

FAIL BETTER:
TOWARDS A CONCEPTION OF NARRATIVE TOTALITY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2012

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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Two opposing visions dominate the manifold ways in which totality has been conceived throughout the history: the expressive notion of totality and the generic notion of totality. This thesis argues that these conceptions should be understood as determinate negations of each other. It pays particular attention to the emergence of a narrative concept of totality in the transformation of subjectless, goalless and formless flux of history into a frame depicted by the mediated-expressive totality. It claims that it is this narration that allows the emergence and subjects in history. To make this argument, it juxtaposes two periods of the work of G. Lukács as examples of these different visions of totality. It further discusses the introduction of the concept of finitude to 20th century political philosophy by Heidegger and evaluates its consequences that establish a framework where the access to the whole is considered to be impossible and the attempt to do so politically dangerous. The discussion of Heidegger is followed by a discussion of Althusser around whose work the impasses of the rejection of a dialectically conceived notion of totality is analyzed. The argument culminates around the work of Badiou which provides the context in which questions that

were left with Lukács can be asked again: questions about the political subject: political party: the state: questions about the relation between the standpoint of totality and emancipatory politics.

Acknowledgements

Any work, any act of creation is a collective process claimed by its author or authors. This general statement is particularly true for this dissertation. After being inspired by so many people I honestly do not know which of these ideas presented here are “my” original thoughts. As it is the tradition, I also want to specifically thank to some of my companions in thought not for allowing me write this dissertation but writing it with me, sometimes in their absence.

I first want to thank H. Ünal Nalbantoğlu who has taught me how to read the works of the great names of philosophy. Moreover, it is thanks to him that my education in Lukács started with his aesthetic theory. It is thanks to him that I always understood Lukács (and Heidegger, and Aristotle, and Heraclitus) as a living presence. Without him I could have easily considered Lukács in the prisonhouse of the history of philosophy as the theoretician of false consciousness. It is his meticulousness and focus on detail and craftsmanship that left its mark in the best moments of this dissertation. A year after his passing I still miss him as a friend and a mentor.

My advisor, Marshall Berman is the one who has taught me to see poetry in where one least expects to find it. Only knowing that he would read this thesis would be enough to make me a better student but he provided much more. He carefully considered all of my ideas, challenged me, and made me see things from different perspectives. In cases where our disagreements remained he enabled me to formulate my ideas in ways to endure his

critical remarks. Marshall has been and remains to be an inspiration as a mentor, as a teacher, as a thinker and as a poet.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the members of my committee: Jack Jacobs has been an excellent critic and a very careful reader. He has assessed my work almost surgically and let me know what is good and what is open to improvement. His remarks were not only important as to the questions that I dealt with but also very crucial for the level of scholarship in the way I dealt with these questions. Stanley Aronowitz has always been a great source of important questions one can spend his life dealing with. Many of the problems addressed in this dissertation directly came out of our private conversations; discussions in reading groups; or points that were raised in his seminars.

I should also thank to Fulbright Commission Turkey, which provided material support for my studies.

This dissertation would not be what it is without the pleasing, joyful, unending and intoxicating discussions with my friends Katharina Boudirsky, Işıl Çelimli, Ayça Çubukçu, Emrah Göker, Barış Kuymulu, Cem İnaltong, Barış Mücen, and Aras Özgün whose ideas contributed to this dissertation in ways that it is impossible to truly acknowledge their importance.

A very special thanks to Laia Canals who was there with me at all the difficult phases of this long journey. She kept me focused, motivated and on my path when I could

easily change my route. She contributed not only to the intellectual process of the creation of this thesis but she did take all the material burdens upon herself so that I can finish writing it. I also want to thank her parents: Pepa Fornons and Josep Canals did not have to share these burdens, but they did. My parents Bahar and Şeref Hoşadam but also my grand mother Cavidan Hoşadam they are the ones who made me what I am. Is there any way to thank for this? And finally Pau and Mina, you have taught me how beings infinitely precious, infinitely precarious, beings of infinite joy, beings infinitely singular come to this planet everyday. I am truly thankful that you have joined my world.

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Introduction: Can dialectics break bricks?

“Can dialectics break bricks?” this is the timeless question of political philosophy whose urgency is being increasingly felt today: can the thought become a material force to change reality. The question is obviously the basis of the well-known (and out-of fashion) idealism – materialism division, but it is also the title of René Viénet’s 1973 “detourned”¹ movie. For this dissertation, the latter is a more interesting starting point than the former one: The original movie, before Viénet’s intervention, takes place in a small Chinese village under Japanese occupation (probably after the first Sino-Japanese war) where there are two antagonistic groups: the occupants and the poor peasants. After Viénet’s redubbing, the Japanese occupants –depending on the scene, turn into the bourgeoisie, the union bosses, the bureaucrats, the leadership of the communist party and the representatives of big capital, i.e. into the various forms of oppressors; the locals remain peasants and workers, i.e. the oppressed. The occupants have everything: their samurai swords, the police, an army but also more. At one point their leader threatens the workers:

I don’t want to hear any more about class struggle... If not, I’ll send in my sociologists! And if necessary my psychiatrists! My urban planners! My architects! My Foucaults! My Lacans! And if that’s not enough, I’ll even send my structuralists!²

¹ Détournement is a technique developed by the situationist movement. In cinema, Woody Allen’s redubbed debut movie “What’s Up, Tiger Lily?” can be seen as another famous example of this technique.

² Viénet’s movie is available at http://www.ubu.com/film/vienet_dialectics.html

Against this total attack, the poor has only one weapon to rely on: the dialectics, which in the movie is a synonym for martial arts. After practicing and sharpening their “dialectics” daily, the workers face their enemy in the final battle where the command of the dialectics helps them win the decisive victory! In a quite literal yet absurd way, Viénet’s movie depicts how dialectics came to be seen in the 20th century especially until the 1970s: as a powerful weapon, if not a form of martial arts.

The key feature of this weapon is that it featured the “point of view of totality” that enabled the dialectician to connect the seemingly isolated parts of the reality. Totality gave him the eyes of the owl of Athena: a sharpened gaze directed toward the borders, toward the limits of the possible in the given society. Thus totality helped form ideas, vision, strategy, tactics, and slogans in the fight against the capitalism. But this vision, the Archimedean point of history was not always considered to be available at any moment. In the words of the greatest dialectician of the 20th century, it emerged only in the struggle for emancipation:

Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understands society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and the object of knowledge; in short, only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of the theory, become possible.

Such a situation has in fact arisen with the entry of the proletariat into history.”¹

Accordingly, the formation of the point of view of totality not only requires the conjunction of a specific set of objective facts but is fundamentally dependent upon the moment of the emergence of the new collective subject of history which will become the bearer of this vision. This thesis will add that once this moment comes to fruition and what Badiou calls a “sequence” is complete, the point of view of totality will be once again impossible from within the new status quo established. What once declared itself to be the subject *of* history will join the subjects *in* history.

I. Defining totality

But what is to be understood by the word totality? The concept never assumed an ultimate definition. One can speculate that it is probably the most used concept which has no clear meaning. Not only totality’s definition varies among different authors but the same author often uses it with different meanings in different contexts without bothering to explain what s/he means by the word. Probably the first attempt to make a proper definition of totality is to be found with Aristotle, who talks about it as a closed system:

We call a whole (1) that from which is absent none of the parts of which it is said to be naturally a whole, and (2) that which so contains the things it

¹ György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 2-3. (Hereafter *HCC*)

contains that they form a unity; and this in two senses—either as each and all one, or as making up the unity between them.¹

This definition posits the whole as a unity which lacks nothing in its constitution and is thus perfect. After Aristotle, philosophers developed a diverging range of definitions of totality. One can talk about totality as a closed and perfect system; or as a way to unify apparently isolated fragments of present; or as a way to unite different episodes of history; one can even posit it as a goal of harmony to be achieved in the society to come.² But today totality is farthest from the dignified place the philosophy had placed it for centuries. Once the proud concept with which every attempt to build a genuine understanding of society and politics had to wrestle, it is now surrounded with a silent consensus that on the one hand it is scientifically incapable of explaining the complexity of our world, and on the other that it is politically complicit in the most horrible crimes of our age. Political thought was once marked with an open competition for the most adequate notion of totality, today everybody is running away from the concept today as if it was plagued; everybody changes their course even when the shadow of totality appears on their path. Even those who have some recourse to the concept –like Habermas, feel compelled to disguise their efforts. While the 20th century thought that arguably developed the culmination of the past endeavors to grasp

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bekker: 1023b. Translation: Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1616.

² For these and other usages of the concept especially from the Marxist perspective, the seminal study is: Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

totality and provided the space for their violent clash, is also responsible for leaving the concept to oblivion during its last quarter.¹

How did this happen? Slavoj Žižek notes that thinkers as different as Popper, Adorno and Levinas unite and lead the efforts in directly linking the political crime of totalitarianism to the theoretical crime of totality. Thus he identifies them as the philosophical policemen who are responsible for collecting the evidence about the straight line between totality and totalitarianism.² Here Žižek is going probably too fast, especially about Adorno, who is probably the philosopher who understood the ambivalence of the concept more than anybody else. Adorno knew well that the 20th century is marked by the radical antagonism between totality and “the slightest of its fragments.”³ The Adorno that is depicted by Žižek is indeed an empirical reality. This Adorno, by the powerful argument of Jay is also elevated to the established, dominant interpretation of his work as the arch-enemy of Lukácsian/Hegelian totality within critical theory. But there is also another Adorno; an Adorno who writes that “automobiles, bombs, and films hold the totality together until their leveling element demonstrates its power against the very system of

¹ This thesis does not claim that the forgetting of totality is a recent phenomenon and simply a product of postmodernism. For example, as early as 1968 Perry Anderson was complaining about the elimination of the category of totality as one of the reasons for the lack of radical student movement in England. See: Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture," *New Left Review* I, no. 50 (1968).

² Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 98-99.

³ The expression belongs to Badiou who does not mention Adorno in this particular passage, but still this expression brings Adorno's position in one sentence. See: Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 2007), 39.

injustice it served.”¹ This Adorno is definitely providing a “total” critique of his society that does not even admit the possibility of a crack that provides a fragile space for at least his own critique of totally administered society. He also explicitly uses a very Lukácsian understanding of the concept, especially in an argument against Popper.² Just like Lukács, he understands totality as a category of mediation, not as a category of “immediate domination and subjugation.”³ What Adorno opposes thus is not the mediated totality as a depiction and criticism of capitalist society, but totality understood as the harmony of the dominant tune, a harmony imposed upon its fragments. This is why he claimed that “totality is not an affirmative but rather a critical category.”⁴ In other words, his famous aphorism “the whole is the false”⁵ is not a call to give up the category of totality but rather a way to understand it: the whole is the name of the wrong that is done against us, not an objective to be achieved. To understand the wrong, we need to develop an adequate understanding of the present totality, only in order to overcome it.

Adorno’s ambivalence in the face of totality guides the implicit yet central question of this dissertation: is it possible to talk about totality that is not “anti-semitic,” i.e. that is

¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 95.

² I will rarely mention Adorno; when I do, my interpretation will bring him as an ally of Lukács, not his enemy. On this occasion Adorno writes: “Without the anticipation of that structural moment of the whole, which in individual observations can hardly ever be adequately realized, no individual observation would find its relative place.” Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Logic of Social Sciences,” in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 106.

³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴ ———, “Introduction,” 12.

⁵ ———, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 50.

not hostile to the Difference? Even with this question in mind, one can nonetheless ask whether it is a dangerous nostalgia that guides this inquiry into the conditions of the reactivation of the concept of totality. Nostalgia: because this attempt may well be the outcome of a longing for the good old days where the philosophy was bold and naïve enough that it could pretend to explain everything. Dangerous: because the concept is inextricably linked with the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. In the present, the commonplace function of the criticism of totality is to provide the easy link between two distinct criminal regimes of 20th century: totality and totalitarianism connects the horrors of Stalinism with the horrors of Nazism and Fascism. In this sense, the current usage of totalitarianism owes a lot to the Cold War, where the concept was deployed to prove that these are not two different regimes but essentially share a common ground in their refusal of western democratic values. Thus the concept also served to legitimize the form of democracy that is widespread in the West: those who ask for a radical change of the system in fact wanted to drive Western Democracy toward these totalitarian nightmares. Of course it was not only the cold war propaganda machine, and figures like Hayek and Brzezinski that invented these ideas; for instance one can find a much more refined and well thought association of concepts in the work of Arendt. Whatever these earlier criticisms were, they culminated in the post-modern rejection of the concept, against which this thesis stands. But it would be wrong to blame the recent political theory and cold war theorists for this easy association. For instance it is Gramsci who uses the word totalitarian in an approving or at least in a neutral way and then brings “totalitarian party” and “total” conception

together in the same analysis.¹ One can defend Gramsci's usage stating that the word totalitarian had not yet assumed its current meaning but Gramsci made no effort to distinguish fascist totalitarianism and the totalitarianism he defended even in instances where he explicitly quoted Mussolini talking about fascist totalitarianism.² Thus the defense of Gramsci's use of totalitarianism will not hold if it is only shown that the inherent horrors of the concepts were not yet revealed but were already there. Such countermove may even go further and argue that Gramsci together with others laid the intellectual basis of these horrors to come. Maybe there a good reason that totality is left to oblivion. Maybe totality necessarily leads to totalitarian regimes and there is no way to think totality that will dissociate itself from totalitarian politics. Is there any reason one should attempt to rethink and redefine this archaic concept?

One of the answers lies in the recent history: It is curious to note that during the last decades of the past century, while theory was busy digging the grave of totality and was diverting its attention away from economics throughout the "cultural turn," the greatest project of economic globalization was going head on by imposing a planetary consensus on the set of rules that would affect every single human being living on the world. While philosophy was concerned with "difference;" a singular juridico-political-economic-moral order has been summoned under the name "neoliberalism" was put into use all over the

¹ Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York,: International Publishers, 1972), 147-58. Total conception is translated to English as "global."

² For instance: *ibid.*, 254. It is the Italian fascists who appropriated the concept and started the widespread usage of the word "*totalitario*" (totalitarian) in a positive sense with Giovanni Gentile.

world.¹ The totalitarianism of capital, with the one-size-fits-all solutions provided by the institutions such as the IMF that ignored the specificity of the locality, was not an interesting topic for post-moderns. Despite theory's blindness to this process, the present bourgeoisie is effectively acting as a "universal class." This pretension of universality cannot be negated by merely pointing to the empirical differences among the types of capitalisms thus effectively denying the validity of claims that there is "no outside" to the global capital.² One of the tasks of the critical thinking today must be to forge conceptual tools not only to analyze the present "totality" of social relations but also help imagine a world that is one step beyond the existing one while reconsidering the lessons of the 20th century.

How to understand the existing totality? This study intends to conduct an exploration of totality as a 20th century concept. This neither means that it is a pure 20th century invention, nor that the 20th century usage of the concept owes nothing to the past. To the contrary, much of the 20th century discussions concerning totality are about how to

¹ There is a wealth of publications on the transformation that took place during 1970s and onwards. To name a few: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); ———, *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Robert Brenner, "The Economics of Global Turbulence," *New Left Review* I, no. 229 (1998).

² One important work in this regard is: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000). Chakrabarty argues that there is no universal history of capitalism which operates beyond the cultural / religious traditions of the given society. He insists that what is called universal capitalism is nothing but the generalization of the contingent experience of Western Europe and that every occurrence of capitalism is a local occurrence immersed in the contingent and historical features of this locality. His argument was later repeated in a shorter article: ———, "Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000).

interpret the earlier usages of the concept: how to deal with the ghosts of mainly Hegel and Marx but also of Kant, Spinoza, Vico, Leibniz, Hobbes, Rousseau and other great figures of the political thought. However taking part in these debates about the interpretation of the past uses of the concept may deviate the present inquiry from its course: contribution to an ever-evolving definition of totality.¹ Given the fact that Jay's previously mentioned study brought an authoritative exploration of the totality in its 20th century usage one can ask in what ways this present study will distinguish itself from Jay's. One of the possible answers is the perspective: Jay's study conducted throughout 70's provided a retrospective when an age of political thought marked by the totality was coming to an end. I believe that we are standing at the dawn of a new age where "point of view of totality" (if not "totality" itself) has an important role to play. Will the concept resurrect? One can never know. But I will insist that political thought as well as emancipatory political movements will gain a lot if this happens.

How can think of the 20th century totality from the perspective of this study? Although this will be further discussed in detail in the following chapters, at this point an overview of the overall argument can be useful to give the reader a broader picture of what will be discussed in this dissertation. It is possible to argue that the 20th century usages of the concept can be centered around two diametrically opposed definitions: expressive vs. unbounded totalities. The first of these concepts suggests that the social whole, in its

¹ My goal is after this study is to direct my future investigations, including the interpretation of the earlier usages of the concept under the light of the understanding of the concept that will be established with this dissertation.

multitude of fragments, in its endless transformations and in its contradictions that guide these transformations must be seen as a manifestation of a singular kernel / principle / essence / contradiction. Each particular thus becomes an expression of the totality.

This version also comes in two forms: first of these suggest that the particular is an immediate manifestation of the center. In Marxism, this notion is illustrated by the “economic determinism” which reduces every phenomena of the so-called superstructure to the appearances (images) of the transformations in the economic base (real or as Plato would call it: idea). The immediate totality is not exclusive to Marxism: fascism as well as negative and positive stereotypes about different social groups also rely on this type of totality. When one says “Blacks are (...);” “Chinese are (...);” “Jews are (...);” “Women are (...);” “Homosexuals are (...);” these categories are treated as if they had essences that are manifest in each individual belonging to them. Eventually, I will argue that the immediate totality that describes the appearances as direct manifestations of the essence is the basis of totalitarianisms of the 20th century.

A second usage of the “expressive totality” suggests that the essence becomes manifest only through a series of irreducible mediations that involve chance and accidents as well as dialectical tendencies. In this conception, the essence can never appear in its pure form. As a result of the endless mediations that give birth to the phenomena, it is very difficult to decisively distinguish the essential from the accidental in the appearances. Besides, the dialectics work both ways: the manifestations of the essence and the events

belonging to the “superstructure” transform the dialectical center. In this sense, dialectics provide not a formula but approximations.

Against both usages of the expressive totality, stands a definition of the social whole that is “non genetic,” of a whole that has no center. This definition has varieties from those that posit a loosely bound whole to those that reject that there is anything beyond the fragments. It is possible to say that the latter variety became increasingly dominant in social and political philosophy under the name post-modernism. The premise of this post-modern version of the emancipatory politics was indeed co-opted by Neoliberalism. Margaret Thatcher summarizes this view in an interview with *Women's Own* magazine (October 31, 1987): “There is no such thing as society.”¹

The fundamental thesis of this dissertation is that the two conceptions of totality: mediated-expressive-totality and the unbounded-whole, far from being binary opposites, are dialectically related to each other. This study maintains in agreement with the second definition that the history is a process that has no meta-subject; and that has no ultimate Goal; there is no essence of history that expresses itself in its moments. It also accepts that within the “situation;” or during the “consensual times;” when there is no prospect of radical change, the depiction of society as a loosely bound whole is also accurate. However, it insists that this understanding leads to a depiction of history as a static existence: an eternal present of unrelated contemporaneities. Thus it argues that the history as a process

¹ In her case this also meant that there is no such thing as the private appropriation of the socially produced value.

is only possible through the brief moments marked the emergence of a mediated-expressive totality. These moments are momentums where a new subject is born; this subject ascribes a new goal to the historic process; it reinvents society's origins; it thus institutes a narrative of "expressive totality." This narrative becomes manifest in the universals created or discovered by the subject. In this sense, universals are born within history; they are contingent products of the conditions of their making; yet they are still valid for the entire human history. In this dissertation, the process of the emergence of a universal vision will be called –with an inspiration from Lukács' "Narrate or describe?"¹ as the construction of a "narrative totality". Accordingly, "history as a process without a Subject and Goal" is possible because of the moments where subjects claim to be the Subject of history and posit final goals to the process. Totality as an unbounded historic whole is possible because of the revolutionary sequences that posit expressive totalities.

II. Plan of Study

This study starts with a chapter focusing on the work of Lukács; not only because he is the founder of the 20th century understanding of revolutionary totality but because his thought contains the elements of both of the opposing understandings of totality. Through a reading inspired by the work of Alain Badiou, this chapter will show that Lukács contains two separate notions of totality appropriate to two different historic moments. Although both of these understandings are always present together in the work of Lukács, for analytic

¹ György Lukács, "Narrate or Describe," in *Writer & Critic, and Other Essays* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971).

reasons, a contrast will be highlighted between his writings of 1920s and 1960s. While the first of these periods can be seen as an example of the mediated expressive totality, it focuses more on *the point of view* of totality rather than totality itself.¹ The task of this period is not defining the structure of the social whole but to inquire into the conditions of the formation of a subject that can lead to what is outside this whole. As with Hegel, Lukács knows that whole can only be understood through its limits, by transgressing these limits. The use of totality in this period is inseparable from its construction by the revolutionary subject. On the other hand, the second period is explicitly aimed to build a new definition of totality albeit without using the word; here, society is defined as a complex that consists of complexes: it depicts social complexes that have neither beginnings nor ends. Curiously, in this period the word proletariat is no longer the center of Lukács' writings. By juxtaposing these periods, this study will show that these two positions are not mutually exclusive interpretations of totality but "determinate negations" of each other.² Formally speaking the first chapter will also bring different understandings of totality. While my focus will be specifically the work of Lukács, I will also discuss different ways of interpreting totality and underline underline the relation between a non-mediated totality and totalitarian crimes of 20th century.

¹ What I understand by the "point of view of totality" is best described by Brecht as *realism*, ironically in a polemic against Lukács: "Realistic means: discovering the causal complexes of society / unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who rule it / writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught / emphasizing the element of development / making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it." Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukács," *New Left Review* I, no. 84 (1974): 50.

² It should be admitted that Lukács who claimed that his latter work is a correction of the mistakes of 1920s, would be the first one to object to this proposition

On the basis of this “possible Lukács,” an evaluation of the actual Lukács will become possible: in the third chapter, the unfulfilled promises of his thought will thus be explored and contrasted with his expressed ideas and actions concerning party, class and the state. The intention here is to constitute an “imputed” politics of Lukács. In constructing this “imputed” Lukács, I will not deny the mistakes that Lukács did and I will definitely not intend to absolve him from these mistakes. However, I will not insist so much on these mistakes either; these are so well-known today that this study can contribute nothing to the established knowledge in this respect. My goal here is to listen closely to what Lukács can still say about our present, and can help to form a vision to understand our present. The intention of this chapter is thus to follow the consequences of the definition of totality that describes the concept in its movement between a conception of a central conflict, a subject, and a goal to the history and the conception of a totality without subject, without goal and with multiple conflicts. Once totality is defined in its movement, the next question is how to think of the place of political party, state, ethics and the political action based on this conception. The thesis advanced here proposes the idea of a political party as the collective place of an experiment in thought that helps to momentarily transform the unbounded whole to the mediated-expressive totality; and that vanishes when the task is complete.¹

¹ Did I overinterpret Lukács’ arguments in these lines and put words in his mouth that he would never say? Honestly I do not know: drinking into Lukács’ work I was only too glad to see my voice mixing with his. Not knowing and not minding which one of us is the “original” source of the ideas developed here, I will still maintain that they exist in Lukács at least as an “imputed possibility.”

The discussion of the Lukácsian concept will be followed with a long detour. In order to understand the process whereby the totality is first established as an unreachable and incommunicable entity and secondly is denied existence, the following two chapters will be focused on Heidegger and Althusser. In this second step, the immediate-expressive-totality becomes established as the only version of expressive whole, thus Lukács is thrown to the dustbin without ever being admitted to the battlefield of political philosophy.

It should be admitted here that the chapter on Heidegger is much less generous than the ones on Lukács. It is not interested in discovering an “imputed” Heidegger that can speak to us in our present. It rather intends to discover the material basis of what can be called Heidegger effect. So my aim will be to explore the basis and problems of the “really existing” Heidegger. I will start my discussion with one of the central themes of *Being and Time*: Death. I will show how Heidegger creates an ontological truth by universalizing the experience of death that is contingent to a specific geography and time. I will then show that after the 1920s Heidegger seldom uses the word death, and that in its stead “finitude” becomes his central concept. On the other hand, the definition of death barely changes when it becomes finitude. I will thus show how Heidegger universalizes his own totality that is born with an ontologization of the contingent experience of death in the Germany of 1920s. But Heidegger does more than to universalize a particular: I will further argue that Heidegger’s concept of finitude created a philosophical framework within which it was impossible for humans to achieve the point of view of totality; it was a framework where

universalism became impossible. In other words, if one accepts Heidegger's universal, all others lose their legitimacy. Finally I will claim that this framework results in an understanding of worlds that cannot communicate with each other. A few questions will be left at the end of this chapter and will not be answered until the chapter on Badiou: How is it possible today to not to accept Heidegger's finitude? Is it possible to affirm his philosophical operation and yet still create a space for universalism? What is the place of totality in this universalism to come?

The discussion of Heidegger will then be followed by a chapter on Althusser. This chapter in a way follows the consequences of finitude within Marxism. At the pure philosophical level, Althusser's operation is within the confines of Heideggerian limits – although improved and changed with Althusser's insights about the philosophy and dialectical materialism. Althusser is important not only for the original translation of the idea of finitude to Marxism, but also for his legacy, for his influence over the French intellectual milieu through his ideas and his actions. The theme of this chapter is Althusser's substitution of his understanding of decentered whole in the place of what he claimed to be Hegelian totality. As Perry Anderson notes, Althusser classified not only Lukács (actually he wrote very little about him) but almost all the great figures of 20th century marxism as historicists, he argued that they reflected

an ideology in which society becomes a circular 'expressive' totality, history a homogeneous flow of linear time, philosophy a self-consciousness of the historical process, class struggle a combat of collective 'subjects', capitalism

a universe essentially defined by alienation, communism a state of true humanism beyond alienation.¹

Althusser thus proposed to replace the expressive whole, with the idea of history as a process without subject and without goals but he did not pay any attention to the difference between the unmediated (immediate) whole and mediated one. While I do agree with Althusser about the history as a non-teleological process, I claim here that Althusser's conception fails to provide a space for the emergence of a subject that posits goals, works to accomplish these goals and thus gives this subjectless process a subjective momentum thus making history a process rather than a static being.

The discussion of Heidegger and Althusser could have been followed with a chapter on the child of their unexpected encounter: post-modernism. However, the fusion of these two thinkers that end up in postmodernism through an “overdetermined” process will not be discussed here. Nor the figures associated with post-modernism will become the topics for discussion. From the perspective of political thought, the arguments about post-modern condition will be rather developed around its intellectual roots to be found with Heidegger and Althusser.

The last section of this study will focus on the work of Badiou which provides an opportunity to move beyond the scope of postmodern politics and provide the space for an attempt to rearticulate the unfulfilled promise of Lukács' thought. This will not be done because Badiou has the answers but because his work provides the conditions to ask

¹ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), 70.

questions that were left with Lukács. Badiou's thought will thus be read as a way to partially accept the terms of the world as understood by Althusser and Heidegger, but also as a way to inscribe the possibility of universal truths in this world. But for this to happen the "point of view of totality" has to be first inscribed into his work, and this is not an easy task. I will show that Lukács' concept needs to be translated as "the truth of the void" in order for such an inscription becomes possible.

Although these days Badiou is becoming the new French superstar of the academic milieu, he is still lesser known than the other figures discussed in this study. This is why I will start the last thematic chapter with a broad introduction to his work: about his philosophical system, about his concepts, about his procedure... etc. Then I will make what was implicit in the second chapter apparent: I will discuss what Badiou calls "situation" and "event" in politics with a focus on the place of totality in these moments. For Badiou, situation can be roughly described as status quo marked, not by the domination of One but by the undifferentiated multiplicity. In the situation, totality is what maintains the order and is closely related with the state (of situation). The event, which can be roughly translated as revolution, is thus a transitory moment that disrupts the order and becomes the basis of a new situation. I claim here that the event can only become possible with and through the emergence of a point of view of totality and I will follow this claim in Badiou's work on his discussion of the subject, party and state.

In this dissertation, while I highlighted a number of similarities between Badiou and Lukács on a number of occasions, I left many others open. The reason is that my intention is not to create a catalogue of similarities between these two thinkers but to establish a space where two thoughts can combine and tell something. In my research, I did not encounter any serious discussion of Lukács by Badiou, nor I did find any extensive studies comparing them. Given the lack of any empirical relation and the different traditions of thought that Lukács and Badiou belong, it was a pleasure to find a common space of thought as well as many points of similarities in their arguments. I hope my readers will also share this joy in discovering these points for themselves.

There is one last question about the plan of my chapters: Do these three parts repeat the vulgar dialectics and its thesis (Lukács) – antithesis (Heidegger and Althusser) – synthesis (Badiou) model? The answer is no: Lukács does not provide a clear thesis; his definition of totality is no origin in itself. He rather provides a 20th century take on 19th century understanding of totality. Besides, rather than giving a clear definition of a practically applicable concept; the legacy of Lukács provides nothing but a tension between two understandings. It gives a tension that will be reconstructed through the concept of narrative totality.

Moreover, Heidegger is not an “antithesis” of Lukács: To the contrary, his idea of Being and Lukács’ totality show fundamental similarities. It is of course the argument of this dissertation that accepting positions of Heidegger prohibits the access to the whole, and

denies the possibility of universals. But it should be underlined that Heidegger proceeds only by inventing his own definition of the whole and by producing his own universal: finitude. The same goes with Althusser: this study refuses the established animosity between Althusserian and Lukácsian Marxisms. It shows that the thought of two thinkers appear almost homologous and that the differences seem to be minute and almost look like an “appendage” to the main body of agreement. But on the basis of this small disagreement this thesis further shows that there is even a stronger difference between the two thinkers than what is commonly accepted. In other words, far from the antithesis of Lukács, the second section discusses attempts to further his positions in such a way to lay the philosophical basis for their impossibility.

Finally Badiou is no synthesis: he does not bring a settlement to the open questions of the past, he only provides new ones. Moreover he is heir to Althusser and Heidegger in a more powerful way than he is to Lukács. He will be considered not because he has the answers but because his questions (about the event, subject, militant, state, party... etc.) provide the context to revitalize some of the Lukácsian concepts left to oblivion. Thus a Lukács inspired reading of Badiou will complement the Badiou inspired reading of Lukács. The goal is to show the relevance of the concept of narrative totality in Badiou’s conception of event and thus also to highlight that his discussion relies on an unacknowledged presupposition about the “point of view of totality.” In other words, Badiou will be

discussed not because he provides an adequate notion of totality but because his idea of event depends on a “point of view of totality” which is far from being explicit in his work.

III. Future Studies

Together with both Lukács and Badiou, this thesis argues that politics belongs first to the intellectual order: politics is its thought. This does not necessarily mean that academics, scientists, theoreticians or philosophers are in a privileged position to understand totality. The thought of politics is a collective creation. Yet people who are paid to read, think, talk and write politics do have the responsibility to contribute to the collective creation more than anybody else. The Chinese custom officer of 2600 years ago who forced Lao-Tzu to write Tao-Te-Ching knew this perfectly well: According to the legend, he had asked the wise Lao-Tzu who refused to own anything to pay the tax for his wisdom. I will never pretend to possess such wisdom yet after this dissertation I want to become a part of the process where the narrative adequate to our age will be constructed.

This contribution can start with what is missing in this dissertation. First, I plan to make the invisible dialogue with Adorno visible. I want to conduct a study of Adorno with the explicit question of whether his work allows the possibility for the construction of non totalitarian totality: on how to deal with the relation between normative totality and narrative whole. A “we” subject that does not exclude the difference cannot be imagined without thinking together with Adorno. His work in this sense can be read together with Arendt, Levinas but also with Bernard Yack.

Second figure that could have been included in this study is Sartre. While his *Critique of the Dialectical Reason* is very close to the thesis of this dissertation, I excluded this work. The reason is not the difference but the similarity of the accounts: basically I was afraid that his strong gravity would pull this thesis to itself and not allow something very close to continue to its direction. In a future study, with a clearer idea of how to understand the relation between the two totalities I also plan to return to Sartre's two-volume study. Here I want to ask whether the second volume of the *Critique* that ended up in Stalinism was inevitable.

Finally I want to consider the post-structuralist descendants of Althusser: I especially want to study Foucault's conception of local resistance movements, and ask whether his thought allows a possibility of the emergence of universalism in particulars. Moreover I plan to work on the contemporary debates emerging from this context and produce critical work on figures Laclau and Negri.

*Miracles alternate with the effects of the natural laws – they each limit the other, and together they constitute a whole.*¹

Chapter two: Inner Tensions of Lukács' Totality

I. Concerning the Two Thousand Men that Lukács Is

It is a commonly accepted fact that 20th century understanding of totality has its “origins” in the work of György Lukács, who had famously declared in *History and Class Consciousness* that the exclusive difference of Marxism does not stem from the primacy of economy in the explanation of history but from the point of view of totality; and had thus defined totality as “the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.”² This defines totality not as a mere scientific method for Marxism but as the embodiment of the revolutionary principle itself. Lukács underlines this point by stating that Lenin’s distinction lies in the fact that for him, totality is “the basis and standard of everything,” it is not just a tool in the debate or “principle of teaching.” The reality of political action has three fundamental properties: “universality, totality, and plain concreteness.”³

¹ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 24.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 27, italics removed.

³ ———, “Lenin – Theoretician of Practice,” in *Marxism and Human Liberation; Essays on History, Culture and Revolution*, ed. E San Juan (New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1973), 102. In a similar fashion in the 1967 postscript to *Lenin* he wrote: “Universality, totality and concrete uniqueness are decisive features of the reality in which action should and must be taken; the extent to which they are understood is therefore the measure of the true efficacy of any practice.” See: ———, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*. Trans. Nicholas Jacobs (London: N.L.B., 1970), 98. It should also be noted that Lukács’ discussion of Lenin here and elsewhere is a very particular one. He definitely wants to follow the path of the leader of the revolution. But to do so he should forget about some of Lenin’s major works, such as *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and emphasize and over-interpret even some minor passages in lesser known speeches, letters... etc.

The first question that arises here is what is meant by the “origin” of the 20th century understanding of totality? Probably Lukács’ thought suffers the most from the chronology that imprisons him. *HCC* is often taught as the foundation of western Marxism, but serious consideration of Lukács’ ideas seems to be something of the past. It is as if everything that could be said about Lukács is consumed during the debates of the 1970s and nothing is left after the early 1980s. Lukács is now established as the philosopher of ideology as false consciousness. Discussions of the present day often choose to ignore him even when his thought is the most relevant; the assumption is that nothing new can come out of his work. This study does not share the opinion that Lukács belongs to the venerable place he is offered in the museum of frozen ideas. This is why when one talks about Lukács as the “origin,” the word “origin” should not be considered as the beginning of a tradition that belongs merely to the history of ideas but should be taken as Heidegger understood it; as the source of a spring that continuously gives fresh water: as the *Ursprung*. Then the next question is: how to engage with the *Ursprung* of totality? The approach adopted here will be to think through the inner tensions of Lukács’ texts. As Martin Jay noted, it is perfectly possible that the word totality meant different things at different stages of Lukács’ life.¹ Confirming this point, in the 1967 preface to *HCC* Lukács argues that the totality as the epicenter of *HCC* was a “Hegelian distortion” that was “overriding the primacy of

¹ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 84. This argument about the discontinuity in the personal history of Lukács can be understood in parallel with his defense of discontinuities in history in general. See György Lukács, "Lukács on His Life and Work " *New Left Review* I, no. 68 (1971).

economics.”¹ This point is interesting to ponder for two reasons: First, in this preface Lukács spends lengthy efforts to perform self-criticism even about the smallest “mistakes” of *HCC*. However, the “Hegelian distortion” concerning one of the central concepts of the book (together with the reification) is merely acknowledged in half a paragraph and nothing else is uttered as to what was the “mistake,” why it was a “mistake,” what were the consequences of this “mistake”... etc. Secondly, maybe it is exaggerated to say that Lukács never believed in the “primacy of economics,” but one can safely say that in 1967, when he was preparing for the *Ontology of Social Being*, he was as far as possible from this understanding. Moreover, in the very same text, Lukács reaffirms his earlier conviction that the privilege of Marxism is the method, dialectical materialism. As dialectical materialism always meant the recognition and the transcendence of the immediate facts, one can say that the concept of totality is still maintained in the defense of method. Thus it is possible to say that what is cancelled in the 1967 preface is not totality as a concept, but its earlier usage. Is it possible to bring the young / old distinction to the concept of totality? But maybe one can go further than that: maybe the word meant different things even in the same work. Lukács, in the 1967 preface to *HCC* also writes that a person can unite conflicting intellectual trends.² Although in this context Lukács meant that his transition from what he called a bourgeois stance to what he called a proletarian one was not yet complete while writing the essays that became parts of this book; this passage encourages a

¹ ———, *HCC*, xx-xxi.

² *Ibid.*, x.

further question: can it be that *HCC* contains not one but several different versions of revolutionary politics? A younger Lukács had written to his lover that the self consists of “two thousand men, not two:”¹ is it possible to find two thousand approaches to totality in *HCC*?

How does one consider the two thousand Lukácses? Should one ask which ones are dead and which ones are living today, or should one evaluate what are the correct versions of revolutionary politics advocated by Lukácses and which ones lead to totalitarianism? Given the fact that Lukács always called for a critical evaluation of his past work, one can easily thread this path.² On the other hand, here it is impossible to not to remember Adorno’s frustration against Croce for assuming a similar position of a judge about Hegel. For Adorno, the correct question to ask for Hegel is not “what is living and what is dead in Hegel” but “what the present means in the face of Hegel.”³ Adorno’s claim can be extended to any original thinker, including Lukács: thus what matters is not which of Lukács’ ideas are relevant to present politics but ask how our present would appear to the eyes of Lukács. Under this light, the tension within the two thousand Lukácses should not be seen as inner contradictions, or “antinomies” of his thought that need to be resolved in order to make

¹ The letter is addressed to Hilda Bauer and is quoted at: Arpad Kadarkay, *Georg Lukacs: Life, Thought, and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1991), 92.

² For example, in 1967 postscript to *Lenin*, he called for such criticism: “This work is a pure product of the mid twenties (...) it must always be remembered that its ideas were determined more by the conceptions of the period – including their illusions and extravagances – than was Lenin’s own theoretical life work. (...) I hope that sober, thoughtful readers will themselves establish a critical distance.” Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 90.

³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 1.

Lukács relevant for our present; but precisely as what makes Lukács a ‘real presence’ in our contemporaneity.

This study claims that the foundational moment of 20th century understanding of totality embodied in the work of Lukács is born with an inner tension between two understandings of totality. This tension, never explicitly acknowledged by Lukács himself is the central speculative motor of his political philosophy. This chapter will try to show in its conclusion that Lukács produces two totalities at the same time: a “generic,” subjectless, non-teleological ever-evolving, indefinable, fluid understanding of totality; as well as a totality developed with a fidelity to the proletarian revolution, a totality whose subject is working class, whose central narrative is the class struggle, and whose final vision is directed toward the end of history as socialism. These two different understanding of totalities are often understood in direct contradiction with each other. The studies in Lukács are often oriented toward seeking the trace of one totality –or its related concepts, or the other; but never both. So Lukács is either depicted as the philosopher of Leninism with regards to his work in 1920’s or as the ontologist who attempted to develop a new way out of the mistakes of 20th century. The unheard Lukács is the one who has both totalities in a dialectical unity. This Lukács, who is maybe even unknown to himself, has valuable lessons for the emancipatory projects of our present. These lessons may help us move beyond the assertion of post-modern politics that the universals are empty as well as a “totalitarian” imposition of the universal over the differences that constitute the society.

I.a. Studies on Lukácsian Totality

Lukács' understanding of totality has deservedly attracted a number of important studies. When one looks at the broader picture, two basic trends become apparent. The mainstream understanding of Lukács focuses on his evolution up until the publication of *HCC*, if not until his "autocriticism" following the *Blum Theses* where Lukács explicitly renounces his earlier work and aligns himself with the party line. After this period, what attracts more attention is not what Lukács writes but what Lukács does. It can be argued that these studies are mostly concerned about the place of Lukács in the history of ideas and do not aim to build an understanding of totality in dialogue with Lukács. Their fundamental concern is to establish the 'truth' of Lukács' ideas.¹

¹ This group includes the best known works in the field such as Jay, *Marxism and Totality*; *ibid.* Jay's work, being the best known is partly an exception to the argument presented above. Despite his failures in the evaluation of the concept, Pelletier arguably gives the best account of the path that Lukács followed toward the *HCC*. See: Lucien Pelletier, "L'émergence Du Concept De Totalité Chez Lukács (1)," *Laval Theologique et Philosophique* 47, no. 3 (1991); ———, "L'émergence Du Concept De Totalité Chez Lukács (2)," *Laval Theologique et Philosophique* 48, no. 3 (1992). Other than these: Paul Breines, "Young Lukács, Old Lukács, New Lukács," *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 3 (1979). provides useful biographical data on the concerns of young Lukács leading to his leap of faith. In a similar way, Zoltan Tarr, "A Note on Weber and Lukács," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 1 (1989). explores the ethical concerns of young Lukács in embracing totality: can one lie his way to the truth? His 'discovery' of Marx is discussed in Ferenc Lendvai, "György Lukács 1902–1918: His Way to Marx," *Studies in East European Thought* 60, no. 1/2 (2008). Some other well-known contributions include: Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); Andrew Arato, "Lukacs' Path to Marxism (1910-1923)," *Telos*, no. 7 (1971); Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács: An Evaluation," *New Left Review* I, no. 70 (1971); Michael Löwy, *George Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism* (London: NLB, 1979).

The other trend consists of a smaller number of studies which maintain that Lukács developed a very original understanding of totality in his incomplete *Ontology*.¹ Either by arguing that late-early division is not appropriate for a thinker like Lukács,² or by showing that after his masterpiece Lukács never gave up his attempts to grasp totality³ the authors in this group go against the main current establishing Lukács as the philosopher of the October revolution and solely focusing on his work during the 1920s. Timothy Murphy argues that by establishing Lukács place in relation to the Russian revolution “we think we know (...) where it fits into the taxonomy of Marxist thought,” but this comes with a price: his ideas on “aesthetics, de-stalinization and radical democracy,” which are very much relevant to the present never receive the recognition that they deserve.⁴ In a similar way, Joós claims that the late work of Lukács, written as a prelude to ethics reveals a reconsideration of his earlier ideas about tactics and ethics,⁵ which should be independently considered as an original attempt to think politics. Despite the vigor of these appeals, the mainstream appreciation of these ideas can be seen in Tom Rockmore’s review of Joós: the

¹ Only three manuscripts of the multi-volume project is published in English: György Lukács, *Labour*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1980); ———, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1980); ———, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1980). None of these were ready for publication during Lukács’ life. The intent of the missing chapters can be inferred from Lukács’ last interviews and from his draft plans for the book.

² István Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic* (London: Merlin Press, 1972), 17-19.

³ Csaba Varga, *The Place of Law in Lukács' World Concept* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985), 75.

⁴ Timothy S. Murphy, "The Ontological Turn in the Marxism of Georg Lukács and Antonio Negri," *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture & Politics* 16, no. 2 (2003): 164-65.

⁵ Ernest Joós, *Lukács's Last Autocriticism, the Ontology* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983).

best of Lukács was around the *HCC*, he never reached this level again, let alone in these incomplete manuscripts.¹

On the other hand, there is virtually no study placing these two periods of Lukács together.² This study aims to bring together Lukács' writings of the 1920s with his incomplete project. As the importance of the former texts is already well established, the emphasis on the latter deserves an explanation. Besides, there is another question that needs to be answered: if Lukács never stopped thinking about totality why exclude three decades of his life's work and focus only to two periods? Maybe Lukács' excluded writings may help illuminate the gaps in the incomplete essays.³ It is true that some of the key concepts can be found in these excluded works: for example, the earliest discussion of labor, which is the key concept of the *Ontology* can be found indeed in *Young Hegel*.⁴ These two discussions of labor process are indeed significantly close to each other in such a way that it is even possible to find almost exact matches in some sections of these two works of separate periods. However, there are crucial differences as well: it is arguable that the incomplete *Ontology* is more complete in terms of the ripeness of the ideas. For example,

¹ Tom Rockmore, "Lukács's Last Autocriticism - the Ontology - Joós, Ernest," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 1 (1984).

² One important exception is Roy Pascal, "Georg Lukács: The Concept of Totality," in *Georg Lukács: The Man, His Work and His Ideas*, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970). However Pascal's inquiry is mainly directed toward Lukács' aesthetics not toward totality as a political idea. Frederic Jameson, who refuses the periodization of Lukács and reads his work as variations on and the development of some fundamental concerns does not include the late Lukács in his study. Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form; Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 160-206.

³ Murphy, "The Ontological Turn in the Marxism of Georg Lukács and Antonio Negri."

⁴ György Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 338-64.

Young Hegel discusses the labor process in terms of the dialectic of purpose and causality; whereas while *Ontology* maintains the dialectic, it additionally provides a concrete analysis of labor process with the intention of establishing it as a model for human action.¹ It further introduces the category of “accident” as an inevitable part of human development.² As a further issue, there is the difficulty caused by Lukács’ subservience to the Stalinist dogma in this period. The author of the present study agrees that despite this appearance Lukács tried to incorporate the criticism of Stalinism in the body of the work he wrote during these decades albeit in a hidden form that allowed him to survive.³ The work of uncovering Lukács’ hidden criticism; or observing the evolution of his ideas can be very interesting aspects of a study. However, the present one does not intend to establish the ‘objective truth’ of Lukács but intends to engage in a critical dialogue with his notion of totality.

There are further reasons to include Lukács’ late work to this investigation into the *Ursprung* of totality. First is the goal of the project that Lukács aimed to undertake: to

¹ For a recent analysis of the role of the category of labor in *Ontology’s* conception of totality: Michael J. Thompson, "Ontology and Totality: Reconstructing Lukács’ Concept of Critical Theory," in *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Essays in Politics, Philosophy, and Aesthetics*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (New York: Continuum Press, 2011).

² These ideas will be discussed in the following parts of this study. Preparing for his work during the 1960s Lukács himself had spoken that he no longer wanted to be “homo duplex” and speak directly and clearly without trying to remodel his ideas to conform to the official position of the party. Kadarkay, *Georg Lukacs*, 439.

³ This argument is presented at: George Lichtheim, *George Lukacs* (New York: Viking Press, 1970). For instance Lukács criticizes a concept nobody will oppose but his criticism is made in such a way that it can be extended to a criticism of the party line; or he explicitly approves an idea, but when the web of references are explored in their totality this explicit approval turns out to be a criticism... etc.

assert “Marxism in the 20th century, and the 20th century in Marxism.”¹ This double task makes this work all the way more interesting: the attempt to renew the fundamental categories of his thought by drawing lessons from the century and to make Marxism relevant in a world that has moved farther from the conditions of the revolution of 1917 may help considering a similar attempt for the 21st century. After all, the goal of his last work is to show the “ontological bases for the socialism of every-day life.”² One other reason that makes the *Ontology* relevant is that Lukács explicitly referred to this work as an attempt to “solve the problems that were posed quite falsely” in *HCC* such as “the relation between necessity and freedom.”³ This does not mean that the last work of Lukács is superior to *HCC* or that it brings a better, more adequate notion of totality. But the questions as to which ideas have changed, which ideas remain the same, which ones appear changed but remain the same, which ones appear the same but have substantively changed, which ones are completely out of the picture, what are new ideas that come to the forefront opens a new space into a better understanding of totality that can be relevant today. This space is that of the pronounced parallax⁴ between these two works which may shed a light to the way in which the social whole should be conceived today.

¹ Ervin Gyertyán, "Lukács György Szellemi Odüsszeiája (the Intellectual Odyssey of György Lukács)," in *Párbeszéd Sokszemközt (Public Dialogue)* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1973), 143. quoted in Varga, *The Place of Law in Lukács' World Concept*, 71.

² Lukács, "Lukács on His Life and Work ": 51-52. The key part of this project is the establishment of the preconditions of “meaningful life,” see: ———, *Labour*, 108.

³ ———, "Lukács on His Life and Work ": 51.

⁴ The word used in the Kantian sense, that the truth lies in none of the positions but in the movement between them. See: Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, trans. Emanuel F. Goerwitz (London: New-Church Press Limited, 1915), 85-86.

Excursus: Honneth's Reification

Axel Honneth recently made an attempt to reactivate one of the notable concepts of Marxist humanism that was left to oblivion: reification.¹ This essay provides a unique and exciting occasion where the leading representative of the latest generation of the Frankfurt School returns to the school's arguably founding text and offers a reconsideration of one of the founding conceptions of this tradition of critical theory. Thus, this reading is a moment where the beginning and the end stand together in such a way that enables one to observe the gap that separates them.

Honneth begins his discussion with a well-known epigraph: "All reification is a forgetting." It is a striking point because his entire essay is based upon a forgetting: namely the relation between totality and reification. Unfortunately, through this forgetting the reification itself turns into a reified concept in his overall discussion. It is obviously a mistake to argue that Honneth is incapable seeing the obvious relation between totality and reification in the context of the *HCC*. His reading rather represents a conscious forgetting of this relation which leads to cutting the tie between these two concepts in such a way to turn the problem of reification into an individual, almost to a psychological one.

¹ Axel Honneth, "Reification and Recognition: A New Look at an Old Idea," in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea (the Berkeley Tanner Lectures)*, ed. Martin Jay (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Another notable attempt to resist the oblivion of reification is Timothy Bewes, *Reification, or, the Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2002).

Briefly, *HCC* argues that the historic knowledge of totality is the principal revolutionary force that the proletariat can and should accumulate to counter all the forces that are at the disposal bourgeoisie. But in the day-to-day practice of politics, proletariat (not just the individual proletarians, but proletariat as a class) seems to be out of touch with the totality. The concept of reification is meaningful in Lukács' system in this context, as the answer to the question of why the only social being that has the objective possibility to access the totality is not relating to it in actuality. In other words, reification in the first place is a concept that belongs to class politics. The individual aspects of reification can only be understood within this framework. When the class-political notion of reification is excluded from the picture, one is left only with the individual implications of reification; but this individual is out of history, out of society, out of the relations of individuation and thus the concept is out of context. Honneth, in his turn is precisely interested in this: reification as an individual phenomenon. In his introduction to Honneth's essay, Martin Jay draws attention to the connection between totality and reification and he underlines the class nature of both concepts.¹ However, Jay does not ask why the concept of totality is not mentioned even once by Honneth. Jay also notes that no class, social movement, no privileged actor exists in Honneth's politics.² Jay rather than problematizing this appearance, celebrates it as a 'democratic' act in theory that puts all the actors on a level

¹ Martin Jay, "Introduction," in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea (the Berkeley Tanner Lectures)*, ed. Martin Jay (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6-7. Jay writes: "only by adopting an active, world-changing practice could the contemplative passivity of a class that had forgotten its constitutive role in the making of the social world, in fashioning history, be rectified"

² *Ibid.*, 9.

plain.¹ But behind this appearance, at least in this particular text, Honneth has a privileged subject: the abstract individual hidden behind the category: “everyone,” the abstract individual who suffers from the forgetting of the historicity of its being.

Under the conditions of reification, how do the abstract individuals relate to the world? Honneth writes:

(a) to perceive given objects solely as “things” that one can potentially make a profit on, (b) to regard each other solely as “objects” of profitable transactions, and finally (c) to regard their own abilities as nothing but supplemental “resources” in the calculation of profit opportunities. Lukács subsumes all these changes in the person’s stance toward the objective world, society, and himself or herself under the concept of “reification,” without taking the many nuances and diversities among these attitudes into account.²

In other words, shifting the gaze from the class aspects of reification to individual is not enough; the personal consequences of reification should be further broken down into more specific components. When one looks at the mirror and thinks, “What have I got that I can sell?”³ the answer may vary: my products, my relations, my talents. Honneth is absolutely right that these answers are quite distinct from each other, but Lukács is not interested in the psychology of reification, he is interested in the social situation where everyone is forced to establish a thing-like relation with what constitutes their ‘self.’ It can further be observed here that Honneth’s take on reification as “detached, neutrally

¹ The difference between the ‘privileged’ meta-historical actor and the ‘privileged’ actor as the bearer of the universal in a concrete situation will be discussed in the sixth chapter of this study.

² Honneth, “Reification and Recognition: A New Look at an Old Idea,” 22.

³ Marshall Berman, “Unchained Melody,” in *Adventures in Marxism* (London ; New York: Verso, 1999), 262.

observing mode of behavior”¹ is already assuming an active subject: The subject in Honneth is the one who treats others like the thing, not the one being treated like the thing. Following Habermas, Honneth argues that Lukács’ critique of reification may also have “gravely underestimated the extent to which highly developed societies require—for reasons of efficiency—that their members learn to deal strategically with themselves and others”² What Honneth uses as a neutral-objective term, “efficiency” is exactly the problem for Lukács: it is nothing but the symptom of the permeation of “productivity” into every human relation. In other words, what Lukács sees as products of historic development subject to change in time; Honneth takes as objectively given, unchangeable aspect of society.

In this way, reification can be understood by reducing it to a normative category that “deviates from a more genuine or better form of human praxis.”³ The task is not anymore the class struggle as envisaged by Lukács, but the rehabilitation of the reified individuals. Then the first thing to do is to show that the “atrophied” praxis of reification does not exhaust all possible human actions. Honneth argues that the “ought” of Lukács as to the constitution of the non-reified individual subject is available in the famous reification essay:

¹ Honneth, "Reification and Recognition: A New Look at an Old Idea," 26.

² Ibid., 28.

³ He also writes, echoing Heidegger’s criticism of Lukács in *Being and Time*: “his analysis of reification is obviously not without normative content. After all, his mere use of the concept of ‘reification’ betrays his assumption that the phenomena he describes are in fact deviations from a ‘genuine’ or ‘proper’ stance toward the world.” Ibid., 20, 26.

For instance, an active subject must be conceived as experiencing the world directly or in an unmediated [miterlebend] way, as an “organic part of his personality,” and as “cooperative,” while objects can be experienced by the active subject as being qualitatively unique,” “essential,” and particular in content.¹

Honneth’s discovery of the active (individual) subject in Lukács carries several problems: First, the quotations are used out of the context. For instance when Lukács is talking about the subject who is experiencing the world directly, he is comparing the perspective of the historian against the person who actually lived in the past. They obviously perceive the same situation in different ways.² However, Lukács never says that one point of view is preferable to the other; besides they do not appear in the context of a comparison between reified vs. non-reified human action. Secondly, the quotations about the active subject are pulled from the passages where Lukács describes the way that the human beings related to their present before the capitalism. These are passages pointing to the times where one was acting as a part of the organic community.³ There is no evidence that Lukács considered this type of agency as a remedy to the problems caused by the

¹ Ibid., 26-27. I do not know whether Honneth has approved the translation of “miterleben” (to experience, witness) as unmediated, which is the translation of “unvermittelt.” The incredible problem with this translation is that it suggests that the greatest dialectician of 20th century not only admits the possibility but also argues for the superiority of unmediated experience. Not only unmediated experience is dialectically impossible, but the attempt to build it leads to the totalitarianisms of the 20th century. (this argument will be elaborated on the section: “Parts and the Whole: Wrong” of the present study.)

² “This is the source of the - apparently - paradoxical situation whereby the ‘law’ of primitive societies, which has scarcely altered in hundreds or sometimes even thousands of years, can be flexible and irrational in character, renewing itself with every new legal decision, while modern law, caught up in the continuous turmoil of change, should appear rigid, static and fixed. But the paradox dissolves when we realise that it arises only because the same situation has been regarded from two different points of view: on the one hand, from that of the historian (who stands ‘outside’ the actual process) and, on the other, from that of someone who experiences the effects of the social order in question upon his consciousness.” Lukács, *HCC*, 97. It should be underlined once again that in this passage Lukács uses “Standpunkt des miterlebenden Subjekts,” not “unvermittelt”

³ Ibid., 47.

capitalism. In other words, far from being a positive ‘sublation’ of the reified human being, the human being characterized in these lines is yet to become an individual. Lukács kept on underlining that such return to the past is neither desirable nor possible.

“All reification is forgetting,” Adorno and Horkheimer were in complete agreement with Lukács’ notion when they wrote this line that became the epigraph of Honneth’s text. One should be absolutely clear about the concept here: Forgetting in question here is the forgetting of the past tortures, real and symbolic violence to which humanity was subject so that the “progress” could take place. Forgetting, is forgetting the ruin that is piling in front of the feet of the “Angel of History.”¹ As Marcuse would say, to forget is to forgive the past repressive forces that caused the present injustices today without first defeating them.² But Honneth also uses Adorno and Horkheimer out of context in order to build the complete opposite image of history: the romantic notion of the happy past. Honneth’s happy past though is not the historic past of humanity; it is the past that suits to the conception that takes “everyone” as its subject. The past here refers to a stage that “everyone” has to go through: the “nine month revolution!”³ According to Honneth, the transformations that the babies go through around this period are a proof that all human beings are capable of non-reified praxis, yet human beings forget their happy childhood and become reified subjects.⁴

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 257-58.

² Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization; a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1966), 232.

³ Honneth, "Reification and Recognition: A New Look at an Old Idea," 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

All that needs to be done is to recover the forms of praxis that reification did not eliminate “but merely concealed from our awareness.”¹

There remains one question: how to define the action of this subject constructed with an out of context understanding of forgetting, an out of context image of past ages, and the romantic notion of a happy past applied to the individual. Honneth uses the concept of “engaged praxis” to define the type of action prescribed by Lukács.² The nature of this engagement is completely absent in Honneth’s essay, engagement is also treated as an abstract category without dealing with what, why, how, when and with whom one engages with. Moreover without an explanation as to the change he is introducing, Honneth transforms “engaged praxis” into “empathetic engagement.”³ Despite the fact that Honneth gives no explicit reference as to where Lukács is using “engaged praxis,” it is possible to argue that the concept falls somewhere within the Lukácsian territory. However, the same does not hold true for “empathetic engagement.” Honneth again gives no reference as to where Lukács is using the concept and it is very difficult to imagine as to why, where, how Lukács might have used it: in the end, class warfare is not done with empathy. Without a proper explanation of the place of this concept in Lukács’ thought, Honneth does not hesitate to place it as its central category. The problem here is not to show that unless Honneth brings a new definition of empathy as the revolutionary struggle of the working class, Lukács not even implied “empathy” within the context of the *HCC*. The problem is

¹ Ibid., 31.

² Ibid., 30, 31, 32.

³ Ibid., 35.

neither Honneth's own views about how human beings are capable empathy but they forget it. The problem is the philosophical operation that brings the name Lukács to justify a theory that he would find devoid of any concrete political content. Honneth writes: "Lukács intended 'reification' to be understood as a kind of mental habit or habitually ossified perspective, which when taken up by human subjects causes them to lose their ability for empathetic engagement in other persons and occurrences."¹ Lukács' concept of reification had nothing to do with the empathetic engagement; it had everything to do with totality. The forgetting of totality does not necessarily lead to Honneth; but without the omission of totality it is impossible to get Lukács' reification without its political consequences.

II. The Aleph: Toward Narrative Totality

The aleph is the beginning. It is more than the first letter of the Arabic, Hebrew and other Semitic alphabets; in the dizzying imagination of Borges, it designates a point in space that contains all other points.² One of these points, located at the cellar of Carlos Argentino allows one to see all places, clearly, without confusion, and simultaneously. Though its diameter is just about an inch, it contains an undiminished, infinite universe. Looking through it, Borges sees everything from every angle:

¹ Ibid., 53.

² Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 118-34. In this context, I am sure that Borges refers to the Hebrew \aleph . In set theory \aleph represents the cardinality (number of elements in the set) of infinite sets. After George Cantor's formulation that different infinite sets can have different cardinalities, the notation is invented as \aleph_0 as the smallest infinite cardinal number representing the cardinality of natural numbers. Cardinalities continue with \aleph_1 , \aleph_2 and so on...The \aleph is different from the infinity (∞): while the latter is the extreme limit of a real number line that diverges in an unbounded way, the former measures the size of a set.

the populous sea (...) dawn and dusk (...) the multitudes of America (...) a broken labyrinth (it was London) (...) endless eyes (...) grapes, snow, tobacco, veins of metal, water vapor (...) convex equatorial deserts and their every grains of sand (...) a woman in Inverness (...) her violent hair, her haughty body (...) cancer in her breast (...) tigers, pistons, bisons, tides, and armies (...) the circulation of my own dark blood (...) the Aleph from everywhere at once (...) the earth in the Aleph and the Aleph once more in the earth and the earth in the Aleph (...) the inconceivable universe.¹

The Aleph, is it the point of view of totality that Lukács is talking about? The point of view of totality; is it a gaze directed to everything from every angle? If so, there are several major problems: First, in the Aleph everything is simultaneous, but language is sequential; aleph escapes language. In other words, giving an account of the Aleph is an impossible task because Aleph is infinite and the language is finite.² Secondly, Borges just goes on living after facing the Aleph, nothing special happens to him. However, the consequence of facing such an object is explored in another short story: the Zahir.³ Here Borges tells the story of acquiring an object, the Zahir who forces a single thought upon whoever encounters it. The Zahir can be a tiger, a vein in one of the pillars of the synagogue of Córdoba, a blind man, or in the case of Borges, a coin. All these have the same property. Those who come to encounter them start meditating into the fact that every being is related to every other being. So the inevitable occurs: thinking through the infinite ways of the relations that are mediated through one single object, those who come to encounter the Zahir are drawn into madness. In other words, even if it is possible to

¹ Ibid., 130-31.

² This point will be further developed in the chapter on Heidegger.

³ Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*, 79-89. In Arabic Zahir means: the manifest, the apparent, the visible.

encounter totality as the infinite multiplicity, there would be no coming back from this encounter.

It is not only that the Aleph and Zahir denote inconceivable, inexpressible entities. But overall, they represent “partial totalities” because the passing of time is entirely absent in them. Borges only talks about the infinite multiplicity of being that exists in a single moment. If the history can be seen simply as the sequence of such instances, the moments of history added to one another would form an infinite composed of infinites. How to define the infinite of infinites? The point of view of totality, the concept so crucial for Lukács, is it a gaze that looks through an Aleph of all Alephs? Who can gaze through this rich madness? But first the question needs to be simplified: let’s consider only the totality so far as the society and politics are concerned!

Here it is possible to argue that the mountains, the seas and the grains of sand are at best indirectly relevant so long as the goal is to attain the social whole. This statement indeed is correct; however there are no less than an infinite number of relations conceivable among the human beings. Thus reducing totality to society does not make the job easier. Here, the four categories of totality that Martin Jay discussed may offer a starting point for a workable definition of the concept. According to Jay, different versions of the idea of totality may be grouped around four basic definitions: *Descriptive* totality that is concerned with the relations between parts of the whole; *normative* totality, i.e. totality as a goal as to the harmony vs. the disharmony; *longitudinal* totality that perceives the history as a

developmental whole; and the *latitudinal* totality that deals with the unifying features of historical stages. These four notions form an impeccable heuristic device that enables Jay to map the entire 20th century Marxism in his immense *Marxism and Totality*. However, as discussed above just to count the elements of descriptive totality alone is an impossible task. Even if the time can be stopped in a given moment and one starts describing the relations among the human beings occurring just at that moment, from the global capitalism to the small talk taking place in the barber shop in a remote village of Anatolia, one may fill all the libraries in the world in an incoherent and crazy encyclopedia, yet the list will not be exhaustive: only the “Library of Babel” would be fit enough to contain this descriptive list. When one resumes the time and the longitudinal and latitudinal totalities enter into the picture, the job will get even more complex. In this sense, Jay’s definitions are very useful to grasp different usages of totality; however they are not very helpful to build a positive content of it. What does the totality consist of? To answer this question, it should be first stated that the four notions of Jay are possible because they are in the first place grounded by a fifth: the *narrative* totality.¹

In his essay, “Narrate or Describe” Lukács had compared the “descriptive” mode with the “narrative” mode, not in social relations but in their reflection in literature.² What Lukács argues in this text is that even if one manages to describe everything, it will amount

¹ Although “narration” belongs to the order of Lukács’ work on literature I will be coining it as a “political narrative” as well. For a study exploring the relation of Lukács’ thoughts on literature and his broader philosophy: Sara Nadal-Melsió, “Georg Lukács: Magus Realismus?,” *Diacritics* 34, no. 2 (2004).

² Lukács, “Narrate or Describe.”

to nothing. Description creates a “kaleidoscopic chaos” of “false contemporaneity” rather than an adequate understanding the totality of being.¹ In contrast to description, narration is the art of telling more by telling less. A great work of drama contains one “single conflict,” yet nothing is missing in this reduction because all other conflicts are dialectically connected to this epicenter.² In a way, narrative totality can be seen as a concept deduced from the infamous “expressive totality” that suggests that every single relation is a manifestation of the central contradiction of history. For instance when Fredric Jameson points to the connection between totality and narration –in order to prove that the deployment of the concept of realism in literature and totality in politics is not inconsistent, the purpose that he assigns to totality is to highlight the central determinants of the act or experience in question. The operation this study proposes is the opposite: to look at the function of narration inside the totality.³ From a Lukácsian perspective it can be argued that while the narrative totality is about the “truth” of the given moment in time, it nonetheless belongs to a story, to a fiction. It does not come with the pretense that it is the unchangeable scientific truth of history, not even it suggests that it is the absolute truth of the time. Thus the act of narration is not merely about expressing the given truth of the age, but about its invention. As Lukács of *Die Eigenart Des Ästhetischen* would insist: science is objective and is interested in generalities; whereas creation in art is subjective, almost personal and

¹ Ibid., 133.

² Ibid., 127. Borges also joins Lukács here in his search for a single tale where all the voices of humanity can be found. See: Jorge Luis Borges, "The Telling of the Tale," in *This Craft of Verse (the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1967-1968)*, ed. Calin Andrei Mihailescu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London; New York: Verso, 2009), 205.

singular. On the other hand while science cannot move one step beyond the generality; in art, the subjective can get beyond the generality of science. The subjectivity of art is the precondition of its universality.¹ In this definition, the idea of the narration of the truth is far from the postmodern definition of the concept instituted against the claims of truth, universality... etc. On the other hand, a version of post-structuralism is useful to remind that narration also exists in science² and in other areas where human beings display their creative potentials; this definition may as well include politics.

In politics, narrative totality provides a subjective point on social whole which connects seemingly unrelated realms of existence; it magnifies some of them, dismisses some others. Narrative totality invents the epicenter of the whole; only to undo it as the cause of injustice. This invention is indeed not a creation out of nothing; it is the realization of an objective tendency; of an imputed possibility. Thus the center of totality cannot be “discovered” as an objective phenomenon; its objective reality needs to be an act of subjective assertion narrated to others. Thus narrative totality concerns less “totality” itself

¹ György Lukács, *Die Eigenart Des Ästhetischen*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1987). I mostly consulted this book in its Turkish translation: ———, *Eстетik*, trans. Ahmet Cemal, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Payel 1985). For an evaluation of these concepts in Lukács’ aesthetic theory: Ágnes Heller, "Lukács's Aesthetics," *The New Hungarian Quarterly* VII no. 24 (1966). G. H. R. Parkinson, "Lukács on the Central Category of Aesthetics," in *Georg Lukács: The Man, His Work and His Ideas*, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970). I would like to extend my gratitude to H. Ünal Nalbantoğlu who introduced me to Lukács’ aesthetic theory. Had I not known the Lukács of aesthetics and ontology before any other reading of Lukács, none of the ideas that appear in this dissertation would be possible.

² I am thinking of the work of Bruno Latour: Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); ———, *Aramis, or, the Love of Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

but “the point of view of totality.” This is why *HCC*’s central focus is not the structure of the capitalist totality but the proletarian perspective aimed to understand and destroy this totality. Still, the key point of narration, the central focus of the gaze is about the singular conflict that brings all others under its own register. For most of the 20th century politics, this operation was conducted by the mode of “expression:” today, this mode of narration seems to be untenable. The task of today’s politics is not only to identify the dialectical center of the social whole but also to create a new mode of narration adequate to it. But which conflict dares today to occupy the dialectical core of the multiplicity of irreducible social & political issues that stand in distinction from each other? Labor conflict; the environment; the religious cleavages; central states vs. regions asking for their autonomy and independence; urban-rural cleavages; movements of landless peasants; the immigration; cultural rights; women’s movements; the queer movement; new forms of colonialism and imperialism as well as the struggles against these... among this multitude of struggles, how can one choose The struggle of our time, not in literature but in the practice of politics? Or should one argue like Hardt and Negri that the mark of our age is the multiplicity itself and that the task is to celebrate it rather than choosing One in this multiplicity. Should politics learn to appreciate the multiplicity as such and do something with it? But what if the multiplicity is and has been a characteristic of “normal” human existence, a property of status quo, thus an aspect which in itself carries no ontological or political value? These questions will become more relevant for the final part of this study in

relation to the work of Alain Badiou. Here, the first preliminary task is to establish Lukács' concept of totality.

II.a. Totality and Mediation

In the final chapter of *Savage Mind* –as a polemic against Sartre's idea of dialectic, Lévi-Strauss argues that totality is not the exclusive privilege of the modern man and his historical perspective. He insists that the “characteristic feature of the savage mind is its timelessness; its object is to grasp the world as both a synchronic and a diachronic totality.” Lévi-Strauss also adds that this totality is a product of the analogical thought; he thinks that the urge to form continuities and unify is a product of the domestication.¹ The problem here is that while Lévi-Strauss correctly underlines that modern man did not invent the category of totality, he pays no attention in these lines to the central category of modern notion of totality: mediation. So where does the concept of mediation fit in Lukács' thought? How does Lukács define totality?

It is very curious and very crucial to note that Lukács, arguably the founder of the 20th century understanding of Marxist totality, nowhere gives a definite description of what he understands by the word totality, and he doesn't give it for a good reason. Lukács would be the first one to object the discussion of totality as presented in these lines. Lukácsian understanding of dialectics prohibits the discussion of totality in the abstract; totality should

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

always be brought to question as a “concrete totality.” From a pure analytical point of view, concrete totality may be seen as contradiction in terms similar to transcendental finite, the particular universal, etc... Totality as the negation of concrete should stand in complete opposition to it. This thought is of course only possible when one does not think dialectically. Without proper dialectics, concrete is a simple concrete fact, not the beginning of a journey that ends back in the concrete. Obviously, this is not the path of Lukács who follows Marx in striving to bring the theory up to the concrete: “concrete analysis of the concrete situation is not the opposite” but “the culmination of all genuine theory.”¹ Does this mean that the concrete is prior to, or immediately linked to totality? The very beginning of *HCC* claims the contrary: while positivism and empiricism rely on “isolated and isolating” facts; dialectics is concerned with the unity of the whole.² Positivist science falls prey to the immediate, helping to reproduce the fetishism of commodities, through which relations between men appear as relations between things.³ The “dialectical nexus” which dictates the “simultaneous recognition and transcendence of immediate facts,”⁴ stands in complete opposition to the fetish. In other words, the concrete stands both at the beginning and at the end of the dialectical journey of totality. But this journey will

¹ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 43, italics removed. Thus “theory is useless if it limits itself to generalities. It has to solve particular problems,” *ibid.*, 16. It can also be legitimately argued that this approach is not new to *HCC and onwards*, even the young Lukács was not far from this perspective: In Lukács’ “upside down Platonism” the forms are similar to Plato’s ideas: “they are the manifestation of the universality in the real,” see: Pelletier, “L’émergence Du Concept De Totalité Chez Lukács (1),” 295.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 14. i.e “With the totality out of the way, the fetishistic relations of the isolated parts appeared as a timeless law valid for every human society.” *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

never be understood without the key element of the whole, of the “continuous transformation:”¹ mediation.

Transcendence of immediate facts through mediation does not mean to shift the perspective from one point to another. As Martin Jay notes, the concrete totality of HCC must include all the mediations that linked the facts that appeared to be isolated from each other.² Quoting Hegel, Lukács adds further that what is attained in the concrete whole is the result plus the process of arriving at it: without the process, the naked result is only a corpse.³ Thus dialectical totality is a historical totality of “qualitative changes of specific complexes, both in themselves and in relation to other complexes,”⁴ which reveals the “moving and moved contradictions of the genesis of man himself in the process of creating and comprehending his world.”⁵

It is in this sense that Lukács’ prominent student Mészáros argues that the two central categories of Lukács’ dialectic are totality and mediation.⁶ He also underlines the interrelationship between these two concepts by stating that the “social totality without

¹ Ibid., 7. “(...) facts must be interpreted, and therefore they must be transcended. It is not a question which comes first, facts or abstraction. There is no first and there is no later. If we forget this we end up in a hyperstatis of the terms of the problem and therefore relapse into insoluble metaphysics.”

² Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 105.

³ Lukács, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 22. He refers to: “For the real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about. The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it.” from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 2.

⁴ Lukács, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, 72.

⁵ ———, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 24.

⁶ Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic*, 61.

mediation is like freedom without equality: an abstract and empty postulate.”¹ One may add to his observation that it is also a very dangerous one. Mészáros is right in pointing out to the fact that Marxism is not alone in claiming the access to totality. Fascism and Nazism almost simultaneously with Lukács’ texts had also raised the claim that it is them who had the privileged access to totality. One can argue that the path of liberal criticism of totality best expressed by the work of Hannah Arendt is precisely based on this simultaneous demand. However, it is possible to argue that one would be rushing too fast to conclusions by associating totality with totalitarianism. Mészáros shows perfectly that the mediated totality of Lukács and the direct cult of totality of Fascism and Nazism are fundamentally different. On this point Lukács makes no mistake, Stalinism shares this similar element with other totalitarianisms:

Stalinist method consists of abolishing all mediation; establishing an immediate relation between the crude fact and the most general theoretical propositions. (From fact immediately up to the theory, not vice versa – theory up to the concrete)²

First thing to note here is that Lukács refuses to resort to ethics or human rights in his critique of Stalinism: “Stalinism is more than the evils of Stalin. It cannot be understood by reference to the categories of morality. It is quite simply the substitution of tactics to

¹ Ibid., 63.

² György Lukács, "Reflections on the Cult of Stalin," <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1962/stalin.htm>.

theory.”¹ What is important here is to note that Lukács does not deny the horrible abuses of human rights that took place under Stalin's rule. Yet, acknowledging the evils of the regime, he does not want to limit his criticism with morality. He wants to understand Stalinism as a political project: a criminal political project responsible for the deaths of millions of people. This means that the moral categories will bring at best a partial picture of Stalinism as a political sequence. In order to grasp Stalinism, and what made possible the crimes of Stalin, one should think it as a political project; this also means to understand the mistake in the thought that is peculiar to Stalinist politics. For Lukács, this mistake is to abolish the category of mediation in the conception of totality; it is to think totality without

¹ Franco Ferrarotti, "Conversation with György Lukács," *Worldview* 15, no. 5 (1972): 32. This is precisely the point that Löwy is missing in his analysis of Lukács' relation with Stalinism. For Löwy, the fact that Lukács was subscribed to one of the core ideas of Stalinism, socialism in one country, constitutes a proof by itself of the way in which he became sympathetic of Stalinism. See: Michael Löwy, "Lukács and Stalinism," *New Left Review* I, no. 91 (1975). It is interesting to note that in his later interviews Lukács refers precisely to this approval when he argues that Stalin made some correct strategic decisions. The important word that Löwy misses here is "strategic." During the later stages of his life, Lukács was far from being apologetic to Stalinism, however he still wanted to fight against the revolutionary nostalgia that Trotsky could have become a better leader than Stalin. If there is one figure in the revolutionary leadership that Lukács disapproved more than Stalin, this has always been Trotsky. He always believed that Trotsky was more susceptible for the "cult of personality," than Stalin and that his revolutionary adventurism would have even more disastrous consequences than Stalin's actions. Lukács thought that during the 1920s, the idea of permanent revolution would bring more wars. What Lukács does not consider here –maybe because his vision is limited to the opposition between Trotsky and Stalin, is the possibility of a permanent revolution carried on not on the basis of aggression but on the basis of international solidarity among different movements. Excluding prematurely the "peaceful" alternative, he thinks that the only alternative to "socialism in one country" is another war. The horrible consequences of this war aside, the young communist state couldn't even afford maintaining an army ready for the possible wars. At a pure strategic level, even feeding an army meant reducing the number of peasants (turning them into soldiers) and forcing them to produce even more than what they used to produce. This meant an open invitation to famine. He thus viewed "socialism in one country" as a correct strategic choice that was necessary to survive the difficult early days of the revolution. On the other hand, when this turns into a generalization Neil Smith's comment is absolutely right, socialism in one country is as absurd and as impossible as capitalism in one factory. See: Neil Smith, "Başka Bir Devrim Mümkün (Another Revolution Is Possible)," *Birikim*, no. 205-206 (2006). Thus what Stalin did and is absolutely the wrong thing to do, is to immediately elevate these momentary strategic political decisions to the generalizations about human society and history; and thus to create a totality out of the immediacy. Unfortunately, this point is often missed while judging Lukács peace with Stalin. For the purposes of this dissertation, this issue will be brought again in the discussion of the place of the political party.

the dialectics. Secondly, this immediate totality of totalitarianism is not about the contradictions, the fissures, the gaps, the discontinuities that make the social whole; it is not about a totality that is out of joint; to the contrary it refuses the ontological place of the inconsistent parts. It is a “normative totality” aimed at harmony, and totalitarian politics consist of the real elimination of the parts which do not properly belong to the harmonious whole. Unlike totalitarian totality, the social totality of Lukács exists “through those manifold mediations” which links “partial totalities,” specific complexes “to each other in a constantly shifting and changing, dynamic overall complex.”¹ Thus Lukács’ concept of totality calls for an articulation of the relation of the parts and the whole. How to formulate this relationship? Maybe before trying to understand the proper way, it is better to analyze in what ways the conception of totality may be formulated in wrong ways

II.b. Parts and the Whole: Wrong

How does Lukács’ notion separate from the totalitarian totality? One can point out to the lines where Lukács underlines that totality should not be conceived in such a way to reduce its various elements to an “undifferentiated uniformity and identity.”² It is possible to say that these examples provide an implicit critique of totalitarianisms that deny the autonomous existence to the parts. However, besides these remarks it is very difficult to

¹ Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic*, 63.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 11.

find his explicit interventions which criticized Nazi and Fascist totalities.¹ However, at different occasions he mentions wrong ways of conceiving totality. From these comments one can deduce three interrelated approaches that are the basics of the repressive totality.

The first wrong can be found in his *Lenin*, as a critique of “revisionism.” Lukács here argues that the foremost mistake of revisionism is to start with the interest of society taken as a whole. As the descriptive mode in literature intends to mention everything, revisionism is concerned with the interests of society at large. The theoretical problem that is discovered here is that as a result of starting with the whole as such, the “revisionist takes an ever-changing product of the historical process as a fixed theoretical starting point.”² Much like the positivist science criticized in the *HCC*, revisionism becomes obliged to accept the capitalist social whole as the unquestionable reality of the time. Once the social whole under capitalism is accepted as a given as the starting point, revisionism has to deny the imminent possibility of a radical change. Thus the only sphere of appropriate action that remains is the *realpolitik*. This concept, not to be confused by the *revolutionary realpolitik*, designates a vision of politics reduced to a mere play of interest among the different segments of society. The logic is simple: if the rules of the game cannot be changed,

¹ Köwes argues that Lukács’ critique of fascism can be analyzed in three different periods. If one builds a larger picture of his engagement in these periods ignoring the particular differences, following points can be highlighted: a. considering it as an enemy in the day-to-day politics b. unfolding the gap between the deeds and the words of fascism c. revealing the socio-historical conditions that created the mass basis of fascism d. inquiring the intellectual roots of Nazism in the post-enlightenment irrationalist tendencies of philosophy. See: Margit Köwes, “Lukács and Fascism,” *Social Scientist* 25, no. 7-8 (1997). However, in none of these moments Lukács provided fascism with the dignity of the serious analysis of its concepts, even in order to refute them.

² Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 55 italics removed.

political action should be aimed to win whatever one can within these rules. Revisionism thus, “sacrifices the genuine interests of the class as a whole (...) so as to represent the interests of specific groups.”¹ What happens here is that paradoxically the analysis that begins with the totality as such is doomed to end up with the particular. On the other hand, for Lukács of the *HCC* the only way to reach the concrete definition of the social whole is to begin with a singular. This is why against the generalization of the revisionist approach, Lukács defends historical materialism that draws its inspiration from the idea of “single conflict” in narration, thus interprets “*all* socio-historic phenomena *exclusively* from the class standpoint of the proletariat.”²

Another mistaken concept of totality is produced by the “abuse” of logic: the concept of harmonious whole. It is only a logic that became corrupted with its own imagination that is capable to impose “a homogenous medium of thought whose structure must be qualitatively different from that of the intrinsically heterogeneous reality”³ over that reality. This point is the basis of Lukács’ criticism of the false ontology of Hegel, i.e. the criticism of his formalism and his resort to the contradiction as a logical necessity.⁴ When the “logic is conceived as the theoretical foundation of ontology, it is unavoidable that logical deductions come to be conceived as the proper forms of ontological genesis.”⁵ The practical problem is to impose homogenous forms of thought into heterogeneous

¹ Ibid., 56 italics removed.

² Ibid., 54.

³ ———, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 49.

⁴ Ibid., 40-49.

⁵ Ibid., 51.

reality; i.e. the political repression required to transform the amorphous, chaotic multiplicity into a harmonious unity. It is precisely on this point that Marxian dialectics differ from what is false in Hegel:

Marx proceeds from the totality of the existent, and seeks to comprehend this as closely as possible with all its intricate and manifold relationships. Here the totality is in no way formal and simply ideal, but rather the reproduction in thought of the really existing, and the categories are not building blocks of a hierarchical system, but actually are ‘forms of being, characteristics of existence’, elements for the construction of relatively total, real and dynamic complexes, whose reciprocal inter-relations produce ever more comprehensive complexes.¹

This means that the realm of totality is not the realm of smooth continuities; rather that in “the ontological realm of reflection determinations, the growth or decline of a moment, in the dialectical relationship that constitutes any complex” is marked by contingent “sudden changes” and “leaps” that are dependent on the “concrete context.”² In other words, the social development under capitalism does not follow a “simple, straight line.”³

Ignoring this point leads to a third mistake that can be observed with respect to this central “territory of dialectic” that is called totality. This mistake is to think that the “historical process as a whole;” with its “individual, concrete, unrepeatable moments;” with the “qualitative differences” among these; and the “continuous transformation of their

¹ Ibid., 19. One should add here that the Marxian dialectic is synonymous with Hegel’s genuine ontology..

² Ibid., 82-83.

³ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 33.

objective structure”¹ can be reduced to a law. The “concrete history” of dialectics does not fit to a “schematic, simplified formula,” especially those of economic and technological determinisms.² It is this understanding that authorizes Lukács to go against the mechanistic understandings of dialectics. One of the reasons that Lukács has resorted to the category of totality is precisely to refute the idea of “stages of development.”³ In this sense Lukács, is even willing to argue that Lenin himself, did not see history as conforming to the laws of development.

But those who think that they can find in his decisions ‘formulas’ and ‘precepts’ for correct and practical action applicable everywhere misunderstand him even more deeply. Lenin never laid down ‘general rules’ which could be ‘applied’ in a number of different cases. His ‘truths’ grow from a concrete analysis of the concrete situation based on a dialectical approach to history.⁴

This does not mean that dialectical method is to be reinvented each case a new situation arises. An example can be seen in Lukács’ comparison between Stalin and Marx (after he was in a relative safety to be able to openly criticize Stalin, he kept on emphasizing that Stalin was the anti-Marx): Whereas Marx, based on the dialectical method had a “world historical perspective” that enabled him to make concrete, strategic choices; Stalin first made a concrete, tactical, strategic choice and elevated this choice to a general

¹ ———, “Technology and Social Relations,” 57.

² Ibid., 50.

³ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 17-18.

⁴ Ibid., 83-84. These lines contained an implicit criticism of the way in which Lenin was becoming a dogma in the Soviet Union. Later on he would write that under Stalin “Lenin’s strategic formulas, correct at their time, turned into unchangeable rules.” See: ———, “Reflections on the Cult of Stalin.”

theory.¹ The point to be emphasized here is that the dialectical world historical perspective cannot be reduced to “schematic and mechanistic” laws that are “eternal” and “fixed.”² The “eternal laws of history” cannot contain the new situations that will emerge; the situations that will be guided by new laws or the situations “whose outcome depends on the will of the proletariat.”³

The “new” is thus one of the central problems that cannot be answered by mechanistic understanding of history. This “new” is a radical new, a new that is inconceivable in the order of the previous situation. No formula leads toward it, no book, however dense can contain it. Lukácsian dialectics, as a political strategy does not prescribe the denial of this new; rather it states the mode of readiness for it. In the polemical beginning of the *HCC* this is precisely what permits Lukács to claim that Marxism is correct even if everything Marx said is wrong.⁴ This often misunderstood passage involves no dogma; the emphasis on the method already implies that everything Marx said, and that everything Lukács himself said will become antiquated as a result of the historical change that will certainly bring an unforeseen new. Marxism is not correct because everything Marx said is immediately applicable to every situation but because it teaches how to deal with the new: as a part of a concrete totality.

¹ In the last decade of his life, Lukács made this statement in a number of occasions. This particular quote is from ———, “The Twin Crises,” 313.

² ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 55.

³ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴ ———, *HCC*, 1.

In an interview, Georger Steiner says that Lukács quoted him Brecht's maxim and that he "had on his wall written in letters of fire, not real letters, letter of fire: 'Brecht: always leave the good old for the bad new, verlasse immer das gute Alte für das schlechte Neue.'" ¹ Steiner uses this anecdote in order to illustrate why Lukács chose the bad new (socialism under Stalin) to the good old (best possible capitalism), however it tells more about Lukács' decisiveness about leaving the past. To illustrate this point, one may look at the latter self-criticism about *HCC*'s analysis of reification. What Lukács argues in his late interviews is not only a minor objection; he says that the latest developments in capitalism rendered the earlier critique of alienation obsolete and that an entirely new definition of the concept of alienation is necessary. ² This is of crucial importance firstly, for personal reasons: it is this discussion of reification that had brought him international fame, not just for the quality of the analysis but also for his ability to detect the concept of alienation without reading Marx's 1844 manuscripts. But also as a second point, this self-criticism indirectly means that the alienation as described by Marx, or the mainstream interpretation

¹ Eva L. Corredor, *Lukács after Communism: Interviews with Contemporary Intellectuals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 69. The story of this quotation is an interesting one, it owes its origin to an essay that Brecht had written as a critique of Lukács, the original quote in English translation is: "Then writers must simply retain the old patterns, produce a rich life of the spirit, hold back the pace of events by a slow narrative, advance the individual to the centre of the stage by their art, and so on. Here specific instructions dwindle into an indistinct murmur. That his proposals are impractical is obvious. No one who believes Lukács's basic principle to be correct, can be surprised at this. Is there no solution then? There is. The new ascendant class shows it. It is not a way back. *It is not linked to the good old days but to the bad new ones.* It does not involve undoing techniques but developing them." See: Brecht, "Against Georg Lukács," 40, italics added. The essay, although was not published in Brecht's life, was read by Walter Benjamin who had written: "A Brechtian maxim: don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones" See: Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 2003), 121. In this sense, it is doubtful whether Steiner's quotation is *objectively* correct, however it tells the truth of Lukács much better than any objective fact.

² György Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, ed. Theodor Pinkus, et al. (London: Merlin Press, 1974), 58-59.

of it, originated by Lukács himself is no longer valid. A new concept of alienation is called by the radical transformations that took place in the capitalist system. He says that that there is an increasing integration of the world both as a result of the world trade and as a result of the fact that the labor increases socialization;¹ this in turn creates the possibilities for new forms of global solidarities. He also adds that the situation of capitalism can now be best described with the terms of “real subsumption.”² As labor productivity has been increased to the levels beyond imagination in the advanced capitalist countries, the exploitation does not take place on the absolute but on the relative surplus value allowing workers to work in better conditions and affording better standards of living. For Lukács, this means that the old concept of alienation, not in the sense understood by Marx, but in the sense that became commonplace; based on the loss of humanity and laboring in horrible conditions is not capable of describing the situation of the worker of advanced capitalist

¹ Ibid., 120-22.

² In one of his last interviews Lukács says: “But today capitalism collides with, and conditions all aspects of life. The logic of capitalism tends to coincide with the logic of social process itself, thus spreading and engulfing the whole life of society. We have passed from the partial capitalism of the last century to today’s generalized capitalism” Lukács here also implies the need to go beyond Marx himself: “Marxism must be developed as we study things that Marx was not able to study.” He insists that the ‘new’ requires ‘new’ tools of study: “Believe me, today it is necessary to do what Marx did for the capitalism of his time. We must do it for the sake of capitalism today and for the sake of socialism.” This must nonetheless be done following the Marxian method overthrown by Stalinism. This method “analyzed the whole of society, its style, its movement, the rhythm of its development.” The holistic analysis Lukács insists escapes from the reach of the academic disciplines, especially sociology, even in its interdisciplinary forms. Ferrarotti, “Conversation with György Lukács,” 31.

world today; and thus it is incapable to appeal to the contemporary proletariat.¹ In advanced capitalist countries where working people define themselves as “middle class” because they can afford a house, a car and slightly more than their basic needs, it practically makes no sense to try to convince them on how horrible their living conditions are. Thus he calls for a new effort to redefine alienation in the new world; the goal of the concept and the new goal of political action should be oriented toward a new need fit to this new world: the need for a meaningful life.²

What can be maintained about Lukács’ shift that follows the historical change is that every new situation brings a new range of possibilities for political action, and requires new strategies and goals. Moreover, there is no way to predict the outcome of any struggle in the midst of this image of ever changing history. The dialectician is not a clairvoyant who can ease the metaphysical pain of human mind oriented toward the unknown future. Human society cannot be solely calculated as if it was only a product of conscious actions

¹ Here Lukács does not refer to the concept of alienation as described by *1844 Manuscripts* but to what became commonly understood as alienation: “Unhappy” workers doing heavy physical work in the most horrible conditions, for long hours, compensated so little, no benefits, no welfare state... etc... Since at least in the “advanced” capitalist part of the world, the conditions of labor are much better than a century ago, Lukács argues that this depiction of work does not appeal to the present working classes. Otherwise his analysis is perfectly close to that of the young Marx.

² Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, 53-58. It is important to note that all along these interviews, Lukács underlines the decline of religion and crisis of faith in western societies and almost implies that the Marxists should be filling the void before the return of religion. It should be further underlined that Lukács’ analysis is based upon the situation of capitalism in the West during the 60’s. There is no reason to believe that he would insist on this particular position in if he were to analyze the global capitalism today.

of man. There are also forces born out of these conscious interactions yet are out of control.¹

This understanding of society and change allows Lukács to refuse any teleology in history: “The process itself has no goal.”² Does this statement include the rejection of communism as the final *telos* of human history? Does Lukács not believe in the socialism to come? One may be rushing to easy conclusions by underlining passages where he argues that even when economic developments prepare the material basis (e.g. the reduction of the necessary labour time to a minimum) socialism is still not a necessity.³ But when Lukács argues that communism is not a necessity he says it in the sense that it is not a “mechanical” or “causal” necessity; for Lukács revolution is still a necessity, but a dialectical one.⁴ Communism as a dialectical necessity means to posit “communist hypothesis”⁵ as an Idea that becomes a material force in its own realization. The riddle of the philosophy of history is well-known: on the one hand in any given moment the future is an unknown, the change is contingent upon an uncountable number of variables; but on the other, when one looks at the history what one sees is a meaningful story where it seems as if everything that has happened could not have happened in any other way. Lukács is proposing a dialectical reading of the riddle.

¹ ———, *HCC*, 15.

² ———, "The Ontological Bases of Human Thought and Action," *The Philosophical Forum* VII, no. 1 (1975): 32.

³ ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 127.

⁴ ———, *HCC*, 129.

⁵ See Chapter 6 on Badiou.

In order to get in tune with the core of Lukács' argument it is necessary but not enough to shift our vision of history and adopt a holistic vision that dialectically connects the cave man to the Silicon Valley. What should be further brought into the question is the dialectics of freedom and necessity, which should not be conceived as binary opposites. In a magnificent discussion, Hegel had shown that if the infinite was to be thought as the opposite of the finite it would be immediately reduced to a very large finite set. When the finite beings are left outside of its definition, the infinite would no longer contain everything thus would be reduced to a particular.¹ In an analogous way, Lukács posits that freedom cannot be free so long as it stands in opposition to necessity. To the contrary, the true meaning of freedom is that it is conditioned by necessity: "life provides men concrete alternatives."² Unless it stands in relation to the concrete, unless it is conditioned by necessity human freedom will be a completely empty category.

The question of socialism hence gains a new dimension as an expression of human will. The way to achieve socialism, class struggle can be seen as a synthesis of the materiality of the given conditions (economic law) and the exercise of human will (non-economic components). Lukács here is absolutely clear that the law can never be extended to the individual conflicts: the relation between the general and the particular is always a mediated relation. Accident and chance play a major role in determining the outcome of the specific conflicts. What is very important here is that the outcome of a conflict determined

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 139.

² Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, 129.

in part by chance and contingencies turns itself into a material force and in turn affects the economic law.¹ In other words, “scientific laws can only fulfill themselves in the real world as tendencies, and necessities only in the tangle of opposing forces, only in a mediation that takes place by way of endless accidents.”² In its turn, *tendency* is also a concept that is born out of totality. Lukács argues that “tendential similarities, convergences, types, etc.” emerge once “totality of acts and their mutual relations with one another in a given society are taken into consideration.”³ If the law is not a formula but a tendency, knowledge cannot be the exact science of everything but an approximation. This does not mean a failure in terms of heuristic capacity of historical materialism; rather it means that dialectics do not provide a blue print of history. Each individual case must be analyzed given the concrete circumstances of its existence:

For Marx, dialectical knowledge has a merely approximate character, and this is because reality consists of the incessant interaction of complexes, which are located both internally and externally in heterogeneous relationships, and are themselves dynamic syntheses of often heterogeneous components, so that the number of effective elements can be quite unlimited.⁴

Coming to be of Totality

Before explaining in what ways (for there is more than one way) the relation between the parts and whole should be understood, it is useful to discuss the historicity of

¹ ———, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, 97-98.

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ ———, *Labour*, 38-39.

⁴ ———, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, 103.

totality. Does the history of mankind amount to a totality? Can different historical epochs be understood as closed totalities? Or is totality a product of capitalism? If it came into being with capitalism, how can one know that it does not belong to the cluster of the evils of capitalism together with others such as exploitation or imperialism?

Lukács begins his *Theory of Novel* with a eulogy for a much earlier notion of totality:

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light.¹

These wonderfully written lines depict the supposedly ancient Greek understanding of totality as an organic whole. Despite Lukács' contestation that the birth of the philosophy is a result of the split between the parts and the whole (maybe in order to bridge this gap), the best political expression of this totality is given by Aristotle: the difference between the habits or customs (ἔθος - éthos) of a community (ἔθνος - éthnos) and the moral character of a person (ἠθικὴ - ēthikē or ἦθος - ēthos) lies only in the slight difference in the

¹ ———, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 29.

first letter of the word.¹ This is a world, says Lukács, where the individual and the community are inseparable:

For totality as the formative prime reality of every individual phenomenon implies that something closed within itself can be completed; completed because everything occurs within it, nothing is excluded from it and nothing points at a higher reality outside it; completed because everything within it ripens to its own perfection and, by attaining itself, submits to limitation. Totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogeneous before it has been contained by forms; where forms are not a constraint but only the becoming conscious, the coming to the surface of everything that had been lying dormant as a vague longing in the innermost depths of that which had to be given form; where knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness, where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible.²

Here one finds also a very commonsensical notion of totality as a closed system where there is no “outside.” The poetic language of the book, which is quite different from Lukács’ later writings, makes one think whether Lukács is nostalgic about the ancient Greek polis. However, even Lukács who was not yet a Marxist is very clear about this: the restoration of the ancient Greek totality is an impossible task.³ The modern age is an epoch where totality is no longer given, yet marked by a longing toward totality as a closed system. This is what gives birth to the novel. The novel as a literary form is possible in an age where the “extensive totality” does not exist anymore, leading to a new problem about the “the immanence of meaning in life,” for the age still “thinks in terms of totality.”⁴

¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28, Bekker: 1103a.

² Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 34.

³ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

Therefore the task of the novel is to “uncover and construct the concealed totality of life,”¹ totality is no longer given but it exists as an aim. Here emerges a difference between the “extensive totality of life” and the “intensive totality of essence.”² According to Pelletier, this is a very crucial difference that will be running throughout the *HCC*.³ Indeed it is perfectly possible to show how the October Revolution and the idea of socialism as the reconstruction of the ethical totality of the ancient polis provided an easy answer for the ethical impasses of the young Lukács. One can also imagine totalitarian resonances of this approach, where the individual becomes part of the totality of the state, leaving no space for difference. Every part of the whole has to be homogeneous: the more one insists on the natural homogeneity, the more force would be required to suppress empirical differences. However, after this earlier text, Lukács never uses totality in the sense of a closed system; in his later writings there is no sign for a yearning toward a static world where everything would remain where it is and stay what it is. However, this work is still important to draw attention to the fact that totality has become a problem in the modern age. Why did it become so?

It is hardly possible to find in Lukács’ work, a comparably clear definition of the way in which the ages between the distant Greek past and capitalism related themselves to

¹ Ibid., 60.

² “Great epic writing gives form to the extensive totality of life, drama to the intensive totality of essence. That is why, when essence has lost its spontaneously rounded, sensually present totality, drama can nevertheless, in its formal *a priori* nature, find a world that is perhaps problematic but which still is all-embracing and closed within itself.” Ibid., 46.

³ Pelletier, “L’émergence Du Concept De Totalité Chez Lukács (1),” 315.

totality.¹ These ages, in the quick descriptions emerge as imperfections that are to be situated between the two ideal types: capitalism and ancient Greece. They seem to be closer to the ancient Greece because the capitalist alienation did not yet occur and the individuals act as immediate parts of the organic community. But on the other hand the life persists as closed totalities that are disconnected from each other: villages, guilds, etc. This lack of mediation in everyday experience does not mean, as Honneth thought, that this mode of experience is superior to the alienated modern one; it is rather caught up in the drift toward it. Yet the knot is broken, in pre-capitalist society some of “the particular aspects of the economic process” are “separate from each other;” some others are in an “indissoluble unity” with other economic and “non-economic factors.”² This means that the world (of Western Europe) provides a unity where religion, classes, power structures, military mechanisms and mode of production perfectly fits into their designated place, and those who do not fit are coerced to fit. But this small world is not a completely synchronized one: the languages, the rhythms of life, the levels of economic development, techniques of production, trade... etc. varies tremendously even within small distances. The fragmentation of the world further increases when one adds the other continents into the picture as well as the disconnectedness between them.

It is curious to note that Lukács never uses the term mediation in the *Theory of Novel*, even in order to describe the modern societal existence that led to the birth of the

¹ Lukács is also completely silent about the non-west.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 230.

novel.¹ But it is possible to argue that the first of these ideal types, the Greek totality as described by Lukács, can be considered as the archetypical definition of a totality without mediation. Had he not abandoned this position, Lukács would be philosophically closer to fascist totalities: As discussed above, the impulse to create a totality without mediation is the common element of totalitarian regimes of 20th century. The totality of the modern world exists not as an immediate totality but as a complex relation, as a complex of manifold relations between its irreducible parts. To bring this multiplicity into a unity is not possible except through repressive violence. The young Marx had raised a warning against the type of communism that stood not as a positive transcendence of private property; against a communism that had not yet attained private property. An analogy is evident here with the pre-capitalist totality; it is a totality which does not stand as a positive overcoming of the fragmentation of modern society, it is a totality which has not yet attained it.

What happens under capitalism is that the parts (such as the world of clergy, the world of the artisan, or the world of the aristocrat) that stood as isolated totalities begin to stand in dialectical relation to one another, even in their appearance of autonomy.² This relation works in two opposite directions: The first is the dissolution of the past totalities, the fragmentation of the society, and the further fragmentation of the new fragments until the one reaches the individual as the indivisible monad of modern society. In the words of Lukács, “capitalism separates the producers from the process of production; society from

¹ The words about mediation (*Vermittlung*) occur only three times in the book and without a strong emphasis.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 231.

the individual, isolates the man and thus makes him lose his humanity.”¹ This reified individual, ascribed a fictitious autonomy is praised as the epicenter of capitalism by its ideologues. This is why “the survival of the bourgeoisie rests upon the assumption that it never attains a clear insight into the special preconditions of its own existence.”² These preconditions lie with the second tendency under capitalism that leads toward a global totality, toward the progressive annihilation of the “outside” of capitalism. For instance, through an “inconsistent” and “contradictory” capitalist development colonial people are drawn to the capitalist system. If there is any positive result of the colonization process it is that “the oppressed and exploited by capitalism no longer fight isolated wars.”³ This is what Lukács means with the declaration: “category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.” Revolutionary totality is the simultaneous negation of bourgeois individualism, capitalist totalization, and the totalitarian abuse of the concept.

How to overcome capitalist fragmentation? According to Lukács, the fragmentation of capitalism already leads the way by exceeding the limit of the individual, by dividing One. What does this mean about the status of the human being with respect to totality?

Bourgeois democracy dates from the French Constitution of 1793, which was its highest and most radical expression. Its defining principle is the division of man into the citizen of public life and the bourgeois of private

¹ Ibid., 27. With these lines Lukács maybe still thinking in terms of the “Golden Age” of the ancient totality when the man still had his “humanity.”

² Ibid., 225.

³ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 44.

life—the one endowed with universal political rights, the other the expression of particular and unequal economic interests.¹

This split in the constitution of the human exactly corresponds to the split between the universal and the particular in every-day existence. The “citoyen” is the political man, he is the one concerned with the universal values, with the common good of the society; the “bourgeois” is the one seeking to satisfy his particular selfish interest. Lukács is saying not only that the society is divided into two, each representing one of the incommensurable positions, but that this division became constitutive of what came to be known as the modern man.² It is also possible to say that this rupture constitutes one of the main problems in political philosophy, starting with the Enlightenment, leading up to the present. The one side of the debate intends to show that there are timeless values toward which human civilization is (or should be) moving. The other side opposes this claim by showing that each enunciation of the universal is nothing more than the declaration of a particular. For example it is shown that the subject of the *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du*

¹ ———, “Lukács on His Life and Work”: 49. The task of overcoming this division can be traced back to “The Old Culture and the New Culture,” originally published in 1920. In this essay Lukács was emphasizing the importance of the realm of culture to regain man’s unity. He returned to this task toward the end of his life and he insisted that the great works of art have a power to transform the everydayness of man “der ganze Mensch” to “Menschen ganz:” to a human being in his totality. ———, *Die Eigenart Des Ästhetischen*.

² Pelletier shows brilliantly that this split was also a concern for the young Lukács for whom “life” stood for: “the world of profusion, of inauthentic being, network of mechanical cause and effect,” “the soul” for the “authentic individual, the irreplaceable source of wealth of human existence,” and “form” for the “mediation between life and soul,” which gives meaning to life, structure existence, provide cohesion and allow the subjectivity to achieve universal validity. See: Pelletier, “L’émergence Du Concept De Totalité Chez Lukács (1),” 295. Though this concern remained with Lukács until the end of his life, the way he cultivated and formulated it has changed to such an extent that it is impossible to find any affinity between the philosophical consequences of this earlier and Lukács and the Marxist Lukács.

Citoyen is firstly a property owner (Marx), secondly is a citizen (Arendt), thirdly is a man (feminist theory)... etc.¹

Revolutionary totality that stands as the sublation (*aufhebung*) of capitalist totality and fragmentation should be also oriented to overcome the split between the bourgeois and the citizen. Lukács' unending interest in Hegel is meaningful especially in this regard. While the Enlightenment is the "philosophy of the preparation of the French revolution," Lukács says, Hegel is the "philosophy of its consequences."² What Lukács reads in Hegel is not about the shortcomings of the Enlightenment project but also about its unfulfilled promises. On this point, one encounters a new task for the revolution: to fulfill the gap between the modern ideas and the modern forms of oppression. Against the capitalism that creates isolated individuals who are divided even in themselves, socialism has to assert the status of the individual as a whole in oneself.³ Late Lukács underlines that Marx had criticized Feuerbach for failing to realize that there is a third option to the binary opposition among the "isolated individuals" and "dumb *genus*" which is merely a collection of many isolated individuals. This third option is the historical materialist ontology, which has:

¹ Of course these positions are rather misrepresented under postmodernism beyond the intent of their authors. Lukács' own position is to assert that there are "movable limits" with regards to the universal: "human understanding is in a position to establish certain things that are valid for the whole human history" but every man is involved in social struggles, every man speaks from a class position. Thus accepting or denying any one statement in a given point in history is determined by the particular position in which one is situated. However, this acceptance or denial says nothing as to the intrinsic quality of the universal. See: Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, 43-44.

² ———, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 5. In a similar way, Lukács' thought can be seen as the philosophical consequence of October revolution.

³ ———, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," 16-17.

to discover the genesis, the growth and the contradictions within this unified development. It has to show that man, as the producer and at the same time, as the product of society, actualizes in his humanity something <ontologically> higher than to be an abstract specimen of an abstract *genus*. (...) <It has to show> that these individuals will rather <find> an increasingly articulate <collective> voice, and will raise themselves to the level of an ontological-social synthesis of individuals-become-personalities and conscious humankind.¹

The next question is then how to define the totality for the purposes of this ontological project. As an answer it can be claimed that Lukács provides two solutions instead of one. These seemingly contradictory versions of totality, in fact stand in dialectical relation to one another.

Two Versions of Totality Properly Conceived

Despite the fact that this thesis rejects the distinction between the old and young Lukács, there is one way in which the late Lukács and the Lukács of the HCC stand in two opposing positions. Martin Jay argues that starting with mid 1920s Lukács had shifted his account toward a more “decentered,” and “non genetic” understanding of totality.² The argument that will be defended here is that although this shift had started at an earlier period, it did not become crystallized until the *Ontology*.³ It should also be said that both understandings are not completely apart from each other and the purity presented here is the

¹ ———, "The Ontological Bases of Human Thought and Action," 33.

² Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 122. Unlike Jay, I will consider the book on Lenin as the continuation of the position in *HCC*.

³ The personal belief of the author of this study is that both of these positions can be detected at all stages of his life coexisting in a tension with each other. Thus, here it is not claimed is not that Lukács changed his position toward the end of his life, but that different texts written at different periods render the two individual trends more visible.

result of an abstraction to highlight the differences in these two positions. The first understanding can be called a “class concept of totality” and the second a “labor concept of totality.” The first approach is the product of the perspective that is opened up by the radicalism of 1917; thus in this version the point of view of totality is marked by the “actuality of revolution.” As mentioned above, Lukács’ focus is on the “point of view of totality” rather than totality itself. The second understanding of totality views society as “complex of complexes,” it is a much more mature notion, it makes no injustice to the irreducibility of the parts, yet it is the product of a world where there is no revolution to come, a world where the degeneration of Russian revolution is obvious, a world where Lukács’ own efforts of an alternative socialism has failed, a world with no possibility of radical change in the near future. Moreover, the difference between the Lukács of *HCC* and of *Ontology* is that whereas for the former the knowledge of totality or the knowledge of socialism (for these are the same) can be attained only through the class struggle;¹ for the latter the emphasis is on labor.² Not merely to labor itself, but to all human activity which takes labor as its model. These two notions³ of totality require further discussion:

¹ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 73.

² Norman Levine argues that the entire intellectual trajectory of Lukács is based upon the “inherent discontinuity between Jacobin Leninism and Hegelian Marxism, a Marxism predicated upon the teleology of work.” See: Norman Levine, “Lukács on Lenin,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 18, no. 1 (1978): 17. It is possible to interpret the two understandings of totality discussed here as products of Jacobin Leninism and Hegelian Marxism. It should also be noted that Lukács always aimed to reconcile these apparently irreconcilable positions. For a study that situates Lukács reading of Lenin within the broader context of Western Marxism, see: Kevin Anderson, “Lenin, Hegel and Western Marxism: From the 1920s to 1953,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 44, no. 1 (1992).

³ These two versions will also become of crucial importance in the discussion of Badiou.

Here it is worth reciting the purpose of the *Ontology*: to “solve the problems that were posed quite falsely,” particularly in *HCC*.¹ One of these is declared in the 1967 preface: *HCC* lacked a conception of labor “as the mediator of the metabolic interaction between society and nature.”² It is a known fact that from a very early stage of his life, labor was the privileged human activity for Lukács, expressed in his motto “laboro ergo sum.”³ However, his writings of 1920s show no particular interest in discussing what is special in the “work” of working class. One explanation as to why the *HCC* lacked a proper analysis of labor can be that Lukács saw no need to add further commentaries to what Marx had already written. However, it is more likely that at this stage he was not interested in developing a theory of labor at all, what he was interested in was a theory of the struggle.⁴ The revolutionary subject did not need any justification, any theoretical grounding, or any elucidation; it was simply there and already in struggle, so Lukács went on and joined it in combat. In other words, why and how of labor were not questions to deal with for the purposes of *HCC*; work was nothing else than the attribute of the subject/object of history.⁵ On the other hand, the complete opposite of this approach can be observed in the later *Ontology*. There, one may see a very detailed analysis of the human character of work, but

¹ Lukács, "Lukács on His Life and Work ": 51.

² ———, *HCC*, xvii.

³ Kadarkay, *Georg Lukacs*, 44. This biography also mentions that after the death of his best friend Leo Popper (1911), Lukács was obsessed with the idea of overcoming death through work. Ibid., 43-47.

⁴ For example, his notorious 1919 essay, “tactics and ethics” claims that the class struggle is both the means and the end; i.e. class struggle is not a means to achieve the goal of communism, but is an end in itself

⁵ The role of labor was not questioned even in its role in the being identical of the subject and object. The ideas of Lukács on the status of working class in relation to other social actors will be discussed in the next chapter .

one will look in vain to find any explicit class analysis made from a revolutionary perspective; thus no theory of class struggle. Of course, for the dialectician there is no dilemma to be solved here; both of these periods are the moments of the same analysis: one belongs to the moment of the struggle, the other to the foundation of the future struggles. What will be highlighted here is the distinction of these two moments, even though they belong to the same process.

In the *Ontology*, Lukács follows the footsteps of Nicolai Hartmann in his distinction between three forms of being that are qualitatively different from each other: inorganic being, organic being and social being. This schema is not simply another way of repeating the well-known forms of being as stone, animal and man. In the first place, Lukács' definition tells something about what is the man, it is not the emotional being, not the thinking being but in the very first place, it is a "social" being; and in the leap from organic to social, labor is the key category: While all other categories assume a leap from organic being to the social being, labor provides a

relationship of interchange between man (society) and nature, and moreover with inorganic nature (tool, raw material, object of labour) as well as organic (...) it characterizes above all the transition in the working man himself from purely biological being to social being..¹

In other words, man is the "animal who has become human through work."² In his explanation, Lukács follows closely Aristotle in arguing that human work consists of two

¹ Lukács, *Labour*, iv.

² ———, "The Ontological Bases of Human Thought and Action," 25.

parts: thinking that is the mental plan to change reality, and the actual process of production.¹ In labor, the goal positing consciousness of human mind sets up causal chains to achieve the final *telos* that allows the human being to engage in the act of production. At the end of this process, “something qualitatively and radically new in relation to nature”² emerges. However, labor process is not just simple a cause and effect relationship. The “teleological project of the laborer” is indeed one of the reasons why labor has “no analogy in the organic world,” but once the causal series are set into motion, there can be no project that can exhaust all the possibilities that may come out of this chain. In the labor process, something exterior to the final aim is always bound to emerge. For Lukács, this is no mere accident, to the contrary the “whole of human development depends on such minimal displacements,” on “something else,”³ or the radical new that comes unexpectedly.

Moreover, the dialectics of work are not limited to the external world; labor changes “the nature of the men performing it.”⁴ This occurs in the first place in the formation of the mental images, because human beings must always act with a “definite picture” of the world in which they are acting. Although, formation of mental images can be found among other animals, these are limited ones: for instance a spider views a fly as “that which gets caught in its web.” In labor, human beings create “concept of things,” they get beyond the

¹ ———, *Labour*, 4-10.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 18.

⁴ ———, *Labour*, 103.

life preserving functions.¹ This means that human beings will never be satisfied with the imminent, the immediate; their world will become more and more complex. Here one can speculate that the idea of totality is a product of labor in two ways: first it is a result of the increasingly complex social being created by labor, secondly it is an outcome of labor's need to create a concept to make sense of the complexity of social being.

However, this does not mean that labor is superior to other human activities. To the contrary, none of the categories "such as labour, speech, cooperation and division of labour" can be properly understood in isolation... social being must be understood in its "real totality."² Among the human activities, labor is neither alone in representing a leap from the organic to social being; language is equally something which has no analogy in the animal world. On this point the question of which human activity is the first one, what is the prime act that gave birth to others, which one is hierarchically superior is a completely unnecessary search.³ The leap from a pure biological existence to social being is

¹ ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 27-28. In the well-known words of Marx, this is what "distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees." Moreover, Lukács argues that the human beings of even the most "primitive" civilizations encounter a special question in the labor process: the question of value. The question of which stone should one choose to be able to cut a tree, the question of what is useful and what is not useful is the beginning of an entirely different set of activities in human mind. *Ibid.*, 30. When contemporary philosophy intends to abolish all hierarchies starting with human and animal, it tends to omit this aspect. For example, one would look in vain to Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*. Trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004). to find any single reference to labor process. Agamben not only omits the ontology of Lukács but also disregards the place of labor in the thought of Heidegger, who is his main interlocutor in the book.

² Lukács, *Labour*, i.

³ That is to say, the political leadership of the working class cannot be justified with reference to the ontologically privileged position of the human character of the labor.

not a sudden event but a lengthy process that took thousands of years to be completed.¹ The length of the process makes it impossible to clearly designate which one came first. Moreover, in the materialist ontology the fact that something is the first does not mean that it stands in a hierarchically higher position than the others. For example consciousness is a late product of human development but a “later product must never be regarded as ontologically inferior.”² So why to focus on labor? The answer is that labor is the model for any social practice. It is not superior to others but the common elements of human action stand in clarity in the labor process. Thus the distinction of labor is that it can help understand other social-teleological positings as well.³

Based on this ontological understanding of labor, how does Lukács formulate the social totality?⁴ In its basic definition, it is a “complex of complexes.”⁵ In other words, totality is the complex outcome of the interactions of individual complexes. What Lukács thinks here is far beyond a simple schema where the society is seen as the interactions between groups, where the groups further divided into smaller and smaller sets until the

¹ Lukács, *Labour*, 102.

² ———, “The Ontological Bases of Human Thought and Action,” 23-24.

³ ———, *Labour*, 3. Also this attempt is useful to reconsider the status of labor under the conditions of “real subsumption.” If the exploitation does not occur only in the factory, rather the entire society has been revolutionized in such a way to contribute to the creation of surplus value it will make no sense to analyze labor solely as what is going on in the work place. In the analysis of real subsumption what one should first figure out is how human actions, modeled on labor, are capable of producing values. What Lukács failed to write (something that he would probably talk about in the unfinished project) is the specific mechanism of how this socially produced good is appropriated under the conditions of the late capitalism.

⁴ The basic problem here is that the sections of *Ontology* where Lukács would specifically address to this problem are not written: the plan of the book contains a chapter titled “reproduction” with the discussion of “complexes of complexes” and “the reproduction of society as a totality.” On the other hand, the written parts of the book as well as Lukács’ interviews toward the end of his life contain traces (as objective possibility) of what he might be writing in these sections.

⁵ See also: Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, 18, 135.

individual human being, which ultimately forms the limit of the divisibility of the society. However, the isolated individual is not at all a monad: it is a divisible entity in the ontology of Lukács. Through this division, the human-subject does not become something less than a 'human' or an individual; to the contrary it becomes much more than the mortal that one is: one becomes not two but two thousand men. Formally speaking, individual human being is to be understood also as a complex of complexes determined in its inorganic composure, biological being and in its multitude of complex relations to the other social complexes. This totality has no center, no fixed boundaries; it is not reducible to a simple determination, to a singular contradiction:

For Hegel, however, the totality was far more than a mere synthetic summarization of extensive universality; it was the basic structure in the construction of reality as a whole. Thus reality does not have a property of totality as such, but it rather consists of parts, or 'elements', that are similarly structured as totalities in their turn. The whole that Hegel refers to programmatically is a totality built up out of the dynamic inter-connections of relative and partial, particular totalities.¹

What comes out of this vision is an ever changing social world where everything is "both a moving and moved part of a concrete, complex whole."² Reciting how Lenin

¹ ———, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 67. The same argument is also repeated on p. 72.

² ———, "The Ontological Bases of Human Thought and Action," 23.

introduced the category of totality in the trade-union debate, Lukács underlines one crucial aspect of complex whole: “we can never fully know the totality of determinations.”¹

If so, one may ask: “what about the primacy of economics?” For Marxists economy has always been the primary concern. Where does the economy stand in the interactions of complexes? Mészáros writes that economy is not a “magic wand” or a “common denominator;”

the assertion about the importance of economic becomes meaningful only if one is able to grasp the manifold specific mediations in the most varied fields of human activity, which are not simply “built upon” on “economic reality” but also actively structure the latter through the immensely complex and relatively autonomous structure of their own.²

As a matter of fact, this understanding of totality is not only limited to later Lukács. For example even the Lukács of 1920s reminds Marx’s commentary on Hegel that dialectical totality can never be the subsumption of different parts under a general

¹ ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 155. Although the explicit reference is not given in this book, the text that Lukács is referring to should be the following:

“But the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of that class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts (by imperialism in some countries) that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard that has absorbed the revolutionary energy of the class. The whole is like an arrangement of cogwheels. Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and of the essentials of transition from capitalism to communism. (...) the fact that we have here a complex arrangement of cogwheels which cannot be a simple one; for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation” Vladimir Ilich Lenin, “The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and Trotsky’s Mistakes,” in *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, ed. Yuri Sdobnikov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 21, underlined.

The problem here is that the cogwheel metaphor is precisely what Lukács does not mean by the complex of complexes. A cogwheel is only externally related to others, it is an internally consistent unit whose essence does not change with the interactions: in other words a cogwheel is not a complex.

² Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic*, 71.

principle.¹ He also adds that the interaction can never be seen as the “reciprocal causal impact of two otherwise unchangeable objects.”²

How does the class-concept of totality differ from the labor-concept of totality? To highlight the two different usages of this concept, the latter will be written as totality and the former as [totality]. Here the brackets are not used in the well-known phenomenological sense of bracketing which designate that the question of entity’s real existence is suspended. In this dissertation bracketing rather visually shows that in a given moment the shifting boundaries of social whole are forced to a standstill, that the entire flux of the whole is enframed.³ From the spectator’s position (always problematic for Lukács) what happens can be seen as if somebody pressed the pause button while the images of history were rapidly passing from the screen. Needless to say, this pause is only descriptive; the flow of history never stops. The act of pausing or enframing serves to render this flow meaningful, explainable. Based on this enframing, a *narrative* of the present and of the history can be invented. In other words, this temporary limitation transforms the social totality into something conceivable to those who are within it. The borders of otherwise amorphous, ever shifting entities can be seen when their movement is suspended; the

¹ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 84.

² ———, *HCC*, 12.

³ Here the word “enframing,” should be understood in its Heideggerian usage as “*Gestell*.” Accordingly, it implies a double movement: First it follows the essence of the technological age that creates a world picture by forcing every being to fit into a frame. On the other hand, Heidegger’s discussion also gives it a positive content in the sense that the frame also allows beings to come to presence; without the frame there is no presence. See: Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993).

central figures, the central contradictions and parts that are related to these suddenly appear meaningful in their relation to the [totality.] This is why outside the [whole,] “elements,” or “partial totalities” lack proper historicity, it is only in the [whole] that they “they have a real existence.”¹ Totality is a placeholder to designate the unimaginable multiplicity of beings and the manifold relations in which every individual being finds itself. [Totality] allows for a central contradiction of the time: the development of this central contradiction is called “fusion” by Althusser (through Mao). Yet, as will be shown, in Althusser the fusion is a gift: it happens. The perspective adopted in this thesis is different; the multiple contradictions of totality fuse into one another in the process and as a result of the creation of the narrative totality. The narrative transforms the “levels” into “proportions.”²

Totality is the unnamable; [totality] gives the name. What this means is that the social agents caught up in the [totality] start to see their being in terms of the terms of the [whole,] they rewrite their histories, reinvent the order of the meaning, discover the new truths within the guidance of the new [whole]: this is what this study calls *the narrative totality*. [Totality] is an internally ordered web of beings where every element stands in clarity. In the world of totality, a bourgeois is by no means only a bourgeois, it can be said that even his being bourgeois is always already overdetermined by the other aspects of his being. Under [totality] one’s entire being is determined by being a bourgeois, or by being black, or by being proletarian, or by being homosexual; but always with one central aspect.

¹ Lukács, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, 112. The brackets are the invention of the author of this study, probably Lukács would have hated the idea.

² ———, “Narrate or Describe,” 127.

The other parts are also relevant, but their relevance matters so far as they stand in a dialectical relation with this center of being. Totality is the child of labor, [totality] of working class. Totality explains why [totalities] will always be constructed and will remain insufficient to account for the infinitely complex flux of life, [totality] sees itself as the ultimate explanation of totality. [Totality] allows clear distinction between friends and enemies; [totality] authorizes political action.

Politically speaking, the vision of [totality] is only possible through “a Devil’s pact with historical necessity.” The “daemon” in his turn provides “the secret of objective truth;” “the power to confer blessing or pronounce anathema in the name of revolution.”¹ “Devil’s pact,” calls for the political party. As will be discussed later, the price that the devil kept asking from Lukács was precisely this: the self sacrifice that is required for being a party member.

The simple distinction of two visions of totality can be understood when one juxtaposes Lukács’ own statements about the totality as the irreducible multiplicity of being with others testifying that there is “only one truth” that the history can be nothing but “the history of class struggle;”² or that every situation contains one central problem and that “*once related to this central problem, all other moments of the historical process can thereby be correctly understood and solved.*”³ How these two understandings can stand

¹ George Steiner, "George Lukács and His Devil's Pact," *The Kenyon Review* XXII, no. 1 (1960): 15.

² Lukács, "The Twin Crises," 326. It should be noted that his remark comes from the late Lukács.

³ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 85.

together? In an interview with Lukács, Holz makes a comment on the infinitely complex real world with the closed totality created by the work of art. His argument, verified by Lukács, is that through projecting the reality into a smaller context, the work of art creates an “internally ordered system of meaning.”¹ A similar argument can be made about the narrative totality of the revolutionary struggle: a fleeting image of the infinite - the irreducible - the complex reveals itself around the moments of the revolutionary struggle. In *Lenin*, Lukács suggests that the point of view of totality (for the purposes of this text “point of view of totality” is the same with [totality]) is the point where every single event will be understood from the perspective of the actuality of the revolution.² This vision of [totality] is also apparent in his discussion against the stages of development where [totality] signifies the knowledge of the link between the past, present and the future of human society. The political action is meaningful so long as it is directed toward the realization of the *telos* of human existence, which is socialism. In the revolutionary praxis, the past, present and the future do not stand in a chronological line; they exist as the constitutive elements of the moment (*Augenblick*). The point of view of [totality] should be understood as a gaze directed from the point of view of the imminence of revolution, from the point of view of the society to come.

¹ ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 27. On this point, the idea at hand is strangely close to Benjamin: “We do not always proclaim loudly the most important thing we have to say. Nor do we always privately share it with those closest to us, our intimate friends, those who have been most devotedly ready to receive our confession. If it is true that not only people but also ages have such a chaste—that is, such a devious and frivolous—way of communicating what is most their own to a passing acquaintance, then the nineteenth century did not reveal itself to Zola or Anatole France, but to the young Proust...” Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” 205.

² Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 9-13.

Totality knows that the teleological consummation of history is impossible, however it also knows that history is not possible outside the positings of *telos*. In this sense, totality always knows that it has to transform itself into the [totality] that will posit the final goal of the struggle. Thus totality calls for its own negation. In its turn [totality] posits the final goal of history; claims that it establishes the Subject of history; initiates a chain of events whose outcome is unpredictable; and thus dissolves into goals and acts that constitute the goalless and subjectless flow of history; that is totality.

Narrative totality, the construction of the “point of view of totality” depends on the possibility of a correct yet limited perspective on the unbounded totality. The emerging subject, the proletariat, can see the existing [whole] with its cracks, fissures and limits only with the knowledge that there is something beyond the limits of the present society. The *beyond* can be in the form an image of the past or in the form of a concrete possibility about the future; but it exists as the constitutive element of the explosive now-time (*Jetztzeit*): of the present. For Lukács, this *beyond* is not a mere abstract “another world is possible,” it belongs to the realm of the concrete possibility. In a way it posits what Jay calls the “normative totality,” the construction of a new concrete form of social organization is its goal. Is this goal the final goal of history? [Totality] believes it is; totality knows it is not.

Another question is the importance of the revolutionary struggle in reaching a concrete understanding of [totality].¹ Why point of view of totality is not achievable during 'normal' times? Why the knowledge of totality is bound to remain abstract outside the context of the political struggle? The matter at hand here is once again "the new," whose coming cannot be predicted by any philosophy, however sophisticated and deep it may be; a "new," that "cannot be forecast by any infallible theory;"² a "new" which is irreducible to the conditions that gave birth to it. How is it possible to not to mistake the new with something already in existence? Is it possible to recognize, let alone understand the new? This is a crucial question because for Lukács, the creation of the "new" is precisely the founding element of history. The answer to the scandal of the emerging unknown is that the novelty of the "new" can only be grasped through struggle.³ This is not simply because a philosophical stance appropriate to the "new," can only be created from the revolutionary perspective. In history, the new subject emerges only through the struggle in which the "new" is recognized. The historical subject becomes what it is through this struggle. This is what Lukács means when he claims that "masses can only learn through action."⁴

¹ Benjamin is once again is not alien to the idea that the truth of an age is revealed in struggle: "Proust describes a class which is everywhere pledged to camouflage its material basis and for this very reason is attached to a feudalism which has no intrinsic economic significance but is all the more serviceable as a mask of the upper middle class. (...) And much of the greatness of this work will remain inaccessible or undiscovered until this class has revealed its most pronounced features in the final struggle." Benjamin, "The Image of Proust."

² Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 35-36.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

As argued before, Lukács always rejected abstract totality, abstract universals etc., however he rejected the world of the immediately given beings as well. The action is the answer to the dualism between the abstraction of empty concepts and the positivism of the reification. In a discussion of Fichte, Lukács argues that if the philosophy starts with the fact, it remains stuck in the world of the finitude; and infinite will remain unattainable. On the other hand, if it starts with the action, it will “stand at the point where two worlds meet.”¹ Lukács sums the division between what this thesis calls the totality and [totality] in a wonderful way: “the totality of objectively unfolding existence is –as Lenin knew–infinite and, therefore, never completely cognizable.” However, problems “that seem abstractly and theoretically insoluble;” can be solved “in practice.”² The ethical maxim to overcome the dilemma between the impossible knowledge of the ever-shifting whole and the action (labor is the model) that requires a clear picture of totality to be able to start can be found in Shakespeare as well as Lenin: “readiness is all.”³

The infinite, in itself is an abstract category; the finite is imperfect, what matters is the point where the two worlds meet: in revolutionary practice, as concrete [totality], at a point where concrete universals will be created. These universals are product of a contingent point of history, but that are relevant for the entire human history. How are these created? How do they communicate with the “other worlds” of human existence? These will be the questions that will be further developed in the discussion of the work of Alain

¹ ———, *HCC*, 123.

² ———, “Lenin – Theoretician of Practice,” 104.

³ *Ibid.*

Badiou. At this point this inquiry will follow the consequences of Lukács notion of totality in the areas of: revolutionary subject –class, revolutionary agent –party, and on the place of state. On how Lukács himself betrayed the promises of his thought, in his actions as well as in his own philosophy; and on what stands as unfulfilled promise of his political thought.

*the state is by nature clearly prior to
the family and to the individual,
since the whole is of necessity prior to the part¹*

Chapter Three: Political Implications of Lukács' Concept of Totality

In what ways does the Lukácsian notion of totality relate to politics? What are the implications of his ideas with respect to the political subject, political agent and the state? Before proceeding with these questions it is imperative to discuss which version of totality is to be pursued here: totality or [totality]? As claimed in the previous chapter, unbounded whole designates a goalless and subjectless flow of historical existence. Can a political entity stand in certain relatedness to this flux of being? For the *HCC* where the idea of [totality] is the most emphasized, the name of this relation is knowledge and accordingly subjectivity is thought there as consciousness. Is it possible to get a similar notion about totality? On the other side, the Lukács who focused his attention to the generic totality makes a few comments on the relation between totality and knowledge. He argues that as a result of the unlimited number effective elements in shifting interaction that it has to consider, the dialectical knowledge is always of approximate nature. He also adds that this does not mean that “structure of social being,” i.e totality, is unknowable; or that the “possibility of knowing” is reduced by this infinite complexity.² However, this is as close as he gets. He makes no claim as to whom, whether a class, a political party, or an

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, Bekker: 1253a. Translation: Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, 1988.

² Lukács, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, 103.

individual can know the totality of mediations. He also does not ask the question of what allows this privileged access to the knowledge of the “complex of complexes.” Although it may still be possible to speculate on the basics of a political project that claims access to the infinite as such, this thesis will not follow that path. It will rather maintain that any relation totality is impossible without transforming it to a [totality]. The silence of Lukács with respect to the place of the subject should be understood in this sense. Besides, even if he had given a name for the subject capable of knowing totality, this would not have been the decisive act for the late Lukács had already dismissed the role of the consciousness in the constitution of the revolutionary agent. The earlier attempts to relate subjectivity to consciousness seems futile to this Lukács, he considers *HCC*'s claim that the proletariat is the identical subject-object of history constituted through self knowledge as an attempt to “out-Hegel Hegel.”¹ In this way, he insists *HCC* does not fall far away from the idealism of the master, thus, it is totally useless for a materialist ontology. The identical subject-object cannot be created through knowledge; even if this knowledge is the most adequate, perfect understanding of the whole. Besides, not only the idea of self-consciousness but the entire edifice of the identical subject objet is problematic at this point:

[t]he theory of the identical subject and object is a philosophical myth, which has to violate the basic ontological facts to achieve its intended unification of subject and object.²

¹ ———, *HCC*, xxiii. This is very close to Martin Jay who argued that one of the problems of *HCC* was its reduction of subjectivity to consciousness, see: Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 115.

² Lukács, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 28.

Jay notes that until *HCC* Lukács did not believe that any social entity could become universal subject. His transformation to Marxism brought together the shift with the idea that totality can be achieved by a class allowing it to become the Subject.¹ Consistent with the argument in the previous chapter, it is possible to argue that the subject emerges through the act of bracketing the [totality], subject is precisely what brackets the totality in the act of the construction of the narrative of the whole. In this regard, all the writings of Lukács about the class and the party are derived from the very act of bracketing the totality. Principally, this chapter will follow these texts with the intention of also getting an insight to the politics of totality.²

I. Class: Interest vs. Consciousness

Lukács' most famous essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" can be seen as the story of a great tragedy. The entire theoretical edifice that constitutes the structure of the *HCC* and this specific essay relies on the idea that the only social entity capable of accessing the totality is the working class. The proletariat, the single social entity capable of bearing this precious gift is also the one that is the most distant to it as a result of the process of reification. The objective circumstances keep pushing the proletariat farther

¹ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 107-08.

² As the following chapter is principally concerned with the consequences of [totality], all references will be referring to this usage. Therefore, in the remainder of this chapter I will not be using the notation with brackets. Unless it is specified otherwise, the words whole or totality should be understood with their meaning inside the brackets as [totality] and [whole].

Since Lukács' writings on class, party and state belong to the 1920's the focus of this chapter will be this period. This does not contradict with the claim of the previous chapter that the classical periodization is to a large extent mistaken. What I focus on this chapter is the writings of Lukács, the militant who stood side by side with Lukács the philosopher in the texts of 1920's.

away from the whole. This gives Lukács a few fundamental questions to solve: why is the working class capable of accessing the whole? Why it is only the working class that has this privilege? And what is to be done in order to help the proletariat overcome reification, turn the objective possibility into the actuality?

Despite the changes in his understanding of the constitution of subjectivity, Lukács was always sure about what was absolutely wrong: the point of view of the isolated individual. The polemic of the *HCC* is based on disqualifying the individual's place in social and political change rather than on questioning the merits of other social groups. His suspicions on the abilities of the individual human being were never lifted until the end of his life.

[t]he false appearance corresponds to the viewpoint of the individual, who is directly subject here to the operation of a social law that determines his position in society, in production.¹

This does not mean that the isolated individual will always be wrong about social mechanisms, but it means first that her/his viewpoint will always be incomplete. Secondly and more importantly, that the knowledge produced from this perspective will never lead to social change. The knowledge of the partial whole will at best be a useful tool in the interest based politics. A more-or-less accurate understanding of the whole is possible because every worker in a capitalist society “has to” acquire “a correct understanding of his

¹ Lukács, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, 64.

own class situation” through a “more or less arduous process of experience.”¹ As one’s class position cannot be properly understood without situating it inside the totality of the relations under capitalism, the worker is continuously led toward the totality. However, when an individual becomes conscious of the whole, he will find “himself controlled by (...) social forms mystified into natural relations.” These appear as “fixed, complete and immutable entities which can be manipulated and even comprehended, but never overthrown.”² What the isolated individual cannot see is the possibility of a revolutionary change, not the empirical elements that constitute the totality. This gives a very important definition of the correct knowledge of totality: it is the knowledge of the empirical elements of the whole supplemented by the concrete possibility of radical change. That is radical change not as a “mere utopia,” not an empty “another world is possible” slogan; but a concrete relatedness to and inclination toward that world. When this supplement is not there for the individual, the only thing that remains is to use the knowledge as a commodity; to fulfill one’s self interest. But this partial knowledge is not always a necessary correlate to the interest politics. This knowledge brings together the possibility of a praxis that will found a new “ethics” only when it helps to realize oneself as a social being that is both the subject and the object of socio-historical process.³

The most important political aspect of the notion of totality can be found here: The political subject can only be constituted through the adequate knowledge of the whole. In

¹ ———, *HCC*, 326.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ *Ibid.*

other words, becoming of the subject consists in the development of its relation to the whole. The individual can no longer be the political subject, because no path leads from him to totality:

The totality of an object can only be posited if the positing subject is itself a totality; and if the subject wishes to understand itself, it must conceive of the object as a totality. In modern society only the classes can represent this total point of view.¹

This definition allows only social classes to be legitimate political subjects. Not only the individual, but also particular groups: gay and lesbians, environmentalists, women's right activists, civil rights movement, lobbyists for particular sectors of the economy, racist groups... etc. none of these groups can claim subjecthood unless they establish a clear link with class politics. Lukács did not spend so much time with the status of these groups; he did not attempt to answer either why it is classes but not other social groups that can link to totality. Why working class is a totality but politically organized homosexuals are not? There is no way to determine the answer of this question. Lukács' first task in *HCC* was the dialectical sublation of the individual and the second was the establishment of an adequate notion of the class politics. For the first step, he showed that once the locus is shifted away from the individual, the question is no longer that of ethical act within the confines of a given totality but the praxis to overcome its boundaries. But what about the interest, is class politics an extension of interest politics? The answer to this question is both yes and no. From the perspective of bourgeois politics, the question is

¹ Ibid., 28.

always that of the interest; from the perspective of the working class politics, the answer is more complicated. The class interest exists but it is neither the aggregation of the interests of the members of this class, nor the short term interests of the class as a whole.¹ This stems from the peculiar status of the working class whose “interest” is the destruction of class society. This makes the working class an exception to the rule that exists among all living beings. The Law is simple: a lion not only wants to survive (Spinoza’s self preservation) but also wants to pass its genes to future generations, so does a human; bourgeoisie wants to maintain the capitalist status quo until the end of time; particular institutions of human creation will do anything to persevere in existence and in their will to power. The working class represents the complete opposite of this struggle for survival. The long term interest of the working class is the end of exploitation, which can only happen with the end of class society, which is the same thing with the end of proletariat itself. This means that unlike anything in existence the proletariat wills its own destruction. This end cannot be achieved by furthering the immediate interest of the working class within the boundaries of capitalist system of relations.

As the long term interest of the working class can no longer be defined as an interest, the emerging political agenda must be built around a new concept: this is the place of consciousness in *HCC*. What follows this is that the consciousness can never be the consciousness of the class interests, or simply the consciousness of one’s class position.

¹ ———, "Tactics and Ethics," in *Political Writings, 1919-1929*, ed. Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1972).

Class-consciousness cannot be the property of an individual; it should be the consciousness of the class in its entirety as a concrete totality. But this consciousness is the consciousness of what? The answer is simple: the end of capitalism. The consciousness is the point of view of totality. The point of view of totality is the knowledge of at least one concrete possibility that is impossible in the present order. Consciousness is a gaze directed to the end, to the limits of the closed totality that the capitalism is; it is a look inside the capitalist sphere of relations directed from the perspective of its imminent destruction. Where do these limits come from? Are they coming from an alternate universe? To the contrary, the limits of capitalism are not exogenous to it; what lies beyond them is nothing but the unfulfilled promises of the bourgeois society. Going beyond the immediate interests “brings functional change into the consciousness of the proletariat,” which is the creation of a new culture that establishes “man as an end in himself.”¹ This is the continuation of the bourgeois project because it is the bourgeoisie that unconsciously created the objective possibility for the human being to understand that his reality is the society.² Before capitalism every class could only have false consciousness, they could only become aware of their partial totalities but they could never reach the consciousness of the social whole. Adequate conception of totality and the possibility of exercising “conscious influence on the historical process” have only become possible with capitalism, “in the form of

¹ ———, “The Old Culture and the New Culture,” 15.

² ———, *HCC*, 19.

proletarian class consciousness.”¹ The task of furthering the bourgeois project belongs exclusively to the proletariat because proletariat cannot understand its class situation without understanding society as a whole.²

Lukács summarizes the evolution of the proletarian consciousness in three steps: The first step is becoming aware of oneself “as a commodity,” “as a naked object” in the process of production: When the “immediacy” is thus revealed to be the result of the “multiplicity of mediations,” the fetish of the “commodity system” begins to melt. Even though what is at hand is still the “self consciousness of the commodity,” the worker can never be completely reduced to an object. This leads to the second step: “this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge.” Object realizes that he is in fact the subject that appears as an object. Without this step, labor is still in the leading position of the economic process, but without understanding its own role. In the third step, the veil created by “the fetish character of every commodity” falls down: what is now completely visible is the evolution of society as the product of relations among men.³

While the economic development, the emergence of the proletariat gives the formal possibility of this consciousness, the real possibility only comes to being through and during the class struggle.⁴ In other words, class struggle precedes class consciousness: i.e.

¹ ———, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*. Trans. Esther Leslie. Ed. John Rees (London; New York: Verso, 2000), 54.

² ———, *HCC*, 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 168-69. Italics removed.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

the struggle does not start after achieving the consciousness; rather the consciousness is achieved after the struggle begins.¹ The fact that the struggle is the precondition of consciousness means that the proletariat, outside the moments of struggle does not have the correct knowledge of totality. The class position of proletariat may lead it to have an accurate knowledge of the historical totality. “But does it always have this knowledge? Not at all.”² Doesn’t Lukács need to have the correct knowledge of totality, the correct consciousness to claim this? Not really: His claim is that the knowledge of totality realizes itself in the proletarian consciousness in the form of a possibility, as the “imputed consciousness.” This possibility is an “objective possibility” that belongs to the order of concrete totality; it is an attempt of constructing the “objective situation” by looking at the “subjective moments” given to us.³ Thus it aims at establishing the correct image through its distorted versions: “The actual thoughts (of classes, parties, leaders) about certain situations, however do not always match the correct ones that these people should be able to reach from their class position.”⁴ Lukács claims that “by relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have” if they were in a position to assess the situation, their interests and the societal impact of their action.⁵ The obvious dilemma is manifest in Heidegger’s contention that one should know how non-reified consciousness operates before diagnosing a reified one is a

¹ This question will be further dealt on the section about the political party.

² Lukács, *A Defence* 66.

³ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵ ———, *HCC*, 51.

misguided one. From his position one can say: if the proletariat is the only entity that can have the knowledge of the totality, how can Lukács –as an individual, know that they are mistaken? Or one may go further: How can he relate to the “consciousness of the whole of society” and assess the objective situation? A simple example may illustrate why Heidegger’s objection is a misguided one: I sit in the driver’s seat of my car, insert the key and turn it. Nothing happens. At this point I may say that the car is broken. This is not because I am a mechanical engineer or know how car’s engine exactly operates. This doesn’t even require a correct knowledge of the relation between the key and car’s electrical structure. But I know a simple thing: if the car is not broken, it moves. So is the same principle with the class consciousness. If it is there, the class is already acting on the reality that it knows, it is directed toward changing it; if it is not there what exists is the “empirically given,”¹ reified consciousness that takes the world as it is. Even if it is impossible to know the exact structure of the class consciousness in action, it is not improbable to detect this “wrong” consciousness.

The wrong totality is that of the commodity form, the “universal category of the society as a whole” under capitalism. Reminding the “phantom objectivity,” emanating from the commodity fetishism as described by Marx, Lukács underlines that the relations between men lay beneath the exchange of commodities. Commodity exchange, while

¹ Ibid.

possible only through this wealth of relations, it obfuscates its origins in them.¹ Today the global trade only means that all human beings are linked through their labor, but the shining products of labor prevent us to see this global totality. The ghostly totality is the product of the human labor that became independent of the human that performs it, thus turning into an alien force controlling him.

On the objective side this means that the products of labor –commodities, start living an apparently autonomous life. Their interaction has its own laws that can be studied by the specialized disciplines of social sciences; the individual who learns these laws can even benefit from them. Yet, it seems to her/him that these laws cannot be overturned, they seem to be eternal, and divine: who dares to question the holy market who has generously provided us our freedoms! This lack of imagination is not so much of a product of ideology that stultifies people but a product of the incapacity of the isolated individual to face capitalism as a totality and change it. The subjective counterpart of this process is the alienation of man's activity from himself. Labor which is an intrinsically incommensurable activity has to be reduced to something abstract, measurable, equal, and comparable so that it can be the fundamental piece of capitalist relations of exchange.² A double movement of atomization and totalization is the indispensable of capitalism. While the "existence is reduced to an isolated particle," and the "organic" bonds of the communities are destroyed, a new whole simultaneously erupts itself. The very disintegration and the disappearance of

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., 87.

organically composed wholes is only a moment in the construction of this totality. This new whole is visible firstly in the transformation of society after the model of the factory.¹

The atomization and the fragmentation of the society thus exist only as the appearance of the social transformation. What manifests itself behind this appearance is that for the first time in human history “the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified laws.” A unified economic process permeates, in a mediated way to every aspect of society, proving that the atomization is a necessary aspect of totalization.² Indeed it can be shown that the process is not that uniform: it is already implicit in the idea of mediation is that the universal will appear in each particular in a different way; the objective can only appear in a mediated, subjective way guided by accidents and chance. These divergences create the illusion that separate laws govern different aspects of life; however a Law of laws emerges. This law, governing the whole is “the ‘unconscious’ product of the activity of the different commodity owners acting independently of one another, i.e. a law of mutually interacting ‘coincidences’ rather than one of truly rational organisation.”³ Finally, capitalist totality opens the possibility for an alternative perspective of totality by massing of workers in factories, by mechanization, by standardization; and by leveling down the standard of living. However, the manifold mediations that rule social

¹ Ibid., 90-91.

² Ibid., 91-92.

³ Ibid., 101-03. Incidentally Lukács argues in these lines that what lies behind the appearance of the rationality of these laws is the fact that capitalist totality is ruled by sheer irrationality. For him, in the moments of crisis the rational mask of capitalism falls and the irrational shows its face

relations are at work here, capitalism as well as anti-capitalism will be manifest in unexpected forms. To have a clear vision of the totality to come cannot be an easy accomplishment.

I.a. De Te Fabula Narratur!

The inevitable question here is that if the capitalism creates a “bad” totality where the whole of society is brought under a single set of rules; if the capitalist production is not confined within the borders of factory but it involves the entire society, why does the Lukácsian politics have the proletariat as its principal actor? In a society that is organized like a factory, where the fate of the worker that becomes identical with the fate of the society as a whole,¹ how and why proletariat can be excluded as the privileged political actor? Maybe the answer is to be found in *Capital*, with Horace’s words that are quoted twice: “the tale is told of you.” In the preface, Marx uses this quote to tell the German workers that even though the book mainly is concerned with British industrial and agricultural workers, it also tells their story.² The second instance can be found in the section on the struggles for a normal working day. After a lengthy quote on how human life is easily wasted in the conditions of slave market, Marx turns to the entire working people of the world and reminds them of Horace: “The name is changed, but the tale is told of

¹ Ibid., 91.

² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London ; New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1981), 90; *ibid.*

you.”¹ He tells that the entire story in the labor market can be told in the terms of the slave trade. In a similar way, it is possible to say that the entire fate of humanity under capitalism is told in what happens to the worker. The first question that raises here is still why it is the worker that reflects the human under capitalism; why not the slave, why not the farmer, why not the woman, or why not bureaucrats, statesman, etc...? Is it that György Szegedy von Lukács,² the son of one of the leading financiers of Eastern Europe, the intellectual, the aesthete, believes that the salvation lies with the most degraded forms of human existence? Is it a class guilt that derives his entire project?³ Or are there plausible reasons as to why it is exclusively the proletariat which is entitled to be the avatar of humanity. Secondly, when the worker becomes the emblem of humanity, a concrete appearance of an abstract notion, the dialectician will never see an immediate representation of the universal in the particular. If the universal human appears in the particular agent in a mediated way; how is it possible to detect what is universal from what is hazardous and coincidental in proletarian existence?

But before addressing these there is another problem to tackle: if the abstract humanity can become concrete in the existence of a particular group in a mediated way;

¹ Ibid., 377-78.

² Until a few years before the publication of *HCC*, Lukács had no problem with using the aristocratic title “von” for which his father had spent a small fortune.

³ Some of the critiques of Lukács argue that the proletarian standpoint as the overcoming the bourgeois individualism belongs to the factions within the bourgeoisie that rebel against itself, to the bourgeois intellectuals. They claim that it is an invention that does not correspond to the reality. See: Assen Ignatow, “Is There a ‘Proletarian Standpoint’?,” in *Lukács Today: Essays in Marxist Philosophy*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988).

why is it in the proletariat that this manifestation takes place? Lukács is not bothered to find an elaborate answer to why it is precisely the proletariat but not any other social group that is the subject of totality. In passing, he argues that the peasants are “*objectively incapable* of leading and organizing the *whole* society on the basis of and in line with their class interests. The contradiction of their social being (*half-worker* and *half-speculator*) is mirrored in their consciousness: ‘(...) They do not form a class’”¹ But why are they incapable? Do they lack education or skills of organization; are they completely incapable of seeing the totality? Besides, if there is a lack, is this a result of what is constitutive of peasantry as a group, or is it a result of what is accidental in their being? If the “empirical consciousness” of the proletariat and the peasantry are both misguided, what allows the proletariat to have a correct “imputed consciousness?” What disqualifies the peasantry? Another likely historical agent is the “middle class,” or in Lukács’ language: the “intermediate strata.” He says that this group acts on its particular class interest, without even the pretension that it is the interest of the whole. In this sense it has a vested interest in the protection of the capitalist totality. It is causally tied to the whole, can understand its particular mechanisms, can benefit from it but it is incapable of changing it. The movement of middle class is caused by the external factors, thus its relation to totality is

¹ Lukács, *A Defence* 90.

“adventitious.”¹ Given this, Lukács claims that there are only two “classes capable of consciousness: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.”²

In the case of the bourgeoisie, the consciousness is directed toward a special kind of totality. It simultaneously produces the power/knowledge that enables the capitalist domination to permeate into the minute details of social existence. But as the domination advances, the bourgeoisie “loses (...) the possibility of gaining intellectual control of the society as a whole.”³ In this definition, the consciousness means once again more than a mere awareness of the interests; it is the precondition for the intellectual and political leadership. In the case of the proletariat, overlapping the interests with the rest of the humanity is a necessary but not sufficient reason of its agency endowed with the consciousness. In the opening essay of *HCC*, Lukács describes the two crucial aspects of proletarian consciousness through a lengthy Marx quote: First of these state that the consciousness of working class is the consciousness of a void. It is not the consciousness of a positive feature of existence, but it is a theoretical awareness of the truth of modern life: “man is lost to himself.” The knowledge of totality is not the awareness of an extant but it is an awareness of a loss, and in its first moment it is purely theoretical. Second point is that for all other social groups interest defines something that will at least help them persevere in their being, if not help them improve their conditions. In the case of the proletariat, as argued before, it is self-destruction. The liberation of working class is only possible if the

¹ ———, *HCC*, 308.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 121.

conditions that gave way to its existence are completely destroyed.¹ So what proletariat has in common with humanity cannot be a positive feature of existence, or a set of overlapping demands. The narrative totality of “de te fabula narratur” is the tell of a world that is out of joint: The common that exists stems from a void, which leads to the undoing of the existing social order and the promise of a just one.

How this link is to be established in the actual practice of politics? Here the criticism of Jay that Lukács’ theory is based on the “abstract notion of a fully unifiable class”² misses the point. True, Lukács says that to access the social totality, the knowing being should itself be a whole. Yet this whole is not a result of a quantitative expansion of its elements. Strangely, unlike other Marxists of humanitarian tradition Lukács has no intention to expand the definition of proletariat to include all who must sell their labor power in order to survive. He rather follows a double task: first is a distillation of social whole, the process of distillation gives the party membership, the second task is to create universality out of this act of this distillation. For him the founder of this method is Lenin who introduced the idea of

strictest selection of party members on the basis of their proletarian class consciousness, and total solidarity with and support for all the oppressed and exploited within capitalist society. Thus he dialectically united the exclusive singleness of purpose and universality.³

¹ Ibid., 20.

² Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 115.

³ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 30.

What does Lukács mean by the dialectical unity of exclusive singularity and universality? Does this say that the party must be subtracted from the proletariat; which in turn should be subtracted from the larger society of workers; and other exploited social classes must be kept separate yet in solidarity? Then how does Lukács justify this act?

First of all, by the word proletariat Lukács means strictly manual laborers.¹ He explicitly forbids other segments of the workers from the definition of proletariat. He says that while capitalism destroyed previously existing divisions among the workers, it created new ones. Especially a new segment distinguishing itself from the rest through its “superiority in education;” “experience in administration;” “petty-bourgeois living-standard;” “occupation of positions in the party or trade union bureaucracy (...) or “in municipal office” but lacks “mature proletarian class consciousness” has a reactionary influence over the rest.² This group, although “economically proletarianized” remain “fervently bourgeois in their ideology.”³ This ideology which includes the elements such as the superiority of mental labor, or concepts like responsibility, hides especially from the white collar worker the naked fact that a worker is transformed into a commodity in capitalist mode of production. Again, Lukács proposes no convincing argument of why the

¹ This is indeed a very narrow definition of the working class, and Marx would be the first one to disagree with it. While trying to define a group of revolutionary activists, Lukács is missing the entire point of the human emancipation in Marx.

² Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 28. This definition of the “white-collar” is strikingly similar to Kracauer who saw in this group the mass basis of fascism to come. See: Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London; New York: Verso, 1998).

³ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer," *New German Critique* 54, no. Fall (1991).

white-collar worker cannot have a revolutionary imputed consciousness that will differ from the empirical one dominated by the ideology. For him, this façade of ideology indeed needs to be torn apart, however this will not happen by merely expanding the definition of proletariat. Besides, the problem with the middling strata is that their work concerns mostly their mental faculties only. In the case of a proletarian the whole existence is at stake: the fact that capitalism tries to “dehumanize” man and “atrophies” one’s soul; consequently humanity’s resistance to be converted into a commodity can be seen most clearly in the case of a blue collar worker.¹ Again this is not because of any positive feature of proletarian identity, but because there is nothing that can be salvaged in it.

Here the crucial point is that although proletariat is seemingly the savior of humanity, one cannot establish an immediate connection between the two. To the contrary, proletariat achieves its function and its place only by separating itself from the “chaotic concept of ‘the people.’”² Therefore the first task of the politics is an act of thought in the form of “theoretical differentiation of the proletariat from the amorphous mass of ‘the people,’” however, this still does not lead to an automatic “knowledge and recognition of its independence and leading role.”³ The fact that establishing the decisive singularity of proletariat is the key act of politics becomes clearer when one remembers that other classes can only have “ill-defined class consciousness.”⁴ This does not mean that other classes do

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 172.

² ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ ———, *HCC*, 324.

not know their interests. As argued before, it means rather that they know it too well; their action is exclusively directed to promote it. Only proletariat fights knowing that “it can liberate itself only by destroying the class society.” Thus it is “*forced*” to fight “*on behalf of* every suppressed and exploited sector of the population.”¹ This is what Lukács means when he says that proletariat must do more than fighting for the interest of other classes.² The task is to destroy the conditions that form the material basis of the unfreedom of every other class in the society.

Does this mean that proletariat must act alone in the revolutionary struggle? The answer is no. However, one should replace the immediate unity with a constructed unity. In other words, the concept of “the people” must be replaced by the “revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed.”³ How will this alliance be forged? What is the meaning of the leadership of proletariat? This is an important question especially when Lukács seems to be dismissive about the other social groups that belong to the alliance of the oppressed. For example, he depicts peasants as incapable of becoming a relevant social actor. They are not only “culturally backward” but are also forced by their “objective class position” toward an “instinctive revolt.” He insists that the fate of the rural world is dependent on the “urban class struggle” whose decisive force is the proletariat.⁴

¹ Ibid.

² _____, *Lenin: A Study*, 67.

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ Ibid., 22.

Why is the proletariat the decisive force? The absolute wrong answer to this question is to reduce it to a simple function of arithmetic. Proletariat is not the decisive force because it is the biggest group in the modern society. To the contrary, numbers do not matter in politics:

Where the minority rule of the modern bourgeoisie is concerned, it must always be remembered that the great majority of the population belongs to neither of the two classes which play a decisive part in the class struggle, to neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie; and that in addition pure democracy is designed, in social and in class terms, to ensure the bourgeoisie domination over these intermediate strata.¹

Lukács does not claim that everybody is becoming a worker, thus a part of proletariat either. The objective situations of the doctor, the intellectual, the bureaucrat, the peasant... etc. lead them toward being a wage earner, a worker; but this will not immediately transform them to the members of proletariat, the working class as a political subject. What is absolutely crucial in the social existence of proletariat is explicit when he says:

Every minority rule is therefore socially organized both to concentrate the ruling class, equipping it for united and cohesive action, and simultaneously to split and disorganize the oppressed classes.²

Lukács' argument here is directed toward the rule of the bourgeoisie. However the key lesson of the hegemony is also expressed: The political subject must be able to establish its decisive unity and be able to disorganize its enemy. For Lukács, the proletariat

¹ Ibid., 65-66.

² Ibid., 65. Italics removed.

is capable to resist the tendencies of split and achieve unity through discipline. Solely this property will enable the proletariat to turn the weapon of the bourgeoisie back on itself to disorganize the ruling alliance. This minute difference is what separates proletariat from all other exploited groups.

Having said this, Lukács is certain that the revolutionary situation cannot be created by the proletariat alone; the entire society must take part in the revolution. Lukács is fully aware of Lenin who had said: “Whoever expects a pure social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.”¹ Again, Lukács follows the footsteps of Lenin when he argues that revolution is near when the “upper classes” cannot continue and the “lower classes” refuse to go on “in the old way.”² He is therefore very much aware that the danger of the age of the proletarian revolution is to “overlook, despise and rebuff” the tendencies such as “agrarian, colonial and national questions” that lead toward “decay and fermentation.” However it should be underlined that these tendencies can only be “*objectively revolutionary within the context of the proletarian revolution.*”³ In other words they need to be articulated to the central narrative of the age. Lukács is also well aware that the bourgeois hegemony depends on a subtle balance between force and consent. Compared to past ruling classes, bourgeoisie has less “immediate” control over “springs of power.” Thus the capitalist peace is achieved

¹ Ibid., 48. Here Lenin is arguing against the labeling “putsch,” a derogatory term used by some leftist circles, about the Irish rebellion of 1916. See: Vladimir Ilich Lenin, “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up,” in *Marxism & Nationalism* (Sydney: Resistance Books, 2002), 173.

² Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 29.

³ Ibid., 48.

through a compromise with other classes. Yet capitalism still depends on the exercise of force by the petty bourgeoisie, peasants, or members of subject nations on its behalf. Far from endorsing the view that the economic struggle has the primacy over the non-economic, Lukács argues that the economic domination of the bourgeoisie is dependent on these non-economic relations. If the loyalty of the classes in service of the bourgeoisie shatters, the bourgeois apparatus will collapse.¹ Thus a successful revolution must first destroy the hegemonic balance of capitalist society.

In order to counter the network of social forces brought together by the bourgeoisie, proletariat must build a new system of alliances, must make compromises, not only with the oppressed but even with the bourgeoisie. The situation compels these alliances not because the proletariat is weak but because the revolution is imminent.² The model of this hegemonic project is found in the Soviets with the:

[R]adical seizure from the bourgeoisie of the possibility of ideological leadership of these classes – particularly the peasants – and in the conquest of this leadership by the proletariat in the transition period.³

With respect to the hegemony, Lukács does very little other than co-founding the concept with Gramsci and defining it as the ideological leadership. The future problem of “articulation”⁴ is unthinkable for Lukács; besides he fails to envisage a much simpler problem: How will the other agents recognize proletariat as the bearer of totality, as the

¹ ———, *HCC*, 307.

² ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 80.

³ *Ibid.*, 67. Italics removed.

⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001).

revolutionary class? How will they be able to understand the new universals that the proletariat defends when they are not capable of seeing the system from the point of view of totality; that is when they are incapable of seeing beyond the limits of the possibilities capitalism? If they have an access to totality, it means that they are equally valid revolutionary agents; if they do not, they will never understand the meaning of the leadership of proletariat. To the contrary, the actions of the working class will appear as if it is promoting its particular interest just like any other social group. Besides, why should any other group accept their place as secondary with respect to the genuine agent of revolution?

These questions remained unanswered in Lukács, and later criticisms did not refer to his work for the criticism of the Marxist revolutionary movements. They rather focused on the mechanical materialism that had undialectically established proletariat in its leading role by accepting the broad framework of the interest politics. When the subject comes to Lukács, he is merely reduced to the theorizer of the ideology as “false consciousness.” The solution of post-modern politics to the dilemmas of Lukács’ work consisted in denying the place of totality, in treating it as an “empty signifier.” The task was to exert hegemony in a system of equivalences. This study will inquire first to the philosophical basis of such criticism in Heidegger, and Althusser. In the final part, with a critical dialogue with the work of Badiou, the question will be asked again as to how the emerging “world” of the political subject can be recognized by the other worlds of human existence.

It is already argued that for Lukács, the decisive act of the political actor consists in its unification of “exclusive singleness” and “universality.” In order to lead the “alliance of the oppressed” proletariat must cut “its ideological association with other classes,” even with some segments of the working class. It has to be absolutely freed from its ties linking it, not only to the bourgeoisie, but to all other exploited classes. It has to “establish its own class-consciousness on the basis of its unique class position and the consequent independence of its class interests.”¹ If the proletariat acts following its unique revolutionary instincts, the “action will then advance of itself along the right road;” however if other strata are involved the movement may go along the correct way but may as well advance on the counter revolutionary path.² In other words, the proletariat must move away from the particular, not toward the immediate generality, but toward a decisive singularity. Only by severing its ties to the existing social/political order of being that the proletariat will be able to found a new totality beyond the existing one.

II. The “Antinomies” of the Party

The culmination of the decisive singularity finds its expression in the political party. As Lukács makes it explicit, the whole argument of the *HCC* concerns the role of the political party in the revolutionary process.³ While his ideas on the party opened new perspectives for revolutionary politics, what he wrote as a legitimization of the communist

¹ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 24.

² ———, *HCC*, 320.

³ ———, *A Defence* 48.

party in Russia turned out to be the complete undoing of what is great in his thought. Thus the discussion of the party generates a formidable paradox in terms of the constitution of the revolutionary subject. On the one hand it is the subject's strongest manifestation, yet it can be also seen as a negation of its legitimacy qua subject. Before opening this point further it is important to consider what the communist party meant to Lukács at the personal level: The actions of Lukács are not mere personal idiosyncrasies but the realization of his thought *in actu*. István Eörsi, the poet and the student of Lukács probably has the best description of what the party meant for his former master:

He did not fear death or intellectual annihilation. On the other hand, the specter of excommunication from the party filled him with horror and drove him, at least before 1965, to accept intellectual and moral degradation.¹

As we shall see in the last part of this section on the “ethics” of the militant, this is a perfect description of what the party member should do: to be ready to sacrifice her/his life and integrity as a person. Eörsi further argues that Lukács' horror for the excommunication is related to his greatest fear: the “monological way of life.” The Weber circle was the first experience that showed him a way out, but it was a limited experience in time and scope. Eörsi, going through the diaries of the master shows that his life before 1919 was in fact filled with a longing for a “Damascus experience” that would move him beyond the logical questioning of existence, especially his own.² In a way, pondering upon and search for a resurrection of the limited experience of Weber circle was one of the factors that led him to

¹ Istvan Eörsi, "The Unpleasant Lukács," *New German Critique*, no. 42 (1987): 11.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

the party as an ultimate answer. This shows in the first place one absolutely important thing: For Lukács, the party essentially belongs to the order of the intellect:¹ it is an experiment to be performed first in thought. Of course there is more to that: what is exciting in the party is not just conversation among brilliant people, but to be in the midst of the proletarian consciousness as a “logos:” A “polylogical” speech that stands in relation to the existing totality; directed toward the construction of an impossible world; irreducible to any particular voice and yet capable of action as one.

It is of course, possible to consider an alternative explanation of the transformation of Saul into Paul, and it is given by Daniel Bell who describes Lukács as the St. Paul of the religion of Marxism.² Bell brings Plato’s doctrine of the “noble lie” as a quick solution to the much exaggerated “sudden” transformation of Lukács to Marxism. Indeed, just a year before his radical transformation Lukács had written “Bolshevism as a moral problem” where he had argued that the proletarian dictatorship means nothing but the exchange of places between the oppressor and the oppressed. His argument was that soviet revolution was far from bringing an end to the oppression as such.³ Here one can see that Lukács is treating proletariat not in terms of the subject of totality as described in the previous section but as one of the particular groups that constitute the society. With Bell’s reasoning, one can say that totality is the best “noble lie” possible. First, it is empirically impossible to

¹ This point is made first to suggest that Lukács brings Plato to Marxism and second as to establish a link between Lukács and Badiou who also relies heavily on Plato.

² Daniel Bell, "The Return of the Sacred? The Argument on the Future of Religion," *The British Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1977).

³ *Ibid.*, 437-38.

prove because neither the individuals nor the positivist science can access it. Secondly it authorizes a particular social group, which not only has a privileged access to it but which is also capable of using it as a weapon: In the class warfare the weapons of the bourgeoisie are “knowledge, culture and routine;” against these the “only decisive weapon of the proletariat is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete, historic totality.”¹ Finally, it legitimizes the party elite to act on behalf of this privileged subject: the proletariat “cannot travel unaided” on the revolutionary road.² If this explanation is correct, not only is this study a waste of time, but all the 20th century Marxists who struggled with the concept were either complicit in the lie of totality invented to legitimize the privileged position of the party leadership or were fools who did not see totality as the lie that it is. Besides, Lukács despite all his personal shifts managed to keep his mouth shut to not to give away the lie, even in when he knew he was terminally ill. Finally, Bell’s explanation says nothing with respect to the content of the idea. Is Lukácsian totality an impossibility? Why? Any answer to this question assumes that there is a better explanation of all the facts, thoughts and concepts considered by Lukács, probably provided elsewhere in Bell’s work. Thus one should be mindful of Bell’s warning, yet this warning will not help on how to understand Lukácsian totality; it will only suggest dismissing it altogether.

Marshall Berman also finds a religious dimension in Lukács’ Marxism: this dimension is what makes Lukács great and terrible at the same time: the themes such as

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 197.

² *Ibid.*

“the redemption of man,” transition to socialism as a leap into the realm of freedom, to be born again as a new man under socialism give an inner depth and “spiritual yearning” to Marxist discourse that is much more powerful than the economic analyses. On the other hand, Lukács also proposes a dreadful trinity composed of party as the “incarnation” of the proletariat; totality that reduces freedom to tactics; and orthodoxy that is blind to facts. The first of these paths lead to socialism as a project for human emancipation, the second to total submission to the party and its leadership.¹ At a personal level Lukács’ commitment to the party poses another religious and existentialist question. In “Bolshevism as a moral problem” Lukács had rejected the Bolshevik Party together with Razumikhin of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*: it is not possible to lie our way to truth. Yet almost right after the publication of this essay, Lukács publishes “Tactics and Ethics” and joins the communist party. Berman notes that despite the Kantian rhetoric of the essay, its overriding theme is emotional: guilt. The feeling of the essay unlike its language belongs to Dostoevsky not to Kant. All communists are guilty for all crimes that are committed and that will be committed in the name of communism, but all the others are guilty for the murders of fascism and capitalism of the past and of the future. It is not a symbolic guilt, he does not say that we legitimize these murders; rather the tone says that we have blood in our hands whatever we choose. Is Lukács’ actions are derived from his guilt about the

¹ Berman, "Georg Lukács's Cosmic Chutzpah," 191-93.

suicide of Irma Seidler, the first love of his life? Is it this guilt that allows her brother Ernő Seidler to recruit Lukács to the party?¹

Having this personal trajectory in mind one can return to the function of party in the concept of the narrative whole. The previous section brought forward the depiction of the subject of history which provided this very key for Lukács. However, this subject existed only as an “objective possibility,” in the empirical world it was yet to come alive. What this subject would see in the totality and how this subject would act once it acquires a full-fledged knowledge of it was left in the abstract. This should indeed be indeed abstract because this knowledge is like the knowledge of a future classless society: it will emerge in the process of its own realization.² It was also stated that neither Marx, nor Lukács can have concrete depictions of how it is going to happen: the only knowledge they can have can be that of tendencies. Then isn't there a paradox related with the role of the party? How can the party have this knowledge and thus act as a revolutionary agent? These questions will be answered in the following section. Yet before proceeding it should be underlined strongly that Lukács made it absolutely clear that he did not leave a blueprint for the political party valid for all ages. The particular depiction of the party here belongs to the

¹ Ibid., 199-202.

² Lukács writes that neither Marx, nor Lenin wrote about socialism as a finished project: “concrete knowledge of socialism is – like socialism itself – a product of the struggle for it; it can only be gained in and through this struggle.” Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 73.

party of the “time of proletarian revolution.”¹ The only general lesson of Lukács is that there is no ready-made formula for the party: “Party... *is not but is becoming.*”²

II.a. Party as the Distillation

It is already demonstrated that in order to posit “the proletariat” as the unique social entity capable of accessing totality, Lukács claims that only a subject that is a totality itself can be able to posit an object that is totality. This positing though stays in the realm of objective possibility; it is not yet materialized in the empirical consciousness of the working class. To bridge the empirically given consciousness with the possible one is precisely the task of the leaders and the party.³ However, this brings a new problem: the leaders of the party must a. recognize the empirical consciousness as wrong b. know how the imputed consciousness should look like in order to bridge the empirical and the possible. This means that the leader knows totality even before the class does. Isn't this in contradiction with the first principle? If there is no path leading from the individual to the whole how can Lukács claim that Lenin was able to develop his account from the perspective of the actuality of the revolution, i.e. from the point of view of totality?⁴ Does the leader have superior characteristics than the ordinary human beings? Or is the party itself a totality? Is it possible to say that the party has the “knowledge of society in its totality,” that it “represents the interests of the whole proletariat,” and thus “mediates the

¹ Ibid., 26.

² Ibid., 37-38.

³ ———, *HCC*, 65-66.

⁴ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 9-13.

interests of all the oppressed – the future of mankind.”¹ Does Lukács repeat here Lenin’s formula where

the masses are divided into classes (...) classes are led by political parties;” and “political parties (...) are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders.”²

According to Badiou, this formulation is emblematic of 20th century’s *expressive dialectics* that reduces the “moment of creativity of masses” to the proper names of the leaders. If Lukács is following this path there is a particular problem: isn’t this a return to the monological way? His transition to communism had meant the discovery and becoming part of a new subject whose voice was irreducible to that of the One. Is the process of distillation nothing but a filter which reduces the multiplicity of voices to the speech of the leader? On the other hand, maybe Lukács, under the guise of Leninism, is introducing something much closer to what Badiou calls non-expressive dialectics.³ Or it can be argued that the bridge that the party provides between the imputed and the empirical consciousness is a modest one. The party, far from seeing totality can be merely providing a “concrete analysis of a concrete situation,” and stay firm on the course led by the masses especially when that masses will have some hesitations. In this sense, the party must learn from the masses, discover revolutionary possibilities that masses are creating but they have not

¹ Ibid., 34.

² Vladimir Ilich Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder," in *Collected Works, Vol. 31* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 41.

³ Alain Badiou, "Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics." Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, 2005, Available at: <http://blog.urbanomic.com/sphaleotas/archives/badiou-politics.pdf>. This relation will be discussed with the rest of Badiou’s arguments.

noticed. To do so, the party needs no special knowledge; only the discipline to stay on the course and the alertness to that which emerges as the “new.”

In this context, party is the culmination for the proletariat to achieve its decisive singularity; it is the final process in the step of the distillation. The party consists of “single minded revolutionaries, prepared to make any sacrifice” that is separate from “the more or less chaotic mass of the class as a whole.”¹ It provides an “inner clarity before the decisive battles” to the proletarian movement so that these can be won.² The party is the exclusive organ where the decisive singularity is achieved: the notion of the Bolshevik party suggests that the proletariat must fight “in league” with the oppressed, yet not in the same organization.³ Thus the party is the organization separating the proletariat from the mass of the people while at the same time providing the collaboration “on the level of the tactics.”⁴ Here emerges the final problem: “the chaos” of the crowd. “People” is a chaotic concept and working class subtracts from it; working class is chaotic, manual laborers subtract from it; proletariat is chaotic, thus the party subtracts from it; until when the chaos continues? Doesn’t Lukács end up once again with the name of the Leader? The answer to this question lies in the position of the party with respect to the class: Is the party an organic extension of the class? Or is it mechanically separated from it? The question of the dialectics of the party and the proletariat is not clearly established in the work of Lukács

¹ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 25.

² ———, *HCC*, 329.

³ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 325.

and contains paths leading to the mistakes of 20th century revolutionary politics as well as paths away from them.

II.b. Is Party Outside?

The easiest way to solve the riddle of the relation between the party and the class is to adopt Gramsci's notion of "organic intellectual" to describe Lukács' notion of the party. The evidence for this explanation can be easily collected when he says that "the form taken by the class consciousness of the proletariat is the Party;"¹ or when he argues that "the theory is essentially the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself."² This point of view can be summarized as:

*[t]he communist party is the organizational expression of the revolutionary will of the proletariat. It is therefore by no means bound to embrace the whole of the proletariat from the very outset; as the conscious leader of the revolution, as the embodiment of the revolutionary idea, its task is rather to unite the most conscious sections, the vanguard, the really revolutionary and fully class-conscious workers.*³

The conceptual limits of the party as an "expression" are obvious: First, it assumes an immediate, undialectical unity between the party (the organizing mind) and the class (the body). The problem is not only that this is *undialectical* but that it assumes an immediate unity where there is none. The idea of immediate unity is nothing but the political reproduction of the separation of body and mind culminating in the domination of the body

¹ Ibid., 41. Italics removed.

² Ibid., 3.

³ ———, "The Moral Mission of the Communist Party,"
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1920/moral-mission.htm>.

by the mind. There is one further question related with the organic unity of class and the party: let us think about Lukács himself as a party member. He is the son of a wealthy banker who got the best possible education; who had the all the distinctions that allowed him to study philosophy and arts: how can he be the organic “intellectual expression” of the people who dwell in completely different worlds of existence with him? The organicness here is not an overcoming, a “sublation” but a simple denial of the empirical differences. It is an outcome of the ‘wrong’ –logical, totality that assumes a unity where there is none. Secondly, it provides a pretext for the process of the distillation that leads to the proper name of the leader where the creativity of the movement is lost.

On the other hand, Lukács himself is perfectly aware of this. He claims that the class and the party are unified *dialectically*, i.e. not immediately, and are separated organizationally. The split is justified by the “differing degrees of clarity and depth” as well as the disunity among the different individuals. Besides, the separation provides a distance which allows the party to act despite the changes in the “momentary thoughts and feelings” of the class.¹ But isn’t this split another continuation of the mind-body split, where the conscious, rational mind should rule over the unpredictable, subversive desires of the body? The consciousness (party) should rule over the body (proletariat) for the greater good of the latter. Can’t the class, the privileged agent capable of accessing the totality, know what it is doing? Here Lukács seems to have forgotten about all the explanations privileging

¹ ———, *HCC*, 322.

proletariat vis-à-vis other social actors. Here he is completely in line with Lenin of *What is to be Done*: The class, by itself can only acquire “trade union consciousness,” i.e. will follow only the terms of the interest politics. The correct revolutionary consciousness should be “brought to them from without.”¹ This conviction never left Lukács; even during the late 60’s he claimed that the “significance” of the fact that the consciousness must be brought to the working class “from outside” had only “increased extraordinarily”. He argued that the task of the radical intellectuals of the day was to elaborate principles and methods, but not yet the slogans of the revolutionary theory to come.²

At this point one can easily follow Bell and argue that the revolutionary politics is a mere pretext, a “noble lie” invented to justify the rule of the worthy few over the many. Yet in the very same interview, a few pages after stressing the role of the “outside,” Lukács also argues that the movement always comes before and is prior to the party. If the consciousness is to be brought from the outside, how can the movement start without the help of the organizer outside, which is the party? If it can start without the party, why does it need the party at all? Isn’t this a contradiction? Besides, *HCC* contains a further testimony to the primacy of the class in its praise of Rosa Luxemburg for having shown how the

¹ ———, *A Defence* 82.

² ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 87. Around the same time Marcuse was talking about the “vicious cycle of freedom and liberation.” He was stating that “the slaves must be *free for* their liberation before they can become free, and that the end must be operative in the means to attain it.” According to Marcuse, socialism must exist as a reality in the consciousness of those who act for it in order to realize it. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man : Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 41, 223.

[m]asses exhibit in their actions an incomparably higher degree of class consciousness than even the party and the unions which presume to treat them with condescension, regarding them as immature and ‘backward.’¹

To repeat: the movements of the masses are capable of surpassing the party in terms of the consciousness. If so, again: why is there any need for the party? If one assumes that the job of the party is to act “on behalf and in the place of”² the proletariat, there is no need at all; but in fact, this is absolutely not the party that Lukács is talking about. His idea of the party is the one that will take what lies in the “instincts” of the class and bring it to the consciousness.³ In this way, the task of the revolutionary party is to provide a “permanent dynamic” to the “explosive power” of these movements.⁴ This is why Lukács describes the Marxist orthodoxy as the “eternally vigilant prophet proclaiming the relation between the tasks of the immediate present and the totality of the historical process.”⁵ Party does not create the movement; it is not the movement itself; it is not above the movement; it is not the expression of the movement. Yet, it is the manifestation of the movement; it is the declaration that the change is near. In the mode of declaration its job is to link the moment with the historic totality, hence its definition is the “concrete principle of mediation between man and history.”⁶

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 303.

² *Ibid.*, 326.

³ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁴ ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 91.

⁵ ———, *HCC*, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 321. See the concluding part of this chapter.

II.c. Dialectics of the party

The previous chapter showed that neither versions of Lukács' idea of totality posit a deterministic understanding of history. The task of the philosophy and science is not to discover the rules of the historical development but to highlight broader tendencies. The fact that there are no laws of history means that the unpredictable, the unexpected, the impossible change is always an imminent possibility of any given moment of history. The Lukácsian party is a product of this non-mechanistic understanding of history. To link the present and the historic whole: the party thus has a unique task that requires the ability to recognize the marker of the present, which is "the new." In the revolutionary struggle the absolutely crucial role of the party is to recognize "the new" and bring it to the consciousness at the moment of its appearance in its embryonic form.¹ This is why when Lukács talks about the task of the theory in the 1970s, he says that it must first discover what is new in the economic and the social phenomena; and then relate this to the general course of history making the possibility of a movement credible.² This means that the politics is first of all an intellectual process; categories of political thought or political science are simply politics par excellence.

Here the party acquires a new definition as the mediator between the two understandings of totality.³ It is argued before that the historical totality as a subjectless,

¹ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 36.

² ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 90.

³ Here we momentarily return to the notation of the previous chapter between totality and [totality].

goalless flow contains not one but an uncountable number of tendencies. The task of the party is accordingly twofold: first to figure out the new that is the marker of the present and second to highlight the tendency that makes its existence meaningful and relevant in such a way to add fuel to the explosive possibilities of the nowtime (*Jetztzeit* as Benjamin would call it). In this way, the party is capable of transforming the totality into [totality] in the construction of the narrative whole. Here what is absolutely crucial is that this twofold task that results in the transformation of boundless totality into a concrete [totality] is not just one thing among others that the party does. Party as the mediation between two totalities is rather the definition of the party. On the one hand, this definition of the party is even broader than Gramsci's idea that defined any political organization a party. It is also much more specific because it prescribes a concrete action dependent on the unbounded and unpredictable flux of history. For example, Lukács saw that the concrete problem in the 1970s was first the real subsumption; thus he worked on how labor is the model of every human action. A second problem was the decline in the labor activism due to the improvement of material conditions of the working classes, so he highlighted the fact that over the course of the thousands of years of human improvement the tendency was toward the elimination of the hours devoted to provide for the subsistence of the individual – providing a new goal for the movement; third was the crisis of the religion, so he stressed the need for meaningful life, a tendency that can be linked with the previous ones... etc. The important point is that when the “new” changes, so must the analysis, so must the mediations, so must the image of totality, so must politics. In our present, when the welfare

states are brought to the point of demolition due to the constant attack from the right wing politics, when the greatest problem of the workers is their job security (hence the fashionable word: precariat), when the religious fundamentalism is on the rise, the previously shown tendencies make little sense. The task of the thought/party today should be to find out the possibility of radical transformation in the given present, even if it is in its embryonic form, and to retrace its lineages in the historical tendencies to give it a possibility to come to fruition. In this sense the only way to stay loyal to Lukács' idea of the party is to betray to every single concrete analysis he provided about his present.¹

Of course the idea of politics as thought encounters a basic problem: If the task of the political party is an intellectual task aimed at discovering the novelty, isn't the theoretical activity given the privilege of discovering the basis, the direction, and the meaning of movement; thus effectively in a position to lead the entire movement? Isn't this the textbook definition of idealism? The problem for Lukács is that this criticism is still a product of an abstract thinking which posits subject and object as cut off from each other; however the political praxis starts with the refusal of the split and posits the unity of thought and action as well as subject and object. In the dialectical thinking, subjective moment should be considered as a moment of the objective process, which is capable of exercising an influence over it. In this sense, what is idealist and "Kantian" is precisely the denial of the subjective moment. While the problem of falling into pure subjectivism

¹ Lukács always referred to the party explicitly in the concrete context of the October revolution and its aftermath. In this section whenever a broader, abstract notion of the party is described it is deduced from his treatment of the communist party in the 1920s.

should be treated seriously; when politics emerges as an intellectual edifice of the first order, this cannot be solved theoretically but organizationally. It is the discipline of a “real Communist party” that “dialectically restricts” the subjective moment and prevents it turning it into an empty intellectual endeavor.¹

The dialectics properly conceived neither prescribes the undifferentiated unity nor the mechanical separation of the moments constituting the process.² The dialectical unity is not a mere fancy theoretical apparatus; it is the formula of revolution according to Lenin which is characterized by the unity of objective conditions and the subjective factor.³ As a part of the objective process, the party as subjective action acquires a further task: to “transcend capitalist society –in thought.”⁴ Of course the task of the theory is neither to simply invent, nor to impose what is beyond the existing order. As argued in the previous chapter, the point of view of totality is the point of view of this “beyond.” Lukács summarizes his whole argument with a quotation from Marx where the job of critical thinking is to help

the world to become aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it from its dream about itself, in *explaining its own actions to it* (...) It will then be seen that the world has long possessed a dream of things *which it only has to possess in consciousness in order to possess them in reality.*⁵

¹ Lukács, *A Defence* 59.

² *Ibid.*, 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴ ———, *HCC*, 230.

⁵ Letter from Marx to Ruge, September 2003. Quoted and italicized in *ibid.*, 259.

But who are the people to form the party? Who is capable of taking this tremendous task upon her/himself? The non-deterministic idea of history is also at work here. Lukács' answer to the problem of the new was not a formula that can predict it but an agent capable of recognizing it. Yet, there is not a formula as to the constitution of the agent either. The objective process does not determine the subjective moment: the revolutionary action can only be accomplished by the people who can emancipate themselves from the existing system. The intellectual and emotional emancipation, on the other hand, does not go parallel to the economic development.¹ This means that the quality of the leaders of the movement, their capacity of analysis, their leadership skills, their momentary decisions... etc. have nothing to do with the quality or the possibilities of the movement. Thus mature movements lacking the leadership matching their quality may fail effecting the material development itself; on the other hand minor movements may succeed with adequate organization can succeed. Who will lead the party depends on chance and accidents.²

The fact that party is an agent of dialectics as a non-deterministic process has a final consequence: the decisions. The questions about the emancipation of women, the peasant problem, racism, climate change... etc., none of these will cease to be a problem 'after the revolution.' To the contrary, no problem will ever "solve itself."³ Whether the party or movement will be able to find answers to the concrete problems of the time has no relation or whatsoever with whether the time is ripe for the revolution. These questions require

¹ Ibid., 257.

² ———, *Conversations with Lukács*, 23-24.

³ ———, "The Twin Crises," 325.

“decisions of the moment,” which are completely products of contingent, subjective processes that in turn influence the overall objective process.¹ If the decisive step is not taken at the correct moment, the contradictions will remain unresolved. They will not merely persist as they are but will reproduce themselves at a higher level.² This is what Lukács calls *augenblick*: the material development creates a moment where there is an objective chance for radical transformation. If this moment is lost the material development will not keep flowing toward the social revolution and create a better opportunity. Revolution is no destiny: if the moment where the boundless flow can be bracketed as [totality] has fled away, there will not be a better chance in the future. The history has no goal to attain. When the revolutionary moment is lost, the material development is likely to reverse its course toward the exact opposite.³

II.d. Party as a Pedagogical Project: Learning from Camarón

Party is a result of the fact that the history does not follow any ready-made formula. It is a result of the fact that the consciousness does not automatically follow the economic development, that the revolution is not a destiny.⁴ This does not mean that revolution is something that the party can singlehandedly achieve. The task of the party is to “foresee the objective economic forces and to forecast” the appropriate actions to be taken by the working class; thus to “prepare the proletarian masses intellectually, materially and

¹ ———, *HCC*, 302.

² *Ibid.*, 197-98.

³ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

organizationally.”¹ The intellectual preparation reveals the true function of the party toward a communist future, the leadership role of the party is the leadership of the educator:

Now because the socialist economy does not spontaneously produce and reproduce the men appropriate for it, as classical capitalist society naturally generated its homo œconomicus, the divided citizen/bourgeois of 1793 and de Sade, the function of socialist democracy is precisely the education of its members towards socialism.²

To define the task of the party as that of education certainly brings the question to a higher plane; it certainly avoids the commonplace mistakes associated with Stalinism, however it is far from solving the problem. At this new plane the question revolves around the nature of the pedagogical task. It should be first admitted here that Lukács never asked this question explicitly. From his texts, one can deduce two types of answers to the pedagogical question. The first admits education as the mere transmission of knowledge from the one who knows to the one who is set to know. It can be claimed that this definition of education is nothing but Leninist politics reproduced at the pedagogical level. The first problem that one can find in this perspective is obvious and can be avoided: The transmission of knowledge presupposes that the party consists of the members of the proletariat who managed to overcome the situation of false consciousness and thus achieved the consciousness of the whole. This brings once again the central question of the party: How can the totality be inaccessible to any individual and but a group of individuals can have the task of teaching the totality to the class. How do they know it

¹ Ibid., 33.

² ———, "Lukács on His Life and Work ": 58.

before the class does? On the other hand, it is possible to answer this challenge in the context of education. One can argue that the party is the part of the working class that establishes the first link with the totality. Or with a better explanation it is possible to insist that the formation of party is a moment in the dialectical process of the construction of the knowledge of totality... etc.

On the other hand the knowledge-transmission interpretation of the party as a pedagogical project carries one further impasse that cannot be easily avoided. The problem, as eloquently put forward by Rancière concerns the pedagogy that reproduces inequality in the name of equality.¹ His position starts with recounting the experience of Joseph Jacotot, the polymath, the teacher and the revolutionary who was forced into exile in 1815 when the monarchy was restored. At the University of Louvain where he finally found a position, he had a particular problem: His students did not know French and he did not know Flemish. To his help, a bilingual edition of *Télémaque* was just available, opening the doors for a splendid experiment. At his request, students learned how to read and write in French on their own just by comparing the words that appeared side by side in their copy of *Télémaque*. They had not needed any teacher to explain them the rules of French language in order to learn it. This experiment was the precondition of the great discovery of Jacotot.

¹ He had first advanced his critique of the pedagogical function of the political, implicitly in: Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991). He explicitly underlined the obvious analogy between the teacher and the party in a recent conference: ———, "Communists without Communism?" (paper presented at the On the Idea of Communism, The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, University of London. March 14, 2009).

In *Persian Letters* (Letter 56), Montesquieu was talking about people teaching what they themselves do not know. For Jacotot, this is not only possible but also preferable to teaching what one already knows. The thing that everybody knows the best, one's mother tongue is not taught to anyone through formal pedagogy. Everybody, rather learns it through "observing and retaining, repeating and verifying," by relating the new to those they already know, "by doing and reflecting about" what they do.¹ Why can't one do the same when it comes to learning a secondary language or to the language of mathematics, law, engineering, politics, philosophy... etc. Rancière, through Jacotot (or vice versa) asks a fundamental question regarding the nature of the pedagogy: what is taught through the very performance of teaching? The answer to this is inequality, it is being inferiors, and thus the conclusion is that education is stultification. Formally speaking, education starts with the ignorance which is replaced *progressively* with knowledge, thus education is a journey from the situation of inequality toward equality. However, this journey will never come to an end; if a student wants to pass beyond his current master, s/he will need another master. In other words, the traditional mode of explication always teaches something else in addition to the explicit content of the subject taught: a surplus that is transmitted through the performance of the teacher. Following the link Aristotle had established between theater and politics one can imagine the classroom as a stage and focus on the performance ignoring the content of the class: There is one teacher and many students; the teacher is the one who speaks and is the one to decide when others are allowed to speak, s/he is the one

¹ ———, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 10.

capable of passing judgment over the many, s/he is the one deciding on the content to be learned as well as the content of day-to-day discussions; the students have to follow the lead and hope in vain that one day they will arrive to the same level with their teacher. It is a staging of the worthy one in relation to the unworthy many. This process teaches the students to be minors; it reveals them that the inequalities have sound, justifiable bases; thus leads them to accept and internalize the situation of inequality through repetition. This is the lesson of Jacotot: if one starts with the assertion of inequality, one will end up infinitely reproducing it. In order for the education to achieve equality it has to assert it not as a goal but as a starting point. Equality exists as “an opinion, or a presupposition, which opens the field of its verification.”¹ For Rancière, the equality exists in the equality of the intelligence of anybody with anybody regardless of one’s place in the social order. It cannot be achieved by “progress.”

Rancière’s edifice centered on this new idea of education is set against Plato’s *Republic* which associates particular types of intelligence to particular positions in the social order.² In Plato’s city a shoemaker can only make shoes; one cannot be a shoemaker and something else at the same time. In *The Republic* workers whose soul is made out of iron cannot be communists, only the legislators who have golden souls “can and must” let

¹ ———, “Communists without Communism?”.

² In conjunction with his argument that since *The Republic* the principal task of political philosophy has been the production of arguments to overturn the scandal and the great premise of politics, the community of equals; Rancière’s political writings consist in unmasking these pretexts of inequality. See: ———, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); ———, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

go the material gold. In a strange way, Plato's *Republic* asserts the power of communists over the workers. Rancière argues that the ingenuity of Marx's thought lies here, in his assertion that the "gold of knowledge" belongs to the proletariat as a product of the "iron condition."¹ This argument is exactly in accordance with the knowledge of totality as Lukács asserted it. On the other hand, the same condition that allows the knowledge of totality is the condition of the ignorance as well: the worker is reified within the capitalist working conditions. The knowledge can thus belong to the ones who are not caught by the machine, to the communists as such. In this sense Jay is right in claiming that the reification serves as a "philosophical correlate" to *What is to be Done?*'s claim that the proletariat will only develop trade-union consciousness without the intervention of the vanguard party.² Even if an individual worker will see the system in its totality, he will try to bend it toward his own advantage, because worker is "unable to move beyond the here and now of the immediate economic interest."³ A tension thus emerges between those who can emancipate themselves and those who are caught in the machine. Plato's distinction between the golden communists and the iron worker has been reasserted. The emancipated ones do not trust that workers are capable of emancipating themselves; the party as a project of education thus exists as a precondition to keep the worker as a minor who is never completely emancipated.

¹ ———, "Communists without Communism?". In this talk Rancière does not refer to Lukács at all. In the following lines I will be following the spirit of his criticism, but extend his argument toward the discussion of Lukács.

² Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 112.

³ Rancière, "Communists without Communism?".

If there is an empirical difference between those who are emancipated and those who are not (and there is such difference of consciousness) how is it possible to emancipate others? Jacotot's idea of emancipation has one feature that matters here: Emancipation is a form of action that is only possible between individuals. It is not possible to emancipate society as such; social bodies follow the laws of "social gravity."¹ Every individual can be emancipated but one at a time, and by another individual. "And no party or government, no army, school or institution, will emancipate a single person."² "How can the collectivization of the capacity of anyone coincide with the global organization of society? How can the anarchical principle of emancipation become the principle of social distribution of tasks, positions and powers?"³ Rancière asks the perfect question here but he does not give an answer. He insists that this problem has to be told apart from the age old discussions about the spontaneity and organization but it is less evident where the discussion should be relocated.⁴ The problem here is not that Rancière is making a case for spontaneity without acknowledging it; it is neither the practical difficulty of emancipating everybody on an individual basis, the problems of the division of labor... etc. The problem here is that Rancière relies on a difference between the emancipated and the not yet

¹ ———, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 76-80.

² *Ibid.*, 102.

³ ———, "Communists without Communism?".

⁴ Except the affirmation of Badiou's idea that will be discussed in the last section of this thesis.

emancipated without meditating on the line separating the teacher and the student.¹ He is not simply suggesting that a community of equals will suddenly become possible if the empirical inequalities are ignored. But he does not make it explicit what authorizes someone to emancipate another in a situation where any person can emancipate any other.² Besides, Jacotot's teachings suggest that the only form of emancipation is the intellectual emancipation. There will be no emancipation where the laws of social gravity act. What about social justice? Can there be no possibility for a project of emancipatory politics then? Despite providing an excellent critique of the party as a knowledge transmission device, Rancière does very little to contribute toward a different notion of party as a device for education.

Here one can return once again back to Lukács: maybe what Lukács meant by educating the masses is not simply transferring them the knowledge of the totality that the party has miraculously acquired. Maybe there is an alternative interpretation of Lukács' position that can be very close to Rancière's definition of communism first as the "principle of equality of intelligence," second as the affirmation of "the process of collectivization of the equality of intelligence" and especially as the "ability to invent futures which are not

¹ "To emancipate an ignorant person, one must be, and one need only be, emancipated oneself (...). The ignorant person will learn by himself what the master doesn't know if the master believes he can and obliges him to realize his capacity..." Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 15.

² A practical consequence of Jacotot's teaching is that it allowed illiterate parents to teach how to read and write to their children. One can easily imagine what this teaching meant to the working class families in the conditions of the early 19th century Europe.

yet imagined by anyone.”¹ This last one is the ultimate aim of the “narrative of totality.” But for that to happen one needs to rethink about the party as a pedagogical project, more importantly one needs to rethink what education is and can be in the context of emancipatory politics. How can one teach and learn on the basis of equality of minds? While current debates on education give a number of important ideas, here I want to discuss a figure of music. I want to discuss how the legendary cantaor (singer) of Flamenco, Camarón de la Isla, has taught invaluable and path breaking lessons without having the slightest intention to teach anything. Maybe the political party may also learn something from him and thus reconsider an unrealized promise in Lukács' thought.

Probably Camarón's partner in music, Paco de Lucia is the first one to realize the importance of Camarón as a teacher: A few years after the death of Camarón in 1992, Paco de Lucia had said that beyond all that makes him sad about his colleague who had died at the age of 42, there is one in thing that stands out: that he still had had much to learn from Camarón. What can anybody teach to Paco de Lucia, to the arguably greatest guitarist of Flamenco of all times? Is there any single note in the book of Flamenco that he had missed? Maybe this is another act of humility from the man who practices his guitar eight hours every day, and is willing to admit that anyone who works eight and a half hours is a better guitarist than he is. But there is more than the humility here; there is something different about Camarón. To understand what he can teach, a very brief look on the two stages of his

¹ Rancière, "Communists without Communism?".

career can be useful. These stages can be seen as the manifestation of the Andalusian spirit inclined both toward an avant-garde modernism and at the same time toward an 'idyllic' simplicity.¹ The first period covers the nine "nameless" (known by the first name of the first song) albums recorded together with Paco de Lucia between 1969 and 1977. The best way to describe the achievement of this period can be seen in the difference between the 'tradition' in its usual sense and in its Gadamerian usage as "Überlieferung" (as handing down).² The period these albums are recorded is marked by the fascist promotion of Flamenco as the sound of the authentic Spain as opposed to its modernist, socialist and anarchist "degeneration." This Flamenco promoted the 'traditional' Spain as opposed to the one which experimented in republic, democracy and radical left. Flamenco thus was in the same package with the king, the church and the ruthless oppression unifying Franco's Spain. This reappropriation of the tradition gave the music an institutional recognition but killed its creative energy; in the Spain of 60's Flamenco was being increasingly reduced to a mere tourist entertainment. When Camarón appeared on the scene, Flamenco was almost a decadent form of music marked with the undue usage of "palmas,"³ back vocals, and with an unnecessary number of the musical instruments. The gypsy who, after he could, would appear on the stage carrying the Star of David and the crescent of Islam knew better than that. He knew that singing (Flamenco) meant giving his voice to the songs of the oppressed, and all the superfluous adornment was insulting the memories of those who suffered. The

¹ The best example of this radical move between two extremes is Federico García Lorca.

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd, rev. ed., Continuum Impacts (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).

³ Hand clapping in Flamenco.

albums recorded during this period show this clearly: there is one singer, one guitar and a minimalist usage of “palmas.” It is not so because there is a lack in the talent to display but there is too much of it that it wants to disappear only to clear the space for the naked “essence” of the song to reveal itself. Of course, the musical authorities who praised the “tradition” hated these albums; but the public, immediately recognized what was going on. This raw Flamenco was not the traditional, institutionalized Flamenco, but the one that was handed down. The success of these albums is beyond the achievement of a singer: Among the gypsies, the Flamenco singers have always been considered as people with mystical powers, but Camarón goes even beyond that: he is the incarnation of God’s voice.

The first albums then can be called a clarification of the mess that we inherit as a tradition. If these albums angered the traditionalists or the “purists” because there was too little in them, what came in 1979 and afterwards infuriated them because there was too much. *La Leyenda del Tiempo* (The Legend of Time), an album dedicated to Lorca, incorporated instruments such as electric guitar, electric bass, synthesizer, sithar, and percussions and had elements of rock and jazz in it. The album was not just too much for the purists, this time general public deserted Camarón: Unlike the previous ones, this album turned into a disaster in the sales. On the other hand, the status of this album in the history is far beyond the failure that it was once considered. It is rather accepted as The Album that singlehandedly changed the fate of Flamenco and established what is called the “new Flamenco.” If today Flamenco performers can easily mix traditional tunes with hip-hop,

electronic music, jazz or with the tunes of others traditions, it is thanks to the path that is opened by the only album of Camarón that has failed in sales. This is what Paco de Lucia, incorporating jazz and Flamenco himself, meant when he said that we all had too much to learn from Camarón. What Camarón had pursued after 1980 was an experiment in discovering the possible pasts of Flamenco in relation to Indian, North African, and Sephardic tunes; it was an experiment in discovering the possible voyages of Flamenco to South America and the Caribbean; it was an experiment in discovering new possible relations with other contemporary forms of music; and finally it was an experiment toward the possible futures. Camarón is not the teacher of the knowledge he knows better than anybody else, he is not “teaching” at all, he is only performing and experimenting into the possibilities. What he teaches is not what he knows but what he invents as a possibility. This possibility does not exist in the realm of “another world is possible,” but in the way Lukács would call it, as a concrete possibility. The students of Camarón are not in the state of ignorance, they are not the proletariat imagined in the model of the Leninist party. They are much closer to the creative potential that people like Negri see in the contemporary informational labor: They are rather innovative people who perfectly know what they want and what they do, thus they are not alienated “virtuosos” as described by Lukács. They are talented, intelligent people who want to observe the possibilities and take action themselves. They can thus become a part of an experimental process that allows that them to develop their own creative potentials in a way that they choose for themselves.

Can the political party act the way Camarón did: first clarifying the mess of the tradition, then experiment into the possible pasts, geographies, presents and futures? Does Lukács talk about such a possibility? And finally does this party have anything to do with totality? The answer can only come with an emphasis on the difference between the two totalities, and from an unusual source: from Adorno who is allegedly the biggest critique of the idea of totality. One can maintain all the clashes between these two figures of critical thought, yet it can still be claimed that what Adorno calls “the standpoint of redemption” below is very close to what Lukács calls the point of view of totality. The messianic appeal of the last fragment of *Minima Moralia* is strongly connected to the messianism of the *HCC*:

Finale. - The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. (...) Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.¹

Neither for Adorno, nor for Lukács, the world suffers from an original sin; the redemption here refers to a process of justice beyond the law. As Adorno notes, whether redemption as final emancipation of humanity is real, whether it is the final goal of history

¹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 247.

does not matter. What needs to be done is to form perspectives toward that (unrealizable) goal; and this is how Lukács' point of view of totality must be understood. Indeed the two thinkers would radically differ in innumerable ways on how this is to be realized. However Adorno's depiction articulates Lukácsian concept of the party, which is nothing less than organized thought in a better way than what Lukács wrote himself. The task of the party is not to develop the knowledge of totality but to experiment in order to create "perspectives" where the limits of the existing whole; as well as its fissures, distortions, injustices become visible: the task is thus the creation of the narrative totality. The party does not need to know what will come out of these experiments; it just has to act in such a way to reveal that the possibility of the impossible, to reveal that what seems impossible is a concrete possibility.¹ The sequence that will follow this revealing is not in the control of the party.

Besides, even the 'reified' proletariat is more active than it appears. Lukács writes: "man in capitalist society confronts a reality 'made' by himself (as a class)" he adds to this that even in acting he is not the subject but the object of events.² One can argue that the human-object of capitalism is already at work as human-subject that created the capitalist society. Moreover, Lukács adds that everyone has a knowledge of laws that s/he is using and everyone knows their inner reactions to the course of the events. So everybody more or less knows the society they live in; this is precisely the point that Lukács is raising in his ontology of labor. To act, one must have an at least approximate knowledge into the

¹ "The possibility of impossible" will be further discussed with respect to Heidegger but especially to Badiou.² Lukács, *HCC*, 135.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 135.

conditions and into the effects of the action and that the more one labors the more knowledge is produced as a result of the interaction with the nature, with other human beings and with the previously accumulated knowledge. If what a person knows is the laws he is using; what s/he doesn't know is that the law can be torn apart. One knows how to act in a given order; one indeed knows that the order is unfair; what one does not know is that everything can be reorganized in an egalitarian way. The party does not possess the definitive knowledge of a better world, but experiment and invent so that a vision of the future reveals itself. This vision of the better future is precisely what is missed in the contemporary politics that has one recipe toward the future: fear.

But how can the party create situations where the present will reveal itself as “it will appear one day in the messianic light,” if it does not know the totality of mediations? Lukács' answer lies with the struggle: The “new” that can never be forecasted is the marker of history, and the only way to recognize the new qua new in its embryonic form is through struggle.¹ The ideological influence of the party is not only manifested in the conscious ‘pedagogical’ acts: the “pure” and the “practical” reason cannot be separated.² Yet even in leadership Lukács is clear that the party cannot impose its tactics upon the masses.

On the contrary, it must continuously *learn* from their struggle and their conduct of it. But it must remain active while it learns, preparing the next revolutionary undertaking. It must unite the spontaneous discoveries of the masses, which originate in their correct class instincts, with the totality of the revolutionary struggle, and bring them to consciousness.

¹ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 35-36.

² ———, *A Defence* 63.

The party must explain “their own actions to the masses” thus maintain the continuity and help the further development of the revolutionary struggle. At this point the definition of party is immensely broad, any social entity; a small collective, a broad organization, even an individual may assume the role of the party. So long as their actions shed a light upon the limits of the existing order and provide an insight toward an egalitarian future, these groups or individuals do not even need to be openly and consciously communists. On the other hand, the writings of Lukács on the nature of the party do not stem from an abstract perspective but from the notion of [totality], which imposes a limit upon the creative potentials of his ideas. This limit is clearly seen in his statements which argue that in the context of the proletarian revolution the party must educate first the workers and then the rest of humanity in “freedom and discipline;” and that it must also supply the spontaneously arising movement with a goal and direction.¹ How can the party be able to perform this double function? How can the spontaneous jam session dancing around the borders of innovation and madness turn into a well ordered orchestra following the steps of a carefully designed plan? This is where the formula emancipation = “spontaneous revolutionary self-education” + party agitation and propaganda fails. The problem is the problem of organization.²

¹ ———, "The Moral Mission of the Communist Party."

² ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 25.

II.e. Restraining the Party: Organization

The creative madness at one point must come to a decisive point. For a practice to be genuine, it has to be “directed toward totality. However, the recognition of totality can never be spontaneous. It has to be introduced ‘from outside,’ that is with the help of the theory, into the consciousness of those who act.”¹ In other words, the multiplicity of the theoretical activity must come to an end to give way to a concrete plan. This is why Lukács dismisses the Menshevik praise of spontaneity which supposedly makes them lose the sight of totality.² Lukács’ insight coming from 1970 speaks to our present:

What is happening is grotesque. Lacking a theory, Marxists are condemned to trail along after daily events. Collective moments erupt, and are called “spontaneous” – the movements of students, the young, and so forth – and then the Marxists run to catch up with the events, to understand them after the fact. Their theory is little more than a rationalization of their surprise.³

In the same way, he criticizes Rosa Luxemburg’s “overestimation of the spontaneous, elemental forces of the Revolution” of her idea that “living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them.”⁴ Luxemburg, however, is different than Mensheviks, for instance she agrees that “opportunism” has to be fought against; she is aware of the tendencies that may be leading toward the degeneration of the movement. The major difference between the Lukács/Lenin line and hers is that while the former believe that this fight has to be conducted

¹ ———, “Lenin – Theoretician of Practice,” 103.

² ———, *HCC*, 310.

³ Ferrarotti, “Conversation with György Lukács,” 32.

⁴ Lukács, *HCC*, 279. Italics removed.

organizationally she believes in an ideological fight. Why Lukács dismisses the ideological struggle is not so clear: Can't the better perspective of totality be understood by the masses in a discussion of ideas? Or, is the theoretical discussion a loss of time? Rather than explicitly criticizing Luxemburg's position, Lukács argues that in order for an idea to be a force affecting reality it must assume an organizational form; a theory without an organization is an empty idea. Thus, in an essay written in the same year with the critique of Luxemburg, he defines the organization as "the form of mediation between theory and practice. And, as in every dialectical relationship, the terms of the relation only acquire concreteness and reality in and by virtue of this mediation."¹ But this mediation comes with a price: not all the discussions, antagonisms and the disagreements that are perfectly compatible in theoretical debates are so in organizational form. In this way, organization is an exclusionary apparatus that brings together compatible forms of ideas and gives them a concrete existence contributing to the process of distillation toward the "exclusive singleness."

Organizational form as a mediation means one further thing: it is a non-deterministic process that is also guided by accidents. It also depends on the wrong or correct decisions of the individuals. There is no necessity that correct theory will assume the proper organizational form. This can be bad news for the countries with advanced

¹ Ibid., 299.

working class movements but good news for the countries where such movements have not yet obtained enough force:

Thus, the Russian proletariat was to a great extent spared those hesitations and regressions to be found in the experience of all the developed countries without exception –not in the course of successful class struggle where they are unavoidable, but in theoretical clarity and in tactical and organizational confidence.¹

In other words, thought which becomes concrete through organization is a force capable of changing the course of material history. Regardless of the severity of the situation and the balance of power it dictates, there is always a space for the egalitarian politics to initiate a sequence of radical change. On the other hand, the problem in Lukács' account of the party as an organizational form lies with its unquestioned praise of discipline. The way organizational exclusiveness is maintained can only be through the party discipline. Here, Lukács is the first to follow Lenin in admitting its importance; not only in his writings but also in his life choices. Should one dismiss Lukács' idea of party in its entirety because of the undue role it gives to the discipline? Here Lukács' idea of reification can provide a salvation: He had foreseen that when the existing reification one is overcome, there is always the possibility that another one will start with its new terms and conditions.² This means that he knew that there is always the possibility that what one does to solve the problem of today, becomes the problem of tomorrow. This is why Lukács

¹ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 16.

² ———, *HCC*, 335.

refused to give a fixed definition of the organizational form, his idea of the party as an organized entity is rather a fluid one as “simultaneously product and producer of itself.”¹

In other words, Lukács does not suffer from not having read Foucault to learn the fallacies of disciplinary organizations. He is well aware of the fact that inner life of the party carries the dangers of the capitalist inheritance, such as “ossification, bureaucratization, and corruption.”² He knows that the party can reproduce the forms of the inegalitarian society. He certainly must have given a critical thought about discipline: about the genuine product of the factory and the military barracks. But in his writings he is nonetheless using discipline as an unquestioned principle, why? The answer to this question requires one further step into the discussion of the place of ethics in its relation to totality and politics.

II.f. Ethics and Totality

The mainstream understanding of Lukács’ intellectual development proposes more or less four periods in his work as it relates to ethics: first, a “Kantian” interest in ethics in its relation to aesthetics, which ends up with a brief discovery of Hegel that will guide him toward Marx. Second period is that of an almost overnight transition to Marxism. The ethical concerns miraculously vanish. Lukács finds an easy fix to the aporias of moral philosophy by fleeing toward historical materialism. The political writings of this period

¹ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 37.

² ———, *HCC*, 335.

constitute the foundation of 20th century Western Marxism. The third period is that of willing subservience to Stalinist dogma. It starts during the 1930s and goes on until the 1960s and produced ‘bad’ writings and polemics. The final phase is the return to the initial project of ethics. However, with the principle “no ethics without ontology,” he starts writing his ontology. But working on the specificity of aesthetics; and forms of being does not leave him enough time to write the final project he planned on ethics. In this period Lukács explicitly criticizes Stalinism and assumes an anti-authoritarian position.

The claim of this dissertation is that these periods appear antithetical to each other because of a failure to understand the dialectical relation between [totality] and totality. To understand how this relation produces the ethical categories one can start with the final period of Lukács’ work: Tertullian notes that Lukács’ initial task was to write an “ethics.” But in his ethical writings he wanted to avoid not only “the pitfall of moralism” but also “Realpolitik” as forms of moral praxis. This task in turn required the study of the evolution of forms of human praxis, as well as the interconnection of moral and other values: hence, “no ethics without ontology.”¹ The periodization breaks down precisely with this enunciation because it declares what Lukács came to realize in 1919: that the discussion of ethics in the abstract is a vain effort. Ethical action can only be discussed in the concrete context. As argued in the first chapter, freedom is only possible and meaningful in its relation to necessity. Thus ethics make sense so long as it is established in relation to

¹ Nicholas Tertullian, "Lukács' Ontology," in *Lukács Today: Essays in Marxist Philosophy*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988), 243-44.

concrete totality. In this sense, Lukács' ideas concerning ethical action as well as his own personal choices are established in the context of the proletarian revolution, defined by the Leninist party organization.

Before proceeding to analyze Lukács' ethics derived from the proletarian totality, it is crucial to underline his idea of organization that forms the material context of the ethical action. Although Lukács' notion of discipline appears to be indistinguishable from that of the factory/military model, his ideas on the organizational hierarchy have nothing to do with Fordist / Leninist organizational models. The form of the Leninist party is that of a pyramid, with the leaders on top and the mass basis is at the bottom, it is a form that is designed for the power to flow from top to the bottom. It is marked by the distinction and the privilege of party leadership and management. Lukács obviously does not explicitly criticize Leninist party; to the contrary he claims to give its very definition. However, the model he criticizes and the alternative he proposes is obvious, even to Lenin who criticized Lukács with "ultra-leftism."¹ What is the claim of Lukács? He argues that the very division that separates the active leadership and the passive group that constitutes the mass basis of the party is a product of the bourgeois party organizations. This form allows its mass

¹ Lenin's explicit reference is to the article "On the Question of Parliamentarianism" by "Comrade G.L." This is a short note sent to the journal *Kommunismus*, which congratulates Béla Kun for demolishing anti-parliamentarianism. Lenin takes sides with Kun and says that "G. L.'s article is very Left-wing, and very poor. Its Marxism is purely verbal..." Lenin, "Kommunismus," 165. This is Lenin's only explicit reference to Lukács, there is no reason to believe that Lenin would think differently had he read *HCC*. As Žižek notes, Lukács has to completely ignore some of the major texts of Lenin in order to maintain his Leninism. Slavoj Žižek, "Postface: Georg Lukács as the Philosopher of Leninism," in *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*, ed. John Rees (London; New York: Verso, 2000), 179. Besides, Lukács often finds the textual basis of his Leninism in the lesser known passages.

component only one freedom: that of an “engaged observer.” He further argues that this division between the leader and the follower relies on a mechanical division of labor that needs to be overcome, thus a genuine freedom must be given to every participant.¹ In the communist party:

Every hierarchy in the party (and while the struggle is raging it is inevitable that there should be a hierarchy), must be based on the suitability of certain talents for the objective requirements of the particular phase of the struggle. If the revolution leaves a particular phase behind, it would not be possible to adapt oneself to the exigencies of the new situation merely by changing one’s tactics, or even by changing the form of the organisation (e.g. exchanging illegal methods for legal ones). What is needed in addition is a reshuffle in the party hierarchy: the selection of personnel must be exactly suited to the new phase of the struggle.²

This does not only mean that different people must have different responsibilities depending on the different phases of the political struggle. In the same lines, Lukács goes on to say that party members should not be seen as office holders following a “duty” but they must “extend to every possible kind of party work.”³ This is why the party “transcends the reified divisions according to nation, profession, etc., and according to modes of life (economics and politics) by virtue of its action.”⁴ Besides, he is very well aware that even if the temporary hierarchies cause the leaders to be isolated, the criticism of the membership base will come only too late. Party must always act as a whole, with the active participation

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 318.

² *Ibid.*, 336. Italics added.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

of all its members.¹ Here Lukács' is farthest possible from the Fordist/Leninist model of organization and yet strangely close to Heidegger's claim about the organism: it is not the organ that has capacities; rather the capacity (*Fähigkeit*) has organs.² It is not the party hierarchy that must dictate the actions, but the required actions for the tasks at hand must dictate the form of the hierarchy as well as the distribution of the tasks and roles in this hierarchy. Following Heidegger's discussion of the unicellular protoplasmic creatures; it is possible to call this organism a polymorphic party.³ When the party is thought as the vigilant prophet of the radical new, it is clear that the polymorphic model of organization is suited to the recognition of its emergence and is capable to transform into a mode appropriate to it. Moreover, the constant transformation of the party also allows the experimental mode oriented to discover and narrate the limits, the cracks and the fissures of the present political order as a whole.

When Lukács discusses the question of ethics in *HCC*, the concrete context is that of the Leninist party. However, it should be emphasized at this point that his expectations

¹ Ibid., 336-37.

² Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 221.

³ "The so-called lower animals, the amoebae and infusoria, only have the protoplasm of a single cell at their disposal. We distinguish between ectoplasm and endoptasm. The tiny protoplasmic creatures are structureless and formless. They display no firm animal shape at all and that is why we describe them as polymorphic creatures. *They have to form their necessary organs individually in each case, only to destroy them again in turn. Their organs are therefore temporary organs.* This is the case with the amoebae. With the infusoria certain organs do remain in place, indeed all of those organs involved in propulsion and grasping, whereas the vegetative organs which serve the process of nutrition are not firmly fixed (pararoaecium). The other organs by contrast are dependent upon the protoplasm. Around the food in each case there forms 'an aperture which first becomes a mouth, then a stomach, then an intestine and finally an anal tract.' We are thus confronted by a determinate sequence of organs which replace one another in this specific sequence. This conclusively shows that the capacities for feeding and for digesting are prior to the organs in each case." Ibid., 224. Italics added.

from the party members are derived from the notion of the polymorphic party. In a process where the leaders and the ordinary members may easily exchange places and where the entire organization is actively involved in decision making, it is not merely possible but it is imperative to ask nothing less than the total commitment and devotion from the participants. This devotion is not comparable an empty, blind submission to authority; it is a submission that is a required only to become more active in a project that reveals the utmost creativity of human action in a collaborative process. This is why Lukács argues that the meaning of freedom is freedom is “the conscious subordination of the self to that collective will that is destined to bring real freedom into being.”¹ This subordination thus requires a degree of discipline, because this is the only way through which the emergence of the collective will is possible.² The closely-knit organization of the party, as well as its “iron discipline and its demand for total commitment tears away the reified veils that cloud the consciousness of the individual in capitalist society.”³ In other words, conscious submission to the collective will is the only way to fight reification; the price for this is to subordinate one’s whole “personality and existence to the party.”⁴

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 315.

² *Ibid.*, 316. It is possible to say that in this way *HCC* is far from overcoming the so called “fact-value dichotomy;” the achievement of the book is rather a new definition of these: The possibility emancipation is stuck in the depths of existing society; to bring it to the surface is only possible by an act of will. See: Norman Fischer, “Hegelian Marxism and Ethics,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 8, no. 1-2 (1984).

³ Lukács, *HCC*, 339.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

Here Lukács never asks one crucial question: what is the nature of the discipline appropriate to an ever-changing organization that requires the active participation of its members in every step? “Subordination,” “submission,” “discipline” are values that stem from the military barracks, factories and in some ways, from Kant. The problem here is that whereas Lukács’ organizational form blows away the basis for this notion of discipline, he still keeps his intellectual and personal commitment to it. An example here can be based on the Kantian distinction between the private usages of reason. In the famous example, Kant states that the officer taking orders from his superiors must obey the order because it is his duty; but must make his criticisms and observations public.¹ As discussed above, there is no place for ex post facto criticism of public reason in the model of the polymorphic party. Rather, in this model, it is the public use of reason that should lead to the decision. This is why Lukács emphasizes that the party offices have nothing to do with the Kantian notion of the duty. On the other hand, he fails to follow through the ethical consequences of abolishing the “duty” as a category. Why should obedience and submission remain valid, let alone fundamental categories of ethical action in the process of collective creation?

Besides, there are further problems: how does the idea of the polymorphic party coincide with the party as a way to achieve the exclusive singularity? Polymorphic party must be the form that is the most open to diverging ideas and forms of engagement; it should do the opposite of separating from other organizations and social groups. If there is

¹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Siegbert Reiss (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 56.

one way for justifying its status as an exclusionary device, it should be not on the basis of simple ideological disagreements. The exclusiveness should refer solely to its requirement of commitment from its members. The commitment, not to be confused with obedience, is a must: the polymorphic party requires the complete devotion of its members much more than any other organizational form.

The problem in Lukács' writings about the party as well as the tragedy of his personal life choices stem from the fact that that he abode by the ethical dictum drawn from the model of the polymorphic party in the empirical context of the pyramid-like organizations. Lukács, being the one who called the members to "risk their whole physical and moral existence" in order to comply with the decisions, is the one who did so for a period of forty years.¹ Lukács indeed did not merely preach but did actively practice a dangerous form of action. Yet it is still curious to note that Lukács as early as 1925 had seen perfectly that both the communist party and the communist state are not the simple instruments of a linear history but are capable of making serious mistakes that can reverse the course of the "objective" process toward a better society.² How can the man who knew the possibility of mistakes, the man who was smart enough to see those mistakes kept his loyalty to the party for half a century? In a way he deliberately chose to be on the right side

¹ Eörsi notes that the man who loved to quote Churchill's "period of consequence" knew that he was committing a sin by joining the party: In *Tactics and Ethics* he had accepted violence. *If* one accepts violence in theory *then* one cannot refuse becoming a political commissar; *if* one accepts being a political commissar *then* one cannot refuse to order the execution of deserters. See: Eörsi, "The Unpleasant Lukács," 10. Ironically, *if-then* rationality is Lukács answer to the extravagances of irrationalism.

² Lukács, *A Defence*

and be wrong against being right on the wrong side or to be right and have no side.¹ He did not need to see what has happened to Karl Korsch to know that choosing the right moral action or defending the right idea was a return to a monological way of life. In a passing criticism of Adorno, he called this position a “non-conformist conformity.”²

On the other hand, if [totality] calls for a complete submission; totality can see the larger picture created by the modes of submission emerging from the history. In *Labour*, Lukács gives an insight about this idea in a reconsideration of the long standing discussion of the ends and means. It should be noted here that in this specific text Lukács makes no explicit usage of “ends and means” in the political sense. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the specific discussion concerns the labor process; it is obvious that goals-tools discussion is written as a way to rethink the dialectical relation between the ends and the means in the political sense.³ Besides, it is possible here to pay heed once again to Heidegger who had reminded the relation between the root word of the organ, ὄργανον (organon, which literally means instrument) and the Greek word for work, ἔργον (ergon).⁴ Accordingly, one can say that the basic problem of organ-ization concerns the usage of instruments, or means to achieve certain ends, and thus see a basic link between the ways of thinking about the labor process and organizational issues. Lukács’ discussion of means and ends in labor can

¹ In the 6th scene of the *The Decision*, this is how the “three agitators” try to convince “the young comrade:” “Show us the path we must take, and we / Shall take it with you, but / Don't take the right path without us. / Without us it is / The most wrong of all.” Bertolt Brecht, “The Decision,” in *Collected Plays Volume Three Part Two*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1997), 82-83.

² Lukács, “Lukács on His Life and Work”: 56.

³ ———, *Labour*, 14-19.

⁴ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 213.

be summarized in three steps: The first one concerns the possibility of the ends and suggests that for an end to become a concrete possibility (rather than a utopia); the means must have reached a certain level. Human beings freely choose their goals, but some of these goals are mere dreams, some are realizable ends. For example, although flying has been a dream for centuries, it became a concrete possibility when the means for its realization has been invented. So the choice of ends always depends on the investigation of how far the means “manages to transform natural causality into a posited causality.”¹ The second process is the actual labor (or for the purposes of this study, the process of political action): Man works to achieve immediate goals, but labor constantly interposes mediation between the goals and the man.² In this step, the end absolutely commands and governs the means. Human will wills to give order to the capricious contingencies of the mediations. Lukács’ writings on *Tactics and Ethics*, on the legality, or his giving support to “revolutionary *Realpolitik*” are products of this precise moment in the dialectics of ends and means. These writings that claimed that ends justify means indeed drew a number of correct criticisms.³ However, there is one problem with the overall discussion of the ends and the means. It does not consider the dialectical, i.e. mediated unity of both; and treats the question on the basis of the choices of the isolated moments. The third step of Lukács’ discussion is especially important in this regard: when one moves one step away from the process of the construction of [totality] and establishes the continuity of the processes, one

¹ Lukács, *Labour*, 15.

² *Ibid.*, 101-02.

³ Besides, it would definitely not be a mistake to say that the political prescriptions of these texts, being a product of a specific period, are already outdated.

will realize that the hierarchy of means and ends is reversed. Quoting Hegel, Lukács reminds that the means is the “external middle term of the syllogism,” and it is thus superior to the finite ends through its externality.¹ This means three things in turn: first, when the end is achieved, the immediate enjoyment it gives vanishes away. The means used to achieve the ends, however, outlast the enjoyment. Secondly, the means provide the domination over the external world, but in positing the goals man is subject to the material necessities. Finally, with regards to labor, Lukács reminds that the tool provides the gateway to the knowledge of human development: its own creation, mode of its users, their conception of the world... etc. In a similar way, it is possible to say that the study of the means used by the successful political projects can provide similar information on the past ages. In its totality, what Lukács says is striking: Although in the actual process the ends must rule over the means; from a historical perspective the means used to achieve the goals outlast these goals as well as the subject who posit the goals and uses the means. Then should the question “what is to be done” be dropped for “how is to be done”? The answer is no. The “how” is the primary determinant from the perspective of the historical process, but to become so it must remain secondary in the isolated moment. This brings Lukács to arguably his favorite quotation from Marx: “They do not know it, but they do it” (*Sie*

¹ Lukács, *Labour*, 16.

wissen das nicht, aber sie tun).¹ For Lukács, this sentence suggests that a simple teleological positing, that starts with the investigation on the nature that leads to the creation of means, “consists of real acts of knowledge and thus contains the beginning, the genesis, of science” even though this is not consciously recognized by the subject. In this sense, the inner dialectic of the labor process leads to its continuous improvement.² Still, while man works and acts, although “teleological propositions are conscious,” the subject positing them “is unable to comprehend neither the preconditions nor the consequences of his activity.”³ As Murphy correctly noted, Lukács’ attitude is clearly distinct from the general trend based on the postmodern criticism of Marxism which fails to distinguish between “teleological positing” and “universal teleology.”⁴ Unlike the current criticism, which refuses both, Lukács argues that although the overall process, as a totality, has no goal; human action is impossible without positing a *telos* in the context of a [totality].

¹ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 166. Translated as: “They do this without being aware of it.” This quotation has long been misread and criticized as the manifestation of the basic definition of a simplistic notion of false consciousness. For example: “The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: ‘Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es’ (‘they do not know it, but they are doing it’). The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive naïveté: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it. That is why such a ‘naive consciousness’ can be submitted to a critical-ideological procedure.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 28. In his more recent work, Žižek keeps going back to this dictum and has been critical of his earlier position.

² Lukács, *Labour*, 18.

³ ———, “The Ontological Bases of Human Thought and Action,” 28. This statement obviously calls for the “cunning of reason.” See: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975). However, Lukács is explicit in the lack of a meta-historical reason that guides human actions.

⁴ Murphy, “The Ontological Turn in the Marxism of Georg Lukács and Antonio Negri,” 179.

The distinction between the telos that guides the [totality] and the non-teleological nature of totality is not a discovery of the mature Lukács. At the very beginning of the HCC, one can see a manifestation of this distinction:

Only when consciousness stands in such a relation to reality can theory and practice be united. But for this to happen the emergence of consciousness must become the decisive step which the historical process must take towards its proper end (an end constituted by the wills of men, but neither dependent on human whim, nor the product of human invention). The historical function of theory is to make this step a practical possibility.¹

Lukács argues here first that the consciousness is a step toward the proper end of history. So he seems to be accepting that there is a final end of history. But he continues to say that also that this end is although constituted by the wills of men, it is neither a product of arbitrary decisions nor an artificial product of the Spirit. In other words, although human will must be oriented toward the end; there is no way to establish that this end will be the absolute End of history.

In this context, party as the theoretical function of the revolutionary movement must take this possibility of emancipation that exists only as a tendency in a given society, and carry it to its logical conclusion: It must oppose the ‘false’ reality of what actually exists to the ‘true’ reality of the ‘ought.’² Not because this “ought” is the final telos of human

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 3. The text in parenthesis in its original: “(...) Menschenwillen zusammensetzenden, aber nicht von menschlicher Willkür abhängigen, nicht vom menschlichen Geiste erfundenem Ziele entgegen tun muß (...)” The explicit reference to Kant with the usages of *Wille* and *Willkür* (at the risk of simplifying: former refers to the “objective/legislative” and the latter to the “subjective/executive” aspects of the faculty of volition) may also suggest that Lukács was thinking about the Kantian problem of teleology while writing this passage.

² *Ibid.*, 258.

history, but because it is a concrete possibility in the given society. The people participating in the construction of the society to come must also know one further thing: there is no place for them in the world that they are set out to build:

“The present generation,” says Marx, “resembles the Jews whom Moses led through the wilderness. It must not only conquer a new world, it must also perish in order to make room for people who will be equal to a new world.” For the ‘freedom’ of the men who are alive now is the freedom of the individual isolated by the fact of property which both reifies and is itself reified. It is a freedom vis-à-vis the other (no less isolated) individuals.¹

In other words, what the present generation can know and can will is limited with the contingencies of the present epoch. A new world inhabited by human beings born out of different set of relations will not share the ends that can be conceived from the perspective of the existing one. This is why Marx did not write about the life in a communist society; to do so is the task of the ones who will live in this society. The theory as the “intellectual expression of the revolutionary process” must help the consciousness to emerge;² it must strive toward a “meaningful life;”³ but it must know: when it succeeds, it will cease to exist. Slavoj Žižek recently argued that the only form of subjectivity that is appropriate to the emancipatory communist project of our present consists of advancing so far in radical activism that self sacrifice will be the only option that remains.⁴ The implication of Lukács’

¹ Ibid., 315. The reference is to Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 114.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 2-3.

³ ———, *Labour*, 108.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, "Populism and Democracy." The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, University of London., 2009, Available at: http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/archive/audio/2009_06_Zizek/2009_06_18_SlavojZizek_PopulismAndDemocracy.mp3.

idea is the complete opposite of Žižek's: Lukács is not preaching and fetishizing an act that can be meaningful in a given circumstance, but irrelevant in many others. What he says is actually much more radical and frustrating than Žižek's statement. For Lukács, the revolutionary is the one who contributes to the collective creation of a world where her/his own existence and even dreams will become antiquated. There is no heroic self sacrifice for the revolutionary: only a world that looks down upon her/him, a world which approaches her/his ideas with contempt; a world where s/he will be considered old, naïve, and out of touch with reality; and these will happen in case of the success.

III. Aporias of the State

The success, that is the revolution, poses a further question: the state, which forces party as a theoretical agent to mutate into something different: party-state. Although communism should be marked by the "withering away" of the state, the actuality does not follow the historic tendency. Even in the fight against the state, its empirical reality cannot be undone only with theory. In any given moment, even in the chaos of the struggle, the proletariat will continue to think that the "state, laws and the economy of the bourgeoisie are the only possible environment for them to exist in"¹ This is not a result of a conscious betrayal or compromise. State seems to be the only static point in a world at the brink of chaos.² This is precisely what gives the party its mission to educate the masses toward socialism. The task at hand thus requires emancipating the proletariat from the life forms

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 262.

² *Ibid.*, 263.

created by the capitalism, which is the essence of revolutionary self education.¹ If the state is the physical manifestation of the “spiritual strength” of the existing society, then the knowledge made flesh is the best way to fight against it.² On the other hand, the experience of the revolution of 1917 has taught Lukács a valuable lesson: even after the revolution bourgeoisie remains as the most powerful class, which will do everything it can in order to restore the old order. Only by using state, the “*new powerful weapon* of class struggle,” that the proletariat can “undermine, isolate and destroy the bourgeoisie” and “win over and educate” the other social strata.³ So until the revolution, the state is a weapon at the hand of the bourgeoisie used to exploit the masses and to suppress their uprising even before it appears as a practical possibility. After the revolution, the same weapon is used against the old ruling class.

Unfortunately, things are quite more complicated than this basic explanation. The truth of the matter is that Lukács’ thoughts on the state give a complex puzzle full of radical intuitions that are in direct conflict with each other. What causes this chaos is twofold: first, there is already a tension between the two understandings of totality that prescribe distinct, yet dialectically related stances vis-à-vis the bourgeois state.⁴ Second, Lukács faces the question of how to organize the political life after the revolution as an immediate practical

¹ Ibid., 264.

² Ibid., 262.

³ Ibid., 69.

⁴ This does not mean that totality and [totality] have different states; rather, as will be shown in the discussion of Badiou, only [totality] can have a state. Yet the critique of the state of [totality] can come from different visions.

question. Not only does he have to deal with the implications of the two totalities, but he also feels compelled to baptize the actions of the newly born communist state with the sacred word of political philosophy.¹

For example, in an issue where the periodization of Lukács is relevant, Lukács of *HCC* believes that the problem of reification is a problem specific to the capitalist society. He believes that the existing alienation may be replaced with a new process of alienation, but this can happen so long as capitalism stays. The meaning of revolution and socialism here is obvious: the end of the process of reification. Despite Boer's argument that Lukács exemplifies the best attempt to remove the traces of theology from the political thought,² his earlier idea of revolution is drawn from the religious imagination that promises eternal / heavenly peace at the end of the ages of earthly suffering. The eternal peace, in the case of reification means the establishment of direct, unmediated relations; that is the end of dialectics, the end of history.³ The impossibility of the eternal redemption is a speculative question. But it is clear that in the starting point Lukács the dialectician and Lukács the militant are in serious disagreement with each other on its possibility. After decades and the

¹ Understandably, this led to the endless debates on who is the real Lukács. For a good review of these discussions: David Pike, "The Owl of Minerva: Reappraisals of Georg Lukács, East and West," *German Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (1988). For a critical account of Lukács' personal political choices: István Eörsi, "Georg Lukács and Gelebtes Denken: The Right to the Last Word," *New German Critique*, no. 23 (1981).

² Roland Boer, "Politics without Theology? The Case of Georg Lukács," in *Moderne Begreifen: Zur Paradoxie Eines Sozio-Ästhetischen Deutungsmusters*, ed. Christine Magerski, Robert Savage, and Christiane Weller (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts - Verlag, 2007).

³ To be fair to Lukács: he is absolutely against the vision of socialism as a static being; instead he views it as a process of becoming. Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 72. However, at this stage how socialism as a "moving target" is compatible with the idea of communism as the solution to the problem of reification remains unthought.

horrors of Stalin the mature Lukács returned back to the problem of alienation with a twist: it is no longer called reification (Verdinglichung) but objectification (Objektivierung).¹ He argues that not only art and science but institutions and laws created by human beings are all forms of objectification. The new problem is not to get rid of objectification at once but to find ways in which it can be used to create an egalitarian and free society. Unfortunately, at this point in his life Lukács also refrains from explicitly talking about a social order where this would be possible and what to do with the problem of the state toward and within that order.² Thus this discussion will first consider the problem that the existing communist state created in the thought of the Lukács of 1920's; and then his general understanding of state and its inner tensions will be exposed.

III.a. Revolution and the Communist State

In 1962, Lukács described Stalin as the apex of a pyramid composed of many little stalins.³ It would be a harsh judgment to argue that Lukács himself was one of these little stalins, but for a considerable period of time he kept silent, if not apologetic about the

¹———, *Die Eigenart Des Ästhetischen*. The first chapter of this study on the “problems of reflection (Widerspiegelung) in everyday life is particularly important. For a good study discussing the ontological account developed in this work: Kenneth Megill, “Georg Lukacs as an Ontologist,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 9, no. 4 (1969).

² The interviews in Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*. could have been a major exception. While the first two conversations “Being and Consciousness” and “Society and the Individual” are not directly on the matter, Lukács gives strong insights toward the problem of the state. During the third interview, “Elements for a Scientific Politics,” Lukács tries to open these insights but he is constantly diverted by his interviewer who tries to pull the conversation to the German politics of the day and make Lukács say how horrible the German Social Democratic party is.

³———, “Reflections on the Cult of Stalin.”

wrongs of this period.¹ This misguided “fidelity” to the event of 1917 is much more difficult to comprehend than the confusion of the “ought” of the polymorphic party with the “is” of the Leninist party, yet it starts in an analogous way.

As early as 1920, Lukács argued that communism stands for the creation of a social order where everyone can live the life that was available to aristocracy in the pre-capitalist Europe, and the life that no one can live under capitalism.² This statement is striking in many ways: First, it insists that even the bourgeoisie suffers under capitalism. Here Lukács is very close to Adorno and Horkheimer who had proposed an unlikely metaphor for the modern bourgeoisie: Odysseus, who had to be bound to the mast of ship while listening to the song of the sirens.³ The bourgeoisie has accumulated an unimaginable wealth and power; but there is a price to be paid, the fullest enjoyment of life is also prohibited to them. Lukács could easily compare the bourgeoisie with the class he was born into. He had the first hand knowledge of what it meant to have someone like Thomas Mann as a guest at the dinner table. He knew the profound experience that came with the privilege to dedicate oneself to the development of ‘higher’ human faculties. For the mature Lukács this transformation is of historical nature: the cave man was not very different than other animals in the sense that he had to spend most of his time for the purposes of his physical reproduction. If there is anything that can be called “progress” in history, it consists of the

¹ This includes his notorious statement: “I have always thought that the worst form of socialism was better to live in than the best form of capitalism,” ———, “Lukács on His Life and Work ”: 58.

² ———, “The Old Culture and the New Culture,” 5.

³ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 46-47.

reduction of the time devoted to physical reproduction and the emergence of “free time” available to human beings that enables them to create and appreciate marvels of arts, science and philosophy. While capitalism creates the material possibility for millions of people to have their own time, it simultaneously destroys it both for the worker and for the bourgeois.¹ In a way, Lukács wanted everyone to benefit from what has been exclusively available to him as he was growing up in an aristocratic family; so communism at this stage meant to share the distinction of the few with everyone.² Here Lukács may find an unlikely ally: John Dewey who had argued that Democracy is the “aristocracy carried to its limit.”³ But while Dewey believed that the aristocracy of everyone could be achieved with social democracy and education, Lukács believed that it would take a revolution to make this happen.

Does this mean that Lukács’ is a reactionary with a human face? Does he feel nothing but contempt for the bourgeois society? Does he think that capitalism sole contribution is to the economic basis for the revolution? The answer is no. It is the bourgeois revolution which promised “liberty, equality and fraternity;” yet these remain unfulfilled under capitalism. The task of proletarian revolution is also to realize these

¹ Adorno’s work provides a fuller insight into this process than Lukács’, for a summary of his overall stance: Theodor W. Adorno, “Free Time,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001).

² To contrast: During his service for the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic socialism meant, among other things, to make sure that working class children may use public baths freely, thus to give thousands of them the chance of having a proper bath for the first time in their lives.

³ John Dewey, “Individuality, Equality and Superiority,” in *The Political Writings*, ed. Debra Morris and Ian Shapiro (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993), 77.

demands.¹ Freedom, in its modern meaning is the invention of bourgeoisie, which however remains restrained to the idea of free market. But the very idea is an explosive weapon that can be turned against the capitalist society itself.² It would be absolutely wrong to say that the capitalism creates a few fundamental ideas that can work against itself, rather the entire realm of the culture provides the necessary space for anti-capitalist mobilization.

It was argued in the previous chapter that the capitalism creates a double movement toward both extreme totalization and extreme fragmentation. It should be further added to this depiction that these fragments do indeed have a relative autonomy from the capitalist order. Lukács saw that the realms of ideas and culture provide a peculiar opportunity for the working class politics. He argued that the culture of capitalism can only be the critique of capitalism,³ which meant that the capitalist economy and the capitalist culture had created an inner tension that could open a space for the revolutionary intervention. Here Lukács explicitly argues that liberation from capitalism means overcoming the domination of the economy over the other aspects of life.⁴ Thus the educative function of proletarian politics gains a new definition:

[I]t is not enough for the proletariat *to fight objectively for the interests* of the other exploited strata. Its state must also serve to overcome by education the inertia and the fragmentation of these strata and *to train them for active and independent participation in the life of the state*. One of the noblest

¹ Lukács, *Lenin: A Study*, 49.

² ———, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," 9-10.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

functions of the Soviet system is to bind together those moments of social life which capitalism fragments.¹

Besides the question of whether this is an accurate description of the early stages of the soviet system, this passage is important because it shows the Lukácsian strategy to fight capitalism. Against the capitalism that works as a totality to fragment, revolutionary politics consists of a fragment's (proletariat) actions toward the construction of a totality. But the idea of class coalition as a way for the construction of totality creates further problems in Lukács' thought when the state is concerned. For example, despite his explicit dislike of bureaucracy, he sees no problem in saying that the state planned economy shows an "Aufhebung of the autonomy of economy." Economy is no longer an independent realm dominating other worlds of human existence but is itself dominated by the logic of administration.² Here Lukács confuses sublation with undoing: indeed the logic of administration gives an end to the logic of the market. Does this mean a positive overcoming; i.e. bringing the problem to a higher plane? What are the problems associated with a group of government officials making the economic decisions? Lukács himself employs the term "state capitalism," to describe this situation and argues that "state capitalism" is the same with "monopoly capitalism" except that "it is made to serve the

¹ Here Lukács has a great confusion of "is" and "ought." He continues: "Everywhere, the Soviet system does its utmost to relate human activity to general questions concerning the state, the economy, culture, etc., while fighting to ensure that the regulation of all such questions does not become the privilege of an exclusive bureaucratic group remote from social life as a whole." ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 67-68. He is obviously not that naïve to believe that this is actually happening. Probably, instead of taking the risk of becoming an outsider who tells the truth of what is actually happening he prefers to stay inside and try to pull what is happening toward what should happen.

² ———, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," 13.

interests of the whole people.” Note here that the language of totality as the beyond is replaced with a totality which is the aggregation of the interests of everyone. The concept of totality, originally invented as a tool to overcome the interest based politics turn into its justification. “Controlling the heavy industry,” not the creation of a new economy under the name of socialism is the task after the revolution. The reason Lukács gives for this is that “until the global revolution is complete, the proletariat remains the weaker class.”¹

Lukács does not simply say that exploitation and the relations of power concerning production are fine so long as the outcome benefits the interest of the society. He knows that “state capitalism” has nothing to do with communism as an emancipatory project. As one of the first philosophers who discovered, what would later be called “ideological state apparatuses” he knows that state agencies are not simple instruments to achieve certain explicit goals. After showing that “the creation of a bureaucratic state apparatus which gives large sections of the petty bourgeoisie a material and moral interest in the stability of the state, a bourgeois party system, press, schools system, religion, etc.” he argues that

(...) all these further the aim of preventing the formation of an independent ideology among the oppressed classes of the population which would correspond to their own class interests; of binding the individual members of these classes as single individuals, as mere ‘citizens’, to an abstract state reigning over and above all classes; *of disorganizing these classes as classes* and pulverizing them into atoms easily manipulated by the bourgeoisie.²

¹_____, *Lenin: A Study*, 76-77.

² *Ibid.*, 66.

He definitely knows that the state bureaucracy is not a simple tool to manipulate; it is rather invented with a specific purpose. Regardless of who is “using” it, the state will do what it is built to do. Under socialism why should it miraculously start functioning in a different way? In a later work, Lukács would admit that the bureaucratization was one of the evils that had started during the very early stages and that worked against the revolution,¹ yet he never stood against the administrative logic of the party-state. As one cannot say that the problem will be solved “after the revolution,” because it already took place; Lukács postpones them to be solved after the “world revolution.” While postponing these problems he would subscribe to the “socialism in one country” idea given the situation of Russia and the global status quo. In other words, communism has to be deferred endlessly. But does the state capitalism serve the interests of the whole people? Lukács says that the proletarian state is at least honest that it does not hide the fact that it is a class state.² In short, Lukács starts with communism as the idea of overcoming domination of economic logic over human emancipation; then he states that state domination oriented toward the public good is better than the economic domination; and he ends up stating that the rule of one class, which is nothing than the rule of the party acting on behalf of that class is the only available option. Thus he starts with a Marxism oriented toward human emancipation and ends up subscribing to a version of Leninism that is very close to Stalin.

¹ See: ———, *The Process of Democratization*, trans. Susanne Bernhardt and Norman Levine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). The later Lukács would also insist that the aspirations toward socialist democracy should never be dealt with administrative methods. ———, “Lukács on His Life and Work”: 50.

² ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 68. Maybe the domination that tries to hide itself is better than the honest domination. Once power has nothing to hide, it will be less likely to hesitate in resorting to violence.

III.b. Democracy: Beyond State as the Locus of the Struggle

There is a passage in *Lenin*, which is directly derived from the vision of the political party as an unceasing experiment. Writing this short statement Lukács knowingly takes the risk of being labeled as idealist in the debates of 1920's: "For Revisionism, all thought which points in a practical way beyond the horizons of bourgeois society is illusory and *utopian*."¹ For Lukács, this is precisely the point of view of totality: a gaze that points beyond the limits of existing order. The party can contribute to the formation of this gaze by its experimental politics yet as an experimental agent it cannot be a pure speculative device: Pointing to socialism without the "dialectical interaction with the day-to-day problems of the class struggle makes a metaphysics of it, a *utopia*"² Workers rightly consider socialists who are only talking about the theory without addressing concrete problems as *utopians*.³ Here pure thought –socialism as a project of human emancipation, faces the concrete problems stemming from everyday life as well as those of institutionalized politics, global situation, culture as well as structures of a given society in a give time... etc. This is how the narrative of the whole is built: The mediation between the image of totality and the concrete facts of the day determines the definition of [totality] that comes as a result. However, for Lukács this transformation does not take place in an explicit manner and his vision thus becomes the victim of the concrete losing touch with the broader vision of totality, i.e. human emancipation:

¹ Ibid., 56. Italics added.

² Ibid., 73. Italics added.

³ Ibid., 72. Italics added.

Because the proletariat fights against bourgeois class rule and strives to create a classless society, the undialectical and therefore unhistorical and unrevolutionary analysis of opportunism concludes that the proletariat must fight against all class rule; in other words, its own form of domination should under no circumstances be an organ of class rule, of class oppression, Taken abstractly this basic viewpoint is *utopian*...¹

Thus Lukács, the utopian who dares to imagine forms of interaction beyond the limits of the existing society sees no problem to call those who dare to imagine ending the domination as such utopian. Does this mean that Lukács' apologetic attitude about communist state extends a baptism of state as such? Not at all, Lukács' critique of the bourgeois state radically differs from what he says about the communist state. This division between two states may be stemming from an earlier text where he had written: "When the structures made by man for man are really adequate to man, they are his necessary and native home (...)" Maybe he thinks that the context of the party-state provides "the home" for the modern man. The problem here starts with the fact that there can be no criteria that can establish whether a given structure is adequate to man's essence. Rather, it can be claimed that no structure, no institution, no construct will ever be fitting to the divergences of human multiplicity. While Lukács' position leads to silence for the structures he finds adequate, this latter attitude will lead to a permanent critique of the state as reification, magnificently put by Lukács himself in the same text:

When the soul-content of these constructs can no longer directly become soul, when the constructs no longer appear as the agglomerate and concentrate of interiorities which can at any moment be transformed back into a soul, then they must, in order to subsist, achieve a power which

¹ Ibid., 64. Italics added.

dominates men blindly, without exception or choice. And so men call 'law' the recognition of the power that holds them in thrall, and they conceptualise as 'law' their despair at its omnipotence and universality: conceptualise it into a sublime and exalting logic, a necessity that is eternal, immutable and beyond the reach of man.¹

This discussion can be extended to the very idea of the state itself. The excruciating law, blind submission to domination, and the man haunted by his own creation are not exclusive products of capitalism. They existed before capitalism in different forms: in a sense it is French revolution and other bourgeois revolutions that first mobilized the broader public with their appeal to overthrow these structures. Yet after these revolutions, capitalism and the bourgeois state reproduced the reification of law and power in a different form. The historical lesson is not merely that of the hypocrisy of bourgeoisie; but that of the difficulty in overthrowing the power of manmade structures. How can one be sure that the newly invented collective action will surely evade the penetration of power into the movement? How can Lukács be sure that the revolution that calls itself communist will live up to the promise of its name?²

It can be further argued that Lukács was always aware that the state is the bearer of "bad" totality. For him, the culmination of Hegel's 'false' ontology is when the particularity "passes over into universality" by developing itself into totality. With a

¹ ———, *The Theory of the Novel*, 16-17.

² This is not only the problem of the communist revolution whose fate is well-known. Contemporary, post-Foucault attempts of organization seem to believe that there is a possibility of getting rid of the power in the collective action. They seem to be forgetful of the lesson of Foucault: the power will permeate everywhere; the only thing to do is to remain alert. The one who thinks that power can be avoided will end up reproducing it. For an influential book where this problem is evident: John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power* (London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002).

lengthy quotation he shows that for Hegel this process gives the particular “its truth and the right to which its positive actuality is entitled.” For Lukács, this discussion stems from a vision that is limited by the boundaries of the bourgeois state as the source of legitimacy and rights. The parts can only count as true, and thus claim their rights so long as they stand in a relation to State: “This already indicates that the relationship of the bourgeois society and the bourgeois state is conceived in a one-sided and mechanical fashion as an absolute and ideal supremacy of state.”¹ The very notion of state as the bearer of the principle of totality is the outcome of a misguided dialectics. The Lukács of 1920s was wrong in precisely this point: He wanted to construct a state that is worthy of totality and this failed miserably.

The new question is then what to do without attempting to gain the state power, and yet not follow the logic of the Foucauldian local resistance. Here Lukács has valuable lessons to teach: on the question of legality, on parliamentary democracy and on the place of the revolutionary movement with respect to the state. On the question of legality, the above quoted statement summarizes Lukács’ thoughts which can be called Kafkaesque *avant la lettre*.² Law is a reified yet seemingly omnipotent human construct which forces its

¹ Lukács, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 17-18.

² *The theory of the novel* took its final shape in the winter of 1914-15, a decade before the publication of *The Trial*. On the other hand, I found no information on whether Lukács had read *The Penal Colony* which was written and published in 1914.

own creators to submission.¹ The submission however is not the same thing with the approval.² To the contrary, deriving legitimacy from submission; translating the submission into approval is the specific task of the ideology and it has to be fought against. Does this mean that the revolutionary movement must consciously break the law and choose the path of illegality? For two reasons the answer is no: Firstly, the state can easily control the isolated infringements of law.³ But more importantly to make a “grand gesture” of breaking the law only proves that law still maintains its moral authority.⁴ This is why the revolutionary movement must get beyond both the “legality at any price” and romanticism of illegality.⁵ The point is simply not caring whether a given action falls within the approval of the legal order. But is this mode specific to the communist revolution? Not at all. It was first the revolutionary bourgeoisie that refused “to admit that a legal relation had a *valid* foundation merely because it existed *in fact*.”⁶

In the same fashion, Lukács refuses to abide by the boundaries of the legal order: He rejects the arithmetical model of the representative democracy and its “*undialectical concept of the majority*.” This model where theoretically the voice of every citizen is valid works under the false pretense of equality; and is deceitful in its claim to represent the

¹ An excellent discussion of Lukács’ concept of law can be found in Varga, *The Place of Law in Lukács’ World Concept*. However I do not completely agree with Varga’s claim that Lukács of HCC, influenced by Weber, understood law as a mere calculable instrument.

² Lukács, HCC, 257.

³ Ibid., 261.

⁴ Ibid., 263.

⁵ Ibid., 256.

⁶ Ibid., 107.

society as a whole. It considers human beings as “abstract individuals, abstract citizens or isolated atoms” instead of “concrete human beings who occupy specific positions within social production, whose social being (and mediated through it, whose thinking) is determined by this position.” The most deteriorating aspect of the institutionalized democracy lies in the fact that it “connects the naked and abstract individual directly with the totality of the state.” The individual is not at all empowered by the bourgeois democracy; s/he is crushed by the ‘bad’ totality of the almighty state. The “pulverized” society is not merely creating “an advantage for the bourgeoisie but is precisely the decisive condition of its class rule.”¹

Given the fact that Lukács refuses legality and formal democracy it may appear as if he is subscribing to the vicious circle of blind violence that is and has always been popular within the anti-systemic movements. Indeed Lukács’ politics have something to do with violence but not in the familiar way. Practically the task of the party is to shake the image of the state as the point of stability in a world on the brink of chaos.² Theoretically, the whole point of violence is to unmask the state as the bearer of bad totality. The revolutionary movement must establish the correct [totality] only by exploring the limits of the existing one, and in this process the clash with the state is inevitable. To move beyond the limits of the capitalist [totality] is only possible “when class and inter-party struggles no

¹ Ibid., 65.

² Lukács also makes the case for the relative autonomy of state: During the period where a “balance of power” is established among the classes, the state may assume an exceptional degree of independence. Ibid., 242-43.

longer take place within the existing state order but begin to explode its barriers and point beyond them.” The revolutionary struggle that “appears” for the state power in actuality forces the state “*to participate* openly in them.” The struggle is not just a fight against the state; its objective is to expose it “as a *weapon of class struggle*, as one of the most important instruments for the maintenance of class rule.”¹ This means that the most important question is not that of the violence revolutionary party will exercise but that of the state violence it will draw upon itself: The revolutionary violence is not exercised but attracted upon by the party. Communist parties must force the governments to break their own law at every possible instance.² The state cannot survive if it is “compelled to use force every time it is challenged.”³

This final Lukács openly declares the state as the enemy, as the “power factor against which proletariat’s organized power has to be mobilized.”⁴ He exorcises as pseudo-Marxist anyone who thinks that the state is the object of struggle, that it stands above classes. From this perspective, politics oriented to take the control of the state is absolutely misguided. But then there is a Lukács who thinks that “the disease itself is the inability to see the state as nothing more than a power factor,”⁵ who views the state as a weapon. If the state is merely a weapon, then the struggle may easily be oriented to gain its control without needing the pseudo-Marxist fetishism. This is where Lukács’ trouble begins; he

¹ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 60.

² ———, *HCC*, 265.

³ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 260. Italics removed.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

constantly attempts to reconcile his anti-state, anti-static politics with the existence of a party-state that claims to act on behalf of the communism. Maybe the problem can be exposed in a very simple declaration about the workers' Soviets: "*they are an anti-government.*"¹ It should be first noted that the Soviets that were originally dazzling instances of direct democracy. Yet when Lukács was writing these lines they were already ceasing to exist as "grassroots movements;" rather they were transformed into administrative, government bodies. Here the word "anti" of Soviets as the anti-government should be understood in the way Žižek proposed to read: as a government that is a not-government.² While trying to move away from the logic of governing and administration Lukács falls in the trap of the government that on the one hand stands for the "excessive core" of governing and at the same time refuses to call itself for what it is.

IV. Conclusion

In his postface to *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, Žižek starts by summarizing the view that Lukács is the philosopher of Leninism, who probably understood Lenin better than Lenin himself.³ Thus he reads Lukács to understand the transition from Marxism to Leninism and then to Stalinism. There is no need for a lengthy discussion to show this process. Three mediated terms will answer it all: The history

¹ ———, *Lenin: A Study*, 63.

² Žižek's elaboration of the "anti" compares the statement "he is not dead" with "he is un-dead." Based on this he reads Lacan's self definition as an "anti-philosopher" not in the sense of "I am not a philosopher" but in the sense of "I am a not-philosopher." In other words, "I stand for the excessive core of philosophy itself, for what is in philosophy more than philosophy." Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 21-22, 389.

³ ———, "Postface: Georg Lukács as the Philosopher of Leninism," 153, 79.

(universal), the class (particular) and the party (singular).¹ Lukács had made the first mediation explicit: Communist Party is “concrete mediation between man and history.”² Thus the party mediates between the class and the history, enabling the proletariat to become aware of its mission. It helps to transform the class-in-itself to class-for-itself. However, this requires that the particular interests of proletariat overlap with the universal interests of humanity, to transform the proletariat into the universal class. As proletariat can only have trade union consciousness, the party has to understand historical process and educate the proletariat.³ But this process brings an undue role to the party, contradicting the statement that only a totality can understand totality: Lukács has to give the party the role of getting in touch with the historical totality. Thus the second mediation: class mediates between the party and the history. Party becomes the subject whose privileged position allows it to intervene into and redirect the objective historical process. This finally leads to the Stalinist mediation where the universal mediates between the party and the class. In other words, the party uses history and the universal as pretexts in order to gain legitimization for the “domination over and exploitation of the working class.” Universal becomes the ontological trick to make the pragmatic decision stand.⁴ Whether this syllogism looks simplistic/mechanic or whether Lukács would object to some of its

¹ In a way to remind the mediations of the terms of title of the book: History –Class – Consciousness.

² Lukács, *HCC*, 318. Already the problem is evident: the party is the external middle term of the syllogism, thus superior to the two other terms. (See: above discussion of the tool)

³ After affirming Rosa Luxemburg’s statement that every seizure of power is premature, Lukács says: “the proletariat is forced to take power at a time and in a state of mind in which it inwardly still acknowledges the bourgeois social order as the only authentic and legal one.” *Ibid.*, 266. Italics removed.

⁴ Žižek, “Postface: Georg Lukács as the Philosopher of Leninism,” 159-60.

mediations can be discussed, yet it manages to give a one page explanation of what went wrong with Lukács' understanding of [totality.] The problem is that it relies on a paradox: It starts with the statement that what matters is the proletariat which carries the potential for the revolutionary class consciousness. To bring it to the front the party may play a "modest, self erasing, maieutic role." But this ends up legitimizing the party to exert dictatorial pressure over the empirical, actual workers. The more one insists that it is in the nature of working class to have a revolutionary stance; the more one is compelled to exercise the external pressure.¹ Does this mean that Stalin is the inevitable outcome of Hegelian Marxism? Is Laclau's politics the only way out? Should we say that the political universals are empty and the link between the universal and its hegemonic content is a product of contingent ideological struggles; that no political subject has any historic mission?² Here this thesis insists that this criticism is correct within the limits of the Leninist [totality], however Lukács has also developed a generic totality which is dialectically linked with moments of the creation of [totalities]. It is the central claim of this study that the dialectics of totality and [totality], although never explicitly acknowledged by Lukács remain at the center of this thought. Is it possible to reactivate this dialectic to save Lukács from the trap of party-state he is succumbed into and allow him to speak to our age? This requires bringing to the forefront the implicit dialogue that this thesis established between Lukács and Alain Badiou.

¹ Ibid., 166-67.

² Ibid., 161-62.

How can such an encounter take place? The differences between these two thinkers are obvious. Despite the fact that their political thoughts both rely on an ontological account, the definition they give to the word ontology is not just different but utterly incommunicable with each other. Moreover, Lukács is the leading representative of what Badiou calls “expressive dialectics” who argues that social truths are found “when the soul of an age is revealed in them.”¹ For Badiou the truth does not express but “subtracts” from what Lukács calls the soul of an age.² On the other hand there are similarities: When Lukács –via Marx, argues that in order to understand an age one must go beyond its limits; or when he states that the Archimedean point where the social totality can be understood is an “unreal” a “mere theory,” his idea comes very close to the core of Badiou’s thought which has this non-being at its very center. When Lukács says that this is not just another utopian point; it describes the tendency and the meaning of the socio historic process,³ Badiou may have problems with the language and theoretical framework but as to the content they are essentially on the same page. As Žižek notes, there is another way of reading Lukács’ notion of the proletariat as the universal class: The universal class which has no immediate universality in it. What makes it universal is its out of jointness: its inner

¹ Lukács, *HCC*, 231.

² This is the particular difficulty of bringing these two thinkers together: they do not share a common vocabulary. To make them speak to each other requires the task of translation which will betray both (tradurre e tradire!). I find courage in the fact that none of them are particularly interested in the intricacies of translation.

³ Lukács, *HCC*, 261.

self-fissure. This reading brings Lukács and Badiou on very close terms.¹ Another similarity lies with Lukács' concept of *Augenblick* which designates a decision of a moment, an act that cannot be accounted for only with a consideration of the material conditions that gave birth to it. This is why Lukács concept of totality is not a mere count of the empirical, objective aspects but is a mediation "between its subjective and objective aspects."² Here Lukács is very close once again to another central concept of Badiou's philosophy: The event.³

But the point of establishing a dialogue between these two thinkers is not just to highlight their commonalities and discuss their disagreements. Reading Lukács via Badiou will also enable the unanswered questions of this study: When does the unbounded flux of totality transform itself into a [totality.] How does the process of construction work? How does the subject enter a relation into it? Given the fact that there is no subject of totality, is there a philosophical or scientific method that can identify the likely subject of [totality] to come? How others recognize it if and when a singular part of the social whole becomes the bearer of a new [totality], and starts acting as a universal agent. How to transpose things that Lukács wrote about the subject of proletarian revolution to a broader theory of the emergence of historical subjects? Finally, how to act vis-à-vis the state? How to overcome the impasse opened by the state centered politics and the postmodern withdrawal from the

¹ Žižek, "Postface: Georg Lukács as the Philosopher of Leninism," 168-70.

² Ibid., 164.

³ Last chapter on Badiou will show that after the publication of the second volume of *Being and Event*, this similarity noted by Žižek became slightly misguided and that the correct concept should "point" in Badiou's language.

question of state? Badiou indeed does not have answers to all of these questions, let alone correct answers.¹ But the space between these two thinkers may help to give a glimpse where the answers can be visible.

However, before going to Badiou I should explore the philosophical context that allowed his grounds of existence as well as the space for his philosophical intervention. This context is the one where Lukács is absolutely disqualified from discussions. The two chapters until the one on Badiou will explore the intellectual foundations of this situation and will thus make his philosophical task more distinct.

¹ I am leaving the question of how Lukács may help with Badiou to the specific section of this study.

*Nor dread nor hope attend
A dying animal;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all;
Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone -
Man has created death.¹*

Chapter Four: the Death of Totality - Finitude and the Universal Truth

I. Lukács and Heidegger

The two previous chapters of this study proposed that the 20th century idea of totality contains an inner tension at the moment of its foundation. This and the following chapter intends to depict the intellectual process where the tension appears to be settled, a peculiar definition of totality seems to be established as its ultimate meaning and where a powerful attack against this definition prohibits any recourse to totality as a concept. Although this depiction also requires an analysis of the dissemination of the ideas of Lukács; a process through which his notion of totality became “saturated,” this will not be carried in this chapter. Such an attempt would indeed be valuable but also would risk transforming this study into an investigation into the history of ideas. What can be said in this regard is summarized by *Marxism and Totality*’s discussion of Lucien Goldmann’s

¹ W. B. Yeats, "Death," in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan and co., 1933).

work: Jay argues that Goldmann established a clear definition of totality but at the same time rendered the problems of Lukácsian totality (well concealed in its source) visible. The important issue with this version, established as the truth of Lukácsian totality, is that it made it impossible to assess whether the defects belong to the interpretation of Goldmann or whether, as Jay himself believes, they stem from Lukácsian totality itself.¹ It is indeed possible to compare Goldmann's idea of totality with the totality composed in the tension of its two versions presented here and thus discuss what got lost in the process of translation. However, this can be a useless attempt as well: after the shock waves created by Heidegger's thought, one really did not need the mistakes of Lukács or his followers to dismiss any recourse to totality. In the same fashion, this thesis will not deal with the issues advanced by the post-modern criticisms of totality. The focus will be rather on the ontological framework of such rejection prepared by Martin Heidegger and on an original manifestation of this framework by Louis Althusser.

The thesis that will be advanced here is the following: It is impossible to authoritatively decide whether Heidegger's *Being and Time* (hereafter *BT*) was written as a polemic against the *HCC*; besides the question of whether Heidegger has consciously attacked Lukács is immaterial as to the consequences of his thought. It is also impossible to deny the similarities between the arguments of these two thinkers. What Heidegger abolishes is not the category of totality; indeed his notion of Being and its relation to beings

¹ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 305.

can be regarded as a radically new and nuanced way of formulating the relation between the whole and its parts.¹ In this way, Heidegger provides a much more nuanced and poetic way of looking at the totality of being. What is prohibited by Heidegger is not “totality” as such but “the point of view of totality.” Totality is possible but along with the infinite and universal it is unreachable and escapes communication. This is achieved in Heidegger’s ontology with a crucial concept to the constitution of human being: finitude (*Endlichkeit*²). He claimed that death (*Tod*) completes the totality of human, not as an event that will happen in a future moment, but as an *existentiell* that permeates to every instant. This definition enabled him to argue that the access to the whole, to the infinite, or to the universal is impossible by the finite being and in the finite world of the language. Although his claim does not directly contradict Lukács with regards to the individual, Heidegger did not differentiate between social formations. No entity existing in the world of language can move beyond its finitude: this provided the key that will undo the claims of totality, including his own. Secondly, Heidegger’s effect created the philosophical basis of an attack which directed its criticism to the very concept of totality. The consequences of

¹ Jay notes that when a western Marxist refuses one, s/he tends to refuse the other on the similar grounds. For instance, Adorno’s criticism of totality and his criticism of Heidegger’s Being stem from the same concern. *Ibid.*, 333.

² I will provide the original versions of Heidegger’s statements more often than those of Lukács, Badiou and Althusser. The reason for this is not that that I share the conviction about the untranslatability of Heidegger but that there is an established concern about the translatability. So I will be providing the German text or a reference to the German text which will enable the suspicious reader to decide on misunderstandings and mistakes that emanate from the translation. For the German originals, when I will refer to the collected works: Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976). I will use the abbreviation *GA-Volume*, page.”

Heidegger's thought in terms of revolutionary politics will be discussed in the next chapter through close reading of Althusser's rejection of totality.

I.a. From Death to Finitude

The relation between Heidegger and Lukács' thoughts is established by Goldmann's famous study *Lukács and Heidegger*. Although he underlines the differences in both thinkers, especially in the chapter titled "totality, being and history" he insists that similarities are undeniable. Heidegger of 1927 and Lukács of 1909-1923 are fundamentally attuned to the same problem; their thoughts are homologous yet they contain differences in orientation and on concrete problems.¹ However what is not asked by Goldmann as to the differences is the problem of accessing to totality. He indeed mentions that Lukács posits a "transindividual subject,"² but he does not follow through the differences between the individual Dasein and Lukácsian subject in terms of their relations to totality. The section "objective possibility and possible consciousness" which brings this question only talks about Lukács and how he views proletariat's position to access the totality. It does not

¹ Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 51. How to interpret Goldmann is an issue that can be discussed endlessly: Joós, *Lukács's Last Autocriticism, the Ontology*. argues that Goldmann saw only similarities. Mitchell Cohen criticizes this position and insists that Goldmann does not refer to an immediate unity among these two thinkers but to "fashion a structural homology between their systems of thought and to trace it genetically." Cohen insists that Goldmann underlines the fundamental differences between the two thinkers. See: Mitchell Cohen, *The Wager of Lucien Goldmann: Tragedy, Dialectics, and a Hidden God* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 319.

² Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger*, 8.

compare it with Heidegger's position on the finitude of Dasein.¹ This chapter intends to discuss how Heidegger prohibits the realm of totality to any being that is thrown to the world of language; it provides a criticism of his claim that the point of totality is impossible for any finite being.

It is argued in the previous chapters that Lukács' totality also reflected on the individual and stressed the need or the sublation of the split between the citizen (universal) and the bourgeois (selfish individual, particular). Heidegger also testifies to the incompleteness of the modern subject; however, he establishes this incompleteness as a metaphysical event. For him, finitude is the foundational aspect that is indispensable for the reconstitution of human being in its totality. In this sense, if it is possible to follow his claim that every thinker thinks only one thought,² the singular thought of Heidegger must contain the word finitude.

In Heidegger's original formulation in *BT*, the emphasis is not on finitude but on death. For Adorno, Heidegger's thought "gains its concept of authenticity, and thus central speculative motor, through reflecting on what he calls the structure of death"³ A simple observation of the schema of Being and Time reveals the centrality of death in early

¹ Ibid., 52-67. Dasein is sometimes written as Da-sein to stress the thereness of being. This notation used under the light of the later Heidegger probably conveys the content of Heidegger's later thought in a better way. However, as in this chapter I will be dealing mostly with the Heidegger of *BT*, I will follow his own usage in this book. On the other hand when translations or other commentators refer to Dasein as Da-sein I will not change their notation.

² Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, trans. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 50. »Jeder Denker denkt nur einen einzigen Gedanken.« *GA8*, 53.

³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 130.

Heidegger. *BT* consists of two divisions: First of them, “the preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein” culminates in the ontology of care which shows that “care is temporal, and time is the time of care.”¹ Yet, care is not temporal by definition; rather *BT* establishes the temporality of care through evolving of the question of care into the question of death. In other words, the first section on the analytics of Dasein does not culminate in care but they culminate *through* care: in death. The discussion of death stands in the beginning of the division of temporality: schematically speaking, death opens to temporality. It links the division of being to the division of time; the schema of the book reveals the intent of its author. In death, in this “possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein,”² being and time touch each other and are made into a single question.

As Demske observes during the years following the publication of *BT*, that focal point gradually disappears from Heidegger’s usage: In Heidegger’s work after the 1930s “death is still important, although, in contrast to its prominence in *Sein und Zeit*, it remains for the most part in the background.” For this Heidegger, “death is the ‘privileged place’ in which being is illuminated in a special way.”³ This transformation can be observed in 1929-

¹ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 346.

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 232. »Der tod is die möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit« ———, *Sein Und Zeit* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1967 [1927]), 250. Hereafter, *SZ*.

³ James M. Demske, *Being, Man, & Death: A Key to Heidegger* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 4.

1930 lectures where Heidegger acknowledges the importance of question of death,¹ but shifts the question from death to finitude:

We developed three such questions [1.] What is world? [2.] What is finitude? [3.] What is individuation? Here the second question is the most originary and most central one.²

After these lectures, death almost completely fades away from Heidegger's language, and finitude starts fulfilling the function that death performed in *BT*: to connect being and time.³ Is this a mere substitution of words? Or is there a reason why Heidegger changed the central concept of *BT*? Did he notice a fundamental flaw with his understanding of death? Can finitude overcome these flaws or does it carry these flaws to a different plane? These questions should be thought in terms of Heidegger's *Kehre*, which fundamentally represents his shift from the question of the meaning of being, toward that of the truth of being. It is possible to argue that Heidegger's fundamental problem in *BT* was

¹ "(...) innermost essence of life, namely what we call *death*. The touchstone of the appropriateness and originary character of every question concerning the essence of life lies in whether or not this question has adequately grasped the problem of death and whether or not it is able to take it up into its own question concerning the essence of life in the correct way, and vice versa. (...) Nevertheless, on the basis of its apparent negativity as the annihilation of life, death does initially possess the methodological function of revealing the apparent positivity in the problem of life." Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 266. Moreover in these lectures, death distinguishes man from other animals: "Because captivation belongs to the essence of animal, the animal cannot die in the sense in which dying is ascribed to human beings but can only come to an end." Ibid., 267.

² Ibid., 181. »Was ist Welt? Was ist Endlichkeit? Was ist Vereinzelung? Dabei ist die mittlere die ursprünglichste und zentralste Frage.« *GA29-30*, 268.

³ This does not mean that the word death becomes forever banned from his language. He occasionally refers to death in his later work. For example, among the examples cited at the beginning of *On time and being*, one might note "Death and Fire" by Paul Klee and Septet of Death by Georg Trakl ———, *On Time and Being*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1. Elsewhere, he writes: "To be a human being means to be on earth as a mortal. It means to dwell." ———, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 349. or "The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death *as death*. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities" *ibid.*, 352.

to *deconstruct* (in Heidegger's usage it corresponds not to destroy but to what it is in today's language deconstruct) Cartesian subject, *Res Cogitans*. Dasein named the project to institute the human being that would accomplish this task. On the other hand, the elucidation of Dasein not only needed to overcome cogito-ego but also to distinguish human subjectivity from all other forms of being. The tension between these two tasks turned Dasein to a way of reinstating the Human being as conscious subject in *BT*. While *BT* thus provided a magnificent depiction of modern subjectivity, it did not give Heidegger what he wanted. The failure of the book in achieving its author's ambition revealed him that starting from human subject, whether one renames it and/or redefines it, one cannot end far away from the modern subjectivity. In this sense, *Kehre* refers to the process in which Heidegger identifies the problem emanating from the centrality of human subject and creatively addresses it. During this period, the question of human Dasein as a starting point leaves its distinguished place to the question of Being:

Although man remains basically the same after the turning –Da-sein of finite transcendence, whose ontological meaning is temporality –he has also become something else (...) his finitude is no longer defined in terms of his inner structure, but more importantly in terms of his relation to Being.¹

Accordingly, as Heidegger's initial question shifts from Dasein to Being; death which belonged to the inner structure of Dasein leaves its place to finitude. In this, he goes one step further than what Marcuse had criticized: "Theology and philosophy transform the biological fact of death to the ontological essence of man and celebrate it as an existential

¹ Demske, *Being, Man, & Death*, 104.

category.”¹ Hence, there are two problems that emerge here: The first is how the biological fact of death can be thought as the ontological essence of man. The second is the question of how that essence of man became the foundation of the finitude of Being. Therefore, death as the defining characteristic of human being and his relation to time; the historical period that made this thought possible; the consequences of this thought; how much Heidegger’s notion of finitude owes to a historically shaped human experience; and above all, politics of finitude need to be brought into question.²

¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236. Despite the fact Marcuse’s main interlocutor is Freud, I believe, in this and several other passages of the book he speaks directly to his former mentor.

² For an introduction to the concepts of death and finitude in Heidegger, see: Demske, *Being, Man, & Death*; Paul Edwards, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Eugene Freeman, Monist Monograph (La Salle: Hegeler Institute, 1979); David. Gross, "On Dealing with What Is Passing Away," *Telos* no. 124 (2002); David Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986); Joan Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being*, Suny Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); Carol J. White, *Time and Death : Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*, ed. Mark Ralkowski (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); ———, "Dasein, Existence and Death," in *Heidegger Reexamined*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Routledge, 2002); William D. Blattner, "The Concept of Death in Being and Time," in *Heidegger Reexamined*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Routledge, 2002). Jean-Luc Nancy develops a fascinating reading of Heidegger’s finitude: “We only have access to ourselves — and to the world. It is only ever a question of the following: full access is there, access to the whole of the origin. This is called finitude in Heideggerian terminology. But it has become clear since then that finitude signifies the infinite singularity of meaning, the infinite singularity of access to truth. Finitude is the origin; that is, it is an infinity of origins. ‘Origin’ does not signify that from which the world comes, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000). As the aim of this chapter is to establish the effect of Heidegger’s idea of finitude it will not deal with the question of the paths that can be opened with a new interpretation of the concept. In a similar way I will ignore Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying--Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of Truth" (Mourir--S'attendre Aux "Limites De La Vérité")* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).on the basis of the fact that it cannot be treated solely as an interpretation of Heidegger and requires a task that cannot be completed without engaging with Derrida’s work.

II. Death as Reification

In the narrative of *BT* death does not represent a factual situation which happens at a moment in human life, it is rather the ontological essence, the “ever-present possibility of Dasein.”¹ So long as death permeates every instant in the mode of expectation, it individualizes and rules the relations of the individualized Dasein.² But where does this centrality come from? Is it a philosophical invention, or is it rather the reflection of a social reality? Heidegger certainly is not the only philosopher to overestimate the autonomy of his thought vis-à-vis the historic conditions of his present. These conditions definitely remain as the “unthought” of Heidegger’s thought, and they are worth thinking in order to understand how death permeates to his thought as to become the central question of *BT*.³ This chapter will argue that Heidegger’s obsession with death is not without a reason. In his notion of death, a rather crude social reality speaks:

But the less people really live – or, perhaps more correctly, the more they become aware that they have not really lived – the more abrupt and frightening death becomes for them, and the more it appears as a misfortune. It is as if, in death, they experienced their own reification: that they were corpses from the first. (...) The terror of death today is largely the terror of seeing how much the living resemble it.⁴

¹ Demske, *Being, Man, & Death*, 62.

² “As the nonrelational possibility, death individualizes, but only as the possibility not-to-be-bypassed, in order to make Da-sein as a being-with understand the potentialities-of-being of the others” Heidegger, *BT*, 244. *SZ*, 264.

³ “Death remains the limit situation which defines the ontic ideal of the hermeneutic situation of the book *BT*, and perhaps even the unique factic situation of its author. (...) The self now becomes its time, a project taut between birth and death. It is not a goal to be achieved, since it never finished, even when it is finished: the peculiar stasis of ecstasis.” Theodore J. Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 437.

⁴ Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 136.

At least in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic culture, the biblical depiction of Abraham's death describes a good death: living one's days. That is to say a life lived in full; a good life is what gives good death. It is not death as such that terrorizes one in the face of an early death; but rather the days that are not lived. Heidegger speaks through an age where every death is an early death because nobody lives one's days to its full. The work time has no meaning other than trying to earn the money that will be spent in the future. The "free-time," on the other hand is limited by the working hours and its content is determined by the culture industry, and is lived like a vengeance: killing time. For Adorno who says: "he who dies realizes that he has been cheated of everything. And that is why death is so unbearable,"¹ "the terror of death" is a direct result of what capitalism does to human beings. Although Heidegger shows a similar attitude to the culture of his time, for him capitalism had never been a question. This is the principal reason why rather than questioning the peculiar relation with the death, he establishes that relation which is a product of a specific historical period, as the ontological truth of Dasein.

In order to understand how Heidegger arrives and becomes trapped in death, three different arguments will be brought in this section. First, it will be shown that contrary to what his critiques argue, Heidegger is not an ordinary conservative thinker who speaks the reactionary rhetoric of the decaying European ruling classes. It will be argued that in him the disillusioned masses of modern politics speak. Secondly, it will be argued that

¹ Ibid.

Heidegger's notion of death reflects his understanding of the transition from *techné* (although the Greek word *τέχνη* –*techné*– can be roughly translated as artisanal work, in Heidegger's usage it gains a new dimension) to technology. In other words while Heidegger describes the collapse of the lifeworld of the artisan in a powerful way, he is incapable of seeing any opening in modern forms of labor and association that they bring into life. Thirdly Heidegger's unwillingness to see the potentials in modern ways of *being-with* will be brought to question. It will also be shown that this leads him to strip off every relation that surrounds modern man and denounce them for being inauthentic; thus he ends up with a naked man who has no other property than the fact that he is born and he will die.

II.a. Death of Tradition?

One of the common criticisms concerning Heidegger's panic and tragedy in the face of death is that it reflects the traditional reactionary attitude against the French revolution and the passing away of ancient ruling classes of Europe. This position is brilliantly summarized by Lukács when commenting on irrationalism: He starts by illustrating what he calls "if-then rationality:" If I leave the stone I am holding in my hand then it will fall to the ground. On the other hand it is perfectly normal to imagine a world where the stones would fly upward. If such a world exists, then the people of this world would be thinking that it is rational and natural that stones fly up. Moreover it is also possible to imagine a time in which the physical laws of our world would change and stones would start falling up as well. If such a change happens, a simple transformation of the terms of if-

then rationality would be able to grasp this world. Though the change in the laws of physics is quite difficult, the rules of our social world constantly change. The first task in such a change is again to perceive this once again as a rational development and try to understand the new rules it brings to existence. For Lukács, conservatism as a modern idea relies on refusing to accept the inevitable change and is thus hostile to the idea of rational development. For him, the birth of this attitude starts with the reaction of the old ruling classes to the French revolution. For them, this was just not a new rational development but the end of the world. It was the destruction of everything that is normal; the death of their natural way of living.¹ The emergence of modern public life had abolished the rules of distinction upon which these classes had established their dominion. Hence the reactionary attitude is reflected as a revulsion against the public space as well. If one accepts this point of view, is not hard to find passages that prove how Heidegger's thought reflects the decaying point of view of nobility; especially when he speaks about how Dasein is lost among the others. So is *BT* the narrative of the death of aristocratic life? It is not hard to perceive Dasein as an aristocrat losing its privileges in the modern world:

This averageness, which prescribes what can and may not be ventured, watches over every exception which thrusts itself to the fore. Every priority is noiselessly quashed. Overnight, everything primordial is flattened down as something long since known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes something to be manipulated. Every mystery loses its power. The Care of averageness reveals, in turn, an essential tendency of Da-sein, which we call the *levelling down* of all possibilities of being.

¹ Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, 46-47.

Distantiality, averageness, and levelling down, as ways of being of the they, constitute what we know as “publicness.” Publicness initially controls every way in which the world and Da-sein are interpreted, and it is always right, not because of an eminent and primary relation of being to “things,” (...) because it is insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness.¹

Who loses his priorities and his mystery? Who is leveled down in the modern public space? Whose speech has lost its priority as just another voice among the voice of the multiplicity? Who loses his place simply by being among other people? Answers to these questions can easily establish Heidegger within the tradition of German conservatism in its reactionary attitude against modernity.² On the other hand, such explanation would utterly fail to grasp the ways in which Heidegger is radically modern. For instance, his Marburg

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 119.

»Diese Durchschnittlichkeit in der Vorzeichnung dessen, was gewagt werden kann und darf, wacht über jede sich vordrängende Ausnahme. Jeder Vorrang wird geräuschlos niedergehalten. Alles Ursprüngliche ist über Nacht als längst bekannt geglättet. Alles Erkämpfte wird handlich. Jedes Geheimnis verliert seine Kraft. Die Sorge der Durchschnittlichkeit enthüllt wieder eine wesenhafte Tendenz des Daseins, die wir die Einebnung aller Seinsmöglichkeiten nennen.

Abständigkeit, Durchschnittlichkeit, Einebnung konstituieren als Seinsweisen des Man das, was wir als >die Öffentlichkeit< kennen. Sie regelt zunächst alle Welt- und Daseinsauslegung und behält in allem Recht. Und das nicht auf Grund eines ausgezeichneten und primären Seinsverhältnisses zu den »Dingen«, nicht weil sie über eine ausdrücklich zugeeignete Durchsichtigkeit des Daseins verfügt, sondern auf Grund des Nichteingehens >auf die Sachen<, weil sie unempfindlich ist gegen alle Unterschiede des Niveaus und der Echtheit. Die Öffentlichkeit verdunkelt alles und gibt das so Verdeckte als das Bekannte und jedem Zugängliche aus.« ———, *Sz*, 127.

The German word for publicness used in this passage is Öffentlichkeit. Despite the fact that Offene (open), one of the crucial concepts of Heidegger’s thought, lies at the root of this word, he never thought that something may open itself in the public space. Offene, which will characterize in later Heidegger man’s being open for the gift of Being never belongs to Öffentlichkeit. One can see that his position vis-à-vis publicness remains unchanged in his later thought: an obstacle to the openness of individual human being: “Rather, what is said there contains a reference, thought in terms of the question of the truth of Being, to world’s primordial belongingness to Being. This relation remains concealed beneath the dominance of subjectivity that presents itself as the public realm.” ———, “Letter on Humanism,” 222.

²Another hint of conservatism in Heidegger’s conception of time would be the recurrent discussion of boredom. G. Steiner brilliantly shows the emergence of the theme of boredom as a result of the life experience of the European aristocracy who thought that the world was devoid of its meaning after the French revolution and how they felt that the time came to a standstill. See: George Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle; Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 3-25. Hence, one could argue that in his elaboration of death Heidegger speaks through the stopped clock; through the dead time of aristocracy.

Theological Society lecture of 1924 titled “The Concept of Time” gives a hint on the birth of the concept of “they” that would be later employed in *BT*:

On average, the interpretation of Dasein is governed by everydayness, by what one says about Dasein and human life. It is governed by the ‘One’, by tradition.¹

In other words, publicness is repressive because it is still dominated by tradition. Remembering his ruthless criticism of tradition² in *BT*, it can be said that his attack against public space is not because it is modern, but because it is not modern enough. *BT* is far from being conservative in these lines, in a way it can be seen one of the great manifestoes of modern life defending what can be called the right to subjectivity in a repressive society. In the light of Marburg seminar, his attack against publicness has to be understood as the condemnation of an oppressive society dominated by tradition that does not let modern individuals to develop their abilities, to become what they really can be. It is an attack against a world where “no one is himself in everydayness.”³ This kind of thinking might change our answer as to what dies in Heidegger. It can be argued that his thought represents classes which believed that after French revolution stones could really fly upward for them but now come to realize that the stones were made to move just to arrive to a new equilibrium, to a new disposition. This is the thought of the classes coming to realize that

¹ »Durchschnittlich ist die Auslegung des Daseins von der Alltäglichkeit beherrscht, von dem, was man so über das Dasein und das menschliche Leben überlieferter Weise meint, vom Man, von der Tradition.« Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*. Trans. William McNeill (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1992), 9, 9E. (This is a bilingual edition where page X refers to the original German and XE to the English translation.) The word ‘One’ used in this translation is the German word “*das Man*,” translated by Stambaugh as ‘they’ in *BT*.

² Heidegger does not even care about the difference between ‘*tradition*’ and ‘*überlieferung*,’ that would be of absolute importance for his student Gadamer.

³ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 8, 8E.

the world created after the French revolution fails to fulfill its promise; they now understand that the aristocratic dominion was merely replaced by the bourgeois dominion. While Germany was going head on to a disastrous economic and social crisis, these classes which did not believe in the working class movement were seeing no rational way to move the stones once again. The death that speaks in Martin Heidegger is the death of a hope in popular movements that could lead to what Marcuse would later call a non-repressive civilization.

This thesis can be better understood if one remembers a study conducted in the Germany of 1920s by Kracauer. His interviews that constitute the examples of cultural ethnography *avant-la-lettre* focused on white-collar workers who distinguished themselves from the blue-collars through the concepts of “personality,” “education,” “culture,” “profession,” and “community.” One could even risk saying that they were feeling themselves as members of the social stratum to which Hegel entrusted the world spirit. On the other hand, despite their common sentiment as the center of a fantasy world, in the empirical reality their privileges were getting “noiselessly quashed,” their distinctions flattened and their incomes were leveled down as a result of the inflation, war and economic rationalization of 1920s.¹ Kracauer also foresaw that white-collars, who were economically proletarianized yet “fervently bourgeois in their ideology, would contribute to

¹ Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*.

the mass basis of fascism.”¹ How the tension between their ideology and material conditions of life led salaried workers towards National Socialism is a wide subject that cannot be discussed here. Nonetheless, one can find something in Heidegger about the fear of becoming expendable; of the common personal catastrophes; of the inability to struggle against them commonly; and of the futility of personal survival strategies which results in the expectation of the great event to save them all. Indeed, that saving cannot be any political event; it should comply with the dreamworld of white-collar proletariat, an event of Being; an event of the spirit.²

II.b. Death of Artisanal Work

Even if it is possible to insist that it was primarily the white collar workers who found their voice in Heidegger, it should be acknowledged that the thinker was at best disinterested with their world. His thought rather remained attuned to the world of the artisanal worker. Heidegger whenever he found the chance stated that he saw his task no

¹ Adorno, "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer," 169. Adorno elsewhere adds: "The jargon no longer knows primary and secondary communities, and by the same token it knows no parties. This development has a real basis. The institutional and psychological superstructure, which in Kracauer diagnosed as a culture of employees, deluded the celluloid-collar proletariat, who were then threatened by immediacy of losing their jobs. It deluded them into believing that they were something special. Through this delusion the superstructure made them toe to the bourgeois line, while in the meantime, thanks to a lasting market boom, that superstructure has become the universal ideology of a society which mistakes itself for a unified middle class. They let themselves be confirmed in this attitude by a uniform mode of speech, which eagerly welcomes the jargon for purposes of collective narcissism." ———, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 14-15.

² Beistegui observes Heidegger's stance toward 'national socialist revolution' with the following words: "In short, revolution was not (just) a political event for Heidegger. In fact, it was not primarily political. Its political aspect was only superficial. It was a historical event, but historical in Heidegger's sense: an event that announced a turning within history itself, and the possibility for the people as a whole to turn once again to the truth of being, thus matching the greatness of the Greek beginning." Miguel de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger* (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 173.

different than that of craftsmanship.¹ But modernity also meant the death of the artisanal labor. Modernity's experience of time and its futurity took its shape with the birth of capitalism and the industrial revolution, for Habermas this coincides with the destruction of the "experiential space" of European peasants and craftsmen.² This shift in society's relation to time is related with the vanishing of the "unity of experience," which brought about the destruction of the perception of an immediate and timeless totality that belonged to the world of craftsmen and peasants. This change obviously was not a simple shift in mental dispositions but ultimately related with the transformation of these social groups into the modern working class. It should be noted here that the perception of the immediate community as an organic whole was precisely what made death endurable in premodern Europe.³ In other words, one of the major elements in Heidegger's notion of death is that in the modern world where craft –τέχνη (techné) is replaced by modern work (technology) one is not allowed to die an authentic death. Death in this sense is the death of authentic death.

It can be said that this conception of death is Heidegger's own version of reification: the death of non-alienated labor. Yet, this reification is timeless, spaceless and subjectless: is it the reification of modern worker, the individual in a capitalist society, or any Dasein,

¹ For example: "We have called thinking the handicraft *par excellence*." Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, 23.

² Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 12.

³ Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 133. This does not mean that the premodern Europe had a better way of dealing with death. It rather means that, in this society where the idea of autonomous individual was not yet present, death was dealt with within the community. It needs to be underlined here that premodern Europe, far from being a desirable world that was destroyed with modernity. The "organic whole" of this society, its *immediate* unity left no place for difference and for individuality.

any self-conscious being? The same thinker who establishes such a revolutionary account of temporality in terms of history of being omits history when it comes to the historicity of Dasein. Reification thus established is not seen as a direct result of the organization of labor under capitalism but as a pure metaphysical event:

What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the estrangement of man has its roots in the homelessness of modern man. This homelessness is specifically evoked from the destiny of Being in the form of metaphysics, and through metaphysics is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such.¹

In this way, Heidegger recognizes the phenomenon of alienation (or reification), yet at the same time he removes it from the scope of politics. It exists but as a destiny, it cannot be fought against but apprehended metaphysically. Heidegger gives a great sense of the collapse of temporality as the world of artisan shatters, but he is incapable of perceiving the possible temporalities that the modern world can create.

One should indeed state here that *τέχνη* (techné) represents less a particular form of work (craft), but is foremost a manner of relating to things. It denotes the laboring process in which man's action is attuned to nature (*φύσις* –physis); acts in harmony with it; transforms it and becomes a part of it. When the inherent danger in *τέχνη* (techné) is realized and it becomes technology; it is first of all this relation that gets destroyed. Labor becomes an enemy of man, of nature and of things at large. That animosity is manifested

¹ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 243. »Was Marx in einem wesentlichen und bedeutenden Sinne von Hegel her als die Entfremdung des Menschen erkannt hat, reicht mit seinen Wurzeln in die Heimatlosigkeit des neuzeitlichen Menschen zurück. Diese wird, und zwar aus dem Geschick des Seins in der Gestalt der Metaphysik hervorgerufen, durch sie verfestigt und zugleich von ihr als Heimatlosigkeit verdeckt« GA9, 339

first of all in the incapacity of attuning oneself to the things that surround human beings. This is why contrary to what many of his followers saw in Heidegger; his notion of alienation is not a result of using modern instruments. Technology does not belong to buttons and levers that the modern worker has to handle but in the relation established with them: "But where in the manipulations of the industrial worker is there any relatedness to such things as the shapes slumbering within wood?"¹ On the other hand, Heidegger does not merely condemn technology; there is a way out of it:

Neither the industrial workman nor the engineers, let alone the factory proprietor and least of all the state can know at all where modern man "lives" when he stands in some relatedness or other to the machine and machine parts.²

Here Heidegger testifies that in the womb of technology there grows something ultimately new and that has a capacity to change our entire world. This "new" constitutes an "imputed possibility" that is beyond the comprehension of the worker, engineer, capitalist and it is especially beyond the state. However, he fails to cultivate these possibilities in his thought. This failure of thinking through modern possibilities is due to his resistance to see that the modern man does not only stand "in some relatedness to the

¹ ———, *What Is Called Thinking*, 23. »Allein wo ist in den Handgriffen der Industriearbeiter der Bezug zu so etwas wie den schlafenden Gestalten des Holzes?« *GA8*, 26.

² *Ibid.*, 24. »Weder der Industriearbeiter, noch die Ingenieure, noch gar die Fabrikbesitzer und am wenigsten der Staat können wissen, wobei sich der heutige Mensch überhaupt aufhält, wenn er in irgend einem Bezug zur Maschine und zu Maschinenteilen steht.« *GA8*, 27. It should be mentioned that this passage depicts the best of Heidegger, not his worst. He also has a dark side where he sounds as if he is the spokesperson of the 'Beautification of Labor Office: "But labor is also not simply the production of goods for others. Nor is labor simply the occasion and the means to earn a living. Rather: For us, 'work' is the title of every well-ordered action that is borne by the responsibility of the individual, the group, and the State and which is thus of service to the folk." ———, "National Socialist Education," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 59.

machine;” that he also stands in some relatedness to other human beings. Despite the fact that from *BT* on he thinks of Dasein as that being whose inside is outside and whose outside is inside, he pretends as if there is no other Dasein to which one can relate. That is what Heidegger keeps omitting, in him be it a craftsman or industrial worker, a human being is always an isolated human being. In a way, Heidegger testifies to the truth of modern life: we are either beings that are always already together or we are always already dead.

II.c. Death of a People

Can Heidegger appreciate where the moderns dwell when they relate to each other and act to materialize the possibility of a historical impossibility; or the “possibility of impossibility” can only depict one’s death? In order to deal with this question it is worth considering it through a detour with Jacques Rancière’s discussion of “the dead king.” Here Rancière provides a close reading of *Mediterranean World* and argues that in this book Braudel transformed the death of Philip II into “its own metaphor.” In other words, with Philip II dies (even before his actual death) the first name of history, that of the king, along with the history that is built around this name.¹ Despite giving Braudel credit in this regard, Rancière becomes increasingly critical of him in his elucidation of the death of the king. Where Braudel sees an obstacle to transmitting the objective truth of the historical period, Rancière sees what kills the king: the emergence of the new subject of history; a

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 11.

subject consisting of multiple subjectivities that are eager to speak, “the people.”¹ The people love to tell stories; their own and other people’s stories. Indeed the official accounts of the palace chroniclers are blurred with these multiple accounts; the historian of our age cannot authoritatively decide what truly happened in that period. These stories are often inconsistent; contradict each other and mix reality with made-up stories. But on the other hand, whether they accurately tell the truth about their age is not an important issue, because they *are* the truth of their age. The king dies because his speech gets lost in the crowd of the modern public space. The excess of words not only kills the royal truth that can survive only so long as it remains the only voice; but also establishes science, literature and modern democracy.²

Can Heidegger see the Dasein that comes alive in the people, a Dasein that is irreducible to the One? The answer is no. It has already been mentioned that there was a link between Heidegger’s thought and the salaried masses’ inability of combining in the face of a popular tragedy. This does not necessarily mean the lack of political organization, this is the inability of coming together in a way that precedes and founds the need for being

¹ Rancière’s notion of people as a being composed of polymath men and women is radically different from those equating it with the coherent subject that is the foundation of the nation state, e.g. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 102-05. For a comparison of Hardt & Negri’s understanding of “the people,” with Rancière’s: Ernesto Laclau, “Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?,” *Diacritics* 31, no. 4 (2001).

² Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, 11-41. The very beginning of Aristotle’s *Politics* (Bekker: 1253a), which describes the man as the only animal endowed with speech (λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζώων) thus capable of politics, here and elsewhere is one of the fundamental issues of Rancière’s thought. It should also be noted the word “ἔχω” (echō) used in this description is usually translated as “has”, but to the ancient Greek mind “to possess something” did not mean the same as what it means to the moderns. The word “ἔχω” (echō) also meant to *inhabit*. In other words, when Heidegger calls human being as the animal that dwells in language, he is almost providing a proper translation of Aristotle.

politically together.¹ This is the urge to be on one's own even when one is already among the other people:

This being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Da-sein completely into the kind of being of "the others" in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the they unfolds its true dictatorship.²

It has already been argued that Heidegger cannot be seen as a traditional conservative because his very attitude that brings him this charge is the same that proves his anti-traditionalist stance. On the other hand, his claim that "they," and the everydayness dominated by it represents tradition and repression, need to be questioned here. That the perception of "they" as the "sum of inauthentic relations" is wrong;³ and that it is based on the confusion of "everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical"⁴ are important and necessary criticisms about such stance, but they are not enough. It should be further observed here that the word "das Man" that Heidegger uses can neither be reduced to "they" nor to the "one." In the first instance, Stambaugh's translation of "das Man" as "they" seems to be wrong: whereas the former openly includes me as an individual human being, the latter does not; at best it may call for an empathy that I might be a part of

¹ In a wonderful passage on the Communist workers in France, Marx argues that the need for a new society does not emerge as a result of political meetings, but through them when workers exchange cigarettes; chat and establish human relations that point beyond the limits of capitalism. See: Karl Marx, *Early Writings* trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Penguin, 1992), 365.

² Heidegger, *BT*, 119. »Dieses Miteinander löst das eigene Dasein völlig in die Seinsart >der Anderen< auf, so zwar, daß die Anderen in ihrer Unterschiedlichkeit und Ausdrücklichkeit noch mehr verschwinden. In dieser Unauffälligkeit und Nichtfeststellbarkeit entfaltet das Man seine eigentliche Diktatur.« *SZ*, 126.

³ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 359.

⁴ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 9.

'they' for other people. Then again, the translation as "they" is not wrong, because this is precisely what Heidegger means by "das Man." What is crucial to see here is that Heidegger does not etymologically or emphatically fail to see the relation between Dasein and 'das Man;' to the contrary, Dasein constituted in antagonism to "das man" is his ideology. In Heidegger "das Man" never means "us." The call of Heidegger is not a John Dewey style "distinction for everyone," it is rather a call in which each individual's distinction is destroyed by others. Sartre famously wrote in his play *Huis Clos (No Exit)*: "The Hell is others." Yet what Sartre meant by this aphorism is the absolute opposite of what Heidegger stands for: the problem is not the other people but the very existence of the category of others.¹ A better society will be possible only when the antagonism between the Dasein and the "they" is resolved.

This section had started with Rancière's depiction of the birth of modern public space as an entirely new form of life. The ultimate characteristic of this life form was that it existed in the multiplicity of forms of speech. Heidegger, in a singular move, reduces multiplicity of speeches of public life to a uniform, homogenous, commanding and hence repressive speech of a consistent subject, and declares that this subject is the opposite of life: It is not even dead, because it had not lived. On one side Heidegger is correct to state

¹ This line is often misquoted to suggest that Sartre says the same thing with Heidegger. He wanted to correct this misperception of "Hell is others" in 1965: "It has been thought that what I meant by that was that our relations with other people are always poisoned, that they are invariably hellish relations. But what I really mean is something totally different. I mean that if relations with someone else are twisted, vitiated, then that other person can only be hell." Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 99.

that one stone, one animal, or one human being is always finite; and he is also correct to state that human being alone experiences its finitude in the (language) world as death. But can one say the same thing for the forms of being-together that are unique to humans? For example, Lukács' definition of human as "social being" is precisely his way to say that in humans there is a capacity to collectively move beyond the finitude of the "one." Heidegger never asks this question; and when the multiplicity that gives the life to the "people" is not recognized, it is not wrong to say that the people never lived. But such lack of recognition misses exactly what is exciting about modern public life: the invention of forms of collective subjectivities that are never reducible to that of the One. That such forms of associating are not bound with finitude prove, that this new being's relation to temporality defy the rules of western metaphysics. This is also the absolute core of Lukács' argument in *HCC*: totality is not accessible to the finite individual but there exists a singular mode of being-together that can move beyond the finitude of the ones forming it and such a collective can establish a special relation to the infinite. This new relation opens a new temporality that needs to be explored¹ but Heidegger can never take this task of such exploration in his denial of life to "they:"

Only something that is capable, and remains capable, is alive. Something which is no longer capable, irrespective of whether a capacity is used or not,

¹ For a bold attempt in this regard: Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York; London: Continuum, 2003). Although explicitly hostile to the tradition of Hegelian Marxism, it can be argued that in this book Negri implicitly shares the same ground with Lukács.

is no longer alive. Something which does not exist in the manner of being capable cannot be dead either.¹

Hence the problem is to ask: are (after this point, it cannot be 'is') "they" capable? Are "they" alive? For Heidegger the answer is clear: "The they never dies because it is unable to die."² That human multiplicity has created a new form of being out of being-together, a form of being that is "immortal" leads Heidegger to panic. The fact that this new art of living together goes beyond the dead time; that it does not die is not a proof that it does not live, it simply shows that a radically new being is invented. In failing to grasp this new being, and contrary to the contention of Heideggerians that Dasein cannot be reduced to the individual, Heidegger himself makes the worst kind of such reduction. Dasein in "they," being-there of a subjectivity that is multiple in itself is a topic that is never opened in *BT*. Rather, in declaring the death of publicness (*Öffentlichkeit*), he ironically retreats to the being that can only live in the public life: ζῷον πολιτικόν (*zōion politikon*: the city animal). He will later call this man "the open" (*Offene*): open for the gift of Being. On the other hand, Heidegger never thinks that the gift of Being is being-together. He thinks of the city animal outside his relation to the city; of the public man outside the public life. His "man" removed from his connections thus has no other peculiarity than the fact that he must die. Hence Heidegger ends up in death two times: both as a path and as where the path leads to.

¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 236. »Nur was fähig ist und noch fähig ist, lebt; was nicht mehr fähig ist, ganz abgesehen, ob von der Fähigkeit Gebrauch gemacht wird oder nicht, das lebt nicht mehr. Was überhaupt nicht in der Weise des Fähigseins ist, das kann auch nicht tot sein. « *GA29-30*, 343.

² ———, *BT*, 389. »Das Man stirbt nie, weil es nicht sterben kann...« *SZ*, 424

Indeed for the humans being is always being-together (*mitsein*), but Heidegger –at least in *BT*, does not see something to celebrate in this. For him, the relations established in everydayness are not authentic; they are marked by a constant flight from death; their main task is to make us forget that we are all mortals. That is the very reason Heidegger starts his investigation on death: in search for a relation that is more authentic than those that exist in everyday. Marcuse claims that the “descent toward death is an unconscious flight from pain and want.”¹ Maybe while Heidegger is trying to passionately to un-escape death, he is fleeing from the possibilities of everydayness. Besides, why can Dasein not relate authentically with others but can relate with his own death? More importantly: What does Heidegger intend to establish by substituting the (authentic) relation with my death instead of (inauthentic) relations established in everyday? Following quotes may help answer this question:

*No one can take the other's dying away from him... Every Da-sein must itself actually take dying upon itself. Insofar as it “is,” death is always essentially my own.*²

*The they does not permit the courage to have Angst about death.*³

In these and similar lines death becomes the definitive characteristic of Dasein, an innermost possibility which is threatened by others. In this sense, *BT* deploys death as a principle of individuation; as the unique event that every human being will go through, and

¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 29.

² Heidegger, *BT*, 223. »Keiner kann dem Anderen sein Sterben abnehmen. (...) Das Sterben muß jedes Dasein jeweilig selbst auf sich nehmen. Der Tod ist, sofern er >ist<, wesensmäßig je der meine.« *SZ*, 240.

³ *Ibid.*, 235. »Das Man läßt den Mut zur Angst vor dem Tode nicht aufkommen.« *SZ*, 254.

will go alone. It is a possibility in the pure sense of the world: a possibility that gives nothing to actualize. Despite the fact that it cannot be properly faced in modern society; it renders every Dasein singular. In being-toward-death, Dasein not only becomes distinguished from the rest of the beings; but can also be abstracted from the relations that constitute Dasein's being-together. Hence dying-alone becomes extended to life as living-alone.

Heidegger would later argue that a doctrine of being is always about man's essential nature;¹ in this sense *BT* is no exception. What Heidegger conceives as man's essential nature in the context of *BT* is indeed a very anti-Heideggerian usage of the words essence and nature. He attempts to establish the nonrelational (*unbezüglich*)² inner structure (*die innere Struktur*)³ of Dasein that is not subject to change across cultures, time and individuals. In other words, the way to understand Dasein is not to explore all the possible relations through which Dasein exists in everydayness; it is not to follow infinite number of relations that flourish from the finitude of Dasein: it is rather to deny all of them. Thus one can find the pure essence of man which is not affected by societal existence. This denial results in the claim that "Da-ein always exists for the sake of itself."⁴ But is Dasein as just another form of bourgeois selfishness? Ricœur marks that Levinas "opposes a despite-

¹ ———, *What Is Called Thinking*, 79. *GA8*, 83-84

² "As the end of Da-sein, death is the ownmost nonrelational, certain, and as such, indefinite and not to be bypassed possibility of Da-sein." ———, *BT*, 239. *SZ*, 258.

³ A question asked a couple of years after the publication of *BT*, in the Davos encounter with Cassirer: "How is the inner structure of Dasein itself, is it finite or infinite?" ———, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 197. *GA5*, 278.

⁴ ———, *BT*, 219. *SZ*, 236

death, an against-death, which opens a fragile space of manifestation for goodness liberated from the egoist gravitation.”¹ Against this and similar criticisms based on his account of death,² Heidegger argues that there is no question of being good or bad or egotism:

The statement: Dasein exists for the sake of itself, does not contain the positing of an egoistic or ontic end for some blind narcissism on the part of the factual human being in each case. It cannot, therefore, be “refuted” for instance by pointing out that many human beings sacrifice themselves for others and that in general human beings do not merely exist alone on their own, but in community. The statement in question contains neither a solipsistic isolation of Dasein nor an egoistic intensification thereof. By contrast, it presumably gives the condition of possibility of the human being’s being able to comport “himself” either “egoistically” or “altruistically.”³

This does not simply say that in order to be-for-another one should first “be,” rather he states something about what he understands as the unchanging essence of to be: to be for the sake of oneself. For Adorno this is just another way to say that man’s essence is self-preservation (*selbserhaltung*).⁴ In other words, Dasein and “they” do not dwell in a place that is foreign to political theory: their relation unfolds into the war zone of Hobbes.

¹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 361.

² Adorno states: “Only a solipsistic philosophy could acknowledge an ontological priority of ‘my’ death over and against any other.” Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 123.

³ Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122. »Der Satz: *Das Dasein existiert umwillen seiner*, enthält keine egoistisch-ontische Zwecksetzung für eine blinde Eigenliebe des jeweils faktischen Menschen. Er kann daher nicht etwa durch den Hinweis darauf >widerlegt< werden, daß viele Menschen sich für die Ändern opfern und daß überhaupt die Menschen nicht nur für sich allein, sondern in Gemeinschaft existieren. In dem genannten Satz liegt weder eine solipsistische Isolierung des Daseins noch eine egoistische Aufsteigerung desselben. Wohl dagegen gibt er die Bedingung der Möglichkeit dafür, daß der Mensch >sich< entweder >egoistisch< oder >altruistisch< verhalten kann.« GA9, 157.

⁴ Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 112.

At this point, one can ask as to why Heidegger did not put his terms openly from the beginning and had to make a detour through the concept of death in order to conceive his thoughts about the human world. In *BT*, one can find a hint as to why he could not start that way:

One of our first tasks will be to show that the point of departure from an initially given ego and subject totally fails to see the phenomenal content of Da-sein. Every idea of a “subject” –unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character–still posits the subjectum (hupokeimenon) ontologically along with it, no matter how energetic one's ontic protestations against the “substantial soul” or the “reification of consciousness.” Thingliness itself needs to be demonstrated in terms of its ontological source in order that we can ask what is now to be understood positively by the nonreified being of the subject, the soul, consciousness, the spirit, the person.¹

In this only explicit reference that *BT* provides to *HCC* Heidegger gives the hint that his task is to found a “primary subject that is untouched by reification.”² Indeed after Lukács’s introduction of the concept of reification it would be foolish for Heidegger to start with a description of man outside history. Rather he had to invent a way to peel off the relations that constitutes the modern man in order to arrive to his essence: This is precisely the task that death performs in *BT*. One needs to know the essence of a thing (Ding) in order to understand reification (verdinglichung), says Heidegger. Not only this is as absurd as to state that one can only recognize water as water so long as one recognizes hydrogen and oxygen in it; but it also reflects his ontology based on the pure and unmixed beings. Unless one defines what something is in its pure and unmodified form it is impossible to

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 43. SZ, 46.

² Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 124.

say what this thing is in its altered form: what if there is no pure form? Heidegger does not bother asking this question when it comes to the essence of man. We rather need to have him stripped off from all his qualities that are subject to change; we need to see him naked, unspoiled with these relations. In other words: Death is the concept of detour through which Heidegger reveals what he thinks about the essence of man and it is at the same time where he ends up. Death leads to the radically isolated individual to whom it represents god:¹

But death becomes the core of the self, as soon as it reduces itself completely to itself. Once self has emptied itself of all qualities, on the grounds that they are accidental-actual, then nothing is left but to pronounce that doubly pitiful truth, that the self has to die; for it is already dead.²

II.d. Gelassenheit: Heidegger's way out?

If there is one thing that needs to be retained from the previous discussion, it is how Heidegger takes a contingent historical experience and describes it as the basic ontological principle of the constitution of the human being. Heidegger indeed knows that this experience is far from being only possible experience of death:

The self assertion of technological objectification is the constant negation of death. By this negation, death itself becomes something negative, something completely inconstant and empty (...)³

¹ Ibid., 113.

² Ibid., 112.

³ Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 125. »Das Sichdurchsetzen der technischen Vergegenständlichung ist die ständige Negation des Todes. Durch diese Negation wird der Tod selbst etwas Negatives, zum schlechthin Unständigen und Nichtigen« ———, "Wozu Dichter?," in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950).

In other words, Heidegger knows that death lived as reification is not the only possible way death can be perceived. Where Heidegger differs from Lukács and Adorno is on his claim of a way out: making peace with man's finitude. In Heidegger's language this peace is called *Gelassenheit* (releasement toward things). It has already been mentioned above that Heidegger wanted to distance himself from the problems of phenomenology of *BT*. In this sense, it can be right to say that the releasement is rather the culmination of his distancing¹ from the existentialism of *BT* marked by Dasein's "anxiety in the face of death" and the move toward an understanding of human being defined by "high-minded contemplation of Being, and the language of Being."²

Technology, not as a product of capitalist development but as the loss of spirit is the key term of this definition. In a way, Rousseau's understanding of *perfectibilité* is very close to Heidegger's notion of technology: In his 1929-1930 classes Heidegger devotes a considerable time in talking about the ontological distinction of human being vis-à-vis other forms. Closely following Hartmann's categories, he states that a stone has no world and that the animal is poor in the world. Why the animal is poor? Why the animal is captive in the world? The answer is that the Animal's world does not expand beyond its immediate

¹ This change is of course within the path that is opened to him with the deployment of *Ereignis*: "A new conception of Being, considered no longer as the ground of beings, but as unfolding of the clearing from an abyssal withdrawal. Because man is no longer the thrown basis of this clearing but rather stands in it and is indebted to it for his own Being. (...) Dasein becomes Da-sein, 'There' of Being can no longer be understood as the Being that Dasein projects through self-projection and self-affection, but as the call of Being itself to man, a call to which man corresponds through thought." Françoise Dastur, *Heidegger and the Question of Time*, Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and the Human Sciences (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1998), 64.

² Krell, *Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being*, 155.

needs. In a breathtaking elaboration of the distinction of man, Heidegger does not say that the man has a world; he rather says that the man is world forming; that man forever expands his world.¹ Although Heidegger does not yet use the word technology in these lectures but one can see here the concept at its birth. On the one hand, it has a positive aspect: it is what moves the man beyond the realm of immediate needs and is the source of everything we know about our world. On the other hand, this destiny of man to expand forever threatens him in the modern world. As Rousseau blames *perfectibilité* for the end of the days of the happy primitive man; technology designates in Heidegger the transformation of *τέχνη* (*techné*) to a world destroying force. On the other hand a very strong line separates these two thinkers, whereas for Rousseau *perfectibilité* is the answer for the problems created by *perfectibilité* itself; Heidegger does not think that technology can cure its own wounds.

Bruno Latour, among others, criticizes Heidegger for refusing to make peace with technology: why can't Heidegger see that the gods of our age are present in the technology as well.² This criticism of Heidegger misses the point: for him, technology is not about with technological devices; but it is about the relation with them, it is precisely what prevents the gods to come to presence. What is to be done is rather to change our relation with technology. In his memorial address of 1955 Heidegger makes it clear when he says that the point is not avoiding the use the technical devices but about not becoming dependent on

¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 176-300.

² Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 65-67.

them, about the ability of letting them go; the point is about not being dominated by the world imposed by the technological devices. The way out is that of “*releasement toward things*.”¹ Although the account of technology here is strangely close to that of Adorno,² they are separated with a fundamental difference in the conception of technology as a working relation against an understanding of technology as a destiny. Heidegger’s “we” that gets related to the technical devices is an undifferentiated category. There is no capitalist who deploys technical devices for the sake of exploitation; there is no worker who gets exploited with these. The “they,” whose elaboration is needed the most in this situation is now replaced by an undifferentiated “we.” This replacement also blurs the distinction between the resentment toward technology with struggles against technologies of domination; it fails to see that nature gets destroyed not because man (as such) expands his world but some men do so to make more and more profit. Of course there is a way to expand man’s world without destroying nature, without destroying “the spirit.” Yet, how this world can be achieved is beyond Heidegger’s perspective. In this way, the peace with technology –which is only possible through a peace with man’s finitude, represents nothing but submission to destiny. Thus Heidegger sees tortures, murders, evil, exploitation, and all forms of suffering merely as the results of the insufficiency of human being; this

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*. Trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 54. *GAI6*, 528.

² For example, to his “do not knock:” Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 19.

insufficiency must be accepted. As Adorno observed this thought leads to an unconditional submission to authority.¹ On the other hand:

In a life that is no longer disfigured, that no longer prohibits, in a life that would no longer cheat men out of their dues—in such a life men would probably no longer have to hope, in vain, that this life would after all give them what it had so far refused. For the same reason they would not have to fear so greatly that they would lose this life, no matter how deeply this fear has been ingrained in them.²

III. Time for Heidegger: Temporality and Politics

It can be said that the discussion so far is merely a historic (*historisch*) insight into the sociology of Heidegger which still says nothing as to the content of his thought. This remainder of his chapter will tackle this problem: what is the achievement of Heidegger's idea of temporality that is often celebrated as the full-fledged culmination of the Kantian revolution? What is the status of a basic category like human being, or ethics or politics that is imagined through this idea of time? This discussion will explore the consequences of finitude in its relation to the "point of view of totality" and develop into the next chapter on the consequence of Heideggerian understanding of time,

To say that unlike any other being, human beings are the ones who have a consciousness that they must die, would be a simple argument to which even the strongest critics of Heidegger would agree (of course neither Heidegger nor his critics would write the sentence this way). But this basic statement allows Heidegger to come to the conclusion

¹ ———, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 53.

² *Ibid.*, 128.

that this final moment permeates to every instant of Dasein. The care (*Sorge*) about one's death is what makes care as such possible. *BT* starts its elaboration by arguing that Dasein is ever open to possibilities. Through the existentiell analysis, it shows that its relation to the future is shaped in the mode of being-toward-possibilities. This leads to the next step, which states the possibilities toward which Dasein is open come to presence in the present of Dasein. All the future possibilities are here and now.¹ What about death? It is the center of the existentiell analysis: This "possibility not-to-be-bypassed,"² comes to presence before any other in the constitution of Dasein and determines its nature as being-toward-death. The argument that the death completes the totality of Dasein should not be thought in the sense that a person's achievements in his lifetime are crowned in death. That would indeed be nonsense.³ Rather death completes Dasein in every given moment as an existentiell: in being-toward-death, Dasein experiences his being in time. Death, in the mode of passing away shapes not only the modality of Dasein's own existence but his modality of encountering other beings:

The now is a temporal phenomenon that belongs to time as within-time-ness: the now "in which" something comes into being, passes away, or is objectively present. "In the Moment" nothing can happen, but as an

¹ This is why Heidegger's "now" can be seen under a similar light with Walter Benjamin's "*jetzeit*" See: Andrew E. Benjamin, "Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger Showing the Present," in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Andrew E. Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).

² Heidegger, *BT*, 244.

³ Demske, *Being, Man, & Death*, 23; Edwards, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Evaluation*, 60.

authentic present it lets us *encounter for the first time* what can be “in a time” as something at hand or objectively present.¹

Therefore even in *BT* death which defined the experience of temporality of Dasein began to shape the fundamental character of Being as time and as finitude.² This position can be contested at least on two points: First, as argued above the idea that death is equal to passing away from presence to nothingness describes a historically contingent experience of death. For instance (so-called) philosophical Daoism (especially stories of Chuang-Tzu) perceives death as a moment in the transformation of everything into everything, an event totally internal to the flux of life. It is like the changes of seasons, movement of clouds. In death, one transforms to something else, not in the sense of reincarnation but in the sense of becoming once again part of the organic nature. In this perception, death is not seen as vanishing to the past; but as another opening toward the future. Moreover one can never know how people, in a just society –living their days to the full, will experience death. Secondly, even if the experience of death as passing away could be established as a transhistorical, transcultural ‘fact,’ that would be no proof that Being’s presence by definition is finite. It doesn’t answer to the finitude or to the infinitude of “transindividual”

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 311. »Das Jetzt ist ein zeitliches Phänomen, das der Zeit als Innerzeitigkeit zugehört: das Jetzt, >in dem< etwas entsteht, vergeht oder vorhanden ist. >Im Augenblick< kann nichts vorkommen, sondern als eigentliche Gegen-wart läßt er *erst begegnen*, was als Zuhandenes oder Vorhandenes >in einer Zeit< sein kann.« *SZ*, 338.

² Of course Heidegger is not the first one to come up with an understanding of Being on the basis of time. Especially culminating in his principle interlocutor Aristotle, ancient ontology asked the first questions in this issue and one can make a long list of thinkers who followed their path. The great contribution of *BT* “consists precisely in having made of these traditional problems a single question, that of temporality of Being” (Dastur, 1998, pp. 9, 13; Heidegger, 1972).

subjects thus completely ignores their relation to time, to Being in its totality and to the universals.

On the other hand, death does not immediately announce the end of the futurity of Dasein. To understand the full force of being-toward-death, more attention should be paid on *being-toward* (*sein zu*). That “human beings are not in time as are things of nature, but are fundamentally temporal; they are time,”¹ makes sense so long as human being is understood in his being-towards the future. In this sense, future gathers within itself the ground of possibility of past and present.² It is in being-towards-future that “the meaning of the being of that being we call Dasein proves to be *temporality*.”³ However, this elaboration of man as a being-toward, despite the fact that it opens infinite amount of creative possibilities for thought, starts to penetrate into dangerous ground. In Heidegger’s thought the ontological account given through temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) begins to give immediate answers to the questions on ways of being together in ethical life (*sittlichkeit*). This means

¹ Dastur, *Heidegger and the Question of Time*, 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ Heidegger, *BT*, 15. »Als der Sinn des Seins des Seienden, das wir Dasein nennen, wird die *Zeitlichkeit* aufgewiesen.« *SZ*, 17.

the subordination of what should be the outcome of political struggles to the Truth; to subsume politics to ontology.¹

“The part of those who have no part,” Rancière argues is the single riddle political philosophy has tried to solve. It came into being when the emergence of *demos*, the political subject which had no *virtue* other than being free, disrupted of the order of ancient Greek city. This originary constitution of a historical subject immediately compelled philosophers to produce pretexts to keep *demos* away from the order of the city. Since then, while politics proper consists in the acts through which those who have no part claim their part, the task of the philosophy has been to protect the order against the scandal of the emancipatory politics. Thus there is no history of political philosophy except the history of the different accounts denying the part to those who have no part. In his magnificent study, Rancière identifies three tendencies in the history of political philosophy, three ways to deal with the part of those who have no part: archipolitics (“substituting an equivalent role for it”), parapolitics (“creating a simulacrum of it”), and metapolitics (“performing an imitation

¹ Three remarks on this point are necessary: Firstly, here the word politics in this usage does not signify administration but politics proper; in the sense of struggle for equality that is the same with freedom. Secondly, same problem is also present in his followers such as Nancy. Despite the fact that his ontology formed under the light of later Heidegger is significantly different than the one criticized here, He follows the same logic where ontology precedes real life struggles. Thirdly, this can be useful in understanding in Heidegger’s own political choices (in a cautious way: the generalization, “substituting ontology for politics leads to fascism” is senseless.) Beistegui writes: “(...) he never ceased to subordinate politics to ontology. It is the specific way in which the relation of precedence of the philosophical over the political was established and reformulated, but never called into question, that made his support for Nazism possible and at once and simultaneously, irreducible to it.” Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 164.

of politics in negating it”).¹ However he forgets to add the fourth, the one that is the ground of possibility of all other three forms: ontopolitics. Heidegger’s version of ontopolitics is the politics of death: the one that creates a false equality among men in their thrownness (*geworfenheit*) and mortality (not every death is the same), the one that substitutes the metaphysical event for the political one.

In order to further develop this claim one can think about the relation between ethics and temporality as explained by Françoise Dastur: in the light of the advent of the Christian theology that changed Western civilization’s relation to time. Dastur states that “the second coming to presence of Christ, signaling the end of time” did not mean the expectation of an event that will take place in the future but to live in attunement to the “imminence” of this event.² As she further insists, Christianity turned the question of “good life” that belonged to the Greek beginning to the question of temporality: in the “mode of readiness.” In other words, the originary question of philosophy, “how to live?” which is in itself a political question as “how to live together?” was transformed by Christianity into the question that needs to be asked in a relation to temporality. It is on this schema that Heidegger brings his contribution. The imminence in Heidegger is not the imminence of the second coming but of death. Heidegger, the prophet of this new religion, is ready to teach how to live under the light of ontological Truth of death. But there is a fundamental flaw of politics of death: Marcuse diagnosed this when he saw that death as the essence of human being “seems to

¹ Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, 65. For a further elaboration of the same thesis: ———, *The Philosopher and His Poor*.

² Dastur, *Heidegger and the Question of Time*, 4.

defy any hypothesis of non-repressive civilization.”¹ When he states that “in a repressive civilization death is an instrument of repression (...) of surrender and submission;”² the death in question is the ontological death; the politics of death in the form of finitude. It is in this sense that the struggle for human liberation is a struggle against time and against death.³

III.a. Modernity’s time

It can be objected that for Heidegger, peace with death does not signify a passive submission but an active contemplation that radically alters our notion of subjectivity. It can further be said that the ethos based on this radically different subjectivity can be a step toward the creation of what can be called non-repressive civilization.⁴ To open how Heidegger offers an active peace with death, the issue of one’s relationship with the passing time needs to be opened. This brings the question of the transformation of past and passing away of time under the light of modernity’s orientation for future. According to Habermas, Heidegger’s *BT* ontologizes such “radical historical thinking:”

The horizon open to the future, which is determined by expectations in the present, guides our access to the past. Inasmuch as we appropriate past experiences with an orientation to the future, the authentic present is preserved as the locus of continuing tradition and of innovation at once; the

¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 134.

² *Ibid.*, 236.

³ *Ibid.*, 191-93.

⁴ Marcuse was aware of the relation between time and politics: “The flux of time is society’s most natural ally in maintaining law and order, conformity, and the institutions that relegate freedom to a perpetual utopia; the flux of time helps men to forget what was, and what can be; it makes them oblivious to the better past and better future” (1966, p. 231) Hence time enables the perpetuation of repressive civilization.

one is not possible without the other and both merge into the objectivity proper to a context of effective history.¹

Hence, in order to understand Heidegger, it is necessary to have a glance over modern understanding of temporality within which Heidegger operates. As Koselleck argues, modernity is marked with the sharp divide between the present moment and the past.² The increasing rhythm of modern life broke the continuity of time that caused the experience of the present to distance itself from the past. Fading image of the past not only made the establishment of a discipline of the study of history a necessity; but also shattered the smooth line which used to make it possible to understand the present and the future on the basis of the past. This development was not a mere loss of historical unity; on the positive side, it created an utterly new definition of the future:

Whereas in the Christian West the ‘new world’ had meant the still-to-come age of the world of the future (...) the secular concept of modernity expresses the conviction that the future has already begun.³

Koselleck draws attention to the German word for modernity: New times (Neuzeit). For him, the “new” does not only depict the novelty of today, but also calls for a new relation with the history:

Time is no longer simply the medium in which all histories take place; it gains a historical quality. Consequently history no longer occurs in but through time. Time becomes a dynamic historical force in its own right.¹

¹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 13.

² Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 254-58.

³ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 5. This should not be thought in contrast to previous quote from Dastur. While she refers strictly to the writings of Christian theologians, Habermas compares everyday experience of modernity with previous ages.

That also meant that for the first time human beings began to realize that they were living in history which brought about two novel experiences between which there is a tension manipulated skillfully by Heidegger. First is an awareness of the flow of time in which the present designates the moment in which tomorrow is transformed into yesterday.² The second is the revolutionary aspect of modernity: the realization of living in history is also the realization that human beings are making their own history, thus:

Everything has begun to move, or has been set in motion, and with the intention or under the pretense of fulfilling and completing everything, everything is placed in question, doubted and approaches a general transformation. The love of movement in itself, without purpose and without specific end, has emerged and developed out of the movement of the time. In it, and in it alone, one seeks and sets real life (...) Time is oriented toward future and with increasing acceleration.³

This sense of rapid transformation through time had radical effect in human relations. First of all, the idea that an object (likewise a relation, an idea) should be valuable because of its being old started to vanish (though the antiquity and nostalgia business became profitable). Secondly as such objects mediating relations between people disappeared, the organic ties linking individual to the community began to be destroyed.⁴ Far from being the fall of man, this means that the individuals finally started breaking the bonds of traditional closed communities. This is how conservative complaints about the

¹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 246. He also says: "But there is something special about the concept *Neuzeit*. Why a specific period of time should be characterized by the term *neue Zeit* or even *Neuzeit* remains linguistically unclear, even if one reads it in terms of highlighting provided by the so-called end of *Neuzeit*." And that "new times mean new history (*Geschichte*)." *Ibid.*, 233, 35.

² *Ibid.*, 238.

³ *Ibid.*, 251-52.

⁴ Gross, "On Dealing with What Is Passing Away," 56.

lack of rule and chaos of modernity began to emerge. However, these transformations did not mean that there was no rule in modern life, but simply what Kantian notion of autonomy meant: that the “modernity can no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself.”¹

III.b. Problem of Teleology

This new sense of temporality radically changing the shape of social life manifests itself in a well-known passage from Marx, in which the “out of itself” of modernity finds its meaning in its being-towards-future:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content -- here the content goes beyond the phrase.²

In other words, modernity does not need the image of a golden age to be repeated, neither holy rules of any kind carved into stones to be applied. It is rather the dreams, personal or collective imaginations, and the being-toward-future of concrete individuals that becomes a material force. That power of imagination about future, belittled today as a naïve, yet totalitarian teleology of enlightenment helped to shape modern age from Jules

¹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 7.

² Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 18.

Verne to Franklin Delano Roosevelt; from Lenin to Martin Luther King. Indeed today it is still an active force, though in a diverted form. On the other hand, it can be observed that for most of the part what motivates people to act today is not the dream but the fear of future. This manifests itself in both right wing and left wing forms as fear of: Islamic fundamentalism, terror, immigration, loss of job, environmental catastrophe... etc. It is the claim of this essay that Heidegger stands in a critical place where the political power of future is transformed from poetry and dream to fear and nightmare.

The distinguishing mark of Heidegger in contrast to conservative philosophers who feel a banal contempt for modernity is that he does not attack the modern understanding of time from an outworn notion of temporality that is borrowed from the experience of decaying social classes. His understanding of temporality is radically modern; his criticisms are not external attacks but an attempt of destruction (deconstruction) of modernity on its own terms. First of all he does accept and carries further modern notion of futurity: "The self-project grounded in the 'for the sake of itself' in the future is an essential quality of *existentiality*. *Its primary meaning is the future.*"¹ He further adds that in the expectation of future "one leaps away from the possible and gets a foot in the real."² Here Heidegger's idea of death assumes a positive content; it is a brilliant concept designed to deliver a decisive blow to the vulgar materialism which fails to see ideas, language, dreams, mental

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 301. »Das in der Zukunft gründende Sichertwerfen auf das >Umwillen seiner selbst< ist ein Wesenscharakter der *Existenzialität*. *Ihr primärer Sinn ist die Zukunft.*« *SZ*, 327.

² *Ibid.*, 242. »Auch im Erwarten liegt ein Abspringen vom Möglichen und Fußfassen im Wirklichen, dafür das Erwartete erwartet ist.« *SZ*, 262.

dispositions, habits... etc. as material forces. Heidegger starts on what is known since Epicurus: when I am death is not; when death is I am not. In other words, my death cannot become an actuality for me; thus it is the outmost definition of possibility; it is “the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Da-sein.”¹

As possibility, death gives Da-sein nothing to ‘be actualized’ and nothing which it itself could *be* as something real. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every mode of behavior toward..., of every way existing.²

Whereas the value of any possibility can be said to come from its actualization, death is privileged because it cannot be actualized, it stands as a pure possibility:

If death is an experience, and I cannot experience the end of experience (for to set a limit is to be in some sense already beyond it, Hegel teaches us), then I cannot experience my own death. Thus even when I die, my death does not happen to me. I never *meet* my death.³

Thompson is absolutely right in detecting that the operation of Heidegger is nothing less than overturning the time-honored Aristotelian distinction that places actuality (*ενδελέχεια* -entelekheia, *wirklichkeit*) above possibility (*Möglichkeit*). This definition, the kernel of undifferentiated materialism becomes questionable when death as an unrealizable possibility determines every instant of Dasein; when it completes Dasein’s totality in every moment in the mode of being-toward. This kind of thinking opens revolutionary paths in understanding our world: If the possibility that gives nothing can determine our every

¹ Ibid., 232. »Der tod is die möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit« SZ, 250.

² Ibid., 242. »Der Tod als Möglichkeit gibt dem Dasein nichts zu >Verwirklichendes< und nichts, was es als Wirkliches selbst *sein* könnte. Er ist die Möglichkeit der Unmöglichkeit jeglichen Verhaltens zu ..., jedes Existierens.« SZ, 262.

³ Iain. Thompson, "Can I Die? Deleuze on Heidegger on Death " *Philosophy Today* 43, no. 1 (1999): 33-34.

instant; any possibility, however unattainable might become a material force in transforming the historical world in the mode of readiness, in being-toward-the-possibilities. A possibility does not need to be “proven” that it will be materialized in the future in order to become an active force in the present: so long as there are those who act in attunement to it, the possibility becomes a part of this world without requiring a future event of rupture. For example one does not need the stages of development ending up in Communism to give “communist hypothesis” a material effect; whether the Communist society is an end that will be realized is immaterial for the communist idea to become a material reality in the present. In this sense, ontological death is not on the side of demolition and destruction but it is on the side of life. However, Heidegger who opens this path remains willfully ignorant about the possibilities of other orientations, other attunements; his notion remains stuck with being-toward-death.

By ignoring the power of other possibilities Heidegger himself undoes the positive content of death. While he has developed the conceptual apparatus to carry modernist futurity to a new dimension Heidegger chooses to implode it. In *BT*, the meaning of the future is defined in conjunction with the meaning of the *telos*, i.e. the end:

But the “end” itself belongs to what is outstanding. The “end” of being-in-the-world is death. This end, belonging to the potentiality-of-being, that is, to existence, limits and defines the possible totality of Da-sein.¹

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 216. »Zu diesem Ausstand aber gehört das >Ende< selbst. Das >Ende< des In-der-Welt-seins ist der Tod. Dieses Ende, zum Seinkönnen, das heißt zur Existenz gehörig, begrenzt und bestimmt die je mögliche Ganzheit des Daseins.« *SZ*, 234.

In other words, when the *telos* of living is achieved, Dasein reaches its wholeness but at this very same moment he is no longer there.¹ For Dasein, for that being which is distinguished by its being open to possibilities, there is only one possibility that is inescapable: Death. In this way, death constitutes the model for the futility of all human endeavors in building future projects. When Heidegger places the obvious fact that all human beings die as the central moving force of his thinking, this has disastrous consequences for the being-towards-future: “We can be said to have a future for as long as we are not aware that we have no future. The repression of death reflects the will of life.”²

The word end has a peculiar character: when one is talking about the end of a project, what is spoken about can be the aim toward which the project is directed, or the termination of that project, hence its non-existence. It is this second character that Heidegger wants to impose on the first. On the other hand, this double meaning of end is not a new discovery at all. The enlightenment thinkers had to go through rather special difficulties in facing this problem. For example, at one point while his text leads Kant to the question of whether any teleology is at all sustainable, he abruptly diverts the topic to the

¹ Ibid., 221. *SZ*, 237.

² Hans Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 65.

evolution of animal organs to attain their ends.¹ Kant's panic in the face of such a question is not without a reason. He knew first of all that the truth he pursued was not of ahistorical character. In "What is Enlightenment?" he is perfectly aware of the fact that different ages are capable of producing different relations with the truth:

Our age cannot enter into an alliance on oath to put the next age in a position where it would be impossible for it to extend and correct its knowledge, particularly on such important matters, or to make any progress whatsoever in enlightenment.²

On the other hand, the statement that our knowledge is subject to change in ways unknowable to us may blur our vision with regards to our goals. Kant should have sensed the risk of apathy in this when he wrote that "there can be no will without an end in view."³ In other words, end as nonexistence may paralyze end as the motive for action. Besides, Heidegger never considers whether the finite will of human beings may lead to something that transcends the finiteness that gives birth to it. If a will can transcend its conditions, can this will still be called finite? An example of this can be the emblematic book of the "naïve" idea of progress of enlightenment: *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de*

¹ In "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," he writes: "All the natural capacities of a creature are destined sooner or later to be developed completely and in conformity with their end. This can be verified in all animals by external and internal anatomical examination. An organ which is not meant for use or an arrangement which does not fulfil its purpose is a contradiction in the teleological theory of nature. For if we abandon this basic principle, we are faced not with a law governed nature but with an aimless, random process, and the dismal reign of chance replaces the guiding principle of reason" (1991, p. 42).

² Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'," 57. Of course, the standard reading of Kant suggests that Kant "could never gain an insight into the problem of temporality." Heidegger, *BT*, 21. This reading suggests that Kant's thought dwells in an eternal present which is the condition of possibility for his universals.

³ Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice,'" 65.

l'esprit humain, which was written when its author was expecting his death in the hands of the terror to which French revolution had evolved to. But his imminent death (in the end he killed himself rather than being executed) had not prevented Condorcet, first from thinking of a better future for humanity; second to write a sketch for a future book about the progress toward that future. Condorcet, while writing the sketch for a book that he knew will never be written understood what remained unknown to Heidegger: the necessity of death does not refute the necessity of a struggle for the future.

III.c. Will and Time

The question of philosophy here remains unchanged: how to live. In Heidegger it is asked: how to live under the ontological truth of finitude. Heidegger often questions the ethical action in a way that is inseparable from his discussion of temporality. In these sections, whenever Heidegger refers to time he calls the fourth book of Aristotle's physics explicitly or implicitly. In this book Aristotle asks whether time is one of those which exists or not. He concludes that only "now" of the present moment is present; future is "not yet," and the past is "no longer" present. In this understanding of time, nows come from the future presence themselves in the present and pass away to the past:

Although it is not explicitly stated that the nows are objectively present like things, still they are "seen" ontologically in the horizon of the idea of

objective presence. The nows *pass away*, and the past ones constitute the past. The nows arrive and future ones define the “future.”¹

In his remark on “passing away” Heidegger adds a twist: nows constituting the temporality are very similar to the fate of individual human being:

When a man dies and is removed from what is here, from beings here and there, we say that his time has come. Time and the temporal mean what is perishable, what passes away in the course of time... For time itself passes away. *But by passing away constantly, time remains as time.* To remain means: not to disappear, thus to presence. Thus time is determined by a kind of Being.²

Here Heidegger diagnoses the contradiction of metaphysics. This contradiction is not something that incapacitates it, but rather as the central tension it is what gives its energy and dynamism. Each being presences: it means that each being becomes present. This, in turn suggests that each being is bound to pass away. On the other hand for western metaphysics “to presence means to last.”³ This tension between passing away and lasting is what results in “the revulsion against time” that is nothing but the essence of technology. In *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger takes the task of clearing this tension in his

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 387. »Obzwar nicht ausdrücklich gesagt wird, die Jetzt seien vorhanden wie die Dinge, so werden sie ontologisch doch im Horizont der Idee von Vorhandenheit >gesehen<. Die Jetzt *vergehen*, und die vergangenen machen die Vergangenheit aus. Die Jetzt *kommen an*, und die ankünftigen umgrenzen die >Zukunft<. « *SZ*, 423. The French and the German languages designate the future as that which is “to come:” as *avenir* and *Zukunft*. Here Heidegger is playing with the coming of future and passing of past. Following the path opened by Heidegger, Derrida makes a crucial distinction between the foreseeable future, “le futur” and the future that is still to come, “*avenir as à venir*” which is analogous to the coming of someone who is not expected at all.

² ———, *On Time and Being*, 3. Italics added. »Wir sagen, wenn ein Mensch stirbt und aus dem Hiesigen, hier und dort Seienden weg genommen wird – er hat das Zeitliche gesegnet. Das Zeitliche meint das Vergängliche, solches, was im Verlauf der Zeit vergeht. Unsere Sprache sagt noch genauer: solches, was mit der Zeit vergeht. Denn die Zeit selber vergeht. Aber indem die Zeit ständig vergeht, bleibt sie als Zeit. . Bleiben heißt: nicht-verschwinden, also anwesen. Somit wird die Zeit durch ein Sein bestimmt.« *GAI4*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 12. »Wesen heißt Währen« *GAI4*, 12.

elaboration of Nietzsche's statement: "For *that man be delivered from revenge*: that is the bridge to the highest hope for me, and a rainbow after long storms."¹ For Heidegger, what Nietzsche calls revenge is nothing but will's revulsion against time. His discussion starts by showing that (quoting Schelling) "willing is primal being;"² here willing is not a capacity of human soul but as a designation of being of beings: the will to be. Willing in this sense wants to be present, but it wants an everlasting present. To achieve that, it sticks to the present moment, which is there by the virtue of passing away and hence it passes away with the moment.³

Then the "it was" becomes the sorrow and despair of all willing which, being what it is, always will forward, and is always foiled by the bygone that lie fixed firmly in the past.⁴

Marcuse had developed a similar thought when he wrote: "Will is still a prisoner because it has no power over time."⁵ In Marcuse, the will indeed designated everlasting enjoyment. Yet its victory against time and against death was the task of the struggle for

¹ ———, *What Is Called Thinking*, 85. »Denn dass der Mensch erlöst werde von der Rache: das ist mir die Brücke zur höchsten Hoffnung und ein Regenbogen nach langen Dnwettern.« GA8, 90

This discussion of the "ethics," "will," and "revenge" found in these lectures are not only philosophical discussions. These are Heidegger's reflections about dealing with the Nazi past; about the new Germany; and the world that is built after the 2nd world war. The letters between Arendt and Heidegger reveal that these rather abstract discussions are forged upon their talks about these concrete historical moments. Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Letters, 1925-1975*, ed. Ursula Ludz, trans. Andrew Shields (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004), 74-90.

² Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, 90. »Es gibt in der letzten und höchsten Instanz gar kein anderes Seyn als Wollen. Wollen ist Ursein « GA8, 95.

³ This discussion can be compared to the discussion of "overcoming the unfit" ———, *Basic Concepts*. Trans. Gary E. Aylesworth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 81-101. GA51, 94-118.

⁴ ———, *What Is Called Thinking*, 92. »So wird das >es war< zur Trübsal und zum Zähneknirschen jeden Wollens, das, als ein solches, immer vorwärts will und gerade dies nicht kann gegenüber dem, was als vergangen fest-und zurückliegt.« GA8, 96.

⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 120.

freedom, a task for the political struggles of his time. It is precisely Marcuse's thoughts that Heidegger finds dangerous: one cannot ask for an eternal happiness because it means to ask for asking the "now" to last eternally. This is precisely what leads to the revulsion against time, and "revenge marks the manner in which man so far relates himself to what it is."¹ For Heidegger, it can be said that it is the very struggle to be free that makes us unfree; technology is not just the alienation but the fight against alienation. The will should not strive for emancipation; it should admit that it cannot will eternally, hence accept its passing away, it should admit its finitude. "The will becomes free from what is revolting in the 'it was' when it wills the constant recurrence of every 'it was'."² In this way the past, present and future can be saved from this linearity³ and the "now" can be thought in a new fashion.

Heidegger's understanding of time is set to move the meaning of the present from presence in the sense of lasting to the presence (*anweisen*) in the sense of unfolding. What matters is not what persists but what unconceals itself for an evanescent moment. This is the meaning of truth for Heidegger: unconcealment –ἀλήθεια as ἀ-λήθεια. While Lethe (Λήθη) means concealment or state of being hidden, in Greek mythology it is also the name of the river that separates the realm of the dead from the realm of the living. It is the river

¹ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, 97. » die Rache prägt die Art und Weise, wie der bisherige Mensch sich überhaupt zum Seienden verhält.« GA8, 101.

² Ibid., 104. »Der Wille wird frei vom Widrigen des >Es war<, wenn er die ständige Wiederkehr von allem >Es war< will.« GA8, 106.

³ "but origin always comes to meet us from the future" ———, "A Dialogue on Language," in *On the Way to Language* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 10. »Herkunft aber bleibt stets Zukunft.« GA12,

of forgetting and eternal oblivion. Those who drink from its waters forget everything and those who cross it toward the kingdom of Hades walk toward eternal oblivion. In Greek mythology there is a very short list of heroes who went to this kingdom for the souls of the dead and came back. Probably, from Heideggerian perspective the most important of them is the poet Orpheus who went there to bring his beloved Eurydice and returned as a mad man. The details of the story of Orpheus are not important here; what matters is that it depicts the word of the poet, the poet who lost his mind after a traumatic experience as the standard of truth. What is beyond oblivion, what unconceals itself belongs to the poetic truth. In other words, science or rational debate will never fail to grasp this truth. Maybe Heidegger also remembers about what Plato said about Orpheus in *Symposium*: the Gods punished him because he was a coward who did not want to die in order to be with Eurydice, because he wanted to go beyond death as a mortal man.¹ So around the figure of Orpheus one may encounter two contradicting aspects of Heidegger's thought: first is an admiration for a poetic notion of truth that redeems the past; that aims to bring back what is left to oblivion; that enables the present as unconcealment. But Heidegger would also dismiss the act of Orpheus for his rebellion against death. Orpheus breaches the core of Heidegger's ethics: to accept our death, to make peace with it. Heidegger claims that the understanding of presence as unfolding requires man to kneel down before his finitude, to not to rebel against it. But this is where he is absolutely wrong: The unfolding of present, to

¹ Plato, *Six Great Dialogues*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Dover Thrift Edition (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2007), 147.

realize the hidden possibilities within it is the task of the historical action. Neither Heidegger nor anybody else can teach it the rightful path to take. It is only within the concrete political struggle that “freedom implies reconciliation, redemption of the past,”¹ not in willing the past wills, regardless of what these wills willed.²

IV. Finitude and the Totality: Status of the Universal Truth

The problem of the ethics of finitude requires further discussion: it will be resumed with Badiou’s concept that can be called the “ethics of infinite.” At this point we will proceed with the consequences of Heidegger’s notion of finitude in its relation to the universalism and to totality. In the words of Žižek:

Heidegger’s greatest single achievement is the full elaboration of *finitude* as a positive constituent of being-human –in this way, he accomplished the Kantian philosophical revolution, making it clear that finitude is the key to the transcendental dimension.³

In this way, finitude is instituted as the “the ground of emergence of the universe of meaning” in the horizon of which, “even infinite can emerge”.⁴ Finitude, on the one hand brings the problem of transcendence under the light of the limits of human knowledge;⁵ and on the other it is established as a dimension of truth which should now be understood as

¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 117.

² “Remembrance is no real weapon unless translated into historical action. Then struggle against time becomes a decisive moment in the struggle against domination. Ibid., 233.

³ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 273.

⁴ Ibid., 273-74.

⁵ Demske, *Being, Man, & Death*, 76.

concealment-unconcealment-concealment.¹ It remains concealed until an encounter takes place and it opens itself.

It is already argued that Heidegger's notion of finitude is derived from a particular definition of death, which in its turn relies on the ontologization of a determinate cultural experience:

Although nature, in the form of death, juts into society and culture as something not yet integrated, nevertheless the experience of death, the side which it turns towards us, the living, is undoubtedly determined in part by society. Dying, if not death, is certainly a social phenomenon.²

In other words, the experience of death changes across cultures, historical periods and even among individuals.³ Death, removed from its facticity is first established as the overarching human experience; now it founds Heidegger's notion of totality in the form of finitude.⁴ This criticism of Heidegger can be rather seen as another step in the path opened by him in rejection of the claims of universality. If one says that he simply creates another false universal, one risks missing the ingenuity of Heidegger's attempt: he not only universalizes a contingent human experience but this universalization enables him to deny the validity of all other universals. Heidegger thinks finitude not as a barrier to be encountered in the future, but as an ever-present limit on the possibilities of the human

¹ Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being*, 1-2.

² Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 131.

³ Edwards also explains the false logic of "everybody is dying" argument. To illustrate his point: At this moment I am dying in the mode of being-toward-death but there are different forms of being-toward-death. It would be foolish to say that I am in the same position for instance with the people who are dying in Iraq as a result of today's share of suicide bombings which became a part of their everyday life. Edwards, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Evaluation*, 23-24.

⁴ Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 120.

being. When he establishes this finitude as The Universal of his thought, all others lose their legitimacy: Grounded on a finite human experience, they fall short of the infinite they aspire to. This is the ghost that haunts post-modernist rejection of universality, that such rejection is itself based on false universality of finitude. It is based on the rejection that eternity may unfold itself here and now through the actions and within the grasp of ordinary individuals.¹

IV.a. Universals and Finitude

It was Kant who had established the modern understanding of universals. For Heidegger, the question of universals had been possible only because Dasein, hence the finitude of Dasein had not become an issue to be addressed for Kant.² He would further argue that Kantian universals had been possible only through a poor understanding of temporality marked by turning away from an “uncomprehended finitude toward a

¹ Cassirer, quoting Goethe argues that if one wants to step in the infinite, the only thing to do is to go in all the possible directions within the finite. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 201.

² This is a highly questionable assertion: “Let us pause here to note that epistemology has been conscious of the fact that the totality of the world order is not representable at least since Immanuel Kant. This insight, however, did not prevent Kant, and generations of other philosophers from the Enlightenment to modernism, from producing bodies of knowledge that treated their object in its universality, as is evident throughout, from Kant’s own examination of the transcendental preconditions of pure reason in its universality, all the way up to Heidegger’s and Sartre’s accounts of Being.” Kiarina A. Kordela, “Four Fundamental Myths of Postmodern Thought (or, the Eclipse of the Gaze),” *Cultural Critique*, no. 75 (2010): 3. Kordela, while being right about Heidegger’s claim of universality fails to notice that what she criticizes is grounded upon the Heideggerian universalism.

comforting infinitude.”¹ The same goes with the truth; he states that this should now be seen under the light of the temporal limits of Dasein.² Here, Heidegger’s notion of finitude does not provide any positive content as to the nature of truth that is produced as a dimension of finitude; he limits himself to undermine the universalist claims to truth.

Ernst Cassirer had underlined the problem with Heidegger’s criticism in the Davos debate:

For me, that was always really Kant’s main problem. How is freedom possible? (...) The Categorical Imperative must exist in such a condition that the law set up is not valid by chance just for human beings, but for all rational entities (*Vernunftwesen*) in general. (...) The ethical as such leads beyond the world of appearances (*Welt der Erscheinungen*) (...) That holds for the ethical and in the ethical a point is reached which is no longer relative to the finitude of the knowing creature.

He thus formulates his question to Heidegger:

How does such a finite creature (*endliches Wesen*) in general come to have knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), to have reason (*Vernunft*), to have truth (*Wahrheit*)? (...) How does this finite creature come to a determination (*Bestimmung*) of objects (*Gegenständen*) which as such are not bound to the finitude?³

¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 208-09. » Sie ist möglich und notwendig geworden durch Kant, weil bei Kant selbst das Problem des menschlichen Daseins, die Endlichkeit, nicht eigentliches Problem und d. h. nicht zentrales Problem der Philosophie wurde, weil Kant selbst — wie die 2. Auflage der »Kritik der reinen Vernunft« zeigt — diesen Weg begünstigte, von einer unbegriffenen Endlichkeit sich wegzuschlagen zu und sich zu beruhigen in einer Unendlichkeit.« GA29-30, 306

² ———, *BT*, 208. *SZ*, 227.

³ ———, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 194-95. *GA3*, 276-278. The debate is considered to be one of the greatest encounters of the 20th century philosophy and is accepted as a triumph for Heidegger. For many in the audience, including Levinas it marked the decisive point in the Heideggerian revolution in philosophy. For a recent study of the Davos disputation: Peter Eli Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Hence the problem is clear: the discussion of finitude is never a discussion of temporality per se. It is neither a discussion concerning one among many other qualities of human beings: it is a discussion that is much more fundamental for political philosophy than whether the man is essentially good or evil; or whether the war is the inescapable reality of human existence. The question of finitude brings together the questions of whether human beings (or any rational entity) are free: whether they have any capacity for choice: whether they can access to the universal truth: whether they are accountable: whether justice is possible: whether there is a way beyond interest politics and whether there is any need to strive for a just society. On the other hand, Heidegger carefully avoids addressing Cassirer's questions, he replies them rather indirectly when he argues that "truth is relative to Dasein" and that "truth can only be as truth, and as truth it only has a sense in general if Dasein exists."¹ On the other hand he insists elsewhere that this relativism does not mean that the truth depends on the arbitrariness of the subject.²

Heidegger makes a crucial intervention here, especially when he argues that "the fact that there are 'eternal truths' will not be adequately proven until it is successfully

¹ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 197-98. »Wahrheit kann überhaupt als Wahrheit nur sein und hat als Wahrheit überhaupt nur einen Sinn, wenn Dasein existiert. « GA3: 281

² ———, *BT*, 208. In his lecture, "the concept of time" he explains that all he wanted was to provide a philosophical counterpart to what Einstein did in physics with his relativity theory: "Space is nothing in itself; (...) Time too is nothing" »Der Raum ist an sich nichts (...) Auch die Zeit ist nichts.« ———, *The Concept of Time*, 3, 3E. It should be underlined here that his rejection of the categories of absolute time and absolute space consists of replacing them with the categories of relative time and relative space. He totally omits the possibility for relational space and relational time. This omission is not a philosophical incapacity but rather the result of his politics as seen in his denial of the relational possibilities of the they. For an evaluation of absolute, relative and relational understandings of time and space: David Harvey, "Space as a Key Word," in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, ed. Noel Castree and Derek Gregory (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006).

demonstrated that Da-sein has been and will be for all eternity.”¹ If this is meant to say that the truth is not relative to Dasein as subjectivity but it is relative to the existence of an entity named Dasein, it simply repeats what is known to every school child: that the universal truth is not accessible to the stones, to the animals and plants (this does not mean that they do not exist in accordance with certain truth that is accessible to us through the knowledge of physics, biology, chemistry... etc.) but to human beings. Everybody would accept that consciousness is not eternal, and that before the birth of Dasein (read: consciousness) truth was accessible to no one and when it will be extinct it will no more be accessible to anyone. This does not mean that the planets and stars would quit their orbits and dwell in complete randomness after the destruction of earth (or any place inhabited by a self-conscious entity); it rather means that whatever happens to stars and planets, there will be no one to know. Does this refute that human beings can relate themselves to the universal? It seems that the only answer that Heidegger can provide to Cassirer’s challenge is that the only rational entity that can know the universal should be an undying entity, an entity infinite in itself. There is something odd here, Heidegger’s logic runs:

1. As a human, unlike other living beings I am aware that one day I am going to die;
2. As a modern subject, I relate to my death as a limit experience
3. Being-toward-death means that this limit is not something to be expected from the future but forms the totality of the human being in the present as finitude;
4. Totality of human comes with a limit, *thus* s/he cannot access to the universal. Universal belongs only to an entity that can access the infinite.

¹ Heidegger, *BT*, 208.

Linking these four points means that if the human being wants to understand the universal s/he has to discover a way to become immortal. The shortcoming of Heidegger is here: he does not inquire into the conditions of becoming immortal. Of course, at least given the state of current science and technology the idea of biological / physical immortality seems to be unattainable; yet as man's finitude belongs to neither of these realms, this unattainability means nothing as to its infinitude. It was Lukács who had shown that by contributing to the creation of a collective subject –i.e. as a class, human beings are capable of accessing the knowledge of the whole. With Badiou, the inquiry will consider another idea for the possibility of this worldly immortality. But the consequence of Heidegger needs to be underlined here: When one accepts his categories, and his line of thinking there can be no place for a “point of view of totality,” no place for different claims of universality; thus his frame works to undo the categorical grounds for the politics of equality and justice; these terms are beyond the reach of finite individuals. The only path left to them is war of survival based on interest politics. Whether he is willing to admit it or not, his idea of finitude leads to one conclusion; all mortals are bound to the irrational pursuit of their particular interests.¹

¹ Moreover, his rejection of universals can be understood as a way to understand his relation with National Socialism: “(...) rejection of universal concepts by no means entails a commitment to Nazism. Yet, with this radical philosophical maneuver, Heidegger left himself vulnerable to political movements whose major selling point—in opposition to the presumed decrepitude of Western liberalism—was an unabashed celebration of volkish particularism. Heidegger used the same normative criticisms he had brought to bear against Western rationalism as arguments against their corresponding political forms; cosmopolitanism, rights of man, constitutionalism.” Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 175-76.

IV.b. Language and Finitude: a Note on Dialogue

But neither Lukács, nor Badiou, nor anybody else can ever convince Heidegger. For him, even if the point of view of totality, the perspective of the immortal was possible, it would be absolutely incommunicable:

In other words, language is something that belongs to the essence of man in his finitude. To imagine a god expressing himself in speech is utterly meaningless.¹

Hence, what distinguishes the being of human from God and from other forms of being is its finitude and it determines human being's thrownness to the language. When the language speaks, it speaks within the finitude that gave birth to it. In this way, the language is not only a mark of distinction between man and others, but becomes one among men as well. To say the last thing first: Heidegger is right in rejecting any immediate connection between the individual as such and the infinite. Heidegger is also right in challenging the view that language is the manifestation of the rational essence of man and that every language can be subsumed to the Language –to the metalanguage, whose claims of

¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 238. »daß die Sprache etwas ist, was zum Wesen der Endlichkeit des Menschen gehört. Einen Gott sich sprechend zu denken, ist der absolute Widersinn.« GA29-30, 346

Or “The word fails, not as an occasional event – in which an accomplishable speech or expression does not take place, where only the assertion and the repetition of something already said and sayable does not get accomplished - but originally [i.e. it is language as a whole that fails, not just the lack of a specific word]. The word does not even come to word, even though it is precisely when the word escapes one that the word begins to take its first leap. The word's escaping one is enowning as the hint and onset of be-ing” — —, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 26. »Es verschliigt einem das Wort; dies nicht als gelegentliches Vorkommnis, wobei eine vollziehbare Rede und Aussage unterbleibt, wo nur das Aus-und Widersagen des schon Gesagten und Sagbaren nicht vollzogen wird, sondern ursprünglich. Das Wort kommt noch gar nicht zum Wort, ob es gerade durch das Verschlagen auf den ersten Sprung kommt. Das Verschlagende ist das Ereignis als Wink und Anfall des Seyns.« GA65, 36.

universality cannot hide its Eurocentricism. However, he stops merely in undermining the truth claim of this Language. The understanding of finitude as an ever-present limit cannot accept that one can access the Whole but keeps its free floating fragments intact as partial totalities.

One can develop this point by depicting the Language attacked by Heidegger: The Language of commonplace universalism can be represented as the widest possible set of a metalanguage which has its subsets of particular languages. In this conception, the metalanguage of rationality produces the universals as common elements to all of its subsets. However, as cultural criticism proved again and again, the universals of this metalanguage are nothing but historically contingent concepts that emerged out of the historical experience of Europe, and their importation to the rest of the world bears the mark of exploitation, death and suffering caused by capitalism and imperialism. Hence it should be acknowledged that Heidegger's concept of finitude opened the path whereby this undifferentiated universalism became vulnerable to the subsequent criticism.

On the other hand, the entire path that is opened by the deployment of finitude as a conceptual apparatus suffers from what Heidegger did: he destroyed the set of metalanguage but left subsets intact. All that is left after him are sets of languages, these languages are closed totalities that are stuck with their culturally determined finitude; they are disconnected completely from each other. The previous understanding was that of a set

imposing its rule to its subsets, with Heidegger there are sets that do not intersect or interact with each other, unless they clash violently.

This can be illustrated with his famous dialogue which bears the title: “A dialogue on language, *between a Japanese and an Inquirer.*”¹ First thing to note about this dialogue is the italicized part of its title. The dialogue is between an inquirer and “a Japanese;” little matters who that Japanese is, his social class, his education, his profession, his ideology, his tastes, nothing matters. By the virtue of being Japanese, he becomes an ideal type of his culture: the title of the dialogue assumes that the Japanese culture is a monolithic whole, an unmediated totality which can be represented by any Japanese. In other words Japan is a closed totality whose essence is manifested in every Japanese individual. On the other hand, the European in this dialogue has a proper name,² and an adjective: inquirer.³ Moreover the Japanese of the dialogue plays the eastern wise man ad nauseam that after a while his attitudes become ridiculous. Since the question here is not about Heidegger in his relation to culture I am not going further on how, despite his admiration for the culture of

¹ ———, “A Dialogue on Language,” 1. Italics added. In original: »Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache. Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden«

² A note that does not belong to the original text states that the “Japanese” is Professor Tezuka of the Imperial University, Tokyo. On Heidegger’s Japanese connection: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Martin Heidegger and His Japanese Interlocutors: About a Limit of Western Metaphysics,” *Diacritics* 30, no. 4 (2000).

³ In this way cultural Other, definitely fits to the description that “these others are not *definite* others. On the contrary, any other can represent them.” Heidegger, *BT*, 118. » Diese Anderen sind dabei nicht *bestimmte* Andere. Im Gegenteil, jeder Andere kann sie vertreten.« *SZ*, 126.

Whereas the westerner of this dialogue is marked by the distinction that his culture endows him with (with proper name and adjective) the easterner is indissociable from the mass he is part of.

Far-East, he becomes the worst orientalist. More important than that, is the relation he establishes between the two language worlds:

Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man. (...)

And so, a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible.¹

Here, it is possible to see the linguistic result of finite essence of human being. The idea that human is finite does not mean that it is endowed with a finite Human Language that has many forms. Rather there are many languages stuck to their different finitudes and they are totally incapable of communicating with each other.² Following Heidegger, it is possible to have an insight in the various forms of “culture talk”³ that is widespread today: we can fight, tolerate, destroy, respect, hate and admire other cultures but can never try to relate with them in communication: politically. Maybe it is a correct criticism that followers of Kant took the language of law as their metaphor for universality; then Heidegger and his followers have one single metaphor that is drawn from the finitude of man: war. But stuck between law and war one misses that there is another way of relating oneself to what exists;

¹ ———, "A Dialogue on Language," 5. »Vor einiger Zeit nannte ich, unbeholfen genug, die Sprache das Haus des Seins. Wenn der Mensch durch seine Sprache im Anspruch des Seins wohnt, dann wohnen wir Europäer vermutlich in einem ganz anderen Haus als der ostasiatische Mensch.« and »So bleibt denn ein Gespräch von Haus zu Haus beinahe unmöglich.« *GA12*, 85.

² "Because I now see *still* more clearly the danger that the language of our dialogue might constantly destroy the possibility of saying that of which we are speaking." *Ibid.*, 15. »Weil ich jetzt noch deutlicher die Gefahr sehe, daß die Sprache unseres Gespräches fortgesetzt die Möglichkeit zerstört, das zu sagen, was wir besprechen.« *GA12*, 98.

It is curious to note that Heidegger and his interlocutor do share a strong understanding that they can never understand each other.

³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 17-62.

this way is called politics and it is not reducible to either law or to war. Thinking the language from the perspective of politics opens an alternative to both to the idea of immediate communicability and to the desert of misunderstanding.

It remains that thought must be spoken, manifested in works, communicated to other thinking beings. This must be done by way of languages with arbitrary significations. One mustn't see in this an obstacle to communication. Only the lazy are afraid of the idea of arbitrariness and see in it reason's tomb. On the contrary. It is because there is no code given by divinity, no language of languages, that human intelligence employs all its art to making itself understood and to understanding what the neighboring intelligence is signifying.¹

Besides, the arbitrariness of language was not unheard of until Heidegger. For instance Kant, in *dreams of a visionary* wrote the following:

Formerly, I viewed human common sense only from the standpoint of my own; now I put myself into the position of a foreign reason outside of myself, and observe my judgments, together with their most secret causes, from the point of view of others. It is true, the comparison of both observations results in pronounced parallaxes, but it is the only means of preventing the optical delusion.²

This passage gives us a great deal on how to understand the infinite in a renewed Kantian sense: indeed there are worlds that are different from each other, these are finite worlds (and they need not be cultural worlds either, any human being's world is different than any other) as well. All of these worlds are equally suspect to "optical delusion" and none of them can be trusted when they talk about the universal. But while facing "the

¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 62.

² Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, 85-86. For an excellent discussion of Kant's text, see: Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*. Trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

reality that is exposed through difference (parallax)”¹ one starts to put a step toward the infinite.² Kantian universal does not refer to such concepts that are open to an individual named Kant, Heidegger or any other but to the infinite that unfolds in the pronounced parallax.

Although the framework for the emergence of a new universalism will be discussed with respect to Badiou, such an attempt requires one preliminary step in this direction. This step requires a close reading of Badiou’s teacher, Louis Althusser, as a consequence of Heidegger.

It is important to note that for this study, the historical mechanisms of the translation of Heidegger to French contexts and the ways in which philosophers explicitly linked themselves to Heidegger are irrelevant. While it is impossible to deny the merits of painstakingly difficult studies observing the Heidegger effect on different individual philosophers as well as on different philosophical trends, this study will not follow this path. The inspiration on how to understand the influence of Heidegger comes from what Heidegger himself said about Nietzsche: whether one is for or against him, everyone who

¹ ———, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, 3.

² Cassirer’s words should be thought again under this light: “We must search again for the common center, precisely in the disagreement. And I say, we do not need to search. For we have this center and, what is more, this is so because there is a common, objective human world in which the differences between individuals have in no way been superseded, but with the stipulation that the bridge here from individual to individual has been knocked down. This occurs repeatedly for me in the primal phenomenon of language. Each of us speaks his own language, and it is unthinkable that the language of one of us is carried over into the language of the other. And, yet we understand ourselves through the medium of the language. Hence there is something like *the* language. And hence there is something like a unity which is higher than the infinitude of the various ways of speaking.... And it is for this reason that I start from the Objectivity of the symbolic form.” Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 205. GA3, 292

thinks today must do so under his light and shadow.¹ We can say the same thing about Heidegger today: there is something of him that is alive in each of us. It opens new paths of thinking, dreaming, acting, poetizing, painting or in short, “dwelling” for our world; yet it also closes some other paths. In a way, to study a thinker means to study that which is, that which was and foremost that which may come alive of him in each of us. In this sense whether Althusser’s thought is inspired by Heidegger, whether he was completely against him or even whether he had ever heard of Heidegger is not important. There is something of Heidegger that found its most powerful explanation in the thought of Althusser.² This, in turn has led to the de-Hegelianization of Marxist thought in the 20th century (has it ever been Hegelian, except a few notable cases?); paved the way for Foucault and others that dominated the thought and the practice of radical politics after the 1980’s.

¹ ———, “On the Question of Being,” 321. *GA* 9, 424.

² Empirically speaking the greatest influence should be considered as Spinoza. But it can be questioned whether Althusser could “discover” Spinoza, or be able to see what he found him without the Heidegger effect.

Chapter Five: Althusser and the Fragmentation of Totality

The basic point of this section is clear: Althusser followed through the consequences of Heidegger's thought and his original attempt in the field of Marxist/Revolutionary thought established the "expressive totality" as the authoritative version of Lukácsian understanding and then destroyed it. Yet this first claim rather seems to be baseless: Althusser hardly mentions Lukács or Heidegger. So how this claim is to be understood? First, what is at stake in this point advanced is not the explicit usage of Heideggerian categories to consciously undermine Lukács' claims. It is rather a Heidegger effect that seems to be strongly felt in the postwar France that triggered a further Althusser effect that prohibited any recourse to Hegel's categories. Here it should be acknowledged that both Heidegger and Althusser effects are "overdetermined" and irreducible to their respective sources. The goal of the interpretation of the works of these two thinkers is not aimed to find their objective truth that absolutely determines their effect but to find their *tendential* determinations that led to their effect.

As to the empirical relation between Althusser and the other thinkers: He barely mentioned Heidegger until his withdrawal from the active scene of politics. The few words occasionally said about him do not indicate a clear opinion, they are sometimes lightly positive sometimes lightly negative. It is very understandable though that while he was in active politics, producing his texts strategically as interventions to ongoing discussions in

the radical left, it would rather be a tactical mistake to openly declare that he relied heavily on someone whose Nazi past was known. In a way, Heidegger is lurking in the corner in many of these texts but can never come to the front. What he wrote after a long psychiatric treatment reveals the extent of his debt to Heidegger. The passages not only praise Heidegger as The 20th century thinker for a history without origins, without a Subject, without a Goal; but also they show an incredible command and appreciation of Heidegger's concepts.¹ Seeing the level of immersion to the core of Heidegger's thought manifest in these passages one is easily tempted to say that Althusser was deliberately concealing his debt to Heidegger. Yet in the letters dating from this period, while expressing his admiration for Heidegger, Althusser also says that he only started recently to digest Heidegger's thinking.² The Heidegger he encounters late in his life is new yet familiar; what he "discovers" in Heidegger –subjectless, goalless, originless history; the givenness or "there isness" of any present– are rather the fundamental elements of Althusser's thought. In a way, these pages reveal Althusser's encounter with Heidegger who was known to him only through Heidegger-effect. That is to say that Heidegger was a strong presence that was being felt in French philosophy before the Second World War; this presence reached a climax during the post-war France through various interpretations of his oeuvre as well as discussions around it.

¹ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, ed. François Matheron and Olivier Corpet, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 170-71.

² *Ibid.*, 229.

If the small number of direct references to Heidegger is surprising, the lack of almost any reference to Lukács must be shocking. Althusser who launched a relentless attack against Hegelian Marxism hardly mentions its leading figure. Even these references are indirect: “young Lukács” is cited a few times with a number of other people who are making similar mistakes with him. But in other occasions, Lukács is often excluded from the list when Althusser names the leading figures of 20th century Marxism. Moreover, there is no one single time that Althusser explicitly and directly comments on Lukács’ claims. This is probably an explicit choice of Althusser, yet about his reasons one can only speculate: maybe dealing with a nuanced version of Hegelian Marxism was a distraction for his project to get rid of Hegel’s ghost once and for all; maybe he didn’t think Lukács was that important; maybe he didn’t want to put further pressure on an intellectual who was barely allowed to survive behind the iron curtain... etc. Regardless of his intentions, his writings led to the abandonment of anything Hegel, including Lukács’ version.

The same holds true for Lukács as well: did he read Althusser? Did Althusser’s work have any effect on Lukács’ return to the themes of *HCC* and his “last auto-criticism?” Did he influence Lukács’ distinction between the wrong and genuine Hegel? Does Lukács’ substitution of alienation by “objectification” as a feature that will exist in any society bear the mark of Althusser’s critique of consciousness? These questions cannot be authoritatively answered. Yet despite the lack of explicit references and the commonly accepted hostility between these two leading figures of 20th century Marxism, there are

further similarities pertaining to fundamental categories of their thought:¹ when one gets beyond the explicit disagreements one can see fundamental similarities between Lukács' notion of society as "complex of complexes" and Althusser's structured whole; that both advocate a similar idea of history as a process without a privileged subject and a final goal; they are both against a totality that is guided by a single principle; they are critical of mechanical determinisms of all sorts... etc. As will be shown in the remainder of this section on Althusser, their differences appear to be marginal. For instance when both advocate a history that does not have a goal, Lukács maintains that the history as a process is only possible by the goal-positing consciousness; Althusser has no place for any goal. Yet this minor difference becomes unbridgeable and absolute when it comes to the concrete political projects.

The basic argument of this chapter is that while Althusser is on similar terms with Lukács on the society as an unbounded whole, he establishes this notion as a binary opposite of a totality dominated by a single center. As shown in the previous chapters, for Lukács the opposition between these totalities is dialectical and allows for a transition between its moments through the formation of a narrative. Althusser's denial of the relation between [totality] and totality principally guides him to search for a revolutionary movement that will come out of a decentered notion of a whole. This understanding is indeed relevant for a world where the leadership of proletariat became suspicious; the

¹ Jay mentions that Lukács' *Lenin* is generally approved by Althusserians. However, it can be argued that the similarities is not limited to this essay. See: Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 413.

problems with working class organizations become evident; the problems with the so-called communist state (an oxymoron) are evident; the movements of woman, of youth, of gays and lesbians emerge; former colonies fight for their independence... etc. Relying on the wealth of this world, Althusser forms a philosophy that provides a strong criticism of [totality] replacing it with a structured whole. In this way, structure and totality that were regarded as synonymous in 1950s become the exact opposites within a decade.¹ On the other hand Althusser is left with a major problem about understanding the grounds of possibility for egalitarian and emancipatory movements in a structured totality which has no place for subjects, for goals, for beginnings. Faced with this insoluble problem, he ends up with the idea of determination “in the last instance,” which never comes; and with the idea of fusion of different contradictions, whose mechanism is not properly discussed. The ultimate difference of this new Marxist politics thus has everything to do with the legacy of Hegel: everything to do on how to define totality.²

¹ Ibid., 385.

² Althusser's conception of totality is widely discussed. Other than Perry Anderson's *Arguments within English Marxism* and E.P. Thompson's well-known attack there are a number of general studies on Althusser: For an overview of his concept of totality: Michael Gordy, "Reading Althusser: Time and the Social Whole," *History and Theory* 22, no. 1 (1983). For the place of totality in the wide array of themes addressed by Althusser: Michael Sprinker, "The Legacies of Althusser," *Yale French Studies*, no. 88 (1995). For a brief account of the conjuncture, accomplishment and the consequences of Althusser's thought Jason Read, "The Althusser Effect: Philosophy, History, and Temporality," *Borderlands* 4, no. 2 (2005), http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol4no2_2005/read_effect.htm. For a critical account of Althusser: Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For a study evaluating the political background, the importance, relevance and the evolution of Althusser's work Gregory Elliott, "Althusser the Detour of Theory." (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

I. Pre-Hegelian Totality: Montesquieu & Rousseau

In order to grasp peculiarity of the place of Hegel in Althusser's system it is worth starting with a detour of his interpretation of the versions of totality developed before Hegel. This will enable one to grasp what for Althusser is the specific contribution of Hegel, or if there is any. This discussion can start with one of his earlier publications aimed to bring an analysis of the foundational moment of political science: a moment marked by a rupture from the existing abstract universalism of political philosophy. In a quick overview, Althusser argues that the earliest definition of totality and universalism belongs to Bossuet's "universal" history in the form of the "Bible says everything." This attempt is furthered by Hobbes and Spinoza who tried to grasp the "essence" of society in order to establish an "ideal and abstract model" of it. Against this background comes the ingenuity of Montesquieu. He provides the foundation of the political science because he doesn't care about the society in general; he wants to analyze "concrete societies in history" with the aim to discover "laws," not the "essences." Thus the political science begins with the rejection of the assertion that "a single principle can unite the prodigious and daunting diversity of manners and morals."¹ Here in a two-page formulation Althusser provides what would become a crucial aspect of his politics. The totality as understood by philosophy is spiritual, abstract, aimed at essences; this stands in sharp contradiction to science which is

¹ Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1972), 19-20.

aimed at the concrete and to the laws; to the contingent, not to the essence behind the appearance.

On the other hand, Montesquieu is also committed to totality; he is even willing to create categories of totality whose internal principle can be summarized in one word. Yet in principle Althusser does not have a problem with such totalization: these depictions belong to the realm of concrete which allow Montesquieu to “express politically the whole real life of the citizens.”¹ This totality has nothing to do with the discussion of the ideal state reflecting an abstract idea. It is rather posited as “a scientific *hypothesis* intended to *explain the facts*.”² With Montesquieu totality is no longer an abstract “infinite space,” it is now replaced with a structured space that

possesses concrete centres to which are related a whole local horizon of facts and institutions: the States. And at the core of these totalities, which are like living individuals, there is an inner reason, an inner unity, a fundamental primordial centre: the unity of nature and principle. Hegel, who gave the category of the totality enormous scope well knew his own teacher when he expressed his gratitude for this discovery to Montesquieu's genius.³

This suggests that Montesquieu betrays his own principle when he views the state as a “real totality and that all the particulars of its legislation, of its institutions and its customs are merely the effect and expression of its inner unity.”⁴ Based on this principle Montesquieu treats republic, monarchy and despotism as totalities,⁵ which becomes the

¹ Ibid., 46. Italics removed.

² Ibid., 47.

³ Ibid., 47-48.

⁴ Ibid., 47. Italics removed.

⁵ Ibid., 61.

fundamental error of *Spirit of Laws* which seeks to find “*pure models*.” The institution of the concept of totality which is “only valid for the purity” leads Montesquieu to “relapse into the theory of essences” while dealing with the history which has no purity.¹ After citing this criticism, Althusser nonetheless extends his admiration for the *Spirit of Laws*, especially when he underlines the fact totality simply disappears from the Montesquieu’s list of the principles he discovered: in the end, “the unity of a profound law has turned into a plurality of causes.”² In other words, Montesquieu does not develop a simple totality modeled after the unity of the individual. He is the first to realize that any state founded upon a contradictory unity will perish. In a way he imagines a constantly evolving history whose movement is based upon the conflict between the abstract universalism of the model of the state and its concrete facts. So Montesquieu, even before Marx, develops an idea of history without an end, a history that is constantly changing with contradiction as its motor:³ strangely formulated as the “*pregnant totality of the State*.”⁴

Almost a decade later Althusser returns to the theme of the relation between the totality and the state as the unity of Law. This time his interlocutor is Rousseau, and Althusser is far less generous to the founder of a totality defined as a result of the process of total alienation:

¹ Ibid., 48.

² Ibid., 54.

³ Ibid., 49-50.

⁴ Ibid., 51.

What is a law? The act proper to a Sovereign. What is its essence? To be general: both in its form and in its content, as a decision of the general will, relating to a general object. (...)

1. The generality of the law is the generality of its *form*: 'when *the whole people decrees* for the whole people'. The whole people = the entire people assembled together, *decreeing* for itself as a 'body', abstracting from the particular wills. The will of this body is the general will. Hence we can write: generality of the law = general will.

2. The generality of the law is the generality of its *object*: 'when the whole people decrees *for the whole people*'. The object of the law is the 'whole people', as a 'body' and considering only 'itself', abstracting from all particularity (action, individual). We can write: generality of the object of the law = general interest.

The unity of the law can then be written: *general will = general interest*.

This couple can only be explained by its opposite: *particular will = particular interest*.¹

This long quote contains several ideas that have their center as the relation between the totality and the state. Basically totality is the legitimization of coercive state: according to Althusser *Social Contract* posits state not just as “everything” but as a totality. The Law of the sovereign is legitimized as the expression of the general will; it is a totality achieved as an abstraction/alienation from the particulars; it is a whole that subordinates all the particulars. The general is both the culmination and the negation of each particular. The particular will, particular interest is always wrong; on the other hand the “totality of the sum of particular wills” *express* “a general will that never went wrong; it was one and

¹ Ibid., 147-48.

indivisible, one and coercive ('we shall compel him to be free')."¹ In a way, with these lines Althusser depicts Rousseau as the founder of all repressive ideologies of 20th century. This notion of totality is that of an abstract universal, supposedly good for everyone, known by the Sovereign and imposed upon the society.²

II. Totality: ideology

One common element in both Montesquieu's false totality and Rousseau is the analogy between the social whole and the unity of an individual: "Rousseau's social body does indeed have all the categories of Hobbes's Prince. The community has all the attributes of a natural individual, but transposed into the 'element' of union: it is not a question here of a real individual (some man or some assembly which is the Prince) but of a moral totality, of the moral person constituted by the alienation of all the individuals."³ Thus it would be no mistake to suggest that the developments in the field of psychology that challenged the

¹ ———, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 62. Ironically Althusser's discussion of the state, his take on the state from the standpoint of the revolutionary movements becomes much more nuanced after his withdrawal from active politics caused by the dramatic events in his personal life. His later writings, through a magnificent discussion depict the State as a machine: one who transforms the motion of the violence of the class struggle into juridico-political power. He does not clearly say that the State is an evil and one must think of a politics at a distance from the state but comes near it. In a strange way his discussion ends in an aporia: before the revolution it is easy to say that all forms of subordination and domination as well as division of labor within the state apparatuses must be over. But after the revolution problem begins: if state power is not taken, the result is the violent suppression of the revolution as seen in the Paris Commune. If it is taken: it is not enough to replace state personnel, not enough to redesign it... the machine is built for a specific purpose and it does not matter who is using it. *Ibid.*, 61-135. Especially p. 114-18. For an overview of the development of Althusser's thought in relation to the problem of the state linking his positions to current issues and thinkers: Miguel Vatter, "Machiavelli after Marx: The Self-Overcoming of Marxism in the Late Althusser," *Theory and Event* 7, no. 4 (2004).

² The concept of general will is particularly important for Badiou: for him, general will does not depict the law of the totality expressed in the unity of the State but the principle of its undoing. This idea will be further developed in the next chapter.

³ Althusser, *Politics and History*, 137.

unity of the individual were among the factors enabling Althusser's critique of totality. The most important challenge brought to human being's totality was closely followed by Althusser: Jacques Lacan's conception of mirror stage. Lacan's seminal study begins with the observation of babies –of an age they are no smarter than monkeys– when they see their own reflection in a mirror. For Lacan, this encounter with one's own image precedes a “dialectical encounter with the other:”

Indeed, this act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, in eventually acquired control over the uselessness of the image, immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates—namely the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him.¹

In other words, a monkey realizes that the image is useless and controls it, whereas something else happens in the human baby: The child identifies himself/herself with the image; and through the identification the form seen turns into the “ideal-I:”

For the total form of the body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it.²

In other words, the baby realizes her/his unity as a whole only after encountering her/his image in the mirror. The image encountered is on the one hand an appearance, one

¹ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 75.

² *Ibid.*, 76.

is tempted to say is not “real;” yet it has real effects in the constitution of one’s idea of “I.” The “I” seen in the mirror is total, but it is an image: a construction that leads to the formation of subjectivity. Still the mirror image exists in the world of the “ideal-I,” it is an abstraction that is self-imposed. Does this mean that the unity is only a fiction, a necessarily wrong whole caused by later abstractions and its self is nothing but fragments?¹ Lacan does not say anything about it: he only gives evidence that the perception of a self in fragments manifests itself in dreams.

The lesson for Althusser is clear: social whole as modeled after the unity of the self should be understood in an analogous way. Yet we know that this unity is a late-development in human consciousness that requires an encounter. There are few curious questions that are not asked here by Althusser: Is an image necessarily a distortion of a real? Is the reflection less than the object reflected? The fact that the consciousness of the “I” is lately achieved: does this mean that it is less valuable than the first one? The mirror stage’s false totality of the self stands in direct contrast to Lukács who proposed reflection

¹ It is also argued that Althusser’s idea of decentered whole is a reflection of his own fissured and fragmented self. This claim risks reducing Althusser’s thought to the murmuring of a mad philosopher and is going too fast in linking the psychological and the philosophical. See: Ned Jackson, “Review: The First Death of Louis Althusser or Totality’s Revenge,” *History and Theory* 35, no. 1 (1996). In a more nuanced study, Smith asks the consequence of Althusser’s theory of overdetermination for the psyche of human being: “If Althusser’s theory of overdetermination is correct, it can only be so because the self has been dissolved into a set of social relationships in which there is literally no room left for such traditionally human attributes as free action, purposiveness, and responsibility.” See: Steven B. Smith, “Althusser and the Overdetermined Self,” *The Review of Politics* 46, no. 4 (1984): 518.

(The word he used –*Widerspiegelung* calls for the reflection in the mirror: *Der Spiegel*) as a basic category of human action and creativity in aesthetics, science and everyday life.¹

An essential element of Althusser's conception of ideology is nonetheless found in the mirror stage: a distorted representation which has real effects. This gives the clue about the role that totality plays in Althusser's conception of ideology:

Ideological *representations* concern nature and society, the very world in which men live; they concern the life of men, their relations to nature, to society, to the social order, to other men and to their own activities, including economic and political practice. Yet these representations are not *true knowledges* of the world they represent. They may contain some *elements* of knowledge, but they are always integrated into, and subject to, a total system of such representations, a system that is, in principle, orientated and distorted, a system dominated by a *false conception* of the world or of the domain of objects under consideration.²

Totality thus becomes the center of a system of false representations; it is composed of false representations, to which it gives meaning. Based on this notion of ideology Althusser does not just attack Hegel, but the entire philosophy: a philosopher is in the end a "specialist" of totality.³ Philosophers who belittle experts, engineers, scientists etc. for their command on a partial knowledge, are themselves experts in one unique domain among the others: totality. They claim that their knowledge of totality enables them to discover the Truth yet what they are for is to maintain the appearances: The illusion is the whole.

¹ Lukács, *Die Eigenart Des Ästhetischen*.

² Louis Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott (London; New York: Verso, 1990), 26.

³ ———, "Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists," in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott (London; New York: Verso, 1990), 80.

Philosophy's account of totality produces the idea of one Truth, and this Truth has an essence that is reducible to speech. Outside the ideological realm of philosophy guided by Truth and totality lies the practice. Practice produces truths that are not reducible neither to the logos nor to the sight. Philosophy implicitly knows this fact and tries to incorporate its outside and thus deforms the heterogeneous reality that does not fit to its conception of Truth.¹ "This disarticulation, rearticulation, deformation, appropriation, reformation and reordering of the plurality of truths is made in order to unify them into a totality. The construction of a total system is not just a matter of logic but also of aesthetics."² In other words, Philosophy plays the same trick with the hegemony:³

In order to cause the appearance of the Truth it wishes to impose in the interior of social practices or ideas, and in order to maintain the whole in one single block, philosophy finds itself obliged to invent what I would call philosophical objects, without a real, empirical referent - for example, Truth, Oneness, Totality, the *cogito*, the transcendental subject, and many other categories of the same kind that do not exist outside philosophy.⁴

Against philosophy's claim to the whole Althusser brings the science: the distorted reflections of ideology and the totality that makes them meaningful can only be encountered with the knowledge: the knowledge of practices. For Althusser, this is the key of Marxism that "insists that philosophy has an 'exterior' - or, better expressed, that philosophy exists only through and for this 'exterior'. This exterior (which philosophy

¹ ———, "The Transformation of Philosophy," 248-50.

² Ibid., 251-52.

³ Ibid., 259.

⁴ Ibid., 253.

wishes to imagine it submits to Truth) is practice, the social practices.”¹ Science, by producing knowledge of these practices can counter the effect of ideology and the philosophy whose concept of totality provides the meaning for the effects of ideology. Although Althusser mainly deals with what he considers to be the legacy of Hegel in Marxism, his overall task is to turn the tide of hundreds of years of philosophical practice.

II.a. Of Man and Fish

His attack on philosophy and his redefinition of the task of science allows a world-historic role for Althusser’s thought but at what price? Does his notion of ideology depict man comparable to a fish that is not aware it is in a sea or a fishbowl? According to Althusser, the representations, the elements of ideology are only intelligible within a structure: their meaning is derived from their “*systematicity, their mode of arrangement and combination.*” The agents within the given structure practice their ideology without realizing what it is. Thus the invisible ideology becomes more than “a beautiful lie:” it puts exploited classes in their place while helping the agents of the dominant class “to recognize themselves.”² This is what Althusser calls interpolation: ideology calls individuals “hey you” and thus renders them into a “subject” in the double sense of the word. Moreover this “hey you” does not merely refer to an event that occurs in time, the “always-already” of the interpolation means that just like the cave-dwellers of Plato, individuals are born into the

¹ Ibid., 248.

² ———, “Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle,” 28-29.

illusion of ideology. Just like the cave dwellers they are not aware that they are the prisoners of ideology.¹

On the other hand, Althusser does not follow strictly Plato's formula: he admits that the workers know in their experience that they are exploited. What they do not know is the mechanism of the exploitation. They also lack a second kind of knowledge: this lack becomes evident when their experience of exploitation leads them to the political struggle; when they face the political reality in the economic struggle. In the midst of the political struggle workers are helpless because their everyday experience does not grant them with the knowledge of political reality.² Here Althusser designs the role of science and consequently of the party intellectuals; their task is not help the workers to think for themselves but to instruct them about the concrete, specific, detailed mechanisms of exploitation and political struggle.³ But how to acquire the science when the workers live in a world of total representations? To achieve this, a rupture in the form of a qualitative

¹ Althusser's concept of ideology is designed to replace "false consciousness." Althusser's critique starts with the rejection of accepting the consciousness as the "expression" of the whole but goes further. After Althusser, there can be no correspondence between ideas and reality; true consciousness becomes impossible. This point is adopted from Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London; New York: Verso, 1991). For an account of how ideology replaced false consciousness and how the latter can still be a useful concept: Jason Myers, "The Truth About False Consciousness," *Contemporary Political Theory* 1, no. 2 (2002).

² Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," 35. One may say that this explains why many workers blame "the immigrant," "the Jew," "China" ... etc. as the source of their problems. This is also a point of contrast with Lukács whose workers know that they are exploited but cannot conceive a world beyond the totality of the existing order.

³ This is why Althusser's idea of militant education sounds more like a project of indoctrination: "By *theoretical formation*, we understand the process of education, study and work by which a militant is put in possession - *not only of the conclusions* of the two sciences of Marxist theory (historical materialism and dialectical materialism), *not only of their theoretical principles*, not only of some detailed analyses and demonstrations - but of *the totality* of the theory, of all its content, all its analyses and demonstrations, all its principles and all its conclusions, in their indissoluble scientific bond." *Ibid.*, 39.

transformation is required: the proletarian ideology must transform itself to science.¹ This is why when Althusser defines class struggle as the unity of economic, political and ideological struggles; he insists that last one is the decisive one.² What determines the outcome is not the economic as the Marxist “orthodoxy” would suggest but the transformation of workers’ ideology into science. This is why Althusser must first fight within the revolutionary philosophy; he must transform Marxism into a science that will deliver to the workers the knowledge that they lack. This is the context of Althusser’s interventions that start with his very influential essay “Contradiction and Overdetermination.”

III. Hegel against Overdetermined Totality

For Althusser, Hegel is the name of the culmination of ideological / hegemonic project called philosophy; it is an internal limit for the revolutionary politics. The attack against Hegel and precisely against his notion of totality is the central piece to achieve the science of Marxism. This attack starts with a simple question: what does Marx mean when he is talking about turning the Hegelian dialectic right side up? How can one “discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell;” is the dialectic “rational kernel;” and Hegel’s speculative philosophy the “mystical shell?” In Althusser’s interpretation “shelling of the

¹ The problem here is that one can never know whether this is a real transformation or a carefully crafted ideology masking itself as science? As will be discussed later, for Althusser a world free of ideology is impossible; so when he says transform ideology to science, maybe is talking about science as ideology. Besides, he clearly states that the proletariat will never be incapable of producing this science, thus the science has to be brought from the outside. The question concerns the action of the outside that is Althusser himself: does he bring knowledge or his ideology? Ibid., 31.

² Ibid., 34-37.

kernel and the inversion of the dialectic are one and the same thing.” Althusser notes that this means that Marx’s dialectic is radically opposed to Hegel’s.¹ Although this definition does not solve any problem at all, it points to the direction of a dualism which will provide the correct Marxian dialectic. Below, Althusser’s arguments will be summarized, yet before beginning it is important to note to the way in which dualism is constructed: it is between mechanical determinism and overdetermination. Alternative takes on dialectic –including that of Lukács, have no place in the dualism even if they are equally opposed to economic determinism. However, it would be wrong to criticize Althusser for building a “straw man” to defeat all Marxisms except his own. Althusser who loved to quote Kant’s definition of philosophy as a battlefield knows that he will not secure an easy victory with a single article: at this point he is only winning an easy first battle in a longer war while forging conceptual weapons for the future conflicts.

Althusser starts his depiction of the wrong inversion of Hegel by stating that for Hegel the society is split into two: the material and the spiritual. The Spirit manifests itself in the epoch’s self consciousness, in the political society and ultimately in the state. Material life, that is the economy and civil society appear independent but only to serve the Spirit and its cunning. The Marxists who wanted to turn this dialectic standing on its head thought that they could do it by simply reversing the order, by creating Hegel’s “mirror image.” However, in doing so they became captives in Hegel’s perspective. On the other

¹ ———, “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” in *For Marx* (London ; New York: Verso, 1990), 89-90. Italics and quotation marks removed

hand, in Marx's dialectic "*both terms and relation* changed in nature and sense."¹ The novelty of Marx cannot be grasped as a simple redefinition of the terms: The Marxists who claim that "the *structure* (the economic base: the forces of production and the relations of production)" determines "the *superstructure* (the State and all the legal, political and ideological forms)" are in fact following Hegel not Marx:

We have seen that one could nevertheless attempt to maintain a *Hegelian relation* (the relation Hegel imposed between civil society and the State) between these two groups of categories: *the relation between an essence and its phenomena*, sublimated in the concept of the '*truth of. . .*'²

In other words, it is not Hegelian application of dialectics that is wrong. The dialectic is entirely contaminated by the Hegelian ideology: "*the mystical shell* (...) refers directly to the dialectic itself."³ Economic determinism, which for Lukács was a clear example of anti-dialectical thinking, thus becomes its archetype. But Althusser's achievement is not just that, the terms of his criticism allow him to launch an attack against anything Hegel. Hegel is no longer a philosopher who had mistakes as well as truths in his work: Hegel is a totality whose central principle is wrong, all of his categories and concepts *express* this central wrong. Anybody who comes near Hegel will be contaminated by his ideology.

When it comes to establishing a new category to replace Hegelian totality, Althusser starts by the rejecting the very idea of a whole that is guided by a central contradiction. The

¹ Ibid., 108-09.

² Ibid., 111.

³ Ibid., 91-92.

center of Hegel's thought expressed by its every particular aspect is wrong in defining an "expressive totality." How to move beyond the shadow of Hegel? Althusser finds the answer in Leninist theme of the "weakest link" which provides a new definition to the problem of "contradiction." Through a very similar analysis provided by Lukács in his *Lenin*, Althusser comes to the same conclusion: the objective revolutionary situation in Russia of 1917 is not attributable to any single contradiction, but to a multiplicity of contradictions. These multiple contradictions fuse into one another that lead to an "exceptional situation;" yet this fusion of multiple contradictions is not reducible to the manifestation of a single general contradiction.¹ Thus:

the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence, and even from the *instances* it governs; it is radically *affected by them*, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various *levels* and *instances* of the social formation it animates; it might be called *overdetermined in its principle*.²

Althusser's statement can be objected by saying that the fusion by overdetermination works only in exceptional situations. Althusser has a very simple answer: we always live in exceptional situations. Exception to the rule is the norm because the time of the abstract normal rule never comes.³ The purity itself is the real exception,

¹ Ibid., 94-99. This is why the "weakest link" is the "decisive link" ———, "On the Materialist Dialectic." It is important to note that Althusser mentions nowhere that the decisive link was thought to create a chain reaction that would lead to a world revolution.

² ———, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," 101.

³ Ibid., 104.

thus any “simple contradiction is *always overdetermined*.”¹ In principle, economy is not completely dismissed as the center of the determinations; it still determines but “in the last instance.”² On the other hand, in the world of overdetermined contradictions what matters is the “*accumulation of effective determinations* (deriving from the superstructures and from special national and international circumstances) *on the determination in the last instance by the economic*.” There is no simple, pure determination of the economic: “the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes.”³ In this picture, economy occupies a “site,” within the “structure of the whole;” a “region” articulated with others in such a way that the “degree of *presence* (or effectivity) of the other regions in the economic region itself.”⁴ Thus the economy is to be defined as a relatively autonomous “structured region occupying its peculiar place in the global structure of the social whole.” It functions as “a regional *structure* and as such determines its elements.” The structure of the social totality is merely felt through its effects:⁵ “whereas it is only present there, as a structure, in its *determinate* absence. It is only present in the totality, in the total movement of its effects...”⁶

Althusser defines Hegelian totality as the binary opposite of this: its determinations are never “outside” the others. The parts of Hegelian whole are designed to “constitute an original, organic totality;” they lack their autonomy. They all reflect a singular internal

¹ Ibid., 106.

² Ibid., 112.

³ Ibid., 113.

⁴ ———, “The Object of Capital,” in *Reading Capital*, ed. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar (London: NLB, 1970), 179.

⁵ Ibid., 180.

⁶ Ibid., 181.

principle: “the truth” of determinations. For example “Rome: its mighty history, its institutions, its crises and ventures, are nothing but the temporal manifestation of the internal principle of the *abstract legal personality*.”¹ To rephrase: Hegel appropriating a wrong version of Montesquieu,² establishes a totality that is abstract, that manifests itself in the forms of legal, juridical and state order and that is organized as a coherent personality. The banal versions of Marxism that create a hierarchy of contradictions; that establish a hierarchy within the internal aspects of each contradiction; and that resort to a law of “uneven development of contradiction” are merely applying the Hegelian schema to Marxism.³ For Althusser this dialectic is still sitting on the top of its head and so long as its terms and relations are not radically altered it will never return on its feet.

III.a. Totality Without Mediations

It would be wrong to suggest that Althusser has always been entirely hostile to Hegel, he had passages praising his work as well. In both his moments of generosity and attack against Hegel, the defining feature of his reading of Hegel has nothing to do with the truth of Hegel or with an intention to achieve a better interpretation of his work. His reading is rather strategic, defined mostly by the tasks of his text and the tasks of the day. For instance at a moment of a great affirmation of Hegel, Althusser finds in him an understanding of history as a process without a subject. The historical process is the self-

¹ ———, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," 102.

² Ibid., 103.

³ ———, "On the Materialist Dialectic," 194.

alienation of the *Idea*, yet *Idea* is nothing but its self-alienation: the idea is the totality of its process of self-alienation. Hegel's understanding of history thus has no Origin, no End. This reading of Hegel has nothing to do with the Hegel of "contradiction and overdetermination." It is a Hegel that can link Lukács and Althusser. But does Althusser spend any time pondering about this Hegel? Not at all, the only reason Hegel is invoked as a philosopher of a generic history is to play him against Feuerbach. Hegel is thus defined only to make a sharper contrast with Feuerbach who is talking about man's alienation and who posits an abstract subject to history: man.¹

On the other hand, the great majority of his texts are based on an opposition between Hegel and Marx where the former plays the bad guy. For example, he summarizes the findings of *Reading Capital* as "a non-Hegelian conception of *history*," "a non-Hegelian conception of the *social structure* (a structured whole in dominance)" and "a non-Hegelian conception of the *dialectic*."² He goes out so far as to say that the two dominant forms of totality among the various definitions in fashion are Hegelian and Marxist ones. These two conceptions share only three things in common with each other: "(1) a word; (2) a certain vague conception of the unity of things; (3) some theoretical enemies." Besides this joke, there is no similarity in their "essence;" Hegel's whole is the "alienated

¹ ———, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings, 1966-67*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London ; New York: Verso, 2003), 238-41.

² ———, *Politics and History*, 173. Whether the formula of the findings, (Origin = ((Subject = Object) = Truth) = End = Foundation) is "really" non-Hegelian will not to be discussed here.

development of a simple unity, of a simple principle...”¹ It is curious to note here that what Althusser says about Hegel is not at all different at all from what he sees in pre-Hegelian philosophers. Althusser spends no time in asking about the uniqueness of Hegelian totality; he rather sees it as the culmination of the philosophical ideology.

One concept that is particularly absent in Althusser’s treatment of Hegel is the central motor of his notion of dialectics: mediation. Mediation is not just missing in his reading of Hegel; he is certainly not ignorant about the concept; he rather wants to abolish it entirely. For Althusser mediation is not a Marxist category at all:

The concept of mediation is invested with one last role: the magical provision of post-stations in the empty space between theoretical principles and the 'concrete', as bricklayers make a chain to pass bricks.²

Here Althusser is referring to mediation as an anti-Marxist category, but what does he mean by the term itself? The question then is: What is Althusser’s definition for mediation? What is the particular aspect of the dialectic he wants to abolish with the name mediation? The way in which Althusser conceives the mediation has nothing to do with the Lukácsian notion of the concept. For example when he defines Sartre as “the philosopher of mediations *par excellence*,” he adds that the function of mediation is “to ensure unity in the negation of differences.”³ In Althusser’s definition mediation does not start from the whole and lead to the particulars through a process that contains chance and accident as well as

¹ ———, "On the Materialist Dialectic," 203.

² ———, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy," 63.

³ ———, "The Object of Capital," 136. As opposed to a unity that can never appear in its pure form, a unity that can be glimpsed though a maze of infinite web of mediated relations.

tendential determinations; it is not meant to suggest that the abstract principle can never appear in its pure way. Thus the mediation is not the negation of the abstract to lead up to the concrete but the negation of the concrete, its alienation that leads up to the abstract. This also allows Althusser to define Hegel as the philosopher of the linear time marked by “its homogeneous continuity and its contemporaneity.”¹ The whole is the unchanging Same that manifests itself at every moment:

The Hegelian whole has a type of unity in which each element of the whole, whether a material or economic determination, a political institution or a religious, artistic or philosophical form, is never anything more than the presence of the concept with itself at a historically determined moment. (...) the total presence of the concept in all the determinations of its existence. (...) It is this absolute and homogeneous presence of the determinations of the whole with the current essence of the concept which allows the 'essential section' I have been discussing.²

When the relevance of the mediations is denied there is nothing to stop Althusser from claiming that the Hegelian totality is an “immediate” totality. In Hegel he finds a “spiritual totality” an “expressive totality,” a whole that has a “nature” and where each element act as “pars totalis” expressing the central principle of the whole.³ This is why Althusser can also establish a strange connection between Hegel and empiricism because they are both based on the distinction between the essence and the appearance. In this conception, the outside of the object is considered to be the inessential part; aspects such as individuality, particularity, materiality and knowledge are considered to be inessential.

¹ Ibid., 94.

² Ibid., 94-95.

³ Ibid., 187.

What always matters is the “invisible kernel,” which is covered by the inessential. Discovery thus means “removing the covering.” This is in turn borrowed from the religious vision of essence – existence.¹

The key concept for Althusser’s understanding of Hegelian whole is the “expression,” a concept borrowed from Leibniz to explain the effectivity of whole on its every singular element.² For instance, Hegel’s “theory of reading” is a “theory of expression where “each part is *pars totalis*, immediately expressing the whole that it inhabits in person.”³ Hegelian, “expressive reading” consists of the “open and bare-faced reading of the essence in the existence.” This model that leaves no room for any “opacity” is once again modeled after the “darkness of the religious phantasm of epiphanic transparency, and its privileged model of anchorage: the Logos and its Scriptures.”⁴ Althusser’s rejection of expressive totality is thus accompanied with the urge to find a new mode for “reading” separate from the “expressive” model. A model fit for the structured whole that is makes it “impossible to think it in the category of the global expressive causality of a universal inner essence immanent in its phenomenon.”⁵ His reading is a

¹ ———, “From Capital to Marx’s Philosophy,” 36-37.

² “Very schematically, we can say that classical philosophy (the existing Theoretical) had two and only two systems of concepts with which to think effectivity. The mechanistic system, Cartesian in origin, which reduced causality to a *transitive* and analytical effectivity: it could not be made to think the effectivity of a whole on its elements, except at the cost of extra-ordinary distortions (such as those in Descartes’ ‘psychology’ and biology). But a second system was available, one conceived precisely in order to deal with the effectivity of a whole on its elements: the Leibnizian concept of *expression*.” ———, “The Object of Capital,” 186.

³ ———, “From Capital to Marx’s Philosophy,” 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵ ———, “The Object of Capital,” 187. Italics removed.

“different, 'symptomatic' reading, which introduced into a *question* an answer given to its absent question.”¹ It is called a symptomatic reading because “it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a *different text*, present as a necessary absence in the first.”² It is curious to note that Althusser is once again tempted to establish a “total” system of thinking where each element of his philosophical endeavor immediately *expresses* its central principle. Also this model of reading is possible so long as the reader is not intending to learn the truth of the text but assumes that s/he already has the truth: *Habemus enim ideam veram*. What Althusser does not say is that his reading does not only provide the absent question, based on the question it also transforms the answer. Basically, it introduces a question and an answer to the reading. So long as one doesn't already know that both are in the text before reading it, this operation is impossible.

After all these, Althusser admits that Hegel can still be used as but only as interpreted by Lenin. This interpretation, Althusser insists stands completely in contradistinction to the totality of “young Lukács.” It posits a history as a process that extends to the nature as well as human beings forcing to reconsider the once dismissed dialectics of nature. This attribution of dialectics to the nature is an outcome of Althusser's conception of history as a process without a subject.³ If there is no such thing as subject there is nothing to exclude nature from the dialectics of history. So in the area where Lukács and Althusser seem to be closest they are in fact the farthest: while Lukács

¹ ———, “From Capital to Marx's Philosophy,” 32.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ ———, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 81.

conceives a history without a Subject but with subjects, Althusser wants to erase any claim of subjecthood from history. This distinction can become clearer with a comparison of their respective accounts of history.

IV. History: Process, Goals, Subject and the Human

Althusser's discussion of the goals and the subjects of historical process is probably the culmination of his philosophical endeavor and is the precise point where he can be thought together with the discussion of Heidegger presented in this dissertation. As Balibar recently noted, the main stake of the structuralist movement was a French take on the German problem of 1920's and 30's, namely the possibility of a "philosophical anthropology."¹ The first problem that emerges here is the problem of teleology, the possibility of attributing a final Goal to the historical process. For Althusser, the prospect of establishing a Telos of history is only possible through a conception of expressive totality. The historical process as a whole with a single central contradiction can have an inner dynamism emanating from this contradiction and can lead to an end of history in the form of the resolution of that contradiction. The overdetermined whole of Althusser leads him "to renounce every teleology of reason, and to conceive the historical relation between a result and its conditions of *existence as a relation of production, and not of expression.*"² Therefore the question about the "ultimate ends" as well as that of the "origins" (as implied

¹ Etienne Balibar, "Structure" (paper presented at the From Structure to Rhizome, Transdisciplinarity in French thought, 1945 to the present: histories, concepts, constructions, Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University, April 16, 2010).

² Althusser, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy," 45. Italics added

by the “always already”) must be dropped: they belong not to the science of Marxism but to the ideology.¹ This brings Althusser to the next point that concerns “the meaning of history” or “the destiny of man:” These questions as well belong to the realm of the ideological.²

In his famous “Remark on the Category: ‘Process without a Subject or Goal(s)’” Althusser investigates the consequences of the erasure of Man from the scene of history:

In my opinion: men (plural), in the concrete sense, are necessarily subjects (plural) *in* history, because they act *in* history as subjects (plural). But there is no Subject (singular) *of* history. And I will go even further: “men” are not “the subjects” *of* history.³

How to interpret the claim that there is “no Subject *of* history?” One way of interpreting this assertion is to read this claim in its similarity to Lukács’ previously discussed propositions. Just like him, Althusser defends the primacy of struggle to the actors involved and he claims that there is no subject before the conflict:

For *reformists* (even if they call themselves Marxists) it is not the class struggle which is in the front rank: it is simply the classes. Let us take a simple example, and suppose that we are dealing with just two classes. For reformists these classes exist *before* the class struggle, a bit like two football teams exist, separately, before the match.⁴

On the other hand if Althusser is to follow the path of Lukács, his rejection of a meta-subject of history must be coupled with an affirmation of instances where a subject

¹ ———, “Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists,” 82.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ ———, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976), 94.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

emerges. Or he should also be saying that there is no Goal of history but goals are indispensable in the making of history. This would also bring Althusser to the problem of goal-positing-consciousness to which Lukács had dedicated his last years. But such discussions are nowhere to be found in Althusser's work. In other words, Althusser is not interested in merely replacing Subject with subjects. There is no subject or subjects "of" history, there are subjects "in" history. The word subject here is not used in its 'positive' sense as subject, the maker of things; but negatively as the subjects interpolated by the ideology. More clearly, Althusser says here that at different epochs men claim subjecthood only through an overdetermined "cunning" of ideology:

When that is clear, the question of the "subject" of history disappears. History is an immense *natural-human* system in movement, and the motor of history is class struggle. History is a process, and a *process without a subject*. The question about how "*man makes history*" disappears altogether.¹

This move allows Althusser to reject altogether the natural vs. human history distinction and the "verum factum principle" of Vico at the center of humanist Marxism. The claim that man knows things because man makes things is now thrown away to the garbage box of Althusser's scientific Marxism, the consequence of which leads to the refusal of ontology of labor. Man can neither claim superiority; not an ontological difference vis-à-vis the natural phenomena. In this way the question of consciousness disappears from the picture: it is not solved, it is by-passed. Althusser's strategy here is similar to the ones discussed previously: an oversimplifying dualism. One can either claim

¹ Ibid., 51.

that there is a Subject and a Goal of history or one should reject goals and subjects altogether. The nuanced Lukácsian position rejecting a Subject but inquiring into the conditions of the emergence of a subject evaporates within the dualism.¹

In the same quote Althusser strangely places class struggle in a history that has no place for subjects. Is this not reinserting human beings in the process of history? One can remark two things about this claim: First, in Althusser's terminology "the motor" is heterogeneous to the process. It is not an inner dynamism of the whole but an external object that articulates to the body; for example the "relative autonomy of the state" is explained through an analogy of the state as an engine. Therefore class struggle as the engine of history does not mean that it is an internal contradiction to the process but an external one. Secondly, class struggle as an appendage to an unbounded flux is a theoretical inconsistency Althusser had to hold on to in order to maintain his Marxist credentials. Yet the superfluousness of this last resort to the class struggle was so obvious that it was later easy to cut the bond for those who would walk further on the path of Althusser.

V.a. Man as Telos: Humanism

The discussion of the goals and subjects in and of history leads Althusser to a particular goal/subject of history: Man. This is the central problem of his polemics against humanism and in particular of his "reply" against John Lewis starting with his claim that

¹ This difference is also elaborated in E.P Thompson's contrast of history as "unmastered human practice" with history as a process without subject. E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, or an Orrery of Errors* (London: Merlin Press, 1995), 138.

man makes history. For Althusser, this “man” is a mystery, an abstract category. The proper Marxist/Leninist thesis replaces “masses” with the abstract “man.” The “masses” is not a rejection of the category of “class” but a special form of it:

In a class society they are the *exploited* masses, that is, the exploited social classes, social strata and social categories, grouped around the exploited class *capable* of uniting them in a movement against the dominant classes which hold state power.

The exploited class capable of doing this is not always *the most* exploited class, or *the most* wretched social "stratum".¹

In capitalism the only class capable of uniting the exploited classes and of directing “their action against the bourgeois state” is the proletariat.² This does not mean that the relations between these classes are fixed; to the contrary, these relations are “complex and *changing*” to such a degree to have an effect on the revolutionary process itself.³

Against this approach stands humanism of Sartre who is “the philosopher of ‘human liberty’, of man-projecting-himself-into-the-future (John Lewis's transcendence), of man ‘*en situation*’ who ‘transcends’ his place in the world by the liberty of the ‘project’.”⁴ This account takes the “category of liberty, takes Man (= the Human Race = Humanity) to be the Subject and the Goal of history.”⁵ For Althusser, “man” should be dropped completely for

¹ Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 46.

² *Ibid.*, 47.

³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59. As will become clearer in the next chapter, Badiou’s account of “subject” is much closer to Sartre than it is to Althusser. Badiou who had started his career as a Sartrean philosopher and then became a disciple of Althusser, provides an attempt that can be considered as a particular mix, if not a reconciliation of two conflicting accounts of human being.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

two reasons: first, all the categories associated with “man” belongs to the bourgeois idea of it. Secondly categories of “origin,” “goal” and “subject” belong to the bourgeois philosophy and cannot be appropriated by the Marxists.¹ Althusser’s Marx is the anti-humanist *par excellence*. He is the one that posits a “man” that is no longer the “fundamental, rational category that renders History intelligible.” For this Marx, “man” is an ideological concept which can explain nothing but that needs to be explained: “Man is an irrational, derisory, hollow notion.”²

These are not the last words of Althusser on humanism. He also goes on to equate economic determinism with humanism. Despite the differences in their definition of the whole and process, they both posit a totality that has a center. This is not a mere coincidence but the reflection of a fundamental unity among the two:

I am talking about the ideological *pair* economism/ humanism. It is a pair in which the two terms are complementary. It is not an accidental link, but an organic and consubstantial one. It is born spontaneously, that is to say necessarily, of the bourgeois practices of production and exploitation, *and at the same time* of the legal practices of bourgeois law and its ideology, which provide a sanction for the capitalist relations of production and exploitation and their reproduction.³

A strategic act in the battlefield of philosophy, this equivalence implies that Althusser’s refutation of economic determinism (rejected by the majority of intellectuals in the 1960s) can be extended and held equally valid for humanism (upheld by the

¹ Ibid., 52.

² ———, *The Humanist Controversy*, 259.

³ ———, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 85-86.

intellectuals in the 1960s). Althusser is not willing to stop at this point; he is further willing to associate the USSR with humanism. "Soviet State is no longer a class State but the 'State of the Whole People'.¹ Associating a state, especially a repressive state with humanism, is it one final strategic act by Althusser? Not really: Althusser had no problem with repression when he wrote in 1964: "Ten years ago socialist humanism only existed in one form: that of class humanism." That is to say, his alternative to bourgeois humanism was the one existed in Soviet Union until the death of Stalin.²

V. Question of Party: Science: Truth

Althusser's interventions find their reflection in political action with questions about the party; leadership; working-class and its relations to other formations; the goals of the movement and the objectives of socialism... etc. Once again these are discussed with reference to the question of totality. Yet even with his novel account of the whole, Althusser kept supporting the Leninist party and its justification of absolute power: "its possession of scientific truth."³ In fact, Althusser gave a stronger legitimization to the Leninist organization than any other Marxism. The genuinely new idea that enabled him to proceed was his conception of truth: by rejecting both correspondence theory of truth and

¹ ———, "To My English Readers," 11.

² ———, "Marxism and Humanism," 222.

³ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 398.

Vico's *verum-factum* principle, he relied on Spinoza's notion of truth that refuses to be judged by any external criterion.¹

In order to establish this new principle the first fight has to take place within the party. For him, all of the goals and the means of the hitherto existing Marxism are ideological.² This encounter with other Marxisms can also provide a chance for juxtaposition of Lukács and Althusser to unfold their differences.

First of all, as argued above, Lukács provides a gaze that moves between a "narrative" (instead of expressive) totality that posits an emerging subject as well as a goal in its making and a "generic" totality of "complexes of complexes" that posits history as a process without subject and without goals. Althusser's definition of structured whole seems to be closer to the latter definition, however there is a very important gap between Lukács and Althusser. For Lukács complexes of complexes do not stop at any level; everything is a complex that is composed of complexes. For Lukács, there is "no outside," in a way his totality is built on the principle of its endless fragmentation. For Althusser, social structure is defined as a decentered whole that is divided into regions which are structured totalities themselves. However, Althusser does never ask what it means for these regions to have no center; he does not investigate the consequences of his own thought. He is once again stuck

¹ Ibid., 398-400.

² Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," 3. When E.P. Thompson argues that "historical materialism offers the study of the historic process in its totality" (Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 95.) Althusser sees not a criticism to his "sectoral" history but the ideology speaking. For him, the ideology has always something to do with the total representation of the reality.

by a self-imposed dualism between a totality where determinations reflect its inner principle, its Truth and a structured whole where the determinations are essentially “outside” each other. That these determinations can exist outside each other also means that they are externally linked to each other.¹ This is precisely where Althusser is furthering Heidegger’s ontology: it is argued above that Heidegger had substituted the universal meta-language of reason with the “language worlds” that remain within the borders of their finitude and that only touch each other externally through these borders. In the same fashion, Althusser destroys the expressive whole only to replace it with its regions that are externally articulated to each other. From his perspective, the claim of the universality can only mean the perspective of a particular interest claiming to be that of the whole:

Lukács, for example, replied to the reflex theory of knowledge that the truth value of Marxism derived from the unique position of the proletariat in society through which it alone could grasp the totality. The proletariat's knowledge was therefore universal, as distinct from the particular knowledge of the bourgeoisie. Yet, to Althusser, Lukács' position was just as ideological as his opponent's since thought was still dependent on social

¹ Did Althusser consider Lukács’ ontology as an alternative understanding of totality? There is no explicit reference to Lukács in this regard. Still one can find a passage where although Althusser does not explicitly name the target of his criticism, one can suspect that it is Lukács. Althusser admits that there is no one alternative to the “expressive whole,” but to this definition he directs the following question: “Are we dealing with the elements of a whole, albeit an absent whole, without effective presence - elements which it would suffice to re-elaborate according to traditional models, as in the case of Marxist philosophies that remain immersed in ‘ontology’? Or, on the contrary, is it a question of elements which must be interrogated and deciphered, ‘asked’ precisely why they remain only, and uniquely, ‘elements’?” If these words are directed to Lukács, the depiction of “element” vs. whole is far from making justice to his conception of “complexes of complexes.” Yet for Althusser it is a satisfactory proof that the definitions of whole that do not follow his philosophy are bound to produce spin-offs of the “expressive totality.” See: Althusser, “The Transformation of Philosophy,” 248.

interests. Hence, Lukács was a historicist more concerned with the coming into being of a new society than with establishing a scientific social theory.¹

This fundamental difference is also reflected in the field of political projects. For Lukács, the central contradictions are imminent to the existing society: the gaps between bourgeois vs. citizen; freedom vs. free trade; equality vs. imperfect legal equality etc... constitute the foundations for the political struggles that need to be fought against the capitalist order. Althusser rejects all of the terms of these dualisms. The criticism of capitalism has to be external to the existing society:

Marxist doctrine, by contrast, is *scientific*. This means that it is not content to apply existing bourgeois moral and juridical principles (liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, etc.) to the existing bourgeois reality in order to criticize it, but that it criticizes these existing bourgeois moral and juridical principles, as well as the existing politico-economic system.²

There are two fundamental problems with Althusser's position: first, with this statement he strangely refuses the relative autonomy of ideological / theoretical order. Equality, freedom etc. are merely bourgeois ideas that belong to capitalist society; there can be no disjunction within capitalism; no inner contradiction between its material, economic, juridico-political order and its ideas. While Althusser is trying to avoid determinisms he is reestablishing the definition of capitalist society as a closed totality. On the other hand, Lukács who starts with the idea of capitalist society as a totality can distinguish between its

¹ Mark Poster, "Althusser on History without Man," *Political Theory* 2, no. 4 (1974): 395. As argued before Lukács does not refuse the relation between the interests and ideas but he maintains that this does not undermine the fact that human mind is nonetheless capable of producing universals within and through the struggle of the particulars.

² Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," 4.

different aspects. Totality can exist only in its endless differentiations. Lukács point in this respect can be further illuminated with a reference to the well-known Heraclitian fragment that one cannot step twice into the same river (DK22A6). What Heraclitus says in fact is that one can both step and not step into the same river. River is obviously the metaphor for time here but can be interpreted as totality as well. The first reading shows the component of change: when one steps to the same river a second time, it is no longer the same river; the water of the first time is long gone. On the other hand, river stands as a river; as the Same (in Heidegger's interpretation) only in and through the process of its continuous transformation. So is Lukács' totality: it remains a totality, not because it has an unchanging positive content to offer in its center; but because this content endlessly changes. The conclusion has to be underlined here: a genuine decentered notion of totality is only possible by positing a totality manifesting itself through a mediated process. Starting with the decentered totality leads Althusser paradoxically to a system of closed totalities that are externally related to each other.

A second problem relates to the place of the critique itself: For Althusser the meaning of Marx's project, "critique of political economy" is "to confront it with a new problematic and a new object." The critique of political economy is not its critique on its own terms, not an exploration of inner contradictions; critique belongs to the outside.¹ Althusser's outside is ultimately founded upon the separation of the knowledge of totality

¹ ———, "The Object of Capital," 158. Late Althusser seems to abandon this position: He says that "for Marx, critique is the real criticizing itself;" in this context what matters is to find the real: worker's class struggle. See: ———, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 17.

from the ideology; it is precisely this scientific knowledge that can provide the objectives of the socialism to come.¹ In other words, while for Lukács socialism named a project aimed at accomplishing the unfulfilled promises of bourgeois revolution; for Althusser these promises can serve no more, instead a whole new set of objectives has to be created. The scientific knowledge, being external to the whole that it defines, belongs to the party. This conception thus leads once again to the primacy of the political party as the bearer of scientific knowledge

It is the application of these scientific principles that has led to the definition of the working class as the only radically revolutionary class, the definition of the forms of organization appropriate to the economic and political struggle (role of the unions; nature and role of the party comprised of the vanguard of the working class) - the definition, finally, of the forms of ideological struggle. It is the application of these scientific principles that has made possible the break not only with the *reformist objectives* of utopian socialist doctrines, but also with *their forms of organization and struggle*. It is the application of these scientific principles that has allowed the definition of a revolutionary tactics and strategy whose irreversible first results are henceforth inscribed in world history, and continue to change the world.²

¹ "Thus its general critique rests on other than existing ideological principles (religious, moral and juridical); it rests on the *scientific knowledge* of the totality of the existing bourgeois system, its politico-economic as well as its ideological systems. It rests on the knowledge of this ensemble, which constitutes an organic totality of which the economic, political, and ideological are organic 'levels' or 'instances', articulated with each other according to specific laws. It is this *knowledge* that allows us to define the objectives of socialism, and to conceive socialism as a new determinate mode of production which will succeed the capitalist mode of production, to conceptualize its specific determinations, the precise form of its relations of production, its political and ideological superstructure. It is this knowledge that permits us to define the appropriate *means of action* for 'making the revolution', means based upon the nature of historical necessity and historical development, on the determinant role of the economy in the last instance on this development, on the decisive role of class struggle in socioeconomic transformations, and on the role of consciousness and organization in political struggle." See: ———, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," 4.

² Ibid.

What does the scientific knowledge provide? Tactics, strategy, tools for the ideological struggle, goals, objectives, forms of organization and more. To keep the list short one should rather ask what the science does not provide to the worker's revolutionary movement. Althusser had written:

For philosophy men live and act subjected to the laws of their own social practices; they know not what they do. They believe they possess truths; they are not aware of what they know. Thank God philosophy is there, that it sees for them and speaks for them, tells them what they do and what they know.¹

Can't one say exactly the same for Althusser's science? Isn't Althusser's science exactly doing the same? Althusser would not object it that much, the difference for him would be rather in the content not in the form of intervention. While philosophy produces ideology of how to act, science produces knowledge of how to act. Hobbes had distinguished mathematics from social sciences and reason from the interest,² Althusser follows in his footsteps with the claim that science unites while philosophy divides. The science of Marxism rejects the "ideological myths" that belong to the philosophy and its notion of "origin." It is based on the recognition of the "givenness of the complex structure of any concrete 'object', a structure which governs both the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice which produces the knowledge of it." It replaces

¹ ———, "The Transformation of Philosophy," 248.

² "Hobbes only saw one difference between mathematics and the social sciences: the former unites men, the latter divide them. But that is only because in the former *the truth and men's interests are not opposed, whereas in the latter whenever reason goes against man, man is opposed to reason.*" ———, *Politics and History*, 18.

origins with the ever “pregivenness;” it substitutes the “simple unity” of philosophy with the “structured, complex unity.”¹

How does the science operate to distinguish itself from philosophy? Althusser’s answer to this is first to define three separate generalities: Generality I, preexisting ideological facts; Generality II, scientific theory at a given moment, Generality III, knowledge. Although these are all generalities they are of different type. Unlike Hegel who fails to distinguish between them, science works to allow Generality II to transform Generality I to Generality III.² In other words, science works on the ideology to transform it to knowledge by using the scientific method. The knowledge thus accumulated in turn transforms the scientific method to work further on the facts of ideology. How can science fulfill this task? How the scientific method is transformed with the new knowledge? There is one notion that lies at the heart of Althusser’s thought, a notion borrowed from the logician Cavailles: science improves by self correction. For Althusser, this leads to the concept of self-criticism as the key notion of producing knowledge. The double task of Althusser’s science is to work on ideology as well as the scientific method. Here a problem emerges, not with the idea of self-criticism but with Althusser’s self criticisms. Often his self criticisms (except the texts that appear in the *Philosophy of Encounter*) are not genuine ones. If a self-criticism has the form of “I was wrong in doing X,” Althusser says this but adds “I was wrong because I didn’t do enough of X, I should have done more!” In terms of

¹ ———, “On the Materialist Dialectic,” 198-99.

² *Ibid.*, 184-88. For a critique of this discussion: Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 7-18. Althusser also admits his “theoreticist deviation” in these lines.

the criticism of “ideology,” i.e. the work of other philosophers the problem is even sharper: for example his letter to John Lewis starts with a mild criticism of his interlocutor. Yet as his criticism progresses Althusser asserts that people like him are not simply wrong; their effects go beyond themselves. John Lewis, and especially Sartre are poisoning the minds of the others, they are preventing the progress of science.¹

There is one further problem with Althusser’s notion of truth. One of his criticisms against humanism is that it is the ideology of the “intellectuals of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois origin” who ask themselves whether they are on the right side in the political struggles and whether they have the right to contribute to the making of history.² Maybe this is a fair criticism of the humanist intellectuals, that they do not know where they belong and that they want to make the correct choice. But Althusser never doubts himself, never asks whether he is on the correct side. He “knows” that he is. Althusser does not give any justification on the foundations of his politics; he overturns the established Marxism and provides a great way of “how” to read Marx, but nowhere does he ask “why” to read Marx. He provides no single line to convince others why one should become part of emancipatory and egalitarian struggles; why one should be a Marxist; he rather is focused on recruiting those who are already subscribed to these ideas. Lukács of *HCC* had to go through a large questioning on why the working class is the revolutionary subject. Althusser simply dismisses this question: it *is* the revolutionary subject, there is no why.

¹ Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 60. He doesn’t add “corrupting the youth” but in these lines Althusser is frighteningly close to the mindset of the accusers of Socrates.

² ———, “The Object of Capital,” 142.

This is not a theoretical shortcoming of Althusser but a central feature of his interpretation of Spinoza: truth cannot have any external criteria by which it can be judged:

"*Habemus enim ideam veram...*" (Spinoza). It is just because (*enim*) we possess (*habemus*) a true idea that... that we can also say: "*Verum index sui et falsi*"; what is true is the sign both of itself and of what is false, and the recognition of error (and of partial truths) depends on starting from what is true.¹

"*Verum index sui et falsi,*" (truth is the measure of itself and of the wrong) this notion that lies at the heart of Althusser's politics as well as his thought is both fascinating and dangerous. It is fascinating because it posits that the truth cannot have any exogenous criteria other than itself. Submitting truth to any external criterion already means that this criterion is in a position to judge it: the truth cannot be judged, it simply *is*. On the other hand, this understanding can also be the foundation of an authoritarian logic: "I know the truth; things are so because I say so."² This is also the reason that against John Lewis who repeats "*verum factum principle*" as the basis of knowledge, Althusser replies that the Marxist/Leninist thesis is that "One can only know what *exists* (*ce qui est*)."³ He adds that the fundamental "Thesis" of materialism is "the primacy of being over thought".³ The question thus becomes: how thought and historical action relate to one another? How does

¹ ———, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 121-22.

² This problem will be further discussed in the context of Badiou who further develops Althusser's notion of truth that separates from the ideological facts.

³ Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 54. A better translation of "*ce qui est*" could be "that which is." Unfortunately, here Althusser is missing a great moment where Heidegger can contribute to materialism: "unity of thought and being," not the primacy of one to the other.

Althusser conceive the relation between the party which is the bearer of scientific knowledge and masses whose actions are crucial in the concrete process?

First thing to note in this respect is Althusser's admission that working class movements did not depend on Marx. Science of Marxism and workers movements developed in a relatively autonomous way; the union of the thought and the movement is the outcome of a contingent process, it is a (happy) accident.¹ Marxist theory itself is a product of a particular historic conjunction, but this particular conjunction made it the only theory that can bring the workers above their "spontaneous' anarchist-reformist ideology."² While earlier Althusser posit the development of Marx's science/philosophy as a relatively autonomous, if not an independent event, late Althusser suggests that Marx became what he is through his immersion into the working class activism. But in either of these explanations the outcome does not change: theory is produced in a relatedness to the working class movement but whence it is produced in the scientific context, it is has to be brought to the class from without.³ If the proletariat is left to its own devices; the "economic and political practice of the proletariat" will never be able to produce "the *science* of society, and hence the science of the proletariat's own practice." The working class by itself will only produce "utopian or reformist ideologies of society." The "objective interests" of the proletariat can only be achieved through the "theoretical

¹ ———, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," 32.

² ———, *The Humanist Controversy*, 160.

³ ———, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 32-33.

practice of intellectuals who were not themselves members of working class thus had the privilege of attaining “a very high degree of culture.” These brought to the working class “from without” are then “modified and profoundly transformed” by the class.¹

This assertion of Althusser makes a strange point. His claim that the working class activism precedes its scientific knowledge implies that workers revolted without knowing why, without objectives, without proper organization...etc. Moreover, if Marx is an appendage to the movement, what can Marxist science bring other than the “knowledge”? Why workers would need the knowledge if they did not need it to start their struggles? Besides, Althusser argues that the “knowledge” of the party elite is not for the workers; it is not meant to eliminate ideology. To the contrary, he claims that “*ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence.*”² In other words, the elite must know the truth yet transfer to the masses a better ideology instead of the knowledge. Who can safely argue at this point that Marxists are not outsiders trying to hijack the movement? Is “knowledge” not the Althusserian version of the noble lie?

After challenging the basics of Lukácsian politics Althusser returns to the same fundamental mistakes advocated by Lukács. But the situation is worse for Althusser: as argued in the third chapter, the mistakes of Lukács, starting with “the outside” role of the

¹ ———, “Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle.”

² ———, “Marxism and Humanism,” 235.

party are not derived from the essential features of his thought. This doesn't mean that his mistakes are mere self contradictions; his failures are definitely among the possible consequences of his thought. But same principles can also lead to a completely different practice of politics as well. "The outside" of the elite on the other hand is a necessary outcome of Althusser's thought: the inside cannot produce its own knowledge, goals, categories etc... every consciousness existing in the inside is subjected by the interpellation of the ideology. The science of the "inside" can only be produced and brought from the outside: otherwise Althusser would be implying that the whole can have an inner principle of movement, that it can produce its knowledge, the principle of its own transformation.

VI. The Last Instance

The problem of historic action also leads to one of the central criticisms attributed to Althusser's thought: it is incapable of explaining change. While it is true that Althusser provides no blueprint for change his idea is intrinsically linked to understanding society as a process. When Althusser says that there can be no "privileged present" where totality of determinations finally manifest themselves he does not mean that society lives in an eternal present. His point is to stress that "all presents are privileged to the same degree."¹ In other words, historic action is possible in any given point: one should not wait until the time is ripe. Usually, the criticism that there is no place for change in Althusser is fast in attributing him what he says about "structuralism." On the other hand, Althusser was absolutely clear:

¹ ———, "The Object of Capital," 132.

borrowing concepts from structuralism does not necessarily mean to subscribe to its ideology. It is ironic the reason that Althusser rejected structuralist ideology is precisely its incapacity to explain social change. For instance, E.P. Thompson argues that the solid reality of the capitalist society that established itself as the unchallengeable reality in the west after the Second World War rendered revolutionaries helpless. He argues that this inability to further radical change “felt like a structure.”¹ In his explanation, the resort to structuralism is precisely a result of the perception on the impossibility of the social transformation. However, Althusser, completely aware of this problem in the “structuralist ideology,” argued that in contradistinction to structuralism, Marxism establishes “*the primacy of the process over the structure*” as well as “the primacy of contradiction over the process.”²

The problem of Althusser is then to find an account of social change that does not lie with the central contradiction of an expressive totality. How can one explain the mechanism through which overdetermined contradictions establish a tendency that can lead to radical change. In the first place Althusser does not refuse the idea that in a given moment there is one central contradiction, this contradiction is only not the central

¹ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 99.

² Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 130. This is why Balibar claims that the structuralist movement was already post-structuralist in the sense that it was not interested in finding the principle of a structure but its’ out of jointness. Balibar, "Structure". For a study on the difference between the structuralist totality and Althusser’s totality: Alison Assiter, "Althusser and Structuralism," *The British Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 2 (1984).

Contradiction of history. Secondly, “structure in dominance” reigns in and over this contradiction but only in the “last instance,”¹ and through a process called “fusion:”

'There is no doubt at all that at every stage in the development of a process, there is only one principal contradiction which plays the leading role,' says Mao Tse-tung. But this principal contradiction produced by displacement only becomes 'decisive', explosive, by condensation (by 'fusion').²

Following the idea of fusion brings Althusser strangely close to Lukácsian “complex whole:”

Marxist theory and practice do not only approach unevenness as the external effect of the interaction of different existing social formations, but also within each social formation. And within each social formation, Marxist theory and practice do not only approach unevenness in the form of simple exteriority (the *reciprocal action* of infrastructure and superstructure), but in a form organically *internal* to each instance of the social totality, to each contradiction.³

As mentioned above, this idea exists in Althusser only as a consequence of the logic of “structured whole” whose regions are also further divided into structures. On the other hand he conducts his analysis by attributing an inner logic to different realms; for example theory is produced within theoretical field.⁴ What happens in other realms do not intervene into the realm of theory; and theory has an inner logic that leads to its particular production. Moreover, Althusser keeps ascribing a central problem to ideology, to philosophy, to the economic... etc. Besides, he argues that “each mode of production there is a peculiar time and history” that is “punctuated in a specific way by the development of the productive

¹ Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," 206.

² Ibid., 211.

³ Ibid., 212-13.

⁴ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 394.

forces.” It is not only that modes of production that have their own “time:” “the relations of production”, “the political superstructure,” “philosophy,” “aesthetic productions,” and “scientific formations have their own time and history.”¹ That is to say first, that the different structures of the whole do not share the same temporality with each other. But it also says that they have an inner time different from the rest. The social whole does not have one single temporality derived from its inner contradiction but a multiplicity of coexisting yet distinct temporalities. This means that as a structured whole itself, a part cannot have its distinct temporality. On the other hand, it is still possible to argue that within its fragmentation fragments such as art has its time; and continue stating that the social whole also has its time in its fragmentation to relatively autonomous realms. This is what Lukács does: to establish a whole in its infinite fragmentation.

Another question that is important for Althusser’s whole is the problem of “relative autonomy.” If politics, art, mode of production... etc. do exist in different temporalities why are they “relatively” independent from each other; why are they not altogether autonomous regions of existence? Althusser’s answer is with the mode of articulation to the whole:

The specificity of these times and histories is therefore differential, since it is based on the differential relations between the different levels within the whole: the mode and degree of *independence* of each time and history is therefore necessarily determined by the mode and degree of *dependence* of each level within the set of articulations of the whole. The conception of the

¹ Althusser, "The Object of Capital," 99.

'relative' independence of a history and of a level can therefore never be reduced to the positive affirmation of an independence *in vacuo* (...)¹

Although this explanation once again brings Althusser closer to the Lukácsian/Hegelian whole, he is not willing to admit that. For him, Hegelian time is that of “synchrony” generated by the expression of the essence.² What worries Althusser is that a non-Hegelian time can be established as its binary opposite: synchrony vs. diachrony. On the other hand this opposition brings a problem:

Diachrony is reduced to the sequence of events (*à l'événementiel*), and to the effects of this sequence of events on the structure of the synchronic: the historical then becomes the unexpected, the accidental, the factually unique, arising or falling in the empty continuum of time, for purely contingent reasons. In this context, therefore, the project of a 'structural history' poses serious problems.³

In other words, synchrony can give an easy and abstract formula for change, a formula which is nowhere to be found in concrete events. On the other hand, when structuralism refuses the synchrony, it can only produce a history of contingent events that are even beyond the scope established by the analysis of historical tendencies. In a way, Althusser's structured whole desperately needs one place to hold on; otherwise it would completely fall into absolute relativism. Althusser finds in the economy a very precise point to cling, but only in the last instance. This dilemma is also seen by Cullenberg who is certainly privileging Althusser's whole to the Hegelian totality. Yet he also adds: “It appears that Althusser, despite his concerted attempts to the contrary, could not completely

¹ Ibid., 100.

² Ibid., 107.

³ Ibid., 108.

decenter his concept of the Marxist totality. The determination by the economy in the last instance remained for him an anchor without which the Marxist totality would drift away.”¹ But the subsequent attempts to remove this last instance had caused further problems: “In their attempt to completely "decenter" the concept of a social totality, they have adopted, however unwittingly, a "pluralistic" approach to social theory.”² According to Cullenberg, it is Richard Wolff’s economics that has been able to develop the path between the “pluralism” and the domination by one. Wolff in his turn, through an analysis that is much more generous to Hegel argues that a truly overdeterminist analysis can only start with its own negation. To explain an object, “a momentary essentialization,” a momentary affirmation of a “priority” within an overdetermined totality is required. Yet that moment is a determinate negation which will give way to an overdetermined totality. So an anti-essentialist analysis can only function by advancing and annulling essentialist moments. In other words, Wolff proceeds by reconciling Hegel and Althusser.³ But Althusser himself does not choose the path of finding moments of “determinate negation.”

¹ Stephen Cullenberg, "Overdetermination, Totality, and Institutions: A Genealogy of a Marxist Institutional Economics," *Journal of Economic Issues* 33, no. 4 (1999): 808.

² *Ibid.*, 809.

³ Richard Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel: Making Marxist Explanations Antiessentialist and Dialectical," in *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, ed. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio (Hanover, NH: Published by University Press of New England for Wesleyan University Press, 1996). At a different level what I call “narrative totality” is a political counterpart of Wolff’s “momentary essentialization.” Rather than Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” (See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds : Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 205.) Wolff’s “momentary” is closer to the argument presented here: the subjectless/goalless history is only possible by establishing subjects and goals in moments of history.

His notion of “the last instance” is rather established in opposition to the “orthodox” Marxists and their wrong perception of the determination by the economy. For Althusser, their misunderstanding stem from the fact that while Marx has shown that “every social totality comprises the articulated ensemble of the different levels of this totality: the economic infrastructure, the politico-juridical superstructure, and the ideological superstructure”¹ in *Capital* he only provided “the scientific analysis of the ‘economic level’ of the capitalist mode of production.”² So how to conceive the domination of one of structural levels?

(...) this dominance of a structure (...) cannot be reduced to the primacy of a *centre*, any more than the relation between the elements and the structure can be reduced to the expressive unity of the essence within its phenomena. This hierarchy only represents the hierarchy of effectivity that exists between the different 'levels' or instances of the social whole. Because each of the levels is itself structured, this hierarchy represents the hierarchy, the degree and the index of effectivity existing between the different structured levels present in the whole.³

In this perspective, the “dominance of a structure” is to be understood as the “determination ‘in the last instance’ of the non-economic structures by the economic structure.”⁴ But this “last instance” is a vague anchor to keep Althusser’s project tied to the ground: the hour of the last instance never comes. It is a “cause” that can never attain materiality; it is the “absent cause” of the history. “It is a ‘cause’, but in the dialectical

¹ Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," 6.

² Ibid., 7.

³ ———, "The Object of Capital," 98-99.

⁴ Ibid., 99.

sense, in the sense that it determines *what*, on the stage of the class struggle, is the ‘decisive link’ which must be grasped”¹ This last point is further developed by Balibar whose contribution to *Reading Capital* precisely asks the question of how to determine the determining instance of a moment of history.² His answer is to set the economy not as a determinant by itself but as a metadeterminant:

In different structures, the economy is determinant in that it determines which of the instances of the social structure occupies the determinant place. Not a simple relation, but rather a relation between relations; not a transitive causality, but rather a structural causality. In the capitalist mode of production it happens that this place is occupied by the economy itself; but in each mode of production, the 'transformation' must be analysed.³

The economy does not determine the central contradiction but determines which structure will determine the central contradiction of the time. Basically we have two contradictory resolution of the determination last instance: the first is the one defended by Balibar’s text that replaces determination by the economy with a metadetermination by the economy. Economy is no longer the “unmoved mover” of Marxism but it should be understood as the unmoved mover of the moved mover. If the goal of Althusserian Marxism was such a minute change, it really did not need to fight with every single letter written in the history of philosophy.

¹ ———, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 126.

² Etienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital*, ed. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar (London: NLB, 1970), 220.

³ *Ibid.*, 224.

On the other hand, determination in the “last instance” may also refer to an empty place: “Anything can be determinant ‘in the last instance’, which is to say that anything can *dominate*.¹ This perspective, however risks loosening the knot and lead Althusser to a point of relativism. Very conscious of this problem, Althusser states that the analysis of overdetermination requires an “index of determination, the index of effectivity.” He also admits that this attempt requires further analysis; however, the concept is yet not properly elaborated,² thus the analysis of the “index of effectivity” is nowhere to be found. In a way, he can never turn his criticism of Hegelian totality into a science of it; he cannot build a science of whole. This aporia leads him in his last years to think about the “materialism of the encounter: of the aleatory and contingency.”³ He directs his work to an analysis of history that opens a place for the “chance” to play but which does not lead to relativistic ideologies. This project that remains incomplete with Althusser will provide one of the important themes of the next chapter on Badiou.

VII. Beyond Althusser

Althusser, far from delivering a complete project thus left an ambiguous legacy. His critique, mind-blowing readings, original interpretations, his sharp and surgical analysis, basic yet previously unheard questions altogether brought a philosophy so powerful that established itself as the ultimate Marxism. On the other hand while this Marxism was

¹ Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 263.

² ———, “The Object of Capital,” 106-07.

³ ———, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 167.

strong enough to blow away others; it had its inner problems that soon became evident. The content of his thought as well as the personal political actions of Althusser convinced people around him that his path was not that of emancipatory and egalitarian politics. An example of such an effect can be seen in the work of Jacques Rancière who made an original contribution to *Reading Capital* but soon after distanced himself from his former master with a radical critique in *La Leçon d'Althusser*.¹ But nonetheless when Rancière writes about Marx he follows a strategy of first affirming and establishing Althusserian Marxism as the only possible Marxism and then he turns ruthlessly critical of this Marxism: Nowhere has he considered the possibility of an alternative Marxism that will be closer to his broader philosophical convictions. Besides, although Rancière's own projects can be considered as a very original contribution to humanist legacy,² he seldom speaks about humanism. Or when in *Ignorant Schoolmaster* he is affirming one of the most fascinating projects of the enlightenment, he talks about the enlightenment as the opposite of what he is affirming.³

After Althusser it becomes evident that the whole is not necessarily loosely bound; the determination in the last instance turns into a categorical refusal of any determinism.

¹ Jacques Rancière, "Le Concept De Critique Et La Critique De L'économie Politique Des «Manuscrits De 1844» Au «Capital»," in *Lire Le Capital*, ed. Louis Althusser, et al. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996). This contribution is not available in English edition. ———, *La Leçon D'althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

² His ideas are summarized perfectly in: ———, "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 2-3 (2004).

³ This is why Badiou argues that Rancière is the heir to Foucault. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*. Trans. Jason Barker (London; New York: Verso, 2005), 107. On the other hand, while Foucault's genealogies are directed at discovering the nightmares of modernity, Rancière discovers its unrealized dreams.

The fragments of social existence declare their independence: all one can do is to produce the local knowledge and act in local resistance movements (Foucault) or push them to the global limits (Negri); discover the elements ignored by phallogocentric, western totalities privileging a particular European experience (Derrida, Butler, gender studies, post colonial studies... etc.) or at best one can hope to discover the ways in which the fragments can be articulated to each other (Laclau and Mouffe).¹ Does Althusser leave anything in his legacy to go beyond the extreme fragmentation of social whole? Is it possible to read Althusser in his limits?

In the end, a peace with Hegel and thus to reincorporate the transition of different totalities remains an impossibility for Althusser; Hegel always remains as the theoretical enemy. In *Reading Capital*, he contrasts Marx's passages positing a logical development with those analyzing concrete historical development.² This reading of Marx is precisely the basis of Lukács' distinction of Hegel's false and genuine ontology; but Althusser is not willing to show such generosity to Hegel. For him, he is and remains the founder of a

¹ For a study on the relation of Althusser's thought with that of: Foucault, Warren Montag, "'The Soul Is the Prison of the Body': Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975," *Yale French Studies*, no. 88 (1995). On their differences: Robert Paul Resch, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Social Theory: A Comparison of Althusser and Foucault," *Poetics Today* 10, no. 3 (1989). On the relation of Althusser to Derrida: Thomas E. Lewis, "Reference and Dissemination: Althusser after Derrida," *Diacritics* 15, no. 4 (1985). Although he is not followed very often by the post-colonial theorists one can refer to Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, "In State of Grace Ideology, Capitalism, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge," *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 1 (2002). on how his critique of the whole is important for this perspective. Accordingly, Hegelian totality can be considered as the rule of the imperial center disregarding the particularity. Guardiola-Rivera further uses the concept of ideological apparatus as an explanation of how this strange totality is viewed as the only possibility of being.

² Althusser, "The Object of Capital," 114.

“spiritual unity,” of an undifferentiated whole where seemingly different elements are the manifestations of the self alienation of the inner principle of the whole.¹

In his late writings, while maintaining his general hostility to Hegel, Althusser comes close to a different definition of the whole. About Spinoza who starts with God and moves continuously away from the deity, he says:

Saying that one ‘begins with God’, or the Whole, or the unique substance, and making it understood that ‘one begins with nothing’, is, basically the same thing: what difference is there between the Whole and nothing? – since nothing exists outside the whole...²

Here Althusser comes to a new definition of totality which remains unexplored in his work: the Whole is the Void. “‘there is’ = ‘there is nothing’; ‘there is’ = ‘*there has always-already been nothing*’.” This is both a radically new definition of the whole yet it is also deeply rooted in Althusser who explicitly says that this definition explains the always-already: everything precedes itself, there is no origin.³ This idea is also the development of his most affirmative reading of Hegel: “Hegel’s Logic is the Origin affirmed-denied: the first form of a concept that Derrida has introduced into philosophical reflection,

¹ ———, “On the Materialist Dialectic,” 203-04.

² ———, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 176.

³ *Ibid.*, 189. About Montesquieu, he had written: “Society always precedes itself.” ———, *Politics and History*, 29. This is also crucial for Marxism: “What Marxism refuses is the (ideological) philosophical pretension to coincide exhaustively with a ‘root origin’, whatever its form (the *tabula rasa*; the zero point in a process; the state of nature; the concept of the beginning that for example, Hegel sees as being immediately identical with nothingness; the simplicity that, for Hegel once again, is the starting-point -- and restarting-point, indefinitely -- for every process, what restores it to its origin, etc.); it rejects, therefore, the Hegelian philosophical pretension which accepts this original simple unity (reproduced at each moment of the process) which will produce the whole complexity of the process later in its autodevelopment.” ———, “On the Materialist Dialectic,” 198.

erasure (rature).”¹ The movement of history as the emergence-disappearance of the subject is a different idea than the history as a process without a subject. In this context, the whole (or the void) is the place of a contingent encounter which gives birth to something radically new: it is the site of an event. The atoms randomly aligned in the epicurean model, touch each other out of chance; this accidental encounter in turn produces consequences. This simple model produces new questions: Is there something in the void that allows the encounter? What is the relation between the atoms and the void? How does the encounter transform the whole? What kind of politics is appropriate to the “event”? These questions lead the dialogue straight to the heart of Badiou’s politics.

¹ ———, *Politics and History*, 184.

Chapter six: Badiou - “Amicus Plato, Magis Amica Veritas”¹

In the early universe, modern astrophysics teaches us, there occurred a moment when things looked quite the way Epicurus described them: atoms hanging in the void, in parallel, without touching each other. Where modern physics differs from Epicurus is the explanation of the way in which the encounter took place: had the atoms laid parallel to each other, the laws of nature would not allow the miraculous encounter that fascinated many thinkers. What 20th century physics posits is the imperfection in the order of being: nothing fits to an elegant mathematical order in the universe. That is to say, there were gaps in the seemingly endless flow of the cosmic gas, as well as areas of concentration. Thus the randomness and the chance were not there to cause the swerve but to cause the random distribution of gaps and concentrations. The chance in this instant is so important that without it, with a perfect distribution of atoms, the universe as we know it wouldn't exist, the atoms would simply not move. The imperfection in the beginning allowed the gravity to act by drawing more atoms to the concentrated areas, more atoms led to a higher weight thus to a higher gravity and to more atoms being drawn. At one moment the pressure in the center became so high that it caused a big explosion: the giant stars of the early universe

¹ This is the sentence which concludes the late work of Althusser. See: ———, *Philosophy of the Encounter*. It is interesting to note that the original phrase in Latin is “Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas,” which can be translated as “Plato is a friend but truth is a better friend.” Althusser knowingly or not omitted the “sed” or “but” so his version is “Plato is my friend, truth better friend.” This version is quite accurate to understand Badiou for whom both Plato and a very Platonic notion of truth are friends.

started burning. It is in the core of these giant stars and during their final explosion as a supernova that the atoms that form the planets, our earth and our bodies were forged.

Can one say that the political events follow a similar logic? For late Althusser this is certainly the point:

The idea that the-origin of every world, and therefore of all reality and all meaning, is due to a swerve, and that Swerve, not Reason or Cause, is the origin of the world, gives some sense of the audacity of Epicurus' thesis.¹

As will be shown, this is a thesis that is very close to what Badiou defines as an event² and it is his way out of the fundamental aporia of structuralism:³ How is radical change possible? Badiou's answer is a non-answer. It consists of dropping the question about how objective conditions may lead to a change but to take the radical change as given. That is to say that although it is incalculable and unexplainable, the aleatory event happens. This event's happening needs not to be evaluated on the conditions of how it

¹ Ibid., 169.

² For this point and further explanations to Badiou's philosophy, one can refer to the best introduction to his work: Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Other than Hallward's work, Ed Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010). also provide a general introduction to Badiou's work. Oliver Feltham, *Alain Badiou: Live Theory* (London; New York, NY: Continuum, 2008); *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts*, ed. Justin Clemens and A. J. Bartlett (Durham: Acumen, 2010). provide again an introduction to his thought through a discussion of his intellectual development and political engagements.

³ Although Badiou seldom talks about structuralism and in many ways he is far from it, fundamentally his thought is attuned to the structuralist question. In a recent talk, Balibar said that Badiou is a direct heir to the originary questions of structuralism. Balibar, "Structure".

comes to appear but has to be “interpreted on the basis of the traces it leaves behind.”¹ What one must think is not how an event happens but what to do when it happens. Indeed events are rare, that is to say that politics is rare; but everybody in their lifetime get a few times the chance to become something that follows the event and reshapes the political world; to become a part of the collective and subjective creation of a truth; to become immortal.²

This also means that for Badiou there is no linear change and progress. He accepts the idea of “sequential” history that was even problematic for Althusser. For Badiou, the administrative logic may follow a linear line but (emancipatory) politics has a local occurrence and it happens in sequences of evanescent nature. Just like the Paris Commune, it starts-declares a new truth-and vanishes. This one and many of his propositions sound very close to the post-modern assertions, yet as with all his similar propositions its effect is the complete opposite of postmodern views of politics. His emphasis on the local, the evanescent and on the radical rupture indeed sounds like Foucault, but he takes one step

¹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 191. This notion of event is criticized for being based upon a religious conception of miracle. See: Roland Boer, "The Fables of Alain Badiou," in *Criticism of Religion: On Marxism and Theology*, 2 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009). While Boer is correct in underlining the theological dimension of Badiou's thought, his criticism that Badiou's notion of truth is misguided in its failure to distinguish religious fable from material truth is misguided. Badiou openly states that truth of our age must be in the form of a fiction. In other words, Boer's point is correct but it is not the weakness that Badiou cannot see in his own thought, but this is what Badiou wants precisely to emphasize.

² Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 514. Badiou here assumes a position that would be dismissed by Althusser who did not like the idea of immortal. He would call this idea Feuerbachian: “In God, men worship, love and fear their own infinite generic essence, which is omnipotent, omniscient, infinitely good and has the power to save...” Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 65.

further toward Hegel: the infinite is the “pure quality of the finite.” So although we are dealing with finite situations, the infinite and universal are immanent to them. The occurrence of politics is limited in time and space but its declarations are timeless; its truth is constructed but this construction makes it universal! A political event is a moment, but as a moment it is a momentum: for instance after the local event of the Commune nothing can remain the same in global politics. Same can be said about the October Revolution, about May 1968, or about the ongoing Arab Spring.¹

Exactly where can we situate Badiou’s philosophy? It is possible to argue that the French philosophy of the 20th century is marked by a sharp divide. One side of this divide is represented by an affirmation of the subjective power of the human and a celebration of his freedom; the other is marked by its emphasis on science, the study of structures and mechanisms of domination, denying freedom and autonomous subjectivity.² As Hallward notes, Badiou is not unique in his attempt to unite these two tendencies represented by the figures of Sartre and Althusser. However, even though he shares his endeavor with the

¹ It is important to note that for Badiou event always has a positive connotation. However, it can be pointed out that the counter-events may follow the same logic... one can talk about neo-liberal (counter) event as how a small group of determined and disciplined conservatives shaped the world economy in a similar way to how Badiou describes the action of a revolutionary subject.

² For a review of the common themes of these paths followed in the 20th century: Alain Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," *New Left Review*, no. 35 (2005). Badiou here claims that the French philosophy is marked by a divided between the philosophy of life / body and philosophy of concept / thought and associates himself with the second trend together with Althusser, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. He also claims that the first common feature of the French philosophy is what to do with the German heritage, especially with Heidegger.

great names of contemporary French philosophy such Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze, he stands out especially with his affirmative notion of truth.¹

It is possible to argue that Badiou's philosophy is shaped by this divide, and that the counterpoint of Althusser is Sartre.² About Sartre, he writes: "I have regularly paid tribute to a man who was, when I was eighteen, my absolute master and the man who initiated me into the delights of philosophy."³ Having said this it should be acknowledged that in some of his texts Badiou appears as anti-Sartre par excellence.⁴ Nonetheless, his intellectual transformations are marked with an uninterrupted meditation on the achievements as well as the failures of Sartre. One such failure that deeply influenced Badiou is the second volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* which remained incapable of moving beyond

¹ Peter Hallward, "Order and Event: On Badiou's Logics of Worlds," *New Left Review*, no. 53 (2008). Hallward's list can be further expanded to include a long list of non-French philosophers also dealt with similar problems.

² At the heart of this divide lies the Hegelian notion of totality but even when Badiou puts these names together he never asks the question. For instance in 1978 he had written that Sartre had depended upon an "idealist" interpretation of Hegel and that Althusser had attacked this French take on Hegel. He had claimed that a new conception of Hegel based on *The Science of Logic* of which both Sartre and Althusser were ignorant was much needed. But the next thing did not come: how to understand totality within this new context? Alain Badiou, Joël Bellassenn and Louis Mossot, "Hegel in France" in Alain Badiou, *The rational kernel of the Hegelian dialectic*. Trans. Tzuchien Tho, Ed. Tzuchien Tho (Melbourne: re.press, 2011)

³ Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Postwar Philosophy*, trans. David Macey (London; New York: Verso, 2009), 191.

⁴ For example, the opening essay of his *Metapolitics* is about logician and resistance fighter Cavallès who was killed by the Nazis. The entire essay is written to prove that the logic and reason are better grounds for resistance than Sartre's idea of commitment. While one can only admire the argument for the power of logic to convince one to fight against fascism, Badiou's essay gives no conceptual analysis of the relationship between the reason and resistance. The only proof is that Cavallès was both a logician and resistance fighter, but as to why he fought Badiou gives no further information. See: ———, *Metapolitics*, 1-9. Cavallès is also important in another way: although Badiou argues that for his intellectual development Cavallès did not come to the forefront, Althusser is said to have inherited the idea of self-criticism from him and transferred it to Badiou. In his turn Badiou does not talk often about self-criticism, he is regularly performing it. One can often find in his book a clear statement that his earlier position concerning X was wrong and that he now views it in a new fashion.

Stalin. This led Badiou toward the idea of subtraction of politics from history: history means furthering a relation to State, and Stalin is the absolute manifestation of what happens to emancipatory politics oriented to State power. This is why he defends the idea of sequential politics rather than one can be explained in a historical manner.¹ This failure is particularly important because for Badiou this book's question is the culmination of Sartre: "how can activity, the only model for which is the free individual consciousness, be a collective given? How can we escape the idea that any historical and social reality is inevitably passive?"² How can Sartre start with the conscious action of the autonomous individual yet end up justifying the rule of Stalinist bureaucracy? Despite his expressed admiration for Sartre, Badiou's decision is clear: Sartre's idea of subject is insufficient to move out of the aporias of 20th century Marxism. Although Badiou makes this criticism in 1981 and when he is still a Maoist³ declaring: "it is the masses who make History," or "trust in the masses;"⁴ this criticism still carries what will be the center of his political activity after his transition away from Maoism: what is needed is no longer a "warlike or

¹Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 43. Badiou deliberately declares that philosophy must part ways with historicism. See: Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy: Followed by Two Essays: "The (Re)Turn of Philosophy Itself" and "Definition of Philosophy"*, ed. Norman Madarasz, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 114-15. For a discussion of different modes of subtraction: ———, "On Subtraction," in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 106-10.

² ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, 19.

³ For a study on Badiou's interpretation of Maoism in its evolution: Bruno Bosteels, "Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13, no. 3 (2005). The Winter 2005 issue of *Positions* is a special issue exploring Badiou's relation to Maoism.

⁴ Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 34-35.

dissolving” party but one that will be “affirmative and creative.”¹ This idea of a new party is founded upon Badiou’s objection against the Sartrean idea of “totalisation:”²

There is within the political subject, and within the process of a new type of political party, a principle of consistency, and it is neither seriality, fusion, the oath nor the institution. It is an irreducible that escapes Sartre's totalization of practical ensembles. It is a principle that is no longer based upon individual praxis.³

In a way, it can be argued that elements of Badiou’s work –the event, the fidelity, the truth, sequential history and the subject, are all devised in order to avoid going where Sartre went in the second volume of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

As mentioned above, his connection seems to be stronger and closer with Althusser.⁴ He had applauded the publication of *Reading Capital*;⁵ and had collaborated with him during several lectures, the most important of which is arguably the one directed

¹ Ibid., 35.

² What Sartre calls totality is closely related to what is called [totality] in this dissertation and what he calls totalisation is noted in this dissertation as unbounded totality. For a comparison of these two terms, Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1*. Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London; New York: Verso, 2004), 45-47.

³ Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 34.

⁴ For a study of Badiou’s understanding of subject can be said to have developed in relation to yet through distinction from Lacanian and Althusserian notions of subjectivity: Bruno Bosteels, "The Re-Commencement of Dialectical Materialism (Part 2)," *PLi* 13(2002).

⁵ Alain Badiou, "Le (Re)Commencement Du Matérialisme Dialectique," *Critique* 23, no. 240 (1967). When *Reading Capital* was published Badiou was not yet associated with Althusser.

at scientists meditating on the relation of science and philosophy.¹ But this collaboration was not a long lasting one: as of 1977 Badiou's organization had published a pamphlet declaring that Althusserians are the "theoreticians of state capitalism."² Today Badiou is absolutely clear about Althusser: his path to Stalin was not a mistake in judgment, rather he had "inherited" the "Stalinist version of Marxism." In other words, Althusser was a Stalinist, whose only redeeming point was that he had "disrupted" Stalinism "from within."³

There is one further lesson of Althusser that have left an inerasable mark in Badiou's thought: A political movement does not fail as a result of the strength of the adversaries but as a result of its inner weakness. And what he means by weakness is always the weakness of the project, an "intellectual weakness."⁴ This means politics is an order of

¹ While Althusser's contribution is better known, Badiou's lectures are published more recently: ———, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, ed. Luke Zachary Fraser and Tzuchien Tho, trans. Luke Zachary Fraser and Tzuchien Tho (Melbourne: re.press, 2007). It is in these lectures that Althusser had declared that philosophy's propositions take the form of theses and scientific propositions are demonstrations. Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 40. He had further added that these theses assemble philosophical categories not scientific concepts. ———, "Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists," 81. These statements are closely followed by Badiou in the way he works as a philosopher.

² Alain Badiou, "La Situation Actuelle Sur Le Front De La Philosophie: Contre Lecourt Et Althusser," (1977). As with the tradition of Union Communiste de France Marxiste-Léniniste, the pamphlet was published anonymously yet it is commonly accepted to be Badiou's writing.

³ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 509.

⁴ ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, 55. With respect to Badiou these ideas will be discussed in the last section of the present chapter.

thought.¹ This allowed Althusser to argue that philosophy is the site that names the sequences of revolutionary politics and assess the failures and successes. While naming will also be a crucial idea of Badiou, he will argue that naming is not the task of philosophy, but is internal to politics, which he says is nothing other than thought. This is why for Badiou, Althusser is mistaken in mixing philosophy and politics, leading to a “suture” of philosophy by its political condition.²

I. Badiou and the Present

Built on this background, Badiou’s interventions are specific to the questions of the time. So before proceeding to the discussion of his ontology, it would be useful to depict how Badiou views his present. For him, our age is dominated by the opposite of what the classical philosophy teaches: today the Good is not understood as the capacity for Truth but as preventing Evil from happening. Paradoxically this turns into declaring the affirmative Truth and the Good to be associated with dangerous and criminal tendencies of the 20th century. Today’s so-called “western values,” preach:

obedience (to commercial contracts), modesty (in the face of the arrogance of the ham actor on TV), realism (we must have profits and inequalities), utter selfishness (now known as 'modern individualism'), colonial

¹ “Politics is thought” is probably the first axiom of Badiou’s conception of politics. Although it is partially inherited from Althusser, this was not a quick and immediate inheritance. In a 1976 polemic against Deleuze, he had written: “Masses make history, not Concepts.” ———, “The Flux and the Party: In the Margins of Anti-Oedipus,” *Polygraph: An international journal of culture and politics*, no. 15-16 (2004). Probably, today he regrets having written that statement.

² ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, 56, 82. The philosophy and its conditions is explained below. Elsewhere Badiou claims that his suture was rather the “scientific” suture reducing philosophy to a mere epistemology. ———, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 64.

superiority (the democratic goodies of the West versus the despotic baddies of the South), hostility to living thought (all opinions have to be taken into account), the cult of numbers (the majority are always right), obtuse millenarianism (the planet is getting hotter under my very feet), empty religion (there must be Something)...¹

I.a. Political Present

The basic problem of our political situation is that we live in an age where our planet has billions of people who are deprived of all the wealth our world has to offer. While the past centuries had a name for the excluded proletarian or peasant masses they could mobilize, our political imagination is yet to come up with a name for the collective figure of the deprived. The billions exploited by contemporary capitalism live atomized lives, disconnected from each other and often fall prey to crime, religious extremism or to blind violence.² The singular conflict of our age, the global political struggle will not begin until a new name for the deprived is found. The task of the thought today is to prepare this ground; this is why Badiou keeps mentioning that today we are closer to Marx than we are to Lenin.³ We need first to create in thought the possibility for a new possibility.

Secondly, the working class is no longer the savior; it is no longer the “generic humanity.” The problem is not just the decline of the number of manual workers in the

¹ ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, ix-x.

² ———, ““We Need a Popular Discipline”: Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative, Interview by Filippo Del Lucchese and Jason Smith,” *Critical Inquiry*, no. 34 (2008): 656-57.

³ This statement he often repeats can be found in different places, for instance: ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. David Fernbach (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 114-16. Although these statements can be interpreted as a call for a conception of totality, emphasizing totality at this point can be unripe. Before underlining the need for a standpoint of totality emanating from his work, I will first show how he is explicitly critical of the concept of totality.

west, not just the decline in union density or the decline in class as a denominator of political affiliation, not even a decline in working class activism. These are all facts but the fundamental issue is none of them. It is rather that the class is no more what Lukács had described: an existent whose “interest” was its dissolution, as the being who does not want to be and in order to stop existing it has to change the totality of existence. Rather the working class, at least in the advanced capitalist countries, is another particular that looks out for its own interests. Indeed progressive politics should support this interest, and furthering this interest means improving the living conditions of millions but this interest is no longer the universal interest. What working class stands for is a quantitative equality, but not qualitative equality which will redefine what is to be understood by the word equal. The “generic” working class is gone –maybe to the global south; it may return one day but today another subject is required.¹ For Badiou, the vacuum that is created with the departure of proletariat cannot be filled with “a mere collection of identities” that the concept of multitude implies. Today the task is rather to find a human group that is “beyond identity.”² The question of this politics for Badiou is how to be so few and do something that would change the totality to the situation for the good of all. But who is the enemy? What is to be avoided in the construction of this new politics?

¹ There is a bigger problem in Badiou’s case. In France, recent polls show that the working class support goes to the Front National candidate Marine Le Pen who is likely to receive 36% of their vote in 2012 elections. She was chased by the socialist candidate Dominique Strauss-Kahn (the poll is conducted before the scandal in New York) who was receiving only 17% of the working class support. During the 2007 elections the working class had also chosen the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Sarkozy. Bruno Jeudy, “2012, Le Match Pour L’électorat Populaire,” *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 24 April 2012.

² Alain Badiou, “The Saturated Generic Identity of the Working Class, an Interview by Nicolas Veroli and Diana George ” <http://interactivist.autonomea.org/node/5400>.

Badiou depicts our present with the idea that he calls “democratic materialism,” whose principle can be summarized as: “there are only bodies and languages.” Badiou says that our age is essentially nihilistic; it has no place for an “immortal soul,” it is guided by desires, commerce and finitude.¹ Against democratic materialism, Badiou insists on the relevance of “materialist dialectic” which posits: “there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths.”² The important thing to note in the statement is not that truths exist but that they do exist as an exception to what exists. Together with Descartes, Badiou insists that a truth does not exist in the same way a “thing” exists in the world. Today truths are “incorporeal bodies, languages devoid of meaning, generic infinites, unconditioned supplements” and always in suspension between the “void” and “pure event.” As such, devoid of any particular existence, truths are universal.³ For Badiou, a truth is created within time yet it is timeless; it is enunciated in a particular language yet it is trans-linguistic; it is the “trace of an event;” thus a truth is “infinite and generic.”⁴

But the truth is what remains banned in our present ruled by the postmodern relativism of opinions. Today every attempt toward the Good, every politics of equality and justice, is labeled “utopian” and is negated as the path toward totalitarian nightmares.⁵ The

¹ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 1. Italics removed. This means that “there are only individuals and communities.” Ibid., 8. As will be explained, what Badiou means by the immortal soul has nothing to do with a religious conception of it.

² Ibid. Italics removed.

³ Ibid., 4-6.

⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

⁵ ———, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Trans. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Verso, 2001), 13.

20th century which had started with the idea of a rebellion as its own justification ends up with the figure of Breton's priest who measures everything in terms of results.¹

For Badiou philosophy involves four dimensions: Revolt, a refusal to accept the world as given; logic, belief in reason and argument; universalism, it is addressed to all and open to all; and risk, a decision, a step away from the beaten track.² However, the present world is an undoing of these four dimensions of the desire of philosophy. It replaces revolt with merchandise; logic with communication; universality with specialization and risk with security. Badiou is absolutely clear on this point: the hermeneutic, analytic and post-modern orientations in philosophy all fail to counter the nihilistic tendencies of the contemporary political situation; they are rather its reflections.³

At base, the objective of postmodern philosophy is to deconstruct the idea of totality – to the extent that philosophy itself finds itself destabilized. Consequently, the postmodern orientation activates what might be called mixed practices, de-totalized practices, or impure thinking practices. It situates thought on the outskirts, in areas that cannot be circumscribed. In particular, it installs philosophical thought at the periphery of art, and proposes an untotalizable mixture of the conceptual method of philosophy and the sense—orientated enterprise of art.⁴

This quote summarizes the task of Badiou's thought. Badiou, who is opposed to a conception of an "expressive totality" criticized by Althusser wants also to oppose the post-modern tendency that is precisely against totality of all sorts. His attempt is thus to imagine

¹ ———, *The Century*, 143-45.

² ———, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham, trans. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 30-37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

a place for what Lukács had called “point of view of totality.” But he has to do in the world of contemporary philosophy where the totality which became associated with the totalitarian. It should be noted that Badiou often refrains from a positive usage of the category; his focus is rather on two words that were always together with totality and that were also abandoned by post-modernism: infinite and universal. The fourth chapter of this study had shown how Heidegger’s finitude formed the basis for an attack against totality, infinite and the universal. Badiou cannot and is not willing to defend these concepts in their established forms; he rather creatively reconstructs them to respond the challenges emanating from Heidegger, Althusser and post-modernism. While he is very clear and explicit on the infinite and universal; totality is strangely missing in his discussion. And in cases it is not, Badiou is very critical about various usages of the concept of totality. Yet I believe that the emergence of the standpoint of totality has to become an unequivocal part of his political project. Therefore it should be emphasized here that this chapter is not on a concept that is explicitly discussed by Badiou but on something that is implied and required by his thought yet still not present in it. Why Badiou is not asking this question? Does he share the post-modern disdain for the totality? Does he think that totality associated with totalitarianism will make things even harder for him? These questions cannot be answered. His task is already difficult because he wants to rethink the category of universal in a world where it is described as a philosophical counterpart of imperialism¹ and is abandoned by

¹ For instance Bourdieu and Wacquant authoritatively write: “Cultural imperialism rests on the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be

post-modernism in favor of “the fragmentary, the particular, or the contingent.” In the world after post-modernism, the philosophy is tasked to deal with “situations in which it is impossible to react (Gilles Deleuze), demands that cannot be met (Emmanuel Levinas), needs that can never be reconciled (Jean-François Lyotard), promises that can never be kept (Jacques Derrida).”¹ Talking about an affirmative notion of truth in this world of contemporary philosophy is thus an impossibility.

Another feature of the current thought is the reduction of philosophy to a mere meditation on language making the “metaphysics of truth” further impossible. Thus especially in France but also in other countries where post-structuralism became a strong orientation, the question of language and the question of “meaning” replaced the question of truth.² In a way, the entire philosophical endeavor of Badiou can be seen as a search for a way out of Heidegger and his poetic notion of truth.³ This can be seen at its best in his definition of the event as the “possibility of impossible.”⁴ What is the description of one’s

misrecognized as such. Thus, just as in the 19th century a certain number of supposedly philosophical questions being debated as universal throughout Europe and beyond originated (...) in the historical particularities (and conflicts) proper to the singular universe of German academics, so today numerous topics directly issuing from the intellectual confrontations relating to the social particularity of American society and of its universities have been imposed, in apparently de-historicized form, upon the whole planet.” They further add: “A kind of fictional axiomatization fit to produce the illusion of a pure genesis, the game of preliminary definitions and deductions aimed at substituting the appearance of logical necessity for the contingency of de-negated sociological necessities, tends to obfuscate the historical roots of a whole ensemble of questions and notions that will thus be called philosophical, sociological, historical or political, depending on the field of reception.” Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 41-42.

¹ Peter Hallward, “The Politics of Prescription,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 4 (2005): 770.

² Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 34-35.

³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴ ———, *Ethics*, 39.

death in Heidegger, without explicit reference but very deliberately defines the event in Badiou thus becomes the sign of the radical new, change, truth: it is an affirmation of life.

Against the truth of the event, at the dawn of the 21st century we have the priest everywhere. The “ethics” that he preaches represent the equivalent of Hegel’s “bad infinity” in the eyes of Badiou: It on the one hand seeks for the recognition of the universality of Western position, in other words parliamentary democracy and capitalist market economy. On the other it stems for a desire of domination: the mastery of life and death.¹

The only politics that is acceptable to the priest is representative democracy. Yet the basic division of parliamentary politics is dominated by two forms of a single idea: Fear. The first form of this fear is exploited by the right wing parties and it belongs to those who are in a relatively privileged situation. This fear of foreigners, workers, the youth of *Banlieu*, muslims, blacks... etc. may transform itself easily to a desire for a master who will be protecting the privileges.² But the fear does not only dominate the right wing politics, the left of the spectrum of parliamentary politics mobilizes a second form of fear: the fear of the Master. The problem with this fear is not that the dictatorship and a repressive

¹ Ibid., 38. Despite the tension between the democracy and the market, for Badiou our present is dominated by a particular arrangement between parliamentarism and capitalism. Badiou recites his criticisms about the contemporary western democracy in ———, “The Democratic Emblem,” in *Democracy in What State?*, ed. Giorgio Agamben [et al] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

² ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 8-10.

regime have nothing to be feared about; the real problem is that it fails to generate a positive vision to rival the effects and the domination of global capitalism.¹

In the end, in France as well as the “Western” world, the “right wing” seems to be winning. Against the ruthless attack of neoliberal economics and neoconservative ideology there seems to be a nostalgia where the lines of demarcation between the right and left were more visible; a nostalgia for the Fordist and Keynesian consensus.² For Badiou, this nostalgia is a sign of impotence.³

I.b. Intervention to the present

How does Badiou intervene into this particular situation of philosophy and politics?

What is absolutely interesting about Badiou is that, after what happened in philosophy

¹ Ibid., 10. Badiou’s criticism of liberal politics is advanced better by Jacques Rancière who argued that the contemporary parliamentary democracy has two enemies: dictatorship and a real democratic life. Jacques Rancière, *La Haine De La Démocratie* (Paris: Fabrique, 2005). For a notable study on the theoretical roots of politics of fear: Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

This idea was best mobilized by the Spanish Socialist Party’s (PSOE) regional branch in Catalonia (PSC): During the campaign for 2008 national elections they adorned the streets with a poster that was a *Reservoir Dogs* spin-off. The shadows of mysterious figures were dropped on a blood red background where the slogan was written: “If you don’t go (to vote) they (conservative PP) return” (Si tú no vas, ellos vuelven) The slogan was born out of the desperation of socialist who, after four years in government, had destroyed all the hopes of leftists in Spain. The only option to mobilize people to vote was to remind them that the alternative to PSOE is worse than they are... and the strategy worked: In Catalonia the socialists won with a landslide that brought them the victory in general elections.

The other poster used by PSOE is telling about the parliamentary left. On the same red background, the faces of global right wing leaders from Bush to Berlusconi were drawn. The slogan was “they too want to change the world.” A socialist party against the change, unfortunately this is not exclusive to Spanish Socialists and this is why socialists cannot win and Spanish Socialists are likely to lose in the coming elections.

² This nostalgia can even be felt in the arguably left-wing intellectuals, see: Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1998). While Sennett’s criticism of new capitalism is certainly valid, he is writing as if the age of Fordism was the golden age.

³ Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 30.

during the last part of 20th century he is still able to ask about the human nature without sounding naïve and unsophisticated. He is not “deconstructing” the human nature as it is discussed in this or that text; he is not criticizing the understanding of human nature of this or that philosopher in order to show its aporias and groundlessness. He is asking the question rather straightforwardly and when he is referring to Rousseau, it is only to say that he is right, that the “human animal is essentially good.” If the empirical instances show otherwise, it is because there are external forces at work; the task is then to detect these forces and fight against them. But what does he mean, that human animal is good? Badiou answers this with Plato: to be capable of truth. Truth is the point of departure for all creations directed to the universal, in this sense it is no different than the Good or the Beautiful. Today, the claim that human animal is evil is the vision of those who want to domesticate it to a mere servant in the capitalist economy.¹ This is Badiou’s central question about the human: how to awaken the immortal in slumber within each of us, i.e. our capacity for the Good?

Based on this understanding of human, he feels nothing but contempt for the chief motto of postmodern ethics: respect for the Other. Just like Lukács, Badiou views the self as composed of “two-thousand” men. But unlike Lukács, his context allows Badiou to follow further the consequences of this thought. This refusal of the category of Otherness does not deny the differences among individuals, groups, etc. This is not a statement of “we

¹ ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, viii. This is also the basis of his criticism of the current human rights discourse: one cannot start from the victimhood or the evil that subjugates human beings. One should rather start from the universal Good that man is capable to create; i.e. the truth.

are all the same” or that “we are all brothers and sisters.” Rather, Badiou states just like Rimbaud: “I is another,” and adds:

There are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself.

As many, but also, then, neither more nor less.¹

That is to say that the refusal of otherness cannot be sought in community and in sameness but the absence of a bound that is holding together the community. To start with oneself: since every being is a multiplicity in transformation, as a being I am also a multiple and not the same with myself. Moreover, from the perspective of politics as a truth procedure, the categories relating to identitarian and to communitarian aspects are completely irrelevant.² This leads to a new definition of politics that is “not the realm of power,” but “the realm of thought:”

Its goal is not transformation; its goal is the creation of possibilities that could not previously be formulated. It is not deduced from situations, because it must prescribe them.³

One of the crucial elements that this definition of politics requires is to distinguish truth from knowledge. For Badiou truth is a prescriptive concept that comes to being as a declaration. Knowledge is descriptive, belongs to what Heidegger would call to a “correspondence logic.” But there is more to that: Badiou’s concept of politics is designed,

¹ ———, *Ethics*, 26. The English translation of the book quotes Rimbaud as “I am another,” yet Rimbaud’s famous edict “Je est un autre,” I is another, is very different from “I am another.”

² ———, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11.

³ ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, 98.

just like Lukács', in order to exclude the play of interests from its definition. All Badiou is trying to do is to imagine a way of politics where the concepts such as interest, power, realpolitik... etc. will become entirely irrelevant. In this way, what he calls "politics" is only the politics of emancipation; the politics of interest is called "administration" in his terminology.¹ This is why his politics rely on a truth that is the measure of itself and exist only in the affirmative declaration. The opposite of truth is the knowledge that belongs to the facts which emerge from play of interests and power.²

Here Badiou enters into a dangerous ground because the one who believes that s/he possesses the truth is the one capable of horrible deeds. Certainly al-qaeda militants believe that they relate to a higher truth. In fact, all the mass murderers of the 20th century had deluded themselves into the belief that the eternal truth was on their side. This is what led for instance Arendt to insist that the philosophical category of the absolute calls for tyranny in the realm of politics. She underlined that the categories of truth, Idea, Good, totality, dialectics, even justice as ideal are concepts calling for authoritarian intervention to democratic politics.³ It is thus not a surprise that one of Badiou's central opponents is Arendt (although what he inherits is an Arendt through the lenses of Revault d'Allones who is missing Arendt's point). Against Arendt's privileging of opinion, Badiou first objects to the idea that opinions generate discussion whereas truth is dictatorial. Science, especially

¹ ———, *Metapolitics*, 73.

² ———, *Ethics*, 54-55.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), esp. 70-93.

mathematics is in the first place he claims, is founded against the authority. In a debate where the truth is at stake, it is not one's position in society but the relevance of one's claim matters. Thus, "a singular truth is always the result of a complex process in which debate is decisive." The normative construction of a truth depends on being shared and being approved. Scientific statements are open to the criticism of whoever accesses them and regardless of who utters them.¹ Badiou is indeed representing an idealized version of scientific debate and he probably knows that. But whether he is accurately describing the empirical reality is not so much the point. His genuine interest is to show a mode of debate where the decision does not rely on the majority of numbers supporting a statement but on the truth content of this statement. Science is one such realm which is guided not by the democracy of numbers but with democratic debate: If it was left to vote, we would still think that we lived in a geocentric universe.²

Thus the basic difference between Arendt and Badiou is the following: For Arendt, what matters is how the free and equal men act together and discuss; thus she wants nothing to prevent political discussion, especially the claim to a higher truth. Although American Founding Fathers are her models, the concept is timeless: regardless of the form of government, politics is possible if (all, many or few) men "interact with one another as equals and among equals."³ For Badiou, what matters is how these men (and women) came to be equal and free; no freedom and equality can be gained by respecting the opinion of

¹ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 118-19.

the powerful who benefit from inequality. The equality can only be one-sidedly and violently inscribed into the situation of inequality. Can one listen to the opinions of the slave owners and convince them through a debate that slavery is evil and thus to free all their slaves; can slavery come to an end with a debate of opinions? In this sense, the democratic debate of opinions is the arch-nemesis of the possibility for the foundation of a democratic debate as Arendt understands it. Equality that is the precondition of the democratic debate of opinions cannot be won by a democratic debate of opinions.

What Badiou defends can be called a Democracy of truth. He mentions that the philosophy has a contradictory relationship with Democracy: while philosophy is an essentially democratic activity, virtually no philosopher (from Plato to himself) believes in democracy. He explains this contradiction by arguing first that the “philosophy assumes that the search for truth is opened to everybody. The philosopher can be anybody.” He further argues that it is “completely indifferent to social, cultural or religious position of who speaks or thinks. Philosophy accepts to be *from* everybody.” And finally it is “directly exposed to the judgement of others.” Yet this democratic trait that stems from the “axiom of equality of minds” is not to be confused with the “equality of opinions.” Not all opinions are equal: a distinction is always required first between correct and incorrect opinions and secondly between opinions and truth. Everybody is equal in her/his capacity of accessing or producing the truth but what everybody comes up with is not equal. The arguments in a

debate need to be “validated” according to a “universal logic”¹ The democracy of truth calls for a different type of political procedure. Democracy of the vote and the majority belongs to a form of state; however, for Badiou democracy cannot be the form of a state. The state is the very opposite of democracy. For Badiou if democracy exists, it belongs to the universal content of the political declarations.² So this democracy exists in the egalitarian and emancipatory content of what it declares.

The affirmative, non-critical notion of truth leads Badiou to two very problematic moves: first, a return to the classical philosophy and secondly to declare that ontology is set theory. In both moves Badiou’s task is to move farthest away from the shadow of Heidegger. In the first move, he wants to come up with a truth that does not care about its limits, its historicity, its finitude... etc. In the second he wants to get beyond the obsession with language and poetry. Both of these moves offer great prospects yet bring problems as well.

In the first attempt his main task is to get beyond the Heideggerian idea of finitude against universalism. In doing so he subscribes to the commonly accepted idea in the French academia that Heidegger, especially his ideas concerning time and finitude are the culmination of Kantian revolution in philosophy. The logic is simple: if a new universalism is to be founded it has to restart from the beginning, from the classical philosophy. We need

¹ Alain Badiou, "Democracy, Politics, Philosophy: An Obscure Knot." The Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, 2006, Available at: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/democracy-politics-and-philosophy/>.

² ———, *Metapolitics*, 78-95.

to go before Kant because Kant is the one to bring the issue of limits to the table. Badiou makes this explicit: it is important to get beyond Heideggerian nihilism, but doing so requires dissociating from Kant: the philosophy of today “must de-link itself from the Kantian heritage, from the perpetual examination of limits, from the obsession with critique, and from narrow forms of judgement.”¹ If one wants to imagine the universal, one should start by forgetting about the limits. This is why many of the terms in Badiou’s philosophy are used in their pre-Kantian senses: Badiou is a neo-classicist in philosophy.² This neo-classicism comes with particular operations: for example, the rejection of the category of time and the discipline of history.³

This classicism can be called a new form of Platonism. Badiou calls this a “Platonism of multiple.”⁴ The subtraction of truth from the opinions is the key of the neo-Platonism of Badiou. Against the opinions Badiou insists on the highly problematic concept of truth that he inherits from Spinoza via Althusser: Truth is an “index sui,” the generic truth has no external guarantee.⁵ But this does not mean that the truth stands alone in contradistinction to opinions. The statement “truth subtracts form opinions” means that there is an inner relation between the two categories. Subtraction is not just cutting all ties; it is cutting the ties while maintaining the relation. Badiou underlines this point by

¹ ———, *Polemics*. Trans. Steve Corcoran (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 35.

² After claiming that his philosophy is classical Badiou defines it as “any philosophy that does not submit to the critical injunctions of Kant.” See: ———, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. Trans. Louise Burchill. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 45.

³ ———, *Metapolitics*, 35-44.

⁴ ———, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, 46.

⁵ ———, *Infinite Thought*, 130.

emphasizing the role of the sophist in the Platonic dialogues. Sophist is the one who reminds that “the category of Truth is void.” So although he is the enemy, the totality of the dialogue –the final result and the process of arriving at it, includes the sophist. Without the sophist there is no dialectical strife; without him, philosophy easily turns into a tyranny, to the dictatorship of truth. Renouncing the sophist, i.e. the opinion is a disaster.¹ Badiou’s classicism thus comes with a strife, but Badiou knows that the strife should not end; the enemy should not be eliminated forever; final victory is harmful even to the winner. Badiou’s politics, as shall be seen is modeled upon this question: how to devise a politics where the enemy can be defeated but then return in a dominant position for a new sequence of conflict to restart?

How to make the Platonism of multiple work as a doctrine of truth? For Platonism, the One used to be the guarantee of truth. This guarantee is no more valid for the multiplicity of being; the “complexes of complexes” marks our understanding of being. In the present situation neither “without-being of the One” nor “the limitless authority of the multiple can be revoked. The big question here is the status of truth: how to save it? It is a big question because philosophy is distinguished from sophistry through the category of truth.² So far, the decline of One resulted in postmodernism and the triumph of the finitude of language, which ended up in denying the universality of truth. So if truth is to be reasserted it has to be “subtracted” from language, it has to be a “singular production of the

¹ ———, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 134-35.

² *Ibid.*, 119. It has to be underlined that philosophy does not produce truths but it operates “from truths.” *Ibid.*, 124.

multiple.” Badiou calls this “generic multiplicity.”¹ How it comes to being will be the central question that will be discussed below, but before proceeding into that it will be useful to open the idea of “subtraction form language.”

The dogma of philosophy after Heidegger is the impossibility of world-to-world communication. This is why the translation became the central topic for the philosophy after Heidegger, especially for Derrida. What Badiou does is to offer the language of set theory as one language that does not need any translation. It is the language that allows talking about multiplicities as multiplicities. All the axioms of set theory are clear and well understood in any language and any formulation using set theory will be immediately accessible to anyone informed in set theory regardless of one’s cultural background. For Badiou, this gives philosophy “a weapon, a fearsome machine of thought” that is set to attack against “the bastions of ignorance, superstition and mental servitude.” With Plato, Badiou insists that mathematics is the way out of “the sophistical dictatorship of linguistic immediacy.”² This means not that philosophy is mathematics, it just means that philosophy has to unburden itself of thinking “being qua being.” Philosophy decides that the vocation of mathematics is ontology but does not deal with mathematics itself.³

¹ Ibid., 103-04.

² ———, “Mathematics and Philosophy,” 16. One particularly ridiculous effect is to see the increase in the number of publications making use of a half-learned set-theory. Badiou himself is educated in mathematics and is excellent in what he is doing. A decade ago, some academics were thinking that using a German or French word and talking about how it resists translation would make their articles smarter than they actually were; set theory is increasingly assuming this function today.

³ ———, “The Event as Trans-Being,” 97. His account of mathematical ontology is further discussed in ———, *Number and Numbers* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

Moreover, mathematics provides Badiou an easy way out of what after deconstruction seemed impossible: to absolve philosophy from reflecting on its own historicity.¹ Moreover it should be underlined here that his usage of sets has nothing to do with an allegorical use. He makes this point absolutely clear by differentiating his understanding of mathematics from that of Deleuze, i.e. as a source of metaphors.² This language is important for Badiou especially because it allows a new way of thinking of totality: what set theory conceives as the relation of belonging ($\beta \in \alpha$) is a different way of conceiving what is defined by whole/parts relation.³

To accept axiomatic set theory as the language of being pure and simple brings an immediate problem: set theory is sometimes criticized for dealing with entities that is beyond its boundaries. The complaint raised within the field of mathematics is that set theory is not an adequate language for dealing with the issue of infinity. If this criticism is true, it is a big problem for Badiou, because all he cares about is the infinity as defined by set theory. Moreover, it can be observed that while Badiou, just like Plato, wants his readers to believe that the mathematical notion of truth is given, what he attempts is in fact

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Philosophy without Conditions," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 44. For Badiou, this obsession of reflection on its historicity is precisely what paralyzes philosophy. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 113-14.

² ———, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, 1.

³ ———, *Being and Event*, 266.

to construct this truth.¹ For Lukács, this would carry the risk: although human thought is grounded in material conditions, it always risks getting out of hand and deluding itself into a reality that can exist in imagination. Obviously, what Lukács understands from ontology is the exact opposite of Badiou. For him ontological categories do not belong to a realm specific to ideas but are the reproduction in thought of the really existing dynamic complexes.²

But how does Badiou explain this radical “mathematics is ontology” approach? For him, ontology as the language of Being has to separate itself from particular beings. However, any word in any language in this or that way is associated with a particular existent; this leads to confusion between Being and beings. Therefore, the language of Being must be completely abstract and not refer to any particular existent in the world. Badiou is at his best in pure abstract and mathematics is partly what allows him in this mode of thinking. Mathematics allows him to talk about Being in general without getting stuck to beings. He claims that after the achievements of Frege and Russell,

it became possible to rigorously specify the notion of property, to formalize it by reducing it—for example—to the notion of a predicate in a first-order logical calculus, or to a formula with a free variable in a language with fixed constants. I can thus avoid, by means of restrictive constraints, the ambiguities in validation which ensue from the blurred borders of natural

¹ Balibar writes: “Badiou is attempting to use *meta-mathematical means* –that is, mathematics applied to mathematics itself– *actually to construct a definition, theory or concept of truth*. To be more accurate, he is attempting to demonstrate that that concept is ‘already there’, even though it has not been there for long, and that we have only to recognize it or give it its name: ‘an indiscernible generic extension of a situation’.” Etienne Balibar, “The History of Truth: Alain Badiou in French Philosophy,” in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 30.

² Lukács, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology*, 19.

language. It is known that if my formula can be 'a is a horse which has wings', then the corresponding set, perhaps reduced to Pegasus alone, would engage me in complex existential discussions whose ground would be that I would have recognized the existence of the One-the very thesis in which every theory of the multiple soon entangles itself.¹

This usage of mathematics is very similar to the idea of bracketing as used in phenomenological analysis. Nothing underlines the difference between Badiou and Lukács than an anecdote: Lukács says that Scheler once explained him that even the phenomenological research about the Devil is possible, provided its reality is bracketed.² Against this Lukács' had replied: "and when you are finished with the phenomenological picture of the devil, you open the brackets –and the devil in person is standing before you."³ It is important to note here that a similar line of argument is also developed by Bertrand Russell, who –as exemplified by the above quotation, is an inspiration for Badiou. However his remarks are curiously ignored by Badiou: curiously ignored because they are made precisely on the problems of Plato's understanding of truth which is crucial for Badiou. For instance he states that the "mathematical truth" is "independent of perception; but it is truth of a very peculiar sort, and is concerned only with symbols."⁴ This is not a passing remark but one of Russell's strongest objections against Plato. The truth in mathematics is beyond doubt, independent of opinions and gives an exactitude beyond anything that can be achieved by the sciences. Yet it depends on the presupposition of certain axioms and these

¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 39.

² The bracketing in question here has nothing to do with my usage of totality in brackets. Here it is used to mean that its existence is put in suspension for the duration and the purposes of the analysis.

³ Lukács, "Existentialism," 246-47.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy And Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 155.

assumptions would never exist outside the thought. For Lukács, this is the central question of ontology: what to do when you face devil, Pegasus or the bourgeoisie in front of you? Badiou, who never doubts the limits of mathematical truth comes to the same question in the end but with a different approach.

Moreover, there is one final feature of the mathematics as used by Badiou: After pages of mathematical demonstrations on how everything is regulated in a given situation, on “how everything under sun is in tune,” Badiou comes to the core of his philosophy: “the sun is eclipsed by the moon.” Both volumes of his ontological work end up by showing that what matters is in fact that which is unimaginable through mathematics. In his words: “mathematics cannot think a procedure of truth, because mathematics eliminates the event.”¹ Mathematics give the most adequate description of a static structure, but not how it changes. He will also write that a genuine political sequence cannot be “represented in the universe of numbers and statistics.”²

After this preliminary remarks, it is now possible to proceed to Badiou’s ontological work but before that another question can be asked: What happens to philosophy, when the ontological vocation is delivered to mathematics? As an activist, does Badiou designate a privileged position to people in his position, in a way that is similar to what Althusser did? Badiou’s definition of philosophy is in a way made to avoid where Althusser ended up. For Badiou avoiding Althusser’s mistake is possible only if philosophy further withdraws itself

¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 341.

² ———, *Metapolitics*, 10.

from the realms where the truth is constructed. So does philosophy assume a modest role by associating itself with the role of organizing the consequences of its conditions? It can be said that this depends on a fifth condition: the autonomy of philosophy vis-à-vis its conditions.¹

I.c. The Subtractions of Philosophy

Badiou's depiction of philosophy looks like a modern day manager who, rather than performing the tasks, assigns them to appropriate processes and evaluates the results. For Badiou this makes philosophy less authoritarian and more democratic yet anybody who knows a little about contemporary working place knows that the "team work" is in fact not a solution to draconian uses of power. But Badiou is at least trying to move out of the philosophy's delusions of grandeur. This is why Badiou takes a clear stance against the "political philosophy:"

Even when Badiou writes about communism, he calls his book neither a political text, nor a book on political philosophy. For Badiou, a "political text is something integral to an organized political process," political texts are the declaration of political movements. What Badiou does is rather philosophy which organizes the consequences of political processes. This is the opposite of the "futile" discipline of political philosophy which searches in vain for a foundation of politics and political thus inevitably succumbs into

¹ Alenka Zupančič, "The Fifth Condition," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).

moral philosophy reducing politics to ethical action.¹ The political philosopher is the one who meditates upon the “brutal” and “confused” empirical instances of politics; is the one determining the principles of “good” or “ethical” politics and finally is the one who will refrain from militant involvement of all sorts.² Political philosopher observes while maintaining the safe distance from politics. Then the question is: how to avoid political philosophy?

For Badiou, this starts by asserting that philosophy does not produce truths. What he calls “truth procedures” take place in three Kantian fields –Science, Politics, Art and in Love. The truth is subjective in these fields, not in the sense of the opposite of objective but in the sense of being dependent on the emergence of a subject. For Badiou, a human being is not always a subject. One rather becomes a subject in the midst of an event in these fields. For instance one becomes a subject when serial composing is invented and by producing the truth of this discovery through the novel acts of creation in composition and in performance. Badiou claims that philosophy should rather assume a modest role. In fact, for Badiou, leave alone teaching the militants of truth what to do, philosophy has no role in the making of truth procedures. This is how Badiou understands Hegel’s edict that the “owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk:”³ Philosophy starts thinking the event only after the end of the sequence when the truth is produced. Philosophy collects

¹ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London; New York: Verso, 2010), 38.

² ———, *Metapolitics*, 10.

³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 13.

the consequences of the event.¹ However, he says no more as to the purpose of this act of philosophy. Is it for safekeeping for the future? Maybe philosophy collects the consequences of an event, say in art and abstracts its truth and allows, say the political activists to draw further consequences and apply in politics? That would be a noble goal and useful to explain how similar changes occur together in different realms of activity. Yet Badiou assigns no such role to philosophy.

But do the realms obey the Kantian separation? Although he is usually very careful in keeping the realms separate he once claimed that the “music is a principal operator of the contemporary ideological dispositifs.”² How is the field of art related the political field? What is the operation that takes place? Through what are they related? Badiou says nothing about these questions. Moreover with the exception of the quoted sentence, it is quite impossible to find anything about the relations of realms in his oeuvre. This may lead to the conclusion that the conditions of philosophy are to be considered as Althusser’s structures, i.e. as closed totalities touching each other externally and only through their consequences as gathered by the philosophy. However this separation works only in the level of

¹ Incidentally this is what late Althusser had demanded of philosophy: to observe that there has been an Encounter. Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 170.

² Alain Badiou, "De La Dialectique Négative Dans Sa Connexion À Un Certain Bilan De Wagner," www.lacan.com/badwagnerone.htm. Dispositif is one of the most important concepts of French thought after Althusser. Foucault defines it as “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.” Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194. For a discussion of the concept: Gilles Deleuze, "What Is a Dispositif?," in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992).

philosophical discussion of conditions, in his actual work Badiou is the first one to break this artificial separation between philosophy and its conditions.

While on the explanatory level the distinction seems logical, the analysis of concrete texts and events cast doubt on the viability of this type of clear separation between philosophy and its political condition. Take for example “Politique unique et politiques démocratiques.”¹ The text appears in the journal of *L'Organisation Politique*, the organization co-founded by Badiou and often cited by him as one of the attempts to toward genuine emancipatory politics in our times. In this sense, it is a text that is internal to the political process. It indeed starts with a concrete analysis of the concrete situation: the rise of the *Front National* in France. But soon after the text transforms into a critique of parliamentary model of democracy, a discussion of the role of science, consciousness, the defects of politics built around the state, the prescriptive vs. descriptive notions of truth etc. and all of these leading toward a quite philosophical justification of why the principles of *L'Organisation Politique* are the only way out of the aporias of present politics as well as those of the classical revolutionary politics. In this sense, even including the “concrete” discussion of *Front National*, this particular text is no different than what can be found in Badiou’s philosophical work reflecting on its political condition. His *Polemics*, *Ethics*, and *Metapolitics* contain a number of texts that are indistinguishable from this “anonymous” political text. So where is the difference? Unlike the articles in these books written by

¹ Alain Badiou, "Politique Unique Et Politiques Démocratiques," *La Distance Politique* 28 (1998). Just like the other texts of *L'Organisation Politique*, this particular article is published anonymously but it is quite obvious that its author is Badiou.

Badiou, this one appears in the journal of *L'Organisation Politique* and it is collectively signed. But as to the content, it is hard to note any difference at all. If this is not a political text indistinguishable from his philosophical texts, what is it? Is this also a philosophical text? Then this means that the space of the political declarations, in this case the journal, is a space open for the intervention by the philosophy. In one way or another, this text shows that there is no clear and easily definable connection between politics and philosophy. In his explicit differentiation between philosophy and its conditions, Badiou is going for the clean and analytically feasible option but one that is not empirically viable for any philosopher who is also a political militant, especially for himself.

This is not true only for his political work but also his ontology which is dedicated to the emergence of that which is included in a space but that does not properly belong to that space. The description of the event thus looks like a perfect depiction of the “immigrants,” or “workers without papers” in France. Moreover, he argues that philosophy’s task is threefold: throw light on fundamental choices; on the distance between thought and power; and finally on the “value” of the event, break and exception. With these, Badiou is explicitly assigning a political task to philosophy. Indeed all these operations can be repeated in all four areas of creation, but it means that philosophy is

internally associated with each of them, especially with politics.¹ If this is true Badiou is guilty of what he calls the suture of philosophy by its political condition.²

So if he is not going to obey its rules why did Badiou invent them? Looking at the timing of the idea of conditions, it will become evident that the concept is invented during the 1980's, at the end of the activism of the "red years." It thus belongs to the closure of a venerable political sequence when Badiou probably felt to justify his philosophical interventions with a fidelity to his past political commitments. However, as Badiou intentionally produces the groundwork for a new political sequence to come, he may continue to talk about the idea of conditions but he is the first one to violate it.

Moreover, he does not only separate philosophy from politics. For Badiou, the practise of politics should be entirely separated from analysis of socioeconomic situation. On the one hand, this is a great achievement to get rid once and for all from the superiority of the philosophic / scientific knowledge in comparison to the less informed active militants of the movement: The hierarchical categories of expertise and knowledge are thus entirely banished from the generic politics which is open to anyone who show the will to be there.³

¹ ———, "Thinking the Event," in *Philosophy in the Present*, ed. Peter Engelmann (Cambridge, M.A.: Polity, 2009), 12.

² If the relation of philosophy with its conditions is broken, it means that the philosophy is sutured by its condition. For instance, positivist suture or "scientistic suture" dominates much of the 19th century; and political suture is pretty much the sign of Marxism. In all these cases one of the conditions comes to the front as to determinate the vocation of philosophy. Sutures can also mix; for instance "economic determinism" is a political suture, but since it is also an attempt to push the revolutionary politics to the level of science, it is a scientific suture. While these versions are out of fashion these days, Heideggerian suture or the "poetic suture" still dominates (especially the French) philosophy. ———, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 62-64, 67.

³ Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 225.

On the other hand this approach brings an artificial separation in two ways: first, how in a meeting can one be sure that the eminent professor is in an absolutely equal position with an undocumented worker? The professor may refuse his title, he can act completely in accordance with the axioms of equality, but this cannot be a guarantee of avoiding hierarchies implicit in bodily language, in one's accent, command of language, in one's experience, in the positions achieved within informal networks... etc. Secondly, there is a more important question that will be further discussed below: how can one act without knowledge; how can one decide on the "void of the situation" without invoking analysis?

To make his categories hold Badiou further abandons the site of economy: the only economy is capitalist.¹ That is not to deny the importance of economic field, but to renounce the responsibility to invent an economic order with an egalitarian distribution of wealth. In this way he excludes an entire field of vital interest; on the 'positive' side, this absolves him from a lot of problems concerning the economic distribution, about the communist economy to come... etc. Therefore he ends up with a unique politics whose only possible path is politics of recognition.

II. Badiou's Ontology and Politics

At this point one may ask: but what does Badiou's thought have to do with Totality? In Badiou's ontological work one can encounter several usages of the concept. While it is often used negatively, it can be argued that Badiou's idea of politics requires a resort to

¹ Ibid., 237.

what Lukács had called “point of view of totality;” or rather a “point of view of the void.” But since the word “point of view” sounds too much like a worldview, like an opinion we may call it: “the truth of the void.” In the end, these two means more or less the same thing to these radically different thinkers.¹ Both of these expressions refer to a subject whose existence is impossible within the given totality and finds itself obliged to fight against it; during this struggle it produces a subjective position, which nonetheless becomes a universal truth that changes the entire world and becomes the foundation of a new one. To avoid any confusion that may arise, it should be underlined that the similarity is the interpretation of the present study and that Badiou never explicitly deploys such a term in a proximity to Lukács and his explicit usage of the totality remains on the negative. The manifold usages of the concept in his work can be regrouped around two definitions: the whole and totality.

The “whole”² is what Badiou conceives as the universal set, the set of all that exists. The existence of such a set is a logical inconsistency, thus the set of all cannot exist. What Badiou does in order to claim that the whole is inexistent is to invoke the paradox discovered by Bertrand Russell. Accordingly, Badiou argues that the universal set must be a set that contains itself, otherwise it cannot be a whole. Such type of multiples, are called

¹ I did not come across with a single commentary of Badiou about Lukács. Even when he is asked about Lukács, his answer refrains from referring to him directly.

² Although in *Logics of Worlds* he uses the word “whole” (*le Tout*, literally the set of everything) in this discussion in his recent seminars, Badiou repeated the same line of argument against totality (totalité). Maybe this means that Badiou views totality something similar to Borges’s aleph. For the audio recording of his seminar see: Alain Badiou “Que signifie « changer le monde » ?” <http://www.diffusion.ens.fr/index.php?res=conf&idconf=3063>.

“reflexive multiples,” and of course there are “non-reflexive multiplicities” that do not enter to their own composition. If I am writing a list of books written on totality, this list will not be mentioning itself; so it is a non-reflexive set. Imagine the opposite: a list of everything written on anything but the totality. This would be a rather long list but should contain one particular element: since the list itself is something that is written on a topic other than totality, it should be an element of itself; so this would be a reflexive set. The universal set should be composed of these two parts; it should have a part of reflexive sets and a part of non-reflexive sets. The logical paradox belongs to what Badiou calls “chimera,” or to the set of non-reflexive multiples: is chimera itself a reflexive multiple or a non-reflexive multiple. If chimera is a non-reflexive multiple, it means that chimera should belong to the part of the multiples that do not contain themselves. Yet this means that chimera is a reflexive set, this is a paradox. If chimera is a reflexive set, then it cannot contain itself; thus it should be a non-reflexive set, again a paradox. Thus the existence of the set of everything relies on a logical inconsistency. Here Badiou either must admit that set theory is not adequate to think about the “all” or the infinite or deny the existence of the whole. He goes in the second path, without mentioning any doubt about set theory’s limits.¹ Just like what is discussed about Heidegger and Althusser, Badiou also refuses the universal sets but unlike them, he *explicitly* deals with closed sets. This indeed is the very definition of totality as used in *Being and Event*: that which imposes unity to multiplicity.

¹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 109-11.

II.a. Being and Event

The relation between the totality and politics is one of the central tasks of the two volumes of Badiou's masterpiece *Being and Event*.¹ The basic political problem presented in the hundreds of pages is also summarized by Badiou in a lecture where he defines the goal of his work as to open the way for a "non-expressive dialectic." At the very beginning of the lecture he identifies the problem of 20th century politics: expressive dialectics. The expressive dialectics, on the one hand defines the present moment as the singular expression of the totality of the contradictions and on the other hand, as quoted in the discussion of Lukács, it posits the name of the leader as the expression of the entire movement. Is there a relationship of necessity between these two aspects of the 20th century dialectic except the word "expressive" that Badiou coins? Do these two conceptions merely coincide in 20th century revolutionary politics or do they imply each other? Badiou loses no time in exploring their interconnectedness; he simply implies that if one wants to get rid of resorting to the big leader one should drop the expressive dialectics entirely. Curiously, after coining the idea that getting beyond the cult of personality is only possible through non-expressive dialectics, Badiou does not return to this question in order to answer it. How does non-expressive dialectics avoid the name of big leader? One can point to the fact that his refusal of state centered politics allows him to a vision that would not allow a state leader like Stalin. On the other hand, his speech ends by stating his "conviction" that a

¹ For a critical review of *Being and Event* see: Peter Osborne, "Neo-Classic: Alain Badiou's Being and Event," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 142 (2007).

politics that does not resort to “proper names” must be found. He says that this conviction cannot be “demonstrated” but is required.¹ But why then reformulate the dialectics, if all we end up is with a “conviction”? Badiou would probably answer that it is not required because the older was wrong, it is not that 20th century politics consisted only in great mistakes; he would rather say that expressive dialectics is saturated. That is to say, every possibility is explored in these modes and the creation of new is impossible following the modes of the 20th century politics.²

What does Badiou propose under the title “non-expressive” dialectics? The answer is a dish!³ A dish that used to contain “apples, pears, strawberries, plums and so on,” but after a strange event, now contains also “stones, snails, pieces of dried mud, dead frogs, and prickles.” Obviously, the dish is an example of a mathematical set. The elements of this set are clear: apples, strawberries, stones, dead frogs... etc. And one can indeed talk about the parts of the dish set: all the pears, fruits, all dead animals... etc. But the problem starts with a part of the dish that is composed of “two apples, three prickles, one dead frog, one strawberry and seven pieces of dried mud.” While one can enumerate its elements, this part cannot have a “synthetic and clear name.”

¹ Badiou, "Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics."

² Badiou says that “a political sequence does not terminate or come to an end because of external causes, or contradictions between its essence and its means, but through the strictly immanent effect of its capacities being exhausted.” This can be seen as a summary of the idea of saturation. ———, *Metapolitics*, 127. For example Maoism is the saturation of the party-state. ———, *Polemics*, 292. This means that after Mao, all possibilities of this form of politics are exhausted. Of course one can make modifications, new syntheses etc. However nothing radically new will come out of this model of politics. The implication of this idea is that it allows a move away from party-state model without criticizing it. We need to leave it behind, not because it was wrong but because it is saturated.

³ ———, "Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics."

What Badiou explains here in the example of a dish is called a “situation” in his terminology; it is the “place of taking place.” While a situation is a presented multiplicity, it comes with a “particular operator of the count-as-one.”¹ It is in this perspective that one can find the definition of totality in Badiou: totality is a set; it is a multiplicity that counts as one, a consistent multiplicity.² For Badiou “One is not,” there is no such thing as “one:” just like Lukács whose ontology focused on complexes made out of complexes, Badiou argues that what we have is nothing but multiplicities composed of multiplicities. On the other hand, a multiple can be recognized as a multiple through “a system of conditions” called count-as-one.³ So any multiplicity can only be presented by defining it as a closed totality. This definition offers a way out of the opposition between the totality as a closed system and Althusser’s unbounded whole; it also helps one to understand why Althusser had to treat structures as closed totalities which touched each other only externally.

The regime of count-as-one calls for the law.⁴ Law as an ontological category is not about what is permitted what is not but it is in the first place a decision about what properly exists and what does not.⁵ The question is then about the parts of the dish: what parts properly exist, what parts do not? It is in this context that Badiou invokes the great axiom

¹ In a way, situation stands as Badiou’s link to the structuralist legacy. ———, *Being and Event*, 24.

² *Ibid.*, 38-42.

³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴ Badiou rarely speaks of law and legality. For further information one can consult *Cardozo Law Review*’s special 2008 issue “Law and Event” that is focused on this particular theme, see esp. Bruno Bosteels, “Force of Non-Law: Alain Badiou’s Theory of Justice,” *Cardozo Law Review* 29, no. 5 (2008); Gabriel Riera, “Fidelity and the Law: Politics and Ethics in Badiou’s Logiques Des Mondes,” *Cardozo Law Review* 29, no. 5 (2008).

⁵ Badiou, “Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics.”

of Kurt Gödel which showed that any subset of a set is constructible.¹ This may seem a great victory against the restrictive law; the axiom of constructability may seem as an affirmation of all parts of collective life; it even sounds like the anarchist “anything goes” of Feyerabend. However, for Badiou this axiom also means that there is nothing beyond the law; it is a declaration appropriate to Adorno’s a totally administered society.

This “nothing beyond the law” is not only worrying Badiou, after Gödel almost all the mathematicians wanted to find a non-constructible set. Their dilemma was obvious: the moment one can name a set, it already means that the set is constructible. Badiou’s hero who brought this search to an end is Paul Cohen who “found an elegant solution to name, to identify, a set which is not constructible, which has no name, which has no place in the great classification of predicates, a set which is without specific predicate.” What is so exciting in Cohen is not just the discovery itself but also the name he gives to unconstructible sets: he calls them “generic sets.” The word “generic” links the great advent of axiomatic set theory to Marx who had defined the proletariat as generic humanity. The task of politics thus becomes nothing less than finding or creating “a part of the totality of life which is generic,”² which does not properly exist in that totality, which is beyond the law.

How to conceive the generic set? The same question can be asked in a different manner: if multiplicities do not start with one, if we have only multiplicities of

¹ Gödel is discussed more in detail in ———, *Being and Event*, 296-300.

² ———, “Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics.”

multiplicities how do we start counting? In order to understand this point we need to go back to the composition of the situation as a set: the question is to figure out what is not counted in a total state that counts everything. Nothing escapes this count; literally speaking, “nothing” escapes this count: there is a multiplicity that does not come to presence, there is a “phantom remainder” of the count. In Badiou’s words: “being-nothing is as distinct from non-being as the ‘there is’ is distinct from being.”¹ In other words:

There is a being of nothing, as form of the unrepresentable. The 'nothing' is what names the unperceivable gap, cancelled then renewed, between presentation as structure and presentation as structured-presentation, between the one as result and the one as operation, between presented consistency and inconsistency as what-will-have-been-presented.²

This comes to say that there is a possibility of something that escapes representation in every totality. There is a “nothing” that is “particular to the situation.” This “suture” to the being of a situation is called “void” in Badiou’s language.³ The void is the name for the inconsistency of the totality, which cannot be presented within it.⁴ Yet there is something quite odd about the void: while the effect of void concerns the entirety of the situation, it is always local in its occurrence.⁵ Here one encounters one of the core principles of Badiou’s thought: the universal exists only as a local occurrence, as a local declaration of the scandal of totality. The void is a break, a “suture” in the order of presentation. It is something that is

¹ ———, *Being and Event*, 53.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

not there but which is the precondition for anything to be there.¹ Every count starts with the void (counting does not start with one, but with nothing, there is no originary one upon which multiple is based); the multiple of something starts with multiple of nothing; every presence starts with something that escapes presence. That is to say that any “natural situation,” any “ordinal” is founded “uniquely by the void.” While the void founds the situation, it is the Other inside the ordinal. The void itself is the only multiplicity that has no Other.² This is not just a poetic and enigmatic ontology, for politics this means that every Law, every totality is under the threat of what it denies existence.

Totality and State

Here Badiou invokes the state, as the “state of the situation.” It is what secures the count-as-one of the situation. State recounts parts, subsets, submultiples: “to be included in a situation means to be counted by the state of the situation.” In other words, to be included means to be “represented” by the state.³ This is how the scandal of the void can be contained within the limits of the totality. In other words, state is what secures the totality. In Badiou’s work, totality immediately calls for the state: All totalizing thinking leads to the state.⁴ Here Badiou resorts to an easy language game: in French the word *état*, which means state is derived from the verb *être* which means being. In other words, *état* is on the

¹ ———, *Infinite Thought*, 12.

² ———, *Being and Event*, 186, 88.

³ *Ibid.*, 102. This conception repeats in a critical way what Mussolini had said in an approving manner in a speech on May 26, 1927: “Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State”

⁴ ———, *Metapolitics*, 44.

one hand an ontological category and on the other a juridico-political category. What Badiou does here is to jump from the “state of being” to the state as a political category. In *Being and Event*, his discussion of the State (in French, the political category is marked by capitalizing it) following the chapter on the state of situation is not intended to expose the relation between the two terms; rather the homonymy is accepted as a proof that they are the same. This allows Badiou to argue that all emancipatory politics should take the form of an assault against the state.¹

Following Cohen, that assault takes the form of an event centered around an undifferentiated, anonymous, indeterminate, thus a generic part. But this does not mean that this part is “objectively” generic: a part can be seen as a “constructible” part from the perspective of the opinions that are valid within the situation. The same part, “considered from a truth process” will escape all classifications, will be “caught up in a generic set.”² It is Slavoj Žižek who is the most uncompromising critique of his friend’s notion of state.³ He insists that Badiou’s idea of state belongs to the order of pre-capitalist ages and that Badiou completely ignores the role of capitalism “whose dynamics undermines every stable frame of re-presentation.” Thus Badiou fails to consider that the “system no longer excludes the excess, but directly posits it as its driving force - as is the case in capitalism which can only reproduce itself through its constant self-revolutionizing, through the constant overcoming

¹ ———, *Being and Event*, 110.

² ———, *Ethics*, 57. Italics removed.

³ The relation between Žižek and Badiou’s thought is discussed in Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston, ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

of its own limit.”¹ Badiou’s idea of state power as only a capacity of restriction misses entirely what happened in the 20th century in advanced capitalist countries. Badiou seems to have missed the lesson of Foucault: power is rather productive in our epoch; power which is only the power to restrict is too vulnerable in the modern age and is thus no longer in use.

Despite its defects one can insist that Badiou’s definition of the state is still important because in its purest definition it depicts State as that which prescribes what is impossible, unthinkable in a given situation; State is thus a concept of finitude, finitude of the possible.² It will define the impossibility of the generic. On the other hand, Badiou’s definition of politics can be summarized as an “organized collective action” that aims to “develop in reality the consequences of a new possibility repressed by the dominant state of affairs.”³ This means that the politics is necessarily anti-state.

administration, effective solely on the basis of power and the State, never concerns infinite singularity, either in its process or its aims. Administration, which is homogeneous to the state of the situation, deals with the parts, the subsets. By complete contrast, politics deals with the masses, because politics is unbound from the State, and diagonal to its parts.⁴

The collective event draws upon itself the fixed infinite power of the situation and the measureless infinite power of the state of the situation. This means that just like what

¹ Slavoj Žižek, "On Alain Badiou and Logiques Des Mondes," <http://www.lacan.com/zizbadman.htm>. In the same fashion, Brassier opposes to the very idea of applying set theory to capitalism. A system that thrives on its contradictions, a system that is ever changing and ever expanding defies the static vision of sets. Ray Brassier, "Nihil Unbound: Remarks on Subtractive Ontology and Thinking Capitalism," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 53.

² Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 243.

³ ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 11.

⁴ ———, *Metapolitics*, 73.

Lukács was saying, the event makes the brute state power come out of its hiding place. In a less abstract way what Badiou means here is that the event will not only attract the coercive, judicial, administrative and ideological interventions but also will face “cultural” and intellectual exclusion; it will not be immediately approved by the great majority of the society. The question is how a local, small and fragile event can resist such a ruthless attack of two infinities? For Badiou the answer is to remain at a distance from the State and keep going. Just like the long march of Mao, the event is a journey that starts with a very limited militants; that always faces the risk of being crushed by the state that maintains its inner discipline against the challenges and keeps going. For the purposes of the journey, whether the walk will end in victory, as did Mao’s, is immaterial.¹

II.b. Logics of Worlds

Badiou improves further his claims in the second volume of *Being and Event* titled *Logics of Worlds*.² What Badiou calls world here is not radically different from his earlier conception of situation. As he writes: “Previously, I identified situations (worlds) with their strict multiple-neutrality. I now also envisage them as the site of the being-there of beings.” To this effect, what he calls logic belongs to the transcendental that regulates the regime of appearing in the world.³ This conception immediately comes with a basic problem, his

¹ Ibid., 145-52.

² For a summary as well as a “faithful” critique of *Logics of the world* see: Hallward, “Order and Event: On Badiou’s *Logics of Worlds*.” For the summary of the core argument of this rather long book: Alain Badiou, “Towards a New Concept of Existence,” *Lacanian Ink*, no. 29 (2007).

³ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 99.

depiction of the world remains stuck in “absolute space.” His examples of worlds include the space of a political demonstration, paintings, musical compositions, the plan of Brasilia a battlefield, referendum in Quebec... etc. All of these localities are closed spaces of varying sizes but they always are given and closed. He also says that the world constructed by “points” define a “topological space”¹ Moreover, the world is not necessarily a coherent space; there are disjunctions in the world.² So what Badiou understands is not exactly a world that works as a unified system but a collection of multiplicities that exist together – just like the weird dish of frogs and strawberries, in a common space.

Nonetheless, Badiou argues that “*every world is capable of producing its own truth within itself.*” Does this mean that the world is a closed totality?³ Can the world be understood as an incoherent yet closed totality? There is always a proper logic to a given world which regulates the regime of appearance in that world; thus not everything can appear in a world.⁴ Badiou calls this regime the transcendental of the world. There is a strange difference between the two volumes of *Being and Event*: in the first volume the unity was provided by the rule of count-as-one which prohibited the appearance of the void and which turned the multiplicity into a consistent multiplicity. In the second volume the transcendental performs a similar function without turning the world into a consistent

¹ Ibid., 401, 14.

² Ibid., 129.

³ Not only a world but an entire epoch can be talked about as a “closed totality.” At the beginning of his *Century*, Badiou says that the goal of his book is to stay close to the subjectivity of the age as it relates to itself. Here the subjectivity is not very far away from the *spirit*. ———, *The Century*, 5.

⁴ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 116, 22.

multiplicity. The difference lies in the fact that the transcendental, being an “operational set” which allows to differentiate the degrees of “identities and differences” in a given world it is loosely related to the ontological categories of identity and difference. Count-as-one of the first volume is absolutely on the ontological categories; in the logic of appearance the transcendental can create worldly identities out of “absolute ontological differences.”¹

An example of the transcendental is given by Badiou in his Book on Sarkozy where he claims that the transcendental of France is Pétainism. The Pétainist transcendental in fact does not start with Pétain either, it can be traced back to the restoration of 1815. So it is a timeless concept that takes its name from a specific sequence in time and repeats in long sequences and often in order to stop the revolutionary moments. Badiou is not using Pétain as an “ideal type” to figure out a certain tendency in French politics either. Rather, the sequence of Pétain’s rule is what “gives law and order, to a collective mechanism” from afar.² It has its distinctive features: it is a servility that represents itself as a revolution and invention; it claims to intervene against a “moral crisis.” It counters egalitarian politics in the name of morality and patriotism. It thus resorts to the policing force to restore the moral Good against the demands of equality. Thirdly, it admires and draws inspiration from a foreign country who overcame the decadence through tough measures against those who

¹ Ibid., 117, 23.

² ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 77. In his discussion of Pétainist transcendental Badiou does not explicitly claim that the concept is different from the Weberian category of “ideal type” but neither does he coin it.

caused the crisis, i.e. a country who exerted violence against communists, Jews, intellectuals... Fourthly, it points to a disastrous event of the past that crystallizes the moral crisis. And finally it is racist.¹ So in these five points Badiou does not only depict the French politics in its present moment but recapitulates a historic tendency that keeps ordering the French political scene in its different moments.

Having said this, Badiou makes a seemingly contradictory move: Being a closed totality and regulated by a transcendental, any world is infinite, it is infinite in such a way that the “cardinality” of its infiniteness, i.e. the measure of its infiniteness is inaccessible.² To prove this thesis Badiou refers to one of the well established theorems of Cantor which can be explained with the following example: suppose we have a modest bookshelf that consists of 100 books. The set of the bookshelf has 100 elements, but how many parts how many subsets does it have? The subsets include all the possible subsets constructible by grouping different books together. This number will obviously be larger than 100. The theorem suggests this: the set of parts (the powerset) of a given set is more numerous than itself. But this also means that since parts are multiplicities in themselves, their subsets would become even more numerous... and so on. Cantor suggests that the powerset of any countably infinite set is uncountably infinite. For Badiou, this means that “Like the Hegelian absolute, a world is the unfolding of its own infinity. But, unlike that Absolute,

¹ Ibid., 77-85.

² ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 300.

the world cannot internally construct the measure or the concept of the infinite that it is.”¹ This is what allows the world to be “closed:” a world cannot internally represent itself as a whole. That is to say that any being in the world is incapable of accessing its totality. This is why, instead of “point of view of totality,” following Badiou one should talk about the “point of view” of the void², point of view of that which does not properly exist in the world.

As the title “Logics of Worlds” suggest, there are multiple worlds which are governed by different logics. Beings can exist in more than one world, especially man appear in a great variety of worlds.³ The “worlds” is one great claim of Badiou which is strangely not followed in his book. The implication of this world concept will become more problematic further, especially when it comes to the event but at this point the basic questions can be asked:

First about the transcendental, one can follow Hegel’s criticism of Kantian concept: how can one know it? If to know something is to know its limits, you can only know something when you transgress these limits. This is what allowed Lukács to say that the totality can be known by the proletariat in the midst of the revolutionary struggle when it is about to destroy it. How can then one “know” Pétainism as the transcendental of France? If its truth is not accessible to the world, who knows and how does s/he know this truth?

¹ Ibid., 309.

² I will be discussing this concept in the section on the “event.”

³ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 113-14.

Secondly, the world is not only depicted as a spatial concept but its space is depicted as absolute. A country's borders constitute the world of this country. Can't we be in the same place but share different worlds? Or can't we be in different places but be in the same world? Badiou does not take these into consideration.

A third question is about the relation between the transcendentals of different worlds: How do worlds relate? As a being that inhabits multiple worlds, can man transfer elements of different worlds from one to another? Can the logics become tuned into one another? Is a synthesis, or a "disjunctive synthesis" possible between the transcendentals of different worlds? And finally, can a transcendental transcend different worlds; can there be a transcendental of transcendentals?

A way out of the possible criticisms is to posit world is not as a "descriptive" but as a "prescriptive" concept. Despite his separation of philosophy and truth procedures, maybe Badiou is offering a concept that is constructed for its political consequences: it will be shown later in this study that the topographical concept of infinite yet closed world leads to the statement, "there is one world." That is to say, the foreign born worker and the eminent philosopher, empirically speaking indeed live in different worlds; the objects they encounter, the values associated to them, their public visibility, the language they speak, the food they eat, the music they like, their habits... etc. all these are radically different. But stating that they live in the same topographically constructed world means that they can

relate to one another. The world does not describe the existent but proposes a mental framework of how to change it.

This is why, while the ontological work of Badiou talks about worlds in plural, as will be discussed, his “political” work (although he refuses to call it political) operates under one prescriptive statement: there is only one world!¹ This is completely in line with the central thesis of this dissertation, that is to say that first the multiplicity of human existence is irreducible to any single totality, it is always multiples of multiples: It can be defined as an unbounded whole, it can be said to be consisting of multiple worlds and so on. Yet the political action is possible only when one declares that there is one world, or that the world is a [totality].

II.c. Event

Finding the revolutionary subject has been a central task of the Western Marxism. After the loss of hopes in proletariat, different social groupings of the excluded have been proposed for this category. Maybe, as Žižek notes, the greatest fear of academic Marxism was finding this subject rather than not finding anything: this subject would force academicians to become part of the real, instead of reflecting on it, and the history shows that this road is full of dangers. But the same problem goes for Žižek himself: In the very same article after raising this complaint he argues that today’s world is marked by four antagonisms which cannot be properly addressed within the framework of contemporary

¹ Ibid., 53-70.

order. He says that different patches can be invented to remedy three of these clashes emanating from ecological issues; from the unique nature of intellectual property and from the ethical-social consequences of new developments in science and technology, especially in biogenetics. But he adds the fourth antagonism: the place of the excluded cannot be precisely located in the present society marked by a new social apartheid. He thus seems to have “discovered” the subject of our times: the excluded. He is right in the sense that the only question that can lead to a radical and egalitarian transformation of the society is that of the place of those who do not have a place. However, the category of the excluded is bound to remain in the abstract: who are the excluded; in what ways are they excluded; how different forms of exclusions can be linked together? Žižek feels these problems when goes on to say that the emancipatory politics of our age cannot rely on any single agent but an “explosive combination” of different agents.¹ The “explosive combination” of the excluded of four antagonisms that leads to a universalism emanating not from a positive feature of existence but from the unity of those who share a lack: this is Žižek’s solution and while it sounds great, it does not take place that easily. The principal problem of emancipatory politics today is not simply to affirm a new universalism. What is needed is not “a universalism” but a concrete project of universalism. Should all the excluded follow the leadership of The Excluded or is the unity of the excluded the consequence of a hegemonic project? Is there an epicenter that can gather around itself a condensation of impossibilities?

¹ Slavoj Žižek, "How to Begin from the Beginning," *New Left Review*, no. 57 (2009): 51-55.

Badiou's answer is to be found with his depiction of the event, site and by the void of the situation that emerges with the event. A summary of the argument so far can be given as follows:

Given a multiplicity that appears in a world, and given the elements of that multiplicity, which appear along with it - this means that the totality of what constitutes it appears in that world - there is always one component in that multiplicity whose appearance is measured by the lowest degree.¹

This means that every world has a non-existent, something with minimal existence: there is always a part of the situation which is included in it yet does not belong to it. The non-existent is not the same with nothingness: "non-existent is." Basically, the event is the emergence of the non-existent, it is the claim of the *Internationale* that Badiou loves to quote: "We are nothing, let's be everything." Revolution is exactly this: the non-existent, the void that is a multiplicity uses its being multiple to declare that it exists in the absolute sense.² A singularity is a change that "imposes an effective discontinuity on the world where it takes place."³ The opposite of the event is modification, a rule-governed change in the appearing of variations. For instance, the Paris Commune, "'March 18' is instituted, in the object 'March 18', as the demand of a new political appearing, as forcing an unprecedented transcendental evaluation." March 18 is the date of appearing of the worker-being in politics.⁴ The non-existent's appearance is a "separation" rather than a search for

¹ Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 129.

² *Ibid.*, 140-41.

³ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 357.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 367; ———, *Polemics*, 276.

an identity in the given world. Much like the “liberated zones,” the void declares that it has no place in the totality of existence.

Badiou’s model of politics in a sense is drawn from the French resistance.¹ Badiou underlines that during the decisive stages of resistance against the Nazi occupation, those who resisted were a very small minority. The majority of the French people were either silent or complicit with the Nazi regime during these times when it was very risky to resist; when the resistance became popular it was already relatively safe and victory was at hand. But during those times when a few were resisting one can still say that the France was in resistance; that is to say that at that given moment, France was these women and men who were very few in numbers and who risked their lives for what they believed France was.² For Badiou, this is always the case in France (probably anywhere): “when the country’s existence is really at stake,” those who stand up are admirable yet a numerically small minority who act against a reactionary and fearful background.³ What he maintains here is not resisting against the power, but how people few in number and weak in strength can stand together and keep going in the path they believe until the rest of the society joins them.

¹ Badiou is not at all deluded by the myth of resistance, he claims that France is in general a conservative country where brief revolutionary sequences are cut from each other through long reactionary episodes.———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 1. Badiou’s idea of sequential history looks like a description of this process.

² In the same fashion one can consider the Corinthians, Thessalonians or Romans addressed by St. Paul. He certainly is not addressing to each and every single Roman, Thessalonian or Corinthian. His letters are rather directed to a few dedicated “comrades” living there. But he is not addressing to “Romans” not to the “comrades in Rome” because these comrades *are* Rome. They are “anonymous individuals” “transformed into vectors of humanity as a whole.” ——, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 20.

³ ——, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 18.

This idea calls for a new definition of politics. As Hallward notes, genuine politics is about changing the situation *as a whole*, its horizon is always *universal*. The universal, being one of the key concepts of Badiou's thought is defined by his eight theses. He claims: 1. Thought is the proper medium of the universal; 2. Every universal is singular, or is a singularity; 3. Every universal originates in an event, and the event is intransitive to the particularity of the situation; 4. A universal initially presents itself as a decision about an undecidable; 5. The universal has an implicative form; 6. The universal is univocal; 7. Every universal singularity remains incompletable or open; 8. Universality is nothing other than the faithful construction of an infinite and generic multiple.¹ The second thesis is particularly important: change always begins with a "particular event" in a "particular location" and is "carried by a particular interest."² However, it cannot be seen as a local resistance, for it is no resistance: it is a creation. This politics is not the realization of a possibility that exists; it is the creation of a new possibility: it is the possibility of something possible. For example the Paris Commune did not realize an existing possibility; they rather created the possibility of "an independent proletarian politics."³ The communards might be left alone by the rest of the society and eventually be crushed; however their creation of a new possibility has changed the shape of political scene for everyone, whether they have joined in or not. In this mode of creation of possibilities Badiou also draws his inspiration from the Enlightenment. Just like the enlightenment

¹———, "Thinking the Event," 26-48. In his recent work Badiou repeated these theses several times.

² Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 229. Although I would object to the expression "particular interest," I did not change it to maintain Hallward's argument.

³ Badiou, *Polemics*, 288.

thinkers who found a way to separate thought from the infinite power of religion, he states that a new Enlightenment must be invented to break the consensus of representative democracy.¹

Badiou defines his form of egalitarian politics as a “process of justice without law or vengeance:”²

Politics is a creation, local and fragile, of collective humanity; it is never the treatment of a vital necessity. Necessity is always a-political, either beforehand (the state of nature), or afterwards (dissolved State). Politics, in its being, is solely commensurable to the event that institutes it.³

In Badiou’s conception, this politics is always politics of recognition. The hero of Badiou’s work is similar to Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man*. Just like the *Underground Man*, the subject is he who was denied existence and is now looking for ways for the recognition of his being there. But there is one striking difference with Dostoevsky’s hero: the *Underground Man* is one of the new men who are walking on the streets of Petersburg, and he is searching for an “explosive encounter.”⁴ But his tragedy is that the encounter does not take place, his existence is invisible to those who properly exist in the society. Badiou’s hero is the opposite of that; there is no tragedy of the struggle for recognition in Badiou.

¹ Ibid., 55-56.

² Ibid., 54.

³ ———, *Being and Event*, 345. In recent continental thought Badiou is by no means alone in his attempt to imagine forms of generic community; works in the same order are: Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. Trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*. Trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988).

⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 222.

That which did not exist proudly announces his existence: “we are here, get used to it!” Had Badiou written Dostoevsky’s book, the officer would be immediately looking for a fight in the first encounter rather than moving the underground man just like an object. It might be said that Badiou’s point is a totally exaggerated one and is lacking any human understanding of what is happening at the everyday level in the world of the oppressed. The excluded are more like the underground man, their rage is silent, they feel disconnected, alone and helpless. But his politics is not about everyday: Dostoevsky’s man is still in the underground, although sociologically speaking people like him are crowding the Petersburg street, he is not there politically. Yet he is searching for his recognition in the given world, not by an act of a separation from it. Badiou would say that the world will not recognize him unless he becomes part of a movement that will change the world in its entirety. Thus what he explains is more or less that if underground men can manage to come together and get organized, they will not be looking for violent individual clashes for recognition; they will rather violently declare their existence.

This powerful and proud appearance is not made to last long. An event takes place in a site: the site¹ is a self-belonging, that indicates the void. Badiou defines site as a “part of a situation all of whose elements are on the edge of the void.”² A site moreover, “is a

¹ “A multiple that is an object of this situation - whose elements are indexed by the transcendental of this situation - is a site if it happens to count itself within the referential field of its own indexation.” Badiou, *Polemics*, 274. Italics removed.

² ———, “The Event as Trans-Being,” 99.

figure of the instant. It appears only then to disappear.”¹ The appearing of the site must be forceful “to compensate for its vanishing.”² Only a site whose value of existence is maximal is potentially an event.”³ On the other hand, this appearance in the absolute sense does not last long: The event’s being lies in its disappearing. When it disappears it leaves a trace, which is kind of an abstract formula, “a statement in the form of a prescription.”⁴ Since this truth is infinite, “it can only be represented in the future perfect. It will have taken place as generic infinity.”⁵

After the event, the law must return, It should be underlined here that it is not the same law that returns. What happens is a reconstitution of what exists and what does not follows the event. The practical implication of this abstract definition is the equivalent of saying that revolutions are not made to last. There is no state that will follow the revolution to safeguard the egalitarian distribution of wealth. There will be no just society that will last forever; there is no Biblical end of time. But after each event, as *the internationale* goes,

¹ ———, *Polemics*, 279.

² This is how Badiou distinguishes eventual singularity from facts: a singularity is a site whose intensity is maximal; a fact’s intensity is non-maximal. ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 372. For Badiou facts are the consequences of the state of the situation. The truths are the consequences of an event. A symbolic fact can be attesting to a past event but is not a truth produced by an ongoing event. For example, soon after the victory of Obama Badiou reminded that the event was the civil rights movement, and the election results a symbolic fact. He didn’t completely deny the possibility that the presidency of Obama could be a part of the sequence that can become an event but it was a symbolic fact attesting to the effects of a past event. ———, “Is the Word ‘Communism’ Forever Doomed.” Miguel Abreu Gallery, 2008, Available at: http://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=323.

³ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 371-2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵ ———, “On Subtraction,” 114.

the world rises on new foundations.¹ Although the *Commune* had a brief existence, after it the world cannot be the same, it has to be redefined in order to count the appearance of the worker in it.

There is a particular problem that concerns the appearance of “part of no part” as the universal part. A crucial first question here concerns the place of totality in the political movement: Badiou’s call to action starts with the question about “the reality of a world.” The second thing is to figure out the maxim that can separate itself from this reality and create a new possibility, thus work toward the creation of a new world.² It sounds as if Badiou is defining a separating totality that will radically change the totality of the current situation. But the problem is that Badiou is refraining from bringing totality into the picture. The reason for that is that talking about totality will bring questions about social and economic existence, relations of power, historical facts, strategic dealings, global power plays... etc. into the picture. Badiou wants to avoid the entirety of these questions.

Without totality, though there is a larger problem: how can one choose the void peculiar to the given totality/situation/world, without a proper analysis of that totality/situation/world. This can be illustrated with an interview when Badiou is asked about how to differentiate between situations. In his answer, he says that a situation is

¹ To summarize: Becoming that does not bring real change is modification; if it brings change it is a site. A site without maximal existence is a fact, with maximal is an event. An event without maximal consequences is a weak singularity, with maximal consequences is a singularity: an event. ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 374, 80.

² He is not expressly calling it the totality but the way the argument is built calls for the word. ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 18-19.

composed through the interplay of different situations and that the generic procedures run through them.¹ But to differentiate between them, thus to figure out which has the capacity to turn into an event is a matter of experience.² But why do we need a theory of event and situations if our political actions and choices will be guided primarily by experience? If we need only our tacit knowledge to understand where the event lies what is the purpose of philosophy, political thinking and science?

Moreover the void of the totality has a further problem noted by Laclau who argues that the “void/fullness” distinction does not provide a valid criterion to differentiate between a real event and a simulacrum.³ The biggest challenge of Laclau comes to the idea of a void that is included in a set. He argues that the empty set “ \emptyset ” exists only in mathematics. In society, it always assumes a positive content: thinking, freedom, consciousness... etc. Thus Laclau declares that Badiou’s appeal to set theory is an illegitimate one and merely creates another foundation for false universals. Laclau thereby returns to his well-known claim: there is nothing in any part of the social whole that guarantees its universality: When at the end of a struggle something is declared to be universal; it is nothing but the positive content of a particular that universalizes itself through hegemony.⁴ How easily Badiou’s categories face such criticism is noteworthy: the entire edifice built to avoid the post-modern logic of social movements collapses

¹ ———, *Infinite Thought*, 131.

² *Ibid.*, 128.

³ Ernesto Laclau, "An Ethics of Militant Engagement," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

immediately when it is shown the very simple fact that human beings are not mere mathematical objects, that they occupy multiple positions in their social existence. With the idea of the “world” Badiou makes a step towards the resolution of this problem, however his effort remains insufficient because he does not treat the relationship between the transcendentals of different worlds.

Badiou’s idea about appearance can be seen as a “beaming” theory of appearance. The inexistent calls: “Beam us up, Scotty” and it becomes manifest aboard the ship. The problem here is that the inexistent is not created from ex-nihilo; it was existing in a different world before beaming. Badiou also admits to that, but only in passing and without paying any attention to what it means for his theory of appearing. For example take the statement that the proletariat did not exist before the *Paris Commune*. Obviously before the *Commune*, proletariat did exist in the “social and economic” realms; there is no doubt about it. “What is in doubt, always has been, and is now so more than ever, is its political *existence*.”¹ So what we are talking about is actually not the appearing of something did not exist as suggested by Badiou. It is a transfer between different worlds of existence. We are in a point where worlds do not exist externally to each other but crash, mix and intermingle with each other. Then the question is how the void of the politics is produced in other worlds of human existence; and how this positive content is transferred to political world in the construction of political universals.

¹ Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 131.

What is required then is an analysis of the dynamics of the mixing of worlds, an analysis of the political world concerning its inexistence that exists in a different world. This is what Badiou is doing in his political praxis: the undocumented workers do exist in every sense of the term in every single dimension of the advanced capitalist world. What they lack is the political existence. On the other hand, this aspect of politics is missing from Badiou's philosophy. So if Badiou's framework is to be maintained, its logic of appearance has to be modified and its relation with the totality needs to be emphasized.

What Cannot be an Event

Although what concrete element constitutes the possible site of an event is thus problematic, what does not constitute one is easier to identify:

'Democracy' means that 'immigrant', 'French', 'Arab' and 'Jew' cannot be political words lest there be disastrous consequences. For these words, and many others, necessarily relate politics to the State, and the State itself to its lowest and most essential of functions: the non-egalitarian inventory [*décompte*] of human beings.¹

That is to say an identity predicate always brings the mark of a community, of a particularity to the politics. For Badiou this is the equivalent of a fidelity to a "simulacrum," which is radically different than the fidelity to an event (what Laclau says is basically that the two are indistinguishable from each other). If the subject does not dwell in the void but in the plenty of the situation, the outcome might well be that the subject of the

¹ ———, *Metapolitics*.

false event is the German and the politics is the Nazi politics.¹ The event is always about the void that comes to presence.

Identity predicate as a political name leads to a “disaster” because it substitutes the void with an existent; the singular with particular; and the universal with the communitarian.² Although Badiou refers never to her work in this context, his point is rather inspired by Arendt. In the famous interview of 1964 Gaus reminds Arendt her remarks about Jewish identity and asks her to expand it.³ Arendt emphasizes the difference between two types of groups. One is born to a community, this is only natural. But there is a second type of community that is born out of the organized action of the people who have a certain “relation to the world;” people who have an “interest” in its Latin sense of “inter-

¹ ———, *Polemics*, 178.

² *Ibid.*, 157-254. Since Badiou had a long discussion of this issue with regards to “Jew” as a political name, he was immediately accused with anti-semitism. The charges of anti-semitism were brought up again after the publication of his book on Sarkozy where the president was constantly referred as Rat Man. The depiction was first attacked by a popular blogger saying that it was Nazis who had identified Jews as rats. Since Mr. Sarkozy has Jewish ancestors, the expression Rat Man could only mean a revitalization of the Nazi word. Badiou in his defense says that the word explicitly refers to both the Pied Piper and Freud’s case of the Rat Man. The blogger’s criticism was soon after picked up by Bernard-Henri Lévy who (as a close friend of the president) blamed Badiou in *Le Monde* by quoting Sartre: mixing political terms with zoological ones is always the sign of Fascism. Badiou in his reply quotes Sartre who had written that anti-Communists are swines. Pierre Assouline, “De Quoi Badiou Est-Il Le Nom ?,” <http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2007/11/28/de-quoi-badiou-est-il-le-nom/>; Bernard Henri-Lévy, “De Quoi Siné Est-Il Le Nom?,” *Le Monde*, 21 July 2008. Badiou defends himself against these charges in the preface of the English edition of his book on Sarkozy. Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 4-6. Badiou’s usage of the word rat is indeed in its Sartrian sense, as a word reserved to fascists. He had already used the word for Le Pen saying that people like him existed before but during the “red years” they would never dare to come out of their “rat-holes.” ———, *Polemics*, 82.

³ Arendt had written against Scholem’s criticism that she lacked solidarity with Jewish people: “: I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective – neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love ‘only’ my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly, this ‘love of the Jews’ would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect.” Hannah Arendt, “A Response to Gershom Scholem,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 392.

esse” (dwelling in the midst of Being as Heidegger calls it). The two types of community, the love for one’s family, community etc. should never be confused with being together in its political sense.¹ For Badiou, “To the extent that it is the subject of a truth, a subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation.”² This does not prevent him from admitting that the names of the particulars, in a given context can become names for emancipatory politics. For instance, in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Badiou claims that Jew and Arab can become the “names of peace.”³ However, whether this will be the case depends on the subject who would carry these names forward, the maxims, the prescriptions that will be built around these names; in other words it depends on the construction of a political process that will declare what is universal in these names.

So if one cannot start with an identity can one start with the whole? In the struggles of St. Paul, Badiou finds an analogy to his intervention. He thus underlines that Paul is talking only about two entities: the Greeks and the Jews. He immediately emphasizes that these entities refer to “regimes of discourse,” to “subjective dispositions,” not to ethnicities as understood today. The Greek discourse is the discourse of totality, that of the cosmic order. The Jewish discourse on the other hand is the discourse of exception. If thought as

¹ ———, ““What Remains? The Language Remains”: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 16. The actual conversation includes Arendt’s remark explaining interest as “inter-esse,” however this remark is eliminated from the published text.

² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 8-9. Italics removed.

³ ———, *Polemics*, 210.

historical analysis, what Badiou states here is highly controversial and it is not very wise of him to deal with these rather simplistic depictions that are susceptible to misunderstandings. In other words, he does not say that the Jewish discourse is and has always been a discourse of exception, and the Greek a discourse of totality. He rather says that Paul uses the word Jew to designate a discourse of difference and the word Greek to designate an undifferentiated universalism. For Badiou, the importance of this rather simplifying projection of the regimes of discourses is that it posits the universalism of the event both in contradistinction to the logic of exception/differences and in contradistinction to totality/commonplace universalism. With these figures he intends to build a picture analogical to the clash between the post-modern particularism and the vulgar universalism. He wants to say together with Paul that these discourses that stand in exact contradiction with each other are not the only alternatives. A third discourse is possible, a universalism that emanates from a local event:

It is impossible that the starting point be the Whole, but just as impossible that it be an exception to the Whole. Neither totality nor the sign will do. One must proceed from the event as such, which is a-cosmic and illegal, refusing integration into any totality and signaling nothing. But proceeding from the event delivers no law, no form of mastery, be it that of the wise man or the prophet.¹

¹ ———, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 42. Totality presented here is the totality of the situation as given. Because we know that the militants of the event are the “vector of humanity as a whole.” *Ibid.*, 20.

Here another division becomes crucial between singularity and particularity: singularity is what gives the universal truth; “outside of truth” there is “only particularity.”¹ One can say that empirically the singular and the particular are mere parts of the situation; a “particular” can be a non-existent in the situation as well. Yet the particular wants to be inscribed within the totality, it wants to legitimately exist in its particularity without changing everything. The singular is a part that declares a universal truth and wants to change everything. The problem thus is not the exception to what exists but “what is immanent in exception,” because it is the universal.² The immanent in exception is a non-dialectical idea concerning the universal, for Badiou the event is the singularity that immediately becomes universal. So it is not a mistake that St. Paul is the hero of Badiou: he is the one who declares what is universal in what might otherwise remain within the confines of the Jewish community.³

Generic Equality and Emancipatory Politics

The void where a singular truth is announced is also called the *Real* of the situation. Can the void or Real be understood as a black hole of social existence? Žižek argues that it is wrong to conceive it as the true center of the universe; Real is rather “the obstacle on account of which every Centre is always displaced, missed;” it “is simultaneously the Thing

¹ Ibid., 97.

² Ibid., 111.

³ Ibid., 13.

to which direct access is not possible and the obstacle which prevents this direct access.”¹ It denotes the inner gap of being; the “real is discontinuous:” the consequence of this depiction of Real is that it can never be an identity.² This not only immediately disallows “identity politics” as a form of emancipatory politics but also bans the recourse to the politics of “purification.” The idea of *purification* in politics suggests that the Real of the situation can be reached by shredding away the deceptive layers of appearance; thus isolating as the “singular universal that marks the minimal difference.”³ Just like Althusser’s depiction of “Hegelian” whole, it assumes that the kernel can be reached by peeling of layers that cover the essence. The politics of purification may exist in its fascist form as the “return of the vanished origin,” or may assume its communist form to create the new out of the destruction.⁴ In either case, it requires the destruction of the non-real, the semblance, the exception to totality.

The minimal difference in its constitution also means that the Real or the void may exist in such a way that is indiscernible, it may be known to exist in different subsets or as a subset with the wrong name. This is why naming the Real is the political act par excellence;

¹ Slavoj Žižek, “From Purification to Subtraction: Badiou and the Real,” in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 168.

² Badiou, *The Century*, 56, 109.

³ Žižek, “From Purification to Subtraction: Badiou and the Real,” 178. The minimal difference is the crucial turning point for Badiou, with reference to *White on White*, Žižek calls this “Malevitch in politics.” *Ibid.*, 166. Badiou, *The Century*, 55-56. discusses this painting as in the context of the difference between purification and subtraction.

⁴ ———, *The Century*, 65.

name is the Real.¹ While “illegal immigrant” and “workers without papers” basically refer to the same people and to the same empirical reality, the Real that they point out to is absolutely different. The implication of calling someone “undocumented worker” means first that this person belongs to the working class and that his only difference from the rest of the workers is a piece of legal paper. On the other hand an immigrant refers to someone who is not originally from here and came here; it concludes that there are various aspects of his identity and being a worker is at best a minor part of them, essentially it means that s/he originally belongs to a different world than those who are here. Also it refers to immigration as if it was a recent issue, as if so many workers were not the immigrants: from a different country, from a distant region of the same country or from the countryside. The word immigrant is the one that brings an unbridgeable difference among the citizen-workers and workers born in a different country who are in fact sharing similar material

¹ ———, *Metapolitics*, 28. Badiou’s thoughts on name and politics are developed in relation to those of Sylvain Lazarus, his friend and comrade in politics since the early 1970s. See: Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropologie Du Nom* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996).

interests.¹ Thus the political implications of two names lie in the exact opposite directions. The name immigrant calls either for the two versions of parliamentary politics: either right wing politics of exclusion or social democratic politics of multiculturalism. The name undocumented worker is the beginning of politics proper.

The name though cannot be that of an object: an object is what exists properly in a given situation. The name belongs to the evanescent appearing that cannot be objectified. Here Badiou almost sounds like Lao Tzu: the name is the name of the nameless, of the unnameable.² One way to abandon the uniqueness of the name is to attempt “to inscribe it within a totality.” Because to inscribe the name in a totality means to try to think the singularity of the Real but also “the way in which the name is relative to totality.” This second means abandoning the singularity of the name and thus turning it into a concept.³ To

¹ One way of thinking about the use of immigrant is to consider it through what W.E.B DuBois had observed about the psychological dimension of racism that prevented the unification of people who had identical interest. DuBois had written that during the reconstruction era, the working class unity did not take place because white workers “were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage.” To the white workers, the skin color had served as an ultimate barrier below which they would never fall. They might have been degraded by the working conditions but they would never sink to the level of a colored worker. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 700. One can observe a similar process happening today in economically advanced countries. The living conditions of the working class is deteriorating due to the economic crisis, relocation of enterprises, and to the improvement of technology reducing the need for labor (a great development if allowed to serve human ends): but as their material conditions depreciate, the “white” workers know that they would always be better than an immigrant worker. The welfare state’s entitlement schemes will favor them, their accent, their “culture,” their habits, their “lifestyle” will be more appreciated than the immigrant’s. The more contemporary capitalism degrades them, the more they feel compelled to mark the difference that separates them from the “immigrant” worker.

² Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 29. The first lines of Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching: “The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao / The name that can be named / is not the eternal Name. // The unnamable is the eternally real. / Naming is the origin / of all particular things.” Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 1.

³ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 29-30.

think of a name in terms of totality will turn the appearing into an object bound by the count-as-one of the situation. The name thus designates not something of the totality but a singularity that separates from that totality. But how can one think about the singularity, the void, the Real proper to a totality without ever thinking about that totality? As mentioned above, this is where Badiou's politics encounter its biggest difficulty. When confronted with such difficulty Badiou escapes to mathematics and abstraction.¹ Mathematically, Paul Cohen's method of "forcing" can identify the generic set without turning it into a subset. Indeed this method representing the generic character of truth may also result in a desire of naming. This "imperialism of truth" will lead to lose the singularity and inscribe the void to the situation, for Badiou this is a "disaster" not allowing the subtraction.² But when forcing works to represent the "generic truth," what do the mathematical operations mean in politics remain unexplained.

To return to the name; the name is not the name of what exists but what appears. Since it does not belong to an object, it is not descriptive and objective. It is rather prescriptive.³ And for Badiou politics is to be judged with its prescriptions. The features of the prescriptive politics include the following:⁴ A. "the direct and divisive application of a

¹ To repeat what was said about Badiou's mathematical ontology: pure abstract thought is what Badiou does the best. His thought at this level is very fruitful and full of openings. What I am saying here is that he is sometimes using abstraction as a way to escape concrete difficulties as well.

² Badiou, "On Subtraction," 115.

³ ———, *Metapolitics*, 31-32.

⁴ These principles that can be found spread all around the work of Badiou can be found in a perfectly organized manner in: Hallward, "The Politics of Prescription."

universal principle,”¹ in Lukácsian terms a prescription is a concrete universal. B. Politics consists of following the consequences of the prescription in public and social life. C. As prescription divides, it follows the classical logic. D. it is oriented to the anticipatory certitude of a future anterior. E. The effects of a prescription are relatively autonomous. F. Prescription maintains its relative distance from the laws of socioeconomic causality. G. In becoming concrete it cannot rely on abstract ideas, it requires the close analysis of the situation it intervenes. H. It nonetheless assumes that its “conditions possibility” is “unconditional, transhistorical, indifferent to questions of context and pertinence.”² I. Prescription belongs to the logic, it is indifferent to “community, compromise and consensus”, and thus is suspect of authoritarianism.³ One may add that the prescription belongs to the order of reason and is strictly removed from the realm of the affectionate engagement.

One can illustrate the prescription by the declaration of independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The rights are declared to be “self-evident,” they should be called thus because it is impossible to prove that the content of this statement is objectively correct. Probably the objective truth, today as it was in 19th century would be the opposite. The equality is an

¹ Ibid., 771.

² Ibid., 783.

³ Ibid., 784.

exception and freedom is only too fragile. One can only declare equality and freedom as truth. Whether some are excluded by the definition of “human” in this definition, whether these rights are not objectively “universal” is not a matter; the subjective prescription is local in its occurrence but nonetheless universal in its content. The universal emerges in the political declarations to have been accomplished in future anterior.¹ In other words, yes the American Founding Fathers excluded slaves, women, workers and many others from the definition of human, so did the authors of the declaration of rights of man and of the citizen; but because these declaration exists many of those who were excluded then enjoy them today.

Badiou’s understanding of axiomatic politics can be seen also in his reaction to 9/11 attacks, in his verdict is that this attack is nihilistic: “sacralization of death,” “indifference to victims” and “turning oneself and other into instruments,” attest to this fact. The accompanied silence of al-qaeda and other organizations behind the crime are also frustrating. For Badiou, this is the opposite of this is the French Resistance, for which the point of any attack was to affirm the existence of Resistance. Violence is undeniably a political question and it would be naïve to deny that there can be a politics that can escape violence in all its forms (physical, cultural, symbolic, linguistic, interpretative, critical... etc.). Yet there is a difference in uses of violence: with “affirmative, liberating, non-nihilistic political violence, responsibility is not only always claimed, but finds its essence

¹ The time of event is always future anterior in Badiou. ———, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 115. Badiou writes: “A subject always declares meaning in the future anterior.” Badiou, *Being and Event*, 400.

in being claimed.”¹ Following Badiou, and going beyond what he says one can argue that a violent act, just like any other political statement is an act that speaks. For instance killing people because of ethnic or religious identities should not only be judged with the act of murder but also with the ineagalitarian and repressive political statement it makes.

Another example would be his reaction to the so-called Arab Spring. In an article while the insurrections were going on in Tunisia and Egypt, Badiou wrote passionately that “the wind of the east was blowing the arrogance of the West.” He further called his readers to not to be the know-all advisors of these movements but to be their students, to learn from them about what can be done in France as well. All these talks about the possibility of Islamic fundamentalism or anti-democratic turn of the movements did not worry Badiou a single bit.² On the other hand, right from the first day of the rebellion he did not sympathize a bit with the Libyan rebellion. To the contrary, he wrote a reply against Jean-Luc Nancy who had declared his support of Libyan insurrection and French government which intervened.³ Badiou’s support to Egypt and Tunisia and absolute hostility to the movement in Libya were guided by two observations: first, in Egypt and in Tunisia there were lots of

¹ ———, *Polemics*, 33.

² ———, "Tunisie, Egypte: Quand Un Vent D'est Balaie L'arrogance De L'occident," *Le Monde*, 18 February 2011. The ongoing movement of the “indignants” in Spain precisely follows the lesson of the Arab Spring. The liberal democracy today seems to be a much better way of coping with insurrections. The journalists who report from the squares that the majority of the public is annoyed with what is going on and that the indignant rebels occupying the central square are causing problems of public health, and disturbing city’s touristic appeal etc. are more effective weapons against the insurrection than the brutal police that was sent by the dictators of Tunisia and Egypt.

³ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Ce Que Les Peuples Arabes Nous Signifient," *Libération*, 28 March 2011; Alain Badiou, "An Open Letter from Alain Badiou to Jean-Luc Nancy," <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/463-alain-badiou-open-letter-to-jean-luc-nancy>.

women who participated to movement; there were massive demonstrations, none of these were visible in Libya. But more importantly, the “placards, banners, posters and flags” that were everywhere in Egypt and Tunisia were nowhere in Libya. For Badiou the content in the declarations of these banners as well as the slogans shouted by insurgents were precisely the signals of the event. Not seeing those in Libya he had decided: there is no event in Libya (he certainly wishes there was one) but a conspiracy by French and British government who were long conspiring to replace Gaddafi regime with a friendlier one. One does not to be in complete agreement with Badiou here; also many activists criticized Badiou for judging a movement on the basis of what he sees on the TV. But the important thing for the purposes of this dissertation is where Badiou looks to decide on the nature of a rebellion: its axioms as revealed in its slogans.

What is important here is to note that the declarations that lead to the event do not matter because of the subject that utters it, or because it comes from the “objective” void of the situation: the “singularity of subject” does not validate what the subject declares. It is rather what the subject declares “that founds the singularity of the subject.”¹ The subject is

¹ ———, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 53.

what carries Rousseau's general will or what can be now called the generic will.¹ What is General Will then? For an answer one may pay heed to Badiou's depiction of the Real as that which can be "encountered, manifested, or constructed" but can never be "represented." General Will is the Real. This is the source of Badiou's mistrust in electoral politics, which is the calculus of different interests in a given society. With Rousseau Badiou states that the individual will always leans toward one's interests, but the general will always to equality. There is a particular feature of the prescriptive equality:

It is very important to note that 'equality' does not refer to anything objective. It is not a question of an equality of status, of income, of function, and even less of the supposedly egalitarian dynamics of contracts or reforms. Equality is subjective. It is equality with respect to public consciousness for Saint-Just, or with respect to political mass movement for Mao Tse-tung. Such equality is in no way a social programme. Moreover, it has nothing to do with the social. It is a political maxim, a prescription. , Political equality is not what we want or plan, it is what we declare under the fire of the event, here and now, as what is, and not as what should be. In the same way, for philosophy, justice cannot be a State programme: 'justice' is the qualification of an egalitarian political orientation in act.²

This is why equality cannot be that of "social status, income, function... contract" or a result of a reform program. If one looks for the equality as something objective that

¹ In *Being and Event* Badiou argues that Rousseau's notion of General Will that cannot be represented is the very idea of genericity while later he would use the word generic will to distinguish it from the general will. ———, *Being and Event*, 347; ———, "Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics." It is also claimed that Badiou's reading of Rousseau, especially in his reading of genericity is a very generous one that comes at the expense of ignoring some of the aspects of Rousseau that is not very egalitarian or suitable for emancipatory politics. Nina Power, "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject," in *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, ed. Paul Ashton, A. J. Bartlett, and Justin Clemens (Melbourne, Australia: re.press, 2006), 318. On Badiou's interpretation of Rousseau: Simon Critchley, "Why Badiou Is a Rousseauist and Why We Should Be Too," *Cardozo Law Review* 29, no. 5 (2008). Peter Hallward carries the idea of generic will forward: Peter Hallward, "The Will of the People: Notes toward a Dialectical Voluntarism," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 155 (2009).

² Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 54.

empirically exists in the social world one would be looking in vain. Subjective equality is a political maxim, a prescription, a declaration.¹ One can only declare it and follow the consequences of this declaration in concrete situations. Otherwise equality or justice will turn into a program, something to be achieved in the future. What follows this is that equality and justice cannot be defined as objective concepts. Any attempt to define them leads immediately to transform them into a dimension of state action and this lose their subjective and axiomatic aspects.²

The Event: Destruction and Choice

The event in its simplest definition comes with a degree of violence. It is not a becoming, an ordinary occurrence but a “cut” in becoming. It an atemporal instant that disjoins the state; it is a “separating evanescence;” it suspends the law even “mathematical laws of being and logical laws of appearing.”³ The early work of Badiou posits violence as the only way through which something radically new can emerge. This earlier commitment that he kept throughout 1970s is probably the chief reason of his much-criticized and mistaken support for the Khmer Rouge.⁴ Although he never explicitly made a self-criticism

¹ ———, *Metapolitics*, 98.

² ———, *Infinite Thought*, 55.

³ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 384.

⁴ ———, "Théorie De La Contradiction," (1975). As was the custom, this pamphlet was originally signed by Union des Communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste, but was well-known that the author was Badiou.

concerning this support,¹ it can be argued that the theoretical transformation of Badiou after the 1980s is due to the fact that his previous stance was incapable of distinguishing blind violence from revolutionary action. His emphasis on subtraction; on politics without party and at a distance from state as well as his ideas on the conditions of philosophy (against the political suture) thus needs to be thought as a way out of his earlier emphasis on destruction.²

In his more recent work, even in the instances Badiou keeps the word destruction, its meaning is radically different:

Commune-event, begun on 18 March 1871, definitely did not have as one of its consequences the destruction of the dominant group and its politicians; but it destroyed something more important: the political subordination of the workers and the people. What was destroyed was of the order of subjective incapacity.³

Here what Badiou denotes with destruction is very close to Kant who had said that the real event is not the revolution. What Kant had written was that the sign of progress in history is not the revolution itself, because counterrevolutions are always possible. The progress rather takes place around the revolution: not just in the minds of those who participate but also in the minds of people like Kant himself, in the minds of the distant observers. Whatever happens to the revolution itself, the revolution of minds will be there;

¹ Recently he wrote that Khmer Rouge used Young boys and girls as commandos who then acted out of revenge and blind hatred. Even in this shy criticism of Khmer Rouge, Badiou did not mention why was he incapable of seeing what was happening 35 years ago when he supported them. ———, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 18.

² Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 29.

³ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 379.

those who are captivated by the revolution will know that the history is their own making.¹ But how to keep the revolution of minds going? How to make it endure and make sure that the vanished event becomes the sign of irreversible change. Badiou answers this question with his theory of points:

He writes that an event is followed by the subject point by point. A point is “ultimately a topological operator—a corporeal localization with regard to the transcendental— which simultaneously spaces out and conjoins the subjective (a truth-procedure) and the objective (the multiplicities that appear in a world).”² Žižek’s statement that Lukács’ “Augenblick” is similar to Badiou’s concept of event was already mentioned in the previous chapters. He had seen the similarity in the fact that both include the elements leading up to it plus itself. This view has to be corrected: Lukács’ concept is rather similar to Badiou’s notion of “point:” The point is a decision, a very simple one, a yes or a no but what is at stake in it is nothing less than the “the totality of the world.”³ In a way with theory of points, Badiou also returns to Sartre with a twist and underlines the importance of the choice that creates a dualistic purity out of infinite complexity.⁴ Points

¹ Kant, “The Contest of Faculties.” For an excellent commentary on Kant’s text: Michel Foucault, “The Art of Telling the Truth,” in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 399.

³ *Ibid.*, 400. Lukács writes: “What is a moment? A situation whose duration may be longer or shorter, but which is distinguished from the process that leads up to it in that it forces together the essential tendencies of the process, and demands that a *decision* be taken over the *future direction of the process*. (...) That is to say the tendencies reach a sort of zenith and depending on how the situation concerned is handled, the process takes on a different direction after the ‘moment’” Lukács, *A Defence* 55. It should be noted that both accounts of choice are heavily influence by the protestant theology about decision and conversion.

⁴ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 404.

are guided by classical logic: A point reduces “the infinite multiplicity to the Two.”¹ Here we encounter one of the key aspects of Badiou’s thought: the relevance of classical logic. For the argument of this dissertation it is possible to say that the point is precisely where the unbound flux of historical totality is framed in a [totality]. But how is a point possible, does our world allow points?²

In a very brief yet powerful article, Badiou talks about the conception of negation from the perspective of different definitions of logic.³ Here, Badiou starts by reminding the Aristotelian principles of negation: principle of identity ($a=a$), non-contradiction (proposition P and non-P cannot be true at the same time) and excluded middle (either P or non-P is true but nothing in between). Badiou quickly excludes the principle of identity from the discussion, and depicts different logics with regards to their uses of the two other principles. For instance, in *classical logic* the negation has to obey to both of the principles. That is to say that it is a logic that paints the world in black and white, there can be no grey and one must choose between the black and white. This is why in classical logic negation of negation is affirmation; it thus depicts a non-Hegelian world.⁴ In the second case we have the *intuitionistic logic*, where the negation obeys the principle of contradiction but not

¹ Ibid., 401.

² Although I am focusing here on the political aspects of Badiou’s thoughts, it should be underlined that the ideas discussed here especially about choice and points are not exclusive to politics. Badiou repeatedly shows that they are relevant for the three other conditions of philosophy: for science, arts and especially for love. In other words, points are not only exclusive to those who are involved in political struggles: everyone comes to points where choices with no return are made.

³ Alain Badiou, “The Three Negations,” *Cardozo Law Review* 29, no. 5 (2008).

⁴ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 183.

the excluded middle. One can say that while the classical logic dictates that one must choose between capitalism and communism, the intuitionistic logic will bring social democracy. And finally Da Costa School's *paraconsistent logic* obeys the excluded middle but not the principle of contradiction. Badiou makes two remarks about these options; first the fourth option that obeys neither the excluded middle nor the contradiction does not exist. A negation cannot disobey both, for this will be the dissolution of all negativity. Secondly, the "potency of negation," its destructive power goes weaker from first to the last. Classical logic states that the negation of P excludes not only P but also anything in between P and non-P. The intuitionistic logic excludes P but not other possibilities between P and non-P. And finally paraconsistent logic excludes the middling possibilities but P is not excluded by its negation. ¹

The reason Badiou underlines these three logics is simple: his theory of points, thus his notion of event can only work in the context of the classical logic. In classical logic, the worker who was nothing before the event is the hero of the politics. In intuitionistic logic the worker appears but not as the hero. In paraconsistent logic, it is undecidable between an event and a non-event, so even if the worker appears in political field the figure is no more than a worker.² In this rather abstract article Badiou does not directly talk about the logic that dominates our world today but in his conclusion he gives something like the stages of development for the strengthening of negation. He states first that in a world governed by

¹ ———, "The Three Negations," 1878-80.

² Ibid., 1882-83.

the intuitionistic logic, the change is classical and simulacrum paraconsistent. It should be underlined that classical logic can never govern a world; it can only be the logic appropriate to the radicalism of the event. A world will never be able to function with such powerful negativity. One problem here is that Badiou focuses only to the moment of choice, when the choice is made everything is settled, and we follow through the consequences. But is our world intuitionistic? Badiou is pessimist about it; we are rather moving in the direction of paraconsistent logic which will allow no event, so maybe the fight of today is for intuitionistic logic against paraconsistent.¹ Maybe world was always governed by intuitionistic and paraconsistent logics: we constantly make choices and when life altering decisions present themselves sometimes they are indistinguishable from any other ordinary decision. It is always possible that even after these decisions we continue to make choices without realizing the importance of what we did. The radical decision can only be established retrospectively. To Badiou's defense, in his politics he is not interested in these everyday choices. He is talking about choices concerning an event, and for him an event is only possible through the classical logic.

For Badiou, the current distancing from the classical logic brings us farthest away from the radicalism of the earlier 20th century politics, which is the best example of the classical world, and in a way his theory of points brings us back to 1920's and to Lukács:

In the twentieth century, the shared law of the world is neither the One nor the Multiple: it is the Two. It is not the One, because there is no harmony, no

¹ Ibid., 1883. This can be seen as Badiou's way of endorsing social democracy.

hegemony of the simple, no unified power of God. It is not the Multiple, because it is not a question of obtaining a balance of powers or a harmony of faculties. It is the Two, and the world represented by the modality of the Two excludes the possibility of both unanimous submission and combinatory equilibrium. One simply must decide.¹

Badiou is not naïve; he knows that the purity of choice is a fiction and his construct works in the context of a world guided by classical logic. He also explicitly talks about “atonic worlds,” worlds whose transcendental is devoid of points; the world of “democratic materialism” is such a world. These worlds lack a moment of radical decision.² On the opposite side there are “tensed worlds” which are full of points, and choices are among a multitude of alternatives.³ Our world is certainly moving between these two alternatives and classical logic seems like an impossibility. All Badiou is trying to do is to convince his readers that there is still the possibility of a decision. This decision should not only announce the end of the unjust world of the present but should be the construction of a new world to come: “*A new world is subjectively created, point by point*”⁴ That is to say that the separating singularity of the event slowly builds another world.

Fail Better!

The new world that is born after the event is not always a conscious doing of the event. The event must fail! The law must resume. The political truth by definition is a “concrete, time-specific sequence in which a new thought and a new practice of collective

¹ ———, *The Century*, 37.

² ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 420.

³ *Ibid.*, 422-23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

emancipation arise, exist, and eventually disappear”¹ and leave its trace. Historically speaking, Badiou talks about three different modes of failure of emancipatory politics. First form of defeat can be exemplified by the Paris Commune, basically losing the war against the enemy. Second type of failure is that of May ’68, not seizing the power and the eventual dissolution of the movement. And the last form of failure belongs to the attempts o building socialist states; it is the failure to transform the party-state to the free association of all; failure to cope with the resistance of State.²

But the real failure is none of these, a “failure is a lesson which, ultimately, can be incorporated into the positive universality of the construction of a truth.”³ In fact, Badiou’s great lesson is this: we will not succeed! In this way or another, all attempts fail. There will be no everlasting peace after the revolution. But nonetheless we must fight as if the eternal justice is right around the corner, and declare our principles and maxims as timeless ones. This means that all of these failures leave traces that can, must and will be recovered by the future sequences of emancipatory politics and will then resurrect. Emancipatory politics follow Beckett: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”⁴

The real failure thus can only be something that prevents the emergence of an evanescent event; and we know that the event does not depend on the external conditions but a on the power of its egalitarian maxim. This means that just like the prescriptive truth,

¹ ———, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 231.

² *Ibid.*, 33-35.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983).

the emancipatory politics cannot be judged by criteria external to the movement. The power relations, the enemy, the interests, the structure of the realpolitik do not matter to judge a political sequence worthy of the name. Since losing the war and repression is not the worst thing that can happen; the enemy of politics not outside but inside: “It is the interiority of nihilism, and the unbounded cruelty that can come with its emptiness.”¹

This is why Badiou has only one ethical motto: “keep going.”² Here Badiou is thinking specifically about those who betrayed the 68. The problem with this betrayal is not so much that of the reactionaries like Sarkozy who kept a long lasting disdain against the 68 generation.³ Badiou says that even his most abstract works are looking for the answer to a very concrete question: how so many people who were once the militants of May 68 could so easily turn their back against the event.⁴ He remembers two distinct answers from those who left the activism abruptly: Gérard Miller had said that he had realized that they wouldn’t be able to “take power.” And his brother Jacques-Alain Miller had said that the “country was quiet.” With these two answers Badiou realizes the first obstacle on the road: to confuse politics with an “avenue towards power.”⁵ As a result Badiou thinks of a political process that takes place “at a distance” from power. Secondly, even if it is not

¹ Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 32.

² ———, *Ethics*, 40-57.

³ It is known that even at the age of 13 Sarkozy wanted to join a right wing counter march against the workers and students, however he never could because his mother had restrained him. He kept this hatred until today: during his campaign for presidential elections of 2007 he spoke of liquidating the immoral heritage of 1968.

⁴ Nina Power and Alberto Toscano, "The Philosophy of Restoration: Alain Badiou and the Enemies of May," *Boundary 2* 36, no. 1 (2009): 34.

⁵ Alain Badiou, "Roads to Renegacy, Interview by Eric Hazan," *New Left Review*, no. 53 (2008): 125-26.

explicitly mentioned by him, one can say that he learns about not caring about what the majority thinks through these experiences. If one cares about what the country thinks about the action in a given moment, one will never come up with a revolutionary insurrection.¹ Given the fact that in the end a revolution is supposed to happen for the benefit of the country one can say that this is at least an uncomfortable thought. On the one hand, it invokes Rousseau's difference between the general will and the will of all; in this sense it is correct that the general will does not always reside with the momentary thoughts and feelings of the society. Had the few resistance fighters cared about what the country thought, there would be no resistance against the Nazis. On the other hand, the problem with the truth as its own measure returns back here: this idea can be served to justify anyone to act in what they perceive as generic will. Badiou's defense against this criticism would partly be his definition of truth that justifies the action and partly be his definition of the subject to this truth.

III. Being a Subject

In Badiou's analysis a human being is not always a subject; he rather becomes one by continuing to follow the event, by producing its truth. Without the subject, the event is a mere happening, it may remain just another thing that appears and vanishes. The subject that comes after the event and who carries it produces the truth of the event and thus

¹ ———, "The Saturated Generic Identity of the Working Class, an Interview by Nicolas Veroli and Diana George". . . Of course this is not the only experience Badiou had, for instance he explicitly claims that he first learned from the struggle against the colonial occupation of Algeria that "political conviction is not a question of numbers."

inscribes the event into presence. In Badiou's language this process is called fidelity.¹ Unlike the commonly understood notion of fidelity, which is basically a restriction –for instance: if you are in love, do not cheat, Badiou's fidelity is about production. In politics, this production is the collective construction of universal truth, point by point. In his recent work, Badiou talks about the “physics of subjetivizable bodies” as the agents of a possible truth thus underlines that fidelity is no mere act of consciousness.² Accordingly the reason he is talking about the body of the subject is to avoid reducing the decision to a mere act of consciousness. The subject also has a sequential history which has “continuities and discontinuities, openings and points.” The sequences of subjects can resurrect after centuries.³

Fidelity is what stands against the state, but a strange thing occurs in this fight:

It is at this point, moreover, that one can again think fidelity as a counter-state: what it does is organize, within the situation, another legitimacy of inclusions. It builds, according to the infinite becoming of the finite and provisional results, a kind of other situation, obtained by the division in two of the primitive situation.⁴

That is to say through the process of the fidelity, the event organized around the void of the present situation turns into the foundation of a new situation that is bound to contain a void. The fidelity itself is a counter-state; that means that while it fights against the state of the given situation it also has something like state in its constitution. By

¹For an analysis of fidelity: ———, *Being and Event*, 233-40.

² ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 451-503. a body is that which subordinates itself to the event; to the nothing that becomes everything.

³ *Ibid.*, 83, 65. Italics removed.

⁴ ———, *Being and Event*.

constructing the truth of the event, fidelity saturates it. Thus it becomes the basis of the new law of the world.

The subject in fidelity is “what has no place to be.” The “transcendental law” does not allow it to exist in the world; but also when the subject acts, it acts in order to subtract itself from the world.¹ Thus the subject, just like Lukács’ proletariat and his militant has no place in the new world created. It is in this sense that Badiou uses *Anabasis*, the story of 10,000 Greek mercenaries told by Xenophon, as an analogy for the political militant. The *Anabasis* is the name of the movement of “lost men, out of place and outside the law,” it is a “wandering that *will have been* a return.”² It is a homeward movement, it is the movement of homeless men, yet the path that they thread to go back home did not exist prior to them walking. The theme of the “lost men” that Badiou deploys can be thought further here: It is important to note that Badiou chooses *Anabasis* but not the much better known *Odyssey*. Homeric epic, also tells the story of a homecoming and the story of a lost man in the marvels of the sea. Odysseus is not simply going back home, he rather has to re-discover, re-conquer, re-claim and in a way re-create his home. But this dimension is not very explicit in the *Odyssey*: When Odysseus begins his journey he has a home, he is the king of Ithaca, and thus his journey has a final destination, even if all these would soon be put in jeopardy. When he arrives back, Ithaca is no longer his home and looks like anything but a home; and when he comes he is not Odysseus either. In order to be who he is, Odysseus

¹ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 45.

² ———, *The Century*, 83. What Badiou does here is to take the theme of being “lost” in its sense of antiquity and use it with a very modern sense.

must make the city his home. But all these also have an element of the restoration of a lost order: an order that once existed, now lost and is waiting for a hero to bring back the vanished past. Moreover the *Odyssey* is the story of one man, the crew of Odysseus is irrelevant and do not survive the journey back home.

The *Anabasis* on the other hand is not the story of one man, one hero, one leader but the story of the ten thousand who have lost their Odysseuses and who are obliged to create their own leaders from within and self-impose the discipline required to follow them in the commonly agreed task. Moreover *Anabasis* is a much stronger depiction of that which is implicit in the *Odyssey*: unlike the King of Ithaca, these men have no home to start with. *Anabasis* is the story of mercenaries collected from all around the ancient world, and it is very clear that they can have no illusions of a lost home in the sense that Odysseus had it. Their voyage back home is not toward a home that existed once and was then lost but toward creating that home in the very journey. Moreover, they do not return home as the hero who came up with the cunning plan that led to the decisive victory of Trojan War but as the survivors of a defeated army. They were tricked into a war that was both noble and foolish; when they had understood what was going on, they had followed Cyrus to the end out of loyalty and honor. As defeated men of these wars who have nothing left but inner discipline and the will to “keep going,” they can be seen as a parable for the left (and especially the French left) who stands at the end of the century tired and defeated of wars.

This is why as the story of lost men in their journey back home; Anabasis is much more appealing for Badiou's philosophy than Odysseus.

The idea of “lost men” does not solely belong to ancient Greece. Romanticism has also described man as a lost being. The ultimate lost that romanticism was talking about is not alien to this thesis: it was the loss of the primordial unity of the world. The unity was lost thus man was also, but without being aware of it. This is why Novalis had declared philosophy as “homesickness” and an “urge to be everywhere at home.”¹ In the case of the fragment by Novalis there is still an uncertainty where there was ever a home that one misses and whether that home exists only in our orientation toward it. Here, the distance between the “lost” of Anabasis and the “lost” of Odyssey is minimal. On the other hand, Hölderlin's “Preface to the Penultimate Draft of Hyperion” is clear the lost home is the organic unity that is gone: “The blessed unity, Being in the only sense of the word, is lost to us [,] and we had to lose it, if we were to strive for it, to gain it back.”² It is not only the organic whole that is gone, we are also lost together with this world. Maybe Hölderlin is also thinking about ancient Greece and the stories of their lost heroes, because in a poem titled *mnemosyne* (as the embodiment of memory in Greek mythology, she is one of the Titans) he wrote: “We are a sign that is not read / We feel no pain, We almost have / Lost

¹ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 135.

² Quoted in: Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 116. For further information on Romanticism and the theme of lost unity and losing oneself, a starting point can be: J. M. Bernstein, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

our language in foreign lands”¹ For romantics the task was to resurrect and re-institute the lost language, the lost unity of life. But how would this be possible? For romantic imagination the only way was to turn the unconscious lost to a conscious one: this is why romantics have seen heroism in the act of losing oneself, for this was the only way to find the unity that was lost. This theme was skillfully picked up by Nietzsche, who had claimed in *Gay Science* that losing oneself is the only way to become more than a herd animal, losing oneself is the way to find knowledge. Are these themes familiar to Badiou, one can only guess; with his usual style Badiou interprets Anabasis in the usual way he reads ancient texts: as contemporary ones and as if nothing had happened between the time they are written and today.

Other than the theme of being lost, there is one more aspect of this story that Badiou underlines with a discussion of Paul Celan’s poem titled “Anabasis.”² According to Badiou, this poem “breaks the theme of empty and self-sufficient wandering: something must be encountered.” Together with the theme of encounter, Celan introduces elements of sea to the story which, according to Badiou “function as indices of alterity.”³ With Celan, the “we” that is constructed in the face of the struggle (which was Lukács’ “we” as well) is no

¹ “Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos / Schmerzlos sind wir und haben fast / Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren.” This is a line that also deeply inspired Heidegger, I used the translation in Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, 10. A different translation can be found in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, The German Library (New York: Continuum, 1990), 272-73.

² Paul Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, ed. Michael Hamburger, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 2002), 176-77.

³ This is a strange claim, because in Anabasis, the shout “the sea, the sea” declares that they are on the familiar ground; that their home is near.

longer enough. The theme of “alterity” replaces “fraternity.” The “we” can no longer belong to the epic. The new question is: “How are we to make alterity ours?” Us can no longer act as One as if in a warlike situation. Us can neither “internalize” nor “appropriate” the difference that is heard. The call of the difference “must be made our own, simply because we have encountered it.” Badiou says that we-subject can no longer be One. Celan announces a new form of a “we” that does not have “I” as its ideal. Celan’s “tent-word,” “together!” includes the difference as an “almost imperceptible call.”¹ Badiou’s attempt is in a way to think Celan’s poetry in politics. Although Badiou does not explicitly mention it the last word of Celan’s poem “together” is the key in this respect. Celan does not use the German word *zusammen*², which means together but he rather invents a new word: *mitsammen*, withgether. In forcing the language with this awkward word, Celan states that “together” cannot have unity and fusion as its goal; together (withgether) must be the being together that has a room for an irreducible difference.

As mentioned before, the subject is the becoming of the subject, it doesn’t always exist. It emerges after the event, through a process of fidelity. In the politics as a truth procedure, one becomes a subject by becoming a part of a collective subject (for instance “class-subject” or sometimes Party) which exceeds the militant-subject. For Badiou, paradoxically the individual-subject becomes something more than human, an immortal by

¹ Badiou, *The Century*, 95-96.

² The word is composed of *Zu* (to) and *sammen*. The second part comes from the Proto-Germanic *sammōnan*, and German *sammeln* which mean “to collect and gather.” The word is also related to the Old English *sammian* which meant to collect, gather, assemble, unite, join... etc.

this becoming part of something superior.¹ The anti-Heideggerian attitude of Badiou reaches its climax in his conception of the subject. Nothing illustrates this point better than a recent debate with Simon Critchley whose *Infinitely Demanding* defends a Heidegger-inspired ethical anarchism. Against Critchley's claim that we often have difficulty in facing our finitude, Badiou's immediate reaction is to say that the difficulty is not in only accepting the finitude of human animal, but what is infinite in human nature.² To think the subject at a distance from the mortality means that the thought has to also distance both from the "phenomenological constitution of experience" and from the "Nietzschean nomination of being as life."³

How does the immortal subject act? Here Badiou defends a committed action that is very similar to what was demanded by Lukács: What makes politics a "universal possibility" is to "to attach so little importance to oneself even though an undeniable historic cause demands our devotion." What matters is not the subject but the call of the event that asks one to join, i.e. the absolute commitment. Failure to answer this call is to "sacrifice" more than one's "dignity;" it is to betray to "all ethics and, ultimately, all logic and therefore all thought."⁴

¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 43.

² ———, "On Simon Critchley's *Infinitely Demanding*: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance," *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory* 10, no. 2 (2009): 156.

³ ———, "Existence and Death," *Discourse* 24, no. 1 (2002): 66. "Consequently, it is vain to meditate upon death, for as Spinoza also declared: 'A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death'." ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 270.

⁴ ———, *Pocket Pantheon*, 12.

It thus takes courage to be the subject of the truth but not heroism. Badiou defines hero as a hero of the moment: s/he is the one who encounters the impossible but for a moment. Courage is the virtue of enduring in the impossible, to keep going while everything else fails. Courage is the courage for a new beginning, there is no courage of reconstructing what used to be. The courage is to invent new truth, not to preserve the defeated attempt of the past. And finally courage is to act together, in an organized way.¹

The subject to truth is an apostle. Just like St. Paul who had never seen Jesus himself, an apostle does not necessarily have a firsthand experience of the event. Moreover, s/he is a heretic: challenges the claims of the “guarantors of truth.” S/he is the one who wouldn’t let the event remain as a local occurrence, within the confines of a given community; thus declares what is universal in the event. It can be said that without the subject, the event is a mere happening; the subject is the one turning this occurrence into an event with universal consequences. This is why Badiou writes his book on St. Paul, not on Jesus.

But his depiction of the subject remains rather an idealized version of what happens in everyday existence. In *Logics of Worlds* he depicts three types of subjects:² First is the faithful subject, the one who exists in a relation to fidelity to the vanished event. The second one, the reactive subject, denies the truth; and the last one, the obscure subject,

¹ ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 72-73.

² For an analysis of wrong subjectivities from the perspective of Badiou: Alberto Toscano, "The Bourgeois and the Islamist, or, the Other Subjects of Politics," in *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, ed. Paul Ashton, A. J. Bartlett, and Justin Clemens (Melbourne, Australia: re.press, 2006).

hides the truth.¹ It is important to note that these figures are not “ideal types” that can help measure different subjective dispositions in their proximity to different modes of subjectivities. To the contrary, these are absolute categories: in the face of a vanishing event, the faithful subject emerges first and the others follow in a reactionary or obscurantist attitude. Badiou does not consider any other disposition toward the event at all; maybe these dispositions do not deserve the name subject in Badiou’s language, but nonetheless it is impossible to understand contemporary politics or its lack without resort to these figures. For instance what about the ignorant one? Most of us would fall into this category: when an “event” happens, for Badiou it radiates with pure presence, he thinks that it is obvious to everyone who lives in the world. One has to decide: to join or not. But in reality, only a few will know the event qua event; most of the people will not know it happened or will know it through its distorted image through the media... etc. Secondly, one can talk about the undecided ones. For instance, one can think about the situation of Turkish leftists who believe in the principles of emancipatory and egalitarian politics (while most of self declared in Turkey left lack these features, there is indeed an increasing number of this type). When they face the Kurdish movement they stay at odds, the egalitarian and emancipatory potential of the movement of Kurds is obvious, they feel compelled to embrace it. But then reality kicks in: how can one wholly embrace a movement that is submissive to blind violence, repressive, male dominant, getting revenues from drug and human trafficking... etc? Is an event taking place in the south-east of

¹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 47-63.

Turkey? When an event happens in Badiou, it has none of these practical features which prevent its access to the would-be-subjects of the event, but this depiction simply is missing one of the key reasons blocking potentials subjects of truth. And finally there is the longing one; the one who is searching for an event of our time but is incapable of wholeheartedly giving her/himself to one.¹ None of these ones are subjects in Badiou's sense, because they are not involved on truth procedures. But in some sense, they are the ones who can become subjects. The actual practice of politics must be thinking how to recruit these subjects, how to address to them, how to transform itself to be able to speak and listen to them. On the other hand, Badiou's politics is so interested in its own revolutionary romance that it fails to understand why so many people fail to join the collective production of a truth.

Excursus 1: An Assassination and its Aftermath

Badiou's ideas about the particular identity and the universal can be thought through a case. On January 19th of 2007, the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was murdered in front of his office. The horrible murder, of a man who worked for peace; of a socialist Armenian who was fighting against the hatred in both side caused an irreplaceable loss. Yet, in the midst of all the evil that came to surface with the murder,² the dim light of a trace of good also appeared: Within hours thousands of people gathered in the street where

¹ What I am thinking here is what is depicted in Siegfried Kracauer, "Those Who Wait," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

² The murder did not create the evil; it was merely the culmination of a series of events that made Dink live in fear of being killed for more than a year. This fear was a personal and intense manifestation of what his community felt for more than a century.

Hrant Dink was murdered and they started shouting spontaneously: “We are all Armenians! We are all Hrant Dink!” How this slogan was invented is not clear, maybe some knew “We are all German Jews” slogan of May 68, maybe they remembered movies where the crowd stood up to protect the hero, but it came to being.

The slogan “we are all Armenians” caused a reaction in the media and in public discussion that almost overshadowed the horrible murder itself. Certainly some public figures were thinking that shouting this slogan was almost bad if not worse than the murder itself. The eminent columnists of the media started the big noise: why were these people not shouting “we are all humans!” weren’t the human rights of Hrant Dink violated by a deluded psychopath? Why these people were declaring themselves Armenians; aren’t we all “human” in the end? A very famous columnist, Serdar Turgut, with an impeccable sense of irony was asking: what these protesters will shout in case somebody kills a son of a prostitute tomorrow? The point was obvious: what they couldn’t accept was how a part of Turkish youth could declare themselves Armenian despite the century long anti-Armenian propaganda; despite the seeds of hate that they themselves had planted. In a way in their language the “human rights” had turned into a fascist discourse: don’t say that the one whose rights are violated is an Armenian.

But the protesters knew what is “universal” in Human rights much more than these public figures: The universal is not the abstract right that we all have, it is the concrete right that a particular lacks. In other words if being Armenian in Turkey means being the center

of public lynch campaign, if it means court case against something that you have written (and taken out of context to mean the opposite of what you wrote), if it means not enjoying the same rights with everyone else due to the law or due to its discrimination in application, then the universal human rights are the rights of the Armenians in Turkey. Rancière explains it perfectly well when he writes that the universal rights are the rights of those who do not have the rights that we have; and the rights of those who do have the rights we don't.¹ In this sense the universal first does not belong to the general, but always to a particular. Yet it does not denote a positive feature of existence, as Laclau understands it but a lack. And it is precisely through this lack that it is universal: Kurds, Alevites, girls who are not allowed to universities with their headscarf, gays, workers, and in a way everybody can connect what they lack to what Armenians lack. The lack and the demand for universal rights is the basis of solidarity and the universalization of rights is an open ended process. Of course it is not an easy process, and it does not always happen but when it happens it changes the totality of the society.

What happens when the particular is not that of the lack but of something that exists? The small community of leftist Turkish students and activists residing in New York saw the answer when they went to protest the murder in front of their embassy, because their state was not able to protect, if not complicit in the murder of a man who was threatened for such a long time. Just like the Kurds, Arabs, Armenians and Turks who had

¹ Rancière, *La Haine De La Démocratie*, 68.

gathered a day ago in Istanbul, they were shouting “we are all Armenians” but there was something that was not right. They were outnumbered by the members of the Armenian Diaspora, with whom the slogan meant a completely other thing. These people who hated Dink two days ago for his criticism of Armenian nationalism were now praising him. The people who accused him for betraying the cause for a possible future chair in the Turkish parliament were now declaring him a martyr of their cause. In a nutshell, “we are all Armenians” with them meant that despite their different politics, as a consequence of their ethnic identity, they were the same. A socialist could thus become an “Armenian” in death.

The same identity, the same declaration may start a sequence where a new universal is born, it might thus speak to all other particular and local existences without becoming hegemonic; it might as well be the opposite, the celebration of a positive feature in this local identity. How this happens is precisely what is at stake in the art of politics which cannot be based on a ready-made formula, but which cannot either exist without the proper analysis of the totality of the situation in which the event is to take place.

Excursus 2: Human Rights

While Badiou explicitly associates himself with the anti-humanist tradition, it can also be observed that his work is rooted in political humanism in a much stronger way, especially in his attempt to define the subject as something beyond an ideological

interpellation.¹ Recently his rhetorical attack on humanism even shifted the course. He wrote that the “friendship” as a category refers to “weakened forms of traditional humanism.”² Did this mean a call for a new humanism defined around the category of friendship and equality with foreign born workers? Badiou did not say much, however there is certainly a move toward that direction. He also called Marx an enlightenment philosopher and “great humanist thinker.” Together with the approving quotation of the definition of communism from *1844 Manuscripts*, Badiou is surely getting farthest away from the Althusserian reading of Marx and the anti-humanist tradition.³

But even in his work where he explicitly attacked human rights one could see a search for a new foundation for it. He defines the human rights of today as based on a depiction of man who is a victim, a suffering, emaciated, and dying body, as an animal.⁴ He continues:

1. We posit a general human subject, such that whatever evil befalls him is universally identifiable (...)
2. Politics is subordinated to ethics, (...)
3. Evil is that from which the Good is derived, not the other way round.
4. 'Human rights' are rights to non-Evil: rights not to be offended or mistreated with respect to one's life (the horrors of murder and execution),

¹ Power, "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject."

² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 66.

³ ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 91, 98.

⁴ ———, *Ethics*, 11.

one's body (the horrors of torture, cruelty and famine), or one's cultural identity (the horrors of the humiliation of women, of minorities, etc.)¹

It is on the basis of this criticism that Badiou makes a call to find a depiction of man other than being-toward-death; a human subject must be imagined as immortal. Badiou's fundamental question for the human rights is this: what are the rights of the immortal, how to define the right to the universal and infinite?² Here Badiou is both against Heidegger and with Heidegger. He is with Heidegger because he follows the "Letter on Humanism" in its critique that the human of humanism is not generous enough to depict what human being can become. He is against Heidegger because for Badiou, human being understood in his finitude is the very core of humanist doctrine. In other words, Badiou depicts Heidegger as the archetypical humanist and fights against the Heideggerian humanism. Indeed Badiou takes Heidegger's claim that a mortal human, a finite being cannot access the universal truth; this is precisely why he says that the human being can become immortal. Heidegger's posthumously published *Der Spiegel* interview had famously claimed that "only a God can save us!" Badiou's answer is that us, we are all Gods, or that a God resides in each of us. Unlike Heidegger's muted God, this immortal can also speak in the process of the

¹ Ibid., 9. Actually, Badiou's entire polemic against humanism has to do with the *nouveaux philosophes* who used human rights as a tool for attack against Marxism. They were basically arguing that fascism and communism were the same in that they both desired a radical change and the Good and both were involved in mass murders. Thus they concluded, if we want to respect human rights and avoid murders, we should forget about the radical change, Good, Idea... etc. Badiou obviously feels nothing but contempt for figures like Glucksmann, Finkielkraut, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Jambet and Lardreau some of whom used to be leading Maoists before their transition.

² Ibid., 12. This passage is not explicitly mentioning Heidegger, rather the reference is to Being-for-death. Badiou's translator either did not pay attention to the reference to Heidegger and directly translated French "être-pour-la-mort" to English or decided to use the older translation of Heidegger's concept. In either case I did use being-toward-death for reasons of continuity between the Chapter on Heidegger and the present one.

collective creation of the truth. Yet it should be underlined that the immortal is not simply given: it emerges in singular, concrete situations.¹ Saint Paul had taught precisely this: the event is not Jesus but the resurrection; about that which cannot be proven but what can be declared: The event is about the “possible victory over death.”²

How can one become immortal? Badiou says: “We are open to the infinity of worlds. To live is possible.” For Badiou, this means to live for an idea. Here we find Badiou’s version of “live dangerously:” “live for an Idea,” or “live heroically!”³ On the other hand, this call to become more than a human rings alarm bells for anybody who remembers the totalitarianisms of 20th century. Besides, Badiou’s record as well as his writings about violence is sufficient to make him a suspect on this issue. As noted by Critchley Badiou’s thought sometimes suffers from a “misguided nostalgia for revolutionary violence,” this “deluded romance” can lead to an “apology for dictatorship.”⁴ Badiou himself writes that 20th century’s desire to create a “new man” was so powerful that neither fascist nor communist projects paid attention to the singularity of human lives destroyed in the process.⁵ For Badiou, one can argue that the problem was not in the idea of a “new man” as such but in the idea of the dialectic of destruction and creation that was

¹ Ibid.

² ———, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 45.

³ ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 514. Based on the previous distinction between courage and heroism he should have said: “live courageously!”

⁴ Critchley, “Why Badiou Is a Rousseauist and Why We Should Be Too,” 1933. For a study of the theme of violence in Badiou: Joseph Jenkins, “Violence in Badiou’s Recent Work,” *Cardozo Law Review* 29, no. 5 (2008).

⁵ On the other hand, this very idea of “new man” was the very foundation of “scientific, artistic and sexual ruptures” that left a glorious mark in the 20th century. Badiou, *The Century*, 8.

seen as the path to it. So how to act in fidelity to the century but without falling into the same traps that it fell?

This question becomes more urgent because Badiou writes:

If you think the world can and must change absolutely; that there is neither a nature of things to be respected nor pre-formed subjects to be maintained, you thereby admit that the individual may be sacrificable. Meaning that the individual is not independently endowed with any intrinsic nature that would deserve our striving to perpetuate it.¹

This rather disturbing thought of Badiou is paradoxically a consequence for his affirmation of a Sartrean humanism. Together with Sartre, Badiou renounces a project-less humanism. The project for “integral equality,” i.e. communism is what makes us humans. Without the project, human is no different than any animal, and indeed in the human animal of the present society is also being domesticated just like any other.² So here is the impasse: we can accept the terms of the dominant humanism without a project and we subscribe to the terms of our nihilistic world. This means accepting the degradation of human to an animal species. Alternative to the submission to the ethics of our age is to build a new humanism around the project of communism. Yet any project worth pursuing is to be accepted above the individual and may call for a sacrifice. This is not a difficult choice for Badiou who promotes the second choice passionately.

¹ Ibid., 99.

² Ibid., 175.

III.a. Political Party

What does Badiou's understanding of the subject and of the human signify when it comes to the organized politics? The early understanding of Badiou, his interpretation of Maoist politics during the 1970s is strangely close to what this study described as the mistakes of Lukács. He also defends a notion of proletariat achieved through a "purification" of working class. Although the Maoist rhetoric is always about the praise of the creative powers of the masses, Badiou nonetheless assigns the party a privileged position: "Masses make history, but as vanishing or ephemeral, the party makes this very vanishing *consist* and endure."¹ Just like Lukács, he also maintains that both the proletariat and the party work toward their own dissolution.²

The earlier work of Badiou is thus guided by the idea of "purification," it maintains that the purifying force of destruction appearing in the "out-of-place" is the only way that the radical new can emerge.³ In his later work, Badiou sees the problem with this, the "passion for the real" and its accompanying idea "purification" are best manifested in the "public purges."⁴ Thus he admits that the Stalinist purges are direct consequences of the idea of purification he had once defended. The idea to find the real in its pure form; to find the revolutionary essence means getting rid of all impurities. One can disagree with all the actions of Stalin but if one maintains the purification as a model for the real, a form of

¹ Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 36.

² *Ibid.*, 38.

³ Power, "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject," 325.

⁴ Badiou, *The Century*, 53.

public purge is the inevitable outcome that must follow. Badiou makes it explicit that his “idea of subtractive thinking of negativity” is thought as a way out of the imperatives of purification and destruction.¹ This is why after the publication of *Theory of Subject* in 1982, his emphasis on violence declines.² But abandoning the idea of purification, he nonetheless maintains its core principle: “A minimal and purified political heterogeneity is a hundred times more combative than a parliamentary armada of represented struggles.”³

The question today is how to organize this minimal heterogeneity? Badiou explicitly declares that the communist party was a great way of organizing mass revolt yet it was not the best device for a state of the proletarian dictatorship. It managed to secure a nationwide victorious revolution but failed to build a state as Marx had envisaged: a state organized as a “transition toward non-state, a power of non-power.” Party state was unable to wither away.⁴ Having renounced the relevance of the revolutionary party for our present, Badiou does not hide his disdain for the electoral politics either. For him:

the electoral *dispositif* is not just, or even primarily, a representative *dispositif*: it is also a *dispositif* that represses movements, anything that is new, and anything that tries to break away from it.⁵

¹ Ibid., 55.

² it is curious to note that this decline goes parallel with a gradual abandonment of the categories of history and the deployment of Marxist analysis. Power, "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject," 330.

³ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 44.

⁴ ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 109.

⁵ ———, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 56.

He does not mean that elections do not matter at all, but what he insists is that the change that matters, an event will never come through an election.¹ Aside from this, in contemporary France, (or Europe) the important changes about dismantling the welfare state, public services etc. were made through the pretension of obeying the directives of the European Union and were never asked to the European citizens. The same thing goes for the wars that the countries chose to participate or not, nobody asks the citizens about what they think about a subject that concerns life and death situations. Moreover, what governs almost the entire “western world” is an electoral consensus where the parties agree upon everything except little details.² As these decisions are never asked, the real decisions of emancipatory politics also escape the vote. The vote is rather the undoing of these decisions: “Against revolution nothing beats an election.”³

Another aspect of electoral democracy that Badiou disapproves is the concept of majority. On this issue, Badiou on the one hand brings the familiar theme of the genius vs. crowd to show how the few are right against the majority in the times of change. But more importantly he puts forward a difference between “active number” and “passive number.” Electoral politics are the triumph of the passive numbers, but real political action is always

¹ ———, *Polemics*, 80.

² In issues like budget cuts where there appears to be big disagreements often it turns out that central left parties also believe that the cuts are the right thing to do. What makes them different from their conservative counterparts is that they have bad conscience about doing. Even if the empirical evidence proves that in the European Union high tax / high public spending countries of Scandinavia were the ones that were least affected by the ongoing economic crisis and were the ones where the recovery was the fastest, the center left will not take this advice and truly believe that the public spending is the right thing to do for the entire economy.

³ Badiou, *Polemics*, 90-91, 259.

accomplished by the active number in strikes, demonstrations and especially in insurrections. For the emancipatory politics what counts is then the “active disciplined numbers.”¹ Just like in the Anabasis, the political action comes from the organized few who rely in themselves and in their inner discipline. Badiou, just like 1920’s Lukács, underlines the importance of discipline: “those who have nothing have only their discipline.” He also admits the limits of the military model of discipline and underlines the necessity of inventing a non-military model of discipline. However gives no clue of how that discipline might be working at the organizational level.²

For Badiou it can be said that the question of today is no longer the relation between the movement and the state but to invent a new form of organization that will come after the party. His proposed model is the *Organisation Politique* that he co-founded. The question is why is this not a political party? Surely Badiou has read his Gramsci to know enough that any organized action with implicit or explicit political goal has to be defined as a party. But he does not make it very clear why *Organisation Politique* is not a party, he only says that it is not. In a very limited number of places he says that it “intervenes only on particular questions, raised by specific confrontations or events, always guided by the strict, axiomatic assertion of subjective equality.”³ So while a political party is a prisoner of actuality and has to act on everything that happens, the *Organisation Politique* chooses

¹ Ibid., 93.

² ———, ““We Need a Popular Discipline”: Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative, Interview by Filippo Del Lucchese and Jason Smith,” 650.

³ Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 227.

what matters, what does not. Then the current politics may easily label it as an interest group pursuing issue advocacy. One can say that what Badiou intends to say by declaring his organization a non-party is to state first that it doesn't seek electoral victory and second that it is not the party of the party-state. Otherwise this organization may fit in perfectly well within the different forms of the political party.

This attitude also owes to his recollection of May 68: When Badiou establishes his current political commitments as a fidelity to 68, the example that he cites is about the destruction of the union and party dispositifs. His favorite example is an aleatory fusion of young people and workers on strike: an encounter partly due to a will but partly due to a chance that shatters the party and union organizations that kept the youth and workers apart. For Badiou the entire May '68 can be summarized in this singular, momentary instance showing how the youth and workers can jointly make meetings; discuss; come to resolutions; act together without needing a central organization telling them what to do. The participants in this experience, he says were active but also spectators of what they were doing; the consequences of the collective action were incalculable. This is what 68 is to Badiou: the singular, local creation of the universal; a creation that does not need the party and takes place at a distance from the state.¹

¹ Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 58-60. For him, this is also the first lesson of Maoism: "necessity of direct relations between intellectuals and workers." ———, "The Saturated Generic Identity of the Working Class, an Interview by Nicolas Veroli and Diana George".

One can say that the mistakes of French Communist Party during the May 68 as well as his own mistakes during the 1970s led Badiou to drop the notion of the party in its entirety. One can say that the dialectic “class-party-history” that is mentioned about Lukács and ended up in Stalin sounded like an unavoidable consequence of resorting to the party as a mediating agent. So Badiou opted for a solution for a “non-expressive” dialectics; a dialectics of separation; a dialectics that does not need the mediation of the political party. This is another reason that Badiou is interested in St. Paul: the “Jesus event” and its “immediateness:” Jesus is not that which mediates between God and humans. There is no mediation, no dialectics here.¹ There is no mediation between the whole and its parts; it is the emergence of a singularity whose truth is an “index sui.” But what Badiou fails to note is that the party is not built by Jesus but by St. Paul, who certainly mediates between the faithful subjects and the Jesus event through his act of declaration in what is universal in this event. The point is not to denounce all mediation: one cannot eliminate the category from thought and hope that it will disappear from existence. The elimination of the category will only result in one’s failure to grasp how mediations occur in real life. So the task is to think “how” of the mediations and Badiou has a clear answer for this: without having the state as a goal.

So whatever name one can give to the collective organization, one thing is certain: it must keep its political distance, its distance from the state. Badiou underlines that the 20th

¹ ———, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 48.

century revolutionary understanding of State owes to the ambiguity of Marx's reading of the Paris Commune. For Badiou this ambiguity is composed on one side by his praise of the dissolution of State and on the other by his criticism of "statist incapacities," of the actions that could have been easier if the Commune had evolved into a state. Despite Marx's conclusion was that the "state machine must not be 'taken' or 'occupied', but broken;" the lesson of his criticisms led the 20th century to the opposite direction. The revolutionary party of the 20th century with its particular discipline, centralization, organization is designed for taking state power.¹ At the dawn of the 21st century, it is clear that this model no longer works.

Here Žižek contends that the idea of politics conducted at a "distance" from the state is abandoning a very important field to the enemy.² Badiou's politics that excludes the state is often open to misinterpretations such as this. The reason is not that other people misinterpret but that Badiou does not soften his radical tone and make his point clear. With his idea of "politics at a distance from the state," the first thing to remember is the rarity and sequential character of politics. The idea of excluding the state is something that belongs only to the brief sequences of emancipatory politics, to the political events. It would be the most stupid thing to ignore the state, not just in the developing world as Žižek mentions but in the advanced countries where most of the social functions of state is under the attack. One should indeed fight for the welfare state, what Badiou says is simply that

¹ ———, *Polemics*, 262-64.

² Žižek, "On Alain Badiou and Logiques Des Mondes."

such a defensive position will not lead to a new event. A new regime of citizenship, of rights, of existence, of a distribution of wealth will not come with the modifications of the existing welfare state. Moreover, being on the defensive, the welfare state and its protective screen will not last very long against the continuous attacks of neo-liberal economics that present themselves as novelty and progress. Only an event or the possibility of a coming event can carry it further and make it more generous and more inclusive.¹ Paradoxically, the best way to fight for the site of state is to abandon it! We should not always abandon it, the rights should be fought for, but we should also know that the radical change, the new universal truth of politics will not come from this defense.²

IV. A New Fiction for our Times: Communism

What is the place of “narrative totality” in this story? Badiou does not talk so much about the narration and its relation to truth. He does not mention at all how the people whose existence lacks recognition will start acting, how they will recognize the totality and fight against it. Via Lukács, this thesis argued that what the “excluded” of our present needed was a “narration” of the totality and this narration was only possible with a vision of what is beyond the totality of the given world. Is there a space for “narration” in Badiou? At one particular instance he quotes Deleuze who is talking about narration as a “flexible

¹ On how the working class activism preceded the welfare state: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

² For example before the referendum on European constitution he declared his support for the idea for “social Europe” and called for a Franco-German alliance (rather than the European Union) to move toward that direction. Alain Badiou, "The European Constitution," <http://www.lacan.com/badeu.htm>.

and paradoxical vector of truth,” as a way to falsify and to make it undecidable between the truth and the false. Badiou adds to this that in his understanding, the post-evental production of truth includes narration simultaneously with the mathematical formalization and formulization.¹

Probably because the narration is a word that has the post-modern tone on it about the undecidability of the truth, Badiou prefers the word “fiction” in its stead. At the end of his talk about the possibility of non-expressive dialectics, he cites the poem of Wallace Stevens: “the final belief must be in a fiction.” He further adds that today:

The most important political problem is the problem of a new fiction. We have to distinguish between fiction and ideology. Because generally speaking ideology is something which isn't coupled with science, or with truth or with real, reality. But as we know from Lacan and from before, the truth itself is in a structure of fiction. The process of truth is also the process of a new fiction. And so to find the new great fiction is the possibility to have a final belief, political belief.²

The lack of fiction is the problem, for example in the 2005 riots in the Paris where there were thousands of angry youth but did not come with a declaration as to the world they want to live in. What can be the new narrative for our age? During this talk Badiou names communism a great fiction yet that which goes from masses to proper name.³ After this talk something happens; Badiou starts believing that the fiction that will not resort to

¹ ———, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, 57-59. He states here that the “power of the false” is indiscernible from “the power of truth” but further adds that “power of false” is the Nietzsche-inspired name that Deleuze gives to truth.

² ———, “Politics: A Non-Expressive Dialectics.”

³ Ibid.

proper names can indeed be constructed under the banner of communist hypothesis, and this his recent work is on its possibility.

The question is how to start the narrative of today? How to begin the fiction of communism in our present? It is already mentioned that Badiou's refusal of Otherness allows him to develop a much radicalized version of a theorem of differences: I am not the same with myself! So this leads him to found a notion of truth that is indifferent to differences.¹ This in turn allows to the first statement of the possible politics of today: "there is only one world." How this one world is to be imagined? Does Badiou talk about the globalization? Not at all. The present "global world" represents the "bad universal," it is a generalization of a particular; a universal that excludes great portion of humanity. The world as it exists at a pure descriptive level is in the end two separate worlds: the world of those who have and the world of the excluded.² One can even go further than Badiou: there are an uncountable number of worlds co-existing in our present reality. "Only one world" is the very opposite of this, it is the undoing of the wrong totality; as such it is the true universal. Yet this true universal cannot be established at the factual level, facts belong to the State of the situation; the truth of only one world belongs to the event to come. Thus one cannot start with an "analytical agreement" of the existence of a world and "normative action about its characteristics." "One world" is a decision, a declaration; it is a prescriptive statement. Workers of foreign origin, homosexuals, women, students, peasants, blue collar

¹ ———, *Ethics*, 27.

² ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 54-55.

and white-collar workers, the homeless can agree or disagree with each other because they exist like one another. We are obviously different in terms of dresses we wear, food we eat, the music we listen, education, sexual preferences and so on, yet we exist in the same world, thus we can talk.¹ As Heidegger said, world-to-world communication is impossible; but we exist in the same world.

What about the differences? The one world, does it make everyone the same? To the contrary, world is the unity, “a series of identities and differences.” “The world is transcendentally the same because the beings in this world are different.”² But doesn’t the transcendental reduce differences to the identity? Surely what the current world imposes under the name “integration” is a call to wipe out all the differences. Badiou’s one world, on the other hand is gathered around the Nietzschean maxim: “become what you are.” It is neither ‘let’s keep our differences’ nor ‘let’s be the same.’ A worker of Moroccan origin living in Paris must neither be forced to be a Parisian nor remain a Moroccan, the becoming of his identity is what he is: “a Moroccan worker in Paris.” Thus an identity is always “a dialectical play of a movement of creation and a movement of purification.” While keeping

¹ ———, “The Communist Hypothesis,” *New Left Review*, no. 49 (2008): 39. He wrote that his is why it is possible to communicate with “the people of foreign origin who live amongst us.” One can be critical of this statement because its definition of “us” already excludes the worker of foreign origin. If there is one world “us” should include her/him as well. On the other hand a generous reading can suggest that the readership of the book unfortunately does not include the foreign worker and Badiou is trying to convince the “white” French readers to the idea of a dialogue with her/him. In either case, this is not the best sentence Badiou wrote. ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 60-61.

² ———, *Logics of Worlds*, 62-63.

different identities, the assertion of “one world” allows politics, or the “operator for the consolidation of what is universal in identities.”¹

If communism in the first place is about being together, its imagination today must also admit one thing: “There is no longer a ‘we’, there hasn’t been for a long time.”² So the task is first to create the “we,” to create Celan’s “together.” There is something rather odd about this communism in the first place: it is an axiomatic communism.³ This communism owes more to young Marx than to the mature one. It is in the spirit of the young, rather than the mature Marx that Badiou declares that “communist state” is an oxymoron and that communism is an idea about the destiny of human species. Badiou further posits communism as an idea in Kantian sense: a regulative function, not a programme.⁴ Here one should go together with Žižek beyond Badiou and Kant, toward Hegel: communism is an idea which is a force “in the process of its own actualization.”⁵ In Badiou’s language this means that communism is a truth, not an objective to be achieved. In a recent newspaper article Badiou puts forward the three axioms of Communist hypothesis: First, it is the egalitarian idea; it is the realization of the property of the immanent equality of human

¹ Ibid., 65-66.

² ———, *Infinite Thought*, 95.

³ It is argued that Badiou defends a communism strangely without Marxism and even more strangely without a proper class analysis. See: Bruno Bosteels, “The Speculative Left,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 4 (2005).

⁴ Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 98-99.

⁵ “This Kantian mode of reference effectively allows us to characterize Badiou’s deployment of the ‘communist hypothesis’ as a *Kritik der reinen Kommunismus*. As such, it invites us to repeat the passage from Kant to Hegel—to re-conceive the Idea of communism as an Idea in the Hegelian sense, that is, as an Idea which is in the process of its own actualization. The Idea that ‘makes itself what it is’ is thus no longer a concept opposed to reality as its lifeless shadow, but one which gives reality and existence to itself.” Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), 473-74.

nature. Second, it conceives today that the emancipatory politics can be pursued outside the State. Finally, it declares that the organization of labor does not imply its division, specialization of tasks especially the oppressive separation of intellectual and manual labor. Communism is the affirmation of the polymorphous human labor.¹

Communist hypothesis is a timeless idea that can be traced back to various events in the human history. But Badiou's sequential history traces today's possibility to two events. The first sequence of communist hypothesis was the Paris Commune. It was the first attempt in working-class leadership and armed insurrection. It showed the triumph of the exercise of a new type of power, and the strength of the international solidarity, but it also showed its limits by not being able to extend to the national scope. This limit was the central thought of the second sequence: the question of enduring victorious revolution. How to protect the new power in the form of a state against the attack of its enemies? The ideas about the party and its iron discipline were produced in this context. Yet this obsession led to the internal corruption of the movement, while trying to protect the communist state the communists forgot why they wanted communism in the first place.² Badiou, the admirer of 20th century claims: the century was great but it is over.

This is why we need to return to Marx, to theory and this is a good thing. We are not close to Lenin: there is no victory in sight but also this gives a chance to think about

¹ Alain Badiou, "Le Courage Du Présent," *Le Monde*, 13 February 2010. Incidentally, these lines are almost the only ones Badiou specifically addresses to the issues concerning labour.

² ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 106-08.

why do we want and what do we want from communism. Žižek, in reference to the last line of *Theory of Novel*, states that when the voyage of a particular sequence of communism is over, the travel begins. The travel does not start from where the previous effort had stopped it always starts from the beginning.¹

So the question is how to build the narrative of communism today? The present situation's problem is neither a popular movement to carry the new hypothesis, nor the victory. While it cannot be adequately described yet, it is possible to say that, "it involves a new relationship between the real political movement and ideology;" it requires a "revolutionizing of minds."² This revolution can neither be carried by the "formless, or multi-form, popular movement inspired by the intelligence of the multitude—as Negri and the alter-globalists believe—nor the renewed and democratized mass communist party, as some of the Trotskyists and Maoists hope."³

After the declaration in 19th century and the attempts of realization in the 20th, Badiou claims, this is the beginning of the third era of the communist hypothesis. It begins by "combining intellectual constructs, which are always global and universal, with experiments of fragments of truths, which are local and singular, yet universally

¹ Žižek, "How to Begin from the Beginning." While Badiou who admits that there can be no absolutely new beginning is not as radical as Žižek, he certainly follows the re-commencement idea. Alain Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation: An Interview by Bruno Bosteels," *Angelaki* 8, no. 2 (2003): 117.

² ———, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 113.

³ ———, "The Communist Hypothesis," 37.

transmittable.” The task of the present is thus to inscribe the Idea of communism, in individual consciousnesses: communism is possible, then it must.¹

Badiou writes that 20th century acted to fulfill the promises of the 19th. It knew that the history was not to be trusted to bring progress; it had to master it politically. What the 19th century “announced, dreamed and promised”, 20th century wanted to make it “here and now.” This “passion for the real,” the obsession with victory paradoxically turned the 20th century into the opposite of the 19th, a century of barbarism.² One can say that the relation of 20th and 19th centuries is summarized but by the title of Goya’s famous etching: *the dream of reason creates monsters*. One can further add to Badiou’s analysis that the final decades of the 20th century became so afraid of monsters that it forgot to dream. What Badiou and this thesis say has to be understood as a call: let’s re-start dreaming!

¹ ———, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 260.

² ———, *The Century*, 15, 19, 32, 38.

Chapter Seven: Afterword – Instead of Conclusion

As the last lines are written on this dissertation the world is being shaken up in its foundations. The revolutions that have changed the fate of the Arab world are continuing, but the events took a sharp turn where states, international diplomacy and war are slowly replacing the insurrectional mood. The events continue in Europe as well, the mass demonstrations appear almost in every country, in Greece and in Spain the movement of the “indignants” is occupying city centers and is asking for change.¹ The streets of London are on fire with the outrage of the dispossessed, hopeless and excluded youth. And lastly the occupiers made their appearance in the United States, starting with the Wall Street. So is a revolution making itself heard? The answer is unfortunately no.

While the 18th and 19th century ideals were enough against the dictators of the Arab countries, the regimes of the democratic west prove to be much more resistant against the rebels. The Spanish politicians can easily call the indignants to stop protesting in the name of the democracy: these occupants must learn to respect the Spanish majority that elected a government, who are they to question holy “capitulo-parliamentarism!” The media can report on what is happening, or report that the citizens are angry against these people

¹ The movements are named after Hessel’s best selling pamphlet, *indignez-vous!* The word indignat also calls for “dignity” in it, so what is at stake in the book and in the movement is not just a mere outrage as its English translation suggests but it is an outrage against the daily violation of human dignities. Stéphane Hessel, *Time for Outrage!*, trans. Damion Searls and Alba Arrikha (London: Quartet Books, 2011).

invading the public squares causing issues of health and making life difficult for them; the news can thus be pushed to the back pages and be left to the oblivion.

Is it because the democratic governments are too strong that these movements are failing to create a radical event? Together with Badiou, this thesis has argued that movements do not fail because of their enemy, but because of their intellectual limits. And yes, we have intellectual limits, our age is yet to come with a narrative of its own and it thus failed to create the dream of a future world to come. Take the indignants in Spain, what the movement wants is clear: the entirety of the political system is corrupt, a wholesale cleansing is necessary. There is nothing wrong with this demand; especially given the political elite of the present, one can but agree with it. On the other hand, will the indignants agree on the cuts in public spending if the politicians also cut their high salaries? Will the demolition of welfare state be more acceptable if the “political class” gives up its easy and greasy retirement plan? But there is more to that: one can remember that Nazis had also made the corruption of the political system as a centerpiece of their propaganda. This doesn't mean to say that Nazis and the young rebels are equivalents but to underline one thing: without a positive vision of a future world, protest and resistance are not values in themselves. The same, even worse can be said about the “riots” in England that started in August 6, 2011. One can say that these events are reactions against the rampant racism in Europe; one can talk about the budget cuts and how they affect the youth in poverty; one can talk about the demolition of welfare state and its social consequences; one can talk

about the educational system which is failing the kids from poor neighborhoods... one can talk and talk. But there is one thing that is certain all these explanations come from outside of the streets, from the distant observers who reflect on what is happening. The British youth rebelling is as silent as the French *banlieus* during the 2005 events. In both cases, we have people whose lives have pushed them so much to the limit that they are falling victim to blind violence and end up burning their own neighborhood. But there is no word for the anger of these guys, they do not say and they do not seem to know what they want; forget about a vision for the world to come, they do not even make a simple basic demand for themselves. A similar thing can also be said about the Occupy Wall Street protesters in the United States. All the protesters around the globe say the same thing: we are outraged! But not a single word more.

Here I am not defending the same thing with former U.S. President Bill Clinton who argued that the protesters must make specific demands that can be solved within the political system. Against this claim, Žižek is right to protest against this easy translation of the energy of the movement to pragmatic demands and he is right to point out to the fact that these protests do not stem from grievances about a specific policy that can be solved by the specialists and experts but do bring the entirety of the system into the question. On the other hand he falls into the revolutionary romanticism in his praise about the silence of the crowds. He easily equates silence with the rejection of a dialogue and the proof for more

radical demands for change.¹ Here he sounds strangely close to Hardt and Negri who celebrate these global protests as the actions of “multitude form,”² although otherwise he is a strong critique of Hardt and Negri’s concept. But other than the concrete demands from the politicians, there is one thing that the protesters are silent about: their demand for radical change. How can one know that what the protesters want is about the entirety of the system; and what do we mean by the system in its totality today? Do Žižek or others ascribe what they want to see to the protest, we do not know. What we know is that we can only agree the basic thing that angers us; one step beyond it is the silence. We can agree about how unchecked financial corporations are disastrous for the 99% of the people but the explanations of what causes the disaster vary: on the one hand, one can merely blame the ethical failures of those who run these corporations and on the other one can argue that the crisis is a mere manifestation of what is inherent in capitalism and the particular type of parliamentary democracy that accompanies it; or one can choose a position in between.

There is a moment where the variation among the opinions and positions is great; unfortunately that moment is not today: the variation in these positions and the demands associated with these positions is not a source of strength but a source of weakness. One does not need to be a great genius to know that these “rebellions” with no demands will be easily suppressed. But in the end, even the most successful rebellions can be suppressed,

¹ Slavoj Žižek, "Occupy First. Demands Come Later," *The Guardian*, 26 October 2011.

² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "The Fight for 'Real Democracy' at the Heart of Occupy Wall Street: The Encampment in Lower Manhattan Speaks to a Failure of Representation " <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136399/michael-hardt-and-antonio-negri/the-fight-for-real-democracy-at-the-heart-of-occupy-wall-street?page=show>.

what distinguishes a successful rebellion from what happens today is that when an “event” happens, the world cannot continue in its usual course. The rebellions of today are causing merely a minute disturbance in the course of the neoliberal politics because they are incapable of imagining a world that is outside the limits of the present. We lack a narrative for our present: today, more than ever! How can this narrative be formed? This thesis stated the urgency of this need, but did not merely hint how it can be constructed as a subjective account with objective consequences.

How this narrative can be thought requires further discussions, further studies, and further collective work. However one thing can be said about this narrative: What post-modernism gave us, even in its most radicalized version with Hardt and Negri, is a celebration of the multiplicities and differences. However, with Badiou we have seen that multiplicity and difference are in fact basic components of the status quo in our societies. Even when these differences and identities rebel against the unjust order; without turning an “us” and calling upon others to the collective formation of a new story, they will fail in changing the order in its entirety. They may further their interest within it, but they will not be able to redefine the terms of the order of being in the world. The narrative of our time must turn the undifferentiated multiplicity of ordinary times into a “we.” While previous ages could refer to the “One” as their organizing paradigm and as the ideal of togetherness, our age cannot opt for a “we” that has “I” as its model unless I is redefined as “two thousand men.” In other words, “we” of our age cannot be thought as a consistent subject, it

cannot be hostile to differences, cannot aim unity. Communism of today cannot be the *comme-une* (as-one) unless the “one” is redefined. We must find a narrative where the difference is not suppressed within the collective, yet without turning it to a hodge-podge of identities, languages, bodies and ideas.

Here I would like to repeat, albeit in a brief fashion academic contributions I have aimed to offer with this dissertation. First, I claimed that the two visions of totality, mediated-expressive totality and the unbounded whole should not be considered as binary opposites but as determinate negations. I called “narrative totality” the process in which the subjectless, goalless flux of the unbounded whole is enframed by the revolutionary moment. Narration thus allows the emergence of subjects and provides goals to be ascribed to history: it is the ground of a new definition; the ground of creation of what is to be understood by freedom, by equality, by rights, and by other universal values.

To this effect, I juxtaposed two periods of Lukács as examples of two dialectically related visions of totality and deployed his concept of narrative as a link between these periods. The contrast between periods also allowed me to rethink his writings on political party, classes, state, law... etc. In this way, I tried to rethink Lukács’ political mistakes but more importantly I tried to emphasize passages in his work which constitute a very different Lukács. I tried to learn from this new Lukács, about the idea of political projects that may emanate from the vision of narrative totality. For me, the most important lesson

was on what I called polymorphic party as an experiment in the recognition, creation and teaching of the unexpected “new” of history.

The two intermediate sections of this dissertation were about the idea of finitude and its consequences. I did show how the claim of finitude, if accepted, makes it impossible for humans to access to universals; how it prohibits the formation of a point of totality. I did argue that this vision, which became dominant toward the end of the 20th century (although in a form that Heidegger who introduced this vision would find deplorable) can only imagine worlds of existence stuck in their culturally determined finitude; worlds that cannot relate to each other in a collective political project.

For me the problem with this vision is not that it divides the totality of life into realms of existence that do not combine into a totality. The problem here is that it doesn't divide it enough. For instance Althusser denies that the Whole has its distinct temporality; there is rather a distinct temporality of art, a distinct temporality of science... etc. But take the temporality of art; in a close analysis one will see that different art forms have their own temporalities. But why stay at this level? Individual works of art have their own distinct temporalities as well. Even individual art works can create spaces for different temporalities to coexist. This is what Lukács meant when he was talking about complexes as composed of complexes. These complexes do not divide until One is found, they divide endlessly. However, on the basis of this infinite fragmentation, we can find the temporality of a given work of art; of a given form of art; of art; of science; of production; of the social

whole in a given moment; of social whole in its historic movement. Of course this reconstitution on the basis of infinite fragmentation denotes only dialectical tendencies; it does not provide the formula for history. Moreover, its method cannot be that of peeling off the “inessential” until one discovers the kernel: rather the method should be narration. But from whose perspective that the narration is told?

The answer to this question brought me to Badiou who made explicit what was the implicit assumption of Lukács’s revolutionary subject: subject is the one that has no place to be. The revolutionary subject cannot appear unless the rules of the world are redefined. Its emergence turns the impossible into a concrete possibility: it does not realize a possibility, it creates it. The creation of possibilities takes place in the narration. Although Badiou would agree with the idea of fiction, I maintain a distance from him because I believe that this narrative is only possible with the emergence of the standpoint of totality. Based on this disagreement one can ask a final question: how to define the narrative totality to come?

This question cannot be completely answered at this moment: the narrative is a collective creation, and will reveal itself to those taking part in its creation. At this point I can only end by reciting three elements that this thesis has asserted as its contribution for the narrative of totality: This narrative must present itself as the answer to the riddle of history. We know today that whatever comes next will not be the Answer, there is no Answer. We even know that the event where this narrative will come alive will be

ephemeral. It will either be suppressed or will have its own Thermidor. But nonetheless we must strive toward it for it is this event that will give the momentum for the history to move further. Secondly, the point of view of totality or the truth of the void is not always available. During the reign of status quo where politics is nothing but power brokerage among recognized subjects, it is not even desirable. It can rather be detrimental for the coalitions among the oppressed because it tends to introduce a division within the various groups that might be fighting for similar causes. Having said this, we can come to the third point: when a new social subject comes alive in the scene of the history, when the existing balance is to be broken to make room for the new; for the unexpected; for that which is not counted among the existents; this is when we desperately need the point of view of totality. Without it, the new will be unrecognizable as the new; the universal declared by this subject will not be heard as a universal truth. It is precisely the point of view of totality that will allow this truth to appear as universal: it will declare that a new concrete -impossible way of being together is indeed possible. Critiques of universalism may be right; the universal may be very well an illusion that hides the particular. But this criticism is shortsighted because it fails to see that each particular has also the universal in it. What is thus needed for our time is not an equivalence of opinions, it is not a renewed realpolitik, it is not a new strategy for hegemony, not at all games of language; what we need to work toward is to bring the universal to life: the universal that resides in our particular existence.

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