

**FROM THE STATE TO THE WORLD?
BADIOU AND ANTI-CAPITALISM**

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For Sam Gillespie

What about the rest? The elephant-capital? It's the cement court on which the real game is played. Don't confuse the tarred surface with Bjorn Borg's run. The fact that the same man, Marx, is the cement engineer and the champion of the net heralds the new epoch of the polyvalent worker.

(Alain Badiou, 1982: 296)

We can't defeat the system through isolated actions; we must engage it on all fronts – the university, the prisons, and the domain of psychiatry – one after another since our forces are not strong enough for a simultaneous attack. We strike and knock against the most solid obstacles; the system cracks at another point; we persist. It seems that we're winning, but then the institution is rebuilt; we must start again. It is a long struggle; it is repetitive and seemingly incoherent. But the system it opposes, as well as the power exercised through the system, supplies its unity.

(Michel Foucault, 1994 [1972])

Abstract

In the most complete statement of his doctrine to date, *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou proposes to think the pivotal character, for any thinking of subjectivation, of the immeasurable excess of the State (or representation) of an ontological situation over the (presentation of) the situation itself. In his “metapolitical” reflections, Badiou accordingly tries to formulate a thinking of politics no longer bound to a systemic dialectics of destruction – of the sort that characterised his earlier, Maoist writings – but rather defined by the concepts of “distance” and “subtraction”. In light of a number of statements on the topic of capitalism made in Badiou’s recent work, this paper tries to determine whether the guiding traits of Capital in any way disturb the formulation of Badiou’s ontology and metapolitics. On the basis of a discussion of the differential articulation of Capital and State, it then tries to assay the pertinence of some of Badiou’s work-in-progress on the “logics of worlds” for a thinking of the specificity of anti-capitalist, as opposed to anti-State, politics.

Key words

Capital; anti-capitalism; state; world; sovereignty; singularity; excrescence; distance; Harvey; Agamben; Negri.

It seems beyond dispute that the enthusiasm (as well as the hostility) which has greeted the thought of Alain Badiou in certain quarters within the Anglophone philosophical world is not only to be ascribed to the daunting originality and rare speculative force of his systematic project – a project which is far from being entirely “available” to the English reader and whose doctrinal detail is regrettably not the fulcrum of debate – but also to its provocative political charge. In some respects this should be anything but astonishing; setting aside for the time being Badiou’s ongoing political militancy in *L’Organisation politique*, the stringent demands of a militant intellect transpire from many, if not most, of Badiou’s writings; whether directly, in the urgency of a meta-political theorem or an ethical directive, or elliptically, as the formalised sediment of an endeavour to cognise the requirements of a novel philosophical figure of subjectivity. We should also not ignore the pressure

exerted, in our particular intellectual conjuncture, by an often stagnant politico-philosophical landscape, one rendered all the more debilitating when it is punctuated – but certainly not punctured – by a concern with ethics and subjectivity devoid of anything but a strictly imaginary relationship to political emancipation. Furthermore, it is clear that the strenuous conviction with which the singularity of the political, and of its dignity as an immanent mode of thought (and not just a “practice” that would serve as the occasional or occasioning object of philosophical reflection), is treated in Badiou’s work has struck a chord, uncertain as its resonance may still be. And yet, as some have already intimated, the core of Badiou’s thought seems in many regards to be remarkably indifferent to what over the past few years has appeared as the floating referent of a politics whose retreat – whether “empirical” or philosophical – might be drawing to a close, for better or worse. This referent is that of “anti-capitalism”.

Both in its informational circulation and in its assumption as the watchword of a growing host of demonstrations of antagonism and refusal, many effects of indeterminacy have attached themselves to this unstable and symptomatic syntagm, turning it into a veritable *lure* for political practice. The reasons for the conspicuous absence of an explicit channel of communication between Badiou’s current doctrine and the set of struggles gathered under the banner of “anti-capitalism” are certainly complex and must be sought in some of the fundamental tenets of Badiou’s doctrine. An investigation of their sources may offer valuable clues about the metapolitical specificity of Badiou’s work. What is more, it might lead us to question whether such an absence is intrinsic to Badiou’s proposal or whether it is instead determined by some avoidable properties that have been ascribed, perhaps unjustly, to “anti-capitalist” politics.

We could legitimately begin this investigation by interrogating Badiou on the question of antagonism. This is, after all, the crucial instance around which the passage from his Maoist philosophy of destructive subjectivation to his present thinking of a subtractive “politics without a party” was articulated, most explicitly in that brief but pivotal text which is *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Badiou, 1985). To comprehend the tortuous fate of the figure of antagonism in Badiou’s thought, following its arresting apotheosis in *Théorie du sujet* (Badiou, 1982), is perhaps to seize the conjunctural and theoretical necessity of the qualified break with the dialectical impetus that had driven Badiou’s thought up to his “destruction” of the political fictions behind much of Marxist politics. Alas, this would be a gargantuan task, one that would need to track the many mutations in Badiou’s thinking of subjectivation, and face up to the successive

formalisations that sustain them (vital indications in this direction have been made by Bruno Bosteels in some recent articles, see Bosteels, 2001 and 2002; I have attempted to track some of these transformations in terms of Badiou's visions of "communism" in Toscano, 2004). To put it succinctly, what becomes of the metapolitical conception of capitalism when it is no longer linked to class struggle as *the* arena of political subjectivation (as it remained in Badiou, 1982: 44)? Whilst I hope, in the final analysis, to have elucidated some of the motivations for such a suspension or transfiguration of antagonism, it will be only by a detour, one undertaken "against the grain" of the theory of the subject, that is, from the "perspective" of the structure of situations, or, to use the terminology of his most recent work, from that of the "logics of worlds". This detour will not be so subtle, however, beginning as it does with the rather vulgar question: What does Badiou's more recent (post-Maoist or post-dialectical) work have to say about capitalism? And what resources does his thought supply to come to terms with the intrusion of Capital into the field of philosophy?

Before we touch upon the explicit replies to this question we must confront the resolute disdain for facts ubiquitously evinced by Badiou's thought. Both in his mathematised ontology and his theory of the subject – and *a fortiori*, in the delicate articulation of these two – Badiou's founding gesture is that of evacuating the phenomenal density and persistent enticement borne by the "fact" that things are "thus and so". In the dimension of politics, this inaugural evacuation is accompanied by a sovereign disregard – when not indeed a full-blown contempt – for anything that smacks of socio-economic analysis (Hallward, 2003: 279-284). What summons thought, whether it be the rigorous formalisation of the inconsistency of being-multiple or the infinite composition of a truth from the vanishing irruption of an event, as sustained by the fidelity of a subject, is beyond, or rather beneath, the realm of phenomena. In other words, it is impervious to any generally applicable regime of visibility, whether cognitive, sociological, or "straightforwardly" empirical. Whilst it would be fundamentally unfaithful to attribute this stubborn anti-empiricism to any sort of Gnostic or negative-theological inclinations on Badiou's part, and though, as I hope to show, the configurations of the factual (for want of a better word) do play a role in his thinking, it is undeniable that a stark *disqualification* of reality (as opposed to the immanent exception of the Real) is what, for Badiou, defines thought as a separation, a distancing, or, more technically, a subtraction (Badiou, 1992 and 2004; Toscano, 2004; Hallward, 2003: 161-163). Philosophy (in its indifference to experience) and politics (in its disdain for the administration of reality) bear a more than elective affinity. Abstraction and subjectivation, as moments when the "human animal" lays claim to the status of

“Immortal” (Badiou, 1993: 75), precisely involve a disfigurement of the limits of possibility which define any reality principle. In this respect, for Badiou, politics and philosophy exist for the sake of affirming an impossible-Real *and to draw the consequences of this impossible-Real for “reality” and “possibility”*. This is something all-too easily forgotten by those among Badiou’s critics who mistakenly view him as a thinker of the fulgurating, immaculate Act. As Badiou himself remarks: “we must point out that in what concerns its material the event is not a miracle. What I mean is that what composes an event is always extracted from a situation, always related back to a singular multiplicity, to its state, to the language that is connected to it, etc. In fact, so as not to succumb to an obscurantist theory of creation *ex nihilo*, we must accept that an event is nothing but a part of a given situation, nothing but a *fragment of being*” (Badiou, 2004b).

Furthermore, to the extent that in the last instance facticity can only be sustained by a dense network of placements, a network whose principle guarantees the localisation of every existential instance in an ordered and structured space of appearing, as well as a seemingly exception-less count, the political ontology at work in Badiou’s writings is founded, as Peter Hallward has insistently indicated (and critiqued), on a profound disregard for the primacy of relation (Hallward, 2003: 284-291). Not only is there no “natural” or cosmic bond, no Aristotelian *telos* that would essentially bind a being to its *topos*, but the resources of set-theoretical ontology allegedly allow us to approach being qua being (i.e. the multiple) irrespective of any constitutive form of interaction, as well as independently of any concern for the supposedly relational character of processes of individuation. One of the fundamental categories of Badiou’s politics, as well as of his ontology, is unbinding, *déliasion*. Being qua being, as axiomatically presented in mathematical ontology, and the generic being of the collective, as affirmed by a political truth procedure, are both unbound, that is infinite, non-denumerable and unrepresentable. It is at this crucial juncture that Capital enters the scene as a figure pregnant with ambivalence for a thinking of a radical, egalitarian and fully “unbound” politics.

If we turn to the *Manifesto for Philosophy*, and specifically to the section entitled “Nihilism?” we witness, *pace* Badiou’s disdain for socio-economic facticity and regulation, a genuine paean to the equivocal grandeur of Capital, explicitly re-affirming, and indeed quoting, the epochal diagnosis of that other manifesto, penned a century and a half earlier by Marx and Engels. In a few, rather lyrical, lines Badiou sketches a figure which, whilst it may be familiar to

anyone reflecting upon the link between communism and modernism, is nevertheless a somewhat disruptive, if inevitable, intruder into the coherence of Badiou's own account of politics and of the metapolitical assumption (Badiou, 1998) of politics by philosophy. Briefly, Badiou reiterates the image of Capital as the solvent of the natural, self-evident or revealed bond, whether this be social (the particular community) or religious (the *re-ligio*, literally the binding of the sense of the world to the reason and/or will of the creator). Yet what is at stake here is not the mere registering of the coruscating force borne by the "roaming automatism" of Capital – to wit, the subjection of any available being to the inhuman imperative of surplus-value. Were that the case, Badiou's stance would be inconsequential, yet another reason for passivity, pessimism or idolatrous apologia. The claim is far deeper and more unsettling in what it bodes for thought in general. Capital is not simply the empirical effectuation of a ubiquitous unbinding, as determined by the measureless measure which is money as a general equivalent, and by the transcendental requirement of surplus value; rather, Capital is the "historical medium" of a subtractive ontology, an ontology that would regard being qua being as inconsistent multiplicity woven out of the void. An ontology, moreover, which would serve as the background for the "communist invariants" and "communism of singularities" espoused by Badiou (Badiou, 1991; Badiou, 2003a: 126-140; Toscano, 2004). As Badiou writes in the *Manifesto*:

That everything that is *bound up* proves that in terms of being it is unbound; that the reign of the multiple is the unfathomable depths of what is presented without exception; that the One is but the result of transitory operations – there lies the inescapable effect of the universal placing of the terms of our situation within the circulating movement of the general monetary equivalent. [...] Yet, for Marx, and for us, desacralisation is not in the least nihilistic insofar as "nihilism" must signify that which declares that the access to being and truth is impossible. On the contrary, desacralisation is a *necessary condition* for the disclosing of such an approach to thought. It is obviously the only thing we can and must welcome within Capital: it exposes the pure multiple as the foundation of presentation; it denounces every effect of One as a simple, precarious configuration; it dismisses the symbolic representations in which the bond found a semblance of being. That this destitution operates in the most complete barbarity must not conceal its properly *ontological*

virtue (Badiou, 1999: 55-56).

Adding, in a further variation on this text:

The passage where Marx speaks of the desacralisation of all sacred bonds in the icy waters of capitalism has an enthusiastic tone; it is Marx's enthusiasm for the dissolving power of Capital. The fact that Capital revealed itself to be the material power capable of disencumbering us of the "superego" figures of the One and the sacred bonds that accompany it effectively represents its positively progressive character, and it is something that continues to unfold to the present day. Having said that, the generalised atomism, the recurrent individualism and, finally, the abasement of thought into mere practices of administration, of the government of things or of technical manipulation, could never satisfy me as a philosopher. I simply think that it is in the very element of desacralisation that we must reconnect to the vocation of thinking (Badiou, 1990: 6).

Most readers will be familiar by now with one of the distinctive features of Badiou's proposal, that of putting philosophy under the condition of events that produce truths in immanent registers of thought, otherwise known as the *conditions* of philosophy. In this regard, the seemingly subject-less or impersonal operation of Capital seems as though it should be immediately, if not intuitively, disqualified from any pretension to "conditional" status. Its "mediocrity", to use Badiou's own term, derives from its unthinking, asubjective barbarity. Capitalism is the "truth-less horror which exposes the material for a possible truth", whose desert-like imperative we are summoned to "displace" (Badiou, 1992: 218).

I submit that there is perhaps more than meets the eye in Badiou's passing statement that Capital is "certainly the only nihilistic potency of which men have succeeded in being the inventors as well as the prey": statements such as this could open up the field for a critical inquiry into how Capital "itself" has been successively subjectivated, in what sequences, with what effects... As Dominiek Hoens has brought to my attention, we could even think of the IMF or the WTO as faithful "subjects" of Capital, strenuously eliminating any obstacle in the path of the hegemony of surplus-value. Furthermore, it's undeniable that names like "Bretton Woods", "Davos", the "Fed", and figures

like Alan Greenspan have often generated, among our elites, political affects of considerable intensity; moreover, as some have pointed out, “class consciousness” today is arguably a concept more suited to the Fortune 500 than the factory floor. All the more reason to note that Badiou himself has struggled for many years with the question of whether reactionary or non-egalitarian politics are to be envisaged as subjective. In *Théorie du sujet* he begins by ascribing subjectivity to the bourgeoisie (Badiou, 1982: 60) only to subsequently repeal it, whilst in his recent work on the axiomatic theory of the subject he seems to be returning to a notion of the possibility of a non-egalitarian subjectivity, through a schematisation of subjective space (Hallward, 2003: 144-148).

Yet, though it is perhaps not a condition of philosophy in the strict sense, Capital does seem to present the occasioning or inaugural cause for a subtractive ontology of the multiple (such that we could even envisage it, following Deleuze and Guattari, as a meta- or hyper-condition of ontology, see Brassier 2000 and 2004). This idea of a “historical medium” cannot but strike us as a short-circuit of the strictly mathematical immanence of the ontological situation, as if Capital were the Christ – Badiou does, alas, speak of a “revelation” – of the multiple, the *transcendental (or meta-) event* which doubles as the harbinger of the very conditions for eventality itself. Leaving aside for a moment the arduous question of how to integrate such an instance into the conceptual and formal frame of Badiou’s system (again, see Brassier 2004), we should reflect upon how Badiou himself qualifies this historical-transcendental status of Capital.

For Badiou, Capital is *by no means* the irruption of the multiple *as such* (which is, after all, what transits through the subjective production of truths); what guides the originary accumulation whereby Capital disregards and disfigures all bonds – to wit, the “algorithmic”, recursive imperative of surplus value (Brassier, 2004) – is also what requires it to perpetually reproduce figures of the bond, (ac)countable instances of relationality that can supply it with the materials of surplus. Without the territorialisation of production, the myriad manners in which “incorporeal” or fictitious capital constantly reconfigures its spatio-temporal parameters and the exploitable sources of surplus-value, capitalism would literally have no hold over social and economic being. Every extraction and forced integration – of labour power, intellectual property, biological material... – into the cycles of accumulation represents by the same token a “new enclosure” (Notes from Nowhere, 2003: 27). To borrow from the Marxist historical geographer David Harvey, there is no accumulation of capital

and no global consolidation of capitalism as a hegemonic system of social interaction and reproduction without “uneven geographical development”. As Harvey writes, capitalism’s “radical transformation” has been accompanied by “physical transformations that are breathtaking in scope and radical in their implications. New productive forces have been produced and distributed across the face of the earth. Vast concentrations of capital and labour have come together in metropolitan areas of incredible complexity, while transport and communications systems, stretched in far-flung nets around the globe, permit information and ideas as well as material goods and even labour power to move around with relative ease. [...] [T]his physical transformation has not progressed evenly. Vast concentrations of productive power here contrast with relatively empty regions there. Tight concentrations of activity in one place contrast with sprawling far-flung development in another. All of this adds up to what we call the “uneven geographical development” of capitalism” (Harvey, 1999: 373).

Without a determinate if fleeting anchor, without spatial and temporal organisation, the predatory excess of surplus value is entirely powerless – in other words, there is an *intrinsic* link between the ever more unbridled and unbound character of fictitious finance capital and the creation of new spaces of exploitation, such as the export-processing zones in the “developing” world (Klein, 2000: 204-229), as well as the relentless attempts at producing “spatial fixes” to perpetuate capital accumulation in the face of periodic crises (Harvey, 1999). In this light, we can regard Capital’s disdain for any particularity *as such* (*this* source of surplus-value) as but the reverse of its need for *any* particularity as such (*a* source of surplus-value). Whence Badiou’s claim that Capital is the “singularity *that has no regard for any singularity as such*” (Badiou, 1997: 10). To put it in different terms, Capital is *a pure operation and not a truth procedure* (the repercussions of this claim for Badiou’s notion of politics and of mathematics have been admirably dealt with in Brassier, 2004). This constitutive ambivalence – grandeur and mediocrity entwined – which Marxists have often sought to present as *the* contradiction in capitalism, as an index of imminent and immanent demise, might really be the very force of capital, what may be defined as its full-fledged ontological *opportunism*.

Viewed at a sufficient level of abstraction or formalisation, the unbinding praised in our two manifestos – whilst it must be seconded by any philosophy that extricates itself from the pious glue of meaning and religion – is an *asubjective* consequence of the operation of surplus value, for which multiplicity, pliant and unfettered, is nothing but an object of exploitation. In

this respect, surplus-value is nothing if not the figure of an “excessive count”, a count that draws, from the socio-economic materials which it indifferently affects, the means whereby to perpetually exceed itself (it is telling that in Badiou’s brief presentation in the *Manifesto* the link between surplus-value and surplus-labour is ignored if not effaced, as are the “workerist” themes of real subsumption, general intellect and social cooperation – this is the obverse, of course, of the return of “worker” as a political or subjective *name* purged of systemic-dialectical rationality in the directives of *L’Organisation politique*).

A conclusion, albeit a tentative one, can now be drawn – to wit, that the ontological status of Capital differs from that of the State. When Badiou tells us that: “No symbolic sanction of the bond is capable of resisting the abstract potency of Capital.” (Badiou 1999: 55), how can we not consider – especially on the grounds of the obscene evidence of contemporary national and geopolitical situations (from the sordid debates on “national identity” to the sinister edicts of the Project for a New American Century) – the extent to which all States do effectively resort to an often unspoken primal bond, at the very least in the shape of the fundamental biopolitical fantasy that links the contingency of a birth to the putative endowment of rights? Undoubtedly there is no unambiguous sense in which Capital *intends* the dissolution of the State bond, and it is certainly the case that the State provides what is perhaps an indispensable instance of reterritorialisation, a “fix” which not only generates sufficiently stable parameters for the roaming accumulation of Capital, but also provides the most visible means for the required political and military control over the systematic, yet highly selective removal of the barriers to Capital’s automatism. However, on the basis of Badiou’s own pronouncements, it is clear enough that whilst the articulation may be necessary for one of our two partners (State and Capital) in the seizure and control of singularity, what we are confronted with here is a difference in kind, the difference between two logics – along the lines of what Giovanni Arrighi has identified as the territorial logic of (State) power and the capitalist logic of power (Harvey, 2003: 27). Indeed, the empirical resistances of actually existing States against moments of stark capitalist rationality are more numerous than one may at first suspect – a case in point is represented by the *territorial* measures against immigration into states whose welfare systems are presently unsustainable, according to the *capitalist* logic imposed by fiscal exigencies and debt crises.

Whilst it may be intuitively plausible to argue that Capital and State, though perhaps *de facto* inextricable, are distinguished by a (logical) difference in kind, it would be somewhat imprudent to base ourselves here on writings by

Badiou which are arguably in a “peripheral” position vis-à-vis his doctrine (a ‘manifesto’ and the introduction to his *Saint Paul*). This is all the more imperative to the extent that an intra-theoretical distinction between State and Capital is not to be found in Badiou’s own writings, and, in one instance at least, seems to be altogether elided (Badiou, 1998: 164). Now, if a collective politics of emancipation is to be viewed, in line with Badiou, in the guise of an immanent and illegal excess, bringing forth into presentation the void that the representation of a situation is calculated to foreclose, then surely the qualification of *what* precisely this politics exceeds – interrupting it with its void, engineering a systematic upsurge of inconsistency – is a crucial matter. To put it more concisely, if perhaps somewhat imprecisely, if State and Capital are not isomorphic, then we should be able to assess, *from the point of view of the subject of an event* (in this instance, an organised political collective), how a counter- or extra-State politics differs from an anti-capitalist one.

In order to delineate this hypothesis, let us briefly recall the ontological determination of Badiou’s concept of State. Distilling the matter to what is strictly essential for our present purposes, and admittedly blurring the distinction between the political and ontological senses of the term, the State is the structure that forecloses the danger posed by the errancy of the ontological void – an errancy that would reveal the unfounded character of the political datum – by doubling the counting that a situation already effects with a count of the count, in the guise of a counting (or “partition”) of all the parts of a situation (in set-theoretical vocabulary, this entails a move from belonging to inclusion; in philosophical terms from presentation to representation). This re-presentative articulation of the State onto the situation is marked by an immeasurable excess, of the relationship of *inclusion* (the parts of a situation counted or re-presented by the State) over belonging (the elements of the situation counted by its “native” structure). This excess, according to the Cohen-Easton theorem, is wholly erratic, cannot be fixed from within the situation and must be the object of an “unfounded” decision. With the addition of Badiou’s theorem of the point of excess this means that there is always something in the representative operation of the State that stands in a “relation” of *excrescence* to the situation. This is what Badiou defines as the *impasse of being* and the sole point at which politics may be said to pass, by way of the formalisation of a rupture, a dysfunction, allowing the Real of inconsistency to affect consistent reality (Badiou, 1988: 109-128).

The excess of inclusion over belonging is the ontological inscription of a constitutive *domination*, a domination deriving from the immanent imperative

of the State, which is that of foreclosing the errancy of the void by blocking the possibility that un-binding may present itself as such. The imperative is plain: nothing must be out of place, nothing unaccounted for. On this basis, Badiou concludes that the only politics of emancipation, the only politics that could strive to undo the partiality of representation founded on this excessive principle of domination, must base itself upon, or rather must *decide for* something that invisibly lies “beneath” the law of the State, in the sense that the domination of the State is so absolute that this element, this fragment of the Real, is not even allowed to enter into representation. From a certain vantage point, this political *singularity*, inscribed in an eventual site which *belongs to* but is not *included by* the State, is utterly empty, devoid of content, and can only be retroactively attested by what it can force the State to include, thus terminating the given regime of its functioning.

Politics invariably takes its departure from an excess – the hidden excess of a singularity subtracted from but absolutely dominated by the law of a situation – and is aimed at inhibiting or terminating another excess, the excess of domination, the excess of the State. It follows from this dialectics of two excesses – the infra-representative excess of singularity and the supra-representative one of the excrescent State – that *no politics of non-domination can be founded on the proposal of a new order with which to substitute the old*. Not the figure of a new bond, but the invention – extracted from the singularity of an event and directed at the structure of representation – of an experiment in political unbinding, is what, according to Badiou, the politics of non-domination requires. This definitional hostility to the very thematic of order and power signifies that a politics of the generic must take place at a distance from the State or, more precisely, that it must hold fast to the wager that such a distance is in fact possible.

On the basis of these relatively minimal indications, let us turn once again to the question of Capital. Whilst politics may indeed be characterised in its subjective figure by a certain mode of self-presupposition – given that nothing in the State allows an instance of immanent and generic exception to appear, to be represented – and thus appear marked by its distance *vis-à-vis* the excrescence of State representation, it is not beside the point to consider what this distance may be *to*. The non-dialectical and anti-systemic principle of distance that defines real politics for Badiou, the principled intransitivity of politics to the laws that order “social” or “economic” situations – i.e. the outright denial of any *reformist* or *revisionist* image of politics – *does not* entail the ascription to politics of any sort of purity or autonomy. Whilst there is no

politics without an initial disregard for the laws of representation or the rules of appearance – without a wager on the impossible linked to the singularity of an event – *there is no fidelity to this event without an insistent and organised inquiry into the consequences to be drawn from the irruption of the singular into the ordered*. Returning to the differential articulation of the logic of the State and the logic of Capital, let us ask the following question: are the distance and fidelity of politics, qua criteria for its integrity as the truth procedure of non-domination, affected, or even transformed, by the ubiquity of Capital as a mode of domination heterogeneous to that of the State?

As we have already remarked, Capital as indifferent singularity and historical medium is related to the fundamental ontological unbinding in a manner that differs from the ordered and apparently exhaustive inclusion effected by the State. At a basic level, whilst “the State is not founded on the social bond, which it would express, but on un-binding, which it prohibits” (Badiou, 1988: 125), Capital is instead, by Badiou’s own definition, the most prominent historical *agent* of unbinding. Though in his *Saint Paul* Badiou may have termed it a singularity (Badiou, 1997: 10), Capital is *not*, to remain within the doctrinal apparatus of *Being and Event*, a presented-without-representation. Indeed, whilst the representatives of Capital are legion (though they are never its representatives *sans phrase*, always of this or that corporation, this or that interest – pharmaceuticals vs. oil, new economy vs. manufacturing, Gore vs. Bush...) as is its universal lieutenant, money, Capital “itself” – conceived as the abstract principle of social transformation – is, alas, nowhere to be found. Conversely, it is not technically speaking an “excrescence”, in that whilst it counts and partitions with an abstract ferocity arguably unmatched, especially in its mobility and plasticity, by the representations of the State, it does this with lavish disregard for any stable figure or symbol of the count. As Deleuze presciently remarked in his “Postscript on the Society of Control” (Deleuze, 1990), the object of Capital in the age of ubiquitous control is not the individual body of discipline, but a *dividual* material, an indifferent coded sequence (which can go above or beneath the threshold of individuality) from which surplus-value may be extracted.

Remaining at this level, that of the fugitive ontological composition of Capital, it is also worth considering Giorgio Agamben’s remark, in his *Homo Sacer*, that a fourth ontological figure of the articulation of the State and its situation adds itself to the three outlined by Badiou (i.e. singularity, normality and excrescence). This figure, famously borrowed from the political theology of Carl Schmitt, is that of sovereignty as a state of exception. The exception, like

Capital, is technically not a singularity: “what defines it is precisely that it applies itself by dis-applying itself, that it includes what is outside of it. This is the figure in which singularity is represented as such, that is, as unrepresentable. What can in no case be included, is included under the form of exception.” Not only is this figure not singular, it provides a threshold of indiscernibility between singularity and excrescence, “something like a paradoxical inclusion of belonging itself. *It is what cannot be included in the whole to which it belongs and cannot belong to the set in which it is always included*” (Agamben, 1995: 29-30). Is this ambivalent topology of sovereign exception adequate to a thinking of Capital? In its favour it would have the capacity to acknowledge the “unworldly” nature of our global predicament – a predicament which, in a recent lecture, Badiou has defined as transitional or intervallic (Badiou, 2003b). At the same time, it might go some way towards acknowledging the complex ontological effect of contemporary Capital on the logic of situations and the structure of the State.

And yet, I think that accepting this topology of exception or endowing Capital with the equivocal figure of the Schmittian sovereign would be tantamount to subjecting both thought and politics to an immeasurability so extreme that only a sort of poetic abeyance, if not outright abdication, could follow. The reason for this is that the state of exception remains prisoner to the discourse of representation (and to its Heideggerian critique), at the very moment that it provides us with what is perhaps both the most exquisite and the most stifling figure of representation’s excess. Sovereignty extenuates the State by undermining the clear-cut separation between presentation and representation (the “vertical” topology of politics) and perpetuates it by making its immeasurable excess into the very space of politics. No surprise then that the paradigm (the abstract machine) of this figure is the camp, considered as the minutely structured site of the presentation of the unrepresentable, bare life exposed to a thoroughgoing illegality indistinguishable from the most absolute law. This errant site of “unrepresentation” makes any distance impossible, and ultimately forces politics to assume the obverse of sovereignty’s dominion. Any coming politics is consequently bound to assume the exposition of this unrepresentable being, of “bare life”, to generalize and affirm, against the logic of the camp, the unworldly aspect of the “state of exception”, in such a way as to operate a kind of indistinction between presentation and representation (the State and its biopolitical support), between “life” and its “forms”. As Agamben’s provocative forays into political messianism reveal, such an attempt to suspend sovereignty, tied as it is to a truly epochal horizon, is incapable of providing a metapolitical capture of currently existing political sequences, and,

in its resolutely all-encompassing, metaphysical scope, threatens to obfuscate what exactly the current visages of power and control might require of political invention, what strategies and tactics might be equal to our contemporary conjuncture.

Whilst this is not the place to erect an argument against the pertinence of Agamben's paradigm of exception, I do believe its value lies in suggesting a figure of the possible and perhaps even actual suspension of the "representative" State, and in warning us that the nature of domination may be far more difficult to master, the demand of pure presentation far more difficult to uphold, than the double articulation of State and situation may have us expect. If sovereignty presents the unrepresentable, accesses it *as void*, *as inconsistent*, in other words, as "bare", what resistance can politics provide? How will the uprising of the unrepresentable itself guarantee the possibility of a politics of non-domination if it is already dominated *as unrepresentable*? At the edges of representation, under the twofold sign of Capital and sovereignty, the material from which the force of political distance may be drawn appears here to have lost the force afforded it by its irruption into the order of the State.

Yet for all the impasses that the distance to representation presents to the definition and to the real capacity of a collective politics of emancipation, I believe that Badiou's thinking, in particular the reflections on the logic of appearance that occupy him at present, still affords us the possibility of thinking the specificity of a politics that could come to terms with the constitutive excess of capitalist domination and accompany a philosophy finally equal to the ontological virtues of which the operations of Capital are both the vehicle and the primary obstacle. If Capital, in the principle of its operation, which is the abstract demand to dissolve the autonomy of bonds for the sake of the maximisation of surplus-value, is of a different order than the State, it is in great part because – whilst always coupled to those representations of identity and difference on the basis of which it can produce its excessive count – Capital does not "itself" represent anything or anyone. Its relationship to the State is akin to that of a parasite to its host, though it may often – as is the case today with America's labile hegemony over the global economy – assume the lineaments of a symbiont.

I would thus hazard the hypothesis, which I somewhat rashly base on a few clues gleaned from Badiou's work-in-progress, that, far from constituting a capitulation to the sophistries of signification or the comforts of phenomenology, the passage from the re/presentative articulation of State and

situation to the formulation of the logic(s) of appearance might provide us with a way of thinking a politics that would both measure and “distance” the domination of an entity (or operation) that does not itself fit into the schemas of representation. The key development in this regard is the “substitution” of the category of “world” for that of “situation” (and with it, at least so far, for that of the State). We may here have a means to bolster the theory of the subject with an account of the ordering principle of our political existence which is not indifferent to the vicissitudes of Capital (of credit systems, financial flows, interest-rates, etc.) and its role as an impersonal operator of acute transformations.

Broadly speaking, the shift from the concept of situation to that of world (Badiou, 2004b and 2005) entails an increased concern with the ontological structuring of reality (of that very reality into which events, truths and subjects make their violent irruption). Moving beyond the founding insight concerning the “ex crescence” of representation, the concept of world tries to articulate what the parameters and modalities for the consistency of reality may be, how this consistency might find itself regulated and stabilised. Of course, this is with the sole speculative purpose of gaining a rational purchase on the subjective and effective consequences of an irruption of inconsistency. If “the true problem is the question of the localization of being” (Badiou, 2003a: 171), it is to the extent that, from the standpoint of the subject of an event (the only legitimate spur for either analysis or “phenomenology” in Badiou) the intra-situational logic of placements – of identities and differences, of intensities and exclusion – requires a more exhaustive, if comparatively abstract, “topological” account. In other words, whilst the “concrete analysis of concrete situations”, to quote Lenin, is *not* an ontological, philosophical or metapolitical object (since it must always operate from within a truth procedure or subjective sequence), the “logics of worlds” announced by Badiou in some recent writings signals the need for a more densely articulated framework for “abstract analysis” than the one provided in *Being and Event* via the concept of State. Without delving too deeply in what remains a work in progress, of which we only possess glimpses and sketches (for the time being, the best source is surely Hallward, 2003: 293-315), I would simply like to consider how the aforementioned shift might relate to the differential articulation of State and Capital that I have already alluded to. In what can only be a blueprint for future inquiry, I would like to do this by considering four aspects of Badiou’s argument: the theoretical innovations announced by the concept of *world(s)*; the possible resonance of Marx’s notion of *real subsumption* to Badiou’s thinking of political distance; the tenability of

an idea of the *global* within Badiou's schema; the potential for an *anti-capitalist politics* within this framework.

Like *Being and Event*, Badiou's work-in-progress affirms the non-totalisable plurality of consistent ontological set-ups, as well as the variability of their structuring principles. Against any philosophy of the One or of Totality (whether virtual or actual, real or negative) and in line with the advances of Cantor, Russell, Gödel, and Cohen, Badiou affirms the impossibility of identifying any meta-consistency that would integrate the dissemination of ontological arrangements (Badiou, 2004b and 2005). It is in these milestones of logic and mathematics that we are to find the source of Badiou's resolute acosmism, of his rationalist atheism. Where Badiou's recent work goes further is in the postulate that every arrangement (read "world") is endowed with one element (a multiple) which functions as its structuring principle, localising all other existent (or appearing) multiples and determining their degrees of existence (or appearance), in other words, their degrees of identity or difference from one another. This element is defined as the *transcendental* of the "world" – it is, so to speak, what individuates the world, providing it with maximal and minimal degrees of appearance and intensity (Hallward, 2003: 299-300).

Rather than relegating the structuring agency to the nebulous domain of a perennial and unquestionable law (a danger arguably incurred by the focus on the "count" in *Being and Event*), Badiou's determination of the transcendental as a structured *element* (or multiple) *within* the situation itself heralds the possibility of a far more immanent, which is to say, of a substantially more *materialist*, consideration of order and placement than the one provided in *Being and Event*. What we are given is not the ubiquitous pertinence of "structure" *per se*, but rather an abstract schema to consider how, rather than being shrouded in ontological invisibility, the organisation of a particular ontological region is determined by an identifiable element or complex. What is more, it is no longer clear – despite the capital importance of the excess of the State for *Being and Event* – whether we need any longer to maintain the hiatus between presentation and representation. "Worlds" are not presented and "then" re-presented – rather, a collection of multiples is articulated through the (transcendental) agency of *another multiple*, such that we are no longer in obvious need of a supplementary dimension. The wager of the "minimal phenomenology" that Badiou wishes to construct around the concept of "world" (whose technical details it would be both pointless and premature to discuss here) is that all the fundamental, abstract principles of localised existence (or appearance) can be adequately dealt with by means of concepts gleaned from

the mathematical domains of the theories of categories and *topoi*, namely *structure of order, minimal degree, conjunction, envelope, dependence, reverse, maximal degree* (Badiou, 2004b). Crucially, these abstract determinations of the plurality of structures *do not* announce the deductive obsolescence of *concrete analyses* (Badiou, 2003a: 174).

Now, I submit that we can consider the key tenets of Marx's socio-economic analysis and critique as resulting precisely from an inquiry into the concrete and identifiable structuring principles of a particular world (in praising them as some of the very few "scientific" truths in the field of the "human sciences", Badiou seems to indicate as much himself, see Badiou, 2004c). Indeed, much of the catastrophic fate of supposed Marxist science, from Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* onwards, can be understood as a fallacious *generalisation* of a principle of localisation which is itself localisable, that is to say, not simply global (an inconsistent adjective in Badiou's framework). As a brand of "transcendental materialism" – to borrow from Deleuze & Guattari – Marx's thought, with Capital as its "object", stands somewhere between the general logic of appearance recently proposed by Badiou and the concrete analysis which can only be a tool and a consequence of specific political projects and sequences. As a particularly significant instance of Marx's study of the transformation in the structuring principles of capitalism, consider the distinction between real and formal subsumption, proposed in the "Results of the Immediate Process of Production", the unpublished fragment from the notebooks for the first volume of *Capital*. With formal subsumption, writes Marx:

There is no change as yet in the mode of production itself. *Technologically speaking*, the *labour process* goes on as before, with the proviso that it is now *subordinated* to capital. Within the production process, however [...] two developments emerge: (1) an *economic* relationship of supremacy and subordination, since the consumption of labour-power by the capitalist is naturally supervised and directed by him; (2) labour becomes far more continuous and intensive [...] (Marx, 1990: 1026).

On this basis, the jump to real subsumption signals a veritable event in or for the transcendental, a qualitative and systemic transformation in the ordering principle of the socio-economic situation. As Marx declares:

With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete

(and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists. With the real subsumption of labour under capital, all the changes in the labour process [...] now become reality [...] *capitalist production* now establishes itself as a mode of production *sui generis* and brings into being a new mode of material production (Marx, 1990: 1035).

In other words, we move from an organising principle which, through exploitation and subordination, is grafted onto the logic of semi-autonomous worlds (formal subsumption) to one that itself becomes the principle to which all worlds of production, consumption and circulation are intrinsically indexed (real subsumption). To put it in slightly different terms, we move from logic of capture to a logic of immanence (Negri, 1987). The strength of Badiou's recent proposals might then lie in allowing us to eschew the interpretation of real subsumption in terms of the dialectical movement of totality, in favour of a figure of Capital as an operationally ubiquitous transcendental instance which does not as such confer "regional stability" upon a capitalist world. By abdicating the vision of Capital as totality, but maintaining its efficacy as a structuring principle, we might eventually be able both to analyse the generative, organising force of the capitalist transcendental *and* to think the irruption of anti-capitalist subjectivity as a "dysfunctional" movement *intransitive* to a systemic logic, as a *separation* not anticipated by the parameters of Capital (Toscano, 2004).

Much as I have tried to insinuate that Badiou's forthcoming theory of worlds might go some way towards redressing the ambivalent status ascribed to Capital in his *Manifesto* (as simultaneously constituting "the" transcendental medium for the historical advent of unbinding *and* as representing a blind, mediocre empirical datum), it remains the case that Badiou's actual pronouncements on Capital and the contemporary world in no way presage such a transformation. The erratic status of Capital as a kind of anti-singular singularity implicitly returns in the recent "Caesura of Nihilism" (Badiou, 2003b), where Badiou makes the provocative claim that our times, in which the rule of Capital is seconded by the vacuous emblems of "democracy", are *devoid of world* – that is, they mount a protocol of exclusion but do not effect a transcendental distribution of existence. The implication here is that the hegemony of Capital, seconded by an unstable mix of "humanitarian" oratory (Blair) and brazenly imperial pronouncements (The Project for the New American Century), does not constitute a "world" proper. The reasons for this,

however, are problematic: the “unworldly” nature of Capital is connected by Badiou to its evacuation of any *names* that could be the bearers of subjectivity (consider the way that, prior to what Badiou calls the Restoration beginning in the 80s (Badiou, 2004a), we could encounter living, effective names such as “proletariat”, “national liberation”, “black power”, “women’s liberation”, etc.). Such an account cannot but raise a number of questions.

If, ontologically speaking, *all* existence (presented, represented or “worldly”) is *consistent* (until the advent of an event and the generic inquiries that define truth procedures), how is it possible that an arguably non-evental predicament such as ours *manifest inconsistency*? Once again, we encounter, as we did with the *Saint Paul*, this uncanny figure, that of a non-subjective – and non-subjectivisable? – unbinding, or, alternatively, that of a non-evental inconsistency. (Incidentally, that is precisely what we are told by current world-systems theory, which considers our unstable phase as the rare, epochal occasion of free political intervention on a global scale. In other words, *because the system is off the rails, we have the rare chance to take real, i.e. system-constituting, decisions*. See Wallerstein, 2003.) The upshot of this non-evental inconsistency is that whilst in Badiou’s theoretical writings on the appearance of worlds (Badiou, 2004b and 2005) he cogently argues that events engender the *dysfunction* of worlds and their transcendental regimes, in his “ontology of the present” Badiou advocates the necessity, in our “intervallic” or world-less times, of *constructing* a world, such that those now excluded can come to invent new names, names capable of sustaining new truth procedures. As he writes, “I hold that we are at a very special moment, a moment *at which there is not any world*” (though their frameworks are hardly compatible, one can’t help noting the strange convergence on this point with Wallerstein’s recent analyses). As a result: “Philosophy has no other legitimate aim except to help find the new names that will bring into existence the unknown world that is only waiting for us because we are waiting for it” (Badiou, 2003b). In a peculiar inversion of some of the key traits of his doctrine, it seems that Badiou is here advocating, to some extent, an “ordering” task, one that will inevitably, if perhaps mistakenly, resonate for some with the now ubiquitous slogan “Another World is Possible”.

And yet, unlike the avowed partisans of anti-capitalism, Badiou seems to refuse the status of “world” (which, after all is “merely” a neutral phenomenological descriptive, not a qualitative term) to the system of global capitalism (though contrary indications seem to transpire from Badiou, 1997: 10). The way that he does this, however, seems to indicate that we still remain within the logic of re/presentation, not in the classical and conservative sense

that the excluded need their “identity” represented, but in the subjective sense that only new names will really make the excluded present. It is in light of this that Badiou enjoins us to struggle against the false names generated by today’s imperial “democracies”, to hold true to those exceptions that attack the notion that today’s parliamentary apparatuses and the rhetoric of human rights (or “freedom”) have effectively joined forces to saturate the field of politics. But what of the possibility that Capital may be untouched by the upsurge of new presentations and names? That it is perfectly capable, in line with what Agamben and Deleuze have argued, of directly accessing the “unrepresented”? Arguably, Badiou’s hostility to anti-capitalist politics derives from his crucial repudiation of any fully dialectical or transitive notion of political subjectivity (Badiou, 1985; Toscano, 2004) and his related critique of a notion of systemic totality. It is these arguments combined that explain his profound hostility to the proposals of Hardt & Negri, as well as of Deleuze and Agamben (Badiou, 2002 and 2003c).

Badiou has recently written that “there is no Universe, only worlds. In each and every world, the immanent existence of a maximal value for the transcendental degrees signals that *this* world is never *the* world. The power of localisation held by the being of a world is determinate: if a being appears in this world, this appearance possesses an absolute degree; this degree marks, for a given world, the being of being-there” (Badiou, 2004). This puts paid to any ontological idolatry of Capital as *the* motor of production, *the* expression of the “natural” logic of the Totality. It might even entail redefining “globalisation” as a kind of transcendental regime devoid of totalisation, not a bounded world (not a world, in Badiou’s technical vocabulary, provided with maxima and minima of appearance, with a transcendental “envelope” and so on), but rather an operational principle which, whilst abstractly identifiable, resists localisation, relentlessly generating and exploiting worlds (worlds of labour, intellect, culture, matter, and so on). In other words, considering the operations of globalised capitalism, via the category (admittedly absent from Badiou’s own work) of a *world-less transcendental*. Whilst they connect to entirely different figures of subjectivity, this potential consequence of Badiou’s doctrine might not be entirely alien to Hardt & Negri’s own definition of globalisation as “a *regime* of production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization” (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 45). The passage from formal subsumption to real subsumption would then signal the impossibility of basing a political antagonism to Capital on the “local” resistance of some specified world, and, more importantly, the necessity to invent forms of distance and autonomy not directly deriving from any pre-existing localisation.

On these grounds, it is imperative to subject the ambient concept of *diversity* to unsparing criticism, to reassert the force of a notion of generic equality *without identity*, a notion intransitive to, or at a distance from, available parameters of identification. Crucially, when the unbinding automatism of capital becomes ubiquitous (in real subsumption), such distance cannot depend on breaking through representational exclusions; rather, it must attack the very principle of organisation of Capital as *the* dominant transcendental regime (its dominance is testified by the fact that “democratic” representation remains optional in today’s world, whilst subtracting oneself from the logic of profit is simply not an option). In this respect, we disagree with Badiou’s strong claim that “today the enemy is not called Empire or Capital. It’s called Democracy” (Badiou, 2002: 14). This is emphatically not because we think that Badiou’s attack on the fetishism of democracy is problematic, but rather because we contend that – despite chattering battalions of smug idolaters and renegade ideologues – Badiou overestimates the inhibiting force, as an “ideological, or subjective, formalisation” of the liberal-democratic notion of equality. It is not the principle of democratic representation that hampers the political emancipation of subjects, but rather the deep-seated conviction that there is no alternative to the rule of profit. The cynicism of today’s “democratic” subjects, who know full well that they play a negligible role in the management of the commons and are entirely aware of the sham nature of the apparatuses of representation, is founded on the perceived inevitability of capitalism, not vice versa.

More importantly, against certain formulations of a “politics of the multitude”, we think that anti-capitalism need not be the expression of a creativity latent in the movement of Capital itself. In other words, it is vital to think simultaneously the *anti-singular (or indifferent) singularity* of Capital as the hegemonic principle of political regulation and partition *and* the necessity of a politics *intransitive* to the transcendental regime of Capital; to divert politics from a focus on demands for representation and to accept the lesson that there is no pre-existing subject that anticipates the invention of egalitarian political modes that might be capable of forcing the dysfunction of the transcendental rule of surplus-value. This is not to rule out a politics of prescriptive distance from the State, of the sort practiced by *L’Organisation politique* (Hallward, 2003: 226-227); it is to affirm the necessity of a subjective traversal of both logics, “territorial” and “capitalist”. To think otherwise would be entirely to ignore the subjective significance of trans-national Capital (and *capitalists*) as a distributed but remarkably consistent source of brutally mobile partition and regulation, a recognition that has informed several among the political subjects

which in the past few years have worked towards the dysfunction of the capitalist subsumption of worlds and names, subjects who have actively resisted their “liberalisation” and in so doing sketched out new regimes of organisation, new forms of subjectivity at a distance from the accepted forms of mediated representation: the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional in Mexico, the Karnataka State Farmers’ Association in India, the Assembly of the Poor in Thailand, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra in Brazil... (Notes from Nowhere, 2003). It is from such instances of politics, from their practices and pronouncements, that we might begin to think beyond the intra-State logic of representation, the logic of claims and concessions, and towards ways of terminating the expanding sway of capitalist accumulation, doubling the logic of the place with the logic of its interruption (Badiou, 1982: 301). The challenge, of course, is to do so whilst eschewing the increasingly desperate resuscitation of subterranean teleologies and latent subjects of history, experimenting instead with new configurations of equality, autonomy and distance.

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