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Towards a Materialism of the Real: The One of the Same

Contemporary materialism can be characterised as a position that satisfies two requirements: first, to think means to think from a position of immanence, and second, to think means to take as one's compass those instances of dysfunction that have a power of interruption. Far from being an exception to the rule, this position is rather a mainstream in contemporary thought. Indeed, the primacy of the multiple over the One and the primacy of the Other over the Same, these being the two crucial consequences of immanentism and orientation to the real, has characterised much of twentieth-century thought. In fact, it can be considered as the fundamental axiom of contemporary materialism worthy of the name, a distinctive sign of its originality and subversiveness. Today, however, something has radically changed insofar as contemporary materialism seems to be oddly incapable of effecting a cut in the dominant discourse, to fracture it. In the present conjuncture, dominated by what Badiou called "democratic materialism", a true ideology of *pas-tout*, not-all, since it affirms that "there are only bodies and languages,"¹ considering contemporary social space as a space of an endless proliferation of identities and alterities, we have been witness to a disturbing inversion: the primacy of the multiple and the Other, which has been a mark of an unsettling novelty, a rupturing with the dominant ideology of the times, appears today to be absorbed into the dominant discourse, a prolongation of this discourse.

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Here, Lacan and Badiou will be our guides. Badiou in particular, since for him only what he calls "materialist dialectic" is capable of countering "democratic materialism": the Two of "democratic materialism", which means all there is are bodies and languages, is supplemented by the Three of "materialist dialectic": truths as exceptions to "what there is". This clearly follows from the fundamental axiom of "materialist dialectic": "There are only bodies and lan-

¹ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Continuum, London, New York 2009, p. 1.

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guages, except that there are truths.”² Yet truths, this impossible-real exception to bodies and languages, must, if we are to maintain a materialist, which is to say an immanentist position, manifest themselves as a new body, which is not, for all that, natural. Put differently, a materialist conception requires that the appearing of the truth depends, like anything else, on the regime of identities and differences organised by the structuring law of a given situation, or, to use Badiou’s terminology in *Logics of Worlds*, the transcendental laws of appearing. In this regard, it could be said that what democratic materialism excludes from the outset is the possibility of an other bodily presence or incorporation in a given world, incorporation made possible through the emergence of the impossible-real. The gap that separates democratic materialism and materialist dialectic thus precisely “the gap between the multiple-body of the human animal and its subjective incorporation.”³

I will argue that if the body is the material support, the place in the world of a becoming truth only insofar as it incorporates to itself, and thus to the world for which it is a body, the trace of the disruptive real, the event, to use Badiou’s own term, the subversive gesture today, from the perspective of “materialist dialectic”, consists precisely in recovering the cutting edge, the divisive power, of the One and the Same precisely in a universe in which the One and the Same appear to have no place.

There are two conflicting approaches regarding the question of the status to be accorded to the One (and the Same) in a limitless, not-all universe. I take the crucial stake in a properly fratricidal war that has set as opponents the former allies sharing a common political past (Maoism) and Lacan as the key theoretical reference, to be none other than the question of the universal and whether it is compatible with any kind of the One and the Same. Second, in transposing this ontological problematic into the political sphere, my aim is to evaluate the contemporary possibility of an emancipatory politics, which would be equal to the challenges of the limitless universe. Of particular interest in the context of the current rehabilitation of the One and the Same is an attempt to radically theorise two discredited concepts from the perspective of the structurally untotisable, inconsistent multiple provided by Badiou, who is considered to be one of

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

the most rigorous theorists of the “multiple-without-one”. Let me start by laying out Badiou’s claim for the ontological priority of the multiple over the one.

The One of the Same

The major claim made by Badiou is, as is well known, that nothing can be said of being qua being prior to the distinction one/multiple. Being is neither one (because for Badiou there is no one, only the count-as-one), nor multiple (because the multiple is only the regime of presentation). Indeed, being is only multiple inasmuch as it presents itself. It is in the after-effect of the count, that is, retroactively, that being is thinkable as multiple. If “the One [...] is not,” as Badiou postulates, if the One only “exists as operation,”⁴ two consequences follow therefrom: first, multiple is “retroactively apprehended as non-one as soon as being-one is a result”⁵; second, the fictive being of the One itself is but an after-effect of the operation of counting. Starting with the 1990s, however, we have been witness to a curious pivoting of perspectives in Badiou, a change of coordinates in which one sees a new status of the One re-elaborated. While the key point of reference remains the primacy of the multiple over the One, in his more recent work Badiou sets out to grasp the One, not as an effect of the operation, the count-as-one, but as a product of a generic truth-procedure – and precisely in a domain in which one would least expect it, namely in politics, which is, by definition, the realm of the multiple. We can find an understanding of the specifically political consequences of this re-elaboration of the One in Badiou’s discussion of the notion of equality in his book *Conditions*.

Equality, in his view, is the only philosophically pertinent concept for contemporary theorising on politics. This privilege of equality is sketched out by its contrast with liberty and fraternity. Unlike these two terms nowadays contaminated by liberalism or communitarianism, respectively, only the concept of equality provides a sufficient force of rupture due precisely, in the words of Badiou, to “its abstraction.” It is only by being subtracted from all communal predicates as well as from the juridical statuses – ultimately, by being stripped of all of its contents, as an “emptiness of the same”, to use Badiou’s expres-

⁴ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, London, New York, 2006, p. 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

sion – that equality is “immediately prescriptive.”⁶ Badiou is explicit on this point. What equality seeks to promote is a radical but entirely abstract logic of the Same. Equality is its own proper end. Although an egalitarian prescription neither adds something to nor subtracts from a given situation, it nevertheless succeeds in producing always the same result. Equality generates equality, as it were. My claim is that equality, to the extent that it produces always the same effects in a given situation, is an instance of the real in politics.

How are we to understand this realism of the Same that breaks both with the communitarian as well as with the juridical conception of sameness or, better still, that breaks with the imaginary similarity and the symbolic nomination? What then is the status of the same that is beyond all similarity and difference? The political challenge of the real sameness can be expressed in Badiou’s terms as the challenge of finding a practice which brings out some sameness that is “outside the dialectics of the same and the Other” since we are dealing here with “the same without the other.”⁷

The promotion of the real sameness has some radical implications for a contemporary theorisation of the collective in the political realm. Obviously, not just any form of collective is compatible with the “authority of the Same,” to borrow Badiou’s term. Actually, the only collective that is compatible with the same is one in which no singularity is placed as an exception, in which each singularity is “the same as any other” and is thus compatible with the real sameness. This equality without identity or predicate, the sameness of pure or mere singularities, is what Badiou terms the “communism of singularities.”⁸ In this regard, “communism of singularities,” is, strictly speaking, not a name of any community. It would be more appropriate perhaps to say that it is an impossible name or a name of that which, in politics, cannot be named: community. For there to be an emancipatory politics community must remain unnameable. Communism is therefore a generic name for the very genericity in politics. Or, better perhaps, communism is a generic name for the impossible. That is to say, a name for a paradoxical multiplicity whose members are joined by what dis-

⁶ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Continuum, London, New York 2008, p. 247.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

joins them. A community of pure singularities is thus a community of a radical non-commonality.

However, and this is crucial, the unbinding of the social bond, in a given situation, which brings about the transformation of a consistent or closed multiplicity into an inconsistent multiplicity, an open, not-all multiplicity, is not something that one discovers, something that is there – only invisible. It rather results from an always inventive, inimitable way of abstracting from the statist count. Which means that there is no formula for the production of the Same in the field of politics. This is because for the genericity of singularities to be brought to light a special operation is necessary, one which brings out the structural, irreducible gap between the existing principle of counting: the statist count, which count only parts or subsets, and the egalitarian count which makes each and every singularity count as one. Situated in a specific situation, such an egalitarian count is necessarily a political innovation.

This, I think, is the core of Badiou's claim that emancipatory politics seeks to present a given situation without its representation, that is, without its state. And only from such a perspective can Badiou state that politics seeks to expose the infinity of a given situation, that is, to expose the situation "as virtually subtracted from the necessary existence of the state."⁹ The politics of emancipation is therefore a matter of creating, producing, an impossible zero degree, as it were, when the necessity of the meta-structure, the state of the situation, is revealed to be entirely contingent. It is precisely at this point that there emerges an irresolvable differend, to use Lyotard's term, between two theoreticians of the "communism of singularities," Badiou and Agamben.

Paul versus Paul

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Without entering into this debate, I would simply like to note that by introducing a new third division between "being under law" and "being under grace," Paul, as Badiou and Agamben read him, with one gesture, so to speak, equates and at the same time invalidates both fundamental partitions of his time: the division between Jews and non-Jews, on the one hand, and the division sepa-

⁹ Alain Badiou, "Politics as Truth Procedure" in: *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker, Verso, London, New York 2006, p.

rating free men from slaves, on the other. The previous distinctions are namely displaced by a new division insofar as the latter does not address the subject as a member of a particular community but rather situates him or her at a distance with respect to any communal belonging. As a result, this division to the second power, the division of divisions, entails a radical transformation on both the individual and collective levels.

For Badiou, the lesson to be drawn from Paul is that this ultimate indistinction between the Jew and non-Jew results from the emergence of an ultra-one, an unsituable and therefore disruptive supplement, which he calls the event, whose very occurrence undermines or invalidates the law of the situation. What is crucial for Badiou is a paradoxical feature of the evental One. For the evental One is, by definition, *divisive*. It is One that divides into two – a self-referential division – since it necessarily involves a decision as to the actual taking place of the event and the consequences that such a ratification of its taking place impose on the inhabitants of that situation, that is, their commitment as subjects. It is a divisive One, yet it is precisely through its capacity to divide that it generates a “for all”, the universal. It is because the occurrence of an event is undecidable from the standpoint of the law of the situation that an event can summon no-one in particular. Or, to quote Badiou, the evental One “is that which inscribes no difference in the subjects to which it addresses itself.”¹⁰ This means that it summons anyone, which means everyone. In the words of Badiou, “unless addressed to all, the One crumbles and disappears.”

Everything, however, depends on how we understand the universal. The dispute between Badiou and Agamben is a dispute about the status to be accorded to the universal in the perspective of the not-all. For Badiou – this is my claim – the question of universality is the question of the One and the Same. The maxim of universality that is rooted in an event is that “the sign of the One is the ‘for all’, or the ‘without exception’.”¹¹ Put simply, the One is one only if it is “for all”. The universal, according to Badiou, is based on the capacity of the One not to totalise, to unite, but, rather, to divide. It is the power of division of the One, of the evental One, which creates the universality. It is in this sense that the evental

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, p. 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

One creates the “for all”. It is not addressed to some pre-given particular multiplicity, but rather to a paradoxical multiplicity that is, as such, still indiscernible.

It is not difficult to recognise in this indiscernible multiplicity Badiou’s peculiar formulation of the not-all, however with one essential specification: the not-all multiplicity is not discovered, rather it is produced. Indeed, it is a multiplicity that never ceases to generate an elusive, insituable excess. The Badiouian not-all is characterised as “a multiplicity in excess of itself.”¹² For the eventual One to be truly universal, the “for all” to which it is addressed, the “for all” it summons, first needs to be produced. This is because this instance of the address does not exist as yet, or, more precisely, it only exists as caught up in the existing communal particularities or partitions, that is to say, as a multiplicity that is precisely not susceptible to being “for all”, a multiplicity of individuals who are rather open only to that which is specifically destined to them as members of a particular community determined by particular predicates. In other words, it is not enough to proclaim that a truth is for all since this “for all” must manifest itself as such, that is to say, it has to be materialised, incorporated into a body, which Badiou will later call the “transhuman body of a truth.”

The radical novelty of Badiou’s account of Pauline universalism can be seen precisely in his insistence that the “for all” is articulated to the not-all, indeed, the “for all” and the “not-all” are not incompatible. Hence, if, the “for all” itself requires the “not-all” as its presupposition, this is because the same operation that makes the de-totalisation possible, that is to say, that makes it possible for a multiplicity to exceed its own limits, also constitutes the verification of the universal. The eventual One, insofar as it is for all, necessarily involves the endless production of an insituable excess, a process of ceaselessly exceeding, of surpassing itself of a generic multiplicity. But to the extent that it necessarily implies the not-all, the One that is “for all” must be situated from the perspective of the infinite. The One that is articulated with the “for all” is the One in the infinite. While every truth procedure consists in infinitely deploying a purely generic multiplicity that necessarily collapses differences, this does not entail a destruction or annihilation of differences precisely because these fictitious beings, these opinions, customs, differences, are that to which universality is addressed.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

It is precisely at this point where one would expect that Agamben would recognise the affinity between his and Badiou's position that he completely misreads Badiou's point regarding the universal. In Agamben's reading, what Paul seeks is to show how a new division, i.e. *sarx/pneuma*, not only does not found any universalism, but rather renders any attempt at universalism impossible. Indeed, it is a stratagem destined to expose, in any pre-given All, the presence of an irreducible remainder that turns this All into a not-all. It is this new division that brings out a residue, a remnant, the non-non-Jew, as Agamben calls it, thereby showing that the existing apparatus of divisions (Jew/non-Jew, free/slave, male/female) cannot exhaust the whole of the subject. This "remnant", this measureless, uncountable, elusive remainder, does not separate the Jew from the non-Jew. Rather, it appears as a wedge that separates the Jew from himself or herself and the non-Jew from himself or herself, preventing them from coinciding with themselves, ultimately from "being themselves." The subject, according to Paul, as Agamben reads him, is nothing other than his or her inadequacy to himself or herself, the fact that he or she can be what he or she is only through a minimal difference towards himself or herself.

What is decisive here, according to Agamben, is that Paul's division, by introducing a remnant into the law's overall division of the people, produces the effect that "Jews and non-Jews are constitutively not all."¹³ By producing through his division of divisions an ineliminable remnant, the Agambenian Paul did not found universalism but rather disclosed the not-all, an untotalsable multiplicity of singularities. The fundamental lesson to be drawn from Paul, according to Agamben, is therefore that there only exists the remnant as the not-all. Paul's political legacy thus consists in his discovering the concept of the remnant, which is "that which can never coincide with itself, as all or as part, that which infinitely remains or resists in each division."¹⁴ As an instance which through its appearance in any totality brings about its collapse, its transformation into a not-all, the indivisible remainder is, for Agamben, a stand-in for a true political subject, which, as such, does not exist, yet it exists, precisely as an ineliminable residue, in every subset or multiplicity produced through the law.

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains. A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2005, p. 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

As I shall show in the second part of my essay, this double, highly uncomfortable position – i.e. to be both the incarnation of the divided subject and, as such, an irreducible objectal moment, the object *a*, capable of dividing others, the socio-political Other, thus preventing the constitution of any totality, any All, whatsoever – is precisely the position that some Lacanian Maoists assign to the bearers of the name “Jew”. What then is produced through Paul’s gesture of “the division of divisions”? For Badiou, it is a universal formula for the division of the subject, a formula that “produces a Sameness and an Equality.”¹⁵ This can only be achieved if some inhabitants of a given situation, as a result of the evental rupture, commit themselves, to quote Badiou, to the “faithful construction of an infinite generic multiple.” This being precisely the way in which the One of the Same presents itself in a situation shattered by the event.

With a slight, almost imperceptible shift of emphasis, Agamben comes to a different if not contrary conclusion. Paul, according to Agamben, “makes Jews and non-Jews, inside and outside the law, indistinguishable from each other by introducing a remnant.”¹⁶ The division of divisions brings out a bit of the real, an irreducible remainder, a sort of Pauline object *a*, which is nothing other than a materialisation of the impossibility of the subject coinciding with itself at either the individual or collective level.

The Aleph of the Emancipatory Politics

This brings us to the central issue that divides Badiou and Agamben: the articulation between the not-all and the universal. While both Badiou and Agamben tie the politics of emancipation to the not-all as its point of departure, in Agamben’s case the not-all remains the unsurpassable horizon for politics. Which is why Agamben contents himself with bringing out (as a result of Paul’s “division of divisions”) a production of a remnant as that object in the subject that prevents him or her from coinciding with himself or herself. But this also explains why, according to Agamben, an inconsistent multiplicity of singularities cannot actualise itself as a community. In this respect, I will argue, community, for Agamben, is, in Lacan’s vocabulary, the real, that is, impossible. Agamben only understands the remnant in terms of the not-all, incomplete-

¹⁵ *Saint Paul*, p. 109.

¹⁶ *The Time That Remains*, p. 113.

ness, thus showing that there is no place for the universal or for the same. This is what distinguishes Badiou from Agamben. In contrast to this, Badiou seeks to show that the not-all is no obstacle for the universal. On condition, however, that we invent a way of counting the uncountable, in short, a way of counting the infinite. Badiou's fundamental claim, i.e. that "for all" can and must be situated in the infinite, thus signals an unbridgeable gap between a theory of the production of the remnant and a theory of the production of the Same.

For Badiou, unlike Agamben, it is not enough to say that an emancipatory politics aims at bringing out an inconsistent multiplicity there where the law of the situation is supposed to create a consistent one. The point here is rather to show that the only way in which the One of the Same, the real One of the event, can manifest itself in a given situation is through the creation of a generic multiplicity as a not-all body of the One of the Same. In Badiou's words, politics is the single truth procedure that is not only generic in its result, but also in "the local composition of its subject" What this means is simply that "all are virtual militants"¹⁷ of the truth procedure, which is to say that it is "immediately universalising" on condition that the infinity of the situation is exposed. The famous fidelity to the event is therefore nothing other than an invention of the consequences of the event that prove to be as infinite as the situation itself. This is why the "for all" that the evental One inaugurates remains necessarily not-all, that is, incompletable or open. It is precisely in this context that the axiomatisation of equality takes on its full value. What characterises politics as a truth procedure is its capacity to summon this infinity of the situation "as subjective universality."

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What distinguishes an emancipatory politics is precisely its ability to "treat the infinite as such according to the principle of the same, the egalitarian principle."¹⁸ In other words, by assigning to the egalitarian prescription the function of the counting-as-one each and every singularity that composes the existing situation, Badiou seeks to show that, just as in mathematics, in politics, too, the operation of transfiniteisation can be set in motion. At this point we encounter an unexpected twist. Indeed, what singularises the political procedure is the fact that it proceeds from the infinite to the 1. Every emancipatory politics pro-

¹⁷ "Politics as Truth Procedure", p. 142.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

ceeds from the infinite of a given situation but its aim is to “produce the same” or, in Badiou’s words, “to count as one that which is not even counted is what is at stake in every genuinely political thought, every prescription that summons the collective as such. The 1 is the numericality of the same, and to produce the same is what an emancipatory political procedure is capable of.”¹⁹

Thus, a politics of emancipation is capable of producing the same, or more precisely, of producing the One because it sets out to work, or rather, to count in the gap opened up between the statist count and its own, in order to produce for a given situation the point of its impossible-real. This real that is “in accordance with an egalitarian maxim”²⁰ is precisely what I have termed the One of the Same. A politics of emancipation, I would argue, is possible only if it is able to produce, in a given situation, the One of the Same, namely, that operator that makes it possible to distort “every non-egalitarian claim,” as Badiou maintains, by counting each one universally as one. One of the paradoxes of politics as a generic procedure that concerns the infinite at all levels (the situation, the state of the situation, the post-evental change in a given situation) is certainly the paradox that the “aleph of emancipation” – that is, the number that is capable of counting the infinity of generic singularities – is the One. The 1, then, is the paradoxical transfinite number of politics.

However, the status of what I have termed the “aleph of emancipation” is far from univocal. This elaboration of the One in the not-all universe enables us to account for, *inter alia*, the stakes of an ongoing theoretico-political quarrel about communal predicates and the status of the name in the field of politics. Indeed, today, contemporary left-wing thought is helplessly divided by the question of how to conceive of that One of the Same. Lacan’s elaboration of the status of the One of the Same can help us clarify the crucial stake in this quarrel.

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The Real of the Same

Lacan raised the thorny question of the One of the Same in his elaboration of the repetition of jouissance since, for him, repetition always aims at jouissance. Jouissance can only be attained through the repetition of a marking that the first

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

emergence of *jouissance* had left on the body. However, the mere fact of repetition evokes a loss: “what is repeated cannot be anything other [...] than a loss.” More precisely, “it is in the place of this loss introduced by repetition that we see the function of the lost object emerge, of what I am calling the *a*.”²¹ Crucial here is that this object, the object *a* or surplus-enjoyment, is a retroactive effect of repetition itself. Although it is not a part of the chain of signifiers that repeat themselves, it attains a special place that Lacan termed the place of “sameness”. It is precisely at this level that Lacan articulates the Same with the One.

There are namely two figures of the One. Indeed, according to Lacan, the One of the Same is not to be confused with the One which repeats itself. The One that repeats itself is the One of the unary trait, in short, the One of identification that makes it possible for the subject to be counted. From this symbolic One we must distinguish another One: the one that is only produced once the subject is situated, not at the level of the signifying chain, but at the level of the real or *jouissance*. The difference between these two Ones can be explained as follows: The identification with the unary trait reduces the difference to a trait that allows for the subject to be classified, to receive its place in the symbolic. The One of the Same, by contrast, stands for a pure difference as such, or, in Lacan’s words, it stands for “the sameness of difference.”²²

What is new in Lacan’s initial conception of the same is that it is separated from the subject since it refers primarily to the body: “The difference between the same and the other is based on the fact that the same must be materially the same. The notion of the matter grounds the same.”²³ In a sense, the One of the Same is just like a trace, it is “memorial” in essence, a letter that marks a contingent encounter between the body and the signifier. The same of the difference is for that reason the One beyond all differences, beyond all particularities. Ultimately, the One of the Same only denotes that an entirely contingent encounter has taken place. The One of the Same thus inscribes in language that which language cannot say, namely, the incarnation of a traumatic signifier. It denotes, more specifically, the way in which the signifiers that determine the subject are

²¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London 2007, pp. 46, 48.

²² Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre XIX, ... ou pire*, Seuil, Paris 2011, p. 165.

²³ Jacques Lacan, “L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile a mourre”, unpublished seminar (14th of December 1978).

concretely incarnated for this particular subject, before any meaning is assigned to them. With respect to the One of the unary trait, the One of the same is in a radical sense the Other. The One of the Same is that which is the most “proper” to me, the point of my singularity, and, at the same time, that which signals the presence of the Other as such, the presence of the *inhuman* in me.

Obviously, everything depends on whether it is possible to intervene in this One of the Same, to move it, to displace it from its place, and thus to make repetition impossible. Far from seeking to pin the subject to this traumatic signifier, psychoanalysis seeks to vacillate this One of the Same, to detach him or her from repetition and thus to open the subject to contingency, to encounter. In so doing it also makes it possible for the subject, at the end of the analysis, to provide a new response to the real of the Same.

What consequences can be drawn from Lacan’s conception of the One of the Same for a contemporary theorisation of politics? Psychoanalysis and the politics of emancipation share the assumption that the One of the Same is constitutive of the becoming of a subject. The One of the Same is not pre-given. Rather, it is linked to some traumatic encounter or event that always introduces something new insofar as, however minimally, it breaks with what came before. And they both proceed to its production, or, more precisely, its extraction by means of the reconstruction of the trace, of the marking left by some traumatic event, traumatic in the sense that by remaining an inassimilable surplus in a given situation it disrupts the existing order, thereby drawing a line of demarcation between “before” and “after”.

If psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics share the One of the Same as a common point of departure, they diverge as to their respective goals. At first glance, nothing appears to be more foreign to psychoanalysis than a transformative emancipatory politics. Psychoanalysis seeks to circumscribe the One of the Same in order to neutralise it. Its goal is to make it possible for the subject to separate himself or herself from this One and thus to prevent its repetition. In contrast to this procedure, emancipatory politics, by setting in motion an endless verification of the egalitarian prescription, seeks to prevent the One of the Same from not stopping being written. For emancipatory politics, there is the universal, the “for all”, only to the extent that the One of the Same does not stop writing itself.

The One of the Same, from this perspective, signifies the opening up of a new space within a given situation for the inscription of the consequences of a contingently produced disruption, the working out of the possibilities opened up by the emergence of the impossible within the existing situation. The One of the Same, in this respect, indicates the possibility of new responses to the radical rupture brought about by the occurrence of the event in a given situation. The One of the Same thus opens up a space for the subjectivation of the event in the infinite. It is in this sense that the constitution of a new collective, which Badiou termed a “communism of singularities,” or a “transhuman body of a truth,” constitutes, in a given situation, a materialised verification of the “eternal” imperative of politics, namely, equality.

While both emancipatory politics and psychoanalysis take what could be termed the real of the Same as their compass, psychoanalysis seeks to separate out the One of the Same, an operation that proceeds one by one, as there is no such thing as a generalised One of the Same, a One of the Same that would be “for all”. To repeat once more: the One of the Same is a singularised Same, the One of the Same that supports the singularity of a particular speaking subject. This is why the principles that govern the “extraction” of this Same in psychoanalysis cannot provide us with any guidelines for action at the collective level. But this also means that, for psychoanalysis, the not-all is the unsurpassable horizon of our time. This entails that from the perspective of psychoanalysis the always singularised One of the Same is what makes the transfinite in the domain of the collective impossible.

This insistence on the unsurpassable horizon of the not-all requires that we re-trace a dividing line between contemporary theorists of the One and the Same: partisans of the universal and militants of the exception, incarnated in the name “Jew”. For the latter, the One of the Same is a name that precludes the for-all, a name which cannot be universalised.

For contemporary “universalists”, emancipatory politics, rather than being disarmed when faced with the not-all, has found a way to handle the structural deadlocks of the not-all – by means of the axiomatisation of equality. There are difficulties with this idea, difficulties that concern the exact location of the One of the Same in politics. The One of the Same marks the real cause of the transformation of a given situation in signifying, in Lacan’s words, “the cause

as real.” The One of the Same, just like the Freudian unconscious, is something of the order of the non-realised. Situated in the gap opened by the event, insofar as it disappears in its appearance, that is to say, between the absent cause and that which it affects, it would remain indeterminate unless we introduce the rigorous logic of the production of consequences.

From a logical point of view, the One of the Same must certainly be situated at the beginning. However, insofar as an event’s entire being consists in disappearance, the only trace left behind by the event is the affirmation of its actually taking place in what Badiou calls “the evental statement,” which is for that reason also “the inaugural materiality for any universal singularity.”²⁴ In this regard, the expression the One of the Same formalises, to use a term dear to Badiou, the fundamental connection between universality and singularity. Logically situated at the beginning, the One of the Same is only constructed – by means of a retroactive anticipation, that is, in the future anterior – at the end of the anticipated completion of the infinite generic procedure.

For contemporary theorists of the exception, by contrast, the One of the Same, which for them is incarnated in some irreducible particularity, the “name Jew”, to be precise, entails the exclusion of the for-all. In his highly controversial book, *Les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique*,²⁵ Milner states that politics is constitutively non-contemporaneous with the modern limitless universe of capitalism and science. Invented in the closed world of the Greeks, politics is a regime of the all, of the universal. As such, it is doomed to fail when it tries to solve the problems generated by the paradoxes of the not-all, that is, the constitutive inexistence of a limit or an exception that would close the not-all. Politics, in a word, is structurally heterogeneous to the not-all of contemporary society conceived as an inconsistent, unlimited all. This necessarily provokes violent collisions between society as the order of the limitless not-all, and politics as the order of the all, the universal. The “Jewish problem” is situated, according to Milner, at the very point of collision between the all and the non-all. It is important to see to which problem the introduction of the name “Jew” is

²⁴ Alain Badiou, “Eight Theses on the Universal” in: *Theoretical Writings*, R. Brassier and A. Toscano (eds. and trans.), Continuum, London, New York 2004, p. 147.

²⁵ Jean-Claude Milner, *Les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique*, Editions Verdier, Paris 2003.

proposed as a solution. In what follows, I will argue that such unprovoked, sudden emergence of the name “Jew” as a central topic of theoretical discussion in France today in which one finds the former Maoists engaged, whether Jews or not (Benny Levy, J.-C. Milner, and F. Regnault, to name but a few, yet the most prominent), we have to recognise a symptom of the loss of belief in transformative revolutionary politics.

The Name of the Subject

Both parties involved in a fratricidal war between “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” Maoists concede that the crucial stake today is none other than the status of the universal in politics. It should be noted, however, that the decisive issue for this discussion is not simply to be either for or against universalism. The decisive issue in this quarrel rather concerns the status of the One. More precisely, this dispute revolves around the following question: is there, in the collective domain, “the name which is above every name,” and if there is such a name, can it be subjectified and be “for all” at the same time? One of the fundamental lessons of emancipatory politics is that there are names that are divisive and cannot be borne otherwise than by being subjectified, e.g. to be a Communist, a worker, an immigrant, a woman, a gay, etc. “Jewish” Maoists make at this point an additional, yet crucial distinction. Beside these names, which could be subjectified or not (for instance, the term worker designates both a social category and a political subject), there is a name-exception, a name that cannot not be subjectified: the name “Jew”. Whether one calls oneself “Jew” or is called “Jew” by others, the “Jew”, according to Milner, is always a way of saying “I”.

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Milner’s starting point is that there is some signifier in the real, the name “Jew”. That is to say, the subject has no choice in the matter – it was assigned or dealt out to him or her. Milner proposes grasping this moment of the real in the name “Jew” as the condition for the subjectivation. The name “Jew” is not a name one can choose or not. Rather, it is a name that, in a sense, one cannot get rid of, even if one wants to. It is already there, in the real. The question here is only whether a speaking being-Jew is willing to affirm it as a subject. This is why the name “Jew”, which could be presented as an accident, a contingency, is endowed with a particular signification for the speaking-being Jew. To become a subject requires that a speaking being-Jew turns this accidental trait, this peculiarity, which has been assigned to him or her as his or her affliction, into a

reason and justification for his or her actions that can have consequences that go well beyond his or her individuality.

From the perspective of the real in the name “Jew”, there are two distinctions that must be made between the name “Jew” and all the other names: first, a distinction between a subjectifying and a predicative use of the name, and, second, and more importantly, a line of separation must be drawn within the subjectifying use of the name itself: between those names on which one can give up or not, and the one name-exception, the name “Jew”, on which, in some radical sense, one is not allowed to give up. This is what distinguishes the “name Jew” from all other names of the subject.

According to Regnault, one can be Catholic or Communist, just as one can be French or man or woman. That is, one can be Communist or German in terms of mere belonging to some community. But one can also be Catholic, Communist, or whatever, in such a way that being Catholic, Communist, or whatever involves the subject’s decision not to give up on the name thus chosen, regardless of the price to be paid for it. The imperative “Do not give up on your name of the subject!” indicates that the name has befallen the subject, that it has been assigned to the subject as his or her affliction. But precisely for that reason the name itself has become the decisive issue for the subject. The whole point is how to subjectify “the real that assigns him his condition,”²⁶ to paraphrase Lacan, that is, how to turn this real, which has been assigned to a speaking being-Jew as his or her affliction, into the subject’s name, a name of the subject.

The name “Jew” can therefore be considered to be one of the subject’s names. But what makes this name incomparable to any other name of the subject, what makes it literally “the name which is above every name,” results, paradoxically, according to Regnault, from the intervention of emancipatory politics, because this politics does not believe in the real of any name since it aims at the universal, at the “for all”. Politics, according to Regnault, requires that its militants renounce their names, in particular the name “Jew”, to pass in silence this name in the name of some abstract, universal principles. Politics, in short,

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation: ‘Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure’” in: *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London 2006, p. 559.

presents itself as a space in which “the choice of this name [the name “Jew”] was set aside. As a result, all choices of this kind or the name as such have become whatever.”²⁷ Put simply, for politics, the price to be paid for the fact that any name can be subjectified, that is, that it can become the name of the political subject, the name “for all”, an empty name that anyone can say as “I”, is to make a sacrifice of one name: the name “Jew”, the name which incarnates the absolute particularity, that which is, by definition, non-universalisable, a name which is certainly not “for all”. One could then say that it is the sacrifice of the name “Jew” that opens up the space for the political subjectivation.

This is precisely the reason why the name “Jew” and politics, not just any politics, but precisely the only politics that counts for a Lacanian Maoist, emancipatory politics, are radically incompatible. According to Regnault, politics is based on the assumption, an illusory assumption, in his view, that it is possible to displace, to arbitrarily substitute, the names of the subject – which are those names that keep returning to the same place, names that refuse to be silent. In the last instance, for politics, the name is not real, there is nothing real in the name. The name, in other words, is a mere semblant.

Unlike psychoanalysis, which is supposed to defend the real of the name, politics confronts the speaking being-Jew with an impossible dilemma, a forced choice between politics, “the sole thing that is sacred in their eyes” and the duty “to renew the rights of [...] the name passed over in silence.”²⁸ But a politics that imposes on the subject the choice of either emancipatory politics or saving the name necessarily discredits itself, in Regnault’s view. Hence, every politics that requires that the subject sacrifice, renounce his or her name of the subject, in particular this name, is not worthy of the name. And conversely, what is worthy of being saved is only a politics that enables us to “hear the name in the name of which we speak or remain silent.”²⁹

It is my claim that if the question of the name is so acute in politics today, this is because it concerns the status of the One of the Same in politics. The issue here, of course, is not the question of whether politics allows for some names to be

²⁷ François Regnault, *Notre objet a*, Verdier, Paris 2003, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

“for ever”, “eternal”, but rather whether this “name for ever”, this eternal name is a name of some community that already exists in reality, or, on the contrary, a name of the political subject which is still to come. To repeat once more, the question here is about the modality of subjectifying this One that returns to the same place: Is the One that presents itself to the subject as an indelible givenness or the One that is to be produced, the One, in a word, that results from practicing an egalitarian prescription in a given situation and which therefore traverses all communal nominations?

For Badiou, who on this point refers explicitly to Paul’s postulation of Christ as “the name which is above every name,” the universality in politics, “the production of the Same,” implies an indifference to all worldly nominations, as all names, our own included, should be held to be nothing but “nicknames”, accidentally attached to our body. At the same time, however, he insists that the subject of a truth always lays claim to such “names which are above every name.” Or, more explicitly:

All true names are “above every name”. They let themselves be inflected and declared, just as mathematical symbolism does, in every language, according to every custom, and through the traversal of all differences. Every name from which a truth proceeds is a name from before the Tower of Babel. But it has to circulate in the tower.³⁰

Thus, what is at issue in the controversy between “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” Maoists is nothing other than the question of whether the signifier “Jew” is to be considered as an exceptional signifier, deserving to be given “some kind of nominal sacralization,” as Badiou puts it. For “non-Jewish” Maoists the answer is clear: nobody can monopolise “the name which is above every name.” Which means that no name – the name “Jew” being no exception – is chosen in advance, predestined, so to speak, to play the role of “the name which is above every name.”

Rejecting all the inegalitarian characteristics that mark the uses of the signifier “Jew” in contemporary polemics, Badiou insists that the main objective of such a “monopoly over the word ‘Jew’” is “to eradicate for ever the very possibility

³⁰ *Saint Paul*, p. 110.

of political universalism, of an equality of all particularist predicates, of a politics practiced by people who are here, irrespective of their origin.”³¹ Against this “complete abandon of emancipatory and revolutionary politics,”³² Badiou proposes to examine the possibility of assigning a universal dimension to this word “Jew”. Indeed, he goes so far as to identify himself, “*le juif, c’est moi*”, with “those disparate Jews, those entirely singular Jews [...] who want the universality of what they create to exceed the particularity that they also lay claim to.”³³ What he valorises instead is the way in which these disparate Jews (from the apostle Paul to Trotsky, including Spinoza, Marx, and Freud), by reducing “all communitarian particularities to equality,” that is, by rupturing with Jewish communitarianism, succeeded in refounding universalism – in always particular, specific circumstance. The key point, in this view, is how, by breaking with the name “Jew”, they have provided a new name that is above other names, a name that is precisely “for all”, a name that invalidates all communitarian predicates.

From such a perspective, the marking of a speaking being by some indelible One, the One of the Same, is constitutive of the becoming of a subject only to the extent that it passes what Badiou calls “a single limit-point,” that of the “for all”. In a word, the true value of the real One resides in its compatibility with universalism. In this respect, taken precisely in a Lacanian sense, the name of the subject, the subject’s proper name, incomparable to any other name, (be it the name “Jew” or whatever), instead of being an obstacle to contemporary universalism, represents, in Badiou’s words, “the only real that can be opposed to the dictatorship of predicates.”³⁴

It is through their inherent power of dissolution of any communitarian predicate that the real names, the names of the subject, constitute a paving stone for a contemporary universalism. This is why Badiou, in his characteristic provocative style, proclaims that the fundamental problem for Jews themselves today is not how to bear the name “Jew”, by affirming it or renouncing it, but rather to take up the challenge of “creating a new place,” indeed, of “creating a new

³¹ Alain Badiou, “The Word ‘Jew’ and the Sycophant” in: *Polemics*, trans. Steve Corcoran, Verso, London, New York 2006, p. 232.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

³⁴ Alain Badiou, “Uses of the Word ‘Jew’” in: *Polemics*, p. 166.

Jew,” a new name Jew that would be destined to all. In that sense, for Badiou, “the Jew of our time is still to come.”³⁵

To maintain that the task today is to “create a new Jew” is but another way of saying that the name “Jew” is not a destiny, not even for a speaking being-Jew. Paradoxically enough, on this point emancipatory politics meets psychoanalysis. By insisting that the One of the Same of a particular subject results from some contingent, yet traumatic encounter with the real, psychoanalysis does not ratify the theoretico-political stance adopted by some Lacanian Maoists according to which the name Jew prescribes in advance, so to speak, the subjective position to a speaking being-Jew. On the contrary, just like for an emancipatory politics based on its fidelity to the event, it is the encounter with the real that presents an opportunity for the subject to confront the choice of the name that was imposed on him or her, whether “Jew” or some other name.

To situate the name in relation to the real that “assigns the subject his or her condition,” to paraphrase Lacan, amounts to rendering politics impossible, or, more exactly, to making it an exception. The discussion revolving around the name “Jew” is situated along this edge. Either a politics of emancipation is impossible, that is to say, that it merely arbitrarily substitutes one name for another, thereby indicating that names are a mere semblance in relation to the real – this is how Lacanian Maoists see politics – or politics is an exception. Which means that it is capable of shifting the One of the Same proper to the subject (be it the name “Jew” or something else). And to be a political militant is to consent to remaining faithful to the name of an event, that which displaces one’s particular One of the Same and allows for another name, another One of the Same, to take its place and become that in the name of which one speaks or keeps silent.

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What contemporary theorising of politics has to explore is that the counterpart of the primacy of the multiple over the One is balanced by the fact that there is the One in the real. It is this evental One, the real One, and the defence against this evental real that are at stake in politics. Badiou, who in this respect follows Lacan, has very clearly outlined the choice that presents itself to the subject in the political field, if we accept, despite the fact that the horizon of the not-all is

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

unsurpassable for us, that the One is inscribed in the real. There are two fundamental positions that the subject can possibly take towards “the real that assigns its condition”: either it is fidelity or it is infidelity. Well, it is between this fidelity and infidelity to the One of the Same that contemporary theorisation of politics is condemned to oscillate.