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(UN)POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP AND MOURNING: A COMPARISON BETWEEN KIERKEGAARD AND DERRIDA THROUGH A MONTAIGNE'S QUOTATION

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IZVIRNI ZNANSTVENI ČLANEK UDK: 177.63:393.7:323.23

::ABSTRACT

In the last decades many Kierkegaard scholars have put a lot of effort into enhancing the social dimension of his thought, which has been at length overlooked, even ignored, by the previous interpretative tradition. Nevertheless, his work allows not only for a social-communitarian interpretation, but also for a political one. By radicalizing the current Derridean readings of Kierkegaard, my paper aims to indicate the key political concept of Kierkegaard's work in the idea of *neighbour love*. In so doing, I will put Kierkegaard and Derrida into dialogue around the interpretation of the well-known sentence from Montaigne's *On Friendship*, "O my friends, there is no friend," which is in turn a line attributed to Aristotle.

Key words: Kierkegaard, Montaigne, Derrida, Politics, Friendship, Mourning

POVZETEK

(NE)POLITIČNOST PRIJATELJSTVA IN ŽALOVANJA: PRIMERJAVA MED KIERKEGAARDOM IN DERRIDAJEM SKOZI MONTAIGNA

V zadnjih desetletjih so številni preučevalci Kierkegaarda vložili veliko truda v poudarjanje družbene dimenzije njegove misli, ki je bila zvečine spregledana ali celo ignorirana s strain prejšnje interpretativne tradicije. Kljub temu smemo reči, da njegovo delo ne ponuja zgolj družbeno-komunitarne interpretacije, pač pa tudi politično. Z radikalizacijo trenutnih derridajevskih branj Kierkegaarda cilja moj članek na identifikacijo ključnih političnih konceptov kierkegaardovega dela v ideji sosedske ljubezni. Pri tem bom Kierkegaarda in Derridaja zapletla v dialog okoli interpretacije dobro znanega Stavka iz Montagnovega eseja O prijateljstvu: "Moji prijatelji, prijatelja ni," ki ga pripisujejo že Aristotelu.

Ključne besede: Kierkegaard, Montaigne, Derrida, politika, prijateljstvo, žalovanje

In his *Journal* from 1850 Kierkegaard quotes the sentence from Montaigne's *On Friendship* translated in Danish: "Aristoteless sædvanlige Ordsprog: o, mine Venner, man finder ingen Ven mere [Aristotle's Well-Known Proverb: Oh, my friends, there is no longer any friend to be found]" (Kierkegaard 2015, 43). More than a century later, in 1994 Derrida publishes *The Politics of Friendship*, which can be regarded as a long commentary to this quotation and to the history of its interpretations. By having in mind and confronting with Montaigne's account of friendship, which he inherited from the Greeks and Latins, Kierkegaard and Derrida develop their own intertwined concepts of friendship and mourning with constant reference to their political side. Throughout the paper I will delve into what I name their *(un)politics of friendship and mourning*—or, even better, (un)politics of friendship *as* mourning. These expressions revolve around the negative particle *un*, which is meant to evoke an alternative model of politics to the entrenched identitary paradigm. Whereas the latter establishes excluding fusional communities and societies, wherein the certainty of the monolithic autonomous modern subject is preserved, Kierkegaard and Derrida outline a politics of otherness, hospitality, self-expropriation, self-abnegation and self-giving.

When it comes to Kierkegaard, the difficulty of tracing his thought back to any particular model of politics is due to the lack of the preliminary clarification on the concept itself of the political:

> Given what we might call Kierkegaard's politics of the leap, and the leaps above and beyond all things systematic that such a politics entails, it is not surprising that he has been found difficult to categorize politically. He has variously been seen as 'antipolitical,' 'conservative,' or even, confusingly, 'apolitical and conservative.' (Smith 2017, 211)

Instead, I claim that Kierkegaard can be interpreted as a thinker of the *inoperative* politics, whose agent is no longer the modern Schmittean decisionist subject, rather the *self-emptying relational self*.[1]

::1. CLASSICAL HERITAGE AND MONTAIGNE'S INTERPRETATION

Montaigne dedicates the chapter *On Friendship* to his prematurely dead friend Étienne de La Boétie, with whom he lived in a complete communion (*mélange*) of wills and affections, as they were "two souls in one body." He raises their relationship up to make it the paradigm of the supreme and perfect friendship, for it shares all the features that have been ascribed to friendship by the Ancients: "A friendship so complete and perfect that its like has seldom been read of, and nothing compa-

[1] For an overall idea of the relational self, see Westphal 1987.

rable is to be seen among the men of our day" (Montaigne 1993, 92). Such friendship is grounded on the extraordinary likeness between friends, which makes one the mirroring alter ego of the other (Arist. *Mag. Mor.* 1213a; Cic. *Amic.* VI, 22; VII, 23). Similarity leads both to prefer the friend above and in contrast with all the others and to demand reciprocity (Cic. *Amic*. XIV, 49). The friend we prefer by choosing him, who loves us back and prefers us in turn, is a virtuous man, with whom we share a common virtue. Thus such a private and intimate space, as we usually think of friendship, turns out to be a social bond that establishes a community of *boni*: "There is nothing for which nature seems to have given us such a bent as for society. […] Of a perfect society friendship is the peak." (Montaigne 1993, 92) By identifying in friendship the archetype for social relations, Montaigne echoes the Aristotelian lesson on the correspondence between particular types of friendship, communities and politics (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* VIII 1159b 29-32; 1160a 29-30; Arist. *Pol.* 1252a 1-8). Furthermore he refers to La Boétie's *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, wherein the author points to a further aspect of the friendship's social nature: its revolutionary capacity to restore the original brotherhood and sociability that human kind has given up by an act of voluntary enslavement (see La Boétie 2008, 50). Montaigne's ideal of friendship has also a subversive dimension, for it rules all the asymmetrical and hierarchical relations out and overturns the behaviours underlying them, such as benefices, obligations, gratitude, prayers and thanks. Contrary to Aristotle, he does not equate the natural, sexual, hospitable and utilitarian bonds with friendship. In fact, the former relationships are already given, whereas friendship is freely chosen and does not lead to unbalance and injustice: "Friendship is fed on familiar intercourse, which cannot exist between them because of their overgreat disparity; and it might well conflict with their natural obligations" (Montaigne 1993, 92). While "what we commonly call friends and friendships are no more than acquaintanceships and familiarities, contracted either by chance or for advantage," in the *first* friendship "they mix and blend one into the other in so perfect a union that the seam which has joined them is effaced and disappears" (Montaigne 1993, 97). This sovereign friendship stemming from the individual decision (reminiscent of the Aristotelian *prohairesis*), together with the likeness between friends, opens to an experience of freedom and emancipation from any form of heteronomy. Getting rid of any cause, or aim, or advantage which friendship is usually mixed with, the perfect friendship is pursed for no other cause than itself: "If I were pressed to say why I love him, I feel that my only reply could be: 'Because it was he, because it was I'" (Montaigne 1993, 97).

Friendship displays a further political side: including friends on the basis of similarity is the same excluding whoever does not participate in such likeness. So friendship grounds its inner similarity on dissimilarity; it includes by excluding. Being-in-common demands having-something- in-common (e.g. common properties, common origins, common interests, common projects, and common values.) The Aristotelian-Ciceronian community of friends has been built on *immunitarian*

grounds: community consists in the immunization against its own condition of possibility, that is the actual openness to the relatedness as such and to the friend's otherness. By reducing *being-with* to the sharing of a common identity, the core of community has been immunized: "Immunity, in short, is the internal limit which cuts across community, folding it back on itself in a form that is both constitutive and deprivative: immunity constitutes or reconstitutes community precisely by negating it" (Esposito 2011, 9). The immunitarian dispositive "seeks to protect the common life from a danger that can be seen in the relation that makes it what it is. Common life is what breaks the identity-making boundaries of individuals, exposing them to alteration – and thus potential conflict – from others" (Esposito 2011, 22). In order to protect from the risk of relatedness, a double immunization is at stake: instead of breaking the relation as such, it creates a substitute relationship of unrelated individuals. Social *immunization* works like the biomedical process, from which it borrows the term: a weaker infection is made in order to prevent from its lethal form. In so doing, the danger is not kept out of the borders, rather it gets included within them. Kierkegaard and Derrida detect such dynamics to be involved in those societies and communities that are grounded on the model of traditional friendship. Although their criticism have different points of departure as well as different end points and results, their argument revolves around the relation between friendship and mourning, which leads the two authors to confront again with Montaigne.

Montaigne in fact binds his account and personal experience of friendship with the thought on death and mourning. Friendship is no longer the happy and idyllic sharing of time, feelings and interests, but it is marked with a shadowing sense of loss, absence and distance. The *Essays* itself is a work of mourning and Book I may be said to constitute La Boétie's literary tomb. As the *Essays* is structurally built around La Boétie's libel, so its manifold content floats around a focal point: around the friend and their friendship.[2] And in particular, as occurs so often in the history of the writing on friendship: around the deceased friend. The way Montaigne thinks and experiences mourning reflects his idea of friendship: as he describes the friend as "another self," an "extension of himself," so the dead continues to live inside of the surviving friend, internalized as an essential inner part of an entire Self, something greater than the two friends alone were by themselves.

Friendship projects life beyond death because friend is one's own ideal image. At the same time, in virtue of the logic of the sameness between friends, the friend's death is experienced as the anticipation of one's own death. So, both the life and the death of the deceased friend are blended into a unified whole: the cannibalistic self. Montaigne's autobiography is simultaneously a biography of his literary dead friends (see Epps 1995, 44), for he internalizes the friendship and incorporated it into his self-consciousness. *The Essays* gets to know a *textual persona*, which is in

[2] La Boétie's work becomes the metonymy for La Boétie himself and his relationship with Montaigne.

turn an *inter-textual self* in dialogue with the manifold of characters and authors filling the work. With respect to Montaigne we might say that friendship does not only anticipate the death of the other, as was it already in Aristotle, but that friendship as he envisions it is so ideal, so mystical, that perhaps it could only take place if and only if the friend is dead. So friendship turns out to have a testamentary nature and the epitaph to be the appropriate genre for writing of friendship. The risk inherent in the funereal friendship lies in vanishing the other's identity and giving its autonomy up by subduing the friend to fulfil a core set of personal desires:

> In his quest to represent himself in writing, Montaigne's friendship with La Boétie became a sort of overarching coping mechanism, the means through which Montaigne reconciled internal hopes and fears with his external environment. For Montaigne, friendship yielded to Friendship in La Boétie's absence, taking on a highly-developed independent life in order to serve many of his deepest psychological needs. (Pozen 2003, 136)

The friend's otherness is acknowledged as far as it becomes the external reference point, which the subject seeks out in order to establish its own identity and self-consciousness. His individuality and distinctiveness seems to disappear before the ideal magnification of their relationship:

> In *Of Friendship* Montaigne does not actually tell us much information about La Boétie, instead emphasizing the unique nature of their friendship and the conflation of their inner selves. […] In the first ninety percent of the chapter Montaigne comes close to rejoicing in his idealization of their friendship, the meaning of which he has largely divorced from the actual person La Boétie. (Pozen 2003, 141)

While friendship as a full whole appears at the same time, and almost contradictorily, cleaved by the absence of the deceased friend, this very absence is endured as long as can they be restored in a wider and fuller self-presence: "I made use and advantage of our separation. […] Separation in space made the conjunction of our wills richer" (Montaigne in Pozen 2003, 147).

Nonetheless the *Essays* is usually introduced to us as an example of high sensitivity to the question of otherness and cultural diversity, which allows Montaigne to be regarded as an advocate of cultural relativism. As an evidence of his relativism, scholars are used to refer to the chapter *Of Cannibals*, wherein by comparing the cannibalism to the barbarianism of 16th-century Europe, Montaigne shows the diversity not to be essentially inscribed in the other's nature, but due to historical, thus contingent, customs and believes. According to Montaigne, the one we call *the different* is a *monstrum*: the exceptional, the un-common and un-familiar, and the Heideggerian *unheimlich*, which arouses surprise and shakes the comfortable *pro-*

prium. Thanks to the only comparative and contingent nature of the dissimilarity, the otherness can get absorbed into the identity, as the figure of the *enfant monstrueux* emblematically embodies it. So, the *other* remains a projection of the Self, a negative category, which the subject makes use of in order to both define and understand itself – even criticize itself.

Nevertheless, if the void of otherness is kept open, the identity, which the friends and lovers mutually find within the relationship, turns out to be crossed by an abysmal lack:

> That Montaigne's 'own inadequacy' is not merely measured but achieved at the expense of his dead friend, of an other possibly even more 'inadequate,' reveals the dimensions of this 'hole in the middle of his work' to be ethical and political as well as ontological and poetical. More precisely, it reveals the (in)adequacy of the self to be a function of the (in)adequacy of the other: one emptiness represented, filled in, written over, with another. At the centre of a book, then, we find a proliferating, creative emptiness: the death of a friend, the curious elimination of his work, and the depiction, in words, of a blank space. (Epps 1995, 40)

Montaigne's account of friendship and mourning suits to an underneath reading, which makes the disproportion and incommensurability, rather than sameness and redoubling, the very condition of friendship as well as of mourning. *The Essays* may be said to represent the inscription of the otherness, which exceeds the subject (here, Montaigne), in both the living friendship and death:

> Montaigne seems to bear this out, for his grotesque scripting is, as we have seen, a testament to his lost friend, a thing of death. But Montaigne's scripting is also, lest we forget, a thing of friendship, a thing of love. It is that by which he engages himself, his living and mortal self, with an otherness which exceeds him and which he lacks. (Epps 1995, 42)

::2. DERRIDA'S POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP AND OF MOURNING

In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida aims to deconstruct the traditional account of friendship and its political implications. He accomplishes his task by highlighting the contradictions underlying the Aristotelian-Montaignean model; more specifically, by undoing likeness and reciprocity as the key elements for friendship as well as for mourning. The all-encompassing union, wherein the seam that has joined the two friends disappears, threatens in both friendship and mourning, their singularity and peculiarity:

> If friendship projects its hope beyond life […] this is because the friend is, as the translation has it, 'our own ideal image.' We envisage the friend as such. And this

> is how he envisages us: with a friendly look. Cicero uses the word *exemplar*, which means portrait but also, as the *exemplum*, the duplicate, the reproduction, the copy as well as the original, the type, the model. The two meanings (the single original and the multipliable copy) cohabit here; they are – or seem to be – the same, and that is the whole story, the very condition of survival. Now, according to Cicero, his *exemplar* is projected or recognized in the true friend, it is his ideal double, his other self, the same as self but improved. Since we watch him looking at us, thus watching ourselves, because we see him keeping our image in his eyes – in truth in ours – survival is the hoped for, illuminated in advance, if not assured, for this Narcissus who dreams of immortality. Beyond death, the absolute future thus receives its ecstatic light, it appears only from within this narcissism and according to this logic of the same. (Derrida 2005, 4)

By referring also to Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*, Derrida enhances the correlation between friendship, mourning and politics:

> The *Eudemian Ethics*, for example, inscribes friendship, knowledge and death, but also survival, from the start, in a single, *selfsame* configuration. The same here is none other than the other. It has at least the figure of the other. The necessary *consequence* of this strange configuration is an opportunity for thought. (Derrida 2005, 7)

When talking about human relationships, Derrida's core concern is about grounding them on *responsibility*: on the individual's free, *mad* decision. By claiming that friendship is not a spontaneous attitude and drive, rather it is an act of faith and of free responsibility involving decision and deliberation, he seems to resonate Montaigne's idea of excluding from friendship the natural, already given, bonds, such as the relationships between father-son, husband-wife and brothers. But Derrida distances himself from Montaigne with detecting that friendship has been always thought as having no other cause than familiarity, consanguinity and affinity stemming from birth and nature. This familial drift follows from the classical concept of friendship, which Derrida traces Montaigne's view back to:

> In reading Montaigne, Montaigne reading Cicero, Montaigne bringing back a 'saying' 'often repeated', here we are already – another testament – back with Aristotle. Enigmatic and familiar, he survives and surveys from within ourselves […] He stands guard over the very form of our sentences on the subject of friendship. (Derrida 2005, 6)

Meant in the classical way, friendship gives rise to a corresponding politics, which is based on the distinction between nature and un-nature, common and un-common, sameness and otherness: "The figure of the friend, so regularly coming back

on stage with the features of the *brother* – who is critically at stake in this analysis – seems spontaneously to belong to a *familial*, *fraternalist* and thus *androcentric* configuration of politics" (Derrida 2005, viii). The politicization of friendship inhabits the concept of the political itself, as Schmitt, whom Derrida refers to, pinpoints when in *The Concept of the Political* he identifies the key to his view of the political in the *Freund-Feind-Unterscheidung*. The two terms are not private and personal, rather public, political, politological and polemological categories, which are rooted in the concepts of nature, blood and telluric autochthonism (see Schmitt 2007, 26-27). According to Schmitt, the political is no longer identifiable with the State as is it set against the society, for in the nowadays *total state*, State and society penetrate each other. The political then permeates and defines the whole reality, which appears to be essentially *polemical*: "First, all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning. They are focused on a specific conflict and are bound to a concrete situation" (Schmitt 2007, 30).

Since the political distinction defines the enemy as *the other*, *the stranger*, "existentially something different and alien" (Schmitt 2007, 27), the friend is described as the familiar, the natural and the common. By taking on such political connotation, the friend is no longer to be understood in a private-individualistic sense as the psychological expression of private emotions and tendencies.[3]

Moreover the friend loses all the ancient moral virtues, which have made him electable above all the other and have grounded the ethical status of friendship, together with all his own distinctive qualities and properties. *Friend* becomes the name of every people existing in the political sphere as opposing to the *enemy*. The antagonism friend/enemy does not only oppose one state to another, but splits the people itself, giving rise to civil war as. Thus the enemy is further featured as the stranger, the outcast, the ostracized or the banned one, whereas the friend as the completely integrated and assimilated member of the social body.[4]

Hence Derrida states the essential link between the natural-genetic paradigm of friendship, which is in turn a homo-fraternal and androcentric schema, and the egalitarian and mutualistic model based on homogeneity and homophilia between friends. The work of the politics of friendship consists in recognizing the other in the mode of sameness, that is to say in assimilating the other to the same and the identical, and in grounding legal equality (*isonomia*) on natural equality (*isogonia*). In so doing, politics levels out all the differences between subjects in order to make them countable, comparable and representable. By making friendship a matter of arithmetic (and so bringing back to the old question about the number of friends that Aristotle first raised), it introduces calculation into the multiplicity of the in-

[3] "The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship. The enemy is hostis, not inimicus in the broader sense; πολέμιος, not ἐχθρός" (Schmitt 2007, 28).

[4] On the question of the *ban*, see also Agamben 1998.

calculable singularities: "With this becoming-political […] the question of democracy thus opens, the question of the citizen or the subject as a countable singularity. And that of a 'universal fraternity'" (Derrida 2005, 22).

Enumeration transforms friendship into a quantitative relationship and makes the reciprocity and symmetry that ground it a matter of economy. Reciprocating love turns into the object of a comparative judgment, whereby the proportion of giving and returning is accounted according to an exchange economy. As it happens in trading, the subjects become economic actors who exchange goods only with the prospect of receiving back in kind, or recouping their loss. And as such, friendship becomes something predictable and assured, as well as the friends' identities:

> A constituted subject, which can also be collective—for example, a group, a community, a nation, a clan, a tribe—in any case, a subject identical to itself and conscious of its subject identical to itself and conscious of its identity seeks only to constitute its own unity and, precisely, to get its own identity recognized so that that identity comes back to it, so that it can reappropriate its identity: as its property. (Derrida 1992, 10-11, translation modified)

Making friendship a matter of economy means therefore subduing it to the *oikos-nomos*: the law of *oikos*, property, family, the heart, the fire indoors–that is, the law of sameness. Moreover, having friends become countable singularities, symmetric friendship allows for the realization of equity: a formal and abstract way of equality, a universally sanctioned program and empty conformism, which does not take the particular needs of the single individual into account.

By introducing a "seismic revolution in the political concept of friendship which we have inherited" (Derrida 2005, 27), Derrida points to an alternative model of friendship and its politics, which remains to *come* because of the *aporia* ("the possibilization of the impossible possible") that inhabits it:

> There is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy without the 'community of friends', without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal. These two laws are irreducible one to the other. Tragically irreconcilable and forever wounding. The wound itself opens with the necessity of having to *count* one's friends, to count the others, in the economy of one's own, there where every other is altogether other. (Derrida 2005, 22)

As soon as it is required to give an institutional and political shape to friendship, the friend's otherness get lost. For a democracy to be responsible of the citizens' singularity it needs to go beyond the traditional political concept of friendship, a new *politics of separation* has to follow from a *dissymmetrical phileîn*. Derrida shows that a certain unbalance between the lover and the beloved is already implicit in the Ar-

istotelian statement that it is more worthwhile to love than to be loved. The asymmetry complicates and threatens the egalitarian and reciprocalist scheme of friendship. Now friends turn to be "without common measure, reciprocity or equality. Therefore, without horizon of recognition. Without familiar bond, without proximity, without oikeiótēs" (Derrida 2005, 35). They are "the uncompromising friends of solitary singularity," who are bound in "the anchoritic community of those who love in separation," in the "community of social disaggregation," the "community of those without community" (Derrida 2005, 35). Thus, the conditions of possibility and thinkability of these aporetic politics and friendship constitute their very unthinkability and impossibility. For they aim to ensure *responsibility* towards others—that is, to maintain the others, whom the self relates to and is constituted by, *as* others—they are required to break with the language of the same, of the general and of the measurable. The democracy *to come* speaks the language of madness, which disidentifies the identification of every concept:

> The truth of friendship is a madness of truth, a truth that has nothing to do with the wisdom which, throughout the history of philosophy *qua* the history of reason, will have set the tone of this truth – by attempting to have us believe that amorous passion was madness, no doubt, but that friendship was the way of wisdom and of knowledge, no less than of political justice. (Derrida 2005, 54)

In friendship as well in democracy, we are called to confront with whom is not reducible to the *I* and *mine*, to the *We* and *ours*: the enemy gets lodged in the heart of the friend and vice versa, hindering the reciprocity and mutual recognition. The friend as the haunting other develops the features of the ghost: "Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same" (Derrida 2001, 42). And nothing is more similar to the ghost than the dead friend. Friendship for the deceased in fact carries friendship to the limit of its possibility because loving the dead is the extreme, paradigmatic case of the asymmetry of loving someone who does not love back and does not even know to be loved. The law of friendship turns out to be the law of mourning and the way one mourns the friend becomes the model for responsibly relating to the living other:

> To want to be known, to refer to self in view of self, to receive the good rather than to do it or to give it – this is an altogether different thing from knowing. Knowing knows in order to do and to love, for love and in view of doing and loving […] as Aristotle then says, concluding: 'This is way we praise those who continue to love their deceased, for they know but are not know' […]. Friendship for the deceased thus carries this philia to the limit to its possibility. But at the same time, it uncovers the ultimate spring of this possibility: I could not love friendship without projecting its impetus towards the horizon of this death. […] I couldn't love friendship without engaging myself, *without feeling myself in ad-*

> *vance* engaged to love the other beyond death. Therefore, beyond life. I feel myself – and in advance, before any contract – *borne* to love the dead other. (Derrida 2005, 12)

Friendship begins with the possibility of survival and mourning, for one does not survive without mourning: "Surviving is at once the essence, the origin and the possibility, the condition of possibility of friendship; it is the grieved act of loving. The time of surviving thus gives the time of friendship" (Derrida 2005, 14). In *Works of Mourning*, Derrida defines friendship the "anticipation of mourning" because the aporia of mourning is already virtually at work from the very beginning of friendship. So mourning and friendship appear to be inextricably bound as well as their politics.

Works of Mourning is a collection of Derrida's personal mourning texts, wherein by putting the mourning itself into practice, he reflects on mourning and the involved ethical responsibility. While *The Politics of Friendship* questions an alternative friendship to the fusional paradigm, *Work of Mourning* inquires the risks inherent in the politics of mourning. According to Derrida, mourning is a matter of 'posthumous fidelity' doomed to fail; an 'unfaithful fidelity' if it succeeds in interiorizing the other ideally, in digesting and totally assimilating him, that is, not respecting his infinite exteriority. The work of mourning unavoidably exposes the singularity of the friend's death to its inevitable repetition. The play between irreplaceability and iterability characterizes the very rhetoric of mourning, which allows us to speak of the beloved's death as "end of the world" and yet to multiply it–with regard not only to one friend, one proper name, but many, one death after another. While mourning results in reckoning, narrating, evaluating, enumerating, and thus in dialectizing the unique "undialectical death," the dead friend remains "a point of singularity that punctures the surface of reproduction—and even the production—of analogies, likeness, and codes," the solitude "which renders the fabric of the same, the networks or ruses of economy" (Derrida 2001, 39).

Derrida formulates an alike argument in his foreword to Abraham's and Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, wherein he opposes the mourning process of *interiorization*, which is idealizing introjection and consumption of the other, with the process of *encryptment* or *endocryptic incorporation*. In this latter case, the mourning subject fails to digest the other completely, who remains what always exceeds and resists the assimilation. The *crypt* is a place within another but rigorously separate from it, "an outcast outside inside the inside:"

> The crypt hides as it holds. […] The crypt is thus not a natural place [*lieu*], but the striking history of an artifice, an *architecture*, an artefact: of a place *comprehended* within another but rigorously separate from it, isolated from general space by partitions, an enclosure, an enclave […], a secret interior within the public square, but, by the same token, outside it, external to the interior. (Derrida 1986, xiii)

The concept of crypt makes the difference between introjection and incorporation meaningful:

> Introjection/incorporation: Everything is played out on the borderline that divides and opposes the two terms. […] That boundary is indispensable to the localization of the crypt, for it surrounds, within the Self (the set of introjections), the cryptic enclave as an extraneous or foreign area of incorporation. […] Like the *conceptual* boundary line, the *topographical* divider separating introjection from incorporation is rigorous in principle, but in fact it does not rule out all sorts of original compromises. The ambiguity I mentioned earlier (reappropriation of the other *as* other) actually makes the compromise irreducible. Although it is kept secret, the fantasy of incorporation can and even must "signify," in its own way, the introjection it is incapable of: its impossibility, its simulacrum, its displacement. (Derrida 1986, xvii- xviii)

It does not delimit two homogeneous and independent spaces–the self and the other–but a different organization of space. The other *in us* comes *before* us; it is our law, what first forms our very interiority; it is what "looks at us, inside each of us, and we do not do as we please with this look" (Derrida 2001, 44). In mourning as well in friendship, we experience an asymmetry that can be interiorized only by exceeding and traumatizing the interiority that welcomes it through hospitality. Hospitality is a "passive decision," the gift the other gives to us, "a rending decision as the decision of the other. Of the absolute other in me, the other as the absolute that decides on me in me" (Derrida 2005, 68).

Thus, it is worth wondering whether it is still possible to talk of *politics* of friendship and mourning, or rather we should define them *inoperative* (un)politics. Whereas the aforementioned politics have been built on immunitarian grounds, the politics *to come* needs to be thought as through and through *communitarian*. Here community is meant in a broader sense of *being-with*; a whole of individuals, which a debt, rather than a common property, binds together:

> The tradition assigns to community a common being, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is in common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being in common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. (Nancy 1991, xxxviii)

Instead of being a source of identity, it is the exposure of the subjectivity to the otherness, which interrupts and breaks the monolithic identity of the subject. When the individuals are taken out themselves, a new bond is created: their mutual not-belonging to themselves. If community is meant in this way, the corresponding politics

should not result in institutions and in subjects glued together by the sharing of a common substance. Rather it is expected to *inoperate* and *disactivate* this very common substance, leaving the possibility of the individuals' disidentification open:

> The common is not characterized by what is proper but by what is improper, or even more drastically, by the other; by a voiding of property into its negative; by removing what is properly one's own that invests and decenters the proprietary subject, forcing him to take leave of himself, to alter himself. In the community, subjects do not find a principle of identification. [...] They don't find anything else except that void, that distance, that extraneousness that constitutes them as being missing from themselves. (Esposito 2010, 4-7)

The openness towards the *other* does no destroy but resituates the subject. The otherness is not kept outside the borders of the subject's identity; rather, the transcendental constitution of the subject gets undermined by the constitutive and original presence of the alterity within the singularity. The overcoming of the subject meant as substance and self-presence is a necessary step for the thinking of the inoperative politics of friendship and mourning *to come*: politics of the gift, of gratuitousness, wherein the individual's action disactivates the instrumentality of the political, immunitarian acting.

While the politicized decision (the decision made by a subject willing to realize himself in the shape of a political unity by a voluntary act) is caught up in the metaphysics of subjectivity and it is therefore rational, the inoperative action follows from the madness of the decision:

> The moment of decision as such, what must be just, must always remain a finite moment of urgency and precipitation; it must not be the consequence or the effect of theoretical or historical knowledge, of reflection or deliberation, since the decision always marks the interruption of the juridico-, ethico-, or politico-cognitive deliberation that precedes it, that must precede it. The instant of a decision is a madness, says Kierkegaard. (Derrida 2002, 255)

::3. KIERKEGAARD'S NEIGHBOUR LOVE AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

By quoting Kierkegaard about the madness of the instant of the decision, Derrida opens the Danish author's thought to a political reading. In more than one passage, Kierkegaard himself defines Christianity as "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles," therefore underling the infinite heterogeneity between the worldly human reason and the paradoxical Christian categories. This *qualitative difference* marks also the relationship between the preferential and non-preferential love, that is to say between natural relations, such as friendship and erotic love, and

spiritual, neighbour-love. Precisely his evaluation of human relationships lead many commentators to think of Kierkegaard as uninterested, if not hostile, to politics. While it is no doubt crucial to look at his stance as a *corrective* both to the Lutheran unilateral focus on grace at the expense of the works and to the Hegelian self-realization and self-awareness of the individual in the objective and universal realm of the State, I maintain that his theory of love has its own political relevance.

Kierkegaard develops this thought in *Works of Love*, where talking about preferential bonds (*Forkjerligheden)*, he does not criticize their instinctual and sensual dimension, rather those features that the Ancients and Montaigne praised them for: namely, the preference based on similarity, the exclusivity and the demand of reciprocity. The Danish term *For-Kjerligheden* stresses the prefix *for*, which indicates the act of excluding election at work in friendship as well as in love:

> The same holds true of friendship as of erotic love, inasmuch as this, too, is based on preference: to love this one person above all others, to love him in contrast to all others. Therefore the object of both erotic love and of friendship has preference's name, 'the beloved,' 'the friend,' who is loved in contrast to the whole world. (Kierkegaard 1995, 19)

As can be seen, this definition of the beloved undermines the inclusiveness of the relationship, and more importantly it calls into question the other's identity and the relatedness as such. In fact the beloved is not seen for what they really are, but their fundamental identity is lost behind the abstraction of their accidental qualities, which happen to coincide within the lover's criteria of love and friendship and become a substitute of what the other essentially is. The misperception of the other affects the relationship itself, which proves to be a deceptive narcissistic doubling of the ego, who subdues the other's identity in order to feed the image that the ego has created of itself. The individual affirms their ego by being esteemed or loved by another who in turn loves or holds in esteem them:

> To admire another person is certainly not self-love, but to be the one and only friend of this one and only admired person—would not this relation turn back in an alarming way into the *I* from which we proceeded? Is not this plainly self-love's danger—to have one single object for its admiration when this one and only admired person in turn makes one oneself the sole object of his erotic love or his friendship? (Kierkegaard 1995, 54-55)

Kierkegaard accuses thereby preferential relationships of being a disguised form of improper, selfish self-love:

> Just as self-love selfishly embraces this one and only self that makes it self-love, so also erotic love's passionate preference selfishly encircles this one and only be-

> loved, and friendship's passionate preference encircles this one and only friend. For this reason the beloved and the friend are called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the other self, the other *I*. […] But where does self-love reside? It resides in the *I*, in the self. […] The *I* ignites itself by itself. […] Erotic love and friendship are the very peak of self-esteem, the intoxicated in the other *I*. The more securely one *I* and another *I* join to become one *I*, the more this united *I* selfishly cuts itself off from everyone else. At the peak of erotic love and friendship, the two actually do become one self, one *I*. (Kierkegaard 1995, 53-56)

Selfishness is maintained even when these relationships structure a society, wherein the members sacrifice a portion of their own self-love in order to hold it together in the collective Subject's self-love:

> The distinction the world makes is namely this: if someone wants to be self-loving all by himself, which, however, is rarely seen, the world calls this self-love, but if he, self-loving, wants to hold together in self-love with some other self-loving people, particularly with many other self-loving people, then the world calls this love. […] What the world honors and loves under the name of love is an alliance in self- love. (Kierkegaard 1995, 119)

In contrast with the confusion of *mine* and *yours* in Montaigne's friendship, Kierkegaard wittily highlights that self-property is preserved in the communal property:

> If mine has become yours, and yours has become mine, there are still a *mine* and a *yours*, except that the exchange that took place signifies and assures that it is no longer the initial, the immediate *mine* of self-love that stands contentiously against a *yours*. Through the exchange, the contentious *mine* and *yours* have become a communal *yours and mine*. By being exchanged, *mine and yours* become *ours*, in which category erotic love and friendship have their strength. But *ours* is for the community exactly the same as *mine* is for the solitary one. (Kierkegaard 1995, 266)

Friendship turns to be a seceding corporate pride resulting into a self-referential clique based on the mutual self-approval between members. Indeed in the fusional union, the broadened subject defines itself in contrast to those outside the relation. The more two egos become one ego by merging themselves, the greater the latter ego distances itself from the others: "In erotic love and friendship, the two love each other by virtue of the dissimilarity or by virtue of the similarity that is based on dissimilarity" (Kierkegaard 1995, 56). The modern associations reflect the dynamics involved in friendship: they are a mere enlargement of the subject, glued together by superficial interests that aggregate individuals but do not truly relate them. The criteria for gathering is merely *quantitative* and the process is *levelling*, which irons

out all the distinctions and wins over the uniqueness of the single individual in favour of abstract and indistinct homogeneity, and whose latent passion is *envy* toward any excellence or distinction. Since modernity feels human relatedness as the threat to self-image, a plethora of associations immunized against real and truthful interactions has been developed. They endeavour to make individuals totally isolated and to create a surrogate for communal living, mere amalgamations of individuals who are reciprocally indifferent to one another:

> In our age the principle of association […] is not affirmative but negative; it is an evasion, a dissipation, an illusion, whose dialectic is as follows: as it strengthens individuals, it vitiates them; it strengthens by numbers, by sticking together, but from the ethical point of view this is a weakening. Not until the single individual has established an ethical stance despite the whole world, not until the then can there be any question of genuinely uniting; otherwise it gets to be a union of people who separately are weak. (Kierkegaard 2009, 106)

According to Kierkegaard, the equality which the modern communities give rise to is the artificial, deceptive levelling of all the peculiarities, needs, duties of the individuals: "The dialectic of the present age is oriented to equality, and its most logical implementation, albeit abortive, is leveling, the negative unity of the negative mutual reciprocity of individuals" (Kierkegaard 2009, 84). In *Works of Love* he takes an outspoken stand against the temporal, wordly equality, which people manage to realize by levelling out all the earthly dissimilarities and subsuming them under a selected temporal condition:

> To bring about similarity among people in the world, to apportion to people, if possible equally, the conditions of temporality, is indeed something that preoccupies worldliness to a high degree. […] There must be one temporal condition, one earthly dissimilarity—found by means of calculations and surveys or in whatever other way—that is equality. If this condition became the only one for all people, then similarity would have been brought about. […] To bring about worldly similarity perfectly is an impossibility. (Kierkegaard 1995, 71)

Moreover, adds Kierkegaard, "everyone who struggles against dissimilarity in such a way that he wants one specific dissimilarity removed and another put in its place is, of course, fighting for dissimilarity" (Kierkegaard 1995, 73). This "abortive equality" follows from a deeper misunderstanding, which is not acknowledging ourselves and the others as *spirit*. The well-known definition of *spirit* as "a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another" (Kierkegaard 1980, 13) shows the human being's essentially relational nature, which is needed to understand and thus realize the real equality. Only when the individuals get to know themselves under the "theological determination" (Kierkegaard 1980, 79), they are able to see the

equality beneath the earthy distinctions and so to relate to each other according to what they really are – as *neighbour*: "The neighbor is one who is equal […] since with your neighbor you have the equality of a human being before God" (Kierkegaard 1995, 60). Therefore, only by loving the neighbour—that is looking at ourselves and at the others *as* neighbour—the real equality can be fulfil:

> Whoever then will love the neighbor, whoever thus does not concern himself with removing this or that dissimilarity, or with eliminating all of them in a worldly way, but devoutly concerns himself with permeating his dissimilarity with the sanctifying thought of Christian equality—that person easily becomes like someone who does not fit into earthly life here, not even in so-called Christendom. (Kierkegaard 1995, 73)

Christian spiritual love finds its object in the neighbour, that is not someone who has to be chosen and preferred in order to be loved, but every human being without any exception, neither of preference nor of aversion:

> The word is obviously derived from "nearest [Nærmeste]"; thus the neighbor is the person who is nearer to you than anyone else, yet not in the sense of preferential love, since to love someone who in the sense of preferential love is nearer than anyone else is self-Iove. […] The neighbor, then, is nearer to you than anyone else. But is he also nearer to you than you are to yourself? No, that he is not, but he is just as near, or he ought to be just as near to you. […] To be sure, "neighbor" in itself is a multiplicity, since "the neighbor" means "all people," and yet in another sense one person is enough. (Kierkegaard 1995, 21)

The neighbour defined as *other* is not the *Other-I*, but the *Other-you*. This definition is remarkable for it underlines the impossibility of turning back in a selfish way into the loving *I*. The neighbour works as stumbling block for the egotism for it negates the first *I* and the other, which has been reduced to *other-I*, in their pretension of being originary instances. So it is not only the *other* to be defined as the neighbour, but *I* am in turn the neighbour of the one needing love. Kierkegaard goes so far as to call the neighbour the *Other-You*, meaning that also the *I* does not originally define itself as *I*, but as *You*. Kierkegaard does not aim to ban self-love as such; rather, he wants to oppose to an improper, selfish form of self-love, the proper self-love, which is essentially intertwined with the neighbour-love:[5]

[5] "There is a self-love that one must call unfaithful self-love, but it is also just as aware that there is a self-love that must be called devoted self-love" (Kierkegaard 1995, 55). "Kierkegaard distinguishes between two forms of self--love: a 'selfish,' exclusive love of self, which is at odds with the good of the other, and a 'proper,' inclusive love of self, which both encompasses the good of the other and is the measure of the good of the other. What makes love of self 'proper' as opposed to perverted cannot therefore consist in rejecting, denying, or rooting out love of self" (Ferreira 2001, 43). On the question of Kierkegaard's self-love, see also Lippitt 2013.

> The commandment said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," but if the commandment is properly understood it also says the opposite: You shall love yourself in the right way. To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another. (Kierkegaard 1995, 22)

The adding *as yourself* ensures that the other will not be reduced to a mere extension and reduplication of the ego. It teaches us to love the others as we love ourselves: no less than ourselves, turning ourselves into idols; no more than ourselves, raising the beloved to the God-level. Kierkegaard's view then remains equally balanced between the narcissistic self-assertion, whose seed is detectable both in friendship and in erotic love, and the Levinasian self-debasement within the asymmetric relationship with the other.

For the neighbour is every human being, love does not depend on the object and its qualities, "which means that this love is recognizable only by love" (Kierkegaard 1995, 66). Many commentators have criticized Kierkegaard because with subsuming everyone, without any exception, under the universal, abstract category of neighbour, he ends up depersonalizing the other and not taking into consideration their intrinsic, irreducible singularity. What they regard as ethical irresponsibility in Kierkegaard's thought reveals to be instead the most inclusive, responsible way of relating to the others. It is surely true that the divine commandment demands to commit in the same way to the bride, friends, the enemy, the stranger and even the dead.[6]Actually the commandment is accomplished also when the object is totally absent, making the irrelevance of the beloved individual paradigmatically evident: "As far as thought is concerned, the neighbor does not even need to exist. If someone living on a desert island mentally conformed to this commandment, by renouncing self-love he could be said to love the neighbor" (Kierkegaard 1995, 21). However, upon closer analysis, sameness is not about the beloved object, rather about the love itself, which does not make any difference as far as it finds in every human being the "fundamental similarity" implicit in the category of the neighbour. So Kierkegaard neither recommends the blindness to the individual distinctions per se nor aims to make people abstract and interchangeable. Instead, he indicates in neighbour love the corrective to dysfunctional ways of relating to others.

The commandment does not tell us *to love*, but *how* to love: loving regardless of the beloved's characteristics, whether they are virtues or defects; loving beyond our preferences and our wish of reciprocity and recognition; loving despite the beloved's change. Notwithstanding its mandatory nature, Christian love is not the object of an external and heteronomous enforcement, but it is an inward *task* (*Opgave*). The Danish word *Opgave* (eng. *up* + *gift*) expresses the relation between the need (*Trangen*) of actualizing love and the gift of love from God. Love is already present in "a

[6] "To be sure, the wife and the friend are not loved in the same way, nor the friend and the neighbor, but this is not an essential dissimilarity" (Kierkegaard 1995, 141).

person's innermost being," when one feels the urge to actualize it – or, better, to *upbuild* it. Love is *upbuilding* and it gets *upbuilt*:

> 'To build up' is a metaphorical expression […] 'To build up' is formed from 'to build' and the adverb 'up,' which consequently must receive the accent. […] This 'up' in 'build up' indicates height, but it indicates height inversely as depth, since to build up is to build from the ground up. (Kierkegaard 1995, 211)

By loving, the lover upbuilds the beloved's love for he builds on pre-existing foundations, on what is already present in depth:

> Love is the source of everything and, in the spiritual sense, love is the deepest ground of the spiritual life. In every human being in whom there is love, the foundation, in the spiritual sense, is laid. And the building that, in the spiritual sense, is to be erected is again love, and it is love that builds up. Love builds up, and this means it builds up love. (Kierkegaard 1995, 215)

Loving is then an act of faith. Since one cannot infer from anything external the presence of the love in the other, then love has to be believed: "Like is known only by like; only someone who abides in love can know love, and in the same way his love is to be known" (Kierkegaard 1995, 16). Without looking for reciprocity, the upbuilding love nourishes a kind of mutuality and reinforces an equality between us: when we presuppose love in another person, we presuppose it in ourselves; when we build up others we are allowing them to be able to build up others, including us.

Only when demanded, love becomes really free. Neither it falls any longer with the contingency of the beloved one nor transforms itself according to the changeability of its object. Thus it does never turn into hate; it does not fall prey to jealously and does not weaken in the indifference of the habit; it neither demands to get tested nor is afraid of being deceived. In short, Christian love frees itself from the aforementioned dynamics, which Kierkegaard sees involved in friendship and erotic love, for those latter find the law of their existence outside themselves, in the beloved object. The independence from the beloved object results into independence from reciprocity. The claim for reciprocation fits into the mercantile behaviour, which make love and friendship relationships between creditor and debtor, a mere calculation of what is given and what is owed, ultimately a matter of comparison. On the contrary, by carrying out an overturning in the relation between credit and debit, Christian love breaks with the realm of economy. It is not the beloved owing something to the lover and therefore demanded to equally reward; rather, by loving the lover runs into infinite debt: "To give a person one's love is, as has been said, the highest a person can give—and yet by giving it he runs into an infinite debt. […] It becomes conscious of its giving as an infinite debt that cannot possibly be repaid, since to give is continually to run into debt" (Kierkegaard 1995, 177). Instead of turning love into a property, which the lover is able

to regain through the beloved's repayment, Christian love dispossess the lover as the owner subject: "The emotion is not your possession but belongs to the other; the expression is your debt to him, since in the emotion you indeed belong to him who moves you and you become aware that you belong to him" (Kierkegaard 1995, 12). Breaking with reciprocity goes together with giving up recognition. Since Christian love transcends the human, natural understanding of love, it exposes itself to be misunderstood – to be mistaken for hate. Thus, not only it transcends the natural and potentially political determinations of friend and enemy, for the Christian requirement "to love your neighbour" must be read as also "to love one's enemy," but it demands "out of love and in love *to hate the beloved*" (Kierkegaard 1995, 108).

In its irreducibility to worldly categories and economical-political structures Christian love discloses its apolitical and antipolitical meaning. Its absolute heterogeneity makes communicating it and translating it into the political-social language problematic. Whereas La Boétie saw in friendship the capacity to materially change the human condition and the established order, Kierkegaard claims neighbour-love to be a "matter of consciousness," which does not deal with transforming the human worldly life. Christian equality does not call for the factual accomplishment of mundane justice and equity. Christian unconcern for the property categories of *mine* and *yours* contrasts with the fundamentals of civil society. Similarly, its disregard for earthly distinctions and hierarchies is incommensurable with society, which is based on them. The works of love remains intangible compared to the worldly concreteness; incommunicable and unutterable via human language because of their paradoxicality.

However, by having God as middle term between the lover and the beloved, it lends itself to an (un)political interpretation. In loving each other as neighbours, the individuals do not get merged one with another, but they are united on the basis of an ideal distance. They do not strengthen their selfishness, but rather they get rid of it, for the relation to one another allow them to go back to themselves by having gone through self-denial and self-abnegation. Thus, as stated in *Christian Discourses*, Christianity demands the individual to die to himself, to his willingness, human reasoning and selfishness. Christian relationships thus can be defined as relationships between dead: not only the individual has to die to himself when he relates to the other, but the other himself has to be loved as he was dead. Kierkegaard indicates in loving the dead the prototype of unpreferential and unselfish love, which has to inform all the preferential living relationships: "If you want to ascertain what love there is in you or in another person, then pay attention to how he relates himself to one who is dead" (Kierkegaard 1995, 347). In fact, the act of loving the deceased is a work of the most unselfish, disinterested love, for the possibility and hope of repayment are removed; it is fully free because not inspired by any personal advantage and prescribed by any external constraint; independent from any possible change of the lover. In this relation, no alliance is possible: Montaigne's *confrérie* makes way for the un-society of dead.

This latter can further defined as *communitas* of dead, applying to it the above-mentioned inoperative meaning of community. Within this self-emptying community, the agents of this relation kenotically withdraw from their substantial identity and essence by relating to one another as they were the other-you for their own. As Nancy states, in love "the heart exposes, and it is exposed. 'I' is posed only by being exposed to 'you'" (Nancy 1991, 89). From loving the ego comes back "shattered," "in fragments," broken in his self-possession as subject. Despite the Hegelian origin of its terminology, the Kierkegaardian self undoes every substantialization and essentialist definition of the subject. By being "a relation relating itself to itself," the individual is this very process of becoming – it is the possibilization of its own possibility, the anxious projection onto the no-thing of the possibility. The self is an activity of becoming rather than of being, which marks the death of the modern figure of the self itself, together with its desperate claim for self-knowledge and self-mastery. In fact, being an ever exceeding relation to itself and to the other/Other, the self is fractured by an alterity that pierces and surpasses it:

> It is seemingly at the very moment when the 'self' attempts to attain an all-too-certain grasp on itself that, like water falling through one's fingers, the notion of selfhood undergoes its most fatal crisis. The paradigm shift is from the internal grasp at 'being' to the openness of a relational 'becoming' whose horizon is infinitely receding. (Podmore 2011, 18-19)

The acting of the *eschatological self* needs to preserve the self's openness without filling it with any substance or essential definition. Such acting is outlined as an inoperative *pràxis*, which is not mere contemplative quietism, for "it is sheer action; consequently it is as far from inaction as it is from busyness" (Kierkegaard 1995, 98). Rather it acts by disactivating its own productiveness – that is, it maintains the possibility as such, without actualizing it in any fixed result or end. Thus getting rid of its very finalistic and instrumental facet, the inoperative acting acquires the feature of gratuitousness. Such free, gratuitous action is a *work of love*, which empties itself of any specific objective content and makes itself recognizable only from the *how* it is acted: "It depends on *how* the work is done. […] But here again it holds true that there is nothing, no 'thus and so,' that can unconditionally be said to demonstrate unconditionally the presence of love" (Kierkegaard 1995, 14). And there is any objective content for *love acts love*. Since "in love to help someone toward that, to become himself" (Kierkegaard 1995, 274), loving consists in consigning oneself and the beloved to what they already are: their becoming themselves, which is to become their own possibility:

> The one who loves has done nothing but presuppose that love was present in the ground. […] Indeed, its work seems as if *it did nothing* at all. […] One's entire work is made into almost nothing beforehand, inasmuch as the presupposition

> first and last is self-denial, or the builder is concealed and is *as nothing*. (Kierkegaard 1995, 218, italics added)

The inoperative work is a non-activity which digs from the inside the established socio-political order and the given relationships. It empties them of their content and meaning by leaving them externally intact and yet relating to them in "the form of the *as not*" (Agamben 2005, 24).[7] Schematically said, something remains unchanged but is radically changed. According to Kierkegaard, this precisely happens in Christianity: "Christianity allows all this to remain in force and have its significance externally, but at the same time […] it wants to have infinity's change take place internally" (Kierkegaard 1995, 144). The *work of love* plays this role: it disactivates the natural and socio-economic-political relations and institutions by the *negative* moment of the reduplication and repetition:

> Everything depends on 'how' something is put into the world, upon the reduplication of a principle in the form properly related to that principle. Indeed, to put it very briefly one could say that the difference between politics and religion is that politics wants to have nothing to do with this reduplication—politics is too busy, too earthly, too finite. (Kierkegaard 2015, 141)

By repeating the socio-political categories, which is by negating and yet maintaining them, the inoperative work frees them from their crystalized function: "Christianity has not wanted to storm forth to abolish dissimilarity, neither the dissimilarity of distinction nor of lowliness; nor has it wished to effect in a worldly way a worldly compromise among the dissimilarities; but it wants the dissimilarity to hang loosely on the individual" (Kierkegaard 1995, 88). "To hang loosely" is the Christianity destituting power that allows it to undo, without overthrowing them, every institutionalised form of political action and production. By *informing* the natural and socio-political relationships with the love for the deceased, which is the prototype for Christianly loving, Christian love displays its inoperative function. "Love is the fulfilling of the Law," say Kierkegaard with reference to Paul. As "Christ came not to abolish the Law but to perfect it," so human love is required to "perfect" the juridic-political order by disactivating the fundamental division of the juridical order and the socio-political and economic division of class: divisions, such as those of class, gender, family, and race, all are legal phenomenon, understood in its broadest sense as a mechanism that regulates and produces socio-political identities. In fact, the law, together with the language operate by grouping entities

[7] Agamben, and Heidegger before him (in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*), refers to the Pauline text when he employs the category of *hos mè* (als ob nicht): "But this I say, brethren, time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not [hos mè] having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish you to be without care" (1 Cor. 7:29-32).

through the name on the basis of a common identity. The neighbour, the category of indifference to differences, breaks this exclusive common identity and marks the impossibility for the self's identity to coincide with itself. In so doing, neighbour-love proves itself to be (un)political "remnant:"[8]

> Even if it is the one who stands at the very top, even if it is the king, he is to *lift himself* up above the difference of loftiness, and the beggar is to *lift himself* up above the difference of lowliness. Christianity allows all the dissimilarities of earthly life to stand, but this equality in lifting oneself up above the dissimilarities of earthly life is contained in the love commandment, in loving the neighbor. (Kierkegaard 1995, 72)

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[8] See Agamben 2005, 52.

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