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„R3 – Political Bodies between Re-Petition, Re-Signation, and Re-Signification“

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*For You*

*Let's face it. We're  
undone by each other.  
And if we're not, we're  
missing something.*

*(Judith Butler, Precarious Life)*

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis is dedicated *to you*. That does not mean it was designed for a specific person, a special reader to whom this shall be given as a present. My decision to dedicate this to an anonymous and at the same time all-too-close *you* ('all-too-close' because this *you* is addressed to each and every reader opening this book in the same way) is determined by the fact that it is the very status of this *you* that serves as the point of interrogation for the following inquiry into the possibilities and limits of what I will call the *communal body of a political collective*.

To claim that there is a *you* at stake when talking about questions of political collectives – which could also be called *political bodies* or rather *a political body* –, subjective intervention, and the fundamental conditions at the center of any socio-symbolic community is to say that the questions I will be dealing with revolve around the notion of the *Other*. These questions not only interrogate the role played by the *Other* (with a capital *O*) in the inauguration of any *I* (any autonomous subject), but also – and perhaps more decisively – the role played by the small *other*, our *Nebenmensch*, in the construction of any sense of community. Therefore, the term 'body' in the title should be understood in its twofold meaning – as the body of a community, a state, as composed of a multiplicity of individuals, an envelope which provides shelter for our being, i.e. a certain form of community, *as well as* our individual bodies, perceived as autonomous units acting (seemingly) freely within this larger body of the community.

As we shall see, the notion of the body – and the many ways of saying 'body' – will thus serve as the very hinge for the following attempt, the hard kernel around which everything else vibrates and achieves consistency. But in order to come to terms with this concept, another signifier will – of necessity – require introduction– that is, the notion

of the subject and the process of subjectivation. Before dealing with the neighbor in her bodily presence and the implications of this presence for forms of political intervention I will, in a first step, examine the ontological status of subjectivity and subjectivation in order to both determine the contours of the subject in the process of political intervention (i.e. in the steady labor of re-petition, re-signation, and re-signification), and extricate the relation between the notion of the subject and that of the body, a relation that calls for a distinction between – as Alain Badiou names it in his latest book – *being* and *appearing*.<sup>1</sup>

After a general introduction to the topic which sets the parameters for my understanding of subjectivity and its relation to the symbolic system (i.e. as a system subjected to the interplay between metonymy and metaphor as has been delineated by Jacques Lacan) the second part of my thesis will encompass three different approaches towards a practical understanding of the implications drawn from my first inquiry.

*Chapter 3* will build on the theoretical inquiries into the constitution of the subject carried out in the first part (*Chapter 2.1.* and *2.2.*), while providing for different readings of subjectivity as found in Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida in order to come up with a notion of subjectivity which is able to grasp the subject in both her functions – as one of breach as well as continuity (‘one signifier for another’).

*Chapter 4* will examine the insights gained from the previous chapters and will make use of them to better understand the role of the *work of art* in the process of political intervention. In this respect, the *art-work* shall be conceived of as the materialization of a certain form of

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<sup>1</sup> Badiou, Alain: *Logics of Worlds*. London, New York: Continuum 2009.

constitutive negativity, as a mode of thinking rather than an aesthetic practice.

The final chapter, *Chapter 5*, will examine the role the body plays in the inauguration of a (political) community. How, I ask, do bodies appear? In what way can we speak of our body as an autonomous unit over which we have full command? And how can we account for those whose bodies seem to not be re-presented within the political space of the ‘state of a situation?’

In other, i.e. Badiou’s, words, the second part will cover three of the four conditions in which *events* (that is to say, fundamental and radical change) can take place. One chapter will follow the discourse of *science* (the explication of the status of the subject within the symbolic system of language), another will concern itself with the importance of *art* in this process, while another will examine the connection between the body and the political sphere (and will, therefore, argue within a *political* discourse) ... yet, there will not be a separate chapter on the notion of love – Badiou’s fourth condition. Such a chapter need not be included because, quite frankly, love is to be located throughout each and every chapter insofar as this work is *for* and *about you*, insofar as it examines what is at stake in any interaction between *one* and the *o/Other*. Such a chapter need not be included because it is love that is what is needed for each event; it is as, Lacan tells us, all that is needed to ‘make the discourse change.’



## 2.1. Performativity – Repetition and the Signifying Chain

As noted above, the main point of interest in this paper – or, to speak in Lacanian terms, its ‘quilting point’ – is the political body of the subject. Here, three different yet related signifiers present themselves as the cause of three fundamental questions at the heart of this enquiry: ‘How does the notion of the ‘subject’ (after “the end of the subject”)) have to be conceptualized (if not to say symbolized)?;’ ‘What is this sphere called the political proper<sup>2</sup>?;’ and finally ‘What relation does the body – in its dual signification as that of the individual body of a singular person as well as the communal body of the political collective – assume relative to this political sphere?’

In pursuing this project my first task will be to raise yet another question which is directly linked to the ones just presented. I begin this chapter by focusing on performativity and the notorious concept of *différance* in their relation to my third question (‘What relation does the body...assume relative to this political sphere?’). I distinguish the ‘individual body of a singular person’ from what I call the ‘communal body of the political collective,’ or the *political body of a community to come*<sup>3</sup>. One question immediately arises: ‘Is this distinction between the individual and the collective, the singleton and the multiple, really as straightforward, as unproblematic as it appears to be when it is wrapped up in a phrase such as ‘the individual body of a singular person as well as the communal body of the political collective’?’ If one were to respond from the pre-critical (or pre-deconstructive), occidental perspective of metaphysics (a tradition

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<sup>2</sup> As opposed to a mere ‘politics of opinion,’ a ‘weak politics,’ or a ‘politics of disasters.’ For more on these concepts see for example recent works by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek: Badiou, Alain: *Conditions*. London, New York: Continuum 2006. Badiou, Alain: *Conditions*. London, New York 2008. Badiou, Alain: *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press 2003. Žižek, Slavoj: *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London, New York: Verso 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *Chapter 5* will explain the approach behind this expression in further detail.

which still seems to be *the* decisive ideological framework for the western tradition) the answer would surely be: ‘Yes, indeed, it’s as simple as that. Here I am ... and there you are. This is a subject ... and that’s an object. Here we are ... and there is the o/Other. This is my writing ... and that’s my speaking. I am thinking ... now I am doing. When I am thinking, I am (me, i.e. a self-determined thinking being) ... I am ... I ... I think ... *cogito ergo sum*<sup>4</sup>.’

That dichotomist pairs such as the ones just parodied are not as unproblematic and pre-given as they might appear has become evident since the linguistic turn, if not sooner.<sup>5</sup> Beside linguists such as Roman Jakobson<sup>6</sup> and Ferdinand de Saussure,<sup>7</sup> one should recall John L. Austin’s lectures on the question ‘How to do things with words?’<sup>8</sup> as having contributed to the breaking down of the false binary pairs of western metaphysics. Austin’s merit was to point towards the impossibility of a clear cut distinction between ‘saying’ and ‘doing,’ between ‘speech’ and ‘acts.’ It happens that we sometimes seem to do something as we say something, that an action is being carried out, that we not only express a statement (represent a content, object, or signified via a sign or signified), but the words themselves put

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Descartes Rene: *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1993.

<sup>5</sup> In this respect, one could argue that the dialectical method already had a ‘deconstructive aura’ to it insofar as it was able to animate the static model of an unproblematic and pre-given dichotomy. Aristotle has already argued that it is not enough to think of the object as a given, pre-existing thing ‘for itself.’ For him, the object (*hypochaimenon*) only comes into existence through the predicative effect of a subject. Cf. Aristotle: *Metaphysics*. Sioux Falls: NuVision Publications 2009. While it is true that Hegel already knew about the significance of the signifier (and its domination over the signified), one could still claim that it was not until Jacques Lacan’s logic of the signifier that this insight was pushed to its extreme. Or, in other words, while Hegel’s dialectic can be thought as a reconciliatory one, Lacan’s dialectic remains a purely negative one, one that never adds up, always producing a (as I will try to delineate in this chapter, following Derrida) constitutive remainder. Cf. Hegel, G.W.F.: *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Werke. Bd.3. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Jakobson, Roman: *Fundamentals of Language*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2002.

<sup>7</sup> De Saussure, Ferdinand: *Course in General Linguistics*. Chicago: Open Court 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Austin, John L.: *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press 1962.

something into action, stage it ... they perform. These 'speech acts' or performatives differ in nature from the other group of utterances, the constatives. While, according to Austin, constatives can still be evaluated in relation to their truth-value (they can be either true/or false ) – the distinction is unproblematic –, this is no longer possible when it comes to the evaluation of speech acts.<sup>9</sup> Another interesting feature of performatives is the double nature of their performances. They not only perform an action, they also play a game of 'as if ...':

“The type of utterance we are to consider here is not, of course, in general a type of nonsense; though misuse of it can, as we shall see, engender rather special varieties of 'nonsense'. Rather, it is one of our second class – the masquerades. But it does not by any means necessarily *masquerade as a statement of fact*, descriptive or constatives. Yet it does quite commonly do so, and that, oddly enough, when it assumes its most explicit form.”<sup>10</sup>  
(my emphasis)

This is where Austin's agenda, which is generally a polemic against the dominant linguistic tradition and analytic philosophy, becomes most clear. There is something in language which cannot be sublated in categories such as true/false, something that is speech (or writing) but that cannot be regarded as a simple re-presentation of reality, something that might look like a constative (or descriptive) statement, but is actually something entirely different trying to fool us by its clever play of masquerade. Now it is our task to look behind the mask and see the fundamental difference which subdivides speech into that which describes and that which does:

“Grammarians have not, I believe, seen through this 'disguise', and philosophers only at best incidentally. It will be convenient, therefore, to study it first in this misleading form, in order to bring out its characteristics by

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.4.

contrasting them with those of the statement of fact which it apes."<sup>11</sup>

And this is what Austin, in the course of his lecture series, then does. He not only distinguishes between constatives and performatives, but subdivides the power of the performative into a 'locutionary' force and an 'illocutionary' force.<sup>12</sup> Here, the significance of the 'o/Other' is already introduced. For locutionary and illocutionary acts can only be distinguished from one another insofar as they are *intended* in different ways by the speaker; in that the speaker (or sender) wants to achieve a different result in the listener (or receiver). Locutionary acts are all those which convey meaning (X tells Y 'I'll be here tomorrow.') whereas X might utter exactly the same sentence at another time and it will be an illocutionary act. He says: 'I'll be here tomorrow,' but what he means is 'Beware, I'll be back,' 'I promise, I'll come back to you,' 'Be scared, I'll be back to crush you.' A sentence such as 'I'll be here tomorrow,' can – when doubled – remain semantically as well as grammatically identical at the same time as each sentence *intends* something quite different – a promise as opposed to a warning for example. The 'something' added to the speech act through the speaker's *intention* is the illocutionary force.

The last category of acts introduced by Austin is the perlocutionary acts. These can be regarded as a follow-up to illocutionary acts. While illocutionary acts focus on the sender and her intention (to utter a promise, warning, or threat), perlocutionary acts are to be situated on the side of the receiver. X says: 'I'll be here tomorrow.'; maybe he intends his utterance to be a threat; and maybe Y takes it as such. This is the perlocutionary force – X utters a sentence, and Y *believes* it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp.91-94.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.91.

Lastly, Austin takes into consideration the possibility that speech acts may also fail, that something might go wrong and prevent the act from being carried out felicitously; the result is thus an infelicity.<sup>14</sup> The receiver might not understand, for example, that there is a warning behind the speech act disguised as a simple constative statement; the sender might incorrectly make use of a convention (and therefore frustrate the understanding of the receiver); or the convention might be correct but might be used in the wrong circumstances ... you get the idea. In his second lecture, Austin tells us that both infelicities and another form of speech acts ('parasitic' uses of language) shall not be considered in his inquiry.<sup>15</sup> The 'parasites' Austin has in mind are quotations, like the utterances delivered by actors on stage:

“[A] performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.”<sup>16</sup>

So, let us briefly sum up these interventions so as to underline their relevance for the further explication of my argument:

(1)The binary pair of either *doing* or *saying* has to be regarded as highly problematic because there seems to exist utterances which no longer describe an object, process or event, but rather turn themselves into an event,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp.14-45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.18.

i.e. through speaking these sentences the speaker is carrying out, is *performing* an act(ion).

(2) These performatives (or speech acts) play a game of *masquerade*. They appear to be 'normal' constative utterances but are fundamentally different in reality. Performatives play two games at the same time: they put something into action at the same time as they act in order to conceal (to *mask*) this fact.

(3) Performatives are dependent on intersubjective relations (on the relation between a sender equipped with illocutionary force and a receiver picking up on a statements' perlocutionary force). A sentence will function as a performative or a constative because of the sender and the receiver.

(4) Quotations are to be considered as parasitic (as they lack proper sender-intention as well as sincerity on the side of the receiver) and thus must not be considered in any further inquiries into this topic. They are *abnormal*, and only the *normal* language uses shall be considered.

Austin warrants mention in any work concerned with performativity and the political body because he is not only— as has been stated before—one of the key figures in what has become to be called the 'linguistic turn,' but is also – and perhaps more importantly - responsible for introducing a notion of the act that is carried out through language – see number (1). Aside from his having introduced the notions of performance and the performative in theoretical inquiries, Austin is here extensively made use of because the establishment of his own work will lay the groundwork for further

reflections which will illustrate the ways in which his ‘turn’ did not go far enough, the ways in which his argument – and polemics – against the rest of the linguistic community and the guild of (analytic) philosophers, remained deeply tied to this very tradition he tried so hard to free himself from. Arguing against too simple an understanding of language, performance and the notion of the act, Austin nevertheless did not manage to free himself – as Jacques Derrida puts it – from “the most tenacious and the most central presuppositions of the *continental* metaphysical”<sup>17</sup> tradition, a tradition built on givenness instead of contingency, of presence as opposed to absence, and on singularity not repeatability (or, in Derrida’s words – *iterability*).

But the distinction between constatives and performatives in Austin is not as straightforward as it might appear at first glance. Derrida took great effort to delineate this in his reading of Austin’s ‘How to do things with words.’ In *Sec (Signature Event Context)*,<sup>18</sup> the first occidental, metaphysical presupposition Derrida points out in Austin’s work is the conviction that to communicate (to speak) is equivalent to transporting “a *meaning*, and moreover a *unified* meaning.”<sup>19</sup> Or, in other words, Derrida turns against the assumption that there are – and here he follows Condillac<sup>20</sup> – only two reasons why we speak<sup>21</sup>: (1) because we have to communicate and (2) because what we have to communicate are our ‘thoughts,’ our ‘ideas,’ the representations or

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<sup>17</sup> Derrida, Jacques: Limited Inc a b c ... . In: Derrida, Jacques: Limited Inc a b c ... . Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1988. p.38.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, Jacques: Signature Event Context. In: Derrida, Jacques: Limited Inc a b c ... . Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Condillac, Etienne Bonnot de: Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2001.

<sup>21</sup> At this point, Condillac is not so much interested in speech but in writing. This is why the two reasons he mentions are put forward as an answer to the question “why men write.” That this clear cut opposition is, however, not as straight forward as it seems, that it is to be regarded as another presuppositions of occidental metaphysics shall be delineated in the course of this chapter.

symbols glued to the objects which form our world. The disavowed presupposition shaping Austin's entire theory is that, despite the fact that there might be exceptions (the speech acts), there exists a fundamental function of language: to "depict [*dessiner*] images of things"<sup>22</sup> in a way that positions the signifier 'over' the signified:



According to this presupposition, the primacy belongs to the object and the signifier re-presents the object as, a word describes a thing-at-hand. In this respect, the object is turned into an unproblematic, pre-given entity which exists already for-itself, which is present and only presented once more (in more abstract, i.e. linguistic) when it is re-presented in language.

Representation = Communication = Expression<sup>23</sup>

It follows that when communicating, we express ourselves by re-presenting the world given around us – signifier over signified. Arbitrarily attached to the signifier, the signified joins the signifier to form a couple in which these two different entities are separated from each other but belong to one another and form a perfectly closed pair:

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<sup>22</sup> Derrida, Jacques: *Sec*, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.



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The teachings of Jacques Lacan (himself following Saussure's model of language), his radical continuation of Freud's *Copernican revolution*, draw, however, a very different picture of this relation and must be regarded as a massive contribution to the re-evaluation (and even deconstruction) of the above mentioned pre-critical metaphysical tradition. In his "return to Freud," Lacan moves beyond the latter by emphasizing the power and primacy of the signifier.<sup>24</sup>

In sharp contrast to Austin, Lacan points out that "language is not to be confused with the various psychical and somatic functions that serve it in the speaking subject."<sup>25</sup> Language is irreducible to its function as a means of communication. Austin's exclusion of 'parasitic' uses of language – quotations, speeches on stage which do not express the sender's intention by representing a piece of reality and which cannot have a perlocutionary effect on the receiver because they do not relate to her 'as a whole person' – might, therefore, have been too hasty. In fact, Derrida argues that it is exactly these 'parasites' which point towards a key fundamental feature in

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<sup>24</sup> Instead of focusing on explanations of a mythical kind (the Ur-Vater as a real, living individual, a proto-biblical figure at the beginning of history proper, the Oedipus complex as the little boy's 'real' desire for his mother, the little girl envying her brother for his 'real' penis etc.), Lacan introduced a highly formalist discourse into psychoanalysis. His focus was centered on functions rather than persons, on language as a system rather than as a means of communication, the introduction of the 'letter' as the inauguration of the subject rather than the referee belonging to an object-referent.

This, however, does not mean that Lacan did not produce his own myths; quite the contrary, but they were nevertheless of a different nature. Bruce Fink gives an account of the Lacanian myth. Cf. Fink, Bruce: *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Theory and Technique*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard Univ. Press 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud*. In: Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company 2006. pp.412-441, here: p.413.

language.<sup>26</sup> For, what Austin failed to acknowledge in his account is that every sign (or, in Lacanese ‘letter’) is *graphematic in general*<sup>27</sup> and thus part of a structure, a text; or, to put it differently – these signs cannot be treated in any form of singularity but have to be seen as links in a “signifying chain.”<sup>28</sup>

Lacan takes great effort to show that “no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification.”<sup>29</sup> For, what Lacan meant when he warned that language cannot be regarded as a simple medium humans make use of in order to express their thoughts, those supposedly unproblematic representations of reality, is that the primary and (quite literally) most vital function of language is to provide us with a *structure*. It is a symbolic system which is not introduced by the subject, but already “exists prior to each subject’s entry into it at a certain moment in his mental development.”<sup>30</sup> The implications of this insight for an understanding of the notion of the subject (as well as the resulting consequences concerning ontological as well as ethical questions) will be dealt with in the following chapters. For now, we shall preserve what – according to this insight – demonstrates that it is not enough to say that the subject is a slave of language; that she has to make use of language in order to represent the world. She is subject to the “signifying chain,” to a discourse which exists prior to her, to a place already inscribed at her birth.<sup>31</sup> This discourse - and here Lacan and Derrida are very much in

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida, Jacques: *Sec*: “‘Ritual’ is not a possible occurrence [*éventualité*], but rather, as iterability, a structural characteristic of every mark.” p.15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>28</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *The Instance of the Letter*, p.418. For Derrida’s account of the notion of writing and trace cf. for example: Derrida, Jacques: *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press 1998.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p.415.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.413.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*. p.414.

agreement - revolves around *nothing*, “for experience takes on its essential dimension in the tradition established by this discourse”.<sup>32</sup>

Let us leave aside questions on the origin and substance of the subject for later inquiries (see *Chapter 2* and *3*) and turn our attention to the links of this chain Lacan and Derrida refer to as the primary motor of human relations. Derrida accuses Austin of missing the central aspect of language by overhastily dismissing “quoted” utterances, *citations*. For, if a performative utterance is to succeed, it has to draw back on an established meaning, or *code*:

“Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a ‘citation’?”<sup>33</sup>

In this respect, the signifying chain constitutes itself by virtue of the possibility of repetition, of iterability, of the performative as such and language in general (in fact there is no language which is not performative or, as Derrida puts it, *graphemic* in its essence). That is to say, only because the unity between the signifier and its referent is broken<sup>34</sup>, only because there is a primordial lack of the *Ding*<sup>35</sup>, can

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. By recognizing ourselves at a distinct place in the symbolic system, the structure of the field of language, we enter structures which “display an ordering of exchanges which, even if unconscious, is inconceivable apart from the permutations authorized by language.” (Ibid.) In other words, entering the symbolic order may be conceived, when speaking with Marx, as the “first historical act”. Cf. Marx, Karl: *The German Ideology*. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>. Lacan’s allusion to historic materialism is, I believe, intended, but he does not go into further details concerning this topic (“I shall neither take sides here nor take this as a point of departure, leaving to their own obscurity the original relations between the signifier and labour.”) – at least not in this essay.

<sup>33</sup> Derrida, Jacques: *Sec*, p.18.

<sup>34</sup> Or ‘barred’ as Lacan calls it – the ‘barre’ being the line separating signifier from signified in the Lacanian diagrams. It is also, as we shall see, what separates the subject from herself (\$).

language as well as the world of things arise. This lack, or “nonpresent remainder [*restance*] of a differential mark cut off from its putative “production” or origin,”<sup>36</sup> is the condition of possibility of any form of “experience”. What had been excluded by Austin as a parasitic exception is in fact the very structure of language as such. Without this force of negativity, change would be impossible, signifier and signified would be glued together in a radically immediate and self-present way and the symbolic system – which is the condition of any form of historicity – would break down. We would live like Nietzsche’s animals, tied to fundamental immediacy.<sup>37</sup>

We do not suffer “death as presence”<sup>38</sup> because we are born under the law of the signifier which deprives us of the *Ding* and thus of presence, puts us into a status of the living dead and brings us to life as the condition of possibility of any form of history or experience. Without our submission under the dead letter there would be no possibility of experience of life as such.<sup>39</sup> This is why Derrida refers to *différance* (the differential play in the writing forth of the chain of signifiers) as the site of the production of an “*economy of death*”<sup>40</sup>. In other words, only through a lack of Being can humans come into being through the labor of the letter. Taking this into consideration, Austin’s distinction between ‘proper’ and ‘*parasitic*’ performatives,

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Lacan, Jacques: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII. London, New York: Routledge 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben. Stuttgart: Reclam 1999.

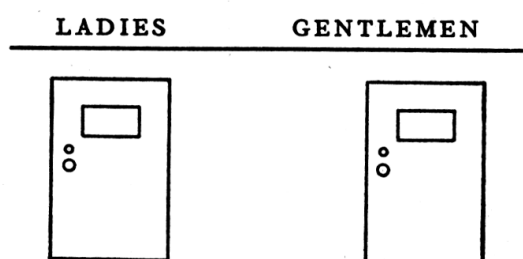
<sup>38</sup> In this respect, Lacan teaches us that „the letter kills while the spirit gives life“ – Lacan: The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, p.508.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the evental nature of the dead letter cf.: Zeillinger, Peter: Das Ereignis als Symptom. Annäherung an einen entscheidenden Horizont des Denkens. In: Zeillinger, Peter and Dominik Portune (ed.): nach Derrida. Dekonstruktion in zeitgenössischen Diskussionen. Wien: Turia+Kant 2006. pp.173-199. Here: 175.

<sup>40</sup> Derrida, Jaques: *Différance*. In: Culler, Jonathan (Ed.): Deconstruction. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Vol.I. London, New York: Routledge 2003. pp.141-166. Here: 142.

between those which are uttered ‘under normal circumstances’ and those which shall not be taken into consideration because they are citations, quoted and repeated expressions, cannot be upheld. Austin draws our attention to the fact that performatives present themselves to us in disguise, but fails to see that the masquerade of language is that it *appears* as a sign of immediacy, of singularity, despite its necessary inability to attain meaning in this singularity. There is no autonomy of one signifier, there is only the differential play of a signifying chain – there is only *différance*.<sup>41</sup>

In order to illustrate this lack of a finite, re-presentable anchor point, Lacan supplements the Saussurian illustration of signifier over signified with the following:



The claim here is not so much to score an easy point by determining that the signified is already preclosed, that the *Ding an sich* can never be grasped as such but only in mediation in and through language. The point is, instead, that the signifier itself enters the signified and thus “raises the question of its place in reality.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, there is no materiality prior to the signifier – the signifier itself is a material fabric, a *grapheme* (Derrida) or *letter* (Lacan). The signified is constantly sliding under the signifier; Derrida’s dictum that “the mark is invalid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only

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<sup>41</sup> The consequences of these insights for the conceptualization of the subject, as well as its implications for political action and intervention, strike deep. They are placed at the center of attention in the second part of this work.

<sup>42</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *Instance of the Letter*, p.417.

contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [*ancrage*]"<sup>43</sup> must be understood in this very precise sense:

## S', S'', S''' .../meaning

This leads Lacan to claim that the signifying function proper can only be understood in its consonance with the laws of metonymy and its *word-to-word* nature. But for meaning to arise a secondary process is needed in order to cause the necessary “poetic spark” for “creation to occur.”<sup>44</sup> We have underscored the way in which the metonymic chain is marked by an irreducible lack (of Being), in which one signifier stands next to another and pushes the other towards filling the lack it supports, a task it can never manage to complete – it can only write itself along, but it cannot create. For creation to happen, for the new to occur, something else is needed. This ‘something else’ is the productive force of metaphor. Metaphor substitutes one signifier for another and is thus able to suture the lack at the same time as it produces something new (a surplus value).<sup>45</sup>

This structural formalization of the performative nature of language must be read as serving – at the same time – as an account of the Freudian notion of the unconscious. This coincidence is due to Lacan’s continuation of the *Copernican revolution* begun by Freud, wherein the insight that there is something which thinks where I am not thinking, is supplemented by the claim that this ‘something’ is structured like a language, thus rendering problematic the pre-given assumption that language is a mere means of communication. The

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<sup>43</sup> Derrida, Jacques: *Sec*, p.12.

<sup>44</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *Instance of the Letter*, p.421-422.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 428-429.

metonymic/metaphoric chain is not something the subject has at hand in order to express her thoughts; this quality of language is the actual birthplace of the subject.

Derrida –and it is at this precise point that we must mark out a different path – dismisses this notion of the subject, for he is more interested in the *graphemic* notion of writing as such and the ways in which the re-production and the re-signation of a statement may produce the new.<sup>46</sup> His focus is on the *text* (the *textum* as a woven fabric of letters, or *graphemes*, which is the garment of our being and experience)<sup>47</sup>, on notions of experience, autonomy (there is no autonomous act in the process of re-signation), and the event, the *à venir*. In Derrida's understanding of the signifier, the signifying chain will always be in process, a constant unfolding of the event which can never be fully realized. In this respect, he is much closer to what might be called a superficial understanding of Lacan's notion of the letter – an understanding that accords with Derrida's own conception. It was only recently that Michel Lewis pointed out that although Derrida often railed against the tri-partition of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real, there is a distinct proximity to Lacan in Derrida's own thinking. And yet, as Lewis points out, there is a fundamental difference which separates these two thinkers. While Lacan introduces three registers of being, Derrida seems to focus most of his attention on only two of them – the symbolic and the real.<sup>48</sup> According to Lewis, Derrida's assumes that in order for the new to unfold (the event to be enacted) we must alter our understanding of the present state of the situation we are thrown into. And this, in a subsequent

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Derrida, Jacques: *The Politics of Friendship*. London, New York: Verso 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Or, as Walter Benjamin calls it, the *textum* out of which history is being woven anew at each moment in time. Cf. Benjamin, Walter: *Zum Bilde Prousts*. In: *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften*. Bd.1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, pp.335-348.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, Michael: *Derrida and Lacan. Another Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press 2008, p.9.

turn, must alter the way in which we then extract ourselves from this very state. In other words, we have to know what we are abstracting ourselves from before we can go ahead and do it.<sup>49</sup> Derrida thus misses the imaginary side of the signifier as it has been accounted for by Lacan and others.<sup>50</sup> This side comprises a writing as trace found at the basis of language and constituting an “indivisible imaginary unity, which amounts to the pre-symbolic real as it is preserved in the symbol”<sup>51</sup>. The emphasis Derrida puts on the Real and the Symbolic aspect of the signifier seems to suggest a greater interest in the metonymical, rather than in the metaphoric, process. In Derrida’s account of performativity, continuity is thus of greater importance than questions of rupture, that radical rearrangement of the given order by the creative spark of metaphor. Following Lacan in this respect, I will argue that a proper understanding of both the ontological and ethical foundation of our being both is needed – a theory of the signifying chain (as an interrelation of metonymic and metaphoric processes), as well as the introduction of the subject into this field as the *vanishing mediator* that sutures Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, or *Being* and *Event*.

What does it mean to say that we must come to terms with the concepts of Being and Event? In order to approach this question – and determine the connections to both Lacan and Derrida that will proceed from this approach – let us turn to another French thinker who distances himself from Lacanian psychoanalysis, while remaining uncannily linked to it. In sharp contrast to Derrida, Alain Badiou places the notion of the subject at the center of his philosophic

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Even in his reading of Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, Derrida seems to be more interested in the dream as a significant trace (as a form of writing and thus of the symbolic) and not in the imaginary closure the symbol represents.

<sup>51</sup> Derrida, Jacques: *Freud and the Scene of Writing*. In: *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1980. 196-231.



inquiries as this which sutures this minimal gap between *Being* and *Event*.

## 2.2. A Subject of Truth

In this investigation into the potentials and limits of what I call the political body of the collective, a body which requires a performative understanding of the political (insofar as it is subject to the performative notions of repetition, resignation, and resignification), questions of subjectivity cannot and shall not be dismissed. Focusing on Lacan's logic of the signifier as the metonymic-metaphoric writing forth of a 'meaningful trace' (a trace which is itself the condition of possibility of any form of meaning to arise), we saw that, in his re-reading of Austin's notion of the performative, Derrida seems to give high priority to the materiality of this signifying chain as trace – a priority that marks a distance from the metaphoric process of quilting delineated by Lacan. This overemphasis of the metonymic chain over the radical unity of metaphorical quilting leads Derrida to several assumptions which might be (and in this inquiry shall be) regarded as problematic. The first, as has already been mentioned, is that the notion of the subject is no longer necessary for Derrida. Quite the contrary – it is regarded as a form of *false consciousness*, a delusion of unity, of a *One* which sublates the lives of individuals within a realized community. For Derrida, this *One* does not exist. But – and this is also where he not only breaks with Lacan, but also positions himself in sharp contrast to the Badiouian theory of *b/Being* – this subject is also not seen as a necessary impossibility – a *supposed Other* who retroactively will always have been. The Derridian emphasis on the metonymic process of writing seems to imply (at least to me) the utopian belief that a writing without a radical intervention, without the production of a unified *One*, could be possible – a free play of *différance* where each speech act holds the potential to fundamentally change the state of the situation ('there are only contexts without anchor'), where each speech act is a possible *event*, all we have to do is to *act* upon it. For Derrida, the *event* can be

first of all grasped as an irritation, something like an anamorphic stain which interrupts the steady and seamless flow of the signifying chain. Its performative character results from a staging of attempts of ontological filling of *différance* as a place holder, a re-signification (i.e. the production of new meaning) through the re-signation (i.e. the transformation of the signifiers' meaning under the labor of re-inscribing its constitutive *différance* within it). In this way, the *event* urges us to put it into action (to introduce it into the scene). And because the *event* manages to speak to us/speak us as *différance*, it not only *has to be read* as an *evental experience*, but – as an evental experience – *cannot not be understood* as such, as it interrupts the innocent slumber of the *status quo*.<sup>52</sup>

But the following question presents itself: is the *event* – as conceived by Derrida – ‘strong enough’ to liberate us from the chains of the state of the situation, from the tyranny of the dead letter under which we have come into being in the form of half being, as the collective body of the living dead. That is to say, is the *event* – as it is understood by Derrida – in a position to radically transform this situation; or, in Lacanese, is this *event* in any way related to the psychoanalytic act of traversing the fantasy, whereby the individuals' entire economy of desire is reconfigured; or does this understanding (of Derrida's) run the risk of remaining within the law's immanent excess in the form of an irritation, of a carnevalesque reversal of values, as the constitutive other (the unconscious in the form of irritating yet pleasurable symptoms, never to be transformed into *sinthomes*)?<sup>53</sup> Instead of theorizing an *event* that would function as a form of radical intervention and rupture, Derrida relies on an idea of the *evental act* as a continuous play of *perhaps* and *promise* (a *Ver-sprechen*, the

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<sup>52</sup> For an account of the symptomatic character of Derrida's *event* see Zeillinger, p.180.

<sup>53</sup> For more on Lacan's notion of the *sinthome* see: Lacan, Jacques: *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre 23. Le sinthome*. Paris: Seuil 2005.

form of differential speech that has been illustrated above), a steady *à venir* of justice to come.<sup>54</sup>

But isn't this assumption uncannily close to the postmodern tales told to us by people like Habermas or Rorty, in which we are told to hold onto a strict 'no no' to terrorism and a 'yes, yes' to promise, to a form of speech that will find the 'right idiom' and the 'right setting' so that everyone will have the chance to subversively transform the cultural signs of society and produce a realized utopia, a juster place,<sup>55</sup> a resignative 'anything goes but nothing ever comes'? Even more so, the excessive (or subversive) disruption of the (symbolic) law's barriers often only leads to this barriers' becoming even more rigid. Metonymical acts of 'one-word-for-another' are very much in the position to change the law within a given order, but they cannot touch the conditions formative for the existence of that very law, they cannot change the coordinates for *being as such*.

For this to happen, a different understanding of the *event* is needed, an event which is not, in fact, separable from the *act* through which it is carried out. This act is precisely the act of naming as such, of giving a name to what, from the standpoint of the situation, is not only unlikely

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Derrida, Jacques: Politics of Friendship.

<sup>55</sup> Gary E. Aylesworth seems to argue in favor of such an understanding of society and change. "Die Immanenz des Politischen in der performativen Geste der Sprache ist statt dessen eine Frage des Idioms und des Rahmens. Wir versuchen, die Singularität unserer Zeit im Sinne einer ursprünglichen Sozialität darzulegen, aber was ist der Rahmen und was das Idiom? Ist nicht das Gesetz der Sozialität, der demokratischen Sozialität, gerade das Gesetz der Unentscheidbarkeit zwischen diesen aporetischen Alternationen? Bedeutet diese Unentscheidbarkeit nicht ein „Nein“ zum Terror und ein „Jaja“ zum Versprechen?" Aylesworth, Gary E.: Der Terror und das Versprechen. Žižek und Derrida vor dem Gesetz. In: Vogt, Erik M. and Hugh J. Silverman (ed.): Über Žižek. Perspektiven und Kritiken. Vienna: Turia+Kant 2004 pp.57-73. Here: 73.

It is true that, speaking from the state of the situation, the *event* is undecidable – but even more so, from the side of the law (the primacy of an established master signifier) the *event* will always and necessarily appear as a form of crime or terror (as it strikes where it hurts most – at the law's roots, that what conditions it, as such). For this as well as the political implications that arise from such an understanding of the notion of the event cf. *Chapter 5*.

but appears as an impossibility, an evental naming in whose aftermath this naming will appear to have always been not only possible but absolutely indispensable.<sup>56</sup> This happens when the metonymic chain of ‘one-to-another’ is sutured by the force of metaphoric intervention of “one-for-another.”

This radical intervention as a fundamental re-structuring of the system’s coordinates has been given no greater importance than in the work of Alain Badiou. For Badiou, the *event* is no longer separable from the *act* of naming it. And it is this revolutionary intervention of a breach with the symbolic system, the ‘state of the situation,’<sup>57</sup> which requires the notion of a subject. For, in contrast to Derrida’s belief that there are ‘only contexts without anchoring,’ Badiou asserts (with Lacan) that any given order has to be structured around a formative absence, something which belongs to the state of the situation but (within this situation) is not counted (or does not count). It is a “supernumary”<sup>58</sup> element which is represented but somehow not present in the situation. Derrida is, of course, correct to posit the event’s unpredictability, but accounts for this undecideability in a wholly inadequate way; it is not unpredictable because ‘it might or might not happen,’ but because it is simply not thinkable within the *status quo*. It is, instead, that which is excluded from the rule of thought but gives rise to the very possibility of thought, to the emergence of reason as such. It is only retroactively, only in the aftermath of the *event*, that it will always have been an event.

While Badiou – and in this respect he is actually quite close the Derridian concept of negativity *qua différance* – claims that the *event* is a nothing, a simple inexistence prior to the act of naming, a

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<sup>56</sup> This is due to the process of retroactivity.

<sup>57</sup> The expression ‘state of the situation’ always refers to both – to a certain structural position as well as to the legal state.

<sup>58</sup> Badiou, Alain: *Being and Event*. London, New York: Continuum 2005, p.173.

fundamental anchor of reality's constitutive negativity (this *différance*) as a constitutive absence, he does not accept the Derridian dictum of the necessity of an openness towards the *event* (which might then hit us from time to time ... or it might not, we cannot tell). While the event (in Badiou) is not graspable as such, there is something related to it and which can be logically deduced from the state of a situation. Badiou calls this the “evental site”. This evental site is, as Peter Hallward points out, “an element of a situation that, as inspected from a perspective within the situation, has no recognizable elements or qualities of its own (no elements in common with the situation).<sup>59</sup> These elements belong to the given state of the situation only through their non-belonging. They are re-presented as a group but lack all individualizing properties. For the group, they function as the (imagined or imaginary)<sup>60</sup> o/Other, the one belonging in not-belonging that renders it possible for the other elements of the situation to position themselves as the (positively given) *One* against an (imagined, or supposed) *Other*. Linking this back to Lacanian terminology, it becomes clear that the *site of the event* can be related to the notion of the symptom. As is the case with the site of the event, the symptom too represents something which clearly belongs to the individual but always remains uncannily foreign to her. It is the manifestation of a discourse which resists submission under the rule of thought – the unconscious. It is the embodiment of a constitutive emptiness, the remainder of an absence of and distance towards Being which is the condition of possibility for being (as individuality) to arise. In this sense, Badiou inserts – between the state of the situation (the *symbolic* order) and the differential mark which renders visible the impossibility and incompleteness of such an order (i.e. *différance*

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<sup>59</sup> Hallward, Peter: Badiou. A Subject to Truth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2003, p.118.

<sup>60</sup> The register of re-presentation is the imaginary. It is the register where the other (and also the individual for herself) *appears* as a unity.

as the *real* of discourse) – a third term in form of the *evental site*, i.e. the symptomal, re-presentation of the impossibility of the unity of this state of the situation, a state necessarily barred.<sup>61</sup> The symptomal element that the evental site itself represents is thus the very foundation of the state of the situation where it is not presented:<sup>62</sup> “there is nothing in or ‘beneath’ such an element that might tie it to the rest of the situation, no trail of belongings or roots that might determine its proper place in the situation.”<sup>63</sup> It is embodied *différance*.

Like Derrida’s theory, Badiou’s interventions focus on the fundamental question of how it is possible to think the inauguration of the new as something which is implicitly given/known within this situation and not coming from somewhere else (from a place ‘outside’ of the given order – for both are well aware that outside the law of the symbolic there is only death as presence waiting for us). Derrida’s merit is to have delineated that this ‘*Other*’ is itself present in the signifier; it is, in fact, the constituting element which bars any signifier, thus making it subject to iterability and, as such, an element within the metonymic chain of meaning. In addition to this, Badiou points out that this differential mark is a very visible one re-presented through the ‘othering’ of certain elements within a community.

These elements, the *evental site* – and this is why Badiou’s intervention cannot be overestimated – are also the place for the production of *truth*. What is it that can be known of a truth? Let us, for now, follow Badiou’s explications of this term; afterwards, we will return to Lacan and his notion of *truth* as something, that – like the

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<sup>61</sup> Thus it becomes clear that while Derrida focuses on two sides of the signifier (its real and its symbolic side), Badiou relies on what has been described by Lacan as the signifier’s three sides (real, symbolic, and imaginary).

<sup>62</sup> Again, in Lacanian terms: the symptom is that around which the subject’s desire is arranged.

<sup>63</sup> Hallward, Peter: Badiou, p.120.

subject (the relation is by no means arbitrary) – can never fully exist, that functions in the form of being “said by halves”<sup>64</sup>. For Badiou, truths exist and are embodied by the *site of the event*, that supernumary element in the form of an Umbilical (i.e. symptomal) knot. But what is needed for change to be realized – for the potentiality sublated in this element to be actualized in the form of a new law is – here we are – a *subject*. A subject which does not exist prior to her involvement in constructing a truth “*from the void*”<sup>65</sup> as is being re-presented in the supernumary element. The intervention of an individual who subtracts herself from the given state of the situation by affirming the truth value of the symptomal knot (the evental site) of the situation’s constitution, this ‘fidelity’ to the disavowed cause of desire is what Badiou refers to as a “truth procedure”<sup>66</sup>. It is a process in which the subject subjects herself to a new cause which is being affirmed as ‘what really counts,’ this one thing (the evental elements) that ‘really matters.’

For Badiou, the notion of the subject is equivalent to the signifier of breach. Subjectivity arises through the *fidelity* to the event, through the affirmation of what is *of the situation* but does not have a part (a share) *in that very situation*. To illustrate this point, Badiou repeatedly calls to mind two major events in western history: the Paul-event and the French Revolution.<sup>67</sup> The founding gesture of Paulinian Christianity is the affirmation of a radically new law erupting under the fundamental singularity of a personal experience that, at the same time, bears the potential of giving body to the (disavowed) void within the situation from which it takes its leave. This (Paulinian) law must not be regarded as an amendment to the existing one, a gradual

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<sup>64</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company 2007, p.36.

<sup>65</sup> Hallward, Peter: Badiou, p.122.

<sup>66</sup> As Badiou repeatedly calls this state.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Badiou, Alain: *Paulus*.



improvement of the latter; it is, instead, the absolute reconfiguration of all the elements present in this situation. Paul addresses this void through his dictum “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female,”<sup>68</sup> thus inscribing the immanent exclusion into the order of being again (and, by this, transforming the conditions of being itself).

The act of naming, giving a name to this exclusion, to the body of the living dead is the *event* proper (the rise of a new *truth*), as well as it has to be regarded as the birth of the subject. Or rather, the paradox involved in this conceptualization is that in order to name this event, a subject (of speech) will be needed to carry out this operation, yet this very subject is what is only constituted *après-coup*, through the act of naming. We are thus dealing here with a form of founding retroactivity, of the event *as well as* the subject (two categories which are, as we shall see, not separable from each other). The subject is ‘interpellated’ by the Other (as void), which is the cause for her inauguration as a subject. In this respect, the notion of ‘interpellation’ is by no means a random one, and it is Slavoj Žižek’s virtue for having pointed out the underlying relation between Badiou’s *event of truth* and Louis Althusser’s notion of ‘ideological interpellation.’ Badiou’s strict opposition of knowledge (the positive knowledge *within* the order of being, or, positivism proper) and truth (as being of the order of the void and thus to be situated in the register of *Being*, with capital *B*) seems uncannily close to Althusser’s dichotomy of science and ideology.<sup>69</sup> Yet, there is a fundamental difference within the conceptualization of subjectivity at the heart of the two thinkers’ accounts. While Althusser locates subjectivity *within* the state of the

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<sup>68</sup> Gal. 3.28 In: Badiou, Alain: Paulus p.9.

<sup>69</sup> For more on this see Slavoj Žižek’s chapter on the ‘Truth-Event’ in: Žižek, Slavoj: *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London, New York: Verso, pp.129-141.

situation (within the rule of the Other), the Badiouian subject is the very *breach with* this situation.

Badiou's claim that *events*, like subjects, are rare need not, therefore, to puzzle us. A subject is she (the 'militant,' as Badiou calls her) who breaks with the established conditions of the given order by pronouncing this founding negativity (in the form of a first founding violence) that is the very condition of any form of (positively sublated) being *within* this order. The rest, the ones who do not engage themselves in this procedure of pronouncing (and thus producing) a new truth remain stuck in a state of the living dead or, as Badiou refers to this state of life – in a form of 'animal humanism.' According to Badiou, there are four fields in which this militant intervention can be carried out: love, science, art, and politics. The essays presented in the second part of this examination will deal with these categories in closer detail. *Chapter 3* will focus on a concept of subjectivity and subjectivation in relation to the o/Other, supplementing what has been established so far with an analysis that argues for the necessity of incorporating a (negative) dialectics of recognition into the theory of the subject. *Chapter 4* focuses on the limits as well as potentials of the 'work of art' as a form of militant intervention; and *Chapter 5* examines the notion of the political body in further detail. As noted above, there will be no single chapter on the notion of love, for love is literally everywhere insofar as it is that which is needed to change discourse<sup>70</sup>, a necessary constituent of *every* truth procedure.

Let us return once more to the notion of the subject. How is this Badiouian subject to be taken in relation to the Derridan notion of the death of the subject? Of paramount importance here are the notions of *decision* and a *break* with the established state of the situation (in other words, the subtraction from the tyranny of the letter). To briefly

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<sup>70</sup> For more on this see for example: Lacan, Jacques: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co. 1998.

recapitulate: within the state of a situation, within a universal order of being, there are certain elements which are excluded from this very order; or rather, are only included through their exclusion (“the part of no part”). These elements bear a distinct relation to the void ( $\emptyset$ ) of the situation in the form of the *evental site* (the ‘edge of the void’ as Badiou also refers to them). In pronouncing this *symptomal site* as the situation’s truth, the concrete seizes the place of the universal and thus reconfigures the very conditions of being as such.

It could thus be argued that the subject as *vanishing mediator* is again – as an *effect* of discourse – the very *evental site* it pronounces as the situation’s truth. In other words:

\$ = Evental Site

It seems, however, that Badiou does not in fact draw the above conclusion, owing (perhaps) to his overemphasis of the *other side* of the metonymico-metaphaphorical process – his, appraisal of the *metaphoric event* of the suturing of the situation and thus the production of the *One*. The Žižekian critique of Badiou’s account of subjectivity finds its origin at this precise point. For, what cannot be accounted for in a theory of the subject which does not take into consideration the subject as *evental site* is precisely the *too-much* (the excess, *jouissance*) this very subject presents as a whole (a void), an entity which exceeds the range of meaning, a signifier that cannot be substituted *for* another, but is rather placed (next) *to* another without any sense (a non-sensical signifier) – the intrusion of metonymy within metaphor, destabilizing as well as conditioning the latter. It is in this sense that Žižek’s criticism that Badiou fails to inscribe the Freudian notion of *defense* into his account of subjectivity and subjectivation should be understood.

Like Derrida, Badiou claims that “the One is not”<sup>71</sup>. But this does not mean that we have to regard being as an infinitely complex state without any “point of anchoring” and thus affirm (A) the end of the subject and subjectivity and (B) the claim that we have to reach a state of the free play of the signifying chain, of *différance* (after the end of imaginary, i.e. ideological representation). Quite the opposite is the case. The *One*, a form of imaginary unity is what is indispensable – if also inexistent – to the human being as such. In his early essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”<sup>72</sup>, Lacan acknowledges the importance of the imaginary function, a function that enables the little child to perceive herself as an individual (a singularly functioning unity) through an *image* (reflected back to her through the mirror) and which re-presents something that does not exist (at that moment in her physical development, the little child does not have full command over her body, a body which is not yet *her body* but rather a partial objects, a multiplicity of partial objects, an inconsistency). Through the imaginary production of a coherent picture of her body, through the register of the imaginary, the body of the little child is *produced* as an individual body *for her*.

The process at work here illustrates once again the interrelation of metonymy and metaphor as noted above in *Chapter 1*. The signifying chain, the metonymic work of putting into action one signifier for another, has to be regarded as incomplete without its *other side*, the metaphoric quilting of this chain; or, in Badiou’s words, the *counting* of the elements present in an inconsistent set in order to achieve a *state (of a situation)*, an imaginary re-presentation of these elements

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<sup>71</sup> Badiou, Alain: Being and Event. This wager is the very starting point of his inquiry.

<sup>72</sup> Lacan, Jacques: The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience. In: *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company 2006. pp.75-81.

within a community supposed as *One*.<sup>73</sup> To affirm the presence of the *One* is the founding gesture of Badiouian thought.

It is in this respect that Badiou's resentment of deconstruction must be understood. Where deconstruction tries to draw our attention to a multiplicity of meanings without 'any anchoring' (through the negative *différance* as the condition of possibility of every sign or mark to appear), which have to be continuously performed and re-signed – in the form of a signature, the seal we attach onto every speech act once we utter/perform it; in other words, where deconstruction emphasizes all the different shades of the production of a signifying chain in its *metonymic* aspects, Badiou rigorously dismisses these insights as postmodern banalities. What he demands of philosophic thought is not a conceptualization of all the multiplicities of meaning but the answer to the question of how all these different meanings, this particular re-presentation, can be transformed into a *universal One* and thus become *meaningful*. For, while it is true that '*the woman*' does not exist (there are only white women, black women, single mothers, middle class women etc.) this insight is not what should preoccupy our philosophical inquiries. The *true* philosophical question is how we can pass from this multiplicity of particularities (the little child's partial objects, the individual's fragmented body) to a unity of *imaginary representation* as it is proposed in Lacan's matheme of the fundamental phantasy:  $\$ \langle \rangle a$ <sup>74</sup>?

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<sup>73</sup> In *Being and Event*, Badiou has more to say on the topic of counting. We would have to provide a slight shift in focus – away from Badiou - concerning the nature of the count in order to replace Badiou's tendency to overestimate the notion of rupture in subjectivation with a more balanced model which will take into account the *two sides* of subjectivation according to Lacan. In other words, *Chapter 2.1.* proposed an understanding of the count which does not only *break* with the established context (the state of the situation) but sublates this count again in a dialectics of recognition.

<sup>74</sup> The matheme of the fundamental fantasy as introduced by Lacan can also be read as an indication that every universal order has to be sustained by a particular (negative) element (objet a) which is only part of this universal through its not taking part in that very order.

Žižek relates these two understandings of infinite multiplicity to the two forms of infinity as presented in Hegel's philosophy: the first, a 'bad infinity'<sup>75</sup>, would relate to the *common sense* notion of infinity in which 'the modern world is too complex for us to fully understand it any longer;' the second, a *truthful* infinity, comes to terms with the infinity of *an event* and thus manages to transcend the 'infinite complexity' of its immediate context.<sup>76</sup> According to Badiou – and this is where he radically differs from Derrida and other deconstructive thinkers –, the *event* is not a performative game of de- and re-contextualization; it is, instead, that which conditions the possibility of any form of 'contextuality' as such.

The *true* performative act is the one where the actor passes through the founding negativity (*différance*) by affirming the state (of a situation)'s immanent exclusion, giving it a name and thus re-inscribing it, thereby altering the conditions of this very state. This 'actor' is the truth of the Badiouian subject – an *effect* of naming the unnamable, the production of a *new law*, the realization of an *imminent utopia*. She re-signs from the state of the situation, subtracts herself from the law of the dead letter and thus falls out of the condition of 'animal humanism' in order to be 'born again,' resurrected under the new law of the *event* which she pronounces and which, retroactively, will have inaugurated her. From the point of view of the established order, this subject cannot but appear as a terrorist threat (threatening to strike deep into that which conditions the order); it is only retroactively, from the viewpoint of the 'new law,' that she *will always have been* an heroic subject, carrying out a fundamentally necessary act.

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<sup>75</sup> This concept has been introduced by Georg Lukács. See: Lukács, Georg: *Theory of the Novel. A Historic-Political Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press 1974.

<sup>76</sup> Žižek, Slavoj: *The Ticklish Subject*, p.180.

But what Badiou fails to take into consideration is that the subject of breach (or rupture) is only *one half* of the subject. The metaphoric spark of rupture which sutures the metonymic chain would not be sustainable without the writing forth of this very chain. Thus, the *other side* of the subject (as distinct from its radical metaphorical intervention) is the subject of the metonymic chain – a subject who has “the relation of one signifier to another”<sup>77</sup>. This relational function is what constitutes the subject for Lacan’s understanding in the first place:

“And from this there results the emergence of what we call the subject – via the signifier which, as it happens, here functions as representing this subject with respect to another signifier.”<sup>78</sup>

The subject is both that which is “divided between (conscious) obedience to the Law and (unconscious) desire for its transgression.”<sup>79</sup> A hidden assumption of the Badiouian account of subjectivity seems to be his (utopian) belief in a subject capable of leaving her state of ‘animal humanism’ behind, a subject positively realizing herself in the reign of life (as opposed to the symbolic death of alienation – what is, through the law, the *nom du père* – what alienates us from *Being* itself) through her fidelity to the *truth event*. The act of subjectivation, however, is doubled: it is the *radical act of decision* which suspends the subject from the order of being, from the order of ideological closure and throws it into a state of ‘transcendental homelessness’<sup>80</sup> as

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<sup>77</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p.13.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. This overemphasis on the metaphorical process of intervention is, to my understanding, also the reason why knowledge (the set of S2 as described by Lacan), all that what can be known *within a situation*, is devalued in Badiouian theory. Even where he talks about the fourth of his categories – the category of science – Badiou is preoccupied with the delineation of radical scientific interventions which reconfigured the entire field’s conditions and not with what Lacan calls ‘the discourse of the University.’

<sup>79</sup> Žižek, Slavoj: *The Ticklish Subject*, p.149.

<sup>80</sup> Again, a term introduced by Georg Lukács.

well as it is the process whereby *one signifier is re-presented for another signifier*. The difficulty we have to come to terms with in designing a theory of the subject is the following: to figure a subject that is neither a static nor a positive category, but a *dynamic and negative function* of our very being. Thus, the subject cannot be grasped as a function of rupture alone, punctuating the order of being by giving a name to its imminent excess and tearing it apart through her fidelity to a truth procedure, i.e. the metaphoric process of quilting. She is also the embodied paradox of a particular element who herself sustains the universal order of a law by re-presenting her knowledge *for an Other*.

And even more so, the process of subjectivation should not be understood as teleological, whereby we affirm an *event*, appear as subjects ... and that's the end of the story. The status of the subject is a precarious one and cannot be sustained for very long because its function is that of a *vanishing mediator* suturing the old (law) with the new (law).<sup>81</sup> In other words, what we are dealing with is the Freudian notion of the *death drive* (a category Badiou dismisses vehemently)<sup>82</sup> as the founding drive of subjectivity. From this point of contention, two insights can be extracted: firstly, the act of naming the *event* is not to be mistaken with the production of a positively given subject but must be grasped, instead, as the production of a gap, the production of a *subject between two deaths*<sup>83</sup>; secondly, the subject of this gap can also be accomplished through an act that has a purely negative gesture (the Bartlebyan 'I would prefer not to'), a form of radical subtraction from the state of the situation.

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<sup>81</sup> And, in fact, this might even be a misleading expression since there is no such thing as a subject *in* time (and space) because the subject is the very condition of possibility of the emergence of time (and space).

<sup>82</sup> Žižek, Slavoj: *The Ticklish Subject*, p.160.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, pp.152-158.



While Derrida overestimates the power of the metonymic chain, Badiou performs the opposing mistake and overestimates the metaphorical process. For a proper understanding of subjectivity and subjectivation, both are necessary, as interpenetrating processes that cannot be so easily prioritized (as Derrida and Badiou would have us believe). Just as the one-for-another of metonymy cannot be understood via the suturing carried out by metaphoric counting (through a constitutive negativity), so too is this counting impossible without countable *elements* (sliding under the primacy *One* signifier). A third term is needed, something which is to be found at the very limit of and the passage from void to *One*. It is this third term that the following chapter will focus on.

### 3. Love will tear us apart: On Ø, 0 and 1 ... and the fatal Attractions of Destruction<sup>84</sup>

All is fair in love and war. If we want to speak about bodies, about the notion of the subject, and, after all, about the political body of such a subject, we will also have to talk about how this body is constituted for *an o/Other*, in relation to this O/one we call our o/Other – be this very o/Other our friend or the person we despise the most, our enemy<sup>85</sup>, be this in love or war. In the first part of this work, I delineated the *structural* properties of subjectivity as they were introduced into the field of psychoanalytic inquiry by Jacques Lacan (through his attention to language as a symbolic system existing prior to and determining the subject in general and the functions of the metonymic/metaphoric process in particular).

I have sought to point out that both Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou appear to remain uncannily close to this concept of subjectivity – no matter what they explicitly state concerning their relationship to Jacques Lacan (we know that defense mechanisms often force us to disavow what we are drawn to the most). While Derrida focuses on the metonymic process (the notion of the *trace*), Badiou seems more interested in the metaphoric act of quilting, of introducing a new master signifier into the reign of the dead letter, i.e. a old law. Because of this metonymic priority, Derrida dismisses the notion of the subject as a form of false consciousness which is to be avoided at all costs so as to make way for a subversive negativity at the foundation of our very being. By contrast, Badiou's central category is this very subject. Or, to reformulate this thesis differently, we might say that Derrida

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<sup>84</sup> This chapter extends a lecture originally held at the German Graduate Research Seminar at Cambridge University in spring 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Freud already knew about this fundamental ambivalence which structures as well as shakes every socio-symbolic community. Cf. Freud, Sigmund: *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur. Und andere kulturtheoretische Schriften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1994.

relies on the necessary absence, the *void* ( $\emptyset$ )<sup>86</sup> (which is the one-word-to-another, the absolute heterogeneous, the ineffable) whereas Badiou's interest clearly revolves around the concept of the *One*. According to the latter, subjectivity is an *effect of truth*, of a truth procedure whereby the subject holds on to her *idée fixe*, a certain thought or cause which is represented within the situation but is not yet present (an empty category).<sup>87</sup> Through this act of love towards that which cannot be said (because there are no words within the symbolic law which could re-present it), the subject re-inscribes the constitutive exclusion within the state of the situation, producing a new law at the same time as she inaugurates herself as a subject *of* this situation. The paradoxical fact that the subject is both cause *and* effect of this truth procedure is clear to Badiou; it is the same paradox as described by Hegel's concrete absolute. It is, in fact, the very same impasse that Lacan's subject has to face up to. But because Badiou conceives subjectivity as a (largely) positive category and attributes such fundamental importance to the force of the *One*, he is unable to properly account for and treat this paradox. In the movement from bare life to the positively given subject of the new law – from *void* to *One* – a gap in Badiou's theory becomes legible. In order to further explain this we shall, once again, draw on Lacan's account of subjectivity by proposing the notion of the subject as a *vanishing mediator* – the *zero* point of focalization between old and new. Or, in other words, what I shall argue for is the re-introduction of a (negative) dialectics of recognition into the process of subjectivation.

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<sup>86</sup> This is a Badiouian concept, which nevertheless corresponds to the Derridian notion of *différance* – the 'uncounted' heterogeneity which is constitutive to any positive given order.

<sup>87</sup> Not to be mistaken with Laclau's and Mouffe's concept of the empty signifier, which is again something quite different. Cf. Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London, New York: Verso 2001.

To speak about recognition is to necessarily always already speak about the o/Other, about someone else (someone special) who has to see us, recognize us and thus put us back together (back again, but for the first time) into ourselves, recognizing our body and thus producing it. Psychoanalysis has gone a long way in explaining the importance of the o/Other for the inauguration of the self. There is good reason to talk about love when talking about subjectivation through and in the o/Other, for is it not the love of our mothers (or, to be precise, of the maternal function) that is required for the materialization of our bodily trace.

The process of subjectivation requires the introduction of a double loss: we have to let go of the symbiotic unity with the o/Other (alienation) and – as though that loss were not dear enough – learn that this Other itself does not exist (separation); or, to put it another way, this Other exists but we will never be enough to fill in its (his/her) lack. The child cannot be the mother's phallus because she wants something else, because she desires an o/Other for herself, because she longs for another law – the *nom-du-père*, the symbolic, i.e. language. Instead of saying that Badiou favors metaphor over metonymy, we could also say that he lets his subject go through separation (a new symbolic law, a new father, a new *One*) without having first passed through alienation.

But before we can be put together again under the reign of a new law, we have to be torn apart – this is what love does to us, this is what we do through the act of loving. Love – and this love is not that of Aristophane's *One* – first puts us into a state of absolute transcendental homelessness, shatters us entirely. Many songs have been sung about this fact – needless to say, love is first of all a form of violence.

In this chapter, we will treat both, love and war – harmony and violence; that which puts us back together and tears us apart again, what sets us asunder, troubles us and holds the power to disintegrate us to a state where we can no longer even be sure what this word ‘*us*,’ this ‘*I*’ as opposed to an other, this ‘*you*’ even means. And everyone who has ever had the dubious pleasure of experiencing this psychotic feeling<sup>88</sup> called love will probably understand that it is both. What we are dealing with here are two sides of the same coin really, the radical act of loving someone is in a way always already war, or – as Slavoj Žižek argues – it’s the true state of exception (Ausnahmezustand)<sup>89</sup>. The first act of love is not that which unites us with our other half (in a Platonic sense)<sup>90</sup>; it is not the goal we reach ... in the end ... finally, after an exhausting journey roaming through the world searching for “our better half.” Quite the contrary, instead of singing us a sweet lullaby before we let go and go to sleep, pacified and happy ever after, love is the force which first of all will tear us apart, which evicts us from our ordinary order of being, our mere being under the steady continuum of time and history, leaving us alone in our state transcendental homelessness. Driving us out of our cozy and velvety “*Etuais*”<sup>91</sup>, it is this moment of utmost danger which radically forces us into the act of decision – yes or no (no more tick-boxes for maybes as elementary school days are definitely over).

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<sup>88</sup> For a more extended discussion of the topic of love in general as well as its relation to psychotic feelings see: Verhaeghe, Paul: *Love in a Time of Loneliness*. New York: Other Press 1999.

<sup>89</sup> The term goes back to Carl Schmitt and his political theology. Schmitt, Carl: *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*. Berlin: Duncker & Humbold 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Remember the tale Aristophanes tells in Plato’s symposion – we humans were once one, complete beings with four arms and four legs, two parts glued together for eternity without any lack and then split by the jealous gods, forcing us to forever roam though the world searching for our other half? Cf. Plato: *Symposium*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1989.

<sup>91</sup> A term used by Walter Benjamin to characterize those beings.

Only in a second step – (which is not to be thought of within the linear time continuum, but grasped in the form of the Lacan’s Borromean knot<sup>92</sup>) – and only if this act is picked up by the o/Other, if we are loved back, will we be put back together –the same yet different, in a world which is still the same, yet altered. This violent rupture within the ordinary order of being, our “Etuais”, the moment of *Jetztzeit*<sup>93</sup> – “jetzt oder nie”/“now or never”, which is the battlefield of any fundamental political act or decision is what shall be brought into focus in this chapter. We have thus far said a great deal about the Ø, the *void* as well as the notion of the *One*. In what follows, we will concentrate on what it means to speak of the subject as a *vanishing mediator* – what shall now be brought into focus is the *zero*.

In order to approximate this zero, this vanishing mediator, a text by Walter Benjamin is instructive. In 1931, Benjamin wrote a short<sup>94</sup> but quite remarkable account of what he calls ‘the destructive character.’<sup>95</sup>

Although opaque, this text, this *destructive character* can – I wager – be read as something like a lover *avant la lettre* – a radically loving *something*. Referring to it as a *thing* is by no means random. Benjamin too was hesitant to speak of it as a *someone*. The reason for this shall become clear in the course of the following pages.

First of all, the *destructive character* is the category of being faithful to what has happened – to follow Badiou, we might say that the *destructive character* is faithful to an event. It is this *something* that clings onto a certain *idée fixe* that something special has happened for sure. It calls it by its (or her, or his) name and continues to spell out

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<sup>92</sup> For an extended discussion of the notion of the Borromean knot see: Lacan, Jacques: Seminar RSI (unpublished).

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin, Walter: Über den Begriff der Geschichte. In: Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. Bd.1, pp.251-261.

<sup>94</sup> It is only two pages long. I short yet extremely powerful *Denkbild*.

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin, Walter: Der destruktive Charakter. In: Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften. Bd.1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, pp.289-290.

the name of this sublime in our midst; it is a neurotic force.<sup>96</sup> In short: the *destructive character* is a lovesick maniac, who annoys everyone with his illuminist ideas.

Let me give you a short example for the sake of clarification. Some time ago, I watched the latest film by Mike Leigh<sup>97</sup>, which is about this girl whose bike gets stolen and so decides that now the time has come to learn how to drive. Her driving instructor, Scott, is a nice example of a *destructive loving character* before he is counted as *One* (or as *the One*, if you prefer the more romantic version). He is basically presented to the audience through Poppy's (the woman's) eyes (the question of perspective is of utmost importance in this respect). The viewers see his entirely maniacal, illuminist, stalking and crazily staring side. If we are honest with ourselves, we would admit that our sympathy for him wavers between amusement, disgust and uncanny anxiety – he is, quite frankly, weird, disgusting (of course, he is also not very handsome) and a bit dangerous (they nearly get into a car accident because he goes crazy – and, even pulls her hair). Obviously she is not into him. He freaks her out.

Now, what does this stalking, 'abnormal' lover, this terrorist threat have to do with love, subjectivity and a dialectics of recognition? And what does all this have to do with Walter Benjamin?

In order to answer these questions, the given example has to be slightly reshaped. Our focus (perspective) need only undergo a minimal shift in order to receive quite a different result. So, what would the situation look like if Poppy had shared Scott's feelings? Let us imagine, for example, that she – unsure whether he likes her or not – returns home from a fun day out to find him looking up to her

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<sup>96</sup> To be more precise, it is the intervention of a hysteric subject we are dealing with here.

<sup>97</sup> Happy-Go-Lucky. GB 2008 (D: Mike Leigh).

window from the other side of the road; but this time he is not staring crazily but, instead, longingly looking up to her window from the other side of the road – a loving gesture, a sweet sign. The film's focus or perspective has thus shifted and instead of seeing an uncanny and violent intrusion of private space the spectator would be witness to a sweet scene of love. ... And they lived happily ever after.

Love is all about finding the 'right' perspective on things. This shift from seeing in the other that which is in excess of this other (the abyss of the Real, the terrorist notion of negativity) and then counting this excess as exactly that which counts; or, in other words, being exposed to the freak within the other (Eric Santner calls it the creaturely<sup>98</sup>) and regarding this freakishness as that which creates our knight in shining armor – this is what is found at the core of subjectivation proper. And this is also what is not present in the theories of both Badiou and Derrida. In Derrida, it is lacking because he does not care about the subject at all; in Badiou, it has to be absent because he is not interested in any form of dialectics of recognition. What counts for Badiou is decision, not perspective. Badiou's subject is a singleton, sublated only in a dyad (between herself and the o/Other, the *event*), not a triad between herself, the o/Other and, again, a third party which is witness to this act of love.<sup>99</sup>

But this third party is indispensable for any theory of the subject. Through third party perspective is generated, the fatally attractive actions of the *destructive character* are no longer seen as following a weird *idée fixe*, but are picked up as what they always will have been

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<sup>98</sup> Santner, Eric: *On Creaturely Life*. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Žižek is therefore able to claim that the perfect scene of love is not a couple looking each other into the eyes but that of two standing next to each other, holding hands and looking at something else (a third party, a third term – the Other). Žižek, Slavoj: *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press 2003, p.38.



(the tense of love is the future perfect, that which ‘will always have been,’ ‘we always will have been meant for one another’) – heroic gestures of love. To be sure, love is a risky business which forces the subject into a state of exception, desubjectifying<sup>100</sup> her, reducing her to this per se destructive force which can only be turned productive if that force is taken as a signal, “ein Signal”, as Benjamin writes.

And here we are – back with Benjamin and the *destructive character*. This is what can be preserved from Benjamin’s text. Let us have a look at the opening passage:

“Es könnte einem geschehen, dass er, beim Rückblick auf sein Leben zu der Erkenntnis käme, fast alle tieferen Bindungen, die er in ihm erlitten habe, seien von Menschen ausgegangen, über deren “destruktiven Charakter” alle Leute sich einig waren.”<sup>101</sup>

It is by no means arbitrary that the *destructive character* is only introduced indirectly. It is not a subject that appears on stage but *another* subject who, when looking back at her life, will become aware that it was this *destructive force* which played the most significant role within it. Thus, the *destructive character* is introduced from the very beginning as a form of being for *an other*, as the condition of possibility for the o/Other in the sense that it is the basis of any deeper social bond between human beings. “Alle tieferen Bindungen” – all deeper bonds are a result of the *destructive character*’s ongoing labor, its fidelity to follow the ways it sees, its busy work of clearing the scene, wiping it clean for the new. The new – “die Zukunft” – this is, however, something it is not interested in; it is not part of its job. It is a cleaner, not a creator; on the side of the negative not the positive:

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<sup>100</sup> One side of subjectivation is indeed the process of desubjectivation – of turning oneself into *objet a* in order to become \$, an autonomous subject of the symbolic order of being.

<sup>101</sup> It could be that, looking back at his life, he would come to the conclusion that almost all the deeper bonds he had undergone, have been related to people about whose ‘destructive character’ all people would agree. (my translation)

“(Er) kennt nur eine Parole: Platz schaffen”<sup>102</sup> – that is to say, this *something* does not look into the future, does not pursue any definite (understandable) goals.

Or, to put it differently, in *Critique of Violence*<sup>103</sup> Benjamin is talking about a similar concept of destruction: in his distinction between the proletarian strike and the general strike, the *destructive character* is to be found on the side of the revolutionary general strike, the one which has the power to suspend the law. In this context he writes:

“Der Gegensatz in beiden Auffassungen zeigt sich in voller Schärfe angesichts des revolutionären Generalstreiks. In ihm wird die Arbeiterschaft jedesmal sich auf ihr Streikrecht berufen, der Staat aber diese Berufung einen Missbrauch nennen, da das Streikrecht “so” nicht gemeint gewesen sei” (p.47)<sup>104</sup>

A few lines later the notion of violence proper to this context – let’s call it the *destructive character’s* violence – is introduced:

“Wäre nämlich Gewalt, was sie zunächst scheint, das bloße Mittel, eines Beliebigen, das gerade erstrebt wird, unmittelbar sich zu versichern, so könnte sie nur als raubende Gewalt ihren Zweck erfüllen. Sie wäre völlig untauglich, auf relativ beständige Art Verhältnisse zu begründen oder zu modifizieren. Der Streik aber zeigt, dass sie dies vermag, dass sie imstande ist, Rechtsverhältnisse zu begründen und zu modifizieren, wie sehr das Gerechtigkeitsgefühl sich auch dadurch beleidigt finden möchte.” (p.48)<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> (He) only knows one slogan: Making room. (my translation)

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Benjamin, Walter: *Zur Kritik der Gewalt. Und andere Aufsätze*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2006.

<sup>104</sup> “The antagonism between these two concepts becomes fully visible in the revolutionary general strike. There workers will, each time, draw on their right to strike while the state will call this a misuse because it is not how the ‘right to strike’ was meant in the first place.” (my translation)

<sup>105</sup> “If violence was what it seems to be at first glance, the mere means to obtain a certain desired good, it could only fulfill its purpose in the form of a dispossessing violence. It would therefore be unable to found and modify relations in an abiding way.

It is not only the revolutionary general strike that amazes and attracts others, but also the dirty deeds of “der große Verbrecher”<sup>106</sup>. In these deeds, the promise/threat of creating a new order of goods<sup>107</sup> is inscribed. The *destructive character* is such a great villain *avant la lettre*. Its actions are a permanent threat to the (existing) law; it touches its roots, shaking its foundations. By acting without the gaze immanent to the system – that is, a gaze directed towards the future – the *destructive character* is the *zero*, the *vanishing mediator* between old and new, neither good nor bad; and for that very reason, the destructive character is the condition of possibility for the rise of any such (ethical) order. In its bodily appearance, it is *the* political intervention proper. And it is in exactly this sense Benjamin’s claim – that the *destructive character* is “das große Band, das alles Bestehende einträchtig umschlingt”<sup>108</sup> – must be understood.

This fact might explain Benjamin’s – and our – hesitation to refer to this force, to this *something* as a *someone*. It is not the act of an individual, but the very founding gesture of subjectivity; in this sense, it is a radical non-subject, it is subjectivity’s negative (empty) side. Benjamin calls this category a “character”, an agent stripped of all human, characteristic traits, a strange, somehow floating entity, passionately attached to ways only it can see:

“Der destruktive Charakter sieht nichts Dauerndes. Aber eben darum sieht er überall Wege. Wo andere auf Mauern oder Gebirge stoßen, auch da sieht er einen Weg. Weil er

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A Strike, however, renders visible it that violence is capable of doing so. It is able to found new legal relationships or modify them, however this may affront one’s feeling of justice.” (my translation)

<sup>106</sup> “the great villain“

<sup>107</sup> A new ethical order.

<sup>108</sup> “the big bond harmoniously encompassing everything” (my translation)

aber überall einen Weg sieht, hat er auch überall aus dem Weg zu räumen.” (p.290)<sup>109</sup>

If the *destructive character*’s actions are not picked up as a “Signal” they will be perceived as terrorism proper, a defiant child wanting to go through walls head first, fighting for something not represented within the law and thus not understandable at all – where it sees oh so many ways, others see only barricades, the comfortable lining of their “Etuais.”

As such, it is a terrorist agent within the law that no longer belongs to the law – it becomes an outcast between two deaths:

“Der destruktive Charakter lebt nicht aus dem Gefühl, dass das Leben lebenswert sei, sondern dass der Selbstmord die Mühe nicht lohnt.” (p.290)<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, Benjamin’s *destructive character* and Lacan’s *Antigone* share the same form of proto-subjectivity. Like *Antigone*, Benjamin’s *destructive character* is a picture of beauty<sup>111</sup> as much as it is one of terror. He is “jung” (young) und “heiter” (blithe). The word “heiter” amazes me in this context as it evokes pictures of clear blue skies, happy smiles and easy listening music, but also – and *because of* these associations – a strange form of detachment.

The connection between destruction and beauty as delineated by Benjamin is especially interesting if we bear in mind that Benjamin was – and this fact is not often given the attention it deserves in

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<sup>109</sup> “The destructive character does not see anything enduring. And, because of that, he sees ways everywhere. Where others bump against walls and mountains he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere he continuously needs to move things out of the way.” (my translation)

<sup>110</sup> “The destructive character does not operate under the conviction that life is worth living but that suicide is not worth the effort.” (my translation)

<sup>111</sup> The relationship between the political, subjectivation and the aesthetic regime is by no means random and shall be outlined in further detail in the next chapter on the role of the ‘work of art’ in relation to the reign of the political.

Benjamin-studies – greatly influenced by the Kantian tradition. One of Benjamin's earliest texts, *Über das Programm einer kommenden Philosophie*,<sup>112</sup> already contains the seeds of what later will become the *destructive character*. Here we find an articulation of the duty of a philosophy to come: "Ahnungen die sie aus der Zeit und dem Vorgefühl einer großen Zukunft schöpft mit dem Kantschen System zu Erkenntnis werden zu lassen."<sup>113</sup> In other words, fusing the German-Jewish tradition of the sign with Kantian formalism is Benjamin's epistemological agenda – but the *destructive character* goes beyond this program, giving it a firm political twist through the interlacing of ethical order and the notion of the beautiful.

It is Kant's merit to have pointed towards this relation. For Kant, the ethical (socio-symbolic) order, itself without concept ("ohne alle Begriffe, als Objekt eines allgemeinen Wohlgefallens"<sup>114</sup>) is another names for the symbol of the good, for that which serves as the order of good's focal point. To say, a Being "without all concepts" is to say that judgement can never come to a definite concept of the beautiful. Here, Kant's identifies the beautiful with the formal structure of means: "Schönheit ist Form der Zweckmäßigkeit eines Gegenstandes, sofern sie, ohne Vorstellung eines Zwecks, an ihm wahrgenommen wird"<sup>115</sup>). In Lacanian terms (and surely going beyond Kantian formalism in this respect), the beautiful is the signifier which cannot symbolize and precisely because of this, necessarily gives rise to the order of signifiers – that is, the socio-symbolic community.

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<sup>112</sup> Benjamin, Walter: *Über das Programm einer kommenden Philosophie*. In: Angelus Novus. Ausgewählte Schriften. Bd.2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1988, pp.27-41.

<sup>113</sup> The task of the philosophy to come is to connect "the forebodings which it extricates from the times and presentiments of a great future with the Kantian system." (my translation)

<sup>114</sup> Kant, Immanuel: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Stuttgart: Reclam 1986, p.124.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p.154.

This is how we should approach the sentence “dem destruktiven Charakter schwebt kein Bild vor”.<sup>116</sup> It cannot have a picture in mind when acting because it *is* itself this beautiful picture, “ein Signal” (a signal), a sign waiting to be picked up, given meaning and followed by others, thus transformed into the above-mentioned bond that connects all human beings. To be more specific: I claim that the *destructive character* is *the* picture (the imaginary surface, the representation) of the founding gesture of a new law at the same time as this picture remains dependent on the o/Other’s recognition. If this is not the case, if the destructive character is not interpreted as “Signal”, if it is not counted as “the *One*”, its actions will remain on the *zero* level of total destruction.

It was Schelling<sup>117</sup> who pointed out that good and bad are substantially the same thing, but distinguished according to different modes of observation. Here the notion of perspective emerges once more: whether I am stalking or courting – every ethical act has to be seen in future perfect tense – I carry out an act and if I am lucky (if my *zero* of destruction, positivizing the void is counted as *One*) it *will always have been* ethical – three sides of the same thing. Of course, this is not about a continuous timeline – one after the other – but rather about the process which is the founding gesture of this kind of time *as such*.

Isn’t this exactly the temporal mode Benjamin describes when he – in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* writes: “Die Vergangenheit führt einen heimlichen Index mit, durch den sie auf die Erlösung verwiesen wird.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> “the destructive does not have a picture in mind” (my translation)

<sup>117</sup> Schelling, F.W.J: Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit. Und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände. Hamburg: Meiner 2001.

<sup>118</sup> Benjamin, Walter: Über den Begriff der Geschichte. In: Benjamin, Walter: Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften. Bd.1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977,

So, back to the *destructive character* as this particular/peculiar thing that is also the establishing bond of humanity. As argued above, the destructive character, as the picture of either beauty or terror – those two sides of the same coin – must to be regarded as the scene of the birth of universality, being the symbolic *Ur-Sprung* of the universal structure. Or, in Badiouian terms, the *destructive character* is this seeming aporia which is the *site of the event* at the same time as it is the very subject (as an empty category) who *affirms* this site by spelling out its name.

Why does this chapter bear the title ‘*On Ø (void), 0 (zero) and 1 (One)?*’ We have underscored the obstacles that stand in the way of any prioritizing of either the void (Derrida) or the One (Badiou), obstacles that compel us to introduce a third term, a vanishing mediator that will suture the other two and give form to a new law. This third term has been introduced as the *zero*, the null of focalization, a symptomal knot which will always have been either terror or love according to the work of retroactivity. This third term has been introduced as a possible *sign*, a sign that is of no significance without the loving work of the o/Other who picks it up, renders it meaningful and gives it truth value. The world does not start with an ‘I,’ but with an o/Other, with a *you* in her ultimate alterity: “You are absolutely strange because the world begins *its turn with you*.<sup>119</sup> This is where a dialectics of recognition comes into play, a recognition that is not, however, fully sublatable, but will always leave a remainder, a *restance*, in the form of a materiality of the *zero*. Moving from *zero* to *One* will not render the former extinct. This movement is, in fact, similar to what Lacan called ‘traversing the fantasy,’ the act whereby the individual achieves subjective status by recognizing that the *objet*

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pp.251-261. “The past carries with it a secret index through which it is being referred back to redemption.” (my translation)

<sup>119</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press 2000, p.6.

*a*, which/who used to be the focal point of her desire, ‘is not really it’ and affirming the significance of a new *objet a*. What used to be the cause of desire will lose its significance (it will have to give way to the rule of the new law), but it will not vanish – the symptom will not disappear, a minimal remainder will always remain. This remainder is the *sinthome*. Thus, the transition from *zero* to *One* may also be grasped as the movement of traversing the fantasy as moving from symptom to *sinthome*.

Gottlob Frege gives a neat (mathematical) account of the importance of the *zero* for any possibility of sustaining a universal order (a *counted* totality of being). His theorem clearly demonstrates that totality (a universal) cannot be pictured as a given, complete, formal structure; instead, totality only emerges through an immanent void sustaining it. To give a brief example: Let’s take 3+1. The result of this arithmetic is 4. And how can this be depicted? Well, 3+1 could also be written as:

0        1        2        3

*Counting through zero* (counting *zero* as *One*) is the fourth term and thus the result is:

0	1	2	3
1	2	3	<b>4</b>

On an ontological level, we could say: Let there be X (a thing of the world) – this is identical with its concept (at least since Hegel) and is



then counted as *One*. As a result, all things of the world are given as 1s: 1,1,1,1, – this series of concepts (or signifiers) is, however, not a universal (it's a not yet counted multitude, it is what had previously been delineated as metonymy). In order to suture these singularities, it is necessary to count through *zero*, i.e. through a non-conceptualizable lack sustaining the universal (this is the empty set  $\emptyset$ ). Rendering the void as 0 attaches a concept to this very lack, giving a name to that which cannot be said. This is the radical act of naming and thus becoming this name (there is no  $\emptyset$  if we remove the *zero*; the lack vanishes as well – the 0/name is the symbolic side of the Real void which is a nothing at all).<sup>120</sup>

But the step from *void* to *zero* is not yet enough. As demonstrated by Frege's theorem, it is necessary to count the *zero* as *One* in order to sustain the natural series of numbers – to be able to count, to make sense of the world, to be sublated in a universal structure, we have to count the *zero* as "*the One*"; the beginning (which is always a fake beginning, a multiplicity of beginnings)<sup>121</sup>, thereby always sutures the lack. The dialectical relationship at work here is one of immanent exclusion; or, in Hegelian terms, we have the concept of the concrete universal – the movement of negativity which breaks up the universal from within, reducing it to its particular content as one of itself.

The surplus element that is represented but not present in the situation thus appears when we move from difference (*différance*) to antagonism; that is, when the *zero* appears (the presence of a terrorist negativity). And isn't this also, as Žižek suggests, the move from Kantian formalism to Hegelian dialectics?<sup>122</sup> – Isn't this also the move

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<sup>120</sup> For this see Jacques Alain Miller's outstanding essay on suture: [http://www.lacan.com/symptom8\\_articles/miller8.html](http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/miller8.html)

<sup>121</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Being Singular Plural*, p.32.

<sup>122</sup> For more on this see Slavoj Žižek's introduction to the second edition of *For They Know Not What They Do*. Žižek, Slavoj: *For They Know Not What They Do*. Enjoyment as a Political Factor. London, New York: Verso 2002 (Second Edition).

from a tension between phenomenon and thing to an inconsistency or gap *between* the phenomena themselves? Thus there is a shift of boundaries – from the outside to the inside insofar as the concept itself is no longer identical with itself. The *destructive character* is not pursuing any definite goals, anything *beyond* the socio-symbolic order; instead, it names the rupture *within* the structure itself. And – this destructive character is also not some violent tyrant out there in the world, but the very faculty, within ourselves, that separates us from truly being ourselves; it is the uncanny rupture *within* ourselves.

These three steps ( $\emptyset$ , 0, 1) should draw attention to the fact that not every act holds the potential to change the universal structure. Particularity has to have direct relation to the *void* of the situation. In this sense, Peter Hallward writes in his introduction to his book on Badiou:

“Individuals become subjects in Badiou’s sense of the word if and only if this intervention conceived as a new criterion for action, is further consistent with a properly universal principle – that is, only if it is an invention with which *everyone* can in principle identify. Only such a principle can become the truth of a new sequence.”<sup>123</sup>

The *destructive character* is such a principle; it is that through which the positivizing of the void of the situation may come to function as the founding gesture of a new universal structure or a “new sequence”. As Marx has pointed out, because the proletariat are capitalisms’ *zero*, stripped of all character traits, absolutely powerless within the structure, “having nothing to lose but their chains,”<sup>124</sup> they, in the act of freeing themselves will thereby change the entire structure from *within*, freeing not only themselves but all human beings as such – their act of violence *will have been* a heroic one.

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<sup>123</sup> Hallward, Peter: Badiou, p.XXVI.

<sup>124</sup> Marx, Karl: The Communist Manifesto. <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html>.

But it must be repeated that this act of affirming the *One* is incapable of introducing a new law unless it is recognized by others, picked up and counted as “*the One*.” This is the moment in which perspective shifts, in which terror becomes love, in which Scott is not presented to the spectator’s gaze as a crazy, love maniac and stalker, but as a sweet guy courting Poppy. This is the time and place of subjectivation (the imaginary/ideological closure within and through the new law).

To bring these remarks into a tight form, we should note that the type of subjectivation advanced here is neither understood in its metonymical aspect, (i.e. dismissing subjectivity altogether in favor of a free play of *différance*) alone, nor in its exclusively metaphorical sense (as a form of radical rupture), but is, instead, presented as the *interrelation* of both sides, an interrelation that requires a third step in the form of a *vanishing mediator*. This *zero focalization* between ‘old’ and ‘new’ at the threshold of a traversing of the fundamental fantasy can be understood as a form of *destructive character*, who has to be taken as a *signal* by the o/Other, as the significant thing that really matters.

It is this function, which through an act of radical love becomes the *zero* of the situation, the *void’s* name, an impossible necessity, a concept which can never fully symbolize.

I therefore claim that the loving labor of the *destructive character* is not the ‘final’ step in the process of subjectivation, but functions, instead, as the condition of possibility for subjectivity as such. In naming the *void*, by becoming the *void’s* symbolic side (its name), the destructive character functions as a possible *signal* for the rise of an altered universal. As a positivized rupture, it is significant for all human beings. As such, it is a sign which is “von allen Seiten dem

Gerede ausgesetzt.”<sup>125</sup> Despite the fact that the destructive character does not, itself, participate in the “Gerede” (gossiping), it remains the founding gesture of that “Gerede,” of the socio-symbolic community, and creates the symbolic bond of language that connects his fellow human beings to each other.

Love – and as such any form of dialectics of recognition – is first of all a violent act that belongs on the side of the *destructive character*, an act which will remain on the *zero* level of irrational and total destruction unless it is addressed to someone for whom this address will be significant – to someone who counts the *zero* as “*the One*”, the act, in Lacanian words, that makes the discourse shift.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Benjamin, Walter: Der destruktive Charakter: “being exposed to gossiping from all sides” (my translation)

<sup>126</sup> For this cf: Lacan, Jaques: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company 1998.

#### 4. The Art of Letting Go: Realized Utopia and the Aesthetic Regime

Let us traverse again the paths we have covered thus far before proceeding. We have been concerned, in general, with the conditions of possibility for the appearance of something as notorious as a subject, as well as the structural foundations of subjectivity and subjectivation as such. Following the paths of Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou, we have drawn on Jacques Lacan's understanding of subjectivation as an interrelation of metonymy and metaphor, the uncoun ted representation of a heterogeneous set of elements (*différance*) as well as the radical decision of the introduction of a new *One*, i.e. metaphoric quilting. It has been argued that the notion of the subject has to be grasped as an *effect* of this back and forth between metonymy and metaphor at the same time as it is regarded as the *agent* of this very interplay (*a form of negative dialectics of recognition*). In this respect, the subject can be grasped as a *vanishing mediator* that only makes its appearance on stage during the moment of danger, the moment of 'disaster'.

This subject – as the *zero point of focalization* – thus seems to be caught in a space between two deaths. Recall that Benjamin's *destructive character* was presented as a characteristic representative of such a subject in *Chapter 3*. But we should also mention that Lacan provides us with a different example in his Seminar Book VII (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*), in the figure of Antigone. This seminar session carries with it the prominent title: *Antigone – Between two Deaths*. Antigone is here described as located at the very intersection of beauty and the sublime; or, to put it differently, the question Lacan raises in this text is one of the *appearance* the subject (as a *fader*)<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> For more on the concept of the subject as fader/feather see: Weber, Samuel: *Return to Freud. Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2008.

which neither belongs to the old law on account of its non-belonging nor to any new order because it is itself the founding gesture of any such new law.)

The question which interests me in *Antigone* - and which shall be examined in further detail here in a chapter on what I will be calling the 'true work of art' (a form of art which bears witness to the *void* and which, as shall be seen in the course of this chapter, is itself a distinct form of *truth procedure*) – is not that which concerns the latent content of Antigone's story and what it can tell us about the process of subjectivation; instead, what is of interest to me is the way in which art itself – and we should not forget that *Antigone* is first of all a play, a mythic script and not a 'real' person – expresses a certain mode of thinking which is also the basis of our own being in the world. In other words, I shall examine what Jacques Rancière has called the 'aesthetic regime' in its function as the basis of all forms of political intervention.<sup>128</sup>

Recall that the subject has been characterized here as something fleeting, a necessary impossibility which cannot be sustained for very long. It is neither *zero* nor *One*, but the very transition from one to the other. Rather than viewing the subject as a mere (static) category, one should also regard it as a process, that which materializes itself in the act of traversing the fantasy and comes to live in the transformation of the symptom (the *objet a* as the cause of the individual's desire) into the sinthome (a remainder, a sign). Lacan alluded to this very transformation in his account of *Antigone*, a transformation that is deeply aesthetic. But the sense of this 'aesthetic' must be framed correctly: it is neither a judgment of taste, nor the type of

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<sup>128</sup> For this see: Rancière, Jacques: *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of The Sensible*. London, New York: Continuum 2006.

“aesthetization of politics”<sup>129</sup> Benjamin refers to derogatively, but a “primary aesthetics,”<sup>130</sup> a “system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience”<sup>131</sup>. Antigone is alternatively referred to as both a “beautiful” and a “sublime” entity. This swaying between the categories of the beautiful and the sublime is – at least in my understanding – by no means random.

What is distinct about the work of art<sup>132</sup> is its conspicuous form of in-betweenness, an in-betweenness that will be brought into sharper focus in the course of this chapter. Although it is surely the case that the title of this work already alludes to in-betweenness (hence all the dashes in ‘re-petition,’ ‘re-signation,’ ‘re-signification’), the question warrants a more precise articulation: what, I now ask, are the political aspects of the ‘true’ work of art; what is the nature of the potential specific to its *form* (or, in Rancière’s words –its specific mode). It is this understanding of the aesthetic regime as a mode of thinking underlying every socio-symbolic order which is responsible for equipping the work of art with its distinct political potentials as well as agency:

It is on the basis of this primary aesthetics that it is possible to raise the question of ‘aesthetic practices’ as I understand them, that is forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the community.”<sup>133</sup> (p.13)

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<sup>129</sup> For more on this see: Benjamin, Walter: Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. In: Benjamin, Walter: Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften. Bd.1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, pp.136-169.

<sup>130</sup> Rancière, Jacques: The Politics of Aesthetics, p.13.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> I purposefully chose to use the expression ‘work of art’ over ‘artwork’ in order to point out the procedural character implicitly enclosed in any artwork. Although a certain piece of art (a picture, a statue, a composition) might appear as a monument, a remainder, something persisting, this is only one side of the artwork. Its other aspect is the opening up to what should come, the constant work art performs.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

Aesthetic practices, according to Rancière produce and arrange what he calls ‘communal bodies’<sup>134</sup>.

The ‘true’ work of art bears witness to that which serves as the constitutive negativity within the state of any given situation. This bearing witness materializes itself in the work of art itself. In this respect, it can be grasped as the framing of that which upholds the situation but cannot be presented, that which is there, all over, but not sayable. In this respect, it is art that shatters the given system of representation by re-inscribing its constitutive exclusion/excess within it once more.

Three central suppositions may be found at the core of this examination of the structural qualities and political potentials of the art-work, the work of art respectively. Although these suppositions have preoccupied my inquiry since the earliest investigation into the foundations of subjectivity, they will now be related to what can be regarded – in line with Rancière – as the basis of any form of political action and thus of subjectivity as such.<sup>135</sup>

In our examination of Benjamin’s *destructive character*, this special entity was characterized as the *zero point of focalization* of any given order. Something that is situated at a special place within the symbolic order, belonging in its non-belonging, unspeaking but serving as the very cause of language as such, a distinct *sign* which nevertheless requires its being picked up by the o/Other.

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<sup>134</sup> Rancière, Jacques: *Politics of Aesthetics*, p.14. We will return to that notion the last chapter of this thesis.

<sup>135</sup> The direct relation between the political act and subjectivity has been elaborated in great detail by Alain Badiou. To recall, for him the act of subjectivation, the inauguration of the subject is an *effect* of a truth procedure. And again, a truth procedure might be called this intervention which gives a name to the *void* of a situation and thus re-inscribes the negativity which is constituting for the order of being.



As a product of the aesthetic regime,<sup>136</sup> the work of art is similar in structure to what has been said about the nature of the subject and subjectivity. It is for this reason that Lacan's account of Antigone describes her in terms of beauty and sublimity; it is for this reason that Benjamin's account of the *destructive character* regards this figure 'heiter' and accords to it the beauty and attraction that profoundly draws us towards the 'great villain.' Speaking from a structural perspective, the work of art is located at a very special place within the socio-symbolic community, within the state of the situation. And it is this very place that allows it to become the symbol of a 'community-to-come', i.e. to re-signate the *status quo* and thus re-signify it. This is how the work of art's double nature – much like the subject's double nature, as outlined before – should be grasped. On the one hand, it is a work, an act and in this respect a symbol. It is that which has taken place, both visible and closed – be it a sculpture, a symphony, a happening, etc. On the other hand, because it presents itself as a symbol, a sign which urges the o/Other to pick it up, the work of art should be understood as something that is constantly in progress, in flux. In this respect, it has to be grasped as an opening up towards that which shall be.<sup>137</sup> In Lacanian terms, the 'true' work of art is nothing else then the quilting (the metaphoric effect) of the metonymic chain, the possibility of an introduction of a new law.<sup>138</sup>

The remarkable feature of the work of art is that – and as opposed to the subject which can only be understood as a *vanishing mediator* – when something flashes up in the moment of utmost danger, the art-

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<sup>136</sup> Which has been introduced here as the founding regime of any representative system.

<sup>137</sup> And again, it is picked up as a sign if its urge for a re-signification is successful, it will always have been a manifestation of this what is. If this attempt fails, it will be regarded as an irritation to the situation, something which may draw a lot of attention to it, but which will still remain uncannily foreign to the system.

<sup>138</sup> For this see for example: Badiou, Alain: *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press 2005.

work has the potential to persist at the place of this aporia it opens up itself. It is intractable, it does not vanish, it does not leave us but continues haunting us, our eyes, our ears and even our bodily sensations. Thus, the work of art is *stasis* (a remainder, a *restance*) as well as *dynamis* (an opening up, this what urges us to talk about it to constitute ourselves *in relation to* it). It is, to express it in Walter Benjamin's words, a materialization of a 'dialectics at a standstill.'

The characteristic trait of this 'true' form of art – of art which bears a distinct relation to the *void* of the situation from which it arises - is that it is the marker of a minimal (and liminal) differential displacement. 'Minimal,' because any single work of art is not only unable to overcome the entire given regime of representation, but also because the art-work's potential is not caught in its capacity for grand gestures, but is, instead, best figures in the form of a fundamental diminuation. This specific form of alterity must not be understood as a relation of opposition in respect to any given norm; instead it should be grasped as the framing of the norm's constitutive negativity which is always somehow represented but never fully present.<sup>139</sup>

In the given state of the situation, this negativity is the *backstage* of the main stage of actions that appear to us as *events* – events which keep up appearances and thus structure the field of representation. But it is not the main stage which is the most important one; it is the backstage that really matters the most. The latter is the anchoring point of the conditions of possibility which form the chore of the representative system. Thus, the backstage's events, the events which are truthful to the *void* are figured in the 'true' work of art, a work that is situated on quite a different level from the field of what I shall refer

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<sup>139</sup> On the imaginary level, there is nothing that the state of the situation would lack. The imaginary representation is always one of ideological closure; the founding negativity, the primal excess cannot be represented. Only on special occasions does this founding (systemic) violence appear on the scene in the form of the intrusion of a traumatic real. Art is a way to give body to this real in an aesthetic way.

to as *semblance-events*. These *semblances* lack the possibility of a *truth event*, an event that is the re-inscription of that which has to always be excluded, that which is always already deprived of its presentation *within* the given order of being. *Semblances* are the beautiful appearances or vividly-hedonistic and colorful ‘event-culture,’ but they bear no relation whatsoever to that which is referred to here as a ‘true’ work of art. Only the latter carries within itself the potential to bear witness to the *void*, to constitute itself *from* this very void and, through this, reinscribe the  $\emptyset$  in the form of becoming its 0, its *zero*, the quilting point of subjective desire, the promise of the new to come.

This is the reason why the ‘true’ art-work cannot belong to the industrious field of the cultural market. Or, rather, of course it belongs – my claim is not that artistic production should only be considered art, political art, if it happens in the ‘underground,’ if it does not ‘sell out,’ if it remains resistant, unsublated within the representative system of the capitalist economy. Thinking about art like this, as the inauguration of the ‘totally different,’ the ‘non-all’, aloof/next to the given order, would quite obviously mean to choose the very dangerous path of demeaning a l’art pour l’art (be this motivated by the hope to be able to establish an ‘alternative order next to the given one,’ or related to the neo-sensualist wish to ‘fully remain in negativity, or *différance*’). Such an understanding of the work of art would cut its ties to the field of *truth*, throwing it back into the reign of *semblance*. But since the artwork’s participation would have to be denied, this would, in the end, lead to a senseless reproduction of the system’s very logic while supposing it to be something entirely different.

But for us, the way in which the work of art’s relation to the representational system of capitalist production shall be grasped is not however, in terms of opposition. It is neither the introduction of a

liberal-utopian pluralism of ‘multiple orders’, nor does it bear relation to any form of hedonistic hyper-sensualism. The *truth* of artistic production lies in the significance role it plays as a punctual caesura for the inauguration and perpetuation of a *universal structure*.

An understanding of the art-work as societies’ *zero* may shed a new light on the role between belonging and non-belonging society is marked by. Obviously the art-work belongs to the logic of the system (there is nothing ‘outside’ this logic, no other language which it could make use of other than the one introduced by the symbolic system). It belongs, yet resists full integration; the work of art does not belong through a type of frictionless participation, but via a refractory breach. It breaks with the seamless continuum of time in becoming the system’s materialized symptom, its quilting point (and with this starting point as well as the moment of the system’s inauguration – dialectics at a standstill). To once again make use of the above mentioned metaphor, the work of art is the *backstage* of the theatrical scene of beautiful semblance, the condition of possibility of any form of appearance, that ‘main stage’ of representation.

This is what characterizes any ‘true’ form of art: a specific form of (political) engagement which marks an intervention, a caesura, which, as a *sign* or *symbol*, and in this respect, *event*, opens the way for the new – not in the way of introducing an ‘alternative logic’ to the system but through becoming that very logic’s minimal difference, an anchoring point giving form to the formless, to that which is the cause of the symbolic system at the same time as it always avoids the system’s count. It is the re-inscription (and through this, the re-signification) of the situation’s immanent exclusion, the sublation of the formative particular into the universal. Thus, Rancière’s conception of the aesthetic system as a mode of thinking becomes clearer. The ‘true’ work of art is the aesthetic practice of forming the communal body of society. To speak of aesthetic practices is always

already to ask questions concerning the possibilities and probabilities of a change of paradigms to come, questions about the probabilities of introducing a *new truth* (a new set of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion).

It is for this reason that the work of art has been introduced as a persisting practice which always already both an everlasting, never ceasing resistance, a remainder (*restance*) that gives an account of the conditions of reality and representation at the same time as it is the reason why this reality will never coincide with its own representation. It is a monument to the refractory breach with reality, frozenly persisting throughout time, as well as a symbol for intervention and active engagement that always moves towards the realization of a justice to come. And because the work of art cannot cease to insist, because it is marked and determined by the impossibility of closure, because it always keeps its door open for that which might come, for that which shall come, because of these qualities of the work of art is also the battleground of that which is called utopia, itself is a necessary impossibility. It is 'necessary' because in order for it to insert into the scene a more just frame of the *status quo*, a symbol is required that will render it possible to think that which shall come without conceptualizing it solely in opposition to the given order. And it is 'impossible' because it can never be fully realized. Utopia does and does not have its place *within* the state of the situation. We cannot live in this place called utopia; its time – the same time that is the time of the work of art – will most necessarily always remain exterior to ours. A 'realized utopia' – a contradiction in terms. It has to lack in order for it to make us dream and strive for it. Dream and strive for it – this is what art makes us do and it is also what we *have* to do, we have to re-inscribe this negativity, we have to remain faithful/true to this *event* which the work of art confronts us

with. This is what the ‘true’ work of art makes us do – this is what the ‘true’ work of art does.

It is this significant/signifying structural position of the work of art as caught in the *in-betweenness* of resistance and resignification, the in-betweenness of *void* and *One*, at the threshold of transition that opens the way towards the new through the act of persisting, of *letting go*. Like the *destructive character* who sees only ways but no goals, who only participates in community through non-participation, through the act of becoming the community’s *minimal difference* in the form of a symptomal knot around which this very community’s desire is structured.

## 5. Let me (un)do you: Bodily Encounters and Political Re-Signification

*'Can you hold me a second!?' ... Don't touch me ... Don't touch me! ... Don' ...'* These confusing, but probably all too familiar sounding words are those of Billy Brown from one of the sweetest and most silent love stories ever put on screen: Vincent Gallo's 1998 film *Buffalo 66*<sup>140</sup>. Gallo's story concerns the o/Other and the (im)possibility of coming to terms with her: Billy (played by Vincent Gallo), having just been released from prison (*'I was innocent'* – and indeed he was) is heading towards the home of his parents, to whom he had justified his being out of the city because he was working for the government. On the way to their place, Billy stops at a dance school (he has to take a leak real badly) where he accidentally runs into Layla (Christina Ricci) and kidnaps her (probably also more by chance than on purpose – he seems to be rather upset, confused, and not really in the mood to think about how to survive the upcoming traumatic encounter with his parents). Billy urges Layla to tell his parents that she is his girlfriend, that they met in high school, and 'have been sweethearts ever since.'

Layla, on the other hand, is a funny girl. She does not at all seem upset by the fact that she has just been kidnapped – violently pulled out of the dance school, dragged through the parking lot and pushed into her car in order to drive Billy to his parents' place. She does not seem hurt by all the bawdy and brutal insults Billy throws at her either. In fact, she seems (for whatever reason) to have been rather into him from the start.

As they get to his parents' house, Billy cannot bear the pressure any longer. He makes her sit down on the front porch with him. Sitting on the top of the stairs, he bends over nervously and helplessly holds his

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<sup>140</sup> *Buffalo 66*. US 1998 (D: Vincent Gallo).

legs. He is shaking and turns towards Layla for comfort: '*Can you hold me a second!? ... Don't touch me .... Don't touch me! ... Don' ...*'

This scene manages to compress the plot of the entire film into one compelling and passionate picture raising the question of how it is possible to let oneself be touched by an other, how it is possible to touch an other, i.e. how it is possible to love one another. In a single scene, a single gesture and a single line of words, the double bind in which human beings seem to be so relentlessly tied up in is exposed. It is the aporia we most necessarily have to get stuck in whenever we want to turn towards our neighbor, the person next to us, the person closest to us: we need the others, we need their touch, their presence, their words, and their caressing – yet, we cannot have it, we just can't stand it, it makes us sick. Defense (in the clinical usage of the term) is all about this phenomenon of striving for this ultimate thing in the other at the same time as we are feverishly trying not to get too close to *it*. This is where desire comes into play – we can only desire (or long for) something we do not have, something we are trying to get to. Reaching *it* would literally be the end, our end.<sup>141</sup> '*Can you hold me a second!? ... Don't touch me ... Don't touch me! ... Don' ...*'

Thus far we have progressed in three steps: first, the subject's nature has been examined as an *effect* of the metonymic/metaphoric process of writing forth and quilting. A process in which it does not suffice to focus on *différance* alone, on the free play of the in-between, on neither the signifier-to-signifier nature of the metonymic chain, nor the radical act of metaphoric intervention, an act whereby a *new truth*

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<sup>141</sup> Reaching this final goal would be death, so to say – death as presence. The role of desire is to avoid this traumatic and deathly intrusion of the real. It is the fantasy, the dream which prevents us from the traumatic, real, kernel as it is present, for example, in our dreams. Thus, desire can also be understood as the dreamlike fantasy of our everyday life, providing us with shelter against the real of our dreams. For more on this see: Žižek, Slavoj: *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London, New York: Verso 2009, pp.47-49.



(in the form of a new master signifier) is introduced and consequently followed. This first step has been illustrated through a comparison and analysis of the approaches of Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou– the former, as I have argued, is more interested in the significance of metonymy in the form of a signifying trace, while the latter is, on the contrary, concerned with the act in the form of a new *truth event*. *Chapter 3* has supplemented the insights drawn from both *Chapter 1* and *Chapter 2* by introducing the notion of a (negative) dialectics of recognition, a form of recognition that renders visible the importance of the o/Other for the successful establishment of the *new to come*. We have seen that the subject is also a name for the vanishing mediator, this *zero point of focalization* that requires an o/Other in order for it to be transformed into a new *One*. It requires someone else to see it, pick up this *zero* and give it the meaning of a *sign*, something that counts ('this is really it,' 'this is what it should be like,' 'this is you,' 'this is us').

Another step in the progress of my argument revolved around the notion of the *work of art*, wherein the art-work was analyzed as something not exterior to the process of subjectivation but, on the contrary, deeply and structurally connected to this process. The work of art's distinct potential lies in its ability to display a materialization of the *zero* of subjectivation. In other words, thus far we have moved from formless subjectivity to its embodiment in the material form of the work of art, from a vanishing, never graspable mediator to a resisting and persisting force sublated and visibly displayed through art.

In the present chapter, Billy Brown has been introduced as someone desperately longing to be touched but still unable to let someone else do this for him, unable to even let another speak of his disability to touch an other– except when touching someone to make this person stop touching him ('Don't do this to me'). We will have to come back

to this strange form of touching designed to stop the other from touching oneself. So, after touching upon the notion of the subject as well as the art-work as embodiment, a *restance* of the process of subjectivation, this last chapter is preoccupied with what has been left outside, what has not yet been touched upon so far even though its signifier adorn this works' title page so boastfully. A lot has been said about the subject in general and the ontological status of the process of subjectivation in particular. And many words have been spent on art and its relation to this very process, as well as about the political potentials of subjective as well as artistic intervention. But, and here it is, this last *but*, this *but* that indicates that something is still missing, this analysis has missed out on something fundamental, *but still* so hard to grasp ... *but, what about the body?*

Between subjectivity, subjectivation, art, and artistic intervention, between the process of re-petition, re-signation, and re-signification, where does the body find its place? What does it even mean to have a body? And what does this mean if I tell you that I want to speak of *political bodies*, i.e. bodies that can no longer be regarded as a pre-given substance but as something that belongs to the same register as that of the subject and art? This register has been introduced as the *space* where the conditions of possibility of a *new to come* are at stake – *but*, where does the body find its place *here?*

When speaking about the body, we necessarily have to speak about how the body presents itself to us, how we perceive our own bodies and those of others – we first of all have to speak of the way we *touch* each other, *touch upon* one another. This shall then also shed light on the expression '*political bodies*,' for the body (or rather we will have to talk about *bodies*) always already carries with it the dimension of the political.

In order to come to terms with the body, however, we have to first speak of this: ‘*Can you hold me a second!? ... Don’t touch me ... Don’t touch me! ... Don’ ...*’ For there is something within the other that amazes us, something that attracts us and to which we are drawn most profoundly at the same time as this *Ding* (thing) is also the very reason why we are so fundamentally scared of the other, sometimes even appalled by her in her otherness.

Facing the o/Other, we are not only turning towards someone who puts us together, who comforts and caresses us, who holds us and makes us complete. This o/Other who puts us together is first of all someone who will relentlessly tear us apart, incapable of holding us without ripping us apart, of loving us without hating us, of making herself anything other than hated by us ... in love and through love. *Love thy neighbor* – Freud already pointed out the ambivalence in this imperative. Or, as Judith Butler has put it: “Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something.”<sup>142</sup> We require the other’s body, which first of all presents itself to us in its most alien and –perhaps most importantly – alienating form. The body is first of all something we have to lose in order to be able to seize. To illustrate this, let us take the simplest example provided by psychoanalyses: the mother’s breast. It is first of all the infant’s primary source of *jouissance*, belonging to herself, exemplar of unity with the m/Other’s breast. Bruce Fink account for this in the following way:

“The infant did not consider the breast to belong to another person (indeed, the concept of belonging or possession was as yet unknown), but in the course of weaning – a form of separation, loosely speaking – it is experienced as wrenched away, as lost. It is not so much

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<sup>142</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London, New York: Verso 2004. p.23.

the mOther the child loses in separation as the erotic object, the object that provided so much pleasure.”<sup>143</sup>

Our first loss is the loss of a partial object, a bodily part belonging to the o/Other; but with this very loss, we come upon the birth of our own bodies – the impression of autonomy and fullness, through the birth of the individuals’ bodily re-presentation in and through the mirror. We learn to see each other as singularly functioning little units, our bodies becoming a cover for ourselves, providing us with shelter to shut us off from the world outside. We turn into who we are, autonomous beings, speaking beings saying *I do* and *I am* at the same time as this *I* begins to coincide with the limits of our own bodies. What is then left outside of this picture – what has to be displaced – whenever we say *I*, whenever the little baby looks into the mirror and turns around in order to see whether the o/Other, is the o/Other’s gaze; the baby looks to see what the other sees – an autonomous little being, of course, *but* a little being for an other.<sup>144</sup>

We are taught to perceive ourselves as having forgotten about the importance of the o/Other’s (bodily) presence within this process. *But* if we want to speak about the body, if we want to grasp the *sense* of a *body*, if *I* want to touch upon *my* body, I will first of all have to start with *you*. At first glance, this might appear to be a paradox because all I have to do in order to come to terms with my body is to take a look in the mirror; or, if I do not happen to have a mirror, I can touch myself, feel my skin, touch my mouth, look at my hands, my fingers, and toenails, feel what it feels like to be at this very place I call *my body*, belonging to me and no one else but me. *But* still, our bodies are *for-another*, they are not existing next to each other – one singleton next to another one, moving freely throughout time and space. Instead

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<sup>143</sup> Fink, Bruce: A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis, p.119.

<sup>144</sup> This has been delineated by Lacan in his essay on the importance of the mirror stage for the formation of the individual as autonomous being. Cf. Lacan, Jacques: The Mirror Stage.

they bear a distinct relation to each other – “there’s no *autos*, no ‘self’.”<sup>145</sup> They are woven into each other, touch upon one another. *I* touch upon *you* and this is where the production of my *I* first occurs (as well as it is, of course, also the site of the inauguration of *you*). If we fail to acknowledge this we are, as Judith Butler points out, missing an important fact related to the formation and foundation of the socio-political sphere:

“If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then ‘we’ is traversed by a rationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation.”<sup>146</sup>

The production of *me* and *you* happens *through the passage of a we*. Or, put differently, the individuation of the body requires yet another body, a body which in this context shall be called the *political body of a community to come*. Yet this community is not to be understood as a plurality of bodies which gather around one another in order to form a still bigger one, the community of a political body – it is not to be understood as the Leviathan. It is not to be understood as a community of individual bodies becoming one *big communal body* which produces meaning and, through this, functions in society like little units. There is no such thing as a *community of bodies*, there is only my body, and your body, and a *community to come*.

But before turning towards the structural definitions as well as the ethical implications produced by the *political body of a community to come*, let us first focus on the notion of the body once again and have a look at what it means to have a body and be in a world populated by bodies. For, as has been argued, the body – according to the

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<sup>145</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Corpus*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press 2008, p.13.

<sup>146</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.23.

conventional understanding of this notion – is something which will always already be sacrificed, which is there, here, visible, but still perpetually evading our grasp. To present it in analogous form to what has been demonstrated in *Chapter 1*, we might therefore say that the body is always sliding beneath the body (as signification or representation):

### Body (representation) Body (presentation)

The body is always already untouchable, inscrutable, it “is already elsewhere while nonetheless being present: here, but not right here.”<sup>147</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the human body is untouchable (that we are all pariahs); we touch each other day to day, we shake hands, we hug, we kiss, we push and pull, we beat and hold each other. *But* still, something evades our touch – and this *Ding* (thing), which cannot be grasped by reaching for the body is the body itself, the body in its full immediate presentation. Between *me* and *you*, our bodies are constituted, but in this process there is something which vanishes from the scene, subtracting itself from the representation of the body – that is, the presentation of the body.

The relation this notion of the body bears to the concept of subjectivity – as established above – is one of analogy. Like the subject, the body is constituted through the metonymic-metaphoric process of writing, coming into presence because of its distance from itself, because of the constitutive absence it presents to itself. As a

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<sup>147</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Noli me tangere. On the Raising of the Body*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press 2008, p.11.

process of writing, it is a form of touching<sup>148</sup> between one and the o/Other, the body being neither the inscribed substance, nor the pen carrying out the writing, but the very liminal space where the pen touches the paper:

“Thus, before its proper sense (or else infinitely beyond it), the text – or the speech – first demands its listener, he who has already entered into the proper listening of this text and has therefore entered into this text itself, into its most intimate movement of sense or of passing beyond sense and into its *unworking*.”<sup>149</sup>

In this respect, it could be argued – and indeed Jean-Luc Nancy does so – that the body is the “*incorporeality* of ‘sense’.”<sup>150</sup> It is situated outside discourse, that which can never be fully grasped by discourse, yet – and this is also the reason why Nancy goes so far as to state that the body can also be referred to as the subject – also the very condition of any possibility of discourse as such. It is situated at discourse’s limit, “at an extreme, outward edge that nothing closes up.”<sup>151</sup> It is always in excess of itself, always being too much of a body to be fully present. All that is possible is to re-present it (in the act of fundamental misconceiving); and then there is also this other thing – we can *touch upon* it.

Both the body and bodies (for it is almost a contradiction in terms to speak of only one single body without others already touching it, forming it, giving it its shape and turning it into that which then *appears* on the layer of re-presentation as *one autonomous body*) do not exist in time and space, they do not fill up space but are, quite the

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<sup>148</sup> For this see Freud’s essay on the ‘Wunderblock’ as well as Derrida’s re-reading of it: Freud, Sigmund: Notiz über den Wunderblock. In: Freud, Sigmund: Gesammelte Werke. Werke aus den Jahren 1925-1931. Frankfurt am Main: 1999. Derrida, Jacques: Freud and the Scene of Writing. In: Writing and Difference. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1980. 196-231.

<sup>149</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: Noli me tangere, p.9.

<sup>150</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: Corpus, p.11.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

contrary, the very site where space (as well as time) unfolds. Bodies do not belong to discourse *or* matter, they are not found in *either* mind *or* body, but are situated at the very “limit, *qua* limit.”<sup>152</sup> It is in this regard that Nancy claims:

“Bodies aren’t some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): they are *open* space, implying, in some sense, as space more properly *spacious* than spatial, what could also be called a *place*. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a ‘here,’ a ‘here is,’ for a *this*.”<sup>153</sup>

And also, since “the body *makes room* for existence”<sup>154</sup>, it is possible to understand this notion as the *site of subjectivity*, as that which is always “*making room for them* to create an event (rejoicing, suffering, thinking, being born, dying, sexing, laughing, sneezing, trembling, weeping, forgetting).”<sup>155</sup> Or, in other words, the body is the place where the *event* of the process of subjectivity finds its *Ur-Sprung* (primal departure), though it does not begin from a singleton but from an understanding of the body which always slips away under its representation, where it is always bound to the one next to it, and begins a signifying chain of bodies touching upon bodies. Therefore, Nancy is right to identify the body as existence, and even more specifically as “the very act of ex-istence, *being*.”<sup>156</sup>

In this respect, the body is neither substance (mere being, an a priori of matter formed by ideas afterwards), nor is it solely a process of signification; instead, it provides the site of the condition of possibility for mind as well as matter to arise – the body, it is *sense*.<sup>157</sup> Yet because the body is not *of* discourse, does not find its place *within*

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>157</sup> As Nancy never tires of assuring us.



discourse, but is situated at discourse's limit, it will always already evade sense, not because it is something different (radical alterity) in relation to sense, but because it is the *place* from which sense finds its *Ur-Sprung*, its primal departure. The body is located at the very intersection of metonymy and metaphor that was introduced earlier as the *site of subjectivity*. An understanding of the body as that which evades sense (i.e. as a pre-discursive entity, a material or substance which has to be formed, modified, trimmed *through* sense in order to become meaningful) fails to notice that the body is the *place* of the production of any form of meaning at all. Therefore, there is no such thing as the *body of a community* prior to the notion of an individual body, of *my body* and *yours*. The bond which holds together this community is established through the passage from *mine* to *yours*, through *me* touching upon *you*, and *you* touching *me* – whereby *we* (as individuals as well as a communal 'we') will have been inaugurated.

*Sense* is to be understood here as the plurality of *Ur-Sprung*, of primal departures, the repetition of *Ur-Sprung*, of the primal leap<sup>158</sup> which forever separates us from ourselves, evicts us from the space of fullness of *Being* in order to throw us into *being*, into the register of knowledge, discourse, the reign of *logos*. This plurality of *Ur-Sprung*, this *sense*, is established between *us* (between *me*, *you*, and the *o/Other*). It is this plurality which is the basis of any form of community (i.e. of any form of encounter of *me* and *the o/Other*), but because this *Ur-Sprung* is also a form of breach that always separates the individual from primordial unity (which, of course, never as such existed but is only hypostasized in the aftermath of individuation), it renders visible the aporia this community will always be caught up in.

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Heidegger, Martin: Introduction to Metaphysics. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press 2000.

Every form of individuation discloses a gap, a minimal difference; *Ur-Sprung* itself is indeed this very gap.<sup>159</sup>

To say ‘community’ is to say ‘one to the other,’ even though something is lost along the way (and will always already have to be lost in order to even provide the conditions of possibility for *one* and the *other*). Call it *sense*, *subjectivity*, or call it *the body*. This primordial loss of the body is what Judith Butler establishes as the founding bond which connects all of us:

“Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a ‘we,’ for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all.”<sup>160</sup>

We are searching for what we have lost, looking for it in the o/Other, wanting the o/Other to give back to us what has gone missing along the way. We want the o/Other to give back to us our body, to hold our body and form one perfect set of parentheses in our embracement of the other.<sup>161</sup> And yet there is this almost unbearable ambivalence: ‘*Can you hold me a second!? ... Don’t touch me ... Don’t touch me! ... Don’ ...*’. For there is not only love in the way we hold each other, in the ways we encounter one another, there is also the other side of the coin – there is also violence. In searching for *us*, we have to expose ourselves to the o/Other, our face, skin, hands ... our body.

Political life is thus to be regarded as the *exposure* of the political body (and I doubt there is a form of the body that is not political) – of *us* as political bodies within a community (to come) which renders it necessary to consider the “complicity” of this very political life with the notion of violence. This is also Judith Butler’s starting point in her

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<sup>159</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Singular Plural* p.40.

<sup>160</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.20.

<sup>161</sup> Holding the other and forming a pair of parentheses – this not only evokes the picture of Aristophanes’ human as a unit without lack but also that of a perfectly rounded *zero* (0).

essay *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, where she seeks to find a way to come to terms with this founding loss of the body as the community's constitutive event:

“I propose to consider a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows, and with finding a basis for community in these conditions. We cannot precisely ‘argue against’ these dimensions of human vulnerability, inasmuch as they function, in effect, as the limits of the arguable, even perhaps as the fecundity of the inarguable.”<sup>162</sup>

In all the ways we may differ, there is still something which connects us to each other like a ‘great bond’<sup>163</sup> and functions as the condition of any such thing as a universal structure. This is the fact that all of us have *lost something*, this very something that is to be graspable as *sense* (or *Being*) *qua body*. Whenever we get into contact with each other, something about this primordial loss (and our striving to compensate for it) is revealed; there is something within the other's touch which “delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us.”<sup>164</sup> The belief in an independent *me* over here and an equally autonomous *you* over there is a delusion Butler points out:

“It is not as if an ‘I’ exists indepentendly over here and then simply loses a ‘you’ over there, especially if the attachment to ‘you’ is part of what composes who ‘I’ am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who ‘am’ I, without you? (...) On one level, I think I have lost ‘you’ only to discover that ‘I’ have gone missing as well.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.19.

<sup>163</sup> Benjamin, Walter: *Der destruktive Charakter*.

<sup>164</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.22.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

But there is not only loss, there is also its other – there is also the encounter of finding the other. In finding *you*, I also find *myself* (which is another way of saying, love proper). But as Žižek never hesitates to point out, this form of love is also ridden with violence. *I* find *you* and in *you*, I find what has been missing in *me*, but this *Ding* (thing) that has been missing must have gone missing in order for me to posit myself as an autonomous being. *You*, qua *objet a* (the missing part in the object around which all my desirous thoughts are circulating – \$ <> a) are in fact *too-much*<sup>166</sup>, *you* are *my* excess. In other words, the other is what constitutes us as beings within a social contract, within a symbolic community of beings; but she is also a fundamentally violent threat, coming too close and threatening to unbind all the carefully bound bondages which hold together the other's representation as an autonomous being, *next to* her (in safe distance – distance is important).

Analytic experience provides us with two chief strategies for repression,<sup>167</sup> for coping with the o/Other qua *objet a* (and, as such, as excess or *too-muchness*), which both have to be conceptualized in relation to the fundamental fantasy (\$<>a). What I am referring to here is the split between how desire is articulated by obsessive neurotics as opposed to by hysterics. Put simply, while the obsessive simply refuses to acknowledge that the object she desires bears any form of relationship to the o/Other, “in the hysteric's fantasy (...), separation is overcome as the subject constitutes herself, not in relation to the erotic object she herself has ‘lost,’ but as the object the Other is missing.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Again, this too-muchness of the world.

<sup>167</sup> The defense of repression belongs to the neurotic pattern of desire. I will not be speaking of the other two (psychosis and perversion) in this context simply for the reason that the neurotic pattern seems to be the ‘standard’ paradigm of the sexual relation.

<sup>168</sup> Fink, Bruce: *Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p.118-120.

But this presents us with a massive problem: let us say that we have two people trying to get through to each other – two bodies wanting to touch and be touched. On the one hand, we have someone who tries to cope with this primordial loss by simply blocking the possibility of there being something like an o/Other on whom she could depend— a case of megalomania, the false conclusion of a presupposition of complete autonomy; but on the other hand, we have someone who disregards the very same fact in repressing her own lack by turning herself into the o/Other's lack, by wanting to become what the o/Other is lacking. But the o/Other does not want to see that she is lacking something, does not want to be faced with the o/Other *qua desired object* – an almost impossible situation that is our human condition. The way we encounter each other, the way we encounter each other's bodies is thus necessarily ridden with violence – hence the relation between love, guilt, and shame.

Neurotic persons have a hard time dealing with this alienation in and through the o/Other in her otherness. This becomes especially obvious when we undo one another, when we are undone by the other, i.e. when we do each other. During sexual intercourse (where is the other's body closer to ours than during the act of sleeping with each other?), we are often appalled by the face of the other, by the moans, grimaces and smells that disgust us (hysteric pattern) or make us feel guilty (obsessive pattern).<sup>169</sup> It seems as if the mask has finally fallen from the partner's face and a much more primal, much more savage creature is leaping at us from beneath. At the same time, we may also be shocked by our own behavior, by the way we seem to lose control over our own bodies, our own senses, our own mind. A body touching another body – the constitution of a *we*, as well as the undoing of the fallacious re-presentation of the singular body as an autonomously

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<sup>169</sup> For this see for example: Fink, Bruce: A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

functioning unit.<sup>170</sup> The path between *jouissance* and aggression in this game is a narrow one. We desire the other's body but we are equally scared by its threat to undo us, by the way we are torn apart with and through this other. An encounter of this sort is first of all two folded: it is *alienating* as well as it is *painful* (pleasure and pain here are only two sides of the same coin) – And again: '*Can you hold me a second!? ... Don't touch me ... Don't touch me! ... Don' ...*' Doing and undoing – long for it; we need *it*.

What is probably the most famous illustration of this '*Don't touch me*' – at least in the Western world – comes from none other than Jesus's address to Mary Magdalen: *Noli me tangere*. Nancy delineates the fundamental ambivalence which lies enclosed in these words:

“Either it resonates with the threatening tone of an affront: don't touch me; don't even try to touch me, or I'll strike you. You won't be spared! Don't touch me; you have no idea how much violence I'm capable of. It is a final warning (...). In this sense, the interjection or the injunction itself constitutes an incitement to violence. It could be that he who issues it is one who wants violence.”<sup>171</sup>

Or else, the phrase resonates less as an order than as a plea made in an excess of pain or pleasure (*jouissance*). “Don't touch me, for I cannot bear this pain on my wounds any longer – or this intense pleasure,

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<sup>170</sup> After what has been said so far concerning the notion of the body as the *site of subjectivity*, only in a sliding from one to the other (from one body to the other one), it is not astonishing that the act of 'doing it' (as well as the act of love by the way, for what is love if not the fundamental – emotional – touching upon each other?) causes a certain psychotic feeling. We can no longer be sure where our individual bodies begin and end, whether we are *I* or *You*. An exciting feeling, but also a scary feeling indeed. Some can cope with it better than others; it is thus not at all random that obsessive neurotics often announce that 'they have to come,' or are 'about to come' in the course of their orgasm. The symbolic structure (the voice) in this moment has to supplement the act in order to prevent the individual from fully giving in to this feeling of absolute limitlessness. Nowhere are we undone more by one another than when '*we come*.'

<sup>171</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Noli me tangere*, p.53.

aggravated to the point of becoming intolerable. I can no longer suffer it or enjoy (*jouir*) it.”<sup>172</sup>

And, of course, there is also the ambivalence Billy Brown presents to us: ‘*Don’t touch me*’ is a wish to be touched, to be held – ‘*Can you hold me a second ... Don’t touch me ... Don’t touch me! ... Don’ ...*’ This is the moment when the body as *place* (*site of subjectivity*) unfolds, when suffering can be enjoyed and enjoying can suffer. “Don’t wish it, don’t even try to touch this point of rupture, for indeed, I would be shattered by it.”<sup>173</sup> It is the potential enclosed in our neighbor – in our neighbor’s touch, her face. So how can and should we love this neighbor if the task of fundamentally tearing us apart is in her hands? Instead of giving up on the claim for sameness which is to be found at the core of universality (loss as a constitutive factor of community, a loss that each and everyone of us had to undergo) and replacing it with a respect for the otherness of the o/Other – as Levinas suggests – we should not fail to acknowledge the utterly *inhuman* dimension of the Neighbor.<sup>174</sup> To illustrate this ambivalence between love and hatred at the heart of *my neighbor*, that fundamental and constitutive *too-muchness* the o/Other presents to us, let us turn to Žižek’s elaboration of this notion:

“It is for this reason that finding oneself in the position of the beloved is so violent, traumatic even: being loved makes me feel directly the gap between what I am as a determinate being and the unfathomable X in me which causes love. Lacan’s definition of love (‘Love is giving something one doesn’t have ...’) has to be supplemented with: ‘... to someone who doesn’t want it.’ Indeed, are we aware that Yeats’s wellknown lines describe one of the most claustrophobic constellations that one can imagine?

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p.52-53.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p.53.

<sup>174</sup> For this see for example Slavoj Žižek’s book on violence: Žižek, Slavoj: Violence. Big Ideas, Small Books. New York: Picador 2008.

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light,  
I would speard the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dearms;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet,  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”<sup>175</sup>

The o/Other's otherness is not a fundamental alterity, but something we know only too well. It is that which we long for but only in order to most carefully avoid it. To be presented with it is first of all not the emergence of an ethical imperative, but its very opposite – the state of exception of good and evil, love and hate ‘whereby suffering can be enjoyed and enjoying can suffer.’ For a start, we do not love our neighbor; we want her to leave us alone; we need to be left alone in order to, in the aftermath of this departure, be able to long for her.

What can be preserved from this is that we (meaning *I* over here and *you* over there) are interlaced, we are interwoven, our bodies touching upon each other, doing and undoing each other at the same time. But the question that arises out of this is how to politically acknowledge this fact. For it is essential to most political movements to make a claim to bodily integrity and self-determination. In this sense, it is vital to hypostasize that our bodies are indeed *our own* and that “we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies.”<sup>176</sup> But at the same time, the body is always surrendered to the other, our skin and face exposed to the gaze of the other. As such, the body is always already marked by primordial vulnerability, by mortality, and also agency. “Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the

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<sup>175</sup> Žižek, Slavoj: *Violence*, p.48.

<sup>176</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.25.



very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever our own.”<sup>177</sup> This is the paradox of the body – it is ... and is not. It is always there, always re-presented, but nevertheless the *other* body, the one touching another body and thus the *site of sense* always evades our grasp. It is a necessary impossibility. This is how we should understand Butler’s claim that “Individuation is an accomplishment, not a presupposition, and certainly no guarantee.”<sup>178</sup> And the felicity of this accomplishment does not depend on *me* alone, but first of all on the *o/Other* acknowledging me in my individuality.

Through this the bond of the *political body of a community to come* is established; bodies touching upon bodies, undoing each other in order to inaugurate an *I*, *you*, and finally, a *we*. It is, however, a community that will never be fully realized, as it is caught up in the *to come* which is at the same time our search for it, i.e. our search for *ourselves*. It cannot be realized because the basis of this community is that something has always already been lacking from the start. What is lacking has – as demonstrated in *Chapter 3* – is the constitutive negativity, the founding violence which exists prior to all forms of good and evil but – and because of this – provides for the rise of any such thing, the ‘great bond’ connecting all of us.

In other words, what we are dealing with here is the fact that every society is built on a primordial *Ur-Sprung* (always to be thought as a multiplicity of departures, not a ‘single event’) which gives rise – *qua loss* – to the possibility of bodily re-presentation. Through this violent intervention, lives are produced and rendered re-presentable as parts of a community. *But* this will always already lack something, and this something is what has been accounted for as society’s *zero* of focalization, what is re-presented yet not present. As a result of this intervention, we have to come to terms with the fact that we are not all

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p.26.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p.27.

‘equal in our fundamental otherness,’ that the face of the other is not the foundation of an ethical order or of any kind of respectful behavior, that lives are not all the same in their otherness. All our bodies matter<sup>179</sup>, but some seem to matter more than others:

“Lives are supported and maintained differently, and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grievable.’”<sup>180</sup>

This is the ‘inhuman dimension’ the other’s body presents us with. The bodies of those who, through the first violent act of the establishment of a community, have been excluded from this very community continue to haunt us, not because they have been immolated in order to found a new positively given order upon their graves, but because they remain *within* this positively given, closed and neatly ordered (according to an ethical order of being) space as the *spectral* negativity haunting this very order. They cannot be protected because there is no safe space for them to turn to and they cannot be mourned because they were always already the lost ones (providing the *site* where the rest can find themselves); they cannot be killed, because they have been undead from the very start, belonging only in their non-belonging. And lastly, they cannot participate in any ‘rational discourse’ where all parties come together to negotiate, to respect each other and to give way to understanding and the force of the better argument (in other words to agonality instead of antagonism<sup>181</sup>) because they themselves are situated at the very *limit* of this discourse, establishing and (bodily) exposing the limits of

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. Butler, Judith: *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London, New York: Routledge 1993.

<sup>180</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.32.

<sup>181</sup> Mouffe, Chantal: *The Democratic Paradox*. London, New York: Verso 2009.

human intelligibility.<sup>182</sup> *'Can you hold me a second!? ... Don't touch me ... Don't touch me! ... Don' ...'* – but this is exactly what we have to do: touching each other, touching upon one another and coming to terms with the (i.e. our) excess as materialized within the bodily representation of our neighbor.

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<sup>182</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life*, p.35.

## 6. Conclusion

Broadly speaking, we have been concerned here with speaking about the limits of human intelligibility, with coming to grips with the notion of political intervention as an embodiment of the *site of the event*. This *site* has been approached from various sides: from the side of subjectivity and subjectivation, from the notion of the Utopian labor the work of art carries out on a day to day basis, as well as from the notion of the human body itself. These three approaches were chosen because, despite their variety, they still have something in common – they share the same structural position: subjectivity, art, and the body are three different fields which render it possible to speculate about the nature of the *site of the event* as the battlefield of ‘true’ political intervention.

As we have sought to point out, the concepts of subjectivity and subjectivation are indispensable to a proper understanding of political intervention. But the notion of the subject can no longer be grasped as autonomous– in which the subject exists as singular unit called into existence solely through the act of thinking herself (‘I think therefore I am’). Rather the concept of subjectivity has been delineated as a delicate interplay of metonymy and metaphor, as a *vanishing category* which cannot be sustained for very long, a category which will always already be caught up in its becoming at the same time as it will always already have vanished from the scene (of re-presentation) again – a necessary impossibility. In order to come to terms with this very notion, we have had to examine both its properties: it is the act of radical (metaphorical) intervention (Badiou’s claim) as well as it is constituted by the metonymic trace of a writing forth of signifiers (Derrida’s signifying chain); *but* – we have added – this interrelation of metonymy and metaphor is at the same time the interwovenness of recognition and non-recognition. Only if the seemingly nonsensical act of subjective intervention is taken as a sign (and followed) by the

o/Other will the constitutive negativity be sublated into the order of being (i.e. the order of re-presentation), thus counting this order anew and producing a more just framing of it.

The *work of art*, the labor of a ‘true’ form of art (one which bears witness to a society’s constitutive void, i.e. an understanding of the aesthetic regime as closely tied to the field of re-presentation, that which provides the *a priori backstage* for anything to appear on the *front stage*) is the materialization of such a sign that gives both a *resisting* and a *persisting* body to the fleetingness of the vanishing force subjectivity presents us with. In this sense, art has been described not as an aesthetic practice but as a mode of thinking. The front stage’s discourse of re-presentation – which could also be referred to as the discourse of (scientific) knowledge – is one of loud and blithesome pattering, of fast words and an all-knowing discourse. It is this discourse of sophomoric words, metaphors, and analogies – re-presentation as certainty - which, however, forecloses the ability to see the constitutive lack as the founding gesture of this possibility of abundance of words. The *work of art* does not participate in this game of semblances, but rather strives to occupy the place of negativity, and thus becomes society’s minimal difference. As such, ‘true’ *art* – as was also the case for our elaboration of subjectivity – is construed *from the void*; although it is not the void it bears a distinct relation to it by giving form to the formative formlessness. Through this, it is marked by a deliberate letting go of power relations. To posit oneself in opposition to the system of re-presentations would still mean to participate in this discourse, to speak the same language. Art which remains caught up *within* the discourse (i.e. not being situated at the

very *limit* of discourse) belongs to what Horkheimer/Adorno referred to as the field of Cultural Industry.<sup>183</sup>

The *work of art*, however, is not of this language but has to be thought as the condition of possibility for discourse as such to arise. Of course it belongs to the symbolic system (there is nothing beyond the symbolic other than death as presence) but it must nevertheless be regarded as that system's symptomal knot, its minimal displacement no longer caught up in power relations but the very focal point from which these relations arise. In *art*, the *zero/One* – which had been delineated in *Chapter 3* as negative dialectics of subjectivity – is here presented to us in a materialized form. Artistic intervention may be conceived as nonsense or even terror as long as it is not picked up by the o/Other – it will continue to function as a society's symptom – but if it is picked up, if it is believed and taken as a *sign*, it will give way to the *new to come*, thus being transformed (in the act of traversing the fantasy) from symptom to sinthome.

So while *art* in general and *artistic intervention* (i.e. the *work of art*) in particular can and must be understood as a way of giving form to the formless space of constitutive negativity, a way of giving a body to the bodiless heteronomy; this body is still of a different kind than the other body we have been speaking of – *our* bodies. While the materialization of sense through *art* does not necessarily have a graspable body, a body that can be touched<sup>184</sup>, our own bodies are marked by the ability to be touched, by us and by each other. What is specific to the notion of the body is that it is so close to us,; while art is something we can see, hear, experience, and sometimes even touch, we can turn away from it again. Our bodies, however, are something we cannot turn away from. We cannot do without either our own body

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno: *Die Dialectic der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1988.

<sup>184</sup> Just think about music or the performance arts for example.

and – as was demonstrated above – or that of the other, both being indispensable to the formation of ourselves as *I* and *you*. The body, in the form of *our bodies*, is the possibility to touch upon the unfolding of sense in the other and through the other.

It could be argued that these three notions – subject, art, body – differ in the way they can be touched upon, the subject being the most fleeting category that only appears in non-appearing, in continuously withdrawing in the form of a constantly *vanishing mediator*; art as a form of materialization of this subjective process which persists as well as it opens up the way for the new to come (always depending on the o/Other to take it as a *sign*, a *symbol* for a Utopian belief to arise); and the body as the corporeality of the unfolding of sense through the process of touching each other, exposing oneself to the o/Other and being touched/marked by an other. But at the same time these three categories have something fundamental in common – they all bear a distinct relation to the situation's *void*, the *site of the event*, or to what can also be called the *edge of the void*; they are construed *from* it, but not really *it*. Instead, they can be understood as (more or less vanishing) *mediators* between the counted set of re-presentation and the heteronomy of the *void*. Subject, art, and the body – they are the link between *void* ( $\emptyset$ ) and *One*, a *zero of focalization*.

An understanding of these notions along the aforementioned lines renders it necessary to take a different path towards the conceptualization of the notion of politics in general and radical political intervention in particular. What we generally refer to as 'political actions' (i.e. day-to-day parliamentary politics within the democratic sphere) are in fact a form of 'weak politics'; what Badiou even goes so far as to call 'sophistry.'<sup>185</sup> This stage sophistry exists as a place for re-presentations where everybody seems to count the same,

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<sup>185</sup> Badiou, Alain: Metapolitics, p.14.

where all can come together in their freedom of speech and can argue. In the end, the 'better argument' will win as long as we keep listening to and respecting each other. This form of politics will, however, always already remain bound to the given set of norms and values insofar as it is unable to operate *within* the system while grasping the conditions of possibility *of* this very system. It is thus unable to come to terms with its founding violence and will, therefore, be unable to produce a more just version through the re-inscription of this negativity in the form of a fundamental re-signification of all given parameters.

But this is exactly the potential a philosophy which does not give up on the notion of subjectivity, artistic intervention, and body politics is able to conceptualize – that is, it renders this formative negativity productive for the process of political intervention. For “(w)hat philosophy *is* able to record, in the unfolding of previously unseen possibilities, the sign of a renewed ‘thinkability’ (...) of politics *conceived on the basis of its own exercise*.”<sup>186</sup> Weak politics cannot think *the new* from the given order (which is the very order of this kind of politics) because from the perspective of this order the new will always appear as unthinkable, as a scandalon, a terrorist threat; only afterwards, *après coup*, this *new* will always have been a necessity to come. This is possible because the very conditions of being have been altered – the set has been counted anew. Weak, system immanent, politics that have lost their relation to the *void* can only produce pseudo-events, happenings and interventions which, at first glance, may seem like radical re-structurings of the situation but which are nevertheless feverishly preoccupied with upholding the *status quo*. Or, in psychoanalytic words, they enjoy their symptom at the same time as they cover it up, not seeing it, instead of working through it by traversing of the fantasy. This form of politics runs along

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p.62.



the line of *norm* and its *immanent excess*, as has been pointed out by our eximantion of Lacan's *Lettre d'Amour* in *Chapter 3*. The norm will produce its fundamental Other, a wholly other that always holds a relationship of complicity to that norm. This other, however, does not have anything in common with the primordial exclusion which the given order is founded upon, but only *seems* to do so – a register of *semblances*. Reintegrating this *excess of semblances* will not change the *status quo*; quite the opposite, it will only make it more powerful, like a virus spreading out and becoming more and more resistant through the little portions of poison it encounters.

This becomes especially obvious in artistic production within the field of the culture industry; but it holds equally true for body politics. The seeming excess provided by a plethora of fashions, musical styles, and artistic interventions may at first glance appear as a threat to the system, but the seamless incorporation of this 'other' within the 'mainstream' of capitalist society demonstrates exceptionally well that here we are not dealing with a fundamental breach that can transform the given parameters but only with its immanent excess. This is also the problem that the sexual liberation movement is facing. Although we liberated ourselves from clothing and monogamy, it is striking to what extent our society is still facing a conservative backlash at the moment – pseudo events, unable to *really* liberate themselves from their complicity with (capitalist) violence by acknowledging this very complicity.

In the register of re-presentation as an order of pseudo events, the excluded (*Chapter 5*), the ones that belong only in their non-belonging, will remain backstage, forever haunting the positively given front stage. On this level, respect and responsibility is all good and well and – as has been delineated – is also necessary in day-to-day politics to work with models of bodily integrity and autonomy – this is

the level of imaginary closure<sup>187</sup> (and on the level of the imaginary, which is the level of our everyday lives, the structures are closed; we have a body which functions as a singular unit, and we are autonomously thinking beings). But something will always already be left outside of this discourse because it marks the limit of that very discourse, qua unfolding of sense.

The difficult task is the following: while we remain on the imaginary level of our daily encounters, we are led to believe that a frictionless politics, a politics without violent rupture, may be possible; but we also have to acknowledge the fact that every society (and in fact, as has been shown above, every form of interaction – because the concept itself is split – and as such, the symbolic order we live in and are inaugurated by) is built on a distinct primordial violence that brings into being the positively given at the same time as it excludes others – othering the other which will henceforth belong only in its non-belonging, forever haunting us in its unaccounted presence.

By working towards the acknowledgement of this founding violence we have already – by the mere act of framing it in language – taken the first step in the production of a *new count* which will have inaugurated a new system of beliefs. “We perform the recognition by making the claim, and this is surely a very good ethical reason to make the claim.”<sup>188</sup> In differentially re-peating the norms of the given order (i.e. in making use of the symbolic system *at the limits* of this very system), we will be able to re-sign – to re-sign *from it* (letting it be, letting power fall in not participating in the system’s logic of norm and immanent excess) and re-sign *it*, (i.e. put our own signature beneath it) – and thus change it fundamentally –re-signifying the status quo.

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<sup>187</sup> Lukács, Georg: Theory of the Novel.

<sup>188</sup> Butler, Judith: Precarious Life, p.43.

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Žižek, Slavoj: Violence. Big Ideas, Small Books. New York: Picador 2008.

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## **Films**

Buffalo 66. US 1998 (D: Vincent Gallo).

Happy-Go-Lucky. GB 2008 (D: Mike Leigh).



### **Abstract (english version)**

My thesis seeks to trace back the conditions and relevance of the notions of subject, subjectivity, and subjectivation for processes of (political) intervention. The first part is designed to serve as a theoretical introduction, drawing on Jacques Lacan's notions of metonymy and metaphor, linking and rendering them fruitful for a comparison of the different approaches Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou take towards an understanding of the notion of the subject. Through a close reading of these authors an understanding of subjectivity shall be provided which is able to take into account the necessity of a (negative) dialectics of recognition in the process of subjective constitution. The second part of the thesis encompasses three essays which – although they differ according to their subject matter – revolve around the notions delineated in the first part and which seek to render fruitful the insights gained in the theoretical analysis. These three essays focus on the notions of recognition and violence (*Chapter 3*), the political potentials of the work of art (*Chapter 4*), and the notions of body and the o/Other (*Chapter 5*).

### **Abstract (german version)**

Die hier vorliegende Arbeit setzt sich mit Fragen rund um die Begriffe: Subject, Subjektivierung und Subjektivität auseinander. Der erste Teil umfasst eine theoretische Herangehensweise an die Materie. Ausgehend von Jacques Lacans Theorie bezüglich der Interdependenz von Metonymie und Metapher sowie dessen Bedeutung für den Prozess der Subjektkonstitution sollen ins besonders die unterschiedlichen Zugänge betrachtet werden, die Jacques Derridas Theorie einerseits und Alain Badiou's Zugang zur Materie auf der anderen Seite auszeichnen. In der genauen Analyse dieser Autoren soll eine Konzeptualisierung des Subjektbegriffs angestrebt werden, die die Notwendigkeit einer bestimmten Form der (negativen) Anerkennungsdialektik für den Subjektivierungsprozess offenlegt. Der zweite Teil der Arbeit umfasst drei Essays, die – obwohl sie in ihrer Thematik divergieren – um die in Teil 1 dargelegten Konzepte und Theorien kreisen und versuchen, diese für das jeweilige Feld fruchtbar zu machen. Diese Kapitel setzten sich mit Fragen der Anerkennungsdialektik (*Kapitel 3*), des Werks der Kunst (*Kapitel 4*) sowie dem Begriff des Körpers und der Körperlichkeit (*Kapitel 5*) auseinander.



## Curriculum Vitae Mag.a Andrea Wald

### Personal information

Surname / First name	Wald Andrea
Nationality	Austria
Date of birth	29.06.1983
Gender	female

### Education and training

since 08/2008	University of Vienna; Department of Theater, Film, and Media Studies Diplomarbeit (equivalent to Master's Thesis): <i>R<sup>3</sup> – Political Bodies between Repetition, Resignation, and Resignification</i> (Supervisor: Clemens Stepina)
01/2008 – 07/2008	PhD ERASMUS Scholarship University of Cambridge Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages; Gonville and Caius College
since 11/2007	University of Vienna; Department of German Studies Doctoral Research on <i>A Weak Messianic Power: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Event</i> (Supervisors: Wolfgang Müller-Funk and Erik Vogt)
10/2006 – 06/2007	University of Vienna; Department of German Studies Diplomarbeit (equivalent to Master's Thesis): <i>Masken des Signifikanten. Subjekt und Begehren in Irmgard Keun's Romanen Gilgi – eine von uns und Das kunstseidene Mädchen sowie Marieluise Fleißers Eine Zierde für den Verein. Roman vom Rauchen Sporteln, Lieben und Verkaufen</i> (Supervisor: Wolfgang Müller-Funk)

10/2002 – 11/2007	Department of German Studies/Department of English and American Studies Final Exam, Mag.a (phil) (equivalent to MA) "mit Auszeichnung bestanden" ("passed with highest distinction")
since 10/2001	Department of Theater, Film, and Media Studies First Graduating Exam, 1. Studienabschnitt (equivalent to BA) "mit Auszeichnung bestanden"
09/1993 – 06/2001	De La Salle School Matura (Secondary School Degree) "mit Auszeichnung bestanden"
09/1991 – 06/1993	De La Salle Elementary School
09/1989 – 06/1991	Marco Polo Großjedlersdorf Elementary School

## Workshops and Seminars

Winter Semester 08/09	Co-Convener of the Seminar: Performance and Performativity. The Teaching Body as a Medium of Didactic Settings (CTEPR)
19.-22.09.2007	Workshop: Alain Badiou The Event of Truth: Politics, Philosophy, and Poetics (Cogito Interruptus in cooperation with the Cultural Forum Austria in Zagreb)
since 2007	Co-Convener of Workshops, Lectures, Talks and Concerts for fiber.werkstoff für feminismus und popkultur
since 2006	Co-Convener of Cogito Interruptus: Interdisciplinary Graduate Research Group on Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis

## Publications and Talks

17.07.2009	Wo versteckt sich der Schatz in "Frau Holle" (Literary Theory for Children for the Children's University Vienna)
06.09.2009	Schrift, Umschrift, Wieder-Einschrift. Das Werkzeug der Kunst (Utopie als Werkzeug in Politik, Kunst und Religion. Talk in Cooperation with the IWK Vienna)
13.11.2008	Zwischen Resignation und Resignifikation. Die Aufgabe der Kunst. (Talk in Cooperation with Unkultur, Berlin)
05.05.2008	Love will tear us apart. On Violence, Etui-Menschen, and the fatal Attractions of Destruction. (Talk at the German Graduate Research Seminar, Cambridge)
since 09/2007	Reviews, Articles, and Columns for fiber.werkstoff für feminismus und popkultur