Filozofski vestnik

What is it to Live?
Qu'est-ce que vivre ?

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« Nous voici à même de proposer une réponse à ce qui, depuis toujours, est la question ‘intimidante’ – comme le dit un personnage de Julien Gracq – à laquelle, si grand soit son détour, la philosophie est à la fin sommée de répondre : qu’est-ce que vivre ? ‘Vivre’, évidemment, non pas au sens du matérialisme démocratique (persévérer dans les libres virtualités du corps), mais bien plutôt au sens de la formule énigmatique d’Aristote : vivre ‘en Immortel’. »

Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*

“We are now in a position to propose a response to what has always been the ‘daunting’ question – as one of Julien Gracq’s characters has it – the question that, however, great its detour, philosophy must ultimately answer: what is it to live? ‘To live’ obviously not in the sense of democratic materialism (persevering in the free virtualities of the body), but rather in the sense of Aristotle’s enigmatic formula: to live ‘as an Immortal’.”

Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*

Contents

Filozofski vestnik | What is it to live?/Qu'est-ce que vivre ?
Volume XXX | Number 2 | 2009

Kazalo

Filozofski vestnik | What is it to live?/Qu'est-ce que vivre ?
Letnik XXX | Številka 2 | 2009

Življenje med stvarjenjem in trajanjem

Lacanovska biologija

Premeščanje humanizma

Drugače kakor biti

Life between Creation and Duration

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXX | Number 2 | 2009 | 7-22

Vanessa Brito*

Deleuze et les modes de vie mineurs

La profusion de percepts, affects et concepts que Deleuze dégage des œuvres d'art va de pair avec la construction d'une identité entre le concept et la vie. Les concepts que le cinéma, la musique ou la peinture suscitent, celui de cristal, de ritournelle ou de modulation, ne nous montrent pas seulement comment se composent les images et les thèmes musicaux, ils nous montrent également comment se constituent les êtres ou les corps, comment se module et se configure le réel. Le cinéma n'est pas que le nom d'un art, il est aussi le nom du monde. De même, le baroque ou le byzantin ne sont pas que des styles artistiques, mais fondamentalement deux régimes de lumière qui posent le problème de savoir comment s'opère l'individuation des corps. Les styles de l'art et ses manières de faire sont aussi bien des styles de vie. Et les personnages que l'art invente sont aussi bien l'invention de modes d'existence.

La typologie des modes d'existence que Deleuze extrait des arts associe à certains personnages un certain nombre de mots : la bêtise, la paralysie, la pétrification, l'automatisme, le non-choix, la volonté de néant ou le néant de la volonté apparaissent liés aux modes d'existence du masochiste, de l'idiot, du voyant, de l'automate, de l'épuisé, du saint ou du démon. Pour ressaisir le projet de cette typologie, il faudrait donc éclaircir les raisons du choix de ces personnages et faire travailler ensemble ces mots. Notre hypothèse c'est qu'ils forment une série témoignant pour un projet qui engage les arts dans la construction d'un « nouvel homme » et d'une « nouvelle image de la pensée » à l'opposé de l'autonomie volontariste qui, pour Kant, définissait notre majorité.

Les démons d'acier et les saints de pierre

Le contrat que signe le masochiste nous permet de poser les conditions du problème. Pour constituer son identité, pour inventer son mode d'existence et apparaître en tant que masochiste, le masochiste doit se vider et transférer tous les pouvoirs qui définissaient sa subjectivité à la figure de la maîtresse souveraine.

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Le contrat se présente alors comme l'acte par lequel une volonté s'annule et délègue ses pouvoirs à une autre qui se réserve tous les droits sans avoir envers la première aucun devoir. C'est ce que nous pouvons lire dans le contrat d'esclavage passé entre Wanda et Sacher-Masoch :

> Les conditions, sous lesquelles je vous accepte comme esclave et vous souffre à mes côtés, sont les suivantes :
> Renonciation tout à fait absolue à votre moi.
> Hors la mienne, vous n'avez pas de volonté.
> Vous êtes entre mes mains un instrument aveugle, qui accomplit tous mes ordres sans les discuter. [...]
> A votre égard, j'agirai toujours sans faute, et je n'aurai aucun devoir. [...] Je suis votre souveraine, maîtresse de votre vie et de votre mort.[1]

Le masochiste renonce à son moi dans la mesure où il abdique de l'exercice de sa volonté et la fait coïncider avec celle de la maîtresse souveraine. Son vouloir est le sien, ses actions les siennes. Lorsque celle-ci le punit, il se punit lui-même. Comme le suggère Deleuze, si le contrat est l'entreprise pédagogique par laquelle le masochiste forme sa souveraine, alors le contrat est aussi l'entreprise par laquelle le masochiste dresse son propre agent.

A l'instar de l'amant masochiste, Jacques Lantier, le mécanicien de *La Bête humaine*, est aussi un instrument aveugle, sans volonté propre, entre les mains d'un Autre qui le commande et avec lequel il va faire un seul corps. Cet Autre agit à travers lui le privant de son moi et de toute vie intérieure. Lantier, « l'homme des sensations rudimentaires et des idées fixes »[2], ne fait qu'obéir à ses muscles et à la bête enragée qui court dans ses veines. Il incarne la figure du criminel-né par laquelle Lombroso ou Tarde ont cherché à expliquer le crime comme étant la résurgence d'une bestialité ancestrale, transmise par atavisme. Cette bestialité qui s'inscrit dans sa chair et le mène inévitablement au crime, c'est une équivalence entre posséder et tuer. Il devient un instrument aveugle entre les mains de cette nécessité, une sorte d'automate préprogrammé, poussé à des actes dont sa volonté n'est pour rien et qui ont ailleurs qu'en lui, dans une longue chaîne d'évé-

[1] Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, Paris, les éditions de minuit, 1967, pp. 256–257.
[2] Je renvoie à la typologie de modes d'existence que Deleuze extrait du naturalisme, cf. *Logique du Sens*, Paris, les éditions de minuit, 1969, p. 376.

nements qui dépasse sa personne, leur cause véritable. Comme les héros de la Grèce Ancienne, il n'est un agent que parce qu'il est le lieu où quelque chose de plus grand que lui s'exerce à travers sa personne (nous reconnaîtrons là le nœud repris par Deleuze pour définir l'idée de fêlure et de scission de la subjectivité : la fêlure est à la fois « le lieu et l'agent », la coïncidence entre l'agent et l'agi au sein d'un moi qui subit son activité comme celle d'un Autre en lui.) Dans la conception religieuse de la faute en Grèce Ancienne, l'individu se trouve également pris par une force qui s'exerce à travers lui. La faute y est perçue comme un défaut de connaissance ou comme un égarement de l'esprit par lequel on devient la proie d'un délire. Si bien qu'il est plus exact de parler d'une victime de la faute que d'un agent qui la commet. Etant la proie d'un instinct qui lui est transmis par le sang, Lantier se voit aussi poussé à des actes dont il n'est pas l'auteur. Il appartient à un monde où ce qui arrive, arrive parce que cela devait arriver, un monde où les notions de responsabilité et de culpabilité ne trouvent pas de place, tant que des forces, des pulsions ou des instincts continuent d'interférer avec les choix des hommes et à en faire leurs proies.

Privé du pouvoir de choisir et d'exercer librement sa volonté, Lantier apparaît également privé de subjectivité. Pendant que la « fêlure-araignée » continue de ronger sa proie et de faire le vide intérieur, il ne peut que suivre la seule idée fixe qu'il a en tête :

> Il avait tué jadis, il voulait tuer encore. Et les choses, autour de Jacques, n'étaient plus que dans un rêve, car il les voyait à travers son idée fixe. Sa vie de chaque jour était comme abolie, il marchait en somnambule, sans mémoire du passé, sans prévoyance de l'avenir, tout à l'obsession de son besoin. Dans son corps qui allait, sa personnalité était absente.[3]

Pour Zola, ce corps qui va « là où l'hybris le porte » n'est pas tout à fait celui d'une personne, mais celui d'une bête. Telle est d'ailleurs la condition de la plupart des personnages de *La Bête humaine* qui, d'une manière ou d'une autre, incarnent l'acharnement et la hargne sur lesquels est bâtie la société du progrès et du bien-être. Cette bestialité reste oubliée comme le couteau négligé au fond du tiroir qui jadis servit à tuer le mari de Séverine et qui va maintenant servir à couper le pain. Et pourtant, c'est sur elle que tout communique tels les rails de fer qui

[3] Zola, *La Bête humaine*, Paris, Gallimard, 2001, p. 303.

qui traversent le pays. Quant à Séverine, elle n'a jamais été rien d'autre qu'une chose entre les mains de son amant Lantier :

> tu m'as prise tout entière. Il n'y a pas d'autre mot : oui, prise, comme on prend quelque chose des deux mains, qu'on emporte, qu'on en dispose à chaque minute, ainsi que d'un objet à soi. Avant toi, je n'ai été à personne. Je suis tienne et je resterai tienne, même si tu ne le veux pas, même si je ne le veux pas moi-même.[4]

On possède l'être aimé comme on possède une chose et on appartient à l'amant comme un objet appartient à son propriétaire ou un animal à son maître. A cette exception près que tous ceux qui possèdent et commandent sont eux mêmes possédés et commandés. Personne n'est le maître de ses actes et gestes, et même ceux qui se servent de leurs mains pour disposer, pour prendre et pour tuer, le font involontairement, inconsciemment, mécaniquement, tels des automates ou des esclaves obéissant uniquement à la loi de l'Autre qui les commande et les malmène – folie, fêlure ou idée fixe. Par rapport aux histoires de mains de Robert Bresson[5], ces mains-ci posent et disposent plus qu'elles ne touchent et n'effleurent les choses du monde sans jamais les prendre, mais l'acte de prendre reste involontaire et aveugle.

L'amant masochiste et le mécanicien de *La Bête humaine* se voient tous les deux privés de leur moi et de leur liberté. Ils se plient à une loi qui les malmène. Pourtant, alors même que le masochiste s'impose cette loi et l'établit par un contrat, Deleuze définit son entreprise par un dépassement de la loi. La loi qui esquinte le moi et le vide va aussi conditionner la naissance d'un « nouvel homme » ; la perte de la santé doit coïncider avec la santé même ; le processus de destruction et de dégénérescence avec la création d'un mode d'existence ou d'une nouvelle subjectivité. Le masochiste, nous dit Deleuze, détourne la loi par un « excès de zèle ». Il « prend la loi au mot, à la lettre » et, par sa scrupuleuse application, en montre l'absurdité, l'envisageant comme un processus punitif qui conditionne et même commande d'éprouver la jouissance qu'il était censé interdire. « Voilà le masochiste insolent par obséquiosité, révolté par soumission. »[6] Son insolence serait de transférer les pouvoirs « paternels » à la figure de la mère et d'expulser le père

[4] Zola, *La Bête humaine*, p. 402.
[5] Je renvoie à ce sujet à l'analyse de Jacques Rancière dans « D'une image à l'autre ? Deleuze et les âges du cinéma », in *La Fable cinématographique*, Paris, éditions du seuil, 2001.
[6] Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 78.

de l'ordre symbolique, en le miniaturisant, en l'humiliant, en le ridiculisant. Car ce que le masochiste châtie, précise Deleuze, c'est l'image du père (lire ici la ressemblance au père) qui subsiste en lui. Et ce qu'il attend de ce châtiment, c'est de conditionner une deuxième naissance, une parthénogenèse où le père n'aurait plus de rôle. Son esclavage apparaît alors comme la condition nécessaire pour faire naître un homme nouveau de ce châtiment. Tel est le « triomphe » issu de la « révolte invincible » derrière l'esclavage auquel il se soumet.

Depuis les premiers textes de Deleuze jusqu'à *Critique et clinique*, sa typologie de modes d'existence travaille à la naissance d'un « nouvel homme ». Dans *Critique et clinique*, la volonté de néant d'Achab et le néant de la volonté de Bartleby représentent le pôle actif et passif de la subjectivité scindée de cet « homme nouveau » – déjà vieux de quelques siècles – dont le moi se représente son activité comme celle d'un Autre en lui. La naissance de cet homme, le passage de la « nature seconde » à la « nature première » incarnée par Achab et Bartleby, se fait tantôt par le déclenchement d'un combat et la mobilisation d'une volonté de puissance, tantôt par la passivité, la contemplation et la suspension de la volonté. Pourtant, le chemin des démons et celui des saints ne divise pas en deux la typologie des modes d'existence de Deleuze. Lantier, par exemple, incarne une démesure doublée d'innocence. Comme les démons, il n'a qu'une seule idée fixe en tête ; mais à l'instar des saints, son seul choix consiste à être choisi. Les démons et les saints sont deux faces d'une même figure que Deleuze cherche à saisir à travers ses variations.

Les démons sont ceux qui suivent ce que Melville a appelé la « voie d'acier ». Achab crie contre les dieux : « Le chemin de ma volonté est tracé par des rails de fer sur lesquels est lancé mon âme. [...] Pas un obstacle, pas un coude sur ma voie rectiligne, ma voie d'acier ! »[7] A l'instar de Lantier, il est possédé par une seule idée fixe qui le fait vivre en somnambule, tout à l'obsession de son besoin. Ce sont des chasseurs qui se voient eux-mêmes pris en chasse, persécutés et commandés par l'obsession qui les possède. La chasse d'Achab, contrairement à celle de Lantier, c'est lui-même qui se l'impose, c'est une chasse voulue. Mais parce qu'il mobilise toutes ses forces pour une seule idée fixe, la volonté d'Achab finit par signer son arrêt de mort et être dévorée par l'être monstrueux auquel elle a illégitimement donné naissance :

[7] Melville, *Moby Dick*, trad. Armel Guerne, Paris, éd. Phébus, 2005, p. 269.

> il avait fallu, dans le cas d'Achab, mobilisant toutes ses pensées et imaginations pour son seul, unique et suprême but, il avait fallu que ce but, par un effort invétéré de son implacable volonté, se forgeât contre dieux et démons une existence propre, acquît un être en quelque sorte autonome et indépendant. [...] Et celui qui se fait ainsi par sa pensée intense un Prométhée de soi-même, un vautour à jamais lui dévore le cœur : ce vautour qui est la créature même qu'il a créée.[8]

Comme l'écrit Deleuze, si choisir est le péché prométhéen par excellence[9], celui qui voulait choisir sa proie devient lui-même la proie d'un délire qui le possède. La créature qu'Achab fabrique devient son propre agent, et sa volonté de fer s'annihile en le générant. Elle se confond avec celle de la créature à laquelle elle a donné naissance.

Tout autre est l'obstination de Bartleby. Tandis que la préférence monstrueuse d'Achab génère un être qui jouit d'une existence à part entière, la préférence de Bartleby reste indéterminée. En répétant obstinément la formule « *I would prefer not to* », Bartleby apparaît comme celui qui ne choisit pas, celui dont la préférence s'abstient d'élire son objet. Privé du pouvoir de choisir, il apparaît comme un être « presque stupide », également privé de subjectivité. L'inhumanité de Bartleby n'est pas celle de l'acier, mais celle de la pierre avec laquelle il partage l'absence de volonté et la passivité, vivant comme « un meuble inamovible dans le bureau » où il demeure « debout, muet et solitaire, au milieu de la pièce déserte, telle l'ultime colonne d'un temple en ruine. »[10] Les démons d'acier et les saints de pierre sont les deux faces d'un homme scindé par une fêlure, privé de volonté propre et de liberté, devenu le site où l'activité et la passivité se confondent.

De la critique de la minorité à une pensée mineure

La typologie des modes d'existence de tous ceux qui vivent la vie des bêtes et des pierres énonce que la pensée est à arracher à ceux qui ne pensent pas. Lantier ne pense pas, Achab non plus : « il n'a pas le temps de penser », écrit Melville, « son cœur bat bien trop vite pour cela ». Son cœur lui commande de suivre une seule

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[8] Melville, pp. 310–311.

[9] Cf. Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, Paris, les éditions de minuit, 1993, p. 101.

[10] Melville, *Bartleby, Les Iles Enchantés, Le Campanile*, trad. Michèle Causse, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 38 et p. 40.

idée fixe et par là même introduit la fatigue et l'exaltation là où « la pensée, c'est – ou ce devrait être – un rafraîchissement, un apaisement »[11]. La pensée, comme le précise le dernier chapitre de *Moby Dick*, est réservée aux dieux, c'est-à-dire, à l'inhumain. Elle est donc à trouver dans ce que les personnages « Originaux » partagent avec cette inhumanité. Dans le cas de Bartleby, on peut la saisir dans ce qui aux yeux trop humains du narrateur suscite son apitoiement :

> Pauvre diable ! me disais-je, il ne pense pas à mal [Poor fellow ! thought I, he means no mischief] ; il est clair qu'il n'a pas l'intention d'être insolent [it is plain he intends no insolence] ; son apparence prouve amplement que ses excentricités sont involontaires.[12]

Le caractère involontaire des actes de Bartleby, l'absence d'intentionnalité et de signification derrière ses gestes et paroles se comptent parmi les traits qui pourraient ici faire signe pour une image de la pensée à laquelle Deleuze adhère entièrement. Pour Deleuze, il n'y a de pensée qu'involontaire. Elle ne peut s'exercer que sous l'emprise d'un signe ou sous le choc d'un événement qui la contraint et la force à penser. L'événement qui la conditionne est aussi bien ce qui lui fait obstacle – la folie, l'idée fixe, l'automatisme ou la fêlure qui frappe la plupart des personnages littéraires que Deleuze examine. Souvent, ils n'agissent que par l'intermédiaire de cet Autre qui s'approprie leur liberté et leur volonté propre. C'est pourquoi la question de savoir comment ces personnages agissent est aussi une manière de se demander comment la pensée devient capable d'action, c'est-à-dire, de s'exercer.

Si la pensée ne s'exerce qu'involontairement, elle est donc à trouver dans ce qui est nécessaire, irrésistible, inconscient, machinal ou automatique. C'est pourquoi, en se confrontant au cinéma, Deleuze affirme qu'il ne concerne rien d'autre que la pensée et son fonctionnement : « l'image automatique exige une nouvelle conception [...] de la pensée elle-même. Ne choisit bien, ne choisit effectivement que celui qui est choisi [...] »[13]. Cette formule apparaît au sein d'une théorie du choix qui ne porte plus sur les objets du choix lui-même, mais sur les modes d'existence que ce choix engage. Dans la littérature, les démons et les

[11] Melville, *Moby Dick*, p. 792.
[12] Melville, *Bartleby,* p. 25.
[13] Deleuze, *Cinéma 1 – L'Image-mouvement*, Paris, les éditions de minuit, 1983, p. 232.

saints innocents de Melville pourraient encore en être l'exemple. Au cinéma, ce sont les momies de Dreyer, les marionnettes de Rohmer et surtout les automates de Bresson qui lui donnent chair. Avec Bresson, écrit Deleuze, « l'automate est pur, aussi privé d'idées que de sentiments, réduit à l'automatisme des gestes quotidiens segmentarisés, mais doué d'autonomie »[14]. Que veut dire ici « doué d'autonomie » ? De quelle autonomie est-il ici question ? On peut convenir que l'automate a l'autonomie de ce qui se meut par soi-même, mais on lui concède moins volontiers l'autonomie de ce qui pense et agit par soi-même, puisqu'il agit comme une machine préprogrammée, sans volonté propre et sans liberté. Pourtant, c'est bien la manière dont l'automate agit, involontairement, qui doit nous indiquer comment la pensée s'exerce.

Bresson imposait à ses « modèles » la contrainte de se conduire selon « l'automatisme de la vie réelle ». Ils ne devaient pas penser, avoir de volonté propre, de sentiments, d'intentions ou d'idées, mais seulement répéter machinalement des gestes et des mots, comme on le fait par habitude au quotidien, dans « la vie réelle », pour qu'ils soient faits et dits involontairement, sans que les « modèles » aient conscience de ce qu'ils sont en train de dire et de faire. Leur privation de liberté est le prix à payer pour arriver à quelque chose qui ne peut être arraché qu'à l'automatisme, à l'aveuglement et à la non-pensée, eux seuls permettent d'« extraire des modèles ce qu'ils ne soupçonnent pas qui est en eux ». Leur automatisme, la répétition machinale de gestes et de mots, doit faire apparaître quelque chose de nouveau, d'inconnu, un geste ou une parole spontanés qui, eux, n'ont pas été incités ni provoqués par autrui, s'avérant capables de briser le mécanisme de la reproduction et de rompre avec le déterminisme de la chaîne causale – un automatisme contre un autre. Vraisemblablement, c'est aussi en pensant à la spontanéité de ce qui se fait de soi-même que Deleuze écrit que les automates ne sont pas moins « doués d'autonomie ». Mais son expression ne manque pas de mettre en évidence le paradoxe d'une autonomie innée qui se présente comme une qualité dont ils sont dotés, qu'ils n'ont pas à acquérir. La spontanéité des automates apparaît malgré eux, involontairement. Ils ne sont pas à proprement parler les auteurs de leurs gestes et de leurs mots spontanés. La spontanéité n'est pas celle de l'automate mais de l'automatisme ou de la répétition elle-même, qui s'avère capable de faire surgir de soi-même (plus que par soi-même) quelque chose de nouveau.

[14] Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, p. 233.

Ce n'est donc pas par hasard que nous nous retrouvons avec des automates, des saints, des démons et des esclaves qui vivent la vie des pierres et des bêtes. Les personnages littéraires et cinématographiques que Deleuze choisit participent à la construction de ce qu'on pourrait appeler une image mineure de la pensée, opposée à la figure kantienne de la majorité. Tout d'abord, son caractère involontaire l'extrait d'emblée du domaine de la responsabilité. Il n'est plus question d'encourager tous ceux qui se trouvent démunis de pensée à prendre la résolution de vaincre leur inertie et de devenir responsables de leur immaturité. Le volontarisme et la liberté ne sont plus les conditions requises pour que ceux qui sont dépourvus de pensée deviennent capables de penser en leur propre nom. Bien au contraire, lorsque l'exercice de la pensée s'identifie à la non-pensée, l'inertie, la bêtise, la pétrification et l'automatisme conditionnent maintenant une pensée qui ne peut s'exercer que sous l'emprise d'un Autre qui la violente. A l'autonomie d'une pensée qui ne se soumet à aucune autre loi que celle qu'elle se donne elle-même, s'oppose l'image d'une pensée incapable de s'exercer sans la contrainte d'un événement dans lequel elle puise hors d'elle-même le principe de son action.

Deleuze ne s'inspire pas d'un Kant qui appelle à un devenir-majeur. Mais il aime « faire des enfants dans le dos des philosophes » et arrache à Kant lui-même l'image d'une pensée fêlée par la forme du temps, c'est-à-dire, l'image d'un moi passif qui vit son activité comme celle d'un Autre en lui :

> sa propre pensée, sa propre intelligence, ce par quoi il dit JE, s'exerce en lui et sur lui, non pas par lui. Commence alors une longue histoire inépuisable : JE est un autre, ou le paradoxe du sens intime. L'activité de la pensée s'applique a un être réceptif, à un sujet passif, qui se représente donc cette activité plutôt qu'il ne l'agit, qui en sent l'effet plutôt qu'il n'en possède l'initiative, et qui la vit comme un Autre en lui.[15]

Toutefois, continue Deleuze, « il est vrai que Kant ne poursuit pas l'initiative »[16]. S'il introduit une fêlure dans le Je, celui-ci connaît une résurrection pratique, et Kant ne va pas jusqu'au point de dissoudre le moi. C'est pourquoi Deleuze affirme que l'issue du kantisme se trouve du côté de la littérature : chez Zola, Hölderlin, Fitzgerald ou Malcolm Lowry. Kant n'a pas su retourner la fêlure contre elle-même,

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[15] Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris, P.U.F., 1969, pp. 116–117.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 117.

autrement dit, il n'a pas su trouver l'issue que la littérature présentera au je fêlé : « l'homme sans nom, sans famille, sans qualités, sans moi ni Je, le ' plébéien ' détenteur d'un secret, déjà surhomme dont les membres épars gravitent autour de l'image sublime »[17]. La lecture que Deleuze fait de *La Bête humaine* dans « Zola et la fêlure » rentre précisément dans le cadre de ce projet : « par la fêlure, c'est déjà le prolétariat qui passe »[18], lit-on à la toute fin du texte, où la course aveugle du train 608 apparaît comme « un chant pour l'avenir ».

Or, nous savons que pour Kant, devenir-majeur c'est s'émanciper. S'ensuit-il que nous devons exclure de la pensée de Deleuze tout appel à l'émancipation, du fait même qu'il scinde le sujet et souscrit à une pensée involontaire et hétéronome que l'on peut appeler mineure ? Deleuze ne nous parle pas d'émancipation, mais de résistance. Et il adhère à l'idée qu'incarnaient les statues évoquées par les romantiques, à savoir, que l'absence de résistance – l'annulation du vouloir – définit la résistance des statues, mais aussi celle des automates et des esclaves. Le masochiste est révolté par soumission. C'est parce qu'il fait coïncider sa volonté avec celle de la maîtresse souveraine et se soumet sans résistance à son coup de fouet qu'il peut faire naître en lui un autre homme. De même, c'est parce que les modèles abdiquent de leur volonté et se soumettent à l'automatisme auquel Bresson les contraint que quelque chose d'inconnu leur est arraché. Enfin, seul la suspension de la volonté de Bartleby permet d'arracher à son immobilité involontaire une formule « ravageuse ». L'esclavage, l'automatisme et la pétrification ne sont pas des figures de l'émancipation, mais de la résistance.

La résistance ne serait-elle pas l'acte des mineurs, de tous ceux qui ne pensent et n'agissent qu'involontairement, sous l'emprise de l'Autre ? La notion de mineur marquerait alors un tournant par lequel la vocation émancipatrice des Lumières se voit remplacée par une pensée de la résistance.

La résistance et la puissance de l'Autre

Le concept de résistance, aujourd'hui évoqué par divers auteurs, paraît si englobant que l'on peut se demander s'il est réellement opératoire au sein de notre présent. Considérons que l'on ne peut pas évaluer son efficacité politique sans

[17] *Ibid*., p. 121.
[18] Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 385.

percevoir comment, à travers les confrontations aux arts de Deleuze et de Lyotard, cette notion devient une catégorie éthique désignant le site de l'expérience possible d'une altérité radicale. Si l'art y apparaît comme ce qui par excellence résiste, c'est parce c'est à travers lui que ne cesse de se construire cette idée qu'il y a une puissance de l'Autre à partir de laquelle la pensée naît de cela même qui la nie et lui fait obstacle. La pensée assujettie par la frappe de l'altérité est aussi ce qui résiste par excellence, c'est-à-dire, ce qui trouve sa résistance là où elle est absente, à savoir, dans la fêlure rendue possible par une diminution de son seuil de résistance. La notion de résistance désigne ici la puissance impuissante d'une pensée hétéronome et involontaire dont l'image ne cesse d'être façonnée par ce que Rancière appelle le « régime esthétique des arts ».

Selon Deleuze, il y a résistance quand il y a confrontation à un ensemble d'impossibilités ou du moins à une double impossibilité qui suspend le vouloir et rend tout choix inenvisageable. C'est dans ce contexte que Bartleby, selon l'expression de Melville, apparaît comme une figure de la « résistance passive ». Sa formule est « ravageuse » parce qu'elle abolit le non-préférable en même temps qu'elle rend impossible n'importe quel préféré. Autrement dit, c'est parce que sa formule « ne refuse pas, mais n'accepte pas non plus » que Bartleby résiste. Il gagne le droit de survivre en s'abstenant de choisir :

> On le presse de dire oui ou non. Mais s'il disait non (collationner, faire des courses…), s'il disait oui (copier), il serait vite vaincu, jugé inutile, il n'y survivrait pas. Il ne peut survivre qu'en tournoyant dans un suspens qui tient tout le monde à distance. Son moyen de survivance, c'est préférer ne pas collationner, mais par là même aussi ne pas préférer copier.[19]

En refusant les alternatives exclusives, ce moyen de survivance ne peut mener qu'à l'épuisement. La résistance devient alors proche de l'épuisement incarné par les personnages de Beckett ainsi que par Bartleby. Parce qu'il renonce à n'importe quel préféré, parce qu'il ne procède plus par exclusion, le résistant devient celui qui en finit avec le possible, qui suspend sa réalisation. Le résistant est aussi bien l'épuisé. Comme nombreux personnages de Beckett, de chez qui Deleuze extrait cette notion d'épuisement, Bartleby est épuisé parce qu'il renonce à tout besoin, préférence, but ou signification. Ce qui apparaît comme la condition pour

[19] Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, p. 92.

développer un « art combinatoire » qui épuise le possible par disjonctions incluses. « Oui, j'ai été mon père et j'ai été mon fils », écrit Beckett. « Moi, Antonin Artaud, je suis mon fils, mon père, ma mère, et moi. » Pour Deleuze, ces disjonctions incluses sont des formules de résistance. En quelque sorte, à travers les notions de corps sans organes, de devenir, d'agencement, de discours indirect libre ou de fabulation, Deleuze a toujours cherché à préciser un tant soit peu en quoi consiste cet art des disjonctions incluses ou de la résistance dont la formule la plus concise est le « Je est un autre ».

Cette même formule, il la retrouve également dans le cinéma de Jean Rouch (*Moi, un noir*) ou de Pierre Perrault. On pourrait dire que la fabulation y devient un acte de résistance dans la mesure où elle ne va pas non plus choisir ni exclure, mais combiner un ensemble d'impossibilités – impossibilité de faire de l'ethnologie et d'inventer une fiction, « impossibilité de ne pas parler, de parler anglais, de parler français »[20]. Ces impossibilités deviendraient des disjonctions incluses par la création d'énonciations collectives ou de discours à plusieurs têtes – « discours de minorité » – où j'ai besoin d'un intercesseur pour parler – qu'il soit un homme, une bête ou une chose – et où cet intercesseur ne peut pas parler sans moi. En tant que discours mineur, l'acte de résistance se définit aussi contre l'idée d'une pensée autonome et libérée de la puissance de l'Autre.

C'est ici que la pensée de Deleuze et celle de Lyotard se rapprochent le plus et s'écartent le plus. Chez Lyotard, la résistance est ce qui s'oppose à la « passion identitaire » en réclamant que « l'Autre est premier au Soi »[21]. Lyotard lui-même oppose cette dépendance constitutive aux métaphysiques de la volonté et de l'autodétermination et, plus précisément, au projet universel d'autonomie porté par les Lumières. D'après lui, ce projet a conduit au crime perpétré par les nazis : « sous l'épithète « juive » est dénoncée la conviction que la dépendance est constitutive, qu'il y a de l'Autre, et que vouloir l'éliminer en un projet universel d'autonomie est une erreur et conduit au crime »[22]. Face à ce crime, « tout ce qui nous reste », à nous qui sommes les héritiers d'une faute et nous trouvons en souffrance de finalité, ce serait de résister. La seule résistance qui mériterait son nom, ce serait celle capable de reconnaître qu'il n'y a plus de chemin à suivre.

[20] Deleuze, *Pourparlers*, Paris, les éditions de minuit, 1990, p. 182.
[21] Lyotard, « La terre n'a pas de chemins par elle-même », in *Moralités Postmodernes*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, p. 101.
[22] Lyotard, *Moralités Postmodernes*, p. 100.

Elle se confond avec l'expiation d'un crime et avec l'idée d'une leçon. La résistance est qui se présente à nous quand il n'y a plus d'alternative, elle est « tout ce qui nous reste ». Et « tout ce qui nous reste » pour résister, ce serait donc la reconnaissance de la dette originaire envers l'Autre qui nous constitue. Dès lors, si l'art devient un acte de résistance, c'est pour autant qu'il témoigne de cette dette dont on ne s'acquittera jamais.

Le vocabulaire d'un philosophe n'est pas anodin. Il nous donne accès à sa pensée, au mode selon lequel elle découpe tel ou tel problème. Or, nous ne trouverons pas, chez Deleuze, des termes tels que celui d'héritage, de reste, de trace, de dette, de reconnaissance ou de témoignage associés à la notion de résistance. C'est que le problème est ailleurs et se découpe autrement. La résistance n'est ni une dette ni une leçon. D'ailleurs, Deleuze rappelle que Nietzsche avait dénoncé l'idée de la dette infinie comme étant la condition de la morale et du système du jugement : « l'homme n'en appelle au jugement, il n'est jugeable et ne juge que pour autant que son existence est soumise à la dette infinie. »[23] Chez Deleuze, si l'art « monumente », le monument de résistance n'est pas ce qui monte une mémoire avec des traces témoignant pour une altérité radicale qui ne peut être connue que négativement. Un monument n'est pas ce à quoi on reconnaît quelque chose qui a existé : « un monument ne commémore pas, ne célèbre pas quelque chose qui s'est passé, mais confie à l'oreille de l'avenir les sensations persistantes qui incarnent l'événement. »[24]

A cet égard, c'est peut-être Pierre Perrault qui nous montre le mieux ce qu'est un monument de résistance. D'autant plus que sa trilogie sur l'île-aux-Coudres a justement affaire à la question de savoir comment on peut construire et transmettre une mémoire à ceux qui viennent après nous. Dans *Pour la suite du monde*, le projet de recréer la tradition de la pêche aux marsouins mobilise vite toute la communauté et bientôt tous se disputent entre eux pour savoir si cette pêche a été amenée par les premiers colons venus du Nord de la France ou si elle remonte aux « sauvages » qui habitaient l'île avant eux. « Qu'importe », dit Grand Louis, « l'important est de garder la trace », c'est-à-dire, « de faire quelque chose pour la suite du monde ». Pourtant l'incertitude quant aux origines de cette pêche

[23] Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, p. 158.
[24] Deleuze, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?*, avec Félix Guattari, Paris, les éditions de minuit, 1991, p. 167.

a quand même son importance, car c'est parce que la tradition touche à l'immémorial que l'espace s'ouvre à la fabulation. Perrault nous montre que les traditions et les ancêtres des habitants de l'île-aux-Coudres ne leur sont pas donnés, ils ne sont pas déjà là. Il faut aller les rechercher, comme le font Marie et Alexis Tremblay lors de leur visite en France dans *Le Règne du jour*. A travers la fabulation, la (re)constitution des pas des ancêtres ou de la tradition de la pêche aux marsouins va donc coïncider avec la (re)constitution de la communauté. Celle-ci n'est pas tant constituée par la trace de quelque chose qui a existé dans le passé, mais par le lien virtuel avec l'avenir que la fabulation va créer. Si la fabulation est elle-même mémoire, Deleuze précise que celle-ci n'apparaît ni comme la faculté personnelle d'évoquer des souvenirs, ni comme la mémoire collective d'un peuple existant, mais comme l'acte par lequel un peuple se (ré)invente lui-même. La résistance ne relève pas, comme chez Lyotard, d'une logique du don. Elle suppose ici une logique de la liberté où l'on va prendre par soi-même ce qui ne nous est pas donné, les traditions, les ancêtres, mais aussi la parole elle-même. La résistance ne passe pas par la dette mais par la « fabulation des pauvres ». En les capturant « en flagrant délit de légender », la fabulation fait sortir des mots de poètes de la bouche des ouvriers, des retraités et des femmes au foyer. Pour reprendre les mots de Rancière, on peut dire qu'elle bouleverse le partage entre les lettrés et les illettrés, entre ceux censés parler et ceux censés se taire et entre leurs capacités ou incapacités respectives pour prendre la parole et détourner les usages des mots.

La fabulation que Deleuze identifie à un acte de résistance vient donc introduire la liberté là où la résistance semble être une affaire d'automatisme, de pétrification et d'épuisement. Deleuze affirme qu'on n'invente que contraint, forcé, et que ce que l'on crée n'a de nécessité que par la violence de ce qui frappe la pensée jusqu'à la fêler. Mais est-ce que l'invention d'un peuple par les habitants de l'île-aux-Coudes rentre dans le cadre de ce discours ? Quel rapport y a-t-il entre la résistance de ceux qui prennent la parole par eux-mêmes et la résistance passive d'un Bartleby dont la formule économe et invariable semble s'éloigner de la prolifique fabulation « des pauvres » ? Quel est le rapport entre leur fabulation et l'épuisement des résistants qui renoncent à tout besoin, préférence, but et signification ? Ce ne sont pas les personnages de Perrault qui se trouvent dans une situation analogue à celle de Bartleby, c'est Perrault que Deleuze met devant un ensemble d'impossibilités impliquant le renoncement aux alternatives exclusives. Lorsqu'il s'agit de préciser la dimension politique de la fabulation, Deleuze

insiste sur le brouillage de la frontière entre l'affaire privé et l'affaire du peuple par la valeur collective des énonciations. Et ce faisant, la liberté que la fabulation semble exiger va être reprise dans un discours de minorité, dans une énonciation collective à plusieurs têtes, qui contrarie l'image d'une pensée libre et autonome au nom de la nécessité et de l'irrésistibilité des devenirs.

Arracher, extraire, sont des mots qui reviennent souvent chez Deleuze pour définir l'acte de création ou de résistance. Mais ces mots sont-ils à inscrire dans une logique de la liberté on l'on va prendre par soi-même ce qui ne nous est pas donné ? « Arracher, extraire, veut dire que l'opération ne se fait pas toute seule. »[25] Nous avons vu que Bresson se proposait d'extraire de ses modèles ce qu'ils ne soupçonnaient pas qui était en eux. Mais il n'arrachait à l'automatisme une parole ou un geste spontanés que par ce même automatisme qui, à un moment donné, faisait surgir à l'insu des modèles un événement capable d'interrompre la répétition machinale qui définit l'automatisme lui-même. En ce sens, l'opération se fait donc toute seule, d'elle-même, car elle est inconsciente et involontaire, elle exclut toute résolution. Extraire et arracher ne sont pas ici des synonymes de prendre par soi-même. En témoigne la figure de cette main qui effleure les choses du monde sans jamais les prendre, au centre de l'analyse du cinéma de Bresson. Ce que Deleuze ne cesse de décrire, c'est plutôt la logique de la nécessité dans laquelle l'acte de création est pris. Comme si, ainsi qu'il l'écrivait à propos de *La Bête humaine*, on n'irait jamais trop loin dans la description de l'esclavage, de la pétrification et de l'automatisme, pour arriver à trouver ce point de transmutation involontaire où la perte de la santé devient la santé même, où le processus de démolition devient invention d'une nouvelle subjectivité, acte de résistance ou de création.

Dans la mesure où la résistance est le site d'une expérience de l'altérité, elle apparaît encore comme une manière de reconduire l'art à l'éthique. Mais quel genre d'éthique peut émerger d'un moi fêlé qui se représente son activité comme celle d'un Autre en lui ? C'est ici que la typologie de modes d'existence de Deleuze nous permet de saisir en quoi il s'écarte d'autres manières de poser la problématique de l'altérité et de construire une logique de la frappe événementielle. Cette typologie présente une série de personnages qui, d'une manière ou d'une autre, que ce soit par leur esclavage, leur automatisme, leur épuisement ou leur

[25] Deleuze, *L'Ile déserte et autres textes*, Paris, Les éditions de minuit, 2002, p. 348.

pétrification, se voient dessaisis du pouvoir de dire Je, de la possibilité de témoigner de leurs actes ou d'assumer la responsabilité d'actions dont ils ne sont pas vraiment les agents. Deleuze ne cherche plus à penser une éthique de l'action, mais une éthique des affections. D'une part, cette éthique s'écarte d'une logique de la liberté qui ne tient pas en compte le caractère nécessaire et irrésistible des devenirs. D'autre part, par le thème de l'involontaire et de l'automatisme, elle s'écarte également d'une logique du don, d'un appel au témoignage et à la responsabilité, se rendant indisponible pour une morale. Malgré le thème de la frappe de l'altérité, l'éthique est soustraite au pouvoir de la loi, de la négativité et à l'injonction de témoigner. Elle n'est pas le nom d'une théologie, mais le nom d'une éthologie, c'est-à-dire, une étude des pouvoirs qu'ont les corps d'affecter et d'être affectés, ou un apprentissage de ce que peut un corps non-pensant. Penser, selon Deleuze, c'est apprendre ce que peut un corps non-pensant. Et apprendre ce que peut un corps non-pensant, c'est apprendre son seuil de résistance, sa capacité d'aller jusqu'au bout de ce qu'il peut. A cet égard, les saints pétrifiés et les démons commandés par une seule idée fixe se trouvent sur un pied d'égalité avec la célèbre tique, aveugle et sourde, qui, ne pouvant être affectée que par la lumière, l'odeur et la chaleur, mène son existence jusqu'au bout de ce qu'elle peut en déployant tous les affects dont son corps est capable. Les Originaux littéraires, dans la vie qu'ils partagent avec les bêtes et les pierres, sont aussi des êtres qui vont jusqu'au bout de ce qu'ils peuvent. Cela pourrait bien être une manière de définir leur automatisme, pétrification, épuisement et esclavage – les figures d'une résistance foncièrement éthique, la résistance passive, sans agent, souvent involontaire et presque muette des corps non-pensants.

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Justin Clemens*

The Life of the Party: a Brief Note on Nietzsche's Ethics

So vertue giv'n for lost,
Deprest, and overthrown, as seem'd,
Like that self-begott'n bird
In the *Arabian* woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay e're while a Holocaust,
From out her ashie womb now teem'd
Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deem'd,
And though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird ages of lives.
— John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*

The greatest thoughts are the greatest events.
— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

The English phrase "This is the life!" is the sort of thing you are meant to exclaim when enjoying the goods of life in an extraordinary setting. Drinking champagne on a yacht in Sydney harbour while the sun glitters from a perfect blue sky, lying on a beach with attractive friends while the surf crashes against pure yellow sands, sitting on the balcony of a large country house while eating prime beef cooked by an inventive chef, or celebrating at a party where everyone is dressed only in the most elegant and expensive season's fashions — you get the picture.

This picture is precisely one to which any self-respecting philosopher would immediately respond: "Now that is *not* the life!" But why? What could possibly be wrong with the democratic drive to make such utopian experiences accessible in principle to everyone?

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Precisely to the extent that such bucolic pleasures fail to touch on the immediacy of an idea — indeed, patently engage an idealised zero-degree media image of yuppie enjoyment from which all traces of physical pain, work, exploitation, competition, violence, murder, aging, ugliness and thought have been carefully purged — they constitute a rebarbative parody of living, a kind of rapacious materialism whose picturesque alibi dissimulates its repulsive truth. An exemplarily resentful truth, moreover, whose global circulation is merely one index of its intellectual bankruptcy, and whose alleged "life" should rather be called the epitome of "survival." The insatiable human beast will be tamed by the promise of vacuous pleasures, at once entirely animal and entirely sublimated. On that yacht, for instance, "you're there only to enjoy what is there to be enjoyed" as Nicholas Heron remarked to me.[1] Less pointedly, leisure itself has turned into something patently laborious, even violently exploitative: becoming-a-spectacle is almost a gladiatorial enterprise these days, not least given the number of yachts in the bay.

It's clearly a problem of what Alain Badiou has recently termed "democratic materialism," whose presuppositions involve something like the following.[2] We are materialists, that is, we know there is nothing except matter in this universe, no creator, no sense, no purpose. The only purposes there are are ones we give ourselves. We know we are all animals, mortal, fragile, transient, born to die. The only thing it's clear we share is death, which isn't shared anyway. So we need to squeeze life for all we can, without taking the slightest risk. Those who take risks are clearly fantasists, in the grip of dangerous ideas, and, not least, most likely curtailing their pleasures and shortening their lives. One cannot survive with ideals; as we know from the crimes of the twentieth century, every ideal too keenly pursued necessarily turns into its opposite, into totalitarian coercion, torture and death. The best, most democratic possible solution is to organise human life in such a way as to minimize its pain and maximize its pleasures. And that, precisely, is living. Against this, the embittered philosopher can only mutter impotently: "Herd animals! Ultimate men!"

A question, perhaps even a philosophical one, remains: why, against the bucolic dreams of commodity capital, do a range of contemporary philosophers routinely find themselves proselytising for an absolute value — "Life" — whose definition

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[1] Personal correspondence. I would like to thank Jessica Whyte and Sigi Jottkandt for their comments on a draft of this paper.

[2] See A. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. A. Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009).

must be more than merely negative, yet cannot, by definition, be given any particular content? The answer can be given as a proper name: Friedrich Nietzsche. Why? Because there is no philosophy of the future which does not still have to reckon with the "revaluation of all values" that Nietzsche undertakes, and for which the master-word remains that of "Life". Moreover, Nietzsche's program insists on linking the concept with the problem of ethics, at the most fundamental level.[3]

"Life", for Nietzsche, is nonetheless not itself a value, for it has to be that which conditions the possibility of all values, as well as determining the necessity for their ceaseless revaluation. It is inconsistent yet absolute, transient yet indubitable. Moreover, and integrally connected with this, "Life" has to be a self-professedly paradoxical word, one which enjoins the necessity of its own destruction or supplantation. In order to truly live, as Nietzsche says, sometimes the organism has to be strong enough to die.

This might suggest that "Life" is a suicidal word. And indeed it is, as we'll see in more detail below. Life is a suicidal act and "Life" is a suicidal word, although usually there aren't any scare quotes to alert you to the resemblances.[4] Nietzsche thoughtfully fails to provide any. Paradoxically enough, then, it is the spirit that kills for Nietzsche, while the letter delivers life — even if the life that is popped through the letterbox turns out to be some kind of time bomb. And the only agent able to deliver this life-bomb is an experimental, evolutionary, philological philosophy, one which destroys what it must presume, and relentlessly returns to what it must abandon, all the while negating itself as *the* word.[5] Self-annihilat-

[3] Nietzsche: "It has gradually become clearer to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; moreover, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy have every time constituted the real germ of life out of which the entire plant has grown." *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. with an intro. and commentary R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 19.

[4] As such, Nietzsche's later philosophy remains conditioned by his assertion that "Greek tragedy perished differently from all the other, older sister-arts: it died by suicide, as the result of an irresolvable conflict, which is to say tragically, while all the others died the most beautiful and peaceful deaths, fading away at a great age". *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. R. Geuss and R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 54.

[5] As Gilles Deleuze phrases this: "[L]ife goes beyond the limits that knowledge fixes for it, but thought goes beyond the limits that life fixes for it. Thought ceases to be a ratio, life ceases to be a reaction. The thinker thus expresses the noble affinity of thought and life: life making

ing vitality, it is not nothing even if it never quite attains being never simply not. Hardly ironical, though, its obliteration cannot not leave a residue.

To affirm an idea for Nietzsche means to actively place oneself in situations in which the absolute contingency of existence is patent; more precisely, to place oneself in situations in which one's own life is clearly at risk and, in doing so, to open oneself to affects that are keyed directly to the necessity of (self) destruction.[6] In this sense, there is only one idea for Nietzsche, that of "eternal return", which literally means: since each must die, each moment is singular; each singularity has a claim; affirm the claim of that singularity; its temporality is by definition not that of a series, of number, or of order; to affirm it demands your distress; to embrace that distress is the definition of living, since living is itself only transient exposure to death.

Moreover, one is only properly individuated (perhaps "singularized" would be a better word) in this relation to the moment and to distress; otherwise, one is only "one", at best an "ultimate" or "last man", whose existence can only be denominated "survival" since no claim matters more than persistence in existence itself. To be a last man is to refuse transience and contingency; even worse, in doing so, to project a staid, stolid, resentful phantasm onto being and, in doing so, give being a meaning — itself.[7] The boast of the last men is, as Nietzsche puts it, not "we live!" but "we survive!" (and then they of course "blink and cough"). The last man is the one who thinks that existence and meaning coincide, and that existence is self-supporting. This gives us the negative example of one kind of "nihilist", here in the full nihilistic blossoming at the arse-end of world history.[8]

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thought active, thought making life affirmative." *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 95.

[6] In this context, Robert Solomon's work is right to recognise that, beyond his maintenance of Aristotelian virtues such as "courage" and "generosity" as well as the "distinctively Nietzschean virtues" such as "exuberance" and "risk-taking," there are a range of "crypto-virtues" projected by Nietzsche's writings such as "health" and "strength" "which throw open again the entire question, 'What is a virtue?'" *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great "Immoralist" Has to Teach Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 167.

[7] As Randall Havas notes of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, "Life is, in short, the unconditioned condition of itself. Nihilism is the result of our unwillingness to acknowledge this fact." "Who is Heidegger's Nietzsche? (On the Very Idea of the Present Age)" in H. Dreyfus and H. Hall (eds.), *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), p. 234.

[8] For an account of the abiding influence of Nietzsche's analysis of the challenge of nihilism to

Existence, however, is properly meaningless, because meaning can only be the outcome of a process of interpretation, and there is no "project" that can counteract this situation without falsification. Or, rather, existence itself is the outcome of an interpretation. This is why Nietzsche's self-proclaimed effort to "break the history of the world in two" is simply the effort to affirm the singularity of *this*, *here*, *now*, which must, by definition, have neither relation nor stability — nor, indeed, possible description. There can be no project or program for life. The idea is not an ideal. (The latter depends on the positing of another world, which is precisely what has been destroyed by nihilism). For *this-here-now* is appearing-disappearing itself, which is exactly why it returns eternally, if only as absolute difference, without consistency or coherence, without identity or number. To affirm it is to be destroyed as such. And the decision to affirm it is neither life nor death nor survival nor nothingness.

Nietzsche's fundamental equation is thus the following: *Life = this-here-now-yes*. But to *choose* life is itself a syncopation, the necessary preliminary to life, without itself being life. Nothing *in* life is able to function as a guide to the decision, since life is what is *attained* by or through such a decision; into the bargain, since each singularity is indeed that, singular, no pre-existing code can function as guidance, only as restraint and curb on life. Each achieved decision changes the very meaning of life, which means that life is what escapes meaning. (This is why Badiou is right, against Deleuze, to hold that Nietzsche is not aiming at sense, but at the unevaluable.[9]) It is in the wake of the decisions of others that the limits of the meaning of life are set and, hence, the limits upon which succeeding generations must decide to dispense with. The decision for life is the decision to dispense with the past, at the limits that that past — that is, the life-affirming decisions of others — has itself set. So, don't be resentful, affirm the past that you had to suffer, because it is a sequence of life-scars; just don't think that's it, either. You will just have to say *yes* backwards, and *yes* forwards, and this *yes, yes* will be linked by the truncated twist of a comma or a minimal gap that is the asignifying trace of the vanished decision itself. As such, no-one will survive the decision. No-one can survive life, only attain it in an "untimely" fashion, the dimensionless hinge that binds the double-faces of Janus.

thought, see my own *The Romanticism of Contemporary Theory: Institution, Aesthetics, Nihilism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), esp. pp. 81–96; also J. Clemens and J. Roffe, "Philosophy as Anti-Religion in the Work of Alain Badiou," *Sophia*, Vol. 47 (2008), pp. 345–358.

[9] See A. Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?" in *Pli*, Vol. 11 (2001), pp. 1–11.

This is why Nietzsche is not, *pace* Heidegger, the last metaphysician, nor, *pace* Badiou, an exemplary anti-philosopher (though he is indeed an "anti-metaphysician" on his own terms).[10] On the contrary, he is an existentialist philosopher, one for whom singular affect-decision-affirmations deserve the name of "Life". Being is nothing other than what is attained by such decisions, and such being must be given the name of "life", because it is not survival, nor persistence, nor diligence, nor existence, nor truth, nor... Life is the hole of the whole.

But to know at which point a decision must be made requires a genealogy — whether of morals or whatever — precisely because otherwise one's decision will be arbitrary or useless. One needs to localise oneself with accuracy, otherwise there is no living. Go to the limit of the decisions of the past, and then find oneself on the edge of the abyss. Decide to jump. Whether you survive or die is of no philosophical nor political interest at that point; that you have lived in the leap, by leaping, must be affirmed as *the* philosophico-political moment. Glancing backwards, a successfully-affirmed decision will have been the establishment of a new limit; in the present, it projects something entirely other, something dead and deadening to be overcome, and a future that is a chaos to be cut into. Life will have been an experiment, not an experience.

Nietzsche, as Laurence Lampert reminds us, was a scientist, trained in one of the most important and rigorous university disciplines of his day: philology.[11] This has four immediate consequences. It is because he was scientist of letters — and a professor, too, although not such a good one under many descriptions — that Nietzsche became a radically materialist philosopher. An immanent, material basis must be offered for all claims. Second, those materials must be literal, literally literal. It is in terms of letters — their emergence, disposition, reproduction, transmission, mutation and destruction — that the world must be conceived. Third, as a materialist, one must track the combinations, permutations and mutations of letters if one is to track the becoming of beings. Fourth, one must affirm that every transformative event must be a literal one; or, more pre-

[10] See M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume IV: Nihilism*, trans. F.A. Capuzzi, edited, with notes and an analysis. D.F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), as well as various other essays, such as "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead,'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. with intro. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Badiou, *op. cit.*

[11] See L. Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

cisely, leave its traces in the forms and dispositions of the letters that the letters themselves cannot say.

The work of genealogy is, for Nietzsche, the necessary interval between ontology (the recognition of the necessary transient contingency of existence) and decision (the overcoming of limits through affirmation of existence), because it provides the trajectory of one's own herd, to the point where one can literally become head of the herd. At that point is power, the head of the herd that is the past as will-to-power, the world itself. Yet to decide necessarily takes you out of the world, beyond power and existence in the affirmation of both. If the artist or adventurer-killer is the preferred emblem for Nietzsche, this is only as a punctual dissimulating marker, not a memorial-stone or starry-pointing pyramid. If world is nothing except will-to-power, life is not world, is not a world. There are not and cannot be any memorials that abide, without themselves weighing the living down with the weight — not even of the dead — but of their inscriptions. What is there must be reconstructed. You have to reconstruct your ontogenesis in order to overgo it. Nothing demands (nor ensures) that any of it can or has to be true. It only has to be effective, and the only signature of that effectivity must be the untimely, getting it all wrong.

Camel, Lion, Child, says Nietzsche in *Zarathustra*.[12] This means: genealogy, negation, resurrection. Or: philology, profanation, creation. Or, again: persistence, obliteration, play. The procedure, then, is clear: 1) a genealogical reconstruction of the processes of emergence of our received ideas (the division of worlds, morality, nihilism); 2) an immanent destruction of received ideas (truth, history, God, being, all the idols of the tribe, etc.); 3) the affirmative production of new ideas (eternal return, will-to-power, etc.). Not that eternal return, will-to-power, the Over-Man, etc., can ever be the last word — although they are the self-assaulting traces of this process, which can expose itself only as misdirection.

Not any species can achieve all three, perhaps on earth only those clever animals who once happened to invent cognition. Still, the clever animals will have to die, *tant pis*, no matter how puffed up like balloons they might be — and that's just the way it goes. In any case, a genealogy assaults both history and species-

[12] See F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. G. Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 23–24.

being. So, just like a very clever philologist, the Over-Man is the one who's prepared to read exceptionally closely, glancing forwards and backwards at once, rereading again, dwelling in the lines.[13] Nietzsche is that philologist who recognises that even letters are evolutionary, that letters breed with each other, intermingle promiscuously, and in the vast orgy that is world literature, produce monsters which — if they are abhorrent from the point of view of any individual morality — may nevertheless prove indispensable for the continuation of the species. Littoral-monsters, whose footprints can be discerned upon the face of the species as a whole (as one says "genetic footprint" these days, as in "Genghis Khan has the biggest genetic footprint in history").

To read is already to reproduce, and if one thinks one does it for edification, even merely for pleasure, one is rather being overtaken from behind, rammed in an unnatural hole from which may later, perhaps, issue more monsters. This isn't like being forced into mastery, as today, where everyone has the power to choose, or, to put it more bluntly, shows him- or herself incapable of refusing the position of the-one-who-chooses-within-life. This is at once why nihilism is very close to Nietzsche ("a perfected nihilist"), and also so distant: the one-who-must-choose-within-life is selecting from possibilities that life offers, not choosing for life. It's not for this or that that the Over-Man decides, nor is it for the whole. The Over-Man is the man who's prepared to take himself out, possibly quite literally, in becoming-other-than-man, in vanishing through the hole of the whole.

"Man is a herd animal": this means, above all, that man is led by the tracks he has laid down *in his own past*. It is not simply a doctrine that holds that men are more willingly followers than leaders, although it is difficult to see how that isn't true for Nietzsche too. It is much rather a doctrine about the ways in which men are able to turn themselves into followers of their own established patterns of behaviour; that is, it is a question of memory, whether voluntary or not, which founds unthought repetition; and such a memory can only ultimately be founded in pain, the true educator.[14] The pain is gone, if its traces remain; it is the dead

[13] As Nietzsche puts it in his "Preface" to *Daybreak*, "this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read *well*, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers…", *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, intro. M. Tanner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 5.

[14] "Only great pain is the liberator of the spirit, as the teacher of *the great suspicion* that turns

traces of the pain in their own experience that lead men on, in all senses of that phrase, like sirens to the rocks or to the factories. To teach man to become other than a herd animal, other than through the whip or the knout — this is then Nietzsche's fundamental paradox. Zarathustra must be a "re-educator" through something other than purely physical pain; it must be by thought, by an event of thought.

This thought must therefore present itself as anti-metaphysical counter-seduction. It has to combat enemies on at least two fronts: first, the yuppies on the bay and their libidinous entertainments; next, the clumsy, ugly, charmless metaphysicians who couldn't seduce the proverbial village wench using all their lumpen fingers and tongues. Nietzsche berates, as usual, the Germans for their enthusiasm for clothes which take no intelligence to design, and no time to put on, for their sodden beeriness and good marching thighs. Yet he does generate a third enemy as a result of these polemical seductions: his own style. His style must fight against itself if it is not to fail its own re-educational test, on the one hand, or the tendency to become a self-annihilating string of pearls, on the other. If it causes too much pleasure or pain, it risks becoming merely aesthetic or moralistic, eminently ornamental or reactively power-hungry.

How else can Nietzsche's own war against himself then be properly expressed or rather disclosed, except in the terms drawn from sex? Life must mate with death, and man with woman. Nietzsche has to be both a man and a woman, and the "feminization of European culture" against which he rages is as much a sly admission of the necessity for him to be a cross-dresser, a hot transvestite driven to this fate by the sorry hand of history.[15] His seduction must be universal in address, if only a very few will take up its challenge. He cannot by his own lights

every U into an X, a real, proper X, that is, the penultimate one before the final one." *The Gay Science*, ed. B. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 6. This is, of course, a corollary of Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, in which torture is the agent of world-historical mnemotechnics, ultimately interiorised as conscience and consecrated in the confessional.

[15] An entirely typical example of Nietzschean ranting in this regard: "To be sure, there are sufficient idiotic friends and corrupters of woman among the learned asses of the male sex who advise woman to defeminize herself in this fashion and to imitate all the stupidities with which 'man' in Europe, European 'manliness', is sick — who would like to reduce woman to the level of 'general education', if not to that of newspaper reading and playing at politics." *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 149. Nietzsche needs this misogyny, as much a part of his esoteric confession of the necessity of radical self-estrangement, as for his own strategy of seductive counter-seduction.

identify this handful in advance, since to do so would be according to established routines of recognition; he must essay to seduce unknown men and women of all kinds into becoming who they are. *Zarathustra* is, notoriously, for "everyone and no-one". The esoteric kernel of Nietzsche's philosophy can be discerned in his staging of the war of thought as a struggle against desexualization.

Alenka Zupančič has noted that the comic aspect of Nietzsche's style derives from life reflecting upon itself in an entirely immanent way.[16] Life is in the irresolvable self-conflict of the style. Yet what else could exemplify the absolute humour of this immanent self-differentiation better than sex? Or, rather, by the exposure of the necessity of one sex to assume through polemical distortion the sex of the other as a strategy of style? Let's not forget that "genealogy" is a word inseparable from the problematic of breeding stock, whether we're talking animals or aristocracy.[17] And let's also not forget that Nietzsche's "genealogies" must therefore finally be about the unintended, ungraspable, ambivalent consequences of *mating with the other* (man with woman, the living with the dead, etc.), and not about purity of bloodlines. On the contrary, the inbreeding of blue blood spells haemophilia; true thought must first mate with the dead if it is to have any issue. Which is, once again, and according to Zeno's interpretation of the Delphic Oracle, equivalent to reading books, *philo*-logy in the fullest sense of the word.[18]

Despite his well-deserved personal reputation for lowering the tone of social gatherings, Nietzsche remains the life of the party because he found he could only give birth to himself by fucking himself — and then fucking himself over. (One may have to conclude in a slightly embarrassed way by adding that whoever feels that words such as these are inappropriate in philosophy must have forgotten the founding writings of philosophy itself. Philosophy is a party, a symposium, and the main thing is to stick with it whether you're a teetotaller, pissed

[16] A. Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (London & Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

[17] On the problem of good breeding and humanism, see P. Sloterdijk's *boutade*, only recently (and belatedly) translated into English, as "*Rules for the Human Zoo*: a response to the *Letter on Humanism*," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 27 (2009), pp. 12–28.

[18] See J. Derrida's brilliant reading of *Ecce Homo* in *The Ear of the Other: otobiography, transference, translation*, trans. A. Ronell et al. (University of Nebraska Press, 1988), esp. "Inasmuch as *I am and follow after* my father, I am the dead man and I am death. Inasmuch as *I am and follow after* my mother, I am life that perseveres, I am the living and the living feminine. I am my father, my mother, and me, death and life, the dead man and the living feminine, and so on." p. 16.

as a newt or just badly hung-over, and keep on agonising about the dictates of Diotima). Here, then, at an end that is also a new beginning, we rediscover a radical variation on the eternal image of the phoenix, that sole Arabian bird that consumes itself in fire in order to be reborn from its own ashes. Just try doing that on Sydney Harbour.

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Felix Ensslin*

From *Hamartia* to "Nothingness": Tragedy, Comedy, and Luther's "*Humilitas*"

Is the Reformation an event? Do we need to understand what happened at its inception in order to understand our contemporary debates? Can such a reconstruction perhaps give us conceptual tools for trying to understand what we might mean by "suspension of the law" or by the idea of a comic subjectivity beyond the comic as carnevalesque, understood simply as a reversal of the given symbolic order? The following study argues that in Martin Luther's reformatory breakthrough a site appears in which the subject is shown to be irreconcilably split due to its constitution through language. In this very split a potentiality appears – not of reconciliation or of reuniting opposites in a new or higher unity or One, but of a kind of suspension. Without taking this site into account, any attempt to try to reconstruct the emergence of such a possibility will fail – whether it applies the purely formal analysis of a "Pauline" subjectivity of truth, as does Alain Badiou, or whether it tries to inscribe this site into the emergence of a comic subjectivity, e.g., in Dante, as does Giorgio Agamben. If one wants to understand and engage in contemporary discussions of subjectivity, universality, or of the problem of exception; or, relating to both philosophy proper as well as to the cultural field, issues such as undeadness or *hauntology*, it will prove to be necessary to reconstruct and engage the Reformation as a genuine event, a site where a potentiality emerges which needs to be re-constructed. The following study is part of a larger project which attempts to affirm that there is a break in the history and thought of the West that bears the name of the Reformation. Having the heritage not just of the Jewish tradition, as does Paul, but also of the Aristotelian-Christian tradition as its point of departure, it does not simply count as a repetition, more or less successful, of the Pauline moment. It is a genuine site, which needs to be taken into account.

Martin Luther conceived of *humilitas* as "nothingness", I will discuss this conception with reference to Giorgio Agamben's essay "Comedy". At stake in this dialogue is the question of whether it might be necessary to introduce a "Protestant" understanding of the "nothingness" of the subject. "Nothingness"

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is the state effected in the subject by a repetition of its constitution, a state that enables the move from tragic subjectivity to comic subjectivity. At stake, then, is also the nature of the insistence of the tragic in the comic – an insistence connected to the Greek term *hamartia*, in both its Aristotelian usage in the *Poetics* as the "great mistake" which introduces the tragic trajectory, and in its New Testament usage referring to "sin". I will affirm, alongside Agamben, not only that the tragic insists in the comic, but that this insistence can and should be related to *hamartia* in its dual heritage in tragedy and theology.[1] The argument will move from a discussion of the relation between *hamartia* in Greek tragedy and in the New Testament, towards charting its implications for the conception of original sin. The move from tragedy to comedy will be further developed through the concept of *kerygma*. *Kerygma* in its modern theological use refers usually to Jesus' injunction to preach his good news. Here it will be used as another conceptual mode for the constitution of the subject, in both tragedy and in St. Paul. A Thomist anthropology of the kind Agamben endorses is superseded by Luther's thought. Such a step produces the principle of the *totus homo* (the whole man) in which the totality of man is taken with sin *and* justification as necessary for a new kind of subjectivity. Finally, I will show in Luther's exegesis of the *Magnificat* the outlines of a subjectivity of nothingness on the horizon of the comic.

[1] A version of this paper was first presented in July 2006 at the conference "Wrong Again: Tragedy's Comedy" at Potsdam University. The conference was held by the Program for Graduate Studies "Life-Forms and Life-Knowledge" of Potsdam University and Viadrina University in Franfurt am Oder, Germany, of which I am a member. I am grateful to Howard Rouse for translating most of the original paper into English.

Since I refer later to Jacques Lacan's conception of the space "between two deaths" which he introduces in his reading of Antigone, I should mention here that he disavows such a relation between that space and *hamartia*. *"Ate* is not *hamartia*; it has nothing to do with doing something stupid", Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. by Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1986), p. 277. However, he also refers in passing to the fact that what brings into play the *ektos atas*, the "going beyond the limits of *ate*", i.e. into the space between two deaths, is the *kerygma* of Kreon, the sovereign revelation of power. Lacan himself points out that this term, *kerygma*, will play an "important role in modern Protestant theology as a dimension of the revelation", p. 273. He thus points in the direction this paper will take in order to realign *ate* and *hamartia*.

I. Tragedy and Heteronomy

1. The Question Regarding a Christian Conception of Tragic Guilt

> A conception of guilt that is certainly tragic is present in Christianity through the doctrine of original sin and the distinction between *natura* and *persona*, natural guilt and personal guilt, which the theologians elaborated and justified.[2]

This claim by Agamben in his essay "Comedy" is made in critical reference to the work of Kurt von Fritz, who has argued regarding the history of the interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of *hamartia* that:

> the fact that Aristotle talks about *hamartia* immediately after his remarks about the necessary imperfection of the tragic hero has had the consequence that the vast majority of interpreters have equated the imperfection of the hero with his *hamartia*, or at least have considered the latter as the necessary cause of the former.[3]

Von Fritz proposes a different reading of *hamartia*, one which strictly distinguishes between, on the one hand, the character of the hero and his imperfection and, on the other, the *hamartia* that objectively – not subjectively – renders the tragic events tragic. He argues that *hamartia* should not be read as an internal flaw within the subject, but as an outside force that is productive of tragedy. He thus wants to strengthen the view that:

> the tragic situation always comes, is given, from outside, that is, it does not emerge with necessity from the character of the hero. Character only plays a role to the extent that the individual has to be receptive, so to say, to the situation given from outside.[4]

In order to clarify this thought, von Fritz points to the example in Sophocles' tragedy of the very different reactions of the sisters Antigone and Ismene to Kreon's "announcement", his *kerygma*, prohibiting the burial of Polynices. Here,

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[2] Giorgio Agamben, "Comedy" in *End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–22, here p. 11.

[3] Kurt von Fritz, *Antike und Moderne Tragödie* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1962), p. 32. One can qualify von Fritz's argument by pointing out that he goes on to say that reading *hamartia* as a determination of finitude is at least "misleading", which is certainly not the same as false.

[4] K. von Fritz, *Antike und Moderne Tragödie*, p. 15.

von Fritz argues that *hamartia* actually suggests that the concretely heteronomous – what von Fritz calls "the situation given from *outside*" – has to be able to encounter a prepared situation, a readiness. The condition of tragedy in *Antigone* is the relation between an external *kerygma* and a readiness for its reception. Von Fritz concludes from this that "an essential presupposition of Greek tragedy" is "that not only physical but also moral suffering is possible without attributable – or at least without fully attributable – subjective moral guilt"[5]. Von Fritz, therefore, explicitly objects to the idea of a family resemblance between Aristotelian *hamartia* and Christian original sin:

> the *hamartia* that Aristotle talks about certainly belongs, as an always open possibility, to the fundamental condition of human existence. As *hamartia*, however, it is something entirely concrete and has [...] not the slightest thing to do [...] with Christian original sin.[6]

2. Heteronomy and Original Sin

In "Comedy" – and in contradiction to von Fritz – Giorgio Agamben connects the "heteronomous" structure of *hamartia* with original sin. Because Agamben understands original sin as natural and not as subjective – *naturaliter*, not *personaliter* – he can talk about a "Christian experience" of tragic guilt. Before he does this, however, Agamben once again draws attention to the problem that the tragic (and the comic) presents in Christian thought. With reference to an inference of Dante – if after the Fall the language or speech of every individual begins with "Woe!", then before the Fall it must have begun with a cry of joy – Agamben claims that "after the Fall, human language cannot be tragic; before the Fall, it cannot be comic."[7] His reasoning is that whoever starts with "Woe!" cannot fall into the transformation (*anagoresis*) of recognizing a tragic involvement. Likewise, whoever starts with joy cannot be, and has no need to be, relieved of guilt. The subject, under Christianity, is always locked into an either pre- or post-lapsarian state. This precludes the transformation in the subject necessary for comedy or tragedy. Agamben solves this problem by post-Adamically reading *hamartia* as original sin, that is, sin *naturaliter* – which accordingly carries no subjective guilt. Consequently, the heteronomy that opens up "concupiscence"

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[7] Agamben, "Comedy", p. 10.

– i.e. the sublation in nature of a sexuality once submitted to the power of a will that conforms to God – makes it possible to define a "Christian conception of tragic guilt." Concomitantly, it also opens up the "comic possibility opened to man by Christ's Passion". This notion of the Christian subject as perennially under heteronomous authority creates the possibility of both tragic and comic guilt, providing the outside condition against which the subject will arrive at knowledge.

Agamben establishes here a relationship analogous to that which – from Augustine to Luther and Kierkegaard, and above all within Protestant theology and philosophy – has enjoyed a central significance. This is the necessity of the experience of the *lex* (law) as a propaedeutic to the experience of grace through the Passion of Christ. These are the two sides of the immutable Word: it is unchangeable in itself, but it also makes possible two modes of reception. The Word can be *lex*, or, it can produce the other work, the *opus alienum* of Grace. This binary constituted the final separation between Judaism and Christianity, at least in Paul's letters. The thought of the Reformation, with its emphasis on the infusion of grace granted by the Word, invariably favoured the Word over *lex* as a mode to achieve grace or redemption. (One only needs to think here of Martin Luther's confrontation with Agricola and the Antinomians.)[8] The problem with the erasure of *lex* that occurs in Reformation theology is that it then becomes impossible to understand Christ's *kerygma* as borne of Grace, and thus comically transforming *lex*.

Agamben maintains this binarised idea of *lex* for the present because he needs to maintain a relationship of tension between the two poles in order to think through the transformation from tragic subjectivity to comic subjectivity. He wants to forge a separation between the guilt that tragedy introduces for the present *into* comedy and the justification *through* comedy. Bearing tragic inheritance, one pole is – and remains – heteronomous to the other. Or, rather, and more precisely, one pole preserves a remembrance of its heteronomy. It conveys its "history", we might say, not as reminiscence[9] but instead as remembrance: of

[8] See, for example, Luther's "Contra Antinomos", in *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883). Vol. 39 I, pp. 342–347. All references to the critical edition are abbreviated as WA followed by the number of the volume in numerals and the page number.

[9] With the term reminiscence, what should be understood here is Kierkegaard's critique of

the relationship of man to something absolutely heteronomous, of his positioning with respect to an absolute, non-subjectivizable difference. This implants in the subject – as *lex* – a "core" that is certainly active and effective, but which does not simply belong to it subjectively. In the terminology of Lacan, it is an "extimate" core. For the purposes of the argument here it an be read as the activity or *insistence* which can be transformed through the Passion of Christ, the *opus alienum*. It is precisely by traversing the path of the Word, into the repetitive *kerygma* of this Passion that the comic subject is created. This is a transformation or reversal from objective guilt *naturaliter* – which cannot be ascribed subjectively *personaliter* – to subjective guilt that is, however, justified *personaliter*. The structure and consequences of *hamartia* as original sin *naturaliter* are preserved in this movement, because justification occurs here precisely as *personaliter*, not as *naturaliter*, i.e. objective guilt *insists* in the place of its justification. This also preserves desire or *concupiscentia* in its full Augustinian-Protestant meaning as a force that preserves sexual desire and its consequent resistance to the "higher" faculties.

II. The Tragedy in Comedy: The Insistence of the Heteronomous

1. Kerygma: An Aspect of Revelation and a "Message" that Repeats Constitution

Kerygma is the message of the herald, the *kerux*, its content and its act. The rule or power ("*kratos*") of Kreon (873)[10] is originally communicated as a "*kerygma*" (8) to Antigone. The Pauline pronouncement of soteriological grace, the *opus alienum* of the Passion of Christ, is also called a "*kerygma*" (*First I Cor.* 2, 4).[11] The power that makes possible the reception of this *kerygma* – a reception that, in a

Hegel's concept of "*Erinnerung*" as developed in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, as well as the earlier understanding of Jacques Lacan of the Symbolic. See, for example, "The Freudian Thing", in *Ecrits: A Selection,* trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton 2002), p. 133: "Indeed, the laws of remembering and symbolic recognition are different in their essence and manifestation from the laws of imaginary reminiscence – that is, from the echo of feeling or instinctual imprinting – even if the elements organized by the former as signifiers are borrowed from the material to which the latter gives signification."

[10] All reference to *Antigone* are to *Sophocles, With an English Translation,* trans. by F. Storr. Vol. 1, *Antigone* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962) Line numbers will be indicated parenthetically in the text.

[11] "For I determined not to know any thing [*ti eidenai*] among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling [*asthenei kai en phobo kai en tromo*] and my speech and my *preaching* was not with enticing words of man's

certain sense, *is* the *kerygma* itself – is not autonomous, but instead emerges out of the power of God ("*dynamei theou*") or, in the case of *Antigone*, the *kratos d', hoto kratos melei* (873), the "powers who hold by might the sway". The creative power, the efficacy of what remains from the *kerygma* is certainly *in* the subject, but it is not *of* the subject. While the *kerygma* or rather the *kratos d', hoto kratos melei* – sustaining it (or, in the Pauline case, the *dyname theou*) remains, as such, immutable, its nature demands a productive reception subject to change. This reception is localized in the subject. It is *extimate*, like the efficacy of the word in the mode of reception of the *lex*. In Martin Luther's interpretation of the *Magnificat*, this same process is indirectly described as follows:

> As he has created in the inception of all creatures the world out of nothing, for which he is named creator and omnipotent, so he remains immutable in this mode of efficacy. And all of his works till the end of the world are done in this mode, that he will make from what is nothing, low, contemptible, suffering, dying, something delicious, honest, blessed, alive. Then again he makes everything that is delicious, honest, blessed, alive into nothing, into what is low, contemptible, suffering, dying. No creature can be effective [i.e., no creature can create] in this way, it does not have capacity to make something out of nothing.[12]

It is important to note here the terms Luther uses in his German: in the expression "*aus nicht zu machen icht*" one can hear "*ich*" ("I" or "ego") as much as "*icht*" ("*etwas*" or something). While there is no etymological root sustaining this association, it clearly functions in the hearing process of the logic of the sig-

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wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the *power of God* [*kai hologos mou kai to kerygma mou ouk en pethois sophias logois* [...] *sophia anthropon* [...] *all en dynamei theou*]." [Italics added]. King James Bible.

[12] My translation. *"Denn so wie er im Anfang aller Kreaturen die Welt aus nichts schuf, wovon er Schöpfer und allmächtig heisst, so bleib er bei solcher Art zu wirken unverwandelt. Und es sind noch all seine Werke bis ans Ende der Welt also getan, dass er aus dem, was nichts, gering, verachtet, elend, tot ist, etwas Köstliches, Ehrliches, Seliges, Lebendiges macht. Wiederum alles, was etwas Köstliches, Ehrliches, Seliges, Lebendiges ist, macht er zunichte, gering, verachtet, elend und sterbend. Auf diese Weise kann keine Kreatur wirken, vermag es nicht, aus nicht zu machen icht. (Etwas)." In Luther, Martin, "Das Magnificat verdeutscht undausgelegt"* (1521), in Martin Luther, *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Ed. by Karin Bornekamm and Gerhard Ebeling (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1982), p. 119. I am using this edition instead of WA since it has been transferred into contemporary German. The old usage of "*icht*" for "*etwas*" or "something" was referenced by the editors of this edition also. For the "Magnificat" in WA, see Vol. 7, pp. 504–604.

nifier. This holds particularly for a listener of Luther's time, as well as today. Luther's aim was to show the privative or derivative way in which the world, its things, and its carrier appear from nothing. Also, we can observe that the state of "nothing" is addressed adverbially, while the state of something is addressed with substantialized adjectives. From here we can draw the inference that what is at stake is symbolic ascription or the inscription of a creative act. Although God preliminarily creates through the Word, he also "remains" in this, "then again" (*Wiederum*), "unchangeable", as Luther says a few lines earlier. This "then again" is the repetition of the unchangeable as *kerygma*, which works to destroy worldly identities and render them as "nothing, low, contemptible, suffering and dying". The condition that relativizes the symbolic order and the attributions and identities that support it is that the destructive entry into the sphere "between the two deaths"[13] is, at the same time, a creative, living power that makes it possible to act. This creativity does not entail, however, the possibility of objectively turning away from the heteronomous source in order – by one's own powers alone – to "make something out of nothing", *aus nicht zu machen icht*. The reason is that in itself the Word is unchangeable, just as God in himself is unchangeable. One cannot turn to the one side and *simultaneously* turn away from the other. The "changeable" God – and the changeable Word – only emerges in the mode of reception. *Ita credunt, ut habent*, as they believe him, so they have him, as Luther writes in his Large Catechism.

In the process followed here, there appears – in Agamben's sense – a kind of "thingness" of the world precisely at the locus where the efficacy of the Word "makes into nothing" or annihilates – "desymbolizes", so to say – symbolic identities and the things mediated by them. The *kerygma* of the "then again", of the repetition, potentially "desublimates" the world into its "thingness" – a concept that, in *The Coming Community*, Agamben relates to things in the thusness "of the world."[14] In this way, these things are not dissolved "philanthropically" – in the sense employed in Aristotle's poetics – into fantasy. In the manner described, then, the *kerygma*, the "message" that is repeated, runs up against the level of the "irreparable". Lacan has pointed out the connection between *kerygma* and the position from which Antigone acts, a position in the zone of the *ate*. He has de-

[13] Compare here Jacques Lacan's introduction of the term "between the two deaths" in his *Seminar VII*, particularly session XXI, "Antigone Between the Two Deaths."
[14] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 88.

scribed this topos as that "between the two deaths". In this topos, an insertion into the existing *kratos*, and the maintenance of the symbolic identities that it mediates and guarantees, is no longer possible. It is possible – and this is exactly what Ismene does in *Antigone – not to hear* this "message". After being asked whether she has heard the *kerygma*, she replies: "To me, Antigone, no word [*mythos*] of friends [*philon*]/ Has come, glad or grievous." (11-12) Antigone is asking here whether Ismene has also been "traumatized" by the *kerygma*, and Ismene immediately answers with precisely the word that Aristotle will later make into an essential component of tragedy. Almost imperceptibly she changes *kerygma* into *mythos*, the traumatic message of the Other into a present or absent element of a comprehensible narrative: "No *mythos* of our friends." That "word" – a felicitous translation of *mythos* here, in the context of our argument – which does not acknowledge the consequence of "communicative action" that does not "exist", i.e. that is not representable, is repressed or disavowed. Ismene *does not hear* the antagonism that the question aims at – namely, that, by means of the announcement, the *kerygma*, the friend has become an enemy in a kind of negative recognition or *anagnoresis* (a "Gestalt-switch" has taken place).[15] Already in the first lines of the play, Antigone makes it clear that she has heard the military leader's *kerygma*; but Ismene, reasoning on the basis of the suffering that has already befallen her, wants to remain in the world that she knows or, above all, to persist in the *way* that she knows it. By referring to past suffering, she indirectly points to the repetitive character of *kerygma*. But she persists, we might say, in melancholy, hears neither "glad [n]or grievous" word (12-13). At the same time, she reproaches Antigone for wanting the "impossible" (90 and 92)[16] by insisting on an answer and reaction outside the existing order, outside the given possibilities. What she wants is an impossibility because it has no imaginable, ascribable, or nameable place in the existing "processual-order" (Blumenberg) of *philoi*, of "friends", Ismene wants a "philanthropic" comportment

[15] It would be interesting to discuss the extent to which "*anagnoresis*" can also be understood in this context: as a moment of sudden change, of a Gestalt-switch, that does not create "new facts", but instead new "ways of seeing". In this sense, the Fall is the "*anagnoresis*" par excellence.

[16] Ismene says "*ei kai dynesei g' all' amechanon eras*" (90). And in l. 92. "*archen de theran ou prepei tamechana*". Storr's translation has here for l. 90: "If thou succeed; but thou art doomed to fail." And l. 92: "But if the venture is hopeless, why essay." While capturing Ismenes mood, he fails to indicate the relationship between "*amechanon*" and "*tamaechana*" both indicating the realm of what in Paul is called the *me onta*, the non-existent or impossible. It is precisely this "impossibility", that which is not within the existing symbolic order, which is the realm of causality. It is the activation or subjectivation of what insists in the subject, of the tragic insistence.

towards the *"kerygma"*, which means ignoring its traumatic and repetitive potentiality. On the contrary, *kerygma* forces Antigone up against the impossible – and beyond. In this sense, the attitude and experience of Antigone is "creative" *in-deed*, *"durch die Tat"*, as Hegel will point out. She asserts and creates an attitude that – speaking anachronistically, in scholastic-nominalistic terms – has no place in the world of the *potentia dei ordinata, in the already existing symbolic order* or *"processual order" (Prozessordnung),* as Hans Blumenberg has so aptly translated this scholastic term. In this sense it is creative, and can be creative, from the place "between the two deaths" – the place between symbolic death and material, bodily death that opens up through the *kerygma*'s banning-effect. But this ban still withholds something. In the very act of individualizing, there is also something amiss.[17]

I only want to mention in passing here that it is precisely the defence of such a *potentia dei ordinata* of a teleologically organized world that Aristotle uses to exclude the "terrible", the "impure", the *miaron*, from the possible fund of tragic "myths." The employment of such "material" would not be "philanthropic". Aristotle excludes here – and this is precisely the employment of von Fritz's insight that Agamben wants to retain – something that indirectly re-enters through *hamartia*, the "great flaw". He excludes the presupposition of the tragic occurrence, which is the *mythos* that domesticates the excluded *miaron*.[18]

[17] Tragedy shows that the "hero is himself the speaker, and the performance displays to the audience – who are also spectators – *self-conscious* human beings who *know* their rights and purposes, the power and the will of their specific nature and know how to *assert* them. They are artists, who do not express with unconscious naturalness and naivety the *external* aspect of their resolves and enterprises, as happens in the language accompanying ordinary actions in actual life; on the contrary, they give utterance to the inner essence, they prove the rightness of their action, and the 'pathos' which moves them is soberly asserted and definitely expressed in its universal individuality, free from the accidents of circumstance and personal idiosyncrasies. Lastly, these characters *exist* as actual human beings who impersonate the heroes and portray them, not in the form of a narrative, but in the actual speech of the actors themselves. Just as it is essential for the statue to be the work of human hands, so is the actor essential to his mask – not as an external condition from which artistically considered we must abstract; *or, so far as we do have to make abstraction from it, we admit just this, that Art does not yet contain in it the true and proper self*." [Italics added]. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 444.

[18] Aristotle, *Poetics*. Trans. by S. H. Butcher (New York: Dover, 1997), p. 22: "It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks

Because Aristotle is obliged, according to the terms of his world-view, to link together the elements of action according to "probability or possibility", he constitutively excludes such a creative act, one that fundamentally transforms the symbolic order. That is, he goes no further than the first, material death. At the same time, however – by means of the initial *hamartia* that the *kerygma* gives rise to – an *aporia* is described: a world that is ordered in such a way must inevitably run up against its own presuppositions. It is not only that the world is not full of friends; symbolic identities – and the *kratos*, the power, that supports them and by means of which they are reproduced – do not completely redeem or sublate the heteronomous structure of their own presuppositions. Something always remains "outside" – which, as extimate to/in the subject is also inside. This extimate core is exposed in *Antigone* through traumatic repetition by way of the occasion of the *kerygma*. This is what Lacan means when he points out that at the end of the play Antigone is described by the chorus as "*autognothos*" (someone possessing self-knowledge) – Lacan wants to read this together with the "*gnothi seauton*" (to know thyself) of the Delphic oracle. A *remainder* insists in and through the invocation; and it is either fantasmatically held at a distance in the "philanthropic" world of friends – this is what happens with Ismene – or assumed, realized, and made one's own, as is the case with Antigone. Nonetheless, it always remains "enigmatic". It cannot be dialectically dissolved or incorporated as an intelligible object of knowledge that guides action. Instead, it can only be assumed by means of a specific form of self-knowledge, that is, by means of the attempt to put oneself, through action, in the position of the impossible. In psychoanalytic terminology, this would be to subjectivize the cause. And, as Lacan's reference to the oracle once again makes clear, this is certainly not something that sublates heteronomy.

In tragedy, as *Antigone* shows, someone being *autognothos* leads to disaster. In the play, immediately prior to the use of this expression, the chorus once again conveys the alternative attitude: "Yet is it ill to disobey/ the powers who hold by might the sway/ Thou hast withstood authority/ A self-willed rebel, thou must die" (872–5).[19] If one reads this passage together with the debate between Agam-

us [*touto alla miaron estin*]." *Miaron* is a word which well designates the locus of reversal, of "nothingness", which will be discussed later. It is an abject word.

[19] This formulation needs to be stronger: No matter who is in control of state-power, it is never conceivable – precisely within the "processual order" of the world according to the *potentia ordinata* – to transgress it.

ben and von Fritz I presented above, one can draw the following conclusion: to be *autognothos*, arises out of one's own drive, not as a subjective, but as an "objective" factor caused by a constitution from outside. Paradoxically, it follows that what exists is in and of itself. *Autognothos* is not subjectively attributable, but it is only the realized deed. Whoever responds to the *kerygma* that repeats heteronomy with a *passage à l'acte*[20], is not of this world. The *kerygma* that repeats itself leads to objectively guiltless symbolic death, while the *passage à l'acte* leads to material death. Antigone is trapped by the necessity to go from one to the other. This trap or this necessity emerges or is instated precisely because she did not understand the message of power as materially reproducing the *kratos*, the existing "symbolic world", and thus as an "order." Instead, she understands this message as the "object-cause" of "self-will" of being *autognothos*,[21] and this is exactly what makes the tragedy a tragedy. Tragedy is necessary as long as this heteronomous object-cause is understood to lie outside our own responsibility, while still being the cause of one's being *autognothos*, or *Eigensinn*, one's own drive. In a reversal, the *passage à l'acte* turns out to be an acting out.[22] It only remains to observe that this *passage à l'acte* is then entirely bound up with a specific pleasure, a "surplus-jouissance", as opposed to the enjoyment of the "processual-order" or the "order of friends". Thus, Antigone can say: "I will suffer nothing so bad that it would not be beautiful to die." Storr's translation speaks of an "honorable death", which misses the point. Antigone is certain of the surplus enjoyment.

2. Anthropology: From the Qualities of the Soul to the Sin of Reflexivity

Agamben is concerned in "Comedy" with the genre categorization of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which was written in the fourteenth century, so he discusses con-

[20] In his Seminar on "Anxiety", Lacan splits the Freudian term "agieren" describing the symptomatic behaviour of the neurotic for the benefit of the Other into two: he translates it as the English *acting-out*, where it describes behaviour that is actually an attempt to get the Other to interpret or to look at the subject as "worthy", as containing an "*agalma*". But he uses the French *passage à l'acte* to describe behaviour which is no longer staged for the Other, but actually leaves that stage completely, cutting the ties to the Other that sustains the existing symbolic order.

[21] The German translation of Norbert Zink (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982) has an even more felicitous translation: "*eigensinnig*", which makes one think of Hegel's "*Eigensinn*" or Wilhelm Kuchenmüller's "*eigner Drang*", one's "own drive".

[22] Again, this is not the place to go into this differentiation in more detail. A good place to start is Lacan's *Seminar on Anxiety, Seminar X*.

ceptions of original sin by Catholic – that is, pre-Protestant – theologians. In *The Coming Community* there is a related discussion, but one that refers more particularly to Protestant theology. Here, Agamben is again concerned with the irreducible immanence of existence. This is an immanence that can sublate neither the division of the subject nor the heteronomy of the efficacy of this division. The name Agamben gives to the *topos* of the irreducibility of this divided immanence is "the irreparable". In his gloss on this concept, he claims:

> This is why those who try to make the world and life sacred again are just as impious as those who despair about profanation. This is why Protestant theology, which clearly separates the profane world from the divine, is both wrong and right: right because the world has been consigned irrevocably by revelation (by language) to the profane sphere; wrong because it will be saved precisely insofar as it is profane.[23]

The repetitive experience of *kerygma* – the dimension of revelation as language and of language as revelation – is accordingly to be found in the thought of Protestant theology. But it is this same theology that then goes wrong when it in turn reifies the heteronomy that it describes as a transcendent *deus absconditus* (a hidden god) and "final cause" – and precisely through this allocates to language itself the dimension of the "sublimation" of the world. When God is transcendent, he returns to the world as a sublimating power.

In "Comedy", Agamben rightly points out that it is precisely the *topos* of original sin which allows for a thought that makes possible a total determination of human beings: "For Adam's sin was not only *personal*; in him human *nature* itself sinned, thus falling away from the natural justice that had been assigned to it by God."[24] He proceeds, however, to obfuscate once again this total determination by means of a reference to the anthropological determinations of Thomism. Agamben holds the door open for the idea that these "natural sins" only encapsulate particular qualities of particular faculties, that is, that they do not determine the whole of man.

Luther also ascribes original sin to nature, and can therefore say that – in contrast to actual sins – these are objective determinations. That is, we can also ob-

[23] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 89.
[24] Agamben, "Comedy", p. 11.

serve in Luther – and *precisely* in Luther – the workings of a "Christian conception of tragic guilt." In the *Lectures on Romans*, for example, he says about original sin or *peccatum originale*:

> One could say that sin is something other than transgression, since sin is retained in a state of being accused [*reatus manet*], while transgression, on the other hand, passes with the act. Thus everyone has sinned, not by an actual deed, but in this sense of being in a state of accusation. Adam alone sinned in the sense of a deed and at the same time of being in a state of accusation, for here we are dealing with the first sin.[25]

This "sin" is heteronomously determined, it is not a quality of human beings (this is why it cannot be "cleansed" as such), but instead comes from outside: "But this sin enters into them and they do not commit it, but suffer it."[26] The medium of this "suffering" is language or – in specific reference to sin – the Word in its mode of *lex*. And this objective guiltiness is transmitted *naturaliter*, by means of sexual reproduction. It is important to keep in mind that "*concupiscentia*", as the "*naturaliter*" path of reproduction, is precisely not just sex. It is sexuality which always already is inscribed and inscribing: "Thus you, too, are a sinner, because you are the son of a sinner. But a sinner can only father another sinner, who is just like him."[27]

Luther draws a further, more radical conclusion from this determination of *naturaliter* sin. He certainly thinks that this determination corrupts the will, and that the *kerygma* of the Passion of Christ must correspondingly "cleanse" it. This does not occur, however, through a new determination of its quality. Instead, a

[25] WA 56, p. 316 (Scholia to 5, 14). "Quasi aliud sit peccatum et preuaricatio, quia peccatum vt reatus manet, preuaricatio autem vt actus transit. Ergo peccauerunt omnes non actu, Sed reatu eodem, Solus autem Adam actu et reatu simul quoad primum peccatum."

[26] WA 56, p. 314 (Scholia to 5, 12). "Sed hoc peccatum Intrat ad eos et non agunt, Sed patiuntur ipsum."

[27] WA 56, p. 315 (scholia to *Romans*, 5, 12). "Ergo et tu peccator, quia filius peccatoris; peccator autem non nisi peccatorem sibi similem generare potest." It can be noted that a doubling of "*generare*" is implied here and in Luther's whole discussion. A doubling between the reproductive aspect of "fathering" and the reference which establishes sexuality in its broader than reproductive scope, referred to in Luther as "*concupiscentia*". One may think here of Piere Legendre and his conception of the "absolute reference" which has to situate the "father" of reproduction. Yet, the conception of a "comic" subjectivity is precisely a project which suspends the "absoluteness" of this absolute.

"knowledge" is effected in human beings that "sees" this will differently. Against this conception, he sees the scholastic-Aristotelian error of ascribing what is *naturaliter* as a subjective attribute:

> What then is original sin? First, according to the subtle distinctions of the scholastic theologians, it is the privation or lack of original justification. But, according to their view, justification is present in the will *subjectively* and thus also has privation as its opposite. This is the way it is in the category of quality according to Logic and Metaphysics.[28]

If we translate this into the problematic that concerns us here, we can say that Luther is of the opinion that it is precisely the retention of Aristotelian anthropological determinations that makes a "Christian conception of tragic guilt" impossible. For these determinations are *compelled* to understand original sin as a subjective loss or transformation of qualities, and not as an objective "tendency" for which the person as such cannot be made responsible. By contrast, a "Christian conception of tragic guilt" once again becomes thinkable in the context of Luther's own – or *secundum Apostolum* – answer to the question of original sin. Here, original sin is

> not only the privation of a quality in the will, not even only the privation of the light of reason or the power of memory, but a total [or "universal"] privation of all rectitude and the potency of all the powers of the body and the soul, of the whole inner and outer human being. And above this, there is a tendency towards what is bad, a nausea relating to the good, a fickleness towards the light and wisdom, and delight in error and darkness, a flight from and horror of good works, and a race towards the bad [or evil].[29]

[28] WA 56, p. 312 (Scholia to *Romans*, 5, 14). "Quid ergo nunc est peccatum originale? Primo secundum subtilitates Scolasticorum theologorum Est priuatio seu carentia Iustitie originalis. Iustitia autem secundum eos Est in voluntate tantum subiectiue, ergo et priuatio eius opposita. Quia scil(icet) est in predicamento qualitatis secundum Logicam et metaphysicam."

[29] WA 56, p. 312 (Scholia to Romans, 5, 14). Original sin is "non tantum priuatio qualitatis in voluntate, immo nec tantum priuatio lucis in intellectu, virtutis in memoria, Sed prorsus priuatio vniuerse rectitudinis et potentie omnium virium tam corporis quam anime ac totius hominis interioris et exterioris. Insuper et pronitas ipsa ad malum, Nausea ad bonum, fastidium lucis et sapientie, dilectio autem erroris ac tenebrarum, fuga et abominatio bonorum operum, Cursus autem ad malum."

This race towards evil, the *pronitas ad mallum* – described elsewhere by Luther as the tendency of human beings to be *curvatus in se*, a self-inclination – is here reflexively related to itself and shown to be at heart the tendency to posit oneself as one's own principle. Rudolf Malter has rightly pointed out that, according to the *Lectures on Romans*, this race is fundamentally identical to original sin.[30] The autonomy that is enacted *curvatus in se* is fantasmatic, its movement or tendency (*pronitas*) is in fact a product of heteronomy, to which the subject does not open itself adequately:

> All of this [these good gifts of God], I say human beings bend back on themselves, seeking with it their advantage and – what a horror – fashioning idols out of it, which are conflated with the true god, by not relating these gifts to God, and by not being content when they are taken away. Thus they only let them [these gifts] reluctantly, when they are deprived of them or stripped of them.[31]

In Luther, then, objective guiltlessness is also to be understood *naturaliter*. This is shown by the fact that original sin is not sinful in itself, but only as a tendency towards an enactment of reflexivity. It is only in false "knowledge" that it is inevitably capable of subjective attribution, that is, precisely as "knowledge", not as a realization by means of a *peccatum actuale* (an actual sin). It is precisely as "knowledge" that it grasps the whole of man beyond grace (*extra gratia*), not only as a set of the particular qualities of a particular capacity. This whole cannot be grasped, however, through the employment of a capacity that belongs to the subject, but instead only from a place entirely inaccessible to it. That place is the "nothingness" of "*humilitas*". From this perspective, "objective guiltlessness" turns into a justified – that is, an always-becoming-justified – guilt. One consequence of this is that this "sin" can only be first recognized as such by means of its justification. The justification in the knowledge of human beings has to first posit its own presupposition, but which is identified precisely as the repetitive effect of heteronomy, not as the autonomous realization of human ca-

[30] Rudolf Malter, *Das reformatorische Denken und die Philosophie: Luthers Entwurf einer transzendental-praktischen Metaphysik* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980), particularly pp. 24ff., i.e. the section titled "Der Ich-Charakter des *peccatum originale*". I am indebted to this book in my reading of Luther.

[31] WA 56, S. 362 (Scholia to Romans, 8, 7). "Hec, inquam, omnia sibi inflectit, suum bonum in iis querit et horribiliter idola ex eis sibi conflat pro Deo vero, dum ea non in Deum refert nec contentus est, si he,c auferantur sibi. Ideo omnibus iis spoliabitur et nudabitur Inuitus."

pacities. Kierkegaard describes this in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, when he rewrites the famous Pauline formula – "sin came into the world through the law" – as "sin came into the world through sin". That is, sin is a product of the *kerygma* that repeats itself. It does not emerge out of the reciprocal determination of the two modes of the Word, the *lex* and the *kerygma or grace*, which then, as a second determination would be inceptive of grace. Precisely as repetition they are in some sense identical and as such not determinative of each other, not consequently acting upon each other. Sin comes through – and in a certain sense *is* – an "announcement of existence".

The limitations of Agamben's reversion to the anthropological determinations of Thomism become apparent at this point. These determinations leave the subject justified through the faith of the Passion of Christ in the "objectively guilty" (*naturaliter*), whilst still allowing the subject to orientate its will purposefully towards the good. It is understandable that Agamben wants to claim this with respect to Dante, the immediate object of his inquiry, but in broadening his conclusions this becomes insufficient. Agamben also says:

> We can even say that precisely in its attempt to explain the paradox of guilt that is transmitted independently of individual responsibility through the distinction of natural sin and personal sin, Christian theology laid the foundations for the categories through which modern culture was to interpret tragic conflict.[32]

Agamben's description of human beings with regard to *comedia* is not restricted to *The Divine Comedy*. In discussing comedy, he also wants to carry out a critique of the kind of moral subject who, like "the tragic actor", "wholly identifies with his mask"[33]. However, it is only possible to criticize this "wholeness" when the human being can also, as in Protestant anthropology, be grasped as a "whole". This is why Agamben's reference to the Thomist conception of the human, which holds that humans certainly cannot dissolve their objectively guilty nature by recovering a pre-Adamic state, but can participate with their "wills" in the orientation towards the good – is, at the very least, misleading.[34] If we are still to comprehend the insistence of the tragic in the comic, thus saving Agamben's in-

[32] Agamben, "Comedy", p. 11.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

sight for a broader theory of subjectivity, this must be seen to occur in a different and opposing way: the "thingness" of the things in the world, their profane character – and this is the opposite of reification, which always relies upon a mystifying, sublimating, "fetishistic" attitude – can only be experienced by means of the desubstantialization that follows from the determination of the "*totus homo*", the whole man, in "nothingness".

Luther fundamentally criticizes the tendency of human beings to posit themselves as a principle, the "ego-like character"[35] of "concupiscence or the race towards evil and the difficulty towards the good"[36]. This goes together with the fact that Luther no longer conceives of concupiscence as a partial capacity that always has to be actualized, but instead as precisely this *pronitas* or race as a whole. It is "materially identical with *peccatum originale*", as Rodolf Malter says.[37] The conflict in the interpretation of Luther about whether concupiscence is to be essentially understood as sexual desire[38] or, as in Malter, structurally, as "ego-like understanding" or "knowledge", can perhaps be overcome if we make visible the dimension of the *remainder* of heteronomy. *Concupiscentia* remains – even in the "comic possibility opened up to man by the Passion of Christ" – unsublatable in its existence, but precisely as a determination of the "whole man", not only as a partial capacity. It is precisely this that constitutes the "Christian conception of tragic guilt", which also continues to insist in its overcoming – not its sublation – by means of the "comic possibility". The *remainder*, the extimate core, is the *movens, it is that which emerges as cause, as that which moves*; it can be understood as a sexuality that encompasses the whole of man. In the repetitive experience of the constitutive moment, however, this *remainder* is, at the same time, the source, the support or movement, of an "other knowledge". This "knowledge" does not appropriate the repetitive *kerygma*, then, by means of a *passage à l'acte* – which, as with Antigone, would turn out to be an *Agieren*, acting-out – that is, by means of an identification of itself with this *remainder*.

What is decisive here is that, when Luther is talking about the fact that the whole of man is subject to original sin, just as the whole of man is subject to justifica-

[35] Malter, *Das reformatorische Denken und die Philosophie*, p. 24.
[36] WA 56, p. 271 "concupiscentia siue pronitas ad malum et difficultas ad bonum."
[37] Malter, *Das reformatorische Denken und die Philosophie*, p. 257, note 8.
[38] See Heinrich Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung* (Mainz: F. Kirchheim, 1906), p. 438.

tion – his *totus-homo* principle – it is not the critique of "free will" that is primary, but instead its presupposition: its determination through a kind of *knowledge*. This knowledge is either an objectively correct self-knowledge, which owes its existence to repetitive heteronomy by means of a passively accepting relationship to it, in which case the will is not free; or it is "*autognothos*", a "knowledge" that – as reflexive self-consciousness – "knows" and "says" its "right" and its "purpose", its "power" and its "will", as Hegel says about the tragic actor.[39] Seen from the first standpoint, this is, of course, a false "knowledge". In the employment of "knowledge" as an interpretative tool in Luther's thought – an employment that has the virtue of combining particular conceptualities – I follow here Rudolf Malter. At another decisive point, however, Malter reaches an incorrect conclusion. He says that "nothingness" – understood as a place of "spiritual" knowledge, a knowledge that is aware of its own irreducible egoicity, inaccessible to autonomous means – does not also imply a "loss of the individual self"[40]. The reason is that the precise result of an "accepting" confrontation with the reality of heteronomy is a loss of the whole idea of "individuality" – of every conceivable, symbolically mediated identity and "proper" self. And I would like to conclude by showing that this *is* the meaning of "nothingness" in Luther. For Luther, this determination of place – which is also a giving of place, a *locum dare* – turns around the transformation of *humilitas* into "nothingness" on the basis of the development of the anthropological *totus-homo* principle.[41] This principle deter-

[39] See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 444.

[40] Malter, *Das reformatorische Denken und die Philosophie*, p. 258, note 1.

[41] Again, there is not enough space to show this in detail, but it should be mentioned that this "anthropology" by its very articulation ends all possible anthropology. Once it is accepted that the core of subjectivity, while insistent, is empty, what anthropology worthy of this name could remain? There is a question in Luther scholarship concerning the extent to which Luther discarded this conceptuality of a "theology of humility." See, for example, Rudolf Damerau. *Die Demut in der Theologie Luthers* (Giessen: Wilhelm Schmitz, 1967); Wilhelm Maurer, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen: Zwei Untersuchungen zu Luthers Reformationsschriften 1520/21* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), pp. 90 ff.; and, Enrico De Negri, *Offenbarung und Dialektik*. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), p. 40. This is worthy of discussion, but precisely in connection with asking if Luther could have followed the consequences through to the end. On the other side of the spectrum Ernst Bizer claims that the whole of Reformation theology only began after a phase in which Luther supported a theology of "*humilitas*". See his *Fides ex auditu: Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 3rd ed.). It remains to be examined whether this difference cannot be better described as precisely a kind of "retreat from the real" within Protestant thought. In his book on Luther, Malter argues that it is impossible to establish such

mines, in its rejection of the medieval idea of *synteresis*,[42] that the whole of man is "corrupted" in its totality. It follows from this idea of totality that it is only possible to know the "true" nature of human beings – and things – from a position that lies outside it, whilst still belonging to it *naturaliter*.

3. Nothingness

We can now determine the relationship between Luther's *humilitas* and the question of tragedy and comedy.

On November 20, 1520, exactly one month before he publicly burns the papal bull, Luther begins to translate and commentate upon the *Magnificat*. The anthropology described above – which had grown in the *Lectures on Romans* and other texts – finally comes here to fruition.

In this text, and with reference to Mary, Luther translates *humilitas* – which before him had been treated as a virtue – as "nothingness". With this he wants to make perfectly clear that self-activity, and the knowledge of human beings that is bound up with it, can contribute nothing to the attainment of the correct "spirit", that is, that every contribution can only produce the opposite. Luther refers to Paul, who says that we must become "fools" to the world in order to receive the message of Christ, because God has chosen "things which are not [*me onta*] to bring to naught things that are." (I1 *Cor.* 1, 27–8) Luther comments:

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a difference. There is instead, he claims, merely a "change" in the conceptuality used to comprehend the thing of "humilitas" as "nothingness". (*Das reformatorische Denken und die Philosophie*, p. 337, note 11).

[42] In scholasticism – and going back, above all, to its Platonic and Neoplatonic roots – *synteresis* designates a shadowy remainder of knowledge in human beings, a kind of "remainder of participation" in the *nous* of God. Emmanuel Hirsch calls it an "original knowledge of God" and finds this meaning in the early sermons of Luther. See his *Luthersstudien* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1954), Vol. 1, p. 111. In the debate about "free will" with Erasmus, at the very latest, this meaning – if we ascribe to knowledge an always potential action-guiding function – has disappeared absolutely. In the *Lectures on Romans*, even though the concept is employed, it can also no longer be intended in such a way. It remains to be examined in another place whether the transformation of this "knowledge" into "conscience" is the only track down which we can follow Luther's reformatory breakthrough. This is what Lennart Pinomaa claims when he says that the "rejection of *synteresis*" is the "fundamental insight of the Reformation". See his *Der Zorn Gottes in der Theologie Luthers: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Einheit des Gottesbildes bei Luther* (Helsinki: Akateeminen Kirjakauppa,1938), p. 50.

> And thus he makes the world into a folly with all its wisdom and abilities and gives another wisdom and other abilities. Since it is his way to look into the abyss and to see abject things, I have translated the little word "humilitas" into German as "nothingness" or "abject being".[43]

The "abject", which possesses no symbolic existence, is the active substance that comes to life through heteronomy. It is the "nothing", the excluded place, out of which "another knowledge", "another capacity", is activated. A "knowledge" that, precisely as excluded, can speak the truth about the "world." It is obviously directed against every "philanthropic" domestication of the *remainder* that is experienced by means of the repetition of constitution. But it is directed just as much against every construction of an "autonomous" self that identifies with the abject in a sublimating way – and against every realization of this self in a tragic *passage à l'acte* or, rather, acting-out. The difference consists in the fact that this place does not forget its dependence on heteronomy – the heteronomy that effects its own constitution. As a result of the theological context, it is obvious that, even if this heteronomy is described as language, the consequences are not fully assumed. The inherent possibility of thinking of this heteronomy as immanence is not realized. But the anthropology of the "whole man", the *totus homo* principle, certainly opens this possibility up.

The insistence of tragic experience – which belongs to constitution because of the heteronomy of language – is not sublated, but instead, from the position of "nothingness", no longer "taken into account". This is because the "subject" as "self" is sublated in the enactment of "nothingness" or, as Luther says with reference to Mary, "she becomes another". This is the "cleansed" spirit that the *kerygma* of the Passion of Christ produces. Luther says about this "whole spirit":

> Peace comes from nothing other than teaching that no word, no outward act, but only faith – i.e. good trust in the invisible grace of God promised us – will make us pious, just and blessed. [...] And where there is no faith, there will have to be works, from which follows strife and tension, since no God will remain there. This is why Paul is

[43] "Und damit macht er die Welt zur Narrheit mit all ihrer Weisheit und ihrem Können und gibt eine andere Weisheit und ein anderes Können. Weil es denn nun seine Art ist, in die Tiefe und unansehnliche Dinge zu sehen, hab ich das Wörtlein 'humilitas' verdeutscht mit 'Nichtigkeit' oder 'unansehnlich Wesen'," Martin Luther's "Das Magnificat verdeutscht undausgelegt". Luther, "Das Magnificat", p. 138.

> not content to say: "that your spirit, that your soul", but he says: that your whole spirit, on which everything depends.[44]

From the place of non ego-like knowledge – which emerges in the same topos "between the two deaths" as the tragically sublimating identification and the tragic act that realizes the abject – it is possible to recognize the relativity of the symbolic order and the work that constitutes it.

This "whole spirit" is not realized: it *is* the "inversion", the subversion, of the symbolic order – "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1, 52). This is where Luther repeats his insistence on "nothingness." What the King James Bible renders simply as "low degree", Luther renders as those "who are low and nothing" (*die da niedrig und nichts sind*). The concreteness of the tragic situation is preserved in the concreteness of "humility" – in the knowledge concerning the belonging of one's self, and one's symbolically mediated identities, to the *me onta*, the non-being. It is not realized, however, by means of concrete, one-sided activity. Instead, it is active in a "universalistic" attitude, and without the still properly tragic division between "mask" and "actor", "role" and "self" – a division that precisely results from the sublimating identification with the abject. This difference makes clear that the tragic subject's putative "oneness" or "being-one" with his role collapses.[45] Because this position of "nothingness" is unrepresentable, because it *exists* in the assumption of the heteronomous structure of language, it also does not know itself – in contrast to the "*autognothos*" tragic subject, which can "know" and "say" itself.[46]

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[44] "Der Frieden kommt von nichts anderem, als davon, dass man lehrt, dass kein Wort, keine äusserliche Weise, sondern nur der Glaube – das ist gute Zuversicht in die unsichtbare Gnade Gottes, die uns versprochen ist – fromm, gerecht und selig mache… Und wo der Glaube nicht ist, da müssen viele Werke sein, woraus Unfriede und Uneinigkeit folgt als kein Gott mehr da bleibt. Darum begnügte sich Paulus nicht damit, zu sagen: 'Dass euer Geist, das eure Seele,' sondern er sagt: dass euer ganzer Geist, an dem alles liegt". Luther, "Das Magnificat", p. 139.

[45] "Convincing as this fusion-in-representation, might be, it still remains exactly that: a fusion of the two, an individual representation of the universal, without reaching the point where one of the two terms would generate the other from within itself, and become this other. To put it more precisely: we are dealing with the classical mode of representation, a constellation of two elements in which one represents the other." Alenka Zupančič reverts to Hegel in "The Concrete Universal and What Comedy Can Tell us About It", in *Lacan: The Silent Patners*. Ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 186.

[46] Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 444.

> Thus it is not things, but us that have to be changed in our nature [*Gemüt*, also disposition] and orientation [*Sinn*, also direction and meaning]. Then it will be a matter of course to despise high things and to flee them and to acknowledge low things and to seek them. In this, nothingness [*Demut*, humility, which Luther above has translated as "nothingness" and "abject being"] is fundamentally good [*grundgut*] and remains reliable [*beständig*] on all sides, while nevertheless never recognizing itself [*gewahr werden*]. This happens with enjoyment [*Lust*]. Yet the heart remains one and identical with itself, however things change, high or low, big or small.[47]

Seen this way, the place of nothingness is a place in which a "comic" subjectivity is constituted – a subjectivity that succeeds in the passage from guilt to "happy life" and justification. But the tragic insists in this "comic" subjectivity by means of the *remainder* that every subjectivation leaves behind. The comic position of Lutheran *humilitas* – a position of "nothingness" – consists in not attempting to avoid this remainder by means of either tragic action (the passion for the real) or the fantasmatic flight into "philanthropy", the identification with the symbolic order. It assumes instead that true self-knowledge only occurs outside of subjective reflexivity, through the practice of "the universal at work"[48]. This position is productive, it works and creates outside of those teleological determinations that would allow for a judgment of good and bad from beyond the sphere of practice. It is in a field of means without ends.

> Those truly humble [or truly confronted with their "empty core", their nothingness] do not look to what is the end [or effect] of humility, but with a simple heart they look to the things that are low, like to handle them, and never recognize themselves as humble. Then the water will well up from the font.[49]

[47] "So müssen nicht die Dinge, sondern wir verwandelt werden in Gemüt und Sinn. Dann wird sich's von selbst lehren, hohe Dinge zu verachten und zu fliehen, niedrige Dinge zu achten und zu suchen. Da ist die Demut grundgut und beständig auf allen Seiten und *wird ihrer selbst doch niemals gewahr.* Das geht mit Lust zu. Und das Herz bleibt gleich und eins, wie die Dinge sich auch wandeln oder geben, hoch oder niedrig, gross oder klein." Luther, "Das Magnificat." p. 142.
[48] Zupančič, "The Concrete Universal", p. 180.
[49] "Die wahren Demütigen sehen nicht auf die Folge der Demut, sondern mit einfältigem Herzen sehes sie in die niedrigen Dinge, gehn gern damit um und werden selbst niemals gewahr, dass sie demütig sind. Da quillt das Wasser aus dem Brunnen." Luther, "Das Magnificat", p. 140.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding concerning the heteronomy that insists in this "spirit", Luther talks about the "whole spirit", the concept that in Christian-Greek usage implies the "cleansed" spirit – the spirit reconstructed by the *kerygma* of the Passion of Christ:

> This is why St. Paul is not content with saying: "your spirit, your soul", but he says: "your whole spirit". He uses a fine word here in the Greek language: *to olokleron pneuma emon*, that is: your spirit, which possesses the whole inheritance. As if he wanted to say: Do not be led astray by any doctrine of works, the faithful spirit alone has it all in all [*gar und ganz*]. It depends only on the faith of the spirit. [...] Wherever this "whole-inheritance-possessing" spirit is sustained, there soul and body too can remain without error and evil works.[50]

By breaking *to olokleron*, wholeness, down into its component parts, Luther creates a remembrance of the fact that the trace of heteronomy can be found precisely in the "comic spirit", that is, the universal spirit which he calls "whole" not because it identifies with the whole of the imaginary symbolic ("*philanthropy*"), but precisely because it is immune to every identification with the symbolic and the identities it supports – in the spirit that is not in danger of realizing the place of its inception, the place "between the two deaths", in a tragic *passage à l'acte* or acting out. By splitting apart the words, Luther draws attention to the meanings of *kleros*. It does not only mean "inheritance", but also "lot", as in casting lots to make a decision. We can certainly detect here the Lutheran origin of Nietzsche's *amor fati*. What Luther is referring to is the purely external – in itself "dead" – determination of ourselves by means of something heteronomous that nonetheless belongs to us: an inheritance or, more archaically, a "lot". "The spirit that owns the whole inheritance" is the spirit that "assumes" and "inherits" its constitution through the Other and the surplus that goes together with it. The "dead" element refers, however, to the fact that this thought already contains the

[50] "Darum begnügt sich hier St. Paulus nicht, zu sagen: 'dass euer Geist', eure Seele, sonder er sagt: 'Euer ganzer Geist'. Er gebraucht hier ein feines Wort in griechischer Sprache: to olokleron pneuma emon, das ist: euer Geist, der das ganze Erbe besitzt. Als wollte er sagen: Lasset euch durch keine Lehre von Werken irremachen, der gläubige Geist hats allein gar und ganz. Es liegt nur am Glauben des Geistes. [...] wenn nur solcher 'ganzerbbesitzende Geist' erhalten wird, können danach auch die Seele und der Leib ohne Irrtum und böse Werke bleiben". Luther, "Das Magnificat." p. 139.

"death of the Other."[51] The spirit described here can endure the heteronomy that insists because it does not attempt to totalize the world that creates it, to force it under a logic and judgment existing outside of practice. The logic of the symbolic order does not possess any permanence – it is subjected to the higher logic of "nothingness". This logic is higher precisely because it can speak in renunciation of "the expressible" and "the doable" – in renunciation of the orientation towards the "consequences", the truth of the expressible, the doable and logical consistency. This is an eminently comic position, in which the tragic insists by means of the trace of heteronomy.

[51] The question whether it follows from this that the dead "Other" knows about its death will have to be postponed for now. Again, surpassing the scope of this paper, here the question arises – if anachronistically – how this "spirit that owns the whole inheritance" is related to the psychoanalytic problem of assuming one's cause, or of "filiation" and its relation to the "dead man". I believe that considered together, this Lutheran and Pauline "inheritance" can open the door to a theory of subjectivity, which can conceptualize the double task of retaining the law while not falling prey to representation.

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Kant and the "Spirit as an Enlivening Principle"

Kant's theory of genius and its faculty of the "aesthetic idea" renders the role of art problematic in the *Critique of the Power Judgment*. Rodolphe Gasché, among others, has pointed out that the passages about the aesthetic idea are the central lines in the third *Critique* which foster the question of art.[1] At the same time, it has been argued that the sections concerning "On Art in General"[2] that deal with genius and the "aesthetic idea" strangely differ from the rest of the book, as the passages on the sublime do, too.[3] The "aesthetic idea" as well as the work of art seem conspicuously alien elements in the third *Critique*. In these – seemingly – an objective moment occurs which seems to impede the main focus of subjectivity in the *Critique of Judgment*. "Art" is, as such, quite an ambivalent concept for Kant. The section "On Art in General" begins with a definition:

> *Art* is distinguished from *nature* as doing (*facere*) is from acting or producing in general (*agere*), and the product or consequence of the former is distinguished as *work* (*opus*) from the latter as an effect (*effectus*).[4]

It is evident that this distinction mirrors a fundamental difference between a *causa finalis* and a *causa efficiens*. While nature forms a connection of effects, art is to be understood as a connection of purposes. It is one of the main efforts of the *Critique* to show that reflective judgment is able to look upon nature *as* art, which means that nature "is thought of as specifying itself in accordance with such a principle"[5]. In this case *art* is a *technique*, "[t]hus the *power of judgment*

[1] Rodolphe Gasché, *The Idea of Form. Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 106.
[2] This is the title of section 43. Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, transl. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 182. [In the following quoted as *CPJ*.]
[3] E.g. Françoise Proust, "Les idées esthétiques", in: *Kants Ästhetik. Kant's Aesthetics, L'esthétique de Kant*, ed. Hermann Parret (Berlin et al.: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 513–529, here p. 519.
[4] *CPJ*, p. 182.
[5] *CPJ*, p. 19.

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is properly technical; nature is represented technically"[6], as Kant puts it in the first *Introduction*. The difference between "an *aesthetic judgment of reflection*" and a "cognitive judgment"[7] will then depend upon the distinction of this technical purposiveness, if it is to be regarded objectively (concerning objects of nature) or subjectively.

Art as a technique is determined "through freedom, i.e. through a capacity for choice"[8] and is distinguished from "*science*"[9] and from "*handicraft*"[10]. But art is not only an "act of will" (or *Willkür*, as the German reads). Kant stresses in section 43 that "something compulsory [is required], or, as it is called, a *mechanism*, without which the *spirit*, which must be *free* in art, and which alone animates the work, would have no body at all and would entirely evaporate [...]."[11] This remark points to the central relevance of the *spirit* and its special compulsory condition, which, in turn, provides the spirit with the necessary body. It is through the spirit that "mechanical" art can be distinguished from "aesthetical", the latter having "the feeling of pleasure as its immediate aim" as Kant explains.[12] This means: to talk about art makes it indispensable to first take a closer look at the spirit. The internal configuration of the spirit might give us better insight into Kant's thinking of art, since art has to combine the compulsory and the free spirit.

In what follows, I would like to look at this constellation which marks a decisive structure in Kant's approach to art, showing a working apparatus inside it that injects the aesthetic into thought as its other. In order to do this, one has to follow the thread that sets up the constellation of spirit, mind, and aesthetic ideas in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The spirit, as I will try to argue, is an enlivening principle in the mind insofar as it is the power which makes the aesthetic a determined-undetermined other of the rational. Thus, the spirit is determined, on the one hand, by a constellation of mind, aesthetic ideas, and a certain liveliness, and, on the other, by a constellation of the rational and the aesthetic that relates to the *infinite judgment*. To arrive at this point, I will try to

[6] *CPJ*, p. 22.
[7] *CPJ*, p. 23.
[8] *CPJ*, p.182.
[9] *CPJ*, p.183.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] *CPJ*, p.184.

closely follow Kant's entwined path of spirit, *Gemüt* [*mind*], and the notion of life. As will be seen, the concept of the *Gemüt* plays a decisive role.

Gemüt

Kant's famous definition of the spirit leads directly to the question of the *Gemüt*:

> *Spirit*, in its aesthetic significance, means the animating [*belebendes*, J.V.] principle in the mind [*Gemüt*, J.V.]. That, however, by which this principle animates the soul [*Seele*, J.V.], the material which it uses for this purpose, is that which purposively sets the mental powers into motion, i.e., into a play that is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end.[13]

One of the vaguest concepts in this definition, which can be easily overlooked, is that of the "mind" (*Gemüt*). It seems somehow imprecise, moving in a grey zone between transcendental philosophy and anthropology or psychology. It is not easy to grasp, whether one is dealing with a principle of the body or, in this case, of the spirit. The *Gemüt*[14] relies on this indeterminateness throughout the first and the third *Critique*, appearing in both cases as an underlying structure, yet hard to grasp.[15] It remains unclear if it belongs more to a transcendental or to an empirical register. This holds also for the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: It is not completely clear just how to describe the *Gemüt*. Kant speaks of a "disposition of the mind" or a "mental state"[16], a "mentality" and the "freedom of the mind"[17], "mental powers"[18] or "the faculties of the mind which constitute genius", as the headline of the section reads, from which the given quotation on the spirit is derived.[19]

[13] *CPJ*, p. 192. In the following, I will rather speak of an "enlivening principle", because "enlivening" renders more closely the connection to the notion of life in *belebend*. The translation as "animation" reduces this connection.
[14] I will continue here to speak of *Gemüt*, instead of mind, because of the bodily connotations this word has in German.
[15] Regarding the function of the *Gemüt* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see Robert B. Pippin, "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind", in: *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17:2 (1987), pp. 449–476.
[16] *CPJ*, p. 194f.
[17] *CPJ*, p.154.
[18] *CPJ*, p.192.
[19] *CPJ*, p.191.

The *Gemüt* concerns the inner sense "by means of which the mind intuits itself, or its inner state", it is a "form under which the intuition of its inner state is alone possible", as Kant phrased it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[20] The *Gemüt* does not give an intuition of the soul, but it makes it possible to conceptualize the totality of the inner representations. So in this way the *Gemüt* is not always already there, but it can be conceived of as a time-creating functioning of the inner sense, as Werner Hamacher has underlined. "The *Gemüt* is in itself self-affection, insofar as it, as the act of representation in intuition, never has a different effect than an affect on itself."[21] Hamacher continues that "this self" never opens anything other "than the transcendental, a priori time; it has to be the one, irreducible bringing about of time [*zeitigen*]"[22]. It is the bringing about of time because its first relation is self-affection. In the concept of the *Gemüt* itself, a difficult distinction between "nature" and "reason" is already implicated. This makes an understanding of the relation between "spirit" and "*Gemüt*" even more difficult, because now it is no longer possible to conceive of the spirit as of the other of the *Gemüt*. The spirit cannot simply be the other, which would enliven the *Gemüt* through alterity, because the *Gemüt* is always already relation. Already in his earlier text on the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (from 1766), Kant developed the notion of the spirit as completely negative. In this text Kant tried to maintain a distance from the concept of the spirit, which he saw in a realm beyond experience, together with the "pseudo sensations" of phantasms and "pseudo-reasons" of metaphysics. Of spirits, as Kant put it at that time, there is perhaps a great deal to think, but nothing to know. The reason is evident: no empirical data of spirits could be found.[23]

However, how does spirit in an aesthetical sense then come to be an enlivening principle in this kind of *Gemüt*? This, at first, leads to the question, what kind of "life" is at stake at this point.

[20] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 157.

[21] Werner Hamacher, "EX TEMPORE. Zeit als Vorstellung bei Kant", in: *Politik der Vorstellung. Theater und Theorie*, ed. Joachim Gerstmaier and Nikolaus Müller-Schöll (Berlin: Theater der Zeit Verlag, 2006), pp. 68–94, here p. 71f. My translation.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 72.

[23] In this regard, see, above all, Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg* (Paris: Vrin, 1990).

Life

In the context of his pre-critical writings, Kant conceived of life as a "principle" that is not explicable through relations of nature alone, but one that also differentiates man as a part of nature *in* nature. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant directly connects this thought to his pre-critical writings, insofar as the latter were clearly influenced by British empiricism. In an appendix to the *Analytics of the Sublime*, Kant writes:

> The transcendental exposition of aesthetic judgments [...] can be compared with the physiological exposition, as it has been elaborated by Burke and many acute men among us, in order to see whither a merely empirical exposition of the sublime and the beautiful would lead.[24]

Kant refers to Burke's understanding of the sublime as a drive, on the one hand, and his inducement of the beautiful from love, on the other hand – similar to Kant's argumentation in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), in which Kant conceives of the sublime as a split drive of nature and searches to find the overcoming of this split in the strange form of marriage, where sublime and beautiful, man and woman, come together and surpass nature. In the *Critique* Kant clearly states the universality of the judgment of taste as opposed to an empirical determination. He demarcates a rejection of a psychology of the beautiful, a passage worth quoting at length, because it offers an insight into a very complex relation between life and aesthetics.

> As psychological remarks, these analyses of the phenomena of our mind are extremely fine [*schön*, J.V.], and provide rich materials for the favourite researches of empirical anthropology. Moreover, it cannot be denied that all representations in us, whether they are objectively merely sensible or else entirely intellectual, can nevertheless subjectively be associated with gratification or pain, however unnoticeable either might be (because they all affect the feeling of life, and none of them, insofar as it is a modification of the subject, can be indifferent), or even that, as Epicurus maintained, *gratification* and *pain* are always ultimately corporeal, whether they originate from the imagination or even from representations of the understanding: because life without the feeling of the corporeal organs is merely consciousness of one's existence, but not

[24] *CPJ*, p. 158.

> a feeling of well- or ill-being, i.e. the promotion or inhibition of the powers of life; because the mind for itself is entirely life (the principle of life itself), and hindrances or promotions must be sought outside it, though in the human being himself, hence in combination with his body.[25]

On first view one could say: "extremely fine", but unhelpful for further transcendental investigation. But then it becomes clear that the argument proceeds via nearly imperceptible restrictions and withdrawals. At first, Kant admits that surely "all representations" – even if only "imperceptible" – can subjectively be associated with "gratification and pain". From this concession the phrase develops into a slightly unwilling decline. The following thought goes even further: bodily effects are *always* connected with representations. Kant does not speak of pleasure and displeasure, but of gratitude and pain. On first interpretation, the transcendental exposition of pleasure and displeasure could be understood as the meta-structure of the relation between gratitude and pain, although having in mind that this meta-structure cannot indicate a direct link from one to the other: In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* there is no direct passage from the affect to the effect of pleasure. Nevertheless, the representations localize a place where the relation between gratitude/pain and pleasure/displeasure comes into question. Up to this point, the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental is still possible. However, with the next sentence the situation changes. If one only stayed on the level of this meta-structure, one would miss a central point: life. "Life" requires the bodily sensation of the hindrance or promotion of the vital forces. But these are at the same time the connotations that Kant introduces of the sublime and the beautiful. Thus, in the larger context of the *Critique,* it can be said that life requires the beautiful and the sublime through their expression of feeling. The beautiful, as Kant had defined it previously, "directly brings with it a feeling of the promotion of life",[26] while the sublime is "being generated, namely, by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers".[27] As such, life means, on the one hand, a feeling of well-being and nausea, the promotion and hindrance of the vital powers. On the other hand, Kant defines the *Gemüt* as such that it is by itself "all life" and thereby

[25] *CPJ*, p. 158f.

[26] *CPJ*, p. 128.

[27] *CPJ*, p. 128f. See also Gasché, *Idea of Form*, who stresses that life in the organs is felt through the affectation through representations. Gasché also underlines that this life cannot be biological life, because the enlivened subject is already a living subject.

these promotions and hindrances cannot be ascribed to the *Gemüt*. Hindrances and promotions are outside of the *Gemüt* and at the same time corporeal: The human body lives only in this constellation. Life is the expression of the principle of life via the promotions and hindrances of the body.[28]

But what kind of life is this? If empirical anthropology examines bodily relations of gratitude and pain, then the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* clarifies the preconditions of the promotions and hindrances of the relations of life. This also means that with the analytic of the beautiful and the sublime, the *Critique* aims in a specific manner at the question of life. On which "territory"[29] – nature or freedom – is the claim based, such that the *Gemüt* is for itself "all life", the "life principle"? In a reflection from the late 1760s Kant defined life as a purely spiritual principle: "Complete spiritual life starts from the death of the animal."[30] The "immaterial [...] *principium* of life" was to be distinguished from the "material" like "*automaton*" from "spirit".[31] It was not possible to establish life as a general concept, for the spirit was subjected to a permanent animal limitation. With the notion of "complete life"[32] organic life in nature could not be explained, if Kant did not want to assign souls to dogs and plants as well. If he had done that, a great part of nature would have fallen out of the field of science: for he had also admitted that it had nothing to say about spirits and souls. The *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, on the one hand, opens up the way to think of organic life as a specific difference in nature, which is to be explained teleologically. So, in the frame of the third *Critique*, which relevance would then have to be given to the notion of "complete life"? The teleologically defined life of organic beings is different from life in its aesthetic perspective, because it exceeds the realm of science. It is remarkable that Kant mentions that "hindrances or promotions must be sought outside it [the *Gemüt*,

[28] Concerning this passage in Kant, see also Ross Wilson, *Subjective Universality in Kant's Aesthetics* (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 124ff.

[29] *CPJ*, p. 61.

[30] "[D]as Vollständige Geistige Leben hebt nach dem Tode des Thieres an." My translation. The German original is in: Immanuel Kant, *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß Metaphysik*, Teil I, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Band XVII, Handschriftlicher Nachlaß Metaphysik (Berlin und Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1926), p. 474, R 4240. (l (?) 1769–1770).

[31] Immanuel Kant, *Notes and Fragments*, transl. Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer, and Frederick Rauscher, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 88 [Reflection 3855, 1764–68].

[32] *Ibid.*

J.V.], though in the human being himself, hence in combination with his body"[33]. It becomes clear that Kant conceives of life as an occurrence of effects that is graspable only on the site of the body, but at the same time exceeds bodily limitations.[34] The *Gemüt* can neither be understood as an empirical nor as a purely transcendental life. The position of the *Gemüt* is rendered more and more complex, and important in Kant's architecture by the same token. Thus Kant writes in his first *Introduction* to the Third *Critique*: "We can trace all faculties of the human mind without exception back to these three: the *faculty of cognition*, the *feeling of pleasure and displeasure*, and the *faculty of desire*."[35] The *Gemüt*, lying at the foundation of these faculties, could thus be understood as an anthropological structure of man. But it should already be clear that for Kant anthropology then takes on a completely different meaning. Michel Foucault has written about the notions of *Gemüt* and spirit in this regard, in taking a closer look at their relation in Kant's *Anthropology*. Foucault's analysis gives central hints that help take the specific aesthetic constellation of *Gemüt*, spirit, and life into account.

Gemüt, spirit, life

Foucault considers (in one of his first texts) the *Gemüt* to be one of the central concepts in the *Anthropology*.[36] He differentiates the *Gemüt* in contrast to "soul" or "spirit", a difference that leads him to an initial approximate understanding of the "spirit" as a principle. Starting from the definition also used by Kant in the *Anthropology* – "The principle of the mind that animates by means of *ideas* is called *spirit*."[37] – Foucault emphasises that this principle must not be understood as determinate nor reflective, but exactly as enlivening or animating.[38] As Kant speaks

[33] *CPJ*, p. 158.

[34] Regarding this, see also: Howard Caygill, "Life and Aesthetic Pleasure", in: *The Matter of Critique, Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), pp. 79–92, here p. 81.

[35] *CPJ*, p. 11.

[36] Michel Foucault, "Introduction à l'anthropologie", in: Emmanuel Kant, *Anthropologie d'un point de vue pragmatique. Précédé de: Michel Foucault, Introduction à l'anthropologie*, ed. Daniel Denfert, François Ewald, Frédéric Gros (Paris: Vrin, 2008). This text together with the translation of Kant's *Anthropology* is the first part of Foucault's dissertation, which remains unpublished. The edition from 2008 is the first complete edition.

[37] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic point of View*, transl. and ed. Robert B. Louden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 143.

[38] See, Foucault, "Introduction", p. 37.

of an "animating principle", neither a regulative nor a constitutive principle can be meant. Further on, one has to avoid the assumption that the *Gemüt* would exist in a dependence on the spirit's totality. If this were the case, Foucault states, then the complete *Anthropology* would have to be in search of a figure of the spirit (as a regulative principle), which is obviously not the case. It is rather the idea, freed of the constraints of transcendental use, which opens itself up to new possibilities within empirically given things, by means of the schema. Its own realm is given through experience and it gives the movement of the infinite, in other words a movement of infinite convergence. Consequently, it is a specific aspect of the ideas marking the spirit that appears in the schema and enables them to get in touch with the empirical. Empirical reason is enlivened by the infinite.

> Like this, empirical reason never drifts off into the given; in linking it to the infinite that it rejects, the idea makes it live in the element of the possible. Such is the function of the *Geist*: not to organize the *Gemüt* in such a way as to make a living being out of it or the analogon of organic life, or even the life of the Absolute itself; but to enliven it, give birth, in the passivity of the *Gemüt*, which is the passivity of empirical determination, to the swarming movement of the ideas– those multiple structures of a becoming totality which make and unmake themselves like many other partial lives who live and die in the spirit. Like this the *Gemüt* is not simply "what it is", but "what it makes out of itself".[39]

The *Gemüt* has to be understood as the passive site of empirical determination and at the same time as the site where the enlivening through ideas takes place. It is not the ideas of the spirit, but the spirit is the principle, according to which the *Gemüt* can enter the movement between the empirical and the idea. Once again Foucault:

> The spirit would then be the principle in the *Gemüt* of a de-dialectized dialectics, not transcendental, dedicated to the domain of experience and forming a body with the game of phenomena. It is the spirit that opens up the freedom of the possible for the *Gemüt*, pulls it out of its determinations, and gives a future to it, which it does not have due to itself.[40]

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[39] *Ibid*., p. 39. My translation.
[40] *Ibid*. My translation.

Foucault concludes that the spirit is that moment which testifies transcendentally to the absence of the infinite, but which empirically supports the force of the infinite for the movement towards truth. Absent and present at the same time, the spirit denotes not only the place of the truth, but also links the necessity of a *Critique*, in transcendental terms, with a sovereign structure and with the possibility of an *Anthropology* as a determination of the possible in the empirical.[41] Foucault leads this analysis on the background of a possible determination of the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* within the framework of a transcendental architecture, and for this reason he only briefly touches upon the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. The determination of the relation of spirit, *Gemüt*, and the enlivening principle hide an obvious parallel to the relations in the *Critique of the Power Judgment*[42], although with a meaningful difference. Foucault relates the definition of the spirit to the ideas of reason, freed of their transcendental use. Yet in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant introduces a new type of idea: aesthetic ideas. Aesthetic ideas form the central means by which the spirit as an enlivening principle is able to work on the *Gemüt* in an aesthetical regard.

Aesthetic ideas

In the passage which the quoted definition of the spirit is from, the spirit is kept in a conspicuous, Pauline contrast to the letter; a contrast which is at first alluded to through the opposition of spirit and mechanism. Spirit, Kant says, needs a mechanism for its survival, because otherwise it would "evaporate". As an example Kant mentions "the art of poetry", which needs "correctness and richness of diction as well as prosody and meter".[43] Even if the spirit has an enlivening effect, it cannot survive on its own. Every time one tries to catch the spirit in a manifest form, one loses it again. Kant then scrutinizes the notion of the "principle" that is said to enliven the *Gemüt*:

> Now I maintain that this principle is nothing other than the faculty for the presentation of *aesthetic ideas*; by an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no lan-

[41] *Ibid*., p. 40f.
[42] Foucault seems to think that this is not the case, as he refers only to the definition of the *Gemüt* in the first introduction, quoted above. See Foucault, "Introduction", p. 38.
[43] *CPJ*, p. 183.

> guage fully attains or can make intelligible. – One readily sees that it is the counterpart (pendant) of an *idea of reason*, which is, conversely, a concept, to which no *intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate.[44]

Here the distinction between letter and spirit is already alluded to: the aesthetic idea cannot be reached by any language. "Language" is not to be understood metaphorically, but means that there is no possible human expression to reach the spirit. The spirit enlivens by means of ideas and subtracts itself from the body, to which it is connected, at the same time. The aesthetic idea as the "medium" of the spirit finds a pendant in the idea of reason. They relate like left hand and right hand, not in a contradictory opposition, but as equal others. Both are to be established and described only in interrelation and mutual dependence.[45] The aesthetic idea introduces the connection of letter and spirit:

> In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.[46]

The aesthetic idea is without a concept, but in the moment in which it is associated ("*beigesellt*") to language, the idea connects "pure letter" with spirit. With the reference to association ("*Beigesellung*", which relates to the two meanings of "*Gesellschaft*": society and sociability), the distance or proximity to cognition comes into play. It becomes clear that at the heart of the concept of the spirit lies a difficult relation between the aesthetic and the rational that has to be clarified. The aesthetic idea as the means by which the spirit enlivens not only explains how the spirit proceeds, but also tells us about what the spirit is, because the

[44] *CPJ*, p. 192.

[45] Even if Kant remarks that aesthetic ideas "seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas)" (*CPJ*, p.192), this should not be understood to mean that aesthetic ideas are simply called ideas because they are incomplete ideas of reason, as Karin A. Fray alludes to: "Kant and the Problem of Genius", in: *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung, Akten des IX. internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, Vol. 3, ed. Volker Gerhardt, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and Ralph Schumacher (Berlin et al.: de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 546–552, here p. 548.

[46] *CPJ*, p. 194.

spirit in aesthetical terms *is* nothing other than this taking place of the aesthetical in the rational, as we will now see.

So, if the aesthetic idea is associated with a concept, how then is the relation between the aesthetic idea and concept to be thought of? The aesthetic seems to stand in a specific proximity to the concept. Nevertheless, the aesthetic idea provides something different than cognition: The "material" delivered via the aesthetic idea to reason, in extension beyond the concept, is not important "objectively, for cognition", but "subjectively, for the animation [*Belebung*, J.V.] of the cognitive powers" and thereby "indirectly to cognitions".[47] Also, the "pendant", the idea of reason, serves, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, not cognition, but the final understanding of the indeterminate by the means of a concept, to which no intuition can correspond; the idea of reason loses its intuition to the benefit of a concept. What is the aesthetic idea missing?

Some pages later, Kant comes back to the relation between the idea of reason and the aesthetic idea. Ideas in their general sense relate subjectively or objectively to an object, but without enabling cognition of it. Aesthetic ideas are "related to an intuition in accordance with a merely subjective principle of the correspondence of the faculties of cognition (of imagination and of understanding)"[48], ideas of reason are related to a transcendental concept. While a rational idea aims at a concept without intuition, the aesthetic idea misses the concept, but not in the same measure as the rational idea misses the intuition, for the aesthetic idea supplements the use of the concepts with "much that is undefinable in words" [*viel Unnennbares*, J.V.]. It does not conjure un-conceptional relations beyond the concepts, but agitates in these constellations, it opens up, in other words, the sphere of the conceptual, not by realizing this opening through a concept aiming at totality, but by producing an open collection of representations of the imagination. The aesthetic idea is actually not a counter-part or "pendant" to the rational idea, but its guest, its gift or, stated differently, its opening.

When Kant talks of "ideas" under the heading "On Taste in Art"[49] in the *Anthropology*, then it seems to be aesthetic ideas that are meant, as introduced in the

[47] *CPJ*, p. 194.
[48] *CPJ*, p. 217.
[49] Kant, *Anthropology,* p. 143.

third *Critique*. But the quoted passage in the *Anthropology* continues to specify the spirit as "the productive faculty of reason which provides a *model* for that a priori form of the power of imagination"[50]. The spirit "creates" ideas, in order to give them as a sample to the imagination. This seems ambivalent, as the spirit is determined as the *faculty of reason*, and in the following the accent shifts to the aspect of representation. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* the spirit then is defined explicitly as the faculty of the representation of aesthetic ideas and therewith the spirit in aesthetical terms as a faculty of the productive imagination, which does not produce ideas of reason, but aesthetic ideas.[51] One side of the imagination, which is a "blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all"[52], as Kant puts it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, comes to the foreground here: its blind, productive faculty, its forming power obtains an undefined independence in representation.

> The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience seems too mundane to us; we transform the latter, no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws, but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason (and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which the understanding apprehends empirical nature); in this we feel our freedom from the law of associations (which applies to the empirical use of that faculty), in accordance with which material can certainly be lent to us by nature, but the latter can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature.[53]

Nature is surpassed by following "principles". These principles are rooted in the higher reason, but they enable the imagination to work up nature into something else. In this way productive imagination creates aesthetic ideas, as Kant continues:

> One can call such representations of the imagination ideas: on the one hand because they at least strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus

[50] Kant, *Anthropology*, p. 143f.
[51] See also: Gasché, *Idea of Form*, p. 110f.
[52] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 211.
[53] *CPJ*, p. 192.

> seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas), which gives them the appearance of an objective reality; on the other hand, and indeed principally, because no concept can be fully adequate to them, as inner intuitions.[54]

Gasché, who underlines the aesthetic idea differently than Foucault, proposes to understand Kant's renaming of the productive imagination as spirit in such a way that imagination, in its productive efficiency, has become analogous to reason.[55] "Aesthetic ideas, consequently, are indefinite, undetermined ideas; they are, on the level of the sensible, *analoga* of reason, that is, of the faculty of ideas"[56]. And really, following Gasché's allusion, in the aesthetic ideas Baumgarten's *analogon rationis* seem to reappear in a different manner. One could understand this as a reconsideration of Baumgarten's basic intention, to parallelize the sensible and the rational. On the other hand, it is no longer the metaphysical order of ontology that demands a totality, in which the logic of the sensible collides as an independent logic. Baumgarten's logic of the sensible now becomes possible as an indeterminate analogy, because now something undetermined is set in relation to ideas. Aesthetic ideas intensify concepts by means of intuitions, while ideas of reason deliver concepts without intuitions. But aesthetic ideas are not in the same measure independent, but rather an *other* in the world of concepts, they are given reality as representations.

The readings of Gasché and Foucault can be crossed in such a way that the spirit enlivens the *Gemüt* twice: through aesthetic ideas as well as through rational ideas. The aesthetic idea is the product of the spirit in the imagination, which shows itself as a representation. In opposition to the rational idea, the aesthetic idea develops productive representations, while the "rational" spirit enlivens the *Gemüt* with regard to the opening up of the empirical material at the border of the infinite. This would mean that spirit in aesthetical terms would combine with the representation of the possible in the concept with the necessity of *Critique*, while the spirit in rational terms, as Foucault puts it, combines the necessity of *Critique* with the possibility of an anthropology. The spirit, which Foucault claimed to be the principle of a de-dialectized dialectics, would have to be understood twice: It opens up the *Gemüt* to the possible as well as to the representation. In this sense, the

[54] *CPJ*, p. 192.
[55] See Gasché, *Idea of Form*, p. 111.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

spirit is the double absent presence of what Kant had dismissed in his earlier writings as beyond experience, and had barred from thought together with *delirium* and *mania*. The spirit marks the absent presence of the infinite and the present absence of the representations of the productive imagination, with the spirit not only the path to an anthropology, but also to what aesthetics opens up.

From this perspective, another view is possible regarding the triad of spirit, *Gemüt*, and the enlivening. It was shown that all three are to be understood in a double way and that they oscillate between the realms of anthropology, aesthetics, understanding, and reason. But how does the spirit enliven the *Gemüt*? By ideas, on the one hand, but on the other hand it is at the same time the "material" by which the spirit enlivens the *Gemüt*. A play, – to again quote – i.e. of "that which purposively sets the mental powers into motion, i.e. into a play which is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end"[57]. The ideas are inseparably connected with the play, which maintains itself and is the play of the *Gemüt*, as could be seen with Foucault. In the aesthetic sign the spirit opens up an enlivening play with regard to representation, which cannot be understood as "*formant corps*" with the phenomena, but which becomes in a way a body itself, combining the force of the idea and the force of the representation.

The consideration mentioned above, that the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* aims at life with the examination of the beautiful and sublime, can now be specified more clearly. "Enlivening" is the result of the connection of spirit and *Gemüt*, and therewith, by way of many complications, also, as cannot be shown here, the result of the combination of the beautiful form with the aesthetic idea. In this regard, too, the transcendental explication of the beautiful and the sublime would be more directly aiming at the enlivening of the *Gemüt* by the spirit, rather than being orientated towards the question of organic life.[58] Organic life is the starting point to which life as spirit can associate itself.

[57] *CPJ*, p. 192.

[58] The idea of the spirit as an animating principle is not new in late Kant. It can be found in many of the early fragments and notes, even in pre-critical times. An extensive list of passages related to the animation of the spirit can be found in: Giorgio Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770–1779) Part I" in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 4:2 (1966), pp. 109–131 (see p. 115 for animation). Regarding early theories of organism and spirit, see also Giorgio Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770–1779) Part II", in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4:3 (1966), pp. 209–224. Tonelli points out that Kant replaces the relation of identity between

One can go one step further to see not only how aesthetic ideas relate to the spirit, but also to a conception of art works. The distinction between an idea of reason and an aesthetic idea is reconsidered by Kant on the side of the object, especially in the comparison of "aesthetic attributes" and "logical attributes". "Jupiter's eagle, with lightning in its claws", does not represent what "lies in our concepts of the sublimity and majesty of creation", but it is a representation, that gives "the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations."[59] The distinction of the attributes allows Kant to transfer the determination of the aesthetic idea onto aesthetic works. They make it possible to analyze the aesthetic attributes in relation to the logical ones in a given work of art. Kant gives only two examples for "the sake of brevity"[60], both from poems, more or less doomed to fall into oblivion. In the first example, the aesthetical attribute enlivens the "idea of reason of a cosmopolitan disposition"[61], in the second an intellectual concept enlivens a sensible intuition, but only insofar as the intellectual concept itself, in its aesthetic regard, is used this way. The examples show the enlivening in the concept or in the relation of one concept to another. What is relevant here is less the quality of the examples (lines of poems from Frederick the Great), than the sketched possibility to begin an analysis of works of art. At this point one can take a look at the formal structure in which the aesthetic and the rational relate, which then can be called the formal structure of the spirit from an aesthetical perspective.

Infinite judgments

Each time the aesthetic enlivening is a relational enlivening. The aesthetic attributes go "alongside the logical ones" and the arts take "the spirit which animates [*belebt*, J.V.] their works solely from the aesthetic attributes of the objects".[62] They mark "a manifold of partial representations" in "the free use of the imagination", as a representation, "associated with a given concept".[63] The aesthetic attribute as such does not stand in direct opposition to the logical; the aesthetic idea does not oppose the rational, but it is associated. The aesthetic

organism and beauty later by a relation of analogy, wherein the "originality and even the meaning of Kant's mature solution" lies. (p. 216).

[59] *CPJ*, p. 193.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *CPJ*, p. 194.

idea "allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable".[64] It is not unsayable but unnameable; it is not: not conceptional, but non-conceptional. In representation this becomes an aesthetic expression, an expression of non-conceptionality. At the same time the aesthetic attribute seems, like the aesthetic idea, strangely irreducible in relation to the logical-conceptional structure. Strangely because the relation of irreducibility is in itself not firmly grounded. What can be said about the aesthetic idea and about the aesthetic attribute can only be said via negative differentiations. As such, the aesthetic structure cannot be put down to the conceptional-logical. In other words, it is "bound up" with it, standing in an un-relation with it. There is no third in itself, in front of which the aesthetic structure could be established in relation to the order of the logical. Rather, the aesthetic is distilled as a distinction out of the logical, without there being the possibility to say what would be the guarantor, which would guarantee the possibility of this distinction. As such, the aesthetic and the logical come together in a relation which is not one. That the aesthetic idea and the aesthetic attribute allow "much thought" does not yet mean that this relation would have to be understood as a special relation of cognition. One would have to think of the aesthetic always already as an extension, a deepening, a making particular in a concrete case. The other way round, from the starting point of thought, there can be grasped a realm of the un-conceptional via the infinite judgment. This is decisive for the relation between the aesthetic and the logical and one has take a brief look at the function of the infinite judgment in Kant to clarify and underline this point, because the sphere that is opened up in the rational through the aesthetic can be understood as the sphere of the infinite judgment.

In his *Logics*, Kant distinguishes, for example, between affirmative, negating, and infinite judgments. An affirmative judgment subsumes a subject under the "sphere" of a predicate, a negating judgment places the subject outside of that "sphere".[65] Phrases such as "the dog is green" are affirmative, phrases such as "the dog is not green" are negative. Of relevance here is that the negation of the assignment of the colour does not say anything about the existence of the dog.

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, transl. and ed. J. Michael Young (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 80.

An infinite judgment exhibits exactly the transition from pure logics to transcendental logics: It has a strange form which allows it to be, in pure logical terms, an affirmative judgment, but a negation in transcendental terms. It is a double or a split judgment. If one says "a is non-b", as the general form of this judgment runs, the assignment is positive in logical terms, it is not a negative judgment. This is why Kant can say that this distinction does not belong to the science of logics, because logically it is affirmative.[66] However, it will not be excluded by Kant, rather he understands it as a completion of transcendental logic. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant develops the infinite judgment as a necessary distinction from the affirmative judgment, because it also asks about the "value or content of the logical affirmation".[67] More exactly, he defines it as limitative. In the first *Critique* Kant used a remarkable example to exemplify the forms of judgment: the soul.[68] The phrase "anima est non-mortalis" defines a specific relation:

> Now, since that which is mortal contains one part of the whole domain of possible beings, but that which is undying the other, nothing is said by my proposition but that the soul is one of the infinite multitude of things that remain if I take away everything that is mortal. But the infinite sphere of the possible is thereby limited only to the extent that that which is mortal is separated from it, and the soul is placed in the remaining space of its domain.[69]

The infinite judgment makes a determination in the indeterminate: it determines a subject (through assigning a predicate) and leaves it at the same time indeterminate in its extension.[70] Thus the soul is neither alive nor dead, it is *undead*.[71] The infinite judgment forms limitative concepts by marking infinity as a border. But also it touches upon existence. A negative judgment tells nothing about the existence of the subject, an infinite does: That the soul is undead means that it

[66] Kant, *Logic*, p. 80.
[67] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 207.
[68] Kant follows Meier with this example. See Kristina Engelhard, *Das Einfache und die Materie, Untersuchungen zu Kants Antinomie der Teilungen* (Berlin et al.: de Gruyter, 2005), p. 325ff.
[69] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 207f.
[70] See also: Kristina Engelhard, *Das Einfache und die Materie, Untersuchungen zu Kants Antinomie der Teilungen*, p. 325ff.
[71] Slavoj Žižek pointed this out several times, see, e.g., Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p. 21f.

is something insofar as it is not something different. Through the assignment of a non-predicate, the negation is moved from the copula to the predicate and the subject is determined through this limitative, finite-infinite sphere.[72] In a broader sense, Kant's discussion of the infinite judgment has to be related to his discussion of the principle of contradiction, which marks a very important path from his pre-critical to his critical writings. In a specific sense, the infinite judgment opens up the sphere of the excluded middle.[73] One can even observe the infinite judgment playing a decisive role in the definition of the antinomies.[74] Central to the argument in this case, concerning aesthetic ideas, is that the infinite judgment marks a determined-undetermined sphere.[75]

The un-conceptional, formed after the model of the infinite judgment, is the central relation between the aesthetic and the rational. The aesthetic is not *not* conceptional, but it *is* non-conceptional. It does not lie at the roots of the conceptional, it is not its substrate, but an opening that surpasses the "nature" of the conceptionalized itself. It is so only insofar as the roots of the undetermined "nature" can be ascertained: It cannot be cognized, but rather only be worked out; thought of as a negative interruption of knowledge, of conceptional order, of the ideas of reason. The powerful imagination somehow produces in the nature of the concept a different nature: It enriches the concept from the inside with the particular and rewrites it in a way that it gets another face, another nature. The aesthetic idea is the prosopopoeia of the concept, always creating another face for it. An inner becoming-other, which is, as the enlivening, at the same time, only possible in the inert, the dead. "Models of taste with regard to the arts of discourse must be composed in a dead and learned language."[76] If concepts are the framework of thought, then these becoming-other bring life into the concept. This again

[72] See Slavoj Žižek, "Kant as a Theoretician of Vampirism", in: *Lacanian Ink*, 8 (1994), pp. 19–33, here p. 28.
[73] E.g. Peter McLaughlin, *Kants Kritik der teleologischen Urteilskraft* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1989), p. 67f.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[75] From the point of view of the history of logics, the "infinite judgment" stems from a grey area between the translation of the Aristotelian *aóristos*, which becomes the *propositio infinita* afterwards and then the "infinite judgment", which could have also been called the "undetermined judgment". See Albert Menne, "Die Kantische Urteilstafel im Lichte der Logikgeschichte und der modernen Logik", in: *Journal for General Philosophy of Science*, 20:2 (1989), pp. 317–324, here p. 318f.
[76] *CPJ*, p. 116.

relates the aesthetic life to the organic life: "The life of creatures", Kant notes, "is a series of becoming-other out of an inner *principle*."[77]

If one understands this process as analogous to the discovery of the particular, then it becomes clear that in the play of the indeterminate aesthetic determination – which is the play of the spirit – thought does not come to help cognition and try to specify the concept in the undetermined (as in the question of organic life), but the aesthetic idea produces intuitions and brings the openings of the conceptionalized into a representation. This procedure may serve cognition, because it brings about "much thought", but only if one is prepared for cognition to change from one nature to another.[78] Cognition runs after the lively concept. Jupiter's eagle still represents something different. This determined-indeterminate other is what the spirit enables as an opening in the rational, by means of aesthetic ideas, and what Kant calls animating the *Gemüt*. Spirit, in its aesthetic significance, thus allows man to surpass nature toward aesthetical life.

[77] "Das Leben der Geschopfe ist die Reihe der Veranderungen aus innerem *principio*", in: Kant, *Nachlass Metaphysik*, p. 728, [R.4786]. My translation.

[78] Gilles Deleuze saw in the free play of the faculties a figure that lies beneath all other forms of judgment and by which the third *Critique* grounds all other *Critiques*. But already here the question arises if the third Critique is not rather an abyss than a ground, an *Abgrund* more than a *Grund*. See Gilles Deleuze, "The Idea of Genesis in Kant's Aesthetics", in: *Angelaki. Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 5: 3 (2000) , pp. 57–70, here p. 60.

Lacanian Biology

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The World of Desire: Lacan between Evolutionary Biology and Psychoanalytic Theory

I.

The primary aim of this paper is to analyse the biological foundations of Lacan's notion of desire as expounded in his first two Seminars (1953–1955). These works provide us with his most detailed discussion of the species-specific preconditions that allow *homo sapiens* to speak and establish symbolic pacts among individuals. Despite its irreducibility to the domain of animal instincts, human desire can only be adequately understood against the background of an evolutionary enquiry on the emergence of language, one that problematises both the implicit teleological assumptions of a certain Darwinianism and the logical consistency of an investigation of origins. Drawing on organic and anatomical evidence endorsed by natural scientists as different as Stephen Jay Gould and Adolf Portmann, Lacan postulates a primordial biological discord between man and his environment, centred on premature birth and a subsequent disorder of the imagination, from which language and the Symbolic arise immanently.[1] Desire is seen in this context as coextensive with what, especially in Seminar I, Lacan repeatedly refers to as "the world of the symbol", or "the symbolic world" – a crucial phrase, rich with philosophical implications, to which critics have not yet paid sufficient attention.[2] The most important point to be grasped here is that the symbolic order is a world in the sense that, in always presenting itself to man as a totality, a uni-verse, it compensates for the failure of a strictly "natural" relationship between man as animal and his environment. Yet, in performing this

[1] On the organic and anatomic evidence that supports the hypothesis of man's premature birth, see for example S. J. Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 369–371; A. Portmann, *Le forme viventi. Nuove prospettive della biologia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1969), pp. 154–156, pp. 297–301.

[2] See *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954* (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 80, p. 87, p. 174, pp. 224–225, p. 268. See also *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 100, p. 170, p. 284.

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function, the Symbolic also amounts to nothing else than "human nature" *tout-court*.[3] In other words, the Symbolic is an exceptional and to a certain extent autonomous *pseudo-environment* that must nevertheless be interpreted by means of biological concepts.[4] For this reason, the very opposition between nature and culture is as such put into question and reproposed at a different level.[5]

Lacan's seminars and articles of the early to mid 1950s are usually read from the standpoint of the notions of "empty" and "full" speech in their relation to the Kojèvian dialectic of the recognition of desire. While not underestimating the importance of this first formulation of desire as desire of the other, I intend to dwell especially on its biological presuppositions, since Lacan will maintain them – to the point of often taking them for granted – even after abandoning the notions of "empty" and "full" speech. This will also enable me to show that the supposedly Hegelian Lacan of this period is already preoccupied with a materialist explanation of language and of human desire as desire for recognition which are framed within the context of a virulent anti-teleological, anti-humanist, and anti-vitalist polemics.

It is, however, paramount to specify pre-emptively that my new approach to Seminars I and II does not intend to deny the impasses of Lacan's early notion of desire as desire for recognition, which I have thoroughly discussed in my *Subjectivity and Otherness*.[6] In brief, the problem with Lacan's appropriation of Kojève is that, at this stage, the mutual recognition of one's desire is identified with the subject's fully successful integration in the symbolic order. What is not sufficiently stressed in this way – yet not entirely overlooked – is the incompleteness of the latter, the fact that man's pseudo-environment presents itself as a totality only insofar as it is structurally not-all. The elaboration of a meticulous theoret-

[3] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 29.

[4] I owe the term "pseudo-environment" to the work of the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno. See especially *Scienze sociali e "natura umana"* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003) and Chapter 6 of *Quando il verbo si fa carne. Linguaggio e natura umana* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003). For an introduction to this theme in English, see P. Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams. The 'New Global' Movement and the Biological Invariant", in L. Chiesa and A. Toscano (eds.), *The Italian Difference. Contemporary Italian Thought*, special issue of *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol 5, No 1 (2009).

[5] See *The Seminar. Book II*, pp. 34–35.

[6] See L. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007) especially pp. 24–26, pp. 39–41.

ical distinction between need, demand, and desire carried out in Seminars IV and V, as well as a direct confrontation with the Real as the not-all of the Symbolic in Seminar VII, will later oblige Lacan to reconsider this harmonic view. By the early 1960s, full integration in the Symbolic will explicitly be regarded as impossible and the dialectic of desire consequently focused on the level of the subject's mapping of himself as failing onto the object of the repressed fantasy.

II.

According to Lacan, man is born prematurely, that is, with "foetalised traits",[7] which are especially observable in the retardation of the child's sensorimotor maturation. As he specifies in Seminar I, "this prematurity of birth hasn't been invented by psychoanalysis. Histologically, the apparatus which in the organism plays the role of nervous system [...] is not complete at birth".[8] Lacan never explicitly speaks of neoteny, an evolutionary notion Gould defines as the "retention of formerly juvenile characters by adult descendants produced by retardation of somatic development".[9] Yet, it is clear that, for Lacan, prematurity of birth gives rise to a permanent biological instability in our species that determines a continuous process of readjustment of *homo sapiens* to his environment. Human nature is indelibly marked by prematurity of birth. Its first noticeable consequence is the fact that the human baby is much more dependent on his mother – and the other adults around him – than the baby of any other primate.

Lacan supplements these biological considerations with an a priori anthropophilosophical thesis, which is usually either not thematised as such or contested by evolutionary theorists: prematurity of birth amounts to an "essential lack of adaptation", a "primitive impotence".[10] This disadaptation primarily manifests

[7] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 210.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 149.

[9] *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, p. 483.

[10] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 169; *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 140. Evolutionary biologists tend to regard prematurity of birth as an *adaptive* response to difficulty in parturition due to the dimension of man's encephalus. According to Gould, "at birth, our brains are still growing at fetal rates [...] if this increase continued in utero, heads would soon become too big for successful parturition" (*Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, p. 370). One may, however, argue that disadaptation could be attributed to the excessive growth of our encephalus [...]. More generally, the relation between adaptation and non-adaptation in human neoteny is further complicated by both Lacan and Gould. For the former, man's disadaptation is eventually a successful disadaptation

itself in man's imaginary relation to his *Gestalt*. Lacan accepts the idea that vital (i.e. first and foremost sexual) relations between animals of the same species, and hence indirectly between a species and its environment, are regulated by means of *Gestalten*. Like other animals, man is instinctively predisposed to recognise the image of the body of another member of his species as a whole form, and is consequently attracted by it. However, unlike other animals, man carries out an alienating identification with the *Gestalt* insofar as the completeness of the body image provides him with an ideal unity that compensates for his organic deficiencies. The imaginary order – which should thus not be understood as the realm of "illusions", but as that of the natural "formative identifications" that make sexual reproduction possible; of Konrad Lorenz's so-called "releasing mechanisms" –[11] is nothing less than "perturbed" in man, Lacan says.[12]

More specifically, this means that man's primitive ego as an imaginary mental object is "constituted by a splitting, by a differentiation" – or, as Lacan has it elsewhere, an irreducible alienation – "from the external world".[13] Not only does the imaginary function of the primitive ego allow man to counterbalance ideally his organic deficiencies – in this sense "it has a salutary value" –[14] but, at the same time, it also inaugurates a new level of prematurity that redoubles the prematurity of birth. "The sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery. This formation is separated from the specific process of maturation and is not confused with it".[15] Lacan therefore promptly acknowledges that the salutary value of the ego "does not possess any the less of a connection with the vital prematuration, and hence with an original deficit, with a gap to which it remains linked in its structure".[16]

as concretely shown by the fact that *homo sapiens* rules over other species. For the latter, human neoteny is basically adaptive but can give rise to nonadaptive consequences; see, for instance, "How the Zebra Gets its Stripes", in P. Mc Garr and S. Rose (eds.), *The Richness of Life. The Essential Stephen Jay Gould* (New York: Norton, 2007), pp. 327–328. Having said this, for Gould neoteny is far from being an exclusively human evolutionary phenomenon (see especially Chapters 9 and 10 of *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*).

[11] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 116, p. 121.

[12] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 37.

[13] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 79.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 282.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 79.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 282.

It is crucial to emphasise that what is ultimately at stake in the gap between ideal and real mastery is not so much man's unavoidable delay in achieving motor maturity – in brief, a child's identification with the human *Gestalt* does not immediately enable him to walk – as his libidinal prematurity. Lacan boldly claims that "man's libido attains its finished state before encountering its object",[17] by which he means that, following Freud's idea of narcissism and opposing Jung's monistic concept of "psychic interest", we must always logically distinguish between egoistical and sexual libido.[18] This should enable us to recognise that, even before establishing any relation to a sexual partner, man both eroticises and aggressively vies with the image of the human body as a whole form. The latter constitutes the ideal unity with which he achieves an alienating identification, but which, for this very reason, he never really possesses. As I have exhaustively argued in my *Subjectivity and Otherness*, without the mediation of the symbolic order, such an ambivalent libidinal relation between man and his ideal image would in the end lead to the self-destruction of the species *homo sapiens*.[19]

Lacan seems to suggest that while a primary form of narcissism characterises the libidinal lives of *homo sapiens* and other animals alike insofar as they all depend on imaginary *Gestalten*, secondary narcissism, the alienating identification with the ideal image, is a prerogative of man alone. This image is then projected by man onto his environment in the guise of the so-called ideal ego; as such, it is literally what enables him to see and establish a "libidinal relation to the world in general".[20] However, this is possible only on condition that the ideal image is itself understood as an "imaginary source of symbolism" that inherently contains the potential to keep at bay the aggressive-narcissistic tendencies of the ego.[21] The relation between this "noetic possibility" of man's ideal image and his sexual function is what mainly distinguishes human biology from that of other animals. In animal sexuality, there is a perfect imaginary fit, an identity, of the *Innenwelt* with the *Umwelt*. Lacan considers animal sexuality as a "closed

[17] *Ibid*., p. 149.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 114.
[19] See *Subjectivity and Otherness*, especially pp. 82–84. On how some animal traits "only appear to be self-destructive [but] are actually self-promoting" and the impossibility of reducing human self-destructiveness to this scheme, see J. Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 192–204.
[20] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 125.
[21] *Ibid*.

world of two" in which there is a "conjunction of the object libido and the narcissistic libido":[22] thanks to primary narcissism, the "animal makes a real object coincide with the image within him".[23] On the other hand, man's "disordered imagination" causes a "game of hide and seek" between the image, that is, the human *Gestalt*, and the sexual object.[24] The species *homo sapiens* can ultimately fulfil its sexual function only by means of a symbolic "adequation", which in modern Western society is provided by the Oedipus complex.[25]

Most importantly, Lacan specifies that man's sexual function is never fulfilled completely: genital love should, in this sense, be regarded as a tentative "series of cultural approximations".[26] The introjection of the ego-ideal that resolves the Oedipus complex – a process which I cannot analyse in detail here and which, at the time of Seminars I and II, Lacan had only begun to sketch – represents a partial symbolic re-adaptation of man's dis-adapted libido, a palliative for a disordered imagination. Such a symbolic re-adaptation may, in the first instance, appear to be somewhat paradoxical, as it re-naturalises, if only partly, the dis-adapted nature of *homo sapiens*. In man, the relation between the imaginary body and the real libido – and hence the propagation of the species – is made possible by the "position of the subject [...] characterised by its place in the symbolic world, i.e. the world of speech".[27]

Here, we should stress that symbolic adequation corresponds to nothing else than secondary narcissism. Commentators usually miss this point. Against superficial approaches to Lacan's distinction between the orders of the Imaginary and of the Symbolic, in this context, it is important to insist on their interaction and mutual dependency. We should even go as far as proposing that the ideal ego as the projection of man's alienating identification with the human *Gestalt* and the ego-ideal as the introjection of a "new form" are the two inextricable sides of the very same process of natural re-adjustment.[28] The ego-ideal symbolically shapes the narcissistic libido of the ideal ego insofar as it is an image that

[22] *Ibid*., p. 137.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 138.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 80.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 133. We must of course logically presuppose a virtual stage at which the child projects

"takes up its place within the totality of demands of law" and thus "governs the interplay of relations [...] with others".[29] This eventually allows a conjunction of the object libido and the narcissistic libido in man, one that nevertheless does not fully overcome the basic disadaptation of his Imaginary. As a matter of fact, we continue to eroticise and vie narcissistically with the human *Gestalt* even if we manage to associate it with the other – the fellow man or woman – as the object of our libido.

The fact that man's libidinal life is normalised only through a symbolic detour should also clear up Lacan's apparently contradictory remarks on the vital function of the ego. In Seminar II, the ego as an "alienated [...] unity" is confusingly said to have a "*vital, or anti-vital*, relation with the subject" [*un rapport vital, ou contre-vital, avec le sujet*].[30] Similarly, according to Seminar I, the ego is not "the high point of the hierarchy of the nervous functions" while, at the same time, there is an obvious "relation between the strictly sensorimotor maturation and the function of imaginary mastery".[31] Even more radically, Lacan manages to juxtapose a definition of the ego for which it is "the mental illness of man" to one for which it is "an essential structure of the human constitution".[32] What do these conflicting statements mean? I think Lacan implicitly answers this question when, in Seminar II, he claims without reservations that "the ego, the imaginary function, intervenes in psychic life only as *symbol*".[33] This is an incredible admission that, again, blatantly refutes any doxastic endeavour to draw clear-cut divisions between the orders of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real – as a consequence of which the ego would be confined to the Imaginary. To put it simply, Lacan is here suggesting that the ego is unthinkable without the ego-ideal – which, as we have seen, is itself inextricable from the ideal ego – and, most importantly, that the ego has a vital function for *homo sapiens* only inasmuch as it is linked to the Symbolic. On the other hand, strictly speaking, only the primitive ego, the Freudian *Ur-Ich*, as the

the ideal ego before introjecting the ego-ideal. This initial unidirectional movement can be better understood in terms of the primitive ego, the *Ur-Ich*, and not as the ideal ego.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 134, p. 141.

[30] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 50, my emphasis.

[31] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 193, p. 105.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 16, p. 52. Lacan criticises ego psychologists insofar as they aim at bringing about the patient's "re-adaptation" to the Real (*ibid*., p. 18). What they fail to acknowledge in this way is the fact that the alienated ego is nothing less than the structural mental illness of *homo sapiens* as a disadapted species.

[33] *The Seminar. Book II*, pp. 38–39, my emphasis.

virtual locus of an Imaginary as yet unmediated by the Symbolic, is anti-vital (i.e. narcissistically self-destructive).[34]

To summarise, beneath his – predominantly polemical – critique of ego-psychology's foreclosure of the dimension of the Symbolic in psychoanalysis, throughout his first two Seminars, Lacan invites us to think the ego's biological aspect together with the fact that, as imaginary function, it is always-already a symbol. Conversely, it should come to no surprise that in the very first lesson of Seminar I, pre-emptively collapsing the triadic system he will strive to articulate for the rest of his life, Lacan regards the ego-ideal as "an organism of defence".[35] On the basis of what we have just explained, this provocative definition should be interpreted without hesitation as compatible with the pedagogical one Lacan offers later in the same Seminar, for which the ego-ideal is the subject's "symbolic relation" to the imaginary "other as speaking".[36]

Let me add that my new approach to the notions of ego, ideal ego, and ego-ideal as an attempt to think the imaginary insertion of the Symbolic into man's primitive biological gap[37] also appreciates Lacan's stressing of the fact that the ego should be conceived in terms of contingency. For him, this is valid in two distinct, albeit related, ways. Not only is the ego the sum of a series of contingent identifications with the loved objects at the ontogenetic level,[38] but, more radically, the fact that, as members of the species *homo sapiens*, we can now say "I am me" is a radical "historical contingency".[39]

III.

We have discussed how, for Lacan, the animal world is characterised by a perfect correspondence between the Imaginary and the Real – "insofar as one part of

[34] See *ibid*., p. 51.
[35] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 3.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 142.
[37] "In so far as [the ego] is image, it is caught in the chain of symbols. It is an element indispensable to the insertion of the symbolic reality into the reality of the subject, it is tied to the primitive [biological] gap of the subject" (*The Seminar. Book II*, p. 210).
[38] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 155: "The ego is the sum of the identifications of the subject, with all that that implies as to its radical contingency." On this point, see also my *Subjectivity and Otherness*, p. 23.
[39] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 39, p. 58.

reality is imagined, the other is real and inversely" –[40] while the human world, what we refer to as "the external world", is necessarily symbolised.[41] As already remarked by Freud, in animals, the "world is built up in accordance with an instinctual structure", for which there is "an essential [bipolar] relation [...] on one side the libidinal subject, on the other the world".[42] Unlike the animal's primary narcissism, man's secondary narcissism, his ego, cannot alone structure the world: the latter can be constituted only if "a series of encounters have occurred in the right place".[43] This is to say that, in man, the relation of the Imaginary to the Real is always-already regulated by "the symbolic connection between human beings", and man's desire – as structurally different from animal instincts – should be located in this context.[44] "What is the symbolic connection?", Lacan asks in an instructive lesson of Seminar I that effectively recapitulates our main arguments so far:

> Dotting our i's and crossing our t's, it is the fact that socially we define ourselves with the law as go-between. It is through the exchange of symbols that we locate our different egos in relation to one another – you, you are Mannoni, and me Jacques Lacan, and we have a certain symbolic relation, which is complex, according to the different planes on which we are placed, according to whether we're together in the police station, or together in this hall, or together travelling. [...] What is my desire? What is my position in the imaginary structuration? This position is only conceivable in so far as one finds a guide beyond the imaginary, on the level of the symbolic plane, of the legal exchange which can only be embodied in the verbal exchange between human beings. This guide governing the subject is the ego-ideal.[45]

Bearing in mind that the phrase "the world of desire" – which was coined by Lacan himself –[46] could be taken as synonymous with the phrase "the world of the symbol", I now intend to dwell on the specificity of the human world as analysed in Seminars I and II. I would suggest that Lacan conceives the symbolic world of desire as non-animal environment by means of a radical and protracted

[40] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 82.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 140.
[45] *Ibid.*, my translation.
[46] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 221.

oscillation between the concepts of openness and totality. This oscillation can be schematically rendered through the differentiation of three logical stages. Firstly, man's world is seen as open and thus fundamentally divergent from the closure of the animal environment. Secondly, man's world is regarded as a totality, which as such, can also be considered as a particular kind of animal environment. Thirdly, man's world remains an *open totality*, a pseudo-environment that is both animal-like and, at the same time, irreducible to an animal environment, since, differing from animals, man's very openness to his pseudo-environment makes him experience it as a totality, a meaningful uni-verse.[47]

On the one hand, the alienating identification with the body-image allows man to open himself up to a potentially infinite number of objects, objects of exchange which are, however, filtered through, and hence somehow unified, by the projection of the human *Gestalt* onto them.[48] In Lacan's own words, *homo sapiens* is "the only animal to have at his disposition an almost infinite number of objects" since it "fans out" the "imaginary equations" carried out by other animals, and thus turns them into "imaginary transpositions" –[49] which are as such

[47] On how language should be regarded as a universe, see *ibid*., p. 287. On how meaning relates to an open totality, a whole "with an exit", see *ibid*., pp. 262–264. For a recent and original re-elaboration of the idea of human openness from a prevalently Heideggerian perspective, see G. Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). It is highly unlikely that Lacan knew Heidegger's lecture courses of the 1930s and early 1940s in which this topic is elaborated in detail, however, it is possible that, at the time of Seminars I and II, he was already familiar with the biological work of Jakob von Uexküll, whom he quotes in later years and was also a major reference for Heidegger.

[48] In this sense, Lacan recurrently speaks of a "hominisation of the world" (*The Seminar. Book I*, p. 141) or a "hominisation of the planet" (J. Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* [London: Tavistock, 1977], p. 88) that is valid for both organic and inorganic entities. As I observed elsewhere, "the individuation of organic and inorganic beings alike is possible only on the basis of an underlying imaginary anthropomorphisation" (*Subjectivity and Otherness*, p. 22).

[49] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 83. We could suggest that, for Lacan, man is consequently a "flexible" animal. The relation between human neoteny and flexibility has been investigated by Gould (see, for instance, "Challenges to Neo-Darwinism and Their Meaning for a Revised View of Human Consciousness", in *The Richness of Life*, pp. 231–232). On his part, Virno thinks neotenic flexibility as non-specialised potentiality together with language as a generic faculty based on an instinctual deficit. This last point, which is very close to Lacan's position, is explicitly mediated from what Virno calls "the tradition of modesty" of German philosophical anthropology – from Herder to Gehlen – for which man is, at the level of instincts, "poorer" than other animals (see Virno, *Scienze sociali e natura umana*, pp. 25–47). In my opinion, the tradition of modesty should ultimately be tracked back to the myth of Prometheus narrated by Protagoras in Plato's

the domain of affects.[50] On the other hand, a human subject is able to recognise an object only by means of a spoken agreement on the object that involves the recognition of another subject and, in this way, tacitly assumes the pre-existence of language as a shared intersubjective totality.[51]

With regard to this last point, as early as the second page of Seminar I, Lacan emphasises that "at first there is language, already formed".[52] A child is thus "passive" before the "universe of symbols",[53] which is indeed initially deprived of any signification for him.[54] At the same time, he "enters naturally" into it insofar as, for *homo sapiens*, "the word in its materiality [...] is the thing itself [...] not just [its] shadow", it is a "reality in its own right".[55] Given that language has a "material, biological foundation",[56] its acquisition is natural but cannot be limited to the acquisition of an organic motor mastery to utter words, since it primarily depends on "an appreciation of the totality of the symbolic system".[57] If speech is nothing less than an environment for man,[58] and the subject's integration in the symbolic system should in the end be understood in terms of development,[59] man is nevertheless "not just a biological individual".[60] In fact, from this perspective, *homo sapiens* is an irremediably helpless primate bound to extinction; man therefore belongs to the common "register of law" – that is, "the totality of the system of language" – already at the level of his individual biology.[61] In reading the sentence "man is not just a biological individual" the stress should be put on the term "individual", and not on the "just", which should prevent us from interpreting it as a surreptitious invitation to superimpose a transcendent symbolic order onto human nature. Rather, this sentence

homonymous dialogue (see *Protagoras* 320d–322d).

[50] Affects are therefore 1) exclusively human and 2) ultimately dependent on the symbolic order (see *ibid*., p. 57).

[51] See *ibid*., p. 108, p. 54.

[52] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[53] *Ibid*., p. 157.

[54] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 284.

[55] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 178, p. 22.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 22.

[57] *Ibid*., p. 54.

[58] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 259.

[59] See *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 86.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 102.

[61] *Ibid*.

plainly acknowledges that the inter-subjective Symbolic is a structural component of the biology of the species *homo sapiens*.[62]

In an intense dialogue with Lacan in one of the final lessons of Seminar II, Octave Mannoni proposes that "language is a universe [...] speech is a perspective [in this universe], whose centre of perspective, the vanishing point, is always an ego".[63] I believe that this formula well summarises the way in which the world of the symbol can be seen as a particular environment for the *homo sapiens* species. However, there are a number of challenging, and at times terminologically contradictory, passages from Seminars I and II in which Lacan seems to be further complicating this conclusion by pointing out that man's universe remains structurally different from any kind of animal environment. In brief, "the symbolic system is not like a piece of clothing which sticks onto things",[64] as demonstrated by the sheer existence of the "polyvalence of meanings in language, their encroachments, their criss-crossings".[65] In opposition to the natural sciences and their perennial search for a "well made language", psychoanalysis should never forget that "the world of things is not recovered by the world of symbols [...] a thousand things correspond to each symbol, and each thing to a thousand symbols".[66] Furthermore, because of this, the symbolic order as symbolised life rapes, conquers, and irremediably transforms nature.

Yet, if we intend to adopt a truly anti-transcendent approach to the relation between pre-symbolic nature and symbolised life, should we not endorse one of Hyppolite's many insightful interventions in Seminar II, and ask whether the apparent lack of correspondence between symbols and things is ultimately a *new* natural form? Do symbols in their differential polyvalence really not stick onto things? From which position can we express this view if, as humans, we are always-already caught in symbolic life? Hyppolite's objection is clear: the simple replacement of the naïve opposition between nature and culture with the more refined one between imaginary *Gestaltic* forms and the formalisations of the symbolic does not suffice. We must also concomitantly acknowledge that "the term

[62] In this sense, psychoanalysis aims at the "reintegration of the subject's history well beyond the limits of the [biological] individual" (*ibid*., p. 12).
[63] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 278.
[64] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 265.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 268.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 265, p. 268.

'universality' at bottom means that a human universe necessarily affects the form of universality, it attracts a totality which is universalised".[67]

Lacan is aware of the difficulties involved in these open questions and the repercussions they have on the possibility of regarding man's symbolic world as either yet another animal environment or something structurally different from it. In replying to Hyppolite, he concedes that the claim according to which the symbolic register is autonomous can "give rise to a masked transcendentalism once again", but he also deems the preservation of the distinction between nature and symbol to be necessary in methodological terms.[68] The implicit admission that Hyppolite's query paves the way to an apparent impasse resurfaces in an intricate passage from Seminar I in which, in rapid succession, Lacan advances that the Symbolic is a system of signs which, as a whole, *has* and does *not* have an "exit". Or, more precisely, it does not have an exit (like any animal environment) only insofar as it has one (unlike any animal environment). In other words, the system of signs – or better signifiers – should be understood as a whole pseudo-environment inherently characterised by the differential polyvalence of meaningful discourse that is, as such, non-unitary, non-totalisable.[69] Conversely – and here Lacan comes very close to a contradiction in terms – discourse as organised discourse should not be confused with what he names "symbolic possibility". While the Symbolic as a possibility corresponds to a non-animal "opening up of man to symbols", the Symbolic as organised discourse partly closes this very opening and thus makes it possible to think the "world of the symbol" as an animal pseudo-environment.[70]

IV.

The underestimated passages I have just commented on prove that, as early as Seminars I and II, Lacan is already attempting to think the Symbolic as a non-animal not-all in accordance with its immanent and contingent emergence from

[67] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 34.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[69] See *The Seminar. Book I*, pp. 262–264. "The system of signs, as they are concretely insituted, *hic et nunc*, by itself forms a whole. That means that it institutes an order from which there is no exit. To be sure, there has to be one, otherwise it would be an order without any meaning;" "We cannot conceive of human discourse as being unitary. Every emission of speech is always, up to a certain point, under an inner necessity to err."
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

nature. In later years, he will thoroughly discuss the notion of the not-all through an enquiry on the status of the Real as remainder, and the complementary formula according to which "there is no Other of the Other".[71] In parallel, Lacan will also develop a compelling account of the dialectic between the partial closure of the Symbolic – the so-called suture which Miller will formalise as a critique of Frege's theory of number – and the possibility of its re-opening – on which the ethics and ontology of psychoanalysis are based.

What, however, emerges more clearly in Seminars I and II than in later Seminars is the deliberate distance Lacan's account of the material foundations of the world of the symbol – as pseudo-environment – keeps from biological discourse. This is particularly evident in his critique of the teleological bias of the dominant versions of evolutionary theory.[72] The latter tends to regard man as the "pinnacle of creation" and is consequently both anthropocentric and vitalist. First, it problematically assumes that "consciousness has to appear, the world, history converge on this marvel, contemporary man, you and me, us men in the street".[73] Second, it takes for granted the idea of a "living evolution [...] the belief that progress of some sort is immanent in the movement of life", which, for Lacan, is profoundly incompatible with the most basic tenets of psychoanalytic theory and practice.[74] Following Freud, life should rather be understood as the maintenance of "a certain equilibrium [...] the action of a mechanism which we now call homeostasis, which absorbs, moderates the irruption of quantities of energy coming from the external world".[75]

Furthermore, in opposition to the teleology presupposed by biological discourse, and beyond Freud's inability to account exhaustively for consciousness, Lacan invites us to develop what he refers to as an anti-humanist "materialist definition" of this phenomenon,[76] which would render it relative, plural, and, above all, independent of *homo sapiens*. From the observation that there allegedly is

[71] See Chapter 4 of my *Subjectivity and Otherness*.
[72] In Seminar VII, Lacan will focus his critique on the work of Teilhard de Chardin.
[73] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 48.
[74] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 79.
[75] *Ibid*., p. 60. "If living being exists, it is in so far as there is an internal organisation which up to a certain point tends to oppose the free and unlimited passage of forces and discharges of energy, such as we may assume to exist, in a purely theoretical way, intercrossing in the inanimate reality."
[76] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 49.

an "organising centre" in the embryo, biology incorrectly infers that "there can be only one consciousness".[77] Far from this being the case, consciousness is nothing else than the contingent apparition of an image on a surface produced by the bi-univocal correspondence between this surface and another set of points in space. Such a phenomenon should not be limited to the domain of animal primary narcissism: take the image of a mountain reflected in a lake and you have consciousness, Lacan provocatively suggests.[78] Conversely, the ego as man's delusional self-consciousness – itself contingently dependent on "the existence of our eyes and our ears"[79] – is not only unable to perceive most phenomena of consciousness,[80] but also in constant tension with them. As Lacan has it,

> The ego, which you allegedly perceive within the field of clear consciousness as being the unity of the latter, is precisely what the immediacy of sensation is in tension with. This unity [the ego] isn't at all homogeneous with what happens at the surface of the field [of consciousness], which is neutral. Consciousness as a physical phenomenon is precisely what engenders this tension.[81]

At this point, it is important to stress once again that such a tension between man's ego and his "immediacy of sensation" is both vital and anti-vital for the species *homo sapiens*. On the one hand, man's secondary narcissism is broadly speaking vital in that, as a particular instantiation of the primary narcissism of other animal species, it "does not partake in the characteristics of inertia of the phenomenon of consciousness under its primitive [inorganic] form".[82] And yet,

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[77] *Ibid*., p. 48.
[78] *Ibid*., pp. 46–47.
[79] *Ibid*., p. 48.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 47.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 50. A similar point is made in another passage from Seminar II where Lacan articulates the relation and difference between the ego and perception. Partial perceptions, "the normal component parts of perception", precede the unification of perception which is brought about by the ego. The former reappear as the "ultimate real" when the human world undergoes an imaginary decomposition, as it happens in anxiety (see *ibid*., p. 166). Lacan's critique of Merleau-Ponty should be understood in this context. Merleau-Ponty would not distinguish between the ego's alienating identifications and partial perceptions. His "phenomenology of the imaginary" is essentially Gestaltic but, unlike Lacan's, he hangs on the notion of a "unitary functioning" of human consciousness that would constitute the world through the "contemplative apprehension" of "good forms". In this way, his position remains a humanist one (see *ibid*., p. 78).
[82] *Ibid*., p. 50.

on the other hand, man's very overcoming of imaginary inertia should be associated with the establishment of an exceptional symbolic world that, unlike the environment of other living beings, cannot be fully explained through the principle of homeostasis, and is thus somehow anti-vital. Man's environment remains a pseudo-environment because, as Freud had already remarked, the regulation of man's life as symbolic life is supplemented by "a very particular insistence", the so-called compulsion to repeat, that irremediably disrupts the idea of life as equilibrium.[83]

This evolutionary complication represents an excellent introduction to Lacan's materialist re-elaboration of the Freudian notion of the death instinct, which throughout Seminar II he discusses in energetic terms. On this issue, let me initially just stress that the unbalance of man's pseudo-environment is precisely what, for Lacan, *refutes* Darwin's generalised notion of the struggle for life (as struggle to the death). There is no such thing as the struggle for life or the survival of the fittest in nature:

> Everything tells against this thesis [...]. It is a myth that goes against the facts. Everything goes to prove that there are points of invariability and of equilibria proper to each species, and that species live in a sort of coordinated way. [...] The strict inter-adjustment which exists in the living world is not brought about by the struggle to the death.[84]

In this regard, man's aggressivity, which may eventually turn into proper aggression, and should be regarded as "an existential act linked to an imaginary relation" – or also, as the manifestation of the death instinct at the imaginary level – is, in a sense, an exception to intra and inter-species adjustment. As I have already remarked in *Subjectivity and Otherness*, according to Lacan, human evolution does not depend on a particularly successful "struggle for life"; the opposite is true: "the struggle for life" is a consequence of human – particularly successful – disadapted evolution.[85] Yet even man's struggle for life remains "subjacent", Lacan specifies, to the extent that the destructive desire for the other generated by the alienating identification with the human *Gestalt* is subordinated to the symbolic order.[86] The notion of the struggle for life is in the end only

[83] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[84] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 177.
[85] *Subjectivity and Otherness*, p. 196.
[86] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 177.

an anthropocentric and implicitly teleological "political myth": it conceals a racist bias that projects onto nature the preconception according to which the stronger race should win.[87]

V.

Unsurprisingly, the critique of the teleological, humanist, and vitalist biases of evolutionary theory obliges Lacan to confront himself with the thorny issue of the origins of language. Bearing in mind that the crucial question for psychoanalysis is not "what is language?", "where does it come from?" – or, more specifically, "what happened during the geological epochs? How did they begin to wail? Did they begin by making noises while making love, as some would have it?" – but rather "knowing how it actually works",[88] he warns his audience against three common interrelated misconceptions. Firstly, the origin of language does not simply follow from an advance in thought. This argument is clearly a vicious circle, since how could thought accede to the symbol if the latter, that is the very structure of human thought, would not be there in the first place? Secondly, the emergence of the symbol, man's supposed advance in thought, can in no way be seen as a progress over animal intelligence. A symbol, for instance a ring symbolising the sun, is valueless outside of a "world of symbols", that is, if it is not related to "other formalisations". It does not make sense to compare the animal's environmental "appreciation of the whole situation" to man's "symbolic fragmentation" as pseudo-environment. Thirdly, and most importantly, the passage from animal to man should not be thought as a transition. This means that there are no intermediary steps in it. Even holophrases, that is, "expressions which cannot be broken down and have to be related to a situation taken in its entirety", should not be regarded as a juncture between the animal and human world. An analysis of their semantic contents shows that they too depend on the intersubjective openness, the "state of inter-gaze", inherent to symbolic fragmentation.[89]

[87] *Ibid*. On Darwin's strictly metaphorical use of the phrase "struggle for life", its misleading popularisation by early Darwinians and successive problematisation by Neo-Darwinians, see Portmann, *Le forme viventi*, pp. 115–149. With regard to the social and political biases of this notion, Gould reminds us that "Darwin developed his theory as a conscious analog to the laissez-faire economics of Adam Smith" ("Challenges to Neo-Darwinism", p. 224).

[88] *The Seminar. Book II*, pp. 119–120.

[89] *The Seminar. Book I*, pp. 224–225.

We are thus left with only one viable hypothesis on the origins of language and the concomitant transformation of animal instincts into human desire:[90] they must be thought in terms of a jump, which is precisely what psychoanalysis uncovers at the ontogenetic level. As Lacan has it in Seminar II, "the dimension discovered by analysis is the opposite of anything which progresses through adaptation, through approximation, through being perfected. It is something which proceeds by leaps, in jumps".[91] More specifically, this leaping or jumping corresponds to the always partly "inadequate application of certain complete symbolic relations" to man's organically deficient Imaginary.

Turning to the phylogenetic level, I believe that Lacan effectively captures the idea of the emergence of language as a jump when, in another key passage from Seminar II, he suggests that "discourse closes in on itself [...] ever since the first Neanderthal idiots".[92] That is to say, discourse is always-already all, or better, all as not-all – Lacan in fact reminds us that discourse closes in on itself independently of its "disagreement with itself" – yet, this is valid only from a particular moment in so-called natural evolution. I take the doubly paradoxical phrase "always-already all as not-all since the first Neanderthal idiots" as an attempt to think together in the figure of the leap, beyond any synthesis, two irreconcilable perspectives, which are both essential and, if left alone, insufficient for a truly materialist theory of human nature. Schematically, these two perspectives can be defined as those of anticipation and retroaction. On the one hand, nature always-already contains and resolves the Symbolic, since the natural order of the Imaginary is the original "reservoir", furnishes the "ballast", Lacan says, of the symbolic order.[93] From this stance, there is a prevalence of the natural imaginary Real over the human Symbolic. On the other hand, the symbolic order is retrospectively eternal and nature will always have been symbolic as it can only

[90] Although the supreme narcissism of children – their relatively closed world – exerts a seduction on adults that makes them compare them to "beautiful animals" (*ibid*., p. 132), children are always-already caught in the intersubjectivity of the Symbolic. All we can say is that a child is "more a captive of the imaginary" than an adult is (*ibid*., pp. 218–219).

[91] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 86.

[92] *Ibid*., p. 71.

[93] *Ibid*., p. 319; J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre IV. La relation d'objet, 1956–57* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 51. For a lucid account of the status of natural symbols in Lacan's work, see Chapter 3 of Mike Lewis's *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), especially pp. 180–185.

be thought symbolically. From this stance, there is a prevalence of the human Symbolic over the natural imaginary Real.[94]

Let us dwell on this opposition between the anticipatory and retroactive perspectives. Throughout Seminar II, Lacan incessantly moves from one to the other. He openly acknowledges that "the first symbols, natural symbols, stem from a certain number of prevailing images"[95] – especially that of the human body and, in particular, the penis "whose symbolic usage is possible because it can be seen, because it is erected".[96] But he also insists on the gap between "the beginnings of symbolism in the instinctual capture of one animal by another" and symbolism *stricto sensu*, which makes exist "what doesn't exist".[97] Lacan does not want to run the risk of being associated with Jungian theory: while symbols emerge from images of the "world or nature", the latter should in no way be regarded as "substantialised" archetypes. The natural symbols are formal *types*, not archetypes, given that, as images, they are symbolised only retroactively, as soon as they are "caught in [...] common discourse, a fragment of this discourse".[98] Moreover, archetypes imply the existence of a collective unconscious that is ultimately nothing else than the "communal soul" of the whole of hu-

[94] We may venture to read Lacan's theory of the emergence of the Symbolic through Gould's evolutionary notion of exaptation, with which he criticises and complicates the classical Darwinian notion of adaptation. Exaptations are "structures that contribute to fitness but evolved for other reasons and were later co-opted for their current role" ("Challenges to Neo-Darwinism", p. 231). Four important specifications should be made. The first two distance Gould from Lacan, while the others reinforce the impression that their positions should be compared closely. 1) Gould does not confine exaptations to human evolution. 2) He does not understand them as instinctual disadaptations. 3) He nevertheless concedes that "the range of exaptive possibility must be set primarily by nonadaptation" since "nonadaptive sequelae are more numerous than adaptations themselves". 4) He also singles out the human brain as the most exaptive biological structure. Although it initially "became large for an adaptive reason [...] most of what makes us so distinctively human (and flexible), arises as a consequence of the nonadaptive sequelae, not of the primary adaptation itself" (*ibid.*, pp. 231–232). We must conclude that, for Gould, exaptations are for the most part retroactive adaptations of nonadaptive sequelae which are, as such, particularly evident in the case of *homo sapiens*.

[95] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 306.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 272. On the possible signal function of the human penis and the importance of this field of biological research, see J. Diamond, *Why is Sex Fun? The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (London: Orion Books, 1998), pp. 186–192.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

manity seen as a "kind of large animal". The Lacanian symbolic function abhors this view.[99]

Moving from these premises, in what appears to be a complete shift in perspective from the previous assumption that first symbols stem from natural prevailing images, Lacan is also led to claim that the Symbolic "extends itself indefinitely into perpetuity, prior to itself". It is worth quoting this passage at length:

> Think about the origins of language. We imagine that there must have been a time when people on this earth began to speak. So we admit of an emergence. But from the moment the [...] emergence is grasped, we find it absolutely impossible to speculate on what preceded it other than by symbols.[100]

Pressed by Hyppolite's straightforward question "how does the use of the word symbolic help us? What does it give us?", Lacan admits in a later lesson that we might "almost" qualify the Symbolic as an a priori category that has, as such, a transcendental function.[101] But beyond this concession, what is primarily at stake in the continuation of the above passage from Seminar II is the issue of the *re-opening* of the partial closure of the Symbolic as man's pseudo-environment. As we have seen, the biological deficit of *homo sapiens* is never completely overcome, and can therefore resurface in history itself beyond the level of ontogeny. From the potentially infinite re-opening of the "symbolic possibility" follows the

[99] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 31. In a recent interview, Jean Laplanche has problematically associated this Jungian view with Freud's own biological ideas: "Freud thinks of the human species as a whole that is able to have a memory and a repression in the same sense as an individual human being has them." Although Laplanche distances himself from this position, which would lead Freud to understand fundamental fantasies as being genetically transmitted, unlike Lacan, he sees the human species as a linguistic individuality rather than as a trans-individuality. "I completely disagree with Freud. I think that the [human] collectivity does not constitute a biological individuality, but rather an essentially linguistic *individuality*, that its memory is essentially a linguistic memory. We need to start up again from here, not from the idea that fundamental fantasies are inscribed in the genes of the species" (J. Laplanche, in *Il manifesto*, October 15, 2008, my emphasis).

[100] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 5.

[101] See *ibid.*, pp. 36–38. For a possible "metacritical" application of a revised version of Kant's notion of the transcendental to the question of the origin of language, see G. Agamben, *Infancy and History* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 44–50.

establishment of another categorical order that imposes itself as a new retrospective eternity. In Lacan's own words, "when another structural order emerges, well then, it creates its own perspective within the past, and we say – *This can never not have been there, this has existed from the beginning*".[102] Here, the relativisation of symbolic retroaction intersects with the pluralisation of the original emergence of symbols as natural symbols. Such a transient intersection is precisely what Lacan refers to as a reiterated jump, and Mannoni more elegantly identifies as the question of contingent universals.[103] In light of this, the ego is just one among many historical, and yet universal, acquisitions of our species: *homo sapiens* as a linguistic animal was not always egological, as we can infer from the fact that Ancient Greek philosophy lacked this notion.[104]

I think that in Seminars I and II Lacan is well aware of the importance of maintaining the perspectives of anticipation and retroaction as radical alternatives to the extent that they reciprocally criticise the residual anti-materialist elements still present in each. In brief, anticipation prevents us from thinking the sudden emergence of the Symbolic as dependent on some extra-natural attribute of *homo sapiens*,[105] while, conversely, retroaction forces us to admit that the Symbolic relies on man's disadapted openness, and not on the proliferation of natural "living forms".[106] To put it simply, anticipation is therefore, in this context, inherently anti-idealist and anti-humanist. On its part, retroaction is anti-vitalist and anti-teleological. In later Seminars, Lacan will further develop his antic-

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[103] See *ibid.*, p. 33.
[104] See *ibid.*, pp. 5-7.
[105] See *ibid.*, p. 232.
[106] See *ibid.*, p. 292, pp. 306–307, p. 312, p. 315. On the "self-presentation" of human and non-human "forms of life" as forms of appearance that, in expressing a "mysterious" interiority of the living as such, go well beyond serving exclusively self-preservation and the preservation of the species, see the biological work of Portmann and his praise of Jung's psychological theories. Even Lacan's disagreement with Lévi-Strauss's anthropology should be related to this context. As Anne Dunand has noted, Lévi-Strauss's thought finally resolves itself into an inscrutable voluntarism of culture *as* structured nature. "According to Lévi-Strauss [...] it is the group that wants to outlive the individuals that constitute it; therefore, the Other is the subject; the Other wants it to last. This implies some kind of obscure will, impossible to decipher, that harks back to a very antiquated conception of nature. Culture is identified with the blind energy of nature – the two systems are fused; because Lévi-Strauss leaves open a passage from nature to culture, they are never really heterogeneous" (A. Dunand, "Lacan and Lévi-Strauss", in R. Feldstein, B. Fink, M. Jaanus (eds.), *Reading Seminars I and II* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1996], p. 107).

ipatory and retroactive approaches to the materiality of language by means of the notions of phallic *Gestalt* and mythical discourse, which will, however, never be systematised. By contrast, what stands out in Seminars I and II through the repeated oscillation between the anticipation and retroaction of human nature, as well as their disjunctive synthesis in a jump, is Lacan's courageous attempt to leave behind the sterility of a presumed mutual exclusion between naturalistic and historical materialism.[107]

VI.

The issue of the primordial "symbolic possibility" and the reopening of the partial closure of the Symbolic as man's pseudo-environment corresponds, for Lacan, to the very question of desire as being. Desire becomes manifest there where the Symbolic emerges,[108] which also means that the closure of the Symbolic as pseudo-environment amounts to the repression of desire, and that the latter thus normally operates at the unconscious level. Although in these first Seminars Lacan does not discuss in detail the structure of what is repressed since, at this stage, he has not yet developed his notion of fantasy, the fact that desire remains unconscious provides us with an additional reason to distinguish it from the domain of animal needs. On the one hand, need smoothly "connects up with the general homeostasis of the organism".[109] On the other hand, desire is repressed insofar as it is coextensive with the symbolic recuperation of the fundamental disorder of the instinctual life of man, its structurally problematic status, which we have already examined at length.[110] The human subject is a discordant subject in that he is fragmented by his ego, and consequently "cannot desire without itself dissolving" (i.e. undergoing alienation) and "without seeing because of this very fact the object escaping it, in a series of infinite displacements".[111] This separation from the object, these displacements that determine desire are not referable

[107] The break between naturalistic and historical materialism characterised philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. On how the 1971 dialogue on human nature between Chomsky and Foucault should be taken as paradigmatic in this regard, see Virno's considerations in *Scienze sociali e 'natura umana'* (especially pp. 13–24) and *Quando il verbo si fa carne* (especially pp. 147–155).

[108] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 234.

[109] *Ibid*., p. 106.

[110] See *ibid*., p. 177, p. 227.

[111] *Ibid*., p. 177.

to "the lack inflicted on need"[112] but, drawing together biological and ontological considerations, should be understood as a relation of lack to being. "This lack is the lack of being [...] It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists", Lacan says.[113] Psychoanalysis thus regards the human subject as a "being in becoming", not an object,[114] a being-of-desire whereby being is a "function" of lack, "arises from a background of absence".[115]

Here, it is not entirely clear whether being should be confined to the symbolic domain of repressed desire, as the quotations above seem to imply, or whether the latter rather amounts to "a new order of being",[116] which would therefore still allow us to predicate being of the pre-symbolic Real. However, it is doubtless the case that, for Lacan, it is language that introduces the mutual relation between being and lack, or even nothingness, precisely in that language "holes", or opens up, the Real. Speech and the "hollow of being" in the Real are "exactly correlative", that is, being as always-already hollowed being is not to be attributed to the pre-linguistic Real.[117] Obviously, the pre-symbolic Real exists, Lacan says, that is out of question, but its ontological status is in the end irrelevant as long as it remains a closed, non-lacking, world.[118] We could go as far as tentatively suggesting that the pre-symbolic world exists without being. What is at stake in such a formula is of course not a Berkeleian reduction of the pre-symbolic world to a vanishing mirage but a problematisation of the possibility of ontologising it as a closed, non-lacking world. Can an ontology, a logos or speech about being, be applied to a real world that, by definition, "resists symbolisation",[119] one that is, in other words, inconsistent, or, using Lacan's own jargon, "ineffective"?[120] If at all possible, would such an application not immediately turn the real world into a consistent world, a symbolic world of meaningful effects? And most crucially, is Lacan not encouraging us always to distinguish between the *ontological*

[112] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 214.
[113] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 223.
[114] *Ibid*., p. 105.
[115] *Ibid*., pp. 223-224.
[116] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 239.
[117] See *ibid*. p. 229. "Depending on the way one envisions it, this hole in the real is called being or nothingness. This being and this nothingness are essentially linked to the phenomenon of speech" (*ibid*., p. 271).
[118] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 219.
[119] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 66.
[120] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 219.

inconsistency inherent to the consistent world of the symbol, man's repressed being-of-desire as the real not-all of the Symbolic, and the *pre-ontological* pure inconsistency of the pre-symbolic Real?

A similar interest in such a pre-ontological condition resurfaces indirectly in Lacan's considerations on the immortality of life. The pre-symbolic Real exists, and yet, even in the case of the highly developed organic life of animals, it cannot simply be said to be alive. The pre-symbolic Real exists, but it is un-dead, for eternity. In other words, "from the point of view of the species, individuals are, if one can put it in this way, already dead", while, conversely, the species is immortal, it is "the only thing to be perpetuated".[121] More specifically, this means that the individual reproduces as a type, or form, that is by means of *Gestalten*, and not as an individual: the individual "only manages to reproduce the type already brought into being by the line of its ancestors [...]. It isn't this or that horse, but the prop, the embodiment of something which is *The* Horse".[122] Whenever there is a correspondence between the *Innenwelt* with the *Umwelt*, whenever the sexual partner is sought like a key seeks a keyhole, the individual animal cannot be described just as mortal: it is rather "already dead in relation to the eternal life of the species".[123]

Interestingly, in this context, Lacan speaks of two degrees of the death instinct. First of all, there is an animal death instinct, which corresponds to the fact that, as we have just seen, the individual animal is subjected to "the *x* of eternal life" of the species.[124] As Hyppolite has it, "the animal is bound by death when he

[121] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 121. It goes without saying that the "immortality" of the species should be seen here as compatible with the evolution of the species via genetic mutations and its eventual "transformation" into another species.

[122] *Ibid*., p. 121.

[123] *Ibid*., p. 145. Lacan develops these arguments commenting on Freud's own considerations about the immortality of life in Chapter VI of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this text, Freud adopts Weismann's theory of the germ plasm according to which the living substance is divided "into mortal and immortal parts. The mortal part is the body in the narrower sense – the 'soma' – which alone is subject to natural death. The germ-cells, on the other hand, are potentially immortal, in so far as they are able, under certain favorable conditions, to develop into a new individual" (S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, S.E. XVIII [London: The Hogarth Press, 1986], pp. 45–46). On how Weismann's theory still tacitly informs present-day molecular genetics, see J.-A. Miller, "Lacanian Biology", in *lacanian ink*, 18 (2001), pp. 17–19.

[124] *The Seminar. Book I*, pp. 148–149.

makes love, but he doesn't know anything about it".[125] In this sense, Lacan can go as far as suggesting that ultimately, in the pre-symbolic Real, "life is concerned only with dying", it is a "blister" characterised by its aptitude for death, a "swelling", or "bubble" that always-already dissolves into the inorganic.[126] At this level there is no possibility for change and hence for the experience of death: the un-dead animal identifies smoothly with its *Gestalt* and thus both satisfies his desire, or better his needs, and propagates the species.[127] On the other hand, man's death instinct is complicated by his disordered imagination and by the related emergence of the "image of death". To put it differently, man's death instinct corresponds to his imaginary subjection to the ideal ego: "This image of the master, which is what he sees in the form of the specular image, becomes confused in him with the image of death".[128] The specular image that man, unlike animals, loves and vies with narcissistically is an image of death since it offers him an image of "adapted" perfection, of an equilibrium which characterises the always-already dead life of animals, and which, as such, he can never attain. Although in Seminars I and II Lacan had not yet introduced this terminological distinction, we can well advance that man's death *drive* is the insistent search for an unobtainable ideal un-dead perfection derived from the deformation of the animal's death instinct – the animal's subjection to the *x* of eternal life.

We should pay particular attention to the fact that, in this way, man opposes to the animal's unproblematic satisfaction of needs – itself ruled by the death instinct – the incessant "pursuit of the fulfilment of desire". Human desire is a negativity sustained by the death drive as a prolongation, a detour, of the animal death instinct.[129] I believe that we should attempt to understand this subtle but fundamental difference by referring to Lacan's recurrent remarks about energetics and the concept of entropy. Reinforcing his anti-vitalist polemics, Lacan claims that Freudian psychoanalysis has always considered need as an energetic notion, which is as such a symbolic notion.[130] In other words, we can approach living things only by means of their metabolism – "the balance sheet, what goes

[125] *Ibid*., p. 149.
[126] *The Seminar. Book II*, pp. 232–233.
[127] See *ibid*., p. 238.
[128] *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 149.
[129] See *ibid*., p. 147.
[130] See *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 113, p. 74.

in and what comes out"[131] – only by regarding them as un-dead homeostats that "look after themselves" in that they assimilate and consume energy. Beyond this level, at which living organisms cannot simply be opposed to machines – without for this reason being reduced to sheer mechanistic processes[132] – the phenomenon of life remains completely impenetrable to us. Thus, psychoanalytic biology should be taken by antiphrasis: "Freudian biology has nothing to do with biology. It is a matter of manipulating symbols with the aim of resolving energy questions, as the homeostatic reference indicates [...] Freud's whole discussion revolves around the question, what, in terms of energy, is the psyche?".[133]

While it is clear that psychoanalysis should not be a naïve science of sexual needs and desire understood as self-evident vital forces of nature,[134] we are initially left to wonder how to reconcile the idea of life – at least non-human life – as energetic homeostasis with that of the death instinct. At first sight, there seems to be on this issue a radical tension in psychoanalytic biology. However, even if Lacan warns against taking this analogy literally,[135] I would suggest that the animal's death instinct could be seen as compatible with the idea of life as a homeostatic equilibrium insofar as the latter is structurally undermined by entropy. The individual animal as a homeostatic persistence, or conservation of energy, is concomitantly also characterised by a loss or degradation of energy, that is entropy: in this sense, it is always-already "concerned with dying" from the standpoint of the species.[136]

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[131] *Ibid*., p. 95.

[132] See *ibid*., p. 31. "We always try to explain the living organism in terms of mechanism. The first question which we analysts must answer, and which can perhaps help us get away from the controversy which exists between vitalism and mechanism, is the following – why are we led to think of life in terms of mechanism?"

[133] *Ibid*., p. 75. Jacques-Alain Miller challenges Lacan's conclusion on the basis of the significant changes that biology underwent in the last fifty years. "Because Freudian biology is first of all an energetics, Lacan allows himself to say that Freudian biology is not a biology. This is so if we understand by biology a discipline which has life as its object, but it is certainly less correct now that we have in some way a biology without life, a biology which has as its object – this is one of Jacob's expressions, but it could just as well be Lacan's – 'the algorithms of the living world'" ("Lacanian Biology", p. 7). The most authoritative text on Freud and biology remains F. Sulloway's *Freud, Biologist of the Mind* (London: Burnet Books, 1979).

[134] See *ibid*., p. 227.

[135] See *ibid*., p. 115.

[136] *Ibid*., p. 81. "A living organism continually increases its entropy – or, as you may say, produces positive entropy – and thus tends to approach the dangereous state of maximum entropy,

Such a scenario is complicated in *homo sapiens* by his disordered imagination. The gap that is produced by the "deviation" of his relation to the species-specific *Gestalt* is both the place where "death makes itself felt" and the originating cause of repetitive insistence. The imaginary and symbolic components of man's alienation cannot be separated: this is the very "world of the symbol" which in terms of energy corresponds to the human death instinct.[137] In Seminar II, Lacan makes only two passing and cryptic remarks with regard to the specificity of the relation between the human death instinct and entropy, which, in my opinion, should be read together. Firstly, while in nature energy "always tends in the direction of an equalisation of levels of difference", in the symbolic order, "to the extent that the information increases" – and is codified, or grouped – "the difference in levels becomes more differentiated".[138] Secondly, if we take the Symbolic as the pseudo-environment of man and his manipulations of nature, this very increase in information can be seen as itself inserted into the circuit of the natural degradation of energy, the equalisation of levels of energetic difference. In this way, it "will cause the general level of the energy to rise again".[139] Although Lacan does not develop this daring argument any further, it does not seem exaggerated to propose that the human death instinct *counter-balances* entropy, if not actually diminishes and slows it down, and thus prolongs, or at least complicates, the trajectory of the animal death instinct. As I suggested in *Subjectivity and Otherness*, the death drive is therefore, against doxastic readings, a conservative principle that temporarily suspends the indiscernibility between life and the un-dead, and postpones the return of the human individual to the immortal in-differentiation of the species *homo sapiens*.[140]

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which is death. It can only keep aloof from it, i.e. alive, by continually drawing from its environment negative entropy [...]. What an organism feeds upon is negative entropy. Or, to put it less paradoxically, the essential thing in metabolism is that the organism succeeds in freeing itself from all the entropy it cannot help producing while alive" (E. Schrödinger, *What is Life?* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], p. 71).

[137] *Ibid*., p. 210, p. 76.

[138] *Ibid*., p. 305.

[139] *Ibid*., p. 83.

[140] See *Subjectivity and Otherness*, pp. 143–147. "No doubt there is a principle that brings the libido back to death, but it doesn't bring it back any old how. If it brought it back there by the shortest paths, the problem would be resolved. But it brings it back there only along the paths of life, it so happens" (*The Seminar. Book II*, p. 80). The human death drive could therefore equally be seen as a vital principle, in that it goes against the identification of animal life with entropy, and, for the very same reason, also as supremely anti-vital, in that it eventually only prolongs this identification and establishes death as an imaginary experience.

We must, however, never lose sight of the fact that, as an individual, *homo sapiens* remains a helpless self-destructive primate. At this level, which in his first two Seminars Lacan explains almost exclusively in terms of imaginary alienating identification and will later associate with the notions of symbolic demand and privation, the death instinct seems intuitively to accelerate animal entropy to the point of causing the extinction of the species. The specificity of the human death drive as a recuperation of entropy emerges only with the establishment of the intersubjective dimension of desire, which is a biological prerogative of the species *homo sapiens*.[141] Desire should therefore clearly be distinguished from the suicidal libidinal instincts of *homo sapiens*, while, at the same time, it is that which, in the partial closure of the Symbolic as pseudo-environment, is derived from and employs these same instincts to counter-balance animal entropy. On the one hand, in energetic terms, desire amounts to a qualitative effect, that is, as such, irreducible to the libido as a mythical unit of quantity. On the other hand, from a strictly biological perspective, desire must nevertheless be identified with a symbolised libidinal "need for repetition" [*le besoin de répétition*].[142]

Lacan explains both points in detail. With regard to the difference between desire and the libido, he claims that the latter is "a unit of quantitative measurement". It is mythical since we ignore its nature, do not know how to measure it, and simply "assume [it] to be there", yet it allows us to "unify the variation in qualitative effects", that is, the "changes of state" which occur when a certain homeostatic threshold is passed. As Lacan has it, "you assume an undifferentiated quantitative unit susceptible of entering into relations of equivalence. If it can't be discharged, can't expand as normal, can't spread out, overflows occur from which other states ensue".[143] These qualitative effects as changes of state that we refer to as, for instance, regressions, fixations, sublimations of the libido, constitute what Lacan names in this precise context the "world of desire". In this sense, psychoanalysis primarily focuses on desire as transformation, "the realisation of anything new": it starts by postulating a field of novelty that equally opposes itself to the unchangeable realm of the un-dead animal and the conservative value of the death drive that sustains desire after its first emergence.[144]

[141] Lacan will later understand this negation of negation as a passage from demand – associated with the discovery of privation – to desire.
[142] *Ibid.*, pp. 87–90. On this issue, see also *Subjectivity and Otherness*, pp. 151–154.
[143] *The Seminar. Book II*, pp. 221–222.
[144] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Having said this, the world of desire also corresponds to the symbolic pseudo-environment in which animal libido manifests itself in the guise of a "need for repetition". In Seminar II, Lacan often uses this phrase which, I believe, well renders in a concise way the libidinal dimension of the human Symbolic. While the need for repetition, introduced by language, goes "beyond all the biological mechanisms of equilibration", it is nevertheless a "vital adaptation".[145] To put it bluntly, man needs to repeat because his libido does not instinctively learn how to fit into his environment. The animal's purely biological cycles follow the reminiscence of an imaginary "good form". On the contrary, man's disordered imagination is a "failure in learning" whereby memorisation can only logically follow repetition: "In man, it is the wrong form which prevails. In so far as a task is not completed the subject returns to it. The more abject the failure, the better the subject remembers it."[146]

Passages like this strike us for their vagueness with regard to what precisely the subject returns to in repetition and how his memorisation is paradoxically reinforced by a failure that is itself not better defined. They should alert us about the fact that, at this stage, Lacan has not yet clarified how desire as the libidinal need for repetition determines in *homo sapiens* the splitting between self-consciousness and the unconscious. As I have argued elsewhere, the conscious mutual pact of recognition to which, in Seminars I and II, Lacan associates the satisfaction of man's desire necessarily presupposes man's repeated obliteration of the other's desire, which is only achieved by becoming its object, and for this reason repressed in the fantasy.[147] Lacan already senses that if human desire as the repetitive pursuit of the fulfilment of desire is ultimately a "desire for nothing",[148] the desire of the other's desire as an irreducible lack, the very opening of the "symbolic possibility", then this biologically unbearable condition requires the introduction of a fantasy. However, he does not seem to realise yet that it is primarily at the phantasmatic level that desire is repeatedly satisfied "in another fashion than in an effective satisfaction" through the symbolic illusory satisfac-

[145] *Ibid*., pp. 89–90.
[146] *Ibid*., p. 86.
[147] See *Subjectivity and Otherness*, especially pp. 163–166 and "Count-as-one, Forming-into-one, Unary Trait, S1", in P. Ashton, A. J. Bartlett, and J. Clemens (eds.), *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, especially pp. 173–176. On the way in which the satisfaction of desire depends on its recognition by the other, see *The Seminar. Book I*, p. 183.
[148] *The Seminar. Book II*, p. 211.

tion of "being acknowledged".[149] In addition to this, in these early Seminars, he confines the inescapable overlapping of the recognition of the Other's desire with its "abdication", or even "annihilation", to the domain of libidinal perversions.[150] What in this way still remains to be elaborated is the notion of fantasy as the historically contingent, albeit universal, natural structure of the unconscious that links up the recognition, repression, and repetition of desire as desire of the Other.

[149] *Ibid*., p. 213. Yet, in Seminar II, Lacan acknowledges in passing the parallelism between the conscious ego and the unconscious fantasy (see *ibid*., p. 214).
[150] See *The Seminar. Book I*, pp. 221–222.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXX | Number 2 | 2009 | 113-141

Adrian Johnston*

Affective Life between Signifiers and *Jouis-sens*: Lacan's *Senti-ments* and *Affectuations*

As Lacanian analyst and scholar Bruce Fink correctly observes, Sigmund Freud is far from consistent in his theorization of affect.[1] In line with Fink's observation, what absolutely must be acknowledged is that Freud is indeed genuinely and entirely inconsistent apropos a metapsychology of affect, erratically oscillating in indecision between various speculations regarding the existence and nature of unconscious affects in particular.[2] Jacques Lacan, perhaps strongly motivated in this instance by what could be deemed (in his own parlance) a "passion for ignorance"[3] (perhaps a passion for ignorance about passion), tends not to admit even this much; he repeatedly insists with vehemence that Freud unflinchingly bars affective phenomena from the unconscious *qua* the proper object of psychoanalysis as a discipline. By contrast, Fink at least concedes that Freud wasn't of one mind on this issue, especially concerning the topic of guilt.[4] However, Fink's concession is tempered by a very Lacanian qualification to the effect that, despite his superficial changes of mind concerning affective life, Freud's metapsychological apparatus is, at a deeper and ultimate theoretical level, consistent in ruling out *apriori* the existence of unconscious affects.[5] And, following closely in Lacan's footsteps, Fink likewise ignores the letter of Freud's original German texts by conflating as synonymous affect (*Affekt*) and feeling (*Empfindung*) so as to sustain the claim that affects are felt feelings (i.e., *Empfindungen*) and, hence, cannot be unconscious strictly speaking.[6]

[1] Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading* Écrits *Closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 142.

[2] Adrian Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings: Unconscious Affect between Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, and Philosophy," in Catherine Malabou and Adrian Johnston, *Auto-Affection and Emotional Life: Psychoanalysis and Neurobiology* (New York: Columbia University Press [under review]).

[3] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971-1972* [unpublished typescript], session of November 4th, 1971.

[4] Bruce Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique: A Lacanian Approach for Practitioners* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), p. 130.

[5] Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, p. 142.

[6] Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, p. 130.

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Most Lacanians not quite of Fink's caliber, in parroting Lacan, simply pass over in silence those numerous textual occasions in which Freud mobilizes the hypotheses that (certain) affects can be and, in actuality, are unconscious. These followers of Lacan present an utterly false portrait of a Freud steadfastly unwavering in his dismissal of the notion of unconscious affect as a muddleheaded contradiction-in-terms inadmissible to correct psychoanalytic reason. Although somewhat superficially faithful to the letter of Lacan's text, such Lacanians flagrantly flout its spirit, failing to "return to Freud" by not, like Lacan before them, bothering to read Freud's *oeuvre* closely and carefully; they are complacently content to swallow the Freudian corpus as chewed over for them by Lacan. Recalling the fact that, in relation to the topic of the psyche's affective side, Lacan uncharacteristically makes no references whatsoever to the German words *Affekt*, *Gefühl*, *Empfindung*, and *Affektbildung* as these words operate literally in Freud's texts,[7] one might risk asserting that Lacan violates the spirit of his own endeavor when discussing the Freudian metapsychology of affect. One can only guess why this breakdown befalls Lacan. Why does he turn a blind exegetical eye, typically so sharp and discerning, to everything Freud says about affective life in addition to, and often at odds with, the far from unqualified denial of unconscious affects connected to the claim that solely ideational representations (ideas as *Vorstellungen*, to be identified by Lacan as signifiers) can become unconscious through repression?

And yet, like Freud, Lacan too isn't thoroughly consistent in the manners in which he addresses affect in psychoanalysis. Although his wavering and hesitations on this matter are more muted and less explicitly to the fore than Freud's, they are audible to an appropriately attuned interpretive ear. Especially in his tenth and seventeenth seminars (on *Anxiety* [1962–1963] and *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969–1970]), Lacan does more than just underscore the non-existence of unconscious affects for a psychoanalysis grounded upon properly Freudian concepts. But, before turning to focus primarily on these two seminars, foregrounding the nuances and subtleties of Lacan's own contributions to a yet-to-be-systematized Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology of affect requires establishing a background picture of his general, overarching account of affects. This is best accomplished via a condensed chronological tour through the seminars, with topical detours into corresponding *écrits* and other pieces.

[7] Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings".

In the first seminar (*Freud's Papers on Technique* [1953–1954]), Lacan argues against distinguishing between the affective and the intellectual such that the former becomes an ineffability beyond the latter. He states his staunch rejection of:

> the notorious opposition between the intellectual and the affective — as if the affective were a sort of colouration, a kind of ineffable quality which must be sought out in itself, independently of the eviscerated skin which the purely intellectual realisation of a subject's relationship would consist in. This conception, which urges analysis down strange paths, is puerile. The slightest peculiar, even strange, feeling that the subject professes to in the text of the session is taken to be a spectacular success. That is what follows from this fundamental misunderstanding.[8]

Particularly during the first decade of *le Séminaire*, the primary audience to whom Lacan addresses himself consists of practicing analysts. Discussions of clinical work in Anglo-American analytic circles, both in Lacan's time as well as nowadays, indeed frequently do give the impression that prompting patients on the couch to produce verbalizations of feelings in the here-and-now of the session is the principle concern of analysis; listening to analysts of the stripe Lacan has in mind in this context, it sounds as though therapeutic progress is measured mainly by the degree to which an analysand is willing and able to struggle to voice affects as he/she is being affected by them between the four walls of the analyst's consulting room. In short, this is to treat upsurges of emotion irrupting into patients' forty-five-minute monologues as analytic pay-dirt, as self-evident ends-in-themselves requiring no further explanation or justification (i.e., "a spectacular success").[9] Although this is an aggressively exaggerated caricature, it informs Lacan's remarks here. He warns those analysts listening to him not to go down this "puerile path" in their practices.

However, Lacan isn't saying that affects are irrelevant to or of no interest in analytic practice. He's reacting to what he sees as an indefensible and misguided elevation of affective life into the one and only alpha-and-omega of analysis. What he actually claims, with good reason steadily and increasingly vindicated since the 1950s, is that neither the intellectual nor the affective (or, in more con-

[8] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. John Forrester (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), p. 57.

[9] Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, pp. 51–52.

temporary vocabulary borrowed from neuroscientific discourse, the cognitive and the emotional) are independent of one another, each standing independently on its own. Not only, *contra* other analytic orientations guilty of fetishizing the appearance of affects within the scene of analytic sessions, are affects inextricably intertwined with ideas (as thoughts, memories, words, concepts, etc.) — ideas, as incarnated in living speech, are permeated with something other than themselves, affected by non-ideational forces and factors (as indicated in the above-quoted passage when Lacan speaks of "the eviscerated skin which the purely intellectual realisation of a subject's relationship would consist in").

Lacan's point can be made by paraphrasing Kant: Affects without ideas are blind (the dynamic movement of the affective/emotional is shaped and steered by the intellectual/cognitive), while ideas without affects are empty (the structured kinetics of the intellectual/cognitive are driven along by juice flowing from the affective/emotional). Of course, given the tendencies and trends within psychoanalysis Lacan is combating at this time, his comments immediately following the ones in the quotation a couple of paragraphs above highlight one side of this two-sided coin, namely, the dependence of the affective on the intellectual:

> The affective is not like a special density which would escape an intellectual accounting. It is not to be found in a mythical beyond of the production of the symbol which would precede the discursive formulation. Only this can allow us from the start, I won't say to locate, but to apprehend what the full realisation of speech consists in.[10]

This is of a piece with Lacan's denunciation, in his 1953 "Rome Discourse" ("The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis"), of an "illusion" plaguing analysts and their practices, one "which impels us to seek the subject's reality beyond the wall of language"[11] (Fink also points out this connection between the mirage of language being a barrier between those who use it and certain conceptions of affect[12]). In other words, analysts shouldn't erroneously strive somehow to gain access to a reservoir of feelings and emotions sheltering behind the manifest façade of analysands' utterances. It's not as though there re-

[10] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, p. 57.
[11] Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* [trans. Bruce Fink] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), p. 254.
[12] Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, p. 51.

ally is a transcendent Elsewhere of ineffable qualitative phenomena subsisting in a pure state of extra-linguistic immediacy outside of the strictures of the linguistic latticework woven session after session by the patient's speech. When dealing with speaking beings — analysis deals with nothing but — any affects inevitably will be immanent and impure *qua* tied up with constellations and configurations of ideational representations (i.e., Freudian *Vorstellungen* as Lacanian signifiers). At least as regards these particular 1954 observations bearing on affects in analysis, Lacan's position seems to be that the affective/emotional and the intellectual/cognitive are mutually co-entangled — although, to counterbalance what he considers to be misguided deviations from Freudian orthodoxy, he slants his stress in the direction of underscoring the intellectual/cognitive mediation of the affective/emotional.

In the ensuing years, this slanted stress seems to lose its status of being strictly a tactical counterbalance against prevailing clinical analytic developments, with Lacan coming to contend that signifier-ideas have metapsychological priority over affects. That is to say, as is particularly evident between 1958 and 1962 (in the sixth, seventh, and ninth seminars specifically), Lacan tilts the balance in the complex ideational-affective *rapport* decisively in favor of ideational structures, maintaining that these are the driving, determining variables in relation to affective (epi)phenomena. This *rapport*, deprived of a dialectic of bidirectional, reciprocal influences between its poles, now appears to be organized by a unidirectional line of influence originating from one side alone, namely, in signifiers and their interrelationships. In a session of the sixth seminar (*Desire and Its Interpretation* [1958–1959]), Lacan, basing himself on what he takes to be Freud's 1915 metapsychological exclusion of affects from the unconscious (as oxymoronic unfelt feelings), claims that affects are only ever displaced within consciousness relative to chains of signifiers as concatenations of ideational drive-representatives, some of which can be and are repressed. Stated differently, whereas *Vorstellungen*-as-signifiers are able to become parts of the unconscious through being dragged, via the gravitational pull of material and/or meaningful associations, into the orbit of branching formations of the unconscious, affects, as felt qualitative phenomena, must remain within the sphere of conscious experience. In line with what Freud posits in another 1915 paper on metapsychology (the essay entitled "Repression"),[13] Lacan views repression as bringing about

[13] *SE* 14: 152.

red-herring-like false connections; more precisely, Lacan thinks the Freudian position here is to assert that affects, after repression does its job and disrupts the true connection of these affects with their original ideational partners, drift within the sphere of conscious awareness in which they remain and form false connections through getting (re-)attached to other signifiers.[14] As Roberto Harari, in his examination of Lacan's tenth seminar on anxiety, puts it, "there are *no unconscious affects but, rather, affects drift*".[15] Both Harari and, in certain contexts, Fink express agreement with this aspect of Lacan's reading of Freud as articulated in 1958.[16] In this same session of the sixth seminar, Lacan also underscores Freud's reservations when speaking of unconscious affects, emotions, and feelings (three terms Lacan lumps together on this occasion); with a calculated weighting of exegetical emphasis, he thereby aims at supporting the thesis that, for Freudian metapsychology, such talk can amount, when all is said and done, only to incoherent, contradictory formulations without real referents.[17]

The seventh and ninth seminars continue along the same lines. In the seventh seminar (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* [1959–1960]), Lacan denounces "the confused nature of the recourse to affectivity" so prevalent in other strains of psychoanalysis basing themselves on what he alleges to be "crude" non-Freudian psychologies — although he's careful to add that, "Of course, it is not a matter of denying the importance of affects."[18] In the ninth seminar (*Identification* [1961–1962]), Lacan, responding to a presentation by his analyst-student Piera Aulagnier in which she appeals to an unbridgeable abyss separating affective phenomena from their linguistic translations (i.e., to something akin to the earlier-denounced image of the "wall of language"), denies that affects enjoy an immediate existence independent from the mediation of words. On the contrary, even in affective life, signifiers (as ideas, symbols, thoughts, etc.) are purported

[14] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation, 1958–1959* [unpublished typescript], session of November 26th, 1958.

[15] Roberto Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety': An Introduction* [ed. Rico Franses; trans. Jane C. Lamb-Ruiz] (New York: Other Press, 2001), p. 22.

[16] Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety'*, pp. 12–13; Roberto Harari, *Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction* [trans. Judith Filc] (New York: Other Press, 2004), p. 268; Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 113–114.

[17] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI*, session of November 26th, 1958.

[18] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Dennis Porter] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), p. 102.

to be the primary driving forces at work in the psyche. Lacan encapsulates his criticisms with a play on words, a homophony audible in French: Insisting on affects as somehow primary (*primaire*) is tantamount to simplemindedness (*primarité*).[19] Instead, affects, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, are secondary, namely, residual by-products secreted and pushed to-and-fro by the kinetic relations between networks of signifiers. Harari maintains that the true "Lacanian conception" of affects is that which "*postulates affect as one effect of the signifier*".[20]

Although, starting the following academic year (1962–1963), Lacan significantly refines and enriches his metapsychology of affect, it isn't as though this poorer, less refined treatment of affects as mere after-effects of the interactions of ideational representations falls entirely by the wayside. For instance, in the text of the 1973 published version of Lacan's appearance on television, he reiterates his earlier opinions on affect. Complaining about "the story of my supposed neglect of affect," a narrative by then quite popular and widespread in the "post-structuralist" intellectual climate of Paris in the wake of May 1968, Lacan indignantly retorts:

> I just want an answer on this point: does an affect have to do with the body? A discharge of adrenalin — is that body or not? It upsets its functions, true. But what is there in it that makes it come from the soul? What it discharges is thought.[21]

The word "thought" here functions as a synonym for ideational representations as signifiers, as chains of multiple linguistic-symbolic constituents. The affected body is affected by words and ideas; even though the effect might be somatic, the cause is not. Lacan adds:

> All I've done is rerelease what Freud states in an article of 1915 on repression, and in others that return to this subject, namely that affect is displaced. How to appreciate this displacement, if not so the basis of the subject, which is presupposed by the fact that it has no better means of occurring than through representation?[22]

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[19] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IX: L'identification, 1961–1962* [unpublished typescript], session of May 2nd, 1962.
[20] Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety'*, p. 27.
[21] Jacques Lacan, "Television" [trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson], *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment* [ed. Joan Copjec], New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1990, p. 20.
[22] Lacan, "Television," p. 20.

From a vantage point reached through an examination of the literal details of Freud's writings relevant to the debated enigma/problem of unconscious affects,[23] Lacan's professions of modesty are in danger of ringing false: Even in his 1915 papers on metapsychology, Freud doesn't limit himself to saying solely that affects are invariably conscious experiential qualia displaced relative to the shifting ground of webs of representational contents — and this in addition to those numerous other places in the Freudian corpus, both before and after 1915, where affect is discussed in ways relevant to the issues at stake here, places neglected by Lacan's highly selective and partial rendition of Freud's metapsychology of affect. In struggling against the excessive over-emphases on affectivity, embodiment, and energetics promoted by a range of figures and orientations (non-Lacanian analysts, disenchanted ex/post-Lacanians, existential phenomenologists, feminist theorists, and so on), Lacan sometimes succumbs to an equally excessive counter-emphasis on the foundational, fundamental primacy of "representation" in psychical life.

Along the same lines and echoing remarks made in the seventh seminar, Lacan, in the twenty-third seminar (*Le sinthome* [1975–1976]), sidelines the topic of affect as too bound up with vulgar, unsophisticated psychologies based on the "confused image we have of our own body"[24] (i.e., mirages mired in the Lacanian register of the Imaginary). In a late piece from 1980, Lacan contrasts the indestructible fixity of desire with the "instability" (*mouvance*) of affects, an instability symptomatic of their status as volatile fluctuating displacements within consciousness buffeted about by the achronological machinations of the unconscious formations configuring desire in its strict Lacanian sense[25] (the latter, not the former, thus being identified as what is really of interest in analysis). Once again, at the very end of his itinerary, Lacan insists that intellectual/cognitive structures, and not affective/emotional phenomena, are what psychoanalysis is occupied with insofar as the unconscious, as constituted by repression and related mechanisms, is the central object of analytic theory and practice.

Before directing sustained critical attention toward the tenth and seventeenth seminars, in which determining the status of affect in Lacan's thinking is a

[23] Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings".

[24] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975–1976* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), p. 149.

[25] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXVII: Dissolution, 1979–1980* [unpublished typescript], session of March 18th, 1980.

trickier task, mention must be made of a peculiar German term employed by Freud and singled-out as of crucial importance by Lacan: *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* (a compound word whose translation, as soon will become evident, raises questions and presents difficulties not without implications for analysis both theoretical and practical — hence, its translation will be delayed temporarily in this discussion). Lacan's glosses on this word's significance, as used by Freud, often accompany his pronouncements regarding the place of affect in the Freudian framework.[26] In the third section on "Unconscious Emotions" in the 1915 metapsychological paper "The Unconscious" — as is now obvious, these three pages of text lie at the very heart of the controversies into which this project has waded — the *Repräsentanz* represented by the *Vorstellung* isn't a representation as an idea distinct or separate from an affect, but, instead, an affectively-charged (i.e., "cathected", in Freudian locution) ideational node. To be more specific and exact, a *Repräsentanz* would be, in this context, a psychical drive-representative *qua* a mental idea (representing a drive's linked aim [*Ziel*] and object [*Objekt*]) invested by somatic drive-energy *qua* the affecting body (consisting of a drive's source [*Quelle*] and pressure [*Drang*]). Such cathexes are the precise points at which soma and psyche (and, by extension, affects and ideas) overlap in the manner Freud indicates in his contemporaneous paper on "Drives and Their Vicissitudes"[27]. *Vorstellungen* would be ideational representations which represent representations-as-*Repräsentanzen* once these *Repräsentanzen* have been submitted to the vicissitudes of defensive maneuvers rendering them unconscious (*à la* the patterns of "repression proper" in connection with "primal repression" as described by Freud in his metapsychological paper on "Repression"[28]). As Freud words it in "The Unconscious" apropos the concept of an "affective or emotional impulse" (*Affekt- oder Gefühlsregung*), "Owing to the repression of its proper representative (*eigentlichen Repräsentanz*) it has been forced to become connected with another idea (*anderen Vorstellung*), and is now regarded by consciousness as the manifestation of that idea."[29] The violent cutting of repression tears away affects/emotions from their own primordial and initial accompanying representatives (*Repräsentanzen*). Thereafter, they move in, along,

[26] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 8, 73–74; Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 167–168.
[27] *SE* 14: 121–122.
[28] *SE* 14: 148.
[29] *GW* 10: 276; *SE* 14: 177–178.

and about "other ideas" as *Vorstellungen* associated with their original *Repräsentanzen*.

Incidentally, Fink, on a couple of occasions, indicates that Lacan identifies the *Vorstellung* as a primordially repressed Real (i.e., a pre-Symbolic "x" inscribed in the psyche as a proto-signifier) and the *Repräsentanz* as the Symbolic delegate of the thus — repressed, unconscious *Vorstellung* (i.e., the signifier signifying that which is primordially repressed).[30] However, the preceding quoted sentence from "The Unconscious" (quoted in the paragraph immediately above) indicates that this reverses Freud's metapsychological usage of these two German words. Moreover, in Freud's contemporaneous metapsychological paper on "Repression" (a text Lacan refers to apropos Freud's use of the compound word *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*), the German makes clear that Freud identifies the ideational representatives of drives (i.e., *Triebrepräsentanzen*) which are submitted to repression (both "primal" and secondary/"proper" repression [i.e., *Urverdrängung* and *Verdrängung*]) as *Repräsentanzen*, not *Vorstellungen*.[31] *Contra* Fink (and, perhaps, Lacan himself), the Freudian usage will be respected throughout the rest of the ensuing discussion below.[32]

This Lacanian (mis)reading of Freud aside, an upshot of the preceding to bear in mind in what follows is that affective elements (intimately related to the drives of the libidinal economy) are infused into these ideational representations right from the start. One cannot speak, at least while wearing the cloak of Freud's authority, of intra-representational relations between *Repräsentanzen* and *Vorstellungen* as unfolding prior to and independently of drive-derived affective investments being injected into the *Ur-Repräsentanzen* constituting the primordial nuclei (i.e., the primally repressed) of the defensively eclipsed unconscious. In Freud's name, one might venture positing as an axiom that a *Repräsentanz* is a strange locus of convergence in which energy and structure are indistinctly mixed together from the beginning. Rather than theorizing as if affective energies and ideational structures originally are separate and distinct, only subsequently

[30] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, p. 74 ; Bruce Fink, "The Real Cause of Repetition," *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus] (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 227–228.
[31] *GW* 10: 250-251; *SE* 14: 148.
[32] Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985* [trans. Jeffrey Mehlman] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 312.

to be brought together over the course of passing time in unstable admixtures through ontogenetic processes, maybe this metapsychological perspective needs to be inverted: The neat-and-clean distinction between energy and structure, between affect and idea, is a secondary abstraction generated by both the temporally elongated blossoming of the psyche itself (a blossoming made possible in part by repressions) as well as the psychoanalytic theorization of this same emergence. In short, one might speculate that energetic affects and structural ideas, separated from each other as isolated psychical constituents, are fall-outs distilled, through repression and related dynamics, from more primordial psychical units that are neither/both affective energies nor/and ideational structures.

A paragraph in Lacan's 1959 *écrit* "In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism" summarizes the basic gist of what he sees as being entailed by the Freudian concept-term "*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*". As usual, when the topic of affect is at stake, Lacan appeals to Freud's 1915 papers on metapsychology in particular:

> Freud's conception — developed and published in 1915 in the *Internationale Zeitschrift*, in the three articles on drives and their avatars, repression, and the unconscious — leaves no room for ambiguity on this point: it is the signifier that is repressed, there being no other meaning that can be given in these texts to the word *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. As for affects, Freud expressly formulates that they are not repressed; they can only be said to be repressed by indulgence. As simple *Ansätze* or appendices of the repressed, signals equivalent to hysterical fits [*accès*] established in the species, Freud articulates that affects are simply displaced, as is evidenced by the fundamental fact — and it can be seen that someone is an analyst if he realizes this fact — by which the subject is bound to "understand" his affects all the more the less they are really justified.[33]

Nearly everything Lacan pronounces apropos *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* in Freudian metapsychology over the course of seminars ranging from 1958 through 1971 is contained in this passage. Before turning to the issues involved in translating Freud's German word into both English and (French) Lacanese — these issues will be gotten at through examining relevant moments in *le Séminaire* running from the sixth through the eighteenth seminars — a few remarks on the above

[33] Jacques Lacan, "In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism," *Écrits*, p. 598.

quotation are in order. First of all, Lacan clearly asserts that his Saussure-inspired notion of the signifier is synonymous with Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.[34] Secondly, the implied delegitimization of any theses regarding unconscious affects looks to be in danger of resting on the erroneous assumption that repression is the sole defense mechanism by virtue of which psychical things are barred from explicit conscious self-awareness (as Lacan well knows, for the later Freud especially, there are a number of defense mechanisms besides repression — and this apart from the fact that what is meant by "repression" [*Verdrängung*] in Freud's texts is far from simple and straightforward in the way hinted at by Lacan here). Third, in tandem with emphasizing the displacement of affects within the sphere of consciousness following repression, Lacan indicates that these mere "signals" — in a session of the seventh seminar, he again contrasts affects as signals with *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* as signifiers[35] — are fixed, natural attributes of the human animal (i.e., "signals [...] established in the species"). That is to say, emotions and feelings themselves don't distinguish speaking beings from other living beings. Rather, only the web-like network-systems of ideational nodes into which affects are routed, and within which they are shuttled about through drifting displacements, mark the denaturalized human psyche as distinct from other animals' nature-governed minds. Put differently, affective phenomena on their own, as signals, are purportedly no different-in-kind from the stereotyped repertoire of invariant reactions characteristic of any animal species. Finally, Lacan, presuming that affects remain conscious in the wake of repression (albeit thereafter reattached to other representations-as-signifiers in what Freud deems "false connections"), insists that a properly analytic stance *vis-à-vis* affects is to call into question the pseudo-explanatory rationalizations people construct in response to seemingly excessive displaced sentiments whose "true" ideational bases have been rendered unconscious.

In the sixth seminar, Lacan reiterates much of this apropos the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.[36] The following academic year, he returns to discussing this term several times. Lacan starts with the first half of this compound German word, namely, the word "*Vorstellung*" (usually rendered in English by Freud's translators as "idea" — thus, "*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*" could be translated into English as

[34] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 103.
[35] *Ibid*., pp. 102–103.
[36] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI*, session of November 26th, 1958.

"representative of an idea" or "representative of an ideational representation"). Lacan situates these ideas "between perception and consciousness,"[37] thus suggesting, along accepted and established Freudian lines, that *Vorstellungen*, although being ideational representations registered by the psychical apparatus, aren't necessarily registered in the mode of being attended to by the awareness of directed conscious attention. However, when it comes to the unconscious, Lacan is careful to clarify that its fabric is woven not of *Vorstellungen* as free-standing, atomic units of mental content, but, instead, of differentially co-determining, cross-resonating relations between multiple representations. This is taken as further justification for his psychoanalytic recourse to a modified Saussurian theory of the signifier *à la* structural linguistics, a theory including the stipulation that signifiers as such exist only in sets of two or more signifiers[38] (a signifier without another signifier isn't a signifier to begin with—for there to be an S_1, there must be, at a minimum, an S_2). This, he claims, is the significance of Freud's mention of *Vorstellungen* in connection with *Repräsentanzen* in his paper on "The Unconscious". The concept-term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* "turns *Vorstellung* into an associative and combinatory element. In that way the world of *Vorstellung* is already organized according to the possibilities of the signifier as such."[39] For Freudian psychoanalysis as conceptualized by Lacan, everything in psychical life (affects included) is "flocculated" through the sieve-like matrices of inter-linked signifiers, with these signifiers mutually shaping and influencing each other in complex dynamics defying description in the languages proffered by any sort of psychological atomism of primitive, irreducible mental contents[40] (in a contemporaneous talk entitled "*Discours aux catholiques*," he relates the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* to a "principle of permutation" in which the possibility of displacements and substitutions is the rule[41]). Lacan reads "*Vorstellung*" and "*Repräsentanz*" as both being equivalent to what he refers to under the rubric of the signifier, with one signifier (the S_1 *Vorstellung* — really,

[37] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 61.

[38] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971–1972*, session of February 3rd, 1972 ; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXV: Le moment de conclure, 1977–1978* [unpublished typescript], session of November 15th, 1977; Jean-Claude Milner, *Le périple structural: Figures et paradigms* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), pp. 144-146.

[39] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 61.

[40] *Ibid*., pp. 102, 118.

[41] Jacques Lacan, "*Discours aux catholiques*," *Le triomphe de la religion, précédé de Discours aux catholiques* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), pp. 50–51.

Freud's *Repräsentanz*) being represented by another signifier (the S_2 *Repräsentanz* — really, Freud's *Vorstellung*).

This becomes even clearer a few years later. Jacques-Alain Miller entitles the opening part/sub-section of the June 3rd, 1964 session of Lacan's deservedly celebrated eleventh seminar "The question of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*". Lacan gets his lecture underway by again stressing the importance of this term in Freud's discourse.[42] He ties it to the Freudian metapsychological account of repression, including this account's purported denial and dismissal of the possibility of affects being rendered unconscious.[43] Moreover, auditors are reminded of the correct Lacanian translation of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*: not "the representative representation (*le représentant représentatif*)"[44] but, instead, "*the representative* (*le représentant*) — I translated literally — *of the representation* (*de la représentation*)"[45]. Or, as he quickly proceeds to formulate it, "The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the *representative representative* (*le représentant représentatif*), let us say."[46]

Lacan's point, here and elsewhere,[47] is that a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is not the psychoanalytic name for a single, special piece of ideational content in the psychical apparatus. It isn't as though a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is one individual item of representational material. Rather, according to Lacan, it designates the co-determining *rapport* between two (or more) ideational representations wherein one representation (the repressed S_1) is represented by another representation (the non-repressed S_2, different from but linked in a chain with the repressed S_1).[48] In this vein, he goes on to claim that, "The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the binary signifier"[49] (and this in the context of elaborations concerning the

[42] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), p. 216.
[43] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, pp. 216–217.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 60.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 217.
[46] *Ibid*.
[47] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIII: L'objet de la psychanalyse, 1965–1966* [unpublished typescript], session of June 1st, 1966.
[48] Harari, *Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 267–268.
[49] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 218.

now-famous Lacanian conception of "alienation", elaborations too elaborate to deal with at the moment). In the next session, this is re-stated — "this *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* [...] is [...] the signifying S_2 of the dyad"[50]. A few years later, in the fifteenth seminar, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as the "representative of representation" (*représentant de la représentation*), is similarly linked to the notion of a "combinatorial" (*combinatoire*).[51] In the sixteenth seminar, he warns against equivocating between the terms "representative" (*représentant*) and "representation" (*représentation*).[52] These terms are distinct from one another insofar as representation is a function coming into operation between two or more representatives (in terms of the psychoanalytic *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* involved with repression, this interval is the connection between, on the one hand, the repressed S_1 *Repräsentanz*, and, on the other hand, the non-repressed S_2 *Vorstellung* as both that which contributes to triggering retroactively the repression of the S_1 *Repräsentanz* and, at the same time, the associative/signifying return of this same repressed). Hence, the function of representation isn't reducible to one given representative as an isolated, self-defined atomic unit constituting a single element of discrete content lodged within the psychical apparatus.[53]

What Lacan means when he claims that the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, accurately translated and understood, is the "representative of the representation"[54] is the following: In the aftermath of repression constituting the unconscious in the strict psychoanalytic sense (with the unconscious being the proper object of psychoanalysis as a discipline), certain repressed signifiers (remembering that, for Lacan, only ideas/representations *qua* signifiers can be subjected to the fate of repression) are represented by other, non-repressed signifiers associated in various ways with those that are repressed. In the restricted, circumscribed domains of self-consciousness and the ego, the Lacanian "subject of the unconscious" manages to make itself heard and felt (or, perhaps, misheard and misfelt) through the S_1-S_2 signifying chains that Lacan equates with Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, with these chains bearing witness to significant "effects of

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[51] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XV: L'acte psychanalytique, 1967–1968* [unpublished typescript], session of November 15th, 1967.
[52] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre, 1968–1969* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), p. 261.
[53] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 102.
[54] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 218.

truth" (*effet de vérité*)[55] having to do with the repressed (this also helps to explain why Lacan maintains that "repression and the return of the repressed are the same thing"[56]). These claims about the place of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* in the vicissitudes of repression are reiterated in subsequent seminars after 1964 too.[57]

What, if anything, is problematic in Lacan's glosses on Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*? Arguably, difficulties arise as soon as Lacan (again in the June 3rd session of the eleventh seminar) proceeds further to flesh out the sense in which he uses the word "representation" with respect to Freudian metapsychology:

> We mean by representatives what we understand when we use the phrase, for example, the representative of France. What do diplomats do when they address one another? They simply exercise, in relation to one another, that function of being pure representatives and, above all, their own signification must not intervene. When diplomats are addressing one another, they are supposed to represent something whose signification, while constantly changing, is, beyond their own persons, France, Britain, etc. In the very exchange of views, each must record only what the other transmits in his pure function as signifier, he must not take into account what the other is, *qua* presence, as a man who is likable to a greater or lesser degree. Inter-psychology is an impurity in this exchange.[58]

He continues:

> The term *Repräsentanz* is to be taken in this sense. The signifier has to be understood in this way, it is at the opposite pole from signification. Signification, on the other hand, comes into play in the *Vorstellung*.[59]

[55] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV: La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967* [unpublished typescript], session of December 14th, 1966 ; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1971–1972* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), p. 14.
[56] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, p. 191.
[57] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV*, session of December 14th, 1966.
Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969–1970* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Russell Grigg] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), p. 144.
[58] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 220.
[59] *Ibid*.

There are (at least) two ways to read this invocation of the figure of the diplomat: one, so to speak, more diplomatic (i.e., charitable) than the other. The less charitable reading, for which there is support here and elsewhere in Lacan's *oeuvre*, is that Lacan completely neglects the fact that, according to Freud, the repressed portions of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* configurations/constellations are not "pure" (*à la* the "pure function as signifier") *qua* functionally independent of affective and libidinal investments. In fact, for Freud and much of psychoanalysis after him, intra-psychical defense mechanisms, repression included, are motivated and driven by the recurrently pressing demands of affect-regulation within the psychical apparatus (primarily, fending off and tamping down unpleasurable negative affects). Additionally, for Freud in particular, the repressed drive representatives (*Triebrepräsentanzen*) constituting the nuclei of the unconscious are saturated with cathexes (*Besetzungen*), with the potent "energies" of emotions and impulses. Such electrified representatives, laden and twitching with turbulent passions, are anything but bloodless diplomatic functionaries, cool, calm, and collected representatives (*Repräsentanzen*) able to conduct negotiations with other representatives (*Vorstellungen*) in a reasonable, sober-minded manner.

The more charitable reading of Lacan's 1964 invocation of the figure of the diplomat in specifying the meaning of "representative" at work in Freudian psychoanalysis involves further elucidating what lies behind this figure. Lacan is sensible enough to realize that the flesh-and-blood human beings charged with the status of being diplomatic representatives are, as all-too-human, influenced by their particular interests, motives, reactions, tastes, etc. (i.e., their peculiar "psychologies"). And yet, as diplomatic representatives, they can and do conduct their business with others in ways putting to the side and disregarding these idiosyncrasies of theirs as irrelevant to the matters at stake in their negotiations. But, the states these representatives represent frequently are far from being as dispassionate as their diplomats. In 1915, Freud, responding to the outbreak of the first World War, is quick to note, with a sigh of discouragement he proceeds to analyze, just how emotionally discombobulated and irrationally stirred-up whole countries can become, even the most "civilized" of nations[60]; the essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" is from the same period as the papers on metapsychology upon which Lacan relies in his downplaying of the importance of affect in psychoanalysis. And, to render Lacan's reading of Freud's

[60] *SE* 14: 278–279, 287–288.

metapsychology of affect even more suspect, Freud's war-inspired reflections emphasize the top-to-bottom dominance of affects in the mental life of humanity, in relation to which the intellect is quite weak and feeble.[61]

Considering this fact about the relation between diplomats and the nation-states they represent, a sympathetic and productive way to read Lacan here (in the eleventh seminar) is to interpret the processes unfolding at the level of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* (as representational/signifying materials) as set in motion by something other than such Symbolic "stuff". Starting in the seventh seminar, the Lacanian register of the Real consistently plays the part of that which drives the kinetic concatenations of signifiers without itself being reducible to or delineable within the order of the signifier. However, once set in motion, these representational/signifying materials help shape subsequent psychical-subjective trajectories in fashions not entirely determined by their originary non-Symbolic catalysts (just as diplomats are dispatched at the behest of their countries' whims, although, once caught up in the intricacies of negotiations, these representatives can and do contribute an effective influence of their own on events). As regards a metapsychology of affective life, this would mean that fusions of energy and structure (i.e., *Repräsentanzen*, as analogous to nation-states *qua* combinations of collective will, with all its passions and sentiments, and socio-symbolic edifices) mobilize and push along signifier-like representational networks (i.e., *Vorstellungen*, as analogous to diplomatic representatives of nation-states licensed to speak on their behalf) — with these networks taking on a relative autonomy of their own that comes to exercise a reciprocal, countervailing influence over that which propels them forward (or, sometimes, drags them backward).

Fink rightly notes that the concept of representation in Freudian-Lacanian theory is very much in need of further clarification.[62] As will be argued later, such much-needed clarifications lead to revisions of and/or deviations from Lacan's signifier-centered version of Freud's metapsychology of affect and repression. But, in the meantime, certain things should be articulated apropos Lacan's more nuanced pronouncements concerning affective life, pronouncements located in the tenth and seventeenth seminars in particular. The first session of the tenth

[61] *SE* 14: 287–288.

[62] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, pp. 73–74, 188.

seminar, a seminar devoted to the topic of anxiety, closes with Lacan rapidly enumerating a series of points bearing upon the psychoanalysis of affects (considering that this seminar's treatment of anxiety has been gone over at length by others, the focus in what follows will be highly selective and partial). To begin with, here and in the next session, Lacan insists that anxiety is indeed an affect.[63] Few people, whether analysts or not, would disagree with this seemingly banal observation. But, Lacan proceeds to clarify his relationship to affect as a psychoanalytic thinker:

> Those who follow the movements of affinity or of aversion of my discourse, frequently letting themselves be taken in by appearances, undoubtedly think that I am less interested in affects than in anything else. This is absurd. I have tried on occasion to say what affect is not. It is not being (*l'être*) given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some brute, raw form. It is not, in any case, protopathic. My occasional remarks on affect mean nothing other than this.[64]

He adds:

> what I have said of affect is that it is not repressed. Freud says this just like me. It is unfastened (*désarrimé*); it goes with the drift. One finds it displaced, mad, inverted, metabolized, but it is not repressed. What are repressed are the signifiers that moor it.[65]

Lacan's comments betray a palpable awareness of charges indicting him for negligence with respect to affects, accusations with damning force in many clinical psychoanalytic circles (several years later, starting in the late 1960s, various so-called "post-structuralists" in France, including many non-clinicians, noisily repeat this long-standing refrain of complaint about Lacanian theory). At the very start of the tenth seminar, he lays the foundations for what becomes a repeated line of defensive self-exculpation: I, Lacan, devoted a whole year of my seminar to the topic of anxiety; Therefore, I am not guilty of neglecting affect, as I'm so often accused of doing.[66] Of course, critics could respond by pointing out that one academic year out of twenty-seven (not including out of a mountain of other

[63] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–1963* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), pp. 23, 28.
[64] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, p. 23.
[65] *Ibid*.
[66] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 144; Lacan, "Television," p. 21.

texts in addition) isn't all that much time for a psychoanalyst to spend addressing affects. Even Lacan admits that his "remarks on affect" are "occasional". What's more, as he goes on to say in the closing moments of this inaugural session of the tenth seminar, he has no plans to elaborate a "general theory of affects" (at least not prior to an exploration of anxiety as one specific affect of momentous significance for psychoanalysis), an elaboration derided as a non-psychoanalytic endeavor for mere psychologists.[67]

Anyhow, in the passages from the tenth seminar quoted above, Lacan also, as is manifest, repeats his mantra according to which Freud flatly denies the existence of repressed (i.e., unconscious) affects (a mantra ignoring the fact that Freud tacitly distinguishes between, on the one hand, feelings [*Empfindungen*], and, on the other hand, affects [*Affekte*] and emotions [*Gefühle*] — additionally, he vacillates considerably on the issue of whether affects/emotions can be unconscious[68]). Again, in the wake of repression, affects are said to undergo only detachment from their original ideational partners (i.e., Freud's ideas and/or Lacan's signifiers) to which they are coupled initially; subsequent to this, they meander off and end up reattached to other ideational partners further away down the winding, branching tendrils of enchained representations. Curiously, Lacan, instead of declaring that what he states regarding affect echoes Freud, announces the reverse: What Freud states regarding affect echoes him ("Freud says this just like me" ["*Cela, Freud le dit comme moi*"], and not "I say this just like Freud"). Perhaps, whether consciously or not, Lacan is signaling, through this odd reversal of positions between himself and Freud, an awareness that the Freud he presents in his teachings as regards affect is one retroactively modified and custom-tailored to the needs, constraints, and requirements of a specifically Lacanian framework.

But, although none of the above is new relative to Lacan's basic metapsychology of affect as sketched in earlier contexts, he does utter something very important, something pregnant with crucial implications — "affect [...] is not being (*l'être*) given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some brute, raw form". This project entirely agrees with Lacan on this key point. That is to say, there's agreement here that affects, at least those affecting the sort of subjectivity of concern in analy-

[67] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, p. 24.
[68] Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings".

sis (i.e., the human *qua* speaking being [*parlêtre*]), are anything but primitive phenomena of a self-evident nature calling for no further analysis or explanation. Affects are not ground-zero, rock-bottom experiences incapable of additional decomposition; they are not *Gestalt*-like, indissolubly unified mental states of an irreducible sort. As per the very etymology of the word, to "analyze" affects (as an analyst) is to dissolve them into their multiple constituents. Along these lines, Harari, in his commentary on Lacan's tenth seminar, helpfully highlights what's entailed by Lacan emphasizing, in fidelity to Freud, anxiety's position as a "signal"[69] — "The mere fact of pointing this out implies considering it as *something referring to another order*. Thus, it is not a self- or auto-referential phenomenon but, on the contrary, has a condition of retransmission to another field. *Anxiety does not represent itself*."[70] However, on this reading, if anxiety is emblematic of affects in general, then the "other order" in relation to which this affect is a residual phenomenal manifestation (i.e., a signal) is none other than Lacan's "symbolic order". Affect is thereby once more reduced to the role of a secondary by-product of the intellectualizing machinations of "pure" signifiers. But, what if it's possible for certain affects to "represent" different affects? Or, what if the complex, non-atomic organizations of subjects' affects involve components that aren't strictly of either an affective or signifying status? These are hypotheses yet to be entertained whose consequences await being pursued.

In 1970, during the seventeenth seminar, Lacan refers back to the tenth seminar. Speaking of the latter, he observes:

> Someone whose intentions I don't need to describe is doing an entire report, to be published in two days time, so as to denounce in a note the fact that I put affect in the background, that I ignore it. It's a mistake to think I neglect affects—as if everyone's behavior was not enough to affect me. My entire seminar that year was, on the contrary, structured around anxiety, insofar as it is the central affect, the one around which everything is organized. Since I was able to introduce anxiety as the fundamental affect, it was a good thing all the same that already, for a good length of time, I had not been neglecting affects.[71]

[69] *SE* 16: 395, 405; *SE* 20: 140–141, 166–167, 202; *SE* 22: 84, 93-95; *SE* 23: 146, 199.
[70] Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety'*, pp. 4-5.
[71] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 144.

Immediately after using the seminar on anxiety to exonerate himself, Lacan continues:

> I have simply given its full importance, in the determinism of *die Verneinung* [negation], to what Freud has explicitly stated, that it's not affect that is repressed. Freud has recourse to this famous *Repräsentanz* which I translate as *représentant de la représentation*, and which others, and moreover not without some basis, persist in calling *représentant-représentatif*, which absolutely does not mean the same thing. In one case the representative is not a representation, in the other case the representative is just one representation among others. These translations are radically different from one another. My translation implies that affect, through the fact of displacement, is effectively displaced, unidentified, broken off from its roots — it eludes us.[72]

Lacan's reference to "*die Verneinung*" sounds like an invocation of the concept of negation *à la* Freud, and not a citation of the 1925 paper of the same title. That is to say, he seems to be asserting that he indeed pays attention to affects, albeit in a negative mode emphasizing what affects are not: not repressed, not unconscious, not irreducible, not primitive, not self-explanatory, and so on. If he talks about them as a psychoanalyst, it tends to be under the sign of negation. Furthermore, Fink's previously noted reading of the Lacanian translation of Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* appears to be supported here; in these particular remarks, Lacan too evidently reads backwards the positioning of *Repräsentanzen* and *Vorstellungen* relative to each other in the core texts of Freudian metapsychology. Perhaps a contributing factor to the confusion evinced by Lacan and Fink with respect to Freud's original German writings is the distinction between "primal repression" (*Urverdrängung*) and "repression proper" (*eigentliche Verdrängung*) in the paper on "Repression". More precisely, in primal repression, a *Repräsentanz qua Triebrepräsentanz* is condemned to unconsciousness, thereafter to be represented in the psyche by other ideas *qua Vorstellungen*. Some of these *Vorstellungen* of the primally repressed *Triebrepräsentanz*, if the former become too closely associated with the latter, can succumb to repression as repression proper.[73] But, once repression proper, as secondary in relation to primal repression, is up and running — by this point, a whole web-like network of ideational representations is established in the psychical apparatus — one could

[72] *Ibid*.

[73] *GW* 10: 250–251; *SE* 14: 148.

speak of certain representatives (signifiers as *Vorstellungen*) being represented by other representatives (signifiers as *Repräsentanzen*).

The alternate translation of the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* which Lacan mentions above would appear to be that of his two protégés Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire. In their famous 1960 paper "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study" (given at the Bonneval colloquium, the same venue at which Lacan orally delivers his *écrit*, rewritten in 1964, entitled "Position of the Unconscious"), Laplanche and Leclaire discuss this vexing compound German word. They indeed translate it as "*représentant representatif*".[74] In the third chapter of this text, Leclaire explains:

> It is emphasized that the drive, properly speaking, has no place in mental life. Repression does not bear on it, it is neither conscious nor unconscious and it enters into the circuit of mental life only through the mediation of the "*(Vorstellungs-)Repräsentanz*". This is a rather unusual term of which it must be immediately said that in Freud's usage, it is often found in divided form as one of its two components. We will translate this composite expression by "ideational representative" and we shall inquire into the nature of this mediation, through which the drive enters into (one could even say "is captured by") mental life.[75]

Laplanche and Pontalis, in their psychoanalytic dictionary, echo this interpretive translation/definition proffered by Leclaire.[76] Therein, Laplanche and Pontalis explain:

> "Representative" renders "*Repräsentanz*" [...], a German term of Latin origin which should be understood as implying *delegation* [...] "*Vorstellung*" is a philosophical term whose traditional English equivalent is "idea". "*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*" means a delegate (in this instance, a delegate of the instinct) in the sphere of ideas; it should be

[74] Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "L'inconscient: Une étude psychanalytique," in Jean Laplanche, *Problématiques IV: L'inconscient et le ça* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Frances, 1981), p. 289.
[75] Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study" [trans. Patrick Coleman], *Yale French Studies: French Freud — Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, no. 48, 1972, p. 144.
[76] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* [trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), pp. 203–204.

> stressed that according to Freud's conception it is the idea that represents the instinct, not the idea itself that is represented by something else — Freud is quite explicit about this.[77]

In the passages from his seventeenth seminar quoted in the paragraph above, what appears to concern Lacan about the way his students Laplanche, Leclaire, and Pontalis translate/define Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is that their rendition of this compound German word implies that the affective forces of libidinal life are adequately represented by the ideational inscriptions (as Lacan's signifiers) forming the signifying networks of the structured psychical apparatus. Although he grants that his students' perspective on this issue of interpreting Freud's texts is hardly unjustified ("not without some basis"), Lacan feels that, when it comes to the (non-)relation between affects and signifiers in the speaking subjectivity of interest to psychoanalysis, it's inappropriate to imply that affects are accurately represented (i.e., depicted, mirrored, reflected, transferred, translated, etc.) by signifiers as ideational representations — hence Lacan's emphasis that, in his own translation/definition of this Freudian term, "the representative is not a representation" (and, as he proceeds to clarify apropos this point, "My translation implies that affect, through the fact of displacement, is effectively displaced, unidentified, broken off from its roots — it eludes us"). As Lacan presents this disagreement in which he's embroiled, Laplanche *et al*, on the one hand, hint at the hypothesis that fundamental affective phenomena connected with the driven psyche can be and are distilled into more or less faithful representational delegates whereas, on the other hand, he, Lacan, insists upon the disjunctive break creating a discrepancy/gap between affects and their non-representative "representations". According to this presentation, Laplanche and company posit a synthesizing, harmonious-enough *rapport* between affects and their signifier-like delegates; Lacan, by contrast, maintains that (to paraphrase one of his most [in]famous one-liners) "*Il n'y a pas de rapport représentatif entre l'affect et le signifiant*." The Lacanian metapsychology of affect stresses, among other things, the estrangement of the *parlêtre* from its affects. Rather than remaining self-evident, self-transparent experiences, the affective waters are, at certain levels, hopelessly muddied from the viewpoint of the speaking subject struggling to relate to them. For signifier-mediated subjectivity, the feel of its feelings ceases to be something immediately clear and unambiguous.

[77] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 203–204.

Picking up in the seventeenth seminar where the last passage quoted above from this text leaves off, Lacan remarks, "This is what is essential in repression. It's not that the affect is suppressed, it's that it is displaced and unrecognizable."[78] To be more precise, there arguably are two senses of displacement operative here (parallel to the two types of repression, primal and secondary): first, the shuttling of an affect from one signifier-like ideational representation to another (a displacement of affect corresponding to secondary repression) and, second, the split between an affect and its non-representative "representations" introduced with the originary advent of the mediation of signifiers (this mediation amounts to a primal repression of affects through irreversibly displacing them into the foreign territories of symbolic orders). Consequently, not only can affects become "unrecognizable" ("*méconnaissable*") through being transferred from one ideational-representational constellation onto another (*à la* such common analytic examples as the displacement of emotional responses linked to one significant other onto a different person who is somehow brought into associational connection with the significant other) — the foundational gap between affects and signifiers means that, to greater or lesser extents, the subject's knowledge (*connaissance* as much as *savoir*) of its affective life in general is problematized through the unavoidable distorting intervention of the signifying systems shaping speaking subjectivity. These statements are made by Lacan during a question-and-answer session entitled "Interview on the steps of the Pantheon" (May 13th, 1970). Right after this discussion of the representation (or lack thereof) of affect, Lacan is asked an unrecorded question about "the relations between existentialism and structuralism". All he says in response is this — "Yes, it's as if existential thought was the only guarantee of a recourse to affects."[79] This one-sentence reply is worth highlighting if only because it serves as yet another indication that Lacan doesn't conceive of himself as seeking to eliminate any and every reference to the affective in psychoanalysis (as he is sometimes accused of doing). He doesn't perceive his Saussure-inspired re-reading of Freud as entailing the reductive elimination of everything other than the signifier-systems of Symbolic big Others.

At the start of the immediately following session of the seventeenth seminar (May 20th, 1970), the topic of affect resurfaces. Lacan's succinct statements here with

[78] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 144.
[79] *Ibid*.

respect to this topic are rather inscrutable, at least at first glance. To begin with, he comments that, "Thought is not a category. I would almost say it is an affect. Although, this is not to say that it is at its most fundamental under the aspect of affect."[80] This easily could be read in several fashions. However, Lacan undoubtedly intends in this context to call into question what is often assumed to be a firm, sharp distinction between the cognitive-structural and the emotional-energetic (but, as the last sentence of this quotation indicates, he nonetheless doesn't deny some sort of distinction between the intellectual and the affective). He then proceeds to declare that:

> There is only one affect — this constitutes a certain position, a new one to be introduced into the world, which, I am saying, is to be referred to what I am giving you a schema of, transcribed onto the blackboard, when I speak of the psychoanalytic discourse.[81]

Lacan goes on to note that there are those, such as some student radicals who reproached him when he appeared at Vincennes in 1969, who would protest that Lacan's mathemes in dry white chalk against a black background (such as his formal formulas for the four discourses forming the focus of his 1969–1970 annual seminar) are bloodless, sterile academic constructs with no bearing whatsoever on anything truly "real" (*qua* concrete, palpable, tangible, and so on).[82] Lacan retorts, "That's where the error is."[83] On the contrary, "if there is any chance of grasping something called the real, it is nowhere other than on the blackboard."[84] Resonating with prior reflections on the dialectical entanglement of the concrete and the abstract in both Hegelian and Marxist reflections on the nature of reality (not to mention with the history of mathematical models in the modern natural sciences from the seventeenth century through the present), Lacan denounces the naïve appeal to any concreteness unmediated by abstractions. Human social and subjective reality is permeated and saturated by formal structures and dynamics irreducible to what is simplistically imagined to be raw, positive facts on the ground. Hence, only a theoretical grasp of these abstractions, abstractions which do indeed "march in the streets" in the guise of socialized subjects, has a

[80] *Ibid*., p. 150.
[81] *Ibid*., pp. 150-151.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 151.
[83] *Ibid*.
[84] *Ibid*.

chance of getting a handle on a real(ity) that is so much more than a mere aggregate of dumb, idiotic concrete givens.[85] It ought to be observed that Lacan makes this point on the heels of talking about affect, thus insinuating that affects are not to be thought of (as, perhaps, some in psychoanalysis do) as elements of a brute, pre-existent psychical concreteness already there before either the analysand on the couch speaks (or even becomes a speaking subject in the first place) or the analyst clinically interprets and/or metapsychologically theorizes.

Lacan quickly returns to his assertion of there being solely a single affect. Again invoking the "psychoanalytic discourse" — this would be the discourse of the analyst, as distinct from the other three discourses delineated in the seventeenth seminar, that is, those of the master, university, and hysteric — he maintains that, "In effect, from the perspective of this discourse, there is only one affect, which is, namely, the product of the speaking being's capture in a discourse, where this discourse determines its status as object."[86] A series of steps are necessary to spell out the reasoning behind Lacan's assertion. First of all, one must remember that, according to the Lacanian theory of the four discourses, the analyst's discourse has the effect of "hystericizing" the analysand.[87] In other words, through the peculiar social bond that is an analysis, a language-organized situation in which someone occupies the position of an analyst in relation to another speaking being, he/she who speaks under the imperative to freely associate (i.e., the analysand) is led to lose the certainty of being equal to his/her discourse, of meaning what he/she says and saying what he/she means. Such a loss of self-assured certainty is inseparable from what is involved in any genuine confrontation with the unconscious. Along with this, the analysand comes to wonder whether he/she is equivalent to his/her previously established coordinates of identification, coordinates embedded in socio-symbolic milieus (i.e., avatars and emblems of identity embraced by the analysand as constitutive of his/her ego-level "self"). Hystericization occurs when the *parlêtre* on the couch is hurled into a vortex of doubts through coming to be uncertain about being comfortably and consciously in charge of his/her discourse and everything discourse entails for an entity whose very identity depends on it. From a Lacanian perspective, one of the analyst's primary aims in an analysis, to be achieved through various means, is to

[85] Joan Copjec, "May '68, The Emotional Month," *Lacan: The Silent Partners* [ed. Slavoj Žižek] (London: Verso, 2006), p. 92.
[86] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 151.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

derail the analysand's supposed mastery of speech and meaning, to disrupt the discourse of the master as the (illusory) mastery of discourse.[88] Referring back to the brief quotation at the start of this paragraph, the thus- hystericized subject becomes riveted to questions about what sort of "object" he/she is, first and foremost, for both inter-subjective others (i.e., incarnate alter-egos, embodied partners actual and imagined, and so on) and trans-subjective Others (i.e., the symbolic order, the anonymous "They," institutions and societies, etc.), but also for him/her-self in terms of self-objectifications: "Who or what am I for you and/or others?"; "Am I really the 'x' (man, woman, husband, wife, son, daughter, authority, professional...) I have taken myself to be?"

In short, the position Lacan labels the discourse of the hysteric, unlike that of the master, is essentially characterized by uncertainty. However, what, if anything, does all of this have to do with the topic of affect? There are several connections. To begin with, another possible line of questioning speaking subjects hystericized through analyses inevitably will be prompted to pursue on a number of occasions is: "How do I truly feel?"; "Do I honestly feel the way that I feel that I feel?" Not only is the figure of the master certain of being equivalent to what he/she says and how he/she identifies and is identified socio-symbolically—the *parlêtre* pretending to occupy a position of masterful agency (in Lacan's discourse theory, agency itself, in any of the four discourses, is invariably a "semblance" [*semblant*] beneath which lies the obfuscated "truth" [*vérité*] of this agent-position[89]) is also certain of how he/she feels: "I know exactly how I feel"; "When I feel 'x,' that's how I really feel." Hystericization undermines confident sureness as regards affects just as much as regards anything else — and this insofar as, within the subjective structures of speaking beings, affective phenomena, like everything else, are inextricably intertwined with socio-symbolic mediators.[90] Moreover, in an effective analysis worthy of the name, doubts arise

[88] Slavoj Žižek, "The Undergrowth of Enjoyment: How Popular Culture Can Serve as an Introduction to Lacan," *The Žižek Reader* [ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright] (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1999), pp. 28–29; Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 133-134, 144; Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), pp. 251–253, 259–260.

[89] Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pp. 251–252; Paul Verhaeghe, "From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory on the Four Discourses," *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive* (New York: Other Press, 2001), p. 22.

[90] Mladen Dolar, "Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis," *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII* [ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg] (Durham:

about the seeming obviousness and trustworthiness of feelings. The analyst can and should guide the analysand to realizations that affects aren't always directly related to what they appear to be related to in conscious experience (thanks to displacement, transference, etc.) and that given feelings can work to conceal other emotions and their associated thoughts (such as, to take one common example, affection/love masking aggression/hate and vice versa). Lacan's neologisms "*senti-ment*" (a neologism linking sentiments to lying)[91] and "*affectuation*" (a neologism linking affects to affecting *qua* putting on a false display)[92] both point to the analytic thesis that, as Slavoj Žižek bluntly and straightforwardly puts it, "emotions lie."[93] But, whereas Lacanians often explicitly assert or implicitly assume that the unconscious "truths" masked by the "lies" of conscious emotions (as felt feelings [*Empfindungen*]) are non-affective entities (i.e., signifiers, structures, and so on), the preceding glosses on Lacan's inadequately elaborated metapsychology of affect indicate that, behind the façade of misleading felt feelings, might be other, misfelt feelings, rather than phenomena of a fundamentally non-affective nature.

Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 143–144.

[91] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, p. 66.

[92] Jacques Lacan, "La mort est du domaine de la foi," October 13th, 1972, http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan70.php.

[93] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p. 229.

Displacing Humanism

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Marc De Kesel*

A Small, Additional, Added – on Life Speaking. Remarks on the Vitalism in Giorgio Agamben's Critical Theory[1]

L'homme est indestructible, et cela signifie qu'il
n'y pas de limite à sa destruction.
Maurice Blanchot[2]

...and the commandment, which was ordained
to bring life, I found to be unto death.
Saint Paul (*Romans* 7: 10)

The core idea of Giorgio Abamben's political philosophy, as developed in *Homo Sacer* – in the book as well as in the larger project of that name[3] – is well known. It is an inquiry into the logic of sovereignty which, according to Agamben, rules the entire political thought of the West, from politics in Antiquity to modern and post-modern bio-politics. That logic implies the ever present possibility of a reduction of the political subject to "bare life", to the position of "*homo sacer*" who "can be killed but not sacrificed". Even language as such is secretly ruled by that logic, Agamben several times adds. Even our daily speaking is virtually able to reduce us to the position of "bare life", of "*homo sacer*". If in this essay, I go into the passages in *Homo Sacer* that treat about language, it is because, there, Agamben's thesis shows its most radical – if not to say untenable – shape. These pas-

[1] A first draft of this essay has been presented at the IPS (International Philosophical Seminar), "Reading Agamben, *Homo Sacer*", Kastelruth (Italy), 28. 06 – 07. 07. 2009.

[2] M. Blanchot, *L'entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), quoted in: Agamben, *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz* (Paris: Rivages, 1999), p. 146.

[3] *Homo Sacer*, indeed, is the title, not only of one book, but of a still unfinished series of books, including *Homo Sacer* (I) (1995), *State of Exception* (II,1) (2003), *Le reigne et la gloire* (II,2) (2007), *Remnants of Auschwitz* (III) (1998) and a fifth volume (part IV) – the "*pars construens*" of the project – which is still to be written. Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 [abbreviation HS]); *The State of Exception*, translated by Kevin Attell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, (New York: Zone Books, 2002); *Le règne et la gloire, Homo Sacer, II,2*, traduit par Joël Gayraud & Martin Rueff, (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

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sages also compel us to reconsider the theory of the subject, implied in Agamben's "logic of sovereignty". For Agamben, to be subjected to the logic of sovereignty implies a desubjectivation or, what amounts to the same thing, an exclusion of the subject. At least, this is what Agamben states in *Homo Sacer* (the book). In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, however, he adds that this desubjectivation, although ruled by the logic of sovereignty, nonetheless hides a possibility of escaping that very logic. There he explains how, as witness, the victim implies a positive subject definition. Again, a reflexion on language and on subject theory will be at the core of his reflexion. If, in my comments on this aspect of Agambenian thought, I make a comparison with the language and subject theory of Jacques Lacan, it is mainly to clarify the vitalistic presuppositions underlying Agamben's theory of the subject.

1. Inclusive exclusion

According to Michel Foucault, the logic of sovereignty characterizes the ancient, medieval and early modern way to legitimize political power. Power, then, was the power over a territory, the power to take possession and to levy toll from people, the power symbolized by death since it allowed itself to take people's life.[4] In the late 18th and early 19th century, things changed. Power, then, becomes power over a population, power founded in the wealth of the population's economic capacity, power legitimizing itself by managing the care for that wealth. This new kind of power is not symbolized by death but by life, since the population's life is now political power's main concern. Life – the life of the people – becomes the very *raison d'être* of political power. Politics became basically bio-politics. This, however, is not to say that power turns more positive or humane. It only means, thus Foucault, that the strategies of power change. The 'micro mechanisms of power' only become more subtle, more secret and concealed, but not less effective.

Agamben agrees with Foucault, except about the idea that the paradigm of sovereignty should have been left behind and replaced by the one of bio-politics. Unlike Foucault, Agamben sees the sovereign paradigm still fully operative within our bio-political age. One of his arguments is that, in politics, the appeal

[4] Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, Population. Cours au Collège de France, 1977–1978* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

to the state of exception has only increased during the last century. Carl Schmitt's emphasis on this term as defining the characteristic property of politics as such is only one of the signs pointing in that direction. Put in a situation threatening its foundation, any (bio)political power has to appeal on the state of exception. Not only the persistence of war in the bio-political 20th century gives evidence of this, the proliferation and persistence of camps during that century point in the same direction. The state's ultimate power over people's live is shown in the clearest way where that state gathers people – illegal immigrants and "*sans papiers*" for instance – in a camp being entirely left, not to the laws of that state (since they are not citizens of that state), but to the grace of its sovereign power, a power that, in that case, indifferently, can decide about their lives, also in the negative sense. Founded in itself, the state remains founded in the sovereign decision about who is inside and who is outside. *Virtually*, once threatened (or feeling threatened), the state can act against all its citizens as a threat from outside, as an enemy to be eliminated. So, even the state's intention to care for its people is in fact based in the possibility to eliminate them. The state of exception is the real paradigm of its rules.

Behind that "state of exception" paradigm, the old logic of sovereignty keeps on ruling, a logic that defines power as the power rather to take life than to take care of it (as all kinds of bio-political power legitimizations claim). It is, more precisely, the power to exclude people from the public life, from life as shaped by its social/political condition, i.e. from βιος (*bios*) in the sense Aristotle gave to the ancient Greek term for human, social life. Sovereign power is the power that, indifferently, can let people in or out the realm of the "bios". It is the power to sorvereingly reduce or not people to ζοη (*zoè*), mere natural live, "bare life".

Crucial is that, for Agamben, "bare life" is not simply natural life, as Aristotle states. If someone's life is reduced to its "bare" condition, it is not because it has become simply natural. On the contrary, "*la nuda vita*" is the result of a political decision, more precisely of an exclusion. It is an exclusion from "bios", from political life. And that exclusion shows the fully sovereign nature of that political decision – and of political power in general. For, even if excluded, someone is still completely at the mercy of that power. In other words, the exclusion is an inclusive one. The most fundamental structure of sovereign power is to be defined as "*esclusione inclusiva*", an inclusive exclusion.

Agamben discerns that structure in the oldest forms of political power. For instance in one of Ancient Rome's most severe sanctions, the "*sacer esto*" curse. It is an excommunication excluding the malefactor from both the profane and the sacred order. Anyone is allowed to kill him unpunished, but nobody is allowed to sacrifice him (HS: 8; 71). Expelled from the human world, the "*homo sacer*" is dedicated to the gods and, in that sense "sacred". Expelled, however, even from the realm of religious practices, he cannot sacrificially be dedicated or offered to the gods. That curse shows the limits of both the human and divine law. And it shows as well how both laws sovereignly dominate their limits *and, consequently, the beyond of these limits*. Excluded from the human, the cursed malefactor remains subjected to that law – and thus, in his very exclusion, included within the law's field. Similarly, his exclusion from the religious power is not contradictory to the fact that he is entirely included in the realm of divine power.

Political power over people is sovereign insofar as it dominates its own limits and, thus, includes even the ones it excludes. It dominates the difference defining its realm, i.e. the difference between who is inside and who is outside – which in principle implies: between the living ones and the ones condemned to death. The space where power can decide sovereignly between who is to live and who is to die, is the genuine political space of sovereign power. It is a space marked by difference (inside/outside, life/death), but about which power decides indifferently, unbound by its own laws. And since it includes the excluded "outside", the space of sovereign power is virtually infinite. As is its power as well.

Did this kind of sovereign power not disappear since, historically, the sovereign rulers – dukes, counts, kings and emperors – were kicked out from the political scene? Is the legitimization of political power not transferred now to the people, and more exactly to the population's life? In other words, is bio-politically legitimized and organized power not freed from the inclusively exclusive logic characteristic for political power founded in sovereignty?

On the contrary, Agamben emphasises. Since modern politics is explicitly based in life, its power has to master life's boundaries and, thus, what is *beyond* those boundaries. The basic procedure underlying the political space it generates as well as its power, is still the "ban", i.e. the inclusive exclusion by which it creates and regulates limitlessly its own limits (HS: 28–29; 49–50). Like the Roman political space once created its space where it decided about its outside (i.e. about

the space of the *homo sacer*), modern politics creates a similar place: the camp. Concentration camps, camps for refugees, for illegal immigrant, for *sans-papiers*, for those suspected of terrorism, et cetera: there, the political power shows the paradigm of its rule, i.e. the state of exception, that allows it to sovereignly decide who is in and who is out. In a globalized world, supposing the boundaries between countries overcome by the universal human rights each "world citizen" possesses, the paradigm of political powers comes to light where people who only possess those "human rights" are enclosed behind the barbed wire of a camp being delivered to the mercy of sovereign decisions.

If modern biopolitics is still ruled by the logic of sovereignty, then, also ancient sovereign power always has been biopolitical. Agamben refers to Aristotle who, in order to define the life of the city (πολις, *polis*) distinguishes good life (ευ ζην, *eu zèn*) from (mere, bare) life (ζην, *zèn*). Here already, at the very beginning of Western political history, bare life is excluded from – and, as excluded, included in – "bios" (βιος), the life as occurring in – and regulated by – the city (πολις, *polis*). "What is the relation between politics and life, if life presents itself as what is included by means of exclusion?" (HS: 7) This "bio-political" question par excellence secretly dominates the entire political thought of the West, without ever being put on the agenda in all clarity. Agamben's larger *Homo Sacer* project is an attempt to rethink the political proceeding from that very question.

2. Language, …

In the context of the quote just cited, Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (the book) mentions a first time of the formal parallel between the logic of both politics and language. Commenting a passage from Aristotle's *Politica*, Agamen writes:

> It is not by chance, then, that a passage of the *Politics* situates the proper place of the *polis* in the transition from voice to language. […] The question: "In what way does the living being have language?" corresponds exactly to the question 'In what way does bare life dwell in the *polis*?" The living being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the *polis* by letting its own bare life be excluded, as an exception, within it. […] In the "politicization" of bare life – the metaphysical task *par excellence* – the humanity of living man is decided. In assuming this task, modernity does nothing other than declare its own faithfulness to the essential structure of the metaphysical tradition. The fundamental categorical pair of

> Western politics is not that of friend / enemy, but that of bare life / political existence, *zoè* / *bios*, exclusion / inclusion. (HS: 7–8)

In order to become a citizen, man has to give up the singularity of his voice and to subject himself to the discourse of the city, to the "political" language, the "logos". The "voice" as the "sign of pain and pleasure", the voice speaking of a life's singularity is supposed to be not compatible with the "logos", i.e. with what is "manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust"[5]. Only, and this is the crucial point in Agamben's analysis, this non-compatibility is a declaration *done by the logos*, by the logic ruling the city/*polis*. The "logos" *excludes* the voice of non-political life and, in the same gesture, *includes* it in its realm. It is a way to declare the voice to be bare life, i.e. to be subjected to a sovereign power that, indifferently, decides whether it may live or must die. The difference laying at the base of politics is not the one between friend and enemy, a difference on the level of attitude, as Carl Schmitt's central thesis claims[6], but the difference between political and bare life, between *bios* and *zoè*, a difference which already operates on the level of speaking, of the "logos" people share with one another. So, already on the level of language (*logos*), the logic of sovereignty operating by the paradigm of *inclusive exclusion* is overpowering.

A few pages further, Agamben's thesis on language sounds still more radical and provocative. Referring to Hegel's theory of language in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, he writes:

> We have seen that only the sovereign decision on the state of exception opens the space in which it is possible to trace borders between inside and outside and in which determinate rules can be assigned to determinate territories. In exactly the same way, only language as pure potentiality to signify, withdrawing itself from every concrete instance of speech, divides the linguistic from the non-linguistic and allows for the opening of areas of meaningful speech in which certain terms correspond to certain denotations. Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself. The particular structure of law has its foundation in this presuppositional

[5] Quotes from the passage Agamben cites from Aristotle's *Politica* (1253 a 10–18) (HS: 7–8).
[6] Carl Schmitt *The Concept of the Political*, translated by George Schwab, foreword by Tracy B. Strong, commentary by Leo Strauss, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

> structure of human language. It expresses the bond of inclusive exclusion to which a thing is subject because of the fact of being in language, of being named. To speak is, in this sense, always to "speak the law", *ius dicere*. (HS: 21)

The context reflects on the validity of legal norms, telling this cannot be traced back to their applicability in concrete cases. Norms need a legitimacy on their own, independent from all applicability and referring to a merely sovereign instance. Which they have. This is what decisions made in cases of exception make clear. Then, it becomes obvious that, on the most fundamental level, legal norms function by reference to the authority of a self-made sovereign law. Similarly, language cannot be traced back to its applicability in concrete situations. Words can only designate concrete things insofar they have a meaning on their own, independent from their designating function. In the last resort (which becomes obvious in states of exceptions), it is language that decides about the sense of things, not the things themselves. The things' *bare* existence is first *ex*cluded from language and, in that very quality, at the same time *in*cluded within language's realm. The sense of things is only based in that "second" moment. This, indeed, shows language's sovereign power, organising a never ending "state of exception" with regard to *bare* reality. "Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself." So, that there is nothing outside of language is not a simple observation. It tells that language sovereignly decides about what is outside or inside. When Hegel states that "language [...] is the perfect element in which interiority is as external as exteriority is internal" (as quoted on p. 21), he does not describe the situation of language as it is, but of how it acts, of its activated capacity, i.e. of its power to decide whether something "is" or "is not", whether something/someone is given life or not. Being subjected to language, all things are virtually its victims. To speak equals "to speak the law" and to be condemned by that law.

In the fourth paragraph of Part 1, Agamben develops another reference to language. The passage is on Kafka's famous short story "Before the Law" which, as he says, is an excellent illustration of the Law that, being explicitly not applied to any concrete case, shows the sovereign logic it is ruled by. For, precisely, the "man from the country" is not *in* the Law's realm, he is outside. From that outside position he intends to enter it – an entrance which seems even facilitated by the open door leading to it, and by a guard who promises to do nothing if one

walks through that door. At the end of the story we learn that precisely this open door was the man of the country's personal obstacle that has kept him for ever excluded from the Law's domain. "The open door destined only for him includes him in excluding him and excludes him in including him", Agamben writes (HS: 50). In other words, Kafka's story reveals the logic of the "ban" underlying the relation between the Law and its subject. In an additional paragraph, Agamben continues:

> In an analogous fashion, language also holds man in its ban insofar as man, as speaking being, has always already entered into language, without noticing it. Everything that is presupposed for there to be language (in its forms of something non-linguistic, something ineffable, etc.) is nothing other than a presupposition of language that is maintained as such in relation to language precisely insofar as it is excluded from language. [...] As the pure form of relation, language (like the sovereign ban) always already presupposes itself in the figure of something nonrelational, and it is not possible either to enter into relation or to move out of relation with what belongs to the form of relation itself. This means not that the non-linguistic is inaccessible to man but simply that man can never reach it in the form of a nonrelational and ineffable presupposition, since the non-linguistic is only ever to be found in language itself. (HS: 50)

The previous quote said that the ground upon which language rests is language's own construction, its product or supposition excluding/including *bare* reality. This quote is even more provocative, telling explicitly that this logic goes also for the subject of language, for the one making use of it. Contrary to what we suppose, we do not precede the language we use in order to talk about ourselves. We are ourselves a supposition made by the sovereign language we use – or, more exactly, that makes use of us.

It is not man who holds language in its ban, it is language that "holds man in its ban". Enabling us to relate to others and to ourselves, language operates in a logical form inclusively excluding us and, thus, reducing us to "bare life" about which can be decided indifferently, sovereignly. The mere logic of our speaking might reduce us to the possibility to become "bare life" living by the grace of language that decides sovereignly whether we are in or out its realm, in or out the life that lives thanks to language's sovereign grace. Relating to people (including himself) in and through language, man is subjected to that language as to an autonomously operating Relation, a kind of transcendental "relationality" to which

he cannot relate (in this sense, it is "nonrelational"), while it makes all his relations possible. To that "condition of possibility" man is subjected as to a Law – a Law that owes its ground, sense and meaning only to itself and whose logic is the one of sovereignty, so Agamben stresses. That Law is to be defined as "*Geltung ohne Bedeutung*", "being in force without significance", thus Agamben, quoting Gershem Scholem's comment of Kafka's short story (HS: 51):

> Nothing better describes the ban that our age cannot master than Scholem's formula for the status of law in Kafka's novel. What, after all, is the structure of the sovereign ban if not that of a law that *is in force* but does not signify? Everywhere on earth men live today in the ban of a law and a tradition that are maintained solely as the "zero point" of their own content, and that include men within them in the form of a pure relation of abandonment. All societies and all cultures today (it does not matter whether they are democratic or totalitarian, conservative or progressive) have entered into a legitimation crisis in which law (we mean by this term the entire text of tradition in its regulative form, whether the Jewish Torah or the Islamic Shariah, Christian dogma or the profane *nomos*) is in force as the pure "Nothing of Revelation". But this is precisely the structure of the sovereign relation, and the nihilism in which we are living is, from this perspective, nothing than the coming to light of this relation as such. (HS: 51)

So, man's position vis-à-vis language is but an illustration of the one vis-à-vis the entire tradition and culture ruled by the logic of sovereignty. Although we think that, since modernity, it is up to us to decide about the sense of our tradition and culture, it is in fact still the other way round. And, what is more: if tradition and culture do decide about the sense of *our* existence, it is not because they rest on a more solid ground or have a firmer legitimation than we do. On the contrary, they are founded in "Nothing" and illustrate strikingly modernity's nihilism. But still they hold man in their ban. Whatever the content of tradition and culture might be, they relate to man with the logic of sovereignty. Supposing himself to be a free subject having control over tradition and culture and using it for the benefit of his and others' life (as is the case under biopolitical conditions), he is always already trapped in a logic that virtually reduces him to a victim subjected to the capriciousness of a sovereign power. Tradition, culture, politics, and even language as such might be groundless, they are still ruled by the logic of sovereignty, excluding man from their domain in order to include him in it *as excluded*, as *bare life,* as the one about whom, indifferently, any decision can be taken.

In spite of what modernity claims, we have not become free, independent and self-grounding subjects. On the contrary, the old theory of the subject is still highly valid. We are still first of all *subjected to* a law, and that law is ruled by the old logic of sovereignty, reducing us virtually all to a radically "de-subjectivised" "bare life", to the life of a *homo sacer*, a life that can be killed but not sacrificed, a life delivered to the deadly grace of an indifferent, sovereign decision.

3. … and representation in general

So far the theory of the subject Agamben criticizes in his *Homo sacer* and in many other of his books. The subject involved in Western thought is not the "free actor" as liberal democracy likes to believe. It is rather an "object" subjected to an independent, sovereign law reducing man to an included exclusion. Even his language puts him in that includedly excluded position. In Agamben, there is no mention of it, but in fact that theory of the subject is quite near to that other famous/infamous one elaborated by Jacques Lacan between the fifties and the seventies. Certainly when one takes into account the passages in *Homo Sacer* on language, the similarity is striking.

For Lacan the subject is to be defined as subject *of* – and, thus, *subjected to* – language. Put in psychoanalytical terms, this means that, unable to obtain pleasure directly from the real, the libidinal *infans* has to get it from the others with whom it identifies. In order to get an identity, the child more precisely identifies with the "one" the others talk about. It supposes itself to be the subject of their talk. Initially the infans understands not one of the signifiers they utter, but even then it knows itself to be the "signified" of those signifiers. This lays the foundation for the "subject" it will remain during its entire life. In a first time, the *infans* supposes itself to be the full meaning of the incomprehensible signifiers uttered by the others (this is the ground for the imaginary Ego). In a second time, it holds itself exclusively to signifiers, which keeps him infinitely referring to other signifiers, thus becoming the subject – bearer, support, in Greek "*hypokeimenon*", in Latin "*subjectum*" – of a desire. It becomes the subject of a never ending longing for full identity or complete satisfaction.

So, according to Lacan too, language "holds man in its ban insofar as man, as speaking being, has always already entered into language, without noticing it". This quote from Agamben expresses strikingly the core of the Lacanian theory of

the subject. Forced to be what underlies his desire, the subject is entirely relying on language, on signifiers. Or, as Lacan puts it, the subject is "what a signifier represents to another signifier".[7] This means that the libidinal being – as *bare life* – is by definition excluded from the order that represents (and *solely* represents) it. The only life it is given is one within the realm *representing* that life (and, thus, excluding life "as such", "bare life"). The (symbolic) realm in which the libidinal being has to realise itself as a self or an identity, excludes that being, and, by implication, includes it. The "bare" or "real" side of that being is for ever "castrated" from the order in which it lives its life as mere representation. This is what the Lacanian notion of "symbolic castration" is about. And it matches perfectly with the theory of the subject Agamben discovers in the entire tradition of western thought.

Only, for Agamben this theory of the subject illustrates the *evil* logic at work in western politics and in thought in general. If, also for Lacan, this logic is not necessarily the logic of the good, it is however definitely not the one of evil. It is a *tragic* logic defining things as they are; defining what, in things, cannot be changed. If change is needed, it will occur within the boundaries drawn by that tragic logic. It is within the logic of inclusive exclusion that we have to work on justice for today's biopolitics. The universe in which modernity operates is one of "*Geltung ohne Bedeutung*", "being in force without significance": a nihilistic universe lacking any real ground and entirely replaced by representation, i.e. by an independent realm of signifiers which, as such, have no meaning and, therefore, in full sovereignty can allow any meaning. Unlike Lacan, Agamben considers this paradigmatic way of dealing with the world as the source of a profound evil. The analysis *he* makes of it aims at a radically different thought and politics. In his eyes, the logic of representation is a logic of sovereignty and, for that reason, not simply tragic but evil – which is why it has to be demolished and replaced by a better one. Agamben's paradigmatic enquiry is a contribution to that.

Here, I think, we face the main target of Agamben's criticism: the logic of representation. As soon as something is presented *as* something, "*as such*" for in-

[7] Lacan's definition of the signifier in seminar IX is in fact a concealed definition of the signifier: "the signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier". Jacques Lacan, *Seminar IX, L'identification, 1961–62*, the lesson of 6 december 1961, unpublished.

stance, it is involved in a logic of *re*presentation and of difference, introducing an incurable split in the thing itself. Intending to grasp the thing as such, one splits off the bare thing, thus creating a zone over which a sovereign decision can be taken. Representing things *as* (whatever) they are is impossible without splitting off a rest, and installing a zone of sovereign power. At the end of *Homo Sacer,* in the last "Threshold", Agamben writes:

> In the syntagm "bare life" bare corresponds to the Greek *haplōs,* the term by which first philosophy defines pure Being. The isolation of the sphere of pure being, which constitutes the fundamental activity of Western metaphysics, is not without analogies with the isolation of bare life in the realm of Western politics. What constitutes man as a thinking animal has its exact counterpart in what constitutes him as political animal. In the first case, the problem is to isolate Being (*on haplōs*) from the many meanings of the term "Being" (which according to Aristotle, "is said in many ways"); in the second, what is at stake is the separation of bare life from the many forms of concrete life. Pure Being, bare life – what is contained in these two concepts, such that both the metaphysics and the politics of the West find their foundation and sense in them and in them alone? What is the link between the two constitutive processes by which metaphysics and politics seem, in isolating their proper element, simultaneously to run up against an unthinkable limit? For bare life is certainly as indeterminate and impenetrable as *haplōs* Being, and one could say that reason cannot think bare life except as it thinks pure Being, in stupor and in astonishment. (HS: 182)

What is supposed to be Being as Being, Being *as such*, is in fact the result of a decision about Being's borderline, about its "unthinkable limit". Unthinkable, indeed, because there, without ground or reason, without argument, is decided about what is inside and what is outside Being, about what is and what is not. The outside and the non-existence are excluded and, as excluded, show that Being has power over the whole of what is, including even what is not, even Being's outside. As is the case in politics, excluding the *homo sacer*, sovereignty reveals its power to include everyone, even the excluded. Thinking of Being as Being, and thinking of the polis as polis (as being sovereignly itself) – or, which amounts to the same thing, ontology and politics – suppose both a decision about an "unthinkable limit" excluding what is beyond that limit and, by so doing, definitely including it. This is to say that ontological thinking, in a way, supposes a *political* decision, a decision as lays at the basis of the typically political logic of sovereignty, a decision supposing an indeterminate zone where

the difference between inside and outside or life and death, only depends on the sovereign capriciousness of power.

4. Vitalist Ontology

So, is pure ontology – ontology kept unspoiled from any politics – not the remedy against the ruses of the logic of sovereignty? To find a way out of the impasses of that logic, should we not strictly separate political thinking from general ontological thought? To avoid the dangerous indeterminateness of representationalist concepts, in case "bare life" and "Being", should we not remove the political from the ontological? In the paragraph following the one cited above, Agamben suggests the opposite:

> Yet precisely these two empty and indeterminate concepts seem to safeguard the keys to the historico-political destiny of the West. And it may be that only if we are able to decipher the political meaning of pure Being will we be able to master the bare life that expresses our subjection to political power, just as it may be, inversely, that only if we understand the theoretical implications of bare life will we be able to solve the enigma of ontology. Brought to the limit of pure Being, metaphysics (thought) passes into politics (into reality), just as on the threshold of bare life, politics steps beyond itself into theory. (HS: 182)

We need ontology to understand what is going on in politics, just as inquiries in the political are indispensible to "solve the enigma of ontology". For Agamben, the opposition to be made is not the one between ontological and political thought, but between representationalist and ontological thinking. To avoid the traps of representationalist thinking, to avoid thinking based on the inclusive exclusion of "bare life" and/or pure Being, we need an affirmative thought about bare life and being. We need ontology. A vitalist ontology.

For in being, conceived as life, and even in "bare life", there is potentiality of resistance, able to make the sovereign look a fool. A few pages further in the last "Threshold" of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben gives a description of the "*Muselmann*", the one in the Nazi concentration camps who illustrates the situation of bare life in the most extreme way. Radically excluded, his bare life still has the capacity to shock the executioner:

> Antelme tells us that the camp habitant was no longer capable of distinguishing between pangs of cold and the ferocity of the SS. If we apply this statement to the *Muselmann* quite literally ("the cold, SS"), then we can say that he moves in an absolute indistinction of fact and law, of life and juridical rule, and of nature and politics. Because of this, the guard seems suddenly powerless before him, as if struck by the thought that the *Muselmann*'s behavior – which does not register any difference between an order and the cold – might perhaps be a silent form of resistance. Here a law that seeks to transform itself entirely into life finds itself confronted with a life that is absolutely indistinguishable from law, and it is precisely this indescernibility that threatens the *lex animata* of the camp. (HS: 185)

The acme of biopolitics is the nazi's supposition that, by exterminating the Jews, the gypsies, and other "racial" minorities, they were simply assisting the work of Nature. The only law they imposed on those people, so they believed, was the law of natural life, a law as animated by and coinciding with life itself (which is the meaning of *lex animate*, see HS: 183). But that "life itself" meets "itself" in the bare life, in the life excluded from it, in a life that, be it in its own way, is beyond the distinction between law and life, in this case, between order and cold, SS and nature. In the bare life of the *Muselmann*, the executioner might suddenly see what the "full life" he is promoting is about. The victim's bare life has the potential to finally mirror the life served by the executioner *in a true way*. The lack of distinction between the cold and the SS might show the latter his own lack of distinction (between fact and law). It might show him the zone of indifference created by the sovereign logic of his power. The bare life is able to mirror the sovereign and tell him the truth of his own position, the logic of inclusive exclusion he himself is virtually victim of as well.

Life, even bare life, can serve as a weapon against sovereign politics. Ontology has the potential to resist representationalist logic and its catastrophes. As numerous are the passages in Agamben where he announces ontological thought to provide the alternative to the logic of sovereignty, as rare are the ones where he extensively elaborates that idea. He once *will* do this, so he promises, in the Part IV of the *Homo Sacer Project*, the "pars construens" in contrast to the "pars destruens", i.e. the other deconstructing parts elaborating his criticism of sovereign logic.[8] Some of

[8] Lieven De Cauter quotes from an e-mail Agamben wrote him on November 4, 2003 and in which, talking about the entire *Homo sacer* project, he states that "the final and fourth section

the announcing passages, however, give us already a first insight in the framework of the ontological alternative he proposes.

So does "Forma-di-vita", "Form-of-life", a short essay from 1993 that announces a lot of themes elaborated in *Homo Sacer* published two years later.[9] In a way, all is already in the title, both the evil and its solution. The basic "mistake" in Western thought, the logical source of its disastrous (bio)politics, lays in the fact that life has given a form. Just like he does in the introduction of *Homo Sacer,* here, Agamben refers to the distinction Aristotle makes between ζοη (*zoè*) and βιος (*bios*). *Zoè*, natural life has been given a political form, *bios*. As we know already, the logic of this form-giving is ruled by an inclusive exclusion procedure giving room to a sovereign domination on the difference zoè/bios, i.e. to a power of deciding indifferently on life and death.

And what is the alternative for that disastrous form of life? "Form-of-life", i.e. a hyphenated "*forma-di-vita*". The remedy is a matter of hyphen, so to say.[10] On the first page of his essay, after a short evocation of the *zoè/bios* distinction, Agamben writes:

> By the term *form-of-life* [...], I mean a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life. [...] It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power [*potenza*][11]. Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a spe-

will contain the *pars construens* of the work, on form of life"; Lieven De Cauter, *De capsulaire beschaving. Over de stad in het tijdperk van de angst* (Rotterdam: NAi Uitgevers, 2005), p. 177, note 4.

[9] Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, translated by Vicenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Mineapolis & London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000 [abbreviation MWE]), pp. 3–12. In *La règne et la gloire*, Agamben he explicitly calls "la quatrième partie de la recherche [*Homo sacer*] consacrée à la forme de vie »; Giorgio Agamben, *Le règne et la gloire – Homo sacer, II, 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 14.

[10] Agamben himself pays explicitly attention to the hyphen ("le plus énigmatique des signe de punctuation dans la mesure où il n'unit que parce qu'il disingue, et vice versa") in his essay on Deleuze. Giorgio Agamben, "L'immanence absolue", in: Eric Alliez (réd.), *Gilles Deleuze. Une vie philosophique* (Le Plessis-Robinson: Institut Synthélabo, 1998), p. 167.

[11] "*Potenza*" (in French "*puissance*", in German "*Vermögen*") is to be distinguished from "*potere*" (in French "*pouvoir*", in German "*Macht*"). "*Potenza*" is the term for the vital potency of life force, "*potere*" is rather reserved for institutionalised power.

> cific biological vocation, or is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how costumary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always retains the character of a possibility; it always puts at stake living itself. (MWE: 4)

Form-of-life is not a form given to life *from the outside*, referring to a kind of transcendental "model" or "representation", imposing itself to the living thing as a Law. It is not a form as the result of a "force of law", of a "non-relational" Relation that precedes life and mediates its forms (as mentioned above a quote from HS: 50). Form-of-life, hyphenated, is a form *inherent* to life itself, a "form" not to be considered as a passive model, but as an active forming potency (*potenza*). A form as infinite capacity to formation; a form not to be limited to what life biologically needs, but to be considered as life's infinite possibility to change, to modify life and to create new life. Life, never as a given fact, but always as a vital and inexhaustible possibility, as a possibility of ever new possibilities, or, in the words of Agamben here, as what always "puts at stake living itself".

The Aristotelian difference between ζην (*zèn*, natural life) and ευ ζην (*eu zèn*, good, happy life, typical for human beings) is to be read in that sense. Which is to say that the same vital creativity characterizes not only the human individual, but also the human community and the political in general. Or, as Agamben writes in the lines directly following the quote above:

> This is why human beings – as beings of power [*potenza*] who can do or not do, succeed or fail, lose themselves or find themselves – are the only beings for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose life is irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness. But this immediately constitutes the form-of-life as political life. (MWE: 4)

The difference involved here is not the one between life and form, but the difference at work within life itself, provoking incessantly new forms-of-live. That difference, that active form-of-life, cannot be traced back by classical – i.e. representationalist – thinking. Contrary to what representationalist logic pretends, thought is not a matter of abstracting forms from life in order to use them for other representations of life. Agamben coins a new definition of thinking:

> I call *thought* the nexus that constitutes the forms of life in an inseparable context as form-of-life. [...] To think does not mean merely to be affected by this or that thing, by

> this or that content of enacted thought, but rather at once to be affected by one's own receptiveness and experience in each and every thing that is thought as a pure power [*potenza*] of thinking. [...] Only if I am not always already and solely enacted, but rather delivered to a possibility and a power [*potenza*], only if living and intending and apprehending themselves are at stake each time in what I live and intend and apprehend – only if, in other words, there is thought – only then can a form of life become, in its own factness and thingness, *form-of-life*, in which it is never possible to isolate something like naked life. (MWE: 9)

The act of thinking is, first, to be defined as being affected by the "*potenza*" of the thing thought about, and, secondly, as being affected by the inner "*potenza*" of my receptivity. Even my passive reception is active, has "potenza" going beyond what is actualized of it in my particular reception. Agamben uses Aristotle's terms to stress the primacy of thought's potentiality over what it actually thinks – or, what amounts to the same thing, the primacy of the potentiality of experience over what actually is experienced. Fully actualized, thinking always has potency in "rest", in reserve. And it is the same kind of rest or reserve that reshapes again and again the form a living being has. It is in that sense that thinking has access to the form-of-life (hyphenated), and that "*thought* [is] the nexus that constitutes the forms of life in an inseparable context as form-of-life". In that sense, too, "community and power [*potenza*] identify one with the other" (MWE: 10).[12]

In Agamben's reflection on the logic of sovereignty and its alternative, a broader debate in current continental philosophy is involved, a debate about whether or not we can/must get beyond the paradigm of representation. On the one hand, there are those who strictly hold on the Kantian caesura, saying that any ontologically based thought – a thought based in Being or reality as such – has become impossible and that we have to stick to representations. 20th century linguistic turn in continental philosophy, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction and other discourse theories have made this line very strong (Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Barth, Derrida). On the other hand, there is an opposite and just as strong line gathering philosophers like Deleuze, Guattari, Hardt and Negri who, following the line of Leibniz and Bergson, take up the ontological and vi-

[12] "Among beings who would always already be enacted, who would always already be this or that thing, this or that identity, and who would have entirely exhausted their power [potenza] in these things and identities – among such beings there could not be any community but only coincidences and factual partitions." (MWE: 10)

talistic thought. Like the ones from the first line, they too emphasise difference, but for them, that difference is an *ontological* one, a difference inherent to being, to reality as such. Reality *is* difference and multiplicity and, here, the word "is" should be taken in its full ontological sense.

In the critical part of his oeuvre, Agamben embraces the tools of that representationalist tradition, using them to analyse the hidden logic behind Western thought. That kind of criticism is characteristic for that tradition, aware as it is of the dangerous ruses inherent to representationalist logic. Only, their criticism is not based upon the supposition that a radically different logical paradigm is possible. The alternatives they propose still accept the representationalist paradigms.

On this point Agamben quits the line of representationalist thought and puts forward the other, ontological line. For, in his eyes, only a proper ontological thought can deliver us from the evils caused by representationalist logic. This is why "life", in its quality of being the foundation of politics and thought, is not only the object of criticism, that what is criticized. It is at the same time a positive concept that, at distance, is guiding all critical analyses. The way the West always has founded politics in *life* is wrong, but the right foundation of the politics to come will do the same, be it on the right way. Life, and nothing else than life, once might save us from the "bare life" the ruling logic of sovereignty can reduce that life to.

5. Barely speaking, …

So, is "life" a concept capable of giving us hope in the age that has made – and still makes – camps as Auschwitz possible? Is there hope after Auschwitz? Was there hope in Auschwitz? If for Agamben, there is and there was, then, it is because of a "rest of Auschwitz". Not only a "rest" *left after* Auschwitz, but first of all a "rest" *present in* Auschwitz. What is that "rest"? It is what Auschwitz is full of, although there was barely one to recognize it for what it was. So, what is that "rest"? "Bare life", the life the *Muselmänner* lived, the life of the "undead", deprived of all that makes them human, a life that has changed living in merely surviving, in vegetal, low profiled bare biological life, a life radically reduced to its sheer "*élan vital*".[13] At the end of chapter 4 in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, after

[13] In his essay on Deleuze, Agamben refers to a quote of Deleuze from Charles Dicken's *Our* a

mentioning a few examples of metaphorical use of "survive", he defines the term as "the pure and simple continuation of bare life with respect to truer and more human life" (RA: 133). Which fits with what, in an earlier passage, quoting Des Pres[14], he had defined as the

> small, additional, added-on life for which he [the survivor] is ready to pay the highest price [and which] reveals itself in the end to be nothing other than the biological life as such, impenetrable "priority of the biological element". (RA: 92–93)

And how can such an "additional", merely "surviving" life be a factor of resistance in Auschwitz? Not only as a possible mirror, in which the SS perpetrator might have the opportunity to see a life not sovereignly dominated by Law, a life where Law and life are indistinguishable. Remember the quote above, from *Homo Sacer*, about the *Muselmann*:

> Here a law that seeks to transform itself entirely into life finds itself confronted with a life that is absolutely indistinguishable from law, and it is precisely this indescernibility that threatens the *lex animata* of the camp. (HS: 185)

Needless to say that not much effect is to be expected from this vital "rest of Auschwitz", since it depends completely upon the willingness of the SS.

Yet, this "rest", this "bare life" surviving in the death camps, has still another force of resistance. It can bear witness. A "rest" of life survives already in Auschwitz and, therefore, can survive in the testimony of the survivors. Thus the basic line of

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Mutual Friend, more precisely the story in which Riderhood nearly drowns. "At the last minute, a scoundrel, a bad subject despiced by all, is saved as he is dying, and at once all the people taking care of him show a kind of attention, respect, love for the dying man's smallest signs of life. Everyone tries to save him, to the point that in the deepest moment of his coma, the villainous man feels that something sweet is reaching him. But the more he comes back to life, the more his saviours become cold, and rediscover his coarseness, his meanness. Between his life and his death there is a moment that is nothing other than that of *a* life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal yet singular life, a life that gives rise to a pure event, freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, of the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens. 'Homo tantum', for whom everyone feels and who attains a kind of beatitude." Deleuze quoted in Agamben, *Potentialities – Collected Essays in Philosophy*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Standford: Standford University Press, 1999), pp. 228–229.

[14] Terence Des Pres, *The Survivor, An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: WSP, 1976).

Agamben's theory of the witness, a theory that supplies some insight in Agamben's own ontological theory of the subject.

For Agamben, the problem of bearing witness is indeed particularly intertwined with the one of the subject, to such an extent that it even shapes his definition of the subject. Giving witness, so he writes in the third chapter of *Remnants of Auschwitz* entitled "Shame, or about the subject", is to be conceived as having always two "subjects" involved: the *Muselmann* and the witness. "Testimony ", Agamben writes, is

> the impossible dialectic between the survivor and the *Muselmann*, the pseudo-witness and the "complete witness", the human and the non-human. Testimony appears here as a process that involves at least two subjects: the first, the survivor, who can speak but who has nothing interesting to say; and the second, who "has seen the Gorgone," who "has touched bottom", and therefore has much to say but cannot speak. Which of the two bears witness? *Who is the subject of tesitmony?* (RA: 120; Agamben underlines)

"What is the subject of giving witness?" The question is not rhetorical. For the answer is neither the one Agamben, referring to Primo Levi, promotes as the "complete witness", the *Muselmann*, nor the one actually giving witness, the survivor. The subject is not to be defined as a human being at all. If it often seems so, then it is because that human being "by accident" occupies the place of the subject and plays its part.

As many 20th century linguists and philosophers, Agamben conceives the subject as the effect of that which it is *subjected to*, the effect of that *of which* it is the subject/bearer. It is the point or platform that, paradoxically, is the product of what occurs on that platform. This is so striking in the most provocative subject theories: like in the story of Baron Munchausen, who, on his horse and sinking in the marshes[15], draws himself out of the water by pulling (not even his hair but) his wig, the subject bears the whole process although being entirely the effect of that very process.

This is why the subject is never what, since Descartes, it is commonly supposed to be: the self-presence of a *cogito*, a firm ground able to doubt about the entire

[15] See Marc De Kesel, *The Munchausen Syndrome: Essays on/in Lacanian Theorie*, to appear.

universe but doubtlessly sure about itself. A confrontation with the supposed Cartesian subject will end up facing desubjectivation. So, desubjectivation is an essential part of many current subject theories, including Agamben's. For the latter, "subject" is what occurs between two poles: the supposed Cartesian firm subject and the vanishing point of mere desubjectivation. The subject is *in between*, in between identity and non-identity, or, as Agamben puts here, in between "the human and the non-human". Not as a point, but as process, as a fluctuating power going back and forth between one pole and the other. And does that process come down in a subject *of consciousness*? Desubjectivation as such cannot be appropriated by consciousness. Yet, it can be the object of a testimony, that what a witness is about. And, more precisely, in that case it is its "subject": that which witnesses in a testimony is in the end the desubjectivation pole, the non-identity, the "non-human".

> But this means that the one who truly bears witness in the human is the non-human. It means that the human is nothing other than the agent of the non-human, the one who lends the inhuman a voice. Or, that there is no one who claims the title "witness" by right. To speak, to bear witness, is thus to enter into a vertiginous movement in which something sinks to the bottom, wholly desubjectified and silenced, and something subjectified speaks without truly having anything to say of its own [...]. Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak, and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and speaking, the inhuman and the human enter in a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the "imagined substance" of the "I", and, along with it, the true witness. This can be expressed by saying that the *subject of testimony is the one who bears witness of the desubjectification*. But this expression holds if it is not forgotten that "to bear witness to a desubjectification" can only mean that there is no subject of testimony [...] and that every testimony is a field of forces incessantly traversed by currents of subjectification and desubjectification. (RA: 120–121; Agamben underlines)

Giving witness of desubjectivation: this is what defines a subject. Which is to say that there is no subject "in the proper sense", in the sense of "property", of fixed identity. The subject of the witness is in the end its object, its impossible, ineffable object, speaking through the voice of the survivor who constantly gets "decentred" by what he has to say, oscillating incessantly between the two poles of the process of which he is the bearer/subject.

6. … and its vitalist subject

In the following pages of *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben seeks for a theoretical background to support his theory of the subject. The one he mentions first is by Émile Benveniste, claiming that "the foundation of subjectivity is in the practice of language" (cited in RA: 128).[16] Only by speaking, the infans becomes a "human" subject. Subjectivity and conscience "rest in what is most precarious and fragile in the world: the event of speech" (RA: 129). Which is to say that it has to retake – and even re-invent – itself in every speaking act that sets in act language by getting lost in it.

> There is more: the living being who has made himself absolutely present to himself in the act of enunciation, in saying "I", pushes his own lived experience back into a limitless past and can no longer coincide with them. The event of language in the pure presence of discourse irreparably divides the self-presence of sensations and experiences in the very moment in which it refers them to a unitary center. Whoever enjoys the particular presence achieved in the intimate consciousness of the enunciating voice forever loses the pristine adhesion to the Open that Rilke discerned in the gaze of the animal; he must now return his eyes inward towards the non-place of language. This is why subjectification, the production of consciousness in the event of discourse, is often a trauma of which human beings are not easily cured; this is why the fragile text of consciousness incessantly crumbles and erases itself, bringing to light the disjunction on which it is erected: the constitutive desubjecification in every subjectification. (RA: 122–123)

If, here, Agamben supposes "the living being" to be able "to be present to himself", (but on what ground, and how to conceive that presence to itself without consciousness?), he immediately adds that, in an *absolute* way (which means here: in a way that allows to say "I"), he is only so once he is excluded from that which makes presence-to-oneself possible at all, i.e. discourse, language. Presence to itself, identity, subjectivity is only possible by excluding the animal side – sensations, bare living, bare live – and, in the same gesture, including it in the

[16] "le langage enseigne la définition de l'homme. […] C'est dans et par le language que l'homme se constitue comme *sujet* ; parce que le language seul fonde en réalité, dans sa réalité quie est celle de l'être, le concept d' 'ego'". Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 259. Agamben refers to chapter XXI entitled: "De la subjectivité dans le langage" (pp. 258–266).

order of discourse and language. It is the *tragic* condition (it "is often a trauma") characterizing human being, he concludes, repeating that desubjectification is a constitutive part of each subjectification and of the subject as such.

Although not mentioned by name, the logic here is definitely the one of inclusive exclusion, defined in *Homo Sacer I* as the logic of sovereignty. However, whereas in *Homo sacer* that logic is described as source of Western biopolitical evil, in *Remnants of Auschwitz* it is characterized as tragic and "constitutive". Desubjectification proper to any subject simply phrases the human condition.

Once again, we are extremely close to that other theory of the subject I mentioned earlier. What else is Lacan's subject theory about? The Lacanian subject is entirely the subject of language, excluding the real (i.e. any kind of "immediate", "bare" life) and therefore being totally integrated and included in the autonomously operating signifying system. The subject's consciousness, i.e. its "absolute" presence to itself, is only possible under the condition of absolute alienation in language. In Lacan, the subject is not a fixed point either: on language's surface – on the flow of signifiers – it slides back and forth between two similar points as in Agamben: between the ego and the Other.[17] In pursuit of its real self, the subject will find this only in its non-appropriable desubjectivation, i.e. as constitutively alienated in the Other. All this shows the tragic condition we humans are in. And what is more: here, the logic of inclusive exclusion – read: of sovereignty – is one of representation. Mourning for the *real* – for *bare life* – does not invite the real's rehabilitation, but simply expresses the condition in which we have to deal with it, i.e, as representation. In other words, the logic in which Agamben operates here is the representationalist one he rejects.

So, it might be not a mere coincidence when Agamben, using the logic of inclusive exclusion to characterize the subject, explicitly does *not* mention it. If he had done so, his conclusion could only have been that the logic of sovereignty is the logic of the subject *tout court* and, thus, that representationalist logic remains the one and only with which we have to handle the problems inherent to the universal bio-politics we are in. Arrived at that point in his argumentation,

[17] Or more exactly, in Lacan, these points have been doubled and form the four points of the *Graphe of desire* (elaborated in the 5th [*Les formations de l'inconscient*, 1957/8] and 6th seminar (*Le désir et son interpretation*, 1958/9], and summarised in "La subversion du sujet", in J. Lacan [1966], *Écrits*, pp. 793–827).

he briefly and between brackets refers to Derrida, adds his comment on the tragic condition, and closes the paragraph.

> (It is hardly astonishing that it was precisely from an analysis of the pronoun "I" in Husserl that Derrida was able to draw his idea an infinite deferral [*différance*][18], an originary disjunction – writing – inscribed in the pure self-presence of consciousness.) [RA: 123]

Again, one can ask whether the reference to Derrida is not brief and between brackets precisely because the logic used there is representationalist. In a Derridian perspective, there is no real alternative for the representationalist logic. "There is no outside of the text" is an injunction not to get beyond the text, to endlessly deconstruct that text *from within*.[19] This is definitely not Agamben's option. In the next paragraph, he comes up with his real theory, which in a way is the theory *of* the real – the real subject as well as real life.

His reference now is Ludwig Binswanger's essay "The Vital Function and the internal history of life" (1928), allowing him to leave the logic of inclusive exclusion and, thus, the one of representation. In that essay, Binswanger replaces the old dichotomy "psychic" versus "somatic" by "functional modality of the psycho-somatic organism" versus "the internal history of life", the former functioning while sleeping and dreaming, the latter while being awake. The subject will not be conceived as excluded from that "life", but rather as what emerges in between the two functions, the vital one and the "historical" one, i.e. the one of language.

> Where, and how, can a subject be introduced into the biological flow? Is it possible to say that at the point in which the speaker, saying "I", is produced as subject, there is something like a coincidence between these two series, in which the speaking subject can truly assume his biological functions as his own, in which the living being can identify himself with the speaking and thinking "I"? In the cyclical development of bodily processes as in the series of consciousness' intentional acts, nothing seems to consent to such a coincidence. Indeed, "I" signifies precisely the irreducible disjunction between vital functions and inner history, between the living being's be-

[19] "Il n'y pas de hors-texte", see: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158.

> coming a speaking being, and the speaking being's sensation of itself as living. It is certainly true that the two series flow alongside one another, in what one could call absolute intimacy. But is *intimacy* not the name that we give to a proximity that also remains distant, to a proximity that never becomes identity? (RA: 124–125)

Is the subject simply an element in the "biological flux"? Not at all. If not excluded, it is at least separated from it. Or, more exactly is it not the subject that is separated from the "biological flux"; it is the history and the language making the subject possible. And is, then, the subject to be defined as the point where the biological and the "historical", the vital and the discursive join one another? Not exactly. It is the place where the two series get separated. The subject *is* that separation and the "intimacy" of the two series in that separating zone.

The logic here is not without reminiscence to the "logic of the sense" Gilles Deleuze develops in his 1969 book of the same name.[20] It is a logic of "difference and repetition" taking place upon – and, more exactly, in between – "series". Coupled series: a corporeal and an incorporeal one, "bodily processes" and "consciousness' intentional acts", living and speaking, life and language. These series are disconnected from one another and, precisely by means of that disconnection, in relation with one another. And, so Agamben states, the subject is in between, as a fluctuating process at the same time separating and combining the two series. Or, more exactly, the subject is the witness, the testimony of that disconnection.

> If there is no articulation between the living being and language, if the "I" stands suspended in this disjunction, there can be testimony. The intimacy that betrays our non-coincidence with ourselves, is the place of testimony. Testimony takes place in the non-place of articulation. (RA: 130)

In the same way, the witness of Auschwitz keeps "living" and "surviving", i.e. human life and its vegetally surviving "rest", separated from one another.

> The witness attests to the fact that there can be testimony because there is an inseparable division and non-coincidence between the inhuman and the human, the living

[20] Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1969). See especially the "series" on language" (pp. 212–215).

> being and the speaking being, the *Muselmann* and the survivor. [...] its authority depends not on the factual truth, a conformity between something said and a fact or between memory and what happened, but rather on the immemorial relation between the unsayable and the sayable, between the outside and the inside of language. *The authority to speak consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak – i.e. in his or her being a subject*. (RA: 157–158; Agamben underlines)

The witness – not the one bearing witness, but the witness as such – speaks in the name of an incapacity to speak. This is why it defines the subject, which always is the subject of an desubjectification, of a process between the one who speaks but has nothing to say, and the mute who is the only who has something to say. On the one side the *Muselmann*, the non-human, the de-humanised and desubjectified one; on the other side the human, the survivor, the one who has regained his humanity, his subjectivity. Only the latter can speak, and what he gives voice to is the silenced *Muselmann*. The survivor gives "ground" or "subject" to the radically desubjectified. In his testimony he has to affirm that, being *in a sense* the subject/bearer of that witness, in *another, more real sense*, that subject/bearer is somewhere else, in the desubjectified *Muselmann*, and, thus, in his own desubjectivation.

And on what ground such testimony and its subject are possible? Agamben's ultimate answer, here, is life. What enables a testimony is the fact that, in Auschwitz, the *Muselmann* "survived", not in the human, but in the non-human sense: reduced to bare life, he lived the vegetal life of sheer surviving, the vital "zero degree" that rests when someone's life is completely deprived from its human dimension. Life's vitality, even in the most deadly situation, the creative difference that incessantly separates life from the form it has taken and stimulates it again and again to new forms-of-life (hyphenated): this is what enables the witness to let the non-human (the *Muselmann*) speak in his testimony. This is what enables the "barely speaking" of the witness, i.e. a speaking giving voice to mute bare life. It is the foundation of Agamben's testimony and subject theory, and of the entire "positive" side of his thought.

However, is this an adequate alternative for the evil logic analysed in the "negative", critical part of his oeuvre? Is Agamben's vitalistic ontology delivered from and immune to the grammar of inclusive exclusion, characteristic for the logic of sovereignty? Does the witness avoid that trap? Let us once again, with the wit-

ness, enter "into a vertiginous movement" that makes him speak what the speechless has to say, as tells one of the passages cited above:

> Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak, and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and speaking, the inhuman and the human enter in a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the "imagined substance" of the "I", and, along with it, the true witness. (RA: 120–121)

Given that it is true that, in the testimonial "place", there is no "'imagined substance' of the 'I'", does this necessarily imply that the logic of inclusive exclusion is absent there? Present any way is the "zone of indistinction", the proper domain of the logic of sovereignty. And does that "zone" not invite , or maybe even require a sovereign decision? Of course, the speaker's speaking tells what the speechless has to say and his witness does not reduce the victim to bear life. But is he not in the position he could have done this? Could he not have *preferred not* to bear witness and to let the *Muselmann*'s bare life bare and mute? Is, according to Agamben, the speaker's "potentiality not to" not essential in his potentiality to witness, just like the "potentiality not to" is precisely the one that makes "what rests of Auschwitz" – the non-life of the *Muselmann* – a "surviving" one? And so, does the situation in which "the speechless one makes the speaking one speak" not suppose a decision of the speaker allowing the speechless to make him speak, a decision that cannot but be sovereign, since the place in which it is taken is a "zone of indistinction"? And of course, in this case, the speaker takes the decision not to be the sovereign, not to play the game of the "'imagined substance' of the 'I'", but to fully recognize his own desubjectification, thus giving voice to the *Muselmann's* desubjectification and to the "life" that "rested" in him even in Auschwitz, a rest that makes giving witness of Auschwitz possible. But is all this not based on a sovereign decision that excludes the proper voice of the *Muselmann*, declaring it is not possible to include him in the realm dominated by the speaker's "I", in order to, in that quality, be included in the testimony? The repeated emphasis on the distance to be kept between the human and non-human, the one giving witness and the "complete witness", the survivor and the *Muselmann*: is this not all too similar to the inclusive exclusion logic to be a convincing alternative for the logic of sovereignty? Certainly, even if it is sovereign, the decision of the survivor's witness is contrary to the one the Nazi's took on the level of content, but on a merely formal level, it is as sovereign.

Agamben's thought gives us an interesting set of tools and references to critically analyse the logic of sovereignty haunting even the best intentions of Western biopolitics. But does his vitalist ontology provide an adequate alternative for that logic? As far as my reading reaches, and as far as his publications allow it (since the "pars construens" of his *Homo Sacer project* is still to be published), my answer to this question must be negative. In his passages on language, his provocative analysis detecting everywhere the logic of sovereignty shows its most radical implications. But the passages on language in which Agamben develops *his* alternative logic (for instance the ones on bearing witness), do not really seem to go beyond the logic of sorvereignty, I must conclude. At least they give no adequate answer to the representationalist way of treating the same problems which says that the logic of sovereignty – of inclusive exclusion – is the logic we have to deal with even to find solutions for the disaster that logic has provoked and is still able to provoke.

7. (Coda)

In addition to the three mottos at the opening of the Italian (as well as the French) edition of *Homo sacer*, the English translation adds a fourth one: "And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death" (HS ix). One can wonder why, unlike the three others, here, no author is mentioned. Is it because that sentence, and the entire chapter 7 in Saint Paul's *Letter to the Romans* of which it is taken, reveals too clearly the formal messianic scheme of Agamben's thought?

In this (famous) chapter 7, Paul analyses ruthlessly the impasse of the basic fantasy underlying Jewish monotheism: God's Law (or "commandment") that once promised life (i.e. a restored relation with God) ended up to bring only sin and death, so Paul argues there. His analysis is striking if only because, in its way, it develops a theory of the split subject, surprisingly comprehensible for the late moderns we are. ("For the good that I would do, I do not; but the evil which I would not do, that I do; Rom.7: 19.)[21] And why, in this chapter, Paul's analysis can be so merciless, so implacable? Because he has already the solution in mind, which is Christ. All can be doomed to death, for the redemption of death has occurred already in Christ

[21] Think for instance of the way Jacques Lacan affirmatively quotes a substantial part of Rom. 7 in his seminar on ethics; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, translated with notes by Dennis Porter (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 83

("O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." Rom. 7: 24–25).

Formally, a similar structure characterises Agamben's critical gesture. The promise of life (inherent to any kind of biopolitics) puts us in the position of sovereign power's deadly victims. The way we think of – and deal with – life, the way we suppose life to be the foundation of the political, is doomed to (virtually) bring us all into a death camp. Agamben's analysis is ruthless: nothing escapes the inclusively exclusive logic of sovereignty. But *why* can his analysis be so merciless? What enables him to say that nothing escapes the ruses of that deadly logic, not even language itself? The answer to that question is that he has the definite redemption already in mind: a non-representationalist, ontological logic, or, even more precise, a vitalist ontology will save us from the logic of sovereignty. Not a New Creation, as was the core of the Paulinian message, but a new way to relate to reality, a new logic, will save us from the universal state of sin the representationalist logic has brought the world into. Once this new logic will be generally accepted, Agamben's critical analyses will become a senseless gesture.

One can wonder why Agamben does not consider his own critical gesture precisely as a "gesture". For, he himself defines "gesture", for instance with a reference to Stéphane Mallarmée, as that what is kept "suspended 'entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir" (between desire and fulfilment, perpetration and its recollection)", so he writes in *Meanings without end* (MWE: 58). Criticism, he explains, is not to be considered as a means leading to some end (to a radically new way to thinking, for instance), but as a "means without end", as a thinking not relying on the dreamed alternative but tarrying in the postponement of it, in "the exhibition of a mediality". Criticism as a "process of making means visible as such" (MWE: 58). In the case of Agamben, this would mean: a process of making visible the criticisable sovereign logic as such, without referring to the alternative logic dreamed of.

As he defines "gesture" as what shows "the being-in-language as pure mediality" (MWE: 59), Agamben could have defined his own thought as, so to say, "being-in-criticism as pure mediality". It would have been at the expense of the messianic pathos of his writings, but it would have benefited the realism of his critical thought.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXX | Number 2 | 2009 | 175-193

Frank Ruda*

Humanism Reconsidered, or: Life Living Life

Frères de l'immense histoire ! [...] Peuples de tous les temps! De tous les lieux !
Vous êtes parmi nous !
Alain Badiou[1]

[...] it is linked [...] with a necessity to displace humanism. This is one of the great and profound requirements of our times.
Jean-Luc Nancy[2]

Humanism reconsidered[3]

The displacement – or even more adequately: the transformation – of humanism is an important requirement of our times.[4] This requirement is a practical one: a demand for a specific form of praxis, a renewed praxis of thinking. But what exactly does it mean to claim that this requirement of our times is a demand for a different form of the praxis of thinking, which essentially means, a demand for *a different form of conceiving of human life*? In the first place, it means subtracting from the predominant and seemingly evident determinations of the human being its capacities and its limitations. Secondly, it means to conceive of man in a new way, to think the human being differently.[5] For such a displacement, and

[1] Alain Badiou, *L'écharpe rouge* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), p. 108 sq.
[2] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Derridas Spuren. Über das Risiko und die Schrift im Herzen der Stimme, Jean-Luc Nancy im Gespräch mit Sergio Benvenuto", in: *Lettre International* 70, Autumn 2005, p. 100. My translation from the German version of this interview.
[3] I am grateful for comments on a draft version of this text to Sophie Ehrmanntraut, Mark Potocnik, Ozren Pupovac, Tzuchien Tho, and Jan Völker.
[4] The first results of this ongoing investigation have been published in: "Der sich selbst entfremdete und wiedergefundene Marx", edited by Helmut Lethen, Birte Löschenkohl, and Falko Schmieder, (Munich: Fink, 2009).
[5] One contemporary predominant determination that refers to the essence of man and his capacities is that human beings are only capable of appearing in two different but interlinked forms: as communities and as individuals. This determination is one of the axioms of the ideology that

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this will be my main thesis, it is nowhere else than in Marx that one finds important indications, clues, and even more: a model.[6] My claim will therefore be that it is possible to find in Marx and retrieve from him a conception of a renewed, transformed, different humanism, of a different conception of human life. The following remarks will thus attempt to offer a new reading of the early Marx and will try to transform the traditional picture of the early humanist Marx, inasmuch as he himself, as I will endeavour to demonstrate, transformed what has been called humanism. Methodically, my remarks can be considered as a *lecture Badiousienne*, which is at the same time meant as a forced reading of the Marxian text, a *lecture forcée*.[7] I want to note in passing that such a reading will not be preoccupied with an introduction or explanation of concepts, notions, or conceptions of Badiou's philosophy, as it will try to employ his thinking for a creative, transforming, and transformative re-construction of Marx. My reading will thus start from a question that can be addressed to what the early Marx assigns

Badiou calls "democratic materialism". See: Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes. L'être et l'événement, 2*, (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp. 9–49.

[6] Concerning the range of the conception of the model, see: Alain Badiou, *The Concept of the Model. An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics* (Melbourne: Re-Press, 2007).

[7] I want to remark here that the following is not intended to be a deconstruction of early Marx. I basically share Nancy's comment which provides one of the mottos of this text and that he himself rather relates to the thought of Deleuze and Derrida. But, in contrast to Nancy, I will claim that relevant indications regarding a transformation of humanism can be found precisely in the texts of that Marx which usually is considered to be humanist and that Nancy himself often treats as a dead – due to the smell of bad eschatology – dog. The following remarks rather attempt to force an "interpretation-cut" (see Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?* [(Paris: Seuil, 1985] p. 14. Hereafter cited as PP) and try to pursue its consequences. There have been other contemporary attempts to relate Badiou, Marx, and the question of humanism that I would like to mention here. See, for example, the interesting investigations of Nina Power, "Marx, Feuerbach and Non-Philosophy", at: marxandphilosophy.org.uk/power2007.doc, Nina Power, "Philosophy's Subjects", in: *Parrhesia. A Journal of Critical Philosophy,* Number 3, 2007, pp. 55–72. Her reading leads in the last instance to the necessity of inscribing a minimal (or even maximal) anthropology into Badiou's thought. See: Nina Power, "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject", in: *Cosmos and History. The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1–2 (2006), *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, pp. 186–209. This is a consequence that I reject, as, to me, it seems to be an attempt to again introduce an objective dimension into Badiou's conception of the subject, whereas Badiou's project precisely seems to start with the wager that a non-objective subjectivity can be thought – without thinking it in terms of a pure self-commencement; it has to be a subjectivity under conditions. But it is imperative to here note that a condition does not take the form of an object. For the notion of a non-objective subjectivity, see also: Alain Badiou, *Seminaire sur: Image du temps present (2)*. Session of 9th October 2002, at: http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/02-03.3.htm.

as one of the essential determinations of the human being. The designation is the following: Marx claims that human beings, in contrast to animals, are capable of producing universally and this form of production is precisely what makes them into human beings. The two questions I want to take as a *Leitmotif* are therefore the following: firstly, how can one conceive of this universal production? And, secondly, how can this form of production be a peculiarity of man that distinguishes him from all other species, or better: that makes him into a singular "species-being"? Giving an answer to these questions will in the end also help to display the notion of life, of human life, that is involved in the philosophy of early Marx.

Diagonal towards the Tradition, or Humanism is In-Humanism

With very little effort at formalization one can distinguish at least three traditional forms of reference to the texts of early Marx, three forms of how to posit oneself theoretically to early Marx that have all become classical. The first two take their form through a different construction and exegesis of the humanism of early Marx, which does not play such a central role in the third form of reference to Marx. I will simply call the first form of reference the *humanist reference* to Marx.[8] Its decisive feature consists in the thesis that the truth of Marx's thought lies entirely in his early writings. According to this position, what the later Marxian thought lacks, and what therefore constantly has to be added to it as an essential component of its truth, is precisely humanist thinking as such. This position elucidates humanist thinking by an interpretation of the Marxian conception of man as a being that is determined by a substance, a free species-being. Species-being, in fact, becomes a political slogan against the present circumstances of alienation. Against this netherworld of existing modes of production, it posits a collective organization that is rational and that leads to a free self-determination and self-realization that is adequate to human beings. The *humanist reference* therefore conceives of Marx as the theoretician of the sublation of alienation – a theorist of *Ent-Entfremdung* – which can be achieved because the constitution and disposition of human nature, of the human species-being contains all the resources and possibilities which are needed to implement it. The existing obstructions of the essence of the human being can be sublated in a

[8] Paradigmatically one can here refer to one book of Fromm: Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, (London / New York: Continuum, 2003).

properly emancipatory revolutionary action which means in the last instance that they can be reversed: human nature is not only an obstructed and distorted nature but it is also the enabling, liberating nature. The human species-being therefore becomes at the same time the motor and the origin of critique – and it seems hard to not recognize the Aristotelian subtext[9] – as it becomes the instance of possibility from which one can think and understand what a true realization of the *causa finalis* inscribed into the substance of the human being can be. Although its realization is still hindered by the existing and established relations of society, it presents the level of a more general, historically-philosophically, and finally ontologically, secured machinery of realization and enabling. The *humanist reference* is taken up critically in the second form of reference to early Marx. The reference to the humanism of early Marx remains essential, but in this second form of reference such a conception of humanism is negated in its premises. I will therefore – in taking up its classical name – call the second form of reference *anithumanist*.[10] Here as well, the essential feature in referring to young Marx is obviously his humanism. This second reference shares with the first one the reconstruction of the humanist image. But it gains its proper form principally by a specific perspective on the complete works of Marx, or to be more precise: it gains its proper form through the thesis of an epistemological break between the young and the late Marx, which is essentially read as a break with humanism, with all the ideal determinations of a seemingly pre-given essence of human beings and its *causa finalis*. Such a break is primarily a break with the philosophically secured determinations of human nature and with its functioning in the theory of a revolutionary overthrow of the present state of things. For the *antihumanist reference*, Marx becomes Marx when he moves from ideal determinations to real contradictions and this is only possible when he abandons the (proto-)substantialist, or in the last instance, Aristotelian conception of the human species-being; when he leaves humanism behind and finally advances to become the theoretician of the critique of political economy. The third form of ref-

[9] I have to leave aside the question of whether this form of reference to Marx actually offers a correct interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of "genus". A critical reading of early Marx that takes the interpretation of the Aristotelian "genus" as a starting point and therefore seems to remain somehow bound to the *humanist reference* to Marx is developed by Giorgio Agamben. See: Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 68–94.

[10] I am obviously thinking of the readings of Marx presented by Louis Althusser. See for example: Louis Althusser, *On the Young Marx*, in: *For Marx*, (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 49–86 and Louis Althusser, "The '1844 Manuscripts' of Marx", in: *op. cit.*, pp. 153–160, or: Louis Althusser, *Marxism and Humanism*, in: *op. cit.*, pp. 219–248.

erence understands itself in the broadest sense as fully intrinsic to the works of Marx and does not seek to gain its consistency by a necessary reference to the "concept of man" of early Marx – or to the thesis of a continuity or break with it. I want to call this third form of reference *a-humanist* because it presents itself as a more or less linear reconstruction of the development of Marx without any significant breaks. Following this position, what changes between early and late Marx is less the direction of his project than the means and instruments that he applies, for example the specific form of critique.[11] The *a-humanist* form of reference to young Marx attempts to establish the thesis that the seeming difference between early and late Marx is only a difference of means, concepts, and conceptions. There is neither a declaration of an indispensability of humanism for the understanding of Marx nor an implication of a necessary negation or critique of it. It is rather a certain *causa finalis* of Marx's thought that continually, step by step, realizes itself further and further in his early and in late works, up to the point of *Capital*. My following remarks attempt to develop a diagonal to these three forms of reference. I will therefore neither claim, together with the *humanist reference,* that the young Marx subscribes to a (proto)substantialist concept of man and his *causa finalis* which one would have to sustain and even cultivate. Nor will I claim that Marx finally becomes Marx when he breaks with such an understanding and conception of what humanism is. Finally, I will also not claim that humanism does not play a central role for the philosophy[12] of early Marx. I will try to show: 1. That humanism, which can only be thought in relation to the Marxian conception of man as a species-being, plays an important role in and for the philosophy of early Marx; 2. That one can conceive of this humanism in a way that is distinct from the *humanist* and the *antihumanist reference*; 3. That humanism in early Marx can be thought in a way that can take up the *antihumanist reference* in a transformed form – in its critique of a "humanist humanism" – and I will thereby

[11] Although it might seem less obvious, this form of reference can be linked to quite a few names in the Marxist tradition. Here I only want to refer to the oeuvre of Ernst Bloch.

[12] I deliberately speak here of "the philosophy of early Marx". It should become clear in what follows that in my reading it is only from a philosophical perspective that insists on the primacy of praxis that the notion of truth which I develop below can result. This perspective therefore does not limit the universal dimension (of the praxis) of politics. Rather it will be precisely the being-conditioned of philosophy by politics that renders it possible to think its specific constitution. Concerning the "philosophy of Marx" from a different, rather Spinozist perspective, see: Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 2007). Concerning politics as a truth procedure and as a condition for philosophy, see: Alain Badiou, "Philosophie et Politique", in: *Conditions* (Paris: Seuil, 1992) pp. 213–250.

finally claim that in this specific form of humanism of the young Marx, a political universalism can be uncovered which in no manner needs to be limited to his early works. Rather, it is in the early works of Marx that this universalism gains its original "thinkability"[13]. Accordingly, what is at stake here is neither a positivisation, nor a critique or suspension of humanism. It is rather a diagonal between these three that I will try to develop. Or to put it more precisely: what is at stake is an affirmation of a different, transformed humanism of the young Marx. I will try to extricate a humanism of impossibility – and not a humanism of the already invested and inscribed possibility of the human being. I therefore understand what follows as an *affirmative reference to the in-humanism* of the young Marx.

Alienation as Necessity. The Proletariat

The starting point of my investigation is a "structural remark" of Jacques Rancière, who, in his contribution to *Lire le Capital* – at that moment when he tries to follow the supposed necessity or contingency of the process of alienation – provides an interesting diagnosis: "Well, the problem of the origin of the alienation of labour poses itself: either alienation is an accident and we are now referred back to a problematic of the origin of the bad history, which is assimilable to that of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, or alienation is a necessary process which is inherent to the development of humanity. It is the second solution which will be chosen by Marx in the third manuscript [of the economic and philosophical manuscripts – F.R.] in which the alienation of the human essence will appear as the condition of the realization of a human world."[14] A superficial glance through the Marxian manuscripts of 1844 shows that Rancière is fully right in his reading. There Marx states clearly that alienation is precisely not a contingent fact. Rather, he describes it as a historically necessary result of the nationally-economically constituted society and its dynamics. When one at-

[13] For the notion of "thinkability", see Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropologie du nom*, Paris 1996. Thinkability means here, as Badiou reformulates Lazarus, "an overbalancing [bascule] of what exists into what *can* exist, or from the known towards the unknown. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London / New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 31.

[14] Jacques Rancière "Le concept de critique et la critique de l'économie politique des 'Manuscrits de 1844' au 'Capital'", in: Louis Althusser / Etienne Balibar/ Roger Establet / Pierre Macherey / Jacques Rancière, *Lire le capital* (Paris: Quadrige, 1996), pp. 81–200, here: p. 103, et sq. My translation.

tempts to determine in such a structural way the place of alienation in the theory of early Marx, at first one can hence point out the following: that alienation is a historically necessary condition. The "impoverishment [*Entwesung*]"[15] of the human being is necessary for the constitution of a truly human world. Consequently the supposition of alienation in Marx's conception only makes sense if one reads it together with an effect linked to alienation. But how can one conceive of this necessity of alienation? If one remembers the insight offered by Lukacs and accepts that Marx thinks from the "standpoint of the proletariat"[16], one can give a first answer. For this purpose it is also helpful to quote at length the designation which the early Marx gives to the proletariat. Marx defines the proletariat as: "the formulation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong*, but *wrong generally*, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no *historical*, but only *human*, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences, but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man, and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning* of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*. [...] By heralding the *dissolution of the hereto existing world order*, the proletariat merely proclaims the *secret of its own existence*, for it is the factual dissolution of that world order."[17] The proletariat as a class is not a class of civil society, and as an estate it is not an estate of civil society. It is rather the factual and acute dissolution of the existing order, because it "does not by itself possess any of the properties by which the bourgeoisie defines Man"[18]. Or to use

[15] Karl Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, translated by Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus, 1988), p. 134. Hereafter cited as MM plus page number. The German notion of "*Entwesung*" is here more precise than the English "impoverishment", because it implies two semantic components: 1. a loss of essence/being (*Wesen*) and it renders 2. this loss as a process. In the following I will stick to the English translation as far as possible and will, if necessary, refer to Marx's original terminology.

[16] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), p. 149.

[17] Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction", at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm. Hereafter cited as MC.

[18] Alain Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste. Circonstances 5* (Paris: Lignes, 2009), p. 196. My translation.

a formulation by Stathis Kouvelakis, the proletariat "confronts [...] society with its own impossibility"[19]. So, why is there a necessity of alienation? Man has to externalize his own essence in the development of the economic and historical process; he has to become the impossible human being to be able to become truly human. This means that all determinations of the essence of the human being have to be externalized so that a true determination of the essence of the human being becomes thinkable. For early Marx, it is necessary that the essence of man has no determination, no attribute, no property, because any determination proper to man would prevent him from producing universally.[20] The historical process that empties the essence of man of all determinations is necessary so as not to constantly fall back into a particularization of the universal. That is, it is necessary in order not to constantly reduce and limit the universal of human production to that which is *proper* to and particular for man. A universality which depends on determinate properties that are able to totalize the essence of man is no true universality. This is how one could render the intuition that stands behind the necessity of alienation. The adoption of the thesis of the necessary alienation in Marx should therefore be read as an intervention against any particularization of universality. But it should also be read as an attempt to develop a new, truly universal universalism. To think human essence as an essence with determinations *proper* to it would imply to understand this essence as a *proprietor* (of its own properties). This is why the national economist does not know anything of man. It is the first and fundamental form of the Marxian critique of political economy. This distance to national economy is necessary in order to avoid the inscription of any logic of (private) property into the determination of the essence of man and to come up with a limitless universal perspective of equality as a starting point. To cut a long story short: this is the attempt to begin with communism – in the double sense of this expression. To think a universal dimension of production and thereby to think a universality of whomever in the form of (constant) production (of universality and equality), one initially has to think the essence of man as indeterminate. The theory of estranged labour and alienation therewith finds its systematic place in the Marxian attempt to think a true, non-limited political universalism.

[19] Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution. From Kant to Marx* (London / New York: Verso, 2003), p. 331.
[20] MM, p. 77.

"Un"-Equality. Equality will have been

From the claim that universality, a notion of universal equality, can be thought *in actu* – not reducing "equality as the *groundwork* of communism"[21] to any particular attribute – one can derive the necessity to think absolute alienation, to think "the *complete loss* of man"[22]. At first man has to become "unessential [*Unwesen*, F.R.]"[23]. Being the negation of essence, man neither has to have an essence nor does he not have one. He is a non-being [*Unwesen*] and this is what designates his constitutive indeterminacy. One can here think of the helpful distinction between three forms of judgment in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*:[24] The positive judgment assigns an attribute to a subject ("X is dead"); the negative judgment negates this attribution ("X is not dead"), and this is what makes it possible to translate this judgment into a positive one ("X is not dead, that is to say, X lives"). Finally, the infinite judgment assigns a non-attribute to a subject ("X is undead, that is to say, neither X lives nor X is dead"). Therewith, the infinite judgment undermines the given possibilities of distinction. But the insight into the constitutive indeterminacy of man, into the human non-being [*Unwesen*], into the void of his essence, is what is only offered with the emergence of the proletariat. With it, what becomes clear is that man will always have been a non-being [*Unwesen*].[25] There is no substance which is proper to him, no (determinate and determining) property that will have made him essentially into man. If one attempts to ground equality on a (constructible) determination of human essence, the universality of man is always already lost[26] and the talk about true equality can only remain "a mere phrase"[27]. That is to say: Marx does not hope for de-alienation, for "*Ent-Entfremdung*", for a

[21] *Ibid*., p. 123.

[22] MC. Marx also talks about "absolute poverty". See: MM, p. 107.

[23] *Ibid*., p. 94. I here add the German "*Unwesen*", because it is important to note that the German term "*Unwesen*" implies that the essence [*Wesen*] of man is a negation of that essence itself [*Un-wesen*] which should not be conceived of only in terms of negation, but also as an indicator of an existence.

[24] I adopt this argument from Slavoj Žižek. See Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London / New York: Continuum), p. 286.

[25] The essential temporality which is at play here is the future anterior. For this, see also Badiou's reflections on the "true time of real politics" in: PP, p. 107.

[26] One would have to develop further how and why any reactionary politics grounds its thought in the principle of constructability. See also: Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London / New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 265–326. Hereafter cited as BE.

[27] MM, p. 124.

return to an "original state of paradise"[28] prior to alienation. This is precisely what Marx vehemently criticizes the theorists of national and political economy for. It is rather the "impoverishment [*Entwesung*]"[29] of man that builds the condition for the fact that the proletariat as soon as it emerges at its material site[30] implies an immediate dimension of universality which is addressed *to* anyone, because it is *for* anyone[31]. If man is characterized by a universal dimension, then this universality can only be truly universal if it passes into a process of universal production. The important task is thus to think together the indeterminacy which grounds the equality of anyone with anyone and the production of equality: as a production of indeterminacy. The evental appearing of the proletariat has to be read as the inauguration of a process in which a subject that includes (principally) anyone comes to universal production (of an equality of anyone with anyone). But how does Marx think the evental emergence of the proletariat and of universal production? Marx's answer is strict and clear: what is needed is an "*actual* [*wirkliche*, F.R.] communist action".[32]

Actual Communist Action and Actual Communism

The actual communist action names an event; an evental irruption into the structures of historical societal dynamics which lets the specific "universality of

[28] *Ibid*., p. 122.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 134.

[30] I refer here to the relation of evental site, event, and subject in Badiou. The working class can be considered as the evental site of the proletariat. See also: BE, pp. 104–111 and pp. 173–190. It is imperative therefore to introduce a distinction between proletariat and working class. This has often not been acknowledged in the contemporary discourse. See, for example: Ernesto Laclau, "God Only Knows", in: *Marxism Today*, December 1991, pp. 56–59. That this distinction remains a provocation to some thinkers is explicit in Laclau's debate with Slavoj Žižek in which Laclau, first quoting and then commenting on Žižek, claims: "'Marx distinguishes between working class and proletariat: the working class effectively is a particular social group, while the proletariat designates a subjective position [...].' Now, to start with, Marx *never* made such a distinction." Ernesto Laclau, "Why Constructing a People is the Main Task of Radical Politics", in: *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer 2006), pp. 646–680, here: p. 659 sq. The quote from Žižek is from the following text: Slavoj Žižek, "Against the Populist Temptation", in: *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer 2006), pp. 551–574.

[31] That universalism in this regard can be understood as a universal address within a potentially infinite process becomes intelligible if one also considers it alongside Badiou's theory of fidelity and investigation. See: BE, pp. 201–264.

[32] MM, p. 123.

man"[33] appear as something that logically lies "before" (although it is always only accessible "after") the structures of the state and of civil society. Therein Marx is in a certain sense an essentialist. But one has to remember here that the essence of man that is designated is only thinkable in the temporal mode of the future anterior, and can therefore only be thought as indeterminate, unessential. The universality will have been before the structures of the state. Through the event of an actual communist action, the impossibility of universal production under given capitalist modes of production and under the dictatorship of private property becomes an "impossible possibility"[34] which brings about the appearance of a new subject: the proletariat, which prior to its emergence had no determinations of existence.[35] The actuality, or better the effectivity – "*Wirklichkeit*" in German in the literal sense – of the communist action consists in the fact that it transforms the previous history and its laws into a history of "preparation"[36] by changing even the seemingly stable laws of change. One could formulate this with Badiou in the following way: what is changed by communist action is also the transcendental of change itself.[37] What should become clear is that actual communist action is determined by the historically necessary site of the event at which the proletariat might appear – the working class. This action is in no sense an action of pure beginning[38]; in this sense, there is no idealism in it. As Hegel

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[34] PP, p. 101.

[35] As Marx writes in the *Holy Family*: "But not having is not a mere category, it is a most dismal reality; today the man who has nothing is nothing, for he is cut off from existence in general, and still more from a human existence, for the condition of not having is the condition of the complete separation of man from his objectivity. Therefore, not having seems quite justified in being the highest object of thought for Proudhon…" See: Karl Marx / Friedrich Engels, "The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company", at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/index.htm.

[36] MM, p. 110.

[37] For the notion of the transcendental, see: Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, pp. 107-201. One could also derive from this point that the fundamental antagonism is not between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but between the proletariat and the bourgeois "world" and its transcendental (of change). For this, see also: Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (London / New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 7.

[38] What should be completely clear here is that there is no decisionist aspect implied in communist action. Neither Marx nor Badiou are Schmittians. It is rather that the communist action itself could be described as voluntarist in the sense of Peter Hallward. See: Peter Hallward, "The Will of the People. Notes towards a Dialectical Voluntarism", in: *Radical Philosophy* 155 (May/June 2009), pp. 17–22.

already made clear in his *Philosophy of Right* from 1830, poverty is a necessary and not at all contingent product of the movement of civil society.[39] Poverty is and subsists, as the young Hegel once put it, in the "impossibility to bring something in front of oneself"[40]. For Hegel, civil society permanently produces the impossibility that its own principle – namely that everyone realizes his own freedom by earning his own subsistence by his own labour – is realizable by everyone. This moment is linked to the insight that if poverty is a necessary product of civil society, it means that anyone can become poor, which implies that anyone is latently poor.[41] With Marx it is also that the emergence of the proletariat can only happen if there is a necessarily produced condition – the poverty of the working class which is the (logical) site of its appearance – by communist action. The working class presents the material condition of the evental emergence of the proletariat and is therefore not identical with it.[42] It is a strictly localized, even more, local but at the same time immediately universal action. It is therefore singular – localized – and universal because the proletariat concerns everyone, since

[39] See G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought)* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 265 sq.

[40] G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Realphilosophie. Vorlesungsmanuskripte zur Philosophie der Natur und des Geistes von 1805–1806*, Hamburg 1986, p. 232. My translation. The German version of this definition is that poverty is "die Unmöglichkeit, etwas vor sich zu bringen".

[41] Here, in order to fully grasp the transition from Hegel to Marx from this reframed perspective, it is imperative to highlight the relation between what Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* calls the "rabble" and the Marxian proletariat. In Hegel this formula then takes the following form: Everyone will have been latently poor and will have been latently "rabble". I presented a fist attempt to understand this relation elsewhere: See: Frank Ruda, *Hegels Pöbel. Eine Untersuchung der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie [Hegel's Rabble. An Investigation of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right]*, Dissertation (unpublished).

[42] There are, as already noted, many adjustments to the distinction between working class and proletariat. Badiou formulates this insight clearly when stating, concerning "vulgar-Marxism", that: "it thought the working class as the mass of workers. Naturally, 'the workers', in terms of pure multiples, formed an infinite class; it was not the sum total of empirical workers that was at stake. Yet this did not prevent knowledge (and paradoxically Marxist knowledge itself) from being for ever able to consider 'the workers' as falling under an encyclopedic determinant (sociological, economical, etc.)." BE, p. 334. The distinction between working class and proletariat in this sense is essential to not too hastily misjudge the Marxian conception. In Badiou's terminology, one would have to say that the working class in the historical situation exists at "the edge of the void" and therefore is presented but not represented: the elements it is composed of do not exist in the given situation. The proletariat in this sense is one of its elements that is not counted in the situation and therefore does not appear in it: a name that is drawn from the void with which, following Badiou, any situation is sutured.

everyone will have been latently poor and latently proletarian. If there is an eventual irruption of a truly communist action and if this action brings the proletariat into existence, then here the question arises of how the young Marx develops the process of universal production which structurally follows the event.

Somersault. Universal Production and the Production of Universality

How does Marx elucidate what he himself calls universal production? How does he elucidate that which is only thinkable 1. under the condition of a radical alienation of all essential determinations of man and 2. if and only if a true communist action eventally breaks the existing historical situation into two, and even changes the laws of change, and which finally, 3. depends of the subject-proletariat that initially defines the agent of the true communist action and in consequence defines the subject of the process of universal production? How does Marx therefore meet the claim to think a universality which introduces an equality of anybody but which is at the same time essentially bound to the *production* of this equality? What gets introduced by true communist action is the procedural deployment of a subject which Marx describes as man's active "*species-life*"[43]. One direct result of this is that to conceive of a process in which a universally producing life of the species emerges, one has to avoid any reference to anthropological categories and determinations. It is rather in this process that "truly *ontological* affirmations of essential being"[44] take place. Only in this process, "the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase [...] but a truth"[45]. In its process universal production leads to ontological affirmations of the (fully indeterminate) nature of man which deploys the equality of anyone – the brotherhood of man – as a truth.[46] But how can one understand this seemingly opaque formula? To start one can note that the process of universal production is immanently linked to what Marx calls "a truth" and that this truth is also immanently related to ontological affirmations of an essence. Universal production is firstly

[43] This expression in German is "*werktätiges Gattungsleben*", which at the same time implies an activity and the creation of a material work. See MM, p. 162.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 124. The English translation does not render the German "*Wahrheit*" as "truth" but as "fact of life", I therefore modified the translation.
[46] As also Alain Badiou claims: "Truths are eternal because they have been created, not because they have been there since forever." See Alain Badiou, Séminaire sur: *S'orienter dans la pensée, s'orienter dans l'existence (2)*. Session of October 19, 2005. My translation.

a production of truth, which itself has an ontological dimension. If one now tries to bring together this first and still abstract definition of the process of universal production and the necessarily indeterminate essence of man which emerges as an effect of the actual communist action, a consequence becomes clear: the universal production which affirms the essence of man has to itself preserve the indeterminacy of this essence in the process of production. If it does not do so, it will not have been a true affirmation of human essence. But, how to imagine a production that is at the same time able to preserve the constitutive indeterminacy of the human essence? Or to begin with a slightly different question: If Marx implies that these ontological affirmations of essence in the active species-life are related to what he calls man as "species-being"[47], how can one understand this species-being that is affirmed only in universal production? One can offer an answer to these questions if one focuses in greater detail on the operation of universal production. An example that Marx offers is quite helpful in this context: "just as music alone awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear – is no object for it because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers [...] for the same reasons, the senses of social man are other senses than those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form, in short, sense capable of human gratifications, senses confirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being."[48] If one reads Marx's exemplary considerations as an analysis of the structure of universal production, things become clearer. What happens in the process of universal production – in this process that logically begins after the actual communist action – is that a constitutively indeterminate human (collective) subject cultivates "*social* organs"[49] that themselves retroactively determine the essence of the human being. The invention of music signifies a retroactively occurring determination of man who will have had a musical ear. Universal production is therefore on the one hand a production of determinations of the human being that become objective and actual. These determinations are objective because they change the constitution of the essence of man in a way that they will forever have changed this essence. But this process can, on the other hand, be fully grasped only if it is

[47] MM, p. 102.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 109.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 107.

considered in its proper temporality. For the retroactive determination of man in the process of universal production, or to put it differently: the determination of that which will have been human, cannot refer back to any given determinations of the human essence. It only results *retroactively and in the process* of its determination. For this reason, the temporality of universal production is the *future anterior*. The determination of the "unessential [*Unwesen*]"[50] that is man is therefore no longer bound to a predetermined possibility of humanity which would realize itself in this process of production. This process itself continually retroactively creates the conditions of its own possibility. This is why Marx can claim that "communism [...] as such is not the goal of human development"[51], because the process of universal production as emerging after the communist action cannot, due to its inherent logic, know any goal. Rather this process is *in actu*, i.e. it is actual or it is not. Therefore: communism is *in actu* or it is not.[52] If one begins with the assumption that there is no essence of man which could be realized in the process of production, or to state it even more clearly: if one begins with the claim that the human being is constitutively indeterminate, then this leads to the consequence that this process of determination – whose name is "universal production" – can have no immanent boundaries, no inherent limitations. It rather has to be understood as – at least potentially – infinite. The process of universal production therefore proceeds via a constant conversion into "impossible possibilities"[53] of that which seems to be impossible for man to do or to think. Things seem to be impossible for the human being: 1. because it bears no determinations of what is possible for it and 2. because it is always inscribed into concrete social historical and political situations that present something as an impossibility, as historically impossible. These two dimensions of impossibility – the abstract and the concrete – are converted into impossible possibilities that refer to what will have been possible for man. Against the "fraternization of impossibilities"[54], Marx emphasizes the conversion of the impossibility of fraternization into its possibility. To relate once again to Marx's example: if it seems

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[52] What should be clear at this point is that Marx uses the word "communism" not in the sense of expressions like "communist party", "communist state" – which to me seems to be a *contradictio in adjecto*. It here can be understood in a purely negative way: the logic of classes, the logic of the oppression of one class by another can be overcome. For this, see also: Alain Badiou, *De Quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?* (Paris: Lignes, 2007), p. 130 sq.
[53] PP, p. 101.
[54] MM, p. 138.

impossible prior to the invention of music that man has or can have a musical ear, what happens with the invention of music is that a new organ is born, or to cut a long story short: this specific impossibility is converted into a possibility that has to be thought in the temporality of the future anterior. One can therefore also claim that the proletariat as a subject of universal production continually determines itself retroactively as that which it will have been. It is a constant "being-by-itself"[55] in the steady production of the retroactive determinations of new social organs of its own universal essence. The proletariat is the subject of this process of universal production, and what is produced by it is the universality that Marx calls "species-being"[56]. This also means that there can be no condition of belonging which would regulate who can and who cannot participate in the process of universal production.[57] Rather it is in this process that there is "a moment in which it fraternizes [...] with society in general"[58]. In a different context Marx offers an image that is helpful for an understanding of the logic of this operation. The movement of universal production whose subject is the proletariat is similar to a constant "*somersault*, not only over its own limitations, but at the same time over the limitations of the modern nations"[59]. The somersault movement makes it possible that the process of universal production knows no boundaries or limitations: as universal production itself, it is at the same time a retroactive production of universality. Step by step, or better: somersault by somersault, without any law of production, without any regulation of how it proceeds and without any prior determination, in always singular historical situations, one determination after another is produced that retroactively deploys the universal dimension of the human species-being. The species-being is constitutively indeterminate and it is precisely due to the potential infinity of its connected determinations – this somersault after somersault retroactively change the essence itself – that it remains indeterminate. For the process neither allows a law of op-

[55] *Ibid*., p. 112. I modified the translation because the sense of the German expression *Durchsichselbstsein* which Marx employs here, literally means to be the cause of one's own being. This precise sense gets lost if one translates it as "self-mediated being".

[56] *Ibid*., p. 176.

[57] This thought is what still seems to be one, rarely noticed, aspect of the Marxian heritage in contemporary political and philosophical thinking. Thinkers as different as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek all seem to have this one thing in common: the enterprise to think a form of togetherness or of organisation which does not and cannot know any exclusive conditions of belonging to it.

[58] MC, p. 105.

[59] *Ibid*., p. 104.

eration, a defined condition of belonging to it, nor a point at which the realization of the humanly possible would be reached. This sort of production is rather marked by what I would like to call an immanent *Bestimmbarkeit*.[60] On the one hand, the essence of man is without any determination, because it is stripped of all determinations by the existing forms of alienation. On the other hand, what universal production designates is a process of production that – in always singular historical situations – generates step by step certain determinations which retroactively always determine the ever new species being. This means that the essence of man is and will always be a non-being [*Unwesen*]. Due to the internal infinity of the process there can be no substantialisation, no essentialisation of any determination. This is the reason why the universal production (of the proletariat) and the production of the universal (of the human species being) is and remains *bestimmbar*. It is such a production of universality by a local and always singular subject that Alain Badiou called a "proletarian aristocratism".[61] It is proletarian because the notion of truth that comes into play here can only be thought in the realm of production. And it is aristocratic because this production is actualized by something that always appears at first as a minority[62], as something inexistent. It is consequently aristocratic because only a historically localized singular subject (the proletariat) can introduce an exception to that which the

[60] This term is not translatable into English and its precise sense would be lost if rendered as "determinability". This is because "Bestimm*bar*keit" should be read in two ways: something can constantly be determined because it is stripped of all determinations (it is "bar aller Bestimmungen", as one could put it in German) and produces this double condition also constantly as any retroactive determination changes the basis that it determines. The "bar" of "Bestimm*bar*keit" therefore stands for the continuous condition of the emergence of new determinations that are produced retroactively. This is also how I read some central aspects of what Badiou calls "subtraction". See Alain Badiou, *Conférence sur la soustraction*, in: *Conditions*, pp. 179–192.

[61] Alain Badiou, "Manifesto of Affirmationism", in: *Lacanian Ink* 24 (http://www.lacan.com/frameXXIV5.htm). I modified the translation.

[62] That minority does not imply that particularity should be clear here. "Minority" is rather used in a Deleuzian sense of the term. If in the Marxian conception the proletariat is an objective bearer of heterogeneity that today seems to be lacking, then it is precisely at this point that one can raise the question of the range of what Badiou calls the first and second sequence of the communist hypothesis. Any renewal of the critique of political economy necessarily has to answer to this demand to not fall back into a thinking that understands politics as a subjectivation of objectively given economic contradictions. If this demand is not met, political thinking will remain in the realm of what Badiou calls the state. See: Alain Badiou, *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?*, pp. 129–155; Alain Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste. Circonstances 5*, pp. 85–133.

given situation declares as possible and impossible. This sort of exception is *hic et nunc* universal because it directly leads to the production of universality. It is consequently proletarian because the process itself is a synthesis of singularity and universality and it contains a dimension that is addressed to everyone. This is why in the process of universal production brotherhood is no longer a phrase but a truth. As Alain Badiou puts it: "You know that Marx names 'generic humanity' humanity in the movement of its own emancipation; and 'proletariat', the name 'proletariat' is the name of the possibility of generic humanity in an affirmative form. 'Generic' names for Marx the becoming of the universality of human beings, and the proletarian historical function is to deliver the generic form of the human being. So Marx' political truth is on the side of genericity, and never on the side of particularity. It's formally a matter of desire, creation or invention, and not a matter of law, necessity or conservation."[63] Marx's humanism is a humanism of the impossible; an inhumanism of a collective production of formerly unthinkable possibilities. This is why one can claim that it is precisely the "inhuman ordering humanity to be in excess over its being-there"[64].

Coda: Life Living Life

Man truly lives if and only if this excess is engendered by an actual communist action that leads to the process of affirmation of the ontological determinations of its indeterminate essence. From what I have developed so far, one can draw some conclusions concerning the notion of life that is implied here. Only in the deployment of his universal species-being does man begin his true "*life of the species*".[65] When Marx thereby defines universal production also as the life of the species, it is because this production implies a conception of life which is a "*productive life*"[66]. What universal production produces is thus the universal dimension of the human species-being. In the process of deploying the truth of this

[63] Alain Badiou, "Politics. A Non-expressive Dialectics", Typescript. One should bear in mind here that *humanité générique* is the French translation of the Marxian notion of "species-being". When re-translated from French into English "species-being" becomes "generic humanity". My reading attempts to show that the "generic" aspect of species-being – in the Badiousian sense of the term – is not just a coincidence of translation but rather a fundamental characteristic of the Marxian conception.

[64] See Alain Badiou, Séminaire sur: *S'orienter dans la pensée, s'orienter dans l'existence (2)*. Session of October 19, 2005. My translation.

[65] MM, p. 76.

[66] *Ibid*.

species-being the true species-life of man appears, which includes everyone. Consequently, man lives if and only if he participates in the deployment of his own universality, if he works for the ontological affirmation of his own essence. It is because this production constantly creates retroactive determinations of its own essence that one can claim that this *universally producing* life is as well constantly relating itself to itself, i.e. in the process of living truly, life produces determinations of itself. For Marx, to truly think human species-life signifies to think a collective universal production that itself generates life. "[W]hat is life other than activity"[67] – other than universal production? If to truly live means to produce universally, to produce the universality of owns one essence, then life = praxis = activity. This is why true activity, i.e. universal production, is true life, i.e. the permanent creation of one's own universality. If true life is constitutively universal active life and if therefore life can be said to be creative life, one can conclude that productive life defines a life which in its activity constantly refers back to itself. For Marx, true life is universal activity and universal activity is true life. One can now easily inscribe these interdependent definitions into Marx's formula of "productive life": Marx's conception of human species-life, the life of generic humanity, can be understood as a conception of a *life living life*.

[67] *Ibid*., p. 75.

Other than Being

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Ed Pluth

Alain Badiou, Kojève, and the Return of the Human Exception

1.

Alain Badiou's discussion of "what is living" or "what is it to live" in the section that closes *Logics of Worlds* is an investigation not into the nature of life itself but rather into the human, and what a human life is. So I suggest that the section, despite the generality of its title, is really about "what it is to live *as human*," though he does not add this qualifier. This same section also contains one of Badiou's critiques of humanism, in what he describes as its current "democratic materialist" incarnation. And so one finds in the same, short concluding section of a long and complex work both a promotion of a theory of the human and a critique of humanism. The significance of this should not be lost: it gives the impression that the elaborate and rather abstract philosophical mechanism of the entire book is trying to make this final "ethical" section possible (just as the first volume of *Being and Event* in a sense ended with the later publication of *Ethics*). And in this section, Badiou is trying to show that what goes for humanism now is predicated on an elimination of the key human traits he wishes to revive in his own theory of what life is.

The terminology Badiou uses in his re-framing of the human is rather off-putting. By framing his theory of life in terms of immortality, eternity, grace, and resurrection, this theory appears to be philosophically retrograde, not to mention blatantly religious, especially when compared to the view of the human that is found in democratic materialism. Democratic materialism (henceforth DM) levels down any kind of classical philosophical or religious human exceptionalism, and avoids positing any kind of abyssal species difference. As Badiou describes it, democratic materialism, as humanist as it may be, makes the human out to be one form of animal life among others. For Badiou, this in itself is enough to serve as a critique of DM. But it should be pointed out that it is certainly one of its desired goals and is what makes it so attractive to many. The flattening out of a human/animal difference is no doubt motivated by the many ill consequences of

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the traditional understanding of the human exception – its hubris, its participation in justifications for racism, colonialism, and general intolerance and cruelty; and it is also driven by our increased attention to the lives and qualities of other species, and thus by the realization that the difference between humans and other animals cannot be framed in terms of simple qualitative differences involving language, reason, or what have you.

By thinking about a human exception again, and maybe even by thinking about "the human" at all, Badiou's philosophy thus appears to be flirting with serious theoretical and ethical disasters. What makes Badiou's return to the human better than the model of the human in democratic materialism is not necessarily the terms in which the revival occurs, which, I will explain, I think are ironic anyway. Rather, what makes his return to a human exception worth considering further is the way in which it introduces a transformation into the very grammar we have for thinking about the human, one that results from Badiou's ontology of the multiple. The best presentation of this grammar or framework is found in Kojève's reading of Hegel, which I will set up in the next few sections.

In Badiou's theory, it will turn out that a (human) life itself becomes a strange a-human or inhuman thing, *for us*. Although this means that the human is an exception internal to individual members of the species homo sapiens, which is also one of the strongest points in the Kojevian framework, the human is in Badiou's philosophy made out to be an exception that is external to us as well, external to our existence as individuals, and therefore not something we can safely claim to be "ours" as if it were some kind of essence with which we might identify. It is his way of accounting for the externality of the human that sets his theory off from the Kojevian framework, as well as from the assumptions about the human found in democratic materialism.

2.

The focal point of Kojève's treatment of the human is the notion of the "anthropogenic". This refers to a trait or property the exercise of which is responsible for the appearance of the human at all. Thus, what is "anthropo*genic*" can exist without the human "properly so called" ever emerging. (Pre-history and possibly post-history would be the realms of these non-human members of the species homo sapiens.) Furthermore, for Kojève, once the human emerges its condition

is such that it is always, structurally, seeking its own overcoming in the satisfaction of its desire and the attainment of wisdom. The human is thus of a necessarily limited time span (and its members are keenly aware of such finitude) and on top of being a transitory thing it is also an aberration in the order of things. Giorgio Agamben has pointed this out as well in his discussion of Kojève in *The Open*:

> in Kojève's reading of Hegel, man is not a biologically defined species, nor is he a substance given once and for all; he is, rather, a field of dialectical tensions always already cut by internal caesurae that every time separate – at least virtually – "anthropophorous" animality and the humanity which takes bodily form in it. Man exists historically only in this tension; he can be human only to the degree that he transcends and transforms the anthropophorous animal which supports him, and only because, through the action of negation, he is capable of mastering and, eventually, destroying his own animality (it is in this sense that Kojève can write that "man is a fatal disease of the animal"). (Agamben 12)

What this "anthropogenic" trait is for Kojève must indeed be thought of in terms of the negative: "Man is therefore *Nicht-sein*, Non-être, Néant" (Kojève 431). This entails not just a mental capacity for negation (which would be enough to distinguish the self-consciousness of human beings from the mere consciousness of other animals) but a practical capacity for negation as well. In other words, the human manifests itself in negative actions, such as the famous one in the pursuit of recognition during the master/slave dialectic – that gratuitous suicidal gesture, the demonstration of one's awareness of negativity, in the form of one's own non-being, by risking death. The anthropogenic trait is in Kojève a self-consciousness in action, become practice, and become self-negating.

That the human and the negative are identical is one reason why the human for Kojève constitutes a split (Agamben says, aptly, an internal casesura, a dialectical tension) that runs right down the middle, as it were, of the species homo sapiens. The problem this raises is, as Kojève claims in the course of his study of the master-slave dialectic, that "humanity must remain alive, but be or become human" (53). If the essence of the human amounts to self-negation and self-overcoming, remaining human for any amount of time seems impossible. The threat of the non-human, on both ends, is insurmountable: the negation of the human comes out either as a relapse into the merely animal, or death, or the post-human

(at the end of history). Thus, there is no human without what amounts to its rebuttal (which is also its very condition of possibility) constantly underlying it. From the moment of the emergence of the properly human on, the distinction between the animal life of a member of the species homo sapiens and that creature's life *as human* is its defining tension.

What Kojève's work brings out is the way in which the human tends to be thought of philosophically as an exception and a difference that is both internal to members of the species homo sapiens and external to them. It addresses very well the intuition we have that we are human, which is something strongly distinct in the animal kingdom, yet we must also struggle to remain so. The human is thought of then as an internal difference, in the sense that a human is always also not human – and an external difference, in the sense that the anthropogenic trait is a difference that sets the human off completely from other animals.

3.

Kojève's account assumes that self-consciousness as negativity or negating action is the human essence. This assumption has not fared well. It is even questioned by one of the "existential attitudes" Kojève himself discusses, one that rejects self-consciousness in a manner similar to what I think Badiou is trying to account for in his conception of democratic materialism. Kojève argued that there was only one way to go if one denied that self-consciousness was the essence of the human, which he describes as a mystical option, or, after Nietzsche, a kind of European Buddhism and Nihilism:

> One can deny that self-consciousness reveals the "essence" of man. Or again, to put it in simpler terms, one can say that self-consciousness is a sort of malady that man must, and can, overcome; that there are, alongside conscious men, *unconscious* men, who are nevertheless just as much – although in another manner – *humans*. [...] It suffices to evoke Hindu thinkers who claim that man approaches satisfaction and perfection in a dreamless sleep, that satisfaction and perfection is *realized* in the absolute night of the "fourth state" (turia) of the Brahmins, or in the Nirvana, the extinction of all consciousness, of the Buddhists. (278)

Now, Kojève's reading of Hegel plainly suggests that self-consciousness is some kind of malady – he himself even refers to it as the disease of the animal. Yet it

is also clearly the (troubled, problematic) essence of the human for him; in this sense Kojève seems to share the dark view of self-consciousness contained in the "mystic" option, yet he refuses to place the essence of the human elsewhere – in a mystical communion with being, for example – and he also refuses to reject self-consciousness by pursuing its disappearance. For Kojève, self-consciousness is an aberration in the order of things, and the stuff of an abyssal difference between the animal and the human. Nevertheless it *is* the human essence, and he maintains that there is a satisfaction proper to it – in the attainment of wisdom, becoming a Sage at the end of history, attaining full self-knowledge and self-transparency, as problematic as all that is.

Of course, we have another way to deny that self-consciousness is the essence of the human now, and it is the psychoanalytic way. What is referred to as the instance or insistence of the letter in the psyche by Lacan would be a compelling way of marking out the essence of the human after Freud, pointing out that which makes us into the fundamentally alienated "speaking beings" we are. Psychoanalysis does perhaps preserve a view of the essence of the human, and it also does so in terms of a split or difference, as Kojève's model does – but here it is the unconscious that traces this split. From this point of view, identification with our essence becomes a more difficult matter, and if it were ever achieved it would have to involve some kind of embrace of alienation. The kind of satisfaction posited by Kojève (understood as a wisdom that is a full self-knowledge, a full transparency of oneself to oneself) is simply not possible from a psychoanalytic perspective, but psychoanalysis does not embrace the "mystical option" of a satisfaction in non-consciousness and a communion with pure being either. Thus, in psychoanalysis one is faced with the problem of "becoming", of placing oneself and identifying oneself with an Other scene, there where one is not – where "it was" or "it speaks" ("ça parle"). See also Freud's famous "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*".

Badiou's ethic clearly involves a command "to live" and an affirmation that "life", in his sense, is possible. Yet it does not seem possible to identify oneself there where that life is, for reasons I will explain in what follows. This is why I wish to claim that Badiou makes the properly human out to be a kind of life that is more external or alien to the existence of the individual than even the unconscious is.

4.

The understanding of the human in democratic materialism, as I remarked earlier, attempts to reduce any abyssal human/animal difference. Whether it be language, thought, play, humor, emotions, or what have you, all of these are for democratic materialism just qualities that we have perhaps to a greater (or maybe it is better to say merely *different*) degree in comparison to other species. It is not clear what position self-consciousness would have for DM, and whether that would be the human essence or not. Probably not. According to Badiou the ethic of DM commands us to "live without ideas", and one imagines this is meant as a guide to satisfaction: you will be happier if your life is not disrupted by "ideas" or by what Badiou calls truth procedures. Badiou, by contrast, will make "living", and specifically living with an Idea (the only thing that counts as "living" for him), into an ethical command, something that he wishes to affirm can be and ought to be pursued. The task of *Logics of Worlds* is even to establish the possibility of life in this sense. "To begin, or begin again, to live for an Idea is, since it is possible, the only imperative," he writes, in what is the concluding statement of the book (LM 602). So obviously a distinction between life and something else, which Badiou calls existence or mere being-there, needs to be made. Living is going to be something other than "persevering in the free virtualities of bodies" and something other than just "existing", which is all it would be, and should be, for DM, which places DM close to the mystical option described in Kojève (LM 529).

Democratic materialism does not fail to recognize the stuff that Badiou associates with life and the human. In *Logics of Worlds* he has the following to say on this:

> Democratic materialism wishes itself to be humanist (rights of man, etc.) but it is impossible to make use of a concept of what is "human" without dealing with this (eternal, ideal) inhumanity that authorizes man to incorporate himself to the present under the sign of the trace of what changes. (LM 533)

This reference to "incorporation" into "the present" under the effects of an event is a significant part of his theory, and Badiou has been interested in something like it for a long time. What is different in the theory given in *Logics of Worlds* is that this is being put so explicitly in terms of living. Life is described elsewhere in the concluding section as "the creation of a present", the production of a new situa-

tion in terms of the effects of an event (529). In other words, life is a life with a truth procedure. Badiou thinks DM is founded on a negation of life in this sense:

> Because it does not recognize the effects of these traces, in which the inhuman commands humanity to be in excess over its being-there, it is necessary to annihilate these traces and their infinite consequences, and to maintain a purely pragmatic, animal notion of the human species. (LM 533)

So the "existence" or life-without-ideas DM recommends that we follow looks to Badiou like a recommendation to lead the existence of a contented animal. Whereas, for Badiou, it is something admittedly "inhuman" that "authorizes" us to live in another sense.

5.

It is through our involvement with truth procedures that we have access to the concepts, the stuff of life, that Badiou revives from the religious tradition: grace, immortality, eternity, and even resurrection. Badiou refers to Spinoza in his discussion of these matters, who wrote that "we feel and know by experience that we are immortal" (in the Scolia to Proposition XXIII of Book V of the *Ethics*). For Badiou, this is certainly nothing but a feeling, nothing but something we experience now and then. Through a life with ideas, in a truth procedure, an individual experiences the eternal, or participates in it. But it is the truths produced by such a process that are eternal, not their makers. This is why I want to call the revival of religious terms in Badiou's philosophy ironic. His return to the human exception seems to be giving life, the true life and not merely existing, all that the religious (especially Christian) theory of the human promised, yet none of it is ours really, in the sense that no existing individual can be said to enjoy such things. Truths are eternal. It is "here and now" that we resurrect ourselves "as" Immortals insofar as we live (LM 536). But we are still not immortal. What Badiou adopts is something like a Platonism without the soul: eternity is for truths and ideas, but not for us; and we live "as" immortals only insofar as we live with ideas. And "resurrection" happens because what Badiou calls a "life" is something that occurs sometimes, that may die out but flare up again in the course of one and the same individual's long or short existence (like a love, or an enthusiasm for a new formula). But what Badiou calls "life" is not, it seems, ever able to be the defining essence of the individual who bears it.

Just as Badiou talks about his theory of the infinite as a banalization and secularization of what had always had religious connotations, he could say he is doing the same for the religious terms that evoke what was formerly sacred about human life. He renders immortality and eternity banal, in a sense. He makes resurrection trivial and ordinary. I don't think the sense of this can be fully appreciated unless one tries to account for the status of the individual, of a human "existence" (not "life") in Badiou's philosophy in some more detail. Addressing this will also allow us to see better how Badiou is bringing about a significant transformation in the philosophical grammar for thinking about the human.

The banalization of infinity in Badiou's ontology has important repercussions on the status of the individual in Badiou's philosophy. Mladen Dolar recently wrote the following about what the philosophical status of the individual should be in the wake of psychoanalytic theory:

> One may say that for psychoanalysis there is no such thing as an individual, the individual only makes sense as a knot of social ties, a network of relations to others, to the always already social Other – the Other being ultimately but a shorthand for the social instance as such. Subjectivity cannot make sense without this inherent relation to the Other, so that sociality has been there from the outset – say in the form of that minimal script presented by Oedipus – a social structure in a nutshell. (Dolar 17)

This is a lesson from psychoanalysis that really should have sunk in by now but for some reason hasn't. Given Badiou's perspective on the ontological status of the multiple ("the one is not"), and given what we know about "life" now for Badiou, what can be said about the relation of a human life to an individual member of the species homo sapiens? I would assert (though I do not think Badiou does this explicitly) that there is no *human* or *living* individual in Badiou's philosophy, in the sense that there is no individual identical with someone who lives a human life (or, who can be said to be *exclusively* living such a life). To live "as human" is simply one (or several) traits or tracks followed in the multiplicity that is the existence of any member of the species homo sapiens. And this is yet again why eternity and immortality may be the stuff of "life" but not the stuff of our existence.

Badiou therefore continues to make the human into an exception internal to us, albeit one no longer having to do with self-consciousness. A human life, for Ba-

diou, is an interruption of another type of life (or more strictly, existence) that goes on in the many different "worlds" inhabited by one and the same creature:

> Humanity is this animal whose property it is to participate in a great number of worlds, to appear in innumerable sites. This sort of objectal ubiquity, which makes it pass almost constantly from one world to another, on the basis of the infinity of these worlds and their transcendental organization, is by itself, without any need for any miracle, a grace: the purely logical grace of innumerable appearing. [...] To every human animal is accorded, several times in its brief existence, the chance to incorporate itself into the subjective present of a truth. To all, and for several types of procedures, is distributed the grace of living for an Idea, thus the grace of living *tout court*. The infinity of worlds is what saves from any finite dis-grace. (LM 536)

And so, as it was for Kojève, such a life is parasitic on something else, labeled by Badiou "existence". Yet, since no individual is "there" where this human life is, in the sense that no individual can identify with it, this life is as external to us as it is internal to us. Thus, unlike the Kojevian framework, life here does not exempt or mark us off from other species (comparative discussions of animals and humans seem to be absent from Badiou's work); life as human is as much an exception to us as it is to other species. Thus, the human is a strangely "inhuman" thing from the perspective of our existence as individuals. This is not the case for democratic materialism: DM may not adhere to self-consciousness as the essence of being human, but our individual existence is what we are for it, and is what we are commanded to cultivate in the pursuit of our satisfaction.

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What is it to Live? Critical Considerations with Regard to Badiou and Bergson Concerning Life Theory and its Language

En vain nous poussons le vivant dans tel ou tel de nos cadres.
Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*

Nowadays, philosophy is marked by a paradigm all creative thinking has to cope with: the intertwinement of cultural theory and life sciences. As a remarkable renewal of 19th century positivism, today one believes in the objectivity of scientific data provided by technological empiricism. The discursive turn that locates newly created theoretical substrates of technique, life, and thinking in the human brain is carried out by neuroscience, which is now considered to be the ideal way of understanding human affairs. The reigning master-discourse is delivered by the "converging technologies" in which neuroscience is brought together with biotechnology, molecular nanotechnology, and information technology, creating an interdisciplinary cluster to administer the progress of biochemistry, neurophysiology, psychology, and genetics. Allegedly, here new answers are given to conceptual questions raised by a philosophy of mind, for example the notions of consciousness, memory, cognition, mind, emotion, etc.

The philosophical situation of this leading framework, which includes all kinds of cultural phenomena as extensions of the human mind, can be represented by a technique coming from the old science of *phrenology* (which is literally Greek for "knowledge of mind"). Considering the self-presentation of leading life-science-laboratories, one might think that the new phrenological discoveries of computer-generated tomography are nothing but a technical optimization of late 18th century Franz Joseph Gall's medical philosophy of life which described the brain as the centre of all vital and mental functions. A curious effect in the humanities, which today are eager to catch up with the epistemological status of the (socially more valuable) natural sciences, is the creation of new fractions of art history and literary studies based on neuroscience. Representatives of these branches "visualize" the neurons "firing" in specific areas of the brain, while a man (or a woman) is looking at Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus*, listening

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to Bach's Violin Partita No. 3 in E major, watching David Lynch's movie *The Darkened Room*, or reading Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*...[1]

Notwithstanding the curiosity brought forth by the new constellation of the relationship between the social and natural sciences, one has to state a principal problem of conceptualization inherent to the biotechnological paradigm of life science. As a reconfiguration of early Enlightenment's body-mind problem (which is, with reference to Descartes and Aristotle, more precisely a problem of life and soul), the implicit philosophical reference of this suggestion is the positioning of the mechanist materialism developed by Julien Offray de La Mettrie in *L'homme machine* 1748. In an immanent manner, life – particularly human life – is considered to be a self-sufficient entity driven by a movement of self-improvement that can be (nowadays surely better than in the 18th century) technically "optimized" for purposes of individual, social, and thus political "health". The interface of *organism* as the molecules of a living body and *algorithm* as a network of computing machines can be seen as the latest translation of the old dualism of substances in interaction. The more techniques of optimization and controlling improve in this interface, the better it is for the sake of human life and its perfectible social interaction in a political environment.

This new thinking of progress, hence inheriting a combined teleology of 18th century materialism and 19th century positivism – and managing the heritage with the means of 21st century technology – enables a (postmodern) philosophy of "biopolitics" that wipes out all metaphysical or transcendent *mysteries* of life. The conceptual challenges towards the limits of intelligence exceeded by the notion of life which were formulated in the 20th century by philosophy of life (Bergson), phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty), anthropology (Plessner, Gehlen), symbolism (Cassirer), semiotics (Uexküll), structuralism (Foucault), and history of science (Canguilhem) now seem to be reducible to the mathematics of a digitalizable language emitted by the human brain, the "central computing unit" of the most complex cellular organism existent. This language is, philosophically, built on a narrow interpretation of the concluding remark of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which turns the requirement of "where one cannot speak, one must pass over in silence"[2] into

[1] I eschew the quotation of the analysts' names.

[2] "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, in: *Werkausgabe*, Vol. I (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 85.

the hope that one *can* pass over without further analysis. Not having to speak about the unexplainable nature of life, banned by the new encyclopaedia of computer generated facticity, one has, free from life-threatening concerns, the advantages of intelligible, desacralized, and utile bodies playing their (more or less diverting) part according to the rules of a "human park" (Sloterdijk).[3] The loss of life as a philosophical concept is offset by the prospect of the technical possibility of repressing the fear of death.

The problem in this constellation is that there is no longer need for a philosophy of life. And as life is one of the oldest and most important philosophical questions, there is hence no need for philosophy at all. So, if the task is to preserve philosophy, the main challenge right now is to keep on *thinking* life. But to think life is, as it has always been, not to rely on the neutral facticity of constructible language (like automatons), but to count on the imperfect and uncanny truth of living. Henri Bergson, the pioneer of "philosophy of life" at the beginning of the 20th century, who first developed the modern philosophical concept of life, introduced a few years earlier by Friedrich Nietzsche, raised the issue of the "intellectually unrealizable and unaccomplishable conceptualization of life"[4] as the very reason for mankind's creativity. Based on Bergson, one has to retain three basic theorems of an appropriate "life theory" (in contrast to life science) – which are requirements of general philosophical thinking as well as the test questions for the re-entry of converging cultural studies to the community of thinkers:

1) There is no monist sense of life as such. Every life – from the protozoon to Shakespeare – has to be lived individually. 2) Life cannot be considered without death. This theorem is not a hypostasis of intangible death as a human condition (in distinction from God), but a methodological necessity to conceptualize the progress of the human being as the incorporation of a specific "duration", which is, for Bergson, the condition *sine qua non* of memory, consciousness, and freedom. Imagine a biotech lab discovering a technique (e.g. a cellular tissue) en-

[3] Peter Sloterdijk, "Regeln für den Menschenpark: ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus (Rules for the Human Park. A Response to Heidegger's Essay *On Humanism*)" (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), is a post-Nietzschean interpretation of Plato's *Politikos* showing how the era of biotechnology can be understood as the latest historical step (after humanism and eugenics) of "anthropodicy", consisting in the self-controlled production of "domesticated" and "cultivated" men.

[4] Henri Bergson (1907), *L'évolution créatrice*, ed. Arnaud François (Paris: P.U.F., 2007), p. 52 et seq.

abling physical deathlessness. How could the happy few who profit from this immortalizing machine pretend to be "living" as subjects in a social or political context? Cut off from time, they would neither be able to age nor to renew. A duration that extinguishes death, as Benjamin puts it, has nothing but the "bad infinity of an ornament".[5] 3) Life is a concept that exceeds intelligence. The intelligible part of life is that of the constructible language, e.g. the biophysics of *l'homme machine*. The other part is the intuitive knowledge of the subject which is the "differentiating" instance (or agency) in the dysfunctional connection of matter (concrete or abstract material transmitted to the brain) with the needs, perceptions, imaginations, and memories of living human beings. Therefore, "intuition" in the sense of Bergson is far more than a simple inspiration of feeling; it has to be unfolded as a philosophical method "to transform life by understanding it".[6]

The difference that exists in the philosophical concept of "understanding" life, stretched by the gap between objective data and imaginative intuition, could be obscured by the essentialistic wording of the (nominal) question "What is life?" – which opens the floodgates for biopolitics – and would in this case be better stated by emphasizing the subjective part of the understanding process: "What is it to live?".[7] The philosophy of Alain Badiou, who carried out this modification in the last chapter of the second volume of *Being and Event*, does not stand, at first glance, in an obvious succession of 20th century philosophy of life. Nonetheless, this major work of fundamental onto-phenomenology only recently accomplished presents a perfect touchstone for verifying the three alleged theorems of life theory. Considering with Badiou the philosophical consequences of a "subjective" concept of life that exceeds intelligence, challenges death, and is able to think individual durations of time, my aim is to demonstrate moreover that there is an implicit but "vital" link from Badiou to Bergson that proceeds via the "vi-

talistic ontology" of Gilles Deleuze. Both of them – Badiou and Bergson – respond to the thesis of positivist materialism by referring to an antagonism explored by Nietzsche: the antagonism between natural situations (knowledge of life) and historical situations (deeds of living men) as the fissuring hiatus of all

[5] "Die durée, aus der der Tod getilgt ist, hat die schlechte Unendlichkeit eines Ornaments." Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire", in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1991), p. 643.

[6] Gilles Deleuze, *Le bergsonisme* (Paris: P.U.F., 1966), chap. 2: "L'intuition comme méthode".

[7] Alain Badiou, "Qu'est-ce que vivre?", in: *Logiques des mondes. L'être et l'événement 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp. 529–537.

philosophical edifice concerning mankind: "History has to be *done* for the *sake of life* [...] One has to understand the sentence that life needs the service of history to the same extent that the excess of history harms the living."[8]

In Badiou's Ontology the Nietzschean antagonism is given by the hiatus of being (the encyclopaedia of scientific knowledge) and event (the self-constitution of acting subjects). The notion of life does not figure at the centre of his ontological framework which defines philosophy as the "meta-ontological" instance of thinking the subjective "truth procedures" of events (in politics, science, art, and love) that "interrupt" the structured (and mathematically legible) language of being.[9] But there is a genuine reason why this notion (re)appears at the end of the work as a *prima materia* of philosophy. It is related to Badiou's claim, in analysing Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson, that life is an appropriate *name* of being.[10] The process of "naming what is", according to Badiou, belongs to the crucial decisions of "intervening" subjects in their respective truth procedures. "Drawing names from the void" (presenting what is not represented in "situations") is the essential action by which the subject, on its faithful way to truth, generates itself. Hence the name of being itself is the crucial decision of the philosopher who has to propose "a conceptual space" in which the naming of the new can take place. This is the first "intuitive" answer to the question of the appropriateness of life as the "name of being" shared by Bergson and Badiou (via Deleuze): the name of life – representing the question "What is it to live?" for the philosophical subject – combines a conceptual emphasis on "radical novelty" and a fascination of the "new-born"[11].

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[8] "Wenn wir nur dies gerade immer besser lernen, Historie zum Zwecke des *Lebens* zu treiben! [...] Dass das Leben aber den Dienst der Historie brauche, muss eben so deutlich begriffen werden als der Satz [...], dass ein Uebermaass der Historie dem Lebendigen schade." Friedrich Nietzsche: "Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben" (On the Use and Abuse of History for Life), in: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. I (München/Berlin: dtv/de Gruyter, 1988), p. 257 et seq.

[9] Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), Introduction. Idem: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, Paris, 1989.

[10] "L'être mérite le nom de *vie*", idem: *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), p. 63. Cf. idem: "De la vie comme nom de l'être", in: *Rue Descartes* 59, *Gilles Deleuze: immanence et vie* (Paris: P.U.F., 2006).

[11] Badiou says: "Prends soin de ce qui naît", *Logiques des mondes*, p. 529. Bergson says: "Il semble que la vie, dès qu'elle s'est contractée en une espèce déterminée, perde contact avec le reste d'elle-même, sauf cependant sur un ou deux points qui intéressent l'espèce qui vient de naître", *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 168. This sentence, by the way, is perfectly legible in terms of Badiou's ontology.

Besides the intuition however – with regard to the holistic thesis of materialistic positivism, which Badiou calls "democratic materialism"[12] –, we have to consider the philosophical consequences of the ontological effort to retain the concept of life. Let's summarize, therefore, the outcome put forward by Badiou in his concluding synopsis at the end of *Logics of Worlds*. The greater context is the panorama painted in both volumes of *Being and Event* concerning the very possibility of philosophical thinking based on mathematics – the most objective language existing – stretched between the set-theoretical axiomatics of existence itself (being or life as such) and the topology of an existential phenomenology (being or living in the world).[13] In this theoretical situation, to call a being a living being is to compel living beings to "position" themselves with regard to the question "What is it to live?". So the philosopher (the subject of the philosophical situation), only assuming that "it is possible to live"[14], analyses the different logics of the developments of all living "appearances in situations": as an unfolding of objects, facts, and ideas that are interrupted by "evental" reconfigurations in the power structure of their representations (ontology) and as developments of intensity in the processes of subjective self-constitutions that follow or oppose the truth procedures triggered by these interruptions (phenomenology).

The logical implications on both sides of the philosophical approach can be generalized as follows. I reduce the 15 sentences of Badiou's concluding chapter to the three main points which will afterwards be revisited from a Bergsonian perspective: 1) If life is the name of being, the possibility to live belongs to every being-in-the-world. This is the principle of the equality of individuals which is fundamental for ethics and politics. 2) If every being-in-the-world is living, the conceptual edifice of the philosophy of life faithful to equality must be able to transcend the antagonism of life and death. This is the principle of (potential) im-

[12] "Il n'y a que des corps [immédiats] et des langages [disponibles]", *Logiques des mondes*, p. 9, p. 531.

[13] The only prerequisite of the constructability of such an edifice is what Badiou calls his "wager", i.e. the supposition that "ontology *is* mathematics" (*L'être et l'événement*, p. 27). The fundamental goal is to describe "situations" in the most basic and most general sense, analysing the existence or non-existence of "elements" in situations (first volume) and searching for logics of their appearances and durations (second volume). So, my critical objective here is to confront two philosophical decisions in their axiomatic connection to ontology: (mathematics is the language of being) *and* (life is the name of being).

[14] "Vivre est possible", *Logiques des mondes*, p. 536.

mortality: to live is (with Aristotle) "to live as immortal".[15] The transcendence of the antagonism of life and death is the most appropriate way not to think life without death! According to Badiou, to live as immortal means that for truth procedures only the present exists: a subject has to "resuscitate" by "incorporation" into that present while the differentiating instance is not time as such, but the "degree of intensity" (which in fact is a Bergsonian term)[16] of the appearing elements. This point is crucial for the philosophy of time which in Badiou's ontology occurs as a subcutaneous contention with the Pre-Socratics. The first category of thinking is not time, but truth, on which depends the intensity of the appearing of more or less faithful subjects. Hence the sequences of time are subjective *creations* of the present. Time as such *is not* (the infinity of sequences as a whole is uncountable), so there is neither past nor history as such: "l'Histoire n'existe pas".[17] History is what has to be done for the sake of life as the principal matter of the sequential creations of presents. This creation is possible *and* necessary, insofar as life is what "irrupts" in present time-sequences (and if the intensity of such a creation is maximal, the present has the "amplitude" of eternity).

Within this conceptual frame, life is cut off from time except for the moment it (re)emerges as living in a present. The intensity of a present depends on the appropriation (perception, action, or impact) of "ensembles" that come into being. The neutrality of this formula complies with the concept of objectivity in sciences: living beings embrace humans, animals, plants, even cells (as objects transferable to signals of movement whose transcriptions can be immobilized and stored). But it goes beyond that, too. In the topological field of phenomenology, appearing "beings" that change the intensity of the situations of life also include abstract objects, ideas, or even "the pure acts of naming" which suddenly occur as "intensities" brought forth by new subjects (or parts of the same subject), while the first imagining, thinking, or simply naming subject can be dead for a long time. So "true life" comprises natural life, but transcends it at the same time by covering a scheme of immanent and creative *autopoiesis* that

[15] "Vivre en Immortel", *ibid*., p. 529. It also transcends the difference between the organic, the biology of living bodies, and the inorganic, the physics to which dead bodies return.
[16] Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 98 (and passim).
[17] Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 531. Or in other words: "Il n'y a aucun réel de l'Histoire". Idem: *L'hypothèse communiste. Circonstances 5* (Paris: Lignes, 2009), p. 190. There are only (present) situations which might prove to be "historical" in the sense that they interrupt the natural movement of appearances.

depends on unpredictable events and has its (crucial) impact in human affairs like science, art, and politics. Hence, for acting subjects, the creation of time is always an experiment: "expérimenter au passé l'amplitude éternelle d'un présent" and "expérimenter au présent l'éternité qui autorise la création de ce présent" (p. 532). And it remains true that this is possible for everybody at any time: "C'est ici est maintenant que nous nous (res)suscitons comme Immortels" (p. 536).

3) If life is the true name of being and if it is true that every being-in-the-world is living (given that truth is eternal), then the philosophical answer to the question "What is it to live?" – as a theoretical situation that is antecedent to nature and history – relies on a "subtractive" concept of the new as radical emergence. The intuition formulated above obtains here its ontological fundament. The concept of the new that philosophy relies on, must be subtractive in the sense that the changes ("leaps") of life as "events of time" can be so radical that the reliability of thinking itself is brought into question. Philosophical theory must provide for the moments of its own dissolution which make possible (and *force* by "intervention") the renewal of the possibility of thinking. At this point, it becomes clear why Badiou's ontological fundament of philosophical thinking – and, in this case, the wager that life is the appropriate name of being – is based on (set-theoretical) mathematics. Beginning with Georg Cantor in the late 19th century (and continued by Dedekind, Hausdorff, Russell, Neumann, Hilbert, Gödel, et al.), mathematics has developed a meta-mathematical branch that proves – in a logical and consistent language – a fundamental inconsistency at the core of its own methodological system. In mathematics there are absolutely undecidable "independencies" which, then, compel subjective or "intuitive" interventions to decide the undecidable. The most famous result of meta-mathematics in the early 20th century is Gödel's "incompleteness theorem", the consequences of which have not been understood by most of the scientific methodology based on logical consistency up to today: "Any formal system (any effectively generated theory capable of expressing elementary arithmetic) cannot be both consistent and complete."[18]

For this reason, Badiou "chooses" the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatization of classical set theory in order to formulate a proper model theory of philosophical lan-

[18] "Jedes hinreichend mächtige formale System ist entweder widersprüchlich oder unvollständig." Kurt Gödel, "Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der *Principia Mathematica* und verwandter Systeme", in: *Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik*, Vol. 38 (1931), pp. 173–198.

guage. In axiomatic set theory, meta-mathematics concurs with philosophy as meta-ontology, both of them being faithful to truth. Starting from the identification of ontology with mathematics, the purely symbolic language of axiomatics (the ten Zermelo-Fraenkel axioms, including the "axiom of choice") is able to provide both: a conceptual fundament for claims of existence in that the possibility of any being (or appearing element) is based on the mere empty set *and* a framework of positions where the failing consistency of formal language necessitates the "forcing" of the uncountable or the "wager" concerning the power structures involved that withhold the existence of specific impossibilities. This forcing signifies the same movement in symbolic (set-theoretical) language as the wager in natural (phenomenological) language: an intervention first given by a "pure name", the meaning of which is to be developed by the intervening subject. This dialectical description of the uncountable multiplicity of appearances (in living worlds) is covered by the philosophy of time (analysing the sequences of presents) that connects a concept of emergence, the concept of the radically new drawn from the void, with a concept of eternity: the idea of truth. In Badiou's edifice, the shifting point between both of them is delivered by the notion of "event", which is at the same time an unpredictable, sudden "appearance" of a new thinking (in truth procedures like politics, arts, sciences) and a "creation" by truth-linked defenders of this appearance: "Qu'il soit de l'essence d'une vérité d'être éternelle ne la dispense nullement d'apparaître dans un monde et d'être inexistante antérieurement à cette apparition [...] L'éternelle nécessité concerne une vérité en elle-même [tandis que] son processus de création [est suspendu] à la contingence des mondes [et] à la constance d'un sujet [...] Les vérités sont éternelles parce qu'elles ont été créées, nullement parce qu'elles sont là depuis toujours." (p. 534 et seq.)

Life depends on events of novelty, and to live truly is the acceptance of continuing to work on the outcome of these events.[19] So, with regard to the epistemological question concerning the consistency of language used by life science, the philosophical choice to name being life, with its three ontological implications – the principle of equality, a transcendence of death and time, and a concept of radical novelty –, brings about consequences of major importance. I would like to draw attention to two of them. The first consequence is a valuable clarification

[19] "Vivre suppose [...] qu'on accepte d'œuvrer aux conséquences, généralement inouïes, de ce qui advient." *Logiques des mondes*, p. 534.

concerning the mathematical fundament of Badiou's own philosophy. One of the most controversial points is the concept of "subtraction", which functions as a catalyst of the (positively "inconstructible") connection between the symbolic language of set-theoretical situations and the "natural" language of particular situations in empirical worlds. It has been argued that a subtractive ontology with "minimal foundations" which are grounded "upon nothing" (the empty set) can only account for novelty in an effective sense, if either the existence of the void had more "ontological validity" than the existence of positively appearing entities (grounded on numbers) or the notion of event, linked to the void and actuator of the new, had to be split into two parts, one directed towards a discernable "situated void" (the inconsistency of the situation) and the other directed towards a point of "escape" beyond the situation.[20] The difficulty is whether there can be a situated void or whether "to be subtracted is to not be situated at all". This problem, which consequently has been submitted to both volumes of *Being and Event* – the ontological fundament of being remaining valid for the topology of appearing –, as a matter of fact is best resolved by considering the effect of concentrating the philosophical question on a concept of life (that has to be lived): Life as the proper name of being comprises two parts of one *immanent*, self-constitutional procedure: the transcending movement beyond itself and the interruption of movement at the points of radical emergence which renew parts of (living) existence. The logical equilibration which is necessary for the differences of intensity in the topology of appearing is provided by a (potentially) *equivalent* interaction of positivity and negativity. This is one of the most difficult points in Badiou that the notion of life helps to understand: Subtraction is (uncountably) multiple, too! As there is for every being, there is for every *nonbeing* that might come into being by virtue of subtraction, a *specific* and potentially differentiable "impresentation".[21]

This is why life as an "inconceivable totality" is able to create as many catastrophes as fortunes (or even more for those who struggle to know what it is to live) and regenerates itself by an unpredictable emergence based on a specific inexistence that can be forced to truth without any predetermination or "intelligent

[20] Sam Gillespie, "Giving Form to Its Own Existence: Anxiety and the Subject of Truth", in: Paul Ashton, A. J. Bartlett, Justin Clemens, *The Praxis of Alain Badiou* (Melbourne: re.press, 2006), pp. 180–209, p. 183 et seq.

[21] "Toute présentation structurée imprésente 'son' vide, dans le mode de ce non-un qui n'est que la face soustractive du compte." Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, p. 68.

design". This is also why time (as well as space) has to be thought as sequels of living presents: "Tout présent est fibré."[22] One could say that life must be lived because the elements of the presents are unpredictably *capable of erring*. Life itself must have the chance to be (deadly) mistaken.[23] But from this it follows that neither life nor death are intrinsic questions of physical objectivity: "La vie et la mort ne sont jamais en elles-mêmes des problèmes de physique".[24] So the second consequence is a fundamental challenge to all scientific efforts aiming to define life or to analyse the living. The core of that challenge is a question concerning the limits of language. Being – life! – is anterior to language, as Badiou points out with reference to the "axiom of separation". Or, to put it in Bergson's words: "Notre pensée, sous sa forme purement logique, est [...] créée par la vie".[25] Theory itself depends on life and appears to be a living manifestation (in a specific duration of time). Hence, in assessing the necessity to think the appropriate language of life theory, one has to ask whether a technical (even digitalizable) language is able to provide a model that embraces the requisites – equality, emergence, and transcendence – put forward by philosophy. If the language is artificially built, one might presume that it should not be wholly constructible like in materialistic positivism or other consistency-based scientific methodology.

The discovery of the insufficient puissance inherent in language "on the way" to designating beings in life[26] – which has also been, of course, a central question of linguistics and philosophy of language since Gottlob Frege or even John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* – has never been developed further on the side of today's philosophy than in Badiou's twofold proposition of ontology followed

[22] Idem, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 530.

[23] This idea refers to a formulation of Foucault that comes very close to Badiou's concept of the "wandering" or "errancy" of the void: "La vie a aboutit avec l'homme à un vivant [...] qui est voué à 'errer' et à 'se tromper'...". Michel Foucault, "La vie: l'expérience et la science", in: *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, Vol. 90, no 1 (1985), pp. 3–14, quoted from: *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 1593.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 1592.

[25] Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. VI.

[26] While Badiou and Heidegger may represent in actual philosophy the most extreme antagonism possible in ontology and in aesthetics, there is a common ground in their respective theories of language: the critique of metalinguistics and the (subjective) condition of "experience with language": "Was zu tun übrig bleibt, ist, Wege zu weisen, die vor die Möglichkeit bringen, mit der Sprache eine Erfahrung zu machen." Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1959), p. 161.

by topological phenomenology. The language of the mathematical truth procedure this philosophy is faithful to, the axiomatization of set theory (and a Heyting algebra), traces itself back to an evental shift in philosophical epistemology. Contemporaneous to Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice*, the Zermelo set theory (first published in the same year 1907) is itself situated at the heart of the philosophical "crisis" of European sciences that confront a "technization" of the *Lebenswelt* (the immediately experienced concreteness) with a "positivist restriction of the idea of science".[27] The main question, raised most explicitly by Edmund Husserl in 1935, is whether the "mystery of subjectivity" remains conceivable in the era of the (perfected) "mathematization of Nature" which "decapitates" philosophy by cutting the subject out of language.[28] The crucial relationship between science and language is in fact an indicator of the whole epoch of the modern period (since Galileo) which can be characterized as a "process structure" enabling a "technicity of mind" that "transforms phenomena into products".[29]

The turning point of that era as a new condition for philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century can be elucidated by the simple question "What is it to live?", which is our link from Badiou to Bergson. The comparison between the "vital" elements of these philosophies that will round off this essay aims to confront the ontological wager of life as a name of being with the first and most important *immanent* concept of life. Bergson's philosophy of life is the elaboration of a (projective) theory that is able to "reach" life itself. The philosophical project of Bergson aims to expand theory – and the language of theory – as far as possible, so that it expresses a potency as multiple, as puissant, and as unpredictably different as life is for living beings. So the crucial requirement is to forge an "immanent" concept of life, a concept that thinks life from within itself. The name of this concept is "*élan vital*"[30], which defies the English translations "vital force" or "vital impetus", as well as the German *Lebenskraft* or *Lebensschwungkraft*. This naming, one of the most influential in 20th century philosophy, is the con-

[27] Edmund Husserl (1935, 1969), *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1996), p. 3.
[28] *Ibid*., pp. 4, 8, 22.
[29] "Die Verwandlung von *Phänomenen* in *Produkte* ist die essentielle Prozeßstruktur der Technizität des neuzeitlichen Geistes". Hans Blumenberg (1966), *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 39.
[30] Bergson: *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 80, p. 254 et seq.

ceptual counterpart of the outlined life theory. Where Badiou chooses life as the name for being in order to enlarge philosophical theory to enable an encounter of ontology and phenomenology, Bergson chooses the *élan vital* as a name for life in order to enlarge life theory so that it can reach all beings.

Bergson's *élan vital* is a concept that works as a twofold "differentiating instance"[31]. It comprehends two (multiple) ways of developing the question "What is it to live?". *Élan vital* "means" (is) at the same time the immanent force behind the movement of all beings (or appearances) *and* the immanent reason for the (undecidable) emergence or creation of new beings. "The universe lasts."[32] And it does so "in different durations with specific rhythms".[33] The philosophical implications of this conceptual choice – which can be interpreted ontologically, as Deleuze already pointed out in his book *Le bergsonisme* from 1966 – converge to a stunning complementarity with Badiou's thinking of equality, transcendence, and novelty. I would like to emphasize three of them: 1) Life – named *élan vital* – is the movement of being. The fact that "life in general" is identified with "movement itself"[34] causes its ability – from within – to "progress and last"[35]. It follows that every being lives forasmuch it has a specific duration. This is the fundament of Bergson's tacit ontology. It is not named as such, but it establishes the purely conceptual possibility of unlimited and unpredictable manifestations of life (respectively, as Badiou would call it: situations or worlds). The ontological concept comprises *all* possible durations, that of humans, animals, and plants – as well as, on the side of non-living beings, that of objects (sugar) or concepts (the idea of evolution). The difference between the "organisms" is only conditioned by the levels and the quantities of moving energy. The ontological concept of life is at the same time anterior to all those beings: it leaves them and their languages as "forced" creations.

2) If "life in general" is an overarching process of creation that is "unceasingly renewed" in its manifestations, then the *élan vital* requires that the "forms of life"

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[31] Deleuze, "Cours sur le chapitre III de *L'évolution créatrice* de Bergson" (21 March 1960), in: *op. cit.*, pp. 662–669, p. 664.
[32] "L'Univers dure." Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 11.
[33] "En réalité, il n'y a pas un rythme unique de la durée; on peut imaginer bien des rythmes différents". Idem, *Matière et mémoire*, in: *Œuvres*, ed. Henri Gouhier (Paris: P.U.F., 1970), p. 342.
[34] "La vie en général est la mobilité même." *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 128 et seq.
[35] "La vie, elle, progresse et dure", *ibid.*, p. 51.

are created in the same way as the ideas and concepts reflecting these forms.[36] So the (tacitly ontological) philosophy that provides the appropriate language for life theory and avoids reducing the potentiality of subjective "processes of consciousness" has only one goal: to think – following the "synergy" of intelligence and intuition – the "real durations" of time as (creative) emergences and (continual) developments of individual presents. Creation and continuity are the two main antagonistic but complementary functions of "evolution" that fuse – in the name of *élan vital* – into the immanent concept of life. While life is what "in every moment creates something" – which in fact can be a negative thing not coming into being (or dying shortly after being born) –, to understand what it is to live, is to consider the different places where time "inscribes itself" as presents: "Partout où quelque chose vit, il y a, ouvert quelque part, un registre où le temps s'inscrit" (p. 16). This phrase contains the clue that resumes the whole philosophy of Bergson, which is fundamentally a project of understanding the relationships between time and space under different perspectives, from the *Essai sur les données immediates de la conscience* (1889), which discovers the concepts of duration and extension as unassailable coordinates of the perception of living (caught between coercion and liberty), to *Matière et mémoire* (1896), which explores the dialectics of nature and mind, matter and memory, bodies and souls, etc. as (Cartesian) "product sets" of extension and duration.[37] The concept of *élan vital* that motivates *L'évolution créatrice* breaks radically with the remnants of the metaphysical overvaluation of time (as aspects of mind) over space (as aspects of matter) presupposed in these earlier books. It reunites both, time and space, as effects of a moving multiplicity that "constitutes intellectuality and materiality by reciprocal adaptation".[38]

[36] "L'évolution est une création renouvelée, elle crée au fur et à mesure, non seulement les formes de la vie, mais les idées qui permettraient de la comprendre, les termes qui serviraient à l'exprimer". *Ibid*., p. 104.

[37] The problem of the "philosophical sequel" between main works that has been posed with regard to Badiou by Bruno Bosteels, Justin Clemens, Oliver Feltham, and others is an even harder task with regard to Bergson. Including *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), there are four stages in the journey, the last one delivering a very late metaphysical development of the ethical and religious consequences of the twofold concept of life developed by *L'évolution créatrice* and the position of mankind in it. The "chef de file" of today's Bergsonism who works on this linkage is Frédéric Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie* (Paris: P.U.F., 2004).

[38] Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 188. This means that the *élan vital* as a differentiating instance finishes with the overvaluation of history as well: "Le mouvement qui parcourt l'Histoire est celui même de la différentiation." Deleuze, "Cours", p. 664.

3) If life is the universal movement of all beings and the unceasingly renewed creation of all of its manifestations, then the task of a philosophy that aims to understand life is a "deepening reflection of becoming in general" and hence a "true extension of science".[39] This conclusion is very similar and fundamentally compatible with the result of Badiou's reflection. The concept of life in general – as the name of being – meets the principle of equality on the same level as Badiou's situations (*Being and Event I*) or worlds (*Being and Event II*). The *élan vital*, as the movement of creative evolution, encounters the principles of transcendence and novelty on the level of the appearing intensities (or durations) and the events (or emergences) "drawn from the void". Moreover, one can state a similarity within the philosophy of time (as sets of presents) and the topology of space ("homogenous and void, infinite and infinitely divisible")[40], so that in both cases an ontological model of "subtraction" based on mathematical order is expressed. This parallel might be the most surprising and the most interesting for Badiouians. At the core of *L'évolution créatrice* Bergson introduces the notion of "inversion", which describes the "leaps" of matter jumping from "tension" into "extension" and of mind passing to freedom through "mechanical necessity" (p. 237). Here he refers to a purely negative mathematical order that symbolizes – i.e. negatively "materializes" – the points of interruption of order, where the re-inscription of being is possible: "L'ordre mathématique, étant de l'ordre, [...] paraîtra renfermer quelque chose de positif. En vain nous disons que cet ordre se produit automatiquement par l'interruption de l'ordre inverse, qu'il est cette interruption même."[41] In this context Bergson also develops – half a century before Paul Cohen – a concept of the "générique" (p. 226) which is the purely conceptual "common ground" of organic and inorganic manifestations of time-space-differentiations driven by the *élan vital*.

[39] "La fonction propre de la philosophie [...] est l'approfondissement du devenir en général [...] et par conséquent le vrai prolongement de la science." Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 368 et seq.

[40] Bergson's topological philosophy of space renewed by his concept of life is stunningly *congruent* to that of Badiou: "Il y a un *espace*, c'est-à-dire un milieu homogène et vide, infini et infiniment divisible, se prêtant indifféremment à n'importe quel mode de décomposition." *Ibid*., p. 157.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 220 et seq. That is also why space has become as important as time at this stage of Bergson's edifice, "L'unité pure et vide ne se rencontre [...] que dans l'espace: c'est celle d'un point mathématique." *Ibid*., p. 258.

So, if the general parameters of ontology and phenomenology are *logically congruent*, it remains to be seen how the *subject* is thought in Bergson's edifice. With the objective to consider the philosophical premises of life theory, it proves advantageous to round off the Badiou-Bergson-comparison by raising a Lacanian question. One has to state that Bergson does not suppose any difference in truth procedures. For him, there is only one generic truth, that of life itself. One has to state furthermore that the position of humans – who can be immortal by their deeds as faithful subjects – is considered in an anthropological perspective which is absent in Badiou' edifice. Man is of *natural* interest for Bergson. With regard to the other beings, man is positioned on a "higher level" of evolution, because his brain is able to "construct an infinite number of drive mechanisms" and to "dominate automatism" (p. 265). Nevertheless, we can find an equivalent to Badiou's subject in *L'évolution creatrice*. Bergson calls it – "due to default of a better word" – the consciousness: "la Conscience" (p. 187). Consciousness is "coextensive with universal life", so it is essentially linked to movement, motivated by the *élan vital* in the same way as the forms of life. Because they are coextensive with life, the acts of consciousness create and are created as "living beings", but on a conceptual level of "reflection" (p. 261) that casts an "immanent light" on these beings. This "accompaniment" of life by an "immaterial" framework has been interpreted by Deleuze as a "virtual" coexistence. But Deleuze's famous development of the concept hides the fact that Bergson's consciousness is less linked to virtuality than to "real" activity (or praxis, as Badiou would call it): "la conscience est la lumière immanente à la zone d'*actions possibles* ou *activité virtuelle* qui entoure l'*action effectivement accomplie* par l'être vivant" (p. 145). With Bergson's famous battle cry in mind – "there are no things, there are only actions"[42] – one has to understand the "twofoldedness" of consciousness realized as life is by intelligence and intuition: The *élan vital* of consciousness is a "limited force" that "exceeds itself endlessly" (as intelligence), so it remains always an "inadequate representation" of the achievements it tends to produce.[43] But at the same time, it is an unlimited force, a "pur vouloir vivifié" (as intuition) linked to mobility itself that is "interrupted" by the inadequateness of its own representation and thus, exceeding itself, "compelled into action": "Un être vivant et

[42] "Il n'y a pas de choses, il n'y a que des actions." *Ibid*., p. 249.

[43] "La force qui évolue à travers le monde organisé est une force limitée, qui toujours cherche à se dépasser elle-même, et toujours reste inadéquate à l'œuvre qu'elle tend à produire." *Ibid*., p. 127. "Cet inadéquation de l'acte à la représentation est précisément ici ce que nous appelons conscience." *Ibid*., p. 145.

un centre d'action" (p. 262). So the virtual action "surrounding" the real action sublates the inversion of energy that opposes action and imagination. While the *élan vital* is divided by communicating itself[44], consciousness is "attached" to this communication by "making itself".[45] This is the equivalent of Badiou's subject as a subjective procedure linked to life. It is a centre of "free action" – ideally subtracted from all constraints – that can be supported in reality by an individual who "contracts all of his being to push the pure will [the 'making itself'] forward" (p. 238).

In default of a definition of the difference of truth procedures – with Bergson everything that is created in life is a (first) event –, there is only one truth procedure that is differentiated as forced ("pushed") autopoiesis. It is the task of philosophy to do this faithfully. So the philosopher is a true subject, the philosopher who is "faithful to truth" by trying to understand what it is to live. Reality being the very object of philosophy (p. 85), the philosopher pushing forward (or deepening) the reflection of becoming in general (p. 369) is affected by the *élan vital* and engages himself in the continuation of its movement: "Le philosophe est obligé [une fois qu'il a reçu l'élan] de se fier à lui-même pour continuer le mouvement" (p. 239). At the same time, the philosopher is a "communicator" of truth in the sense that he thinks – creates conceptually – the points where the *élan vital* of consciousness is interrupted and recreates itself. But it remains that these points concern all living beings that can "retroactively" (p. 52) understand consciousness and become (possibly) aware of life as "concrete experiences" that have to be pursued. Life is, for all living beings alike, to live their lives actively.

One could perhaps argue that the conclusion of this comparison is slightly "forced" as well. It might seem questionable to conceive – within Badiou's edifice of situations that is based on the ontological framework of set theory and "extended" by logical phenomenology – a *naturalness* of events. Could the requirement of the historicity of the "evental sites" of situations, which interrupt the natural currents of becoming and opens them up for subjective re-creation, be re-orientated "for the sake of life"? Moreover, one has to question the exclusion of anthropology from philosophy that has been put forward in Badiou's book

[44] "L'élan se divise de plus en plus en se communicant." *Ibid.*, p. 104.
[45] "Pour que notre conscience coïncidât avec quelque chose de son principe, il faudrait qu'elle se détachât du *tout fait* et s'attachât au *se faisant*." *Ibid.*, p. 238.

L'éthique from 1994.[46] From a Bergsonian perspective, the question of man as a living being goes further than the ideology of "technical dominion of death", which irrevocably separates natural (dying) animality from the eternity of truth. One might imagine the (perfectly inconstructible) "situation" of mankind in general, as Bergson does, and argue that a singular man (or a society) that is potentially linked to truth – not as such, but as a living being – can enact a truth procedure by actively and creatively positioning himself with regard to his natural environment (e.g. the planet that has been wasted).[47] I claim that these are two of the consequences (within a multiplicity) that have to be accounted for, if you call being life or if you conclude a treatise of phenomenology by the question of what it is to live.

Nevertheless, one crucial argument results *for certain* from the comparison of these two fundamental philosophers of life who represent the two ends of a century that is vitally depending on a resolution of the question "What is it to live?": that is the philosophical challenge posed to the language of life science. It has been said that neither the symbolic language of (meta-)mathematics nor the natural language of social situations are "puissant" enough to express the whole of life in all of its manifestations. They designate only "parts", the logical or the phenomenological elements of it. The reason behind their insufficient puissance is that the undecidable situations of life and the infinite potentiality of (positively and negatively) disseminated independencies, which are fundamental for life's own movement of interruptions and recreations (in evolutionary adaptation or in thought) cannot be completely accounted for either on the basis of logical consistency or on the basis of socially encoded "language-games" (Wittgenstein). The rest of the mystery always remains. So, if the task is to preserve philosophy, and if philosophical thinking is to be faithful to the assumption that (all) being is life, then its "capital problem" is to know "how sci-

[46] This question has been raised by Nina Power: "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject", in: Ashton/Bartlett/Clemens, *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, pp. 309–338.

[47] Badiou reads Bergson too rigidly in a Deleuzian direction when he claims that in "the line of thought" of the philosophers of life – "de Nietzsche à Deleuze en passant par Bergson" – the eternity of truth is a "lethal fiction". Badiou: *Petit manuel d'inesthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 62. He is more in line with the founder of life theory when he analyses "local energy" as the origin of the "affirmative courage" that the subject needs in order to follow the truth procedure: "Se saisir d'un point, et le tenir." *Ibid.*, p. 117 et seq.

ence is possible".[48] Bergson responds: Positive science being the "work of pure intelligence" (p. 196) and intelligence being the "faculty of connecting the same to the same" (p. 52), a "science of life" is a *contradictio in re*. The neutral facticity of constructible language only targets the "laws" of being (p. 230), not being itself. "Consciousness lies dormant when life is condemned to automatism" (p. 262). Badiou only radicalizes the same answer. The language of life theory – the philosophical question of being – cannot be scientific at all! Science is a truth procedure that constructs its language in the simplest manner possible (feigning clear understanding). It does not care about language. To care about language is to continue to create it in the direction of independency. That is the "inaesthetical" task of poetry. To visualize the neurons in the brain of a man (or a woman) who is reading Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* like counting the letters of the poem.

[48] "Le problème capital de la théorie de la connaissance est en effet de savoir comment la science est possible". Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 232.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXX | Number 2 | 2009 | 227-245

Rado Riha*

Sur le matérialisme de l'Idée

I.

Dans la « Conclusion » de son *Second manifeste pour la philosophie*[1], Badiou présente la différence entre ce manifeste et le premier, publié il y a 20 ans, de la manière suivante : si le premier *Manifeste* a mis l'accent sur le triplet catégoriel de l'être, du sujet et de la vérité, le second *Manifeste* met l'accent sur « l'apparition effective » de ce triplet et sur « son action observable dans le monde » ; si le premier *Manifeste* a réaffirmé la possibilité et la nécessité de l'existence continuée de la philosophie, le deuxième est dédié à sa « pertinence révolutionnaire[2] » ; et finalement, « la doctrine séparatrice de l'être » du premier *Manifeste* est suivie dans le seconde *Manifeste* d'« une doctrine intégrative du faire »[3]. Dans ce passage d'une « ontologie de l'universalité-vraie » à une « pragmatique de son devenir », on peut isoler deux thèmes : s'agissant du monde contemporain, c'est la question du « renouvellement de l'hypothèse communiste ». Cette question est inséparable du thème de la « vie véritable », qui n'est autre qu'une « vie sous le signe de l'Idée ». En amont du *Second manifeste* se désigne ainsi « un communisme de l'Idée[4] ».

Dans cette mise en relief de la différence entre les deux manifestes, on reconnaîtra, sans aucune difficulté, le passage d'une considération ontologique de l'être-multiple à la logique de l'apparaître et sa considération de l'être-là de la pure multiplicité, le passage conceptuel qui sépare, comme on le sait, les deux œuvres majeures de Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* et *Logiques des mondes*. Une question s'impose cependant à propos des quelques propositions badiousiennes que je viens de citer : est-ce que le déplacement de l'accent effectué par le *Second manifeste* marquant l'écart entre les deux manifestes annonce également un

[1] A. Badiou, *Seconde manifeste pour la philosophie*, Paris, Fayard, 2009.
[2] *Ibid*., pp. 132–133.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 143.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 139.

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changement dans le statut de la philosophie qui est sous la condition de quatre procédures de vérité ?

On remarquera d'abord que l'axiome fondamental réglant le rapport entre la philosophie et la politique n'a pas changé dans *La logique des mondes,* ni d'ailleurs dans le *Second manifeste* : une philosophie sous conditions, ce n'est pas une philosophie qui serait conditionnée par la science, l'art, la politique ou l'amour. C'est plutôt une philosophie qui se donne à soi-même, donc d'une manière intra-philosophique, une condition selon laquelle son existence dépend du système des conditions qui lui sont extérieures. On pourrait donc dire que la philosophie est sous sa propre condition de penser les quatre procédures de vérité comme étant ses conditions extérieures, réelles. C'est-à-dire comme conditions que la philosophie elle-même pose comme ses conditions immanentes, donc comme conditions sans lesquelles elle ne pourrait pas exister comme philosophie, mais qui sont pour cette raison même irréductibles, extérieures à la philosophie.

Constatons donc que le rapport que la philosophie entretient avec sa condition politique n'a pas changé dans ce passage de *L'Être et l'Événement* à *La logique des mondes*. La philosophie reste toujours « sous condition des événements de la politique réelle », elle y est même « organiquement » liée, tout en restant cependant, selon Badiou, « une activité de pensée *sui generis*[5] ». En effet, Badiou lui-même définit le rapport philosophique au regard de la politique comme *métapolitique*[6]. Dans cette perspective on dira que la formulation de l'hypothèse communiste est une formulation entièrement *philosophique* : « ce livre », écrit Badiou au début du livre qui porte ce titre, est, « je veux y insister, un livre de philosophie[7] ».

Tout en prenant cette affirmation au sérieux, une question se pose néanmoins : bien que la formulation de l'hypothèse communiste appartienne au domaine de la philosophie, les noms philosophiques de la politique, quant à eux, sont si étroitement, si « organiquement », presque immédiatement liés aux noms propres de la politique elle-même que l'on devrait se pencher sur la manière selon laquelle il faut entendre l'énoncé qui porte sur la « pertinence révolutionnaire »

[5] A. Badiou, *Abrégé de la métapolitique*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, p. 70–71.
[6] *Ibid*. : « Par 'métapolitique' j'entends les effets qu'une philosophie peut tirer, en elle-même, et pour elle-même, de ce que les politiques réelles sont des pensées. »
[7] A. Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste*, p. 32.

de la philosophie. La « pertinence révolutionnaire » de la philosophie ne signale-t-elle pas que la philosophie « sous condition de » ne s'est pas, subrepticement, bien sûr, éloignée de sa position métapolitique qu'elle est obligée de maintenir comme philosophie ? Qu'elle est basculée dans le rôle qui lui avait été désigné par le marxisme : non pas d'interpréter le monde comme un discours purement contemplatif, mais plutôt d'assumer le statut d'un discours théorico-pratique, presque politique, qui intervient dans le monde pour le changer. Autrement dit, est-ce que le déplacement de l'accent opéré par le *Second manifeste* signale un changement qu'on pourrait comprendre au sens de la thèse onze sur Feuerbach : « Les philosophes ont seulement interprété le monde de diverses manières, il s'agit de le transformer » ?

Il est incontestable que la philosophie badiousienne vise à un changement du monde. Mais on se tromperait si l'on prenait le fait que Badiou s'appuie dans *Logiques des mondes* et dans le *Second manifeste* sur la « doctrine intégrative du faire » comme son aveu tacite que la philosophie devrait quitter son champ de la pensée qui ne pense que la pensée elle-même pour devenir une pratique, implicitement du moins, politique. Or si la philosophie sous conditions se sépare d'une philosophie considérée comme la part théorique du changement politico-pratique du monde, c'est précisément dans la mesure où il s'agit d'une philosophie qui opère avec l'Idée. À ce propos, j'avancerai la thèse suivante : l'Idée, avec laquelle opère la philosophie sous conditions, n'est pas le moyen de s'approcher du domaine de la pratique politique, c'est plutôt une manière de renforcer son orientation matérialiste.

Pour développer cette thèse, en m'appuyant sur des affirmations supplémentaires, je poserai quelques jalons. Premièrement, pour concevoir l'Idée au sens où Badiou a introduit ce concept, il faut partir de l'indiscernabilité de la pensée et de l'acte. Il n'est possible de penser l'Idée que sous la forme d'une prescription : vivre selon l'Idée, ou encore, agir selon l'Idée. Deuxièmement, l'indiscernabilité de la pensée et de l'acte requiert en tant que telle de joindre au couple initial : pensée et acte une troisième instance, celle du réel ou de la Chose. C'est l'instance du réel justement qui ouvre la voie vers le matérialisme de l'Idée. Pour formuler ce point d'une manière plus rigoureuse, je dirais que la théorisation de l'Idée comme point de l'indiscernabilité de la pensée et de l'acte impose une articulation conceptuelle mise en œuvre par la psychanalyse lacanienne du symbolique, de l'imaginaire et du réel, une articulation que Badiou, au prix de

quelques remaniements, a fait sienne[8]. Pour donner à la philosophie son fondement matérialiste, nous avons donc besoin d'un nœud de ces trois instances. Et troisièmement, le matérialisme de l'Idée demande une figure singulière du sujet : celui demeure toujours, pour le dire dans le vocabulaire du premier *Manifeste*, un sujet « sans vis-à-vis[9] », mais, à cette figure du « sujet sans objet », il faut ajouter maintenant un tour de force supplémentaire : tout en demeurant le « sujet sans objet », il n'est cependant « pas sans », et plus précisément encore : il n'est pas sans objet, justement. Ici, je fais allusion, bien sûr, à la thèse lacanienne selon laquelle l'angoisse, cet affect qui ne trompe pas, bien qu'il n'ait pas d'objet déterminé, n'est pas sans objet. Citons Lacan : « Elle n'est pas sans objet, mais à condition qu'il soit réservé que c'est ne pas là dire, comme pour un autre, de quel objet il s'agit – ni même pouvoir le dire[10] ». C'est précisément dans cet objet paradoxal qui va avec « le sujet sans objet », dans cet objet qui est là, sans qu'on puisse le voir pour autant, qu'il faut chercher, à mon avis, la matérialité de ce « corps exceptionnel », exceptionnel parce que subjectivable et que Badiou introduit sous le nom de « corps-de-vérité ». Ce corps-de-vérité, bien sûr, n'est pas ineffable ou inexprimable, or pour pouvoir le penser et l'exprimer il faut introduire la catégorie du réel.

En tant que point de l'indiscernabilité de la pensée et de l'acte, l'Idée, loin de garantir le passage de la théorie à la pratique, consiste plutôt en un franchissement du symbolique en direction du réel. Nous trouvons une précieuse indication pour élucider ce point dans Badiou lui-même lorsqu'il se réfère aussi bien à la fonction imaginaire qu'à la fonction symbolique de l'idée[11]. Cependant, pour démontrer le matérialisme de l'Idée, il faut tenir compte d'une autre fonction de l'Idée que Badiou lui assigne, celle du nouage du symbolique et du réel. En effet, en définissant l'Idée comme « une médiation opératoire entre le réel et le symbolique[12] », Badiou la décrit plus précisément en termes suivants : « L'Idée est une fixation

[8] *Ibid*., p. 187.

[9] A. Badiou, *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, p. 74.

[10] J. Lacan, *Seminaire X*, *L'angoisse*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, p. 155. Ou encore : « Non seulement elle n'est pas sans objet, mais elle désigne très probablement l'objet, si je puis dire, le plus profond, l'objet dernier, la Chose », *ibid*., p. 360. C'est la raison pour laquelle l'angoisse ne trompe pas. Elle est hors de doute, elle « ne trompe pas, précisément en tant que tout objet lui échappe », *ibid*., p. 252.

[11] Voir par exemple : « L'idée communiste est l'opération imaginaire... L'Idée symbolise dans l'Histoire le devenir 'en vérité' des idées (politiques) justes », *L'hypothèse communiste*, pp. 189 et 195.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 194.

historique, de ce qu'il y a de fuyant, de soustrait, d'insaisissable, dans le devenir d'une vérité. Mais elle ne l'est qu'autant qu'elle reconnaît comme réel cette dimension aléatoire, fuyante, soustraite et insaisissable[13] ».

Et c'est pour rendre raison au réel de l'Idée que je supplémenterais l'énoncé de Badiou selon lequel l'Idée est ce « à partir de quoi un individu se représente le monde, y compris lui-même, dès lors qu'il est incorporé au processus d'une vérité[14] », de la manière suivante : l'Idée, avant même d'apparaître en tant qu'une représentation du monde, est *l'articulation du réel*, plus exactement, l'articulation d'un réel que je nommerais, faute de mieux, « la chose de la pensée ». Je peux réécrire maintenant la thèse dont je suis parti et selon laquelle l'Idée est fondée sur l'indiscernabilité de la pensée et de l'acte, ainsi : l'Idée est structurée comme un acte qui met en jeu « la chose de la pensée », c'est-à-dire ce point réel qui, tout en restant irréductible à la pensée, permet à celle-ci de se constituer comme pensée. Autrement dit, l'idée, au sens dans lequel je l'entends ici, est originairement la manifestation d'une pensée affectée. Cette manifestation est à prendre au double sens du terme. Premièrement, l'idée est une pensée affectée par la chose de la pensée, à savoir par ce quelque chose qui, bien que immanent à la pensée, lui reste radicalement hétérogène, extérieur. Deuxièmement, l'Idée est une pensée qui pense son être-affecté, ou, ce qui revient au même, le prend sur soi, l'assume. De ce point de vue, l'acte par lequel la pensée met en jeu la chose de la pensée, bref, cet acte de l'auto-affection comme hétéro-affection, pourrait être considéré comme analogon de l'acte psychanalytique désigné par Lacan comme acte de « désangoisser ». Désangoisser, c'est l'acte qui accomplit le passage de l'angoisse qui inhibe à l'action qui emprunte à l'angoisse sa certitude, transformant par là son objet fuyant en un objet-cause non prédicatif, mais qui conduit l'action. On pourrait donc de la même manière entendre l'Idée comme acte qui, en incitant la pensée de faire face à son être affecté par quelque chose qui lui appartient, tout en lui étant irréductiblement extérieur, donne à la pensée son matériau premier, ouvrant en même temps à l'intérieur de la pensée un passage à son dehors hétérogène.

Avant d'expliquer cela plus en détail dans la perspective de la doctrine kantienne de l'idée, je reviendrai brièvement sur la triade lacanienne du symbolique, de

[13] *Ibid*.
[14] A. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 119.

l'imaginaire et du réel. Ces trois catégories, on pourrait dire, nous donnent tout, ou encore, elles sont, d'une certaine manière, tout ce que nous avons à notre disposition. Ainsi, cette triade nous donne-t-elle notre monde, mais elle nous permet en plus d'avoir accès à ce monde. Quant à ce monde, on peut dire, premièrement, qu'il est constitué et ordonné comme une structure symbolique, donc S. Deuxièmement, ce monde, nous le vivons d'une manière toujours singulière, telle que nous nous le représentons, bref, d'une manière imaginaire, donc I. Et troisièmement, dire, comme Lacan, que notre réalité n'est rien d'autre qu'un montage d'une structure symbolique et d'une représentation imaginaire[15], c'est dire que, dans cette réalité constituée du Deux, quelque chose fait défaut, à savoir le réel, donc R. Ou pour le dire d'une façon ramassée : à cette réalité symbolique et imaginaire appartient encore quelque chose qui la dépasse où lui fait défaut : son exception immanente, le réel comme une extériorité intérieure de la réalité. À part ces trois ordres, il n'y a rien d'autre, il n'y a rien qui puisse échapper à ces trois principes de classification.

Or si ces trois catégories ne sont pas simplement juxtaposées, coextensives, c'est parce que la triade lacanienne constitue un nœud. En d'autres termes, dans la mesure où la réalité est structurée symboliquement, elle ne peut exister sans que quelque chose ne lui fasse défaut : le réel comme son extériorité intérieure. Qu'est-ce qu'il faut entendre par cette extimité du réel par rapport au symbolique ? Rien d'autre que ceci : si la structure symbolique n'est pas possible sans le réel, elle n'est pas possible avec le réel non plus. Dès le départ nous avons donc affaire à un Un qui se divise en Deux, nous avons affaire au symbolique, accompagné de quelque chose qui ne lui appartient pas, qui est à part : l'exception immanente du réel. Il s'agit, strictement parlant, d'un Un impossible et d'un Deux, également impossible. C'est la raison pour laquelle, à cet Un impossible, toujours déjà divisé un Deux, s'ajoute un Tiers : l'imaginaire.

Je voudrais souligner, pour ma part, que cet ajout a une fonction tout à fait particulière. L'imaginaire n'est pas seulement la manière selon laquelle nous vivons la réalité ordonnée symboliquement, comme je viens de le dire. L'imaginaire constitue également la façon, toujours singulière d'ailleurs, selon laquelle la chute du réel est pensée et mise en scène dans la réalité. Bien sûr, cette chute peut être niée

[15] « La réalité est une montage de l'imaginaire et du symbolique. » J. Lacan, *Logique du fantasme*, séminaire inédit des années 1966/67.

ou supprimée, même à demi avouée. Mais l'exception immanente du réel peut se manifester également comme quelque chose qui, tout en étant radicalement hétérogène à la réalité, opère au sein de la réalité. En d'autres termes, c'est à travers le nœud de ces trois instances, R, S, I, qu'il est possible affirmer, au sein de la réalité, la trace du réel, la trace de quelque chose qui interrompt la réalité, soit qu'il lui fait défaut ou qu'il la dépasse. Pour ma part, je dirais que l'Idée de Badiou, comme d'ailleurs le semblant de Lacan, n'est rien d'autre qu'une telle manière de faire le nœud avec R,S,I. En effet, la réalité, telle que l'Idée l'organise, est une réalité qui est en soi, en tant que telle, déréalisée. Il s'agit d'une réalité qui est organisée autour d'une instance qui la rend inconsistante, mais qui par là même ouvre la possibilité de l'émergence de quelque chose qui, dans la mesure où il est coupé du temps de la situation dans laquelle il a eu lieu, c'est-à-dire précisément comme ce « horlieu » et « hors temps », universel, émancipateur, en un mot, destiné à tous. Pour emprunter une formulation ancienne de Badiou, on pourrait dire que l'Idée réalise le parcours du matérialisme intégral : du réel comme cause au réel comme consistance[16]. On pourrait exprimer ce parcours du matérialisme intégral ainsi : ce qui fait que le réel en tant qu'une présupposition aura été produit comme un surplus-produit d'une orientation de la vie selon le Vrai, c'est l'Idée.

Il y a un aspect dans la notion badiouisienne de l'Idée qui m'intéresse particulièrement. Ce que cette notion met en relief, c'est l'Idée comme pensée qui est affectée par le réel de la « chose de la pensée » et qui, en même temps, pense son être-affecté. Penser cet être affecté, bien évidemment, n'a rien d'une posture contemplative. Il s'agit plutôt d'une pensée qui est indiscernable de l'acte. Dire que la pensée est indiscernable de l'acte, c'est dire que nous avons affaire à un acte qui vise à matérialiser, c'est-à-dire conduire à l'apparaître, cette « chose de la pensée » qui affecte la pensée dans son for même, si je puis le dire ainsi, et qui la fait pensée, tout en lui étant irréductible. Bien sûr, il n'y a pas de vraie pensée sans ce qui l'affecte, sans la chose de la pensée. Mais le nouage de la pensée et de son réel, quant à lui, reste quelque chose de construit. Cette matérialisation de la pensée qu'opère l'Idée est à entendre en double sens du mot. Elle « matérialise » la pensée en lui donnant pour ainsi dire son « matériau primaire », c'est-à-dire en construisant une différence minimale entre la pensée et la chose qui affecte la pensée de l'intérieur, en lui permettant ainsi d'être la pensée de quelque chose qui lui est hétérogène. Mais elle la matérialise aussi en organisant l'apparaître de la chose

[16] A. Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, p. 243.

de la pensée, c'est-à-dire son objectivation en guise du corps-de-vérité dans un monde. De ce point de vue on pourrait dire que c'est « la chose de la pensée », et non pas la pensée en tant que telle qui est à l'origine et qui est la cause de l'indiscernabilité de l'acte et de la pensée comme mode de fonctionnement de l'Idée.

II.

Dans ce qui suit, j'essaierai de développer plus en détail la thèse qui porte sur l'Idée que je viens d'avancer par un détour inattendu: je ferai recours à Kant, un philosophe qui, à premier vue, est bien étranger à la philosophie badiousienne. Il faut dire que Kant ne s'intéresse guère au matérialisme, ni au matérialisme en général ni au matérialisme de l'Idée en particulier. Or si j'essaie de lire Kant avec Badiou et Lacan, c'est parce que sa doctrine des idées de la raison pourrait nous aider à construire une réponse à la question du matérialisme, y compris celui de l'Idée.

Pour présenter brièvement la doctrine kantienne des Idées, je commencerai par un détour. Il est bien connu qu'au cours de la phase dite précritique, surtout entre les années 1763-1766, Kant a été hanté par le problème de diverses « *maladies de tête* », pour utiliser le titre d'un de ses essais[17], comprenant autant les troubles mineurs dans le fonctionnement « normal », donc prescrit de la manière de penser et d'agir, que les phantasmes occultes, jusqu'au disfonctionnement irrationnel de la pensée, l'objet du traitement clinique. Le phénomène du *Wahn,* qui accouple la folie dans ses diverses formes à la perception trompeuse et illusoire de la réalité, a constitué pour Kant un problème tant existentiel que théorique, dans la mesure où la distinction de la raison et de la folie touchait, pour lui, la détermination de la philosophie elle-même. Le point d'intersection de ces deux aspects du problème constitue un point central de la philosophie kantienne, à savoir : comment distinguer la vérité du délire, la folie de la connaissance d'expérience, la pensée spéculative ou la métaphysique des hallucinations de la pensée. Dans son beau livre, *La folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg,* Monique David-Ménard nous a montré, avec une rigueur et une conviction exemplaire, à quel point la philosophie critique peut être considérée comme issue de la rencontre du philosophe avec

[17] Cf. Voir par exemple « Essai sur les maladies de tête » (1764), « Observations sur le sentiment du beau et du sublime » (1664), « Rêves d'un visionnaire expliqués par des rêves de la métaphysique » (1766).

le danger des « maladies de tête », qui l'ont troublé[18]. Si la croix que porte la philosophie, comme l'a remarqué Badiou dans son commentaire à propos du livre de Monique David-Ménard, est bien la croix de la vérité, alors, pour reprendre le propos de Badiou, « avant de porter patiemment, dans un labeur conceptuel infini et précautionneux, la croix de la vérité, Kant a porte celle de la folie possible… Homme des lumières éprouvé par la tentation de l'obscurantisme délirant[19] ».

On peut cependant comprendre la rencontre kantienne avec la possibilité de la folie et les effets de cette rencontre sur son système philosophique de deux façons différentes. Si l'on suit la lecture de Badiou, on pourrait considérer la tentation de la folie de la raison comme un symptôme de la philosophie kantienne. De ce point de vue, le système critique, surtout la théorie massive de l'objet, telle qu'elle a été développée dans la première *Critique,* donc « l'objectivité kantienne », présenterait, pour citer Badiou, « la thérapeutique philosophique d'une terrible exposition au délire spéculatif[20] ».

Pour ma part, j'opterais pour une autre lecture qui consiste à inverser la perspective et à postuler que « l'exposition au délire spéculatif » ainsi que les écrits psychologiques de Kant revêtent, sous une guise imaginaire, ce qui deviendrait l'un des problèmes centraux de sa pensée à savoir : comment montrer ou, plutôt démontrer que la raison, qui, selon Kant, « n'est en fait occupée que d'elle même » (CRP, B 708/680), n'est pas qu'un délire spéculatif. En effet, c'est justement au moment où la raison ne s'occupe que d'elle-même, c'est-à-dire au moment ou la raison n'est rien d'autre que la raison pure – c'est bien la pointe de Kant – qu'elle touche à quelque chose de réel, quelque chose qui est hétérogène, extérieur à la raison.

Kant ne s'intéresse donc pas à la folie pour purifier la raison de ses pensées délirantes. Ce qu'il cherche, c'est, au contraire, une procédure de la pensée qui vise à

[18] Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg*, Vrin, Paris 1990, p. 9 : « […] la réflexion kantienne sur la folie » a une importance essentielle « dans l'élaboration et l'organisation même de la philosophie critique et transcendantale », le problème de la folie est « l'un des matériaux essentiels » pour la philosophie théorique et critique de Kant. Cf. également l'ouvrage de Constantin Rauer, *Wahn und Wahrheit. Kants Ausseinandersetzung mit der Wahrheit*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 2007, qui avance la thèse selon laquelle le vrai problème de la philosophie critique kantienne est le « Wahn » justement.

[19] A. Badiou, « Objectivité et Objectalité : Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg*, Vrin 1990 », typoscript.

[20] *Ibid*.

élever la folie à la dignité du concept, pour paraphraser la fameuse formule lacanienne, ce qui ne veut dire rien d'autre que d'intégrer la folie dans la notion de la raison. Pour Kant, il s'agit en effet, d'élever la folie, le délire au rang de la notion rationnelle.

Etant donné que la raison constitue l'instance de l'universel par excellence, on pourrait dire que la réflexion qui porte sur la relation entre la folie et le fonctionnement de la raison mène Kant d'une description précritique et d'une analyse de diverses « maladies de tête » à une élaboration critique de la raison qui lui permet de se séparer, comme instance de l'universalité du délire justement, d'avec les maladies de tête. Dans ce contexte, notre tâche consiste à élucider cette thèse selon laquelle la raison kantienne opère comme instance de la folie généralisée. En même temps il faut montrer comment la raison, pris comme l'universel délirant, est articulée avec la matérialité de l'Idée.

L'autocritique de la raison est le nom kantien pour l'opération qui vise à démontrer non seulement que la raison, bien qu'elle n'ait affaire qu'à elle-même, n'est pourtant pas fermée dans l'immanence homogène de la « pensée pure » qui ne produit que des pensées délirantes, mais est ouverte, au contraire, à quelque chose du réel. L'autocritique de la raison constitue la réponse à la question de savoir comment la raison peut être à la fois chez soi et hors de soi. Prise en ce sens, cette opération implique ce qu'on pourrait appeler la « révolution matérialiste de l'Idée » de Kant.

Voyons de plus près en quoi consiste au juste l'opération de l'autocritique de la raison. Comme il est bien connu, pour Kant, la raison est une fonction de l'unification, sauf que, à la différence de l'unification par l'entendement, la raison cherche l'inconditionnel. L'inconditionnel auquel pousse la raison son « irrépressible désir », comme le dit Kant, (Crp, B 824/A 796), est la réponse finale à la question de savoir pourquoi il y a quelque chose plutôt que rien. Il est vrai que la raison trouve toujours, du moins dans un premier temps, ce point de l'inconditionnel. Or la raison est toujours déçue par ce qu'elle trouve comme inconditionnel. Elle ne cesse de découvrir que là où elle a vu quelque chose, il n'y a, en vérité, rien. Mais cela tient seulement jusqu'à un certain point, celle de la révolution de l'entendement kantienne, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à l'opération complexe de la critique et de l'autocritique de la raison.

Au cours de son autocritique, la raison découvre l'erreur structurelle de son mode d'opérer. Elle apprend que ses idées constituent une sorte de court-circuit entre la pensée et le réel. Autrement dit, la raison transforme, d'une manière tout à fait fétichiste, sa propre forme d'unification en quelque chose d'objectif. Ou encore, là où il n'y a que la forme propre du procédé subjectif, les idées de la raison produisent l'apparence d'un objet. Il importe de noter que, même après l'autocritique, les idées de la raison fonctionnent de la même façon. Elles continuent de transformer le purement subjectif en quelque chose d'objectif, elles continuent de créer l'apparence de quelque chose là où, strictement parlant, il n'y a rien d'autre que leur mode d'opérer. La seule différence étant : désormais cette illusion, quoique naturelle et inévitable, « ne nous abuse » plus (*Crp*,B 354/A 298).

Le résultat de l'autocritique de la raison est, pour aller vite, double. En ce qui concerne la raison elle-même, il n'y a pas de grands changements. En dépit de l'autocritique, la raison ne renonce pas à ses idées, aux grands récits de l'immortalité, liberté, création, etc. Elle renonce, en revanche, à ce qui l'obligerait de les traiter comme des objets réels. Désormais, la raison se limite à elle-même, ce qui veut dire qu'elle renonce à la demande que ses idées soient directement partie constituante du monde objectif. Utilisant une expression qui n'est pas kantienne, on pourrait dire que la raison traite désormais ses idées comme des fictions du vrai. À travers ces fictions, la raison est, certes, présente, dans la réalité constituée empirique, mais elle ne participe pas directement à sa constitution. En ce qui concerne le deuxième résultat de l'autocritique on dira que, en se bornant à elle-même, la raison abandonne la lourde tâche de la constitution de la réalité et la cède à l'entendement. On connaît le résultat : alors que la raison échoue dans ses tentatives de résoudre les grands questions portant sur le fondement ultime et le sens de tout, les questions dont dépendrait le destin de toute la réalité, l'entendement, couplé à la sensibilité, réussit dans le projet de la constitution de la réalité objective. Monique David-Ménard résumé cela dans une formulation très précise : « l'entendement réussit là où la raison échoue ». À cette réussite de l'entendement, la raison ne participe que d'une manière indirecte : à travers l'unification de la connaissance rationnelle.

À première vue, ce double résultat de l'autocritique de la raison est assez modeste. En effet, il semble que la raison a accepté de jouer un rôle secondaire dans la constitution de la réalité accomplie par l'entendement. Toutefois il ne faut pas méconnaître une chose qui est pourtant essentielle : la constitution de l'objet

qu'effectue l'entendement a beau être une réponse réussie à l'impuissance de la raison, cette réponse, et ce point est crucial, n'est possible que grâce au pouvoir de la raison d'accomplir son autocritique. Nous n'avons pas affaire ici à une raison qui, fatiguée à cause de sa recherche infructueuse de l'inconditionnel, cette chose qui l'affecte, cède la recherche de la réponse à la question : Pourquoi quelque chose plutôt que rien, à l'entendement, et ne se contente désormais que d'ajouter quelques touches finales à la construction de la réalité objectivée accomplie par l'entendement. Il ne suffit pas de dire que la constitution objective de la réalité par l'entendement peut réussir seulement après l'autocritique de la raison où celle-ci apprend à se limiter à elle-même. La constitution de la réalité par l'entendement est la partie constituante de l'autocritique de la raison. Plus précisément, en dépit du fait que la réalité constituée se présente comme la machine autonome de l'objectivité, cette réalité objective est toujours déjà en fonction de l'autocritique. La constitution de la réalité est une constitution selon les idées de la raison, c'est-à-dire selon l'inconditionné en tant que fiction du vrai. N'est vraiment objective que la constitution de la réalité qui se déploie comme champ de l'apparaître et de l'effectuation de cette autocritique, donc une réalité dans laquelle on trouve les traces de l'autocritique de la raison.

L'autocritique de la raison apparaît ainsi comme un processus paradoxal, d'abord parce que la raison se présente dans le monde de l'apparaître précisément au moment où elle n'a affaire qu'à elle-même, ou encore, où elle n'est que la raison pure, puisque l'autocritique l'a amenée au point de renoncer à son objet fantomatique pour se limiter à soi-même. La raison qui, avant son autocritique, reste prisonnière de son propre désir de l'inconditionnel, rivée à l'immanence de la pensée, après l'autocritique réussie à apparaître dans le monde phénoménal. Comme on le sait, Kant appelle cet apparaître de la raison « l'usage empirique » de la raison. À ce point on pourrait formuler le premier paradoxe de l'autocritique : l'autocritique de la raison qui lui permet de s'autolimiter est inséparable de l'usage empirique de la raison, c'est-à-dire d'une présence singulière de la raison dans le monde de l'objectivité. Or l'autocritique est paradoxale pour une autre raison encore : selon Kant, les idées de la raison n'ont pas d'existence objective, puisqu'il n'y a rien dans l'expérience qui leur conviendrait. Si la raison, à travers son usage empirique, est présente dans le monde de l'expérience, cette présence signale la présence de quelque chose d'inexistant. Dans son usage empirique, la raison est présente dans le monde comme l'inexistant de ce monde.

La présence des idées de la raison comme inexistant du monde requiert une formulation plus précise de la proposition selon laquelle, après l'autocritique de la raison, ses idées, donc la présence de l'inconditionnel, sont posées désormais comme fictions véridiques. En effet, il serait plus correct de postuler que les idées de la raison opèrent dans leur usage empirique comme fictions du vrai qui visent l'universalité. C'est seulement cette validité universelle des fictions véridiques de la raison qui fonde l'un des théorèmes clés de la philosophie critique de Kant, du moins c'est la thèse que j'avance ici, à savoir que le monde phénoménal constitué par l'entendement n'est que le songe, bref, qu'il est objectif.

Certes, on pourrait se demander si, en soumettant l'objectivité de la réalité, c'est le résultat le plus important de la première *Critique*, au fonctionnement de la raison, nous n'avons pas déjà renoncé à ce résultat, pire, si, en subordonnant l'objectivité du monde à l'universalité des idées, nous n'avons pas abandonné cette réalité au désir de l'inconditionnel de la raison, un désir qui tourne à vide, c'est-à-dire transformé cette réalité objective en un champ du délire généralisé ou en réalité hallucinatoire ? La réponse à cette question dépend de la façon dont on entend l'universalité des idées de la raison dans leur usage empirique. Pour sortir de cette impasse il faudrait articuler l'universalité au fait que les idées de la raison postcritiques sont l'inexistant du monde. La condition de possibilité pour cette articulation relève de l'axiome central de la philosophie critique, à savoir la différence centrale entre le phénomène et le noumène, la chose en soi. Dans la perspective de cette différence, le monde dans lequel nous vivons est le monde phénoménal dans lequel la chose en soi fait défaut. Le monde phénoménal ne veut dire rien d'autre que cela : ce monde n'est pas la chose en soi, le monde tel qu'il est en soi. Ce qui détermine le monde phénoménal, ce n'est pas l'inconnaissable de la chose en soi, mais le fait que la chose en soi lui fait défaut. Le monde phénoménal est objectif dans la mesure exacte où, dans lui, opère la réflexion sur le monde phénoménal comme n'étant en tant que tel la chose elle-même, donc que le Monde en soi lui manque. Mais il ne faut pas s'arrêter là. Il faut encore tirer une implication cruciale pour la perspective kantienne, à savoir : si le monde phénoménal est marqué par l'absence de la chose en soi, si le monde phénoménal n'est objectif que sous la condition de ne pas se prendre comme le monde en soi, alors il est indispensable pour ce monde que sa référence négative, l'absence de la chose en soi, y est présente. Bref, en tant que monde phénoménal, il existe sous la condition que, dans lui, est présente la trace de l'absence de la chose elle-même, la trace de ce que, dans ce monde, un vide

ontologique est présent. Et c'est précisément l'usage postcritique de la raison qui réalise cette condition, son usage empirique n'étant que le tenant lieu de ce vide ontologique. Dans le monde phénoménal, les idées sont présentes comme son inexistant. Ou encore, les idées de la raison en tant qu'inexistant du monde phénoménal sont le signe matériel du fait que ce monde est marqué par un manque crucial, qu'un vide y est présent : le vide de l'Un. C'est seulement à travers l'usage empirique des idées de la raison, donc à travers la présence des idées de la raison dans le monde phénoménal, que celui-ci devient en vérité un monde phénoménal, c'est-à-dire un monde qui n'est pas déjà le Monde.

L'absence du monde dans le monde, son manque de fondement, est présente par les idées. Leur caractère universel relève du fait qu'en tant que telles elles sont le signe matériel de ce qui caractérise tout monde phénoménal, à savoir : l'absence de la chose en soi, c'est-à-dire le Monde lui-même. Les idées de la raison, prises dans leur usage empirique, ne sont donc rien d'autre que la présence matérielle de l'absence du Monde dans le monde phénoménal.

Venu à ce point, nous pouvons revenir à notre thèse de départ affirmant que la raison postcritique, c'est-à-dire la raison en tant que la raison pure, est l'instance du délire universalisé. L'expression « l'universalisation du délire » par laquelle nous cherchons à capter le statut de la notion de la raison kantienne après son autocritique, est à entendre dans un double sens. La raison postcritique kantienne est en même temps l'instance de l'universalité du *délire* et l'instance de *l'universalité* du délire. Par l'universalité du *délire* nous entendons le fait que c'est justement l'usage empirique de la raison qui confirme que de notre monde est objectif parce que le noyau réel y fait défaut, la chose elle-même, ou encore, le Monde. Dire que la raison est l'instance du délire universalisé, c'est dire que le monde phénoménal, du point de la raison pure, est sans fond, finalement, que c'est un monde sans Monde. En revanche, dire que la raison est l'instance du délire *universalisé*, c'est dire que l'absence de la chose même, constitutive de l'objectivité de notre monde, est néanmoins présente – à travers les idées. À travers les idées de la raison, ce qui est commun aux divers mondes phénoménaux, à savoir le fait que chacun d'entre eux est un monde sans Monde, est néanmoins présent. Les idées ne sont pas le réel de nos mondes, mais elles peuvent presque le toucher, dans la mesure où, du fait d'être présente dans le monde empirique comme son inexistant, elles signalent que le monde est construit sur la présence de l'absence du Monde. De cette manière les idées témoignent que dans chaque

monde constitué il existe encore un autre monde pour tous, un monde qui traverse la constitution spatio-temporelle des mondes phénoménaux comme ce qui est en eux éternel, plus réel que leur réalité constituée elle-même. En un mot, dans leur usage empirique, les idées de la raison sont l'instance du délire universel parce qu'elles sont la manifestation matérielle de la présence de l'absence de la chose même, le Monde, et en ce sens, elles constituent le noyau le plus réel de nos mondes constitués par l'entendement.

L'autocritique de la raison apparaît ainsi comme un processus qui se déploie sur deux niveaux distincts quoique interdépendants. Premièrement, au niveau de la raison, son désir de l'inconditionnel se déploie un processus qui permet à la raison d'apprendre à *vouloir vraiment ce qu'elle désire*. Je m'appuie ici sur la remarque conclusive de Lacan dans son écrit : « Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache » où Lacan insiste sur le fait que « le sujet est appelé à renaître – comme objet a du désir – pour savoir s'il veut ce désire[21] ». On pourrait traduire la formulation lacanienne dans le langage de la problématique des Idées, dont je traite ici, de la manière suivante : ce que l'autocritique rend possible à la raison, c'est de renaître dans les apparences qui ne trompent pas, dans les fictions du vrai qui produisent des effets réels dans le monde empirique, mais la raison sait maintenant qu'elle veut ce qu'elle désire. Bref, au premier niveau de l'autocritique nous avons à faire à une raison qui a obtenu un savoir faire avec l'inconditionnel comme objet de son désir. Vouloir son désir signale ici une interruption de l'identification immédiate de la raison et de l'objet de son désir. L'autocritique se présente donc comme acte qui introduit entre la raison et son désir une distance minimale. Une distance qui n'est rien d'autre que le moment où la raison se matérialise dès qu'elle accepte son propre être affecté par quelque chose qui lui appartient, bien qu'il reste irréductible à elle, à savoir l'inconditionnel comme la chose de la pensée. Ou encore, la pensée accepte d'être sous la condition de son « *Triebfeder* », son mobile, cette « chose de la pensée » irréductible à la pensée elle-même, qui affecte la pensée dans son for intérieur et lui permet de devenir la pensée de quelque chose hétérogène à elle. La distance entre la pensée et la chose qui l'affecte est minimale, cependant c'est elle qui fournit à la pensée sa matière première. Une autre manière d'exprimer ce que je viens d'appeler l'acceptation de la pensée à son être affectée est de dire qu'il s'agit d'un processus où l'inconditionnel, l'objet de l'imperturbable demande, est renversé

[21] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1968, p. 682.

en condition absolue de la raison pure mais qui est en tant que telle détachable de la raison. Pour citer Lacan : « le désir renverse l'inconditionnel de la demande de l'amour, où le sujet reste sous la sujétion de l'Autre, pour le porter à la puissance de la condition absolue (où l'absolu veut dire aussi détachement)[22] ».

La raison pure, c'est-à-dire la raison qui n'est pas au service de la survie et du bonheur, telle qu'elle émerge de son autocritique, se présente désormais comme la raison ou, plutôt, la pensée matérialisée. C'est une pensée matérialisée en quelque chose qui lui est intérieure, mais qui lui reste en même temps extérieure, et qui, pour cette raison même, constitue la présupposition de sa pureté. Mais, et cela nous renvoie au deuxième niveau de l'autocritique de la raison, cette présupposition n'existe que comme issue de l'incessant usage empirique de ses idées. Autrement dit, le premier résultat de l'autocritique de la raison, son être affecté comme présupposition de sa pureté, n'est que le surplus produit du fonctionnement incessant de la raison au niveau de l'apparaître. Il n'y a pas de pensée sans ce qui l'affecte sans le réel de sa chose. Or le nouage de la pensée et de son réel, quant à lui, reste quelque chose de produit. On pourrait dire aussi : le fait que la raison apprend à traiter la chose qui l'affecte, ou encore, qu'elle transforme l'inconditionnel en sa condition absolue et, en tant que telle, séparée d'elle-même, est inséparable du fait que l'idée de la raison réalise cette chose de la pensée dans le monde. Les apparences dans lesquelles la raison renaît sont les idées de la raison comme fictions véridiques, mais ces fictions véridiques existent dans le monde de l'expérience.

À suivre la première *Critique,* surtout son Esthétique et Analytique, il peut sembler que, pour apparaître dans le monde, la raison devrait se contenter d'un rôle secondaire, pire, elle devrait assumer son instrumentalisation au service de l'entendement. Dans ce cas, sa seule tâche serait l'unité de la connaissance rationnelle. Bref, à première vue, il semble que la manifestation de la raison dans l'expérience n'est qu'une thérapie de travail afin d'empêcher son délire : au lieu de se livrer à des hallucinations les plus fantasques, la raison se contente de bricoler dans l'expérience pour rester calme. Or ce calme n'est qu'apparent. En vérité, au moment où la raison, quoique d'une manière indirecte, entre dans le monde de l'expérience, ce monde est déjà perdu pour l'expérience. Dès que la raison, cet inexistant de ce monde, s'y manifeste, c'est le monde de l'entende-

[22] « Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir », dans : Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 814.

ment lui-même qui est potentiellement déréalisé. Dans le monde de l'expérience dans lequel les idées de la raison n'ont pas leur place, puisque aucun objet ne leur convient, elles obtiennent une existence spécifique : une existence dans le mode d'un objet non-objectif. On pourrait dire aussi, pour introduire le thème de la troisième *Critique,* que les idées de la raison ont dans l'expérience une existence singulière – celle du cas de l'Idée.

Qu'est-ce que un cas de l'Idée ? Si la raison, dans un premier temps de l'autocritique, se rend compte que là où elle a vu quelque chose il n'y a en vérité rien, l'accomplissement de son autocritique l'amène au constat que ce rien est néanmoins quelque chose. Il s'agit là d'un quelque chose formel puisqu'il n'y a pas de réalité objective dans laquelle ne seraient pas présentes les idées. La présence des idées de la raison dans l'expérience requiert un statut ontologique tout à fait spécial : les idées ne sont pas les éléments de la réalité objective, mais elles ne sont non plus une réalisation purement hallucinatoire du désir subjectif de la raison. On dirait donc que les idées de la raison existent sous la forme des cas de l'Idée. C'est-à-dire comme une donnée ou particularité du monde, mais qui est, en même temps, dans sa donation immédiate déréalisée de sorte qu'elle ne compte que comme point de la singularité absolue qui fait, en tant que telle, partie de l'universel. Car la déréalisation n'est rien d'autre que l'opération par laquelle les données de la réalité objective se transforment en matériel potentiel de l'Idée, en un mot, deviennent une partie du cas de l'Idée. Du point de vue de l'autocritique de la raison, le monde de l'expérience se présente comme quelque chose d'objectif dans la mesure, seulement, où il perd déjà son objectivité, ou encore, dans la mesure où il peut être transformé en monde dans lequel l'autocritique de la raison réalise ses conséquences.

L'objectivité du monde empirique n'existe que dans la mesure où les données particulières du monde apparaissent comme données dans lesquelles s'actualise la condition absolue de la raison. Ou pour le dire autrement, dans la mesure où elles se transforment en corps de la « chose de la pensée », en une présence matérielle qui témoigne de diverses manières que les cas de l'Idée existent dans le monde.

Le résultat de l'autocritique de la raison ne consiste donc pas seulement en ceci que, dans l'autocritique, les idées de la raison deviennent les fictions du vrai, mais les fictions qui ne trompent plus. Il s'agit plutôt d'une anticipation du ma-

térialisme de l'idée. En effet, l'opération de l'autocritique implique une esquisse du matérialisme de l'Idée dans la mesure où l'Idée elle-même est le point de l'indiscernabilité de l'acte et de la pensée. L'acte, inséparable de la pensée, consiste en construction d'une double différence minimale. Pour qualifier cette construction de la double différence, on pourrait utiliser la formule badiousienne : « vivre avec l'Idée ». L'acte est d'abord déterminé comme acte qui construit une différence minimale entre la pensée et la « chose de la pensée » qui affecte la pensée. Ou encore, il s'agit là d'un acte qui construit « la chose de la pensée » comme une différence minimale entre la Chose comme présupposition et la Chose comme surplus produit. Dans un deuxième temps, l'acte construit la réalité comme cas de l'Idée, c'est-à-dire comme une différence minimale entre la réalité et la réalité comme l'existence d'un cas de l'Idée. On pourrait dire aussi : comme différence minimale entre les faits qui sont, dans la réalité, le cas de l'Idée, et ce cas lui-même.

C'est ici qu'on pourrait évoquer le tableau de Malevitch *Carré blanc sur le fond blanc* tel qu'il a été commenté par Badiou dans son *Siècle.* Où exactement est trouve le carré blanc sur le tableau ? Il n'y a nulle part que, justement, dans la différence minimale, nulle, mais absolue du blanc au blanc, comme le dit Badiou. Cette différence minimale, c'est pour ainsi dire le cas du Carré blanc. C'est seulement dans cette différence que le Carré blanc trouve son existence matérielle, visible sur le tableau. De la même façon, l'idée de la raison n'existe dans le monde que sous la forme d'un de ses propres cas. Dans la réalité elle existe ainsi comme la différence minimale entre l'actualité et l'actualité comme corps ou cas de l'Idée. Le cas de l'idée lui-même n'est que la différence minimale entre ce qui *est* de toute façon le cas et ce cas lui-même. Il est une donnée particulière du monde dont la particularité est soumise à ce qu'elle pointe vers sa propre singularité, c'est-à-dire au fait qu'il est l'événement singulier de l'universel, la singularité du cas de l'Idée.

Résumons : on peut entendre le matérialisme de la notion kantienne de l'Idée selon deux sens. On pourrait dire que l'idée kantienne constitue le moment où la raison se sépare de l'objet de sa demande de l'inconditionnel, le moment où elle transforme l'inconditionnel en sa condition absolue qui, tout en lui étant inhérente, reste séparée d'elle, une condition donc avec laquelle elle sait maintenant faire. Ce savoir faire ne consiste finalement en rien d'autre que ceci : la raison a réussi à se séparer de « sa chose ». C'est ainsi que les idées de la raison

apparaissent dans le monde. Mais elles apparaissent sous la forme de quelque chose qui n'est pas de ce monde, sous la forme de son propre cas. La raison participe ainsi à la constitution de la réalité en la déréalisant en même temps : la nature empirique des idées de la raison constitue le modus de la constitution non-objective de la réalité objective. Il s'agit d'une déréalisation de la réalité au sens où les données particulières du monde se transforment en un corps ou un cas de l'Idée. De la même façon que l'enthousiasme des spectateurs de la Révolution française a déréalisé la réalité empirique et historique afin de transformer cette même réalité en cas de l'Idée, en signe historique du « progrès vers le mieux ».

Je terminerai par la remarque suivante : le problème de la matérialité de l'Idée nous conduit à une nouvelle image de Kant. En ce qui concerne le rapport que Badiou entretient avec la philosophie kantienne, il n'est pas, comme on le sait, favorable. Si cependant nous prenons le thème de l'Idée dans le *Seconde manifeste* comme point de départ pour une nouvelle lecture de la théorie kantienne des Idées, bref, si nous lisons Kant avec Badiou et Lacan, une nouvelle perspective s'ouvre sur l'unité systématique qui lie les trois *Critiques* kantiennes. La première *Critique,* prise dans l'unité de son Esthétique, Analytique et Dialectique, présente une esquisse d'une théorie de la matérialité de la pensée pure, cette théorie étant aussi bien une théorie de l'affection de la pensée par « la chose de la pensée » qu'une théorie de la réalisation du corps de la chose de la pensée dans le monde ; la deuxième *Critique* nous présente une théorie de l'indiscernabilité de l'acte et de la pensée qui constitue le manifeste de l'acte pratique, un acte dont la devise est : « Nous pouvons, donc nous devons » ; la troisième *Critique,* finalement, est une théorie de l'acte pratique comme le nœud de l'universel, du singulier et de la subjectivation. C'est justement grâce à ce nœud qu'une individualité empirique se subjective ou entre en composition du sujet, pour le dire avec Badiou, ou encore, se constitue comme le support local d'un point du singulier qui est immédiatement universalisable. Pour le moment, cette remarque restera une hypothèse de travail.

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Infinitization of the Subject

Traditionally, emancipatory politics is a question of knowing which parts of society are capable of counting for something, and which ones are not. From such a perspective, the founding act of politics consists in uncovering what Rancière termed the "conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it"[1]. Formulating the question of emancipatory politics in terms of *existence* means acknowledging that there is a constitutive disjunction between politics and the system of domination, a system that is usually characterised as a system of placement, identification, counting, or quite simply the State. Indeed, the division between two irreconcilable logics: the egalitarian or generic, on the one hand, and distributive or constructivist, on the other, is, according to some of the most radical political thinkers today, considered to be definitional of politics as such. Hence, if politics itself is viewed as a disruptive excess of equality over to the distributive logic of the State, this signals that a new perspective is opened for the theorization of politics: one that locates the proper place for emancipatory politics, that is, for "political subjects who are not social groups but rather forms of inscriptions of the count of the uncounted,"[2] within the very terrain in which the statist counting operates.

In a certain sense, the polarity between the State and the politics of emancipation is only tenable if the State is reduced to what Lacan singled out under the name of the master's discourse conceived as a power of positing, the power of the signifier to call something into being. As a matter of fact, for Lacan, "[E]very dimension of being is produced in the wake of the master's discourse – the discourse of he who, proffering the signifier, expects therefrom one of its link effects [...] which is related to the fact that the signifier commands. The signifier is, first and foremost, imperative."[3] In the field of politics, the master's discourse, given

[1] J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy,* trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota, 1999), pp. 26–27.

[2] J. Rancière, "Onzes theses sur la politique", in *Filozofski vestnik,* n° 2/1997, p. 99.

[3] J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore,* trans. by Bruce Fink (New York and

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that it aims at saying what is, could essentially be viewed as a symbolic constitution of the social order according to a certain logic of predication: by establishing the relation between the elements that constitute a given situation and their attributes, the master's discourse effects the "partition of the sensible", to borrow Rancière's well-known expression, by determining what counts and what is of no account, what is visible and what is not, in the final analysis, what exists and what does not. In light of this, the master's discourse is obviously "creative". Having the performative power of the signifier to structure the social field by assigning to the members of a given society a place and a function, the master's discourse can be seen as the power of conferring existence, a paradoxical power, as it requires the subject's complicity in order to be fully effective. While it is true that before his/her place is mapped out by the master's discourse, the subject does not yet exist; he/she is, strictly speaking, a potentiality, he/she can as yet have no being, yet it is only after taking up a place and function assigned to him/her by the master discourse that the subject comes into existence: the subject can become what he or she "is" from the viewpoint of the State, that is, only by taking upon himself/herself the function imposed upon him/her by the State. Indeed, only by being identified, by assuming his/her role or function, can the subject exist at all. The symbolic birth of the subject or, rather, the quandary of his/her existence is formulated by Lacan, as is well known, in terms of a fundamental alienation: "either I am nothing but this mark" (this role, function, or mandate, attributed to me by the social Other), "or I am not this mark", which means that "I am not at all". The subject can thus "be" a mark, or not be.[4] What is thus "created" is an empty subject, lacking being and signifier: from the moment the subject consents to his/her symbolic existence, i.e., takes up the symbolic identification assigned to him/her, he/she becomes name-less, caught in an infinite quest, in the metonymy of his/her identifications, for the missing signifier, the one which could at last name him/her in his/her being.

Bearing in mind the ontological dimension inherent in the discourse of the master, as its principal task is to decide what exists, the crucial question for every emancipatory politics worthy of the name is of course: how can that come into being which, within the framework of the master's discourse, ultimately, does

London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 32.

[4] J. Lacan, unpublished seminar *L'acte psychanalytique (1967 –1968)*, the lesson of 10th January 1968.

not exist? At first sight, it may appear that, faced with deciding between (real) being and (symbolic) existence or identification, there can be no choice for the subject. Due to the fact that before the identification with his/her symbolic "mandate", the subject does not exist at all, the choice of being over identification would prove catastrophic, in truth, an impossible choice, since it would exclude the subject from society and relegate his/her existence to the obscurity of a life outside the discursive space where all that counts is exactly the place that one occupies within this space. In social terms, it then appears that the subject cannot avoid choosing identity, as it is through identification that one can obtain a sense of existence – but at the price of complete identification with the role laid out for one by the Other.

From the standpoint of emancipatory politics, however, there is a possible way out. The starting point of emancipatory politics is nothing but the irreducible gap between the subject's being and his/her symbolic existence or, more precisely, its departure point is not the alienated subject of the master's discourse, the subject taken up by the master's order, but rather the subject as the failure of the master's discourse to completely absorb or take up his/her being in the imposed system of places and functions. It thus sets out from the excess of the subject's being over the statist counting – the remainder, the waste-product – of the operation of predication by which the State structures the social reality. In a sense, the emancipatory politics is only possible because there is something that is limping in the regime of mastery: the subject, insofar as he/she can never coincide with the role laid out for him/her by the discourse of the master. Hence, when it is the forced choice instituted by the law of the situation, whether one terms it the master's discourse, as Lacan does, or the transcendental regime of the world, as Badiou does, which must be brought into question in order to reveal the utterly contingent character of its necessity, then the only possibility for the subject to face the forced choice is, ultimately, to choose what cannot be chosen: being. In order to find a new existence, a form of life beyond or outside the existence that has been prescribed by the logic of the situation, the subject must, paradoxically, first choose not-to-be.

Taking Joan of Arc as a model, Badiou provides a compelling account of the subject's choice of non-being as the obligatory step in his/her coming into (a new) existence. What constitutes Joan of Arc as a proper event in the sense Badiou conceives of this term is namely a series of "successive choices not to be what

the situation prescribes her to be"[5]. Hence, what characterises Joan of Arc as an emancipatory subject, according to Badiou, is exactly a kind of subtraction from the possibilities or roles that her time had prescribed to her contemporaries, an invention of a posture that allowed her to maintain herself at a distance from the situation of the times. The subject must be willing to accept his/her non-being, that is to say, his/her subjective destitution, in order to begin to create a new being ex-nihilo, as it were. In essence, what marks out the initial position of the emancipatory subject, a sort of "common denominator" of various figures of the political subject, is their refusal of the imposed identification, even and especially if such refusal brings their very symbolic existence into question. This choice of Joan of Arc "not to be" or, more generally, this ability of the subject to escape the power of identifications imposed on him or her by the Other, i.e. this newly acquired margin of the subject's freedom, is what Lacan calls "the infinitization of the value of the subject"[6]. Lacan namely presents the subject as a fraction which takes on an infinite value insofar as the zero in the denominator, a kind of stand-in for a traumatic encounter with the real, abolishes the value of all terms placed in the numerator. It is noteworthy that, for Lacan, the infinitization of the subject signifies the function of freedom. This is not to be understood in the sense that the zero is open to all interpretations that have been attached to that signifier in the course of the subject's desperate successive attempts to render the irruption of the real meaningful, but rather in the sense that all of them are cancelled out. And that is just what the choice of being involves: a solution where "the subject designates his being only by barring everything it signifies"[7].

In view of the infinitization of the subject, to choose being is to choose the choice, the possibility to choose. The choice of being, at this point, it is less a matter of the choice of a concrete "form of life". It is not about choosing this or that. At stake in this second choice is rather, to quote Badiou, "the choice to choose, the choice between choosing and not choosing",[8] where the potentiality of this

[5] A. Badiou, "L'insoumission de Jeanne", in *Esprit*, n°. 238, p. 29.
[6] J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin books, 1977), p. 252.
[7] J. Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus", in *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 581.
[8] A. Badiou, *The Clamour of Being*, transl. by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 11.2.

"choice to choose" can be, of course, re-established only retroactively: in actuality, i.e., the here and now of this second choice. So, in some sense, emancipatory politics can be said to be concerned with the question of existence and being simply because it sets out from the assumption that the forced choice can be revoked by reconfiguring the coordinates of the initial choice. Why, indeed, one might ask, would emancipatory politics have as its pre-condition one's putting at stake of one's position of the subject, indeed, one's very (symbolic) existence, if no choice were involved in the forced choice? Yet it is only from the standpoint of the second choice, the choice of being, that the subject discovers that he/she was free and therefore responsible, forced to bear the consequences of his/her choice, when he/she opts for what the social Other imposes upon him/her as the "only possible choice", namely his/her alienation in a given structure of representation and domination. In confronting the forced choice qua choice, the subject annuls it, more specifically, he/she annuls the imposed aspect of the necessity implied in the forced choice. The choice of being, we could then argue, is exactly the gesture that effects a kind of return to the point of departure which preceded the attribution of existence, since it allows the subject to regain his/her power of choice in order to confront once more, as it were, the original choice: being/existence, thus allowing him/her to ratify or to reject his/her initial, although forced choice. Emancipatory politics, on this account, is nothing but a process of re-subjectivation allowing the subject, enslaved by the master's discourse, to repeat the act of choosing in order to verify his/her first choice. Insofar as emancipatory politics makes it possible for the subject to restore his/her capacity to choose, Lacan seems quite confirmed in his claim that "one is always responsible for one's position as a subject",[9] on the proviso that one understands this responsibility in terms of the subject's radical conversion or re-birth: in order for the subject to accede to this point beyond the imposed identifications and/or symbolic existence,

> it is as desire's object a, as what he was to the Other in his erection as a living being, as wanted or unwanted when he came into the world, that he is called to be reborn in order to know if he wants what he desires.[10]

[9] J. Lacan, "Science and Truth," in *Écrits,* p. 729.
[10] J. Lacan, "Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation: 'Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure'", in *Écrits,* pp. 571–572.

Separation from the Other becomes possible whenever a dysfunction of the seemingly faultless functioning of the master's discourse becomes visible. In order for the master's discourse to vacillate, there must be, a gap, an incommensurability between being and existence. It is this breach that allows the subject to challenge the master's regime rather than consent to blindly follow it as law. To the extent that the choice of being involves the refusal of all identification, i.e. the possibility for the subject to disengage himself/herself from the social Other, it also shows how the subject, precisely by being nothing but an empty place within the Other, can nevertheless render the Other incomplete, and disrupt the smooth working of its order. Likewise, emancipatory politics aims at the lack in the Other, its impossibility to completely absorb the being of the subject, to transpose it into the signifier. Lacan indicates at several points, notably in his text "l'étourdit"[11], that it is the hole that structures. Lack is in fact necessary to the subject for him/her to sustain himself in the master's regime which constitutes his social reality.

To Have or to Be

To arrive at an understanding of how the choice of being can be re-enacted in the field of politics, we must keep in mind that existence can only be situated on the basis of a discourse which constitutes an institutional framework determining the type of social existence. Consequently, if emancipatory politics aims at reconfiguring the existing state of affairs, it is the impossible choice of being over the symbolic existence or identification that imposes itself upon the subject. No better idea of the effects that the choice of being might produce in the field of politics can be given than by expanding on a point which has been made by Giorgio Agamben a propos the Chinese May '89. In his book *The Coming Community*, Agamben evokes the Tiananmen demonstrations to illustrate emancipatory politics such as is possible at the present time: a politics of whatever singularities. The latter being Agamben's name for a new, unheard-of figure of the emancipatory subject situated beyond both all identity and every condition of belonging to any community whatsoever. In this remarkably lucid analysis one also finds elements for understanding when the mere fact of speaking can count as an act:

[11] J. Lacan, "L'étourdit", in *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), p. 483.

> What was most striking about the demonstrations of the Chinese May was the relative absence of determinate contents in their demands (democracy and freedom are notions too generic and broadly defined to constitute the real object of conflict, and the only concrete demand, the rehabilitation of Hu Yao-Bang, was immediately granted). This makes the violence of the State's reaction seem even more inexplicable. [...] In the final instance, the State can recognize any claim for identity – even that of a State identity within the State (the recent history of relations between the State and terrorism is an eloquent confirmation of this fact). What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable conditions of belonging. [...] The State, as Alain Badiou has shown, is not founded on a social bond, of which it would be the expression, but rather on the dissolution, the unbinding that it prohibits. For the State, therefore, what is important is never the singularity as such, but only its inclusion in some identity, whatever identity (but the possibility of the whatever itself being taken up without an identity is a threat that the State cannot come to terms with.[12]

Highlighting the resistance of whatever singularities to any form of representation, Agamben marks a subtle, yet significant change in emphasis. Indeed, what is subversive about whatever singularities, this powerful example of the invention of a new political subject, are neither their "ways of doing" nor their "ways of saying", what is subversive is rather their "way of being": in peacefully demonstrating the "impotent omnivalence of whatever being"[13], whatever singularities bring all possible belongings radically into question. Thus, if we are to follow Agamben, by situating themselves beyond belonging to any community whatsoever, by presenting in the here and now what could best be called, in Badiou's jargon, "political unbinding", thereby defying any system of classification or counting, ultimately, any predicative inscription in the symbolic, whatever singularities incarnate the principal enemy of the State. In this regard, the mere "staging", putting on stage of the social unbinding, presents a threat to the proper function of discourse, that of establishing a social link. What is actually involved in the concept of whatever singularity is a peculiar figure of "unbinding" that announces, in the words of Lacan, "another dimension of discourse and opening up the possibility of completely subverting the function of discourse as such"[14]. Precisely as an ele-

[12] G. Agamben, *The Coming Community,* trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 85–86.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[14] J. Lacan, *Encore*, p. 30.

ment which is unsituable within the social space, as construed by the State, a whatever singularity appears as a place-holder for the anonymity of the generic: manifesting their belonging to themselves, whatever singularities affirm genericity, in Badiou's words, under the guise of "the disparate 'we' of togetherness"[15]. That is to say, in refusing to "give up on the demand that there be a 'we'",[16] as Badiou puts it, a collective emancipatory subject which, in accordance with Lacan's thesis that a group is the real, that is, impossible, manifests its own inherent disparity, without dissolving itself.

What is striking about Agamben's example of the way in which a new political subject is formed is the divisive power of its demands, it is the manner in which whatever singularities succeed in uncovering the lack in the Other, thus provoking the Other's passage to the act, a proof that the statist Other is facing its impotence. This clearly indicates that, for the emancipatory subject, the Other's lack is central because its demand concerns its existence as subject, an existence obtained through the Other. What is initially so striking about the Tiananmen students' protest is the fact that nothing that was actually said there, no content of the students' demands, could have had such a subversive force to provoke the violent response of the state power. Indeed, the intolerable threat that the state power recognized in the students' demonstrations is not to be sought in some specific, concrete content of their demands, but resides ultimately in the fact that their demands were perceived by the State as claims which are by definition unfulfillable. In effect, from the standpoint of the Chinese State, the students demanded the impossible. What they demanded, in fact, was not what the State could give, but, literally, what it could not give: the exposure of its impotence, its lacking the means to satisfy their demands. What was unbearable for the Chinese State to the point that the mere fact of uttering these demands made it respond with force, is the insistence of the demand beyond all its specific contents, an insatiable More! that no amount of giving and concessions on the part of the State could appease. From Agamben's account of the Tiananmen demonstrations it is namely clear that the protestors' demands could not be assuaged as they served to constantly re-inscribe the initial lack of the Other, its lack of means to satisfy them.

[15] A. Badiou, *The Century,* trans. by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 97.
[16] *Ibid.*

The mere fact that the demand could persist, insist beyond all particular contents, requires that we make a rigorous distinction between two structurally different demands: a want-to-have and a want-to-be. The elementary form of demand is situated at the level of the having. In the want-to-have, the Other is always-already there. Every demand, inasmuch as it is formulated in terms of the lack of having, is directed at the Other that is supposed to have what we are lacking. By making the subject dependent on the Other, since in order to obtain what one is lacking it is necessary to presuppose an Other that lacks nothing, a demand for "having", is therefore constitutively alienating. A want-to-be, a demand for "being", by contrast, is a demand which, properly speaking, makes no claims addressed to the Other as the one who "has". Rather, it is articulated to the Other's lack. In demanding "being", the subject may well appear to be demanding a complement of being that is supposed to be located somewhere in the Other. However, the mere possibility of expressing such a demand indicates that one cannot find one's place in the Other, such as it is, revealing in this way that, in demanding being one demands nothing from the Other that the latter might supply on demand, nothing that could therefore fall under the heading of "the having". The crucial point here is that, whereas the demand of having allows the Other to gain a tighter grip on the subject, the demand for being, by contrast, involves the subject's separation from the Other. It is for that reason that a demand for being is intrinsically subversive, revolutionary.

The case of the Tiananmen demonstrations seems to be a particularly appropriate example that can account for the splitting of the demand since a disjunction is introduced at the moment at which a demand which appears to be a demand for some specific having (democracy, freedom...) suddenly turns into a demand of a quite different type, a peculiar demand since it is somewhat indifferent to its fulfillment, thereby indicating that its proper objective is the subject's being.

In some radical sense, all demands of the subject are demands for being since the subject's initial demand is motivated by the fact that the Other lacks the signifier to capture the whole of his/her being. Being nothing but the interval, the gap between two signifiers, the subject always seems to be lacking in some respect. Which is why, in order to make good the lack of his/her being, the subject desperately seeks a complement of its being that is presumably located somewhere in the Other. Hence, there is no contradiction in the fact that there can be no demand without aiming at the lack of being that supports it, and the fact that the

subject's demand for being always appears in the guise of a demand for something, in short, a demand for having. It then appears that a demand for being is, as such, a paradoxical demand. It is paradoxical, first of all, because it can never be expressed as such. A demand for being is namely always "dressed up" in a demand for having, disguised, so to speak, as a wanting-to-have. As a result of this obligatory passage of the demand for being through the demand for having, something of the demand for being gets "lost in translation" and it is this ineliminable remainder of the unsatisfied demand that operates as a stand-in for the demand for being. In a certain sense, it can only assert itself as a wanting-to-have, i.e. as a demand for something, whatever that might be, a having which is a stand-in for the unsayable want-to-be. In other words, one of the particular demands for having, which represents, within the space of the Other, an anomaly in the order of demands, as it aims at an object that is, from the perspective of the Other, unattainable, stands in for the constitutively inexpressible demand for being. A demand for being is, in the strictest sense, an impossible demand for having, that is to say, a demand which, under the existing positive social order, has to remain unfulfilled. Yet it is precisely because some demand for having remains uninscribable in the existing discursive universe, that it can make manifest the subject's lack of being and, consequently, lead the latter to claim its being.[17]

Hence, to take up the example of the demands made by the Chinese protestors, there does not seem to be anything specific about their demands for democracy and freedom, for instance, that immediately situates such demands under one heading or the other. Yet precisely this "relative absence of determinate contents in their demands", as has been rightly emphasized by Agamben, reveals one of the essential features of the demand for being. Actually, it is because "democracy" and "freedom" do not have intrinsic contents of their own, i.e., it is precisely as "empty signifiers" that they can figure as a paradoxical incarnation of the subject's lack of being, indicating in this way that the proper object of such a demand for being is a demand for something which has no being, just like the famous Lacanian object *a* that can be characterized solely negatively: "That is not

[17] This insistence of the demand for being, however, is not to be confused with the desire's eternal "This is not it!" that signals the structural impossibility of satisfaction. Rather, to the extent that any "having" can, in principle, operate like a stand-in for the proper object of a demand for being, on the condition that it opens the way to repetition, to the eternal return of the same. Hence, by not giving up on this object, whatever this may be, a demand for being betrays the insistence that characterizes the drive.

it!", a paradoxical lack of having that can only emerge through the subject's disappointment once he/she obtains the demanded object. One can therefore argue that a demand for being is, to quote Lacan, "but the request for the object *a*",[18] the latter giving body to the void presupposed by the demand as such. If, by slightly revising Lacan's formulation, we could state that "the discordance between want-to-have and want-to-be is our subject",[19] this is because the demand for being is, ultimately, nothing but a division of the One into Two, a scission of the demand for having itself, or, in the word of Badiou, a minimal, yet absolute difference between a having and the void to which it gives body.

The demand for being is a paradoxical demand for yet another reason. On one hand, a demand for "being", as any other demand, is addressed to the Other. Only here, the very fact that it is a demand for *being*, signifies that there is no room for the subject in this Other, to which the subject addresses its request. This is because a demand for being can only be addressed to the Other by an inexistent agency of sorts, those who are denied a place in a given social order, that part of society that is in excess of the classification, unaccounted for by the master's discourse. In this respect, a demand for being is not a demand for something in particular, the satisfaction of which would depend on the Other's "good will", for it is quite clear that the satisfaction of the demand for being made by the inexistent part of society, one which is uncounted and unaccounted for in the given structure of assigned places, would have the effect of making the Other disappear, a disappearance by which the whole of its order is annihilated, too. This fact alone justifies us in situating the demands of the Chinese demonstrators under the heading of the demand for being rather than that of the demand for having. There where Western observers could recognize in the demand for the freedom of speech, for democracy, merely a demand for having, the Chinese State correctly placed freedom and democracy in the register of the empty signifiers as the metonymy of the protesters' lack-of-being, a being incompatible with the established order of things, thereby correctly deciphering behind the apparent demand for having (democracy and freedom), a No! directed at the existing regime of mastery. The Chinese State, by responding with violence, thus returned to the demonstrators their own message in an inverted, which is to say, in its true form: behind what appears to be a demand for having, it correctly recognized that noth-

[18] J. Lacan, *Encore,* p. 126.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

ing that it can give them would satisfy them, thereby indicating that such a demand, by not being reducible to a "having", as such, proves to be incompatible with the existing order of power. "We understand that in demanding only more democracy and freedom," the Other is presumed to reply to the demonstrating students, "you are in fact demanding that the actual socio-political order should exist no more".

It is, therefore, only to the extent that being itself is at stake in the demand for being that the mere fact of proffering such a demand can bring about a radical modification of the connection between the subject and the Other. A demand is, as such, always destined to the Other. To put it bluntly: all demands are articulated, fundamentally, to the Other. All demand calls for a reply from the Other. What this immediately implies is that for a demand to be recognized by the politico-social Other in the first place, it has to be reduced, downgraded to a "lack of having". This may be why in an era of the proliferation of demands, all these demands, inasmuch as they are made in the name of belonging to some already existing group, in the name of some communal identity, such as it is represented in the Other's order, can, in principle, be acknowledged by the latter. From our earlier developments, however, it is clear that the subject obtains some sense of its being by being identified with what the Other lacks. A wanting-to-be may well seem to be addressed to the Other that is supposed to be whole, but the very fact that such a demand is possible at all bears witness to the lack in the socio-political Other. In fact, it is through such a demand for being that the lack in the Other, its incompleteness, comes to light. Ultimately, insofar as such a demand presupposes some kind of exclusion, the only "message" of the demand for being that is directed at the Other by those who occupy the position of internal exclusion within the established order, is: "You are not whole!". In this sense, we might consider that whenever the demand for being succeeds in forcing the socio-political Other to acknowledge it, this necessarily involves a complete reconfiguration of the existing socio-political framework, thus engendering a new Other, ultimately, it involves the creation of a new order. It is then this particularity of the demand, its fundamental dependence on the Other, that a demand for being subverts by revealing that demand made by "whatever" or generic singularities, precisely those singularities that lay no claim to identity and refuse any criteria of belonging to whatever community, cannot be recognized by the Other as a legitimate claim. The operator of the social linking, the State, and generic singularities are mutually exclusive since, to ratify a demand made by

generic singularities would namely entail the unbinding of all social bonds, an unbinding that undermines the State whose *raison d'être* is exactly to assure the social bond by distributing singularities according to the established system of places in the social order.

A demand for being is therefore a paradoxical demand since it can only be issued from some unthinkable place, literally, a non-place, to be precise, since it is made by an instance which, being a waste-product of the constitution of the social order, of the Other's counting, cannot, by definition, have a place within the Other's order. A demand for being can only be expressed from the position of an instance which, by being but an unsituable excess, does not have its proper place in the field of the Other and is therefore condemned to endlessly err in the space of the Other. This place from which a demand for being is issued is, strictly speaking, an invisible, or better put, perhaps, a nonexistent place, a place that is not yet given in the Other. And conversely, the very fact that a demand for being is made signifies that the Other, which declared that there is no loss, that everything that counts has been counted and can be accounted for, is not whole, that it is incomplete, since, in its order, there is no possible room for the inexistent, i.e., those who demand to be recognized in their being. This is why whenever the inexistent, that is, such an instance that has no proper place in the discursive space of the Other, declares its being-there, it renders the Other necessarily incomplete.

This would amount to asserting that in order to make itself be there, i.e. to be included in the Other's order, the subject first has to make a place in which to inscribe its being. One might even add here that there is no demand for being that does not in some sense create the space in which it is to be inscribed. One can therefore argue that the emancipatory subject speaks out or makes its demand for being from the point at which the Other falls silent. However, no demand can be made if one does not exist. It is for that reason that a demand for being always manifests itself through a proclamation of existence: "*nos sumus*, *nos existimus*"[20], a proclamation which signifies that something which, for the Other, does not exist at all, which was therefore mute, starts to speak out. The subject comes into being here by proclaiming "we are, we exist," thereby ratifying the being that is only anticipated in such a proclamation. The subject speaks out as

[20] This formulation is borrowed from J. Rancière's *Disagreement*, p. 36.

if it already existed. In truth, the declaration "we are, we exist" can be issued at the moment in which the subject who claims to exist, does not yet exist, because, in the socio-political configuration established by the Other, there is no possible place for it to be situated in. To find one's place in a given symbolic order, if this place is not already provided by the Other itself and assigned by it to the subject, therefore requires that the subject bores its way into the Other, makes a hole into the Other and situates itself in that hole. Hence, the subject can speak out only by making holes in a given order of power, or better still, by adding something which, with regard to this order, is regarded as superfluous, in excess, a disturbing surplus that should not be there in the first place, indeed, that which, from the moment that the Other acknowledged its existence, would cause the disappearance of the Other itself.

The Curse of Metonymy

This is why the subject of the demand for being has affinities with the position of the hysterical subject, namely that subject who, at the level of being, can only exist if the Other is lacking. Indeed, just like the hysteric, the subject of the demand for being occupies the place of the barred subject – the subject which experiences its lack of identity as a lack of being, a lack of its being in the Other: it is not because it cannot situate itself there. Consequently, the hysteric will concentrate her efforts towards exposing the lack in the Other, or, if necessary, by boring a hole in the Other in order to make a room for herself. Lacking being, and unable therefore to recognize herself in the role attributed to her by the Other, the hysteric is condemned to a ceaseless search for an appropriate signifier to represent her. But precisely for that reason it is also the subject who, by definition, rejects the closure, the act of saturation, this being, in Lacan's vocabulary, a master's "point de capiton", the act of the "hegemon" par excellence, which, far from denying the impossibility of the constitutively non-totalizable social field to totalize itself, succeeds rendering a given situation "legible" by drawing a line of demarcation between that which exists and that which does not. This also explains why such a subject wants to count, actually, continues to count, after the Other has declared to have counted all there is to count. Stated differently, if she wants to add, after the Other's the last word, at least one more word, it is because she does not allow the master to have the last word. In responding to the master's gesture of closure by adding at least one more signifier, the hysterical subject opens up a dimension beyond the closure, thereby revealing how is it possible to

make a move from a logic of necessity, this being eminently the logic of totalization, the logic of the "all", to a logic of contingency, which is but another name for the logic of the "not-all", and which can only be acceded through the hysteric's operation of de-totalization. The hysterical gesture concerns us, not just because it challenges the master, but also because it shows us how it is possible to pass from closed intervals to what Lacan designates as "open sets, in other words, sets that exclude their own limits"[21]. Which is why the Other, whose counting is based on the sequence of natural numbers, can never catch up with the hysteric or with the emancipatory subject, for that matter, since they situate themselves at the level of real numbers, those numbers namely which, because there is always a real number between any two given real numbers, converge towards a negative limit that will never be reached or, to be more precise, which can be reached only at infinity.

It is precisely this move from the logic of the all to the logic of the not-all that the hysterical subject and the emancipatory subject, as it has been theorized by J. Rancière and G. Agamben, have in common. Just as the coming into existence of the hysterical subject, the political subjectivation rests on a peculiar articulation of counting and unbinding. The subject, from such a perspective, exists only through and for the ceaselessly repeated operation of uncovering a miscount in the Other's count. In either case, in response to the Other's counting, the subject proposes an entirely different operation of counting, one that proceeds "one by one". But the problem with such a solution where the political subjectivation is premised on hysterical refusal lies in this very rejection of the closure. And indeed, prima facie, the closure is what we might think of as the master's gesture par excellence, since it is a gesture by which it is decided, as Rancière remarks, "whether the subjects who count in the interlocution 'are' or 'are not'"[22]. Therefore if the elementary gesture of emancipatory politics consists in de-totalizing all totalization, it becomes apparent that emancipatory politics, as Rancière sees it, precisely because it depends upon the master's closure, is only possible in a world in which the Other exists.[23]

[21] J. Lacan, *Encore*, p. 9. This ability to continue with counting once everything has already been counted is essential for the hysterical subject. "When the hysteric proves that, once the page is turned, she continues to write on the other side and even on the next page, we are at a loss. For the hysteric is a logician." J. Lacan, *Le séminaire. Livre XVIII. D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 157.

[22] J. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 50.

[23] We can understand A. Badiou's critique of Rancière along these lines. See in particular his

In the view argued for by Badiou, however, the operation by means of which the emancipatory subject exposes a dysfunction of the Other's count, revealing in this way the lack in the Other, is not the final word on the question, since there is another perspective, another angle under which emancipatory politics can be situated in the present conjecture. Hence, contrary to what Rancière holds when he situates emancipatory politics in a universe in which it is the Other that carries out the closure, we should follow the path taken by Badiou and Lacan and set out from a situation in which the closure is no longer achievable, moreover, a situation in which the non-existence of the Other, its inconsistency, is flagrantly obvious to everybody. To sum up, we could say that the subversion of the master's closure is certainly not sufficient to account for an emancipatory politics that would be more attuned to the deadlocks of globalized capitalism. The reason for this is the mutation of the master's discourse, that namely which, by being articulated to the lack in the Other, to the barred Other, and which Lacan, as is well known, designated as the discourse of the capitalist, instead of providing a new master signifier, capable of rendering a given situation "legible", by an operation which involves the forcing, the crossing of the bar that separates two incommensurable orders: the symbolic order and the order of the real, literally "lives for" the preservation of this bar, thus assuring, through an infinite quest for the constitutively lacking compliment, an eternization of the existing state of affairs: an interminable status quo. The capitalist discourse, having as its structural principle the "generalized metonymyzation", from the outset excludes the possibility of closure. This is also why, with the generalization of metonymy in the late capitalist conjecture, the problem of a break with the existing state of affairs acquires an urgency. The real burning question today is thus: How, indeed, can we identifiy "the wherewithal for prescribing new possibilities," [24] as Badiou explicitly puts it, within the non-totalizable space of discursivity created by the new dominant discourse, a discourse in which everything is included, in which the exclusion itself is excluded, and in which therefore everything seems to be possible?

Metapolitics, trans. by Jason Barker (London and New York: Verso, 2005, pp. 109–110). It is not by chance that key examples used by Rancière to illustrate the working of emancipatory politics, the Athenian demos and the proletariat, are precisely two models of the political subject from an epoch in which the operation of conclusion was still possible, i.e. an epoch in which the Other still existed.

[24] A. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 72.

Our point is namely that the possibility of an emancipatory politics changes fundamentally as the master's discourse yields to the "generalized metonymization". Or to be more precise, the total hegemony of a discourse that is structurally metonymic, the capitalist discourse, has decisive consequences for the transformative power of politics, ultimately, for its capacity to change the transcendental regime of the present world. What characterizes the globalized capitalist discourse is precisely that there be nothing left that serves as a barrier. Indeed, in a discourse that knows no limitation and in which, as a consequence, "everything is possible", it is the impossible that appears to be impossible. We are living in a regime of mastery which no longer proceeds by prohibition and repression and which, thus, renders transgression and, as a corollary, the idea of a revolutionary change questionable. For something has radically changed with the globalization of the capitalist discourse. Globalization, in this respect, does not mean simply that nothing is left in its place as no anchoring seems to be capable of controlling the unending movement of displacements and substitutions. Indeed, in the current space of discursivity, the notion of place itself is strangely out of place. What is more, with the category of place thus rendered inoperative, it is one of the key categories of emancipatory politics, the notion of lack, necessary to the subject for it to sustain itself in the symbolic Other, which as a result becomes obsolete.

There are two structural consequences of this. The first is that, contrary to the classic discourse of the master, in the capitalist discourse the subject appears to be disidentified. By situating in the place of the agent, the barred subject that is essentially guideless, caught in an infinite quest for the missing signifier, the one which could at last name him, anchor him in the field of the symbolic and put an end to his erring, the capitalist discourse exploits the lack it installs in the subject as a way of reproducing itself. The cunning of the capitalist discourse then consists in exploiting the structure of the desiring subject: by manipulating his desire, i.e. by reducing it to demand, the capitalist discourse creates the illusion that, thanks to scientific development and the market, it is able to provide the subject with the complement of being that he is lacking by transforming the subject's lack of being into the lack of having. In this view, "having" is considered to be a cure for the lack of being of the subject of the capitalist discourse. The second structural consequence is that the subject of the capitalist discourse, which is the embodiment of the lack of being, is completed by products thrown on the market. This is why Lacan named the subject of the capitalist discourse "*the proletarian*". Indeed, it is a subject which is inseparable from that which con-

stitutes the complement of his being: his surplus-enjoyment, the object *a*. As the dominant structure of social relations, the capitalist discourse provides the conditions of an obscure subjectivation which depends on the conversion of the surplus-value, that is to say, any product thrown on the market, into the cause of the subject's desire. We would suggest that it is precisely this indistinction between the surplus-value and the surplus-enjoyment which makes it possible for the capitalist production of "whatever objects" to capture, indeed, to enslave the subject's desire, to sustain its eternal "this is not it!". It could be claimed that capitalism, insofar as it promotes the "solipsism of enjoyment", promotes at the same time a particular communal figure, that which J.-C. Milner termed a "paradoxical class", a collective in which its members are joined or held together by that which disjoins them,[25] namely, their idiosyncratic mode of enjoyment. What is thus placed in question is precisely the social bond. Or to be more precise, the social bond that exists today is one presented under the form of dispersed individuals that is but another name for the dissolution of all links or unbinding of all bonds.[26] Both of these features of the capitalist discourse could, then, be brought together in a single syntagm of the generalized proletarization. In the words of Lacan, "there is but one social symptom: every individual is in effect a proletarian, that is to say that no discourse is at the disposal of the individual by means of which a social bond could be established".[27] Ironically, proletarization remains the symptom of contemporary society. Only, this proletarization is of a particular kind, one that, by being articulated with the intrinsically metonymic nature of the capitalist discourse, has lost all its subversive effectiveness, all its revolutionary potential.[28] Summarizing in this way Lacan's thesis on the contemporary proletarization, is to shed some

[25] J.-C. Milner, *Les noms indistincs* (Paris : Seuil, 1983), pp. 116–123.

[26] Capitalism, in a sense, could be seen as an aberration among social bonds, since it realizes what in all the other bonds seems to be impossible: its compatibility with enjoyment. The capitalist discourse is a social bond which does not demand that the subject sacrifyce his or her enjoyment. On the contrary, the capitalist social bond is a bond that adapts itself to the "trifle", the private enjoyment of everybody. So, from this perspective, it could be argued that, not only does enjoyment not threaten the capitalist social bond, but, on the contrary, capitalism presents itself as a discourse in which the "democracy of enjoyment" reigns. It is in the sense of this solipsistic "democracy of *jouissance*" whose sole principle is *primum vivere,* to live for enjoyment, that we propose to read "democratic materialism", a syntagm that Badiou introduces in order to identify the dominant ideology of our time. See his *Logics of Worlds,* trans. by Alberto Toscano (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), pp. 1–9.

[27] J. Lacan, "La troisième", in *Lettres de l'Ecole freudeinne de Paris,* n° 16, 1975, p. 187.

[28] Despite the fact that the value of the symptom in politics and psychoanalysis differs, never-

light on the impasses of the present generalized "metonymization", in particular the fact that no social link can be established on the basis of metonymy.

Arguably, it is this generalized metonymization operated by the capitalist discourse, which provides us with a plausible key to identifying the difficulties of contemporary emancipatory politics in finding a way out of the present impasse. For the inexistence of the Other, and the resultant limitless expansion of metonymic displacements, contrary to what might be expected or hoped for, is not in and of itself a liberating factor for the subject, it is not experienced by the subject as liberation from the capture which the Other effects upon him/her. Quite the contrary: in the absence of the master signifier which would render a given situation "readable", the subject remains a *prisoner, not of the Other that exists, but of the inexistent Other,* better put perhaps, of the inexistence of the Other. Examined closely, however, far from disappearing, the Other is re-introduced in a discursive space in which metonymy dominates. It is by structural necessity that metonymy resuscitates the belief in the Other as an agency which, while remaining invisible, situated at an inaccessible point locatable only at infinity, is supposed to govern this seemingly erratic, properly lawless movement. It is this deadlock that the subject faces in a universe of the inexistent Other, that Lacan highlights in raising the following question: "S_1 represents the subject for another signifier, but if there is no Other to furnish another signifier, what, then, becomes of S_1?"[29] Better yet: "for whom" or,

theless they are not without convergence in some respect. The seemingly ostentatious connection Lacan is making here between politics and psychoanalysis may find confirmation in the following passage: "there is no difference, once the process has started, between the subject engaged in the path of subversion in order to produce the incurable where the act attains its true end, and that of the symptom which takes on its revolutionary effect only by not being conducted by the so-called Marxist baton". J. Lacan, "Comptes-rendus d'enseignement", in *Ornicar*?, n° 29, 1984, p. 24. From the start, Lacan conceived of the symptom as that which disrupts the smooth working of the social order, betraying the subject's resistance to total alienation in that order. By taking the lead that the above quote offers us, we will contend that the affinities laid out by Lacan between his notion of symptom and Marx's proletariat as a symptom of the bourgeois society can only appear on the basis of Lacan's claim that "the symptom is a metaphor". J. Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter", *Écrits*, p. 439. The point here is that the symptom can generate its subversive effects precisely to the extent that it operates like a metaphor, that is to say, as a quilting point which, by reconfiguring relations between elements of a given situation in a different way, momentarily reveals the possibility of a new, an entirely unprecedented type of the socio-discursive arrangement.

[29] J. Lacan, "III-L'impossible à saisir," *Le séminaire. Livre XXIV, L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre, Ornicar?,* n° 17/18, 1979, p. 18.

rather, "for what", then, is the subject represented? And vice versa, the the putting of the master signifier, S_1 – that signifier namely whose principle function is to ensure the "legibility" of the given discursive space – in parenthesis and hence making a given situation "illegible", requires that the subject, by assuming the impossibility of a closure, nevertheless finds a way of "telling the situation", i.e., of making it "legible".

The problem for contemporary emancipatory politics is not that the closure of the incomplete, not-all discursive space is actually impossible, but that it cannot be represented in the symbolic, i.e. effected through the quilting point. To put it another way, insofar as the counting effected by the master and the counting accomplished by the hysteric can never coincide in the real, as they can meet only in infinity, at the (non-)place of the limit, what is at issue here is an operation of counting that brings together the infinite and the finite, an operation, that is, which, by revealing the action of the structuring rule of the established regime as that of the infinitization, thus opening a perspective of infinity, could also give cause to hope for its modification. In this context, Badiou's critique of Rancière has a very precise theoretical value: it reminds us that the theory of the double counting does not suffice to account for a politics of emancipation capable of producing something new in a given situation, indeed, of bringing about a new situation in the actually existing situation, as this situation already presents itself as a situation of infinite possibilites. Emancipatory politics in the epoch of the nonexistent Other is therefore confronted with the task of reversing the structural impossibility of the closure of the capitalist discourse into a condition of possibility of invention, ultimately, the invention of a new socio-political structure, while assuming the impossibility of the closure. For such an invention cannot be satisfied with the anchoring point, the metaphoric totalization, as it always brings us back inexorably towards the infinitization of metonymy. What is needed in addition, indeed, as the beyond of the theory of counting that is modeled on the hysterical revolt, is a theory of a break or rupture capable of producing effects that forever change the discursive configuration within the limitless universe. By making a move to Lacan's notion of the cut, one finds a possible theoretical framework through which one can situate a possible way out for the contemporary politics of emancipation by opposing the infinitization of an interminable discourse, such as the capitalist's, and an operation of a "transfinitization", to use Cantor's term, effected through the cut respectively termed act (Lacan) and event (Badiou).

The hypothesis here is that the cut comes to the place of the metaphoric suture or, rather, the cut intervenes there where metaphor as an act of closure is no longer operational, i.e. in an infinite universe in which it is impossible to create, by way of a predicate, a totality. The difference between metaphor and the cut could then be summarized as a difference between a space of discursivity seen as a structure striving towards completion, towards closure, and a space of discursivity considered, on the contrary, as being not-all, i.e. the incompleteness that can never be completed. Not-all, in this view, is not a discursive structure which would be decompleted, it is rather presented as a series without any limit, moreover, a lawless series. In a sense, both, metaphor and the cut attempt to reconfigure the existing discursive universe on the bases of radical groundlessness. Yet unlike metaphor, which comes to punctuate the metonymic slippage, thereby allowing for the closure of the series, its totalization, the cut intervenes precisely in order to prevent the closure. Bringing a not-all sequence back to the hole, the cut thus makes the point of the real, the radical lawlessness, emerge.

Generally speaking, the exposition of the point of the real as the immanent impossibility of a given social configuration, is a constitutive prerequisite to initiate change. It then follows that for change to be possible at all, the point of the impossible of a given social order must be identified. A truly transformative act would thus consist in marking the point of the impossible-real of the existing socio-political situation, more precisely, marking a point at which the impossible turns into the possible. Inasmuch as change can only occur as a disruption of the hegemonic regime of discursivity, contingency must be established at the point at which the impossible, that which can not be, emerges: something that is considered as impossible suddenly comes into existence. With this in mind, the politics of emancipation could be seen as aiming at making contingency a necessity in order to approach the impossible: to invent a new form of collectivity, while acknowledging the impossibility of grounding it in the real. However, in the existing conjecture, which is itself structured as a lawless sequence, this point of the real, marking some radical heterogeneity to that which exists, is not articulated to any kind of impossibility, whether presented as defense or interdiction, rather, it is obscured by a seemingly limitless expansion of the realm of the possible. In an era of the frenetic production of the new for the sake of the new, in an era in which everything is new but the new signifier which would render the situation “legible”, its structure discernible, the only manner, in Badiou’s vocabulary, to “say the situation”, which would allow one to orientate oneself in

existence, is through a veritable cutting gesture. There where the inconsistent Other cannot provide the subject with a compass, it is up to the subject itself to discover a stopping point, which would put an end to the erring of the generalized metonymyzation of the master's discourse of our time, to measure its measurelessness, as Badiou would say it, a measurelessness which is itself due to the errant, non-measurable surplus of the Other's power, "the subjective errancy of the power of the State",[30] and would therefore anchor the subject's being.

But for this, it is necessary that the cut, to quote Lacan, "be revealed as the knife which introduces difference into [the world]"[31]. From such a perspective it could then be said that the cut can be validated in view of its consequences. One does not demonstrate the cut, insofar as, for Lacan and for Badiou alike, it is verified, just as in science, through its effects on the real. That is to say, a true cut is only true by way of its consequences, or, which amounts to the same, "[I]t is only true inasmuch as it is truly followed"[32]. The cut, in this account, no less than the master's catachresis, has the same creative power of a groundless positing. The essential difference between the cut and the master's "*point de capiton*" being, however, that whereas the master's gesture of closure is only effective if it succeeds in concealing the groundlessness of this positing, the cut, by contrast, is overtly situated in a zone beyond all guarantee, beyond the Other as guarantee. This is why the mode of temporality involved in the master's gesture of closure is that of retroactivity: using Lacan's own terms, it is a question of reordering "past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come";[33] whereas a true cut, to the point that its validation depends upon its consequences, is inscribed in the future anterior: it will have been. This is the principal lesson to be drawn from Lacans seminar "L'acte psychanalytique": how can a cut occur such that it would provoke a logic of consequences to be followed, a logic that, moreover, derails the transcendental regime of a given discursive universe.

The implication here is that, if the Other is no longer capable of the suture, this leaves the emancipatory subject the task of coming up with a solution, not, however, at the level of the signifier, as it will inevitably fuel the process of metonymization, but at the level of that which is heterogeneous, disparate with the

[30] See in particular Badiou's essay "Politics as Truth Procedure", in *Metapolitics,* pp. 144–145.
[31] J. Lacan, "La psychanalyse dans ses rapports avec la réalité" in *Autres écrits,* p. 357.
[32] J. Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, p. 13.
[33] J. Lacan, "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", p. 213.

signifier, namely the act. Indeed, it is not enough to expose the inexistence of the Other and the resultant inconsistency of the social field, it is also necessary to understand that in relation to the deadlocks of the general metonymization only the act can be situated as a solution – because it does not involve the relation to the Other.

Actheism[34]

Intrinsically sui-referential, as it cannot find an ontological support, the act, as such, is correlative of the inexistence of the Other. But how does the act constitute a resolution to the deadlock of the inexistent Other? Ultimately, what exactly is it that the act affects, modifies, creates? This is where Lacan provides us with an answer as to the question of whether violence, in the epoch of the inconsistent Other, is the only way out of the powerlessness of the subject. What concerns Lacan in this respect is to define a transmutation, a proper conversion of the subject, a conversion that renders it capable of the act. At the centre of this is the following question: how is the subject of the signifier, that is, the subject as an effect of the signifier, implicated in the structure of the act? In the seminar *L'acte psychanalytique*, Lacan provides a way of thinking about the act that is slightly different from that furnished in his preceding seminars. The far-reaching novelty of this new approach can help us explain the emergence of the emancipatory subject in an era of otherlessness and, as a corollary, account for two distinct conceptions of the emancipatory politics. For what is at stake in the act is the saying of that which, in a given situation, cannot be said, namely its point of the impossible. Lacan's solution to the impasses of the inexistent Other is to propose a new definition of the act: a paradoxical short circuit of saying and doing, of speech and action. The act is accomplished through a saying whose subject, as a result, emerges different, other than he was before: "The act (*tout court*) takes place by means of a saying, thereby changing its subject."[35] Hence, what is at stake in the act for Lacan is the status of a "saying" insofar as it is presumed to produce a set of decisive consequences, starting with the subject. It is

[34] This neologism, which we borrow from C. Soler, by condensing "act" and "atheism" in one word, points to that dimension of the act which could best be designated as the "atheistic transcendence", an immanent transcendence beyond all figure of the Other. See C. Soler, "Les fins propres de l'acte analytique", in *Actes de l'Ecole de la Cause freudienne,* n° 12, E.C.F. Paris 1987, p. 18.

[35] J. Lacan, "Comptes-rendus d'enseignements", in *Ornicar?,* n° 29, 1984, p. 18.

here that the crucial aspect of the act comes to light: it is an act which appears without a subject. Instead of saying that the subject carries out an act, it is the subject which is considered as resulting from an act.

However, for an act of saying to be taken as a true act, it is required that it leaves an indelible trace in the universe of discourse within which it occurred. This clearly indicates that the act is not something that is beyond language, something that is more real than language, since, for Lacan, "the signifying dimension is constitutive of any act"[36]. And indeed, to paraphrase Lacan himself, the act does not go without saying. We should not take this to mean that whenever there is a saying there is also an act. To avoid the absurd conclusion that every act of saying alters the subject, it is decisive to differentiate between two heterogeneous ways of "doing things with words". Here we have to distinguish between the act in a Lacanian sense and the act such as has been elaborated by speech act theory in order to accurately locate the true agent in an act. According to J.L. Austin, for an enunciation, for instance, "I promise", "I declare a general mobilization", to count as the accomplishment of an act, "there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances".[37] A true act in Lacan's sense, by contrast, is an act for which no such "conventional procedure" is supplied in advance. What is more, it is only "*nachträglich* [retroactively] that an act takes on its value"[38]. In this regard, a Lacanian speech act is the reverse of an Austinian speech act: while an Austinian speech act, where the speaker performs an act by proffering a formula designed for that purpose, aims at the absorption of certain ways of doing realized through a mere act of saying into the signifier, the reduction to the signifier of that which is fundamentally heterogeneous and therefore incommensurable with it, namely doing, a Lacanian speech act pushes the signifier itself beyond the limits of the symbolic. Or to be even more precise, whereas the Austinian speech act, where the act amounts simply to "doing things with words" in conformity with a pre-given convention, a genuine act in Lacan's sense involves a passing through a barrier of the signifier. One could say that such a speech act makes use of the signifier to bring into existence something that is of the order of the real.

[36] J. Lacan, *L'acte psychanalytique (1967–1968)*, 16 May 1968.
[37] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 14.
[38] J. Lacan, *L'acte psychanalytique*, 16 May 1968.

It is not by chance that Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon illuminates, for Lacan, the essence of a true act. Indeed, if the signifying dimension is constitutive of the act as such, this is precisely because for Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon to take on the value of an act, it must go beyond a limit, to cross a boundary that only exists in the symbolic. That is to say, it is not enough for Caesar to cross the Rubicon with his army, thereby violating the Roman law according to which the army, upon returning to Rome, must be disbanded before crossing the Rubicon, he must in addition proclaim: "*alea iacta est*!". It is in the symbolic itself that this transgression must be marked. At the same time, the act is correlated to a real upon which it has effects: the inscription of some radical discontinuity in the symbolic, which thereby inaugurates a reconfiguration of the existing discursive universe. In emphasizing the dimension of discontinuity brought about through an act, it should be noted, however, that the Lacanian notion of act is not primarily concerned with the transgression. Rather, the crossing of a purportedly inviolable barrier is to be understood less as the hysteric's act of defiance directed against the Other's prohibition, than as an attempt at locating the point of the impossible of the existent social order: marking and dissolving at the same time the point of the impossible-real in the situation, the act succeeds to initiate a set of until then unheard of possibilities, to chart an uncharted zone, beyond borders, to be explored. There is, then, an act on the condition that the crossing of the symbolic barrier is conceived as a clearing gesture signaling a new beginning which, however, cannot be attained without crossing some point of impossibility. It is in this sense that we could speak of the act as constituting a true beginning insofar as it gives rise to a new desire[39] – to be sustained by way of its consequences. And we can start to see more clearly now that it is only through such a forcing of the barrier of the symbolic that an act can constitute an interruption, a break, a discontinuity that forever separates a "before" and an "after".

But what becomes of the subject after the act? Undoubtedly, Caesar before crossing the Rubicon and Caesar after crossing the Rubicon are not the same Caesar. By crossing the Rubicon, by inscribing in the symbolic his gesture of transgression, "*alea iacta est*!", Caesar, who launched this new signifier and thereby introduced a new order in the world, becomes himself nothing more than a waste product of "his" proper act. The moment of the act, strictly speaking, is the moment at which the subject appears to be "suspended" between the "old" subject

[39] *Ibid*., 10 January 1968.

that he was before the act, and a new being that is a being without essence, as he will only become who he really is through the deployment of the act's consequences. He will become what he is, i.e., nothing other than a series of consequences that follow from "his" act. Stated otherwise, the act does not include, at the moment of its realization, the presence of the subject. It is only after the act and through its consequences that the subject will find its presence, but a renewed presence, says Lacan. We are confronted here with two fundamentally different subjects: the first one, the one that will be ultimately sacrificed, is the alienated subject of the signifier, and another subject, the one that emerges disidentified, without a mark and therefore in search of a new mark, a new signifier. It is this fundamental mutation of the subject that could be referred to as "the suicide of the subject", to use the term J.-A. Miller prefers in order to emphasize that the (old) subject, i.e., the subject as an effect of the signifier, has to "die" in order to make it possible, by virtue of the act, for a new, wholly different subject to emerge[40]: the subject of an infinitization of the consequences of "his/her" act.

The act of crossing a boundary that is traced in the symbolic has the effect of shattering the existing symbolic order. So what characterizes the act is not merely the fact that it alters the subject, it is not just the death of the old subject and the birth of a new one, but the act, also and essentially, involves a modification of that agency at which or against which it is, ultimately, always directed: the Other. Generally speaking, it is by taking into account this "address" to the Other that it was possible for Lacan to oppose acting out and *passage à l'acte*, passage to the act, two types of acts particularly difficult to distinguish as they both appear to involve an unexpected, violent headlong movement. Lacan defines acting out as the subject's playing out on a stage, literally making a scene for the Other, and a passage to the act as an attempt to detach itself from the Other. In the event of acting out, the subject addresses the Other through his/her act, thereby contributing to making this Other consist. Through the passage to the act, in contrast, the subject in effect escapes from the power of the Other, but at the price of a drastic separation: by evacuating himself or herself from the stage. Signaling in this way the subject's definitive separation from the Other, the passage to the act entails at the same time the subject's disappearance.

[40] J.-A. Miller, "Jacques Lacan: remarques sur son concept de passage à l'acte", in *Actualités psychiatriques*, n° 1, 1988, p. 52.

However, the passage to the act is not Lacan's final word on the question. There is another angle in terms of which it is possible to draw a far clearer distinction between a true act, on one hand, and both, the acting out and the passage to the act, on the other. This is not the final word, since it is against a background of this second demarcation that he seeks to elaborate more rigorously the act in relation to the Other. What a genuine act, for Lacan, has in common with the passage to act consists in the fact that both can only be accomplished in the void of the Other; at the very moment of its realization, the act appears to be without a support in the Other. This is why, for Lacan, one can never know what an act will bring about. More importantly, there will always be the risk that the act will flip over into a mere mise-en-scène, a playing out for the Other, in a word, into an acting out.[41] It then appears that a true act, because it does not belong to the order of calculation or reasoning, as such, is paradoxically left at the mercy of the Other. This reintroduction of the Other in the act, however, requires an additional distinction, this time a distinction between the act in the proper sense of the word and the passage to the act. What would a proper act be, then, in light of this distinction?

It is noteworthy that this demarcation from the passage to the act was introduced by Lacan in passing, as it were, yet at a crucial turning-point in his teaching, when he proposed a singular procedure, termed the pass, destined to verify, that is, to ratify the purportedly irreversible change in the subject's status at the end of analysis.[42] The point at issue here is that because Lacan's proposition, "Proposition of 9 October 1967"[43], met with resistance by "the old guard" of Lacanianism, this failure of "his" act leads Lacan to a radical reformulation of the act in its relation to its outcome. At the centre of his re-elaboration of the notion of act at that time is namely the question of the kind of authentication that the act might receive. In fact, the second definition of the act proposed by Lacan is, strangely enough, best argued through the experience of failure. Commenting on the failure of his "Proposition", Lacan gives us another very important clue to understanding the act. It is therefore from the perspective of this uncertain fate of his speech act known as the "Proposition" that Lacan is able to shed some light on the act as such. Namely, that if all he received from the Other as a response to his "Proposi-

[41] J. Lacan, "Comptes-rendus d'enseignements", in *Ornicar ?,* n° 29, p. 23.
[42] Namely, the pass as a modification presumably indicating the subject's passing from the position of the analysand to that of the analyst is the one which marks the destitution of the subject of the signifier and its passage into the mode of the object, the passage from subject to object.
[43] J. Lacan, *Autres écrits* (Paris : Seuil, 2001), p. 243–259.

tion" was a flat rejection, the Other's No!, is not just an aspect of the act, it is rather the fundamental feature of what we mean by the act. One can go further and state that, due to the Other's refusal to ratify his "Proposition", Lacan is obliged to raise the question of whether his "Proposition" is an act at all. What, then, according to Lacan himself, is his "Proposition" lacking, such that it might not deserve the qualification of an act? Whereas the passage to the act may well remain indifferent to what follows since the consequences of the act are precisely what the subject who precipitates himself into the act does not want to know anything about, this cannot be said of the "Proposition". Indeed, the fact that the "Proposition" has met with resistance, rejection even, from the Other, is seen by Lacan as an indicator that the status of the act is retroactively annihilated. Hence, the only answer to the question: "Is it an act?", for Lacan, is: "It depends on its consequences".[44] This centrality of consequences is arguably at the heart of Lacan's revisited theory of the act. In fact, it is by focusing on the consequences that the precarious, ungrounded nature of the act is truly brought to light. If Lacan can claim that "it is in the consequences of what is said that the act of saying is judged,"[45] this is because "what one does with what is said remains open"[46]. What this immediately implies is that the essential feature of the act at stake for Lacan here introduces a peculiar logic of consequences to account for the effect the act has in the situation in which it has been accomplished.

This brings us to what we take to be one of the most important shifts in Lacan's theorizing of the act. One cannot but experience some difficulty in reconciling this emphasis on the consequences of the act, with Lacan's initial insistence that, for a genuine act, there is no "after", no "tomorrow". Is not, which is now thrown into question, in essence, what Lacan regarded as the exact nature of (the passage to) the act, i.e., this dimension of finality, of irrevocability, without appeal to any "tomorrow", this refusal to take into consideration the outcome, the continuation of the act, ultimately, the effacement of that which would have issued from it, the utter indifference with respect to the "after"? These two apparently contradictory aspects of the act are none the less bound together. To make the status of the act dependent upon what follows, to take into account, so to speak, as an integral part of the act, this uncertainty, i.e. the impossibility of predicting its consequences, in short, the dependence of the act on the Other

[44] J. Lacan, "Discours de l'EPF", in *Autres écrits,* p. 262.
[45] J. Lacan, *Encore,* p. 16.
[46] *Ibid*.

that is supposed to ratify it, announces an unheard of heresy with respect to the Lacanian canonical definition of the act that has been modeled on the passage to the act. As is well-known, the latter constitutes, for Lacan, a paradigm of every (successful) act as it is through such a passage to the act that the subject can divorce himself from the Other, definitely tear away, wrench himself from of its power. This also explains why suicide is regarded by Lacan as "the only act that can succeed without misfiring"[47]. But if we take the consequences of the act to properly constitute the structure of the act, does this not indicate a major shift, a displacement, perhaps even a throwing into question of Lacan's classical definition of the act? Is it not rather a break with the Other inherent in the very essence of the act? Is it not a moment of the subject's definitive separation from the Other?

If Lacan is concerned with the failure of his "Proposition" to the point of doubting its status as an act, this is because at the moment of its accomplishment, we cannot know whether we are dealing here with an impotent posturing, ineffective gesticulation, or with a true act capable of producing certain dislocatory effects in the existing situation. Actually, by inscribing the consequences in the very status of the act, Lacan merely indicates that the outcome of the act is uncertain, as indeed, the status of the act depends, ultimately, on the Other, i.e. the effect it has on its law. The Other, thus, unexpectedly re-appears as that instance which is supposed, retroactively, of course, after the event, to ratify the act. Which is but another way of saying that the only authentication of the act as a transformative power follows from its consequences. At the moment at which the question is raised of knowing whether we are dealing here with a futile gesticulation, an empty posture, or with something that is capable of producing certain dislocatory effects in the existing situation, the question of the address to the Other is re-posed with all urgency. The true in an act in Lacan's sense, is then to be measured by its consequences; ultimately it has to be judged by the effects it has on the Other. What distinguishes the act, then, is not simply the subject's separation from the Other, but also, or even more so, the reconfiguration that the act causes in the Other's world, the reconfiguration that may go so far as to the emergence of a new figure of the Other. It is only in this sense that a true act constitutes an interruption, a cut, a discontinuation, in relation to the existing

[47] J. Lacan, *Television*, trans. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 43.

state of affairs, and the founding gesture, the foundation of a new order, a new situation, indeed, the creation of a new discursive universe.

The impression now is that the emphasis has shifted: the act is less a matter of a break, a discontinuity, than one of inaugurating a new series, initiating a "new counting". How are we to understand this paradoxical structure of the act? Discontinuity, a breaking up of the (signifying) chain is undoubtedly essential to the notion of the act. The act, in this respect, designates the fact that an interruption occurred in a situation, yet an interruption which nonetheless points to an "after", to some "tomorrow", whilst signifying a new beginning. How is this possible? Being utterly contingent, i.e. underived, emerging, as it were, *ex nihilo*, the act, at the moment of its accomplishment, *assures nothing*. In effect, the act cannot guarantee that anything at all will follow. What specifies an act as the beginning of a new epoch, however, is precisely the uncertainty of the future to which it is exposed because of its consequences. Or more broadly stated: to the extent that the act breaks the link between the before and the after, to put the act in its place is to put it in a chain, in sequence. Through its consequences, the act is inscribed in a chain, in a metonymic series, to be precise, without being entirely able to master it, to control it. Only if the act succeeds in transforming the series in which it is inscribed, into a new sequence, can it be decided after the fact, that is to say, retroactively, whether we are truly presented here with an act or not. On the one hand, in all genuine act, there is a dimension of "auto": it is by "authorizing" oneself that one can accomplish an act, which is to say that one has to take upon oneself the fact that one finds no support, no guarantee in the Other, the symbolic order. The act, in this regard, is a *causa sui*, a cause of itself, which, of course, is not to be confused with the subject. For the cause that is at work in the act, cannot be attributed to the subject, rather, it must be located in the object, and more specifically, in the cause of desire as that which is withheld from the subject's knowledge. Which is why Lacan evokes a paradoxical structure of the act, since, in the act "the object is active, while the subject is subverted".[48]

On the other hand, though, the act is equally inscribed in the dimension of the retroactivity, in so far as it is precisely to the point that it is on the basis of its consequences that it can be decided whether the act was accomplished or not. To state with Lacan that the destiny, even the validity of the act, is dependent on its con-

[48] J. Lacan, "La méprise du sujet supposé savoir", in *Autres écrits*, p. 332.

sequences, is to state that the "status of the act is retroactive".[49] But what does this dependence of "his/her" act on the consequences that proceed from it, ultimately, on the Other's reception of the act, entail for the subject? What, then, is the role of the subject if the act is essentially transindividual? To this question no other response can be given except one in terms of the infinitization of the subject: in a universe in which the Other does not exist, the subject accedes to certitude solely by virtue of an act, on the condition, however, that he or she assumes the groundlessness of the act itself.[50] In this respect, we can claim that every act worthy of the name is accomplished in the perspective of the last judgement, since to "accomplish an act [...] means to be responsible for the act and its consequences"[51]. A new subject emerges as the effect of the act. This subject, however, is not to be identified simply with the agency which assumes, takes upon itself the responsibility for the always unforeseeable outcome of the act. It would be more appropriate to say that the subject is the insistence of the (in principle at least) interminable series of the consequences brought about through the act.

There is perhaps no better illustration of this paradoxical aspect of the act than the famous dialogue (whether it actually happened or not) between Lenin and Trotsky, on the brink of the October Revolution: "What if we fail?" asks Lenin anxiously. "What if we succeed?", no less anxiously replies Trotsky. Despite the fact that this divergence in questions quite obviously indicates two distinct conceptions of revolution and politics in general, the subject here has to answer for his/its own course of action. Signaling a moment of anxiety preceding every act – for there is no answer in the Other to tell him or her what she or he should do – both of these questions indicate that, regardless to the outcome of the impending revolutionary act, the subject has already situated what is about to be carried out in the perspective of the "last judgement", thereby demonstrating his willingness to assume the unforeseeable consequences that proceed from this act, consequences that, ultimately, remain at the mercy of the Other. But what "Other" is the act aiming at in a universe in which the Other, precisely, does not exist? That is the quandary proper to the act by which the question of the act becomes a quandary for both psychoanalysis and politics. There seems to be no other way out of this impasse but to assert that the act itself creates a new Other to which it is addressed.

[49] Here we draw on J.-A. Miller's elaboration of the act in his seminar "Politique lacanienne", 27. 5. 1998.
[50] J. Lacan, "La méprise du sujet supposé savoir", p. 338.
[51] J.-A. Miller, "Politique lacanienne", 27. 5. 1998.

One might just as well say that the Other at which the act is directed is in essence an effect of the act. It is the act itself that creates that agency that is supposed to be validating it. Being the material support of the act, the subject necessarily fails to notice that the act itself creates the Other, that space namely in which the inventions it brought about will have been inscribed. At once anticipatory and retroactive, the act always presents itself in its paradoxical aspect: it is both ungrounded (at the moment of its occurrence) and foundational (from the viewpoint of its consequences), foundational inasmuch as it calls into existence both the subject as that instance that will assume the consequences that follow from the act, and the Other that will retroactively ratify it as an act. The Other, which is, strictly speaking, *the after-effect of the act itself*.

It is here that the implications of Lacan's novel account of the act become valid for emancipatory politics. One of the paradoxes of the kind of field that politics constitutes, is that it is a field in which this structure of the act remains unsurpassed. Indeed, according to some of its most radical contemporary theorists, emancipatory politics is impossible without the claim that people, taken indistinctly, are capable of thinking[52]. More specifically, what singularizes this unshakeable belief in the capacity of people to think essentially consists in the wager that there is a cause that mobilizes people, in short, a belief that their desire is guided by a cause that, while operating unbeknown to people, i.e. going beyond what they know, nevertheless makes it possible for them, to paraphrase Lacan, to be *"sure in their action"*. While finding no support in the Other, the emancipatory subject is guided surely by some cause unbeknown to it, so much so that it is never in the position to ask: "What is to be done?" Indeed, from the moment one starts to ask what to do?, it is already too late. The desire that was animated by this cause is already fading, thus announcing the return of anxiety, that affect namely that reins in contemporary "democratic materialism".

[52] A. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 142.

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Vanessa Brito

Deleuze and the Minor Modes of Life

Key words: Deleuze, Kant, Lyotard, "major", "minor", emancipation, resistance, ethics

This article proposes to examine the relation between art and the experience of alterity through the typology of modes of existence which Deleuze extracts from literature and cinema. Through the figures of slavery, automatism, petrification, and exhaustion which characterize this typology, it suggests that these experiences of alterity define "minor" modes of existence and thought which are opposed to that volitional autonomy which, for Kant, defines our maturity (majorité). The hypothesis examined here is that the notion of the minor marks a turning point from which the emancipatory vocation of the Enlightenment is replaced by an idea of resistance – understood here, according to Deleuze and Lyotard, as an ethical category designating an experience of the alterity constitutive of the self. From this common point, the article finally seeks to identify what separates the ethics of Deleuze from that of Lyotard, analyzing how Deleuze's typology fits neither a logic of freedom nor that of the gift, making itself unavailable for morality.

Vanessa Brito

Deleuze in nedoletni življenjski načini

Ključne besede: Deleuze, Kant, Lyotard, »nedoletnost«, »zrelost«, emancipacija, odpor, etika

Članek preiskuje razmerje med umetnostjo in izkustvom drugosti na podlagi tipologije eksistenčnih načinov, ki jih Deleuze črpa iz literature in filma. Opirajoč se na figure suženjstva, avtomatizma, okamenjenosti in izčrpanosti, ki prečkajo te tipologije, Deleuze opredeljuje izkustva drugosti kot »nedoletne« eksistenčne in miselne načine, ki so zoperstavljeni avtonomiji volje kot kantovskemu določilu naše zrelosti. Članek se pri tem opira na hipotezo, da je pojem nedoletnosti zaznamoval preobrat, ki je emancipatorično naravnanost razsvetljenstva nadomestil z mišljenjem odpora. Le-tega Deleuze in Lyotard razumeta kot etično kategorijo, ki označuje izkustvo drugosti, konstitivno za sebstvo. Izhajajoč iz te skupne točke, skuša članek na koncu najtančneje opredeliti tisto, kar Deleuzovo etiko ločuje od Lyotardove, pri čemer analizira težave vsakega prizadevanja uvrstiti Deleuzovo tipologijo bodisi v logiko svobode ali pa v logiko daru, zaradi česar je nedostopna za moralo.

Lorenzo Chiesa

The World of Desire: Lacan between Evolutionary Biology and Psychoanalytic Theory

Key words: Lacan, desire, the symbolic order, biological discord

The primary aim of this paper is to analyse the biological foundations of Lacan's notion of desire as expounded in his first two Seminars (1953–1955). These works provide us with his most detailed discussion of the species-specific preconditions that allow *homo sapiens* to speak and establish symbolic pacts among individuals. Despite its irreducibility to the domain of animal instincts, human desire can only be adequately understood against the background of an evolutionary enquiry on the emergence of language, one that problematises both the implicit teleological assumptions of a certain Darwinianism and the logical consistency of an investigation of origins. Drawing on organic and anatomical evidence, Lacan postulates a primordial biological discord between man and his environment, centred on premature birth and a subsequent disorder of the imagination, from which language and the symbolic arise immanently. Desire is seen in this context as coextensive with what Lacan repeatedly refers to as "the world of the symbol". The key argument I intend to put forward is that the symbolic order is a world in the sense that, in always presenting itself to man as a totality, it compensates for the failure of a strictly "natural" relationship between man as animal and his environment. In performing this function, the symbolic also amounts to nothing else than "human nature" *tout-court*. In other words, the symbolic is an exceptional and to a certain extent autonomous *pseudo-environment* that must nevertheless be interpreted by means of biological concepts.

Lorenzo Chiesa

Svet želje: Lacan med evolucijsko biologijo in psihoanalitično teorijo

Ključne besede: Lacan, želja, simbolni red, biološki nesklad

Osnovni cilj članka je analiza biološke podlage Lacanovega pojma želje, kot je bil razdelan v prvih dveh seminarjih (1953–1955). Oba seminarja nam ponujata podrobno razpravo o vrstno specifičnih vnaprejšnjih pogojih, ki omogočajo *homo sapiens*, da govori in vzpostavi simbolni pakt med individui. Kljub temu, da je človeška želja nezvedljiva na področje živalskih nagonov, jo je mogoče ustrezno razumeti le na ozadju evolucijskega raziskovanja pojavitve jezika, ki problematizira tako implicitne teleološke postavke specifičnega darvinizma kakor tudi logično konsistentnost raziskave izvorov. Lacan na podlagi organskih in anatomskih evidenc postulira izvorni biološki nesklad med človekom in njegovim okoljem, osredinjajoč se pri tem na prezgodnje rojstvo in posledično na motnjo v domišljiji kot imanentnem kraju jezika in simbolnega reda. V tem kontekstu je razumljena želja kot koekstenzivna s tem, kar Lacan večkrat imenuje »svet simbolov«. Poglavitni argument članka je, da je simbolni red svet v pomenu, da kompenzira neuspešnost strogo »narav-

nega« odnosa med človekom kot živaljo in njegovim okoljem s tem, da se človeku vedno kaže kot totalnost. Pri opravljanju te funkcije velja simbolno natančno kot »človeška narava« nasploh. Drugače povedano, simbolno je izjemno in do določene mere avtonomno psevdo-okolje, ki pa ga je treba vseeno razlagati s pomočjo bioloških konceptov.

Justin Clemens

The Life of the Party: a brief note on Nietzsche's ethics

Key Words: Friedrich Nietzsche, life, philology, eternal return, genealogy

As a philologist, Nietzsche had to be a materialist – a materialist of letters. If letters are not life, however, they are the indices of its limits. You can't live except at the limit; to get to a limit, you have to reconstruct a genealogy for yourself; once you know where you are, you have the opportunity to lose yourself again, this time effectively. Life is whatever will have greeted you in that loss, the disappearance at the limit.

Justin Clemens

Življenje kot party: kratka notica o Nietzschejevi etiki

Ključne besede: Friedrich Nietzsche, življenje, filologija, večni povratek, genealogija

Kot filolog je moral biti Nietzsche materialist – materialist črk. Črke nimajo življenja, so pa znamenja njegovih mej. Živeti je mogoče samo na meji. Za to, da pridemo do meje, pa moramo sami zase rekonstruirati genealogijo. Ko enkrat vemo, kje smo, imamo možnost, da se znova izgubimo, tokrat zares. Življenje je karkoli, kar nas bo srečalo v tej izgubi – izginotju na meji.

Felix Ensslin

From *Hamartia* to "Nothingness": Tragedy, Comedy and Luther's "*Humilitas*"

Key words: tragedy, comedy, Protestanism, nothingness, nature, humilitas, subjectivity, Martin Luther

Within the broader horizon of asking about the relevance of the Reformation, or more particularly, Martin Luther's thought, this paper first draws on the old debate whether there can be a Christian conception of tragic guilt by reconstructing an argument Giorgio Agamben develops against von Fritz's denial of this possibility. The paper shows that Agamben makes a similar move as Protestantism by claiming that *natura*, which is always already spoiled by *hamartia* (original sin), is objective, *naturaliter* not *personaliter*. But in doing so, he does not draw the proper consequences. He tries to re-inscribe this real-

ization into a post-Thomist anthropology, thus not drawing the most radical conclusions necessary from the objectification of *hamartia* as *natura*, namely that *natura* is always already lacking and is itself in a sense an object as lack. This paper shows how this consequences is, on the contrary, developed in Martin Luther's notion that the "whole of nature" is corrupted and in the ensuing *totus-homo* principle. To draw the delineation of the production of this lack, it is useful to draw on the notion of *kerygma* and its usage in both tragedy (Antigone) and the Pauline New Testament. With it, one can think of a repetition of the constitution of the subject through a "message" or "*kerygma*" that is heteronomous. What is left in and through this repetition can be viewed as "nothingness", as is shown in the example of Martin Luther's translation of the *humilitas* of Mary as "nothingness". This product of *kerygma* is at the same time potentially the cause for another type of subjectivity, a comic subjectivity, yet one which carries the heritage of its tragic constitution with it. As a methodological consequence, this paper suggests that it is not possible to develop proper notions of the subject within contemporary debates without repeating or representing the event of the site of this potentially comic subjectivity within the early thought of Martin Luther.

Felix Ensslin

Od *harmatia* do »niča«: tragedija, komedija in Luthrove »*humilitas*«

Ključne besede: tragedija, komedija, protestantizem, nič, narava, ponižnost, subjektivnost, Martin Luther

V širšem okviru vprašanja o pomenu reformacije, natančneje Luthrove misli, se članek najprej vrne k stari razpravi o tem, ali je možno krščansko razumevanje tragične krivde, pri čemer se opira na argument, ki ga Agamben razvija proti Fritzovem zanikanju takšne možnosti. Članek pokaže, da ravna Agamben podobno kot protestantizem, ko trdi, da je *natura*, ki je vedno že skvarjena s *hamartia* (izvirnim grehom), objektivna, *naturaliter*, ne pa *personaliter*. Vendar pa pri tem ne potegne pravilnih konsekvenc. To udejenanje skuša ponovno vpisati v posttomistično antropologijo, vendar pa ne postavi najjradikalnejšega sklepa, ki je nujen za objektivacijo *hamartije* kot *nature*. Predvsem to, da *natura* vedno že manjka, da je sama na sebi nekakšen objekt kot manko. Članek skuša pokazati, kako je ta posledica razvita v Luthrovem pojmovanju, da je »celota narave« skvarjena, prav tako tudi načelo *totus-homo*. Za zaris produkcije tega manka je koristno opreti se tako na oris pojma *kerygma* in na njegovo rabo tako v tragediji (Antigona) kakor v Pavlovskem Novem testamentu. Na ta način je mogoče misliti ponovitev konstitucije subjekta na podlagi »sporočila« ali *kerigme*, ki je heteronomna. To, kar umanjka v tej ponovitvi in skozi njo, lahko razumemo kot »nič«, tako kot nam to kaže Luthrov prevod Marijine *humilitas* kot »nič«. Ta proizvod *kerigme* je hkrati potencialno vzrok za drug tip subjektivnosti, in sicer za komično subjektivnost, vendar za takšno, ki jo spremlja dediščina njene tragične konstitucije. Članek iz pokazanega izpelje metodološko posledico, da ni mogoče v okviru sodobnih

razprav razviti ustreznih pojmov subjekta, ne da bi ponovili ali predstavili umeščenost te potencialno komične subjektivnosti v zgodnji misli Martina Luthra.

Adrian Johnston

Affective Life between Signifiers and *Jouis-sens*: Lacan's *Senti-ments* and *Affectuations*

Key words: Freud, Lacan, affect, representation, signifier, unconscious

Not only is Lacan's repeatedly advanced assertion that Freud categorically denies the existence of unconscious affects a misleading oversimplification of Freud's various ambivalent discussions of this issue—Lacan's own circumnavigations around the topic of affect are much more nuanced and subtle than either he or many of his commentators often acknowledge. What's more, such complexities aren't confined solely to the tenth seminar of 1962-1963 devoted to a sustained discussion of anxiety, a seminar to which Lacan sometimes appeals in response to criticisms according to which he reduces the psychoanalytic unconscious to the lifeless formal skeleton of pure linguistic-symbolic units alone. Through analyzing Lacan's explorations of the distinction between signifiers and affects (especially in connection with the Freudian concept-term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*) as articulated across the full span of *le Séminaire*, this essay seeks to complicate and problematize the standard picture of Lacan's metapsychology of affective life. In so doing, it strives to clarify hitherto obscure remarks made about affects by Lacan as well as, through this work of clarification, to lay down foundational elements for the construction of a much more accurate and systematic rendition of a Lacanian theory of affects.

Adrian Johnston

Afektivno življenje med označevalci *jouis-sens*: Lacanovi senti-menti in afektuacije

Ključne besede: Freud, Lacan, afekt, predstava,označevalec, nezavedno

Lacanova večkrat ponovljena trditev, da je Freud kategorično zanikal obstoj nezavednih afektov ni samo zavajajoča poenostavitev Freudove mnogostranske in ambivalentne obravnave te teme, pač pa ima Lacanovo lastno kroženje okoli teme afekta veliko več odtenkov in je veliko bolj pretanjeno, kot so to pripravljeni priznati številni njegovi komentatorji. Še več, te kompleksnosti Lacanove obravnave ni mogoče najti edino v 10. Seminarju iz l. 1962–63, posvečenem razpravi o tesnobi. Gre za seminar, v katerem Lacan mestoma odgovarja na kritike, da reducira psihoanalitično nezavedno na neživljenjsko formalno ogrodje čistih jezikovno-simbolnih enot. Članek skuša na podlagi analize Lacanove obravnave razlike med označevalci in afekti (predvsem navezujoč na Freudov pojem *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*), ki je razčlenjena v celotnem Seminarju, zaplesti in pro-

blematizirati običajno podobo Lacanove metapsihologije afektivnega življenja. S tem skuša tudi pojasniti Lacanova stališča o afektih, ki so ostala vse do zdaj nepojasnjena, namen te pojasnitve pa je tudi, da utemelji elemente za natančnejšo in bolj sistematično razlago Lacanove teorije afektov.

Gernot Kamecke

What is it to live? Critical Considerations with Regard to Badiou and Bergson Concerning Life Theory and its Language

Key words: science, language, being, life, materialism, universality, creation subject, truth, aesthetics, Badiou, Bergson

This essay raises a philosophical question concerning the language of Life Theory. It aims to prove the assumption that in contrast to Life Science, which today is connected to neuroscience and biotechnology, a theory that comprehends "life itself" must exceed the computerized mathematics of modern materialistic positivism. For this purpose, the conceptual possibility of such a theory is analysed from the perspective of 20th century philosophy of life. Beginning with Henri Bergson, who developed an immanent concept of life "from within itself" in *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), the analysis turns to Alain Badiou, whose fundamental onto-phenomenology of being is summed up in *Logiques des mondes* (2006) by answering the question "what is it to live". The comparison between the two philosophies exposes the conditions of a Life Theory that encompasses, beyond the results of the digitalizable language translated from the neurons of the human brain, the uncountable and unpredictable aspects of living and being alive. These conditions are: an ethics of universality, a differential philosophy of time, and a concept of independent novelty enforced by the (in)aesthetics of subjective creation.

Gernot Kamecke

Kaj pomeni živeti? Kritična razmišljanja o Badioujevem in Bergsonovem pogledu na teorijo življenja in njeno govorico

Ključne besede: znanost, jezik, bit, življenje, materializem, univerzalnost, subjekt kreacije, resnica, estetika, Badiou, Bergson

Članek zastavlja filozofsko vprašanje o govorici teorije življenja. Dokazati skuša, da mora, v nasprotju z znanostjo o življenju, ki je danes povezana z nevroznanostjo in biotehnologijo, teorija, ki razume »življenje samo«, preseči računalniško podprto matematiko sodobnega materialističnega pozitivizma. To skuša dokazati tako, da analizira konceptualno možnost takšne teorije z gledišča filozofije življenja v 20. stoletju. Začenja z Bergsonom, ki je v *L'evolution créatrice* (1907) razvil imanenten koncept življenja »iz njega samega«, nato pa se obrne k Alainu Badiouju, katerega temeljna ontologija biti je v *Logiques des mondes*

(2006) povzeta v odgovoru na vprašanje »Kaj pomeni živeti?« Primerjava obeh filozofij nam pokaže pogoje teorije življenja, ki vsebuje, onstran rezultatov digitaliziranega jezika, prevedenega iz nevronov človeških možgan, neštevne in nepredikativne aspekte tega, kaj pomeni živeti in biti živ. Ti pogoji so: etika univerzalnosti, diferencialna filozofija časa in koncept neodvisne novosti, ki jo podpira (in)estetika subjektivne kreacije.

Mark De Kesel

A Small, Additonal, Added–on Life Speaking. Remarks on the Vitalism in Giorgio Agamben's Critical Theory

Key Words: Agamben, Foucault, *homo sacer*, life, language, subject

Agamben's thought gives us an interesting set of tools and references to critically analyse the logic of sovereignty haunting even the best intentions of Western biopolitics. As an alternative to the inherently disastrous logic of inclusive exclusion, he puts forward a strong vitalist, ontological way of thinking. This paper is an enquiry into whether that alternative is really valid. As far as his publications allow (since the "*pars construens*" of his *Homo Sacer project* is still to be published), the answer to this question must be negative. A careful reading of the passages on language in both *Homo Sacer I* and *III (Remnants of Auschwitz)*, is illuminating in this regard. This is because the passages on language in which Agamben develops *his* alternative logic (for instance, the ones on bearing witness) do not overcome the logic of sovereignty denounced in the usual – representationalist – way of thinking the biopolitical. Those passages give no adequate answer to the representationalist way of treating the same problems, saying that the logic of sovereignty – of inclusive exclusion – is the logic we have to deal with even to find solutions for the disaster that logic has provoked and is still able to provoke.

Mark De Kesel

O malem dodatku – govoreč o življenju. Pripombe k vitalizmu v kritični teoriji Giorgia Agambena

Ključne besede: Agamben, Foucault, *homo sacer*, življenje, jezik, subjekt

Agambenova misel nam ponuja zanimivo mrežo orodij in referenc za kritično analizo logike suverenosti, ki postavlja pod vprašaj celo najboljše namene zahodne biopolitike. Kot alternativo inherentno rušilni logiki vključujoče izključitve, postavlja v ospredje strogo vitalistični, ontološki način mišljenja. Prispevek raziskuje resnično veljavnost te alternative. Glede na dosedanje objave (saj »*pars construens*« njegovega *Homo sacer* še čaka na objavo), je odgovor na to vprašanje negativen. To nam pokaže pozorno branje odlomkov o jeziku tako v *Homo sacer I* in *III* kakor v *Kar ostaja od Auschwitza*. Kajti odlomki, v katerih Agamben razvija *svojo* alternativno logiko (na primer logiko pričevanja), ne prese-

gajo logike suverenosti, ki je predmet kritike v običajnem – reprezentacijskem – načinu mišljenja biopolitike. Ti odlomki ne ponujajo ustreznega odgovora na reprezentacijski način obravnave istih problemov, saj v njih Agamben zatrjuje, da je logika suverenosti – logika vključujoče izključitve – logika, s katero moramo shajati, da bi našli rešitev za razdejanje, ki ga je ta logika povzročila in ki ga še vedno lahko povzroča.

Ed Pluth

Alain Badiou, Kojève, and the return of the human exception

Key words: Badiou, Kojève, Hegel, democratic materialism, life, human, *Logics of Worlds*

The theory of life that Badiou proposes at the end of *Logics of Worlds* is considered in this paper as a retooling of the old idea that the human is an exception in the order of things. What distinguishes Badiou's account of the human from others though is the fact that it posits the human not as an exception from other animals, nor as an exception to ordinary life, but an exception that is other to the individual as such. The way in which Alexandre Kojève framed the human in his reading of Hegel is used to establish the basic philosophical grammar for Badiou's thinking about the human. What Badiou calls "democratic materialism" – his philosophical nemesis – is also considered from the perspective of that grammar.

Ed Pluth

Alain Badiou, Kojève in vrnitev k človeški izjemi

Ključne besede: Badiou, Kojève, Hegel, demokratični materializem, življenje, človek, *Logika svetov*

Prispevek obravnava teorijo življenja, ki jo razvije Badiou na koncu *Logike svetov* kot novo obliko stare misli, da je človek izjema v redu stvari. Kar ločuje Badioujevo stališče o človeku od drugih misli, je dejstvo, da človeka ne postavlja ne kot izjemo glede na druge živali ne kot izjemo glede na običajno življenje, ampak kot izjemo, ki je drugo od individua kot takega. Način, na katerega je Alexander Kojève razumel človeka v svojem branju Hegla, je uporabljen za zaris temeljne filozofske slovnice za Badioujevo mišljenje človeka. To, kar imenuje Badiou »demokratični materializem« – njegova filozofska *nemesis* – je tako obravnavano z gledišča te slovnice.

Rado Riha

On the Materialism of the Idea

Key words: communism of the Idea, philosophy under condition, pure reason, the ideas of reason, materialism of the Idea

This article aims at clarifying the status of the Idea in two of Badiou's recent works: *Second manifeste pour la philosophie* and *L'hypothèse communiste*. Badiou sets out from the assumption that the operation with the Idea implies an affirmation of the materialism of a philosophy that is under the conditon of four generic procedures. In his attempt to elaborate Badiou's materialism of the Idea, the author does not turn to Plato, as one would expect, but, rather, to Kant's theory of ideas such as it is presented in the Transcendental Dialectics of the first Critique. In so doing, the author seeks to develop Kant's idea in terms of the act. Posing the question of the Idea in terms of the act has at least two advantages: it shows how the pure reason separates itself from the Thing in itself that affects it while allowing for its appearance in the world.

Rado Riha

O materializmu ideje

Ključne besede: komunizem ideje, filozofija pod pogoji, čisti um, ideje uma, materializem ideje

Prispevek se sprašuje o statusu pojma Ideje v Badioujevih delih *Drugi manifest za filozofijo* in *Komunistična hipoteza*. Njegova osnova teza je, da implicira operacija z Idejo afirmacijo materializma v Badioujevi filozofiji pod pogoji štirih miselnih procesov. Elemente za elaboracijo materializma ideje pa prispevek ne išče pri Platonu, ampak v Kantovem nauku o idejah, začrtanem v Transcendentalni Dialektiki njegove prve *Kritike*. Kantovo idejo skuša prispevek razviti kot akt, s katerim se »čisti um« na eni strani loči od »stvari misli«, ki ga aficira, na drugi pa omogoči njeno pojavitev v svetu.

Frank Ruda

Humanism Reconsidered, or: Life Living Life

Keywords: anti-humanism, Badiou, communist action, equality, euman species life, generic humanity, humanism, in-humanism, Marx, political universalism, proletariat, universal production

The article attempts to develop a diagonal towards classical readings of the humanism of early Marx. Traditionally, referring to early Marx meant to either affirm a substantialist conception of human beings or to criticize the same conception by insisting on a break between early and late Marx. By presenting a *lecture badiousienne* of early Marxian texts, the

article shows how an affirmative reference to man as species-being and as part of a 'generic humanity' can be thought without falling back into the substantialist traps of classical humanism. In a systematic and forced (re-)construction of the Marxian idea of the evental character of actual communist action and of universal production, the article shows how Marx's concept of *human species life* can be understood as the central source of a transformed thinking of humanism. Consequently, neither Badiou nor Marx will be rendered as classical humanists or pure anti-humanists, rather the early Marxian thought will be presented as a philosophical armoury of in-humanism that is still of great use for sharpening one's conceptual tools.

Frank Ruda

Ponovni pretres humanizma ali: življenje, ki živi življenje

Ključne besede: antihumanizem, Badiou, komunistična akcija, enakost, življenje človeške vrste, generična človeškost, humanizem, Marx, politični univerzum, proletariat, univerzalna produkcija

Članek razvija diagonalo glede na klasično branje humanizma pri zgodnjem Marxu. Tradicionalno sklicevanje na zgodnjega Marxa bodisi afirmira substancialistično razumevanje človeškega bitja ali pa kritizira prav to razumevanje tako, da vztraja na prelomu med zgodnjim in poznim Marxom. Članek predstavi Badioujevo branje besedil zgodnjega Marxa in pokaže, kako je afirmativno sklicevanje na človeka kot vrsto, ki je del »generične človeškosti« mogoče misliti ne da bi se zopet zapletli v substancialistično past klasičnega humanizma. Na podlagi sistematične in izsiljene (re)konstrukcije Marxove ideje o dogodkovnem značaju dejanske komunistične akcije in univerzalne produkcije članek pokaže, na kakšen način lahko Marxov koncept življenja človeške vrste razumemo kot osrednji vir preoblikovano mišljenje humanizma. V skladu s tem Badiou in Marx nista predstavljena ne kot klasična humanista ne kot čista protihumanista, pač pa je misel zgodnjega Marxa predstavljena kot filozofsko orožje in-humanizma, ki je še vedno uporabno za to, da izostrimo naša konceptualna orodja.

Jelica Šumič-Riha

Infinitization of the Subject

Key words: emancipatory politics, the Other, subject, act

Traditionally, emancipatory politics is a question of knowing which parts of society are capable of counting for something, and which ones are not. Formulating the question of emancipatory politics in terms of existence, more specifically, in terms of "political subjects who are not social groups but rather forms of inscriptions of the count of the uncounted" (Rancière), means acknowledging that the proper place for emancipatory

politics is the very terrain in which the system of domination operates, a system that radical political theorists characterize as a system of placement, identification, or counting. At present, however, this question of counting the uncountable, crucial for emancipatory politics, cannot be raised at all to the extent that globalization means that everybody is always already included, the exclusion of the uncounted is necessarily obscured, indeed, it has become invisible. Beginning with a discussion on an enigmatic remark: "the infinitization of the value of the subject", taken from Lacan's Seminar *The Four Fundamental concepts of Psycho-analysis,* this paper examines a conceptual shift in the articulation of the relation between the subject and the figures of the Other in an epoch of the Other which does not exist. Taking as her point of departure Lacan's theory of the cut, the author shows how, in an era of the "generalized metonymization", only an act constitutes a way out of a discourse that knows no closure.

Jelica Šumič-Riha

Infinitizacija subjekta

Ključne besede: emancipatorna politika, Drugi, subjekt, dejanje

Emancipatorna politika je danes dojeta predvsem v luči vprašanja obstoja delov družbe, ki nekaj štejejo oziroma ki ne štejejo nič. Postaviti vprašanje emancipatorne politike v luči eksistence, natančneje, v luči političnih subjektov, ki po Rancièru ravno niso družbene skupine, marveč forme za vpis štetja nevštetih, pomeni obenem priznati, da je pravo mesto za tako politiko ravno teren sistema dominacije, naj ga imenujejo sistem za distribucijo mest, identifikacje ali štetja. Danes vprašanja štetja nevštetega, ki je ključno za emancipatorno politiko, sploh ni mogoče postaviti, ker je ena prvih posledic globalizacije, da je vsakdo že vnaprej vštet, zaradi česar je vključitev nevštetih bodisi zamračena ali pa nevidna. Izhajajoč iz Lacanove nenavadne opazke o "infinitizaciji subjektove vrednosti" iz *Štirih temeljnih konceptih psihoanalize,* članek v nadaljevanju obravnava premestitev razmerja med subjektom in liki Drugega v obdobju globalizacije. Opirajoč se na Lacanovo teorija zareze, prekinitve, avtorica pokaže, da je lahko v dobi "generalizirane metonimije" zgolj dejanje izhod iz diskurza, ki ne pozna konca.

Jan Völker

Kant and the "Spirit as an Enlivening Principle"

Keywords: Kant, aesthetics, life, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Foucault, infinite judgment

In a famous passage in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant calls the "spirit" an animating or enlivening principle in the mind. Rather than a positive affirmation building on a protobiological background, this definition marks an aesthetic notion of life. As

a first step, the "*Gemüt*" (mind) shows itself to be an ambivalent concept between transcendental philosophy and anthropology. This ambivalence then reoccurs in the notion of life in an aesthetical regard: Life in this sense is the one hand bound to the empirical notion of the powers of life – and thereby to the pre-critical works – but is now turned into something surpassing. Life in aesthetical terms is negatively bound to life in an empirical sense. So is spirit, too: It rather works as a negatively defined principle opening up the given. Life, *Gemüt*, and spirit make up a relational constellation that provides the grounds for the work of aesthetic ideas. By means of aesthetic ideas, spirit opens up the cognitive and thereby enlivens the *Gemüt*. This principle, which is spirit, can then be understood as following Kant's logic of the infinite judgment, because the aesthetic is the opening of the rational to its indeterminate other.

Jan Völker

Kant in "Duh kot oživljajoče načelo"

Ključne besede: Kant, estetika, življenje, *Kritika razsodne moči*, Foucault, neskončna sodba

V slavnem odlomku *Kritike razsodne moči* Kant trdi za »duh«, da je oživljujoče načelo čudi. Ta definicija ni pozitivna trditev, zgrajena na protobiološkem ozadju, pač pa estetskega pojma življenja. V prvem koraku je *Gemüt*, čud, prikazana kot ambivalenten koncept, umeščen med transcendentalno filozofijo in antropologijo. Ta ambivalentnost se ponovi v pojmu življenja z estetskega gledišča: tu je življenje na eni strani povezano z empiričnim pojmom življenjske moči – s tem pa na Kantova predkritična dela – na drugi strani pa je predstavljeno kot nekaj presegajočega. Življenje v estetskem pomenu je negativno navezano na življenje v empiričnem pomenu. Prav tako je tudi z duhom: deluje kot negativno definirano načelo, ki odpira dano. Življenje, *Gemüt* in duh oblikujejo relacijsko konstelacijo, ki je temelj za estetske ideje. S pomočjo estetskih idej duh odpira področje spoznavnega in na ta način oživlja *Gemüt*. Duh kot takšno načelo lahko razumemo na podlagi Kantove logike neskončne sodbe, saj estetika odpira področje racionalnega glede na njegovo nedoločeno drugo.

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1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1988, p. 123.
2. *Cf.* Charles Taylor, "Rationality", in: M. Hollis, S. Lukes (Eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, pp. 87–105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), p. 153.

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