

... AND WHICH OTHER IS LEFT US?  
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE  
REAUTHORIZATION OF POLITICAL BODIES  
– A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper performs a political or worldly reading of Lacan's subject, and the way in which such subjectivity is founded as existing in today's "existential" space. The question is the following: if, especially politically speaking, we are obliged to think the inexistent Other or delegitimated master signifier, what can and must be said about the status of the subject's existence today and, in particular, its political or worldly status? How is political affirmation possible in the complete absence of symbolic authority? This essay attempts to confront these questions head-on, and to draw the conclusions, in classically Lacanian categories, that directly follow from both the fact of the total absence of either symbolic authority or, as a result, symbolic difference (including all gods "as if," identities "as if," etc.) and, on the other hand, the necessity of affirmation beyond this absence.

**KEYWORDS:** Lacan; Schmitt; Event; The Political

[T]he social bond that exists today is one presented under the form of dispersed individuals that is but another name for the dissolution of all links or unbinding of all bonds. For something has radically changed with the globalization of the capitalist discourse. Globalization, in this respect, does not mean simply that nothing is left in its place, as no anchoring seems to be capable of controlling the unending movement of displacements and substitutions. Indeed, in the current space of discursivity, the notion of place itself is *strangely out of place*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jelica Šumič, "Politics and Psychoanalysis in Times of the Inexistent Other," in *Jacques Lacan Between Politics and Psychoanalysis*, eds. Samo Tomšič and Adreja Zevnik (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 33-4, emphasis added.

## I

We begin straightaway with the following formula of Lacan's, on the nature of an existing discourse: "[T]here is no existing language whose ability to cover the field of the signified can be called into question, one of the effects of its existence as a language being that it fulfils all needs there."<sup>2</sup>

As multiple the directions leading away from this sentence are, the present essay limits itself for its own particular purposes to two important, albeit for now somewhat broad and imprecise, implications: first,

(1) that an "existing language" or, more formally, the being of (a particular) discourse, implies a "place" wherein the subject is constituted in a framework or field of meaning, a horizon which "fulfills all needs," in other words—to put it colloquially—which runs or "works" (and this is one aspect of the fact that it "covers the field of the signified"); and second,

(2) that, for Lacan, meaning, a field of meaning which "operates," although in motion and even violently so (the subject is never perfectly at home in its own or any discourse), is in some non-trivial sense closed or "tied together"—*gathered*, to use Heidegger's term—and this necessarily by something which is *not itself* a mere element of the discourse, but is in fact situated in a place of difference behind and beyond this or that discourse: a place "other."<sup>3</sup>

Formally speaking, one might say, given this, that the second point—the fact of a kind of otherness constituting a "point of closure," we can say, although what this means must for now remain entirely vague—is what allows the first point—the operation of a meaningful "place" wherein the subject can itself "work"—to be true, that is: to be actual(ized), to exist.

Framed as such, we can of course speak of this formal relation between a field of meaning and its constitutive "otherness" (or Other) in a number of ways and for various purposes, but the intent of the present essay leads us in the

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), p. 415. All future citations from the *Écrits*, even when from different essays, will be marked via in-text parentheses indicating page number in Fink's edition, eg., (E, 415).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E, 418: "Now the structure of the signifier is, as is commonly said of language, that it is articulated. This means that its units—no matter where one begins in tracing out their reciprocal encroachments and expanding inclusions—are subject to the twofold condition of being reduced to ultimate differential elements and of combining the latter according to the laws of a closed order."

direction of what I am calling, and will flesh out as we proceed, a political or *worldly* interpretation.

In the same work cited in the epigraph to the present essay, Jelica Šumič invokes the jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt for the purposes of showing—this is arguably the ultimate end to which her piece moves—that Lacanian psychoanalysis is anything but politically irrelevant, which is to say, according to her, that it perhaps provides a way to *transcend* Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction qua ground of a community (which itself constitutes what she calls a “segregation” model, a model which she deems worthwhile to think beyond) without, to be sure, regressing to a naïve and untenable liberal position (one of Schmitt’s main targets, of course) which, still today and despite everything the last century gave birth to, establishes—through the alliance of big finance and politically correct rhetoric—the reign of a supposed “positive universal” that would “include everyone.”

Šumič’s own conclusions on the political meaning of Lacanian psychoanalysis we will leave to investigate in the final part of this essay. For now, I mention her use of Schmitt simply to turn our reading of the aforementioned Lacanian distinction, constitutive of subjectivity, between the site of meaning and that of meaning’s other, in a political direction, namely: that Schmitt’s distinction between politics and the Political—the latter term of which designates, we will say appropriating Heidegger’s insight, an “ontological” dimension (Schmitt himself says “existential”), while the former signals, then, “ontic localizations” or particular modes of manifestation of the latter—might be used, in a provisional or analogous manner (I make no claims here to rigorously read Schmitt into Lacan, or vice versa), to make certain sense of said implication of the passage of Lacan’s cited above. Precisely put, the place or point of otherness wherein an order of meaning is tied together can be said to coincide with the order of the Political (where the logic of this order can be articulated, due to its generic character, in a quite *formal* manner), whereas an actual or localized world, consisting of its particular discourse, coincides, on the other hand, with the order of “politics,” the rules governing which are never general but always specific and, as such, “closed” in particular fashions.

The grounds for this analogy are provided by Šumič herself when she observes what she designates as “the precariousness, in the field of politics, of

the very link, the agency of the Other, on which the structural equivalence between the discourse of the unconscious and the master's discourse [is] founded."<sup>4</sup> This observation is of cardinal importance for what follows.

What Šumič ultimately makes explicit here is the fact that our contemporary moment—characterized by what she calls the continuing and ever-increasing “globalization of capitalist discourse”—is suffering from a particular kind of illness, instability, and precariousness, at the level of the Other, which does not leave unaffected our fundamental political situations, our being in the world, and which, qua ontological (meaning here not merely relating to specific beings or “this or that” situation or world), is the instability of *the “agency of the Other” itself*.

According to Šumič, the function of such agency is the guarantor of the structural equivalence between the “discourse of the unconscious”—namely, the transcendental *ratio* of desire qua metonymic-linguistic logic—and the master's discourse which, evidently, is tantamount to the political field itself. If this agency is now “precarious” or even, she suggests, practically nonexistent, then it is no longer possible to count on the identity or equivalence of the field of politics—which operates according to a particular master's discourse—and the unconscious itself, the negative logic of desire or “lack.” In other words, the “big Other,” insofar as (now) undeniably nonexistent (Nietzsche already announces precisely this), would not then be the operator of sociality in our time; on the contrary, *a different Other would usurp its place*. These remarks are necessarily quite nakedly stated at this point, but will be fully fleshed out as we go along.

In accordance with the analogy being drawn here, we might then translate some of this Lacanian jargon into Schmittian terms: What is precarious here—even nonexistent, as we said—is *the existence of the Political (capital P) itself*. Interestingly enough, when Schmitt, in his essay “The Concept of the Political” from which this distinction is drawn, considered this very thing—namely, the possible inexistence of the Political—he concluded that, if this were to somehow be realized, then it would *logically follow* that human beings would not be able to distinguish themselves, qua communities—but we are always and

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<sup>4</sup> Šumič, “Politics and Psychoanalysis,” p. 29.

only in communities, so one might as well say “at all”—from each other in any meaningful or “real” sense, but that any distinctions arising therein would be, due to the nonexistence of the Political and its logic of genuine difference and separation, “mediated” by a dimension that would certainly *not* be political, and would even, indeed, be *anti-political*. In simpler terms: that the authentic difference of the Political would be elided and foreclosed by superficial differences unavoidably mediated by an anti-political, indeed merely “legal,” super-structure.

Which is precisely to say—and we must not equivocate on this point—that such a world-situation would be precisely that situation we find ourselves in today. Such a situation must concern itself, first and foremost, with technically and economically (i.e., “liberally”) organizing human beings into and within a great and homogeneous system of laws (which is opposed to what Schmitt calls the “pluriverse,” the plurality of states, implied by the existence of the Political), the foundation or *archē* of which must remain concealed, unthought, and indeed repressed and foreclosed, as it is precisely that “truth,” as Lacan would say, which would undermine its legalistic ideology and airtight monopoly: the order of the Political.<sup>5</sup>

The justification for interpreting the Political, following Schmitt, as the *archē* of meaningful difference is wholly justified on Lacanian grounds—provided,

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<sup>5</sup> For everything outlined here, see Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 19-79, but in particular, pp. 44, 53-7. In his book *The Mystery of Evil*, Giorgio Agamben describes a very similar scenario in terms of the distinction between *legality* and *legitimacy*, wherein a pervasive and one-dimensional logic of legality is the power of today’s all-encompassing system of flattened individualism; in such a space, one only ever “acts” in accordance with an impenetrable fabric of legality which posits one as a “lawful actor” but which, as a result, can paradoxically allow for no deviations or even judgement—indeed, no risk of “extra-legal” discernment whatsoever. To this sort of “acting,” Agamben opposes—and he locates this, interestingly enough, precisely in Benedict XVI’s stepping-down as Pope in 2013, historically only the second Church leader to have ever done so—what he describes as acting in accordance with, or on the basis of, a question of *legitimacy*, a gesture which calls the entire field of legality into question due to the fact that it acts in such a way that cannot be understood primarily, or even at all, in strictly legal terms but, on the contrary, precisely brings into view the unthinking homogeneity of the law by introducing thoughtful and even traumatic difference. One can here clearly infer that such acts calling into question the legitimacy of a particular order are in no way neutral *vis-à-vis* that order and, conversely, that, as a result, said order must perceive the introduction of an unaccounted-for difference as a tear or moment of confusion in its blind working. Indeed, it will perceive it as an attack. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Mystery of Evil: Benedict XVI and the End of Days*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

that is, that we accept the present proposed analogy between the two thinkers. In Lacanian terms, the foreclosure of the Political is in truth nothing other than the historical event of the “precariousness” (Šumič) or nonexistence of the big Other, which dissolves the overlap between the master’s discourse and the discourse of the unconscious. This dissolution, practically speaking, is equivalent to the erosion of symbolic authority within an all-encompassing and all-consuming liberal-capitalist discourse. *It follows that symbolic authority as such is that which has historically allowed real difference(s) to emerge.*

If this conclusion sounds counterintuitive for us “post-moderns,” we should allow a moment to remind ourselves that the sole reason the (continuing) collapse of symbolic authority produces, and has in the present age produced, an unprecedented economico-technological (ideal of) liberal individualist homogeneity (the “positive liberal universal,” in other words) rather than difference—the reason why, to say it another way, the “death of God” does not leave us, first and foremost *politically* speaking, on a peaceful liberal plane of immanence wherein all hierarchies and antagonisms vanish in an orgy of respect and equality but establishes, on the contrary, the reign of a system whose concern is the absorption and therein eradication of all differences, limits, conflicts, and boundaries—is that it is, according to Šumič, *precisely real and operative symbolic authority as such that founds a genuine worldly situation, a genuine place, inclusive of its given distinctions and differences, its intersecting and clashing histories, traditions, and positions, inclusive of its capacity for contentedness, respect, and “toleration” in the first place: an intelligible situation, “readable,” as she puts it: “[I]n the absence of the master signifier which would render a given situation ‘readable,’ the subject remains a prisoner, not of the Other that exists, but of the inexistent Other, better put perhaps, of the inexistence of the Other.”*<sup>6</sup> To be a prisoner in this sense is the exact opposite of being “imprisoned” by authority, and infinitely more immobilizing. Indeed, such a form of imprisonment to the *inexistent* Other is tantamount to the total suffocation of subjectivity, rather than its founding beneath the signifier of an existent authoritative Other. This is in fact precisely what Lacan is getting at when he famously remarks—inverting Dostoevsky—that without God, *nothing is*

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<sup>6</sup> Šumič, “Politics and Psychoanalysis,” p. 34, emphasis added.

*permitted*: the inexistence of the Other, as we shall see and further investigate below, is a far more horrific and debilitating exposure for the subject (analogous to, we might add, the proximity of the Mother, the unbearable force of which is held at bay by the Father's enabling name). That "nothing is permitted" means that distinctions and differences, the very conditions of conflict, war, plurality, and, to be sure, revolt and rebellion—indeed, opposition or movement of any kind—neither appear nor, when they do appear today in grotesquely "parodic" form, truly count for anything.

Let us conclude this first section by emphasizing two additional and crucial points:

(1) What Šumič emphasizes as a chief characteristic of our time (see epigraph to the present essay)—namely, that the increasingly globalized "capitalist discourse," the spirit of a "democratic materialism" (Badiou) demanding a monolithic techno-economical mode of being and thinking of ourselves, each other, and our relation to the world and earth, signals not simply that nothing is left in its place but that *place as such* is disappearing, as an operative or relevant "ontological" category—this characteristic is translated into Schmittian terms to mean that it is not merely politics, certain forms and styles of political organization, that are displacing themselves, eroding, disappearing, in favor of others (a continuous process of movement and conflict that in fact presupposes the existence of the Political), but the Political is itself vanishing or *has already vanished*. Otherwise said, the possibility of conflict or community, enemy or friend, constituting a meaningful difference or plurality which the Political, by way of its separating operation, implies, is giving way to a world that is ideally (or "metaphysically") unified at the levels of both being and appearing. On the one hand (at the level of being), technical control and a homogeneous materialistic understanding of all beings, including the human, as en-framed organizable objects (Heidegger); and, on the other (at the level of appearing), the economically-countable and exchangeable nature of everything which can as a result meaningfully appear (a common observation since at least Adorno). Culture or "world" is today reduced to an industry, as the Frankfurt School thinker pointed out, and can as such be sold, exchanged, and regulated in a flat space rendered essentially anonymous or "placeless." The real difference implied in the existence of the Political, on the other hand, is as such

the *actuality* of place (this does not mean simply geographical of course, but indicates, for example, differentiated cultures, ῥῆθῆ, and discourses) as an irreducible category, operating as a force of difference, which is why place and the Political have disappeared at the same time. World—or, in Lacanian terms, the effect of what Šumič calls the “agency of the Other” which guarantees, again in Heidegger’s terms, a gathered site of the coming-to-presence of beings in a particular way—disappears into the thin air and placeless-ness of a calculable space wherein the Other qua world-founding authority no longer functions.

(2) *Vis-à-vis* the basic contours (yet to be in any way set out) of how Lacan thinks the reality and possibility—the place—of the *subject* of psychoanalysis, the modern subject, in relation to the “agency of the Other,” not to mention what this entails for the subject’s conception of and relation to being itself, the suspicion arises that there are interesting and significant consequences for how this should be newly set out and construed against the backdrop of the present moment, namely, a time in which, to once again quote Šumič, the “incompleteness [or non-all character, of which we shall say more] of any space of discursivity” seems blatantly obvious, as “the emergence of a new discourse, the capitalist discourse, problematizes the notion of the Other as guarantor, thus shaking up the basic laws of the constitution of the social order and changing what constitutes social reality for us.”<sup>7</sup> We can already see, given the Lacanian formula with which we began, that the problematization of the notion of the Other as guarantor already causes us to inquire into what is meant, or can still be meant today, by the implied closure or “economy” of a given field of meaning governed by a master signifier. The “capitalist discourse,” as Šumič calls it, appears to wholly invalidate or, at any rate, to at least threaten any straightforward dichotomy between the tying-together of meaning beneath a “master” (which constitutes coherence itself) and the (supposed) “openness” of that which would—in reaction, by way of revolution, anarchism, or anything else supposed to be radical (social) “transgression” of meaning and spaces of meaning—run it aground. (In this way, Šumič’s use of the phrase “capitalist discourse” basically operates as the “death of God” does

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 29.



for Alain Badiou: once we grasp this as our real situation, once the blinders fall off once and for all, all recourse to some god, master, father, authority, or subject that is presumably enslaving us and against which we must “transgress,” must assert our desire, becomes banal, anachronistic, and even comical.) It is Šumič’s great merit (she is not alone in this<sup>8</sup>) to both grasp this fact and, in this,

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, in the same volume (pp. 72-85) Juliet Flower MacCannell’s essay “Lacan’s Imaginary: A Practical Guide,” where she argues, against the notion of an operative or existent symbolic authority in our time, for an understanding of our “mode of being” in terms of the priority of the register of the imaginary. Such a priority, such an understanding of our socio-political or worldly space, signals the need for a renewed and creative approach to how we construe the problems of, for example, authority, hierarchy, politics and/or ethics (liberal, communist, or otherwise), the ground and possibility of democracy, and the meaning today of a transgressive or “revolutionary” position. Slavoj Žižek, for his part, has repeatedly called for a revision of our assumptions concerning these very things—not least revolution and the priorities and assumptions of “the Left”—and consistently demonstrates, in various ways, the loss or nonexistence of the authoritarian master and the emergence of what Šumič calls, speaking of his work, the sadistic superego. Such a superego-istic authority in place of the old father figure—its command is “transgress! enjoy!,” as opposed to the latter’s straightforward prohibitions and limitations—is, for example, distinctly noticeable in the emergence and practices of what Žižek calls, in one of his well-known anecdotes, the “postmodern” father (though we might today say postmodern *educators* as well): “Instead of bringing freedom, the fall of the oppressive authority thus gives rise to new and sterner prohibitions. How are we to account for this paradox? Think of the situation known to most of us from our youth: the unfortunate child who, on Sunday afternoon, has to visit his grandmother instead of being allowed to play with friends. The old-fashioned authoritarian father’s message to the reluctant boy would have been: ‘I don’t care how you feel. Just do your duty, go to your grandma’s and behave yourself there!’ In this case, the child’s predicament is not bad at all: although forced to do something he clearly doesn’t want to, he will retain his inner freedom and the ability to (later) rebel against the paternal authority. Much more tricky would have been the message of a ‘postmodern’ non-authoritarian father: ‘You know how much your grandmother loves you! But, nonetheless, I do not want to force you to visit her—go there only if you really want to!’ Every child who is not stupid (which is to say most children) will immediately recognize the trap of this permissive attitude: beneath the appearance of free choice there is an even more oppressive demand than the one formulated by the traditional authoritarian father, namely an implicit injunction not only to visit Grandma, but to do it voluntarily, out of the child’s free will. Such a false free choice is the obscene superego injunction: it deprives the child even of his inner freedom, instructing him not only what to do, but what to want to do.” See Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), pp. 92-3. In the terms we have been invoking in this essay, one might notice that the “authoritarian” father is *located*—he has a definite place that is *distinct from* the subject’s: one might even say, in the spirit of Schmitt, that there is the possibility of there being an enemy. On the other hand, the “postmodern” permissive father is *not localizable*—to paraphrase Žižek, he literally gives the subject’s position to it in a way that makes it impossible to rebel or even act freely at all *since the subject experiences this desire* (albeit in a very ambivalent way) *as his own*. There is no *place*, no clean distinction between the superego-istic other and the subject—which does not of course mean that there is no Other but, rather, that there is *more of an Other than ever*, since this Other is now nowhere and everywhere, now deeply embedded in the subject itself, depriving the subject, because it refuses to locate itself and draw a clean line between itself and the subject, of any possibility of a consistent or “owned”

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to demonstrate how the possibilities intrinsic to the Lacanian subject do not, for all that, expire with the emergence of a radically “otherwise Other.” On the contrary, they anticipate and perhaps even await it.

The remainder of the present essay wishes, with all that has been said so far as its backdrop, to undertake a reading of Lacan’s thinking of the place of the subject, with a mind, via Šumič, to its contemporary “political” implications (and here I put political in scare-quotes to indicate the fact that it could as well read “existential,” given our reading of Lacan *avec* Schmitt, or even “ontological,” recalling precisely Heidegger’s sense of the term, which is justified due to the fact that it is not in a clinical or primarily logical sense that I take up Lacan in this essay but an historical or *worldly* sense, which itself, for Heidegger, is also the “sense” of being.) For this reading, I will rely—in part II of this essay—mainly on Lacan’s work cited earlier, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” which, to speak like him, will do the trick just fine, despite the fact that other writings are of course relevant. I will also have recourse to Alain Badiou’s critical reading of Lacan in the final pages of his *Being and Event*. Following this, the third and final part of this essay turns back to Šumič’s reading of Lacan, in order to suggest that our contemporary moment requires a *strong rethinking of subjectivity*—also a central concern of Badiou’s—: a radical reexamination of our assumptions, commitments, possibilities, and real situation. Whether or not that means remaining within the parameters of the Lacanian subject is, and will remain, a point of contention for anyone following Badiou in both his reading of Lacan and his rethinking of the subject. As is well known, Badiou emphasizes what he calls the need for a “post-Cartesian” (which precisely means for him post-Lacanian) subject—a need he proposes to satisfy with his conception, on the basis of his unique ontology as well as his thinking of the “event,” of what he calls a *rare* subject: a subject which is not simply given (as he takes Descartes’s and Lacan’s to be) but “takes place,” and which signals, perhaps paradoxically given that Badiou still insists on the term “subject,” the radical loss of individuality in the spirit and force of a newly constituted “we.” Such a subject is a living and breathing force, a transcendent

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position of difference. This is one of the reasons why continuing calls of further transgression are ridiculous rather than emancipatory today: in order to transgress, there has to be a real line to cross.

organism in which a number of human animals can participate, as organs constituting the body which is never itself reducible to them. On the other hand, Šumič seems to suggest that, contrary to Badiou's *evental* subject, perhaps the "given" Lacanian subject can itself be mobilized in surprising and novel ways towards equally radical ends. What will emerge is therefore, perhaps, a clue for the direction of something which, according to Šumič, Lacan might well yet answer to, and which is necessitated in our time by the fact that although it is indeed ludicrous to imagine an existent symbolic authority or master actually operative in today's "existing state of affairs," nonetheless, as she definitively puts it, "there is no question more burning today than the question of *the way out*, i.e., the possibility of a radical break with the existing state of affairs capable of initiating change within the late capitalist conjecture."<sup>9</sup> Such a break calls, today, not so much for the spirit of negation and continued, for over sixty or so exhausting years now, criticism—a spirit often identified with, *inter alia*, a resigned and traumatized post-modern, post-holocaust, "post-metaphysical" disposition—but, on the contrary, a more Nietzschean sensibility, namely: a sense for *creation*.

## II

Throughout his thinking, Lacan explicitly identifies the Freudian subject—the subject of psychoanalysis—with the Cartesian subject or the "subject of science."

Politically speaking, the Cartesian subject—a purely formal point of self-transparent certainty—is nothing other than the *universal individual agent*, of rights, desires, choices, etc. Self-transparency implies the irreducible right of each individual to their own particular beliefs, interests, cultural traditions, religion, and general "taste." Today, such a subject is strictly economic rather than political, and as such is maximally emptied of worldly content: "rights," for example, amounting for many on "the left" today to little more than a right to individually calculated choice, comfort, and security or—put more simply—merely the right to consume and to be counted, the technological power and

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<sup>9</sup> Šumič, "Politics and Psychoanalysis," p. 28, emphasis added.

impoverished spirit of capitalism having displaced many if not all concrete aspects of traditional Catholic-European as well as Anglo-Protestant universality. The fact of the liberal subject's absolution from worldly, religious, historical, cultural, and even biological constraints coincides in an interesting way with the fact that Lacan's subject is, politically speaking, none other than this very subject, now radically spread out, decentered, and colonized by the signifiers of capital, in a similar way to how Lacan theorizes it (of course, such radical dismemberment remains a secret to many so-called liberals on both the "right" and "left" today). This perhaps initially paradoxical identification will receive its full sense below.

To speak for the moment on a more formal level, however, Lacan's identification of the Freudian subject with Descartes's carries with it a number of crucial *philosophical* implications, two of which I will investigate here. First,

(1) that Lacan's thinking, whatever else we may say about it, by means of this identification situates itself within—and thereby, as Badiou puts it, "attaches Lacan" to—as we already noted, the "Cartesian epoch of science,"<sup>10</sup> and, philosophically speaking, all of the in particular *ontological* commitments, both explicit and latent, implied therein, some of which Badiou attempts in various places to delineate in a very precise fashion; and second,

(2) that—and this as a direct result of the first point—the *meta-psychological potential* of the categories and structure of the Lacanian subject, including its capacity for, say, social and political critique and proposal, appear to be in advance committed to understanding our historical moment, which includes the possibilities available to this moment, as essentially defined by—i.e., maintaining itself within the parameters of—the space and logic inaugurated by the modern subject, the *cogito*. According to Lacan, *our era is still that of Descartes*.

In the essay of his that I will be mainly drawing from (as well as other places I won't have recourse to here), Lacan lays the groundwork for the identity of Descartes's subject and that of Freud with continuous recourse to a topo-logical framework. Indeed, according to Badiou, "[t]his identity ... can only be

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<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 454.

grasped by attempting to think the subject *in its place*.”<sup>11</sup> Thus we read Lacan on his own terms, which means with an eye and sensitivity to the terminology of place—a motif already revealed as quite central to Šumič’s, as well as our own, argument. In this connection, Badiou goes on to claim that “[w]hat localizes the subject is the point at which Freud can only be understood within the heritage of the Cartesian gesture, and at which he subverts, via dislocation, the latter’s pure coincidence with self, its reflexive transparency.”<sup>12</sup> More simply stated, this means that to locate the subject in its place—*vis-à-vis* being, itself, and its Other—it is necessary to *locate the point* at which Freud’s discovery of the unconscious *dislocates* the foundations of the modern scientific endeavor, the Cartesian subject’s aforementioned coincidence with itself in the famous formula *cogito, ergo sum*. Two additional points are forthcoming that will further spell out the critical implications of this. First,

(1) that Badiou’s recourse to the language of “location” is noticeable and significant for the fact that not only must we “locate” the modern subject, but in order to do this, we must, perhaps paradoxically, first “locate” the point of the (Freudian) dis-location of Cartesian reflexive transparency. And second,

(2) that locating such a site of dislocation is to locate the subject itself at its most fundamental level, that is, not only at the level of the subject’s (self-) knowledge but *at the level of its being*. The fundamental question is: How does the subject relate to being, to its own existence? As Badiou writes: “The point of the subject is that *there* where it is thought that thinking it must be, it is. The connection between being and place founds the radical existence of enunciation as subject.”<sup>13</sup> The implication being, then, that Descartes’s formula is arguably *not* simply the coincidence of the subject in an epistemological sense (the harmony of knowledge or “self-consciousness”)—in fact, Lacan appears to think it, when examined more closely via Freud, the exact opposite of such “epistemological harmony”—but in an *ontological* sense: *cogito, ergo sum*. This *ergo sum* marks the fact and moment of the subject’s existence—the rootedness of thinking in being, its ontological link or point of groundedness, its “anchor,” as Lacan will say, in what-is. Which is to say, not only does thinking, in the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 453.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

moment of the *cogito*, self-consciously coincide with itself in an important sense, but *being and thinking coincide*, touch each other, and this touching is both established and affirmed in the instance of its absolute irreducibility. Importantly, and in a way that makes further sense of this distinction between epistemological and ontological registers, Lacan distinguishes between “thinking” and “knowing,” or between what he also calls truth and *knowledge*. Paradoxically, truth (as Heidegger already in his own way demonstrated) is *subtracted* from knowledge, such that the functioning of knowledge “conceals” the truth, while truth, conversely, only discloses itself in the eclipse of knowledge. As Lacan writes in his “Science and Truth”: “[The *cogito*] is the defile of a rejection of all knowledge, but is nevertheless claimed to establish for the subject a certain anchoring in being; I sustain that this anchoring constitutes the definition of the subject ...” (E, 727). The subject is constituted, *in its being as res cogitans*, in the gap, the defile, of *the rejection of all knowing*; in this moment, (the subject’s) truth is established and it discovers (or “locates”) itself as, at this precise point, *anchored* in being. What follows from this is the unprecedented proposition that the modern subject’s anchor in being, its very existence or status as “real,” is radically severed from its knowledge of itself; conversely, knowledge must fail, and at the locus of such a lack, the truth of the subject’s being is—*ibi*, “there.”

The conclusion that we may draw from this, in combining points (1) and (2), is the following: that the point at which Lacan takes the Freudian discourse—reducible, for our purposes here, to the discovery of the unconscious—to “dislocate” the Cartesian heritage is comprehensible on not simply an epistemological but a necessarily ontological plane. It affects the subject’s place *vis-à-vis* being itself. The Cartesian conception and, indeed, establishment of the subject’s relation to being in the *cogito* is, with Freud, pushed in a new and unsettling direction. This direction is indicated by Badiou when he writes that “[t]he unconscious designates that ‘it thinks’ there where I am not ... The subject thus finds itself ex-centred from the *place of transparency* in which it pronounces itself to be ... [Its] purification of any *knowable depth* deliver[s] the truth.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 454, emphasis added.

Let us now turn in a more focused way to what Lacan says in his essay “The Instance of the Letter ...”—It is worthwhile, in the first place, to point to the fact that he both spells out here precisely what has been said concerning the “link,” in the Cartesian gesture, between the subject’s knowledge and its being, and in fact goes beyond this, when, for example, he observes that “‘I am thinking, therefore I am’ (*cogito ergo sum*) is not simply the formulation in which the link between the transcendental subject and his existential affirmation is constituted ...” (E, 429). Although it is indeed the case that the transcendental subject—the “subject who speaks,” as opposed to the one “spoken”—establishes its anchoring in being in the moment of the *cogito*, this is not, for Lacan, the end of the story. For the subject is established, to be sure, yet as an *object*—as something existent—while nonetheless not being simply a mere “mechanism” (as for example, according to Descartes, animals are) due to the fact that this object, as the author of the *Meditations* shows, uniquely *thinks*, that is, withdraws itself from the world of objects—its “extreme purification,” as Lacan will put it—into a pure point of the suspension of all knowledge of being. The paradox is that only in this withdrawal from all knowledge and objects, from all being, is the subject *affirmed as itself be-ing*:

Perhaps I am only object and mechanism (and so nothing more than phenomenon), but assuredly, insofar as I think, I am—absolutely. Philosophers certainly made important corrections here—namely, that in that which is thinking (*cogitans*), I am never doing anything but constituting myself as an object (*cogitatum*). The fact remains [however] that through this extreme purification of the transcendental subject, my existential link ... seems irrefutable ... (E, 429)

Thus it is that Lacan reads Descartes as introducing a fundamental split into the human being qua subject, between *res cogitans*, the transcendental subject who “thinks,” maintaining itself in the suspension of all knowledge, and the *res cogitatum*, the subject qua existent object or knowing being established in the certainty that it is indeed thinking.

This split is, of course, one of the keys to Lacan’s identification of such a subject with the subject of psychoanalysis—to put the implications in topological terms: the (withdrawn) *place* where the subject thinks, in order to establish itself as an object, is *wholly other than* that wherein the latter exists and “knows,” has its being. This is captured nicely, and in somewhat different terms, in Lacan’s short phrase: “[B]eing raises [its own question] *in* the subject’s

*place*—in other words, being raises the question in that place *with* the subject, just as ... antiquity's man thought *with* his soul" (E, 432-3). The human being existing in the world raises the question of its own existence—in Descartes's terms, it *doubts* it—and does so *in the place of the "subject."*

The subject is therefore—and perhaps one should detect Heidegger in Lacan's reading of Descartes here—nothing other, *vis-à-vis* being, than this being-raised of the question, which constitutes a "tear" in being that suspends all given knowledge, in order to open up the space for "affirm[ing] a presence in that beyond-the-veil where the whole of Nature can be questioned about its design" (E, 436). This tear or withdrawal, this suspension of knowledge in the question (and, again, recall the way in which, in *Sein und Zeit*, anxiety "suspends" Dasein's whole "knowledge" of the world, while nonetheless at the same time "founding" truth by bringing the world into view), is, according to Lacan, being's-becoming-subject, in other words, *its being radically dis-placed*. The subject is constitutively displaced, dynamic. Knowledge can be suspended *here*, in the human being qua subject, and this fact indeed constitutes a universal subject—universal, in the same way that, in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud realizes the move from his theory being merely about "sick" people to it being about everyone: in dreams, we all "go mad." As Lacan might put the point, in the *cogito*—that is, in any thinking or instance of thinking whatsoever—knowledge can be and is always-already essentially suspended as being "raises its question" in the subject's place.

Lacan goes on to repeat this point in "Freudian" terms—invoking both the ego as well as Freud's discovery of the suspension of its functioning—in order to situate Freud in the—as Badiou put it—"Cartesian heritage":

While Freud—by situating in this ego the synthesis of the perceptual functions in which the sensorimotor selections are integrated—seems to agree with the tradition that delegates to the ego the task of answering for reality, this reality is simply all the more included in the suspension of the ego. (E, 433)

We now arrive at an interesting point, one in which what becomes apparent is what we have been referring to, following Badiou, as Freud's *subversion*, via "dislocation," of any harmonious coincidence with itself—and specifically, its being with its thinking—of the subject.

For Lacan—in the third part, titled "The Letter, being, and the other," of



the essay we have been reading—now asks: “Is what thinks in my place, then, another ego?” (E, 435) The implication here is that a subject “split” within itself, within its being, seems to suggest or suppose, perhaps, another agency or “other ego,” a different “I,” which thinks “in my place.” This question is, despite everything, quite valid, as it might in a way be seen to follow from Descartes’s own designation of two (in fact three, but the third is irrelevant for our purposes here) different *kinds* of substance: namely, thinking and extended. The extended substance is, along with the material world, the subject’s body, an object or being “in the world,” whereas the thinking substance is the subject’s mind, the “place” where it—being—thinks. Nonetheless, as Lacan has put it, being raises *its* question *in* the subject’s place, *with* the subject, which implies on a plane or at least a place otherwise, somehow distinct from the place of being itself—namely, the unique dimension of the subject: being’s self-suspension. However, Descartes does not—in at least one way of reading the matter—exactly draw this conclusion: on the contrary, although it is the case that we have two *kinds* of substance (difference is present), nonetheless: *both are substances*, i.e., both share the same ontological status, the implication being that they are, in the final analysis, simply distinct kinds of things in the objective world.

The transcendental subject and its unique dimension are thus here reduced back to a mere “thing,” an objective substance ontologically “present at hand,” to use Heidegger’s phrase. The difference that thinking makes within being, “the self’s radical eccentricity with respect to itself that man is faced with” (E, 435)—an eccentricity which Lacan notices Descartes merely *introducing* in his “radical suspension” of all knowledge, in order to discover what “really is,” but which, according to Lacan, Freud would unveil to modernity in its fullest sense—is concealed in the positing of two distinct beings, two distinct kinds of substance: “substance dualism.”

So, the answer is, of course, no: it is *not* another ego, another “object,” which thinks in the subject’s place: “There can, in fact, be no confusion on this point: what Freud’s research introduced us to was not some more or less curious cases of dual personality” (E, 435). (Lacan’s remark perhaps recalls one of Freud’s own in his meta-psychological paper “The Unconscious” wherein the latter, in his defense of the concept of the unconscious, rejects the notion of

positing “another” consciousness.) Thus Lacan asks, sounding very much like the St. Augustine of the *Confessions*: “Which other is this, then, to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the most assented to heart of my identity to myself, he pulls the strings?” (E, 436) In other words: *How should we understand the onto-topological implications of the “tear” in being that is the modern subject?*

Lacan’s answer is that the other which thinks in “my” place is thus “the Other,” capital “O,” the place of the unconscious, of absolute difference, at once the locus of language or signifying, of enunciation,<sup>15</sup> itself which, in a quite literal sense and radicalizing Descartes, *founds being* through its enunciation. “If I have said that the unconscious is the Other’s discourse (with a capital O), it is in order to indicate the beyond [of being or knowledge] ... In other words, this other is the Other that even my lie invokes as a guarantor of the truth in which my lie subsists” (E, 436).

We are confronted here with an almost Thomistic sounding formula: The Other acts, in its own place, as the *ontological guarantor* of the place within which the truth of being or reality, of the “world”—inclusive of falsehood or erring—comes to pass as something knowable, intelligible: “readable.” As Lacan puts it—cited by Badiou—“thought founds being solely by knotting itself within the speech in which every operation touches upon the essence of language.”<sup>16</sup>

Badiou elaborates upon this in the following way, namely, that, with this formula, “he [Lacan] maintains the discourse of ontological foundation that Descartes encountered in the empty and apodictic transparency of the *cogito*.”<sup>17</sup>

Which brings us back to our earlier claim that Lacan’s central *philosophical* gesture—his radicalization of the Cartesian subject via Freud—confines him all

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. E, 579 (from “The Signification of the Phallus”), where Lacan “designat[es] by ‘Other’ the very locus evoked by recourse to speech in any relation in which such recourse plays a part. If it speaks in the Other, whether or not the subject hears it with his ear, it is because it is there that the subject finds his signifying place in a way that is logically prior to any awakening of the signified. The discovery of what it articulates in that place, that is, in the unconscious, enables us to grasp at the price of what splitting (*Spaltung*) he has thus been constituted.”

<sup>16</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 454-5. On this point, cf. E, 437, where Lacan writes that “the ‘this’ which he [Freud] proposes we attain is not a this which can be the object of knowledge, but a this—doesn’t he say as much?—which *constitutes my being* and to which, as he teaches us, I bear witness as much and more in my whims, aberrations, phobias, and fetishes, than in my more or less civilized personage” (emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 455.

the more to the Cartesian heritage and its ontological foundation(s), as these foundations are now, to put it somewhat cheekily, quite up to date, and thereby all the more difficult to subvert. This, at least, is how a philosopher might (and, in Badiou's case, appears to) read the matter. And so the question arises—not if Lacan's subject is capable of subversion on its own terms, is itself susceptible to the same immanent critique as the Cartesian and Freudian subjects are, but—if the *entire Cartesian-Freudian paradigm* might not in a crucial way be wholly inadequate to the present moment. This is exactly the proposition that Badiou furthers in his thought, namely, that a “post-Cartesian doctrine of the subject is unfolding.”<sup>18</sup> It is not a matter of immanent critique but, as Badiou's radically buoyant style would have it, of transcendent surpassing: what Badiou famously calls the “passion for the real”—the very substance of the twentieth century, and especially its political substance—signals the irruption in the world of a mode of infinite being that would not be beholden to *anything whatsoever*: there is no Other of the eventual subject, just as there is no Other of the event itself, for the simple reason that there is *no Other at all*. In such an ontological framework, difference is neither dialectical nor negative, nor indeed critical in any sense, but unconditionally affirmative and violently creative.

But are the implications of Lacan's onto-topology of modernity's subject entirely clear in this respect? Does such a dependence on the Other—and therein wholly negative, dialectical, “barred” ground of the subject's existence—limit Lacan, as Badiou arguably thinks it does, to not being able to think a genuinely novel form of subjectivity in our new post-transgressive, “post-Other,” time?

If, on the one hand, it is indeed true that Lacan's subject is divided between, by way of a purely logical “knotting” together, (1) the unconscious which is, *vis-à-vis* reality, the void of the Other qua place of language, and (2) being itself which is anchored in a place quite otherwise—since it is literally founded by this “otherwise”—than it knows,<sup>19</sup> it does not, on the other hand,

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>19</sup> In his short essay “Philosophy and Psychoanalysis,” Badiou takes note of this division constitutive of the subject in order to interpret what he calls Lacan's “anti-philosophy,” insofar as it is the core of Lacan's critical and even sarcastic position *vis-à-vis* philosophy itself and the supposed falsity of the latter's fundamental “axiom,” which psychoanalysis, of course, unmasks: “For Lacan, if the void [or “Other”] is on the side of being [as Badiou's own philosophy claims], this means that thought is also on the side of

necessarily follow that the meaning of these terms or the relations between them are in any way fixed. Turning back to Šumič's thesis that, politically or "worldly" speaking, it is precisely this Other, constitutive of the barred subject's very existence, that is "inexistent"—precarious, worldly *inoperative*—what is therefore clear is that being must, and does, necessarily—and might we not simply look around us for proof of this?—fall itself into a state of radical precarity, disfunction, and, what of course follows directly from this, immense transformation. In concrete terms: Is it really the case that the subject's being is "barred" today, that it is constituted by the dialectic of transgression and failure beneath the name of the father? Is it in fact the case that today's subject is a *desiring* subject?

As the epigraph to the present essay intimates: our time is the time of an unprecedented shaking of the relation between heaven and earth, which is to say—with somewhat less pathos—the time of the greatest onto-topological disturbance the world has yet seen.

This fact forces a *Lacanian*, at least, to reexamine the concrete status as we know it of both the Other and its subject—which is to say, then, the *political* meaning today of the proposition that the Other "founds being."

### III

Whatever else it may involve to think psychoanalysis qua praxis—clinical, political, ethical, or otherwise—in the present time, as well as the nature and reach of the discourse of psychoanalysis insofar as it confronts and challenges both philosophy and politics, not to mention ordinary "common sense"—it can't, according to Lacan, be a matter of compromise. For "compromising" is

precisely what both the spirit and the letter of Freud's work most repudiate. For, since he constantly points out that compromise is behind all the miseries his

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being, because thought is precisely the exercise of separation [i.e., of the introduction of otherness or difference]. But on that basis one would say that being itself thinks [or "knows something"]. For Lacan the fundamental axiom of all philosophy is this idea that being thinks [knows]. I cite: 'The supposition that being thinks is what founds the philosophical tradition from Parmenides onwards.' For Lacan, this axiom is unacceptable. *Thought must be an effect of the Subject, and not a supposition concerning being.*" See Alain Badiou, "Philosophy and Psychoanalysis," in *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, trans. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 71, emphasis added.

analysis assuages, we can say that resorting to compromise, whether explicit or implicit, disorients all psychoanalytic action and plunges it into darkness. (E, 435)

As was said above, this essay seeks to read Lacan not primarily in either a clinical, logical, or even philosophical sense or setting, but in what we have called a worldly one. In this sense, what is significant in Lacan's designation of the suffering that psychoanalysis seeks to "assuage" as the result of a compromise is that, in the same way that the suffering of a symptom can be read as the direct result of the psyche's working out a compromise (repression, conversion, etc.) with, as the early Freud would say, an unacceptable piece of reality, so too can we read, to now recall our previous discussion, what we have called the disappearance of the Political dimension, or the precariousness or nonexistence of the symbolic Other in our time, as *the price paid for a radical compromise*, namely, modernity's compromise, from the beginning, with the ideal of an unconditionally functional, economic, and democratic world-system. "We ourselves have killed God," Nietzsche remarked, and we have done so, in a word, with science, taken here to mean, broadly enough, the shift of the locus of authority from a transcendent Other to what can be demonstrated or made transparent within an immanent system of laws. The political or worldly consequences of applying a scientific, democratic, and thus fundamentally economic viewpoint to every facet of existence—as Nietzsche knew better than and surely before most—are in our time proving themselves to be increasingly catastrophic and difficult to ignore. For one thing, *counting*, accounting for things—ballots, opinions, profits, averages, choices, desires, violations, ambiguities, words, identities, feelings, results—has in more ways than one gone entirely off the rails, an important point for what follows.

The parallel of such a grand collective sacrifice with the Freudian psyche's own compromises is not inappropriate: in the same way that the world increasingly moves towards (the ideal of) a fully accounted for, transparent, and totally functioning global situation, and as a result must deny (repress) any *archē* or, indeed, even possibility, of a site of authentic difference, so too do Freud's patients, in the name and for the purpose of (the ideal of) total functionality and unity with themselves, reject and repress anything "incompatible," anything which, as Lacan would say, touches upon *truth*. Repression—or absorption (conversion), or elimination (disavowal)—is always the result of a compromise with an ideal of comfort, functionality, and sense *at any price*.

Thus if psychoanalysis, as Lacan thinks, teaches the subject to *not* compromise—and to not compromise precisely with an ideal that, in the end, inevitably multiplies its sufferings and precarity (repression always to a greater or lesser extent fails)—what, then, would this look like on a worldly or political level? What does this crucial Lacanian imperative signify on the level of our shared situation today? What would it really mean to *not compromise* with the often forcefully imposed socio-economic, scientific, and democratic—in a word: homogenizing—ideals of our time? What does political difference today *mean*?

As I mentioned above, the answer cannot be transgression, not merely because transgression is itself caught in a repetitive cycle which, incidentally, the spirit of our time precisely encourages and requires, but—beyond this yet related—for the simple reason that there is nothing to transgress. Transgression qua emancipatory gesture, as we have already seen, is only possible—to reiterate only slightly—when there is a real line to transgress, that is, when the symbolic authority figure is operative and “metaphysically potent”: when we are founded as desiring agents.

Let us agree once and for all with Šumič as well as Žižek (and Badiou) on this point and attempt to think, along with them, the character of the subject as constituted by the “other Other,” the latter which, having displaced the Other of symbolic authority, spectrally presides over our time and, precisely, the paradoxical *being* of our time. For such an other Other, inclusive of the peculiar way in which it “founds” existence today, is perhaps the key to *an other subject*.

As we have briefly touched upon in a footnote above—and as anyone familiar with his work should by now know—Žižek frames this other which governs our time in terms of a sadistic superego commanding enjoyment. In a word, this is an *imaginary* rather than a symbolic Other—it is on the side of, to again radically simplify things, a kind of psychotic relationship rather than a neurotic one. Such a relationship is defined not by a prohibition but, on the contrary, by a crushing command to enjoy, which is quite different than the symbolic command to “accept finitude” or lack, to *limit* enjoyment. As a result, therefore, psychoanalysis, as the Slovenian says, must be, in one way or another, precisely the discourse in which the subject is allowed to *not enjoy*.

There are multiple ways of reading the implications of this conclusion in

Žižek's own work—and certainly, this is in no way my object here—but suffice it to say that there is a question, at least on my reading, of the specifically political status or potential of *realized* non-enjoyment in Žižek's vision. Sometimes, it certainly appears that a destructive revolution or an “act” is indeed what this entails, a revolt against enjoyment (which is to say, in the time of the non-existent Other, a revolt against *oneself* ) that “cancels” it, the compulsion to enjoy, by the subject's coinciding with and affirming its drive reduced to a pure “zero level”; at other times (but perhaps these conclusions are not mutually exclusive), non-enjoyment cannot but appear in Žižek's thought as mere resignation, a “refusal to act” that may or may not be all that it appears to be.

But to set Žižek aside for now, let us nonetheless pursue this notion of the “authority” of an imaginary rather than symbolic Other. Such an Other in truth allows the subject neither revolt nor resignation (perhaps the reason for Žižek's perceived equivocation on this point), but—surprisingly enough—demands a kind of affirmation and, importantly, excessive creation. Today's Other is not, in other words and as we have made abundantly clear, the Father challenging the subject to rebel but, on the contrary, much closer to the *Mother* whose confused identity today (and precisely confused with the subject's) silently challenges us to attack her: to “enjoy,” and to radically and unconditionally affirm such enjoyment. If today's liberal politics amount to necessarily giving in to such a command, but still—because proximity to the Mother is in truth unbearable, and especially for our increasingly weak and exhausted state today—tempering such submission with the aid of more and more ideologically constructed and purely provisional barriers and buffers rooted in nothing and nowhere, “idols” of the father, whose function is to regulate in some way or another the drive to at last fully enjoy the imaginary mother (“Go ahead! There's nothing stopping you! You're free!—but wait, not too much, don't become extreme, don't give yourself away, refrain from really committing to or overdoing anything or becoming too attached, it may disturb your health and lifestyle, and prevent your sleep!”)—if this is so, then would a politics and mode of being which breaks with liberalism, but which necessarily finds itself unable to escape the parameters of its age, not be precisely some mode of *unconditional consent to the mother's command*? In other words, and again—

as Badiou has christened it in his unsurpassable book about the twentieth century—an unrestrained passion for the real, the will to actualize the real here and now, without the law, *without God?* We are dealing here with the question of the possibility of a truly atheistic politics.

Interestingly, such a seemingly extreme and unrestrained way of framing things is perhaps not too far from Šumič's own proposal of how Lacanian psychoanalysis might overcome today's deadlock of being trapped in the gaze of an anonymous superego (M)other commanding frantic enjoyment and consumption (achieving, designing, making, choosing, which is to say: buying ...) while, in this, being at the same time entirely stripped of any subjective agency or difference, again, due to the fact that the subject—and I will repeat this point a final time here—no longer faces an Other which would constitute it in a consistent or placed (“readable”) economy of desire.

At a crucial point in her argument, Šumič is, in the first place—and this constitutes a decisive decision in favor of the continued necessity of the past century's “passion for the real”—at pains to separate what she takes to be the authentic political potential latent in Lacan's thinking from what she calls the *politics of love*. Although there are, it is true, psychoanalytic versions of this, it is primarily the case that “deconstructive” thinkers usually end up in this position on the question of politics, namely, what Šumič describes as “a politics which aims at the impossible articulation of the otherness and the social bond, the impossibility of counting and the necessity of counting[, etc.]”<sup>20</sup> It is unfortunate that such a subtle deconstructive approach to relationality has, today, been fully endorsed by contemporary liberal ideology and its demand for the subject's perpetual and irredeemable *guilt* in the face of the (oppressed, usually racial and sexual) Other, which is to say: made common, debased. In truth, however, the “politics of love,” as Badiou has also pointed out apropos of the postmodern obsession over “the absolute Other,”<sup>21</sup> constitutes the most radical reduction of the political and its possibility today to what might be called the merely ethical or “moral” (and there are without a doubt times when even Žižek's position appears to accomplish this same reduction, albeit in a

<sup>20</sup> Šumič, “Politics and Psychoanalysis,” p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2001).



very different way), which is why, in its being

forever “to come” ... never in the here and now ... [it] cannot provide us with a satisfactory answer to the question: how is it possible to justify the legitimacy of the move from the singular to the universal [the political or “worldly” dimension]? The politics of love is satisfied with the ceaseless affirmation of the singularity of otherness. That is why *it cannot indicate a way in which this singularity could be asserted politically*, i.e., a way of politicizing the singularity of the singular by introducing another principle of counting: that of counting the uncounted, the uncountable.<sup>22</sup>

In its radical suspension of the question of political legitimacy, the politics of love abandons the social sphere to an absolute and crushing legality, whose abstract and absolute “transcendental” Other constitutes the incredible return, in perhaps the most brutal form imaginable, of the Judeo-Christian subject of irredeemable guilt. Such guilt—as it was already for Luther, Calvin, and the entire “modern religion” which was founded the first time God died, and whose spiritual true home is, in the first place, America—is both politically *and* morally crippling, trapping the subject in a hidden web of missed obligations and transgressed boundaries, violent unforgivable crimes which it always-already accomplishes in virtue of merely existing.

What is absolutely of the essence and indispensable, then, is the discovery of *a form of political legitimacy*, a way to realize the “move from the singular to the universal,” which constitutes a mode of “counting the uncountable”: not in a mode of respectfully “refusing to count” (and therein all too sentimentally and righteously “taking notice of” the radical alterity of the other) but, on the contrary, in a mode which *asserts singularity politically*.<sup>23</sup>

In a time when, as was said above, counting has indeed “gone off the rails,” becoming the sole way of relating to beings today—and yet in a time when,

<sup>22</sup> Šumič, “Politics and Psychoanalysis,” pp. 37-8, emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> We might note at this point, and Šumič is surely not unaware of this, that Badiou’s concept of the event aims at precisely this, namely, that it allows for and even requires the assertion of singularity in an evental space which, because radically heteronomous to being (or “the situation,” the always-already counted), renders such assertion itself a uniquely other mode of counting. The (continuous) assertion of the space of the event which, in its taking-place, constitutes the subject—a process that Badiou also refers to as “fidelity”—is nothing other than the *praxis*, always risky and never guaranteed, of “counting the uncounted, the uncountable.” What makes this connection to Badiou even more plausible is Šumič’s use of the language of “counting”—as well as other terminology which we will presently take note of—a vocabulary which cannot but remind us of Badiou’s terminology in *Being and Event*.

equally, there seems to be less and less *real* things, actual agents, communities, religions, subjects, rituals, traditions, differences, places, positions to count, and thus in a time when a genuine count appears to be foreclosed—can we find a way to, as Šumič will put it, “force” a count where there is none? In other words: is a forcing of a count in the real today possible? A passion for the real means: *a passion for forcing a count in the real*, for “realizing” the real in a concrete way. Following Šumič, then, our first thesis: The forcing of a count today—the concept of which we will certainly say more—is nothing less than the assertion of singularity politically. On at least a formal level, Šumič appears to be with Badiou on this point.

To assert singularity politically, to “force a count” in the real, to *affirm and create*—how can Lacan help us? Can he help us?

If being, the subject’s existence, is no longer founded within and as “closed” horizons of meaning, at least on the social and communal level, then what this means—in Šumič’s somewhat Badiouian terms—is that an authentic count, a “traditional” count of difference, is for us today strictly speaking *impossible*. Such a count coincides with the Other’s founding of being qua desire, which means that, in a non-trivial sense, this Other no longer founds being for us (founds us as desiring agents) at the very moment when the count becomes impossible, i.e., when God dies. Which is also to say that the world governed by the “capitalist discourse” is, to use Lacan’s term, “not-all”: no “One” holds it together. Our “democratic materialist” time asserts that much, but immediately fails to draw the inevitable conclusion that there is no law which binds us, which holds the human being in (any, even the most formally articulated) place. The possibilities would then appear to be truly open in the most radical sense—if, that is to say, a count was in fact able to be “forced” in the face of the suffocating proximity of the other Other, the paradox being (as we already outlined above) that the freer we are from the Good Old God, the less free and the more difficult it is to genuinely *act*.

And so it is that the direct consequence for both the possibility and actuality of what Šumič still refers to as an “emancipatory” community is an imminent or unavoidable confrontation with—and, in a sense yet to be clarified, affirmation of—both the historical impossibility of the count and the necessarily violent “act” of counting anyways, of forcing a count, a work of strength and

imagination, of *giving birth*, that any authentic collective or “we” would today demand. Authentic politics appears possible today only in the unconditional affirmation of the necessity of such groundless violence: the bringing-forth of something with no (especially legal) precedent, of creation “*ex nihilo*.” Such an act of difficult creation must not delude itself into thinking that it can be “for all,” or immediately “include everybody”—or, crucially, that there are, as the fascists as well as Marxists both thought, any predicates that could identify the key “actors” ahead of time. As Šumič writes:

We propose to call the politics of emancipation that politics that organizes a confrontation between counting and the impossibility of counting, an operation that reveals the constitutive impossibility of institutionalizing a collectivity “for all,” a collectivity in which what is at stake is precisely the predicate determining the belonging to the community, the line of demarcation between inside/outside, us/them.<sup>24</sup>

The constitutive impossibility of a community “for all,” the founding liberal fantasy (in truth, a “soft” totalitarian vision), is what is revealed in a confrontation with the non-all—or other-less space—which the capitalist discourse continues to introduce into the world. Importantly, this means, for Šumič, that, apropos of Schmittian theory, it is impossible, lacking a given predicate, to “draw a line” in a real or Political sense. Because there is at this time no such “line in the real,” no dimension of the Political to speak of, Šumič claims that, since Lacan’s “solution” to the question of a new community is “a paradoxical [one due to the fact that] we are dealing here with an interior way out,” such a paradoxical position—as we have indicated a few times in various ways—“implies no transgressions, no forcing of a barrier, since there is [in this radical state of immanence] no barrier separating the outside and the inside.”<sup>25</sup> The new community will not be founded by its declaration of the difference between itself and its enemy (civilized and barbarian, liberal and conservative, left and right, bourgeois and proletariat ...), which is always “over there.” Capital, as has been said in many ways at multiple points in recent (and not so recent) theory, knows no distinction between here and there, between interior and exterior, and does not limit its reach in the social and political realms, in

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<sup>24</sup> Šumič, “Politics and Psychoanalysis,” p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

order to come to a halt in the face of, for example, the depths or place of the subject's principles, commitments, and ideology.

Now, in the final section of her essay, Šumič attempts to draw the consequences of her rejection of both an ethical "politics of love" (today's PC-culture's "noble" predecessor) *and* the Schmittian founding distinction between the friend and the enemy (which depends on the existence of the order of the Political), as well as all politics of transgression (anarchism, race and identity-politics, etc.). She thus articulates a concept of political being that consists of three aspects, all of which potentially characterize a radically novel Lacanian conception of political community, of "we"—in other words, all of which make up the consistency of *the existence of a new subject*, the affirmation of a "new being," itself compelled and destined into existence by the imaginary other Other.

The three aspects are as follows: (1) the community, in virtue of simply existing, issues an imperative or "address to all"; (2) the community depends on the strength of its capacity for "forcing"; and (3) the substance of the community is a conception of "work" as a kind of unconditional fidelity to the project of what she calls the "universaliz[ing] of the singular," in other words, the unconditional nature of the community.<sup>26</sup>

Let us now investigate these three ideas, and the way in which the subject, constituted as it is today by the other Other, is in fact *uniquely* capable—that is, *historically capable for the first time* : God did not die for nothing—of realizing concretely these possibilities.

(1) Concerning an "address to all"—to begin with—the possibility of the authentic community is indeed addressed "to all," an unrestricted imperative, since there is, in the absence of the symbolic Other, no *a priori* exclusionary predicate of identity which can be located or fixed: no racial, sexual, class-based, etc., conditions. Lacan's vision, for example, of his new psychoanalytic school, according to Šumič, is an example of such an address, and as such anticipates the intensification of the radically other-less and predicate-less situation which our world is at present realizing, in many ways still kicking and screaming, in the most extreme way. As Šumič describes Lacan's thinking in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

founding his *École de la Cause* :

Setting out from the assumption that there is absolutely nothing to define the analyst, no pre-given predicate or property on which his identification could be grounded, the only viable solution is one that takes into account precisely the impossibility of determining a predicate that would be proper to the (Lacanian) analyst. The solution is then none other than to call on all those willing to work in the Freudian field. By inviting to his School anybody, without any qualification, Lacan created an open, empty space destined to be inhabited only by a special kind of work, the work of the “determined workers,” be it analysis or not, as he puts it.<sup>27</sup>

Šumič describes a situation or space wherein one does not “need” anything *a priori* to participate in the project: to “work.” The only thing that *is* required is a willingness to work—a will, and therefore a certain kind of spirit and *capacity* for the work. However, is this not precisely the (ideal of) openness of capital, and of “liberal freedom” itself—a call to all the “willing and able”? Everything will depend here on the difference of what we might call, after St. Paul, a “new creation,” the necessity of which determines the precise concepts of will and capacity—and therefore of work—we are dealing with here.

(2) Concerning the notion of work itself then, it is the pure *praxis* of a will to project—open-ended, constitutively incomplete, and affirmed as such—that constitutes “membership” in the community. No *a priori* predicate of membership or contrived sign could stand in for this wholehearted and determined praxis. As Šumič puts it: “As the expression ‘determined worker’ suggests, it is the work that decides the belonging to the collectivity. This [requirement] ... implies that this work cannot be standardized. The work to be done is by definition interminable ...”<sup>28</sup> Such a concept of work is wholly incompatible with how we understand and are capable of understanding “work” today: for its effects are precisely not able to be measured and are perhaps not immediately evident, having as it does neither an external nor fixed goal—and certainly, it does not “pay,” at least not in the sense of a clear and direct exchange. *The work of the authentic community is a work devoid of the individuality within which one calculates and understands oneself as an economic unit, i.e., as a unit of desire and willing capable of autonomy and “rights.”* The

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

community's work is thus devoid of desire, which may sound quite paradoxical at first. Admittedly, this is a difficult point, but remember that we are speaking at not primarily a clinical or purely theoretical level, but at the level of world, of our real situation. It is in fact only in this way—in the giving up and replacement of one's fantasized identity as a desiring subject with a kind of passion, a kind of radical passivity or submission *vis-à-vis* the living, breathing place of the community—that the agency-depriving power of the other Other can be turned against itself: the community cannot pathetically and anachronistically attempt to directly assert its desire within the bounds of a contrived contract, as liberalism today still demands we do, in order that we may shield ourselves from becoming too invested, gripped, burnt up by our era's lack of lack. On the contrary, it mercilessly affirms that it is a community of "subjects" who are radically *without* the phantasmatic individuality and agency that the economic ideology of capital and liberal democracy demand we assert. Only such an affirmation of this "without" serves to force a place, a unified project, into being where neither places nor projects, nor any genuine "we," could be said to have truly existed.

(3) On the notion of forcing, let us cite Šumič at length one final time, a passage which contains a number of quite critical propositions:

The paradox of the politics implied in Lacan's School resides namely in the fact that it is situated precisely at the level of that which cannot be represented nor counted as it is what is left *after the completion of identification*. In short, it is situated at the *level of the pure*, whatever singularity. Yet it is precisely this irreducible singularity that Lacan's School proposes to take into account, to "count." For the ambition of Lacan's School is not only to find a way out of the traps of identification. It is above all to find, to *force*, a passage there where there is a non-passage, an impasse, a deadlock of the group. ... Such a collectivity "for all" that is grounded in the real of the group, which is to say in its impossibility, is certainly a forcing: a forcing of saying, because what characterizes such a collectivity is precisely the advent of an allegedly mute, uncounted, invisible instance that starts to speak out and, in doing so, *asserts its presence* ...<sup>29</sup>

For Šumič, what itself forces the Lacanian group "into existence"—what compels the affirmation of its members as always-already without both individuality and identity—is the fact that, in the midst of the community,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 40, emphasis added.

*something asserts its presence.* This “something” is not transcendent but rather radically immanent—the “real” of the community itself, the dimension of “pure ... singularity.” The presence of the singular here constitutes a great force of compulsion and a complete overwhelming of the subject’s contrived identities, peeling away, so to speak, the thin layer of defense draped over each one of us today in our respective roles as autonomous desiring individuals, in order to expose us to an historically and ontologically unprecedented force.

It is, in other words, the transition from today’s parodies of symbolic and identarian authority and difference (self-satisfied particularisms of every kind, from nationalisms to pride parades) to the constitutive impossibility today (the “real”) of a community of desire—as Žižek sometimes likes to say, the necessary transition “from (the façade of) desire to drive”—which constitutes the starting point for the possibility of the authentic community in the time of the ubiquitous capitalist discourse. For Badiou, it is precisely the necessity of such an unprecedented shift in authority, in the human animal’s locus of allegiance and focus of energy, which compels our risking the thought of the event. However, if there is, arguably, no event for Lacan, at least not in Badiou’s sense—what then?

The onto-topological logic of capitalism is unconscious. If this is true, then the unconscious is structured like an unhinged and anarchic yet for all that homogeneous and flat space, a plane of immanence which demands that there be neither distinction nor discrimination—which is to say: *no lack*—allowing, in consequence, no logic of legitimate symbolic separation, no coincidence of itself with any authentic master’s discourse.

Without an operative symbolic Other, the unconscious is thus today an oppressively *imaginary realm*—: what is at times called the dimension of the “imaginary-real.” This being the case, the authentic community, in sharp distinction to the “liberal universal,” must not provide itself with any reactionary symbolic identity markers and predicates—today’s moral stand-ins for authentic ethical and historical positions that were, in the past, operative on the basis of a living god. Such anachronism today amounts to a fundamentally conservative position that contributes to what Badiou calls the great “restoration.” Quite on the contrary, the community’s “event,” its founding act, consists rather in directly *asserting* the fullness of the enjoyment of the other Other—that is to say, a “politics of enjoyment” which, as such, fully draws the

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consequences of the impossibility, after the death of God, of any predicate or marker that would allow it to distinguish itself from the real as a subject, as Man, as a “human being”—exposing itself entirely to the *inhuman* real of our situation.

It is therefore not that the true community is the mere *symbol* of the real in history—rather, lacking both symbolic “historical” identity, destiny, and, therein, the concept of history and even of agency itself, the community directly embodies the force of the real by means of its assertion of this force in a situation as its own substance: to “force a count” without recourse to the master is to force the real to take on flesh and blood, *to become a body*, in a manner unmediated by symbolic authority, which is to say: to cloak with an *image*—as Šumič quite elegantly put it—“the advent of an allegedly mute, uncounted, invisible instance that starts to speak out and, in doing so, asserts its presence.” In other words: to accomplish the move, in the (re)founding of the political, from the weaving of the community from the fabric of the symbolic to the wrenching of a body from the density of the imaginary.

We might conclude that, if the preceding psycho-analysis of the character of our age is correct, if the great family drama of our entanglement with Father and Mother has today finally brought us into defenseless and unavoidable confrontation with the real of the Mother’s terrible generosity and irreducible confusion—an apt metaphor, considering the increasingly urgent factor of the earth, in our era’s eco-logical precarity, as a site of both desperate generosity and pained confusion—then the contemporary inauguration of the political, of *construction* in the midst of an unprecedented impoverishment of agency, identity, and direction, must today be nothing short of the risk of an unjustified creating and shaping, an *imag-ination*, of the presence which presses itself upon us: the eruption of a body in the real.

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