living off the accumulated moral capital of traditional religion and traditional moral philosophy, and that once this capital was depleted, bourgeois society would find its legitimacy ever more questionable.”³¹

If we remember Nietzsche, the death of God was not only that of God but of all that which had been built on the claim of that God. If God dies, then bourgeois capitalism is exposed as now existing on the shadow of God—as are the institutions of bourgeois capitalism. This is why we can again draw upon Kristol who observes: “*The enemy of liberal capitalism today is not so much socialism as nihilism*. Only liberal capitalism doesn’t see nihilism as the enemy, but rather as just another splendid business opportunity.”³²

²⁵ Kristol, x.

²⁶ Kristol, x.

²⁷ Kristol, 65.

²⁸ Kristol, *Neo-conservatism*, 33.

²⁹ Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, x.

³⁰ Kristol, 64–65.

³¹ Kristol, 65–66.

³² Kristol, 66.

For this is not a Nietzschean nihilism, rather a nihilism from within the institutions of liberal bourgeois capitalism. To put it another way, after the death of God we need to be not just beyond good and evil but beyond the institutions of liberal bourgeois capitalism—and the neoliberal caves of their shadows.

This means the radical theologian can find an unexpected ally in Kristol the neo-con; (similar perhaps to how Žižek can draw upon the conservative Chesterton . . .?) for Kristol asks a question aligned to that of radical theology:

Who on earth wants to live in a society in which all—or even a majority—of one's fellow citizens are fully engaged in the hot pursuit of money, the single-minded pursuit of material self-interest? To put it another way: Who wants to live in a society in which selfishness and self-seeking are celebrated as primary virtues? Such a society is unfit for human habitation: thus sayeth the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran, the Greek philosophers, the medieval theologians, all modern moral philosophy.³³

Kristol also provides an unexpected entry point to critique neoliberalism by noting:

The inner spiritual chaos of the times, so powerfully created by the dynamics of capitalism itself, is such as to make nihilism an empty temptation. A "free society" in Hayek's sense gives birth to in massive numbers to "free spirits," emptied of moral substance but still driven by primordial moral actions. Such people are capable of the most irrational actions.³⁴

In line with Kristol's critique, what we fail to properly recognize is that neoliberalism is the ethos of not only a post-Christian society but actually an anti-Christian society. As he observes (in what is of course a highly contestable statement), "it is the ethos of capitalism that is in gross disrepair, not the economics of capitalism."³⁵ This is because central to neoliberalism is the rebellion against tradition: culturally, societally, religiously, morally and economically. While on the one hand this is a rebellion against the institutions of Christian society, on

³³ Kristol, 85.

³⁴ Kristol, 268.

³⁵ Kristol, *Neo-conservatism*, 112.

the other it is rebellion in the name of romantic market nihilism that still leaves us with the dominance of the caves of the shadows of God. Now we have new neoliberal institutions of the shadow of God: God as neo-liberal capitalism and market forces, God as agency of the individual within neo-liberal capitalism, God as the new institutions of identity politics or rather, the institutions that now enforce the individual romanticized politics of the shadow of God.

Entry Point 2: Nash on the University

The second entry point comes from within one of the central institutions of modern bourgeois society, the university.

In 1949, amidst a wider rethinking of post-war western culture, values, and civilization that often looked to draw upon Christianity, appeared Sir Walter Moberly's *The Crisis in the University*.³⁶ Moberly's book was both an explicit and implicit Christian response to a wider "conviction that much ails universities today, that what is wrong with them is closely connected to what is wrong with the whole world; and that the chief seat of the malady is to be found in the underlying assumptions, largely unconscious, by which their life and work are determined."³⁷

Moberly observed that the only recent work "which deals with the university today from a Christian standpoint" is "Arnold Nash's deliberately provocative and challenging *The University and the Modern World*,"³⁸ which is subtitled *An Essay in the Social Philosophy of University Education*. And it is to this secondary text, not Moberly's better-known text, that I want to turn.

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Nash provides a social theology of higher education that, having critiqued the issues and failures of, variously, the liberal democratic university, the Nazi university, and the Soviet university, then argues for a reconstruction of the university under a revived and rethought Christian framework. Nash's overall concern is the confusion and questions of meaning that arose as the basis of the university

³⁶ Walter Moberly, *The Crisis In The University* (London: SCM Press, 1949).

³⁷ Moberly, 7.

³⁸ Moberly, 7. Arnold S. Nash, *The University and the Modern World: An Essay in the Social Philosophy of University Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1943). I will refer to the later edition (London: SCM Press, 1945).

changed from that founded in a Christian culture of identity to one that sought a basis in scientific method and spirit. Nash argues that the totalitarian university of either the Nazi or Soviet system occurs as an inadequate answer and remedy to these issues as do the failings encountered in the liberal democratic university. The underlying concern is the absence of a meaning of life or history.

As Nash sets out in his preface: "What is at stake is the adequacy of the common premises of any tradition now current in the liberal democratic world on the nature and function of the university in society."³⁹ The focus of his discussion is what can be drawn upon to order experience "in the new world being born."⁴⁰ That is, the issue of the passing away of a world whereby its "*Geist* of rational individualism expressed itself in politics as representative democracy, in religion as liberal Protestantism, in thought as the scientific movement and in economic life as capitalism."⁴¹ That is, the crisis in the university is a symptom of a wider crisis in liberal capitalist democracy,⁴² whereby in the face of "the confusion and chaos of the liberal world view" the "liberal democratic university, by rejecting any real attempt to discover and then teach a unified conception of life refuses to be a university."⁴³

That is, like liberal bourgeois capitalism, the liberal democratic university was living off an ever-depleting moral capital, yet unsure what to replace that moral capital with that would enable a unified conception of life that was neither nihilistic nor reduced to market forces. In short, the institution of the university became—and I would argue remains—yet another cave of the shadow of God. In the case of the university, of the shadow of God that scientific thinking can be the basis of meaning and history, whether in the natural and physical sciences or in the growth of the social sciences—or even in the turn of the humanities to justify themselves via forms of "the scientific method." This, Nash names the idol of science in the modern world. He traces this to the challenge to scholasticism undertaken by the Protestant reformation and how this in turn was challenged by the Enlightenment.

³⁹ Nash, *University and the Modern World*, 11.

⁴⁰ Nash, 11.

⁴¹ Nash, 16.

⁴² Nash, 22.

⁴³ Nash, 35.

It is not that Nash wishes to undo the advances in human knowledge made possible by these changes, rather that the social turn to science created a philosophical gap in the meaning of life and of history that science has been unable to fill. In his discussion of the inter-relatedness of the rise of capitalism and that of the scientific movement, the point is made that neither science nor capitalism can provide that which is missing, and the result is chaos and nihilism—or the turn to totalitarianism.

So, what then is to be done? For Nash it is nothing less than that in the liberal democratic university, the task is “to accept the responsibility for the creation and teaching of a unified and coherent philosophy.”⁴⁴ This involves both its ontological reference (“the ultimate purpose for which knowledge is sought”) and its form, that is “the categories in which it is finally expressed.”⁴⁵ In other words, Nash is arguing that what is needed is “a new frame of reference in terms of which scientific knowledge can be ordered and understood.”⁴⁶ Nash saw this as occurring within moves towards a collectivized economy because of “the disorder in the socio-economic life of liberal capitalist society.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the questions becomes not shall an economy and its university be planned but rather, on what shall it be planned and to what purpose?⁴⁸ For this to occur, Nash argues that “knowledge can only be adequately understood in terms of its social origins.”⁴⁹ The university can therefore only be a *uni-versity* when it is able to work towards and proceed from such a rethought, intellectual synthesis that interprets human life and destiny in light of and in response to the crisis of modernity.

Crucially, it is here that radical theology asks that problematic question: but is not the university still the institutional cave of the shadow of God? Or rather, what would a university that embraces—rather than ignore or dismiss, or even not hear—the radical announcement of the death of God look like? Is the university actually even able to display an awareness of something missing? Is this why it has been so open to capture — in fact seemingly sought to be captured — by the romanticist nihilism of neoliberalism?

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⁴⁴ Nash, 163.

⁴⁵ Nash, 163.

⁴⁶ Nash, 164.

⁴⁷ Nash, 166.

⁴⁸ Nash, 166.

⁴⁹ Nash, 167.

Entry Point 3: Silone on Liberalism on and Religion

Writing in the cold war journal *Encounter*⁵⁰ the Italian author and ex-Marxist Ignazio Silone in "The Choice of Comrades" discussed the question of a beneficial alliance between liberals and religion.⁵¹

The issue Silone identifies in 1954 is that which we can say proceeds in many ways from the still not yet fully acknowledged death of God:

The last forty years have witnessed the collapse of most of the great politico-social myths bequeathed to us from the 19th century. As a result, certain kinds of people who had relied on these myths as a compass find themselves in a state of spiritual vagueness and ambiguity that is still far from being clarified. This situation is one aspect of the general crisis of capitalism and anti-capitalism. We are confronted with the need for reassessment, not only of the question of how to behave but also the greater question of the meaning of our existence.⁵²

Silone identified Nietzsche as the first one to identify this as "the nihilism of modern times,"⁵³ a world of spiritual crisis and nihilism in which modern progress, capitalism and communism are all found wanting, resulting in a world whereby "we are neither believers nor atheists, nor are we sceptics."⁵⁴ Silone's essay, in its signalling of a possible, provisional way out of post-war nihilism, was influential amongst North American Protestant liberals who became radical theologians; in particular it was a major influence on the American death of God theologian William Hamilton⁵⁵ and can be seen as one of the early expressions of secular theology. Hamilton describes Silone as expressing "the dilemma of the non-Catholic, non-Communist, non-humanist European intellectual."⁵⁶

⁵⁰ For any overview history of religion and *Encounter* in the Cold War, see Mike Grimshaw, "Encountering Religion: Encounter, Religion, and the Cultural Cold War, 1953–1967," *History of Religions* 51, no. 1 (August 2011): 31–58, <https://doi.org/10.1086/659608>.

⁵¹ Ignazio Silone, "The Choice of Comrades," *Encounter* 3, no. 6 (December 1954): 21–28.

⁵² Silone, 21.

⁵³ Silone, 21.

⁵⁴ Silone, 28.

⁵⁵ William Hamilton, "On Doing Without Knowledge of God," *The Journal of Religion* 37, no. 1 (January 1957): 37–43.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, 37.

I would argue that the situation of the radical theologian is very close to this statement by Silone from 1962:

Now I consider myself to be a Socialist without a party and a Christian without a church. I still feel bound to the ethics and idealism of each but I can no longer have any part of what the State has made of Socialism and the Church has made of Christianity.⁵⁷

In such a context requiring “A Choice of Comrades” we are left with perhaps only “a few Christian certainties so deeply immured in human existence as to be identified with it.”⁵⁸ That is “founded on the inner certainty that we are free and responsible, and it turns on the absolute need of finding a way towards the inmost reality of other people. This possibility of spiritual communion is surely the irrefutable proof of human brotherhood.”⁵⁹ This is not faith, but trust and is therefore aligned to what Vattimo will describe as the announcement.

What really resonates with radical theology is Silone’s positioning of what occurs:

[T]he spiritual situation I have just described admits neither of defence nor of arrogance. Frankly, it is merely an expedient. It resembles a refugee encampment in no-man’s-land, an exposed makeshift encampment. What do you think refugees do from morning to night? They spend most of their time telling one another the story of their lives. The stories are anything but amusing, but they tell them to one another, really, in an effort to make themselves understood. As long as there remains a determination to understand and to share one’s understanding with others, perhaps we need not altogether despair.⁶⁰

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Conclusion

It is perhaps a necessary cliché to consider that, as Marx observes, with capitalist modernity “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and

⁵⁷ Kenneth Allsop, “Ignazio Silone,” *Encounter* 18, no. 3 (March 1962): 49.

⁵⁸ Silone, “Choice of Comrades,” 28.

⁵⁹ Silone, 28.

⁶⁰ Silone, 28.

man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."⁶¹ Institutions were—and are—one central way modernity attempts to institute, justify and maintain into contemporary existence, what we can call "solidity." Therefore, modern bureaucracy often seeks to inform and instil in us the belief that it is the role and duty of institutions to order our world. And yet they fail. It was another former hard-left liberal turned neo-conservative, Norman Podhoretz, who offered a reason why: most thinkers and critics being "unable to establish the connection between the spiritual condition of the individual and the institutions by which the condition was shaped and formed."⁶²

In conclusion, it is not institutions that enable us to live after the death of God, for our current institutions are either institutions of God and of the culture and society of God—or at most, caves of the shadow of God. What radical theology reminds us—via Silone—is that in taking a critical position against such institutions, and in finding ourselves after God, the choice of comrades takes on paramount importance.

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⁶¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," trans. Samuel Moore, chap. 1, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed June 29, 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/cho1.htm>.

⁶² Norman Podhoretz, *Breaking Ranks: A Political Memoir* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979), 50.

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Uroš Kranjc*

Institutions, History, Subjects¹

Keywords

institutions, Law, subjectivity, history, event, Giordano Bruno

Abstract

Recent years have seen an immense upsurge in developing the notion of institution with the aim of updating and reconfiguring its conceptualisation to make it correspond to present times. The stakes are high as the current Western institutional framework struggles to ensure its historical continuation—conceived broadly as political, economic, social, scientific, artistic, and other institutions—as the predominant global dispositive. In the article, we first review the current most significant orientations and disciplines that focus on institutions and proceed with a critical assessment of relevant events. In the second part, we question the subjective process and subjectivation of an institutional framework. If we reject the linguistic, empirical, or hermeneutic approaches, how can we capture the dynamics of change in a framework? What indicates that a subjective process is taking place? We draw on the cases of St. Paul and Giordano Bruno to illuminate the Law's historical repetition through cumulative cultural growth in re-inscribing the subjectivization of faithful and enduring—i.e. universalist—operations of rupture and dispute leading to a Decision against reigning particularisms of institutional setups.

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Institucije, zgodovina, subjekti

Ključne besede

institucije, Zakon, subjektivnost, zgodovina, dogodek, Giordano Bruno

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* Institute of Philosophy ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia
uros.kranjc@zrc-sazu.si | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8778-2169>

Povzetek

Zadnja leta smo priča izjemnemu vzponu in reartikulaciji pojma institucije. Namen teh refleksij je konceptualna posodobitev in prilagoditev pojma skladno s potrebami sodobnega časa. Gre predvsem za čas, ko se Zahodni institucionalni okvir utrjuje v svoji historični poziciji – zajemajoč politične, ekonomske, družbene, znanstvene, umetnostne in druge institucije – kot prevladujoči globalni dispozitiv. V prispevku se najprej osredotočimo na trenutno najpomembnejše orientacije in discipline, ki pokrivajo določitev pojma institucije, ter nadaljujemo s kritično obravnavo konkretnih dogodkov. V drugem delu nas zanima predvsem subjektivni proces ter subjektivacija v institucionalnem okviru. Če namreč zavrnamo lingvistični, empirični ali hermenevtični pristop, na kakšen način naj ujamemo dinamiko spremembe v okviru? Kaj označuje subjektivni proces v odvijanju? Na primerih sv. Pavla in Giordana Bruna prikažemo historično rekurenco Zakona, ki skozi »kumulativno kulturno rast« pre-vpisuje subjektivacijo zvestega in vztrajajočega – univerzalnega – v operacijah preloma in nesoglasja, ki vodita k Odločitvi proti prevladujočim partikularnostim institucionalnih redov.



What would be an intuitive and immediate answer to the question: “What are institutions?” We could say something along the following lines: Institutions are ubiquitously present in today’s lives. We explicitly talk about them as social, political, or economic institutions of concrete places such as parliaments, central banks, world trade centres, the United Nations, courts of justice, medical hospitals, etc. or refer to them in a more implicit manner, such as marriage, money, law, religion, the police, army, cultural traits or sportsmanship inclinations. This might just be our first sense of what they are and how we “see” them.

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The last fifteen years have unleashed an intensive restructuring of human institutions, paralleled by intensive research into new technologies, economic structures, political power, and social relations. The underlying circumstances for the project² *Institutions and Society: Towards a Critical Theory of (Economic) Institutions* were precisely the global financial crisis and the economic turmoil that started in 2007, with the collapse of the famous Lehman Brothers bank in the US and Europe’s sovereign debt crisis, which lasted for over 5 years. In either

² This project was part of my Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship awarded in 2020.

case, the political repercussions have been immense and sustained. The populist backlashes to the monetary union and attempts at preserving the monetary union, including proposals to integrate a monetary and fiscal union, which if adopted would significantly change the current institutional set-up, were surely to raise fundamental questions about the character and purpose of economic institutions in the following decades. In any case, we can conclude that the first decade of the century was not resilient enough to face the coming times. Unfortunately, these chronic economic issues were only the tip of the iceberg on an open road to a period of looming stagflation, eclipsed by an even bigger collective shock announced on the 11 March 2020—the Covid-19 pandemic. While collective panic during the Great Recession was confined to financial markets and businesses alone, sparingly affecting households and the general global population, impulsive and uncoordinated action unfolding throughout the pandemic became widespread. The severe virulence and pathogenicity with a relative high morbidity and mortality in the oldest age and immunocompromised cohorts sent both formal and informal institutions to the highest levels of alert. For pure theory, this situation crucially and vividly revealed the versatile character of institutions as a concept—exposing why they truly are a transdisciplinary concept—that fundamentally organises numerous disciplines. On the other hand, we must examine these consecutive definitions to uncover the essence and functioning of institutions. Just consider the intersection of definitions of institution as rules-equilibrium following, cumulative cultural growth, instituted behaviour of the collective body and its praxis, or even the abstract mathematical study of formal logical systems. All of these impose a number of difficulties when in search for a “generally” valid definition of the concept *institution*.

This project, however, has also had a particular angle of approach. It calls for a “back to the tables” approach that starts with reignited interest in the philosophical and sociological interpretation of economic concepts.³ Such an undertaking, however, presupposes a philosophical debunking of the prevailing conceptual and institutional dispositive, in economics in particular, but also more broadly, touching upon the historical and sociological conditions of institutional frameworks: cumulative cultural growth, vested interests, social/symbolic

³ We are faithful here to Herbert Marcuse’s remark that “philosophy appears in the concepts of economics”; Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: MayFly Books, 2009), 99.

significations, the dialectics of Law and desire, etc. The driving question of the present enquiry is the following: Does it not seem like that the current state-of-affairs is presenting us with an ever more opaque, chaotic, and yet completely oriented institution of reality? Or could it be just the opposite? We hear contemporary philosophers, like Alain Badiou, talk about living and thinking in absolute disorientation,⁴ while Jacques Rancière and Étienne Balibar⁵ turn the tables to emphasise the complete determinacy of (capitalist) orientation unfolding in our day and age. What is invoked here, although from opposing sides, is a pure problem of *politics*. Choosing either path, our initial question now becomes: Is our (instituted) reality (we choose to call it institutional framework) determined to such a degree as to make it impossible to critically reflect upon it? There are multiple layers to this answer: (1) the project of an adequate disambiguation, apprehension, reinterpretation and satisfactory fixation of economic categories is still very much in progress, a process taking absolutely far too long—for three centuries now; (2) the theoretical ramifications of the notion of institution and its many disciplinary aspects infused by consensual operations should be countered with emancipatory subjective processes, and (3) the (onto)logical and philosophical tenets of an institutional framework ranging from mathematics to linguistics and beyond provide us with new modes of thinking and representing such frameworks.

The scope, content and structure of this essay is set to deal only with the second (2) point outlined above and is thus composed of two distinct and interrelated sections addressing that point. The first part gives a general scope of the concept of institution with its most recent elaborations in various disciplines. The second part poses the question: How does a subject of modification/change in an institutional transformation come to be?

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Institutions in Theoretical and Historical Perspectives

Why do we encounter these difficulties when speaking about the notion of institution? It seems that the current state of literature on institutions in social

⁴ The title of Alain Badiou's seminar *Comment vivre et penser dans un monde livré à une absolue désorientation?* held at La Commune—CDN Aubervilliers in the 2021/22 academic year.

⁵ A presentation given by Jacques Rancière entitled *Quel est notre présent?* and in discussion with Étienne Balibar at Citéphilo 2021 on November 13, 2021.

sciences and philosophy is caught in a deadlock of endless conceptual back-and-forth. Today, we use the word as if it were second nature, confident of speaking about an agreed-upon determinate set of entities. Yet, we should bear in mind the striking fact that the word “institution” has not played a significant role for most of human history. These institutions are supposed to have been known to humankind ever since evolution first endowed the human animal with reason. However, historic analysis tells a vastly different story. The term “institution” itself is a relatively recent notion that describes human and social organisation, and as such, it only retroactively renders palpable the historical social structures that fall under the same notion today. There is surprisingly little use of the term in the contemporary sense anywhere prior to the seventeenth century if we discount its use in religious orders. Only later did it slowly begin to penetrate the legal and political discourses of the time, finally establishing its general meaning in the eighteenth century. This is attributed to the Enlightened Spirit in France, their merit in the final semantic transition from the term “establishment”⁶ to the almost universally comprehensible concept of the institution.⁷ The works of the German Historical School, the Institutional strands in economics, and the French School of Sociology have managed to turn a rather undetermined concept into an entirely new object of knowledge. In doing so, they unleashed a vast array of new theoretical insights on thinkers, ranging from Hobbes, Rousseau, and Montesquieu, but also Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, and Constant, all the way to latter-day thinkers, like F. A. Hayek, Richard Rorty, and other prominent liberals. A broader delineation of these thinkers can be summoned up into four general orientations that deploy the term “institution” in distinct manners: (i) the early principal usage, designating legislation and political discourse as a structure of power of a sovereign or religion, hearkening back to the ancient political philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and others; (ii) a dynamic/static social/logical entity, structure or organisation operating within functionally ascribed (tacit or explicit) rules, as in Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* as the prime example, but also contemporary (political) institutional theory or recent computer science model theory; (iii) the scientific concept, marking a genuine object of analysis for a discipline of sociology, as is done in the works

⁶ The term *establishment* once conveyed much of the functionalities known to be later promoted by the modern *institutionalisms*.

⁷ Alain Guéry, “Institution: Histoire d’une notion et de ses utilisations dans l’histoire avant les institutionnalismes,” *Cahiers d’économie Politique* 44, no. 1 (2003): 7–18, <http://doi.org/10.3917/cep.044.0007>.

of the French School of Sociology; and, (iv) an anthropological usage that provides insight into social habits of thought, social regularities and tendencies, instincts, drives and customs. A scrupulously intertwined impact can be most clearly seen in contemporary commentators of classical political dialogues and texts. Such commentaries may, for example, build on the Western heritage of Plato or Aristotle and *retroactively* re-interpret the contents of *Laws*, *Republic* or *Politics* for the institutional disposition of today's societies. This presumes that these contents and today's institutions are transhistorical, universal, and always already present.

Below are some examples of how the notion itself is defined relating to the above distinctions:

Sociology

“In fact, without doing violence to the meaning of the word, one may term an institution all the beliefs and modes of behaviour instituted by the collectivity; sociology can then be defined as the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning.”⁸ (Émile Durkheim)

“[Institution is] an already instituted set of actions and ideas that individuals find before them and that impose themselves on them to a greater or lesser extent. [. . .] Institution, therefore, in the social order, plays the same role as function in the biological order; and in the same way that life science is the science of vital functions, so the science of society is the science of institutions thus described.”⁹ (Marcel Mauss, Paul Fauconnet)

“The institution is a socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations. Alienation occurs when the imaginary moment in the institution becomes autonomous and predominates, which leads to the institution's becoming autonomous and predominating with respect to society. This becoming autonomous, or autonomization, of the institution is expressed and embod-

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⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982), 45.

⁹ Marcel Mauss and Paul Fauconnet, “Sociologie: Objet et méthode,” in Marcel Mauss, *Œuvres*, ed. Victor Karady (Paris: Minit, 1969), 3:139–77.

ied in the material nature of social life, but it always presupposes at the same time that society lives its relations with its institutions in the mode of the imaginary, in other words, that it does not recognize in the imaginary of institutions something that is its own product.”¹⁰ (Cornelius Castoriadis)

Mathematics

“Whereas traditional model theory assumes a fixed vocabulary, institutions allow us to consider many different vocabularies at once. Informally, an institution consists of

- a collection of signatures (which are vocabularies for use in constructing sentences in a logical system) and signature morphisms, together with for each signature Σ ,
- a collection of Σ -sentences,
- a collection of Σ -models, and
- a Σ -satisfaction relation, of Σ -sentences by Σ -models.”¹¹ (Joseph A. Goguen and Rod M. Burstall)

“The theory of institutions is a categorical abstract model theory which formalizes the intuitive notion of a logical system, including syntax, semantics, and the satisfaction relation between them. Institutions constitute a model-oriented meta-theory on logics similarly to how the theory of rings and modules constitute a meta-theory for classical linear algebra.”¹² (Răzvan Diaconescu)

Heterodox Economics and Social Ontology

“Institutions are the kinds of structures that matter most in the social realm: they make up the stuff of social life. [...] Without doing much violence to the relevant literature, we may define institutions as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.”¹³ (Geoffrey M. Hodgson)

¹⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), 132.

¹¹ Joseph Goguen and Rod Burstall, “Institutions: Abstract Model Theory for Specification and Programming,” *Journal of the Association for Computing Machinery* 39, no. 1 (January 1992): 95–146, <https://doi.org/10.1145/147508.147524>.

¹² Răzvan Diaconescu, *Institution-Independent Model Theory* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2008), 1.

¹³ Geoffrey M. Hodgson, “What Are Institutions?,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 40, no. 1 (2006): 1–25.

“Institutions are particular forms of emergent social phenomena, mostly social systems, or structured processes of interaction, that are either intended to be (whether or not they are), or are discovered a posteriori to be and are recognised as, relatively enduring.”¹⁴ (Tony Lawson)

“Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. [. . .] They are a guide to human interaction, so that when we wish to greet friends on the street, drive an automobile, buy oranges, borrow money, form a business, bury our dead, or whatever, we know (or can learn easily) how to perform these tasks.”¹⁵ (Douglass C. North)

“The rules are symbolic markers that represent equilibria (or parts of equilibria) and help the players use a particular coordination device. Unlike in rules-based theories, the concept of pattern (equilibrium) is central in this theory. But unlike “pure” equilibrium-based theories, this account brings at center stage the representation of the equilibrium by means of symbolic markers (rules). This way, we obtain a satisfactory, consistent, and empirically adequate conception of institutions.”¹⁶ (Francesco Guala)

Observing the various definitions above one last time, we can derive the following propositions to formulate and group the ideas of different directions:

- (a) *the institutions themselves* as the object of the science of sociology,
- (b) *mathematical structures* conveying different logics through multi-signatures,
- (c) *the accepted system of rules or means* in philosophical discourse,
- (d) *settled habits of thought* in the social realm.

* * *

¹⁴ Tony Lawson, “What Is an Institution,” in *Social Ontology and Modern Economics*, ed. Stephen Pratten (London: Routledge, 2015), 553–77.

¹⁵ Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3–4.

¹⁶ Francesco Guala, *Understanding Institutions: The Philosophy and Science of Living Together* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 55.

The latest contribution to the concatenation of definitions is delivered by Roberto Esposito's short book reflecting on the institutional response to the pandemic bearing the simple title of *Institution*. Writing in the summer of 2020, he proposes these reflections on institutions: "Institutions [. . .] are the bridge by means of which law and politics shape societies, differentiating and uniting them."¹⁷ There are two intertwined distinctions to be drawn, (a) between law (*nomos*) and politics (Πολιτικά) and (b) between bare life (*zoē*) and instituted life (*bios/vitam instituere*), whose interplay is a continuous effort of *instituent praxis*. What Esposito posits is a contradiction between bare (biological) life and life that institutes and is instituted within institutions; a contradiction that manifests the unravelling of freedom and power relations. In rethinking the French sociological roots, German philosophical anthropology, and Italian legal institutionalism, Esposito relates the *instituent praxis* with the continuous and contingent contradiction of freedom and necessity, of subject and object, of the inside and outside. His functionalist description of institutions goes: "Whatever lies outside institutions, before being institutionalized itself, alters the previous institutional structure, challenging, expanding, and deforming it,"¹⁸ and ends his short treatise with confidence in mobilized mass movements (once again) becoming the subject of creative change in the institutional fabric. This point was also already highlighted by Giorgio Agamben with his posited division of political and economic theology.¹⁹ What both share is *nomoi*, either in relation to *politiká* or *oikos*, *oikonomia*, distinguishing political philosophy and modern theory of sovereignty from the modern management of bodies and lives through economy and governance, *biopolitics*.

To illustrate these points, numerous literary works could be evoked, covering different aspects of pandemics, dystopian futurist writings of (technological) apocalypse, inquiries into (micro)eschatologies, etc. Let us briefly mention just some of the most famous and insightful, as they relate to the pandemic in question. Surely one of the most general guidelines for interpretation is offered in Jean de la Fontaine's fable *Animals Sick of the Plague* (*Les Animaux malades de la peste*, 1678), where animals around the world are dying from a deadly disease.

¹⁷ Roberto Esposito, *Institution*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity, 2022), 2.

¹⁸ Esposito, 9.

¹⁹ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa and Matteo Mandarini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1.

The Lion declares it a punishment from the gods and seeks confessions from fellow animals, himself confessing eating sheep and the shepherd—a minor species. All other animals follow suit, while also saying how unworthy the sheep are of existence, downplaying the Lion’s original sin. Only the donkey confesses truthfully, eating the grass from an abbot’s field. The confession and punishment proves to be fatal. The fable in itself represents a classic example of the seclusion between (life) truth and (institution) power relations. However, how these relations *in concerto* unfold is famously captured in Camus’s *Plague* where the main protagonists Bernard Rieux and Jean Tarrou disapprove of the Law’s reactions (embodied by the Prefect and Dr. Richard—chief medical officer in the town of Oran) shown in a slow, muddled, and authoritarian response from the authorities and medical association. This kind of response was also very vividly seen in practice during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The second phase (starting in 2021) with the rollout of quarantine measures and vaccination programmes is brilliantly epitomized by José Saramago’s *Blindness*, boiling down to the question of how all these measures were *in fact* implemented by the institutions and how the distinction of bare life *versus* instituted life, inside and outside, was implemented as *biopolitics*.

What we saw with the global governmental responses to the pandemic was not just the execution of pre-planned pandemic playbook actions but also an orchestration of disproportionality and opposing set of actions, frequently contradictory measures, a science-ideology-driven narrative on different ends, further extended with authoritarian mass control, unnecessary fear-mongering and panicking at the same time, segregation of unvaccinated, war-like profiteering, blocking of non-mainstream viral remedies, and so on. In *Blindness* Saramago concomitantly captures a crucial angle and significant shift in the writing of maladies embodied in the character of the doctor’s wife, more precisely, her unique ability to retain vision in an epidemic of blindness. In attaching this supplementary role for the character Saramago provides an ethical context to the storyline, i.e. her imperative usage of this advantage for her cause and that of the community, all while fighting injustices imposed both by the mob and the authorities. What one can observe here is a transitional shift in the dispositive, i.e. a parallax, from the classical Antigone-like Law imposition on society, the struggle and defiance, power relations, etc., to an ever more nuanced position of an ethical judgement included in an “outside” point (the doctor’s wife with an uncompromising desire to declare the faithful search of a resolution in their

particular state of emergency). While the doctor's wife keeps her eyesight a secret and fulfils her individual role, what is at stake here is the ethical attribute of a subject "who can see/drill a hole in the full wall," both of the good and the bad, the benevolence of the (state) institutions, and also the nihilism of the authorities and businesses.

To put this in a more theoretical context, we can turn to what Cornelius Castoriadis called the difference between autonomy and heteronomy. If the term *nomos* usually describes the law—with Castoriadis it also acquires the meaning of social custom, convention, and institution—it is the difference between the *Autos* as self and *Heteros* as other that defines the situation. In today's societies, we do not enact an autonomous, i.e. emancipatory stance, against the institutional order. Rather, we all increasingly choose to passively witness the "rule of other(s)"—in a manner of a "lazy consciousness," which is in another sense a form of (self) alienation or suppression. This instance of the other(s) becomes an established vocabulary, knowledge, or signature, in other words, a recount of terms. This fact disables our capacity to see other possibilities, putting an amalgamation of concrete material practices, organisation and functioning securely in between institutional frameworks and our individual imaginaries. As Marx once put it: "For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the other hand, imagine that they are subjects because he is king."²⁰ Every historical society is heteronomous, with its institutional framework, i.e. its laws, customs, traditions and habits of thought. This heteronomy is reinforced by relying on a determinate ideology, symbolic structure, or social imaginary significations. Recall also Foucault's concept of heterotopias, a term describing the utopian synthesis of such concrete places and virtual spaces. Therefore, every society within a heterotopia first and foremost bears an autonomous potentiality, a capability of a scission, a discontinuity, a disclosed and enunciated wrong in a world of *standardisation and homogenisation* according to the Law. How does such an autonomous act take place in actuality?

Looking back at the last two years, we hear persistent talk about so-called "new reality," a social transformation kicking in. Let us call such a transformation *a change in the institutional framework*. How is this transformation unfolding?

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 149n22.

On close examination, one could hardly call this an unravelling revolution or a revolutionary break. The imposition of the Law in most time sequences does not work in this way. What we had and still experience can better be described as a culmination of smaller and greater evolutionary increments and the consequent adaptation and mutation of institutions. In this sense, we can here also recall and paraphrase Catherine Malabou's recent inquiries into a plastic modification of psychic/social frameworks.²¹ Today, we can simultaneously also observe a significant deterioration of world-wide trust in formal and informal institutions (particularly law enforcement and the press, media and digital social platforms, and, of course, the now perpetually crony, political establishment), reducing their credibility and giving rise to alternative institutions to substitute their tasks and actions. The latter can be seen as an autonomous response of a collective subject that seeks to establish a disputative space toward the *nomos*. It is the reflection of the part that has no part in the distribution of the sensible (Foucault, Rancière), leading to a demand for *equaliberty* (Balibar) with a recourse to the remnant (Agamben), in positing the undecidable and searching for an (antagonistic) decision (Laclau) that makes the subject resurface in the social body as something *universal*.

Who is the Subject of Modification/Change in an Institutional Framework?

From St. Paul

Recent decades have brought an extensive philosophical interest in the Jewish/Christian figure of St. Paul and his quest for universalism. The almost slogan-like, accepted statement that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"²² has become a universalist operation of shedding difference in search of its concrete realization at an appropriate time, place, or event together with subsequent consequences. Contemporary philosophers,²³ ranging from Agamben and Badiou to Lyotard and Žižek, have endorsed a universality of truth stemming from the Christ-event and the enduring fidelity to it, thereby countering the now influential postmodern

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²¹ See Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

²² Gal 3:28.

²³ All motivated by the preceding scholarly interest in Paul by figures such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Comte, Freud, Heidegger, etc.

pluralism of particular identities and differences framed in a capitalist mode of standardisation and homogenisation. Unfortunately, these latter instances are not akin to any search for truth, rather being characterised with an absolutely overt quest for power and struggling entities for hegemony. Such universalization of identitarian singularities will (have) all end/ed up in either unfavourable, untenable and reactionary outcomes, or in some cases in disasters. In the current nihilist age, both Badiou²⁴ and Agamben²⁵ therefore come to the conclusion that proper (political) subjects are indeed rare.

The Pauline example for our purposes convokes these two main hypotheses: (1) the Universality of infinite truths supported by an agent/subject and holding for everyone, and (2) the disturbance of the Law through the dialectic of faith (*pistis*) and law (*nomos*). Granted, once in accordance with these two operations, the subject's threshold becomes immeasurable and the consequences potentially limitless. However, we must point out the preceding path taken by Paul, formerly Saul, from his early days of being a Greek-speaking Jew, born a Roman citizen (?) in Tarsus (Asia Minor, present-day Turkey) and raised in Jerusalem. During his early years, he lived as a Pharisee and believed there is only One, true living God, while wishing to know nothing about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet, he also tried to resolve the contradiction between the law of the Torah and the teachings of Christ. Thus he tried to adhere to both a conception of righteousness under the law (Torah) and charity for all (Christ). This fact was his motivation for being a faithful observer

²⁴ In *Theory of the Subject* Badiou posits: "Every subject is political. Which is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics." Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), 28. Later in *Conditions* he recasts this thesis but withholds the scarcity of subjects: "Every subject is induced through a generic procedure, and therefore depends upon an event. As a result, the subject is rare." Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 305n12. Even later in his *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou had to give avenues on how to perceive and adopt structural transformations devoid of any subjective support, hence adding a distinction between modification and change occurring at a "site," becoming either a modification or a factual/singular change resulting from the site—event.

²⁵ The messianic concept of the remnant in *The Time That Remains*, for Agamben represent a figure of "the only real political subject" (Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005], 57) as never coinciding with its own identity, prohibiting the closure of All (i.e. remaining non-All) maintains the potentiality of a subject to always evade inscription.

of the Law (*covenant nomism*) and strict critic of the nascent sect surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. Having observed his “earlier life in Judaism,” Paul experiences the Damascus transformation and conversion to becoming an “apostle to the Gentiles” not by renouncing his Judaism, but rather by adding to it his role as a messenger to Gentiles spreading the word about *God having raised Jesus*. What needs to be acknowledged here is how the forming-of Paul as Paul, not just his encounter with Jesus and the following revelation and universalist agency, but even more importantly, the prior course of his personal development had all in all attributed to his entire edifice and the consequences that followed. While his apostolic missionary status and achievement is generally underscored, the earlier circumstances leading to his initiation remain more opaque. It needs to be emphasised that for him to be able to freely fulfil the inclusion of Gentiles as the new peoples of God, starting anew the Christian “race,” he first had to go through his own journey of lawful torment applied to these peoples beforehand in order to finally transgress Law through the encounter with Jesus sending him to Damascus: “And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.”²⁶ With such a background in mind, we turn to a second example that even more pertinently depicts our current worldwide situation in transitory modification/change: the dispute between the Law and an individual.

To the Case of Giordano Bruno

Some fifteen centuries later, Europe had witnessed the unprecedented spread of the Christian religion, the Church now boasting tens of millions of adherents spanning from Europe to the Far East and South, adding the newly discovered territories over the Atlantic. Owing to numerous (ecumenical) reforms, missionary expansions and crusades, schisms, inquisitions, the development of ecclesiastical (canon) law, etc., this entire expansion was eventually initiated by a universalist grassroots approach laid down by Paul the Apostle. By the sixteenth century, the Church institution had already accumulated an enormous amount of cultural growth, habits and vested interests, traditions and rites leading also to many moral scandals, corruption at the highest ranks of the papacy, financial contrivances of the-now-already wealthy clergy, finally resulting in the Husite (Bohemian) and Lutheran calls for Reformation of the Church against such

²⁶ Acts 22:7–8.

aberrations. The Law was once again put to the test, responding in the form of a Counter-reformation with its famous heresy trials, surveillance of suspected heretics, excommunication, and persecution of Protestant Christians. When talking about the period from the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE (312) and all the way to the Early Middle Ages, but also the Renaissance, we have to acknowledge that the institutions of the Church and State were immensely interwoven²⁷—it was the French Revolution that finally brought about a secularised disentanglement of these relations—related particularly to their development and mutual influence of the Law. At the start of the fourth century CE, the crucial question was the unity of the Catholic Church and who counted as a Christian. With the first ecumenical council in Nicea (325 CE), the State began to support the Councils to maintain Christian Law, where these “tribunals of faith” had now become the State religion and the fight against heresy incorporated into laws of the Roman Empire with the Inquisition and the *Congregation of the Roman Holy Office/Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* as their operational posts.²⁸ What this implied was that the philosophical (with findings also originating in the natural sciences) and theological truths could not co-exist anymore, but rather had to be synthesised. This is the background that frames the current governmental and legislative structure of modern European nation states, with its ministries and bureaucracies, but also its obscurer side, the protection of secular and holy “truths.” The first and most famous historical figures to find themselves at odds with these new circumstances were Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei. These were the times and circumstances during which the

²⁷ Two further remarks can be made pertaining to Agamben’s distinction of political and economic theology above: (1) Observing a strictly *theoretical* conceptualisation arching from the arch-political theologian Carl Schmitt with his famous thesis “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” to the already mentioned Marcuse remark about “philosophy occurring in economic concepts” culminates well in Marx’s politico-economic analysis of commodity perceived as “abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.” (2) On the *practical* level, it was John Kenneth Galbraith who meaningfully coined the term “Bureaucratic Symbiosis” to depict the tendency of the executive bodies of public and private organisations to pursue a common objective. As was the case by the time he wrote *Economics and the Public Purpose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), the symbiosis was well in effect between Pentagon and weapons firms, such as Lockheed, Boeing or General Dynamics, while today we have similar cases between the FDA and Pfizer, or the FBI, DHS, Global Engagement Center and Twitter, Facebook or Google.

²⁸ See Germano Maifreda, *The Trial of Giordano Bruno*, trans. Paul M. Rosenberg and Loretta Valtz Mannucci (New York: Routledge, 2022), 56–57.

most famous Italian philosopher of the Renaissance from Nola began his journey through European courts and universities. The lectures he delivered were extraordinary. In his childhood, he discovered his immense memory, leading him to master the art of memory and the application of the mnemotechnic in the lines of Hermetic tradition,²⁹ i.e. drawing from the resurgence of Renaissance magic and alchemy to master his own memory, soul, and being. Another correlated theme is his rejecting of Aristotle for a Neo-Platonist version of Ideas as shadows of divinity that pushes human understanding to light and knowledge (*On the Shadows of Ideas/De umbris idearum*, 1582) and towards unity of the human soul with the infinite One. His opposition to Aristotle's physics, which was a generally accepted philosophical doctrine of the Catholic Church at the time, combined with his endorsement of Copernicanism and the open and infinite Universe with a plurality of worlds with intelligent beings, was the second of his heresies. To keep these claims intelligible and coherent, Bruno relies heavily on relations between nature (atoms), human understanding (cognitive methods), metaphysics (matter and form) and mathematics (monadology; points, geometry). This pantheist (Spinozist-like) basis was a third marker of profound disagreement with the Church. What this all adds up to is a stipulation that his goal was to introduce theoretical foundations (a general reform) to a world where the philosophical, natural and theological spheres would fall under one canopy, free from unintelligible dogmas and rites, while remaining a pure Christian one.

Bruno's name unquestioningly joins those of Copernicus, Galileo, Gilbert, Kepler, and Brache in the preparatory period of the early modern times scientific revolution, however, there is another aspect to his endeavours. It was his personality, torn between an intellectual and imaginative scholarship and personal impatience, quarrelsome and hysteric nature that eventually makes him a *subject of faith*. Which of Bruno's particular qualities therefore made him a subject of modification/change? It could not have been his scholarly discoveries—although he did make unprecedented observations and practices—but rather his synthetic abilities to migrate different theories in a unified corpus and disseminate them imperviously. He did so with fierce fidelity both to his ideas and to his cause, defending his theoretical positions wherever he was invited to orate and prompting the legitimate interest of the Inquisitorial bodies. This second aspect, which

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²⁹ The seminal book on this topic is by Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964).

associates him with Paul, is the spatial trajectory that gave him enough leverage to both develop his own theories and simultaneously promote his teachings to all progressive European lands. The method he employed can be likened to drilling small holes into the Law, by way of opposing or seeking a contradictory argument, thereby probing different cornerstones of a monolith finitude of the Church—all with the clear aim and justification that it was the good and the true he was pursuing when promulgating ideas. To this kind of subjective process Balibar gives the name *equaliberty*³⁰—taking on the demand, i.e. maintaining an untenable stance of persistence in an endless (impossible) “drilling” of the Law—the present and future to be retroactively and ceaselessly re-shaped by the past. As one biographer observed, these traits ran in Bruno’s family:

Dès lors, Bruno prend les armes tout comme l’a fait son père: il est excubitor, soldat plutôt qu’académicien, prêt à combattre, à réformer ou à détruire les idées comme les institutions qu’il juge vieilles, obsolètes, impropres à satisfaire aux besoins de son temps et de ceux à venir. Penseur éminent et de haute volée, il est aussi homme d’action, engagé dans la bataille; maître de la pensée, il en est aussi le témoin sur tous les champs de dispute ; il en sera finalement le martyr. Il n’est donc jamais à court de mots cinglants et durs pour se moquer de ses confrères trop doctes, les provoquer en duel, les combattre et les vaincre. Ils sont, écrit-il dans *De la cause, du principe et de l’un*, « aussi bon marché que les sardines: comme elles se multiplient, se trouvent et se pêchent sans peine, elles s’achètent également à bas prix ». Lui revendique de ne pas être un mercenaire, mais un philosophe libre, « académicien de nulle académie », proclame-t-il fièrement dans *Chandelier*, missionnaire de sa propre pensée, la nolana filosofia [. . .].³¹

A militant for free thought, Bruno anticipated Kant’s message delivered to the question *What is Enlightenment?*³² and paid for his struggles with power by sac-

³⁰ See Étienne Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, trans. James Ingram (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³¹ Jacques Arnould, *Giordano Bruno: Un génie, martyr de l’Inquisition* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2021), 52–53.

³² We rely here on a distinctive reading of Kant’s usage of private and public reason in an attempt of positing an “universalization of emancipatory politics, understood as a singularity of—that ‘thing in particular,’” proposed by Rado Riha in his interpretation of real politics, i.e. universalization of the real. For more, see Rado Riha, “Kako je mogoče misliti singularno univerzalno?,” *Filozofski vestnik* 20, no. 1 (1999): 193–203.

rificing his very life at the stake. Both Paul and Bruno stand for the faithful militants of presented events, unconditionally maintaining the truth that arises out of them, opposing the established and vested institutional dispositive, maintaining the dispute to be enforced at any cost. As Bruno declared in his last declaration to the pope: “The debate will not be closed by my stake, but rather on the contrary, opened after it and perhaps because of it to all humanity.” This Messianic gesture designates a rupture in the established scientific purview that was only left to the likes of Galileo, Kepler, Gilbert and Newton, with philosophers Bacon and Descartes to finally conclude the scientific revolution and abolish the existing scientific law of the Middle Ages. On the one hand, this signified a historically repetitive, but also confused and unconvincing, reaction coming from the Law towards the promoters of misdeeds, indicating on the other hand a thorough transformation of the institutional landscape taking place.

* * *

Why are the two figures of Paul and Giordano Bruno important for us? It is because they stand precisely at the crossroads of historical pathways on which our institutional frameworks are decided upon, displaying the recurring (potentially failed) mechanisms employed by the Law. Put obversely and concretely, their names represent the agents of instituent praxis stemming at least from the early Middle Ages, giving support to a new distribution of the sensible, new state of situation, new social imaginary significations, new content to floating signifiers, etc. Presently, we can posit along these lines a situation marked with a (rare) visible short-circuit between heteronomy and autonomy emerging from the two heterogeneous events—the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These give the latest empirical display of the dialectic of Law (states of emergency and martial law) and Faith (fidelity to a righteous stance, following through end-to-end, a Decision), that was however, already put in place throughout a long history of accumulated institutional growth, glimpses of which we tried to illuminate above.

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Just consider how elites in power have used the states of emergency (the facts regarding the course of events are used in an entirely non-pejorative way) to impose mandatory vaccinations as a condition to work, vaccine passports and quarantine hotels for restriction of movements and doings, media campaigns, as well as promulgating bizarre obligations of outdoor mask-wearing, banning

smoking outside, curfews, and the banning of public protests and manifestations. What recasts the case and trial of Giordano Bruno is the Law's response to any critical attitude against these measures and the entire development, promotion and instrumentalisation of the science-ideology driven narrative around the effectiveness and invincibility of newly developed mRNA vaccines. How individuals were being discredited and ousted for having questioned the "official executive narrative" and the agenda behind it has only recently been revealed with the publication of the so-called "Twitter Files" and other informal social media correspondence between high-ranking officials of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the European Commission. The IT and social media giants in cooperation with governments were and still are instructed to pool information about criticisms and to promote "official fact-checking" to fight "disinformation" and conspiracy theories against opposing views on either the pandemic measures or critical attitudes towards Western support for Ukraine in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Precisely in the same vein as Inquisitorial judges in pre-trial proceedings, these modern symbiotic administrators collect facts, use various mechanisms to admonish, disqualify and ban individuals from public spheres by resorting to talk about the "greater cause" or the "meaningless, but nonetheless valid Law."

Anticipating such a sequence, this is also what is covered by Agamben's distinction³³ between law of the state-of-exception and the Messianic (Kingdom state-of-exception) law, where the first instance indeed suspends the law(s) in force, but is nonetheless an "imperfect nihilism," a law without any significance, any content, and yet residing in validity, although *undecidable*. The law of the Messianic Kingdom ("perfect nihilism"), however, represents the suspension of validity itself by the Messiah, destroying any significance, opening "another use of the law [. . .]. What is found after the law is not a more proper and original use value that precedes the law, but a new use that is born only after it. And use, which has been contaminated by law, must also be freed from its own value."³⁴ It must, however, be maintained that such an excess over law, as was the grace for St. Paul coming prior to the law, is a parameter of sustained en-

³³ In reference to Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem and Franz Kafka. See Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 169–72.

³⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 64.

durance, of insistence on the symptom, of fidelity to the decision that can suspend the time and alter the situation—or as Badiou has it: “An eventual rupture always constitutes its subject in the divided form of a ‘not . . . but,’ and that *it is precisely this form that bears the universal.*”³⁵ What is impossible or indifferent as far as the law of a determinate institutional framework is concerned becomes nonetheless possible or transcendental, a potentiality and a fidelity, either for a Christian convert, the Renaissance man, or for a contemporary seeker of material enjoyment.

By Way of Conclusion, the Coming of New Struggles

It was held not so long ago that the twenty-first century has not yet begun. With the overture of the financial crises of 2007–13 and the main events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, we can claim that it has finally begun. In the midst of all these events lie different institutions, international and domestic, tacit and formal, archaic and contemporary that supply us with modes of being and doing by shaping various relationships. A critical analysis of any institutional framework is always comprised of two stages: (1) the continuous tracking and assessment of plastic modifications *within* the institutional dispositive and a (2) new conceptualisation of a rupture and de/reconstruction of an existing framework. Our aim for the near future should be to formulate a new analytical framework, particularly in terms of (a) modern (critique of) political economy, that could tackle and build upon the extinguished projects of state-socialisms in the twentieth century, and simultaneously also confront the now abruptly declining model of liberal-democratic economies of the West. The upcoming circumstances dictate that the task of grasping and interpreting a new global setup—considering an interrelated web of burgeoning technological advancements of artificial intelligence, bio technologies, virtual spaces, big data economics—in a world of rising individual control and severe environmental changes is needed in the near future. Novelists such as Jonathan Franzen (in his novel *Corrections*) already portray the slow demise of our imaginary to grasp financial innovations, while Kazuo Ishiguro (*Never Let Me Go*) along with the entire cyberpunk genre (Neal Stephenson is a paradigmatic example of the latter) point to our limited (in)ca-

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³⁵ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 63–64.

capacity for comprehending the technological ramifications waiting around the corner. To confront these challenges, our conceptual apparatuses need to reassess the historical conditions (economic, political, sociological, psychological, etc.) of the rise in new technological advancements, but also environmental damage, while sustaining the leitmotif of universal ideas such as equality, enlightenment, communism, and justice.

Why institutions then? Our concluding thesis here is the following: If the nineteenth century was dominated by class struggles and the twentieth century came absorbed in the struggle of grand narratives, the twenty-first century will have encountered the struggle of institutions.

Observing one last time the definitions of the concept of *institution*, we can posit that for us it does not present an extension of a linguistic model based upon rules and equilibrium (social ontology); it is not just a science of institutional origins with their functionalities, modalities and interpretation (sociology) and it can be only formally conceived as a (logical) model of different signatures, i.e. syntaxes and semantics (mathematics and computer science). Neither do institutions fall simply under an empiricist delineation of mainstream (neoclassical) economics. What institutions, and their particular mounting in a framework, need to have is architecture robust enough to institute different *logics*, *ontos* (ὄντος) and modalities of *creation/modification/change*. Furthermore, there is the question of the status of a subject. Is there a subject to/of institution? This was the topic of the second part of this paper: What are the (historical) conditions to instigating a subjective process of institutional alteration of a framework? What kind of events, occurrences, as well as contingent and necessary sequences evoke a peculiar situation where a dispute, objection, etc. is raised, uncovering the real state-of-affairs in the current institutional setup? We traced these doings to the acts of grace and fidelity, to the “keep going” moment, and the faithfulness of subjects that support and maintain such acts. What can be deduced from the examples of Paul and Bruno is that there has to be autonomous thought and the freedom to follow it through; there has to be a thought-out exception, i.e. a singular universal, a Decision, going into opposition to the Law and existent registers of knowledge; and there has to be support for the consequences, coming either from a revolutionary act that shatters all relations among objects and places new ones, or else a slow and laborious moulding of existing objects in a framework. This is because the recasting of the framework

had already begun by the time the names of St. Paul or Bruno were used to signify the irreversible re-composition of the institutional framework.

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Tomaž Mastnak*

Is Economic Power an Institution? The Limits of August Ludwig von Rochau's Redefinition of Liberal Politics

Keywords

August Ludwig von Rochau, *Realpolitik*, economic power, counterrevolution, Bonapartism, Liberalism

Abstract

The article deals with August Ludwig von Rochau's reformulation of Liberal politics after the defeat of the 1848 revolution. In response to the widely perceived crisis of Liberalism, von Rochau developed a realistic view of politics (he is credited with the invention of the concept of *Realpolitik*) as the basis for a renewed Liberalism. His realism with regard to politics, however, did not extend to a critical view of economic power. Economic power was exempted from political reflection and control.

Ali je ekonomska moč institucija? Meje redefinicije liberalne politike Augusta Ludwiga von Rochaua

Ključne besede

August Ludwig von Rochau, *Realpolitik*, ekonomska moč, kontrarevolucija, bonapartizem, liberalizem

Povzetek

Članek obravnava reformulacijo liberalistične politike po porazu revolucije leta 1848, ki jo je ponudil August Ludwig von Rochau. Von Rochau je kot odgovor na očitno krizo liberalizma razvil kritično razumevanje politike, na katerem je utemeljeval prenovljeni liberalizem. Njegov realizem v odnosu do politike (von Rochau velja za iznajditelja pojma *Realpolitik*) pa ni imel dopolnila v kritičnem razumevanju ekonomske moči. Ekonomska moč se je izmaknila tako politični refleksiji kot kontroli.

* Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia
tomaz.mastnak@guest.arnes.si



Economic power is an established mode of social action whose structural elements correspond to the definition of an institution in the social sciences, yet it is as a rule not defined as an institution. In the social sciences, institutions are of prime concern. With reference to Paul Fauconnet and Marcel Mauss, Émile Durkheim famously defined sociology as “the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning.”¹ I will here presuppose an elemental definition of institution as a social structure, organization, or system of rules, norms, and beliefs that regulate (shape, direct, constrain, manage, control, etc.) social behavior, and is in turn itself based on and regulated by its own rules, norms, and beliefs, as well as by public law, and will ask the question why economic power is generally not dealt with as an institution. This, in my view, is an important theoretical question, but also one that has huge practical implications.

Introduction

In order to outline the problem, I will begin by touching upon a relatively recent debate that addressed the question of economic power, and note that such debates are actually rare. In one of his last publications, Lapo Berti called for limiting economic power. He characterized “excessive wealth and economic power in private hands, which produces and presupposes excessive wealth,” as a problem that afflicts contemporary democratic regimes, yet is not taken issue with, or confronted, and, moreover, is not even named. He also reminded the reader that constitutions, which from the beginning of modernity regulate the life of our type of societies and enshrine the social pact, do not deal with economic power. “Among the powers, which [our constitutions] are trying to temper and control, economic power does not figure.”²

Berti belonged to the Italian *operaista* collective that launched the journal *Primo Maggio* in 1973, and more specifically to the “working group on money” as-

¹ Émile Durkheim, “Préface de la seconde édition,” in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), xxii; all translations of non-English works are my own.

² Lapo Berti, “Mettere un limite al potere economico,” CivicoLab, December 11, 2017, <https://www.civicolab.it/mettere-un-limite-al-potere-economico/>.

sociated with the journal.³ In retrospect, that was one of the last productive attempts to retool and revitalize Marxist theory so that it would be able to engage with contemporary capitalism. What in the early 1970s determined contemporary capitalism was the world economic crisis that was building up, and capital's response to it. Characteristic of the crisis was an enormous expansion of the boundaries of monetary policy. Along with it grew the space "to maneuver and manipulate money for political ends." As Berti later observed: "Money had become an institution with a high political value. After effectively being transformed into an instrument of government, it was thus inevitable for monetary policy to directly intervene in the power struggle between social classes." At the center of the working group on money's analysis was the insight that "money is an institution which is part of the governance of society."⁴

The analyses of the working group on money were initiated and given direction by Sergio Bologna's rereading of Marx's articles on *Crédit Mobilier*, published during the world economic crisis of the mid-1850s. Bologna argued that those forgotten or neglected articles represented an important shift in Marx's theoretical development. In them, Marx turned his attention to the "money form." The "institutional organization of the money form, the bank, becomes the point of departure for Marx's analysis of the whole of the bourgeoisie, of capital in its entirety."⁵

Crédit Mobilier was "the first appearance of investment banking in the nascent European capitalism."⁶ The celebrated Italian economist Piero Sraffa in his lectures at Cambridge in 1929–30, for example, presented it as "an antecedent of industrial banking, and industrial banking as a type (or ideal-type) of a conti-

³ See Stefano Lucarelli, "The 1973–1978 Workgroup on Money of the Journal *Primo Maggio*: An Example of a Pluralist Critique of Political Economy," *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* 4, no. 1 (2013): 30–50, <http://doi.org/10.1504/ijpee.2013.053585>.

⁴ Lapo Berti, "Interview: Marx, Money and Capital," interview by Paolo Davoli and Letizia Rustichelli, trans. Ettore Lancellotti and Letizia Rustichelli (n.p.: Rhizosfera, 2016) 16–17, 19, 23, https://monoskop.org/images/1/1a/Marx%2C_Money_and_Capital._An_Interview_with_Lapo_Berti.pdf.

⁵ Sergio Bologna, "Moneta e crisi: Marx corrispondente della 'New York Daily Tribune,'" *Primo Maggio: Saggi e documenti per una storia di classe* 1, no. 1 (June–September 1973): 3.

⁶ Joseph Ricciardi, "Marx on Financial Intermediation: Lessons of the French *Crédit Mobilier* in the *New York Daily Tribune*," *Science and Society* 79, no. 4 (October 2015): 498, <http://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2015.79.4.497>.

mental banking system differing from the English system.” *Crédit Mobilier* was an institutional innovation that answered the problem of financing industry.⁷ From a different perspective, *Crédit Mobilier* was a key institution of the new Bonapartist regime, which Louis Bonaparte established in France after his *coup d'état* in December 1851. Marx's articles on *Crédit Mobilier* represent an important advance in his understanding and critique of Bonapartism as first laid out in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, as well as in his understanding of capitalism.⁸

It is easy to observe a cross-fertilization between the Italian operaists' analysis of the 1970s economic crisis and their reading of Marx's articles on *Crédit Mobilier*. With the new understanding of how the advanced capitalist system worked, it was possible to detect in Bonapartism or, to be precise, in the economic revolution under the wing of the Bonapartist counter-revolutionary political dictatorship, elements, or beginnings, of the institutionalization of monetary power and of financial policies as an instrument of government. As Sergio Bologna wrote, Marx in his articles on *Crédit Mobilier* (preceding his work on the manuscript we know as the *Grundrisse*) confronted the Bonapartist regime as “the first accomplished form of the *modern state*, as the rule of social capital [. . .] as the first accomplished form of the modern monetary system.”⁹

Bologna here projected too much on Marx's articles. Marx only came to understand Bonapartism as the modern form of the state, or as the modern state, fifteen years later in his writings on the Paris Commune. Drafting his well-known *Civil War in France*, Marx characterized Louis Bonaparte's rule as the “ultimate political form” of “bourgeois society,” as “*the statepower of modern classrule*.”¹⁰ Such appreciation of Bonapartism was not unique. For Friedrich Engels, too, Bonapartism was “a modern form of the state,”¹¹ as it was earlier, for example,

⁷ Michel Bellet and Adrien Lutz, “Piero Sraffa and the Project to Publish Saint-Simon's Works,” *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)* (2019): 10, 14, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3312188>.

⁸ I discuss this in Tomaž Mastnak, *Bonapartizem: Prolegomena za študij fašizma* (Ljubljana: Založba / *cf., 2021), chap. 10.

⁹ Bologna, “Moneta e crisi,” 5.

¹⁰ Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France (Second Draft),” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, pt. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–), 22:117.

¹¹ Friedrich Engels, “Ergänzung der Vorbemerkung von 1870 zu ‘Der deutsche Bauernkrieg,’” in *Marx-Engels-Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957–68), 18:513.

for Theodor Mundt¹² and Bruno Bauer (who considered Louis Bonaparte's empire a "modern empire").¹³

What is important for my argument is that we find here an initial analysis of economic power as an institution in Marx, which is intertwined with his analysis of the modern state. We are in the 1850s, at the junction in history that witnessed crucially important developments of both political and economic power. One might say that we are at a decisive or formative moment in the historical formation of modern political and economic power.

Just as the formation of modern political and economic power took place simultaneously, and the two were interlinked, so did the beginnings of their analytical and conceptual understanding. The times when political thinkers could write their treatises as if the economy had not existed¹⁴ were definitively over. However, and this is the paradox I want to highlight, whereas political power was widely discussed, the elements for a conceptualization of economic power do not seem to have been taken up and systematically developed—at least not with the same intensity and to the same extent as discussions of political power. And, as Berti pointed out, whatever understanding of economic power there existed, it was not—in contrast to political power—translated into institutional policies and constitutional arrangements.

Economic power would become a practical issue, for example, in the United States with the antitrust Sherman Act of 1890, or with the suspension of the Act during the World War II industrial mobilization, and it was theoretically addressed in the work of Thorstein Veblen, the British New Liberals (J. A. Hobson in the first place), and the German Ordoliberals (especially Franz Böhm and Walter Eucken, but also Hans Grossmann-Doerth).¹⁵ But the volume of these writings

¹² Theodor Mundt, *Paris und Louis Napoleon: Neue Skizzen aus dem französischen Kaiserreich* (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1858), 2:175.

¹³ Bruno Bauer, *Russland und das Germanenthum* (Charlottenburg: Verlag von Egbert Bauer, 1853), 75.

¹⁴ See István Hont, introduction to *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 1–156.

¹⁵ More on this in Tomaž Mastnak, *Črna internacionala: Vojna, veliki biznis in vpeljava neoliberalizma* (Ljubljana: Založba / *cf., 2019), chap. 1, 2, 5.

seems negligible in comparison with all that has been and continues to be written and talked about political power, and today hardly anyone discusses them.

A history of the sporadic and fragmented thinking about economic power is a desideratum. Here, however, I aim to elucidate the absence of such thinking at a point in political and intellectual history, where one would, by the “logic of things,” expect it to occur. I will de-center my discussion from the already mentioned “English model,” which has decisively shaped and dominated our views on modern political-economic history as well as on the societies we live in, and blinded us to the issue of economic power, while at the same time glorifying it. I will turn instead to the developments in continental Europe. I will focus on August Ludwig von Rochau’s book *The Principles of Realpolitik*.

Published in 1853, von Rochau’s book redefined liberal politics and policies after the defeat of the progressive forces in the 1848–49 revolution, and was widely read and influential in Germany in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The book was polemical, a *Streitschrift*, yet it also brought about a shift in theoretical perspectives on politics. As such, von Rochau has earned his characterization as one of the most interesting German political writers of the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

While the book was an intervention into German political life, it was not provincial. At the core of von Rochau’s theoretical innovations were reflections upon Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état* in France and upon the Bonapartist system that the violent seizure of power had inaugurated. The Italian historian Trocini has recently credited von Rochau with discovering the “law of power.”¹⁸ Since this term refers to political power, I take von Rochau and his *Principles of Realpolitik* to be a perfect case for asking the question of why this discovery of the “law of power,” that is, these new reflections on power, did not encompass economic power.

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¹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze der Realpolitik: Angewendet auf die statischen Zustände Deutschlands*, by Ludwig August von Rochau, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1972), 7–21.

¹⁷ Federico Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik” e la scoperta della “legge del potere”: August Ludwig von Rochau tra radicalismo e nazional-liberalismo* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2009), 15.

¹⁸ Trocini.

I will first say a few things about von Rochau. I will then present his ideas about a realistic approach to politics and the introduction of the concept of *Realpolitik*.¹⁹ This will be followed by addressing the question of how to understand von Rochau's redefinition of liberalism, which will include a discussion of Bonapartism, of the defeat of the 1848 revolution, and of contemporary critiques of liberalism. I will conclude by exploring the limits of *Realpolitik*, that is, von Rochau's failure to take issue with economic power.

August Ludwig von Rochau

August Ludwig von Rochau was born in 1810 in Prussia. During his student years, in the early 1830s, he was heavily involved with *Burschenschaften*, student associations or fraternities. In order to escape imprisonment for his radical activities—a court in Frankfurt had sentenced him to life—he fled to France in 1836. From Paris, where he became acquainted with other German exiles and developed an interest in Fourierism, he worked as a translator and wrote as a correspondent for a number of German liberal newspapers. In 1840, he published a book on Charles Fourier's "social theory" and seven years later another one on his travels in southern France and Spain.

In 1846, von Rochau returned to Germany and worked as an editor in Heidelberg. After the general amnesty of March 1848, he took part in the *Vorparlament* in Frankfurt and was active as a journalist. On the liberal left himself, he soon began to criticize the impotence of German liberals—their lack of "moral and material strength"—as well as the "eccentricities of the extreme left" and

¹⁹ Whether the concept of *Realpolitik* was indeed invented by von Rochau is of secondary importance. The point is that he introduced the concept into wide public usage. See Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*, 7. Duncan Kelley calls von Rochau "the most important developer of the concept." Duncan Kelley, "August Ludwig von Rochau and Realpolitik as Historical Political Theory," *Global Intellectual History* 3, no. 3 (2018): 302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2017.1387331>. See also John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chap. 1. According to Trocini (*L'invenzione della "Realpolitik"*, 8), von Rochau also introduced to the German political language the term "socialism" (*Socialismus*). His reference seems to be to von Rochau's early publication on Fourier's "social theory." However, the term does not appear in that text, in which von Rochau in fact used the term "socialist." See the use of the term *Socialisten* in Rochau's book, written under the pseudonym A. L. Churoa, *Kritische Darstellung der Socialtheorie Fourier's*, ed. Gustav Bacherer (Braunschweig: G. C. F. Meyer sen., 1840), 67.

the “arrogance of the conservatives.”²⁰ Soon after the defeat of the revolution, he emigrated again, this time to Switzerland, travelled through Italy, and published a book about the travels. In 1852 he took residence in Heidelberg and dedicated himself to writing. He published books on Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état* and on the Moriscos in Spain, the *Principles of Realpolitik*, and later in the 1850s a history of France in two volumes, and a new edition of the *Principles of Realpolitik*.

That second edition of the *Principles of Realpolitik* impacted the younger generation of German liberals like a “bolt of lightning,” as von Rochau’s younger contemporary, the historian and liberal politician Heinrich von Treitschke was to say in his obituary for von Rochau.²¹ In the late 1850s, von Rochau entered politics and as one of the leaders of the liberal *Nationalverein* and worked for the unification of Germany. This finally brought him to supporting Prussia and its Minister-President Otto von Bismarck for their leading role in the state unification process. Von Bismarck, as we know, was and remains something of a symbol of anti-liberalism, and von Rochau had a clash with him in 1850, which cost him his journalistic license. Up to 1866, von Rochau regarded von Bismarck as the “Messiah of feudal aristocracy.”²² But the war in 1866, in which Prussia defeated Austria and established itself as the leading German state and the undisputed bearer of national unification, changed the political calculus—not only for the liberals, but also for the socialist labor movement as well.²³

Soon after von Rochau the politician had made his nod to von Bismarck’s political success, to what he regarded as *Erfolgspolitik*, he offered a theoretical justification as well. In 1869, he published the second part of the *Principles of Realpolitik*. The first volume in 1853 had appeared anonymously and prompted guesses about the authorship. Some, for example, attributed the work to Arnold Ruge. I find this an interesting choice because, on the eve of the 1848 revolution, Ruge

²⁰ For these citations, see Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 32.

²¹ Quoted in Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 35. For a more cautious view, cf. Natascha Doll, *Recht, Politik und “Realpolitik” bei August Ludwig von Rochau (1810–1873)* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005).

²² Quoted in Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 36.

²³ See Cora Stephan, “*Genossen, wir dürfen uns nicht von der Geduld hinreißen lassen!*” *Zur Theoriebildung in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1862–1878* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), chap. 2, 3.

(an erstwhile close associate of Marx) published a “self-critique of liberalism,” in which he called on his fellow radical democrats to make the transition from liberalism to “*democratism*.”²⁴ The second volume of the *Principles of Realpolitik*, too, was printed without von Rochau’s name on the title page, yet this time the authorship was not kept a secret. In the eyes of some scholars, the book established von Rochau as a literary precursor of Bismarckian politics, and von Bismarck himself now on some occasions passed flattering judgement on him.²⁵ Von Rochau died in 1873 as a member of the German Reichstag.

Realpolitik, Constitutional Politics, Force

In his *Principles of Realpolitik*, von Rochau goes *in medias res*. His starting point is the state, and his objective is to define “the dynamic basic law of the state [Staatswesen].” The state is “the political organism of human society,” whose existence is “based on natural necessity.”²⁶ This “natural” necessity is understood historically: in a historically given state, it is fulfilled through the interaction of manifold forces, whose composition, measure, and results endlessly change with time and place. “The starting point of all political understanding is the study of the forces that shape, maintain, and transform the state, and its first step leads to the following insight: that the *law of strength* [Stärke] dominates the life of the state in a similar way that the *law of gravitation* dominates the material world.”²⁷

Whereas the old *Staatswissenschaft* fully understood that “truth,” it drew from it a “false and baleful” conclusion: “the *right* of the stronger.” In modern times, this “unethical erroneous conclusion” (that the stronger has the *right*) was corrected, yet at the same time something important was lost from sight: “the real power [Macht] of the stronger,” whose importance in and for the state necessari-

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²⁴ Arnold Ruge, “Selbstkritik des Liberalismus,” in *Arnold Ruge’s sämtliche Werke*, 2nd ed. (Mannheim: J. P. Grohe, 1847–48), 4:116. On attribution, see Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 13n10.

²⁵ See Trocini, 39, 47, 228.

²⁶ On the “organism” metaphor, see Lynn K. Nyhart, “The Political Organism: Karl Vogt on Animals and States in the 1840s and ’50s,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 47, no. 5 (November 2017): 602–28, <https://doi.org/10.1525/hsns.2017.47.5.602>.

²⁷ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1853), 1. I will refer to this work as *Grundsätze* (1853).

ly needed to be recognized. “This error is the cause of the grossest blunders and heaviest defeats of the constitutional politics [*Verfassungspolitik*], committed and suffered in European states for some generations.”²⁸

There is a lot to unpack here, but let us just note first that the formulations of von Rochau that I cited belie the criticism that his was a “social Darwinism avant la lettre,”²⁹ and turn to the core of his argument, to his critique of constitutional politics. Whereas his view of politics was definitively state-centered, his view of the state was just as clearly not constitution-centered.

The examination of the question of who *ought to* govern, whether the right, wisdom, [or] virtue, whether one, or few, or many—this question belongs to the realm of philosophical speculation; the practical politics first has to deal with the simple fact only power alone is that which *can* govern. To govern means exercising power, and solely he who has power can exercise power. This direct connection between power and governing is the basic truth of all politics and the key to the entire history.³⁰

As we see, von Rochau blamed political blunders and defeats of the recent past—which included the 1848 revolution—on the preoccupation with constitutional politics, that is, with the form of government. This is how he interpreted the recent and lived history. Early in the twentieth century, the great liberal historian Guido de Ruggiero offered a very similar interpretation, describing two of the three main proposals put forward by German liberals in 1848 as “to obtain, especially in Prussia, genuinely modern constitutions in place of the old feudal diets; and to make these constitutions a bond of political union for the whole German people.”³¹

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There was a theoretical dimension to von Rochau’s interpretation. His decentering of the state from the question of the constitution was very much an expression of the *Zeitgeist*. In the aftermath of the 1789 French Revolution, the more perceptive political thinkers of the time tended to turn their attention away from

²⁸ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 1–2.

²⁹ Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*, 11.

³⁰ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 2.

³¹ Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 248.

the constitution and progressively ceased to rely on the classical political language of the forms of government. Such was the case with Benjamin Constant, who was among the leading thinkers seeking to reformulate or reconstruct the post-revolutionary political theory and rehabilitate political language, and who observed that “the study of the constitutional organisation of government [. . .] had generally fallen into disgrace.”³² Refusing to differentiate between the forms of government, he in his *Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation*, instead introduced the distinction between “regular government and that which is not [regular],” and the concept of usurpation, which applied to the latter.³³

As another example of turning away from the question of constitution as the central political question, I will cite Lorenz Stein (later in life: von Stein). Stein was von Rochau’s contemporary and even lived in Paris when von Rochau, too, was there. And like the latter, he studied the contemporary French socialism and communism, and French political developments in general. I have seen no mention of their ever meeting, but Stein cited von Rochau’s pseudonymous book on Fourier in his own account of “socialism and communism in today’s France.”³⁴ In a later work, analyzing contemporary French political struggles, Stein detected the shift from *Verfassung* to *Verwaltung*, that is, from constitution, or the form of government, to administration (or management). For Stein, administration was the application, or the use, of state power.³⁵ The question was who uses state power and for what purposes.

Stein linked that shift to the emergence of “social democracy” as a fusion of the radical democratic republican “political movement” with the socialist “social

³² Biancamaria Fontana, *Benjamin Constant and the Post-Revolutionary Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 18; see also 13, 15, 27.

³³ Benjamin Constant, “De l’esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation dans les rapports avec la civilisation européenne,” in *Écrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 181, 184.

³⁴ Lorenz Stein, *Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs: Ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1842), 263, 278.

³⁵ Lorenz Stein, *Das Königthum, die Republik und die Souveränität der französischen Gesellschaft seit der Februarrevolution 1848*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1855), 216. In his voluminous later work on the science of administration, or management, he defined administration as the “concrete realization of the will or essence of the state.” Lorenz Stein, *Die Verwaltungslehre: Erster Theil* (Stuttgart: Verlag der J. G. Cottaschen Buchhandlung, 1865), 9.

movement.” In his interpretation, the key importance of the administration of the state was recognized precisely by the labor movement. As long as the propertied class, which had state power in its hands, did not use it in the interest of the propertyless class, the latter had to fight to take over the administration of the state. Then it could use “all the means of state power to promote the laboring class with regard to its most essential interest.” The administration of the state by the working class meant the “*administration of social reform*.”³⁶ Von Rochau himself wrote about the “struggle for the possession of public authority [*öffentliche Gewalt*]” between the governed and the governing, which had run through the “whole of European history” and had been the moving force “in the present century more than in any preceding.”³⁷

The final discredit of the forms of government approach to politics and the state was brought about by Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état*. On the one hand, Louis Bonaparte’s seizure of power dispensed with constitutional niceties and was an apotheosis of the politics of force that sent waves of admiration (among the ruling classes) and horror (among those with democratic leanings) across Europe. On the other hand, the fact of the successful *coup* and the system of power it inaugurated, the so-called Bonapartism (or Caesarism), posed a problem to apologists and critics alike: its nature could not be explained in the existing (traditional) language of politics and in particular could not be captured with the categories of the forms of government.³⁸

When von Rochau relegated reflections on politics in terms of forms of government to “philosophical speculation,” he put at the center of thinking about practical politics—for practical, or real, politics was what he was interested in—the “fact” (*Tatsache*) of strength, force, and power. In this regard, too, he was very much expressing the spirit of the age. A good example of how “force” began to be considered of central importance is von Rochau’s French contemporary Auguste Romieu. Even before Louis Bonaparte seized power, Romieu wrote of “Caesarism” as a new political phenomenon. Writing about new political phenomena as a rule goes together with new ways of looking at politics, as well as with realizing that the old concepts have lost their explanatory power. In this

³⁶ Stein, *Das Königthum*, 217–18.

³⁷ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 41.

³⁸ I quote the textual evidence in Mastnak, *Bonapartizem*, chap. 1–2.

sense Romieu wrote, for example, that the emerging Caesarism “signifies neither royalty, nor empire, nor despotism, nor tyranny.”³⁹

Romieu connected the advent of Caesarism with the decline of monarchies. Napoleon may have wanted to restore “monarchical foundations” for his rule, but could not succeed in that intention. Monarchy rested on faith and the hereditary principle, but the era of faith had been succeeded by the age of reason. Consequently, Caesarism could not be “founded,” like monarchy had been, but had to be “established.” To be precise: it had to “establish” itself. It could only rely on itself, and that ultimately meant relying on force.⁴⁰ With the sacred gone under the new reign of reason, only force had remained. Force was a “FACT,” it was at the bottom of all human institutions, even those believed to have been born “in the name of liberty.”⁴¹

Bonapartism and *Realpolitik*

Bonapartism made a big impact on von Rochau’s understanding of politics. It was a revealing moment. Von Rochau was quick to describe the *coup d’état* in great detail. He published a booklet in which he explained how Louis Bonaparte had “seized absolute power [*Alleinherrschaft*] with violence” and had his autocracy legitimized both democratically, through a plebiscitary vote of the people, and priestly, by the Church, which “with a *Te Deum* declared God the originator of the *coup d’état*.”⁴² In his *History of France*, he again narrated the preparations for and the execution of the *coup*, and the political changes it introduced. That narration made it clear how easily Louis Bonaparte repeatedly dispensed with the existing constitution and the law, and how he, relying on force and power, shaped the new constitution according to his will.⁴³ In his booklet on Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état*, von Rochau cited Auguste Thiers, who had allegedly retorted to the police officer who came to arrest him “in the name of law,” that

³⁹ Auguste Romieu, *L’ère des césars*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ledoyen, 1850), 30.

⁴⁰ Romieu, 194–95, 197.

⁴¹ Romieu, 200–3.

⁴² August Ludwig von Rochau, *Vier Wochen französischer Geschichte: 1. December 1851–1. Januar 1852* (Leipzig: Avenarius & Mendelssohn, 1852), 139, 161.

⁴³ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Geschichte Frankreichs vom Sturze Napoleon bis zur Wiederherstellung des Kaiserthumes, 1814–1852* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1858), 2:314–30.

the arrest was made “in the name of violence.”⁴⁴ In the *History of France*, the dimension of violence and force is even more pronounced.

In the *Principles of Realpolitik*, however, von Rochau delivered a categorical judgment of Louis Bonaparte’s *coup*. He characterized it as an epochal moment in modern political history (*eine große Epoche in der politischen Geschichte der Neuzeit*). He confronted his reader with the following shocking fact (*Tatsache*):

The people that have for two generations stood at the helm of the European movement, that have in the name of civic freedom gone through a string of most difficult trials and withstood them, that after the fall of Napoleonic domination seem to have made themselves completely at home in the parliamentary system, these people have overnight lapsed back into an absolutism, which on this side of the Russian border does not have an equal any longer.⁴⁵

How was one to understand the fact that “the highest official of the French people overthrew the constitution and the law [*Gesetz*], private and public law [*Recht*] of the country, and seized for himself a plenitude of power, thanks to which he can with unlimited arbitrariness command not only over the state institutions but also over the life, freedom, and property of citizens”?⁴⁶ Von Rochau had an answer:

These events hold one of the biggest political lessons that history has ever taught. What emerges from them in the first place, and with an unprecedented clarity, is the incurable nothingness of constitutions, which seek to separate public law from public power, that confront the armed power with unarmed right. *The politics of facts* overthrows governments and creates governments; the *constitutive constitutional politics* on the contrary has essentially nothing else to do but to recognize the existing powers and consecrate them with the written law.⁴⁷

Some historians of political thought hold the view that Bonapartism entered von Rochau’s thinking in the first place as regarding international relations.⁴⁸ I

⁴⁴ Rochau, *Vier Wochen französischer Geschichte*, 18.

⁴⁵ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 207.

⁴⁶ Rochau, 207–8.

⁴⁷ Rochau, 208.

⁴⁸ See Kelley, “August Ludwig von Rochau,” 312 et passim.

do not think so. France under Emperor Bonaparte—whom von Rochau, just like, for example, his contemporaries Stein and Mundt, saw as being bent on war⁴⁹—was of course a big issue for German foreign policy. But an effective foreign policy clearly demanded building up German unity, that is, it was reflected on the internal political changes.

Bonapartism (and French contemporary politics in general) had a formative impact on von Rochau's thinking about the *nature of politics*. I do not think that that impact can properly be explained as his—or Stein's—"nationalizing in German form the social diagnoses of French political theory."⁵⁰ Rather, both von Rochau and Stein were following and reflecting upon the "raw" politics and social movements in the neighboring country and, based on their observations and analyses, formulated their own theories. Stein, studying French political developments, hammered out a "theory of society," or social theory.⁵¹ Von Rochau, himself stimulated by French political developments but primarily concerned with the state of the fragmented German nation, worked out a theory of politics in a realistic key.

"Realism" was a philosophical concept. In Ludwig Feuerbach's influential statement, which reverberated especially on the Hegelian left, *Realismus* represented the spirit of the time or of the future.⁵² It was opposed to "theology," and "the negation of theology" was "the *essence of the modern time* [*Wesen der neuern Zeit*]." If in Feuerbach's critique, realism was the opposite of "refined illusions and unbecoming [*vettelhaft*] prejudices,"⁵³ in von Rochau's polemics it was pitted against abstraction, speculation, chimeras, dogmatism, doctrinairism, castles in the air, the autonomous power of ideas and principles, and "creatures

⁴⁹ For Rochau, see the 1859 edition of *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die statischen Zustände Deutschlands: Neue, mit einer Einleitung vermehrte Ausgabe* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1859), iii.

⁵⁰ See Kelley, "August Ludwig von Rochau," 311.

⁵¹ See Lorenz Stein, *Der Begriff der Gesellschaft und die sociale Geschichte der französischen Revolution bis zum Jahre 1830*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1855), especially the long introduction.

⁵² Quoted in Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*, 7, and Trocini, *L'invenzione della "Realpolitik"*, 13.

⁵³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (Zürich: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1843), iii, 23.

of ideas.”⁵⁴ The same applies to repeated references to “facts.” These references were an expression of the rise and growing prestige of the natural sciences, which Feuerbach counted among “the so-called real sciences [*reale Wissenschaften*]” as prime examples of “empiricism or realism.”⁵⁵

Just like Stein, who was well acquainted with Hegelian philosophy, turned to class struggles, von Rochau turned to social struggles or, to use a more cautious formulation, social dynamics. He postulated the importance of studying social forces (*gesellschaftliche Kräfte*) “that shape, maintain, and transform the state.” (If this formulation sounds rather Machivellian, it is because it probably was: Machiavelli was at the time an important presence in German thinking about French politics.)⁵⁶ In von Rochau’s view, the constitution of a state was “determined by reciprocal relations among the forces that are either active or resting within that state. Each social force [*gesellschaftliche Kraft*] claims a standing within the state that corresponds to its magnitude, and the state power [*Staatskraft*] itself is solely the sum of the social forces that the state has integrated into itself.”⁵⁷

In his analysis of the active and passive social forces in Germany, and pondering their intellectual and monetary power—he spoke of *Geistes- und Geldkräfte der Gesellschaft*⁵⁸—von Rochau privileged the historical position and role of the rising middle classes, of the “middle estate.” That *Mittelstand* possessed in the greatest measure “wealth, opinion, and intelligence,” the “main social forces,” the “three factors” that had to be reflected in the representative system.⁵⁹ This social analysis was clearly pregnant with a political program. It postulated the need to adjust the political system to the social transformation, which meant the necessity of the state integrating the advancing social forces, as well as mirroring the waning strength of the old social forces.

⁵⁴ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 2, 3, 23, 32, 91, 106, 131, 153, 165, 212.

⁵⁵ Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie*, 23. Nyhart writes that “the natural world and its sciences” provided “a source of legitimation for politics, especially liberal politics.” Nyhart, “Political Organism,” 32.

⁵⁶ Theodor Mundt, for example, published three editions of his book on Machiavelli between 1851 and 1861 (I cite the first and the third enlarged edition in notes 72 and 82). See also Jacob Venedey, *Machiavel, Montesquieu, Rousseau* (Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1850). Von Rochau was close with Venedey during his French exile.

⁵⁷ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 4.

⁵⁸ Rochau, 9.

⁵⁹ Rochau, 24.

Following such “historical-sociological” approach, however, would lead us away from the main concern of this paper, which is not so much the social transformation as the political transformation. I differentiate between them for the sake of argument, and want to further specify that the political transformation I am primarily interested in here is that which concerns political ideology and theory. And of special interest to me in this regard are the fortunes of liberalism.

Was the Revolution Defeated?

The few scholars who have studied von Rochau agree that his *Principles of Realpolitik* was a book that crucially contributed to the reformulation of German liberalism.⁶⁰ These appreciations of von Rochau’s work turn on the question of the failure of the 1848 revolution. The reformulation of liberal theory, ideology, and politics appears to have been prompted by the experience of defeat. But let us first ask: Was the revolution really defeated? This question contains two sub-questions: Which revolution? Whose revolution?

The question of the defeat of the 1848 revolution was a moot question already for contemporaries. Karl Marx famously wrote that, “with the exception of only a few chapters, every major section of the annals of the revolution of 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: *Defeat of the revolution!*”⁶¹ The German historian Johann Gustav Droysen had a more nuanced view. He wrote that Louis Bonaparte’s regime rested “on the European movement of 1848” and was “its ripe fruit.” He explained: “Everywhere else the big European reaction has won, only in France did the wild movement coalesce into a new positive foundation.”⁶²

Considering Bonapartism the fruit of the 1848 revolution may be confusing. To untangle the confusion, Droysen referred to the conservative legal scholar Friedrich Julius Stahl and his “confreres,” who had commented that “the street tumult, barricades, the revolts, etc.,” as such were not to be understood as revo-

⁶⁰ I cannot enter into a discussion of this literature here. For an exhaustive list of sources, see Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, and Kelley, “August Ludwig von Rochau”; see also Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, “Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1849,” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 10:119.

⁶² Johann Gustav Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik der europäischen Krisis,” in *Politische Schriften*, ed. Felix Gilbert, (Munich: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1933), 310.

lution.⁶³ Droysen added that it was “also certain that [revolution] was not ended in the moment when it stabilized itself in a monarchistic form.”⁶⁴ (That was also Stahl’s view: that Bonapartism, characterized by “mechanical violence,” was not “the closing of the revolution but its consolidation.”)⁶⁵ For beyond the “street tumult,” momentous changes were taking place in nineteenth century Europe, of which the year 1848 was only one moment: “All the basics and conditions of European life, all social and state forces, all mental and material factors have changed.”⁶⁶ Droysen’s description of those changes was not unlike the picture Marx and Engels drew in the *Communist Manifesto*.⁶⁷ Only that Droysen seems not to have found much to celebrate in “the destruction of the old,” which progressed with an “insuperable force.”⁶⁸

Unlike von Rochau, who portrayed the growing importance and strength of the middle classes, Droysen saw them already helplessly falling victim to the *Verpöbelung* generated by the economic changes that the *Communist Manifesto* portrayed as the revolutionary work of the liberal bourgeoisie: just like the “lower strata,” the “middle strata” were being “reduced to mob.”⁶⁹ But like von Ro-

⁶³ Droysen, 310. Droysen referred to Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution? Ein Vortrag, auf Veranstaltung des Evangelischen Vereins für kirchliche Zwecke am 8. März 1852 gehalten*, 3rd ed., with an addendum *Die Reformation und die Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Schultze, 1852), 8–9.

⁶⁴ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 310.

⁶⁵ Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution?*, 13. Constantin Frantz saw “mechanic coercive power [*mechanische Zwangsgewalt*]” as characteristic of liberalism. Constantin Frantz, *Vorschule zur Physiologie der Staaten* (Berlin: Ferdinand Schneider, 1857), 290.

⁶⁶ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 322. Here, too, Stahl held a similar view: “Revolution is not a one-off act; it is a continued condition, a new order of things,” brought about by turning the world upside down, by an *Umwälzung*. Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution?*, 4, 8. Von Rochau, for his part, held a negative view of the historical school of law, to which Stahl belonged. See Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 93–95.

⁶⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 4:459–93, especially pt. I.

⁶⁸ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 324.

⁶⁹ Droysen, 324. A few decades later, Wilhelm Roscher made a similar point, writing about the middle estate melting away at both the top and at bottom and the people splitting “into the opposition of the over-rich capitalists and the wholly propertyless workers.” He called the emerging system plutocracy, giving rise to “Caesarism.” See Wilhelm Roscher, “Umrisse zur Naturlehre des Cäsarismus,” in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1888), 10:641–42. An earlier “Naturlehre” of Caesarism can be found in Constantin Frantz,

chau, Droysen detected the change in the nature of political power, at the core of which was the expansion of “power” and of its importance. The key change was not that power simply expanded, grew, but that it now began to generate itself. The state became an “institution” that was “*engendering* [*erzeugen*: producing, generating] *power and exercising it*.”⁷⁰

Droysen compared this new type of institutionalized power to that “insuperable force” with which the economic changes asserted themselves. He described the state as similar to the “big mechanized [or: machine-based] industry.” This state machine, absorbing the power of the “artisanal” type and eating up the “autonomy of all the lower circles,” became omnipotent. It “needed and demanded omnipotence” in order to have everyone and everything at its disposal at any given time, to use for its own purposes, to determine, and to mobilize.⁷¹ Whereas von Rochau used the medieval legal term plenitude (or fullness) of power (*plenitudo potestatis*) to describe the post-revolutionary French state, Droysen described it as omnipotent. In contrast to the static state of the preceding period, which had summed up in itself the existing stable relations of power, the omnipotent new state was producing power: its own power. It became a productive force on the industrial model.

If we understand revolution in the modern sense as a radical change (and not in the traditional meaning of a circular motion), the transformation of political power Droysen described was revolutionary. However, the omnipotent state machine he depicted was the Caesarist, or Bonapartist, state of France, and it was an exception. (Only in retrospect does it appear as a political vanguard, the harbinger of “the new normal.”) Elsewhere in Europe, as Droysen wrote, reaction had won. And even if we consider the Bonapartist type of power to have been the fruit of revolution, that does not mean that it was a revolutionary type of power. In fact, that was a reactionary, or counter-revolutionary, regime.

Theodore Mundt captured the paradox when he characterized Bonapartism (he called it Napoleonism) as “the true system of revolutionary reaction in modern

Naturlehre des Staates als Grundlage aller Staatswissenschaft (Leipzig: C. F. Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1870), especially 173–74 et passim, and even earlier in Constantin Frantz, *Vorschule zur Physiologie*, passim.

⁷⁰ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 323.

⁷¹ Droysen, 323.

Europe.”⁷² Already in 1849, Alfred Meißner, a German writer of democratic leanings (whom Marx and Engels ridiculed as a “true socialist”), wrote of the “work of the counterrevolution,” that is, of the counterrevolution at work within the French Revolution.⁷³ In that context he described the plans of Louis Bonaparte and his “Napoleonic party” as part of the “plans of the counterrevolution” and as a “parody of the eighteenth Brumaire.”⁷⁴ Meißner’s descriptions and insights are interesting, yet to the best of my knowledge Karl Korsch—reflecting on the victorious fascist counterrevolution in Europe on the eve of World War II—was the first to clearly point out that no one, neither Marx and Marxists nor liberals, had had a theory of counterrevolution. That amounted to saying that they were unable to think of counterrevolution as a productive force of history and as a phase of social development. Instead, they regarded it as an “abnormal interruption” or a “temporary disturbance of a normally progressive development.”⁷⁵ Yet counterrevolution could generate new realities and revolutionary changes, and in that sense it was a revolutionary force. Bonapartism was a case in point.

Political and Economic Revolution, Critiques of Liberalism

All this means that there is not one single, and straightforward, answer to the question of whether the 1848 revolution was defeated. The basic distinction that emerged in the aftermath of the revolution, reflecting what had taken place, was between political and economic revolution. Contemporaries came to the realiza-

⁷² Theodor Mundt, *Niccolò Machiavelli und das System der modernen Politik*, 3rd edition (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1861), 307–8.

⁷³ Alfred Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris (1849)* (Frankfurt: Literarische Anstalt, 1849), 1:107. According to a biographical sketch in the series on German “moderne Klassiker,” Meißner moved to Paris in the winter of 1849, because he could not stand seeing the streets of his native Prague flooded with “foreign agitators from all the Slavic regions,” who had gathered there for the revolutionary “Slavic *Vorparlament*.” During his sojourn in Paris he then wrote the work I cite. See *Alfred Meißner* (Cassel: Ernst Balde, 1854), 15. Neither did von Rochau show much understanding, not to speak of sympathies, for the Slavic peoples in his reflections on German politics. On the “true socialism,” see Friedrich Engels, “Die wahren Sozialisten,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 4:248–90, especially 270–78.

⁷⁴ Alfred Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris*, 1:209, 218; see also 164, where Meißner said that the “fool” Louis Napoleon conceived of “an imitation of the 18th Brumaire.”

⁷⁵ Karl Korsch, “The Fascist Counter-revolution,” *Living Marxism* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1940): 29–37, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1940/fascist-counterrevolution.htm>; see also Karl Korsch, “State and Counter-Revolution,” *The Modern Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1939): <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1939/state-counterrevolution.htm>.

tion that the two did not coincide, and tended to agree that whereas the political revolution was defeated, the economic revolution gained momentum. Mundt's youthful friend Ferdinand Kühne, for example, in his review of Alfred Meißner's *Parisian Revolutionary Studies* cited above, wrote that "the political revolution in France has failed."⁷⁶ Marx and Engels, on the other hand, observed that the defeated proletarian revolution was succeeded by "economic revolution."⁷⁷

But if political revolution was, or may have been, defeated, who exactly was defeated? Whose revolution? Who experienced a political defeat? For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, it was the proletarian revolution. This view became more concise as the years went by.⁷⁸ The German philosopher, political writer, and politician Constantin Frantz, whose political position is more difficult to define than Marx and Engels's, also wrote of the "victory over the proletarians."⁷⁹ Alfred Meißner delineated the defeat of democratic forces. Two years ahead of Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état*, he depicted the "*de-democratization* [*Entdemokratisierung*] of France."⁸⁰ Since republic was the "form" in which democracy was "organized and strengthened," moreover, since republic was "the only" political form "in which democracy can appear," the defeat of democratic forces coincided with the defeat of republicanism.⁸¹ For Theodor Mundt, what happened all across Europe was a defeat of the people, of popular politics. He detected the same "fatal turning of popular politics [*Volkspolitik*] into cabinet

⁷⁶ Ferdinand Gustav Kühne, "Alfred Meißner's revolutionäre Studien aus Paris," in *Mein Tagebuch in bewegter Zeit* (Leipzig: L. Denicke, 1863), 682.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Friedrich Engels, "Einleitung zu Karl Marx's 'Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850,'" in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 32:337–38.

⁷⁸ See Engels, 337–38.

⁷⁹ Constantin Frantz, *Louis Napoleon*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Schneider & Comp., 1852), 6. For Frantz, see the entry Erich Wittenberg, "Frantz, Gustav Adolph Constantin," *Deutsche Biographie*, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118534939.html>; for a balanced recent assessment see Iain McDaniel, "Constantin Frantz and the Intellectual History of Bonapartism and Caesarism: A Reassessment," *Intellectual History Review* 28, no. 2 (2018): 317–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2017.1361218>. Von Rochau called Frantz "a man of conservatism," while "conservative" in his view was a self-description of the "old liberalism that has become unfit to do anything." Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 125, 128.

⁸⁰ Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris*, 1:105.

⁸¹ Meißner, 1:109.

politics [*Cabinetspolitik*]” that Machiavelli had identified in the Florentine politics of his own time.⁸²

All these descriptions point to the popular masses, to the underlying classes (to use Veblen’s term) as the loser. But what about liberals? Were they among the defeated? And if that was the case, how did they relate to the other defeated social or political forces, and how did these other defeated forces relate to them? Let us start with the French writer and politician Victor Hugo, whom we may see, as some contemporaries did, as an icon of liberalism.

After the *coup d’état*, in exile, Hugo wrote an invective against Louis Bonaparte, whom he had earlier supported. Meißner portrayed him as “shallow and puffed up as always,” giving a bland speech of no purpose in the National Assembly in early 1849, finding fault with the legislative body for “not being Napoleonic.” The speech was interrupted by the laughter of the Left.⁸³ Bruno Bauer mocked his bemoaning the Bonapartist suppression of “the tribune, the press, the intelligence, the word, the thought, all that used to be freedom.” Hugo compared “the French tribune” with the “open mouth of human spirit.”⁸⁴ Bauer brushed off this comparison as pathetic. He asked rhetorically: “Toward what barbarism would mankind be heading should it really learn only from the bickering of parliamentary factions, from the trivial quarrels between the right-center and left-center, for example, what intelligence, word, thought are capable of achieving?”⁸⁵ Karl Marx later remarked that Hugo actually made “Napoleon the Little” big because he ascribed to him a “personal power of initiative, which was without parallel in world history,” that is, because he did not understand that the *coup* was a result of historical social and political struggles, in a word: because he did not understand history.⁸⁶

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These remarks *ad personam* may give a glimpse of the low esteem in which radicals on the political left held the liberals. A heavier blow against liberalism

⁸² Theodor Mundt, *Machiavelli und der Gang der europäischen Politik* (Leipzig: Dyk’sche Buchhandlung, 1851), iii.

⁸³ Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris*, 1:216.

⁸⁴ Victor Hugo, *Napoléon le Petit* (London: Jeffs, 1852), 19, 145.

⁸⁵ Bauer, *Russland und das Germanenthum*, 81.

⁸⁶ Karl Marx, “Vorwort zur zweiten Ausgabe von ‘Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,’” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 21:130–31.

came from the political right. It was dealt by Auguste Romieu, whose thoughts on the role of force in the contemporary politics I cited above. Describing the political situation in France, Romieu located the main threat of violence in the popular “masses” or “proletarians,” whom he depicted as being “in organized uprising.”⁸⁷ He admitted that he was “horrified” by “the poor, set up to envy, hate, thirst for pillage, ready to ravage by a million hands the castles, luxurious apartments.”⁸⁸ Yet his accusing finger pointed at the liberals. He characterized liberalism as both deadly and dead, as destructive and self-destructive.

“I’m telling you, O bourgeois! that your role is finished,” Romieu theatrically turned to the liberal. On the one hand, the bourgeois revolution was a charade. What had taken place in France was a foolishly and hastily played comedy in which the bourgeois had changed too many costumes and had been too quick in picking up the ermine coats thrown out the windows of the aristocracy. The bourgeois remade for their own use all that which they had destroyed with the punches of their words, all that which the theater, the printing press, the chanson, and the tribune had helped them demolish.⁸⁹

On the other hand, the liberals could not realize their own ideas or, rather, the realization of their ideas was destructive of liberalism itself. That was fateful. The society they had made was incapable of living. “It is that the society, such as that made by the bourgeoisie, is not capable of anything more. That society has to die.” The illegitimate, “bastard” order, *l’ordre bâtard*, established by the “sophists” (that is, the Enlightenment philosophers and their descendants), could not be maintained and preserved. The bourgeois was no longer fit to rule: “No, bourgeois, you are not going to rule any longer!”⁹⁰ What the bourgeois had sown, they were now going to reap. “You had, O bourgeois, soiled the beginning of your work with blood.” Robespierre and Danton, their advocates, had taught people to murder, their successors had continued that teaching, and the people had learned it in their own way. The spilling of blood was returning with the “tom-tom of the revolt of the poor.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Romieu, *L’ère des césars*, 77, 92, 169, 203.

⁸⁸ Auguste Romieu, *Le spectre rouge de 1852* (Paris: Ledoyen, 1851), 47.

⁸⁹ Romieu, 62–63.

⁹⁰ Romieu, 66.

⁹¹ Romieu, 67.

The liberal idea had arrived at the point of its accomplishment. It had ended up in the hands of the poor in revolt and turned against the bourgeoisie. That was the point at which “the liberal idea accomplishes its last ravage,” Romieu wrote. “In my reflections on that which is wrong with the liberal ideas, nothing has struck me more than this extreme result of their application.” And that result was inevitable.⁹²

Romieu, as we see, regarded the revolt of the popular masses as the logical outcome, or a consequence, of liberalism, which was destructive of liberalism itself. He was scared of the *spectre rouge*, of the “red specter” of socialism and communism. The realization of the liberal idea by socialist hands, in socialism, meant the end of liberal society and liberalism. Liberals themselves became scared of socialism and afraid of the historical dialectics they had set in motion and that was now turning against them. Once socialism appeared to them as if it were a logical consequence, or development, of liberalism, the liberals had to block that development so it would not empower social and political forces opposed to liberalism, but by doing so they themselves paralyzed liberalism.

This dialectics of the self-paralysis of liberalism was well captured by Karl Marx in his first critique of Bonapartism. He depicted how the liberals began to be afraid of their own ideas, ideals, and principles as “socialistic,” and distanced themselves from them.⁹³ He observed that the

bourgeoisie had the correct insight that all the weapons it had forged against feudalism turned their points against itself, that all the means of education it had produced rebelled against its own civilization, that all the gods it had created fell away from it. It grasped that all the so-called civil liberties and progressive organs attacked and threatened its class domination concurrently at its social foundation and its political top, and had therefore become “*socialistic*.”⁹⁴

According to Marx’s critical analysis, what the bourgeoisie had “earlier celebrated as ‘*liberal*,’ it now denounced as ‘*socialistic*.’”⁹⁵ But that meant denouncing

⁹² Romieu, 91, 99.

⁹³ Karl Marx, “Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 11:106, 134–35.

⁹⁴ Marx, 135.

⁹⁵ Marx, 136.

liberalism. When the liberal bourgeoisie, in order to defend itself, attacked socialism, it had to curtail civil liberties and thus thwart liberal ideas and principles. In order to protect itself from being negated by socialism, liberalism negated itself. And in negating itself, and its principles and ideas, the liberal bourgeoisie itself both reached for repression and made the way for a repressive, dictatorial Bonapartist regime to step in.

The function of that repressive political regime was to keep the underlying classes in place and thus to ensure that the bourgeoisie could exercise its economic power freely, unimpeded. Marx did not use the concept of economic power. He argued that the bourgeoisie renounced its political power, or accepted that “its political power be broken,” in order to “maintain its social power unscathed.” In order to be able to exploit other classes, the “private bourgeois” acquiesced to their class being reduced to the same “political nothingness” as all other classes.⁹⁶ But was that really the case?

It seems to me that rather than being reduced to political nothingness, the liberal bourgeoisie gave up the burden and responsibility of holding political power, and opted (as Stein observed) to hold the state power “through the person of Louis Napoleon.”⁹⁷ In this way, it could more effectively and safely exercise and increase its economic power. Under Louis Bonaparte, its ability to subject and exploit the underlying classes, to enrich itself, and enjoy its privileges only increased. In Engels’s vivid description, Louis Bonaparte’s rule gave impetus to industrial development and trade, to speculation and stock market swindles, to corruption and massive stealing. The whole bourgeoisie had enriched itself to a hitherto unheard of extent, while Bonaparte’s court extracted a hefty percentage from this enrichment.⁹⁸ The factional struggles within the ruling classes, between Louis Bonaparte and the liberal bourgeoisie, led to a re-articulation of the relationship between economic and political power, which overcame the vulnerability and instability of liberal class rule. The shift of power in the illiberal direction, rather than endangering the class rule of the liberal bourgeoisie,

⁹⁶ Marx, 135–36.

⁹⁷ Stein, *Das Königthum*, 421.

⁹⁸ See Friedrich Engels, “Einleitung zur dritten deutschen Auflage von Karl Marx’ ‘Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich,’” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 32:8; Friedrich Engels, “Entwurf des Kapitels IV der Broschüre ‘Die Rolle der Gewalt in der Geschichte,’” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 31:72.

strengthened it and made it possible for the consolidated ruling class to more efficiently, and without being accountable, govern and control the underlying population.

Von Rochau's Reformulation of Liberalism

I am aware that, in the preceding pages, I was describing the French political situation at greater length than the German. I claim, however, that this background is relevant, even indispensable, for judging von Rochau's reformulation of liberalism. First, let me repeat, Bonapartism had a big, formative impact on von Rochau's political thinking. And second, Bonapartism loomed large not only beyond the German border and unavoidably entered foreign policy calculations. With Bismarck's presidency, Bonapartism also came to Germany. At least that was the perception of many a contemporary.⁹⁹ As Marx wrote in the name of the First International, the Bonapartist regime "got its counterfeit" on the other side of the Rhine, in Bismarck's regime.¹⁰⁰ It is not only that Bonapartism represented "the first accomplished form of the *modern state*,"¹⁰¹ or that, as Engels observed, the "Bonapartist half-dictatorship" was "the normal form" of "managing the state and society in the interest of the bourgeoisie,"¹⁰² but also that Prussia accomplished its bourgeois revolution "in the delightful form of Bonapartism."¹⁰³ So how does all this relate to von Rochau's *Realpolitik*?

If I may simplify, von Rochau's reformulation of the liberal view of politics and of liberal politics tends to be explained in two main ways. The first is not really flattering and can basically be reduced to the charge of opportunism.¹⁰⁴ The disillusionment caused by the defeat of the political revolution led to the acceptance of the political realities, to the abandonment of the ideals and principles of the revolutionary years, and to conformity with "power politics" (*Machtpolitik*),

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⁹⁹ See Iain McDaniel, "Constantin Frantz."

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx, "The General Council of the International Workingmen's Association ON THE WAR. To the Members of the International Workingmen's Association in Europe and the United States," in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 21:247.

¹⁰¹ Bologna, "Moneta e crisi," 5.

¹⁰² Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, April 13, 1866, in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 31:208.

¹⁰³ Engels, "Ergänzung der Vorbemerkung," 513.

¹⁰⁴ See Troceni, *L'invenzione della "Realpolitik"*, 15, 44, 210, 222.

that is, to the politics that now had revealed its real nature as being determined by those who possessed social power and means of violence.

The other explanation seems to have the unspoken intention of preserving the idea of the continued progress of liberalism. In a sophisticated and well-informed version of this view, “initially radical ideas and ideals” had not been “destroyed through failure in 1848,” but were rather “repackaged and re-described by Rochau, both as part of the social fabric of contemporary politics, and as being natural or inevitable in the present.” Accordingly, what von Rochau produced was “a post-revolutionary political theory that re-described liberal ‘idealism’ around 1848 as political ‘realism’ in the 1850s and 1860s, in order to show that the untimeliness of those early demands had nevertheless become timely now, making their adaptation an obligatory part of a newly realistic account of contemporary politics.”¹⁰⁵

To me, this sounds dangerously like projecting the dominant twenty-first-century Western politics—politics as the ever more consummate art of presentation—back onto the 1850s. The problem is that this—“our”—kind of politics is increasingly being freed from facts and reality, whereas back then political thinkers like von Rochau claimed they were trying to do precisely the opposite: to tie the understanding of politics to “facts,” *Tatsachen*, and reality. One might say that von Rochau was inventing new politics according to reality, whereas today politicians are inventing reality. But let us not wade into discussing today’s politics.

One problem I find with this second explanation is the idea of “untimeliness” applied to political demands (which then in unexplained ways turn “timely”). One can find this logic at work in Marx and Engels’s attempts at putting a brave face on the defeat of the proletarian revolution. The time for the proletarian revolution had not been ripe, yet the progress of history was going to eventually create the material conditions for the proletarian victory. In the explanation of von Rochau’s reinvention of liberalism I referred to above, “the apparent failures of 1848” were due to the fact that “the constitutions then outlined had failed,” because the political situation was not ripe (yet).¹⁰⁶ Based on what I said earli-

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¹⁰⁵ This is how Kelley (“August Ludwig von Rochau,” 306, 309) refers to Natascha Doll’s thesis in Doll, *Recht, Politik und “Realpolitik”*.

¹⁰⁶ See Kelley, “August Ludwig von Rochau,” 311.

er in this article on the waning importance of the constitution-centered view of politics in the first half of the nineteenth century, I want to argue that von Rochau's realistic turn did not lie in recognizing the untimeliness of the "outlined constitutions" but in recognizing the futility of concentrating politics on outlining constitutions. The problem was not that those constitutions were not timely. The (liberal) political focus on outlining constitutions was a wrong approach.

The other problem with the discussed explanation lies in weaving the tale of liberalism's progress into the long-term development tendencies that led to the Prussian hegemony and toward the unification of Germany. Duncan Kelley cited Hermann Baumgarten's "self-critique" of liberalism as a typical—and influential—case of how "the history of Germany into the 1860s became a myriad tale of political and cultural development since the Reformation culminating in Prussian-led claims for unification."¹⁰⁷ From this perspective, if liberalism was to have, or be seen as having, a continuous life, it had to be part of that story, and *Realpolitik* meant adjusting to, or rather adopting, Prussian hegemony. Yet Baumgarten himself wrote that, before the Prussian military victory over Austria in 1866, which consolidated Prussia's leading role in German politics, even "those friends of Prussia who had most believed in it," found it "hardly believable" that the political struggles would turn out the way they did.¹⁰⁸

I do not think von Rochau's *Principles of Realpolitik* can really be judged a "self-critique" of liberalism, like Ruge's in the late 1840s or Baumgarten's a good twenty years later. Von Rochau's book was, rather, a critique of the politics of the era of revolution, especially of the politics on the revolutionary side of social and political struggles, and it was a critique of political forces and their policies in the aftermath of the revolution. Even if written by an ex-left liberal, it was a critique of politics in general, rather than a specific critique—or self-critique—of liberalism. Or to put it differently: the critique of liberalism was part of a wider critique of contemporary politics. It was general reflections on politics that had implications for, and an impact on, conceiving liberal politics, on figuring out what liberal politics for the post-revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary, era

¹⁰⁷ Kelley, 310.

¹⁰⁸ Hermann Baumgarten, *Der deutsche Liberalismus: Eine Selbstkritik. Abdruck aus dem achtzehnten Bande der Preußischen Jahrbücher* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1866), 108.

might be like. It would be misplaced to look for the continuity of liberal ideas, because the view of politics had changed. To be more precise, whatever continuity of liberal political ideas there might have been, it was criss-crossed by new ways of looking at politics.

The new politics was not about “repackaging” old radical ideas but about thinking about politics in a radically different way. That is why none of the two main explanations of what von Rochau’s work had done does justice to his work, yet taken together they come close to opening a productive perspective on it: the continuity of liberalism lay precisely in abandoning its ideas, ideals, and principles (under today’s “dictatorship of values,” one would, of course, say “values”) in order to keep economic power untouched and untouchable. Liberalism sloughed off its political skin in order to grow its economic power, and thus depoliticized economic power. With Bonapartism, periodic political discontinuities became the condition for the continuity of economic liberalism. The continuity of liberalism is the continuity of economic liberalism. The distinction between political and economic revolution that emerged with the defeat of the 1848 revolutions is complemented by the distinction between political and economic liberalism, and both are crucial for understanding the post-revolutionary reformulation of liberalism and its subsequent history.¹⁰⁹

The Economic Limits to Realpolitik: Economic Power without Political Limits

Without entering into a discussion of von Rochau’s concrete political views and analyses, there is not much more to be said about the leading principles of his realistic view of politics than has already been said. But before proceeding further, I want to add that those concrete political views and analyses are not something accidental. One may disregard them only at the cost of fully understanding von Rochau’s *Realpolitik*. They are integral to his political thought: a mode of thinking.

The distinction of von Rochau’s realistic political thinking is his thinking about politics concretely. Concrete political thinking meant looking at “the real social

¹⁰⁹ See Ishay Landa, *The Apprentice’s Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

conditions and their development” instead of being fixated on “state forms”: analyzing the manifold social forces, whose interaction shapes, maintains, and transforms a historically given state, and which—just like their interactions and the results of their interactions—change endlessly according to time and space, “*nach Raum und Zeit*.”¹¹⁰ And the social forces shaping, maintaining, and transforming the state were not only “wealth, opinion, and intelligence,”¹¹¹ not only “the new factors of social life” such as the “civic consciousness, the idea of freedom, national spirit, the idea of human equality, the political factionalism of the parties, the press,” and “public opinion,”¹¹² but also “stupidity,” “lies or any other immorality,” and “even crime.”¹¹³ Early in the twentieth century, Vladimir Ilich Lenin on the left and Carl Schmitt on the right stand out as model representatives of this way of thinking politically.

Limiting my discussion to a more abstract level, and seeing von Rochau’s *realpolitisch* views as resting on his formulation of the “law of power,” I will conclude this paper by looking at the limitations of that “law of power.”¹¹⁴ The law of power, according to von Rochau, “dominates the life of the state.” Among the forces that “shape, maintain, and transform the state,” the stronger prevail: “Power responds [*gehört*: obeys] only to the bigger power, and the strong cannot allow themselves to be swayed [*sich beherrschen lassen*: dominated] by the weak.”¹¹⁵ A realistic view of politics needs to recognize the “real power of the stronger” and realize the standing and importance “the stronger” by “necessity” have to have in the state. For power alone “*can* govern.” As von Rochau put

¹¹⁰ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 1, 8.

¹¹¹ Rochau, 24; see also 24n60.

¹¹² Rochau, 11.

¹¹³ Rochau, 9.

¹¹⁴ Von Rochau used the term “*das Gesetz der Stärke*.” *Stärke* has multiple meanings, including “strength,” “force,” and “power.” English and Italian translations of von Rochau often render it as “power,” or “*potere*”—hence the “law of power,” or “*legge del potere*,” respectively. Von Rochau used distinct terms for “force” (*Kraft*, e.g., “*gesellschaftliche Kräfte*” for “social forces”) and “power” (*Macht*, especially in connection with politics, e.g., “*politische Macht*” for “political power”). Some of his contemporaries, e.g. Treitschke, used the term *Machtpolitik* (politics of power) as roughly equivalent to von Rochau’s *Realpolitik*. See Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 44, 149–50n34, 232. I think a more precise translation would be “the law of strength” (especially because von Rochau writes, for example, of the “power of the strong,” “*Macht des Stärken*”). But with these explanations, I may as well use “the law of power.”

¹¹⁵ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 3.

it: "To govern means exercising power, and solely he who has power can exercise power."¹¹⁶

This language of power, however, fell silent when it came to the economy. Not only did von Rochau himself abstain from using the language of power when discussing the economic life of society. He polemicized against those who did use it. He accused, for example, the Berlin press that was sympathetic to socialism of using "the language of toxic demagoguery" against "the 'bourgeoisie,' against the 'monopoly of capital,' against the 'exploitation of the worker' by the entrepreneur, yes, even against the machinery." Arguing, as the pro-socialist press did, that "the existing national-economic [*volkswirtschaftliche*] system" originates "only in the selfishness and greed of money-men" and, as such, had to be "transformed from the bottom up for the benefit of the laboring classes," was for von Rochau nothing short of "incitement."¹¹⁷

It is interesting and telling that most of what von Rochau had to say about the economy was said in the context of polemics against socialism and "the masses." "The masses" was a new term for a new social phenomenon. They became a political factor that could not be ignored—as Louis Bonaparte was quick to comprehend and skillfully use to his advantage.¹¹⁸ Von Rochau had a haughty and dismissive attitude toward the masses. They were unworthy of polemics. Socialism was a different matter, even though the masses were sometimes drawn to socialism. Socialism's distinction was that it had a theoretical and political answer to the social evils produced by the new "industrial system."

¹¹⁶ Rochau, 1–2.

¹¹⁷ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatliche Zustände Deutschlands: Zweiter Theil* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagshandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, 1869), 138.

¹¹⁸ Louis Bonaparte represented himself as the "instrument, the creation of the masses." See Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie: Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens* (Leipzig: Verlag von Dr. Werner Klinkhardt, 1911), 204. In his time, Louis Bonaparte explained, "one can only govern with the masses; therefore, they have to be organized in order that they could formulate their will, and disciplined in order that they could be steered toward and enlightened about their proper interests." Napoleon-Louis Bonaparte, *Extinction du pauperisme*, 5th ed. (Paris: Pagnerre, 1844), 17.

Von Rochau admitted that “the transformation of crafts into the factory system has its serious wrongs [*Uebelstände*].” However, he was sure that “there is no power in this world that is able to prevent that transformation or even undo it.” Any attempt to make things better must start from this understanding.¹¹⁹ Once the transformation is regarded as given and necessary, and property—which von Rochau, unlike for example Stein, did not see as a social relation of domination and subjection (and resistance), that is, as a power relation—as untouchable, those wrongs or evils appear as a necessary evil. And yet von Rochau agreed that “the economic condition of the poorest popular classes” had to be bettered—but only within certain limits.¹²⁰ Such prudent limited improvement might be called “*social reform*,” whereas the socialists called for “*social revolution*.” The latter, a “violent act of politics,” was a “chimera [*Hirngespinnst*].”¹²¹

Von Rochau called those who spoke for revolutionary socialism “fanatics of theory.”¹²² As their opposite, *Realpolitik* in this context surprisingly turned into a rejection of the politics of force. Von Rochau dismissed social revolution as a “violent and radical change of property,” for which one needed only a “sufficient number of fists.”¹²³ Here, a big enough force to be politically effective did not count as an argument. *Realpolitik* also became concerned with limiting power. For social reform, acting within certain limits when attempting to better the miserable conditions of the laboring poor was about putting limits on state action. Defining the limits of state action was Wilhelm von Humboldt’s aim in an essay he wrote at the time of the French Revolution, but which was only published in 1851—and was adopted by liberals as their own classic text.¹²⁴ In von Rochau’s book, however, whose declared realism lay in recognizing and accepting the role of power in politics and in defining the state by the law of power, speaking about limits on the tasks of the state appears somewhat incongruous.

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Just as it was “self-evident” that one should find a “remedy” for the “economic suffering” of those times, moreover, that that was an “urgent need,” it appears

¹¹⁹ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 98.

¹²⁰ Rochau, 163.

¹²¹ Rochau, 163, 165.

¹²² Rochau, 165.

¹²³ Rochau, 165.

¹²⁴ Alexander von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen* (Breslau: Verlag von Eduard Trewend, 1851).

that it was also evident that such a remedy meant, or involved, state intervention. The question was: How big a room for action should the state be given? Von Rochau gave his answer as soon as he asked that question: "However big a room for action is given to state measures for this purpose, they meet their limit in property rights." Whereas remedying "economic suffering" was the "economic task of the state," that task had to be fulfilled "within those limits."¹²⁵ It was not the state power that defined the scope of the state's action, or its limits. The power that imposed limits on the state was economic.

Von Rochau's preferred "big means of social reform" were two: reducing the costs of running the state (*Ersparnis im Staatshaushalt*), that is, cutting the budget, and the "freedom of exercising economic force" (*Freiheit der wirtschaftlichen Kraftübung*). The perception of wrongs and evils shifted from the "economic suffering" of the "poorest popular classes" to state spending and impediments to economic freedom: "The oversized budgets and the laws that under different pretexts impede the freedom of economic movements—these are the two and sole biggest evils in the economic realm." What one might expect from politics was the removal of those two evils. The rest of the wrongs would be taken care of by "slow organic development" by the "development of the economic strength of the people [*wirtschaftliche Volkskräfte*], in which politics [. . .] has solely the task of warding off external interference."¹²⁶

While von Rochau defined state action negatively, by limiting it he ascribed a positive role to the economy: "The positive part of the task falls to the national economy [*Volkswirtschaft*] itself, and it will, and can be, accomplished only in measure to which *production increases*."¹²⁷ The "*increase of production*" was first an argument against the lingering remnants of the guild system, or artisanal production. The "economic interest of society" or, more emphatically, the

first, the most urgent, and the most irrefutable demand of the economic interest is the following: that each economic force be realized [*verwerthet*: utilized or exploited to produce value] as much as possible. The economic interest of society does not ask for a certificate of apprenticeship or for a masterpiece, but for the

¹²⁵ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 163.

¹²⁶ Rochau, 164–65.

¹²⁷ Rochau, 165.

ability to produce as much as possible [*Leistungsfähigkeit*], regardless of how and where it is acquired.¹²⁸

The answer for Germany was “economic freedom” (*Gewerbefreiheit*), such as it existed in the countries which stood “at the forefront of world industry.”¹²⁹

The same argument was then used against socialism, because, as von Rochau asserted, the social revolution, with entails the violent transformation of property, could not “increase social production” and “augment public wealth.”¹³⁰ By the time von Rochau wrote his *Principles of Realpolitik*, economic science had made enough progress to relegate into oblivion the sober—one may say realistic—view that increased production, while it might multiply individual riches, did not necessarily increase public wealth (rather the opposite was often the case).¹³¹ Since, as von Rochau contended, a “new economic system,” such as imagined by the socialists, was simply a “folly”¹³²—that is, since liberalism already in its first reformulation adopted the position that “there is no alternative”—the most logical solution for getting out of the crisis and going forward was indeed an increase in productivity. The sum total of what the labor of the whole society yielded was insufficient to cover the existing needs, and a different distribution of the fruits of labor would achieve “little or nothing,” unless production was increased. “But the increase in production is not a matter of politics, and politics can basically do nothing to support it except for removing the impediments.”¹³³

This applied also to the proletariat. An honest and smart thing to do would be to “bluntly tell the proletariat that by and large one cannot help them in any other way but by creating the legal possibility that they can help themselves.” Von Rochau not only reminded his reader of the German folk wisdom “Help yourself, and God will help you,” but also brought up the “motto of the North American entrepreneurial spirit and of the North American labor force,” which was: “Help

¹²⁸ Rochau, 97.

¹²⁹ Rochau, 99.

¹³⁰ Rochau, 165.

¹³¹ See especially James Maitland, The Earl of Lauderdale, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth, and into the Means and Causes of Its Increase* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1804).

¹³² Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 165.

¹³³ Rochau, 165.

yourself.” That was the “magic formula” which in two generations made America a “first class economic power” and created a general welfare such as had not been seen in the whole of history.¹³⁴

In this context, von Rochau found it worth repeating that “the big means of social reform, which stands at offer to German national politics, is the freedom of economic movement.” Only under the conditions of economic freedom could “each economic force be exercised” and yield the most it could, and “the highest increase in economic production” be achieved. That would also benefit “the so-called workingmen’s estate.” Consequently, that is what the workers could demand from the state: “The free use of their economic force is the most rightful, the most irrefutable, demand that the proletariat can make of the state.”¹³⁵

All of this could be described as a staple *laissez-faire*. The irony of it would be that von Rochau, in his turning away from philosophy and his realistic commitment to “facts,” ended up with him embracing a philosophy—for, as Keynes was to say, that is what *laissez-faire* actually was.¹³⁶ If *laissez-faire* had been economic science, one could say that von Rochau was actually consistent with his political realism project. But one would have to understand economic science like von Rochau’s contemporary Frantz did: as a science insisting on observing “what is going on and how is it going on,” instead of developing a doctrine “scholastically”—which was characteristic of the theoretical doctrine of the state, *Staatslehre*—i.e., proceeding from a general idea.¹³⁷ Understood in this way, economic science offered “something real,” and because it was in this sense superior to state doctrine, the latter “struck sail” in front of it and “made economy the organ of all political thinking.” Consequently, the state would become simply “an economic institution.”¹³⁸

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This is not what von Rochau’s embracing *laissez-faire* was. If anything, he made the state a handmaiden of economy, of the existing “economic system.” But with regard to his political-theoretical project, the embrace of *laissez-faire* philosophy was a failure. Instead of sticking to the “facts,” a set of facts was kept be-

¹³⁴ Rochau, 168.

¹³⁵ Rochau, 169, 170–71.

¹³⁶ John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926).

¹³⁷ Frantz, *Naturlehre des Staates*, 71.

¹³⁸ Frantz, 74.

yond questioning. Even more seriously, those were the facts that involved power, more precisely: the exercise of power. The exercise of power within the economic realm was closed to political thinking, while the state was locked into protecting and maintaining, one may say serving, that exercise of power. Instead of analyzing the exercise of economic power, von Rochau spoke of the development of economic forces—he consistently uses the term *Kraft* in this context, never *Macht*—i.e., an increase in economic productivity, efficiency, and freedom.¹³⁹ While those who wielded economic power were free from state interference, but were shielded by the state from “external” “impediments,” the proletarians were given the freedom to be proletarians. That was the help they could hope for by the state. The state power was limited by economic power, while economic power was kept politically unlimited. The law of power did not extend into the realm of the economy. It was limited to reflections on the state and politics, while economic power, never named, was a law unto itself, *legibus solutus*. As such, it was in no conceivable sense an institution.

Discussing the crisis of liberalism early in the twentieth century, John Hobson wrote of “the shipwreck which Continental Liberalism has suffered when it was driven on the submerged reefs of the economic problem in politics.”¹⁴⁰ One may say that von Rochau’s *Realpolitik* was shipwrecked on economic power, which he himself turned into a submerged reef. But the failure of his *realpolitisch* project did not impact his reformulation of liberalism. In that very failure lay a successful reformulation of liberalism: the exemption of economic power from political reflection and control.

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¹³⁹ Regarding “freedom,” too, Frantz was much more realistic than von Rochau. “The liberation of man, which liberalism proclaimed, has in the economic realm totally failed.” Frantz, *Vorschule zur Physiologie*, 291. Unlike von Rochau, Frantz was a perceptive critic of liberalism.

¹⁴⁰ J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1909), xii-xiii.

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Being Affected

Antonia Birnbaum*

Un courage sans héroïsme: Antigone, Créon, Ismène, Hémon, Tirésias

Keywords

desire, tragic, courage, heroism

Abstract

The comprehension of the tragic in Hegel and Lacan states Antigone's unconditional desire as heroic. Against this tendency, another hypothesis is explored: The heroic, be it ironic or a sublime brilliance of the sublime, bars the access to the unconditional by attaching it to a transcendence, rather than inquiring into its address. To play down heroism means to reinterpret the capacity of solitude which characterizes heroic courage. What courage then reveals is an ignorance regarding the law of totality, regarding the world that is to be lived in, through a risk taken by a single one. The direct reference to a "conflict of worlds" throws new light on the approaches of Hegel and Lacan.

Pogum brez junaštva: Antigona, Kreon, Ismena, Hemon, Tirezij

Ključne besede

želja, tragično, pogum, junaštvo

Povzetek

Razumevanje tragičnega pri Heglu in Lacanu afirmira Antigonino brezpogojno željo kot junaško. V nasprotju s to težnjo bomo mi raziskali drugo hipotezo: Herojsko, pa naj gre za ironično ali za sublimni sijaj sublimnega, onemogoča dostop do brezpogojnega, kolikor ga namreč pripenja na transcendenco, namesto da bi se spraševalo po njegovem nagovoru. Oslabiti junaštvo pomeni reinterpretirati zmožnost za samoto, ki je značilna za junaški pogum. Pogum torej razkriva nevednost glede zakona totalnosti, glede sveta, v

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* Universität für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, Austria
antonia.birnbaum@wanadoo.fr | <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4272-9721>

katerem je treba živeti s tveganjem, ki ga prevzame vsak sam. Neposredno sklicevanje na »konflikt svetov« meče novo luč tako na Heglov kot na Lacanov pristop.



Décrit très simplement, l'acte d'Antigone consiste à rester fidèle à la fatalité, au fléau (Ate) de sa lignée, en enterrant son frère criminel contre l'ordre donné par Créon de laisser Polynice pourrir sans sépulture. A partir de là, toute simplicité cesse. Il y a la tragédie de Sophocle, il y a des interprétations qui se sont transformées en des morceaux de théorie autonome, voire en un mythe d'Antigone. Il en va ainsi des considérations de Friedrich Hölderlin, G.W.F. Hegel, Jacques Lacan, qui éclairent des contextes différents, à savoir respectivement : un transcendantal du temps, une figure historique de la *Sittlichkeit* antique, le désir de l'analyste.¹

L'approche adoptée ici détraque l'héroïsme emphatique d'Antigone tel qu'il est véhiculé de manière différente chez Hegel et Lacan. Chez Hegel, l'excellence de son héroïsme est déterminée par le fait qu'elle agit dans le savoir de son crime, contrairement à OEdipe. Pour autant, la sépulture dont elle fait don à Polynice ne transforme en aucun cas la différence entre crime et loi dans la sphère de la polis. L'acte d'Antigone ne fait que provoquer le retour inévitable de la famille, de la fin privée, au sein même de la fin universelle qui régit la cité. Ainsi, le féminin se dispose selon une « ironie éternelle de la communauté », il se fixe en une négativité qui reste continuellement limitée à la rétribution des défunts, seuls êtres pleinement singularisés.

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Pour Lacan, Antigone est l'héroïne en tant que seule héroïne ; il raccourcit volontairement le drame de Sophocle en faveur de sa personne, mettant en évidence sa « beauté sublime », dont nous sommes éblouis. Son éclat incarne l'image négative d'un désir inconditionnel, le désir de rendre justice à son sort filial. La simple mort n'atteint pas ce désir. Selon Lacan, cette tragédie de So-

¹ Nous ne traduisons pas *Sittlichkeit*, pour éviter l'amalgame avec la moralité, qui fait contre-sens. *Sittlichkeit* désigne ici chez Hegel l'esprit historique du monde antique, en tant qu'il est rapporté aux lois des dieux et à celles de la cité.

phocle crée le champ d'un entre-deux-morts. Elle ouvre un interstice, une tension entre un horizon de mort au-delà de la fatalité et la mort naturelle. Ce faisant, il concentre le tout du drame en la transgression des limites par l'héroïne, au détriment des trajets que le drame parcourt. L'intransigeance d'Antigone, ce qui en elle s'adresse à l'au-delà, devient pour ainsi dire le noyau essentiel de la tragédie.

Quel est l'enjeu de minorer ces penchants héroïques ? Tout d'abord, il convient de rappeler que pour les Grecs, la forme de la tragédie signifie une décomposition de l'héroïsme, alors que la modernité établit une continuité entre l'héroïque et le tragique. À l'encontre de cette tendance, une autre hypothèse est ici expérimentée : l'héroïque, qu'il soit ironique ou qu'il nous expose à l'éclat d'une beauté sublime, barre l'accès à l'inconditionnel, car en lui cet inconditionnel reste toujours attaché à une exception supposée transcendante, au détriment de son adresse. Déjouer l'héroïsme signifie donc réinterpréter la capacité de solitude qui caractérise le courage héroïque. Ce que le courage de la protagoniste risque, ce n'est pas en premier lieu sa propre mort, mais une dissolution des coordonnées qui lui sont assignées ; son audace est celle d'une parole et d'un acte « déliés ». Ce que le courage révèle, c'est une ignorance en partage quant à la loi du tout, quant au monde qu'il s'agit d'habiter, à même un risque pris par une seule. La référence directe à un « conflit des mondes » porte un éclairage nouveau, qui diverge des approches de Lacan et de Hegel.

Le désir inconditionnel d'Antigone dont s'enquiert Lacan n'est pas à chercher seulement dans l'éclat sublime, mais tout autant dans les ombres qu'il projette. Car ce désir pur ne fonctionne justement pas comme l'ultime limite à laquelle se heurtent toutes nos aspirations et tous nos faire, mais constitue le réel même de ces aspirations et de ce faire, sa vie immanente, ce à quoi nous ne sommes pas prêts à renoncer. L'inconditionnel n'est pas à découvrir au-delà, mais dans les impasses et les enchevêtrements irréductibles du contingent lui-même, dans les symptômes qui le perturbent, dans les dysfonctionnements qui en fracturent la disposition. Cela vaut aussi pour Antigone : elle est constituée par son désir, mais en tant qu'elle est aussi affectée par celui-ci, poussée par son « partage de l'amour » (*symphelein*) à enterrer son frère. On peut faire l'hypothèse que ce qui de son désir fait symptôme, c'est la manière dont il s'affecte d'une urgence sans répit. C'est cette urgence par laquelle elle ne cesse de se devancer elle-même qui

la précipite vers son sort. C'est de cette hâte, du désordre politique qu'elle introduit dans la raideur tyrannique, que la cité porte trace.²

« L'ironie éternelle » appelle elle aussi une pensée autre. Le savoir d'Antigone n'est pas, comme le prétend Hegel, un savoir « préalable » du moment inconscient des lois de coutume, le savoir négatif de commettre un crime contre une autre loi. Dans la perspective hégélienne, l'accomplissement de ce savoir est le retour hostile d'un intérieur, au sens d'un retournement contradictoire du féminin contre l'exclusion que l'universel de la polis lui inflige. Mais le savoir insu d'Antigone n'est précisément pas un tel savoir de l'identité du féminin avec la famille, avec la loi souterraine. Ce qui est « inconscient » dans ce savoir, c'est plutôt la rupture de cette coïncidence, un acte supplémentaire qui fait ressortir le caractère contre-nature de la répartition des sexes. Le malentendu des sexes provoqué par l'intervention d'Antigone ruine irrémédiablement la dialectique de leur complémentarité.

Ces apories invitent à localiser différemment la relation du conditionné à l'inconditionnel, tant du point de vue topologique que temporel. Les démons qui indiquent ces détours s'appellent Walter Benjamin et Hölderlin. L'appui pris sur leurs considérations portent l'éthique jusqu'à une géographie politique. L'interprétation déployée s'empare philosophiquement du drame sophocéen, avec les défauts que cela suppose.

Lacan

Le fait que le commentaire de Lacan sur Antigone dans le séminaire de 1959-1960 soit aporétique, tant en ce qui concerne le drame qu'en ce qui concerne l'éthique de la psychanalyse, a été noté à plusieurs reprises. Il donne lieu à deux confrontations, l'une sur la tragédie elle-même, l'autre sur l'éthique de la psychanalyse, qui se recoupent en plusieurs points. Je rappelle très brièvement la seconde, dans la mesure où elle est importante pour la première.

Dans son livre *La Marionnette et le nain*, Slavoj Žižek remarque que, loin d'être LE séminaire, le séminaire VII sur *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse* rapproche dan-

² Hölderlin souligne que la hâte caractérise les deux protagonistes, Créon et Antigone, avec la différence que l'un commence et que l'autre répond.

gereusement celle-ci d'une « passion du réel » classique.³ L'énoncé que Lacan extrait de la tragédie, selon lequel il importe de « ne pas céder sur son propre désir » tend à transformer le désir en un simple impératif. De plus, la mise en avant d'une pureté du désir le rend étanche à son rapport immanent avec la défaillance. Or le désir ne peut être pensé que depuis un retour, depuis une révocation de sa défection ; il est donc uniquement concevable dans le registre d'une expérience à laquelle participent culpabilité et lâcheté. Cette critique a été formulée par des psychanalystes, entre autres Pierre Bruno, Geneviève Morel.⁴ Lacan lui-même n'est pas le dernier à l'exercer. Les développements ultérieurs de son enseignement montrent qu'une topologie du désir pur ne suffit pas à saisir l'enjeu de l'expérience analytique ; sans la référence à la contingence symptomatique, ce désir n'est pas même saisissable. Ces déplacements le conduiront sept ans plus tard à formuler une éthique de l'analyse placée sous le signe de la destitution subjective, dans la « Proposition de la passe, 7 octobre 1967 ».

En ce qui concerne la tragédie elle-même, Jean Bollack, Nicole Loraux, Françoise Duroux ont remarqué, sous des aspects différents, que l'Antigone de Lacan est une Antigone sans théâtre.⁵ Certes, la mort est l'horizon ; l'ordre donné par Créon de laisser Polynice sans sépulture place d'emblée la fidélité d'Antigone à son égard dans un autre monde. Mais, pour parler avec Hölderlin, il faut demander en quoi cet autre monde fait irruption dans la polis, et non comment l'intransigeance d'Antigone quitte celle-ci.⁶ Dans une tragédie, il ne s'agit pas seulement de ce qui arrive aux protagonistes, mais de ce qui arrive au drame lui-

³ Slavoj Žižek, *La Marionnette et le nain: Le christianisme entre perversion et subversion* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

⁴ Pierre Bruno, « Éthique du littoral », *L'éthique de la psychanalyse: Retour du séminaire d'été 2020*, Groupe niçois de psychanalyse lacanienne, https://www.gnipl.fr/pdf_journees_1_ethique_de_la_psychanalyse/%C3%89THIQUE%20DU%20LITTORAL.pdf. Geneviève Morel, « D'un éclat féminin qui suscite la dispute: Lectures croisées d'Antigone de Sophocle par Jacques Lacan et Jean Bollack », dans Christoph König et Denis Thouard, dir., *La Philologie au présent* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2020), 185–99.

⁵ Jean Bollack, *La Mort d'Antigone: La tragédie de Créon* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999); Françoise Duroux, *Antigone encore: Les femmes et la loi* (Paris: Côté-femmes-éditions, 1993); Nicole Loraux, « Antigone sans théâtre », dans *La Grèce hors d'elle et autres textes: Écrits 1973–2003*, dir. Michèle Cohen-Halimi (Paris: Klincksieck, 2021), 629–36.

⁶ « Parce que c'est son caractère [à Zeus], contrairement à l'éternelle tendance, de retourner l'aspiration à quitter ce monde pour un autre en une aspiration à quitter l'autre monde pour celui-ci. » Friedrich Hölderlin, « Remarques sur Antigone », dans *Antigone de Sophocle*, trad. Philippe Lacoue Labarthe (Paris: Christian Bourgois éditeur, 1978), 167.

même. Dans cette perspective, la tragédie de Sophocle explore l'écart entre deux lois, celle de la filiation et celle de la polis ; leur désajustement, leur interférence crée un hiatus où le nouage entre vie et mort se désagrège. Il a souvent été noté que la spécificité de cette tragédie — Antigone — est qu'elle ne connaît pas de développement, que la fin intervient au début. Si l'on suit le drame dans son déroulement, la décision d'Antigone entraîne irrésistiblement d'autres morts dans la sienne. Mais si l'on appréhende la tension dramatique à rebours, prêtant attention aux haltes qu'elle marque, les parties plus indépendantes, les regroupements dialogiques, les traits disparates apparaissent, qui freinent cet emportement. Devient perceptible ce qui va à l'encontre de l'intrigue, ce qui y inscrit des trajets divergents.

L'intransigeance d'Antigone ne constitue pas simplement une scène excentrique. Son bouleversement de l'ordre malmène la polis, son « insurrection » (Hölderlin) prend effet en des déplacements de frontières, des malentendus. Lorsqu'il est pris sous l'aspect de sa hâte, son refus d'abandonner le frère criminel peut être interrogé en tant que symptôme : quels déplacements, prévisibles aussi bien qu'imprévisibles, produit son geste, quelle hétérogénéité traverse la fatalité guerrière, virile de la polis ?

Lacan expose cette problématique de la manière suivante : « La descendance de l'union incestueuse s'est dédoublée en deux frères, l'un qui représente la puissance, l'autre qui représente le crime. Il n'y a personne pour assumer le crime, et la validité du crime, si ce n'est Antigone. Entre les deux, Antigone choisit d'être purement et simplement la gardienne de l'être du criminel comme tel. Sans doute les choses auraient-elles pu avoir un terme si le corps social avait bien voulu pardonner, oublier et couvrir tout cela des mêmes honneurs funéraires. C'est dans la mesure où la communauté s'y refuse, qu'Antigone doit faire le sacrifice de son être au maintien de cet être essentiel qu'est l'Ate familiale — motif, l'axe véritable, autour de quoi tourne toute cette tragédie.⁷ » La décision d'Antigone est sans doute à penser d'abord depuis l'objet de son désir — procurer une sépulture à son frère — mais elle n'en évoque pas moins un danger qui ne concerne pas seulement les Labdacides, mais la polis elle-même. Le courage, écrit Benjamin, « est don de soi au danger qui menace le monde. [...] le courageux a conscience du danger, mais il n'en tient pas compte. Car il serait lâche s'il

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 329.

en tenait compte ; et s'il n'avait pas conscience du danger — il ne serait pas courageux. La solution de cet étrange rapport est que le danger ne menace pas le courageux lui-même, mais bien le monde. Le courage est le sentiment de la vie qui se livre au danger, qui, en mourant, étend donc le danger au monde et, en même temps, le surmonte.⁸ » Que se passe-t-il si l'on prend cette pensée comme boussole ?

Le processus dramatique de la pièce sophocléenne inclut deux niveaux dans son articulation. La transgression d'Antigone répond à une confiscation des lois souterraines par Créon. Soucieux de distinguer ennemi et ami, soucieux de l'ordre de la polis, il s'est arrogé le droit de tuer une seconde fois l'ennemi, de lui barrer le passage vers le royaume des défunts. Antigone enterre Polynice et, sommée de rendre compte de son acte, invoque des « lois non écrites ». « Créon : Et tu as osé passer outre à mon ordonnance ? Antigone : Oui, car ce n'est pas Zeus qui l'a promulguée, et la Justice qui siège auprès des dieux n'en a point tracé de telles parmi les hommes. »⁹ Et encore : « Antigone : Hadès n'a pas deux poids et deux mesures. Créon : Le méchant n'a pas droit à la part du juste. Antigone : Qui sait si nos maximes restent pures aux yeux des morts ? Créon : Un ennemi mort est toujours un ennemi. Antigone : Je suis faite pour partager l'amour non la haine (*symphilein*). »¹⁰

Objet de désir et de dispute : les funérailles refusées à Polynice mettent en jeu le nouage de *Dike*, (la loi relative à la justice des dieux souterrains) et des *Nomoi* (les lois relatives aux prescriptions humaines de la polis).¹¹ La fidélité au défunt doit-elle participer aux commandements de la polis, ou ceux-ci doivent-ils être déterminés uniquement par la différence entre ennemi et ami ? La chose paraît comme indémêlable : l'attachement au frère criminel devient la cause d'Antigone exactement dans la mesure où la polis elle-même devient pour tous les autres protagonistes l'objet d'un malentendu. La méthode exige de ne pas dua-

⁸ Walter Benjamin, « Deux poèmes de Friedrich Hölderlin », dans *Œuvres*, trad. Maurice de Gandillac, Rainer Rochlitz et Pierre Rusch (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 1:120.

⁹ Sophocle, *Antigone*, dans *Théâtre complet*, trad. Robert Pignarre (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2013), 79.

¹⁰ Sophocle, 81.

¹¹ Signalons que Françoise Duroux (*Antigone encore*) marque la complexité de ce point en interprétant les recouvrements de *Dike*, *Nomoi* et *Themis* (coutume).

liser, de partir d'emblée de ce démêlé du singulier et du pluriel afin d'en saisir la logique.

Le recouvrement du corps de Polynice, aux confins de la cité, connecte un dehors à la scène devant le palais, y répand une étrangeté. D'un même geste, l'acte d'Antigone ruine l'identité entre pouvoir et politique, tout comme il révoque l'assignation du féminin à la famille. Rien ne reste inchangé, ni le caractère prétendument naturel, archaïque, des dieux d'en bas et de leurs lois souterraines, ni le caractère conflictuel et guerrier de la polis.

Hegel

Dans l'interprétation hégélienne, cette double délimitation s'avère comme le contenu aporétique de la tragédie. On le sait, la conception de Hegel correspond à l'interprétation conservatrice par excellence de la tragédie antique. Il prend deux sphères, celle de la famille, celle de la polis, et les répartit entre l'homme et la femme. Pour le philosophe, il ne s'agit nulle part de démesure, mais d'un droit contre un autre droit, même s'il est évident que les deux protagonistes (Antigone et Créon) ne respectent aucune mesure et que la tragédie dans son ensemble entraîne une dislocation de la mesure. Voilà ce qui a tellement irrité Goethe, et plus tard Erwin Rhode : où donc trouver cette égalisation des discours dont Hegel fait état ? Pourtant, il ne faut pas se hâter de congédier son interprétation. La différence sexuelle telle que Hegel la répartit dans la tragédie décrit précisément la situation que perturbe l'action d'Antigone. Elle peut donc valoir comme formulation d'un point de départ.

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Chez Hegel, la *Sittlichkeit* de l'Antiquité est une figure historique de l'esprit. En celle-ci, la naturalité des deux sexes prend une signification rationnelle. Dans ma féminité ou ma masculinité, je réalise d'emblée ma part d'universel, ma détermination de sa dimension commune. En appartenant à l'une de ces parties, par exemple à la partie féminine, j'incarne directement la totalité elle-même. Mais cette symétrie recèle une asymétrie drastique. À y regarder de plus près, la détermination rationnelle de ces entités naturelles consiste à son tour en une division de cette rationalité, laquelle répartit à nouveau rationalité et physis.

L'homme devient individu parce qu'il devient un citoyen, et se libère ainsi de sa naturalité. Ce détachement implique un certain rapport à l'éros. Ainsi Hegel :

« [...] cependant que chez l'homme, ces deux côtés (le singulier et l'universel du désir) se disjoignent, et dès lors qu'il possède, en tant que citoyen, la force consciente de soi de l'universalité, il achète par là même le droit du désir, tout en se conservant en même temps la liberté de s'en affranchir. »¹² Le naturel du sexe est devenu pour lui désir, dont l'universel entre de manière singulière dans sa subjectivité, exactement comme pour tous ses autres actes. L'éthique se subordonne le naturel, il y a donc désir humain au lieu de l'indifférence naturelle du sexe.

Chez la femme, cela ne se produit pas. La rationalité de la singularité de la mère et de l'épouse est « pour une part quelque chose de naturel qui appartient au plaisir, d'autre part quelque chose de négatif qui n'y aperçoit que son disparaître, et c'est pourquoi précisément cette singularité est pour une part quelque chose de contingent, qui peut être remplacé par une autre. Dans la maison du souci éthique, du souci des bonnes moeurs et de la coutume, ce n'est pas sur tel homme, ce n'est pas sur tel enfant, mais sur un homme, sur des enfants en général — ce n'est pas sur le sentiment mais sur l'universel que ces rapports et la condition de la femme se fondent. »¹³ En bref, la femme colle à la généralité de sa fonction sexuelle et reproductrice, qui ne mène en soi à aucune subjectivité, mais représente la contrepartie souterraine, divine, du règne des lois humaines. Elle est vouée à l'emprise de la physis, là où l'homme s'en détache.

Pour Hegel, la médiation de ces moments vaut comme une mise à l'épreuve complémentaire. « L'un des extrêmes, l'esprit universel à soi-même conscient, est concaténé avec son autre extrême, à sa force et son élément, avec l'esprit sans conscience, par l'individualité de *l'homme*. En revanche, la loi divine a son individualisation, ou encore, l'esprit sans conscience de l'individu singulier a son existence chez la femme, par l'intermédiaire de laquelle, comme terme médian, il monte de son ineffectivité à son effectivité, passe de l'ignorant et du non-su au royaume conscient. »¹⁴

¹² G. W. F. Hegel, *La Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, trad. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (Paris: Éditions Aubier, 1991), 310.

¹³ Hegel, 310; traduction modifiée.

¹⁴ Hegel, 314.

Cette complémentarité est résolument hiérarchique. Le tout de l'éthique forme une rationalité commune qui exclut d'emblée sa part féminine des procédures de son universalité. Elle condamne le féminin à ne pouvoir transformer d'aucune façon la rationalité qui la fixe sur une position naturalisée et muette en son sein. Cela vaut pour toute rationalité qui se réclame d'une complicité des ordres. Aussitôt surgit irrésistiblement la question : et quelle part de cette articulation complémentaire du rationnel détermine comment les ordres doivent se compléter ?

La complémentarité de l'éthique tragique hégélienne repose logiquement sur une naturalisation de la différence sexuelle. La femme ne participe à la vie rationnelle de la citoyenneté que dans l'exacte mesure où elle est exclue de son logos, où elle fonde ce qu'il y a de non-conscient, de souterrain en lui. La femme a sa place dans les conflits de la *polis* en ce qu'elle n'y a aucune place. Le *polemos* a lieu entre hommes, sa disposition est homosexuelle. Sans s'attarder davantage sur les incohérences internes de cette interprétation, on peut reprendre le cadre esquissé par Hegel comme tendance aporétique. L'esprit éthique détaillé par Hegel ne correspond pas à une complémentarité dialectique, mais à une hiérarchie des sexes qui opère comme condition monotone et opaque de leur différence. Celle-ci impute au féminin une incapacité à la dispute.

Le drame

Il existe bien une protagoniste du drame qui fait sienne cette élimination d'elle-même, qui acquiesce à son mutisme, à savoir Ismène. Ainsi, la scène d'introduction du drame contient une indication directe sur la mise à l'écart d'Antigone. Sa fidélité à la fatalité des Labdacides, son acte, sa proclamation de cet acte divise la loi de la parenté dans l'exacte mesure où elle déclare honteuse la soumission féminine d'Ismène. Antigone n'incarne donc en aucun cas le naturel inconscient du deuil féminin, pas plus que sa voix ne représente le féminin face à la *polis*.¹⁵ Il ne s'agit pas pour elle d'une chose qui serait déjà commune à toutes les femmes, mais d'une chose qui la sépare directement d'Ismène, et partant, qui clive le féminin. La fidélité d'Antigone divise à nouveau un lien de sang qui est lui-même contre-nature. Elle ne se situe pas simplement dans une loi

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¹⁵ Proclamer Antigone « féministe » revient le plus souvent à ne pas s'intéresser à ce qu'elle aurait à nous dire sur les rapports entre sexualité et politique égalitaire.

de parenté assumée, elle l'aliène. Pas de sororité donc ; Antigone répond d'une solidarité inexistante, que l'on peut anticiper comme une réinterprétation de la politique elle-même.

La loi prescrit qu'au-delà de la politique, les femmes sont assignées au deuil, tandis que Créon interdit à tous d'offrir une sépulture à l'ennemi politique. Par conséquent, Antigone ne peut venir au secours de son frère criminel qu'en transgressant les limites qui lui sont imposées. D'abord, comme on n'a cessé de le souligner, les liens autres que ceux avec ce frère perdent toute signification pour elle. Ensuite, son acte, sa revendication déconcertante font effraction dans la sphère où il n'y a aucune place pour elle. La sépulture offerte au criminel Polynice inverse les rapports des sphères : il fait du deuil féminin une chose contre-nature de la *polis*. La fidélité au frère s'interpose, déporte les frontières du dedans et du dehors, de la justice et des lois, bouleverse le contexte ordonné qui situe l'ami, l'ennemi et la femme.¹⁶

La « monstruosité » d'Antigone est clairement attestée dans l'aversion spécifique que son acte suscite chez Créon, ainsi que dans la dispute d'Hémon avec Créon. Ce n'est pas seulement l'insolence à l'égard de son règne qui lui est odieuse, mais bien le fait que cette transgression soit accomplie par une femme. « Créon : Un ennemi mort est toujours un ennemi. Antigone : Je suis faite pour partager l'amour non la haine (*symphelein*). Créon : Descends donc là-bas, et, s'il te faut aimer à tout prix, aime les morts. Moi vivant, ce n'est pas une femme qui fera la loi. »¹⁷ Et encore : « Créon : Son forfait accompli, elle pêche une seconde fois par outrecuidance lorsqu'elle s'en fait gloire et sourit à son oeuvre. En vérité, de nous deux, c'est elle qui serait l'homme si je la laissais triompher impunément ».¹⁸

Créon ne cesse d'y revenir : une femme ne doit pas avoir de voix là où Antigone s'immisce. La domination de Créon est tout uniment patriarcale et tyrannique et c'est justement cette unité qui est rompue par la contestation d'Antigone. Sa transgression des limites ne fait pas que déplacer les frontières ; elle engendre

¹⁶ Il ne s'agit donc nullement de reprendre dans les mêmes termes l'assignation d'un deuil au delà de la politique, quitte à en faire une « politique du deuil », ainsi que le propose Judith Butler. Il s'agit de décomposer les frontières selon lesquelles se départagent mort, deuil, conflit et guerre.

¹⁷ Sophocle, *Antigone*, 81.

¹⁸ Sophocle, 80.

une nécessité, sans aucune solution possible, la nécessité de relier autrement le partage d'amour (*symphilein*) et le *polemos*. Il ne s'agit pas d'un changement politique, mais d'une détotalisation de la politique, de son rattachement à ce qui lui échappe, à l'impolitisable dont elle procède. Ou, pour reprendre le vocabulaire de Benjamin : sa transgression a pour effet un inachèvement de la justice.

Dans cette perspective, le recours aux lois souterraines prend également un sens différent. L'enterrement du frère est revendiqué auprès de Créon en faisant appel à Zeus. Mais l'acte d'enterrer, ce qui en lui n'accède pas à la parole, ne conduit pas simplement une loi plus ancienne. Elle s'apparente à une tentative d'élargir le champ symbolique, d'y matérialiser un topos nouveau. Son balbutiement d'oiseau en témoigne. Ainsi le gardien : « Au bout d'un long moment, quand la bourrasque s'est éloignée, nous apercevons la fillette qui pousse des lamentations aiguës, comme fait un oiseau affolé, quand il arrive au nid et n'y trouve plus ses petits. »¹⁹ Ces circonstances, ces bruitages indiquent que la saisine explicite de Zeus fonctionne comme un soutien et non comme une justification. Hölderlin exprime cet aspect étrange et insaisissable dans la tournure blasphématoire qu'il prête au dire d'Antigone. Sommée de s'expliquer sur qui l'autorise à passer outre le décret, elle déclare s'autoriser « Par ceci, que *mon* Zeus ne m'en a pas instruite. »²⁰

De même que l'insurrection d'Antigone est le point focal des conflits déclenchés par le contexte tragique, de même sa solitude ne peut être saisie comme un centre vide, à égale distance de tous les autres protagonistes. Le fait que tout perde de l'importance pour Antigone à l'exception de l'enterrement de Polynice ne dit rien sur l'éloignement ou la proximité des autres à celle-ci. La dispute entre Hémon et Créon met cette différence à l'épreuve ; c'est en elle qu'a lieu, de manière irrésolue, ratée, l'inachèvement de la justice évoqué plus haut.

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Dans l'échange avec son père, Hémon tente de prévenir une terrible faute, là même où la condamnation à mort d'Antigone a déjà été prononcée, mais n'a pas encore été mise à exécution. La chance manquée de la justice se manifeste à contretemps. Le fils ne fait pas appel à un possible que le réel aurait déjà effacé. Bien plutôt, la dispute tourne directement autour de l'effacement de ce qui n'a

¹⁹ Sophocle, 79.

²⁰ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Antigone de Sophocle*, 57.

pas encore eu lieu, et partant autour de la temporalité qui s'y loge. Hémon s'en remet à la possibilité d'un revirement temporel : que l'injustice s'interrompe. Ainsi, son appel à la rétractation, l'échec de cet appel ne peut être pensé que dans l'élément du temps : si la justice est bafouée, c'est que l'ajournement de l'injustice fait défaut.

On a souvent remarqué que l'amour pour Antigone n'est jamais évoqué par Hémon. Il est peut-être plus important de noter qu'Hémon est saisi, ébranlé par ce que dit et fait Antigone, qu'il prend en charge et élargit le choc qu'elle introduit et transmet au sein de la polis.²¹ Il s'avère que la fidélité d'Antigone n'est pas restée une intuition isolée. C'est précisément en cet endroit que se révèle une rupture dans le contexte tragique, laquelle renvoie au seuil du drame, vers son dehors. L'enchaînement de l'intrigue et ce que montre le drame sont deux choses différentes. L'acte d'Antigone prend effet doublement, à même son éclat solitaire et à même l'ombre sans éclat qu'elle projette : dans le fait que sa contestation a été entendue et relayée par Hémon, qui l'a traduite. Ou, pour le dire avec Lacan ; Antigone est seule, mais elle n'est pas la seule. Elle ne peut certes rien en savoir, ni y prendre appui, sinon sa décision ne serait plus tragique. Mais le drame parcourt les deux, l'ombre et l'éclat.

Il y a un passage remarquable dans la dispute entre Hémon et Créon. Hémon tente à plusieurs reprises de dissuader son père de tuer la jeune fille. Créon veut l'obliger à prendre parti contre Antigone. « Créon : c'est pourquoi notre devoir est de défendre l'ordre et de ne jamais souffrir qu'une femme ait le dessus. Mieux vaut tomber, s'il le faut, sous les coups d'un homme, que d'être appelé le vaincu d'une femme. »²² Le fils tente de le raisonner en intervertissant les positions interlocutoires. « Créon : Ce garçon à ce qu'il me semble, fait cause commune avec la femme. Hémon : Si tu es femme, oui, car c'est à toi seul que je m'intéresse. »²³

Le fils devient le défenseur de la polis en devenant à la fois défenseur de l'épouse et du père contre le père. Il ne peut exprimer le fait qu'il s'inquiète à la fois du père et du juste qu'en incluant Créon lui-même dans la mise à l'écart du féminin,

²¹ Le déplacement de ce problème est redevable à l'impressionnante réflexion de Kurt von Fritz, « Haimons Liebe zu Antigone », dans *Antike und Moderne Tragödie. Neun Abhandlungen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1962), 227–42.

²² Sophocle, *Antigone*, 85.

²³ Sophocle, 86; traduction modifiée.

en l'y inscrivant. Cet étrange report met en jeu un fossé d'expérience, une faille qui traverse les rapports des sexes. Le père est lui-même exposé à cette faille, et avec elle à la chance de revenir sur l'injustice de sa prescription ; cette séparation éprouvée pourrait empêcher sa faute envers celle-ci, et partant, envers la cité elle-même. Ce n'est que le rejet obtus et tyrannique de Créon qui amène finalement Hémon à s'exclamer : « Si tu n'étais pas mon père, je dirais que tu n'as pas toute ta tête ! »²⁴

À cette première torsion du cadre vient s'en ajouter un autre. Créon accuse le fils de sa prise de parti : « Créon : Tous les mots que tu dis ne sont que pour elle. Hémon : Et pour toi aussi, et pour moi, et pour les dieux d'en bas. »²⁵ Hémon enchaîne paratactiquement sur le dire de son père, affirmant que le parti des prescriptions de la cité ne peut être pris sans l'élargir. Parler pour Antigone ne signifie pas l'excepter, cela signifie aussi parler pour les autres. Le mouvement d'inclusion prend effet dans une traversée dialogique, dans l'écart franchi d'une parole à sa réponse. Cette parataxe répercute, dans le contenu dialogique, la succession dans l'intrigue des plaidoyers pour l'acte d'Antigone, celui d'Ismène, celui de Hémon lui-même, enfin celui de Tirésias. Chacun donne voix différemment à ce qui fait malentendu, et cette consécution elle-même gagne en violence au fur et à mesure de son déploiement. Ismène la soumission rappelle à Créon l'amour qui est porté par Hémon à sa soeur, Hémon en appelle à la raison de son père et l'exhorte à se rétracter, à quitter l'espace solitaire de la tyrannie. Tirésias enfin décrit le malheur qui s'abat sur la cité et prédit à Créon le sort funeste qui attend son règne imprudent et arrogant.

Dans sa progression, cette suite mène à la chute, où la mort du fils puis de la mère matérialiseront la défaite de Créon. Le dialogue de Hémon et de Créon y prend place tout en dérogeant à sa cohérence. Mettant en jeu cette parataxe bigarrée, démultipliée, du « un par un » (Elle, Moi, Toi, les dieux d'en bas) contre l'acharnement de son père, Hémon anticipe la chute des anciens ordres, non selon l'issue funeste dictée par la tyrannie, mais selon leur transposition en un autre sériage, en l'occurrence précisément le sériage auquel Antigone refuse de renoncer. Ce sériage d'une autre vie n'est donc pas seulement la « propre » vie d'Antigone, sa vie de femme, d'emblée perdue, dont elle se désole dans sa cé-

²⁴ Sophocle, 87; traduction modifiée.

²⁵ Sophocle, 87; traduction modifiée.

lèbre lamentation du quatrième épisode. Cette autre vie s'esquisse déjà au milieu de la dispute entre Hémon et Créon, et à ce titre son altérité change aussi de sens. Le conflit tragique s'élargit, comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné plus haut, d'un désir porté par la seule qui soit fidèle à sa lignée vers un conflit des mondes irréductible à l'ordre de la polis.

Ainsi, nous qui assistons au drame, nous voyons une articulation temporellement tordue : d'abord une réinterprétation de la polis, provoquée par l'incroyable audace d'Antigone, puis l'échec anticipé du possible que son audace a esquissé, la solitude de son désir implacable, et enfin le cruel destin de Créon, qui le transfigure lui aussi en personnage tragique. L'audace d'Antigone se transpose dans tous les incidents, les efforts, les disputes que suscite son intransigeance. De Lukács à Lacan, on ne cesse de souligner que tout perd de son importance pour elle au regard d'un seul objet inconditionnel. Mais quel est donc cet « un seul objet » ? L'intransigeance d'Antigone dans la tragédie ne se répercute-t-elle pas plutôt dans tous ses retournements ? Son désir s'étend à un enchaînement : ne pas trahir sa propre naissance, accorder une sépulture à ce criminel qu'est Polynice dans sa singularité, contrer l'injustice de la polis par une justice divine, chercher un langage inouï pour cela, chanter la perte de sa propre vie.

La simple mort n'atteint pas le désir inconditionnel d'Antigone. Non pas parce que cet inconditionnel serait d'emblée qualifié de pur, mais parce que l'énigme qu'il représente persiste dans tous les enchevêtrements et toutes les significations de son destin. Ce n'est pas le sublime d'Antigone qui nous éblouit : les morceaux et les chutes nous sautent aux yeux et nous regardent, comme s'ils étaient le tout.

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Christian Fierens*

Une petite pensée : « l'appensée » ; La dernière séance du séminaire XXIII (11/05/1973)

Keywords

appensée, Borromean knot, ego, fantasy, Joyce, *lalangue*, narcissism, sinthome, symptom, thinking, trefoil knot

Abstract

Psychoanalytic practice requires articulating three dimensions (imaginary, symbolic, real) in the Borromean Knot. The Freudian symptom articulates these three dimensions with a fourth one, psychic reality. Articulation of the three dimensions in the personality presupposes their fusion or confusion in the trefoil knot. The concatenation of the symbolic dimension with the real one would lead to the loss of the imaginary dimension if the knot of the ego did not retain it within the structure. All these movements support the thinking of psychoanalytical practice: the “*appensée*.”

Mala misel: “l'appensée”; zadnja seansa seminarja XXIII (11. 5. 1973)

Ključne besede

appensée, boromejski voz, jaz, fantazma, Joyce, jezik, narcizem, sintom, simptom, mišljenje, trilitni voz

Povzetek

Psihoanalitična praksa zahteva artikulacijo treh razsežnosti (imaginarnega, simbolnega, realnega) v boromejskem vozlu. Freudov simptom te tri razsežnosti poveže s četrto razsežnostjo, psihično realnostjo. Artikulacija treh dimenzij v osebnosti predpostavlja njihovo zlitje oziroma pomešanje v trolistnem vozlu. Združitev simbolne razsežnosti z realno bi vodila v izgubo imaginarne razsežnosti, če je voz, jaz, ne bi zadržal znotraj strukture. Vse te poteze podpirajo mišljenja psihoanalitične prakse kot »*appensée*«.

* Psychanalyste, Association lacanienne internationale, Paris, France
christian.fierens@telenet.be | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1996-1517>



How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life !
 —Ludwig Wittgenstein ; mise en musique par Steve
 Reich dans *Proverb*

Est-ce une application pour la psychanalyse ? Est-ce « App psychanalyse » à télécharger sur l’Iphone du psychanalyste ? Voilà la question de l’app penser. Comment penser en psychanalyse ?

La philosophie comme appui à la pratique psychanalytique

« On s’appuie contre un signifiant pour penser ».¹ C’est le sens de « l’appendée », donné par Lacan tout à la fin du séminaire. Au début du séminaire, il a pourtant dit autre chose : c’est la chaîne borroméenne qui est appui à la pensée. Alors, sur quoi allons-nous nous appuyer pour penser : sur le signifiant ou sur la chaîne borroméenne ?

Et que veut dire penser ? Et pourquoi nous intéresser au penser, alors que l’analyse du rêve montre clairement que l’inconscient « ne pense pas, ne calcule pas, ne juge absolument pas » ? Quoi que nous fassions, nous sommes menés par l’inconscient et, dans ce sens, nous ne pensons pas encore.

Mais.

Mais maîtriser. Mais si nous voulons ouvrir une pratique avec l’inconscient, si nous voulons en quelque sorte *maîtriser* la pratique analytique, nous nous trouvons automatiquement dans un discours magistral. Ce dernier se supporte d’une philosophie qui y occupe la place de vérité. Tout maître (y compris le sujet supposé savoir) s’appuie sur une pensée, sur une philosophie. Ici, nous ne cherchions plus un appui pour la pensée, mais une pensée comme appui pour une pratique (psychanalytique) plus ou moins bien maîtrisée.

¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le sinthome, 1975–1976* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 155.

Quelle est la pensée, la philosophie capable de soutenir la pratique psychanalytique de l'inconscient (lequel ne pense pas)? Eh bien, ce sera la philosophie comme telle. Elle se définit par ce qui lui échappe; « amour de la sagesse », elle se définit par ce qui lui manque, la sagesse et c'est ce manque qui recèle l'inconscient. Elle ne fait que tendre vers la sagesse, c'est un éternel *projet* (projet de sagesse) toujours jeté vers ce qui pourrait advenir, tendu vers le futur qui n'est jamais pleinement accompli. La philosophie est cette tension, ce temps futur projeté. L'être que vise le discours du signifiant maître/m'êtré n'est rien sans le temps.² Je reviendrai plus loin sur ce temps pensé projeté, qui est au cœur de notre pratique : l'analysant vise un futur qui lui échappe radicalement (de même qu'à l'analyste).

Comment s'appuyer sur quelque chose qui n'est qu'une faille?

Le nœud borroméen

Nous rencontrons sans cesse le trou, le manque, la difficulté majeure, la panne, le ratage dans notre pratique : ça ne va pas. L'os de notre pratique, c'est ce « ça ne va pas » dans notre pratique elle-même, le manque d'une sagesse ou de savoir pertinemment comment appliquer un savoir, un savoir-faire qui n'est jamais donné par avance, quelles que soient les finesses de la théorie. Nous n'avons pas l'app de la psychanalyse qui sait tout.

Mais comment faire avec ce trou? Nous pouvons penser pouvoir le cerner et nous écrivons un cercle, un rond simple. Mais c'est trop facile, car ce qui fait trou n'est pas cerné, il est partout. Nous sommes cernés par le trou, par du « ça ne va pas » que nous ne cernons pas. Prenons un signifiant, au sens d'un signe qui pourrait faire signe vers une signification, une association quelconque d'un analysant, un lapsus ou même un symptôme. Bien sûr, nous imaginons déjà qu'avec une bonne app, nous allons pouvoir l'interpréter, c'est-à-dire lui coller un signifié : voilà un fil imaginaire possible, qui vient d'un passé insondable et qui surtout qui court vers un futur improbable et tout ce qui entoure ce projet imaginaire de l'analyste et de l'analysant, c'est la vastitude d'un espace vide autour de cette ligne imaginaire infinie. Nous avons beau imaginer le signifiant inséré dans une « chaîne », la chaîne signifiante. Cette « chaîne » n'est qu'une

² Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Être et Temps*, trad. François Vezin (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

droite infinie plongée dans le vide de signification, dans un océan de perplexité, de non-savoir.

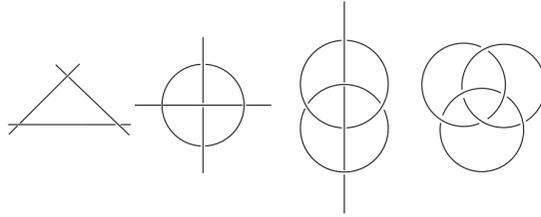
Prenons maintenant un signifiant, au sens plus poétique d'un fil qui court sans fin, qui court comme le furet de la chanson sans jamais s'arrêter. Fil symbolique que l'analyse comme processus ne lâche pas. Nous avons beau nous accrocher à ce fil des associations libres. Ce fil n'est qu'une droite infinie plongée, entourée par le vide de sens radical et mélancolique de la vie de tout homme.

Prenons maintenant le « ça ne va pas » comme un fil réel que nous rencontrons dans le cours de la vie et de l'analyse de tout analysant. Ce n'est encore qu'une droite infinie plongée dans un autre Réel dont nous n'avons même pas idée.

Voilà bien trois droites infinies — imaginaire, symbolique et réelle — qui donnent une idée de notre pratique psychanalytique, non pas en tant qu'elle rencontre un trou ou des trous, mais en tant qu'elle est de toute part entourée par un « ça ne va pas » radical, que nous percevons gentiment comme un « ça ne va pas... *de soi* ». « Ça ne va pas de soi » la droite infinie du symbolique et nous l'appuyons sur la droite infinie de l'imaginaire (pour suivre le processus symbolique, nous nous appuyons sur des significations supposées fixées). « Ça ne va pas de soi » la droite infinie de l'imaginaire et nous l'appuyons sur la droite infinie du réel (pour suivre les fantasmes imaginaires de l'analysant, nous imaginons qu'ils se réfèrent à un réel plus ou moins traumatique). « Ça ne va pas de soi » la droite infinie du réel et nous aurons vite fait de l'appuyer sur la droite infinie du symbolique et ainsi de suite indéfiniment. Le tour est joué, car l'appui tourne en rond nous avons construit un triskel composé des trois droites infinies du symbolique, de l'imaginaire et du réel. Voilà l'application, l'app, l'appui, l'appensée qui soutient toute la pratique psychanalytique, la « si petite pensée qu'elle peut remplir toute une vie », car elle est faite de droites infinies dans un espace infini.

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Nous pouvons chaque fois imaginer que la droite infinie se bouclera, que la fin de la droite rejoindra le début pour former un cercle. Nous pouvons l'imaginer pour zéro, pour une, pour deux ou pour trois de ces droites. Nous avons ainsi quatre figures de la chaîne borroméenne :



De ces quatre figures, je retiens surtout la seconde. Certes, la figure du triskel avec les trois droites infinies semble davantage correspondre à la réalité clinique : que nous nous situions dans l'imaginaire, dans le symbolique ou dans le réel, ça file vers l'infini. Mais en même temps, nous risquons toujours de perdre le contact avec l'une ou l'autre dimension. La pratique psychanalytique exige une « attention également flottante » entre la perspective imaginaire (quelle est la signification de ce qui se dit ?), la perspective symbolique (ça court comment ? vers où ?) et la perspective réelle (qu'est-ce qui nous échappe continuellement ?). Pour tenir toutes ces perspectives ensemble, il faut que nous imaginions qu'au moins l'une d'entre elles se boucle sur elle-même, se présente comme un rond. Il faut que nous l'imaginions, ce sera l'imaginaire qui fera le mieux l'affaire.

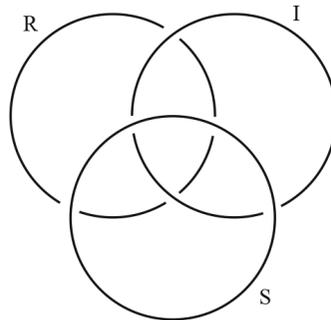
Nous verrons que cette deuxième figure de la chaîne borroméenne est centrale dans le faire. Car « faut l'faire » le nouage borroméen ; si nous ne le faisons pas (dans notre pratique), il n'existe pas. Il nous faut fabriquer cette application qui permet de soutenir l'attention également flottante.

L'attention également flottante ou le nœud borroméen à quatre

Nous ne pensons pas spontanément avec l'app de la psychanalyse, même si nous avons les figures du nœud borroméen en poche. Ici, je reviens à quelque chose qui a précédé cette dernière leçon du *Sinthome*, plus précisément à la première leçon traitant du nœud borroméen à quatre consistances, plus pédagogiquement à la présentation *freudienne* d'un nœud borroméen à quatre dans la leçon XXIII de *Nouvelles conférences*, la conférence consacrée précisément au « symptôme ».

Plaçons-nous dans l'état d'esprit de Freud : le symptôme est causé par le réel du trauma (premier étage de la construction freudienne : R), le réel du trauma sert de base pour l'imaginaire d'une série de fantasmatisation à partir de ce trauma

(deuxième étage : I), enfin sur la base de cet imaginaire fantasmatique vient le commentaire symbolique (troisième étage : S).



Ceci n'est PAS un nœud borroméen. C'est un empilement de ronds, qui se dispersent facilement. Par exemple, c'est le réel du trauma qui attire toute l'attention et on oublie la fantasmatisation imaginaire et le commentaire symbolique comme si c'était rien. L'attention également flottante requiert de prêter également attention aux trois étages sans en perdre aucun. Très bien, mais comment la psychanalyse, qui est essentiellement une pratique de parole, une pratique symbolique pourrait-elle changer quoi que ce soit au réel du trauma et à l'imaginaire des fantasmes qui sont déjà installés dans le symptôme ? Dans ce schéma, c'est fondamentalement impossible : la psychanalyse est un bavardage qui ne change rien.

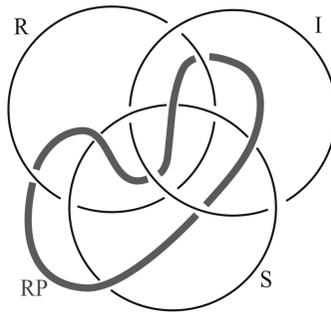
Mais le symptôme n'est pas simplement le résidu d'un trauma réel. Il est un faire (« faut l'faire »), il est un processus, il est une formation.

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La formation du symptôme n'est ni le réel du trauma, ni l'imaginaire de la fantasmatisation du trauma, ni le symbolique du commentaire du trauma et de sa fantasmatisation. C'est une « réalité psychique », dit Freud, qui n'a rien à voir avec la réalité ordinaire. Le symptôme est un compromis, un con-promis : il promet une communauté structurelle, il promet de mettre ensemble les restes du trauma R, les restes de la fantasmatisation I et les restes du commentaire S. Autrement dit, il promet de nouer les trois dimensions : il est le matériel parfaitement adéquat à l'attention également flottante. Or, cette égalité d'attention entre ces trois dimensions ne vient pas seulement avec l'attention également flottante ; elle est déjà là dès avant le trauma et dès avant leurs fantasmatisa-

tion : c'est la «réalité psychique» construite sur une base symbolique. C'est la fonction du père et des fantasmes originaires qui l'explicitent (scène primitive, castration et séduction). La formation du symptôme doit s'entendre avec l'app, l'appensée de la réalité psychique. Et l'attention également flottante utilisera cette «réalité psychique» inventée pour se soutenir. C'est elle qui va expliquer la formation du symptôme, c'est elle qui va soutenir ou supporter le réel du trauma qui dépend d'elle plus que d'une réalité matérielle extérieure. C'est elle qui va soutenir la fantasmatisation. C'est elle qui doit être mobilisée dans le transfert à partir de la parole, sur le fond du symbolique, c'est-à-dire du signifiant.

On peut la dessiner en tenant compte qu'elle doit soutenir le réel et l'imaginaire du schéma précédent tant en étant soutenue par le symbolique. Il faut inventer — «faut l'faire» — une courbe fermée qui passe en dessous du réel et de l'imaginaire et au-dessus du symbolique :



L'écriture : faire la lettre

«Une écriture est un faire qui donne support à la pensée».³

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Cette chaîne borroméenne à quatre ronds se présente bien comme une écriture. Mais quelle est cette écriture ? Apparemment, j'ai exposé quelque chose de la pensée du symptôme par Freud et je l'ai ensuite transposée dans l'écriture de cette chaîne. Et voilà, muni de cet outil qu'est cette chaîne, nous pouvons aller vers le symptôme et l'appliquer dans une pratique dite borroméenne à quatre ronds.

³ Lacan, *Le sinthome*, 144.

Ce n'est pas le sens de ce que Lacan propose. Il ne dit pas que le nœud borroméen est une écriture qui *transcrit* une pensée pour ensuite pouvoir faire de la clinique en s'appuyant sur une transcription schématisée des pensées théoriques. Il dit : « Une écriture *est un faire* qui donne *support à la pensée* ». ⁴

L'écriture qui nous concerne en psychanalyse n'est pas l'écriture qui transcrit la parole, la pensée, le dit, le signifiant sur le papier ou un autre support.

C'est, disons l'écriture comme lettre. Mais le problème se repose : qu'est-ce que la lettre ? À nouveau, non, la lettre qui nous concerne en psychanalyse n'est pas la transcription d'un son, d'une idée ou d'un phonème.

Comme l'écriture, la lettre n'est elle-même pas sans un faire. Nous n'allons pas la trouver dans un tiroir caché de ce qu'on pourrait imaginer comme la cave de l'inconscient. « Faut l'faire », il faut faire la lettre en tant qu'elle est l'écriture *produite par un discours*. Les lettres de l'alphabet phénicien sont produites par le discours du marché, les lettres ou caractères chinois sont produits par l'ancien discours chinois, les lettres de l'alphabet psychanalytique (petit a, S de grand A barré, phi) sont produites par le discours psychanalytique. « N'importe quel fait de discours a ceci de bon qu'il fait de la lettre ». ⁵ Avec ces exemples de discours, nous pourrions maintenant penser que le travail est fait : dans notre ordinateur, nous avons les différentes polices : chinoise, garamond, calibri, arial, cambria, times ; nous avons même la police Lacan. Ces lettres sont toutes faites, autrement dit la formation, le processus, la production, le faire, la fabrication de la lettre, tout ça est court-circuité pour ne laisser qu'un produit tout fait.

Comment revenir au faire inhérent à la lettre ? D'abord, première étape du faire la lettre : faut s'insérer dans le faire d'un discours. Sans discours proprement dit, il n'y aura pas de lettre produite par un discours. Ensuite, deuxième étape du « faut l'faire » : il faut faire le discours *jusqu'au* point où il bute sur son « ça ne va pas », sur son impossible. Ce point d'impossible s'écrit à la place du produit du discours en question. Mais nous ne toucherons à ce point d'impossible que si le produit n'est en aucune façon compris comme quelque chose qui peut

⁴ Lacan, 144.

⁵ « N'importe quel effet de discours a ceci de bon qu'il est fait de la lettre ». Jacques Lacan, *Encore, 1972-1973* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 37.

être assimilé par le discours en question. Ainsi, le discours magistral produit de l'objet par l'intermédiaire du travail de l'esclave ; mais si cet objet est pris comme un objet consommable, le discours magistral devient le discours capitaliste, le discours de la consommation où rien n'est impossible (il ne fabrique pas de la lettre). Ainsi, le discours psychanalytique produit du signifiant S₁ par l'intermédiaire du travail de l'analysant ; mais si ce signifiant est pris comme un signifiant interprétable, le discours psychanalytique devient le discours de l'analyste supposé savoir, où en principe rien n'est impossible (il ne fabrique pas de la lettre, il produit des signifiants qui pourront être interprétés dans le savoir du psychanalyste).

Que faut-il laisser mettre en jeu dans cette production, cette fabrication de la lettre ? Dans le « faut l'faire », nous avons déjà distingué deux moments : *primo*, faut le faire d'un discours, *secundo*, faut pousser le discours jusqu'à son impossible, jusqu'à son « ça ne va pas ». Mais ce n'est pas pour ensuite se lamenter que ça ne va pas et pleurer sur son impuissance. Tout au contraire. Un troisième moment du « faut l'faire » s'impose maintenant pour la lettre : la lettre comme impossible, comme « ça ne va pas » radical ouvre le champ de la création, de l'invention. Mais attention ! cette invention n'est pas celle du sujet ou de l'individu qui bricolerait quelque babiole ou bafouille avec les lettres ainsi produites ; c'est l'invention produite par ce que nous appelons — faute de mieux — l'inconscient.

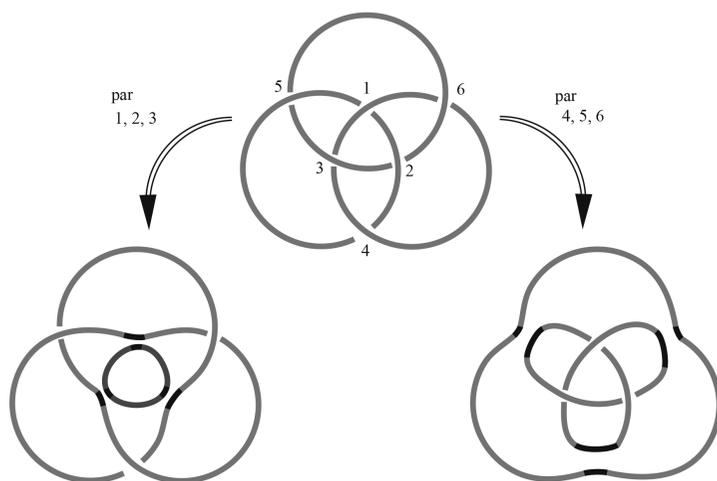
L'impossible du nœud borroméen

Nous ne réussissons jamais à saisir la « réalité psychique ». Nous ne réussissons jamais à cerner le symptôme. Nous n'arrivons jamais à soutenir une attention également flottante. Autrement dit, nous n'avons jamais une formation borroméenne toute faite à enfile à notre doigt. Ça échoue, ça ne va pas. L'impossible de la chaîne borroméenne se présente de trois façons différentes.

Primo, nous pouvons penser les trois dimensions une par une, sans faire chaîne : ainsi, Freud pense le symptôme comme construit d'abord sur un réel, la réalité matérielle d'un trauma pour y ajouter ensuite la dimension imaginaire du fantasme et enfin la dimension symbolique de la parole. On peut aussi commencer par le symbolique : « au commencement est le verbe » et puis le réel créé et enfin l'imagination.

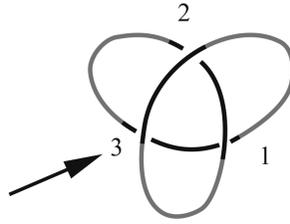
J'ai déjà indiqué la réponse qui s'impose pour ce type d'impossible du nœud borroméen : le troisième moment d'un « faut l'faire », le faire de l'inconscient qui invente, chez Freud, la réalité psychique comme quatrième dimension. Pour ce même type d'impossible, mais en partant du symbolique (et non du réel), on inventera le *sinthome* comme quatrième dimension, nouant les trois premières en une chaîne borroméenne à quatre.

Secundo, nous pouvons penser les trois dimensions ensemble, bien en continuité : ainsi, quand nous présentons un cas, nous tentons nécessairement de montrer ce qui se joue dans la continuité du symbolique, du réel et de l'imaginaire pour tel individu unique ; nous le présentons comme une personnalité (c'est-à-dire un psychisme unifié, qui fait un), un fil unique avec cependant des couleurs tantôt symbolique, tantôt réelle, tantôt imaginaire.



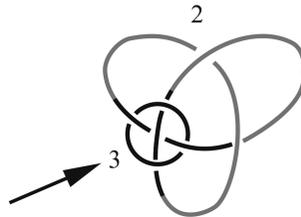
Ce fil unique serait représenté par un rond simple, ce n'est pas une chaîne, c'est un nœud. Mais si nous voulons tenir compte du nœud borroméen dont ce fil provient, il faudra prendre en considération les croisements entre les différentes couleurs (symbolique, réelle et imaginaire) de ce nœud. Autrement dit, nous acceptons de penser dans le cadre de cette personnalité, dans le cadre d'un cas, nous représenterons cette personnalité par un nœud, le nœud de trèfle.

Je rappelle très brièvement qu'une erreur dans les croisements du nœud de trèfle (au croisement 3) transforme le trèfle en un rond simple.



Cette erreur se produit nécessairement : nous n'arrivons pas à penser vraiment les trois croisements du nœud de trèfle : l'impossible de la chaîne borroméenne se dit dans l'impossible du nœud de trèfle. Comment y répondre ? Troisième moment d'un « faut l'faire ». Qu'est-ce que l'inconscient peut maintenant inventer pour soutenir le nœud de la personnalité ?

Deux solutions essentiellement différentes se présentent, qui toutes deux se présentent comme cette invention d'un cercle crochant le croisement des deux droites, qui correspond exactement à la création locale d'une chaîne borroméenne avec deux droites infinies et un cercle :



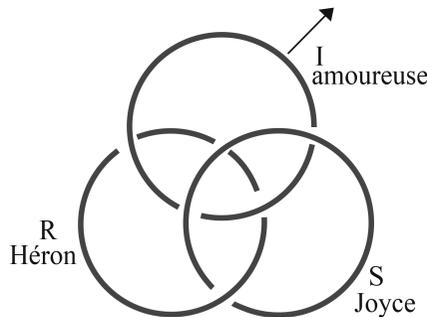
- Soit on laisse faire ; le nœud se réparera de toute façon par — notamment à un autre endroit que celui où s'est produit l'erreur ; et c'est la structure du fantasme qui apparaît. L'invention du nouage borroméen se fait n'importe où et n'importe quand.
- Soit « faut l'faire » vraiment ; l'inconscient doit directement être mis en demeure d'inventer le nouage borroméen *au lieu même de l'erreur* et sans tarder et tout de suite ; et c'est une tout autre structure qui apparaît : celle que Lacan nomme *aussi* « *sinthome* ». C'est cette position active que la pratique psychanalytique doit soutenir.

Les deux sens du «sinthome» ont en commun qu'il s'agit de répondre activement à deux formes d'impossible de la chaîne borroméenne elle-même et de son substitut le nœud de trèfle. Il s'agit du troisième moment de «faut l'faire» impératif éthique de l'inconscient qui *doit* inventer activement – en acte – une nouvelle forme pour pouvoir répondre au symptôme qui lui s'est laissé aller.

Tertio. Il reste encore un troisième mode d'impossible de la chaîne borroméenne, c'est la chaîne qui enchaîne deux ronds, deux dimensions.

L'enchaînement de Joyce

Dans *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme*, chapitre 2, ladite «scène de la raclée» est enchâssée dans une scène plus large. Stephen – alias Joyce – est sur le point d'entrer en scène dans une pièce de théâtre où il tient le rôle principal (non sans raison, puisqu'il s'est très tôt engagé dans la lecture, dans la poésie, dans le symbolique). Surviennent alors deux condisciples ignares dont Héron le jaloux : dans le réel. Héron (le réel) prend Stephen-Joyce (le symbolique) à parti, il l'enchaîne dans une mise en scène précédent la pièce de théâtre à propos d'une faute que Stephen-Joyce aurait commise, à savoir la faute d'avoir une petite amoureuse (avec toute l'imagination qui est ici convoquée, y compris le regard désapprobateur du père). Nous avons apparemment les trois dimensions de la chaîne borroméenne : le symbolique du poète Joyce, le réel de l'agression de Héron et l'enjeu imaginaire de la petite amoureuse présentée comme un péché. Mais ce n'est pas une chaîne borroméenne, car le symbolique et le réel sont ici clairement enchaînés : Joyce est enchaîné dans le piège de Héron et l'imaginaire de la petite amoureuse semble pouvoir ou même devoir s'échapper :



Voilà le discours de Joyce avec Héron (première étape d'un « faut l'faire ») arrivant à une impasse, dans laquelle Joyce est enlacé à Héron (deuxième étape d'un « faut l'faire »). Mais ce n'est pas tout ! Car il y a la faute, la culpabilité — réelle, symbolique et imaginaire — jouée dans la parodie d'un *confiteor* récité par Joyce devant Héron et son comparse, pendant lequel il se rappelle la scène de la raclée proprement dite. La scène dans la scène touche toujours au réel : la remémoration de la scène de la raclée est enchâssée dans la scène du confiteor.

Et c'est là que Joyce arrive à la troisième étape, au réel du « faut l'faire ».

L'invention de l'égo de Joyce

Comment se fait-il que l'imaginaire engagé avec la petite amoureuse ne soit pas perdu ? Qu'est-ce qui soutient la persistance de l'amour malgré l'enchaînement symbolique — réel ? Une autre scène, la scène de la raclée, apparaît comme remémorée. La structure d'enchaînement entre le symbolique de Joyce et le réel de Héron y était déjà présente sous la forme de l'engagement symbolique de Joyce dans la littérature et la poésie (marqué de suspicion d'hérésie et de faute) et la raclée administrée réellement par Héron et ses comparses à cet intellectuel méprisant et arrogant ; Joyce est littéralement enchaîné, « acculé contre un grillage de fil de fer barbelé »⁶. Comment se fait-il qu'il ne reste pas englué dans cet enchaînement et la rage bien légitime qu'il entraînait ? Comment se fait-il que Joyce ne reste pas pris dans la colère provoquée par la lâcheté de Héron et de ses comparses ? Joyce va découvrir en lui une puissance — la puissance de l'égo — devant laquelle toutes les descriptions d'amour et de haine, lui paraissent bien pâles : « Toutes les descriptions d'amour et de haine farouches, qu'il avait rencontrées dans les livres, lui paraissaient, de ce fait, dépourvues de réalité »⁷. Déjà dans cette première scène qu'est la scène de la raclée, « il avait senti qu'une certaine puissance » — quelle est-elle ? — « le dépouillait de cette colère subitement tissée » — tissée de symbolique et de réel — « aussi aisément qu'un fruit se dépouille de sa peau tendre et mûre »⁸.

⁶ James Joyce, « Portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme », trad. Ludmila Savitzky et Jacques Aubert, dans *Œuvres*, dir. Jacques Aubert (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1982–1995), 1:610.

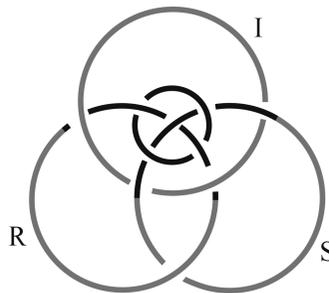
⁷ Joyce, 611.

⁸ Joyce, 611.

Joyce décrit bien la situation produite par l'enchaînement de son symbolique avec le réel de la haine de Héron ; mais il prête une oreille distraite à la fois à la haine réelle de Héron et aux manifestations symboliques de la pièce de théâtre dans laquelle il doit bientôt intervenir. Entre les deux : l'imaginaire de son amoureuse. « Il se demandait s'il avait vécu dans ses pensées (à elle), comme elle avait vécu dans les siennes. Puis, dans l'obscurité, sans être vu des deux autres, il posa le bout de ses doigts sur la paume de son autre main, d'un effleurement à peine sensible. Mais la pression de ses doigts à elle avait été plus légère et plus insistante. Et soudain, le souvenir de ce contact traversa son cerveau et son corps comme une onde invisible »⁹.

Comment l'imaginaire de ce contact traversant son cerveau et son corps a-t-il pu rester présent ?

L'idéal du moi du moi est là : du côté de Héron (et de leur agression réelle), « la voix de ses camarades le pressait d'être un chic type »¹⁰, du côté de son père (symbolique), la voix le pressait « d'être un bon catholique avant tout » et puis encore les voix « d'être fidèle à sa patrie, de contribuer à relever son langage et ses traditions déchues »¹¹. « Et c'était le vacarme de toutes ces voix, sonnante creux, qui le faisait hésiter dans la poursuite de ses fantômes. Il n'y prêtait l'oreille qu'un instant, mais il n'était heureux que loin d'elles, hors de leur atteinte, seul ou bien en compagnie de ses camarades fantasmagiques »¹². Au-delà de toutes ces voix particulières, voilà son égo qui se constitue supportant le réel de ses camarades et surmontant le symbolique de son père et de ses maîtres.



⁹ Joyce, 611.

¹⁰ Joyce, 612.

¹¹ Joyce, 612.

¹² Joyce, 612.

À nouveau, voilà le deuxième schéma de la chaîne borroméenne (avec deux droites infinies et un cercle) qui vient réparer la faute de la chaîne borroméenne première.

« Peu après, il était en scène ». Ce n'est pas lui qui acquiert une vie personnelle, c'est la pièce de théâtre. « Il fut étonné de voir cette pièce, qui avait été pour lui, pendant les répétitions, une chose disparate et inerte, acquérir une vie personnelle »¹³.

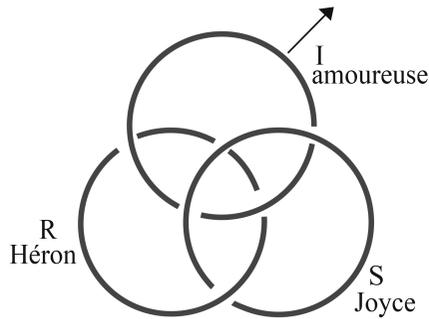
Le développement du moi chez Freud ou le narcissisme

Tout le monde n'a pas vécu une scène de la raclée comme Joyce et tout le monde n'a pas développé une habileté poétique et littéraire comme Joyce. La scène de la raclée n'en fait aucunement un monstre, un être à part, un psychotique ou un extraterrestre ; car, *mutatis mutandis*, nous retrouvons la même structure, exactement la même structure, chez chacun des humains sans exception et c'est cette toute petite structure, cette toute petite pensée qui remplit toute une vie. C'est le travail de l'analyse de la laisser s'épanouir, pourvu que l'analyste puisse se le permettre.

Avec lalangue, chacun a été plongé depuis toujours dans l'émergence de la parole créatrice véritablement poétique (chaque être humain est un petit Joyce : symbolique). Pour chacun, les aléas de la vie sont venus le frapper, donner une raclée à cette joie de lalangue (chaque être humain est en même temps un petit Héron : réel). Le réel de la vie est toujours déjà venu détourner et enchaîner l'efflorescence du symbolique de lalangue.

Avec cet enchaînement des aléas réels de la vie et de lalangue, l'imaginaire d'un narcissisme primaire (qui n'a jamais existé) semble radicalement perdu : *his majesty the baby* est une belle image, mais ça ne tient pas. Oui, il y avait bien les talents, les possibilités infinies de l'*infans* qui ne demandaient qu'à se développer comme un Moi idéal sans faille. Mais le Mozart, amoureux de la musique, a été assassiné dans l'œuf. Avec l'enchaînement du symbolique et du réel, l'imaginaire s'est envolé.

¹³ Joyce, 612.



Dans son écrit « Pour introduire le narcissisme », Freud différencie d'emblée l'autoérotisme et le narcissisme : l'autoérotisme ne suppose aucun développement, tandis que du côté du narcissisme, « le Moi doit subir un développement »¹⁴. Mais quel est ce développement qui fait que le Moi est le Moi ? Tout le texte de Freud est polarisé vers la réponse à cette question, la question de ce qu'est le Moi en ce sens qu'il n'est rien d'autre que son propre développement : le Moi n'est rien d'autre que ce qui moi-ise. « Le développement du moi consiste à s'éloigner du narcissisme primaire (à l'avoir toujours déjà perdu dans l'enchaînement de lalangue par le réel), et engendre une aspiration intense à recouvrer ce narcissisme »¹⁵. Je vous renvoie ici à mon livre *L'âme du narcissisme*.¹⁶

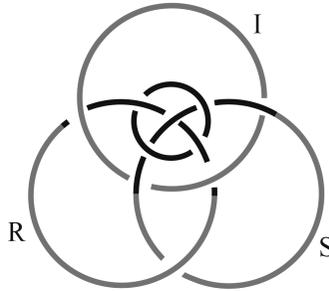
Mais comment satisfaire à cette aspiration à recouvrer le narcissisme primaire, imaginaire toujours déjà perdu ? Il s'agit de construire non pas une réplique imaginaire du Moi idéal (du narcissisme primaire toujours déjà perdu), mais un Idéal du moi construit sur le fonctionnement symbolique lui-même, sur lalangue elle-même. Naturellement, cet Idéal du moi risque toujours d'être entaché des pièges où lalangue s'est déjà trouvée enchaînée avec la voix du père, la voix des camarades, la voix de la religion, du quand dira-t-on, de la police, de la conscience, etc. S'il n'était que ces voix coercitives, l'idéal du moi ne serait qu'une nouvelle raclée administrée cette fois par le surmoi féroce et méchant.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, « Pour introduire le narcissisme », trad. Jean Laplanche, dans *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Puf, 1991–2019), 12:221.

¹⁵ Freud, 243.

¹⁶ Christian Fierens, *L'âme du narcissisme* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2016).

Mais il est possible de vider toutes ces voix de leur signifié ; la voix du Surmoi vaut alors comme un signifiant sans signifié, où le grand Autre ne répond pas, c'est le signifiant du grand Autre barré. Joyce l'écrit : « C'était le vacarme de toutes ces voix, sonnante creux, qui le faisait hésiter... » Et « Il n'y prêtait l'oreille qu'un instant, mais il n'était heureux que loin d'elles, hors de leur atteinte »¹⁷. La voix vide proclame alors « Jouis », c'est le véritable tour de force du Surmoi et de l'Idéal du moi. Celui qui ouvre l'invention de l'inconscient. Petite pensée qui peut soulever tous les aléas du réel et remplir toute une vie. Pour cela : « faut l'faire ».



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¹⁷ Joyce, « Portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme », 1:611.

Dries Josten and Levi Haeck*

Towards an Affective Understanding of Pure Judgments of Taste

Keywords

affect, Kant, Arendt, natural humanity, moral humanity, political/aesthetic humanity, pure judgement of taste, pleasure, desire

Abstract

In this article, we argue that “affect” should be an important notion in political philosophy. We do this, firstly, by tracing the notion of affect through the philosophical system of Immanuel Kant. We find that affect plays a threefold role for Kant, which can be mapped onto Hannah Arendt’s distinction between natural humanity, moral humanity, and political/aesthetic humanity (our rephrasing). Affect clearly plays a role on the level of natural humanity, and it is arguably to be pinpointed from within moral humanity. With regard to political/aesthetic humanity, we argue that in order to understand how pure judgments of taste can vouch for the ‘bridging’ of the gap between natural and moral humanity, an understanding of the role of aesthetic *affection* is essential. Secondly, we broaden the Kantian scope of affect by discussing how Žižek, in Lacan’s wake, has tried (but failed) to systematically examine the political relevance of pure judgments of taste. To understand how humans are able to come together politically, we need a better understanding of affect as that which allows *pure form* to effectuate a subjectively but universally shareable proclivity for (dis)pleasure and desire.

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K afektivnemu razumevanju čistih sodb okusa

Ključne besede

afekt, Kant, Arendt, naravna človečnost, moralna človečnost, politična/estetska človečnost, čista sodba okusa, ugodje, želja

* University of Ghent, Belgium

dries.josten@ugent.be | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5551-9235>

levi.haeck@ugent.be | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7856-8355>

Povzetek

V tem članku zagovarjamo tezo, da bi moral biti afekt pomemben pojem v politični filozofiji. Da bi to pokazali, sledimo pojmu afekta v filozofskem sistemu Immanuela Kanta in ugotavljamo, da ima afekt pri Kantu tri vloge, pri čemer si za njihovo razlikovanje pomagamo z razlikovanjem Hannah Arendt med naravno človečnostjo, moralno človečnostjo in politično/estetsko človečnostjo (naša reformulacija). Afekt ima očitno vlogo na ravni naravne človečnosti, verjetno pa ga je mogoče opredeliti znotraj moralne človečnosti. Glede politične/estetske človečnosti pa trdimo, da je za razumevanje, kako lahko čiste sodbe okusa jamčijo za »premostitev« vrzeli med naravno in moralno človečnostjo, bistveno razumevanje vloge estetske *afekcije*. Drugič, kantovski domet afekta razširimo z razpravo o tem, kako je Žižek, sledeč Lacanu, poskušal (a mu ni uspelo) sistematično preučiti političen pomen čistih sodb okusa. Da bi razumeli, kako se lahko človeška bitja politično združujejo, potrebujemo boljše razumevanje afekta kot tisto, kar omogoča, da *čista forma* udejanja subjektivno, a univerzalno deljeno nagnjenje k (ne)užitku in želji.



Introduction

How is it possible for people to come together politically? This might come across as a naïve question. People do, after all, already do so. Philosophically speaking, however, this topic is not only poorly understood, it is also quite often neglected. In an attempt to revive this question, we will draw upon Kant. In doing so, we will deal with the blind spots left behind by Hannah Arendt and Slavoj Žižek when interpreting Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (hereinafter referred to as the "third Critique").¹ The paper argues that the general conditions of possibility of coming together politically can be articulated by means of the notion of affect and its role in pure judgments of taste. In line with scholars such as Lyotard, Žižek has famously argued that the political value of

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¹ When referring to Kant, we refer to the *Akademieausgabe* (*Gesammelte Schriften*) by indicating title abbreviation, volume and page numbers (e.g., KU, 5:178), but we quote from English translations. For the title abbreviations and translations used, see the list at the end of the article.

the third Critique lies in its discussion of the (dynamically) sublime.² Inspired by Lacan, he relaunches ideology critique by trying out not so much an epistemological account³ as an account focusing on *jouissance*. However, Žižek does not give a systematic analysis of what constitutes ideology as such. More precisely, Žižek fails to see that a critique of ideology is also (and perhaps more interestingly so) to be found in the third Critique's "Analytic of the Beautiful."⁴ Although he acknowledges that the sublime must always be read as *following* the beautiful, namely in the sense that the sublime is the point of collapse of what the beautiful stands for,⁵ Žižek still fails to grasp what the beautiful would, then, "stand for."⁶ This leads one to wonder why Žižek devotes so little attention to the beautiful. In our view, the main reason for this is the minor role of affect in his philosophy. We will thus attempt to contribute to ideology critique by properly exploring the notion of affect and its role in the constitution of the human being as a political being. In view of this, however, we will indeed return to the philosophy of someone who is often portrayed as being totally apathetic, asexual, and affectless: the sage of Königsberg, Immanuel Kant. Although Kant himself is often evidently dismissive of affect, we argue that this notion is crucial to his philosophy.

In what follows, we will first delve into Kant's account of affect, which will serve as a prelude necessary to be able to reconsider, in line with Arendt, the political relevance of pure judgments of taste. Our discussion of the relevance of pure judgments of taste builds on but also attempts to move beyond Hannah Arendt's famous take on it in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. By means of our

² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 228; Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 46–7.

³ That is to say, Žižek moves away from the diagnosis that one falls prey to ideology due to a lack of knowledge. He convincingly argues that such an approach makes no sense in relation to the 'cynical ideology' of our time. (Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 26–30) This form of ideology invokes a certain distance from a universal knowing and, so the argument goes in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, preserves the illusion constitutive of ideology.

⁴ KU, 5:203–44, §1–22.

⁵ Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 228.

⁶ Žižek mentions the beautiful, but merely refers to it as symbol of the good, and refrains from exploring how the beautiful and the good are distinguished by Kant: "Beauty is the symbol of the Good, i.e., of the moral Law as the pacifying agency which reins in our egotism and renders possible harmonious social coexistence." Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 47.

focus on affect, we also hope to shed new light on a crucial issue in contemporary critique of ideology: the place of pleasure in the human condition. In our forward-looking conclusion, we highlight the potential avenues of research that could emanate from our approach.

* * *

In this section, we will explain why considering affect⁷ from a Kantian point of view is an interesting starting position to examine the conditions of possibility of “coming together politically.”⁸ In our view, the Kantian conception of the human being as *both* an animal belonging to the realm of nature *and* as a moral subject belonging to the realm of freedom, seems to draw in a notion of affect. Not only do we encounter affects in human beings considered as *animals*, but they also seem to be at the heart of the position that bridges the gap between nature and freedom: the *aesthetic* subject. In the Kantian universe, affects seem to be the point where the “pure” aspects of our humanity anchor themselves in its “pathological” aspects. Moreover, if we may take seriously the examples Kant gives, this anchoring seems to take place in a manner that is not only morally and aesthetically, but also *politically*, relevant. We will, in the spirit of Hannah Arendt, discuss affect in reference to her tripartite distinction of humans as (i) natural beings (natural humanity), (ii) moral beings (moral humanity), and (iii) actual inhabitants of the earth (political/aesthetic humanity).⁹ More in particular, we will argue that affect, as a specific type of feeling, (i) occupies a (straightforward and unsurprising) place in a conception of man as a natural being, (ii) is a feature of our animality that is excluded from but still must be pinpointed from within the realm of morality, and (iii) seems to play a central but often unnoticed role in man’s capacity to bridge the gap between (i) and (ii).

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⁷ Examples of affects are: longing (KU, 5:178), hope, fear, joy, anger, scorn, laughter (KU, 5:332), timidity, fortitude (Anth, 7:256–8), as well as enthusiasm (SF, 7:85–86). Although sometimes Kant takes longing to be a passion rather than as an affect (V–Anth/Fried, 25:589).

⁸ In our view, this is so even if 1) Kant is often dismissive of affects, and 2) a consistent account thereof is absent from the Kantian corpus.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 26–27.

First, we will give a brief overview of what Kant has to say about affects, and how he distinguishes them from passions in light of his faculty psychology, i.e., on the level of man as a natural being. Then we will highlight, to some extent contrary to his general assessment of them, the possible role of affect in morality. Subsequently, we discuss how this seemingly inconsistent picture can nevertheless be quilted via the aesthetic-political role of affect.

Pathological Affect in Natural Humanity

Affects, according to Kant, are “movements” of the mind (*Gemüt*)¹⁰ grounded in “a feeling of pleasure or displeasure” that do “not allow a subject [in his present state] to rise to reflection.” That is, affects impede a subject from considering “the representation of reason whether one should give himself up to [. . .] or refuse” something.¹¹ This is because an affect involves “surprise by means of sensation, in which the mind’s self-control (*animus sui compos*) is suspended.”¹² In this capacity, affects are to be distinguished from passions:

Affect is a feeling through which we lose our composure [*aus der Faßung kommen*], but passion is a desire which takes away our composure [*aus der Faßung bringt*]. The desire is not a perception of what is actual, but merely of what is possible and future. Feeling however aims at the present. Actual affects therefore appertain to feeling and passions to the desires.¹³

Both passions and affects hinder the subject’s reason,¹⁴ but the former are concerned with *inclinations*, while the latter concern *feelings*.¹⁵ Passions are said to

¹⁰ EEKU, 20:238.

¹¹ Anth, 7:251, § 73.

¹² Anth, 7:252, § 74.

¹³ V–Anth/Fried, 25:589.

¹⁴ Anth, 7:251.

¹⁵ More specifically, whereas an affect is an incapacity “to estimate and compare the object with the sum total of all our sensation [and/or feeling],” a passion occurs when one is “unable to estimate the object with the sum total of all inclination” (V–Anth/Fried, 25:590). Kant did not always sharply distinguish between passions and affects. In fact, in early lectures they seem to be treated synonymously (this is in line with Hutcheson’s account, Kant’s reference point in these matters). For instance, in Anth–V/Collins he is reported as having stated: “A desire that is so big that it makes it impossible to compare the object of our desire with the sum of all inclinations, is called affect” (25:210; quoted from Frierson,

involve the faculty of desire, and are therefore grafted upon a representation of the future, while affects, due to the involvement of feeling, are grafted on to the present.¹⁶ Affects hamper one's ability to keep one's composure, and to "keep one's composure means when the state of the mind is subject to our power of choice."¹⁷ For Kant, affects are thoughtless paroxysms,¹⁸ but they are nonetheless still *able to cause desires* (just like cognition causes feelings).¹⁹ Now, in this context, affect is to be seen as an aspect of human nature insofar as it highlights the latter's *animality*: "In the state of animality, where after all the first human beings were, the affects served to double all of their powers and thus provided for their preservation." Preserving these affects in a civilized context would defeat this purpose:

If the human being has emerged from animality, he does not need the affects anymore and must suppress them. Nature thus implanted the affects in us only provisionally and it gave them to us as a spur to activity, as it were, in order to develop our humanity. In opposition to affect is equanimity, the state of inner repose of the soul, not apathy but affectlessness. [. . .] Furthermore, in opposition to affect is the capacity to control oneself with composure during a surging affect.²⁰

"Affects and Passions"). Here, desires and affects are not yet uncoupled. For a comparison between Hutcheson and Kant, and for a historical account of the genesis of Kant's more clear-cut distinction between passions and effects, see Patrick Frierson, "Affects and Passions," in *Kant's Lectures on Anthropology: A Critical Guide*, ed. Alix Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94–113.

¹⁶ However, this is not to say that the *prospect* of an affect could not in any way be future-oriented (V-Anth/Mron, 25:1343). In an affect, the future can be implicated, but it is implicated *from within the present*. That is why affects and passions are essentially different from each other as concerns their quality, even if they "are equally vehement in degree" (7:251; cf. VA-Anth/Mensch 25:1115).

¹⁷ V-Anth/Fried, 25:589; and, as Frierson ("Affects and Passions," 111) points out: while affects bypass this ability to keep one's composure (thus *annulling* rationality), passions act on it (thus *influencing* rationality).

¹⁸ Anth, 7:253.

¹⁹ V-Anth/Mensch, 25:1125; according to Kant's "psychology," there are three basic "faculties" of the mind: cognition, feeling, and desire. Feeling is indeed right in the middle.

²⁰ V-Anth/Mron, 25:1342–43; cf. V-Anth/Mensch, 25:1125.

Affects According to Moral Humanity?

At first glance, the preceding picture is generally quite in line with Kant's moral philosophy. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant tells us that "moderation in affects and passions" (just like self-control and calm reflection) is not only "good for all sorts of purposes but even seem[s] to constitute a part of the *inner* worth of a person [. . .]."²¹ As is well known, the main focus of this work is on how "the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world," whereby, "if I were only this, all my actions *would* always be in conformity with the autonomy of the will." However, "since at the same time I intuit myself as a member of the world of sense, they [my actions] *ought* to be in conformity with it [the autonomy of the will]." This "*categorical* ought represents a synthetic proposition *a priori*, since to *my will affected by sensible desires* there is added the idea of the same will but belonging to the world of the understanding."²² Now, this addition of the idea of a purely practical will to *the will affected by sensible desires* presupposes, conversely, that the categorical imperative itself can *also* affect our will. This is what Kant calls "moral feeling," namely the "*subjective* effect that the law exercises on the will, to which reason alone delivers the objective grounds."²³ Moreover, Kant grants that

for a sensibly affected rational being to will that for which reason alone prescribes the "ought," it is admittedly required that his reason have the capacity to *induce a feeling of pleasure* or of delight in the fulfillment of duty, and thus there is required a causality of reason to determine sensibility in conformity with its principles.²⁴

²¹ GMS, 4:394.

²² GMS, 4:454; some italics added.

²³ GMS, 4:460.

²⁴ GMS, 4:460; respect, for instance, as the *consciousness* of the "immediate determination of the will by means of the law," is "the *effect* of the law on the subject," namely a "feeling that is not "*received* by means of influence" but rather "a feeling *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept" (GMS, 4:401n). This is still sharply distinguishable from "the *agreeable*, as that which influences the will only by means of feeling from merely subjective causes, which hold only for the senses of this or that one, not as a principle of reason, which holds for everyone." This passage from GMS distinguishes between the agreeable and a principle of reason on the basis of subjective causes, and general validity (holding for everyone). The third Critique adds pure judgment of taste, which confuses things, since it is a judgment on subjective grounds, but independent of the existence of an object. We will come back to this in the next section. Crucial here is that for the categorical imperative to be an *imperative*, it needs to anchor itself in a will that is "exposed also to subjective

This means that *feeling* is both internal to Kant's moral philosophy as well as significantly external it: it is external to the idea of an autonomous will, but central to the idea of the moral law as a categorical imperative. In fact, Kant even says that the universal formula of the categorical imperative (e.g., "*act in accordance with a maxim that can at the same time make itself a universal law*"), can only be specified as a threefold formulation (that is, the three formulae of universality, humanity, and autonomy) by relating it to the subjective, pathological, or sensible aspects of our human condition. Thus, these "three ways of representing the principle of morality"

are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and any one of them of itself unites the other two in it. There is nevertheless a difference among them, which is indeed subjectively rather than objectively practical, intended namely to bring an idea of reason closer to intuition (by a certain analogy) and thereby to feeling.²⁵

The idea intimated here is this: if it were not for our human nature, which is structurally torn between affectation by sensibility, on the one hand, and affectation by reason, on the other, we would not even *have* the three formulations of the categorical imperative, arguably the centerpieces of Kant's moral philosophy.²⁶

In spite of this striking role of affect for morality, Kant's practical philosophy can still be seen (and in a sense, rightly so) as completely affectless, inhuman even. His own contempt for and criticism of affect (see section Pathological Affect in Natural Humanity) cannot be neglected and does of course add to this picture. However, we hold that there is a split within Kant's practical philosophy to which Kant was quite sensitive himself. We have on the one hand a "pure" moral sphere, and on the other hand a "pathological" moral sphere where the

conditions (certain incentives) that are not always in conformity with reason (as is actually the case with human beings)" (GMS, 4:412–13).

²⁵ GMS, 4:436.

²⁶ Admittedly, in this aspect of his philosophy Kant does not come to the point of developing a more fine-grained theory of the role of feeling, let alone of *affect*. This is, after all, not his concern here. Moreover, if affect is indeed what *hampers* our ability to maintain our composure, to control ourselves, because it overwhelms us (quantitatively) with a sensation, then perhaps affect, as a type of feeling, cannot be counted among the moral feelings described in the Groundwork.

former is to exercise its jurisdiction. *How* exactly this exercise of power is possible is a question recognized by Kant himself already in the *Groundwork*.²⁷ In our view, Kant most significantly addressed this question in the third Critique, where (and elsewhere – cf. *infra*) affect is portrayed as being morally significant, at times namely as not unworthy of praise in political contexts.

* * *

As argued in the previous sections, the notion of affect runs through Kant's philosophy in a peculiar way. Even though affect is ascribed to the human being's natural state, this ascription is perhaps also to be made from the standpoint of man as a moral agent. How could the objective moral law effectuate a subjectively felt categorical imperative? This "effectuation" can be made sense of by means of the notion of affect.²⁸ It seems that a human being cannot only be affected by sensations, as described above,²⁹ but also by *laws*. What else could instantiate so-called "moral feeling" (the subjective effect of the law)³⁰ other than the pathological capacity for *affect as such*? To develop this hypothesis, we propose to take a look at Kant's notions of enthusiasm and humor, which form a part of his politico-aesthetic discussions in the third Critique. Before we can do this, however, we must, in line with Arendt, take a look at the political significance of pure judgments of taste. After all, Kant himself had put his hope on pure judgments of taste precisely in order to quilt the divided realms of natural humanity and moral humanity, of nature and freedom.³¹

²⁷ We consider the following citation to be a good example of how Kant anticipates the problem of his unearthly practical philosophy: "Es ist aber gänzlich unmöglich, einzusehen, d. i. a priori begreiflich zu machen, wie ein bloßer Gedanke, der selbst nichts Sinnliches in sich enthält, eine Empfindung der Lust oder Unlust hervorbringe; denn das ist eine besondere Art von Causalität, von der wie von aller Causalität wir gar nichts a priori bestimmen können, sondern darum allein die Erfahrung befragen müssen." GMS, 4:460.

²⁸ This is in line with Zupančič's argument that "form itself must be appropriated as a material surplus, in order for it to be capable of determining the will. Kant's point, I repeat, is not that all traces of materiality have to be purged from the determining ground of the moral will but, rather, that the form of the moral law has itself to become 'material,' in order for it to function as a motive force of action." This concerns what she calls "ethical transubstantiation," namely "the question of the possibility of converting a mere form into a materially efficacious drive." Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real* (London: Verso, 2011), 15.

²⁹ Anth, 7:252, §74.

³⁰ GMS, 4:460.

³¹ KU, 5:176.

Affected by Neither Concept nor Object

First of all, we need to establish that pure judgment of taste can be considered as involving affect.³² In the first section of the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” Kant makes it clear that pure judgment of taste concerns the feeling of pleasure and displeasure.³³ Interestingly, pleasure and displeasure are, thus, common to both affect and pure judgments of taste (see section Pathological Affect in Natural Humanity). Yet, affect does not allow a subject to rise to reflection at the moment of affection, while Kant specifies that a judgment of taste deals with “the reflection of the subject on his own state (of pleasure or displeasure).”³⁴ This reflection does not allow for an objectively and universally valid judgment. As a consequence, the predicate “beautiful” in the judgment “this rose is beautiful” does not allow for subsumption and comparison, i.e., it does not give us a rule with which to determine objectively whether or not a particular thing is beautiful, so that we could compare it with other particulars within the class of beautiful objects.³⁵ In pure judgment of taste, reflection is key, but then the question arises: reflection on what? In the “Analytic of the Beautiful,”³⁶ Kant defines the ground of aesthetic judgment as follows: “The relation to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, by means of which nothing at all in the object is designated, but in which the subject feels itself as it is affected by the representation.”³⁷ The feeling of pleasure in pure judgment of taste is not attributed to the existing object. Instead, the pleasure is effectuated by the free play of our faculties, i.e., as the subject “is *affected* by the representation.” Pure judgment of taste thus entails reflection *on* the felt effect of our faculties vis-à-vis the sensible form of an object, i.e., it entails reflection on the affect caused *by the faculties*.³⁸ Peculiar to

³² For another insightful account on the role of affect in beauty, see Maria Borges, “Emotion and the Beautiful in Art,” *Con-Textos Kantianos: International Journal of Philosophy* 15 (2022): 263–71.

³³ KU, 5:204.

³⁴ KU, 5:285–86.

³⁵ KU, 5:215–16.

³⁶ KU, 5:203–44, § 1–22.

³⁷ KU, 5:204.

³⁸ For more on this “effect logic,” see: Gertrudis Van de Vijver, “Embarrassments of Knowledge: A Philosophical Comment On Lacan’s Formulae of Sexuation,” *Psychoanalytische Perspectieven* 41, no. 2 (2023): 171–86; Levi Haeck and Gertrudis Van de Vijver, “Canguilhem’s Divided Subject: A Kantian Perspective on the Intertwinement of Logic and Life,” in *Canguilhem and Continental Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Giuseppe Bianco, Charles Wolfe,

judgment of taste is that we can and must presuppose this capacity for affect(a-
tion) in all humans, which makes up its universality and disinterestedness.³⁹

That is to say, the grounds of the *subjective universality* of pure judgment of taste lie in the *disinterestedness* of the judgment. Kant characterizes “interest” as pleasure combined with the representation of the existence of the object.⁴⁰ Such pleasure always relates to the faculty of desire “either as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with [it as] its determining ground.”⁴¹ The ground of a judgment of beauty, however, has nothing to do with pleasure in the existence of the object of representation. In pure judgment of taste, we lay “a claim to validity for everyone without the universality that pertains to objects, i.e., it must be combined with a claim to subjective universality.”⁴² Crucially, in claiming (aesthetic) universality, one appeals neither to the object of practical reason, nor to the object of bodily sensations, but to a subjective disposition supposed to be shared by all.

In this way, Kant is at once able to distinguish the beautiful from both the good and the agreeable (*Angenehme*).

- 1) The agreeable, on the one hand, is that “which pleases the senses in sensation.”⁴³ In this judgment the grounds are subjective, but rely on the felt effect of an object on the senses, i.e., on the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. Therefore, one takes an interest in the object’s existence, precisely because what one judges to be agreeable is the effect of the object on our subjec-

and Gertrudis Van de Vijver (Cham: Springer, 2023) 123–46; Levi Haeck, “Immanuel Kants transcendentale logica: Singulier, algemeen, heteroegen.” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 83, no. 2 (2021): 217–48.

³⁹ For universality, see KU 5:212; for disinterestedness KU, 5:204–6. For a discussion of both, see Bart Vandenabeele, “The Subjective Universality of Aesthetic Judgements Revisited,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 4 (October 2008): 410–25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayno42>.

⁴⁰ KU, 5:204.

⁴¹ KU, 5:204.

⁴² KU, 5:212.

⁴³ KU, 5:206.

tive disposition. This is what distinguishes it from the pleasurableness of the beautiful, which, as we know, does not rely on the existence of an object and involves no felt effect of an object as such.

- 2) The good, on the other hand, is “that what pleases through the mere concept.”⁴⁴ Thus, here too we encounter a distinguishing feature of the beautiful, which does not, as we know, rely on a concept. Moreover, if “one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty gets lost.”⁴⁵

Thus, with pure judgment of taste, we get a judgment that (i) does not rely on a concept, (ii) nor on the existence of the object. Interestingly, the judgment of beauty has something in common with both, without possibly being reduced to either one of them. It shares with the agreeable that the ground of the judgment is subjective, i.e., the feeling of pleasure, while it shares with the good the universality of our discursive capacities. This very configuration, we claim, is what allows pure judgment of taste to quilt the practical and the theoretical realms, freedom and nature. However, as will be shown below, in order to establish the binding of these two realms, we need to understand how it is possible that our faculties are the cause of the reality of our representations.⁴⁶

A Quilting Point

Consider Kant’s definition of the faculty of desire, which goes as follows: “The faculty of desire is a being’s faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations.”⁴⁷ Kant was heavily criticized for this definition. He tries to give an answer to the main objections in a fascinating footnote appended to the third Critique’s introduction.⁴⁸ The main objection is quite obvious: one can wish whatever one wants, but the wish will

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⁴⁴ KU, 5:207.

⁴⁵ KU, 5:215.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of this “project of unification,” see: Sebastian Gardner, “Kant’s Third Critique: The Project of Unification,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 78 (July 2016): 161–85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246116000254>.

⁴⁷ “Das Begehungsvermögen ist das Vermögen desselben, durch seine Vorstellungen Ursache von der Wirklichkeit der Gegenstände dieser Vorstellungen zu sein.” KpV, 5:9n; we added the German here because this is quite a controversial definition, and was already in Kant’s time.

⁴⁸ KU, 5:177–78n.

not become reality simply by virtue of wishing it. This, however, is not exactly what Kant is after. Generally speaking, in this definition Kant is concerned with the way in which a representation alone can be the cause of something, say, of another representation—and of the object that belongs to it. This means that even idle wishes are an effect of “our faculties for the production of an object.” It is worth quoting Kant a bit more at length here:

Although in the case of such fantastic desires we are aware of the inadequacy of our representations [. . .] to be *causes* of their objects, nevertheless their [i.e., the representations’] relation as causes, hence the representation of their *causality*, is contained in every *wish*, and it is especially visible if this is an affect, namely *longing*. For the latter prove by the fact that they expand the heart and make it flaccid and thus exhaust our powers that the powers are repeatedly strained by means of representations, but the mind, in view of the impossibility, is inexorably allowed to sink back into exhaustion. Even the prayers for the avoidance of great and so far as one can see unavoidable evil and many superstitious means for the attainment of naturally impossible ends prove the causal relation of representations to their objects, which cannot be held back from striving to achieve their effect even by the consciousness of their inadequacy for it.⁴⁹

Even though we know very well that what we wish for is impossible to obtain, the representation of the causality of the representation remains unaltered. Now, pure judgment of taste has to be understood in line with this representation of causality, for it is caused by nothing but the felt effect of one’s own faculties.⁵⁰ Conversely, however, it seems that pure judgments of taste, because they are both without an object and without a concept, lay bare the very condition of possibility for (moral) representations to have an effect on a human subject.

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To further illustrate the latter point, we will briefly elaborate on two notions closely related to our interpretation of pure judgment of taste: enthusiasm and humor.

⁴⁹ KU, AA05: 178n. For more on the relevance of this footnote for Kant’s theory of objectivity, see: Gertrudis Van de Vijver and Eli Noé, “The Constraint is the Possibility: A Dynamical Perspective on Kant’s Theory of Objectivity,” *Idealistic Studies* 41, no. 1–2 (2011): 95–112.

⁵⁰ We consider this the right moment to stress that our article is in line with Rado Riha’s focus on the self-affectation in Kant’s philosophical system. Rado Riha, *Kant in Lacan’scher Absicht: Die Kopernikanische Wende und das Reale* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2018).

- 1) Kant explains enthusiasm [*Enthusiasm*] as the “idea of the good with affect,” whereby this “state of mind seems to be sublime, so much so that it is commonly maintained that without it nothing great can be accomplished.” Nonetheless, every affect is, as such, blind. Affect is still, and always will be, “that movement of the mind that makes it incapable of engaging in free consideration of principles, in order to determine itself in accordance with them. Thus, it cannot in any way merit a satisfaction of reason.” And yet enthusiasm, as the idea of the good with affect, “is aesthetically sublime, because it is a stretching of the powers through ideas, which give the mind a momentum that acts far more powerfully and persistently than the impetus given by sensory representations.”⁵¹

- 2) The humorous affects, e.g., the humorous conversations during a lively party of about three to eight guests,⁵² are “an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into *nothing*.”⁵³ In the case of jokes, which must be “counted as agreeable rather than as beautiful art,”⁵⁴

the play begins with thoughts which, as a whole, insofar as they are to be expressed sensibly, also occupy the body; and since the understanding, in this presentation in which it does not find what was expected, suddenly relaxes, one feels the effect of this *relaxation in the body* through the oscillation of the organs, which promotes the restoration of their balance and has a beneficial influence on health.⁵⁵

Both enthusiasm and humor testify to the effect that a mere thought, of whatever kind it may be, can have. Both enthusiasm and humor show a similar structure as pure judgment of taste with regard to the latter’s articulation of how it is possible for a mere thought to anchor itself in the body, to have subjective effect. This configuration cannot suffice to demand universal assent, as is the case for *pure* judgments of taste, but it does offer a crucial perspective on what the human’s “split constitution” amounts to, or how it can function. As

⁵¹ KU, 5:272.

⁵² Of all the settings in which Kant dared to venture himself, this is arguably the most political one.

⁵³ KU, 5:332; italics added.

⁵⁴ KU, 5:332.

⁵⁵ KU, 5:332; italics added.

the nodal point between thought and the body *per se*, we can appreciate affect as the baseline condition of possibility for *becoming* something other than a plaything of nature.

Why, then, do we focus on pure judgment of taste, rather than *solely* on affect as such? We argue that pure judgment of taste must still be put center stage, because it shows the connection of affect to discursivity in a *universal way*. This does not hold for enthusiasm (which involves sublimity and thus is not coupled to *sensus communis* as strongly as beauty is)⁵⁶ and humor (which is merely agreeable, and thus not subject to the claim of universal assent), where the connection is general at best. In addition, pure judgment of taste allows us, because of its “emptiness” (with regard to both the object as well as to the concept), to make explicit what underlies moral feeling (i.e., the subjective effect of the moral law). *That* is why beauty is able to bridge nature and freedom.

This quilting aspect of beauty is exactly what Žižek, by focusing on the sublime, does not grasp. By rushing to the sublime, one forgets how a momentary feeling of harmony, i.e., of sense, gets constituted to begin with. In order to appreciate the political value of the beautiful, one must be attentive to the role of affect(a-tion) in it. This is something that, e.g., Paul Guyer and Allen Wood did not fail to see, as they rightly remark “that our disinterested affection for beauty prepares us for the non-self-regarding respect and love for mankind that is required of us by morality.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

We hope that we have marked the crucial role of affect for pure judgment of taste as such, as well having paved the way for further investigations into its political relevance. The manner in which pure judgment of taste functions as a quilting point between nature and freedom has been made more palpable. The beautiful involves an affect, namely a felt effect of x. The x in this case is nothing but form, that is, the forms exhibited by our capacity to judge vis-à-vis a certain sensible

⁵⁶ See, for example, Kant’s discussion of fearfulness regarding the dynamical sublime in KU, 5:260–64.

⁵⁷ Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xxvii.

Vorstellung. Since pure judgment of taste involves no interest in the existence of the object, the delight in this reflective judgment stems from the free play of the faculties, on account of which aesthetic judgment is subjectively, yet universally valid. The judgment of beauty is about the ability to be affected by nothing but our faculties and the free play between them. Importantly, contrary to affection for sublimity, which can only be cultivated by some,⁵⁸ the affection proper to the judgment of beauty implies a capacity or ability that is, in principle, shared by all judging beings. In other words, while the sublime proliferates a politics of exclusion, there is no principled exclusion as to who is able to formulate pure judgments of taste. We think that, on the basis of this programmatic analysis, further avenues of research are possible.

Our interpretation of the role of affect in aesthetic judgments and its political signification can help to elucidate the importance of something like moral *feeling*, and clarify why the moral law appears to us human beings as an imperative. Notwithstanding the significant distinction between morality and aesthetics, we would like to propose that the felt effect of the law as an imperative (moral feeling), presupposes, quite like the judgments of taste, a universally shareable capacity for being affected by form as such (in this case, the law).⁵⁹

We know that pure judgment of taste bridges the gap between practical and theoretical reason, and that affect plays a role in this bridging. However, what was left untouched in our interpretation is the principle for this bridging: purposiveness without a purpose.⁶⁰ This would however merit further investigation, as it too can highlight the importance of form as such. The purposiveness of aesthetic judgment is not (ful)filled by a specific purpose, or: the form remains without content. We can connect this to the fact that beauty as a predicate does not signify anything *in* the object deemed to be beautiful.⁶¹ That is, a judgment of taste does not predicate something of the object, but entails reflection on the felt effect (i.e., affect) of the free play of the faculties. Thus, we propose to understand beauty along the lines of a Freudian and Lacanian framework, where-

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⁵⁸ Cf. KU, 5:260–64.

⁵⁹ See Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 15, 17.

⁶⁰ EEKU, 20:242–43; KU, 5:180.

⁶¹ KU, 5:207, 215–16, 285–86.

by beauty functions as a mere *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* or empty signifier.⁶² If the beautiful is understood as we have been arguing, it should be understood as a functioning of mere form (resulting in a specific type of affect); its element of purposeless purposiveness might be understood as resting on a structure of “signification,” which comes close to the definition of a signifier in Lacanian theory: that which signifies something for another signifier. Understood in this way, the beautiful expresses a formal structure which is itself without meaning, but which allows for the production of meaning.⁶³ In this structure, forms of pleasure and desire can be anchored.

Let us now address the question with which this essay was launched, namely: how is it possible to come together politically? By discerning the importance of affectation in our understanding of pure judgment of taste, we are in a better position to compare it, qua structural features, with affects such as enthusiasm and humor.⁶⁴ Technically speaking, we could say that knowing what affects are is relevant to knowing what pure judgments of taste are, because the latter involve a kind of affectation as well. However, there is an important difference between affects such as humor and enthusiasm and the affectation proper to pure taste—a difference which will turn out to be key in addressing the issue of coming together politically. This difference is in our view wrongly suppressed by Arendt, even if she rightly connects affect (namely, enthusiasm) to pure taste. By bringing affects such as enthusiasm closer to pure judgment of taste, Arendt forgets how affects actually add an element to pure taste that it would otherwise lack.

Pure taste involves a structure that allows a subject to be affected by the activity of its faculties, which, as Arendt explains quite well, involves intersubjectivity.

⁶² For a thorough article on the role of affectation and signification, see Gertrudis Van de Vijver, Ariane Bazan, and Sandrine Detandt, “The Mark, the Thing, and the Object: On What Commands Repetition in Freud and Lacan,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, art. no. 2244 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02244>. For an interpretation of pure judgment of taste and signification, see Moran Godess-Riccitelli, “The Cipher of Nature in Kant’s Third Critique: How to Represent Natural Beauty as Meaningful?,” *Con-textos Kantianos: International Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2020): 338–57.

⁶³ This is another part of the third Critique that is overlooked by Žižek, namely that the form or the Idea that fills one with delight corresponds to purposiveness, but then it is a “purposiveness—full stop.”

⁶⁴ And, perhaps, love, if this is indeed an affect.

She rightly suggests that the three maxims of the *sensus communis*⁶⁵ imply the presence of others.⁶⁶ This, however, is not a complete account. As such, *sensus communis* implies nothing but the idea (and the potentiality) of there being other judging beings whenever one *singularly* judges.⁶⁷ Otherness runs through the beautiful, humor, and enthusiasm, but it does so in a different way. Affects such as humor and enthusiasm involve our being affected by an actual other human being. Judging the beautiful, however, does not require another human being to be judging along with us whenever we are judging. It “merely” implies that if there is another judge, this other being too shall (i.e., must) know (dis)pleasure with regard to this or that object we deem beautiful or not. Pure judgment of taste does not depend on the assent of the other. It is the other way around: one appeals to the other’s assent on the basis of one’s judgment. What is shown by affects such as enthusiasm and humor is the exact inverse of this: affects (can) attest to the fact that, as judging beings, we can also be interpellated by other judging beings calling on us to respond. That is to say, what works in a joke as well as in the enthusiasm for a revolution relies on what the other is trying to *tell me*.⁶⁸ If one speaks, then one demands from the other to hear the universal in what is being said. This indeed goes for the revolutionaries, who would not do what they do (storm the Bastille) if it were not for the presence of a spectator, as Arendt rightly remarks.⁶⁹ The same goes for the funny guy, who would not tell a joke if nobody were around to hear it. This is the role of affect as pathology: in order to hear the universal, one must be able not only to speak, but to listen too. This is why Kant (and Arendt cites this passage), in a sense retroactively, says that “only in society does it become *interesting* to have taste.”⁷⁰ And also: the

⁶⁵ “1. To think for oneself; 2. To think in the position of everyone else; 3. Always to think in accordance with oneself.” KU, 5:294.

⁶⁶ Arendt, *Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 67.

⁶⁷ For example, with regard to the three maxims of *sensus communis*, we can see that from the moment one is capable of saying “I think,” i.e., to think in accordance with oneself, the figure of the other is implied.

⁶⁸ It is in *The Contest of the Faculties* that Kant is most adamant about the value of affect vis-à-vis one of the supreme political events of the century, the French revolution. SF, 7:85.

⁶⁹ Arendt, *Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 61–62, 65–67. Gertrudis Van de Vijver pointed out to us that this is at bottom the idea intimated in “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” (WA, AAo8), be it with regard to freedom of speech. The point made in this text is that to be able to come together politically, we need to be engaged in free public discourse (i.e., we must speak to each other).

⁷⁰ KU, 5:205; italics added.

“beautiful interests empirically only in society.” The “drive to society is,” after all, “admitted to be natural to human beings.”⁷¹ However, this is a testimony to the addition of the pathological (affect) to the pure (beauty). We find this most exquisite collapsing of the pathological in the pure, of which Kant is in fact the masterly analyst, here as well:

For himself alone a human being abandoned on a desert island would not adorn either his hut or himself, nor seek out or still less plant flowers in order to decorate himself; rather, only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being but also, in his own way, a refined human being.⁷²

Through the human pathology, thus, one can escape the singular position in which one would demand that the other assent to one’s own judgment, if the other were around.⁷³ In this sense, studying affects (such as both humor and enthusiasm) can expand our understanding of pure judgment of taste if we acknowledge that the former realize the latter’s fulfillment. Where Arendt locates the actual presence of the other *in* pure judgment of taste, we hold the latter to be a pure moment in need of supplementation by a pathological moment (even though our conception of pure judgment of taste surely *anticipates* this supplementation). Whereas for pure judgment of taste the *actual* presence of the other is not a necessary condition, the exact opposite goes for both humor and enthusiasm. We can now answer our general question as follows. How can we come together politically? By coming together—full stop.

Abbreviations of Kant’s Works:

Anth: Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (AA 7), 1798

EEKU: Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft (AA 20), 1794

GMS: Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten (AA 4), 1785

IaG: Idee zu einer allgemeine Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht (AA 8), 1784

KpV: Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (AA 5), 1788

KU: Kritik der Urteilskraft (AA 5), 1790

⁷¹ KU, 5:296. Albeit a *divided* drive to society, called unsociable sociability (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). Kant calls this antagonism, inherent in man’s sociability, the means by which nature operates to bring about development in human history. IaG, 8:20.

⁷² KU, 5:297.

⁷³ Cf. KU, 5:278 on egoism and pluralism.

- SF: Der Streit der Fakultäten (AA 7), 1798
 V-Anth/Fried: Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1775/1776 Friedländer (AA 25)
 V-Anth/Mensch: Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1781/1782 Menschenkunde, Petersburg (AA 25)
 V-Anth/Mron: Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1784/1785 Mrongovius (AA 25)
 V-Anth/Pillau: Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1777/1778 Pillau (AA 25)

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Alexi Kukuljevic*

Absense, or the Extimate Place of Art

Keywords

art, aesthetics, sense, nonsense, stupidity, extimacy, Heidegger, Lacan, Balzac

Abstract

In order to think Art in its difference from the arts, I argue, requires that we take seriously its lack of sense. This lack is symptomatic of a historical rupture with the sense of art as *technē* (know-how), a sense that remains at play when one speaks of the arts. However, if art is not an art, then what is it? In this essay, I argue that art is a thing that makes sense absent. To specify art's absent sense, its absense, requires both a historical analysis of art's rupture with *technē* and the mastery it implies, and an ontological determination of the manner in which it makes of this loss a thing that serves to dumb-found. Art is thus inseparable from stupidity. Through an engagement with the work of Aristotle and Heidegger, Bataille and Balzac, Baudelaire, and Lacan, I suggest that art marks the extimate place of absense.

Absense ali ekstimno mesto umetnosti

Ključne besede

umetnost, estetika, smisel, nesmisel, neumnost, ekstimnost, Heidegger, Lacan, Balzac

Povzetek

Menim, da je za to, da bi mislili Umetnost v njeni razliki od umetnosti (množina), treba resno jemati njen manko smisla. Ta manko je simptomatičen za zgodovinski prelom s smislom umetnosti kot *technē* (*know-how*), ki ostaja dejaven, ko govorimo o umetnostih. Če pa umetnost ni (neka) umetnost, kaj potem sploh je? V tem eseju trdim, da je umetnost tisto, kar povzroči odsotnost smisla. Da bi opredelili odsotnost smisla (*absent sense*) umetnosti, njeno odsotnost (*absense*), sta potrebni tako zgodovinska analiza preki-

* Universität für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, Austria
alex.kukuljevic@uni-ak.ac.at

nitve umetnosti s *technē* in obvladovanjem, ki ga ta implicira, kot tudi ontološka določitev načina, kako iz te izgube naredi stvar, ki služi poneumljenju. Umetnost je torej neločljivo povezana z neumnostjo. S spoprijemanjem z deli Aristotela in Heideggerja, Batailla in Balzaca, Baudelaira in Lacana zagovarjam tezo, da umetnost zaznamuje ekstimno mesto odsotnosti smisla (*absense*).



“Absense” is a funny word, funny looking at least. Strictly speaking, it is not a word at all. If spoken, it loses this funny quality, which becomes legible only when written down. When read, it pits the eye that stumbles over its presence against the ear that leaps with expectation towards a sense. One does not hear the “s” in “absense”; one hears a “c,” as in “absence.” Moreover, one has to be reminded that the “c” here is absent. One would not be remiss to think it a typo, for the understanding has a powerful undertow, but I assure you it is not. It may have been, but once it catches the eye with its hook, a certain sense accrues to this absence. So, one ought to see the “s” in “absense” not merely as an “s” but as a “c” with a hook. It is an “s” that is not sure of its place, of its identity. Is it merely posing as a “c”? It is not exactly an “s” but more like the excrescence of the “c.”

This excrescence marks something that is missing. It is in between sense, which is to say in between two senses of “sense”: between what can be sensed (the *aestheton*) and the sense of sense. When something makes sense, when it adds up (to think in terms dollars and cents), we do not question its meaning. We take it for granted. The sense of what is missing when the “s” is in the place of the “c” is in fact a missing sense. Absenssse—to exaggerate the failure, to make of it a caricature—here serves to name, and thus amplify, an absent sense. To insist on the “s” is to stress that the sense of “absence” is itself absent. It presents to us an absence that cannot be made sense of. This is what art does: it makes sense absent. To cultivate a relation to this absence is what I have called the art of living absently.¹

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¹ See Alexi Kukuljevic, *Liquidation World: On the Art of Living Absently* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

If this is indeed the case—if art makes absense—then art is itself aptly named. For it is altogether difficult to locate the sense of art. Although the institution(s) of art (the system of galleries, museums, schools, etc.) are there to remind us that the thing itself exists and to ensure if not to engender a belief in its referent, the sense of the word is by no means self-evident.² Art is a noun that does not at all build the kind of confidence in its referent that we normally expect from a noun. Put bluntly, the sense of art itself seems to be absent. This absence doubtless has something to do with a missing “s.” If art named the set of all the arts, or even a definitive subset of the arts—as for a time one still in the habit of speaking of the fine arts could believe—then art would not be lacking sense. One could delimit its extension, demarcate its limits, in short, supply an intuition for its concept. This remains possible when we speak of the arts in the plural. However, art does not designate a general class. Rather, it designates a subset of the arts that excepts itself from their determination. This exception has itself become a commonplace. We speak of the history of art, debating perhaps its beginning and what ought or not to be included. Ought we to include the shell doodles of *Homo erectus* some 500,000 years ago? Yet, the domain or field that is covered by art is not identical with the history of arts, which is synonymous with a history of technics.

Art is both more and less abstract than a conventionally functioning noun. On the one hand, it is akin to a proper name, for it serves to differentiate art from all the other arts, serving to designate something that is “singular and without any qualifiers.”³ Yet, on the other hand, unlike proper names it does not serve to specifically identify what it names. The name itself seems to conceal rather than to reveal an identity as if rendering itself, that which it names, indiscernible. It sets apart a singularity whose very singularity lies in being unnamable. Akin perhaps to Odysseus’s cunning escape from Polyphemus, where the very utterance of the name “Nobody” serves as Odysseus’s disguise, the evasiveness of the proper name “art” points to something improper, an unseemly substance.

² Let us recall the famous opening of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*: “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 1.

³ I borrow this formulation from Jacques Rancière: “A ‘history of art’ assumes that art exists in the singular and without any qualifiers.” *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of the Arts*, trans. Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), 12.

It serves to identify that which lacks an identity. Art's autonomy consigns it to a radical heteronomy that is altogether other than the heteronomy of the arts. Art is extimate to the arts. As such, art locates *something* that is extimate to sense as such: the presence of an absence, the protuberance of the void. As a result of its extimate character, its exceptionality entails that it can be in principle confused with the commonplace.

The historian of art may try to dispel the ontological and epistemological conundrum presented by the name by claiming that art itself does not exist. Ernst Gombrich can claim, "There is no art; there are only artists," and Werner Hofmann may assert that, "There is no art, only arts!"⁴ However, these efforts to maintain the foundation of a discipline's identity from the indiscernibility of its object fail to grasp that artistic practices do not only produce but are produced as the ongoing attempt to come to terms with art's singular abstraction. It is worth recalling that art as a term to designate a "specialized meaning" in "arts" and "artist" only emerges in the eighteenth century.⁵ Before this emergence, it would not have been possible to speak of a history of art or to undertake a philosophy of art. Neither Plato nor Aristotle had any notion of art. Rather, they conceived of *mimetikē* (the art of imitating or representing) as a kind of *technē* (skill, know-how). The retroactive reconfiguration of this field that allows one to speak of cave paintings, Greek tragedies, and altar pieces as art is the result of an effort in principle infinite to specify the singular abstraction of art, to give

⁴ As cited by Helmut Draxler, *Gefährliche Substanzen: Zum Verhältnis von Kritik und Kunst* (Berlin: b_books, 2007), 35.

⁵ See Raymond Williams's entry "Art," in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9. Art itself presumes the institutionalization of what Paul Oskar Kristeller refers to as the modern system of the arts or what is more generally referred to as the fine arts, which chiefly comprises the five arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry (and more loosely, the arts of gardening, the decorative arts, drama and dance, opera, and prose literature). As he argues in a magisterial two-part work of intellectual history, the emergence of "this system of five major arts, which underlies all modern aesthetics and which is so familiar to us all"—art *conceived* as a separate sphere of culture autonomous from religion, science, craft, and other practical pursuits such as entrepreneurship, which thus taken for granted by both post-Kantian aesthetics and critics of aesthetics—"is of comparatively recent origin and did not assume and did not assume definite shape before the eighteenth century, although it has many ingredients that go back to classical, medieval, and Renaissance thought." Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, no. 4 (October 1951): 498, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2707484>.

it sense. Both the history of art and its theory (the emergence of a philosophy of art and the discourse of aesthetics) emerge as efforts to make sense of this abstraction. Most notably, for Hegel, the very revelation of this abstraction, of art's autonomy, exposes the essence of art as "a self-annihilating nothing" (*ein Nichtiges, ein sich Vernichtendes*).⁶ Art embodies the paradoxical freedom of the suicide where absolute freedom is expressed through its irreparable abolition.

Art purports to be something—a thing that artists make, a thing inscribed in works of art—but as soon as one attempts to identify or isolate the ground of this distinction between art and the arts, one is at a loss. Modernism is certainly the most consequential attempt to ground art in and through its relation to the arts. The problem of art's autonomy from the arts becomes a problem of the autonomy of each of the arts. The problem of art as such is thus replaced with the problem of each specific art's relation to itself. And this relation itself becomes the criterion or measure that allows one at once to determine the difference between the many arts and reinstall a hierarchy within each specific art. The autonomy of art from the arts is here thought as the autonomy of each art with respect to itself, that is, the laws governing its own practice. Yet, the theory requires that a nontechnical determination of *technē* is reintroduced, for the difference between the artist (*qua* fine artist) and the artist (*qua* craftsperson) is maintained and asserted as a difference in kind, but the difference in their "know-how" can only be construed as a difference in degree (the craftsperson remains absorbed in the object while the artist is concerned with mediatic conditions that make it possible). Through this sleight-of-hand modernism succeeds in bestowing meaning or sense on art, but at the cost of enforcing exclusions that become increasingly ridiculous, leading to the implosion of this mode of conceptualisation and periodisation. The anachronistic return of *technē* is both understandable and futile since it is perhaps the only means not of saving (since that is impossible) but of attempting to save art from absence.⁷

⁶ Knox translates this phrase as "null in its self-destruction." See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1:67. I am following the translation of this phrase suggested by Georgia Albert in her translation of Giorgio Agamben's *The Man Without Content* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁷ As should become clear shortly in the paper, *technē* as it is thought by either Plato or Aristotle has nothing to do with "media" or its "formal" conditions. Poetics, for Aristotle, is not concerned with the medium of poetry or theater, let alone the medium of the word, of language. The ground of *poetikē* is the story (*mythos*). The poem is most fundamentally

Rather than seeking to restore meaning to art, it is preferable to acknowledge that its relation to the arts is groundless. One encounters this groundlessness, according to Martin Heidegger, in the circularity of its definition: an artist is one who makes a work of art, but a work of art is something made by an artist. To speak of artists presupposes artworks and to speak of artworks presupposes artists. Both the identity of the artist and that of the work of art presume a relation to art.⁸ “Art—this is nothing more than a word to which nothing actual any longer corresponds.”⁹ If art is not merely a work of *an* art (the work of an artisan), then the work of art in itself—pure art, as Gustave Flaubert formulates it—is positioned in relation to its absent sense. Art no longer corresponds to anything, because it names a vacancy. This vacancy can of course always be filled by a relation to the arts, for art is not *not an art*, but this relation is not determinative. Art is indifferent to its being an art precisely because it is not determined by *technē*.

If art is not the product of a kind of making, there is no criterion, measure, or ground to differentiate it from what it is not. It remains, of course, for the most part, something made, but most decisively, it need not be. It can, in short, be readymade. For the fact of its having been made no longer functions as a criterion for it being a work of art. As Flaubert famously puts it in a letter to Louise Colet, “Masterworks are stupid [*bêtes*].—They have the placid faces of the

the representation (*mimesis*) of a story. The art of poetry is differentiated from other arts by means of its end (*telos*). Saddle-making and poetry do not differ in essence, since they are both arts, but in their respective ends. One makes saddles, the other makes stories. To make *technē* a mediatic concern entails a radical transformation of how representation itself is conceived. In other words, to speak of medium with respect to Aristotle’s *Poetics* would entail that the story is itself the medium of poetry. The very thing that would have to be the medium for Aristotle cannot be mediatic.

⁸ It is also worth noting that the term “artist,” from *artista*, first coined in the Middle Ages, initially referred to craftsmen (artisans) and students of the liberal arts. See Kristeller, “Modern System of the Arts,” 508.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Harper Perennial, 1993), 143. Heidegger here recasts the problem that Hegel identifies at the outset of his lectures on *Aesthetics*: “In all these respects art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our *ideas* instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place.” Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1:11.

very products of nature, like big animals and mountains.”¹⁰ A work of art is only when it is not *what* it is; namely, when it is something made in conformity with a specific end and for a specific reason; crucially, it is this “not” which makes it appear dumb like nature.¹¹ Stupidity (*bêtise*) connotes here something that is irresponsive, placid, in the sense of not being easily disturbed, unaffected. Masterpieces (*les chefs-d’oeuvres*) like large animals are not quick to react, unperturbed like a mountain, deadpan. Pure art and the works that most closely incarnate it do not put on a display of intelligence, but, on the contrary, assume its failing. They are closed upon themselves and idiotic.

Immanuel Kant says something strangely similar in *The Critique of Judgment* when he shifts his consideration from aesthetic judgment to the definition of beautiful art (*schöne Kunst*). Although Kant distinguishes “art as such” (*Kunst überhaupt*) from nature as a kind of making or doing (*facere*) grounded in freedom, he writes, “By right, only production through freedom, i.e., through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason, should be called art.”¹² When it comes to defining beautiful art, beauty itself becomes a sign of an exception to this rule: “Beautiful art is an art to the extent that it seems at the same time to be nature.”¹³ Beautiful art embodies a fundamental contradiction. Beautiful art is an art that insofar as it is beautiful does not appear to be an effect of an art. Although we cannot confuse art and nature (we must remain “aware of it as art”), art must nevertheless assume a relation to that which it is not—it must “look to us like nature.” Thus, even though an artwork is “certainly intentional,” as Kant puts it, in order for beautiful art to be differentiated from mechanical art, it “must nevertheless not seem intentional, i.e., beautiful art must be regarded

¹⁰ Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet, June 27, 1852, in *Correspondance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–2007), 2:119; quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 9.

¹¹ Commenting on Flaubert’s claim, Jacques Rancière writes: “When Flaubert says that masterpieces are stupid, he defines a different kind of stupidity, which is the fact of being put forward, just like that, without meaning anything. This can end in a radical decision: since the meaning is stupid, you destroy all that produces a meaning. Consequently, you will put stupidity in art, namely, the decision not to produce meaning, interpretation, any effect of interpretation, against stupidity in the sense of a consensus.” Jacques Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 98.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 182, § 43.

¹³ Kant, 185, § 45.

as nature, although of course one is aware of it as art.”¹⁴ The artwork cannot be conceived as conforming to an intention, for if it did exhibit such conformity, it would be a determinate object that “would please only through concepts.” And although an artwork, according to Kant, has to accord with rules, this accord cannot be merely “academic”; the accord must be “exacting” (*Pünktlichkeit*) without being “painstaking” (*Peinlichkeit*).¹⁵ In order to appear as art, an artwork cannot appear to be the work of an art but appear like a product of nature.

Although Kant attempts to resolve the problem of this necessary gap in intention by introducing the figure of the genius whose transgressive drives must be tamed by the judgment of a true aesthete, as Flaubert perceives, as soon as one admits such a gap there is no criterion to distinguish the genius from the fool. Idiocy rules the day because art is only art if it fails to conform to expectation. Art cannot accord with what we expect from it. It must lack determination. It must dumbfound. Flaubert never tires of railing against such expectations.

I challenge any dramatist to have the audacity to put on stage of popular theatre a worker who is a thief. No thank you, the worker has to be an honest fellow, and the gentleman is always a scoundrel. Just as at the Théâtre Français the girls on stage are always pure, because the mummies take their daughters there. I therefore believe in the truth of this axiom: people love falsehood; falsehood all through the day and dreams all through the night, such is human nature.¹⁶

If human nature inculcates in the subject an ineluctable love of falsehood, pure art, according to Flaubert, serves to confound human nature. Although Kant would in no way suggest that the work of genius is tantamount to work of the most profound stupidity, he would have to admit that stupidity is the danger that genius incurs precisely in abandoning *technē* as a criterion for art.

The sense of art, insofar as it is indexed to the arts, remains tethered to the Greek sense of art: *technē*. It is a know-how, a skill that enables one to make or produce something. All works of art, in this sense, from tables and chairs to sculptures,

¹⁴ Kant, 186, § 45.

¹⁵ Kant, 186, § 45; translation modified.

¹⁶ Gustave Flaubert, “Eleven Letters,” trans. Geoffrey Wall, *The Cambridge Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1996): 235.

health, or stories are not the creations of a particular artisan as much as the result of a conformity to the ends of a given art. A particular doctor only produces health by conforming to the art of medicine. Thus, if I am cured by a doctor of an ailment, I do not attribute the cure to the particularities of the doctor but to her capacity with respect to her know-how. Likewise, the art of poetry (*poētikē*) produces a poem (*poiēma*) through making an imitation or representation (*mimēsis*) of a story (*mythos*). The beauty of a story, according to Aristotle, thus depends on the organization of its plot (*logos*) and the propriety of its magnitude. It is thus the story and the kinds of people that the story is about (whether of high or low moral stature) that in turn determines the kind of story it is (its genre) and the kinds of affects and feelings appropriate to it (e.g., pity and fear in the case of tragedy). Insofar as the work of art is thought in relation to *technē*, it is not the cause of itself; it is not autonomous (to use an anachronistic term). Only nature (*physis*) is autonomous, which is to say, its source (*aitia*) or origin (*archē*) is internal to it.¹⁷ All products of *technē*, on the other hand, have their source (*archē*) external to them: “The source is in the one who makes it and not in the thing that is made.”¹⁸ As Aristotle clarifies, this entails that the sculpture, for example, lies in the skilled know-how of the sculptor (that is, in the art of sculpting) and not what is only incidental to that art: namely, the individual sculptor, Polyceitus: “It is incidental to the sculptor to be Polyceitus.”¹⁹ Just as ethics, for Aristotle, is the art of building character, poetics is the art of storytelling. Each of these arts have a distinctive virtue that the artist strives to master and whose excellence can be judged. Each art has its own “exertion of mastery.”²⁰ One can thus compete in the art of storytelling, just as one can compete in sports, because what is at issue is the *state of the art*, the level of mastery being exerted over those it affects or those it aims to move.

¹⁷ See Aristotle, *Physics: A Guided Study*, trans. Joe Sachs (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), bk. II, chap. 1. Aristotle states clearly that nothing produced by means of art (*technē*) has “the source of its making” in itself.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Indianapolis: Focus, 2002), 1140a12.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, 195a30.

²⁰ The phrase is from Plato, “Gorgias,” in Plato and Aristotle, *Gorgias and Rhetoric*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport: Focus, 2009), 450c–451a. Gorgias defines rhetoric as “the action and exertion of mastery by means of speech.” It is important to note that Socrates denies that rhetoric itself is an art, which is to say, a true art. He thinks that the definition itself is too broad, since arithmetic, for example, also exerts mastery by means of speech. Importantly for what I am here claiming, the assumption that *technē* is an exertion of mastery is not itself questioned.

Art (*technē*) is itself an exertion of mastery. Mastery implies hierarchy, but it does not entail domination. The true master does not have to appeal to brute force but skill, know-how. Art is then precisely something that can be taught and learned. Though art is distinct from nature, it is not opposed to nature. On the contrary, an art has to accord with nature as such and as a whole, and what it produces is not nature but this accord. Aristotle will thus claim that “imitating is in accord with our nature” and that the sign of this accord lies in the pleasure that we take in representation: “We delight in contemplating the most accurately made images of the very things that are painful for us to see, such as the forms of the most contemptible insects and of dead bodies.”²¹ Thus poetry as the art of imitation exhibits mastery only in being in accord with nature. Yet, this accord is produced if the imitation represents the sorts of things that a certain kind of person says and does “as the result of what is likely or necessary.”²² A likely or necessary sequence of events is a sign that the story is in accordance with natural causality. The believable is thus privileged over the possible: “With a view to the poetry, an impossible thing that is believable is preferable to an unbelievable thing that is possible.”²³ Aristotle goes on to claim that poetry, insofar as it is *the* art of imitation, is originally divided according to the “character” of the poet: “And the making of poetry split apart in accordance with their own characters, for the more dignified poets imitated beautiful actions and people of the sort who perform them, while the less worthy sort imitated actions of low people, first making abusive poems just as the others made hymns and praises.”²⁴ Thus, the imitation has to accord with the nature of those being represented. Mastery is ultimately the art of knowing one’s place, of knowing how to shape and control the effects of one’s speech and how to calibrate one’s mode of address. Above all, it is a matter of knowing the limits of propriety. However, the identification of art and nature touched upon above displaces this notion, for art is like nature only insofar as it knows no propriety. Stupidity could thus be defined as the meeting point of intelligence and idiocy.

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The fool is the one who fails to recognize one’s place, and thus by extension the propriety of place. Propriety of place is akin to what Georges Bataille in *Manet*

²¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport: Focus, 2006), 1448b9–12.

²² Aristotle, 1451b9–10.

²³ Aristotle, 1461b11–13.

²⁴ Aristotle, 1448b25–28.

calls rhetoric. Rhetoric consists of a “vast didactic structure” in which representation serves to institute the place of the viewing subject, enabling them to locate themselves within a hierarchical order, such that the subject will accord with expectation. Bataille illustrates this with reference to Antonin Proust’s characterization of Manet’s frustration with the ridiculous heroic poses that his models would *naturally* adopt, preferring his models to stand naturally as they would standing in line at the grocer’s.²⁵ The break with representation is a break with the rhetoric of prescribed attitudes, poses that institute a set of expectations concerning how a subject ought to be presented and establish an accordance between viewer and the work. Bataille notes this shift in Manet’s *The Old Musician* (1862), where a certain “ungainliness” is opposed to theatrical staging. Rather than “a carefully arranged pose,” Manet paints “a natural disorder arrived at by chance.”²⁶ As Bataille suggests, Manet’s realism is not opposed to the autonomy of art itself but is the very means through which representation is itself shattered.²⁷ The conquest of autonomy passes by way of realism.²⁸ The identification of art with nature serves to displace the implied mastery of artistic handling by displacing the sense of the subject or what Bataille refers to as the implied text that renders the painting legible *as a painting*. Manet’s destruction of the subject, as Bataille puts it, proceeds by obliterating the text that serves to place the figure within a legible scene. Nature here marks an indifference of sub-

²⁵ If I insist here on the repetition of the adverb “naturally,” it is to emphasize how “according to nature” can assume diametrically opposed senses, and it is this tension between these two senses that I have been trying to highlight by contrasting the place of “nature” in Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the place of nature in Kant, Flaubert, and now Manet.

²⁶ Georges Bataille, *Manet: Biographical and Critical Study*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (Ohio: Skira, 1955), 38.

²⁷ Bataille identifies the autonomy of art with the emergence of art in general: “The various kinds of painting that have arisen since Manet’s time represent the varied possibilities of painting in this new realm we have entered, where silence reigns profoundly and art is the supreme value—art *in general*, which means man as an individual, self-sustaining, detached from any collective enterprise or prescribed system (and also from individualism). Here the work of art takes the place of everything that in the past—even in the remotest past—was sacred and majestic.” Bataille, 64. Jacques Rancière has emphasized, particularly in his treatment of Flaubert, that realism far from being opposed to autonomy is the condition of its emergence.

²⁸ Thus, although Bataille aligns Manet with the emergence of painting’s autonomy, he gives the modernist interpretation of this notion a violent twist. See Yve-Alain Bois’s essay “The Use Value of Formless,” in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss (New York: Zone Books, 1997) 13–40. This is a point that T. J. Clark also acknowledges as Bois points out in *Formless*, 256n5.

ject matter, a leveling of its order that marks a disjunction between the appearance and its form. According to Bataille, even death, such as in *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (1867), which would seem to preclude “an indifferent treatment” and to be “charged with meaning” is approached by Manet “with an almost callous indifference that the spectator, surprisingly enough, shares to the full.” He continues,

Maximilian reminds us of a tooth deadened by Novocain; we get the impression of an all-engulfing numbness, as if a skillful practitioner had radically cured painting of a centuries-old ailment: chronic eloquence. Manet posed some of his models in the attitude of dying, some in the attitude of killing, but all more or less casually, as if they were about to “buy a bunch of radishes.”²⁹

Bataille stresses that the painting fails to meet with expectation. Given the subject of the painting, one expects an “emotional reaction,” but this is disappointed. Rather, this disappointed expectation leaves behind “the curious impression of an absence.”³⁰ This failure is not a deficit but a gain that positions the painting within a “imponderable plenitude,” a vast lack of significance.

With *Olympia* this is pushed to an extreme. Manet dislodges the subject, that is, the figure, from a ground that would assign it meaning. Manet does not locate “his subject *anywhere*, neither in the drab world of naturalistic prose nor in that, typified by Couture, of absurd academic fictions.”³¹ She of course remains a figure on a ground, but this relationship is itself stripped of the accord that enable’s a viewer to make sense of her place. She is presented as a mere thing, something simply there, a mute obstacle: a presence that presents an absence, the place of signification’s lack. Bataille writes,

In her provocative literalness she is nothing. Her real nudity (not merely that of her body) is the silence that emanates from her, like that from a sunken ship. All we have is the “sacred horror” of her presence—presence whose sheer simplicity is tantamount to absence.³²

²⁹ Bataille, *Manet*, 52.

³⁰ Bataille, 52.

³¹ Bataille, 67.

³² Bataille, 67.

It is her silence, this quality of indifference, of withdrawal that Bataille likens to a downed ship, which serves to stupefy. Bataille is of course aware that the very scandal of her presence has now in part served to ensure its pride of place in the Louvre. However, this misses the point. For there is no art that is beyond all such recuperation. Bataille's simile is here apt. Like the hole in a hull of a ship, *Olympia's* entry into the museum does not diminish but instead seals her fate of never being just a painting, but a painting that serves to exemplify a paradigmatic instance of Art. What secures this place is not its masterly execution (what Bataille refers to as "eloquence") but an enunciation that lisps, an articulation that stutters, things that impress upon sense, an essential incongruity between what is shown and how it is shown, making a place for the implacable.³³

Art as the null-occupant of this place emerges as an effect of a transformation in the structure of mastery in which the products of art are subordinated to the calculated effects one expects them to produce. Art's loss of an "s" appears like a symptom. It is an absence that marks an excess (something that exceeds the determinations of mastery and thus whose effects are difficult if not at times impossible to predict or contain). The appearance of art serves to split the history of the arts in two. This split does not pass between the liberal arts and the fine arts but rather between the arts and art. Art names the ongoing appropriation of this rupture or split itself. Since art both is and is not an art as well as the separation of an art from a position of mastery, not only everything that is made but also that which is unmade can be a work of art (the non-site for Robert Smithson; the refusal to make in Lee Lozano's *Dropout Piece*; or the empty exhibition in Laurie Parsons's *578 Broadway, 11th Floor 1990* at Lorence Monk Gallery, New York). Art as such, and the history of art, is the ongoing effort (perhaps one can say drive) to exhibit the effects of its absent sense. The history of avant-garde

³³ Bataille's critique of Valéry's interpretation of *Olympia* is decisive in this regard. Valéry interprets the painting as an elevation of the ignoble, where a prostitute "whose status requires guileless ignorance of all decency" become a "bestial vestal dedicated to absolute nakedness." Bataille, 66. Yet, for Bataille, Manet does not maintain the form of the majestic, of grandeur, but precisely challenges this very form, this very rhetoric: "[*Olympia*] is the negation of mythological Olympus and everything it stood for." Bataille, 71. *Olympia* does not simply invert a meaning but challenges sense bestowal as such. Bois puts it as follows, "If the *Olympia* caused a scandal, Bataille argues, it was because by means of it Manet refused the various ideological and formal codes regulating the depiction of the nude, whether erotic, mythological, or even realistic (Courbet didn't like it)." Bois, "Use Value of Formless," 15.

practice is a history that attends to its most flamboyant effects. The effects of this history are perhaps less visible if one attends only to the “shock of the new.” More significant in my view is the effect of stupefaction that the appearance of art can produce.

So the conjunction of art and absense should make us think of the missing “s” in “art” and the missing “c” in “absense.” To hear “art,” one should sense what this lack of an “s” here signifies—namely, that art is not one of the arts. And this negation, this “not,” should make us hesitate over the sense of its singularity. A work of art that is not the mere result of the work of an art is neither simply a thing of use (a piece of equipment) nor is it merely a commodity (an exchange value), but it is also not something natural (“it does not have the character of having taken shape by itself like the granite boulder”).³⁴ Heidegger resists identifying this thing, this interstice between the natural and the social as a mere thing. To arrive at a mere thing through the process of subtraction determines the thing, its “thing-being,” as a “left-over.” Heidegger adds that “this remnant is not actually defined in its ontological character. It remains doubtful whether the thingly character comes to view at all in the process of stripping off everything equipmental.”³⁵ To think the ontological character of the work of art is to think the being of this leftover. I propose that we dwell on this moment that Heidegger would not like us to dwell on. In the leftover we are faced with a mere thing, a dumb thing, which is to say, something that dumbfounds.

In English one can speak of being “dumbfounded.” When one is dumbfounded, one finds oneself in an encounter with a demand for which there is no response. As one of its first appearances in the English language attests to in Thomas Urquhart’s translation of Rabelais, to dumbfound is an embarrassment of the head: “I beseech you never dum-found or Embarrass your Head with these idle Conceits.” Or as another Thomas puts it, Thomas Otway, in *The Souldiers Fortune*, “He has but one eye, and we are on his blind side; I’ll dumb-found him. (Strikes him on the shoulder.)” To be dumbfounded is to encounter something unexpected, unforeseen, and thus something that cannot be avoided, resolved, or circumnavigated. “I cannot wriggle out of it; I am dumbfounded,” as Charles

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³⁴ Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” 154.

³⁵ Heidegger, 156.

Darwin puts it.³⁶ In short, one finds oneself dumb, which is to say, unable to speak.³⁷ What is dumbfounding founds the subject in dumbness, in silence. One is at a loss for words, trapped somewhere between being stunned and astonished, between stupidity and wonder. Jacques Lacan introduces the relation to the thing, “the-beyond-of-the-signified,” as a matter of dumbness. “The things in question are things insofar as they are dumb [. . .]. And dumb things are not exactly the same as things which have no relationship to words.”³⁸ Lacan introduces here, as a case in point, the face of Harpo Marx:

Is there anything that poses a question which is more present, more pressing, more absorbing, more disruptive, more nauseating, more calculated to thrust everything that takes place before us into the abyss or void than that face of Harpo Marx, that face with its smile which leaves us unclear as to whether it signifies the most extreme perversity or complete simplicity? This dumb man alone is sufficient to sustain the atmosphere of doubt and of radical annihilation which is the stuff of the Marx brothers' extraordinary farce and the uninterrupted play of “jokes” that makes their activity so valuable.³⁹

Dumbness connotes a reduction to the irreducible. A reduction, in other words, not to nothingness but to a nothing that cannot be made to mean anything, not even nothingness. It marks the muteness of language, that which cannot be signified within language, which is to say, extimate to language. A thing is dumb because it marks the place of a nothing that cannot be made to signify something. A thing because it evades the opposition between something and nothing (nothingness) cannot be reached by means of a negation. A nothing marks the advent of absense.

³⁶ For these references, see “Dumbfound” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

³⁷ One might here also refer to Plato's treatment of *aporia* in the *Meno* where Socrates is jokingly likened to a torpedo-fish or sting-ray (*narkē*) for his capacity to numb (*narkan*) both soul and mouth. See Plato, *Meno*, trans. George Berns and Laurence Anastaplo (Newburyport: Focus, 2004), 79e–80b. I would like to thank Surti Singh for reminding me of this passage.

³⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 55.

³⁹ Lacan, 55.

In the essay, “Salon of 1846,” Charles Baudelaire reminds us of what is at stake in the attribution of this singularly abstract term, “art,” by returning to the scene in 1822 when Delacroix’s *The Barque of Dante* was first exhibited.

To get a good idea of the deep turmoil that the picture *Dante et Virgile* must have caused in the minds of the people at the time, the astonishment, the stupefaction, the anger, the chorus of insults, the enthusiasm, the guffaws of insolent laughter that greeted this fine picture, signal if ever there was one of a revolution, it must be remembered that in the studio of M. Guérin, a man of great talent, but a despot and narrow like his master David, there was only a handful of outcasts who bothered about the forgotten old masters and who dared, albeit timidly, to conspire under the aegis of Raphael and Michelangelo. There was as yet no question of Rubens.⁴⁰

For Baudelaire, Delacroix’s originality consists in his radically different relation to mastery. It is not a matter of a rupture with tradition but how Delacroix relates to the form of its transmission. Raphael and Michelangelo become models not of the pedantry of a despotic master (M. Guérin) but of artists pursuing art as the pursuit of truth. It is this relation to art that serves, according to Baudelaire, to either astonish or stupefy. It stupefies the pedants, because Raphael is not summoned for the purposes of being a model of classicism. It is worth recalling, as Rancière reminds us:

In the prize list of painters compiled by Roger de Piles in 1708, he was the undisputed master in the fields of drawing and expression, equaled only by Guérchin and Rubens in composition. Colour alone, of which Titian and the Venetians were the recognized masters, constituted his weak point. But even this weakness contributed to his supremacy for all those who considered drawing the directing principle of the art of painting, and colour its simple servant.⁴¹

Now compare this understanding of Raphael to that of Frenhofer’s ecstatic praise for the painter in Honoré de Balzac’s *The Unknown Masterpiece*:

⁴⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1846,” in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1972), 61.

⁴¹ Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 22.

His supremacy's due to that intimate sense which apparently seeks to break Form. In Raphael's figures, Form is what it is in all of us: an intermediary for the communication of ideas and sensations, a vast poetry! Each figure is a world, a portrait whose model has appeared in a sublime vision, colored by light, drawn by an inner voice, examined by a celestial hand which has revealed the sources of expression in an entire existence. You people make lovely gowns of flesh for your women, elegant draperies of hair, but where's the blood which creates peace or passion, which causes particular effects? Your saint's a brunette, yet this, my poor Porbus, this belongs to a blonde! And so your figures are tinted phantoms you parade before our eyes, and you call that painting, you call that art!⁴²

If Delacroix's canvas, according to Baudelaire, can induce insult and anger, even "guffaws of insulant laughter," it is because it calls into question hierarchies of painting that an educated public believed they had every right to expect, for by recognizing these hierarchies they would themselves in turn be recognized, confirmed in and by their judgment. From this perspective, Delacroix's painting is not a painting but a mere caricature of a painting, or what Balzac in *The Unknown Masterpiece* describes as a "*prétendu tableau*." Richard Howard translates this an "imagined picture," but it has the sense of the supposed, alleged, or, perhaps, feigned.

Balzac publishes *The Unknown Masterpiece* (*Chef d'oeuvre inconnu*) in the periodical *L'Artiste* in 1831, and he doubtless has Delacroix (and perhaps also Ingres) in mind. Set in the seventeenth century, the central figure, the painter Frenhofer, provides "a consummate image of the artist's nature," as an incarnation of Romantic genius: "everything about this old man transcended the limits of human nature."⁴³ Frenhofer is depicted quite precisely as an artist and not a mere painter. A mere painter, according to Frenhofer, remains "satisfied" with the appearances of things. An artist, such as Raphael, on the contrary, "is never deceived by all those subterfuges, he perseveres until nature's forced to show herself stark naked, in her true spirit."⁴⁴ The artist is one who not only paints ("Many painters succeed instinctively, without ever knowing this theme of art.")⁴⁵ but

⁴² Honoré de Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), 15.

⁴³ Balzac, 25.

⁴⁴ Balzac, 14–15.

⁴⁵ Balzac, 14.

philosophizes, animated by a passion for the truth—a truth that is touched upon only through the inscription of a difference that is “a nothing” (*un rien*). Commenting on Porbus’s unfinished canvas: “What’s lacking? A trifle that’s nothing at all, yet a nothing that’s everything.” For Frenhofer, it is this nothing that carries the burden of differentiating the “the appearance of life” from the expression of “its overflowing abundance, that *je ne sais quoi* which might even be the soul, floating like a cloud over the envelope of flesh.”⁴⁶

Yet, it does not end well for Frenhofer. For he is a contradiction incarnate, an absolute master (a master painter) who has placed his talent, his genius, in the service of rendering that which cannot be mastered. His attempt to render the living presence of his troublesome beauty (*la Belle Noiseuse*), Catherine Lescault, results only in her utter dismemberment. All that remains of her is a mere “stroke of the brush” (*coup de pinceau*),⁴⁷ the “tip of a bare foot.” When Porbus and Poussin confront the painting, they are not “speechless with admiration” but stupefied and fear they are in fact the objects of a cruel joke.⁴⁸

“The old fraud’s pulling our leg,” Poussin murmured, returning to face the so-called painting [*prétendu tableau*]. “All I see are colors daubed one on top of the other and contained by a mass of strange lines forming a wall of paint.”⁴⁹

Howard renders “*prétendu*” on this occasion as “so-called,” which suggests that it is a painting in name only. It is a painting whose status *qua* painting has been suspended through an onslaught of brushstrokes. The painting is all but destroyed. Yet, prompted by the sense that something “must be missing,” Porbus then discovers in the “corner of the canvas” a mere fragment, “the tip of a bare foot emerging from this chaos of colors, shapes, and vague shadings, a kind of incoherent mist; but a delightful foot, a living foot!”⁵⁰ The existence of this moment, which Didi-Huberman will make the basis of his account of the detail in painting, arrests the gaze.⁵¹ “They stood stock-still with admiration before this

⁴⁶ Balzac, 16.

⁴⁷ Balzac, 19.

⁴⁸ Balzac, 19.

⁴⁹ Balzac, 40.

⁵⁰ Balzac, 40–41.

⁵¹ See Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture Incarnée: Suivi de “Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu,” d’Honoré de Balzac* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 91–111.

fragment which had escaped from an incredible, slow, and advancing destruction.”⁵² They are more literally frozen stiff, petrified, by what they see, this bit of nothing, *un rien*, what Baudelaire might call an embellishment of the void. If the painting is no longer a painting but *prétendu*, this fragment distills its manufactured identity with art. It is no longer a painting (because destroyed) but art. Frenhofer’s masterpiece is unknown because it has literalized the *je ne sais quoi*. It is no longer a painting (having become a mere canvas) and thus nothing at all, but it is only in virtue of being nothing at all that it can be art. It is either a work of art or nothing at all in virtue of the suspension of its status as a painting.

The young Poussin, confronted with such a decision, consigns it to oblivion. “But sooner or later he’ll notice that there’s nothing on his canvas!”⁵³ It is this judgment that serves to undo Frenhofer’s delusional belief in his genius, shaking him from his naivete. Overcome with crippling “anxiety” he contemplates his “painting” and staggers “as if from a blow,” declaring:

“Nothing, nothing! And after working ten years!” He sat down and wept. “I’m an imbecile then, a madman with neither talent nor ability. Just a rich man who makes no more than what he buys . . . I’ve created nothing!”⁵⁴

Giorgio Agamben, in *The Man without Content*, interprets Balzac’s story as an allegory of an antinomy that, he argues, “traverses the entire history of aesthetics” and constitutes “it’s speculative center and living contradiction.”⁵⁵ When the work of art becomes a quest for a living work of art, as it does for Frenhofer, far from opening up a shared world, the work marks the site of a radical division that severs the position of the artist from that of the spectator. What appears to Frenhofer as the very incarnation of the truth is for Poussin and Porbus a mess of paint. The process of refinement, in principle infinite, that brings expression ever closer to the expressed, the signifier to the signified, commits itself to an end whose success can only be utter and complete failure: “The quest for absolute meaning has devoured all meaning, allowing only signs, meaningless forms, to survive. [. . .] In order to leave the evanescent world of forms, he has no

⁵² Balzac, *Unknown Masterpiece*, 41.

⁵³ Balzac, 42.

⁵⁴ Balzac, 43.

⁵⁵ Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 12.

other means than form itself, and the more he wants to erase it, the more he has to concentrate on it to render it permeable to the inexpressible content he wants to express.”⁵⁶ Art as such is positioned as the disjunctive synthesis between pure art and its abolition (nonart).

Yet, Agamben overlooks how the “painting” itself inscribes this disjunction through the suspension of its sense *qua* painting. The story lays bare what is at stake in the difference between an art and art, a painting and what appears when a painting is no longer a painting. What appears is not simply nothing—nothingness—but *a* nothing (*un rien*): the void’s embellishment, as it were. The void punctuates nothingness, inserting within it an interval that separates it from its form as negation. What appears is not a what, nor a being, but the presence of an absence, the tip of a bare foot. Less than a fragment, but not nothingness, this fragment of a fragment inscribes the place of an absentee subject. It is painted but its failure to signify a painting allows it to embody a singular lack of significance. It is this punctuality that escapes both Poussin and Frenhofer that the story solicits us, forces us, perhaps, to think. It presents to us an object of absence, a thing in the substituted place of painting. The thing that we all too easily call art.

What is named here is precisely not a sense, but that which appears only in relation to its destruction. We should take Frenhofer’s claim to have “created nothing” quite seriously by shifting stress from what he does to what appears in the contingency of its place. If we focus on what he does, then we are condemned to viewing what appears (i.e., its result) as a bit of bad fortune, symptomatic of an irreparable gap between his intention or desire to make art and the demand that it assume legible form—we are condemned to think that a living work of art in its very accomplishment presents to us death itself. And this failure is a fault that Frenhofer himself cannot live with and wants to destroy forever. He burns his work and then dies. From the perspective of mastery, the remainder (this bit of nothing) is itself unbearable and must disappear, because it can only signify failure.

However, one need not follow the judgment of Poussin. Poussin’s judgment of a failure (there is nothing on the canvas) is in fact a failed judgment. He fails

⁵⁶ Agamben, 10.

to see what is in fact given, which is only given through the form of its failure. We are confronted with a signifier that not only signifies its failure but internalizes a relation to this absence—that is, a signifier that presents its nonsensical presence. Art appears only in and through the failure of the whole to secure the promise of sense. Art is not whole, which is to say, it makes a hole (without a “w”) in sense. Yet, this hole is *not without sense* if we refuse the demand to make sense of it. That which is *not without sense* is what I presented at the beginning as absense.

If we are to take this conjunction seriously (art and absence), then we have to abandon the expectation that art make sense, that its being has a meaning, that its substance is anything other than liquidated. We must take this vacuity seriously. To conclude, let me propose a definition: art is the abscess of absent sense. The “s” adds something to the “c” in absense. It is the abscess of the letter, a contusion of the letter, as if the added stress on the “c” had produced some swelling, as a punch to the gut might produce dropsy, a senseless cedilla (ç), the letter’s bone spur, a part of the letter that is not of the letter and thus cannot be made sense of by reference to the body of language. It is not of language but only appears on its surface as its abscess. Something forced to the surface through a displacement. I would like you to hear the Greek resonance of *oedēma* (from *oiden*, to swell) defined as “a condition characterized by an excess of watery fluid collecting in the cavities or tissues of the body.” Samuel Beckett himself, in a letter to Mary Manning Howe, proposed an idea of “ruptured writing, so that the void may protrude, like a hernia.”⁵⁷ Art is perhaps nothing less than the protuberance of the void. Art hollows out sense, filling it with an absence. Art hollows and fills; it makes a vacuole. What appears as art – in and through this nomination – is an absent sense. Art is thus not something that merely resists definition, that is difficult to define. Its lack of definition is definitive. It is positively lacking. It marks the space of an evacuation such that art truly is everything and nothing. Art appears as an herniatic strain in and of culture; art is a rupture that marks the extimate place of absense.

⁵⁷ The letter is from July 11, 1937. See Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, 1929–40*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 521n8.

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Marcus Quent*

Interval and Event: The Present as In-between Time in Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou

Keywords

time, event, present, contemporary, politics, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze

Abstract

Are we living in an “in-between time”? If so, what does it mean to be the “contemporary” of such a time? Starting from its consistent recurrence over different times, this article investigates the temporal-philosophical operation related to the designation of “in-between times.” It examines the function this operation assumes in thinking about time, i.e. the specific construction of time it establishes. By focusing on the functioning of *intervalle* in Alain Badiou and *entre-temps* in Gilles Deleuze, two contradictory relations to the present conveyed in the concept of “in-between time” are discussed. The article demonstrates that for both philosophers, in-betweenness occupies a key position in their philosophical construction of time—yet, in reverse form in each case. The discussion of this contrasting mode then leads to the final question of whether there is such a thing as a fundamental in-between character that manifests itself through all times, belonging to time as such.

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Ključne besede

čas, dogodek, sedanjost, sodobnik, politika, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze

Povzetek

Ali živimo v »vmesnem času«? Če je tako, kaj pomeni biti »sodobnik« takega časa? Članek raziskuje časovno-filozofsko operacijo, povezano s poimenovanjem »vmesnega časa«, izhajajoč iz njenega doslednega pojavljanja v različnih obdobjih. Preučuje funk-

* Berlin University of the Arts, Germany

m.quent@udk-berlin.de | <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4592-9395>

cijo, ki jo ta operacija prevzema pri mišljenju časa, oz. specifično konstrukcijo časa, ki jo vzpostavlja. S poudarkom na delovanju *intervalle* pri Alainu Badiouju in *entre-temps* pri Gillesu Deleuzu obravnavamo dva nasprotujoča si odnosa do sedanjosti, ki ju izraža pojem »vmesnega časa«. Članek pokaže, da pri obeh filozofih vmesnost zavzema ključno mesto v njuni filozofski konstrukciji časa – vendar v obratni obliki. Razprava o tem kontrastnem načinu nato pripelje do končnega vprašanja, ali obstaja nekaj takega kot temeljna vmesnost, ki se kaže skozi vse čase in pripada času kot takemu.



Is it true that we are living in an “in-between time,” as is sometimes claimed today in light of numerous overlapping crises that our weakened politics seems merely to administer reactively? How plausible is this diagnosis of the present? What phenomena, what developments allow or suggest such a diagnosis, and what conclusions could be drawn from it? And what about the history of this diagnosis itself, its strangely consistent recurrence over different times? Based on these questions, I would like to turn to the specific temporality of in-between times. What concerns me here is not so much a sociological examination or historical characterization of “our” present, but the temporal-philosophical operation related to this designation. The focus will therefore be on the function this operation assumes in thinking about time, that is, on the specific construction of time it establishes. Within this context, I am particularly interested in two contradictory relations to the present conveyed in the concept of in-between time. There is a specific twofold appearance of the present that will be examined by focusing on the functioning of *intervalle* and *entre-temps* in Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze. For both philosophers, in-betweenness occupies a key position in their philosophical construction of time—yet, as we will see, in reverse form in each case. The discussion of this contrasting mode of operation will finally bring me back to the question of whether there is such a thing as a fundamental in-between character that manifests itself through all times, belonging to time as such.

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Interim, Interval, and In-between Times

If we first consider the historical meanings of the phrase “in-between time,” we understand it as a time of transition. In-between time as an interim is a time of the temporary and provisional, a period between two heterogeneous orders. An

interim period always occurs when an old order is suspended without a new one having taken its place. Such times have a minimal, fading, and bracketed being that follows an end without indicating a new beginning, a being-in-suspension that emerges from dissolution or disintegration. Since the formation of the new is still pending, the interim period is relativized. Only in retrospect, that is, in the perspective of its overcoming—once the period in between is over—will it become possible to identify its beginning and end. From the internal perspective, however, the experience of the in-between—which is itself structured in an intervening or intermitting manner—lacks a fixed frame or determination; its end is never in sight, but always impending or looming. Antonio Gramsci famously called this time the “interregnum,” a time in which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”¹ Those who live in an interregnum find themselves in a space between the law of the old and a fragile, ambiguous new that is obstructed.

The crux is that for the one who inhabits this space the distinction between the old and the new, the traditional and the novel, becomes obscure. The in-between status challenges the ability of its contemporaries to distinguish and orient themselves in time. The sign of such times is that dynamics and statics, tension and relaxation, mobility and immobility tend to become indistinguishable. It is symptomatic for intervening periods that social phenomena circulate conspicuously with opposing, mutually exclusive valuations. Even before all symptoms of decay, this crisis of discernment is probably the most conspicuous of the “great variety of morbid symptoms” that, according to Gramsci, appears in such times. Where appearances are obscured, judgment and reasoning become precarious, and, above all, the experience of temporality itself becomes diffuse. Living through in-between times therefore means waiting for the sign of a new order at every moment. The interim is the *topos* of desire, of longing. But often the state of endless waiting cannot be distinguished from nonstop action; time stretches and shrinks ambiguously. Where nothing is given, confusion can reach such an extent that it is impossible to say whether the time is standing still and nothing is happening, or whether it is accelerating and constantly bringing something new. The complicated relationship between past, present, and future is shaken in the in-between time; the very fabric of time is subject to fundamental disorientation. In other words, in such periods, not only has a particular his-

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 276.

torical present disintegrated, but the order of time itself is at stake; the construction and intelligibility of time become problematic.

On the other hand, thinking that emphatically determines its own time as a transition, and tries to *establish* its own contemporaneity precisely on this in-between state, finds itself in a Nietzschean trajectory: when thinking is concerned with an “unfashionable effect,” and assigns to itself the task of “work[ing] against time and thereby hav[ing] an effect upon it, hopefully for the benefit of a future time,”² it declares the present to be a phenomenon of transition. Both downfall and birth, this transition becomes a radical tension that thinking imposes on itself. The interim period is then no longer simply an external process that one suffers; instead, the one who determines the transition takes on an active role and helps to bring forth its in-betweenness in the first place. We conceive our present as a time bracketed between a past that is both outdated and oppressive and a glorious future whose arrival we help to *prepare*.

In his “Comforting words for those despairing of progress” (“Trostrede eines desparaten Fortschritts”), from *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche diagnoses: “Our age gives the impression of an interim state; the old worldviews, the old cultures, still exist in part, the new ones are not yet secure and habitual and hence lack decisiveness and consistency. It appears as if everything were becoming chaotic, the old being lost, the new worth nothing and becoming ever feebler.” People who think “unfashionably” or “untimely” are identified with soldierly bravery directed against fear resulting from uncertainty. They react to the crisis of world views and habits with a kind of mechanical courage, which enables them to overcome the ambiguity of time: “But so it is for the soldier who is learning to march; for a time he is more uncertain and awkward than ever because the muscles are being moved now according to the old system, now ac-

² Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87. The “unfashionable effect” is connected with praise of humankind as a bridging figure, a figure of transition, preparing a new being: “Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still. What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7.

ording to the new one, and neither has yet decisively claimed victory. We stagger, but it is necessary not to let this frighten us and possibly make us surrender what we have newly achieved.³ The interim period appears here as something to be endured only “for a while” until the new, which must be supported by us, has established itself.

But if we include another fragment by Nietzsche, this determination of a particular historical present with an in-between structure is extended to a characteristic of *all* times; it becomes the characteristic of historical time in general:

An age of transition: this is what everyone calls *our time*, and everyone is right. However, not in the sense that this word belongs to our age more than to any other. Wherever we find a foothold in history, we find fermentation, the old concepts battling with new ones; and those with a keen scent—who were formerly called prophets, but who only felt and saw what was happening to them—knew it and were usually very much afraid. If it goes on like this, everything falls to pieces; well, the world must perish. But it did not perish. The old trunks of the forest broke, but a new forest always grew again, and at any *time* there was a decaying and a becoming world.⁴

Here, too, fear is countered by a promise that relies on the becoming of the new within the constant process of disintegration; contemporaries try to read a remarkable persistence into this. Interestingly, the state of “fermentation,” determined as the essential characteristic of history, requires the perception and discovery of a specific vision, a particular “scent.” However, this historical sensibility to the present’s inconsistency, to its contradictory forces, potentially renders every time an in-between time; every time becomes an “interregnum” in which the old concepts battle with new ones and a decaying world and a becoming world coexist. The in-between status is then no longer our temporary malady of disorientation but something that belongs to every time and needs to be discovered by the prophetic thinker.—At one time the intervening present is a transi-

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³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human, I: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 169, § 248.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente, 1880–1882*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 154; my translation.

tion that must be endured and overcome; at another it is the hidden refuge of the forces of becoming that a “keen scent” must uncover.

Living Finitely and the Endless Present

The critique of temporality grounded in the present—that is, of all conceptions of time that proceed from the intertwinement of present/presence—is a central motif of twentieth-century philosophy opened up by Nietzsche. If we take into account the various complications of the concept of the present in this century, it becomes clear that “our” present stands in the shadow of a scientific, technological, and philosophical century which, to put it in a nutshell, has to be termed a century of the *critique of the present*. Critique in this sense, however, does not refer to a specific present; it is not restricted to a specific *historical* formation with its respective social, political, and cultural conditions. If we think of significant philosophical works by Heidegger, Adorno, and Derrida, for example, then “critique of the present” targets above all the metaphysical, phantasmatic, or ideological sediments and residuals that the present or any present-based conception of time contains; it is always firstly about the paradoxes and contradictions of the temporality of the present itself.

At the same time, however, the twentieth century is equally characterized by a tendency towards the *liberation* or *intensification* of the present, which it accomplishes *within and against* its horrific history. Experiencing the contraction and escalation, the depletion and exhaustion of ideas, and remembering their destructive power and biopolitical ramifications, sheds light on the inherent right of the *living* present, which comes increasingly to the fore as affirmed finitude. *To live finitely!*—perhaps this can be identified as the ambivalent slogan that simultaneously closes and opens this century. It means, first of all, liberating oneself from the burdens of the past—which have always obliged the present to continue a tradition, to take over a heritage, or to pay off a debt—but also liberating oneself from the overwhelming demands of projective constructions, which always seem to postpone the fulfillment of a promise to a future still to come, and thus to sacrifice the living present.

This emergence of the present is reflected in the paradigm shift from the modern to the contemporary with its different historical genealogies, each related to significant ruptures of the century (1945, the 1960s, 1989). While for the mod-

ern, it is said, time was essentially oriented towards the future, and the present was primarily understood as something to be overcome because it obstructed and delayed the realization of future projects, the present came to the fore precisely at the moment when modernist projects, goals, and hopes were being questioned, contested, and reformulated. Therefore, the temporality of the contemporary does not appear only as liberation; it is essentially manifested, as Boris Groys has argued, as doubt, hesitation, insecurity, and indecision.⁵ It is as if the living present that tries to liberate itself from past and future—time that intensifies itself as a finite present—were caught up in the horror of its own *endlessness*: the liberation of the present is turned into the jail of the now. And at the same time we sense that the cruel permutations of twentieth-century biopolitics have not ceased to be effective in the economic and technological regime of the present.

In the case of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou, we are confronted with two major philosophies of the event that deal with this contrasting character of the present, and for which the “critique of the present” is primarily connected with a *different* kind of intensification of the present. Remarkably, in each of them the concept of the present appears *twice*; their thinking is marked by a double emergence of the concept of the present as the fundamental problem of the philosophy of time. This problem can especially be elucidated with reference to “in-between time.” In doing so, Badiou uses the concept of *intervalle* to characterize our present as a time of disorientation, a “non-world” suspended between a past world and a new one yet to come. Deleuze, in turn, uses the concept of *entre-temps* to think of the event’s structure as an infinite becoming that opens up an in-between in the midst of the world and time itself. In what follows I would like to elaborate on this opposition, which not only appears between both event philosophies but also traverses each of them on its own terms. Starting from the contrast in the concept of in-between time, I am interested in what it means for both philosophers to determine time as an “interval” or “meanwhile” and, consequently, what they see as the particular task of thinking in interim periods.

⁵ Boris Groys, “Comrades of Time,” in *E-flux Journal: What is Contemporary Art?*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 25.

Intervals without Event: The Amnesia of the Present

In his book *The Century* (2005), Badiou attempts to comprehend the twentieth century by employing the thinking that it produced (or that produced it).⁶ He focuses on what he terms the “passion for the real”⁷ as the century’s key feature, mostly apparent in its entanglements of art and politics. At the same time, the book diagnoses a characteristic loss of a creative force in the contemporary situation, at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. Badiou thus confronts the intensification of the present (which we have defined as its *liberation*) with *another* intensification of the present (which could be defined, as we will see, as its *presentation*). In a certain sense, he actualizes the present of the twentieth century against the “presentism” of our contemporary situation. Or, to put it differently, he emphasizes the *creation* of the present, the present *as creation*, as a key feature within modernism’s futural imperative, and positions it against the temporality of the contemporary: the creation of the present as infinite is mobilized against the liberation of the finite present.

The problem of the contemporary situation is that it ultimately indicates a non-time. Badiou writes that the contemporaries of the twenty-first century have entered “a period of atemporality and instantaneity” characterized by the absence of any thinking of time. Their time, he argues, must therefore be understood as *time without time*: the day after tomorrow has become “abstract,” and the day before yesterday “incomprehensible.” Characteristic of this sort of time, which does not produce its own construction of time and therefore knows only pure passing, is a peculiar “marriage of frenzy and total rest,” the indistinguishability of permanent renewal and immobility. This kind of time, Badiou claims, is “an inaccessible amalgam of agitation and sterility, the paradox of a stagnant feverishness.” Ultimately—and this is the crucial point of his line of thought—it is a time “upon which the will, whether collective or individual, has no grip.”⁸ Because of the lack of a proper construction of time, from the standpoint of thought it is actually the case that the twenty-first century *has not even begun*

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⁶ The century as a “philosophical object” does not simply coincide with the empirical fact of the century or a historical unit of measurement. To be able to *think* the century, “to constitute it as an object for thought,” one has to “construct” it in the first place. See Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 1.

⁷ Badiou, 32.

⁸ Badiou, 105–6.

yet. But what characterizes a contemporary situation if one locates it after some end and before its own beginning?

Badiou qualifies this atemporal, instantaneous time as a transitional time or “in-between.” For him, in-between periods have eliminated the possibility of events, and thus their ability to incorporate a subject. Lingering in an atemporal, instantaneous time does not mark the advent of the new, but is an expression of a deficient and disoriented subjectivity of transition that has not yet found a new formation. Badiou’s diagnosis of the present is that contemporaries are in a phase of transition between two worlds, which at the same time is a transition between two temporalities. This period is characterized by uncertainty and disorientation because the laws of the old world have been suspended, but new ones have not yet taken their place. In the lecture series *Images of the Present Time* (*L’Image du temps présent*), which he delivered from 2001 to 2004, after delivering the series the book *The Century* is based on, Badiou describes the in-between period as a kind of transition “between a worn-out, deteriorating, exhausted world and a world that is not yet either calculable or foreseeable.”⁹ In the original French version, the reader often finds the term *intervalle*, which, unfortunately, is not preserved in the English translation. The moment of the interval in which one lingers extends further and further, and peculiarly perpetuates itself. It is as if the transition that has become permanent is forming a formless non-world in which the contemporaries of the twenty-first century dwell. Their past and future become increasingly distant as incomprehensible and incommensurable images or phantasies. In the non-world, interval, or in-between time, the only thing that remains is a phantasmagorical reflection of the past and future, which is appropriated and applied as definite proof of the backwardness of both the past and the past’s future.

It is this intervening character of time—a time without time, a void caught between two times—that, for Badiou, favors a *supremacy* of the present. In atemporal, instantaneous time, there results, as it were, in an almost natural way, a “unilateral promotion of the present”¹⁰—although not of the present as real, bearing witness to the interruption of an event, but of the present as given, corrupted,

⁹ Alain Badiou, *Images of the Present Time, 2001–2004*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 59.

¹⁰ Badiou, 67.

and bereft of events. By focusing solely on this continuous present, on the endless now, temporality is reduced to an empty measure that registers only the ever-identical passing of time. Atemporal, instantaneous time knows no other form than continuous passing, in which it appears only as an allegory of decreasing possibilities, an indicator of diminishing strength, and an insignia of a hope that has already faded. In the in-between time of the present epoch, time appears solely “as flight, as passage [. . .], as consumption or as consummation.”¹¹ Time is ultimately nothing but the neutral measure of continuous annihilation. This reduction of time to the finite dimension of decay, of consumption, is problematic since it is not capable of any novelty, of any creation, precisely because nothing can persist in it. Everything that could happen in it is nipped in the bud, exposed to destruction in advance, and consigned to death and oblivion.

Jelica Šumič Riha has coined the apt term “anticipated amnesia” for this act of preliminary annulment of every moment of potential rupture, of sealing against potential discontinuity and potential novelty. She describes it as “a readiness to forget in advance”: “Hence, for us, something is doomed to be forgotten even before it has actually taken place. This anticipated, programmed amnesia is the ability not only to wipe out what has happened but to annihilate the very idea of the possibility for something to happen, in short, the ability to erase the possibility of the possible.”¹² “Anticipated amnesia” is thus a severe form of amnesia, because it consigns something that has happened to oblivion along with the possibility of any future. We must conclude that *the future is forgotten*—and not in the sense of an abstract and indeterminate image of the future, but precisely the future *possibilities* produced by a real present:

The amnesia of the beginning, or, rather, of its possibility, is namely a subjectivation of time that denies the event as a clear-cut interruption by inscribing it back into history as one of those things that simply happen. By denying the discontinuity in which the eventness of the event consists, the amnesia of the amnesia not only annihilates the past, but also the future. Not, of course, some abstract future, but the future of the very present, the future of its proper present. It is therefore not enough to say that for an amnesic subject nothing has happened,

¹¹ Badiou, 69.

¹² Jelica Šumič Riha, “Contemporary Thought and the Crisis of Negation,” *Crisis and Critique* 1, no. 3 (July 2014): 79.

that the past event is but an illusion. It would be more appropriate to say that for him nothing can happen. And it is only in this sense that it could be said that for an amnesic subject there is no such thing as a beginning or an event.¹³

The amnesic subject, who abides in the present of the interval, thus annuls the present insofar as it signifies the possibility of intervening in the course of things actively, of taking part in a real change. This subject sacrifices the real present—the present of discontinuity that only enables the incorporation of a new world—and suffers a kind of premature forgetting. Premature forgetting is the crucial political instrument of contemporary domination because, as Badiou points out as well, power today is less concerned with the consolidation of what exists alone but primarily with the regulation of possibilities: “It’s an operation that restricts, limits, cuts, whittles away at, redefines, and formats possibilities.”¹⁴ Following Badiou’s critique of the “democratic emblem” and its aggressive regulation of the realm of the possible, Jan Völker has similarly argued that democratic subjectivity is characterized by a fundamental “corruption of time,” which is the result of a suppression and subsequent reification of the split between subjectivity and the reality of things that ultimately runs through the subject itself. While the suppressed non-temporal appears and reappears again and again in the world, it is itself never just an objective fact, however, but dependent on a subjective stance that perceives and acknowledges it as a non-temporal: “That which both interrupts and generates time, happens continuously, if it has not already been subordinated again to the temporal pulse that always inserts it into the course of the world.”¹⁵

In Badiou’s diagnosis of the present, the concept of the present assumes a double function. It is in play in two distinct ways. The series of lectures mentioned above, *Images of the Present Time*, illustrates this double emergence of the concept of the present very well because, later in the series, a transition is made from a denunciation of transitional or “in-between” time to a more complex construction that Badiou calls “declaration.” Notably, both figures revolve around the concept of the present. On the one hand there is an in-between time—held together by the

¹³ Šumič Riha, 80.

¹⁴ Badiou, *Images*, 113.

¹⁵ Jan Völker, “Das demokratische Subjekt und die Korruption der Zeit,” in *Absolute Gegenwart*, ed. Marcus Quent (Berlin: Merve, 2016), 48.

“democratic emblem” and the “youthful imaginary”¹⁶—that masks the absence of a world. It is a time “concentrated or focused entirely on itself,”¹⁷ a conception that thinks of time as immediacy and thus “unilaterally” promotes the present. Because it valorizes the present one-sidedly, it cannot maintain or hold anything in place. It is a “time without retention” in which a futureless everydayness combines with the succession of interchangeable moments to generate a furious “movement in place.”¹⁸ For Badiou, the present of our contemporary democracy is therefore essentially a “temporal flight,” a “substitutable, empty, and deferred present”; the prevailing temporality is founded on a “vanishing present.”¹⁹

But on the other hand, Badiou speaks of a “present of the present” that functions without an emblem and imaginary, a present that is radically *imageless* and turns against power as an actively *dis-imaging* force.²⁰ If the present is accentuated in the sense of this dis-imaging force of the real, then it is nothing given, no flow of time that can always be presupposed; then, on the contrary, it is uncertain whether there is such a thing as a present in a “contemporary” situation. The question of the present then initially requires an *examination*, which may lead to the disappointing conclusion that “there may be no present”²¹ at all. It is not certain that there is such a thing as a present at any time, in any situation.

While the “vanishing present” is based on a conception of time “without retention,”²² in which the present is “unilaterally” promoted as the immediacy of consumption, the present as this dis-imaging force of the real hinges on a conception of time that constructs a bringing forth of the present as a “conflictual interaction of repetition and projection.”²³ The “present of the present” emerges through a *torsion*, in which a repetitive element of the past is combined with a projective element of the future in a “declaration.” The present—in the sense of the “present of the present” or of the imageless force of the real—which turns against the emblem of power, is constituted in a creative declaration of the mass

¹⁶ Badiou, *Images*, 68.

¹⁷ Badiou, 59.

¹⁸ Badiou, 69, 70.

¹⁹ Badiou, 75.

²⁰ Badiou, 13.

²¹ Badiou, 134.

²² Badiou, 72.

²³ Badiou, 141.

or the *crowd*: “The present contained in the declaration, in what the Crowd declares, is something that raises repetition to the level of projection. It’s not simply replacing the one with the other. [. . .] The declaration [. . .] is the ‘swept up’ coexistence of repetition and projection.”²⁴ The “real” present then, the present “of” the real, has to do with a specific *configuration* of past and future; it is the construction of a torsion of a past element through a projective force:

To sum up regarding the complexity of the present, we could say that the complexity of the present is the declaration—that is, the overlapping of repetition and projection—the declaration insofar as it exerts a torsion on repetition in order to hook it up or connect it to projection. This is an electrification that is different from tradition: a different current will be made to flow. It’s something other than destroying it for the sake of an absolute beginning, of a new world.²⁵

The act of declaration and the operation of torsion are essential features of the incorporation of a faithful subject, which Badiou then further discusses and formalizes in *Logics of Worlds* (2006). In Book I of the second of three volumes of his opus magnum *Being and Event*, he famously introduces a formal theory of the subject, laying the conceptual ground for the appearance of a truth in a world. In this context, the “subject” is understood neither as a register of experience, a category of morality, or an ideological fiction, but essentially as a “system of forms and operations”²⁶ that denotes nothing other than the conjunction between the body and the trace of an eventful rupture. The notion of the present famously plays a crucial role in distinguishing the formal types of subjects introduced. For Badiou, there are three fundamental relations to a present, which is itself nothing other than a “set of consequences of the evental trace”:²⁷ While the *faithful* subject *produces* the present, the *reactive* subject is characterized by the *denial* of the produced present, and the *obscure* subject, in turn, by the full *occultation* of the relation to the present.²⁸ What is decisive for Badiou, of course, is the faithful subject, which involves a “realization in the present of a hitherto

²⁴ Badiou, 143, 144.

²⁵ Badiou, 146.

²⁶ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 47.

²⁷ Badiou, 52.

²⁸ Badiou, 62.

unknown possibility.”²⁹ The faithful subject produces the consequences of an eventful rupture, the trace of an event within a situation—and *thereby produces the present itself in the first place*. Thus the present is neither the point-totality of all that merely exists, nor the punctual experience of an ecstatic presence, but the present of an event-conditioned truth that is in itself universal and eternal. Therefore, the complement of this subjective production of the present (or of the production of the present *as* subject) is that of *incorporation*: “The only real relation to the present,” Badiou sums up in the last pages of *Logic of Worlds*, “is that of incorporation,”³⁰ which is conceived as a continuous process. Contemporary ideology, labeled as “democratic materialism” by Badiou, famously denies precisely the possibility of this real relation to the present: “For democratic materialism, the present is never created. Democratic materialism affirms, in an entirely explicit manner, that it is important to maintain the present within the confines of an atonic reality.”³¹

To summarize, an examination of how Badiou thinks of “in-between” time must be undertaken in the particular context of a diagnosis of the present, in which the concept of the present is involved in a twofold way. Badiou’s diagnosis of the present not only expresses an evaluation of the contemporary historical present but also states, above all, the loss of the creative power of the new in contrast to the temporal constellation that precedes it. At the same time, as part of this contemporary diagnosis, *another* present emerges within the present, or, one could say, is *presented*, resulting from a conflictual construction of past and future dimensions. In the intervening present or the interval’s time, another in-between emerges that is embedded in the sequence of events it highlights. This diagnosis is linked to a task, a kind of ethos of thinking: “A world that’s between two things requires a particular discipline of thought because you’re not supported by any structure. Since you’re in an in-between space, a gap, you are your only reference point.”³²

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²⁹ Badiou, 52.

³⁰ Badiou, 508.

³¹ Badiou, 509.

³² Badiou, *Images*, 38.

Virtual In-between Time: Event without Present

Deleuze's challenging contributions to the philosophy of time are directed against the present. Not just against any given present—that is, for example, a particular historical shape or a determinate political constitution of the present—but against the primacy of the present in thinking about time itself, against it limiting and reducing our understanding of time. Reading the various texts in which he develops his fundamental reflections on a philosophy of time—the difficult sections on the three syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition*, the remarks on the two regimes of time scattered throughout the various series in *The Logic of Sense*, or, regarding his later work, the thoughts on the “time-image” developed with Bergson in the second volume of *Cinema* and the short but dense passages on the concept of *entre-temps* in *What is Philosophy?*—it is striking that Deleuze is always concerned with confronting a conception of time dominated by the present with a fundamentally different way of thinking about time. He challenges the understanding of time that conceives of the past, the present, and the future as three single dimensions of a unified present, thus establishing temporality based on the living present. Instead, this new way of thinking about time assumes an irrevocable *split* in the consciousness of time, whereby the living present dissolves. Proceeding from Kant's discovery of transcendental consciousness and Bergson's concept of memory and duration, the conception of both a past *in itself* and a future *in itself* become decisive features of Deleuze's thought. The dimensions of past and future acquire, as it were, autonomy and independence from the living present.

First, Deleuze's fundamental intervention in the thinking of time consists, roughly speaking, in supplementing chronological time by an *a-chronicle* time that is alien to it. The time of present realization and actualization is contrasted with a non-present time stratum of the virtual that should be regarded as the real site of the event. Time, Deleuze argues, following the Stoics, “must be grasped twice, in two complementary though mutually exclusive fashions.” These are two incompatible ways of looking at time that nevertheless overlap in thought: “First, it must be grasped entirely as the living present in bodies which act and are acted upon. Second, it must be grasped entirely as an entity infinitely divisible into past and future, and into the incorporeal effects which

result from bodies, their actions and their passions.”³³ On the one hand, there is a realm of bodies and things; its time is the present in which all bodies are causes of one another. On the other hand, there is a realm of events that are incorporeal effects; its time is said to be the past-future. “Only the present exists in time and gathers together or absorbs the past and future. But only the past and future inhere in time and divide each present infinitely.”³⁴

The dominant conception of time as a continuous flow within which three successive constitutive dimensions—past, present, and future—permanently merge into one another is radically reconfigured into two simultaneous but incompatible “readings of time,” one being the *chronological*, dominated by the present, and the other the *aionic*, being infinitely dividable into past and future. Past, present, and future no longer denote historically locatable points in the flow of time. Instead they are conceived as non-linear, non-successive, coexisting *strata of time* overlapping one another.³⁵ Instead of a single chronological time, which encompasses three constitutive dimensions merging into one, Deleuze’s fundamental intervention into the thinking of temporality consists in presenting two fundamentally different and mutually exclusive “readings of time,” in each of which the relationship of the temporal dimensions to one another is conceived in a completely different way: the time of the Chronos and the time of the Aion. For Deleuze, the common chronological understanding of time is entirely dominated by the present—although the present is effective in different ways in each case. The chronological account of time sets the present as absolute in all forms and instances. The aionic understanding of time, which he contrasts with it, accepts the present only in the form of a *moment without extension*, dividing the past and

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 5.

³⁴ Deleuze, 5.

³⁵ In his book on Deleuze’s philosophy of time, James Williams accentuates this destruction of the one-dimensionality of linear time: “We must therefore speak of many presents with their own ways of taking the past and the future as dimensions. We must also avoid any general spatial representation of time as something pre-existent that things can be placed on or in. There is no general line of time and no space–time continuum. Instead, singular processes make their own times within the limits set by some wider formal principles, such as asymmetry.” James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 4.

the future infinitely, being only an infinitesimal abstract “limit value.” In aionic time, past and future are set autonomously as eternally coexisting strata.³⁶

In *What is Philosophy?* the idea of a *virtual in-between time* is developed, which in this late work written together with Félix Guattari, varies and expands the notion of the aionic past-future from Deleuze’s early work and inscribes it into the framework of a Bergsonian terminology.³⁷ Unlike Badiou, the concept of “in-between” appears here precisely where the eventful dimension of time is specified. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari argue, there is a time of facts, bodies and objects, and experience. This is the present time of actualization, which passes between moments. In contrast, there is the time of the event, which they call virtual “in-between time” for which the English translators have chosen the equivalent temporal adverb “meanwhile.” Unfortunately the English language cannot reproduce the subtle double meaning of the French *entre-temps*, which Deleuze and Guattari spell with a hyphen that perfectly indicates the split of time the term is intended to describe.³⁸ The *entre-temps* is without beginning or passing; in a sense it is extra-temporal or atemporal. Its in-betweenness opens up the time of the event but no longer serves as a real agent of mediation. It no longer mediates states and bodies but forms a space of its own—a midpoint that has renounced its borders. “It is no longer time that exists between two instants; it is the event that is a meanwhile [*entre-temps*]: the meanwhile is not part of

³⁶ “Chronos is the present which alone exists. It makes of the past and future its two oriented dimensions, so that one goes always from the past to the future—but only to the degree that presents follow one another inside partial worlds or partial systems. Aion is the past-future, which in an infinite subdivision of the abstract moment endlessly decomposes itself in both directions at once and forever sidesteps the present.” Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 77.

³⁷ Deleuze contrasts the pair of the *possible* and the *real* with the pair of the *virtual* and the *actual* to carry out an intervention in ontological thinking on the basis of this four-fold constellation. For the philosophical background in the context of the discussion with Bergson, see Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1–25.

³⁸ The translators themselves address this problem of terminology in a footnote: “We have followed the usual translation of *entre-temps* as signifying ‘meanwhile’ or ‘meantime,’ although the English loses something of the literal meaning of the French as that which happens in the interval between moments of time or actions.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 158n.

the eternal, but neither is it part of time—it belongs to becoming.”³⁹ Becoming is no longer conceived on the basis of a living present that at the same time is always a transient and never graspable movement that couples two interconnecting states of the body or of experience. It is understood instead as a *permanent* and *infinite* movement that reveals an incorporeal being independent of the body and its states.

Ultimately and enigmatically, philosophy itself is identified with this in-between time of the *entre-temps*.⁴⁰ Philosophical thinking has to be understood as the unique practice of this in-between, following the extensionless present as the “limit value.” The different reference to the event, to the virtual, and to becoming is thus unfolded as a distinguishing criterion of science and philosophy: while scientific thinking derives *functions* from the virtual, philosophical thought extracts *concepts* from it. Science descends from virtual to actual states of affairs, while philosophy ascends from actual states of affairs to the virtual.⁴¹ It is their opposite progression that makes it possible to distinguish science and philosophy: the one descends from the virtual; the other ascends to it.

On the descending path from the virtual to actualization—the path of science—we always grasp the time passing between two or more moments, according to Deleuze and Guattari, and thus obtain the image of successive time. On the ascending path—the path of philosophy—where we abstract from realized and actualized forms to give consistency to the “infinite movement” of the virtual, we find ourselves in an “empty” and “dead” “meanwhile” that is measureless and withdrawn from the sphere of power of the present. Through philosophy, we therefore obtain the image of overlapping in-between times that coexist. Now, importantly, what we call an “event” in everyday life is not the same in both regimes of time: from the viewpoint of passing time, the event ultimately always occurs as an accident or ambush. It is an unforeseen exception to the regular temporal course, which nevertheless still confirms it. It is a short incision, and disappears in its subsequent effects. In the *entre-temps*, however, the event lasts as bodiless and extra-temporal.

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³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, 158.

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, 159.

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, 160.

The meanwhile (*entre-temps*), the event, is always a dead time; it is there where nothing takes place, an infinite awaiting that is already infinitely past, awaiting and reserve. This dead time does not come after what happens; it coexists with the instant or time of the accident, but as the immensity of the empty time in which we see it as still to come and as having already happened, in the strange indifference of an intellectual intuition.⁴²

Thus, the in-between of time in Deleuze is something like an empty and infinite middle that has emancipated itself from the bodies and objects enclosing it and remains perpetually withdrawn from the present as an absolute in-between. For Deleuze, *entre-temps* indicates the time of the event that can be infinitely divided and decomposed into past and future. It can never be grasped in any other way than in the strange sensation of something that has only just happened and will happen straight away. The pure event “is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening.”⁴³ From the perspective of time, of the temporal course, an event becomes comprehensible only in its realized and actualized parts. The decisive thing in the event, however, is just what escapes the actualization, evades it, and exceeds it.

Each component of the event is *actualized or effectuated* in an instant, and the event in the time that passes between these instants; but nothing happens within *the virtuality* that has only meanwhiles as components and an event as composite becoming. Nothing happens there, but everything becomes, so that the event has the privilege of beginning again when time is past. Nothing happens, and yet everything changes, because becoming continues to pass through its components again and to restore the event that is actualized elsewhere, at a different moment. When time passes and takes the instant away, there is always a meanwhile to restore the event.⁴⁴

The force mobilized in event-thinking here is based on asserting a “shadowy and hidden part,” a “pure reserve,” which pervades or manages reality with-

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, 158. *Instant* and *chance* are the images of the event in chronological time, while *waiting*, *reserve*, and *dead or indefinitely past time* are images of the event in aionian time.

⁴³ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 63.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 158.

out being able to be appropriated or made accessible. The “pure reserve” of the event, its “intangible” part, is more “real” than reality, without depending on a beyond, without establishing a transcendent realm. The event thus always marks the *inconsistency point* of reality without being merely unreal.

I would argue that the work of art for Deleuze is ultimately situated at the intersection of these two regimes of time, the passing time of actualization and the lasting time of *counter-effectuation*. By capturing invisible forces and opening itself up to deformation, it is able to incarnate the pure time of the event, that is, *to inscribe the virtual in-between time into the living present*. Art—which would then have to be called contemporary art in a strong sense—confronts us with the present as a split of time *and* an intersection of time. Within the work of art, which in *What is Philosophy?* is conceived as a monument (of becoming, not of memory), the rift or crack of time appears.⁴⁵ The present permanently evades itself, incorporating into its monument the endlessly divisible past-future, which is experienced, as Deleuze shows in relation to Francis Bacon’s work, as a present slip or *fall*: the non-present sensation inscribes itself into the flesh, transfers the particular present of an intensity—and manifests itself as a fall.

In Between Two Forms of Timelessness

Considering the steps we have accomplished so far, in-between time entails, as it were, two mutually exclusive perspectives. For Alain Badiou, “in-between time” or “interval” denotes an empty period during which a corrupted, weakened present expands endlessly so that time appears only in the image of con-

⁴⁵ It cannot be discussed in detail here whether and to what extent this model remains subject to the *dispositif* of the expression of being. I am thinking here of Rok Benčín, who, in relation to aesthetics and the work of art, has argued instead for concentrating on the “surplus representation,” enabled by what is excluded from representation, which he develops in strict opposition to the idea of the expression of being as some kind of hidden truth behind the veil of representation. So, against Heideggerian *unconcealment* and Deleuzian *becoming*, we should follow Badiou and Rancière in rethinking the complexity of representation: their subtraction of being, or the reconfiguration of the division of the sensible. Whether Deleuze’s approach is ultimately doomed to this proximity to a concept of truth that relies on a presupposed *concealment* should be discussed elsewhere. See Rok Benčín, “Rethinking Representation in Ontology and Aesthetics via Badiou and Rancière,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 36, no. 5 (September 2019): 95–112, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418806573>.

sumption, exhaustion, and self-destruction. This intervening time is one that lies between two events, a time of the absence of an event in which past, present, and future tend to become incomprehensible. The task of thought, then, is to recover a *discipline* of time capable of tracing sequences of truth-events. For Gilles Deleuze, on the other hand, “in-between time” or the “meanwhile” indicates something like an empty and infinite middle that has emancipated itself from every kind of body and object enclosing it and, as an absolute in-between, is perpetually withdrawn from the present. This in-between is the event itself, which presupposes supplementing the regime of chronological time with a second “reading of time.” The task of thinking then lies in a *counter-effectuation*, which distances itself from actuality—the sphere of existing reality—to approach virtuals that *subsist* in reality.

Thus, while the time of the meanwhile (*entre-temps*) denotes the opening up of time to its hidden and shadowy event dimension, the time of the intervening period (*intervalle*) is the name for a time that, on the contrary, has split off its event dimension, its capacity to incorporate a subject. On the one hand, with Badiou, we have the formalization after a disruption resulting from the presentation of the real that overcomes a dull intervening period. On the other hand, with Deleuze, we are confronted with a timeless subsisting sphere that opens up any given moment in time, and can be detected in each present as something that evades it. The interval calls for the incorporation or subjectivization of the real that will ultimately end it, whereas the meanwhile is the de-subjectivizing effect of the endless real.

Here we face the ambiguous figure or conundrum of the present, its uncanny circle: the present becomes both the name for a problematic, uneventful interval and the term for the moment of its eventful disruption, which is brought into position against it. It indicates the continuum of an incurious actuality, as well as the lucid *counter-effectuation* that is supposed to break through this continuum—or create it in the first place as the present. The “present” circulates as both empty and fulfilled time, as both elapsing and enduring time. It is conceived as a time of unreserved consumption from which the urgency of a “discipline” is deduced, and as a vicious moving moment representing the event that permanently divides time into past and future, thus demanding a different mode of actualization. But how can the present simultaneously be a sealed continuum and a discontinuous incision in the same continuum?

There is a well-known dispute between Badiou and Deleuze, or the “Badiouian” and “Deleuzian” approaches, which not only arises due to complex questions in terms of ontology and the constitution of the event and its relation to truth, but noticeably also based on the question of how to delineate, determine, and construct what we call “politics.” Is politics, for example, as Badiou contends, in the end completely absent in Deleuze? Or, on the contrary, is Badiou’s concept of politics, seemingly purged of all biophysical dimensions, insensitive to the necessary “impure” affective dimensions of politics itself? At this point, within our framework, we can neither decide this matter nor do justice to the complex discussion of its argumentation on both sides.⁴⁶

But as I have indicated above, the uncanny circle of the present is not only effective if we relate and compare Badiou’s and Deleuze’s different concepts of time and the real, but, more importantly, it also traverses both of them precisely in their different denunciations of the regime of the present. The in-between time as a double signifier—once attacked in the critique of the *interval*, and once highlighted in the affirmation of the *meanwhile*—is ultimately effective in each philosopher in the respective other dimension: it appears elsewhere. What is contrasted here in the discussion of their use of the term “in-between time” already appears in their own conceptions of the temporality of the event, even if in each case from a different starting point. For example, in Badiou, the event itself is developed as a figure of the Two, circulating between an eventful interruption and an intervention pertaining to this interruption: the interval of the (non-)world is thus juxtaposed by another kind of in-between-time. In Deleuze, in turn, the meanwhile of the event is contrasted with the pure passing of time between two moments, which is capitalized by the historical logic he opposes.

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With Badiou and Deleuze, we are confronted twice—in two separate and mutually incompatible ways—with a timelessness, a *time without time*. Ultimately, the ambiguous figure or vicious circle of the present pushes us towards the conflict between *two timelessnesses*: the interval of in-between time, the corrupted

⁴⁶ For this comparative discussion, for example, although with a clear swing in the direction of Deleuze, see Katja Diefenbach, “Über das Un/Sinnliche. Ereignis- und Zeitbegriffe in Deleuzes und Badiou’s Ontologien unendlicher Mannigfaltigkeit,” in “Sensibilität der Gegenwart. Wahrnehmung, Ethik und politische Sensibilisierung im Kontext westlicher Gewaltgeschichte,” ed. Burkhard Liebsch, special issue, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 17 (2018): 151–76.

present, is the timelessness of mere temporal passing; the becoming of in-between time, the virtual dimension, is likewise a timelessness, but that of the event itself. In any resistant thinking of time *the present always meets us two-fold*, double in form, critical, and affirmative.⁴⁷ This observation neither implies mediation or relativization nor indicates negligent thinking. It is rather that resistance to the timelessness of passing time, whose inexorable consumption produces an empty duration that regresses to a point, is not feasible if historical time is thought of as the intact *totality* of time. The force of *another timelessness* is required, a timelessness that originates from an unconnected discontinuity: the inner times, the processes of becoming, the events in art and politics.

To somewhat speed up our train of thought here, we must keep in mind that every strong construction of time is ultimately an *intersection and conversion of two timelessnesses*. Historical positivism always tries to fight within passing time, within reality, against its peculiar timelessness. The historian can cure the baleful amnesia of the present only by sketching its prehistory, attempting to develop a memory that deepens, fathoms, and underpins the present. Historical thinking, however, is necessarily blind to that second timelessness that comes from *elsewhere*. This peculiar timelessness, which opens itself up to a living, becoming, subjective duration, is itself an *origin of history* that sets in motion its own construction of time—not as the origin of a supratemporal being but as an unthinkable division or split that marks the event *of* time itself. Time is not the measurement of a homogeneous course; it does not coincide with continuous-discontinuous history, but is a necessary initial construction that operates in the space between two timelessnesses and evades any history given in advance. Time and history exist only as subsisting counter-stories, due to *becoming*, in the form of retroactive *sequences* or *nodes* that unfold their own logic.

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What, then, is the peculiar opportunity of so-called “in-between times,” and how should they be understood? The answer, in the context of the temporal-philosophical operation in question, must at this point be a short one, nevertheless having complex implications: in-between times allow us to develop a sense, first-ly, for *a possible split of a* (historical) present, and, secondly, for *the principle split of the present* as such. The task of thinking about time lies in a construction that

⁴⁷ I have developed this argument in detail in Marcus Quent, *Gegenwartskunst: Konstruktionen der Zeit* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2021).

starts from a double splitting of the present, which itself can never be presupposed as given. We can thus learn from Deleuze and Badiou, without repressing their incompatibilities, that thinking about time always consists in juxtaposing two timelessnesses. Time only becomes possible at their intersection. Resistance to a present regime in any case requires the meeting of both.

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Alexandra Van Laeken*

What's Love Got to Do With It? Badiou's Scene of Two Through the Lens of Lacan's Formulas of Sexuation¹

Keywords

love, politics, sexuation, Lacan, Badiou, emancipation

Abstract

Badiou's philosophy deals with the question of radical change, most prominently in relation to love and emancipatory politics. Yet, he notes that love and politics are not interwoven and must be dealt with separately. In recent literature, Lacan's theory of sexuation and love has been extensively drawn upon and put into relation with politics (notably by Žižek and Zupančič). It is striking that Badiou, being both a highly political thinker and strongly influenced by Lacan, only discusses sexuation in relation to love, but disconnects the concept from politics. In this paper, I probe Badiou's concept of love in light of Lacan's formulas of sexuation. I first examine Badiou's concepts of love and politics in relation to sexuation, then set this against Lacan's formulas, to eventually illustrate the political relevance of love.

Kaj ima ljubezen s tem? Badioujeva scena Dvojega z vidi-ka Lacanovih formul seksuacije

Ključne besede

ljubezen, politika, seksuacija, Lacan, Badiou, emancipacija

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Povzetek

Badioujeva filozofija se ukvarja z vprašanjem radikalne spremembe, predvsem v povezavi z ljubeznijo in emancipatorno politiko. Vseeno pa Badiou opozarja,

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* University of Ghent, Belgium
alexandra.vanlaeken@hotmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1690-0567>

da se ljubezen in politika ne prepletata in ju je treba obravnavati ločeno. V nasprotju s tem so se novejši komentariji v veliki meri opirali na Lacanovo teorijo seksuacije in ljubezni in jo postavljali v razmerje s politiko (zlasti Žižek in Zupančič). Presenetljivo je, da Badiou, ki je izrazito politični mislec in je obenem pod močnim vplivom Lacana, razpravlja o spolnosti le v povezavi z ljubeznijo, sam koncept spolnosti pa ločuje od politike. V pričujočem prispevku proučujem Badioujev koncept ljubezni v luči Lacanovih formul seksuacije. Najprej preučim Badioujeva koncepta ljubezni in politike v razmerju do seksuacije, nato ju primerjam z Lacanovimi formulami, da bi na koncu ponazorila politični pomen ljubezni.



Introduction

When I say I love you, and I do, I don't know what I am saying. And when you say you love me, and I believe you do, you don't know either. What I do know is that we are affirming each other, that we firmly agree upon this very incomprehensible statement that *we love each other*. And in doing so, I become even more convinced of it. I act upon it, and even more so, I was already acting upon it before I dared to say it to you. But the moment I said it, I could act upon it with more confidence. Yet due to the fact that I don't really know what I am saying, my confidence also makes me feel somewhat insecure. What exactly am I acting upon so confidently? Well . . . I try to gasp your difference and make it my own. I imagine how to look through your gaze and see the world from your perspective. I look through a window of how I think you would see the world. And in that window, I see you, standing there, looking through another window, and I wonder what you are looking at.

In his celebrated essay, *In praise of love* Alain Badiou stated that love is a "truth of difference." It creates a new world in which one no longer departs from the perspective of the "One," but from the perspective of the "Two."² Less famous are his elaborations on love in *Conditions*, where he introduces a notion of sex-

² Alain Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 39.

ual difference.³ For Badiou, sexual difference *only* exists in the field of love. The two sexes do not pre-exist. Rather, love establishes sexuation from the moment two lovers encounter each other. Two disjunctive positions arise: the masculine and the feminine position, “as gay as it may be.”⁴ For Badiou states that the two positions are to be understood as “strictly nominalist: no empirical, biological or social distribution is acceptable here.”⁵

This conception of sexual difference resonates Jacques Lacan’s famous formulas of sexuation. Lacan developed a formalisation of two logical positions, the “phallic” or “masculine” and the “Other” or “feminine” logic, to grasp speaking beings’ relation to the world. The masculine and the feminine logic illustrate the way in which we relate ourselves to the world, respectively, through language, and through the shortcomings of language. In Seminar XX, Lacan uses these logics to formalise love. Yet, contrary to Badiou, Lacan does not *restrict* sexuation to love. Lacan’s concept of sexuation is much broader in use and application than that of Badiou.

In recent literature, many Lacanian philosophers draw from the formulas of sexuation to (*re-*)think politics, notably Alenka Zupančič and Slavoj Žižek.⁶ Alenka Zupančič departs in her book *What is Sex* from the claim that “the sexual is political [. . .] in the sense that a true emancipatory politics can be thought only on the ground of an ‘object-disoriented ontology’ [. . .]—that is, an ontology that pursues not simply being qua being, but the crack (the Real, the antagonism) that haunts being from within, informs it.”⁷ Politics, for Zupančič, is not about what is, but about what is not, “the crack,” which is “the sexual.” It is exactly this “crack” that is, following Zupančič, grasped by Lacan in his formulas. It is striking that Badiou, being a highly political philosopher, does not make this connection.

³ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008).

⁴ Badiou, 196.

⁵ Badiou, 183.

⁶ Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017); Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

⁷ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 24.

Following Badiou, sexuation is linked to love, and love should be strictly separated from politics. But if love creates a new world, how could this not be political?

When I say I love you, and I do, I get to see the world differently. My gaze gets differentiated. It gets sexuated. It is on this level of sexuation, I claim, that politics comes into play. In this paper, I question the relation between love and politics through the notion of sexuation. I do so by first examining what Badiou means by love and how this relates to his own concept of sexuation. Secondly, I bring in Lacan's formulas of sexuation, consider their relation to love and think through their political implications. Thirdly, I confront the Lacanian formulas of sexuation to Badiou's frame, to illustrate how Badiou's concept of love is also politically meaningful.

The One That I Want

The philosophy of Alain Badiou is all about the “radical change” caused by the confrontation with “truth.” He formalises this confrontation as an “event,” i.e. an occurrence of love, politics, science, or art which drills a hole in the current state of affairs and makes possible something radically new. “An event is something that takes place in the world, but which cannot be calculated from the elements of that very world itself. It happens.”⁸

The concept of the event should be understood from within Badiou's ontology. According to Badiou, we can discern two notions of being. On the one hand, there is the ontological notion of being, which considers being in terms of a set of beings counted as one. Here, the following Leibnizian principle applies: “What is not *a* being, is not a *being*.”⁹ Everything that *is*, is counted as one. Yet, each one is thereby always a set referring to multiple members, which are in turn multiples themselves. “Every multiple is a multiple of a multiple.”¹⁰ By counting the multiple of everything we experience as one, we create a consen-

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⁸ Alain Badiou, *Alain Badiou par Alain Badiou* (Paris: PUF, 2021), n.p.; all translations of references in French are my own.

⁹ Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 31.

¹⁰ Badiou, 37.

cy in which we can think and move. So, there are sets such as “the Frenchman,” “the artwork,” “the migrant,” and “the witch,” and so forth.

However, despite the appearances of “ones,” Badiou’s central premise is that one is not—“*l’un n’est pas*.”¹¹ The apparent consistency of the one is always an effect of a procedure of counting something inconsistent, namely “inconsistent multiplicity.” This is where the second notion of being comes in, i.e. *being qua being*, which lies at the origin of counted being, and is in itself exactly this true inconsistent multiplicity. The true inconsistent being cannot be grasped by the one, yet we constantly attempt to by counting multiples and setting up a consistent ontology. Every consistent multiple is always a flawed attempt to grasp the inconsistent multiplicity. Consequently, *one* does not exist in itself. It only exists as an operation, the count-as-one.

It should be noted that this metaphysical structure of being is clearly inspired by Lacanian theory, more precisely, the Lacanian notion of castration. That is the idea that all human beings as speaking beings are castrated, i.e. they fall short in language. Badiou’s pure inconsistent multiplicity is in terms of Lacan “non-castrated”: nothing more can be said about it. Yet, once it gets “counted as one”—and therefore recognised within ontology—it becomes castrated. And, just as castration, according to Lacan, is doomed by its shortcomings, so is ontology always lacking according to Badiou.

For Badiou, the counted being is always haunted by “a multiple-without-one” that cannot be addressed. “Its non-arrival makes it comparable to the flight of scenes from a dream.”¹² It is the surplus of our structuring procedure of the count-as-one. Since it is not one, it is not—or rather, it is “no-thing.” Badiou refers to this nothing as the “void,” which functions as the proper name of the negativity of all multiples, i.e. the proper name of the unrepresentable.¹³ It is exactly this void which forms the condition of possibility for the event.

The occurrence of the event passes through different phases. First, there is a “situation,” a multiple of everything there is. This is, for example, the situation of

¹¹ Badiou, 31.

¹² Badiou, 44.

¹³ Badiou, 105.

the Belgian state, which consists of everything that is counted as being part of the Belgian state. The situation is always stuck in place. “It is like it is,” they say. Here comes the need for radical change. How can the migrant free him- or herself from “being a migrant”? How is it possible that the witch is suddenly no longer a witch, but a falsely accused woman? A situation is always temporary since it is but an imperfect representation of what there is. Radical change within a situation is possible when an event occurs. The event in turn is never independent of the situation. It is initiated by the creation of something exceptional—a love encounter, an artwork, a scientific outcome, a political trigger—*within* a situation.

Although the event is thus always intrinsic to a situation, it is always fundamentally extrinsic to it as well. The event arises from an exceptional creation *within* the situation, bringing forth an ineffable truth that is grounded *outside* the situation, i.e. in the void. But this ineffable truth, even once discovered within the situation, does not necessarily lead to radical change. An event can only be realised if there is a subject willing to hold on to the truth. It is a matter of “fidelity” to embody the truth of an event and bring forth its effects in the situation. The subject here should not be thought of as a given, nor as a constituting human being. A subject only arises in relation to a truth. The subject therefore necessarily takes up a revolutionary position within the situation. It could be, for example, a series of artworks moving away from the prevailing art norms, or a political party that breaks with the status quo. The “procedure of fidelity” that is followed by the subject, is, just as the count-as-one, a structuring procedure. It *regroups* the multiplicities that are counted-as-one. “One can think of a fidelity as a counter-state: it organises in fact in the situation another legitimacy of the inclusions.”¹⁴ Because of this procedure of recounting, some things are brought to life and others disappear, for example the unjustly burned woman and the witch.

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It Takes Two

Love, for Badiou, is one of the four realms, next to art, science, and politics, in which an event can take place. Thus, love is posited as “a construction of truth,” that is, not only an encounter, but a new life or even a new world that is made, departing no longer from the perspective of the “One,” but from the perspective

¹⁴ Badiou, 263.

of the “Two.” The truth at stake here is a “truth of difference,” refuting the laws of identity. This new world is what Badiou calls “the scene of Two.”¹⁵

How is the scene of Two realised? It follows the structure of the event as set out above. First there occurs, hazardously and unexpectedly, an amorous encounter between two differences. It finds the sexual difference. For this encounter to turn into an event, the subject, in this case the two lovers, should faithfully hold on to this truth by reinventing the world from the point of the Two. This “long-lasting laborious desire,” “*le dur désir de durer*,”¹⁶ is sealed by the declaration of love: “I love you.”¹⁷ Badiou describes this moment, referring to Mallarmé, as the fixation of the hazard (See Mallarmé: “Le hasard doit être fixé”).¹⁸ This moment of fixation is an eternal task, one impossible to ever fulfil. “The hazard of the encounter is conquered day after day in the invention of a duration, in the birth of a world.”¹⁹

As I mentioned before, Badiou holds it is only in respect to love that the sexual difference shows itself, as a radical disjunction between the two lovers. In the scene of Two, the two lovers have nothing in common and there is no “third position” as a neutral perspective that could count the Two. Therefore, the amorous Two is at the same time uncountable, from the perspective of the one, and immanent, because it is only counted from itself. Love articulates itself around this paradox of the uncountable immanent Two. “Love does not relieve the paradox; it treats it. More precisely, it makes the truth of the paradox itself.”²⁰

The masculine and the feminine, as two positions of difference in the scene of Two, each develop a different relation towards the truth. The feminine position “sustains the articulation of the Two and the infinite,” and at the same time “inscribes when and as needed the becoming-truth [of this articulation].”²¹ In other words, the feminine position is about the long-lasting challenge to make love true, and to prove the ontological existence and symbolic value of the Two. The

¹⁵ Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour*, 39.

¹⁶ Badiou, 42.

¹⁷ Badiou, 50.

¹⁸ Badiou, 49.

¹⁹ Badiou, 52.

²⁰ Badiou, *Conditions*, 186.

²¹ Badiou, 192–93.

masculine position, on the other hand, “guards [. . .] the premier naming, which ensures that the naming of the event is not engulfed by the event itself” and “[takes] absence itself as a modality of continuation.”²² With this, Badiou means that the masculine position recognises much more the split of the Two, and the void in which it situates itself. Rather than affirming its ontological existence, the masculine position sees love as a metaphor for truth.

The paradoxical (non-?) relationship between the masculine and feminine positions becomes even more interesting in light of what Badiou calls “humanity.” While love is founded on a totally disjunctive, uncountable Two, i.e. the sexual difference, its immanent truth appeals, following Badiou, to *one* humanity. By humanity, Badiou refers to “that which provides support to the generic or truth procedures.”²³ When becoming a subject relating to truth, man elevates himself above the bestial and identitarian and lays claim to one universal humanity. While this “humanity function” applies to all four realms of truth (science, politics, art, and love), Badiou points out that the feminine position in love takes on a unique role:

The existence of love makes it retroactively appear that, in the disjunction, the position woman is singularly conveying of the relation between love and humanity. [. . .] Woman is that term x that, as the noumenal virtuality of the human and irrespective of its empirical sex, only activates the humanity function on the condition of [the experience of love]. Thus, woman is she (or he) for whom the particular subtraction of love devalorises $H(x)$ in its other types, namely, science, politics and art.²⁴

In other words, woman states that love is the truth of all truths. “It knots the four [truths] together.”²⁵ Interestingly, Youngjin Park notes that “this implies that anyone who participates in a truth procedure, regardless of the type, is a lover in the Badiouian sense. Love and truth are coextensive,”²⁶ at least from the feminine point of view.

²² Badiou, 192–93.

²³ Badiou, 184.

²⁴ Badiou, 195–96.

²⁵ Badiou, 196.

²⁶ Youngjin Park, *On Love: Between Lacan and Badiou* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2018), 45.

In light of this, it is remarkable that Badiou also claims that “love, as a singular adventure of a truth of difference, must be rigorously separated from politics.”²⁷ What love and emancipatory politics have in common is that both “always fracture a point of impossibility,”²⁸ with regard to, on the one hand, “the power of the state and the gesture of normalisation,” and on the other hand, “the family as the basic unit of property and egoism.”²⁹ Yet, for Badiou, love and politics only share a *structural* similarity. But that is it. Their subject should not be confused. But what about the feminine position claiming that love is the truth of all truths, knotting all truths together? Has Badiou now created a feminine position only to reject it completely? And how can Badiou hold that the effect of love, namely seeing the world from the perspective of difference instead of identity, does not have any political significance? To better understand why Badiou makes a theory of sexuation, and to what exactly the “feminine position” is a response, we must turn to the original formulas of sexuation formalised by Jacques Lacan.

One Way or Another

—*Tu as remarqué que dans le mot masculin il y a masque? Et il y a cul?*

—*Et dans féminin?*

—*Il n’y a rien.*³⁰

For Jacques Lacan, speaking beings’ relation to the world is determined by a “masculine” or “phallic” and a “feminine” or “Other” logic. Although these names refer to the sexes, Lacan is not putting forward any essentialist or stereotypical theory of sex, i.e. male versus female in a biological or institutional sense. As Marie-Hélène Brousse emphasises: “It is not a question of distributing the men on one side and the women on the other as is done in religions, locker rooms or toilets, and more generally in any institutionalised social order.”³¹ We are not doomed to one or another logic, nor could we ever exclusively choose the one above the other. Both logics are applicable to all human beings. They

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²⁷ Badiou, *Éloge de l’amour*, 75.

²⁸ Badiou, 72.

²⁹ Badiou, 62.

³⁰ *Masculin Féminin*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard (Anouchka Films-Argos Films, Sandrews-Svenskfilmindustri, 1966).

³¹ Marie-Hélène Brousse, *Mode de jouir au féminin* (Paris: Navarin, 2020), 67.

aim to illustrate the way in which we relate ourselves to the world, on the one hand through language, and on the other hand through the shortcomings of language.

The first question that arises now is where the need to formalise this as sexual difference comes from. Badiou, just like Lacan, emphasises that his masculine and feminine positions should not be equalised with a human's biological, or institutional gender. But why then do we talk about the sexes anyway?

What is logically interesting about the sexual difference is that the two positions are not, following Lacan, like two equal sides of a coin. They are not "1+1." The two positions can only be understood in relation to one another. Zupančič expresses this in the following formula: "What splits into two is the very nonexistence of the one (that is, of the one which, if it existed, would be the Other)."³² The difference between the Two already departs from referring to both as "the One" and "the Other." "If there are two sexes, and they attract each other, which is [O]ne and which is the [O]ther?"³³ One (or the Other) could say it is equal who is the One and who is the Other. However, this ignores the fact that the second one will always be the "Other" of the first, "One" being the man, and "the Other" being the woman. This unequal relationship can be traced back in various examples in culture and history. To illustrate this, Guy Le Gaufey brings in the biblical origin story. First, there is Genesis 1:27, where God creates human beings, men and women, in his own image. Next, there is in Genesis 2:18–24, the better-known story of God creating man, and subsequently man creating women from one of his ribs. Here the image is created of "men" being created as one genus, and subsequently this genus being split into men and women.³⁴ One can recognise the same hierarchy in language. There is man—in French *Homme*—as the general term for our species, and then there is man—*homme*—and woman—*femme*—as the two genders of the species.

Here, man determines the principle of distinction. At first, he is all (*tout*). Next, he gives away something of himself, creates a part of all, but still thinks of him-

³² Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 46.

³³ Guy Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan: Consistance logique, conséquences cliniques* (Paris: Epel, 2006), 11.

³⁴ Le Gaufey, 17.

self as all, or as the One in relation to the Other. Women however, being the “Other,” have no other to relate to, since there is no other of the Other. Therefore, women follow another logic, of being not-all (*pastout*).

Lacan takes this structural relation between man and woman, the One and the Other, as being exemplary of speaking beings’ relation to language. Being constantly in relation to one another, man represents our linguistic inclination to grasp *all* and define what is there. In this way, the masculine logic illustrates how we positively relate to the world through language. Yet, each attempt is disappointing. There is always something which escapes our grasp, for which our words do not satisfy. This is where the feminine logic comes into play. It represents our negative relation to the world through language: language falls short. This is nicely illustrated in the citation with which I started this paragraph. At some point in *Masculin Féminin*, a movie by Jean-luc Godard, Robert notices that in the word masculine (*masculin*), there is the word “mask” (*mask.*) and “ass” (*cul.*). “And in femininity (*féminin*)?” Paul asks. “Nothing,” says Robert. Femininity as such, is nothing, and to be masculine is to put a mask over this nothingness, in order to be something.

She’s Not There

Departing from the difference between the One and the Other, Lacan develops the following schema:

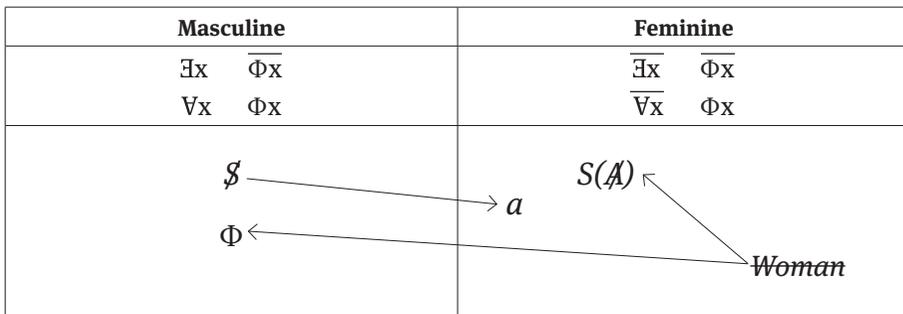


Image 1: Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore, 1972–1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 78.

On the left side there is the masculine logic that is thought of as “One.” The formula $\forall x \Phi x$ states that all x fall under the function Φx , the phallic function. This means that all men are counted or nominated as “One.” In other words, there is the conviction that all can be brought together under one predicate. “All x are subject to the function of castration.”³⁵ However, as I have already pointed out above, just like Pandora’s box, castration comes at a price, i.e. one has to deal with the ever-present shortcomings of language. Yet, the creation of all is only possible if there is something that does not fall under this predicate and thereby, as an exception, confirms the rule. For this, Lacan writes $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$, meaning there is an x ($\exists x$) that does not fall under the function Φx . It is only because there is one that is not castrated that the universal of castration (the phallic function), as the predicate for all, is founded.

On the right side, there are the feminine formulas, the “Other,” which can only be understood in relation to the masculine. Here, not the predicates but the quantifiers themselves are negated: “there is *not one* . . .” and “there is *not all* . . .” It is not about *what* there is but *that* there is. The first formula states $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$, there is *not* one x that does not fall under the phallic function. There is no exception to the rule, and as a consequence there is no rule to be confirmed. In other words, there is no *all* since *all* is not grouped together by the same exception. Following this logic, there is no such thing as *the* woman. Therefore, the second formula states: $\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$, “not all x fall under the phallic function.”³⁶

“Not-all,” *pastout*, does *not* function here as a simple negation of the masculine side (for all x . . .), because this would lead us again to a function of grouping together. “For no x . . .” is in fact “for nothing,” which equally operates as a predicate that applies to *all*. Instead, Lacan puts forward “*pastout*” as a maximal particular, something that only applies to *some*. Not all, not nothing, as “existence without essence.”³⁷ It is “characterised by undecidability.”³⁸ For this reason, I would opt not to use the term “feminine” in reference to *pastout*, but only use the other term Lacan proposes, namely the “Other” logic. This is because the notion

³⁵ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 51.

³⁶ Zupančič, 53.

³⁷ Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan*, 83.

³⁸ Gertrudis Van de Vijver, “De durf van onbeslistheid,” in *Dates with Gender and Diversity: Huldeboek voor Marysa Demoor*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Gent: Skribis, 2021), 282.

of femininity in contrast to masculinity gives all too much the impression that it is about a binary opposition: masculinity and femininity, each having their own essence. The Other logic, however, does not have any categorical trait that correctly classifies it in a set of all things falling under the predicate “femininity.” As Le Gaufey formulates mysteriously: “If there were an Other, it must not be *that one*.”³⁹

The phallic and Other logics each relate to the way we experience “*jouissance*.” Enjoyment or “*jouissance*” refers, within Lacanian theory, to an ever-present attraction that is neither desire nor enjoyment. It cannot ever be satisfied and comes forth out of our human capacity to talk and our incapacity to talk sufficiently. It is an effect of castration. Phallic *jouissance* relates to language and the prospect that there is a possibility to talk sufficiently. In other words, it fosters the dream that one moment we will no longer be castrated. In trying to capture something as “all,” under one predicate, we derive a short-term pleasure. Yet, “phallic” refers to the fallible/fallibility (*faillible/faillibilité*). It fails us, it always disappoints, because no predicate ever suffices. It is never able to grasp the Other. Rather, the Other is reduced to and loved as an object of desire, what Lacan calls “object a.”⁴⁰

Other *jouissance* is then, just like the Other logic, supplementary to phallic *jouissance*. It functions as “a shadow of the phallic *jouissance*.”⁴¹ Its existence is undefined and its longing much more radical. It no longer relates itself to language and does not hold on to any prospect. It is a constant strife, never temporarily satisfied, and therefore also infallible. Following the formula of “*pastout*” (not-all), Fink states that “not all of her [sic] *jouissance* is phallic *jouissance*,” and “there is not any that is not phallic *jouissance*.”⁴² Here, the emphasis is laid on the first “is.” While there exists only phallic *jouissance*, Other *jouissance* “exists.” It is not there as One, but this does not mean that one cannot experience it. Rather, it is not countable. It escapes our grasp. Contrary to the phallic *jouissance*, Other *jouissance* “belongs to that part of the Other that is not covered by

³⁹ Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan*, 43; italics added.

⁴⁰ Bruce Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance,” in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 37.

⁴¹ Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan*, 45.

⁴² Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance,” 39.

the fantasy of the ‘One’—that is, the fantasy sustained by the positioning of the phallic exception.”⁴³

So, we experience Other *jouissance* as negativity, but it cannot be nominated, as otherwise it would fall prey to phallic fallibility. Other *jouissance* is ineffable, but “One’s experience of it simply ex-sists.”⁴⁴ It exists without being counted as one. Nothing can be said about the Other, non-phallic enjoyment “because it is a placeholder for the knowledge which does not exist.”⁴⁵ Other *jouissance* is that which has always fascinated us. It is like the Zombies sang: “Nobody told us about her, she *is* not there.”⁴⁶ This does not mean that Other *jouissance* is not at all there. It is rather excessively there, or, in Lacan’s words, “She is *not* not at all there. She is there in full (*à plein*).”⁴⁷

All That She Wants

Now we can understand how Badiou’s theory of sexuation is a response to and a revision of Lacan’s formulas of sexuation. Badiou takes over the idea of sexuation as two totally disjunctive positions, the masculine and the feminine, that cannot be counted as 1+1. Yet different from Lacan, he absolutises this uncountable Two as the universal truth of love. In doing so, he narrows down the concept of sexuation from two positions expressing humans’ relation to language and its shortcomings, to two positions expressing humans’ relation to love. Instead of the function of castration—that all humans fall prey to the shortcomings of language—he posits the “humanity function,” i.e. that all human beings are capable of elevating themselves to *one* universal humanity, which is embodied in the truth of the Two.

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In this regard, Park notes that “the transition from the phallic function to the humanity function results in the transition of the feminine position from not-all

⁴³ Suzanne Barnard, “Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance,” in Barnard and Fink, *Reading Seminar XX*, 172.

⁴⁴ Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance,” 40.

⁴⁵ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 54.

⁴⁶ The Zombies, “She’s Not There,” by Rod Argent, released July 24, 1964, as the first single from the album *The Zombies*, Parrot PA 61001.

⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 74.

to universality.”⁴⁸ This transition is due to Badiou’s critiques of Lacan’s formulas. Next to his overall critique of Lacan’s use of logic—which, according to Badiou, is inconsistent and overly intuitionistic⁴⁹—he rejects Lacan’s conception of the feminine position and feminine *jouissance* because of its lack of universalisation. Lacan’s introduction of the logic of “*pastout*” makes any overarching idea of universalisation impossible. Badiou criticises Lacan for upholding such a “segregative thesis of sexual difference”⁵⁰ in which the infinity of the *pastout* can only be grasped from the masculine point of view, and the two positions cannot be united as one universal humanity. As Burchill points out:

Indeed for Badiou, as we know, Lacan’s very claims for such a *jouissance* reveal his formulae of sexuation to be flawed from the start: they underline that the phallic function—which does effectively hold universally, or “wholly” in respect of the masculine position alone, according to Lacan—is always already situated within the disjunction of the sexes and is, as such, unsuitable as a support for the universal.⁵¹

Badiou instead proposes that the feminine position be the universalising position *par excellence*. For Badiou, *she* is the one hammering on the ontological existence of the Two. By upholding love as the guarantee of a universality, woman “treats”⁵² the paradox of the two, and shows what both sexes relate to. For Badiou, there is a sexual relationship after all, realised in the event of love.

It is remarkable then that in response to Lacan, Badiou shifts the focus from sexuality to love. He does not elaborate on the concept of *jouissance*. As Zupančič points out: “It is indeed striking how Badiou, who is otherwise a most incisive reader of Freud and Lacan, mostly uses the notion of enjoyment in an entirely non- or pre-analytic sense—as an individual hedonistic idiosyncrasy, devoid of any possible bearing at the level of truth. That is to say: he takes it to be some-

⁴⁸ Park, *On Love*, 45.

⁴⁹ For a logical discussion of this critique, I refer to Russell Grigg, “Lacan and Badiou: Logic of the Pas-Tout,” *Filozofski Vestnik* 26, no. 2 (2005): 53–65.

⁵⁰ Alain Badiou, “The Scene of Two,” trans. Barbara Fulks, *Lacanian Ink* 21 (Spring 2003): 47.

⁵¹ Louise Burchill, “Of a Universal No Longer Indifferent to Difference: Badiou (and Irigaray) on Woman, Truths, and Philosophy,” *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 1179, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday201937250>.

⁵² Badiou, *Conditions*, 186.

thing titillating, but at the same time completely irrelevant.”⁵³ But while dismissing the concept of *jouissance* as irrelevant, could one not understand Badiou’s reaction to Lacan as being a clearcut example of only phallic *jouissance*? By wanting to “treat” all paradoxes, group them together under one truth, and delimit them to the realm of love, he fosters the dream that “all” can be grasped under one predicate, namely “one universal humanity.” The feminine position becomes for Badiou the one that recognises the ontological existence of “all.” Woman becomes just another name of the phallus.

The Power of Love

I argue that Badiou is wrong in dismissing “*pastout*” and “*jouissance*.” Rather, these Lacanian concepts of sexuation and its contemporary reception are of great value for Badiou’s concept of love. Not only do they deliver a fruitful interpretation of his theory, they also pave the way for a more political take on love, revealing its emancipatory potential.

First, Van de Vijver reformulates the logic of *pastout* as being about “the impossibility of universalising. It is about dropping nobody, that is, nobody is left behind, regardless of what someone’s predicates are. It is the universal identification with the unconditional.”⁵⁴ Isn’t this exactly what Badiou’s truth of love is about when he defines it as “a truth of difference,” “refuting the laws of identity”?⁵⁵ Badiou opposes the *pastout* because it does not universalise and thereby seems to contradict his so-called “humanity function,” which appeals to one universal humanity. What Badiou is missing here, however, is that a *pastout*-interpretation would make the humanity function much more radical. It is no longer about inclusion: Who falls under the humanity function, i.e. who is able to belong to that one universal humanity? Rather, it is about “dropping nobody”:⁵⁶ nobody does *not* fall under the humanity function.

Second, recalling what I have explained above, phallic *jouissance* follows the phallic logic, relating to language and the prospect that there is a possibility to

⁵³ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 133.

⁵⁴ Gertrudis Van de Vijver, “Het gaat er niet om gelijk te hebben, het gaat erom niemand te laten vallen,” *VSTN*, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 42.

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Éloge de l’amour*, 39.

⁵⁶ Van de Vijver, “Het gaat er niet om gelijk te hebben,” 42.

grasp “all.” In the words “I love you,” we think that we have captured it “all,” and we derive a short-term pleasure. However, it soon becomes clear that this is not it. It does not cut the mustard. So, Badiou points to the importance of “fidelity” as a “long-lasting laborious desire” (*dur désir de durer*).⁵⁷ Is this laborious desire not exactly what Other *jouissance* is about? As not all seems to be grasped in the words “I love you,” it follows the logic of *partout* (not-all). We negatively experience this Other *jouissance* as an ever-present challenge, a “long-lasting laborious desire” that is impossible to ever fully complete. Thinking of fidelity as Other *jouissance* grasps our struggle to love “beyond the veil of phallic presence.”⁵⁸

With this interpretation of love, through the lens of *partout* and *jouissance*, it seems strange to rigidly separate love and politics. For Badiou, “emancipatory politics presupposes an unconditioned prescription. [It] does not set out from an examination of the world that aims to demonstrate its possibility. [. . .] A politics of emancipation draws itself from the void that an event brings forth (*fait advenir*) as the latent inconsistency of the given world.”⁵⁹ It is this very inconsistency that contemporary Lacanian philosophers, notably Zupančič and Žižek, recognise in sexuality. For Zupančič, “what relates sexuality to politics is that they are not simple ontological categories but essentially imply, depend on, and deploy something which is not of the order of being, and which Lacan refers to as the Real.”⁶⁰ Žižek, in the same vein, states that “politics is structured around a ‘missing link,’ it presupposes a kind of ontological openness, gap, antagonism, and this same gap or ontological openness is at work also in sexuality: in both cases, a relationship is never guaranteed by an encompassing universal Signifier.”⁶¹

Both politics and sexuality deal with the same difficulty, namely a “crack” or an “ontological openness.” One can try to ignore this gap by excluding it, according to a phallic logic. Love, however, forces us to be confronted with the gap. One loves the other unconditionally, without knowing or being able to name exactly what it is that one loves. In other words, love refutes the laws of identity and makes counting impossible. Instead, there is a logic of difference, that

⁵⁷ Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour*, 42.

⁵⁸ Barnard, “Tongues of Angels,” 178.

⁵⁹ Badiou, *Conditions*, 152.

⁶⁰ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 22.

⁶¹ Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 129.

is, a logic of *pastout*, at play. The lovers are haunted by a long-lasting desire, or Other *jouissance*, to try to grasp the other, without ever succeeding. In boldly confronting this negativity, love forces us to do politics. It makes us rearticulate the borders of what is possible and compels us to reinvent the world. That is the power of love.

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Cindy Zeiher*

Rough Cuts: Refusal, Negation and Ineffability

Keywords

apology, forgiveness, Freud, Jankélévitch, ineffability, negation, refusal

Abstract

Vladimir Jankélévitch allows us to rethink the relation between negation and refusal as a rift where one is confronted by the repetition of *givenness* and where refusal upends negation by turning the object being refused into an ineffable question. Here we turn to Freud as a reader of Jankélévitch's refusal of German culture in order to consider his procedure of radical exclusion as a matter of idealistic temperament marking a transition from knowledge as "knowing how things are" to a different proposition which cultivates knowing "how things should be."

Grobi rezi: zavračanje, negacija in neizrekljivost

Ključne besede

opravičilo, odpuščanje, Freud, Jankélévitch, neizrekljivost, negacija, zavrnitev

Povzetek

Vladimir Jankélévitch nam omogoči, da ponovno premislimo razmerje med negacijo in zavrnitvijo kot razpoko, v kateri se soočimo s ponavljanjem *danosti* in v kateri zavrnitev prevrne negacijo, saj zavračani predmet spremeni v neizrekljivo vprašanje. Tu se obračamo k Freudu kot bralcu Jankélévitchove zavrnitve nemške kulture, da bi njegov postopek radikalne izključitve obravnavali kot stvar idealističnega temperamenta, ki označuje prehod od vednosti kot »vednosti, kako stvari so«, k drugačni propoziciji, ki goji vednost, »kako bi stvari morale biti«.

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* University of Canterbury, New Zealand
cindy.zeiher@canterbury.ac.nz | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0575-4760>



To pardon!
But who ever asked us for a pardon?
It is only the distress and the dereliction of the guilty
that would make a pardon sensible and right.
 —Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Should We Pardon Them?*

Vladimir Jankélévitch's idealism calls for a rational, ethical yet passionate temperament in the pursuit of the ineffable as a form of knowledge rather than lofty indulgence. The more one reads Jankélévitch, the more one realises that there *are* some fantasies worth fighting for, even those irreconcilable contradictions which haunt us. What Jankélévitch offers is a method in which one can be discerning regarding which fantasies are worthwhile. This is what distinguishes his independent intellectual trajectory, something he achieves through variations in his thought which gradually shift him away from his mentor, Henri Bergson.

Jankélévitch is usually read along humanist and deconstructionist lines; however, one cannot avoid his ongoing intellectual trauma in facing what it means to be a Jewish thinker. Therefore, in pondering Jankélévitch's position on refusal we should not, however questionably, separate the thinker from their thought, not least because such separation merely serves to fantasise the task of thinking as beyond both divided subjectivity and moreover, the thinker as master of this fantasy of wholeness. Furthermore, the thinker needs to be accountable for their thoughts. In addition to being a philosopher, Jankélévitch was also a dedicated composer and musicologist who positioned himself in the gap of the non-relation between the two fields which, although not cut from the same cloth, have something to offer one another. Here, the Jankélévitchian spirit deftly holds the reins to one's competing passions—a lesson for thinkers and creatives alike.

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While it has been posited that Jankélévitch's refusal of all things German is what marks his later work, I suggest that rather what here marks his eventual refusal of the *given* as a logical precept is his "intuitive knowing," which paradoxically embraces both stoicism and vulnerability. We might even say that he

treats the *given* as to some extent a fantasy which attempts to obfuscate the ineffable as intrinsic to knowledge, or at least to an “intuitive know-how.”

The trajectory of Jankélévitch’s idealism moves from *knowing how things are* to *knowing how things should be* and is therefore in part necessarily negation. His hyper-ethical position is that of the intellectual—one practices what one preaches as much as one can, all the while knowing that one may be acting in the name of its opposite. Here, such fidelity to act complicates Jankélévitch’s maxim when it comes to his “radical exclusion” of German culture¹ because this would seem to refuse what has always been a given in German intellectual culture, namely thinking itself.

Before getting into why and how Jankélévitch embraced refusal it is helpful first to conceptualise negation and refusal and how these are distinctive for him. He did not make such clear distinctions himself; the conceptualisation of these terms is therefore up to us, for which we have no option but to employ those very dialectical thinkers his positions actively refuse without losing sight of his will towards refusal. Thus the task of marking the trajectory of Jankélévitch’s thought is an atemporal process which is always intentionally out of time and slightly out of tune with the present. Nevertheless, this recursive manoeuvre remains true to his stoic refusal of German culture post Holocaust.² Furthermore, it leaves a space for the intellectual courage required in order to contemplate the ineffable.

In understanding Jankélévitch’s paradoxical refusal it is important to appreciate his background. He was born of Russian Jewish immigrants and went on to be a member of the French Resistance during World War II. Following the discovery of the Nazi extermination camps, Jankélévitch systematically removed from his work any reference to German art, thinking, and music, maintaining that the Nazis, together with all Germans, are never to be forgiven for the Holocaust. He maintained this protest against Germany and its culture consistently

¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Should We Pardon Them?,” trans. Ann Hobart, *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 552–72, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448807>.

² I thank Rebecca Rose for here reminding me of Penelope, the Greek mythological figure whose courageous, repeated refusal of potential lovers in her husband’s absence and likely death during the Trojan War can be considered an ethical push-back against both social expectation and libidinal desire.

for the remainder of his life and has been much criticised for this radical and partisan position. Yet in 1948 he started publishing influential texts on the possibility of forgiveness as he felt duty-bound to scrutinise his refusal. In this he was meticulous. Although forgiveness held either no or perhaps too much meaning for him at the time, it was not ruled out as a possibility for the future: forgiveness might arise, but he surely was not counting on it because he could not imagine a scenario in which this could be possible. Then, twenty-three years after his initial texts on forgiveness, he stated that forgiveness was actually impossible and moreover should be actively refused. He even called such an act of forgiveness immoral because firstly it is impossible (along with immoral) and secondly, it does not take into consideration the will of the guilty. At this point we can refocus on the distinction between Jankélévitch's positions on negation and refusal as specific speech acts.

We generally think of negation as emanating from the contradiction or denial of something in order to make more apparent its absence. Freud puts it well when he says of negation that, "the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is negated."³ For Lacan trauma is characterised as traumatic via three distinctive features: the event itself, its affective baggage and its lack of complete "speakability." This entails that trauma is understood as both a psychic reality and inscription in which ordinary identifications are not wholly stabilised.

Negation reveals repression in partially lifting it. But the act of negation does not follow that any consciousness of what has been repressed entails an acceptance of it. Here, negation offers a strange certainty that there is nothing being asked in the revealing of repression, merely something, that which is left over, being repeated.⁴ Thus negation can never be a "no" proper. Refusal, on the oth-

³ To differentiate, in German *verneinen* means "to negate" and *verleugnen* means "to deny." It is worth reading on this point in Freud's "The Infantile Genital Organization: An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality (1923)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 19:143.

⁴ While Freud provided the logic of the traumatic encounter in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (trans. James Strachey [New York: W. W. Norton, 1990]), Lacan furthered the effect of trauma as a specific compulsion one is driven to repeat. See Jacques Lacan, *On a Discourse that Might not be a Semblance*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).

er hand, preserves the matter at issue in order to present doubt through excess of meaning and *jouissance*. It preserves the neurotic fantasy whilst at the same time enjoying the transgression when confronted with the law of the Other.

Here we might say that Jankélévitch's refusal of German history and culture serves to make the necessity of them more apparent in, and relevant to his later work. He does not disagree that the function of refusal is to provoke and wrestle with the ambiguities of dealing with the trauma of the Real. For him war and killing invade the field of the Symbolic Order by providing ways in which objects are captured and integrated, mediated and justified into the formation of meaning. However, for Jankélévitch this is highly problematic because the justification for killing is often propped up by opaque and undifferentiated meanings that appeal signifiers such as divine violence or holy war. To this extent Jankélévitch is refusing a particular chain of signification; he is maintaining that one should not even linguistically create an opportunity to derive meaning from what is beyond meaning. We could even say that for Jankélévitch attributing meaning to war is delusional. After all, although killing as an act of co-optation forms part of Jankélévitch's critique, it also speaks to the dimension of the significant other as one which is also beyond comprehension. If the social bond means that one is capable of meeting the demands of everyday life, then co-optive killing is an act way beyond this.

When Jankélévitch says in his meditation on bad conscience that "moral consciousness does not exist," he is rather pointing towards the crisis of moral consciousness which occurs in the wake of contemplating its non-existence, even that there is joy in lamenting its loss. This is a typical Jankélévitchian manoeuvre whose end result is what Lacanians term *jouissance*. Jankélévitch asserts that for the Holocaust there can be no such thing as a sincere apology; any apology, when uttered, is meaningless, because once it is uttered it has already occurred or perhaps did not occur. For Jankélévitch one should already feel sorry before an apology can be signalled or articulated into the Symbolic of the social bond. Therefore, the apology, being now redundant should be either refused or treated with indifference. There is an amusing anecdote where a student at the Sorbonne arrives late for one of Jankélévitch's classes. Upon arrival the student apologises profusely to which Jankélévitch somewhat light-heartedly dismisses the apology, saying that the student chose to be late. For Jankélévitch since the lecture was already in progress regardless of the student's lateness, the stu-

dent's apology is irrelevant and not therefore subject to judgement (although Jankélévitch did facetiously say he forgave him!). For Jankélévitch, apology is not contingent on forgiveness. From a Freudian perspective, to negate is to exercise an intellectual judgement through having inserted what is negated into the judgement—this is precisely Jankélévitch's melancholic ethic. For Freud the function of judgement is concerned with two sorts of decisions; it affirms or disaffirms the possession of an attribute and it either asserts or disputes that the presentation of this attribute implies its existence.⁵ The attribute to be decided about may originally have been good or bad, useful or harmful. Yet, for Jankélévitch, there is always an intuition associated with judgement, an irrational quality underpinning rational judgement. Trying every which way, in the end one can only accept the destitution from the object rather than refuse it completely. Hence the Nazis cannot be negated whereas the Germans can be refused. Here, we can identify the subjectivity which inserts a gap in the rules and authority of the Symbolic.

It is important to note that Jankélévitch points out what is for him the ontological impossibility of negation since it breaks with *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of opposites which situate tension and release in a boundless field of force. As a literal example, Hippolytus states that “the road up and the road down are the same thing,”⁶ meaning that regardless of the direction one travels the road itself remains that same. Similarly, if we say that fire is hot and water is cold, we are nevertheless acknowledging that in so far as both belong to the field of the four elements both must also contain sameness as well as difference as a basis for change and transformation: for example, ice can melt in the sun. Or as Heraclitus says, “cold things become warm, and what is warm cools; what is wet dries, and the parched is moistened.”⁷ Here we have the contradiction of opposites used to reveal the oneness or unity of things previously believed to be different. This oneness and its circularity provide the unity principal to the very existence of any opposite: “And it is the same thing in us that is quick and dead, awake and asleep, young and old; the former are shifted and become the

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⁵ See discussion in Sigmund Freud, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes (1915),” in *Standard Edition*, 14:136. Freud took up the question of judgement in the first chapter of “Civilization and its Discontents,” in *Standard Edition*, 21: 57–146.

⁶ Heraclitus, frag. 60 Diels-Kranz; quoted in Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 9.10.4.

⁷ Heraclitus, frag. 126 Diels-Kranz.

latter, and the latter in turn are shifted and become the former.”⁸ One’s identity (whether singular or communal) is a contra-posing principal necessitating the Other which is however, simultaneously negated: in other words we are subjects only in so far as we subsume the phantasmatic status of the Other as intrinsic to our subjectivity. The criteria for what is opposite is therefore an *a priori* encounter with its oppositional force.

What sets Jankélévitch apart in his position on fields of force is that for him there is a distinction between the expression/elucidation of an idea and its ability to be possible both as a liveable idea and one which speaks to his conception of ineffability: that thinking must include affect because it directly implicates the ineffable. Any idea—for example, forgiveness—must necessarily remain a possible idea of fantasy which is not always fully realised. For Jankélévitch, it isn’t so much that something is now believed to be different from what it once was, but rather that it must be different now because of the intervening to-ing and fro-ing of repetition. With every cycle of repetition, some gesture of difference becomes more apparent in hinting at its own (im)possibility. Thus, if one takes up a personal idealistic position then one must at the same time contend with the opposite which is not living up to this. Here, one cannot simply be acting out a libidinal fantasy, because to be in the world one must also be contending with its contradictions and impossibilities.

In this way we can think of Jankélévitch’s ontology of refusal as distinct from that of negation. Refusal is an act of idealism where judgement is put on the line, where something unutterable must be at stake in the name of postulating that it is ineffable. Refusal is not indifference, nor a position of repetition (in) difference, as Deleuze might have us think.⁹ Rather, refusal is a moment in time when one participates in the knowledge one has beyond the mere repetition of it. If we return to the thinker/thought dichotomy, Jankélévitch is similar to

⁸ Heraclitus, frag. 88 Diels-Kranz.

⁹ I refer here to Deleuze’s thinking on representation, specifically in *Difference and Repetition*, in which he conceptualises difference as *in* itself and repetition as *for* itself, wherein both cannot be not tied to any given identity. He elaborates that the ontological status of repetition is best understood as “difference without a concept” and thus repetition is reliant upon difference. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 13.

Paul Ricoeur¹⁰ and Jacques Derrida¹¹ who also maintain that the subject cannot be separated from their thinking. By contrast, negation is the absorption of the uttered “no” in a wish fulfilment of complete knowledge. Here, Jankélévitch is often read alongside Emmanuel Levinas who suggests that for the other to be the Other means it cannot be subject to some form of relation because it is absolutely Other, a radical alterity. However, Jankélévitch stops short of this position, because in his ontology one is subsumed via negation into the radical alterity of the Other as an ineffable circumstance within the traumatic event which cannot be spoken about. We might say that the too-much-ness of the event deliberately flouts the rules of taking up refusal, which is precisely what Jankélévitch avows as his hyper-ethical position.

It is important to include in Jankélévitch’s impossible Other not only the Nazis but also the collective bodies of dead Jews, in order to present a unified object of overwhelming anxiety. This ineffable image is an encounter, on the borderline of the Symbolic and the Real, with resignation to one’s ultimate fate. We will die but death itself falls within a strangely ambiguous context of both tolerable and intolerable negation. Although he never said as much Jankélévitch had no time for fantasised collective mourning which he likely thought of as mere romantic resignation. But we can say that for him the uncanniness of death keeps alive the relation of the subject with the fantasy of the body. Perhaps part of Jankélévitch’s ethical re-authorship is to privilege the voiceless dead alongside the body which he shares with them.

Jankélévitch’s ethical subject is a profound reduction who, in living out an impossible relation to the Other in the face of the Other, is nevertheless guaran-

¹⁰ Specifically, Ricoeur’s passionate plea for what is possible in/as thought as an act of mutual recognition. In his *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he commences his text citing Jankélévitch as one who understands how memory of present is also something absent and lingering in the past: “He who has been, from then on cannot not have been: henceforth this mysterious and profoundly obscure fact of having been is his viaticum for all eternity.” Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), epigraph.

¹¹ Inverting Deleuze, Derrida privileges identity over *différance* as a metaphysics of presence in that differences are always located as in between identities. *Différance* refers to a spatiality, a space which is deferred and thus differentiated and from which “immediacy is derived.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 157.

teed maintenance of subjective refusal. However, that the Other is absolutely Other means that the impossibility of the relation to it is also absolute, which is at the same time both reassuring and problematic. Since the impossible cannot be thought outside present possibilities, it cannot be an ontological question beyond the linguistic turn. That nothing can supplement the existence of the impossible is because it cannot be conceived of. The most difficult challenge for thinking is the absence of a signifier on which to hinge a fantasy. Thus, Jankélévitch employs a signifier in order to refuse: the Nazis are never to be forgiven. We should refuse to forgive them regardless of whether or not forgiveness is requested. This is the kernel of Jankélévitch's refusal; it must transcend time and risk oblivion to emerge as an eventual given. On the other hand, for Jankélévitch negation takes place as a response to or promise of the inevitability of a given. The key thing here is this notion that there exists that which cannot be thought. For Jankélévitch this is the horror of the Holocaust which, being just too traumatic, exists in the realm of the ineffable where it should remain. Here we can say that through Jankélévitch's intuitive knowing, he is making a specific judgement.

In contrast to this position, for Alain Badiou, there is no ineffable preventing us from arriving at knowing what we do not. Rather, it is those concrete conditions which plug up the space of the ineffable. According to Badiou, the real predicate of an ethics of the Other is not the ineffable but interventionist truth which occurs in the domain of thought. Yet might not Badiou's ethic of truths represent a principal of operation not so far removed from ineffability? Like truth, the ineffable can present merely as fragmented abstract thought. For the ethical subject who cannot subsume the ineffable, the logical conclusion is indifference, refusal or negation of the so-called given, positions for which everyone has the capacity. We do it all the time, often without thinking, a social procedure which Jacques Rancière calls "the part of no part."¹² There is always a little enigmatic bit left in the regime of ethics which representation cannot touch; this illegible leftover comprises the ineffable and is what hystericizes. It is what

¹² For Rancière the dividing line between what is visible and invisible is where politics can be disrupted and recuperated by those who are excluded by the commons. Moreover, it is a space in which subjects can "exceed" symbolic authority in order to reinvent politics anew. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010).

Badiou calls the void of a situation¹³ or what we might call the bit in every inclusion that does not belong. Every situation contains a void-part which cannot be represented, yet is what everyone shares equally, a generic capacity to not be known. We might even say this is what gives rise to the determination to participate in refusal and negation. While Badiou's refusal of the ineffable—that is, nothing itself is thinkable and nothing is unthinkable¹⁴—is a particular provocation for thinking the subject (and arguably one which is not entirely in line with psychoanalysis's position on the traumatic subject), he does resist the fully interpellated Althusserian subject by insisting that one can refuse to be such a subject. On this Badiou and Jankélévitch agree but for different intellectual and arguably, political reasons: both agree that the subject's ethical potential lies in the transformation of courage into justice.¹⁵ Although for both thinkers something remains which one needs to acknowledge, perhaps their difference lies in whether or not one decides to take up the reminder—the part of no part—as a specific charge of fidelity to truth. For Badiou, this is consistency to remain in a void constructed around his four conditions (art, love, politics, philosophy), while for Jankélévitch it is to stay loyal to truth conditions that can be spoken despite their apparent inconsistency.

¹³ I refer to Badiou's text *Ethics* included without necessarily belonging. That is, the ontology of a situation is understood as through the presentation of multiplicity, one is counted "at the heart of every situation, at the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organised the plenitude [. . .] of the situation in question." Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 1993), 68.

¹⁴ Badiou insists that which cannot be thought must be represented as thought, even tormented thought should not be rejected. Adam Bartlett puts Badiou's positions succinctly: "Everything in contemporary ethics, Badiou argues, is built on this rejection of thought: simply that situations are thinkable, that real change is thinkable, that some truth of the collective exists *and* on this embrace of representation or even the pathos of representation: especially insofar as by the power of representation—myths, fiction, symbolism—the Other becomes the suffering other, the victim other of those with the limit power and the means of representation or knowledge." A. J. Bartlett, "Ethics, Riots and the Real: Badiou's Politics," *Forcings: Philosophical Writings*, April 6, 2024, <https://ajbartlett.substack.com/p/ethics-riots-and-the-real>.

¹⁵ Badiou is clear about this when he says, "decide consequently from the point of the undecidable" as a theory of affect contrasting the difference between fidelity and confidence. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (London: Continuum, 2009), 287.

Jankélévitch's particular uptake of refusal is both as a condition of the ineffable (that which cannot be said) and as a condition in which the ineffable is necessarily included (that is, one refuses in part for reasons that cannot be spoken about). The ineffable is not the void which says nothing but simply something belonging to the category of *void*. For Jankélévitch negation enables the subject's indifference whereas refusal is indifferent to the process of negation. Even if taken for granted, negation does not disallow refusal to be claimed as a possible truth. The effects of the distinction between negation and refusal become clear in Jankélévitch's ineffability: negation allows us to know *how things are* and refusal allows a way into knowing *how things should be*. This distinction provides the basis for his hyper-ethical subjectivity.

Let us consider how this applies to Jankélévitch's position that forgiveness of the Nazis is not possible and should never occur. For Jankélévitch, the problem of forgiveness arose in response to the Second World War, as he dealt with the ontology of evil and ethics in books like *Le Mal* and *Traité des Vertus*.¹⁶ His text *Forgiveness* was published in 1967, although he is far better known for dismissing forgiveness in essays like *Should we Pardon Them?* and the book, *L'Imprescriptible*.¹⁷ The event of the Holocaust says Jankélévitch must be stuck to us all the time and moreover we need to be stuck to the traumatic ineffability of it. With this in mind Jankélévitch distinguishes between forgiveness and pardon: what can be pardoned cannot in the case of the Holocaust be the object of forgiveness because this would require rejection of the ineffable. Jankélévitch's pondering the (im)possibility of forgiveness under the condition of ineffability marks his contradictory relationship to the linguistic turn. On the one hand, because one cannot say everything which captures evil, one should not struggle to say it in the name of forgiveness which can be granted only after an impossibly sincere scrutiny, in other words, never. On the other hand, even if forgiveness could be expressed with adequate eloquence and sincerity, it should be refused on the grounds that this would be entering into the territory of the given.

¹⁶ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Mal* (Paris: Arthaud, 1947); Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Traité des Vertus* (Paris: Bordas, 1949).

¹⁷ Jankélévitch, "Should We Pardon Them?"; Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'Imprescriptible: Pardonner? Dans l'honneur et la dignité* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

Part of the difficulty here is that Jankélévitch is not so much wary of offering an absolute theory on the conditions of forgiveness, he absolutely refuses any. This is not an oversight on his part but rather his understanding that any totalising ontologising of forgiveness misses the mark, being mere identification that may appear to be forgiveness, but in the end amounting to no more than superficial pseudo-forgiveness. Instead Jankélévitch discusses what forgiveness is not: “Indeed, the more forgiveness is impure and opaque, the more it lends itself to description. As a matter of fact, only an apophatic or negative philosophy is truly possible.”¹⁸ For Jankélévitch such impure forms include forgetting the transgression; generational integration, of trauma (transforming memory into a painless element of a person’s past); and intellection (where the efforts to understand the transgression result in the perpetrator’s pardon). Although these all bear a superficial resemblance to forgiveness, none include the intentional aspect necessary for forgiveness. None grapple with the importance of intending to forgive as a form of moral action on the part of the victim of transgression. For Jankélévitch, forgiveness must always be seen as an active moral choice which one stands by. Regarding the Holocaust, this is impossible.

Claiming that forgiveness is not instrumental redirects our attention to the importance of the ethical relation between individuals. Formulations that privilege reconciliation as a fundamental goal or rehabilitation subvert the importance of forgiveness by measuring its value on some external metric. Jankélévitch emphasizes that such a move does not result in forgiveness of the perpetrator since it seeks only to reach a new state of affairs and is thus merely a pragmatic response to the legacy of violations. For Jankélévitch when we direct forgiveness toward some end, such as overcoming bitterness, we are subordinating forgiveness to something and to this extent moving away from engagement with the violator. Here Jankélévitch redirects the difficult (non)ethical relationship between victim and transgressor back towards the centre of his theory of forgiveness. This situates forgiveness as an impossible extimate space in which the subject disappears because here forgiveness as an ethical object of satisfaction is privileged over the radicality of the subject’s struggle. However, this disappearance of the subject cannot suppress its reappearance as one truly traumatised. This is where Jankélévitch’s refusal allows the process of trauma to un-

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¹⁸ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, trans. Andrew Kelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

fold as a negation staging refusal of the perpetrator. We can conclude that for Jankélévitch forgiveness without ineffability is nothing more than another object to be grasped by the will.

In addition to ineffability, Jankélévitch places moral sincerity behind the instrumentality of forgiveness, which invites the question, how then can we ensure that forgiveness is ever pure and sincere and not merely some cheap semblance? We can't, says Jankélévitch. All we can do is turn the focus from transgression in general onto those horrific transgressions whose enormity falls outside the scope of what can be considered pardonable or forgivable. Unlike turning up late for one of his lectures, such transgressions cannot be ignored or excused, because, via negation, we are held captive by their barbarity, helpless to respond by harnessing the miraculous power of forgiveness. In this way forgiveness comes up against a symbolic limit beyond the reach of negation, ethical imperatives, and all reason. After all, one is not obliged to forgive, still less to give reasons for what is beyond reason to forgive. In order to understand from Jankélévitch's perspective the conditions for forgiveness in such cases we have to accept that in any scenario of forgiveness there no radical antithesis in the relation between subject and subject or subject and object. The relation should always be faithful and remain intact in the presence of the other, not become modified or distorted by omission. However, given that we are divided subjects caught within the repetition of the Symbolic order, Jankélévitch sets up an impossibly idealistic scenario for forgiveness to truly take place.

Jankélévitch's scenario is provocative when placed alongside other philosophical views which have gained currency. Although Hannah Arendt shares with Jankélévitch the belief that genuine forgiveness allows for the possibility of creating a new future relationship, thus escaping cycles of revenge, she also argues that forgiveness can be understood only within the realm of comprehensible, if banal human affairs. Thus forgiveness for what she calls radical evil is for her impossible, incoherent and beyond the realm of punishment. In the final section of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she calls for Eichmann's death not as a form of punishment (no punishment could ever be appropriate for his crimes) but rather to cast him symbolically from the community of humanity.¹⁹ Simply the task

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 277–79. Arendt says: “Under conditions of terror most people will comply

of “doing one’s job” is insufficient to justify not acting in according to ethical reciprocity.²⁰ This logic of no agency is an active avoidance of responding to the other’s desire.

The difficulty with Jankelevitch’s philosophy of forgiveness stems from his refusal to allow any notion of fluid instrumentality, instead conceptualising forgiveness as a *gift* or form of *grace* and the one who forgives in the name of acceptance, a *given*.²¹ Such a refusal of instrumentality avoids symbolic capital being made out of the pretence of public forgiveness. In such cases instrumentality certainly poses a problem not least because it risks undermining the normative force of forgiveness, relegating it to the status of pseudo-forgiveness. If we adhere to Jankélévitch’s refusal, then the problem of pseudo-forgiveness might be sidestepped by allowing for the possibility of forgiveness outside the bounds of the Symbolic law, through requiring that forgiveness avoid public expression. It should therefore take place in secret, silently or anonymously notwithstanding the receiver of the gift of forgiveness might never be aware of it. However, this too is problematic because severing the relational nature of forgiveness (which Jankélévitch argues is fundamental to his philosophy) becomes one-sided, since only the forgiver is privy to this secret new relationship. Moreover, in this scenario, with just a single party present, forgiveness becomes viable only as an act of negation. It is perhaps possible that through the psychoanalytic procedure one might come to a place of forgiveness without the need to articulate publicly. Within the psychoanalytic space, forgiveness might take place notwithstanding the risk of becoming indifferent to forgiveness and its consequences; however, it is not usually the neurotic’s charge to be such a bystander to their symptom.

A second way to avoid the problem of pseudo-forgiveness would be to insist on the absolute erasure of memory. However, such a *tabula rasa* response is also problematic. Jankélévitch insists that memory must be maintained following the impossible task of forgiveness: “Nothing could be more evident: in order to

but *some people will not . . .*” Arendt, 55.

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998); Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. See also, Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust* (London: Verso, 1999).

²¹ Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, 9.

forgive, it is necessary to remember.”²² For Jankélévitch forgetting is the worst form of negation because what is given up is the very moral agency which situates conditions necessary for thinking and enacting forgiveness, negation or refusal. However, forgiveness is not automatic and cannot occur as either negation or refusal. Yet as Freud reminds us, conscious forgetting does occur; remembering is motivated by goals and unconscious processes wherein forgetting is a moment of repression presenting in the form of a symptom. It is important to understand the psychoanalytic function of repression: repression emerges in the shape of a symptom and what is refused will inevitably return. For the neurotic the return of the repressed requires managing love and hate. In this regard what Jankélévitch is offering the neurotic is that although foreclosure implies the possibility of outright refusal (which he advocates), he nevertheless allows such refusal an agency by leaving open a symbolic space in which its active and repeated affirmation must push towards a point of radical exclusion.

Memories are *par excellence* the memories of affects, “the persistent effect of an emotion experienced in the past” in the “memory chain.”²³ In Freud’s work there is much that belongs to the associative theory of memory—and as he famously attests, “unexpressed emotions will never die.” Memory, like mnemonic symbols, screens memories and fantasies to form a memory chain concept as part of the logic of the lost object. In *Mourning and Melancholia*,²⁴ Freud demonstrates how, in melancholia, the pathological memory fixes and fetishizes the idealized object, hated as much as loved, and how in the work of mourning, all memories about the object are illuminated in their smallest detail, so that remembering may facilitate release followed by cathexis. Importantly, Freud maintains that no memory is exempt from the influence of fantasy, and no fantasy can do without ideational elements borrowed from a perceived reality. Thus, it would seem that forgiveness can occur only as part of a fantasy scene, internally subsumed and externally enacted. It is in this context that Jankélévitch makes a plea for remembrance to be in service of his hyper-ethics.

²² Jankélévitch, 56.

²³ Sigmund Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” in *Standard Edition*, 3:187–221.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia (1917 [1915]),” in *Standard Edition*, 14:243–58.

In response to Jankélévitch, Derrida's essay *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* addresses similar problems.²⁵ He too locates forgiveness outside politics but unlike Jankélévitch claims that the function of forgiveness is to forgive "the unforgivable."²⁶ For Derrida, this is unconditional forgiveness, and it must forgive the guilty as guilty without a reference to any request for forgiveness or mitigation of guilt. He refuses Jankélévitch's position that "forgiveness died in the camps." It seems that Derrida conflates legal guilt with moral responsibility when claiming that forgiveness is neither a system of exchange nor an enabler of reconciliation. In attempting to name the impossible Derrida brings back the notion of "radical evil" as a singular articulation reduced to dimensions where forgiveness is possible in reconciling the universal with the particular, the public with the private. We might think of this as salvation translated into politics: only the ghastliest is worthy of forgiveness. But if forgiveness lies outside political action, what else is it good for? If, in Derrida's world, our humanity is distinguished by notions of transcendence and salvation, then even more than Arendt he is politicising the Christian roots of forgiveness. Yet, Derrida even proceeds to down-play Arendt's strict political separation between private sentiments and public action. This is because, for him, the demarcation between the private and the public spheres should ideally be abolished. Thus, for Derrida private and public forgiveness are one and the same. Similarly, for Jankélévitch, except that for him forgiveness is not possible and should be refused.

This in turn leads to the recognition of the individual as abstracted from their crimes and the ensuing processes. This is why judicial law is so problematic for Derrida, Arendt, and Jankélévitch. How can judicial procedures deal with big questions like humanity and crimes against it, a concern echoed in many of Arendt's deliberations. This concern also leaves open the precise nature of the transition from forgiveness, an affective quality, to restitution, which is a pragmatic undertaking. The judicial procedure may start with some recognition of transgression which reflects public outrage or regret and finish with restitution, arguably a political gesture of forgiveness. In so far as the act of forgiveness is here secondary, it leaves intact the paradox of individual autonomy and public moral conscience. This marks the transition from the metaphysical level to

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²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁶ Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, 32.

the mundane where refusal is based on symbolic value and not ethical principle. Further, this is how forgiveness translates into remuneration, or the back and forth of currency negotiation as a procedure of negation. Looking at crimes against humanity, one can see how there is both the event, which may be beyond understanding, and the subsequent representation of the event by those not directly involved. Hence, Derrida talks about such crimes against humanity as ultimately crimes “we” committed against ourselves, meaning we are all to some degree, responsible.

In *Le Pardon*²⁷ Jankélévitch argues that forgiveness arises out of a need for love: he even claims that “forgiveness transfigures hatred into love.”²⁸ For him this shift signals his hyper-ethics as an “ethic beyond ethics,” that is, beyond the norms and laws which he found thoroughly unsatisfying. He says of forgiveness that it is not of the natural order of things but rather politically ratified to give it a sense of moral mastership and authority. Nor can we simply forget and thus be left in a void. Forgetting and forgiveness are for Jankélévitch totally incompatible and at the ontological level, mutually exclusive. To grant unconditional forgiveness locates the subject who is either untouched by guilt or hystericized by it, in territory so unfamiliar that it is perhaps more of a way to avoid struggling with injustice.

An example of Jankélévitch’s hyper-ethical refusal of Germany and German culture, in 1980 he received an invitation from German teacher Wiard Raveling to visit him in Berlin, which solidified his stance on refusal. In his letter, Raveling said that he suffered from “bad conscience” regarding certain events of the Holocaust, which kept him awake at night. Appalled by the actions of the Nazis and holding the entire German people responsible, Jankélévitch had relocated to Paris vowing never again to visit Germany. Raveling nevertheless wrote Jankélévitch a heartfelt invitation to stay with him and his family—they would listen to and converse about their favourite music, share food and wine and perhaps, Raveling hoped, Jankélévitch might discover that, together with his own remorse, a similar desire for separation from the Holocaust was to be found in

²⁷ Jankélévitch, “Should We Pardon Them?”

²⁸ In Lacanian terms, the opposite to love is not hate, but despair, destitution and eventually indifference. Perhaps this is where Jankélévitch’s claim on forgiveness falters slightly. In Lacanian terms his plea is not to be indifferent to but *in* the difference between love and hate.

the everyday people of Germany, many of whom still lived with bad conscience. Raveling says in his letter,

I, myself have not killed any Jews. Having been born German is not my fault. No one asked my permission. I am completely innocent of Nazi crimes, but this does not console me at all. My conscience is not clear, and I feel a mixture of shame, pity, resignation, sadness, revolt . . . I do not always sleep well . . .

Raveling goes on,

If ever, dear Monsier Jankélévitch, you pass through here, knock on our door and come in. You will be welcome. And be assured my parents won't be there. No one will speak to you of Hegel, or of Nietzsche, or of Jaspers, or of Heidegger or of any of the great teutonic thinkers. I will ask you about Descartes and Sartre. I like the music of Schubert and Schumann. But I will play a record of Chopin, or if you prefer, Debussy . . .²⁹

In his reply Jankélévitch writes,

I am moved by your letter. I have waited for this letter for 35 years . . . This the first time I have received a letter from a German, a letter that was not a letter of more or less disguised self-justification. You alone, you the first and no doubt the last, have found the necessary words outside the pious clichés. There is no mistaking it. Thank you.³⁰

However, Jankélévitch refused the hospitality of Raveling's invitation, instead inviting Raveling to visit him in Paris, proposing the same hospitality but on his terms:

No, I will not come to visit you in Germany. I will not go that far. I am too old to inaugurate a new era. Because for me it is a new era all the same . . . It is my turn

²⁹ Wiard Raveling, "Lettre de Wiard Raveling," June, 1980, *Magazine Littéraire* 333 (June 1995): 53.

³⁰ Raveling, 57.

to say to you: when you come to Paris, do as everyone does, knock on my door, we will sit down at the piano.³¹

Raveling obliged; he went to Paris. They listened to music, their shared passion and spoke of many things except the Holocaust, the very event which haunted them both. He then returned to Germany and resumed his teaching. Although they remained in contact, it was propelled by civility rather than a confrontation with the rage and anguish which permeated their mutual desire to separate themselves from the Holocaust. Jankélévitch was trying to achieve separation in any way he could, but his anguish was too great to give up. His insistence on the “nonunderstanding” of both the crime and its forgiveness is the reason why forgiveness is for him, truly impossible. Yet, perhaps this was not such an impasse because Jankélévitch also claims that the very impossibility of forgiveness offers a way to preserve the freedom of the transgressor to eventually ask for forgiveness. However, Jankélévitch states this should be refused anyway, since the Holocaust cannot be eclipsed by the mere speech-act, “we forgive you.” Here a strange mirroring takes place, what Jankélévitch calls a mad, spontaneous movement wherein one is not lost or assimilated by the fiction of forgiveness, because how could anyone want to identify with transgression of such incomprehensible magnitude?

What does it mean to truly refuse as an act of politics? It is possible to read Jankélévitch’s refusal as a fault in him: a stubbornness which absolutely refuses the possibility of reconciliation even at a transferential level of friendship and love. Raveling attempts to understand Jankélévitch’s position and offers that it is shared by other Germans. Nonetheless, the Holocaust is simply unforgivable from Jankélévitch’s position. He does not deny the grief and perplexity Raveling experiences, indeed he urges him to stay with it, but however traumatising this experience may be for Raveling, it is nowhere near that trauma experienced in and because of the Holocaust. In stating to Raveling that he is too old to inaugurate a new era Jankélévitch is testifying to a negation beyond his control and moreover, that only via negation can mourning of the Holocaust occur. This is where Jankélévitch as the subject in mourning resides, in resignation and submission to negation as an unhealable wound.

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³¹ Raveling, 53.

One reading of Jankélévitch's refusal is that forgiveness can be thought of as pure tragedy. Like Derrida, Jankélévitch conceives forgiveness as an invention. However, whereas for Derrida the potential for forgiveness opens up something new, for Jankélévitch, in circumstances such as the Holocaust, it is impossible even to imagine any potential, which is why forgiveness should be refused. It would be too convenient to think of Jankélévitch's position on refusal as ideological: that is, as fully identifying with the position of refusal as a political gesture for its own sake. On the contrary, for Jankélévitch the will to forgive is thoroughly ideological because of the theatricality involved in the act of forgiving. Forgiveness here becomes an empty gesture, an imaginary exercise of false modesty, a liberal performative ritual and little more. Forgiving the Nazi's atrocities would require either unconscionable amnesia or the opposite, platforming them via perverse fascination. Jankélévitch rejects both positions.

At the same time Jankélévitch unwittingly leaves open a space akin to the analyst's discourse. His claim, "forgiveness died in the death camps" is an enunciation of *mi-dire* in an uncompleted sentence which neither elaborates anything implicit in it, nor invites any specific response. We can always refuse his refusal of forgiveness, argue against it or become hysterical; negation is strictly within the content of what has been said. For Jankélévitch the space of forgiveness is totally closed off, yet together with Raveling's declaration of his trauma, it is these very limits which prompt the invitation to meet. Jankélévitch's reply implies that this might be a good start in thinking about the unforgivable as a question of politics, and this thus provides a synthetic knotting, which is precisely the analyst's intervention allowing the analysand to differentiate between "to be" and "to do." By focusing on what has actually happened, the process of knotting and unknotting destabilises the wider field in which solutions are usually sought or facilitated. The radicality of negation in mediating horror mirrors the madness of killing. To this extent Jankélévitch's negation tells the truth: his refusal of Germany mirrors Germany's refusal of the Jews. His ultimate speech-act "forgiveness died in the death camps," in precluding forgiveness and reconciliation, thereby signals the end of rhetorical engagement with the politics of war. Jankélévitch's insistence on this intellectual castration of German thinking and culture began with his removal of all reference to it in his previous work, his one truly political act of refusal. This is the neurotic refusal of a fantasy-cure in which the social bond keeps politics alive through a commitment to hyper-eth-

ics. Attending to the singularity of trauma ensures that the subject must take responsibility for their subjectivity.

Freud's idea that within all memories there is always an element of fantasy, is something which Jankélévitch's refusal ambiguously preserves. Thus, remembering the bodies of the dead Jews brings with it the memory of people with the potential for a good life. It is this paradoxical nature of memory that for Jankélévitch holds a fantasy of the ineffable; the ineffable always contains something unreachable and more pertinently in the case of the Holocaust, the trauma of the event and its historical residues. Jankélévitch's plea to remember protects the dignity of the traumatised victims notwithstanding that the effects of trauma remain in the domain of the partially conscious and the uncertain.

In conclusion, those who take up the ineffable as an "intuitive knowing" enabling a new way of locating oneself cannot assume that private thought and public language are so intimate and interrelated as to be unproblematic. But they can acknowledge that what is truly human is sometimes hard to express in language lacking a cohesive grammar of suffering which connects *how things are* with *how things should be*. There is nothing that is given in language—it must necessarily make us anxious thus we must construct what can be taken for granted before coming to a position of negation or refusal. What we can speak of is the struggle to overcome what is difficult to express in language alone, as being beyond linguistic representation. It is what happens after the trauma of speaking which matters. But for the Lacanian subject who takes up the ineffable, there is always something else. It is not necessarily something deeper or profound. Yet, there is something so radical hiding in plain sight that once glimpsed reveals a hyper-ethics of *coincidentia oppositorum*, irreconcilable contradictions. This is the place in which the subject resides, the Lacanian void and perhaps also the very location of Jankélévitch's refusal. In this place we are bound to admit our complicity in the traumatic event and thereby be forced to reckon with how *how things should be*. Any such judgement as an ethical proposition evolves from a temperament exposed to the effects of bad conscience, a subject position one must live with. Afterall, in psychoanalysis we say that if one feels guilty, then one is guilty—of something. Therefore, one should (at least on the couch) act guilty so that it accords with the sensation of guilt and its accompanying anxiety. The very struggle with their articulations is an act of courage one simply should not refuse: the passage to a transformative act confronts the

impossible by also confronting the possibilities of any situation. We could say that bad conscience is an anxious philosophical state of mind and affect which puts to work how one might think about that which cannot be fully expressed in language; moreover, rather than rendering language more complete, accept that being rough cut, the affective inevitably ruptures the linguistic turn.

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