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The Body of Structural Dialectic: Badiou, Lacan, and the 'Human Animal'¹

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La grandeur particulière de l'espèce humaine n'est pas la puissance. Le
bipède sans plumes doit se saisir de lui-même, et contre toute
vraisemblance, contre toutes les lois de la nature, et contre toutes les lois
de l'histoire, suivre le chemin tortueux qui mène à ce que n'importe qui
soit l'égal de tous. Non seulement dans le droit mais dans la vérité
matérielle.

Alain Badiou, *L'incident d'Antioche*

There were three of us this morning
I'm the only one this evening
but I must go on.

Leonard Cohen, *The Partisan*

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Introduction

In *Logics of Worlds* (2006/2009), Alain Badiou discusses “four forms of change”: modification, fact, weak singularity, and strong singularity or event. Modification as “the simple becoming a world” is conceived as a change “without real change” (Badiou 2009a: 357; 372; 374). This possibly explains why, in the more recent *Second manifeste pour la philosophie* (2009), Badiou opts for a *tripartite* division of change and only speaks of “three types of mutation” – fact, weak singularity, and event – omitting any reference to modification (Badiou 2009b: 93).

In this paper I would like to dwell on some of the implications of the notion of modification as a change that changes nothing, but nevertheless underlies all other kinds of change, by focusing on the treatment it receives, from a different perspective, in the conclusion of *Logics of Worlds* dedicated to the question “What is it to Live?” Here Badiou states that the animal that man is “shift[s] *almost constantly* from one world to another” (Badiou 2009a: 513; my emphasis). I closely associate this effortless “shift” with “modification”, since no subjective dimension of creation seems to be involved at this level. We are dealing with nothing more than a natural “kind of objectal ubiquity” that is proper to the species *homo sapiens* (Badiou 2009a: 513). In spite of some terminological ambiguity, this should clearly be differentiated from any real change of world as incorporation into the new body of a truth.

Moving from these premises, my first claim will be that an open thematisation of such a purely *biological* “shift” allows us to identify a series of tensions in Badiou’s notion of the ‘human animal’. I will then argue that Lacan’s own pronouncements on the human animal provide us with a valuable tool to think more thoroughly this basic form of change – which is not a change – in accordance with the theory of the body of truth advanced in *Logics of Worlds*; this will also entail a problematisation of Badiou’s own reading of the way Lacan articulates the connection between

bodies, languages, and truths. Finally, I will show that a full appreciation of the “almost constant” shift of worlds that distinguishes *homo sapiens* from other animals can only reinforce the battle against the reduction of man to animality promoted by the reigning ideology Badiou defines as ‘democratic materialism’. To this end, I will sketch the contours of a fourth figure of the subject to be added to the three figures of the faithful, the reactive, and the obscure subject analysed in *Logics of Worlds*: returning to an intense page from *Théorie du sujet* (1982) that Badiou consecrates to Mallarmé’s and Lacan’s ‘structural dialectic’, I will tentatively name this fourth type of subjectivisation of body allied with the faithful subject, the ‘partisan’.

‘The Purely Logical Grace of Innumerable Appearing’

In point 11 of the conclusion of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou defines the “human animal” as “the animal to whom it belongs to participate in numerous worlds, to appear in innumerable places” (Badiou 2009a: 513). Such participation in different worlds – which is possible only against the background of an “infinity of worlds” and “their transcendental organization” – appears to correspond to the species-specific trait of *homo sapiens*, its sole biological invariant (Badiou 2009a: 513-4). Here, Badiou is clearly considering the universal determination of man as *animal*: “Every human animal can tell itself that it is ruled out that it will encounter always and everywhere atonicity”, that is, a world with no “point”, a world in which the infinite totality of the world itself never appears “before the instance of the decision [...] the duality of ‘yes’ and ‘no’” that paves the way to a mutation (Badiou 2009a: 513-4; 591). Although the participation in numerous worlds granted to *every* human animal – which, as we have seen, is to be understood as an almost constant “shift” from one world to another – does not *per se* amount to any kind of change, it is this basic – and empty – determination of the species that nevertheless universally exposes it, or “opens” it up, to the possibility of the event (Badiou 2009a: 514). This is the reason why no

transcendent “miracle” is needed to explain the subject’s ‘welcoming’ the event as opposed to his denial or occultation of it (Badiou 2009a: 513). We could all be faithful subjects.

In this regard, I would suggest that point 11 of the conclusion should be read as a direct answer to point 8. In the latter, Badiou addresses what he calls the “banal objection” to his theory of the event:

“The banal objection says that if to live depends on the event, life is only granted to those who have the luck [*chance*] of welcoming the event. The democrat sees in this ‘luck’ the mark of an aristocratism, a transcendent arbitrariness – of the kind that has always been linked to the doctrines of Grace” (Badiou 2009a: 512).

Badiou’s reply in point 11 is unequivocal: the human animal’s “objectal ubiquity” is “in its own right” itself a “grace”, “the purely *logical* grace of innumerable appearing” (Badiou 2009a: 513; my emphasis). To reinforce the fact that what is at stake is man’s *pre*-evental animality, note that Badiou speaks in this passage of innumerable “appearing”, and not of “appearance”. The distinction between the two, which, as Alberto Toscano observes in his “Translator’s Note”, is usually hard to pin down, emerges in a particularly clear way few lines earlier in point 10 of the conclusion where Badiou claims that “what appears only shines forth in its appearance to the extent that it subtracts itself from the local laws of appearing” (Toscano 2009: xvi; Badiou 2009a: 513). In this context, it is adamant that only *post*-evental ‘appearance’ is truly creative, while the human animal’s exposure to “appearing” remains, in spite of the ubiquity it promotes, under the *pre*-evental jurisdiction of local laws.

To sum up, Badiou seems to suggest that every human animal can “tell itself”, in a fashion that I would dare to call “instinctive”, that *it* is somehow potentially not confined to finitude even

before incorporating *himself* as a subject to the body of a truth. His argumentation therefore assumes a certain exceptionality of the human animal at a biological level: while, as Badiou himself points out, this view excludes any “transcendent Law” of subjective predestination, in advancing the idea of an immanent grace as objectal ubiquity, it also problematically highlights an anthropocentric remainder in the theory of the body of truth (Badiou 2009a: 513). *Homo sapiens* would be, as such, a “graced” animal, and the subject’s very possibility of achieving an “immortal life” – that “need[s] neither God nor the divine” – by incorporating himself to the universal eternity of truths, would ultimately depend in a retroactive way on this natural precondition (Badiou 2009a: 513). Badiou’s preservation of the term “grace” is significant in this regard; I wonder whether beyond a refutation of the most naïve aspect of the so-called “banal objection” concerning a religious subjective predestination, such terminological insistence is actually symptomatic of Badiou’s recuperation of the idea of “luck” [*chance*] – or, we may specify, of “lucky contingency” – at a different level, namely, that of the species.

Lacan and the Water-Turtle

Badiou also engages with the concept of “human animal” in the short section of *Logics of Worlds* that he devotes to Lacan’s theory of the body. I would like to stress pre-emptively that it seems to me difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this analysis with the discussion he offers in the conclusion. The notion of human animal formulated against the banal objection seems to be incompatible with the one which is developed to contrast Lacan’s alleged ideas on human nature. I would go as far as suggesting that they are in a sense mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Badiou’s final remarks seem to confirm *mutatis mutandis* Lacan’s own line of thought on the biology of *homo sapiens*, and thus indirectly challenge his critique of Lacan.

Badiou starts off by praising Lacan's theory of the body, which he finds commendable for at least four reasons. First, Lacan understands that the body is not divided from the subject, which is to say that, through the unconscious, "the body thinks" or is a "body-thought" (Badiou 2009a: 479). Second, he considers truths to be exceptions that cannot be reduced to bodies and languages (for this reason – we may add in passing – Lacanian psychoanalysis is incompatible with the dualism of "democratic materialism" and its attempt to foreclose the Idea). Third, he acknowledges that "the only beginning that counts" is that of the trace – which he would call "cut" or "unary trait" – and that the very "beginning of the body" is subjected to it (Badiou 2009a: 480). Fourth, he realises that while, on the one hand – against any idealism – "only through incorporation is there an effect of truth", on the other – against any naturalistic reductionism – such incorporation incorporates "the [first] natural body into the [second] body conceived as the stigmata of the Other", that is, into a symbolic/symbolised body (Badiou 2009a: 480).

At this stage, Badiou parts ways with Lacan, since the latter would not grasp the "eternal power" of incorporated truths (Badiou 2009a: 479). To put it simply, Lacan would "take a step too far in the direction of finitude" (Badiou 2009a: 481). This criticism echoes the one Badiou makes of Lacan in his 1982 book *Théorie du sujet*. According to this text, in spite of its "respect" for the real – a real that Badiou already openly associates with truth in the chapters on Lacan – psychoanalytic "structural dialectic" resolves itself into a Hegelian idealist dialectic insofar as it ends up "engender[ing] a Whole without remainder or trace" (Badiou 1982: 73; 80). Although Lacan resists the "authority of structure" – "structuralism is the internal 'right-wing' temptation of [Lacan's] dialectic" to which he makes all effort "not to give in" [*ne pas céder*] – his structural dialectic nevertheless achieves a "circular closure", and thus fundamentally differs from Badiou's 'materialist dialectic' which, against any "mak[ing] of circles", "periodises" (Badiou 1982: 72; 62).

In other words, just as Lacan's siding "*du côté de chez Vraï*" and of the emergence of the *horlieu* does not prevent him from "supporting in the last instance the structural side of dialectic over its historical side, place over force" in *Théorie du sujet*, so in *Logics of Worlds* his recognition that there are truths as exceptions to languages and bodies is not sufficient to avoid their transformation into "truths of structure", which are as such finite (Badiou 1982: 134; 72; Badiou 2009a: 481). In both books, Lacan is therefore ultimately attacked for not being able to think real novelty as *progressive change* – even though he detects real novelty and valorises it. As Badiou has it succinctly in *Théorie du sujet*, the "new One" (of structure) "forbids" the progress of the infinite "new one" (of periods, or sequences) (Badiou 1982: 131). On close inspection, we might even suggest that, in addition to an undeniable thematic convergence, *Logics of Worlds* often adopts a vocabulary that is directly mediated from *Théorie du sujet*, especially when it comes to denouncing the faults of structural dialectic. Not only is Badiou's philosophy defined again, throughout the more recent volume, as a "materialist dialectic", but Lacan's "step too far in the direction of finitude" is itself further specified as the identification of "what I believe to be a sequence [...] [with] a structure" (Badiou 2009a: 480).

However impressive the continuity between the examinations of Lacan carried out in *Théorie du sujet* and *Logics of World* may be, the fact remains that there is at least one important development in the latter critique: here, the finitude of the Lacanian subject is said to be already observable in the psychoanalyst's conception of the human animal. For Badiou, Lacan confines the uniqueness of the human animal to his ability to speak. Language, or better the linguistic "Unconscious [as] *infrastructure* of the human animal", would be as such sufficient to distinguish and single out *homo sapiens* from all other animals (Badiou 2009a: 481; my emphasis). Badiou opposes this supposedly Heideggerian view by "situat[ing] the singularity of the human animal one notch further" (Badiou 2009a: 481). Following Lacan, he concedes that every process of incorporation presupposes what psychoanalysis calls the "splitting of the subject", that is, a "theory of the 'two

bodies”, the individual’s natural body and the symbolised body as body of the Other (Badiou 2009a: 480). Yet, unlike Lacan, he believes that “inhabiting speech does not suffice to found [the] singularity [of the human animal] and the breach that results from the linguistic marking of the body is by no means the last word” (Badiou 2009a: 481). *Homo sapiens’s Spaltung* is not an exceptional biological phenomenon: more explicitly, the “water-turtle which, as soon as it sees me, swims towards the glass of the aquarium, frenetically thrashing its feet, and looks at me with its shining yellow-green reptilian eyes, until, intimidated or culpable, I give it its ration of dried prawns” is, according to Badiou, also a split animal, whose first body depends on the “body-place-of-the-Other” (Badiou 2009a: 481). The true exceptionality of the human animal can therefore reside only in its possibility of being, as subjectivizable body, the material bearer of eternal truths, which allows him to transcend finitude.

But, in light of these remarks – without which, as he promptly acknowledges, Badiou’s doctrine of the body of truth would perfectly match Lacan’s – what do we make of the state of *immanent* “grace” attributed to *homo sapiens* in the conclusion of *Logics of Worlds*? If the faculty of language as species-specific universal invariant is not what singularises man with respect to other species; if the “two bodies” phenomenon “can be effortlessly observed in animals with small brains”, what is it in the *biology* of the human animal that accounts for so-called “objectal ubiquity” – which Badiou clearly regarded as *homo sapiens’s* exclusive prerogative? (Badiou 2009a: 481) (It is worth recalling that, for him, “man is the *animal* to whom it belongs to participate in numerous worlds, to appear in innumerable places” [Badiou 2009a: 481; my emphasis]). It could be argued that, given the specific kind of temporality of the subjectivizable body theorised by Badiou – which he also derives from Lacan – the human animal, its biological substratum, is “graced” only *retroactively* by the event. According to this view, the human animal as indeterminate natural potentiality cannot be separated from the subject-of-truth that it can materially bear. Yet this is precisely the stance Badiou complicated in replying to the so-called “banal objection”: it is

doubtless the case that the subjectivization of bodies of truth is a retroactive process, however, the human animal is not graced *only* retroactively by the event, since the (few) subjects who will have been faithful to the event were not predestined by a transcendent Law to welcome it. The almost constant shift of worlds of the human animal is, as such, already a universal state of grace of the species as potentiality.

I think we are unveiling here a radical oscillation in Badiou's theory of the body of truth. In a few words, we must either admit a kind of transcendence of grace or posit a certain singularity of the human animal that is already present at the level of the natural phenomenon of the two bodies. Faced with such an implicit alternative, Badiou tends to opt for the latter option. From this also follows that the two-body phenomenon is inextricable from language, and the water-turtle has in the end only one body (more keen on dried prawns than Badiou's intimidation and culpability). Note again that the linguistic singularity of the human animal as biological individual does not alone produce any change: it rather just insists in a trivial "shift" of worlds. The human animal can only "take hold" of its two-bodied singularity, and thus truly break the horizon of finitude, as subject, that is to say, in Badiou's own words, as a "trans-human body" (Badiou 2009a: 481). My impression is that Lacan was actually putting forward a very similar argument about the nature of the human animal, for instance when he claimed that "man is not just a biological individual" (Lacan 1988: 102). This sentence efficaciously captures the idea that the inter-subjective symbolic is a structural component of the biology of the individual members of the species *homo sapiens*. In reading it, the stress must 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 closed and transcendent symbolic order onto human nature. Language does not amount, for Lacan, to a "structure" in Badiou's sense, a "circular closure", since it is not-all, even if we consider it as the pseudo-environment that the human animal inhabits. The trace of truth that *remains* always

exceptional with regard to the all as not-all – and should therefore not simply be reduced to a “truth of structure” – can be incorporated at any time by a subject.

The Helpless World of the Symbol

In my opinion, Badiou’s partial misunderstanding of Lacan’s notion of human animal stems from his overlooking of the fact that, for psychoanalysis, *homo sapiens* is a helpless primate. Developing the distinctively Freudian theme of *Hilflosigkeit*, Lacan postulates a basic disadaptation of man with regard to its environment, which originates in prematurity of birth and primarily manifests itself through a disorder of the imagination. Unlike other animals that instinctively recognise the *Gestalt* of the other members of their species – that is, the image of their body as a whole form – in order to carry out the most basic vital functions (first and foremost, reproduction), man *identifies* with it insofar as this allows it to compensate ideally for its primordial organic deficit. Such identification initiates a form of alienation, whose most self-destructive outcomes are kept at bay by a symbolic law that allows the perpetuation of the species, but which is never entirely sublated. The dialectic of demand and desire that makes of man an incredibly successful animal – that dominates and perverts our planet – and, at the same time, precludes its confinement to the instinctual domain of other animals, rests on *homo sapiens*’s continuous confrontation with its ideal image (in Badiou’s jargon, its “second”, ideal body). The latter should itself be understood as the “imaginary source of symbolism” (Lacan 1988: 125). Against the doxastic – and idealist – clear-cut distinction between the orders of the imaginary and the symbolic upheld by many self-proclaimed ‘Lacanian’, as early as Seminar II, Lacan unhesitatingly claims that “the ego, the imaginary function, intervenes in psychic life only as *symbol*” (Lacan 1991: 38-9; my emphasis).

We can thereby argue that, beyond any conciliatory *Aufhebung*, the prematurity of birth gives rise to a permanent biological instability in our species, one that determines an incessant process of readjustment of *homo sapiens* to its environment. The human animal is indelibly marked by prematurity of birth, and language as a natural ersatz never really achieves a completion of anthropogenesis. *Homo sapiens*, as a “speaking being”, remains what Lacan himself calls, pertinently enough, a “little up-turned turtle” (Lacan 1991: 41). This stance is in my view irreconcilable with Heidegger’s insistence on the positive exceptionality of the *logos* and the “open” of the human environment. While Lacan’s account also clearly differs from Badiou’s stress on the immanent natural grace of the human animal insofar as it takes for granted an “essential lack of adaptation”, a “primitive impotence” – and is therefore equally liable to be labelled as anthropocentric (albeit from an opposite perspective; here “grace” always presupposes a more fundamental “dis-grace”) – it nevertheless presents some striking similarities with Badiou’s considerations on the “almost constant shift of worlds” that characterises *homo sapiens* (Lacan 1991: 169; Lacan 1988: 140).

Let’s examine this issue in more detail. Just as Badiou speaks of the human animal’s exclusive “objectal ubiquity”, so Lacan advances that it 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 – for which there is a perfect correspondence between the imaginary and reality – and thus turns them into “imaginary transpositions” (Lacan 1988: 83). Such fanning out is only made possible by the unsurpassable gap between the two bodies, the real and the ideal, which is itself sustained and redoubled by language. The alienating identification with the body image causes in man a corresponding projection of the human *Gestalt* onto the external *Umwelt* which, to put it as Lacan, in “hominising the world” imaginarily, also pluralises linguistically the environment of the species *homo sapiens* (Lacan 1988: 141). In other words, the animal’s instinctual “appreciation of the whole situation” is replaced by the human animal’s “symbolic

fragmentation”: “The symbolic system is not like a piece of clothing which sticks onto things”, and “the world of things is not recovered by the world of symbols”, since “a thousand things correspond to each symbol, and each thing to a thousand symbols” (Lacan 1988: 224-5; 265-8).

Especially in his first two Seminars, Lacan repeatedly uses the phrases “the symbolic *world*” and “the *world* of the symbol” to describe the specific environment of the human animal (Lacan 1988: 80; 87; 174; 224-5; 268; Lacan 1991: 100; 170; 284; my emphases). The main thesis he puts forward is that the human world remains a pseudo-environment – and *homo sapiens* a pseudo-animal. On the one hand, unlike other animals, man is open onto the world, while, on the other, language somehow closes it, and thus functions as an animal-like environment (in this sense, language has a “material, biological foundation” [Lacan 1988: 22]). But beyond this dichotomy, Lacan tries to think of the symbolic as an *open totality* that emerges immanently and contingently from nature; man’s pseudo-environment can present itself to each member of the species as an infinite and meaningful uni-verse only insofar as it is structurally incomplete. (“The system of signs, as they are concretely instituted, *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” [Lacan 1988: 262-4]).

I believe Lacan sets out here the biological foundations for his later logic of the not-all and of the “suture” by means of which the not-all makes a whole only by preserving incompleteness. One can also recover the natural premises of the well-known formula according to which “there is no sexual relation” – as Lacan has it in Seminar I, genital love amounts in the human animal to a tentative “series of cultural approximations” (Lacan 1988: 139). Last but not least, we could easily translate all this into more contemporary evolutionary terms: language is a generic faculty based on neoteny, or at least on a delay in maturation; *homo sapiens*’s incredible flexibility depends on its lack of specialisation, a fundamental indeterminacy of the species. As I have argued

elsewhere, Stephen Jay Gould's notion of "ex-aptation" is not very distant from Lacan's considerations on the natural origins of the symbolic: for Gould, exaptations should be regarded, for the most part, as retroactive adaptations of originally nonadaptive sequelae which are, as such, particularly evident in the case of *homo sapiens*'s flexible brain (Chiesa 2009b: 85-6; 92-3; 101).

Impoverishment or Immortal Life?

In a compelling new reading of the *1844 Manuscripts* and the *Communist Manifesto* that challenges traditional humanist and anti-humanist (Frommian, Althusserian, and Blochian) interpretations, Frank Ruda has recently highlighted that, for Marx, the "impoverishment", or "denaturing" [*Entwesung*] of the human being – which distinguishes man from all other species – is the crucial precondition to achieve actual "political universalism", "the constitution of a truly human world" (Ruda 2009: 180; 181). Man is as such impoverished, he has always lacked any specific determination; alienation is not only inevitable but also inextricably linked with its effect as a process, that is, we may add, with a retroactive dialectic.

Moving from these premises, Ruda derives five strictly interrelated claims. 1. The historical emergence of the proletariat is needed to grasp man's original structural indeterminacy; 2. Such bringing to light of impoverishment "implies an immediate dimension of universality which is addressed *to* anyone, because it is *for* anyone", that supports equality (Ruda 2009: 184); 3. In order to be truly universal, equality must amount to the *production* of equality as the production of indeterminacy; 4. Communist action initiates this process of universal production, and thus breaks the existing historical situation into two, by indicating that indeterminacy has retroactively always been the unessential essence of man; 5. The potentially infinite unfolding of universal production is nothing less than what Marx himself calls the true "life of the species" insofar as, in continuously re-determining itself through "*social organs*", it preserves indeterminacy, un-

determines determination. (“Universal production [...] 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” [Ruda 2009: 190]).

Ruda explicitly presents his suggestive interpretation of the young Marx – “which in no manner needs to be limited to his early works” – as a Badiouian reading, one that, in my view, is more indebted to *Logics of Worlds* than to *Being and Event* and *Theory of the Subject* (Ruda 2009: 180). He thus ingeniously speaks of an “evental appearing” of the proletariat. Along the same lines, we are told that “the actual communist action names an event” and changes “the transcendental of change itself” (Ruda 2009: 184-5). As for the identification of universal production with the true “life of the species”, we are invited to associate it with the concept of “life living life”, an evident hint at the conclusion of *Logics of Worlds* in which man’s “true life” requires the subject’s incorporation to the trace of an event, and can never be reduced to the sheer existence of the human animal (Ruda 2009: 193; Badiou 2009a: 507).

While, overall, I find such mapping of *Logics of Worlds* onto Marx particularly convincing and far from forced – as shown in particular by Ruda’s elegant demonstration of the fact that Marx’s own notion of “species-being” already contains a “generic” aspect in it – I would refrain from labelling this philosophical stance as a “humanism of *impossibility*” when referring to Badiou (Ruda 2009: 192; 180). The problem with associating the latter’s theory of the body of truth with this kind of humanism is, following my previous discussion of grace, at least terminological. It is doubtless the case that Badiou is himself engaged in a “thinking of a renewed, transformed, and different humanism” that answers to an urgent “demand for a different form of conceiving human life” (Ruda 2009: 175-6). It is equally uncontroversial that his own materialist version of

universal production – that is, so-called “Ideation” as the living of the “truthful life”; as subjective participation to truth processes – should be conceived, against any “Idea of the Idea”, as a continuous un-determining of determination (Badiou 2009b: 124; 121). However, Badiou’s insistence on not only “grace”, but also and especially “living ‘as an Immortal’”, even if it does not posit any transcendent Law of predestination, seems to me to pre-emptively *over-determine* his notion of man’s “species-being” (Badiou 2009a: 40; 507; Badiou 2009b: 20). In brief, I deem this vocabulary to be incompatible with Marx’s jargon of impoverishment.

In the preface to *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou boldly qualifies the phrase “forms of life” – so dear to thinkers such as Agamben – as “a major signifier of democratic materialism”, that is, the ideology he intends to fight against (Badiou 2009a: 35). Yet two pages later, the necessity “to bring [the] word [‘life’] back to the centre of philosophical thinking in the guise of a methodical response to the question ‘What is to live?’”, leads him to maintain that “materialist dialectics lays claim to [...] the (subjective) forms of ‘life’ [...] which are the forms of a subject-of-truth (or of its denial, or of its occultation)” (Badiou 2009a: 35-7). Although in the second passage, the “life” of the “forms of life” is written in inverted commas, I would argue that this differentiation remains insufficient and calls for further clarifications. I find such ambiguity to be symptomatic of, again, a more general tension within Badiou’s notion of the human animal, or, in other words, of the living species that is universally given a chance to live life truly.

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou refers openly to Agamben only in the final “Notes, Commentaries and Digressions”, in which he rightly criticises the notion of *homo sacer* for identifying the protagonist of politics with “the one [who] is brought back to his pure being as a transitory living being” (Badiou 2009a: 558). As I have tried to show in a recent article, in addition to unveiling what Badiou calls Agamben’s “latent Christianity”, this passing attack effectively manages – if developed – to demolish his entire “Franciscan” ontology, and throw light on the contradictions

inherent to his concept of “being as weakness, as presentational poverty” (Chiesa 2009a; Badiou 2009a: 558). The complication is that when, in *Second manifeste pour la philosophie*, Badiou argues that his own philosophy promotes the “indiscernibility of life and the Idea”, and true life – as immortal life – would consist of a “thought-life”, he comes, against his intentions, dangerously close to Agamben’s (ultimately Heideggerian and bio-*theo*-political) stance, at least terminologically (Badiou 2009b: 21). According to the latter, not only is the form of life “an absolute indistinction of fact and law”, which the Franciscan poor as the hero of politics suspends by assuming as inextricable, but it can also be inverted through a kind of *redoubling* of life on itself that “create[s] a space that escape[s] the grasp of power and its laws” (Agamben 1998: 185; Agamben 2005: 27). In this context, “presentational poverty” – which Badiou also describes as “the delicate, almost secret persistence of life, what remains to one who no longer has anything” – must in no way be associated with Marx’s life of the species *qua* impoverishment, as it ultimately conceals, beneath its rhetoric of “inoperativeness”, a hyper-essentialist presupposition about the *richness* of human life (Badiou 2009a: 559). As Agamben has specified only lately in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, the exceptional space in which the form of life – or, better, life as pure form – finally triumphs over the form of law corresponds to “*zōē aiōnios*, eternal life” (Agamben 2011: xiii). Moreover, the latter should be considered as nothing less than the “political ‘substance’ of the Occident” (Agamben 2011: 251).

Towards a Theory of the Partisan Subject

Overall, I consider Lacan’s theory of the body to be much closer to a Marxian “humanism of impossibility” than Badiou’s. The psychoanalytical investigation of the human animal as a helpless primate which retroactively transcends *itself* into an inter-subjective dialectic of indeterminate desire provides us, in my opinion, with a good example of what Ruda also defines as an “affirmative [...] in-humanism” (Ruda 2009: 180). Having said this, I identify two main

limitations in Lacan's position. Firstly, the original indeterminacy of man's species-being is understood as a primordial *negation*. Lacan assumes a fundamental *dis*-adaptation – or lack – rather than a 'neutral' *non*-adaptation of the human animal, which poses a serious obstacle to his dialogue with materialist Darwinians such as Gould, in spite of their proximity. In a few words, Lacan's humanism of impossibility is, from this perspective, insufficiently inhuman, since it still relies on a sort of negative anthropocentrism.

Secondly, and most importantly, the infinite indeterminacy of desire does not give rise to any concrete attempt to think inter-subjectivity as "political universalism". On the one hand, against petty sectarian debates about the so-called "*passé*" as the end of the treatment, I believe that Lacan conceives of psychoanalysis as a truly *unendlich* process, a dialectic without any final *Aufhebung* – of which the so-called "traversal of the phantasy" marks retrospectively, in its heterogeneous repetition, the *sequences*. This even allows him to sketch the crucial political issue of progressive periodisation as the retroactive creation of a new past: "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" (Lacan 1991: 5). But, on the other hand, we could say that his proto-political reflections are problematically confined to the individual aspect of inter-subjectivity; there is no Lacanian politics insofar as Lacanian psychoanalysis does not thematise the infinite deployment of subjective indeterminacy as *universal* production (of the species-being). Or, to put it very bluntly, since Freud, psychoanalysis has never aimed at becoming universally accessible: only few subjects are "graced" by it, and even fewer reach the end of the treatment (with the awareness that it marks nothing else than a new, deeper analytical beginning – what I have called elsewhere a progressive "thinning" of the structural veil of perversion, a more daring "courting" of the void [Chiesa 2011]).

It is important to emphasise that Lacan's reluctance to think politics does not stem, as Badiou would argue, from his inability to grasp the "eternity of truths" and his alleged falling back into the horizon of finitude. I agree with Badiou: for Lacan, truths are not eternal; but why should the eternity of truth be a necessary precondition to think political (and non-political) progress in a truly materialist and dialectical way? Wouldn't it be better – in order to prevent any possible association with those philosophies (such as Agamben's) which ultimately presuppose the "formal" substantialisation of eternal life – to articulate real change against the background of what we could name a "sequencing of sequences", a *virtual* concatenation of what *Théorie du sujet* referred to as "vanishing mediators"? But, I also wonder, isn't this not so distant from what, after having excommunicated any form of historical materialism – to the point that "democratic materialism [...] is truly the only authentic historical materialism" – Badiou himself names, in *Logics of Worlds*, the "historicity of exception"? (Badiou 2009a: 509; 513) If truths are, for him, the only real exceptions, can't we also speak, in this new sense, of a *historicity of truth-as-exception*, that is, beyond any naïve historical relativism, of a new form of historical materialism? Such historicity of truth, which is far from being a history – "I already wrote it more than twenty years ago, in my *Théorie du sujet*: history does not exist" – would amount to nothing else than the *infinity*, and not the eternity, of vanishing mediators to which subjectivisable bodies can incorporate themselves (Badiou 2009a: 509). This would be in its turn just another way to reformulate Badiou's claim that "all truths without exception are established through a subject" (Badiou 2009a: 513). (And, we should ask, isn't precisely only this *fourth* time of dialectic that renders it really materialist? First, there are only bodies, but, second, there are also languages, except that, third, there are truths, which, fourth, without exception are established through a subject).

With specific regard to Lacan, I have the impression that the criticism moved by Badiou confuses a finitude of non-infinity with a so-called "finitude" of non-eternity. Again, the limit of

Lacan's project does not consist in finitude but in the failure to universalise infinity – which he cogently theorises on the basis of the not-all (for instance, through the concept of *objet petit a*) – as the production of active indeterminacy. But apart from this, Lacan offers us a potent version of Marx's humanism of impossibility, or impoverishment, as a continuous un-determining of determination that is also, most importantly, a re-determination. It is significant that, in the very final sentence of the chapter he dedicates to the French psychoanalyst, Badiou concedes that “the crucial teaching bequeathed by Lacan remains” his strenuous opposition to the ideological reduction of man to animality, to the supposed oneness of his body (Badiou 2009a: 482). Let us specify that such reduction is in the last instance impossible due to the permanence of an organic deficit that, in addition to characterising man's environment as objectal ubiquity, more remarkably, also makes him experience, at particular times, its truth as incompleteness. Psychoanalysis seeks to highlight this condition. The plural aim of the *ethics* of psychoanalysis is the potentially infinite *re-opening* of the partial closure of the symbolic as pseudo-environment. In other words, we should be aware of the fact that there is a constant dialectic between the suture of the symbolic and the possibility of the subject's uncorking of it – the unleashing of what Lacan calls “symbolic possibility” – from which then follows the establishment of another incomplete structure that imposes itself as a new retrospective order (Lacan 1991: 234).

It is in this anti-ideological context that, going beyond Lacan's teachings but availing myself of Badiou's own depiction of “structural dialectic”, I would like to outline the subjective figure of the partisan as a powerful expression of a humanism of impossibility which is not a humanism of finitude, and of a humanism of infinity which is not a humanism of eternity. I will add, to immediately lay my cards on the table, that the partisan – who should not unavoidably be a political figure; he could equally be referred to all of Badiou's generic procedures – is the type of subjectivization of a body of truth that reminds us of the gap which, within *homo sapiens*, both separates the human animal as potential subject from its dysfunctional animality, and keeps it

anchored to it. In other words, especially at a time when most people are convinced that nothing really new ever happens, the partisan's subjectivised body of truth stubbornly insists on the basic form of change, the constant shift of worlds, which already furnishes a minimal distinction between the body of the individual members of our species as material bearer of the trace of the event and that of all other animals. The partisan is thus a figure of active *resistance* to the animalisation of *homo sapiens*, and as such is to be diametrically opposed to the *passive* resistance of Agamben's pseudo-political figures – which, as we have seen, finally issue into eternal life as the pure transcendence of form.

In a rare discussion of partisan action, Badiou writes, in *Théorie du sujet*, that the partisan “tracks down the tiniest of antagonisms in the midst of a thick consensus [...] and, just when it is on the verge of having exhausted its resources, receives [...] the subjectivizing exception of an abrupt collapse of the initial conditions” (Badiou 1982: 113). Badiou explicitly relates this resistance “in the midst of a thick consensus” to structural dialectic. In light of this, it would not be exaggerated to suggest that, for Badiou himself, the partisan should be regarded as the subjective figure that links (psychoanalytical) ethics to (Marxian) politics. But beyond Badiou's hints, I believe it is nowadays imperative to develop thoroughly the political implications of the figure of the partisan. Through the partisan, at moments when fidelity to the event is practically impossible and the subject is reduced to just one resistant “point” of choice (the “I was cautioned to surrender, this I could not do” of Leonard Cohen's rendition of the classical French resistance song *The Partisan*), the quest for the universalism of indeterminacy, that is equality, is preserved also in the political few – the part – if not even in the one. *The Partisan* is on this point adamant: “There were three of us this morning, I'm the only one this evening, but I must go on”. That is to say, I am the only one this evening as ethical subject but, through me, the three as the dialectical basis of political universalism lives on, and this is why “I must go on”, not cede on my desire for equality. It should be clear by now that the humanism of the partisan is a humanism of

impossibility – as it answers to the temporary suspension of the faithful subject in a time of disaster (which does not necessarily coincide with war) – and a humanism of infinity as repeated concentration of the naming of the new (the partisan’s “*J’ai changé cent fois de nom*”) in a historically specific period of time that does not partake of any kind of eternity.

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