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Real and Political: Badiou as a reader of Lacan

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is the Lacanian legacy in Alain Badiou's philosophy, both in ontology and in politics. Firstly, the article shows how Badiou uses Lacanian categories in order to building his materialistic dialectical theory: Badiou's theoretical philosophy is grounded in the question of the subject and of the real, as well as in the re-reading of Hegelian dialectic, Marxism and Structuralism. These points should be seen as the main theses of Badiou's relationship with Jacques Lacan.

From this theoretical analysis, the article tries to underline Badiou's Lacanian approach to the political field: the radical opposition between the politics of rights and the politics of justice; the question of real and event in the modern and contemporary political science; the themes of revolution and of power; and the device of welfare and the ethics of desire.

Key words:

Badiou, Lacan, Subject, Dialectic, Real, Politics, Welfare, Power.

1. Subjectivity and Ontology: Lacanian Legacy

Alain Badiou's innovative reading of Jacques Lacan plays an important role in the discussion of the importance of Badiou's thought in building a contemporary conception of human organization and political agency. This reading has two consequences. First, Badiou expands on the philosophical capacity of Lacanian psychoanalysis, to produce a new image of human beings, of human action (ethics) and the 'ontological' theme of language. Second, he reads Lacanian thought as an arsenal of logical and theoretical tools that are able to deconstruct the political ideology of the modern State and of liberal democracy with their compromising ties to an overwhelming management of power and capitalistic finance.

With regards to the first point, Badiou reads Lacan's thought in his *Théorie du sujet* (Badiou, 1982) as a strategic moment of development of the materialistic dialectic and of the theory of the subject (the main goal of Badiou's philosophy). From this perspective, Lacan represents a critical step both for the modern philosophical tradition culminating with Georg W. F. Hegel, and for Marxist political analysis. The point that binds these two traditions in a single philosophical question is the term 'dialectic' (see Badiou, 2008). In order to redeem Lacan's critique from the disciplinary and historiographical closure of academic philosophy (its inability to act and understand the desiring/enjoying dimension of subjectivity) Badiou refers to Lacanian psychoanalysis as anti-philosophy (Badiou, 1992: 306-326; Badiou, 1994).

Lacan refers to anti-philosophy in his later works in terms of a radical and critical crossing point of philosophy, in which two themes meet: the subject (the Cartesian step) and the theoretical force of the negative as an element of subjectification (the Hegelian step). In order to do this, he problematizes the metaphysical longing to reduce subjectivity to the conscious ego, expelling any unconscious elements (a betrayal of the Freudian step). This disregard for philosophy, in Lacan's thought, produces oblivion of the questions of desire and *jouissance*, questions that are the foundations of the ethics of psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1986) and of its analytical act (Lacan, 1965).

For Lacan, philosophy belongs to the discourse of the Master, suggesting it encroaches upon the discourse of University. This signifies that philosophy is linked too closely to the dimension of institutional power (the State) and its mode of structuring scientific knowledge in ways appropriate for its purposes of diffusion, conservation and reproduction. Psychoanalytical thought, as Lacan envisages it, does not construct a discipline and therefore does not participate

in the institutional co-optation of the Master's discourse. It is a practice, a form of ethics in which the subject is committed to their desire and to their unconscious, that is, a dimension not reducible to the normative action of power. Although, Lacan explains in his classic *Écrits*, the subject does not correspond to the individual (to the image of man that belongs to the humanistic and liberal tradition), but it is the product of a process of subjectification that depends on the *structure*, i.e., the linguistic-formal dimension of syntactic laws by which we could speak of and then enter in the social and cultural world. The linguistic structure, which Lacan equates as such at the unconscious level, or, structured process (the Other), determines the subject (Lacan talks about a split subject), subtracting them to their individual closure (the fantasy of one's ego as the centre of one's own action) and introducing them into an inter-subjective space constituted by social and political relations.

This dialectical construction of subject is the first theme that Badiou (1982) points out in his reading of Lacan. For Badiou, psychoanalysis shows a new theory of subject that ends the tradition of modern philosophy (i.e., the Ego as foundation), and modern political philosophy (the liberal fantasy that realizes itself in our contemporary democracy).¹ The focus of Badiou's analysis on Lacan's theory of subject, as Badiou states in *Théorie du sujet*, is on its materialist side: considering language as an immanent and materialist structure that determines the subject through the linguistic series of signifiers and letters (that *mark* and *cut* the symbolic body of subject, as occurs in Freudian castration), Lacan creates a theory which is able to found a new dialectical philosophy (Badiou's) and to rewrite those of Hegel and Marx.

Moreover, Badiou suggests that Lacan elaborated the first theory as a way to deal with the developments of mathematics, which is the other side of the materialist method, and in particular with set theories (Georg Cantor, Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell are some of the most frequent references of the later Lacan). Lacan not only reads and understands set theories but also develops a method that combines his logic of the letter with mathematical and topological instruments of analysis, which he applies to psychoanalysis, its representation of subjectivity and its theory of three registers of experience (imaginary, symbolic, real).²

Badiou claims that topology imposes a new ontological vision of the world that 'ferries' philosophy beyond metaphysics (its theory of substance and its logical principles), structuralism (the algebraic ontology that eliminates the dimension of event and singularity) and the speculative philosophy of Hegel (the logic as new and renovate metaphysics). Although Lacan

falls into this algebraic method, very similar to that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Louis Althusser (whose work post-1970 is one of the targets of Badiou), he deserves the merit of opening a new topological perspective.

In order to resume and facilitate comprehension we can determine the topological ontology of the subject by referring to the image of the *Moebius Strip* and *Klein's bottle*: these two topological figures consist in a mathematical elaboration of the spatial surface, that equates the inside and outside in the strip as well as in the bottle. The fact that there is no inside or outside, the surface is unique and continuous, means (in ontological words) that the dialectical understanding of the world may not imply any dimension of profoundness. The new ontology that is at the base of *Being and Event* has its peculiar dimension in the concept of immanence, an epitome of a materialist category.³

This idea was expressed by Lacan through his concept of signifier dis-located from the Saussurian sign: the sign imposes a two-dimensional ontology (reference between signifiant and meaning); while the signifier, that in Lacan's theory determines the meaning (and never represents it in its metonymical deconstruction of *Vorstellung*), opens the dimension of surface.

This ontological perspective is useful for Badiou's reading of Lacanian concepts of imaginary, symbolic and real that is a necessary step in the theory of the event. The first aspect we are eager to underline is Badiou's indifference for imagery. In contrast to Slavoj Žižek's (see Žižek 1989, 1997 and Fabio Vighi, 2010) reading of Lacan, which is centred on his original interpretation of the relationship between symbolic and imaginary (as in fantasy), Badiou deals little with the imaginary and ideological dimension. He considers imaginary as one of the components of the topological knot which Lacan employs to describe subjectivity, without particular attention for its ideological force. This is probably because he wants to underline his own difference from Althusser (see Badiou, 1992: 231-234), who not only develops a powerful theory of ideology, but points out a theoretical link between ideology and psychoanalytical imaginary (see Gaetono Rametta, 2012).

The symbolic (the structural element) has for Badiou two main valences: 1. It is the *esplace* of *Théorie du sujet*, where this category is a neologism that stands for "*espace du placement*" (Badiou, 1980: 28). The *esplace* is the structural location of the structuralist theory: in linguistic and anthropological terms there are some structural places, defined through their difference (there

are only relations, not things), which determines the individual element (a name, an adjective or a real individual) by its logical priority. Badiou compares the structure of linguistics and of Lévi-Strauss with Hegel's notion of system: both represent a philosophical journey that ends when the love for knowledge becomes the science of knowledge without any rest.

The structuralist thinkers claim that each element acquires its meaning in the combination of differential norms that are imposed by its structural place (for example, the place of subject explains the role of a single name as subject in an utterance, the place of maternal uncle explains the role of the single inside a human group). In Badiou's reading, structuralism theorizes a weak idea of difference that is exhausted in the formal identity of *esplace*: this concept of difference does not correspond to the original split that represents the main item of ontology. Badiou studies the principle of identity ($A=A$) that constitutes one of the columns of traditional metaphysics and points out that it is a product and not an original principle (just Johann G. Fichte and Hegel have underlined this point).⁴ It is the result of a genetic split because the two A's are different and not the same, and their difference depends on the respective positions in relation to the equal-sign: the process of identification could be completed only from an original difference that we have to read as a real split.⁵ In other words this priority of non-identity is one of the forms in which Badiou teaches us to see the Lacanian Real. The real is the genetic element of each difference, the modal category that stresses the impossibility of identity (in Lacan words: there is no sexual relationship; see Lacan, 1971; Badiou-Cassin, 2010). Badiou says in a metaphorical way that symbolic construction, that is, the structure in a general philosophical perspective, could also be seen as the State in the frame of a political analysis (Badiou 1982: 55-56).

2. Badiou's second reading of symbolic regards the field of logics and mathematics. In particular his studies regarding set and model theories (Badiou, 1969a, 1988) develop with particular reference to the activity of *Cahiers pour l'analyse* (Badiou, 1968, 1969b). The basic idea is that symbolic in Lacan represents the logical formalization ("*la structure est la logique*" as said by Lacan, 2011: 40), through which psychoanalysis deals with the real. In Badiou, as in Lacan, the formalization encounters its impasse in the real, i.e., the element immanent to the structure and genetics of signification. This element is, in the meantime, not be represented, not be formalized. Therefore the real is the internal space inside the logical/symbolical construction (Lacan and Badiou insist that it is not mystical or irrational) but that is subtracted at every opportunity of calculation. This explains the contingency that is linked with the emergence of Real:

“le réel... s'affirme dans le impasses de la logique... Nous touchons là du doigt, en un domaine en apparence le plus sûr, ce qui s'oppose à l'entière prise du discours dans l'exhaustion logique, ce qui y introduit une béance irréductible. C'est là que nous désignons le réel.” (Lacan, 2011: 41)

“l'impossible, c'est-à-dire ce qui sépare, mais autrement que ne fait le possible, ce n'est pas un <<ou-ou>>, c'est un <<et-et>>. En d'autres termes, que ce soit à la fois p et $\neg p$, c'est impossible, c'est très précisément ce que vous rejetez au nom du principe de contradiction. C'est pourtant le Réel” (Lacan, 1973: 19/02/1974).

This is the outcome of a Lacanian study of logic and set theory that determines the dialectic between symbolic and real conducive to the violation of traditional principles of gnoseology (or, epistemology). Vice versa, for Badiou, the formalization represents the *impasse* of real because it marks and segments the real in its mathematical process of writing (*matheme*). In addition to the two meanings of real as split and as *impasse* of formalization, Badiou connects Lacanian real to his reading of dialectic in *Théorie du sujet*. In this work, as we have seen, the dialectic and the structure are discussed in parallel and Badiou describes these philosophical notions in his terms of *esplace* and *horlien*. If the first represents the symbolic place and its systematic indexing inside the structure, the *horlien*, another neologism by Badiou, depicts the specific strength and the force of subtraction of an element from its place. The element that is inserted and, in some way, normed by its position, maintains at the same time a space of opacity that is its singularity. This capability is strengthened by its immanence in the situation/position that produce its determination (both, in ontological and in political terms of norms and laws). If there is no *esplace* we are in front of a non-philosophical perspective that theorizes an absolute exception, which is totally indeterminate and then irrational (a-conceptual) in ontology, and that is incapable of either historical or political capacity in terms of praxis. In his writings of the 1970s and 1980s Badiou attributes this position to Gilles Deleuze and his *petit-bourgeois* political approach.⁶

Badiou reads in this couple *esplace-horlien* the dialectic that in Lacan's thought references another couple: symbolic-real. Even though Badiou criticizes Lacan in particular in the last chapter (subtitled “*Au de là de Lacan*”) of *L'Être et l'événement* (Badiou, 1988) and in *Logiques de mondes* (Badiou, 2006) he claims that a philosophy that is able to deal with the contemporary has to take into account Lacanian anti-philosophy:

"Lacan s'institue comme éducateur de toute la philosophie à venir. J'appelle philosophie contemporaine celui qui a le courage de traverser l'antiphilosophie de Lacan. Il ne sont pas nombreux." (Badiou 1992: 136).

Badiou proves faithful to this legacy in his main books, where one can find a myriad of references to Lacan functional to the developments of Badiou's philosophy. But the 'textual site' where we can read an extended, committed, and rigorous Badiouian analysis of Lacan in relation to philosophy is the seminar of 1994-95, which is now available in a version transcribed by some of Badiou's collaborators (see Badiou, 1994) This will be our principle reference.

2. Lacan's critique of philosophy

In the seminar titled *Sur Lacan*, Badiou points out Lacan's position within philosophy and metaphysics by analyzing the connections (and the differences) between Lacanian and Heideggerian approaches to the history of philosophy. In doing so, Badiou shows how in Lacan's words 'philosophy' often equates to 'metaphysics', that is, in accord with Heidegger, the history of oblivion. While for Heidegger this is the oblivion of being, for Lacan it comes to the oblivion of original and pre-ontological split within each ontological construction (we have to note that for Lacan there is not any 'being' that is not a 'language being', a signifier or a letter).

Metaphysics, therefore, represents a mystification: it is the imaginary attempt of *suturing* the real-symbolic split, the continuous effort of trying an element (the foundation or *Gründ* to put it in German philosophical vocabulary) that supports the entire philosophical system as a Whole, where truth is completely representable (*Vorstellung*). This element could be the ancient and passive substance, the Cartesian *ego* that belongs to the act of *cogito*, its Transcendental rewriting, the Hegelian dimension of *Vernunft*, as well as the romantics' or Jung's conception of unconscious. Only the Freudian approach has the radical force to deconstruct the place both of the foundation and the logical principles (identity, non-contradiction) of traditional metaphysics: Freud depicts the subjective as the result of the relationships between 'instances' (Id, Ego, Super-Ego) and not as substances, and develops a displacement of the consciousness (the Ego of modern philosophy, the foundation) in connection with the importance of the unconscious in each process of subjectification.

As Badiou suggests in *Being and Event*, the subject is forever a process of subjectification and never will be the solidified result of this process. It never will be the object of an external and scientific gaze: this is the singularity of the subject, which is not an illogical dimension but the ability to resist to its complete formalization inscribed in the logical development of the scientific formalization itself. Thus Badiou's reading allows one to understand the subject of psychoanalysis as a deployment of subjectivity which has no centre, no original identity, no foundation: the unconscious shows the instability of the ego and its lack of identity; the identity is the product of the signifier and linguistic action of the unconscious on the subject; however, the unconscious is not a new foundation but the differential chain of language.

Badiou claims that Lacan objects to philosophy for its fantasy of suturing the lack and the split, occupying its true with the element of foundation and its logics of the representation. Against this image of thought, Lacan develops his anti-philosophical practice as an act of crossing of philosophy: He does not want to produce the annihilation of the letter but the reactivation of its theoretical and critical elements (see Aléman 2000).

In this way Badiou demonstrates how Lacan's anti-philosophical attack against the traditional category of truth (*vérité*) could give way to the new theory of 'generic process' of truth as he presents in *Being and Event*: the truth is never a Whole ("*de vérité, il n'y a que mi-di!*") and it is connected with the dimension of a-conscience knowledge (*savoir*) which could not match; according to Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hegel, 1980) there is a split between the knowledge of the conscience, the protagonist of this *Bildungsroman*, and the truth of absolute knowledge (the speculative identity of thought and being, of subject and object). But for Lacan this split could never be solved in any absolute knowledge and it has to remain as the negative motor of each process of symbolization: despite the philosophy that sutures them.⁷

The Whole defeats the One; this, according to Badiou, represents the logical and ontological principle: while the first targets totalization, the second (in set theory's terms) guarantees the necessity of the two, as the splitting of the identity principle ($A = A$), the genesis of difference by split. Badiou interprets Lacan's ontology as the opposition between "*L'Un est!*" (The One is) and "*Il y'a de l'un!*" (There is of one): the first statement represents Heideggerian ontology with its interrogation of being, the second statement is the Lacanian anti-philosophical interrogation of the event, his subtractive practice (Badiou, 1992: 186-193) that develops an ontology in which

there is a mathematical principle of count (the instance of the letter). Therefore, places and operations are irreducible to substantial being.

3. Political Lacan

If philosophy is taken as a metaphysical operation of closure, one will face many difficulties trying to take into account the real. According to his theory of generic procedures of truth (love, mathematics, politics, art), Badiou shows how in Lacan there is a particular reading of politics and mathematics, as well as (obviously) of psychoanalysis: these are some important modalities of understanding and working with the split and the insistence of real.⁸ Precisely for this reason they are analyzed in relationship to their opposition with philosophy.

Psychoanalysis, mathematics and politics have, in Badiou's reading of Lacan, the constitutive ability of clarifying the split evident in philosophical suture and to present it as a problem for philosophy (Badiou, 1992: 275-326). In other words they force philosophy to consider the danger of forgetting under the suture. In this paper I will explain only the political-psychoanalytical items.

Badiou in his *Sur Lacan* produces a *détour* on Lacan and the political in making reference to *Introduction à l'édition allemande d'un premier volume des Écrits* (Lacan 2001: 553-559). He quotes:

"pour mon ami Heidegger évoqué plus haut du respect que je lui porte, qu'il veuille bien s'arrêter un instant [...] sur cette idée que la métaphysique n'a jamais été et ne saurait se prolonger qu'à s'occuper de boucher le trou de la politique." (Lacan 2001 : 554-555)

Badiou underlines how for Lacanian politics represents an element of hole or split. But in what sense is politics a hole? And a hole compared to what? Instead, Lacan states that there is a difference between philosophy, or metaphysics, as disciplines that belong to the discourse of Master and University (see Lacan, 1991), and politics as a practice that depends on a process of *savoir* that is at the same time an act.

While metaphysics is a symbolic-imaginary construction legitimated by power and its institution, which fight to close the hole and the split (the impossible solution of real, the complete account of *horlien*), politics is a practice of thought and an act which endeavours to work with the impossible dimension of real (this is, for Badiou, the fidelity of event in its precariousness).

Lacan describes a similar practice as the ethics of psychoanalysis (see Lacan, 1986) in contrast to each form of service of goods.⁹ By such a definition he designates the moral philosophies, which teach that subjects must protect themselves from excess (Plato, Aristotle), paying attention to the welfare of the whole of society (Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and political economy), or to the State (Hegel and conservative politics).

For Lacan, the praxis of conservation of itself belongs to the Freudian principle of pleasure,¹⁰ the human homeostatic regulation of mind-body process intensity: each moral philosophy teaches that one has only to do what produces pleasure (even if it is the basic and simple absence of suffering), and should take care to avoid whatever produces pain or sorrow.

However, Freud in his later works (Freud, 1919, 1923) pointed out how human beings are also deeply determined by the death instinct (*Thanatos*) and not only by the principle of pleasure (*Eros*). The latter is the foundation of the Lacanian category of *jouissance* (enjoyment), which drives the subject, but this is not a moral/pleasure concept: this is a drive (*Trieb*) that leads one beyond both the principle of pleasure and each classical moral category. Instead then of the classical utterance “*conatus in existentia perseverandi*”, psychoanalysis speaks about a *conatus* which leads to the fading and consumption of the human-being.

From one side there is the moral of common good, the civilization (repression) project that determines the subject’s renunciation of his/her own desire to obtain a social security and equilibrium. In welfare and security relies the absence of conflict, and so, of the differences that might produce a conflict. As a consequence there is no pluralism or political action developed to manage these differences and to construct a true consent.

Such is the dream of our neo-liberal democracy, a politics without political acts, based on a formal and scientific functioning (Badiou 1992: 242); modern political science aims to ensure the cancellation of differences (as in natural law’s doctrine of power and in its liberal, utilitarian metamorphosis).¹¹

Badiou opposes such a modern political logic of the right of the politics of justice (that is, in Badiou, linked with a strong reading of Plato). Our capitalistic ideology teaches us that justice equates to security; and security only exists within a political society that has definitively gained its welfare. Only a State with total welfare and an organization (representatives/liberal system) that cancels human differences could offer us real justice and the possibility of our political and existential realization.

In Badiou's Lacanian analysis though, justice could comport a state of disparity and differences among subjects or an act which exposes the State to insecurity or which is not functional to its welfare. Such a justice is connected to *real* consent but not the legitimate/representatives' praxis that is more involved in the principles of legality-equality, the formal consent of the 'State of right, than to *real* encounter (in its double meaning) of the plurality of different subjects. The legality-legitimacy is, in Badiou, the external rind of politics, its imagery figure of wholeness. In a style paradoxically close to Carl Schmitt's (see Schmitt, 1968), Lacan and Badiou put an opposition between a politics of justice and *real* consent and a politics of welfare and formalism.

On the other hand, there is an ethics which is not bottled in such a stifling principle of police's politics (*Civilization's* moral becomes a form of political control) and that confronts their acts with the impossible of real and *jouissance*: in politics, this impossibility has the figure of community (Badiou, 1992: 218-224) and of justice with the question of a non-formal or representative consent (*Consensus*) as *Cum-sentire*, the encounter of different subjectivities, their modality of *jouissance* (see Badiou, 1993; Žižek, 1997; Adone Brandalise, 2008).

The psychoanalytical view of split and *jouissant* subjectivity, of real differences, becomes in Lacan and alternatively in Badiou the first step to a re-writing of political categories (community, equality, fraternity, justice)¹² that represent a group of terms associated with the modern logic of power and political science, but also a collection of terms which we cannot be completely inscribed into a formal definition. These are expressions of our political real that are replaced by scientific and abstract concepts (political science's concept of equality, fraternity, etc.) that are not able to give us an adequate idea of the complexity of politics. A new ethics and practice is the project both of Lacan, where it is less political and more connected to analysis, and Badiou, where it becomes a post-Marxist philosophy.

Lacan (1986) sums up his ethics in the argument of ‘not to yield to one’s own desire’ (paraphrasing Lacan’s long reasoning) that we must read carefully as follows. Lacan says ‘not to yield’, that is, an effort and an engagement opposed to the logic of conservation/withdrawal/pleasure of moral philosophy (‘not to commit excess’, ‘not to do what could produce any pain’), that is the logic of good and rights of the human being as the individual of humanism and natural law; ‘to one’s own desire’, that is, not the arbitrary claim of making the world equal to one’s own desire (as in Lacan’s reading of Freudian Marxism); rather it must be emphasized that desire in psychoanalytical theory is an incomplete process, connected with castration and the impossible enjoyment or reaching forth of *das Ding* (the imagery whole object, the Mother). In this way, desire is the metonymy of a lack of being: the lack that keeps open the dynamic of subjectification (the *Je* as splitting subject) and de-centres the humanist conception of human being, the conscience-ego (the *moi*). Desire is linked to a dimension of impossible pleasure and satisfaction: it is linked to the real and uneasiness (*Unbehagen*, as in Freud, 1929).

Therefore, the Lacanian imperative means that the subject has to make an effort, a fidelity, and a commitment with his/her own desire, i.e., the singularity of its subjectivity, although such a move could signify that he/she is in contrast with conservation and production of the welfare and the security of Civility, with power, and so he/she will encounter a real impossibility of realization.

The major example quoted by Lacan is Sophocle’s Antigone (see Zupancic, 2003, Macola-Brandalise, 2004, Moroncini, 2011). She gives up to the good of her *polis*, not to yield to her desire to bury the spoils of her dead brother, although king Creon had forbidden this burial (against her brother who is considered a rebel, guilty of bringing the stasis, the civil war in Thebes). Her desire brings her to the terrible fate of being buried alive or, as Lacan says, to live in an impossible condition that is not symbolic, cultural and human. This myth expresses vividly the ethics of not yielding to singularity, even if it can lead the subject to the impossible knock against the real. To be correct, Badiou conceives Lacanian ethics as a necessary *pars destruens* that shows the true dimension of the act against the institutional ethics of traditional philosophy. But he asserts that the latter represents only a preparatory theory of the act, that is insufficient for a really post-Marxist political agency as Badiou wants to depict. He opposes the *ethics of angst* (Lacan’s Antigone) against his *ethics of courage* (with the example of Aeschylus’ Prometheus): in the

former, the act remains connected to angst, thus it can hardly permit a courageous act as the politics of event in its contingency implies (Badiou 1982: 293-346).

Lacanian ethics speaks about desire as the result of the structure's action, of the inter-subjective dimension of law. So, not yielding to his/her desire is, from one point of view, the realistic recognition of one's place (*esplace*), and the work of mourning of the subject when faced with his/her "egocracy" that is the subjective position in neo-liberal political society (i.e., the subject that considers himself only as a bearer of rights and who is only interested in politics with the aim only of private satisfaction). From a different point of view, this position is a practical attempt to not reduce subjectivity to the objectified concept of modern science or the coercive power of laws. The space of desire represents the hole (*true*) that resists the legislation and diffusion of power.

This hole – a hole that institutions want to suture – is not the space of arbitrariness (in Hegelian terms, a form of madness in the political subject) but rather a space for the thought and the act (two notions that become identical for Lacan) that deal with the symbolic and real of structural law. From such dealings, commitment and dedicative work, always contingent and precarious, could emerge a 'newness' (echoing J. A. Miller) or a real event that rewrites and replaces the symbolical structure of power and law.

But in Lacan this position does not lead to any party or any political construction: there is no institutional closure; there is rather a radical effort to maintain his own critical force and to act against ideology. For Badiou, by contrast, the evental politics is sometimes too linked to historical-political forms and their 'glass', or to a complex waiting of the event in its revolutionary purity (see Adrian Johnston, 2007 and Žižek, 2007, that criticize this argument to Badiou as unable to make it happen as a Marxist political act).

Precisely for this reason, Badiou tries to face the Lacanian perspective on the theme of revolution in his *Sur Lacan*. In my opinion, this argument owes more to Badiou's radical Marxist background than to Lacan's intention (Badiou is too clear on this point in Badiou-Roudinesco, 2012: 17-52). Indeed, Lacan speaks about revolution in philological terms (Lacan 2001: 420-443). When he is questioned on psychoanalysis' revolutionary role (in the moment of French '68 by the students of Vincennes themselves), he places the topic in its original astronomical field,

analyzes the Kantian/Freudian image of “Copernican revolution” and claims that revolution is a circular motion:

"Pourquoi ne pas partir de l'ironie qu'il à a le mettre au compte d'un révolution (symbolique) une image d'une révolution astrales qu'en donne guère l'idée?

Qu'y a-t-il de révolutionnaire dans le recentrement autour du soleil du monde solaire? A entendre ce qui j'articule cette année d'un discours du maître, on trouvera que celui-ci y clôt fort bien la révolution qu'il écrit à partir du réel: si la visée de l'ἐπιστήμη est bien le transfert du savoir de l'esclave au maître....qui demeure inchangé à mesure même de son recul. Pour la conscience commune, soit pour le « peuple », l'héliocentrisme, a savoir que ça tourne ronde, sans qu'il y ait plus à y regarder. Mettre-je ce au compte du Galilée, l'insolence politique que représente le Roi-Soleil?"
(Lacan, 2001: 420-421)

This means that revolutionary attacks against the locus of power (the Master in his theory of the discourses) are doomed to create new and perhaps stronger *loca* of power. As we will see later, revolutionaries do not exit from the logic of the discourse of the Master; they merely attack the physical referent of power, while leaving intact its structure (see Wesley Swedlow, 2011). Thus, for neo-liberalism, the circle of power is only reform.

To explain this Lacan makes a direct reference to the French Revolution: although the revolutionaries tried to change not only the establishment but also the Constitutional side of the modern State and power, they remained trapped by an inability to abandon the modern political logic of power (the Master, in this case, that becomes Napoleon).

In the worst cases, failed revolution replaces the closed space of freedom in modern power with dictatorial power, as in the Soviet revolution and Stalin: a problem that Badiou deals with in terms of non-fidelity to the revolutionary event and of disaster (Badiou, 1992: 227-234). In my opinion, this Lacanian critique deals with modern political aporias and remains too similar to Hegel's response: the French Revolution more than a *Sattelzeit* (a real change in political device), it stays inside the track of modern theories of power (Thomas Hobbes', in my reading); even if it realizes some clear advantages by the way of a less totalitarian power structure, it does not break free of its formal logic.

Badiou would claim that such an analysis is not correct for the revolution in itself. It is true only when the evental and emancipatory force of revolution is misunderstood and dampened in its

final phase by the liberal or the obscurantist interpretation. These are observable at two points: the writing of constitutions and the division of powers, i.e., the aspects that we could inscribe into the logic of power of modern political science.

Lacan's work upon the concept of revolution is directed particularly against any political imagery, even this imagery is tied to the eventual revolution: it is directed against the idea that we must have confidence only in a unique and great fading of capitalistic power (see Johnston, 2007, Milner, 2011a, b). For Lacan, this is a question of strategy: we must not return to liberal politics (i.e. we must not abandon the idea of revolution) but neither can we trust in a violent action that is unable to deconstruct the logic of modern power (i.e., the true goal of a politics of real), a point that is completely correct for a Marxist such as Badiou. Nevertheless, in Badiou's works, we can see, using the Lacanian device, how the idea of revolution seems involved only in the view of a great and visible event, that makes unclear the goals of political strategy: the observation that Lacan moves against the fantasy of revolution (that Badiou reads as a critique of Sartre's Marxism in the 1994 seminar), is also able to impact on the imagery of Badiou's philosophy.

The students of Paris '68 are in the same predicament because they are more preoccupied with attacks on a single referent of master and power (the central State), as there they see a clear meaning of power structure. But structure does not have a central meaning. The structure is a series of signifiers that represent a meaning to another signifier, dissolving the idea of a complete meaning, (Lacan 1966: 498; 838-844). Power has no central meaning in representatives or in the central State (despite the relative strength of the latter). It is diffuse and dispersed into a plurality of signifiers (the super-national, the economical and financial, the scientific institution, the medical gaze) that spread it both at the macroscopic (Globalization) and the microscopic levels (subjection of body, control of life, production of subject, of pseudo-desires and requirements).

Lacan thinks that the discourse of University represents the extension of the Master's power to the whole of society: institutional science becomes a tool both for police analysis and the control of society, and for the construction of subjects. Therein consists the results of power's processes onto the symbolic body, which models itself on the Master's discourse to assume a position in the machinery of State. This logic is developed in the *Discourse of Capitalism* (Lacan, 1978). The political control and structuring of citizens becomes formally secure through the economical-financial determination of power. Such a power controls and produces the subject around a

fantasy: a fictional lack created by the inscription into the subjects of an infinite series of requirements and wishes that are the result of capitalistic ideology (see A. T. B. McGown, 2003)

This turn produces a diffusion and a decentralization of power. Lacan's discussion allows us to understand that the issue at stake in political change (protest, revolution, any other modification) is not individual but structural. We are accustomed to consider political change to be the replacement of one individual representing the State with another. Therefore, when we have to face a negative expression of power, we want to replace the individual that represents it with another individual, who represents an element of newness and hope. According to the Lacanian conception, we should not put our hope in the individual, whatever their strengths or abilities. Indeed, the individual assumes a structural position (the place of Master in the modern logic of power) that remains the same: a place determined by a precise and aporetic application of power. A *real* political act aims at the modification of the structure of modern power, in its symbolic (its place), imagery (his self-narration), and in its relation with the political real.

We can fight against the central phantom of power (a unique Master), but on doing this we remain within the logic of power: this is what Lacan named the 'politics of the hysteric' or 'the politics of the fool'. Modern and contemporary politics have to be discussed on other bases, what Lacan tries to develop in his theory of discourses (see Jeanne L. Schroeder, 2008). A discourse functions by means of the logic of the signifier through the model of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* process (Lacan, 1986: 75-76). A signifier is "making the function of *Vorstellung*", that means that it is not the *Vorstellung*, the representation of signified, but a deconstruction of this semiotic linearity/positivism in a metonymical parade: a signifier represents something (a subject, in Lacan) to another signifier in a play that makes impossible the construction of a clear and whole representation.

In the representative democracies of late Capitalism, a signifier (i.e., a representative) is not the representation of individual or group needs (i.e., the signified), but one of the knots that make the function of the represented another representation, in a process that is disconnected from the concrete basis of individual people. This process deprives people of any political action in favour of democratic representatives that make our political place, represent us and, at the same time, reduce us to thinking only of our private lives. But, as we have seen, representatives do not form a complete representation of the people's will: all attempts to extend representation or to make a democracy really democratic are impaired by the logics of modern power, which

proceeds to the exclusion of the subject's concrete political agency. About this bureaucratic/parliamentary displacement of power, Badiou writes:

"Si l'existence d'un État du droit...constitue l'essence politique du démocratisme, il en résulte cette conséquence philosophique capitale qui est que la politique n'a nul rapport intrinsèque avec la vérité..."

Dans le parlementarisme de l'Ouest comme dans le bureaucratisme despotiques de l'Est, la politique est en dernière instance confondue avec la gestion de l'État..."

Dans un cas la règle abolit toute vérité de la politique (laquelle se résout dans l'arbitraire du nombre, le suffrage), dans l'autre, le Parti déclare détenir le tout de la vérité, devenant aussi indifférent à toute circonstance qui affecte le nombre, ou le peuple." (Badiou, 1992: 241-243)

Certainly, Badiou is more radical than Lacan. This is in part due to his declared relationship with the revolutionary 'Marxist' collective, and his work related to Lenin and Mao. His critique of the State is probably one of the most destructive in contemporary philosophy. But in both Lacan and Badiou there is a strategy that aims for the displacement of this modern modality of the State's power. Although they must confront the modern State, Politics (Prometheus) and Ethics (Antigone) are not reducible to its dimensions. They develop new and original routes of modes of thought that are included but not resolved in the construction of political science (see Yannis Stavrakakis, 1999).

Following Lacan, I would like to suggest that this process could be named "subversion" and not revolution: a practice that, without any fanfare, rewrites the symbolical constitution of law, placing it in relation with the emergence of the real; a process that supports the contingency of a subjectivity that is determined by structural law without being completely formalized by the gaze of power. Lacan considers revolution to be a circle that starts as protest against the Master (the Roi-Soleil of Lacanian irony) and ends with another Master (Napoleon). Lacan writes:

"Ce que Freud, à son dire exprès, dans le recours à Copernic allégorise de la destitution d'un centre au profit d'un autre, relève en fait de la nécessité d'abaisser le superbe qui tient à tout monocentrisme..."

Pas question que cette prétention se soucie de la topologie qu'elle suppose : à savoir celle de la sphère." (Lacan, 2001 : 421)

We must consider this quotation in relation to Lacan's reading of Hegel. Lacan claims that the final aim of the latter is a total sphere where being and real, knowledge and truth are equalled

(Absolute knowledge). This sphere represents the form of political master's power (State in the *Philosophy of Right*):

“Ce qui est bien fait pour montrer combien peu porte l'incidence des écoles, c'est que l'idée que le savoir puisse faire totalité est, si je le puis dire, immanente au politique en tant que tel. On le sait depuis longtemps. L'idée imaginaire du tout telle qu'elle est donnée par le corps, comme s'appuyant sur la bonne forme de la satisfaction, sur ce qui, à la limite, fait sphère, toujours été utilisée dans la politique, par le parti de la prêcherie politique.”
(Lacan 1991: 33)

According to Lacan, politics as well as (anti-)philosophy needs to make revolutions as it is required by Freud's understanding of subjectivity, cultural and social world. As in his theory of the subject, Lacan thinks that we are faced with a field that is both structural and topological. As with the decentralization of the subject of the Seminars of 1950-1960, the issue is the decentralization of power and the Master: we should therefore read the political in terms of topology and of writing.

The decentralization of the Master is the goal of the analyst's discourse because it is the only discourse which discovers the *subjection* that creates the *subject* in the (subjectification) process of the Master, University and the Law. Badiou (1994) states that the peculiar form of the hole in the Lacanian definition of politics is the discourse of analysis because it represents a clear break (i.e., a practice of thought) with institutional knowledge (the discourse of University). Psychoanalysis represents the primacy of practice upon institution and constitutes a true attack to the concept of power. This is what Lacan called anti-philosophy (see Johnston, 2010).

In psychoanalytical terms we speak of “traversing the fantasy”, or the “voyage” during which the psychoanalyst is stripped of power and makes him- or her-self the object of desire (the *objet petit a*). This enables the analysand to overcome his/her imaginary position (the egocracy), discover his/her contingent position inside the symbolic, and learn *savoir faire* of the real. Nevertheless, Lacan (2007) suggests that even psychoanalysis is a non-complete decentralization of power because, as with as other discourses, it is not a pure discourse (it remains linked to semblance and institutions). If politics deals with issues of centralization and decentralization, space and structure, then it has to develop a proper topological dimension that does not equate to a centrality of power.

For Alexandre Koyré (1961; whose ideas are fundamental for Lacanian approach to science), the very change in science was due to the Galileo's mathematical methods, his practice of a mathematical writing that laid the foundations for a new analysis of the physical world. Copernicus replaces the earth with the sun (in our metaphor: the king with the new representative or imperialistic Master), keeping the 'centre'. Galileo, however, makes a more radical subversion.

Similarly for politics: there is no ground to change a form of government to another form of government that is equally intertwined with the modern logic (and structural place) of power. We have to change the space of the structure and its language. This language is the logic of the letter, which becomes, in the later Lacan, not only a symbolical dimension but the bridge (the littoral) between language and the real, since it acts on the subject's situation of being marked and so deprives or overloads their real enjoyment. In my opinion, if there is a Lacanian politics, it is a topological politics of writing (as in Homi Bhabha, 2004: 199-209).

My political reading of Lacan takes into consideration the *Constitution* as *real* element. This element moves the entire politics without being completely represented and constituted (see Brandalise, 2006). The Constitution is never completely symbolic even if it is only the symbolical-constitutional process that forms the constitution itself. The latter is half-way between a constituted reality that changes continuously (in particular with the globalization and migration phenomena) and a constitutional force or organism: it is something that, to paraphrase Lacan, does not stop *not writing* completely. The singularity of Lacanian ethics is based in the subject that makes the experience of this process into a practice for writing his/her space.

This "writing" is another possibility to read the political in a topological way. In the epoch of Globalization and in elegy of the national state, we are facing the change of the spatial conditions of the political which requires a new structure of thought: a structure that is similar to the practice of writing or the mathematical construction of space. The subjectification is now located in the "interstices" or boundaries as a dynamic relation, i.e., forms of limits, convergences, continuities and open sets, surfaces with any inside or outside. We can understand this point through Lacan's reading of Arrthur Rimbaud's 'the ego is an other', where the subject is a beam of signifiers (inter-subjective, social and political). Lacan (1973) suggests just a re-reading of subjectivity and the social field (the theory of the discourses themselves) in this topological manner.

The Nation-State itself has been written as an open set by the encounter with a transnational external point, in the visible figure of the main centres of power (such as Brussels is for Europe) as well as in the 'hidden' figure of migrants, and by the plurality of its own internal structure: but this image of profundity (inside-outside) is just what is going to lose its importance, even if the nation *does not yield its own desire* of political acts. Although the latter could be only in a dimension that reduces the nation's wholeness and independence (a form of pluralism in which the element loses its closing structure without dispersing its singularity).

The Constitution becomes the place of an osmotic writing of the nation, where this act of writing as in Lacanian theory regards, at the same time, the political-symbolic process and the *real-jouissance* of political body both of subjects and of the nation. It is the crossing point between the constitutional process that works through the representative modality of power (the great legacy of the French Revolution's writing of Constitutional Charters, the *Konstitution*) and the real body of nation with its plurality and intensity of change (*Verfassung*): the two sides of the break that affected and deconstructed the contemporary politics of the Nation-State.

4. Some conclusions

It is probably true that, in politics, the Lacanian *pars destruens* is more precise and structured than the *pars costruens*. This is what Badiou criticizes Lacan of in his *Seminar 1994-95*. Badiou works or re-works the Lacanian device while maintaining a fidelity to Lacan's non-*university* style: he takes into account and sustains the wager of Lacanian ethics, while developing its political side. Moreover, Badiou underlines some of Lacan's limits, as in his opposition between Prometheus and Antigone. This corresponds with Badiou's philosophical and political project.

Lacan offers to Badiou the following tools to make his philosophical and political theory a very radical and critical one: 1. Using the signifier's and letter's logic (both in linguistic and topological terms), he employs a materialist reading of Hegel (echoing Marx); 2. the reading of modern political power and the theme of singularity as something that lives within the structure of law, without being resolved in its rule; 3. And the fidelity to the singularity of position in his/her contingency.

On the other hand, Badiou's critique of Lacanian thought has two main themes: 1. the anti-philosophical approach that Lacan practices upon philosophy and 'human science', identifiable in his notion of split between *savoir* and *vérité*, his study of *sens* and its linguistic limitation to a formal-mathematical method (Structuralism); 2. the goal of Lacan's ethics (Badiou, 1982) and politics (Badiou, 1994) is not anything tangible, a real-evental form, but it is an endless dissolution and deconstruction of structures and formations, that remain more or less institutional. Although this could be seen as having healthy political aspects (critique of ideology and institution), Badiou claims that it makes a strong and complete act impossible for Lacan, acts such as those as he wants to obtain and to think with his materialistic dialectic.

Finally, in this paper I have tried to point out the positive aspects of Badiou's reading of Lacan, thinking that they are essential both to understand Badiou as well as post-Marxist debates, and in order to open the field of research into Lacanian politics. I have inverted the chronological reading of philosophical study, starting with Badiou's Lacan, bypassing his critiques of Lacan, in order to reflect on the latter himself and on a Lacanian interpretation of the Political. I did this to show the ethics of psychoanalysis as a political *savoir faire* that is at the same time act and thought; the "not to yield" (or for Badiou the fidelity), could be critically important in eliciting the *not-whole* of modern power as well as its *fantasy*. Lacan's thought could be seen as a new platform for philosophical and political critique of ideology and a starting point to discuss the symbolical-real constitution of social, perhaps more than Badiou's, precisely because the former is foreign to the logic of political group, formation and production.

Notes

¹For an in-depth study see Slavoj Žižek, 1997.

² For a philosophical reading of Lacan, see Lorenzo Chiesa, 2007, and Charles Shepherdson, 2008; in reference to my reading, also refer to Pluth, 2007. For an interesting study of Badiou's philosophy see Peter Hallward, 2003, 2004 and Ed Pluth, 2009.

³ For an analysis of this point see Gaetano Rametta, 1992.

⁴ On these issues is important to see P. Cesaroni, 2012.

⁵ See Alain Badiou, 1997.

⁶ On Lacan's Hegel see Mladen Dolar, 2006, Nicolò Fazioni, 2012.

⁷ See Alain Badiou, 1990.

⁸ On this Seminar see Bruno Moroncini-Petrillo, 2007. An interpretative approach to Lacanian ethics, that is very interesting for this work, is Frances Restuccia, 2006.

⁹ *Pars pro toto*, I quoted: "*Car cette fameuse moindre tension dont Freud articule le plaisir, qu'est-ce d'autres que l'éthique d'Aristote*" (Lacan, 2001: 523).

¹⁰ I will refer to this picture through the terms of conceptual history (Giuseppe Duso, 2007) as *modern logic of power*; the analysis which is articulated through Lacan and Badiou is very similar to that of Foucault's (1997). See also Nicolò Fazioni, 2011.

¹¹ An interesting reading of this issue is in Slavoj Žižek, 2007.

¹² For a political analysis of the idea of representation the work of Giuseppe Duso, 2003, is pivotal. Furthermore, this point is connected to our analysis of constitution, influenced by Mario Bertolissi – Giuseppe Duso, 2008.

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