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Indetermined: Slight Infinitude and Genetic Opening

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Abstract:

There is an irreducible indetermination of the subject, whether by internal forces like genetics or external ones such as experience. The subject refers to the relating-to-itself of its own genes, instincts, impulses, as well as personal or cultural experiences. The only way to reach the subject, it has been argued, is *via* the theory of points, through irreducible antagonism/contradiction as indicative of human subjectivity. This belief is due partly to what are now colloquial notions of 'human nature', leading thus to a complex and ambiguous ontology. Working through Alain Badiou, Catherine Malabou, Adrian Johnston and others, we can see that the problem is that the irreducible contradiction and subject as negativity leads us back through G. W. F. Hegel. This paper aims to demonstrate then the conclusion via Hegel et al. that the subject must remain, and in fact can only be, indetermined.

Key words:

Philosophy, psychoanalysis, human nature, neuroscience, brain studies, Hegel, Lacan, Zizek, Adrian Johnston, Catherine Malabou, plasticity, negativity

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A lively new polemic about the concepts “one divides into two” and “two fuse into one” is unfolding on the philosophical front in this country. This debate is a struggle between those who are for and those who are against the materialist dialectic, a struggle between two conceptions of the world: the proletarian conception and the bourgeois conception. Those who maintain that “one divides into two” is the fundamental law of things are on the side of the materialist dialectic; those who maintain that the fundamental law of things is that “two fuse into one” are against the materialist dialectic. The two sides have drawn a clear line of demarcation between them, and their arguments are diametrically opposed. This polemic is a reflection, on the ideological level, of the acute and complex class struggle taking place in China and in the world.

Red Flag, (Peking), 21 September 1964¹

The Fought-For and the Given - The crux of my argument is that contradiction, opposed to any wholeness, reigns. Any form of consistency, whether of the political field, or more specifically, of the subject, can only be ideological. To bring us as quickly as possible to the wager of this paper we will begin with the theory of points. A point is a point of pure decision, at one and the same time immanent and imminent. A point of decision is not a simple choice, and certainly not a choice “regarding multiplicities which appear in a world” (Badiou, 2006a: 422). A point of decision is the brutal imposition of the Two, or even the “reduction to the Two of the infinite multiplicity” (Badiou, 2006a: 423). The choice can also be conceived as a filtration of multiplicity through the Two. This distinction, this Two can be formulated in a few ways, as we will see: the distinction between the *ethical* “what one must do” (“*ce que l’on doit faire*”), the insistence of a conviction, and the *moral* “what one ought to do” (“*ce que l’on devrait faire*”) according to (politically) legitimate rules.

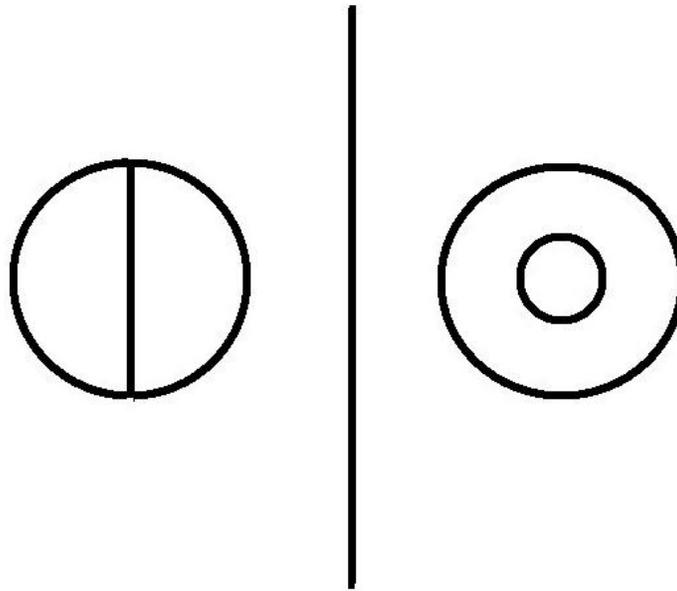
The refusal of the choice is a structural impossibility - the refusal of choice is already the choice itself. The refusal of the Choice of one or the other does not take place in a vacuum. In these circumstances, the refusal to decide between, for example, proletariat and bourgeoisie is already the abdication and therefore choice in favor of dominant powers; in this case, the bourgeoisie. Spontaneous ideology, or “the axiom of contemporary conviction” (Badiou, 2006a: 9) says that there is only multiplicity - of bodies, languages, and particular forms of pleasure. This conviction is also named “democratic materialism”. Opposed to this conviction is that of division, of the excluded term - dialectical materialism. To say that there is class struggle is already to choose sides - that of the proletariat, of inconsistency.

One could argue that the bourgeoisie/proletariat contradiction is outdated; nevertheless there is a “revenge of the Two” which emerges as a sort of “return of the repressed” - why there is contradiction, why there is no harmonious One, no organic unity (or what it means for this pre-supposed organic unity to be broken).

¹ See Guy Debord’s, *Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red, 1977 [*La société du spectacle* (Buchet-Chastel, 1967)]), preface to chapter three, “Unity of Division Within Appearance”.

This is equally the case for Badiou himself who speaks frequently of the bourgeoisie/proletariat distinction from his years in the UCFML through his *Theory of the Subject*. Currently this contradiction takes the form of the contradiction between democratic materialism and dialectical materialism, in many ways congruent with the division between consistent and inconsistent multiplicity. One divides into Two.

In his Structural Anthropology Claude Levi-Strauss provides an example of the Real of antagonism. This example is used many times by Slavoj Žižek himself (1994:25, 2003c:74-75, 2006a:25, 2008:287, 2010:269-270). In this work, as Žižek describes, a village is planned out in a certain way, with houses laid out in a particular fashion. The village is divided between those “from above” and those “from below”. Despite the objective layout of the houses in the village, those “from above” see the village as a circle within a circle - the harmonious whole, the circle as the village with the privileged inhabitants “from above” inhabiting the circle within the circle. Those “from below” however see the village as divided from within, as a circle split down the middle. Both groups see the village as a circle, but one sees the circle containing a privileged center, and the other as divided in two. These two visions are irreconcilable. The Real of the

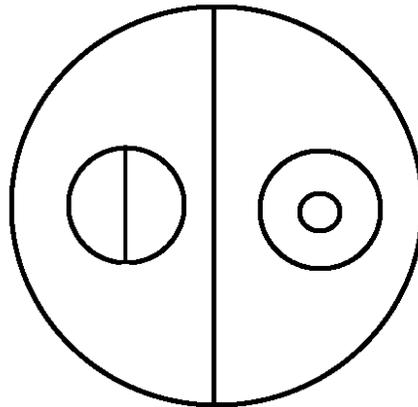


antagonism is primary.²

² Figures are all the authors, as are many of the translations.

However one must maintain that this antagonism, while primary, is asymmetrical. The antagonism, the split between the above and the below is a clash of narratives, and this is what Marxism seeks to make clear - precisely as the critique of ideology *qua* consistency.

Here we can determine how “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”.³ The distinction between Left/Right (or Revolution/Restoration, bourgeoisie vs. proletariat, inconsistency vs. consistency) was formulated during the French Revolution where those sitting to the left side of the president’s chair supported the advances of the Revolution, and those to the right side were against the Revolution and for the Restoration of the monarchy. Prior to the Enlightenment class struggle was obfuscated by a series of particular divisions such as caste, race, etc. The Left/Right distinction, this “inner contradiction” isn’t simple metaphysics but attests to a Real of contradiction, not only at the heart of politics, but at the very (de)center of Being. Class struggle is ultimately the struggle between inconsistency, specifically the inconsistency of what is “out of place” (*hors lieu*, proletariat) and consistency, the assignation to a place of a multiple by the state (of the situation, that which assigns place) through the space of placements (*éplacement*). The reign of consistency is always defined by violence, and continually undermined by the return of inconsistency. In viewing this figure, it becomes obvious how inevitably one side can be



said to be “right” - the side of the contradiction which contains contradiction itself:

³ See one of the many translated versions of the beginning of chapter one of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848).

1.0 At the risk of using an “archaism” (Badiou, 2006a: 12), we should take another step – “*encore un effort*.” dialectical materialism, in its vulgar and rudimentary forms, is not something to be relegated to Stalin's efforts of political suturing, nor to Althusser's same efforts within the context of the “class struggle in philosophy.” Why does Žižek argue for the reversal of “materialist dialectics” back into “dialectical materialism?” The key is in his book *Living in End Times* where he poses the question “Was not all radical politics not always 'sutured' to some trans-political (philosophical, theological...) content?” (Žižek, 2010: 200n30). It is a strong question to pose, and one that cuts straight to the heart of Badiou's remarks on suture in general. I am tempted here to side with Žižek. Was not the French Revolution a case of the philosophical suturing of Rousseau to the political? Was Thomas Muntzer's Revolution of the Common Man not owed to the suturing of theology to the political? Where would Spartacus have been had he not reached precisely from elsewhere, outside, to assert the equality of the slave to the master? Further, is there not some necessity of the meta-physical (and not metaphysical) for the dialectical, one necessarily caught up in the split (or dialectic) between the Idea and the material world?

Adrian Johnston's main innovation here, one born out by both Žižek and Badiou, is the full development and logical consequences of the passage from the Two to the Three. Not genetics (1), nor the external world (2), but subjectivity (3) as that which emerges out of these two substantial orders while belonging to no substantial order of its own. This subject becomes split between itself as object (substance), and its self-recognition as subject. Henceforth this “more-than-material” subjectivity produced by the split must be thought on the basis of a certain level of autonomy relative to these substantial orders as an emergent property. This is what enables one to think of the subject in its very ideality; it is something which is only possible by thinking through materialism dialectically. Johnston's undertaking engages in a stripping-away of the added layers of determination involved with the human subject until we reach the ‘indivisible remainder’ of autonomy characteristic of the subject's negativity.

Catherine Malabou argues at length that “[c]erebral space is constituted of breaks, voids, cracks, preventing us from thinking of it as an integrative totality. In effect, neuronal tissue is discontinuous” (2004: 76). Consequently, she posits the subject as an inherent Plasticity, defined as “at the same time the capacity to receive form [...] and the capacity to give form” (2004: 16). Mnemonic or even evental traces are traces which irremediably affect the composition of the brain; that is, a change at the synaptic level. Malabou describes a third dimension between contingency and necessity: plasticity, which strictly speaking is neither the one nor the other. In other words, between necessity dictated by (genetic, cerebral) nature and the

contingency of (external) experience there is a third dimension that ensures the subject retains a degree of autonomy throughout its various determinations. This means that there is subject, and the subject is precisely the interstice or actualized gap between environment and genetic material. Moreover, not only is this subject capable of relating to its environment and instincts, internal inclinations, external intrusions, but also relating to this very relating-to-self. This minimum of liberty, or subject as negativity, as the negation of instincts, etc., means that the human possesses a minimum degree of self-determination, specifically in the way it “relates to” its various determinations, whether genetic, physical, cultural, historical, traditional, etc.

Malabou’s work consists in demonstrating that cerebral plasticity is not to be confounded with flexibility or elasticity, which in the latter cases would imply that the subject is ‘friends forever’ with the constant revolutionizing of capital - in short, capable of submission. For Malabou, ‘flexibility’ is an ideological concept which hides the primary (and destructive) negativity of the subject. Flexibility receives form, but cannot give it. Plasticity, on the other hand, means that there is no return to any previous state of harmony (if it could even be said that such a state existed). The abdication of this power of negativity can only be ideological.

Malabou mentions three plasticities of the brain and neuronal processes: plasticity of development, of modulation, and of regeneration. The first stage of normal human development, in utero, follows genetic information. After the birth of the individual, however, a program of “cellular death,” as part and parcel of the plasticity of development (1), itself already programmed within the biological material itself, leads to the relinquishing of control by genetic determinism. Here useless connections are slowly effaced. At this stage connections begin to be made more by epigenetic factors. The brain becomes sculpted, divided, formed, and begins to create its own self-identity. And after a short period of time, “[t]he sculptor progressively begins to improvise” (Malabou 2004: 46). The modeling of the brain becomes henceforth “what our own activity imprints in connections”. There is increasingly more influence of external milieu over cerebral development favoring these epigenetic factors over genetic factors. The subject is precisely the interface between inside and outside which ‘oversees’ this development.

The plasticity of modulation (2) takes advantage of the experience of the individual. In *The Organization of Behavior*, Donald Hebb theorizes and postulates the existence of ‘plastic synapses’ where we find a self-organization of neurons. “The synapse is the privileged place where nerve activity can leave a trace which can move around, modify, transform itself by the repetition of a functioning past” (cited in Malabou 2004:

49). Likewise, Adrian Johnston draws attention to the link between Lacan's material basis for the 'mirror stage' and what we can find today under the name of 'mirror neurons,' which reveal a nervous system that functions as an 'intra-organic mirror' (Johnston 2010b: 10-11). We witness a plasticity modulated by the experience of the individual body while information is no longer simply given in advance by genetic structures. There is an augmentation and at the same time a capacity to "undo the trace to remake it elsewhere" (Malabou 2004: 52). This plasticity explains why one can, for example, learn to play the piano. "Over the course of training [...] the mechanism of the depression of incoming [neuronal] signals corresponding to erroneous movement makes possible the acquisition of correct movements" (Malabou 2004: 53).

Neuronal connections are themselves capable of transforming their program. This lends evidence to Malabou's notion of destructive plasticity, based on an understanding of the Hegelian subject as "pure and simple negativity". For psychoanalysis, the biological "programming" of the human animal sabotages itself and consequently paves the way for subjectivity proper. Therefore, despite anatomical similarities (what allows of us to speak of a "human" as species identified through tangible features) each individual is hopelessly dissimilar to any other. "The efficacy of synapses vary in accordance with the flow of information which traverses them; each of us is submitted from infancy and all throughout life to a unique configuration of the influence of external milieu which resounds in the form and functioning of these cerebral networks" (cited in Malabou 2004: 54-55). Malabou concludes this argument with what she calls the "permanent modification of neuronal morphology" (Malabou, 2004: 55).

Third, there is plasticity of regeneration (3). Malabou explicitly opposes the dominant interpretation according to which brain damage entails a permanent loss of brain functioning. Malabou cites several examples that not only reveal that the brain can heal, but that it is capable of "compensating for certain deficits caused by lesions" (Malabou 2004: 56). In other terms, where a part of the brain is in default, other sectors of the brain attempt to compensate. She adds "[t]he fine art of the brain gives birth to a statue that can repair itself?".

It must be said: one of the major characteristics of the nervous system resides without a doubt in its plasticity. The brain cannot be considered as a network of definitively established cables, and cerebral aging as removing an increasing number of elements of this circuit from the network. Even if this hasn't been formally demonstrated in certain experimental models, we can suppose that each day nerve fibers grow, that synapses come apart, and others, new ones, form. These modifications of the neuronal

landscape [...] mark our adaptation, our learning and improvement capacities which maintain themselves until an advanced age of life, in fact until death (cited in Malabou 2004: 59).

1.1 Practical antihumanism - In order to continue our search for a proper explanation of dialectical materialism we must now investigate the development of the subject which introduces the dialectic between the signifier, the ephemeral corporeal existence of sense, and the body, which produces the subject. This concerns the more-than-material effect of the encounter between the body and the signifier. In the beginning of its development the proto-self would be that which ‘counts for one’ the series of erogenous zones (penis, nipple, lips, mouth, fingers, etc.). This is achieved within the ‘mirror stage’ that should be seen, not merely as the recognition of the self but also as the misunderstanding of the self (as body) and reality.

In psychoanalysis the Oedipus complex is the beginning of a process whose conclusion is a cutting of the links between the subject and its purely material being. It is first important to recall that the child’s post-natal helplessness indicates the lack of human nature. The Oedipus complex sets in motion the move from being to becoming by cutting the subject from its biological base and forcing it to name the objects within the world it inhabits. Language becomes an inevitable experience of the subject’s development. “Once the entry into speech has been accomplished, ‘pure sensation’ becomes that from which we exile ourselves” (Pommier, 2004:11). Once acquired, there is no return. This is the crux of Johnston’s argument concerning transcendental materialism. As with Kacem, “[t]here is no return of the human animal in the compulsion of repetition. The subject of Platonic immanence is the subject of infinity without retreat” (Kacem 2004: 91). Once the Oedipus complex is ‘complete’, the subject cannot return to the pure flow of sense. And this process is universal in that it cuts the link with the material base for every subject, or every body which possesses a name. This cut must be thought through the dialectic - that is to say, cognitive science reveals a plasticity of the brain which allows for the production of the subject, not as epiphenomenon, but as an existence which possesses a degree of relative autonomy in relation to the body.

The “counting-for-one” of erogenous zones culminates in the pure “I” or Self - that which posits itself as what performs the count - or even the Signifier (which represents the subject to other signifiers, the signifier as necessary precondition for the chain of signification). Consequently, there is a relation “of having with the body” (Miller 2001a: 16). We should not underestimate phrases such as “my hand” or “my

back”, “my foot”, etc. - the subject has a body, but the subject is not the body. To paraphrase a quotation from Walter M. Miller, Jr., ‘you don’t have a subject. You are a subject. You have a body’.

In his work on Lacanian biology Miller signals that, for Freud, the ‘life’ drive is related to the germ or the signifier, and the death drive with the soma or the body (Miller 2001a: 19). The self-sabotaging of the human body occurs precisely in the subject’s negation of its submission to the body through the body. There are a few examples of this. First of all, “there is no action of the body, only its investment by structure” (Kacem 2004: 83). The subject cannot kill itself. It requires the body in order to do so. Here we meet the subject as Jacques-Alain Miller’s ‘specular’ body, (2001b: 9) which provides some clues towards the division of the material and the immaterial body, or virtual, specular body.

At one point, Miller states “[l]iving bodies die. Life doesn’t die” (2001b). Apropos Miller’s ‘specular body’ and Johnston’s materialism, it is tempting to add “I die, but the transcendental ‘I’ doesn’t die”. The body is the biological body of birth, but the subject is the more-than-material effect that is thrown into existence as a consequence of an innate derailing or frustration of bodily drives. We can tentatively call this The Law of Expenditure of Subjectivity - contrary to matter or energy, which can be neither created nor destroyed, subjectivity can only be created or destroyed: it appears, often fleetingly, and vanishes just as quickly.

Žižek argues that the death drive is associated with what persists ‘beyond’ death, that which separates the subject from its own corporeal existence (1999: 160-161, 291, 293-294, 390). *Jouissance*, he argues, emanates from the body itself. It is precisely and only the subject which can struggle against it. And if we conceive of the subject as the ‘germ’, we can conceive of the body as, in a certain sense, “infected” by the signifier, “sick with sense”. There is an “immortal germ of the letter” (Miller 2001b: 9) which infects the body. The *parlêtre*, as we will see, is for Miller “the union of the subject and substance” (2001b: 26).

Continuing, for Žižek “I=I” is “the initial error of philosophy” (2007c). The “I” is always decentered, divided in itself. For the subject much remains inaccessible or other for it. We can conceive of Žižek’s use of the Anstoss as a purely “ex-timate” element, as the “non-assimilable foreign body in the very core of the subject” (2007c, 1997: 45, 2004a:45) - a purely subjective element that isn’t produced by the “I”. The Anstoss is both the obstacle and very possibility of the subject. The signifier should also be understood as trace, even as eventual trace. But the signifier doesn’t emerge *ex nihilo*, it is born of the confrontation of the subject with an external trauma which demands signification, the ex-timate object that gets caught in the

throat to which the subject, in reacting, is created. “The being of the Subject is to be the symptom-(of-) being” (Badiou, 1988:470) - the subject is precisely the (universal) symptom of being.

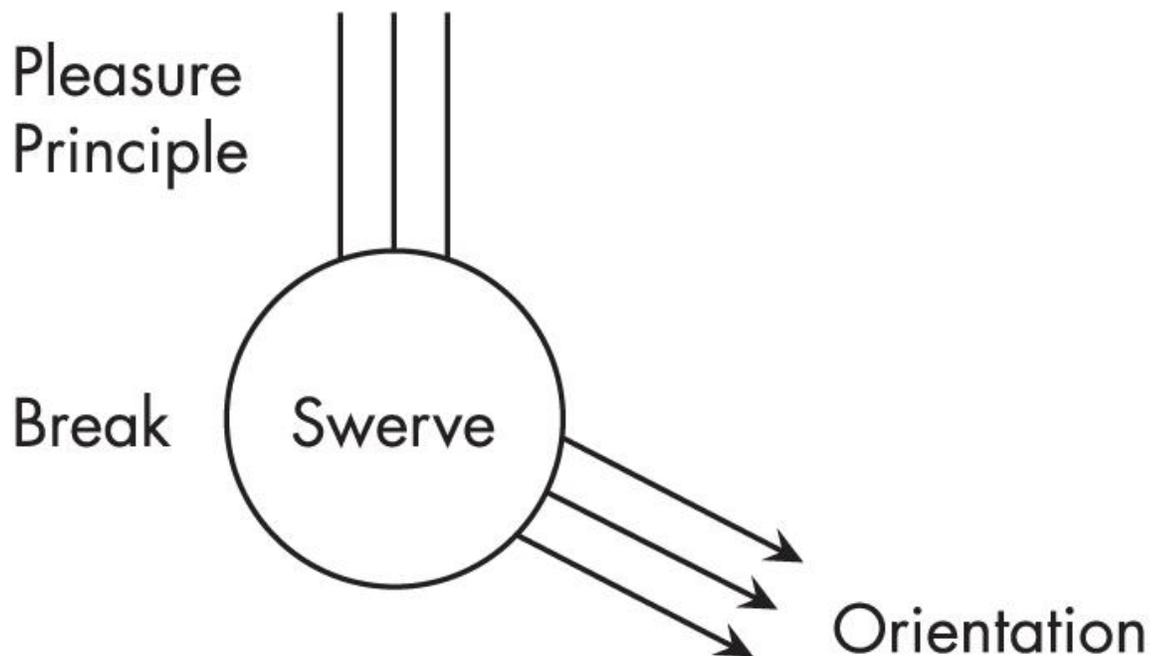
It is the subject, then, which is capable of sabotaging its own relationship to *jouissance* by relating to it, and by relating to this relating itself. For example, an elderly man who takes Viagra to get aroused is confronted by his own proper enjoyment. Consequently, the injunction to enjoy no longer has any excuses - if his penis operates according to the medication, but he finds himself still uninterested in copulation, he is forced to ask why he is still not aroused. If he takes Viagra and still has no pleasure, he'll be forced to confront the void which sexuality seeks to cover. This void is the '*il n'y a pas*' in Lacan's '*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*'.

In order to explain the development and the universality of this experience Adrian Johnston proposes a modified dialectical materialism he names transcendental materialism. For Johnston the determination of the human subject by its own genetic material retains the status of not-All. Johnston goes a step further than Lacan with his 'the Big Other doesn't exist', insisting that “[i]n the absence of every version of this Other [voire DNA], what remains lacks any guarantee of consistency right down to the bedrock of ontological fundamentals” (Johnston 2008: 9). The human, then, is characterized by a certain 'indetermination', specifically a genetic indetermination qua transcendental condition; in other words, the (human) condition of being fragmented such that the body is predisposed to not be predisposed. Johnston credits psychoanalysis's subversive nature to its “depiction of nature as divided by conflicts rendering it a fragmented not-whole non-One” (2008). The genetic disposition of the human is characterized by a genetic indetermination: “genes determine human beings not to be entirely determined by genes” (cited in 2008: 15-16).

For Johnston, transcendental materialism supplements rather than replaces dialectical materialism. In this way, they are not mutually exclusive paradigms (2007b). What marks the difference between dialectical materialism (DiaMat) and Transcendental Materialism (TransMat) is simply that while DiaMat concerns the interplay between being and Thought, TransMat abolishes pure being in the movement to Thought, never to return. Transcendental Materialism adds a Three to dialectical materialism's Two. There are genes and there is the world...except that there is 'subject'. This means that there can no longer be any recourse to any instinctual algorithm of the human biological body. Instead, instincts emerge as signifiers refracted through language. As the title of Johnston's article states, “Affects are Signifiers” (Johnston 2009).

1.1.1 Theoretical inhumanism - “Humanism” loses its sufficiency since it is unable to take into account what is precisely inhuman in the human itself. “Humanity is an infinite victory over its immanent element of inhumanity” (Badiou 2007). Inhumanity should be understood, not as the “not-human” aspect of the human, but as the inhumanity which dwells within humanity itself.

Humanism merely concerns itself with the human as a biological category. This biological category as a political category is inadequate for taking into account the production of the subject. The subject is a purely virtual entity. In its excess over the algorithms of evolution, it is also the Real in excess over reality. This ‘malaise’ of the human condition has been discussed earlier as the animal that suffers from “the wound of nature” (1989:5; 2010:231). And this union of subject and substance, of the signifier and the body produces the parlêtre. When Žižek speaks of a body inhabited by language, he often uses the term ‘stain’ - which can’t help but remind one of the title of Philip Roth’s work *The Human Stain*, in many ways an accurate way to describe the subject. Žižek cites Hegel’s conception of man as “an animal sick unto death” (1989:4). Similarly, Miller finds in Freud that truth and jouissance are “allied” against the “algorithms of the body” and that “truth is the sister of jouissance,” such that they “complicate” the



relationship between the body and the world (2001b: 20). For Badiou, however, truths complicate the

relationship between the human animal and itself, revealing a becoming-immortal of the subject. Truth's swerve and consequent orientation is not the sister of *jouissance* but a derailing of the pleasure principle by the Real as the meta-physical Thing that persists beyond the merely biological (Žižek, 2003c:73-74).

This decoupling, unplugging, or subtraction of the body from the 'order of things' or 'service of goods' (*service des biens*) means that the human always-already irremediably transcends its environs, and this transcendence is itself the transcendental condition and point-of-no-return for every subject.

1.2 In the chart from Badiou's *Théorie du sujet* (1982: 135) we have the five major philosophical paradigms. Johnston uses this schema in order to illustrate the break constitutive of transcendental materialism (2007b). The first part of the schema represents subjective metaphysical idealism, which Johnston refers to as "Berkeley-style solipsism" where there is no being in itself and thought is represented as a circle closing in on itself. The second section of the schema, "objective metaphysical idealism", represents "correspondence between the mental representations of subjective cognition and the material entities of objective reality". The third section, academic Hegelianism, a rough dialectic that begins in thought, moving to being-in-itself before returning to thought. The next, metaphysical or vulgar materialism, perhaps similar to that of Bataille. This conception seems to be the predominant materialism today; all subjective action is reduced to simple material determination - the form of democratic materialism. This materialism is completely dismissive of subjectivity as merely a series of synapses. 'Love,' for instance, is reduced to the play between certain ratios of brain chemistry; 'Art' to a more refined version of the mating instinct, the mere wooing of a mate, a sophisticated version of a colorful bird's feathers. The fifth, however, dominant for Marxism after Marx, describes a dialectical dynamic with material being-in-itself producing thought which in return sculpts being-in-itself, and back to thought, and eventually back to being-in-itself.

Johnston's transcendental materialism shifts the relationship between thought and being once again. Here thought departs from being-in-itself never to return. Žižek in his own philosophy offers his own names for this paradigm - alternately "post-metaphysical idealism" (2004: 24) and "transcendental empiricism" (2004: 19). The bridge between being-in-itself and thought is a passage, which once accomplished burns this bridge behind it. Any nostalgia for the return to an imaginary plenitude, of something 'primitive,' is, consequently, always ideological. I have attempted to illustrate it below, following Badiou's format.

TYPE	PENSÉE	ÊTRE-EN-SOI
Transcendental Materialism <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px 5px;">6</div>		

The development of the subject is to be thought as a series of Events, in Badiou’s sense of the word. Two events are primary. As Kacem states, “being is the fundamental event, the ‘unique throw of the dice’ of Deleuze, the ‘why there is something rather than nothing’ of Heidegger. For Badiou, being is the first event, such that the most radical events can only be in the end the repetition of this primordial event.” (Kacem 2004: 21). For Žižek, formulated in similar words, “[t]he emergence of thought is the ultimate Event” (Žižek2006a: 178). In either case, the advent of thought as the departure from being-in-itself is the event which is the precondition for every other event, the birth of the event which produces a more refined being, and not a simple existence.

The primary difference between Žižek’s/Johnston’s and Badiou’s conception of the subject is determined by other factors. For both Johnston (2005: 160) and Žižek(1999: 159) the subject, properly speaking, pre-exists its Badiouist subjectivation. The consequences for an understanding of political strategy will run deep. In Žižek’s ontology, following his reading of German Idealism viewed through the Lacanian lens, the retreat of being, the “night of the world” (1999:7) is the moment of the subject. Put simply, the void of being is another name for subject. On the other hand, Badiou theorizes this negativity as well. For Badiou, the “name” of being is “nothing”, the void, and the subject emerges later. So what is the fundamental difference in the ontology of Žižekand that of Badiou in relation to the subject?

Having lived a life of revolt, it is only natural that Badiou’s infinite task of revolt will return in ontology as well. For Badiou, the subject is another name for “activation”. What distinguishes the subject between Badiou and Žižekis this activation of the subject, its subjectivation by the evental trace. Science, love, art, and politics, the four categories of truth, entail themselves their own proper names. And this activation only takes place between the subject and a truth without mediation.

The pre-subjectivized subject for Badiou is a ‘sleeper cell’, awaiting its activation by the rupture of the New created by the event - or even the discovery or reactivation of a forgotten truth by a (Žižekian) subject.

These two notions of subjectivity, like dialectical and transcendental materialism aren't mutually exclusive. This difference between a psychoanalytic conception (Žižek) and a militant conception (Badiou) of the subject is also the difference between Freudian psychoanalysis and its Lacanian (militant) activation, or between the subject-in-itself and the subject-for-itself (though this subject cannot be fully developed here).

1.3 Supernumericity and the Virtual - Once the process of subjectivation yields the 'I', one can begin to see how this 'I' is a surface event, a pure interface without substance or substantial existence but which possesses only a formal and performative being. The event of the 'I' is the 'count-for-one' of isolated events (or erogenous zones); the discovery of, hands, arms, mouth, penis, feet, etc. The body is only the necessary precondition for the subject, the indelible base of the subject - "[i]t's very much 'me'...which repeats itself, despite me becoming perpetually and irreducibly other" (Kacem 2004: 144). The 'I' is always the same through the multitude of experiences and states while at the same time remaining in a state of becoming. In relation to the body, the subject is supernumerary. And this process is not undertaken in the mundane everyday but in substance, in the consciousness of the subject.

Closer still to a hard Badiouist orthodoxy - this signifies that there is a 'from' Nature, for example 'my biological, presented body', which is this natural ensemble which 'inhabits' me in my complex multiplicity; but this multiplicity in its entirety is non-attributable, errant, fantasmatic excess over its simply 'natural' structure. What 'my' whole life is witness to - 'I' live in no recognizable equilibrium, in no instant of 'my' experience, between 'my' presentation and 'my' representation: this last spilling out in all directions, and making 'me' lose every hold on my supposedly 'natural' body. (Kacem 2004: 32-33)

The supernumerary or virtual is also what distinguishes the event. An event, an interruption of repetition by the repetition of the New, ("Split Speeds of Transformation" pace Adrian Johnston), is this not a surface-event? A properly dialectical materialism must be capable of counting a surface-event as the existence of a non-being - "[i]n opposition to the mechanical materialism which simply reduces the flow of sense to its material causes, dialectical materialism is able to think this flow in its relative autonomy" (Žižek 2004: 31).

The supernumericity of the Event is evident in several examples. Žižek describes the virtuality produced by the Event which is not eradicated when the service of goods takes over, a virtual excess over the event

itself (2004: 31). After October 17th, for example, when we return to the rule of the market, we cannot simply say that the work of Truth is finished. This is why Marx is right to assert that communism is a spectre which haunts Europe and, one is tempted to add, continues to haunt the world. This spectre is the virtuality of the Event. Thus Badiou has every reason to say that communism is an eternal Idea. From defeat (French Revolution) to defeat (Paris Commune, October Revolution) until the final victory.

The separation between the material generation of the Event and the Event proper is the condition of possibility for the dynamic of the Event. It is necessary to struggle at the level of the political rather than the economic, wagering on its capacity to create effects within the economy itself. In the same way, Žižek argues that while justice is a fantasy (2004:37) it is one with a virtual element capable of producing effects 'in the real'. For Johnston equally, even if justice is only an illusion, it nonetheless produces material effects, orienting being and thought - the definition, for Badiou, of truth.

While the virtual has, strictly speaking, no substantial existence, given the being of the subject, we can nevertheless say there is the virtual. "The virtual is not opposed to the real, but the actual. The virtual possesses a full reality qua virtual" (cited in Badiou 1997c: 157). The virtual, continuing through Deleuze, is "Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract" (cited in Badiou 1997c: 157). Reality isn't complete without the virtual element of the count, which counts all elements as an 'all', the virtual element which produces the 'one', the virtual element qua operation. For example, there is no such thing as a 'chair' - there are only the different elements indifferent to each other - wood, nails, cushions - and it is only with the advent of the subject that we can speak of a chair in its entirety, counting all the disparate elements as one (Žižek 2004: 115). It is impossible to think reality itself without taking into account the virtual element of the operation.

Žižek dialecticizes the virtual itself. For Žižek, the virtual isn't the site of production, as the subject isn't the site of production of material effects, but it is the passage from the virtual (subject) to reality, to objects in the real which produces material effects (Žižek 2004: 20). He maintains that Deleuze is right when he speaks of the becoming-revolutionary, in that "being and becoming relate as actual and virtual" (Žižek 2004: 26). It is necessary to keep in mind that the excess of the virtual over the actual "designates the re-emergence of the virtual in the order of the actual" (Žižek 2004:68). The signifier signifies that reality is incomplete. Reality is not-All. There is a 'lack' in reality which the subject 'completes', there is a hole in reality of which the subject is the excess - for Lacan, void and excess are correlated. The human animal

emerges from the animal tout court, but it emerges with an absence of biological program - and this absence implies an excess: consciousness. Rather than an animal with certain needs and instincts, with language we become a being of language, a being of drives and desires - a *parlêtre*. And what's lacking in reality returns in the excess of the subject over its simple humanity.

The subject is conceived as a force capable of directing language as the 'machine of abstraction', as well as the generator of the virtual 'field' - akin to a magnetic field. Žižek quotes Hasker: "as a magnet generates its magnetic field, so the brain generates its field of consciousness" (2004: 30n). Along these lines, Žižek argues that this "field has a logic and consistency of its own, although it can persist only as long as its corporeal ground is here." And Žižek is not the only one to draw such conclusion. Catherine Malabou uses Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained* (with respect to Alan Turing) to compare consciousness to a "virtual machine" (Malabou 2004:79n)

1.4 In politics when we hear someone speak of the liberation of African-Americans, homosexuals, or women, we presuppose, consciously or not, a harmonious One as the neutral background of the struggle in which other struggles take place. What distinguishes class struggle is not only the impossibility of the 'recognition' of the proletariat (since the proletariat is the dissolution of the order which sustains its recognition, its duty being precisely to aggravate class differences) but the idea that the One does not exist, that the One does not coincide with itself. To say 'society doesn't exist' demonstrates a proper understanding of the domain of struggle. This is not to say that everything is political but, following Žižek, since the One does not exist, because the subject does not coincide with itself being is cleft all the way to its foundations – and, as such, is political (2004: 67-68).

An Event reveals a void in the counting of elements. The subject names this void; the subject is the subtraction of being, the subtraction from knowledge, the subtraction from a mere order of things. An Event exists because there is subject. Consequently whereas for Miller "life is the condition of jouissance" (2001a: 22), for Badiou humanity is "that which supports generic or truth procedures" (1992: 258). Life and subjectivity are the precondition for the Event and, therefore, truth. The subject is "support of a faithful forcing" (Badiou 1988: 456). Since a truth is found at the very edges of the void and since an event is undecidable in terms of its infinite consequences (re: incalculable based on the 'encyclopedia' of

knowledge), “[e]very subject passes in force, in a point where language fails, and where the Idea interrupts” (Badiou, 1988: 470).

There are four types of truth. The *générique* is only the general determinant of a truth. Truths can be political, amorous, scientific, or artistic. Seeing as how the militant work of a truth is a “labor of love”, Žižek states that there are in fact three types of truth – love being the “3+1” of truths (2007a). The Event, which falls under these conditions, and Truth, which emerges from Event, is radically subjective - that is to say they only exist for a subject or subjects who are engaged in them. There is no French Revolution for those who are not otherwise engaged in it - either in the Revolution itself, or in the militant work of its consequences. The same goes for love: love as a truth exists only for the engaged members, the subjects of love, like Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, or Heloise and Abelard. A truth is violently partisan - those concerned are those who are engaged, those who undertake the prolonged work of its consequences. Universality is capable of emerging only through an engaged, partisan perspective.

A truth is such that everything which proceeds from it can no longer be practiced as before (the Event). Between Copernicus and his faithful disciple Galileo, this truly militant work of science, it no longer becomes possible to conceive the world as before the Copernicus/Galileo-Event. That is why it is often easy to say that the French or October Revolution has not changed anything, since we already live in the consequences of these Events. The world has changed, but it is difficult to discern since we live in the aftermath of these changes.

In relation to opinion, truth constitutes an exception, that is, an exception to the dominant laws of a world or situation. “It is right to rebel against the reactionaries’ is an internal condition of the true” (Badiou, 1975). A truth is a subtraction from knowledge. Whereas Althusser utilizes the duality science (knowledge)/ideology, Badiou inverts the relationship into truth/knowledge. For Althusser there is scientific knowledge which occupies the place of truth, while ideology is the (inevitable) obfuscation of knowledge. For Badiou, however, knowledge is concerned with facts, while truth is “plus one” with regard to facts.

A truth then is a decision, an orientation, issuing from a break with regard to the rules of a situation. It is ‘plus-one’ with regard to the count of multiplicities performed by the state of the situation. There are facts, which belong to the encyclopedia of knowledge, and there is truth, which “pierces a hole in knowledge” (Badiou, 1989: 18). This is why the eventual trajectory of a decision is undecidable - it is not covered in

terms of its conclusion or potentially infinite finality. The results of such an intervention aren't covered in the realm of facts or knowledge.

As the "I" is simple appearance-to-self (Žižek 2006a: 217), a truth is only its own inscription (by the subject) into the order of being (Žižek 2007a; 2006a: 167). Since the state (of the situation) is the count of elements which belong to it, Event and truth are those which escape this regulation: in relation to the state, the immigrant occupies the edge of the void, that which escapes the count of the state and thus a potential (evental) site for the emergence of a truth.

For Badiou, subjectivity can only take particular forms conforming to specific trajectories. And these trajectories require differentiation. Fidelity means that the subject is cleft by the event, cut diagonally by the strike of the Event (Badiou 1988: 371). "I call fidelity the collection of procedures by which we discern, in a situation, the multiples whose existence depends on the diffusion - under the supernumerary name which the intervention confers on it - of an evental multiple" (1988: 257).

The faithful subject holds to the Event, and more importantly to the truth which emerges from it. "The Event means being faithful to the consequences, not exalting the occurrence" (Badiou 1988: 233). The subject is what links the Event and the procedure of fidelity. And this fidelity is a fidelity to truth. We can thus distinguish between Truth and Event. This distinction becomes clear in Žižek's article on Badiou (2007b). A total forcing entails a fidelity to the Event proper, rather than to the truth which emerges. That is to say, fidelity to the Event proper is treason, a fidelity incapable of distinguishing between the prolonged work of the militant which is the work of fidelity itself. In sum, there is no fidelity without the work of fidelity.

The first subjectivity is the faithful subject (*sujet fidèle*). Its destination is the production of a truth. We can see how the body is barred and submitted to the Event. For the faithful subject the body is divided *qua* subtracted from all (individual or communitarian - national, ethnic, religious, sexual, familial) particularity. Badiou's favorite example is Spartacus (2006a: 61). In Spartacus's camp there are people of all types - women and men, speaking all different languages, all without a homeland. According to St. Paul, for the body there is "neither Jew nor Greek" - or as Badiou's Spartacus states "We slaves" (Badiou 2006a:61). The crossed-out body, the barred body, is subordinated to the Event. And the consequence of

this subordination of the (divided) body to the Event is a new present, the construction and production of a new present or a new time according to the evental trace.

The reactive subject on the other hand produces refusal - the refusal or negation of the Event. The reactive subject is the reactionary - a subject that prefers *jouissance* to struggle, that prefers “the flavor, a bit more savory, of power over others” over the “acid taste of revolt” (Badiou, 2005:214) - in short, quietude. The reactive subject does not want the Event to break up its peaceful existence. What this subject tries to deny is not only the Event but the new present which the Event is capable of producing. Badiou’s primary examples are the New Philosophers - ‘philosophers’, so to speak (BHL, André Glucksmann, Alain Finkelkraut, etc.) who wish to finish with the tradition of 1968, with Marxism, Communism, with Revolution and with (class) struggle. They prefer to defend democracy against totalitarianism, and communicate only with other “democrats”. They are the ex-Maoists of the *Gauche Proletarienne* who, today, defend humanitarian war against terrorism, and the domination of the market, or capital, against that of religion. They are also Thermidorians who prefer capitulation, peace at any cost, in order to preserve comforts against the uncomfortable resistance of those who refuse to give up terrain.

For Žižek there are three forms of the refusal of an Evental status. The reactive subject also has an eye for (1) re-integration: social democracy, the re-integration of Marxism at an ‘acceptable’ level - (2) total refusal, liberalism, neo-liberalism, Francois Furet’s remarks on the French Revolution - and (3) reactive simulacra: fascism (Žižek 2007b). It is important to understand that, for Žižek, Nazism is a false repetition of communism - the Nazi ‘Revolution’ is the simulacra seeking to preserve the market and capitalism at any price (Žižek 2005).

The third, obscure subject, concerns itself with what it believes to be the full body (C). In this case the new present is subordinated to the full body whose consequence is the negation of the Event as well as the split body. The full body is the transcendent body, “Estate, God, Race” (Badiou 2006a:68). This negation often takes military, religious, racial and police-related forms. Badiou for example describes political Islam, considered as conspiratorial Islam, as an obscurantist reaction in the form of an instrumentalization of Islam under the idea of a full body of God for purely political ends (i.e. control over petroleum reserves, repressive state apparatus). The full body’s existence is ineffective and invisible. But fascism rears its head as well. Fascism considers the full body of race as the sole criteria for ‘truth’.

And lastly there is the subject of resurrection, whose matheme is the same as that of the faithful subject. What is important is the present. Resurrection implies the resurrection of a forgotten truth, or the naming of a previously unnamed truth or Event.

1.5 We can see in Soviet Communism, the ‘obscure disaster,’ a total forcing of truth qua full body. This was a suturing or direct short-circuit between philosophy and the political. What we forget in a total forcing is the present as such. Fidelity is not fidelity to the Event proper, but fidelity to the work of its consequences. “[A] truth articulates and evaluates what it comprises on the basis of its consequences and not on the basis of a simple givennes” (Badiou 2006b). Fidelity to the Event rather than to the evental trace leads to the Khmer Rouge or Stalinism. Total forcing is the work of the obscure subject: we mistake the full body for the Event. For this reason, every fidelity is already a resurrection, “every truth is post-evental” (Badiou 1989: 89). It is post-evental in that it is named as Event after the fact. And in all fidelity there is necessarily some betrayal. If Lenin had not betrayed Marx, there would have been no October Revolution; “between Marx and Lenin there is no continuity or development, but rupture and founding. There is equally rupture between Stalin and Lenin, then between Mao and Stalin” (Badiou 1998: 67). This concerns a betrayal, which is also the highest form of fidelity - the spirit and not the letter.

A spectre is haunting the body - the spectre of subjectivity. It is an incurable affliction or plague. It can not be passed off or left behind. It cannot be buried. In short this “plastic explosive” of subjectivity, properly known as the death drive, negates instincts and counters intuition while at the same time confronting the imposture of mastery. The subject retains its hold on its autonomy by ‘dynamiting’ its determinations, creating a short-circuit between it-self and the impenetrable abyss of its own negativity. Despite all that affects the subject, from deep within the dark places in itself to all those forces which wield all sorts of powers over and around it, the subject is forever doomed to be indetermined.

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