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Toward a Politics of the Common:  
History, Subjectivity and Emancipation

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This thesis is driven by two considerations: first, the consideration for the essence of the common requires a philosophical perspective to explore the underlying structure of the common, its ontological and metaphysical assumptions, and other issues that might be missing or left occluded when the common is conceived purely in its empirical sense as a historical community; second, the consideration for a politics of the common posits a need, in addition to the philosophical attempt to get to the essence of the common, to bring the speculative to bear on the actual; that is to say, if a philosophical approach has the essence of the common for its aim, a politics of the common constitutes *an additional step* taken through a spiraling movement back to the actual; in the absence of this commitment to return to the actual, the philosophical investigation into the common would remain as radical as it is spectral. In the first chapter, I take

issue with the so-called ontological turn in politics primarily around the works of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, examine its impact on other cultural discourses, and explore its political implications in actual historical situations where actions are needed to resist domination and oppression. In the second chapter, I elaborate on a different way of thinking the common in the works of Alain Badiou and Frantz Fanon. My contention is that both Badiou's truth procedure and Fanon's theory of decolonization pave the way for a non-metaphysical conception of the common without having to give up or relegate to irrelevance central political categories such as history, subjectivity and emancipation. In the final two chapters, I look at two literary works from Taiwan, Wu Zhuoliu's *The Orphan of Asia* and Li Ang's *Visible Ghosts*. My reading of *The Orphan of Asia* focuses on episodes leading up to the ambiguous ending, en route to which the protagonist Taiming allegedly grows out of his passive slumber and is rumored to have participated in anti-imperialist struggle in China. My reading is an effort to reorient the discussion by identifying the process of subjectivization in the final chapter of the novel in hopes of moving away from a victimized attachment to resentment morbidly sustained by the concept-metaphor of the orphan. My reading of Li Ang's *Visible Ghosts* examines two distinct conceptions of justice in relation to the author's presentations of the body in two of the stories collected in *Visible Ghosts*. I demonstrate that toward the end of "The Ghosts of Bujiangtian," Li Ang arrives at a non-metaphysical and non-anthropocentric understanding of the common by articulating a transformative politics of materiality that rejects a conception of the body as the locus of symbolic inscription, material exploitation, or drive circulation.

The dissertation of Chien-heng Wu is approved.

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## List of Abbreviations

<i>B&amp;E</i>	<i>Being and Event</i>
<i>BSWM</i>	<i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>
<i>BSP</i>	<i>Being Singular Plural</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>The Dying Colonialism</i>
<i>IC</i>	“The Idea of Communism”
<i>LoW</i>	<i>Logics of Worlds</i>
<i>FOS</i>	“On a Finally Objectless Subject”
<i>POS</i>	<i>Politics and the Other Scene</i>
<i>PoF</i>	<i>The Politics of Friendship</i>
<i>RoH</i>	<i>The Rebirth of History</i>
<i>TAR</i>	<i>Toward the African Revolution</i>
<i>ToS</i>	<i>The Theory of the Subject</i>
<i>WE</i>	<i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>

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## Biographical Sketch

Chien-heng Wu

## Comparative Literature

Chien-heng Wu earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from National Tsing-hua University in 2001. He received his Master of Arts degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from National Taiwan University in 2005. From 2005-2007, he served in Taiwan's Government Information Office in fulfillment of the conscript military service. In 2007 he joined the doctoral program of UCLA Comparative Literature Department. Chien-heng Wu's research interests include Sinophone Taiwan studies, psychoanalysis, theories of the subject and theories of decolonization. His dissertation entitled, "Toward a Politics of the Common: History, Subjectivity and Emancipation," was supervised by Dr. Shu-mei Shih and Dr. Kenneth Reinhard.

## Introduction

### Toward a Politics of the Common: History, Subjectivity and Emancipation

[R]ather than giving multiple, distinct cultures equal due, whereby people are recognized as part of humanity indirectly through the mediation of collective cultural identities, human universality emerges in the historical event at the point of rupture. It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits....Common humanity exists in spite of culture and its differences. A person's non-identity with the collective allows for subterranean solidarities that have a chance of appealing to universal, moral sentiment, the source today of enthusiasm and hope.

Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*

The central question of this study is the question of the common. The specific approach I adopt is geared to a philosophico-political discussion of the common. First of all, why a philosophical approach? As a mode of inquiry, philosophy differs from other empirical knowledges in its speculative reach, allowing us to make inquiries into issues that cannot be addressed on the basis of empirical knowledges. But the empirical domain is not to be facilely dismissed under the pretext of philosophy's speculative reach. This is especially true because at issue is not just the essence of the common but also the politics of the common. And politics, if it is not to be confused with mere academic chatter, necessarily engages itself with the empirical and the actual. This thesis is thus driven by these two considerations: first, the consideration for the essence of the common requires a philosophical perspective to explore the underlying structure of the common, its ontological and metaphysical assumptions, and other issues that might be missing or left occluded when the common is conceived purely in its empirical sense as a historical community; second, the consideration for a politics of the common posits a need, in addition to the philosophical attempt to get to the essence of the common, to bring the speculative to bear on the actual; that is to say, if a philosophical approach has the essence of the

common for its aim, a politics of the common constitutes *an additional step* taken through a spiraling movement back to the actual; in the absence of this commitment to return to the actual, the philosophical investigation into the common would remain as radical as it is spectral. In the introduction, I will lay out the key issues in the philosophical discussion of the common, identify its problematics, and propose a different way of thinking and practicing the common.

## **I. Demarcation**

Poststructuralism's problematization of the grand narrative has alerted us to the illusion of the self-enclosed unity and driven the final nail to the coffin of the metaphysical subject and all its undesirable connotations. The death of the subject and the collapse of the master narrative bifurcates into two lines of development: (1) the cultural turn; (2) the ontological turn. On the most fundamental level, the cultural turn advances an argument that rejects the universalist assumption informing the grand narrative and valorizes cultural differences as the repressed truth to the pretension of abstract universalism. From this perspective, there is no telos for a generalized conception of humanity, no eschatology whether it is couched in secular or religious terms, no universal subject unmoored from contextual specificities. But this preoccupation with the local has been subject to critical examination. Arif Dirlik, for example, has argued that postcolonialism's obsession with cultural differences has come with a costly price tag:

Its preoccupation with local encounters and the politics of identity rules out a thoroughgoing critique of the structures of capitalism, or of other structurally shaped modes of exploitation and oppression, while also legitimizing arguments against collective identities that are necessary to struggles against domination and hegemony. Ironically, the call for attention to "difference" has ended up rendering

“difference” itself into a metahistorical principle, making it nearly impossible to distinguish one kind of “difference” from another politically. (*Postcolonial Aura* ix-x)

Dirlik’s criticism can be recapitulated as follows: first, the conditioning effect of the global on the local is ignored in postcolonialism’s obsession with the local; second, not all differences are the same and some differences have more political valence than others; finally, and the most important one in my view, cultural criticism content with exposing the mechanism of power (i.e. how communities are *imagined*) fails to pose a serious challenge to the status quo, as it is reluctant to admit a conceptual space for collective struggles against the structure of domination that can be put “in service of ‘*imagining* [new] communities’” (emphasis added, xi).<sup>1</sup>

While the theoretical engagement of my project has a different focus, Dirlik’s concern suggests a broad outline that can guide our examination of the ontological turn and its fraught relation to culture as a realm of signification and determination. Similar to the cultural turn, the ontological turn confronts Western metaphysics through an exposure of its finitude. Whereas the cultural turn grounds the limit in the specificity of each culture, the ontological turn situates the

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<sup>1</sup> The same crisis (the obsession with the critique of “what is”) is also noted by Michael Neocosmos in social science disciplines which are so enamored with what is and with the extant, and has consequently become incapable of thinking affirmatively new possibilities:

A critical social science, a social science that is alive rather than moribund, has not always existed historically. When it has, it has only existed as a result of the imagining of an emancipatory project....Today, the absence of an emancipatory political project is reflected in the inability of social science in most of the world to transcend the descriptive and the given.... If the social sciences are to be revived as critical thought that can enable the thinking of new ‘possibles,’ we need, inter alia, an understanding of politics as practice, as enabling the thought of universals (freedom, equality, justice) to be achieved, as a capacity to think what should be fought *for*, not only what should be fought *against* (hence the limits of the idea of ‘critique’ as in ‘critical political economy’ or ‘critical social science’). The new should emerge out of a critique of the old, but this critique is not enough as it is primarily destructive, not creative. (“The Political Conditions” 115, 123)

limit at a more fundamental level, one that concerns the very possibility of identity and community, that is, at the level of its instituting moment.

The institutional establishment of the ontological turn can be traced back to the Center for Philosophical Research on the Political organized by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in the early 1980s. The center was formed in an attempt to further elaborate questions left unanswered or underdeveloped in a conference devoted to the work of Jacques Derrida.<sup>2</sup> The proceedings of the Center in the second year was later edited and published in the book form as *The Retreating the Political*. One of the most prominent features in the Center's work is the reworking of the Heideggerian ontological difference into the distinction between the political [*le politique*] and politics [*la politique*], with the latter denoting the management of power and activities, and the former being the conditions of (im)possibility of the latter.<sup>3</sup>

For Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, the political designates that which remains *unthought* in politics. What has thus far been thought in the name of politics is thought either from an institutional point of view in terms of state management of social, cultural and economic spheres of life or from a point of view centered on the idea of work (e.g. revolution as a project following a preconceived blue-print, to be fulfilled or brought to completion).<sup>4</sup> What remains unthought is that this desire for control or completion is philosophically justified by the metaphysics of

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of the history of the Center, see Nancy Fraser 1984.

<sup>3</sup> According to Chantal Mouffe, "politics refers to the 'ontic' level while 'the political' has to do with the 'ontological' one. This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is instituted" (8-9).

<sup>4</sup> There permeates a sense of defeatism in Nancy's and Lacoue-Labarthe's deconstruction of revolution: "Whatever still remains of the possibilities of revolt...a certain history, which is perhaps even History, is *finished, finite*....we can no longer decently ask ourselves what theory would still be in a position to promise a political solution to inhumanity (which is still not finished), because we now know what the desire for a social transparency promises, the utopia of the homogenisation of the 'social body,' the hope attached to management or to enlightened direction" ("Opening Address" 111).

subjectivity, or what they call the will-to-figure. According to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, the will-to-figure is possible due to the essential co-belonging between the political and the philosophical in which the political is considered as the practical actualization of a philosophical program. On this view, communism, true to Jean-Paul Sartre's provocative pronouncement, is indeed "the unsurpassable horizon of our time,"<sup>5</sup> only that Sartre's statement is now taken to reflect the totalizing phenomenon of a communist politics which surrenders the political to "the complete and completing figure of philosophy's imposition" ("Opening Address" 111).<sup>6</sup> As such, the totalization of the political has paradoxically erased its own singularity. To avoid the will-to-figure requires not an effort aiming at reproducing the political in the form of *another* politics, but a thinking of the political through the motif of the retreat.

The motif of the retreat, thanks to the Heideggerian influence in the authors' investigation into the essence of the political, is to be construed in two senses:

[F]irst, withdrawing the political in the sense of its being the "well-known" and in the sense of the obviousness (the blinding obviousness) of politics, the "everything is political" which can be used to qualify our enclosure in the closure of the political; but also as re-tracing of the political, re-marking it, by raising the question in a new way which, for us, is to raise it as the question of its essence.

(112)

In this movement away from the blinding obviousness (i.e. the totalizing influence) of politics, the authors wish to redraw the specific contour of the political, which no longer posits the will-

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy references this phrase again in his single-authored book *The Inoperative Community*, 1, 8, 20.

<sup>6</sup> The category of totalitarianism, for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, is conceptually expanded to include not just the historical instances of fascism and Stalinism, but also the totalizing phenomenon of politics in the modern era ("The 'Retreat' of the Political" 126).

to-figure/closure/completion as its essence, but rather has the political as an enabling limit to the will-to-figure that has served as the metaphysical impulse toward the totalizing phenomenon of politics. The retreat of the political is therefore a double movement, simultaneously withdrawing from the blinding force that obscures the essence of the political and carving out a non-positivizable space in which the political can be understood as something other than the practical actualization of a philosophical program.

More specifically, the political is distinguished from politics by presenting itself not as *another* politics but as its opening-up or questioning. “Such a questioning,” according to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, “is...dedicated to returning to the most archaic constitution of the political, and to exploring the essence of the political assignation of essence, and that is to say, to putting into question the concept and the value of the archaic in general: origin and primitiveness, authority, principle, etc.” (113). This, however, does not suggest that politics is negated in such a radical questioning. The relation between the two is rather sustained by an aporetic structure. On the one hand, “[i]n opposition to the motifs of ground and the subject...there is the motif of *finitude*”; on the other hand, “it is not certain...that one can in this way avoid a grounding gesture” (“The ‘Retreat’ of the Political” 133). Consequently, “there is an incessant sliding back and forth between two heterogenous levels of analysis, a constant venturing toward the taking of a political position and a drawing back to meta-political philosophical reflection” (Fraser 148).

At the heart of this aporetic structure is “the question of *relation*” (“The ‘Retreat’ of the Political” 133). Unlike the essential co-belonging of the political and the philosophical that grounds the totalizing phenomenon of politics, the relation here is a disjunctive relation of non-coincidence, non-completion and non-closure. It is a relation of non-relation, a paradoxical relation in the register of the impossible, that is, the impossibility of ever capturing or

thematizing the political into a definitive politics. Hence, to think the political as the essence of politics is to think the finitude of politics or to think politics in terms of both its condition of possibility and impossibility. Consequently, the ontological space allocated to the political is a space of indeterminacy, a space not in servitude to a particular ideology or a philosophical program; it is a space anterior to politics, and this is the space where the essence of the political withdraws and where the new contour of the political is to be re-traced.

It can be argued that the Center for the Philosophical Research on the Political, though short-lived, sets in motion a new trend in the contemporary philosophical investigation of the common. One of the major reasons that the distinction of the political and politics gains purchase in contemporary theoretical discussion is the undeniable limit of politics which has been attested to time and again in the failure of politics to resist the lure of closure or completion. Historical catastrophes, such as Nazism, Stalinism and colonialism, are often alluded to as instances that bear witness to the limit of the historical mode of politics because in these instances the political as the essence of politics remains unthought.<sup>7</sup> In response to the failure of politics, ethics after metaphysics has to accommodate itself to a thought of the unthought and accept the absence of foundation as the point of departure for a post-metaphysical political thought.

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars in trauma studies have noticed a slippage from the historical to the structural in the field. Eric Santner, for example, observes that “[i]n the writings of numerous poststructuralist theorists, *historical* suffering is believed to spring from a failure to tolerate the *structural* suffering...that scars one’s being as a speaking subject” (9-10). From this point of view, the speaking subject exists in the symbolic insofar as he or she is at the same time mortified by the symbolic order. Symbolic mortification creates an illusion of a utopian past (or primordial *jouissance*) which the speaking subject believes that he or she is subsequently robbed of. But for poststructuralist thinkers, the originary plenitude is merely a retroactive fiction. Any attempt to return to the ideal past, to self-sufficiency, is thus regarded as a botched attempt to cover up the structural lack, a denial, when carried to the extreme, leads inevitably to catastrophic outcomes. That’s why Jacques Derrida speaks of democracy-to-come, and Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe renounce the idea of work because when democracy finally comes and the work gets done, we will not be witnessing a utopia, but its opposite, catastrophe.



In *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, Oliver Marchart identifies the Heideggerian root in contemporary theoretical articulations of the political and charts its ramified developments in different major thinkers today, including Ernesto Laclau, Claude Lefort, Nancy, Alain Badiou. “This allusion to the ontological difference is not accidental,” Marchart notes:

What unites all theories to be investigated is that they see themselves forced to leave the comfortable realm of positivism, behaviourism, economism, and so on, and to develop a quasi-transcendental distinction, which is not perceivable from the realm of science but only from the realm of philosophy. One could say that...the ontological difference plays itself out as a radical incompatibility, an unbridgeable gap between concepts like the social, politics, policy, polity and police on the one side and the political as event or radical antagonism on the other. (6)

According to Marchart, the post-foundational political thoughts are united by a shared commitment to exposing the inherent fissure of foundationalism, revealing the impossibility of positing the coherence or the wholeness of the One. It is crucial to note that in this post-foundational constellation, the political refers not to a yet more foundational entity. As an unbinding force, the political designates the inherent split or negativity that prevents politics from ever assuming permanent closure. The political is thus “conceived as *negativity*, by which the social (in the sense of society) is prevented from closure and from becoming identical with itself. To indicate this impossibility of final closure, the former concept of ‘politics’ becomes internally split between politics *eo ipso* (certain forms of action, the political sub-system, etc.) and something that always escapes the efforts of political or social domestication: the political” (5-6). The political thus corresponds to the ontological in the sense that the essence of politics is

not to be found in any positive social arrangement; it coincides rather with the moment when we come to term with society's own impossible completion. Given that the political is not a positive entity, it can be known only through inference. Marchart relates the concept of the political to what Martin Heidegger calls "formally indicating concepts," suggesting that although the political resists representation, its contour can nonetheless be formally drawn. Examples of such formally indicating concepts include the real in Jacques Lacan or the real of antagonism in Laclau, for both of these concepts resist symbolization and can only be indicated by circulating around the failures of the symbolic or the social to ever attain the real.

In the most general sense, what characterizes the post-foundational political thought is its profound distrust of the One as a foundational or originary principle. If the foundational thought upholds the One as the principle from which all political activities originate and to which they shall return, the post-foundational thought distinguishes itself by subjecting the One to its own contingent emergence. That is to say, the One is no longer conceived as a natural entity; it is now *a contingent operation of making-One*. The conclusion to be drawn from the post-foundational political thought is both invaluable and indisputable: self-sameness, unity and permanence are not the original state of things but the secondary effect retroactively imposed on the originary absence of the One. The decision that the One is not - the One being merely an operation - is a negative decision, the corollary of which is the postulation of the real (Lacan), constitutive antagonism (Laclau), death drive (Slavoj Žižek), generic multiplicity (Badiou), pure potentiality (Giorgio Agamben) or the primordial spacing/co-belonging [*partage*] (Nancy) at the origin of being. Looking for unity at the origin is thus doomed to failure because the supposedly inalienable Oneness (variously couched in terms of the essential trait, the final meaning, the master race, the new man, etc.) is a reproduced effect whose origin cannot be tied to a necessary

cause, but can only be traced back, in Michel Foucault's view, to an entanglement of contingent events: "to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations....it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents" ("Nietzsche" 146).

## II. Polemics

The epistemology need not be blamed for the politics. Constructionism does provide crucial critical insights into the operations of power. It could be placed in the service of "imagining communities," rather than a tiresome and counterproductive preoccupation with "imagined communities." The question is why contemporary critical thinking dissipates its energies on the latter, rather than worrying about the former?

Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura*

Then what would a politics look like at the end of metaphysics? More specifically, if emancipatory politics requires us to think the transformation of an order, how would the ontological turn allow us to think emancipatory politics? If being is not One, this necessarily leads to the postulation that being is multiple, which is another way of saying that becoming is at the origin of being. In this ontological configuration of being-qua-becoming, we find a rearticulation of the old saying from Heraclitus that no man ever steps in the same river twice. Insofar as becoming is posited as the intrinsic quality of being, we cannot but agree that Oneness is on the side of the effect, not the cause. There is no dispute over the operation of making-One as producing that elusive object setting off, say, the imperialist desire in the late 19th century and the desire for racial supremacy in the early 20th; nor is there any dispute over the hegemonic violence it is capable of enacting. The real dispute is to be found elsewhere. It lies not in the

postulation of being as becoming but rather in *an translation of the onto-ethical thesis*<sup>8</sup> into a *political proposition*, as if we could effectively undo the insidious effects of Oneness - thus putting us in a better position not to repeat the same historical catastrophes that all have their aims sutured to a desire for the real and ultimate One - by bringing to light the unifying effect of the One that has until now informed the metaphysics of subjectivity. Thus, the argument here is not an argument against becoming, but an argument for a distinction between ontology and phenomenology, between becoming and change.

Where does it leave us when this onto-ethical thesis becomes the political horizon of our time? Besides from its emphasis on becoming as the ground of being, it also implies a few other things. Chief among them is a deep suspicion of the idea of work and a profound distrust of the faculty of the will. In “The Question Concerning Technology,” for instance, Heidegger describes the will-to-mastery characteristic of modern technology in terms of the exploitation of nature into a “standing-reserve” (17). This type of exploitation involves a process in which “the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew” (16). The intrusion of the subject upon the object that goes on in modern technology erases the objectivity of the object by rendering the object calculable, measurable, storable, allocable and expendable in a general economy that rounds off technology, willing and subjectivity into a totalizing and totalitarian schema for domination. The structure of modern subjectivity reveals itself in this reconfigured subject/object relation characterized by the imposition of a subjective will upon the object; this relation of domination at the same time constitutes the matrix of representational thinking wherein the bringing-forth [*Hervorbringung*] of being’s presencing is

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Nancy writes “no ethics would be independent from an ontology. Only ontology, in fact may be ethical in a consistent manner” (*BSP* 21).

subject to the enframing and concealment of modern technology/subjectivity (Weber 986-990). To be released from the firm grip of the totalitarian intertwinement of subjectivity and willing, one has to resist the temptation of active willing, or even, as Heidegger would later have it, to practice *Gelassenheit*, a paradoxical kind of will to not will, of letting be.<sup>9</sup>

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt, while herself not a proponent of *Gelassenheit*, has also noted the violence involved in the idea of work. In *The Human Condition*, she argues that a political life modeled on work is an inadequate mode of politics because its principal activity is fabrication: “Fabrication, the work of *homo faber*, consists in reification....Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process...or interrupting one of nature’s slower processes....This element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber*, the creator of the human artifice, has always been a destroyer of nature” (139). The violence of fabrication results from its positing a unilateral schema that goes from a preconceived plan to its predictable end. “The actual work of fabrication,” as Arendt notes, “is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance of which the object is constructed” (140). What renders this process violent is the subjugation of the object to a will such that the object serves merely as the raw material to be worked upon and wrought into a predetermined shape. In the political realm, the unilateralist thinking inherent in the idea of work entails an utter disregard for the plurality of opinions necessary, in Arendt’s view, for the thriving of democracy.

Regardless of Arendt’s own conception of politics,<sup>10</sup> her critique helps us understand the general suspicion of the idea of work in politics. From this perspective, the renunciation of will

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of the question of willing in Heidegger, see Bret Davis 2007.

<sup>10</sup> In *The Human Condition*, political action is the privileged domain of human activity (compared with labor and work) to fight against totalitarianism. In her later years, she shifts the focus from the actor to the

and work – routinely associated with the idea of radical passivity in the ontological investigation of politics<sup>11</sup> – serves to curb the desire for subjective voluntarism and immunize us against the instrumental use of politics. But in an unfortunate development that fosters a generalized distrust of work and will, anything conceptually tainted by these two terms is automatically given negative connotations. And yet the very same move also risks depriving itself of a notion of agency. Without an adequate account of agency, what could move us to action? By raising this question, I do not wish to eschew all the problems linked to a model of subjectivity premised upon will, consciousness and intention; nor do I wish to advocate a nostalgic return to a self-assured subject who manifests his/her agency by initiating a chain of action out of an autonomous will. The point, I suggest, is rather to alert us to one phenomenological discrepancy and one structural paradox, and see whether we can theorize an account of subjectivity capable of impacting the world and yet unencumbered by the implications of metaphysics and psychologism.

The glaring discrepancy not to be missed is that between a general renunciation of the will in contemporary theoretical discourse and its ever-present manifestation in the practice of resistance. Something akin to the logic of fetishism is at work here. Theoreticians know very well that actual political struggles rarely succeed without a manifest assertion of the will by their participants, but when they discuss the method of emancipation in academia they act *as if* emancipation could be achieved without considering (non-ontological) questions such as organization, determination and decision, or they simply relegate these issues to something

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spectator and promotes judgment as the essence of politics in place of intervention. For Arendt's discussion on the significance of the spectator and judgment in politics, see Arendt 1982; for a critique of Arendt's later orientation, see Ch. 2 of Badiou's *Metapolitics*.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the theme “radical passivity,” see Thomas Wall 1999.

derivative, a mere structural aspect or a necessary evil. While it is important to identify various pitfalls that come with the burden of supposing the subject, it is equally important to understand that by pronouncing the death of the subject, we risk losing hold on such concepts as will and decision that significantly determine the way we understand liberty, equality and fraternity, three key signifiers informing modern emancipatory politics.

Rescinding the security and comfort of an autonomous subject need not come with a corresponding sinking into the nihilistic passivity or inoperativity; nor should the moving beyond of identity politics deprive us of a sense of belonging or abandon us to a state of paralysis. The lesson of critical questioning constitutes only the initial sequence for emancipation which cannot be brought to fruition without effective engagement. In their succinct psychoanalytic formulation, Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth put it this way: “to remain faithful to the negative qua negative would be to betray the negative. Only by elaborating on the negative is one actually being faithful to it...Without this elaboration there would be nothing, but inhibition or anxiety. Indeed, the real without name is simply anxiety, and not an act” (187). Therefore, we should acknowledge the burden that comes with the category of the subject, but we should also beware of the consequences of giving it up all too easily. Given the fact that historical instances of emancipation rarely succeed without evoking this category, should we not ask *again* what we can do with the subject before sweeping the slate clean and inquiring about who comes after the subject? The faculty of the will, too, can be salvaged provided that it is not thought in reductionist terms, as in the model of a willing subject acting upon an object. Various attempts have been made to reclaim the political valence of the will, from John H. Smith’s dialectical reformulation of the will, to Badiou’s recasting of Rousseau’s general will in terms of the generic will, to Jane Anna Gordon’s project of creolizing the general will in Rousseau, and to Peter Hallward’s recent

Badiou/Fanon-inspired turn to the will of the people.<sup>12</sup> These attempts can be regarded as the transvaluation of (negative) values accorded the will, as they approach this much maligned concept from a standpoint that exceeds pure theoretical considerations by taking into account non-ontological issues that have always accompanied political struggles throughout history.

The structural paradox concerns the contingency, necessity and impossibility of the One. We have agreed that the unifying function of the One falls on the side of the effect and its historical emergence unfolds in an aleatory fashion. Take the nationalist discourse as example, the contingent formation of the One (a national subject) always presents itself as a natural entity whose legitimacy is confirmed by a line of uninterrupted continuity. It is because the nation, despite being an effect of a fragile contingent formation, retroactively determines the narrative of its own historical origin. That is why the coherence of a national identity has to be repeatedly confirmed through narratives. With the regime change, the content of the narrative will undergo either minor or major revisions, but the narrative form remains the same. The repetition of narrative inscriptions bears witness to an immanent *impossibility* of ever fully representing the real of its origin. However, every failed attempt to represent the real induces further attempts. The consequence of this impossibility establishes the *necessity* of the function of the One to keep inscribing itself on the real. The co-implication of these three registers constitutes a complex causal knot where the effect of the One is simultaneously an effect imposing a unity on the

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<sup>12</sup> Smith's dialectical formulation emphasizes a conception of the will "open to the fusion of contradictory properties" (13). His approach departs from the reductionist understanding of the will that posits a unilateral determination of the object by the willing subject, drawing attention to the "dual directionality" (26) involved in the act of willing. In his own words: "The willing is directed on the one hand 'back' to *create* a sense of a subject or agent and on the other 'forward' to objects and activities that come to be seen as the 'goals' of the subject...the willing 'I' is neither a fixed essence nor a determined effect. Given my willing, however, an 'I' emerges in a particular relation to objects and the discursive context" (26). For Badiou's intervention, see Meditation 32 on Rousseau in *B&E*; Hallward's more recent publications are important intervention in reviving the concept of the will (more on this later); for Jane Anna Gordon's contribution, see her forthcoming book *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Frantz Fanon*. See also *The CLR James Journal Special Issue: Creolizing Rousseau* 15.1 (2009).



dispersion of multiplicities; an effect which is nonetheless primary owing to the fact that there is no direct access to the real of pure presentation/multiplicity except by way of inference based on the errancy of the One; it is furthermore an effect that requires constant reiteration in order to put in place a representational order through which one makes sense of the world. As Mouffe summarizes in her study on the political, “every society is the product of a series of practices attempting to establish order in a context of contingency” (17).

On the basis of the structural paradox presented here, we can proceed to consider its political implications, in particular those concerning the nature of change. The first thing to note in this paradox is its structuralist presentation of change: change is *intrinsic* to any structure of determination. The postulation of the intrinsic nature of change would lend itself to an argument in favor of a politics of radical passivity. Given the dynamic interplay of contingency, necessity and impossibility in the structuralist presentation of change, it would be unethical to impose on it any determinate design for fear of violating the ontological opening at the very heart of being. On this view, the most we can do (or, rather, not do) is to ensure the opening of pure potentiality lest we commit an ethical crime of tampering with pure potentiality by producing *something* (e.g. *another* politics) out of it. We should therefore avoid what Badiou calls “the passion for the real” that had characterized emancipatory politics of the 20th century, as this passion for the real tries to actualize in a phenomenological world what should otherwise remain ontologically indeterminate.<sup>13</sup> Emancipation thought in this vein would consist in a negative gesture of

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<sup>13</sup> Although the passion for the real that has defined many grand political projects in the last century is today viewed with suspicion, Badiou tries to look at these political experiments from the point of view of the 20<sup>th</sup> century itself and locate in it something emancipatory that is worth preserving in our dispassionate age of parliamentary democracy. It should be noted, however, that Badiou’s endorsement of the passion for the real is a qualified one. In *The Century*, he makes a crucial distinction between two different logics of purification: destruction and subtraction. Destruction is a mode of purification tied to the “process of the return of a vanished origin...the task of the century is viewed here as restitution (of the origin) through destruction (of the inauthentic)” (65). The racial policy of Nazi Germany exemplifies

retreating to the *place* of taking place, a space of freedom the access to which demands a will not to will or a Bartlebian disengagement. As a result, ontology collapses into politics and the thinking of being-qua-becoming is itself already an interventional act. Or as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy puts it, “the gesture of the retreat is itself a political gesture” (“Opening Address” 113).

The limit of this ontologization of politics lies in its excessive radicalism, which can be understood in the following sense. The problem with the ontological politics is not that it falls short of what it claims to be; the problem is rather that it succeeds all too well such that every determinate political sequence is preempted from the start by a quasi-transcendental logic of indeterminacy. In other words, politics in its determinate unfolding is always already a betrayal even before it can get positively inscribed. The judgment of betrayal is not necessarily issued from a consideration of what a politics produces; it is judged as betrayal on account of being *a* politics or *a determination* as such. This does not mean that a determinate politics is foreclosed in advance; it means rather that a determinate politics is not only *necessary* but, more importantly, *necessarily inadequate* due to its being conditioned by a fundamental indeterminacy. Thus, political activities with determinate aims and projects serve not as a positive ground for emancipation but as a negative reminder of what has gone wrong in the absence of an ontology of becoming. An example (a joke in fact) from Bruno Bosteels helps illustrate the limit of excessive radicalism:

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the passion for the real in its destructive mode. The subtractive orientation, in contrast, attempts to measure the real by means of “the construction of a minimal difference” (56). The passion for the real in its subtractive mode does not strive for some authentic substance: “instead of treating the real as identity, it is treated right away as a gap” (56). Thus, the passion for the real Badiou wants to preserve in his analysis of the emancipatory politics of the last century is not the passion for the maximal destruction of the semblance in hopes of getting at the real of substance, but the passion for the construction of the real as the minimal difference on the basis of which a genuine political sequence can be developed.

The joke in question puts two madmen together in an insane asylum as they get caught up in a heated shouting match. The first yells: “You’re crazy!” The second: “No, *you*’re crazy!” “No, *you are!*” “*No, you!*” and so on and so forth, until the first person finally shouts out triumphantly: “Tomorrow, I’ll wake up at 5 a.m. and write on your door that you’re crazy!”; to which the second person answers with a conceited smile: “And I’ll wake up at 4 a.m. and wipe it off!” (*Actuality of Communism* 215-216)<sup>14</sup>

Radicalism exemplified by the second madman’s attempt to wake up at 4 a.m. and wipe off things that has yet to be written nicely captures the kind of ontological argument mentioned above. Without a proper distinction of ontology and politics, the interruption of myth (of identity, substance, immanentism, communion, etc.) is likely to undergo a dialectical inversion, turning itself into *the myth of interruption* that wipes off any inscription before it even gets started.<sup>15</sup> We might wonder whence the myth of interruption derives its legitimacy? From the fact that all ontic struggles, when tethered to a will or a project, immediately render themselves susceptible to onto-theological figuration. To be sure, historical hindsight has proved true these worries regarding the danger of onto-theological figuration. From a communitarian politics based on a communal desire for an undivided social body, to the fascist foreclosure of the political, and to the communist production of a classless society, all these instances testify to the undesirability

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<sup>14</sup> Although Bosteels uses this example as a rejoinder to a particular intonation in Žižek’s many conceptualizations of the act, the validity of his argument extends to the ontological turn in contemporary continental political philosophy.

<sup>15</sup> Commenting on Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, Michael Naas argues that Nancy protests too much, that his persistent disclaimers that there is no myth of interruption belies the author’s anxiety “that he cannot avoid the very thing he claims to be avoiding” (110). Naas is right to wonder “[i]f this were the case, would not the price one pays for resisting myth be the giving in to repetition – that is, that which both determines and disrupts assertion and determination in general? In other words, does not the resistance *to* myth betray the resistance *of* myth – its return as a determinate form of interruption?” (111).

as well as the untenability of figuring (out) a politics of the common, be it emancipatory or not. Yet, does it justify us to subordinate analyses of the ideological underpinning of different political movements to a supposedly more fundamental ontological question? Does it justify us to flatten out asymmetry in the relations of power that has always been the defining configuration of a colonial or capitalist situation against which revolts are organized in hopes of an equal distribution of power, means of production, resources, recognition, etc.? When the ontological consideration trumps every other consideration, we would end up in a world where all political projects and all political struggles become, in Heidegger's words, "metaphysically the same" (*Introduction* 48).

Since becoming is an ontological condition intrinsic to being, we arrive at an ontological formulation of change according to which being is already becoming which in turn is already change.<sup>16</sup> Action is no longer the force that makes change happen; the source of change is now identified with an ethical imperative that attends to the ungrounding of every ground. Within the purview of this post-foundational ontology of the common, Nancy proposes a new interpretation

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<sup>16</sup> The extent to which the ontological conception of change is complicit with global capitalism is worth investigating. Badiou recognizes the liberating ontological potential of capital's power of unbinding (*Manifesto* 56-57) but cautions against the illusion of equality under the reign of capital. Capitalism's virtual equality means that "every consumer in his or her virtuality in relation to the commodity is ostensibly identical to all the others from the standpoints of abstract buying power" (*Polemics* 33). A more direct association of capital and political ontology is drawn by Bosteels:

[T]here can be no doubt that the ontological themes of difference, multiplicity, event, becoming, and so on, are the product of late capitalism as much as, if not more so than they are counteracting forces....if it is indeed capitalism itself that reveals all presence to be a mere semblance covering over random multiplicity, then this also means that the categories of a postfoundational ontology not only are not necessarily leftist, they also might turn out to be little more than descriptive, if not complicitous with, the status quo. ("Afterword" 244)

On the other hand, Franco Bifo Berardi brings to task the empowering myth of the future and reflects on the condition of politics after the late 20<sup>th</sup> century's disillusion of the utopian myth of revolutions. For an account of the complicit relations between the idea of the future, the revolutionary politics, and financial capitalism, see Berardi 2011.

to the old question “what is to be done?”: “Perhaps, though, we know one thing at least: ‘What is to be done?’ means for us: how to make a world for which all is not already done (played out, finished, enshrined in a destiny), nor still entirely to do (in the future for always future tomorrows)” (“What is to be Done” 157). Freedom, accordingly, is not a future to be fought for with an organized political project; it is to be thought rather in terms of “what is not yet *done*” (*Experience of Freedom* 47). Perhaps, released from the obsession with destiny and telos, we could deliver ourselves from the danger of installing a halting point on the virtual infinity in a world “for which all is not already done...nor still entirely to do,” that is, from the danger of measuring the immeasurable. *Or perhaps, this simply gives us an excuse to settle for an insight into the impotence of the One rather than actually articulating the possibility of a radical rearrangement of the One.* Recall the concern expressed by Dirlík: when all our critical attention is devoted to the exposure of the imagined communities, who is going to assume a more daunting task of imagining communities? Perhaps, the gesture of the retreat itself, pace Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, does not and cannot suffice as a political gesture. But it could elevate itself to a political gesture when supplemented with the courage to give an affirmative answer to the question “what is to be done?”

The double bind we are facing here is that on the one hand, I have tried to show the inadequacy of thinking change as an intrinsic ontological quality; on the other hand, as far as the questioning of the willing subject is concerned, I am in general agreement that political actualization cannot and should not be prescribed in advance, in the sense of providing a blueprint or a program for the political movement. However, instead of thinking change in ontological terms, I find it more productive to rethink the category of the subject in dialectical terms in which the subject functions as a mediator between the ontology of becoming and the

phenomenology of change. To the extent that our task is to bridge the discrepancy between theoreticians' resistance and activists' insistence, it is crucial to negotiate a space in which the subject is endowed with the capacity to act, but this capacity is cleared of unwanted implications of possessive individualism and is to be understood as a non-voluntaristic way of exercising the subject's will. This requires, of course, that we acknowledge the pitfalls of positing a willing subject but this time through confrontation rather than withdrawal.<sup>17</sup> Herein lies the theoretical wager of this thesis: *to think the subject in the wake of its post-metaphysical dissolution*. To this end, I turn to Badiou's and Fanon's writings on politics, for their theorization of the subject enables me to avoid Scylla of the voluntaristic will-to-figure and Charybdis of the noncommittal will not to will. In the final analysis, if, for Kant, the motto for the Enlightenment is to have courage to liberate oneself from the "self-incurred immaturity" (54), then the motto for emancipatory politics today, from a Badiouian/Fanonian point of view, would be to have courage to confront the question "what is to be done?"

"But to reply to this question," Badiou reminds us, "we require a project" (*The Century* 9). Without doubt, this is a project radically reconceived but a project nonetheless.

### **III. Summary**

Chapters One and Two further elaborate on the theoretical issues outlined in the introduction. In these two chapters, I take another critical look at the ontologization of politics by distinguishing ontological becoming from phenomenological change. I investigate whether anticolonial nationalist struggles or other political projects rallied around cultural or sociological predicates can serve as possible sites for a universalist conception of politics, or whether they are

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<sup>17</sup> "what is demanded of us is an additional step [to think the subject], and not veering towards the limit" (Badiou, FOS 93).

necessarily an encumberment to any universalist politics of emancipation. I argue that a prescriptive politics can help us avoid the twin danger of radical passivity and pseudo-activism, and rethink the question of the common by bringing together the aporetic and the actual, the eventual inconsistency and the post-evental consistency. To illustrate this dialectic, I draw on Badiou's two axioms of equality ("people are equal" and "people think") and Fanon's two formulations of the axiom of decolonization ("everything depends on the people"). Both Badiou and Fanon are fully aware of the danger inherent in the creation of a new possible (e.g. a new man, a new nation, or a new symbolic) by means of a collective political project. And yet, for Badiou and Fanon, the "we-subject" politically engaged in the project is not a passive, inert body, nor a collection of predicates objectively determined in terms of race, class or nation. This, however, is not the same as saying that such a collective could not be locally *supported* by the communal predicates such as "Algerian" or "French."<sup>18</sup> For example, Fanon's Algeria is the name of a new nation (a new particular) insofar as it is also the name that carries a universal address. Thus, "the nation is not simply to be equated with a social category of the native....the nation is constructed through agency and is not reflective of social entities such as indigeneity, ethnicity, or race" (Neocosmos, "The Nation and Its Politics" 190-191). From this point of view, whoever decides to incorporate him/herself into the revolutionary struggle for the general becoming of humanity is immediately qualified as Algerian. This decision is not the Other's

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<sup>18</sup> In Badiou's view, cultural predicates do not contradict a truth procedure; they instead provide its localization: "designations such as 'French' or 'Chinese' are the empirical indices of [truth's] localization" (IC 2). Although the subject is irreducible to the individual, they are not opposed: "while remaining the individual that he or she is, he or she also become, through incorporation, an active part of a new Subject" (3). The Ch. 10 of *Saint Paul* entitled "Universality and the Traversal of Difference" is another place where Badiou explains the relation between truth and differences, a relation of "*indifference that tolerates differences*" (99): "whatever people's opinions and customs, once gripped by a truth's postevental work, their thought becomes capable of traversing and transcending those opinions and customs without having to give up the differences that allow them to recognize themselves in the world" (99).

decision in me to which we are infinitely obliged (Derrida), nor is it the decision given before it is chosen (Nancy), nor is it a decision whose conclusion is reached through an autonomous subject's rational deliberation (liberal humanism). The individual's decision, first and foremost, concerns what he/she can become when he/she, confronted by an evental happening, decides to activate his/her subjective capacity by pursuing the post-evental consequences legitimated by the event. Once the individual decides to incorporate him/herself into the subjectivizable body authorized by the event, he/she continually transforms him/herself in an ongoing post-evental process of enquiries that requires the subject to make decision in regard to his/her encounter with a point. A point, according to Badiou, is the crystallization of the infinite objective complexities into the subjective figure of the Two, into the choice between yes and no: "a point in a world is that which allows an exposition [of the infinite complexity of a situation] to be distilled into a choice" (*LoW* 400).<sup>19</sup> To use Badiou's example of St. Paul, a point would be the either/or choice between the statement "Jesus is resurrected" and its negation.

Or, in the context of decolonization, a point could be the choice between struggle and compromise. *Either* the colonized chooses to be reasonable, to sit down with the colonizers and negotiate the terms of decolonization *or* they decide to carry on with the armed struggle and

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<sup>19</sup> Also noteworthy in this passage is that Badiou take issue with Herman Melville's character Bartleby whose indecision, in his view, is exemplary of the refusal to treat the point. Bartleby has somehow replaced Antigone as the paramount ethico-political figure in contemporary philosophy, especially in the theorization of the idea of radical passivity. For example, Agamben sees in Bartleby's refusal an example of the supreme power which is a power capable of both power and impotence, that is, it has the potential both to do and to not do. Thus, "[t]he perfect act of writing comes not from a power to write, but from an impotence that turns back on itself and in this way comes to itself as a pure act...Bartleby, a scribe who does not simply cease writing but 'prefers not to,' is the extreme image of this angel that writes nothing but its potentiality to not write" (*Coming Community* 36). The paramount ethical figure for Badiou is neither Antigone nor Bartleby; it is Orestes and Athena in Aeschylus's trilogy *Oresteia* who exemplify courage and justice that help exceed the deadlock of anxiety and superego. For Badiou's discussion of Aeschylus, see *Theory of the Subject* 156-168, passim; Bosteels' *Badiou and Politics* has a detailed elaboration on the political implications of Badiou's decision to shift the focus from Sophocles to Aeschylus, 90-104.



throw the colonizers out of the door on their own terms. There are, of course, infinite objective factors to be considered but ultimately the choice boils down to the choice between two alternatives: *yes*, we want equality and a decolonized nation by *earning* independence through struggle; *no*, we will settle for a decolonized nation even if it means that independence is *handed to us*. Eventually, it is not a rational decision concerning what is objectively more beneficial but a subjective decision avowing a just course to be taken. In this regard, Fanon's observation remains unparalleled. "For the colonized subject," he notes, "objectivity is always directed against him" (*WE* 37) and "[the colonized intellectuals'] preoccupation with objectivity constitutes the legitimate excuse for their failure to act" (24). The materiality (or the body) of the subject is composed of a series of such decisions made *point by point*.<sup>20</sup> Since the subject-body is composed by its aleatory treatment of points which is not guided by any objective knowledge, the political project anticipates a future not mapped out in advanced in a blueprint or subordinated to a philosophical program. The project is rather a collective process dialectically conceived, a process in which "men change at the same time that they change the world" (Fanon, *DC* 30).<sup>21</sup> Thus, "[t]he power of the Algerian Revolution," Fanon claims, resides not in the objective goal (e.g. formal independence) it sets out to obtain but "in the radical mutation that the Algerian has undergone" in the very process of its own subjectivization (32).<sup>22</sup> Or in Badiou's

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<sup>20</sup> "the treatment of points is the becoming-true of the subject" (*LoW* 52).

<sup>21</sup> In David Macey's account, Fanon did not come to Algeria with a fully-fledged revolutionary intention (a rebuttal to those who see Fanon as a prophet of revolution). Fanon was caught in the process, became part of the process and transformed himself in the process. For an account of how Fanon personally undergoes this process of radical mutation, see Macey 2012.

<sup>22</sup> In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon provides an excellent example of how this immanent dialectic unfolds with his account of the function of veiling and the Algerian women's bodily and psycho-affective mutation during the revolution. The veil which used to be the sign of tradition was put to revolutionary use by the female militants. The alternation of the stripping and the donning of the veil is no longer dictated by the tradition or by the colonial reason that sees the veil as a symbol of constraint and barbarity. It is now dictated by the living movement of the revolution in which tactics and strategies shift

parlance, the power in question refers to the subject's capacity to treat points in the dialectical unfolding of a political process by virtue of which "the subject...comes to be constituted as a capacity" for an egalitarian procedure, which Badiou dignified with the name truth (*The Century* 100). Conceptualized in dialectical terms, the category of the subject in Fanon and Badiou brings forth the creation of a new man or a new nation resolutely different from the immanentist production of the common based on an essence or property.

Through a dialectical conceptualization of the subject and the project, we arrive at a prescriptive politics of the common: *the real* of the common here refers neither to the lost object one can revive and return to nor to the experience of freedom that resists the collective subject-formation.<sup>23</sup> The true real is the point of intersection between "I" and "we," between the individual and the subjectivizable body (Badiou, *The Century* 122); it is only at this point of intersection when the individual "dissolv[es] itself into a project that exceeds him that an individual can hope to attain some subjective real" (100-101). To put it another way, the "we"

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as the objective conditions shift: "It is the necessities of combat that give rise in Algerian society to new attitudes, to new modes of action, to new ways" (*DC* 64). And in the very same process of changing the world, the Algerian women also reinvent themselves by redefining the relation of their bodies to the world:

Each time she ventures into the European city, the Algerian woman must achieve a victory over self, over her childish fears....Without the veil she has an impression of her body being cut up into bits,....When the Algerian woman has to cross a street, for a long time she commits errors of judgment as to the exact distance to be negotiated. The unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve. She has an impression of being improperly dressed, even of being naked. She experiences a sense of incompleteness with great intensity....The absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman's corporal pattern. She quickly has to invent new dimensions for her body, new means of muscular control. She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled-woman-outside....The Algerian woman who walks stark naked into the European city relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion. This new dialectic of the body and of the world is primary in the case of one revolutionary woman (52, 59).

<sup>23</sup> "He [Nancy] shows that the experience of freedom, and thus the experience of community, is the experience of the *real*, and while he deconstructs the notions of the individual and the subject's presence to itself, he points to the singularity of the self that knows itself as opening to alterity" (Fynsk, "Experiences" xiii).

refers to a collective “bearing out the consequences of the maxim of equality to the extent of its possibility” (Badiou, “Lessons” 50). The we-subject is not an autonomous agent nor is it the anonymous They.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the we-subject shows itself in political struggles against colonialism, in demonstrations against forms of exploitation, in meetings that disseminate knowledge, in tracts that exposes the systematicity of violence, or even in a simple gesture of “giv[ing] out a flyer in a marketplace” (IC 4). These and other activities are the materials of the we-subject, and individuals, through a series of ongoing decisions to commit themselves to such activities mount themselves on the stage of history and becomes its subject. The common in this sense is not the community of friends nor the community of interruption; it is rather a community of those who exercise the subjective capacity for generic equality and for the collective emancipation of humanity. As the essence of the common, generic equality refers people “back to their choice, and not to their position” (*LoW* 26). This “we” then is a totally de-substantialized body that articulates itself into existence through individuals’ decision to remain faithful to an event that momentarily suspends the symbolic order of representation and thereby reveals the *being* of the common in the form of generic equality; most importantly, those subjective decisions avowing one’s fidelity to the axiom of equality through an infinite process of verification *politicize* the essence of the common by giving a consistent articulation to egalitarian inconsistency.<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>24</sup> On this point, see Heidegger 1962, ¶27.

<sup>25</sup> A note on the terms “consistency” and “inconsistency”: inconsistency refers to the idea of generic equality which, within the inegalitarian space of representation, manifests itself only negatively (e.g. rupture, revolution, symptom, trauma, etc.). The idea of generic equality thus can be properly referred to as inconsistency in the domain of representation. Representation constitutes the domain of consistency offering a measure of stability prescribed by the state through various means of grouping (such as those categories catalogued in the census). Although representation is an inegalitarian inventory of beings, it is also an essential order maintaining the consistency of human existence, for lack of which the world will collapse into a psychotic universe. Be that as it may, representation (or the state’s prescription of consistency) is not the only type of consistency theorized in this project. There is a different type of consistency, the consistency of inconsistency, at work in Badiou’s theory of truth and Fanon’s theory of decolonization.

palpable result yielded by this prescriptive politics of the common is not to be understood in terms of substitution (viz. the replacement of one order with another); rather, the change manifests itself through the generic extension which supplements and forces the inegalitarian coordinates of a world to expand in actual historical processes toward the direction of generic equality.

In Chapters Three and Four, I look at Wu Zhuoliu's *The Orphan of Asia* and Li Ang's *Visible Ghosts*. My reading of *The Orphan of Asia* focuses on episodes leading up to the ambiguous ending in which the protagonist Taiming allegedly grows out of his passive slumber and is rumored to have participated in an anti-imperialist struggle in China. Over years, this ambiguous ending has largely lost its ambiguity and there even emerges a tacit consensus to disregard the militant overtone of Taiming's rumored activity, a consensus that gradually consolidates itself into a hegemonic interpretative practice thanks to which a kind of hermeneutic circle is brought into effect: that is, the meaning of *The Orphan of Asia* is to be situated in the historical and political context which, in turn, is symbolically recoded in the literary work; however, the case of *The Orphan of Asia* proves even more troublesome because the hermeneutic circle itself not just forms an interpretative closure but also an existential one as the cultural imaginary of the orphan, on a converging path with other political and international events, keeps reproducing and reinforcing itself in various cultural, political, and economic discourses - so much so that it gives rise to a collective cultural victimology that has come to dominate the existential spheres and that, to borrow a phrase from Marx, "weights like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (595). Consequences? Instead of accomplishing a reflexive movement wherein the subject posits its own presupposition, what we have here is a cultural presupposition engulfing the positing subject, reducing the subject to a mere placed (or

determined) element in a situation;<sup>26</sup> instead of subjectively embarking on an affirmative course of action, critical energies are wasted on how to express and represent the sorrow and misery of a triply-split consciousness; this cultural fixation with the orphan also set out a course of action that keeps looking for the next Father, the next Master and forget that the sense of abandonment, rather than condemning the self to a Sisyphean search for parental recognition, also means that “man is condemned to be free” (Sartre, *Basic Writing* 32).<sup>27</sup> In this regard, my reading is also to be understood as a kind of interpretative intervention that aims at breaking that vicious circle and reintroducing the figure of the subject into the lifeless history that has thus far deprived the people of *their choice to choose*.

A similar spirit also informs my reading of Li Ang’s *Visible Ghosts*. In this chapter, I try to demonstrate two distinct conceptualizations of justice in relation to the author’s presentations of the body in “Dingfanpo de gui” (“The Ghosts of Dingfanpo”) and “Bujiantian de gui” (“The Ghosts of Bujiantian”). In the first approach, Li Ang continues the feminist act of demystification; the body is initially figured as a passive, suffering body, and the removal of external constraints is concomitant with a moment of liberation. Emancipation, in this approach, requires a recognition of alienation and its negation. This first presentation of the body, while indispensable for the liberation of women, remains stuck in the dialectic of law and desire. It is only in the later part of “The Ghosts of Bujiantian” that Li Ang overcomes a morbid fascination with sexual transgression and provides us with a new conception of the body, one that articulates a transformative politics of materiality and rejects a conception of the body as the locus of symbolic inscription, material exploitation, or drive circulation. In “The Ghosts of Bujiantian,”

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<sup>26</sup> On the discussion of the subject’s capacity to posit his own presupposition, see the last Ch. of Žižek’s *Sublime Object of Ideology*.

<sup>27</sup> See also Paul Bové 2000.

justice is affirmed as an axiom of equality beyond the morbid obsession with suffering; the body in the second presentation designates the capacity to actively concentrate objects around the evental site and produce a new form of knowledge that will transform the existing coordinates of representation. The body then consists of objects that offer themselves as the material support for the position taken in affirmation of generic equality. In "The Ghosts of Bujiantian," the position is taken in the form of forcing into existence a new piece of knowledge, a history that documents all the popular revolts against the oppression of the Taiwanese people. As far as the coming-to-pass of this new knowledge is concerned, roof panels on which the history of past revolts is written are no less efficacious than the female ghost herself in the composition of a subjectivizable body, as both work for the happening of knowledge's infinite extensionality.

The first two theory chapters and the later two literature chapters are not to be treated as the mirror image of each other. They are nonetheless related to each other in an essential way. The theoretical discussion of the common affords me critical perspectives on a range of issues pertaining to the question of decolonization, such as the subjective production of the new, the dialectics of determination and freedom, revolutionary optimism, etc. These perspectives allow me to take note of certain undercurrents in literature and look beyond the surface narrative for a critical examination of the political import of these two novels. More importantly, the reason these two novels are selected for this study is that they both demonstrate a progressive movement toward the becoming-subject of an individual, a process affirming the axiom of equality.

In his defense of the virtue of committing oneself to a principle, Terry Eagleton stresses the non-dogmatic and life-affirming quality of the principle: "[p]rinciples can be flexible and still be principles. It is not their unbendability which distinguishes them from the rest of our life. It is the vital nature of what they safeguard or promote – vital from the viewpoint of fostering an

abundance of life” (144-145). The same can be said of the axiom of equality in Badiou and Fanon. What is safeguarded in the egalitarian principle is *an optimism of the will* without which we will be too subjectively impoverished to envision a new possible in a lifeless present we live in. And it is this flash of optimism I hope to capture and rekindle in my readings of Wu Zhuoliu and Li Ang for the affirmation of life’s abundance.

## Chapter 1

### From the Ontology of the Common to the Politics of the Common

#### I. The Ontology of the Common

There is no democracy *without* respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy without the “community of friends,” without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal. These two laws are irreducible one to the other. Tragically irreconcilable and forever wounding. The wound itself opens with the necessity of having to *count* one’s friends, to count the others, in the economy of one’s own, there where every other is altogether other.

Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*

Singularity...is linked to ecstasy: one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no “subject” – but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*

In *Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida centers his reflection on the common around Aristotle’s apostrophe “O my friends, there is no friend,” a sentence that evinces what he calls “performative contradiction” oscillating between address and judgment (27). This sets off other similar reflections on the genealogical concept of fraternity and its inherent aporia. For all its conceptual fecundity and intellectual dexterity, Derrida’s inquiry is sustained throughout by the questioning of the postulate of assurance, sameness, and calculability that show up with every evocation of fraternity.

We can detect two related trajectories in Derrida’s thinking of the politics of friendship. First, friendship signals a departure from the understanding of fraternity that has hitherto informed the historico-philosophical articulations of the common. The experience of fraternity, according to Derrida, hinges on “a *schematic* of filiation” (viii) that gathers countable units into a collection and ties them up with figures of filiation such as birth, blood, nature, nation, etc. The



schematic of filiation ensures that the community and the communal experience acquire an aura of authenticity which naturalizes the community by reversing the effect into the cause. Deconstruction keeps a critical distance from the schematic of filiation, and its task is first and foremost defined by an undertaking to *denaturalize* the alleged naturalness of fraternity. As Derrida puts it, “there has never been anything *natural* in the brother figure....The brother is never a fact” (159).

Deconstruction’s radical critique of fraternity casts doubt on self-enclosing or oppositional types of communal arrangements, favoring instead a recognition of a constitutive alterity whose aporetic structure opens up a space of freedom where an ethics of “democracy-to-come” would supplement any putative ontology of presence. From a deconstructive point of view, the word *community* is burdened with a cluster of metaphysical properties; *community* carries with it connotations of immanentism and the denial of heterogeneity. The dismantling of the notion of pre-given commonality or any conception of collective belonging based on shared characteristics and values then becomes the primary task for deconstruction. Deconstruction reveals that at the foundation of *community* is not an essence but a process of fraternization. In other words, there is no concealed or submerged substance sustaining the integrity of a *community*; *community* comes into being through a series of contingent operations of making One. A fraternal approach to the question of the common is blind to *community*’s originary sense of dissemination and multiplicity. It is, so to speak, the common in its base and depraved form, an operation disguising itself as an origin. Within the deconstructive logic, the word *community* is salvageable, if at all, only by suspending the putative unity of a “we” by passing through its own constitutive limit.

Second, the political imaginations of the past, from the ancient to the modern, from the searching for the best political regime to the global transplantation of the modern politics of the

nation-state, all display a certain fraternal streak under the auspices of which historical communities are experienced as the crystallization of a common measure - a bond, a communion, or an apprehension of simultaneity.<sup>28</sup> Conceived as such, the traditional politics of the common can think community only with a view to its completion as a homogeneous unity, utterly self-contained and snugly assured of its presence. In this fraternal configuration of the common, the status of the other is significantly compromised since the other in this configuration appears only in its petrified form; its radicality is stripped off because alterity is unambiguously marked out as an outside to be identified (e.g. as women, enemies, uncivilized barbarians, immigrants, aboriginal people, etc.) and then conquered, assimilated, or sublated into the self. The petrified other poses no threat to the self. In fact, the existence of the other reaffirms the omnipotence of the self because the self's encounter with the other is experienced as a path toward a higher level of consciousness, a function in a dialectic, the crescendo of which is reached in the eventual return to the self. This vision of the self as an expressive totality in which all the various moments or negativities traversed in the process are considered mere expressions of the essence of the whole is characteristic of the working out of the dialectical movement, a theme philosophically well-explored in the journey of the consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, literarily reproduced in many European novels,<sup>29</sup> and historically played out in different forms of expansionism that subordinate the Rest to the imperialist desire

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<sup>28</sup> This new apprehension of time, in Benedict Anderson's view, is among one of the fundamental changes that make possible the construction of the national imagination: "An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" (*Imagined Communities* 26).

<sup>29</sup> As Fanon says scathingly of the West's will to represent the other, "[f]or a population 98 percent illiterate, there is, however, an enormous amount of literature written about them" (*WE* 41-42). A similar argument underpins Chinua Achebe's criticism of the representation of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad's novel, Africa is without human qualities, a natural background in the story of the spiritual quest of a European. See Achebe 1978.

of the West, a phenomenon under critical scrutiny in the works of Fanon, Walter Mignolo and Yoshimi Takeuchi.<sup>30</sup>

When the politics of the common, as it has been thought and practiced to date, refuses to admit the other's incommensurability, this politics can only serve to institute the self as a sovereign figure - either a subject as an authorial presence,<sup>31</sup> or a community as a self-producing common substance, both, in the final analysis, an offshoot of metaphysical thought. Gradually, a chain of equivalence comes to dominate our way of thinking the common: mastery, lordship, control, fulfillment, destiny, prediction, action, projection, production, voluntarism, work, and so on; these terms form a constellation in which modern subjectivity, whether individual or collective, finds itself lodged in the prison house of identity undisturbed by the trace of alterity within. The second trajectory is, in a sense, the continuation of the first because it also relies on the denaturalizing strategy as the point of departure in the questioning of the community's postulation of its own immanence, but it goes further than a simple negative gesture of denaturalization in that the movement of contestation is not issued from an outside; it is rather to be traced back to an originary moment of dissemination in reaction to which the communitarian formation is put to defensive work. In light of this second trajectory, community is no longer sovereign in the sense given in traditional political philosophy, for sovereignty now comes to designate dissemination rather than unity. In Georges Bataille's formulation – "Sovereignty is NOTHING" – the sovereign refers to that which remains excessive to the philosophico-political categories of community, undoing the identitarian or communal closure by opening itself up to a negativity which remains unemployed; for it is not a negativity serving a purpose nor a

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<sup>30</sup> See Mignolo 2000 and 2011; Takeuchi 2004, especially Ch. 2 "What is Modernity?" and Ch. 6. "Asia as Method."

<sup>31</sup> Derrida puts it this way: "calculable form of presentable unity, the voice of the subject" (*PoF* 102).

negativity construed as a moment in the dialectic that would eventually be annulled and sublated; it is rather a negativity that serves no purpose other than an exposure of the sovereign self to its ownmost limit (*Accursed Share* 2/3 256; *Bataille Reader* 296; *Literature and Evil* 193-194).

This second trajectory, to be more precise, confers an ontological dignity on the moment of rupture and leads to a new way of conceiving the relation of community and interruption in which interruption does not just disrupt the essence of community; it has become the essence of community. That is to say, *community is not interrupted by forces from outside because community is itself its own interruption*. Or, to put it another way, what used to be the stumbling block has now become the bedrock of community. That's why a deconstructive argument always works toward the foregrounding of an aporetic structure, something resembling a Möbius strip that indistinguishes the categorical distinction between the inside and the outside, only that this indistinction now takes place at the level of the reversibility between the condition of possibility and that of impossibility, with each condition slipping into the other imperceptibly. As the essence of community is recognized in the notion of sovereignty as its ownmost limit, we are introduced to a different disposition of the common, to a politics that takes place in the domain of the unworking where the myth of production (of a nation, a people, a consistency, a common essence) gives way to the exposure of inconsistency. Thus, in the place previously occupied by an autonomous subject, we now have a gap that both inhibits and liberates. The gap incompletes the supposed wholeness of a community but the very same gesture also provides the ontological ground for the process of transformation. This ground paradoxically has to be understood as an *Ungrund*, a groundless ground or an abyss of freedom "indifferent to particular difference, to the raging quest for identity" (*PoF* 106). This *Ungrund* forms the basis of freedom because it suspends the symbolic coordinates of one's existence, unplugs the self from its immediate frame

of reference and opens up a space for men and communities to incessantly reinvent themselves. In this new political space, politics refers not to the production of a particular community or its administrative and managerial aspects; politics in its radical ontological sense manifests itself in the sharing of the singular experience of the other as a constitutive limit on the basis of which a new ontology of the common is fostered.

If the new direction in the thinking of the common takes a turn toward the singular, this then requires a consideration of the relation between the particular and the singular, between fraternity (a “we” construed on the basis of a common being) and friendship (a “we” who experiences the bond of being-in-common to the same extent that it undergoes the shattering of the bond). It is easy to forget that although the target of criticism is fraternity, the politics of friendship Derrida proposes is not opposed to fraternity. As Derrida suggests, “it is not our intention to denounce fraternity or fraternization” (237). Still, if the idea of the common is to remain a relevant category in contemporary political thought, it would need to be reconceived by going beyond the concept’s sedimented meaning and beyond the trap of its identitarian logic. In Derrida’s view, fraternization is a violent operation inscribed in the constitution of a community. What makes it such a powerful discourse for community-building projects is that it effects the forgetting of a more originary experience (of an altogether other), an ecstatic experience founded not on the sharing of a common essence, but the sharing of the unsharable:

We are first of all, as friends, the friends of solitude, and we are calling on you to share what cannot be shared: solitude. We are friends of an entirely different kind, inaccessible friends, friends who are alone because they are incomparable and

without common measure, reciprocity or equality. Therefore, without a horizon of recognition. Without a familial bond, without proximity, without *oikeiotes*. (35)<sup>32</sup>

Ethnocentrism, nationalism, communism and fascism are frequently cited as historical instances bearing witness to the violence of fraternity because in these discourses, claims to ethnicity, race, or a vision of a classless society, often involve the suppression of difference - which would not be possible without implementing a Manichaeian logic of some sort, whether it is evinced in the physical compartmentalization between the colonizer and the colonized as described in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*; in the cultural and representational compartmentalization brought to the fore in Edward Said's *Orientalism*,<sup>33</sup> in the linguistic compartmentalization between the standard language and non-standard variants as analyzed in the Sinophone, Francophone and other "-phone" studies;<sup>34</sup> or in the temporal compartmentalization between the modern and the premodern that, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's provincializing project, has been identified as the assumption behind the contemporary historicist thought and the theory of modernization.<sup>35</sup> And yet this dualistic arrangement appear all the more problematic in the eye of deconstruction because it is premised upon the logic of homogenization and hierarchization. As previously noted, the other (or the second term in the

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<sup>32</sup> A variation of the same thesis is put forth by Nancy: "Fraternity is equality in the sharing of the incommensurable" (*Experience of Freedom* 72).

<sup>33</sup> For example, Said points out that "[t]he Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also...its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (*Orientalism* 1-2).

<sup>34</sup> For a succinct overview of this issue in Sinophone studies, see Shu-mei Shih 2011.

<sup>35</sup> See Chakrabarty 2000, *passim*.

pair) within this logic cannot but be a petrified other. As a result, the primitive existence of the colonized is affirmed only to be contrasted with the civilized self-image of the colonizer; linguistic variations are tolerated as long as they are seen as derivative to the norm exemplified by the standard language; and the backwardness of the premodern is evoked to underline the progressiveness of the modern.

Deconstruction, however, does not set out to negate or contradict,<sup>36</sup> nor does it result in a simple cessation as if the mission is considered accomplished the moment the violence of the Manichaean logic is abolished. It would then be erroneous to say that it is possible to be done with figures of filiation or live without a sense of belonging to a particular community. The point

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<sup>36</sup> Although most of the Derrideans see themselves coming from a non-dialectical tradition, it is actually debatable whether deconstruction is really non-dialectical. To be sure, the dialectic of alienation – a procedure premised on the negation of negation as the return of the same to itself and laid out most prominently in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* – is the concept of the dialectic under criticism here and justifiably so. What is usually considered non-dialectical in the Derridean fashion, however, comes close to another conception of the dialectic in terms of scission. In *The Theory of the Subject*, Badiou outlines two matrixes of the dialectic. The first matrix of alienation expresses “the idea of a simple term which unfolds itself in its becoming-other, in order to come back to itself as an achieved concept” (4). The second matrix operates with scission “whose theme is that there is no unity that is not split” (4). Therefore, the claim that deconstruction is non-dialectical has to be situated in its proper context by specifying the specific type of the dialectical matrix in question. As a matter of fact, Derrida himself suggests as much:

If we take, for example, that which makes a dialectical process possible—namely, an element foreign to the system . . . this foreign element, more originary than the dialectic, is precisely that which the dialectic is to dialectize, taking it into and including it in itself. This is why the most dialectical formulations of the dialectic, those which in general are to be found in Hegel, are always both dialectical and nondialectical: identity of non-identity and identity. The non-dialectical does not oppose the dialectical, and is a figure that recurs continually. I have constantly attempted to single out that element which would not allow itself to be integrated in a series or a group, in order to show that there is a non-oppositional difference that transcends the dialectic, which is itself always oppositional. . . . [B]asically, we are dealing with two concepts or two figures of the dialectic – the conventional one, of totalization, reconciliation and reappropriation through the work of the negative, etc.; and then a non-conventional figure, which I have just indicated. Clearly, between the two figures themselves there will also have to be a dialectic – in this case, between the non-dialectizable and the dialectizable. (*Taste for the Secret* 32-33)

is not about the absence of figures but the absence of the figural completion.<sup>37</sup> Had the collapse of distinction been the norm, we would be living in a psychotic universe that could be more horrifying than a world structured by binarism (Derrida, *PoF* 83).<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, it is still important to articulate *something other*<sup>39</sup> that cannot be reduced to *another* thing, *another* politics or *another* community. Without substituting the singular (something other) for the particular (some other thing), deconstruction calls for a different logic, according to which the singular supplements rather than replaces the particular. That is to say, the politics of friendship does not take place in the void of presence, without figures; rather, it “cuts across these figures” (70). What is suggested here is an incessant exchange between interruption and articulation, between placement and displacement. As Derrida points out,

This is not to wage war on [the genealogical schema of filiation] and to see evil therein, but to think and live a politics, a friendship, a justice which *begin* by breaking with their naturalness or their homogeneity, with their alleged place of

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<sup>37</sup> See the quotation from Derrida in the epigraph. The same idea is shared by Nancy: “Figuration itself cannot simply be condemned. It too is part of the structure. The crucial double question of the in-common would thus be: how to exclude without fixing (*figurer*)? and how to fix without excluding? Exclusion without fixing is to legitimate the absence of grounding, or of presupposition, to legitimate being together. Fixing without exclusion is to uphold the lines of exteriority, the two sides of a same edge” (“The Compearance” 393); “I do not think that we should strive to maintain a pure and simple absence of figure....This means that we must reinvent, through and through, what a ‘figure’ is (figure of a ‘people,’ or ‘people’ as ‘figure’); and in order to do this we must first ponder this: there are at least two functions, that of fastening (which does not complete) and that of separation (which also does not complete)” (*Multiple Arts* 32).

<sup>38</sup> Apropos of this logic of disintegration, Kenneth Reinhard comments: “The disappearance of the enemy results in something like global psychosis....As Derrida writes, the disappearance of the enemy opens the door for ‘an unheard-of violence....a violence in the face of which what is called hostility, war, conflict, enmity, cruelty, even hatred, would regain reassuring and ultimately appeasing contours, because they would be *identifiable*’” (“Political Theology of the Neighbor” 17). Negotiating between the Schmittian friend/enemy distinction and global psychosis, Derrida’s politics of friendship sustains its radicality by showing the intertwining of these two alleged opposite terms.

<sup>39</sup> See also Hegel’s *Science of Logic* or the shorter *Encyclopaedia Logic*, especially the section “quantity” in the doctrine of being. For Badiou’s reading of this section in *Logic*, see *Theory of the Subject* 4-8.



origin. Hence, which begin where beginning divides (itself) and differs, begin by marking an “originary” heterogeneity that has already come and that alone can come, in the future, to open them up. (105)

Notice that Derrida sketches out the contour of this politics - alternately referred to as democracy-to-come or the politics of the *perhaps* - through a gesture that takes on, simultaneously, the question of the origin and the future; or rather, it approaches the question by setting up a temporal loop by dint of which the ontology of a fractured origin is inextricably linked to the “to-comeness” (*à venir*) of the future: “The to-come precedes the present, the self-presentation of the present; it is, therefore, more ‘ancient’ than the present, ‘older’ than the past present. It thus chains itself to itself while unchaining itself at the same time; it disjoins itself, and disjoins the self that would yet join itself in this disjunction” (37-38). This gesture allows Derrida to establish a short-circuit between ontology and politics, between ontological finitude (“the originary heterogeneity”) and the infinite to-comeness (*à venir*) of the politics of friendship. More significantly, this short-circuit articulates an aporetic structure in which the origin and the future relate to each other as a limit rather than a goal, and this aporetic structure is revealed through a group of oxymoronic expressions or what Derrida calls “untenable syntagms,” such as “community without community,” “relation without relation” and other similar “X without X” paradoxes (42; 80-81). The aporia shows that every community is always already truncated from inside by an immanent trace of alterity and that democracy-to-come – far from preordaining a future of democracy (i.e. the global spread of democracy as a form of government) – describes a dynamic force of becoming set in motion by this fractured ontology. Thus, the futurity of democracy-to-come refers not to a future as an attainable goal, but a future that “open[s] onto the coming of what comes,” (29) an infinite process of self-differing and self-

deferring with no destiny, no destination and no guarantee. In this way, the infinite (democracy-to-come) is made possible by the finite (alterity) and the finite is opened up by the infinite, as they dance to the aporetic tune of *à venir*: “At stake here is the very concept of democracy as concept of a promise that can only arise in such a *diastema* (failure, inadequation, disjunction, disadjustment, being ‘out of joint’). That is why we always propose to speak of a democracy *to come*, not of a *future* democracy in the future present” (*Specters of Marx* 81).

If we compare this politics with the nationalist politics, the difference in their respective profile comes immediately into sharp focus. Here we take for example the backward-looking cultural discourse, such as Léopold Senghor’s objective conception of negritude, which is to be strictly distinguished from the subjective negritude championed by Aimé Césaire and Fanon for whom negritude is a future-oriented project toward the creation of a new man and not concerned with the restoration of a lost origin or a prelapsarian way of life. “To take,” Fanon warns, “also means on several levels being taken” (*WE* 163). Thus, to reclaim the past also means to be claimed by the past.<sup>40</sup> As cultural politics, objective negritude also faces the past and the future at

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<sup>40</sup> Undoubtedly, negritude can be justified on the affective ground. “Otherwise [the colonized] will be faced with extremely serious psycho-affective mutilations: individuals without an anchorage, without borders, colorless, stateless, rootless, a body of angels” (*WE* 155). But the issue becomes more complex when it is subject to the political deployment. Fanon criticizes Senghor’s objective conception of negritude: “[Senghor] announced that negritude should be included in the school curriculum. If this decision is an exercise in cultural history, it can only be approved. But if it is a matter of shaping black consciousness it is simply turning one’s back on history which has already noted the fact that most ‘Negroes’ have ceased to exist” (169n21). Be that as it may, Fanon endorses a different use of negritude, one that draws on the affective power of culture and converts it into the political force for decolonization: “When the colonized intellectual writing for his people uses the past he must do so with the intention of opening up the future, of spurring them into action and fostering hope” (167). From the point of view of politics, it is important to distinguish these two uses of negritude, one affirms cultural ossification and the other cultural dynamism. Whereas one looks toward the past in order to reconstitute a lost origin, the other look toward the future while facing the past. Césaire writes in *Discourse on Colonialism* that “[f]or us, they problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive....It is a new society that we must create, with the help of all our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days” (51-52). On Fanon’s complex relation to negritude, see Nigel C. Gibson 2003, Ch. 3.

once. However, the past is conceived as a nostalgic origin expressive of the objective essence of “blackness” and the future a projected plan moving toward the fulfillment of this givenness. The objective negritude also relies on a temporal loop, but this loop circles itself into a closed totality where past and future form a commensalistic relationship with each feeding on the other, as the origin dictates the becoming of the future and the future accommodates the realization of the origin. According to this tautological schema, the past is posited as a recoverable past and the future a programmable future. The natives appear again as a fixed and unified object of knowledge, only now that the values attached to blackness undergo a reversal; blackness now signifies beauty and intuition; the free display of emotions is elevated to a status higher than reason. Nevertheless, this objective conception of negritude is a myth since it deliberately obscures the fact of the imposed presence of foreign influences and the process of creolization that inevitably alters the structure of feelings of the indigenous culture.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the objective negritude, now biologically determined, can present itself only as a poetics of the black identity, not to be mistaken for a politics that aspires to the reordering of a representational system.

In contrast to Senghor’s metaphysics of blackness, the origin within the logic of friendship is never *an* origin in the first place since it is already divided into *something* (the particular) and *something other* (the singular) before its hypostasis into a unified entity. To traverse the dangerous passage of the *perhaps* means bypassing the standard oppositions of self/other, presence/absence, origin/future, activity/passivity, finitude/infinity and arriving at the point of

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<sup>41</sup> Ernesto Laclau, among others, has noted that “[i]f a racial or cultural minority...has to assert its identity in new social surroundings, it will have to take into account new situations which will inevitably transform that identity” (*Emancipation(s)* 30). Similarly, as Fanon observes, “[s]eeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one’s people. When a people support an armed or even political struggle against a merciless colonialism, tradition changes meaning” (*WE* 160).

their ambiguous determination and contamination. From this perspective, the distinction between presence and absence is rendered porous as the modalities of presence/absence fluctuate between the lack of being and the being of lack; likewise, there is no clear line demarcating the boundary between activity and passivity, for the exigency of the unworking, divested itself of the meaning of paralysis and immobility, is that which sets to work the infinite process of becoming.<sup>42</sup> In the final analysis, theorizing the idea of the common on the basis of a desubstantiated notion of community requires a thinking that approaches what Lacan calls the real which, in his early formulation, is defined as “what resists symbolisation absolutely” (*Seminar I* 66).<sup>43</sup> In Lacan’s view, the real is impossible and cannot be accessed directly. The contour of the real can nonetheless be drawn by circulating around its own impossibility. As Žižek suggests, “it is precisely through this failure that we can in a way encircle, locate the empty place of the Real. In other words, the Real cannot be inscribed, but we can inscribe this impossibility itself, we can locate its place: a traumatic place which causes a series of failure (*Sublime Object* 195). Perhaps, this is also how the real of the common is to be understood in the wake of the ontological turn in politics, as Nancy, the thinker of the singular and the common, constantly reminds us that community inscribes “the impossibility of community,” that community is the consciousness of “the interruption of self-consciousness,” or that community is “resistance itself” (*Inoperative*

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<sup>42</sup> Maurice Blanchot touches on the point about the radicality of passivity: “passivity is posed or deposed as that which would interrupt our reason, our speech, our experience....passivity is never passive enough. It is in this respect that one can speak of an infinite passivity....there is in passivity something like a demand that would require it to fall always short of itself. There is in passivity not passivity, but is demand, a movement of the past toward the unsurpassable” (*Writing of the Disaster* 16).

<sup>43</sup> Heideggerians as well as French poststructuralists seem to share this in common: what is real, from Heidegger’s tool to Lacan’s impossible real, is revealed through failure or dysfunctionality. See Ch. 8 of Bosteels’ *Badiou and Politics* for an excellent account of the theoretical proximity (on account of their shared distrust of politics) between Lacan and Heidegger.

*Community* 15, 19, 35).<sup>44</sup> In the end, community in the ontology of the common becomes a name for the virtual totality of iterative moments of rupture, something akin to the status of  $S_1$  in psychoanalysis that turns the lack of signifier into the signifier of lack.

## II. Search for a Method: Ethics as/or Politics?

Very often, one equates philosophy and critique. So that philosophical commitment would ultimately amount to saying what is evil, what is suffering, of saying what's not acceptable, or what is false. The task of philosophy would be primarily negative: to entertain doubt, the critical spirit, and so on and so forth. I think this theme must be absolutely overturned. The essence of philosophical intervention is really affirmation. Why is it affirmation? Because if you intervene with respect to a paradoxical situation, or if you intervene with regard to a relation that is not a relation, you will have to propose a new framework of thought, and you will have to affirm that it is possible to think this paradoxical situation, on condition, of course, that a certain number of parameters be abandoned, and a certain number of novelties introduced. And when all is said and done, the only proof for this is that you will propose a new way of thinking the paradox.

Alain Badiou, *Philosophy in the Present*

[T]here is always a measure, a better measure to take. I don't want to forbid everything, but I also don't want to forbid nothing. I certainly cannot eradicate or extirpate the roots of violence against animals, abuse and insults, racism, anti-Semitism, etc., but, under the pretext that I cannot eradicate them, I don't want to allow them to develop unchecked. Therefore, according to the historical situation, it is necessary to invent the least bad solution. The difficulty of ethical responsibility is that the response cannot be formulated as a "yes or no"; that would be too simple. It is necessary to give a singular response, within a given context, and to take the risk of a decision by enduring the undecidable.

Derrida, *For What Tomorrow*

In the last 30 years or so, critical theory is known to have embraced the so-called ethical turn. Briefly, the ethical turn emerges from the ruins of the metaphysics of subjectivity; it shifts

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<sup>44</sup> See also Ch. 10 of *Conditions* in which Badiou discusses the insufficiency of the word community to be the key category for emancipatory politics, not even those formulations attesting to the impossibility of community. Instead, Badiou opts for "equality" as the philosophical name for today's emancipatory politics. In this chapter, Badiou has a rather brief engagement with Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*, Nancy's *Inoperative Community* and Agamben's *Coming Community*.

its focus from the same to the other and is closely bound up with the theme of finitude which, in its philosophical sense, refers to the condition of not being self-sufficient. Finitude then designates the impossibility of ever achieving a self-contained existence and therefore is the source of transformation, signaling the infinite possibilities of becoming other and of outgrowing the same. French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is often credited for bringing ethics to the forefront of philosophical investigation. Contrary to the metaphysical presupposition of the subject's primacy in its relation to the other, Levinas believes that the responsibility to the other is more primordial and already given prior to the constitution of the subject. If we stay with the Levinasian thesis and understand ethics as a way of thinking relationality, it then can be argued that the primacy of the other in Levinas' thinking bestowed an indelible legacy on the contemporary ethical turn, a legacy that ushers in a way of approaching the question of the common in a non-sacrificial and open-ended manner. Although not every thinker discussed in this chapter is under Levinas' influence – for example, whereas Derrida's indebtedness to Levinas is considerable, Nancy draws more on Heidegger's fundamental ontology<sup>45</sup> – they tend

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<sup>45</sup> The relations between these thinkers are more entangled than the one I have outlined above, which defies the assignation of one thinker to a particular intellectual genealogy. Nancy, whose work focuses on Heidegger's less-developed concept *Mitsein* (e.g. Nancy 2008), frequently relies on Derrida's concepts for his own purpose (e.g. Nancy 2011). Nancy shares with deconstruction a general suspicion of metaphysical concepts such as subject, substance, will-to-figure, etc., while insisting at the same time on a non-essentialist reformulation of the Heideggerian categories of presence and sense as a way of thinking being's singular-plural existence prior to its positivization into atomistic entity. For all affinities between them, these Heideggerian categories still appears problematic in Derrida's eyes. As Derrida points out, "[t]here is still perhaps some brotherhood in Bataille, Blanchot and Nancy, and I wonder, in the innermost recess of my admiring friendship, if it does not deserve a little loosening up, and if it should still guide the thinking of community, be it a community without community, or a brotherhood without brotherhood" (*PoF* 48n15; see also A.J.P. Thomson 2002). But I think this is more a matter of terminological preference than a fundamental disagreement; it seems to me that where Nancy sees the presence of the incommensurable (*Truth of Democracy* 19-20), Derrida sees its trace. But both, to borrow a superb expression from Samuel Weber, refer essentially to the same dynamics of "upsetting the setup," according to which the placing/placement/particular cannot be taken *for* granted, but it must be taken *as* granted, that is, the becoming-particular of an identity (its placement) is the consequence (or subsequent reification) of "there is" (*il y a* or *es gibes*) of being. Derrida, in turn, is probably as much influenced by Heidegger as Levinas, depending on which phase of Derrida's work we talk about. One acknowledgement

to, in their own ways, center their inquiries around such issues as the relation of incommensurability, the problematic of exteriority, or the idea of the evental rupture.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, despite different ways in which these questions are parsed, these critical analyses all deploy a post-foundational argument, utilizing the tropes of undecidability and heterogeneity to bring into focus the operation of making-One in the construction of an identity or community without seeing them as a naturalized or finished product. Moreover, this generalized trend of overcoming the metaphysics of subjectivity would be impossible without a fundamental claim that postulates a constitutive gap between being and thinking or between the real and knowledge. Bosteels has noted that “[p]hilosophical materialism has become reduced to the postulate of a constitutive gap between being (matter) and thinking (knowledge) for which finitude often serves as the ontologically dignified name or shorthand notation” (“Jargon of Finitude” 45).<sup>47</sup> In other words, if metaphysics implies a desire to render being and thinking identical, ethics consists in maintaining the disruptive and creative force of the gap between being and thinking. As Nancy

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from Derrida stands out as particularly illuminating. Prompted by a Japanese friend (Toshihiko Izutsu) to reflect on the choice of the word “deconstruction,” Derrida writes:

When I chose this word...I wished to translate and adapt to my own ends the Heideggerian word *Destruktion* or *Abbau*. Each signified in this context an operation bearing on the structure or traditional architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or of Western metaphysics. But in French ‘destruction’ too obviously implied an annihilation or a negative reduction much closer perhaps to Nietzschean ‘demolition’ than to the Heideggerian interpretation or to the type of reading that I proposed. (“Letter to a Japanese Friend” 1)

<sup>46</sup> “The outside does not have to be signified, and that is why language does not penetrate it; there is nothing to penetrate, no depth of the real that would await another signification or a signification from beyond. But this outside – the real, the *thing* itself, the thing in itself – happens (*we* happen). It happens constantly” (Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought* 69). Cf. Foucault 1987; Blanchot, 1995 For a discussion on this trend toward the outside in continental philosophy, see Leonard Lawlor 2012.

<sup>47</sup> In the same article, Bosteels points out that the Parmenidean thesis that posits the identity of being and thinking is regarded as the founding principle of Western metaphysics. Therefore, a post-metaphysical thinking consists in breaking the tie between being and thinking (44-45). From a post-metaphysical point of view, there is a constitutive gap between being and thinking and their relation, as a result, can only be thought in terms of a relation of non-relation or a relation without relation.

puts it, “[f]reedom is in some way their chiasmus. And perhaps fraternity names the illusion that this chiasmus is being resolved” (*Multiple Arts* 33-34).<sup>48</sup>

To be sure, the ethical turn is sometimes misappropriated in certain cultural discourses to promote all kinds of separatism.<sup>49</sup> But overall, the situation we have in critical and cultural theory offers an understanding of ethics as a corrective to the immanentist conceptualization of the common by shifting the focus from the *presence* of identity to the *process* of identification. This shift allows us to avoid the twin danger of immanentism in the liberal ideology of individualism and the communitarian ideology of collectivism;<sup>50</sup> it also facilitates a theoretical alliance between deconstruction, critical theory and postcolonial cultural analysis, especially in their polemics against the homogenizing impulse undergirding the imperialist as well as nationalist projects.<sup>51</sup> Analysis is often carried out in a mode of theoretical reflection disposed

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<sup>48</sup> Existential philosophy, while confirming that the starting point for an ethics is failure, does not lose sight of its beyond: “the most optimistic ethics have all begun by emphasizing the element of failure involved in the condition of man; without failure, no ethics....*But it is still necessary for the failure to be surmounted*” (emphasis added, Simon de Beauvoir 10-11).

<sup>49</sup> The seemingly affinity between the Derridean thought and the communitarian thinking is misleading: the communitarian challenge to the universal is based on the recognition and affirmation of the plurality of differences, whereas Derrida’s challenge to the universal is of an entirely different nature. On this point, see Thomson 2002, 68-69.

<sup>50</sup> Liberal individualism, on the one hand, presupposes some prediscursive individual essence lodged deep inside each individual; this prediscursive essence forms the experiential substrate of the said individual and serves to mark his/her uniqueness from others. Communitarianism, on the other hand, emphasizes its member’s belonging to a collectivity whose ontological status is presumably unproblematic. Although they appear opposed to each other, they are actually the flip side of one another, for both are driven by the same desire for immanentism.

<sup>51</sup> Contemporary cultural theory’s indebtedness to poststructuralism has been noted by many. For example, Rey Chow suggests that “[c]ultural studies as we know it today would not have been conceivable without the radical reformulations of language and discourse, of the relation between high and low culture, and of the relation between representation and politics, which were enabled by poststructuralist theory” (4). Harry Harootunian claims that postcolonialism is “a wholly owned subsidiary of poststructuralism” (“Some Thoughts” 35). Dirlik has also pointed out that postcolonialism inherits from poststructuralism the challenge to the grand narrative of modernity: “postcolonialism has its intellectual origins in the poststructuralist revolt against the very real limitation of Eurocentric modernity...and has answered a very real critical need: not only in calling into attention the obliviousness



toward the underlying structure or assumption shared by both colonialism and nationalism regardless of whether they are mobilized in the name of territorial expansionism or well-intentioned anti-colonial resistance against territorial invasion. Theodore Adorno is quick to point out the isomorphism between fascism and nationalism:

Today the fascist wish-image unquestionably blends with the nationalism of the so-called underdeveloped countries, which now, however, are instead called “developing countries.” Already during the war the *slogans* about Western plutocracies and proletarian nations expressed sympathy with those who felt shortchanged in the imperialist competition and also wanted a place at the table....Nationalism today is both obsolete and up-to-date....But nationalism is up-to-date in so far as the traditional and psychologically supremely invested idea of the nation, which still expresses the community of interests within the international economy, alone has sufficient force to mobilize hundreds of millions of people for goals they cannot immediately identify as their own....Only in an age in which it was already toppling has nationalism become completely sadistic and destructive. (“Working through the Past” 97-98)

Calling attention to the threat of the “wish-image” shared by both fascism and nationalism, Adorno nonetheless fixes the meaning of nationalism onto the supreme expression of “the community of interests” and deprives nationalism the emancipatory dignity of expressing the sovereign autonomy of the people (“to mobilize hundreds of millions of people for goals they cannot immediately identify as their own”), thus downplaying the difference between

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to the local of generalized notions of modernity, but also in calling attention to problems of a novel nature that have emerged with recent transformation in global political and social relations” (*Postcolonial Aura* ix).

anticolonial nationalism and its later institutionalization.<sup>52</sup> This is not to say that it serves no point drawing this structural analogy. Césaire, too, compares fascism to colonialism based on the structure of domination shared by both (*Discourse* 36). However, it is one thing to claim the link between fascism and colonialism but quite another to lump together fascism, colonialism, communism, and even anticolonial nationalism on the ground that all of them are exposed to the risk of metaphysical closure. When such an analogy is drawn in the absence of concrete analysis, this generalization might prove as dangerous as the danger it tries to identify through analogy.

This, unfortunately, seems to be the direction the ethical turn is heading. In order to avoid anything metaphysical, ethics ends up defining itself in terms of *what it is not*.<sup>53</sup> In doing so, it becomes a negative ethics of “fighting against.” In a polemical article, Bosteels has convincingly argued that this philosophical turn toward finitude sustains its radicalism only by *avoiding the worst*: “When thinking can be no more than the exposure of and to finitude...then any attempt to change that which finitude exposes is also by definition blocked in advance. Thinking as finite thinking thus sustains its radicality only by showing that at least it does not make the mistake of having confidence in, let alone act upon, some notion of infinity (“Jargon of Finitude” 45). The ethical turn toward the finite is often accompanied by a deep suspicion of any political project based on collective action because such action is often considered too goal-driven to accommodate a proper recognition of the finite. Furthermore, when identity is revealed to be a

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<sup>52</sup> Žižek issues a similar charge against Adorno and Horkheimer: “Within Western Marxism, it was, of course, Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*...that accomplished this fateful shift from concrete socio-political analysis to philosophico-anthropological generalization, the shift by means of which the reifying ‘instrumental reason’ is no longer grounded in concrete capitalist social relations, but itself almost imperceptibly becomes their quasi-transcendental ‘principle’ or ‘foundation’” (*Universal Exception* 99; also *Philosophy in the Present* 57-58; 63-64).

<sup>53</sup> Brian Elliott also suggests that the idea of singular community in Nancy and Agamben “offer little more than a list of what it is *not*”; as the result “this approach fails to provide any basis for effective opposition to oppression” (37, 42; Ch. 2, *passim*).

contingent formation and when the primacy is given to the process of identification, any project mobilized in the name of identity is already guilty before the context of power is taken into consideration.

In cultural theory, the ethical turn emerges as a response to the bloody conflicts waged in the name of identity in the first half of the 20th century; it finds in the deconstructive ethics a vigilant guard against grand narratives and various forms of exclusionism that consolidate the same at the cost of the other. While the ethical turn toward the other is both indispensable and commendable, I wonder whether it is in itself an adequate form of politics. Insofar as politics is our primary concern, the primacy of ontology needs to be subject to different considerations. First and foremost, what does it mean for the oppressed to understand that the ground upon which the colonial power is erected is ontologically slippery when the air of violence they breathe everyday in the embattled colonial situation indicates otherwise? What would resisting subjectivity mean to the oppressed, when there is neither subjectivity nor immanence to speak of in the first place? It could mean a lot if, on the basis of this judgment, prescriptive actions are called upon to measure the incommensurable; it could, however, mean less than nothing when this judgment, issued from the supreme court of ontology, is meant as the substitution for the subject's political capacity for action. The process of unmasking could end up being "more insidious than naked repression" (Benita Parry 20) when it settles for a description of the immanent becoming of authority's self-undoing and deprives the oppressed of the capacity to prescribe their own autonomy. Moreover, what does it mean to tell the colonizer to take care of the singular, the heterogeneous, and the finite when the deliberate ignorance of which constitutes the very condition of possibility for the colonial situation to exist as it is? Žižek is fond of making use of a famous cartoon scene in which a cat running beyond the precipice and literally

suspending in the air does not fall until the moment it is reminded to look down. In political terms, the question boils down to whether it is enough simply to remind the cat (the oppressor) to look down or whether something more is required for the cat to actually fall down.<sup>54</sup> The first option requires a recognition while the second option demands a prescriptive theory of forcing. It is, indeed, necessary to remind the powers that be to look down. But this solution is too easy because unlike the character in cartoon, the establishment does not necessarily fall when it is reminded of the airy ground it is standing on. If, as Benjamin suggests, “everything depends on how we believe our faith” (*Correspondence* 57), the recognition that reality has the structure of fiction does not necessarily spell the undoing of a colonial reality, for where the philosophers see emptiness, the powerful see a solid ground.

My question would be: could the ethics of deconstruction be an effective way of thinking decolonization? That is, could the ethics of deconstruction itself be considered a politics of deconstruction? Or does the ethics of deconstruction, when detached from the context of power, function not as a politics of deconstruction but rather as the deconstruction of politics? Herein resides the dilemma: while the ethics of deconstruction allows us to avoid the danger of the sacrificial structure intrinsic to the fraternal logic of identity, it also frustrates any effective and sustainable political procedure. I would argue that when this ethics goes unchecked and presents itself as a way of *doing politics*, the ethical turn might end up being a turn toward the worst, that is, toward the prolongation of political paralysis for those wretched of the earth whose material and symbolic condition of wretchedness is already inflicted upon them through measures of socio-economic and representational injustice and now this condition of wretchedness could be

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<sup>54</sup> In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: “Oh my brothers, am I perhaps cruel? But I say: if something is falling, one should also give it a push!....And whomever you cannot teach to fly, him you should teach – *to fall faster!*” (§20).

taken as *a metaphor for an ontologically glorified stance against the lure of mastery and the will to power.*

This is evident in the way the deconstructive ethics has been received in postcolonial theory. It is evident when Homi Bhabha identifies the source of resistance in the ambivalence of the colonizer's own discourse rather than in the struggle against the manifest violence of colonization, which he repudiates on the ground of replicating the same binary structure that makes colonialism possible in the first place. As he explains, "[w]hat is articulated in the doubleness of colonial discourse is not the violence of one powerful nation writing out another...[but] a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes, across differential power relations, both colonizer and colonized" (95-96). Bhabha continues,

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention....To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, then mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. (112, 121)

Displacing the stable binary positioning of the colonizer as the possessor of power and the colonized as the victim of power invites a different conception of resistance. In Bhabha's view, a "spectacular resistance" beyond colonial binarism can be perceived when our attention is shifted to ambivalence, indeterminacy, and liminality that characterize the colonial contact. And for Bhabha, this new conception of resistance is immanently generated at the heart of the colonizer's

own signifying system. On the surface, the colonizer and the colonized are rigorously distinguished as the opposite of each other. However, Bhabha argues, when the focus is shifted to the discursive formation of colonial power, the power differential separating the colonizer and the colonized dwindles rapidly as each party is differentially defined and ambivalently positioned. Thus, in Bhabha's interrogation of identity, since colonial violence is located entirely in the discursive field, resistance is to be sought within the discursive field as well. Under this assumption, postcolonial criticism, through colonial discourse analysis, constitutes itself as the site of resistance by enacting textual subversion against the edification of colonial power. What remains obscure in Bhabha's account of resistance is the fact that power and violence manifest themselves as much in colonial discourse as in extra-discursive (e.g. material, existential, psycho-affective, etc.) realms. Moreover, by focusing exclusively on the intrinsic instability of colonial authority, Bhabha seems to suggest that resistance is always already taking place and what is required is not an organized political movement but an attentive mind like the one possessed by the postcolonial critic.<sup>55</sup>

It is just as evident when Gayatri Spivak claims that there is no subaltern consciousness, only the subaltern subject-effect:

A subject-effect can be briefly plotted as follows: that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network ("text" in the general sense) of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on. (Each of these strands, if they are isolated, can also be seen as woven of many strands.) Different knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are themselves

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<sup>55</sup> Criticisms of Bhabha's idea of resistance are mostly issued from a Marxist point of view. See Ch. 2 of Parry's *Postcolonial Studies* and Dirlik's *The Postcolonial Aura*, especially Ch. 10.

dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject. Yet the continuist and homogenist deliberative consciousness symptomatically requires a continuous and homogenous cause for this effect and thus posits a sovereign and determining subject. This latter is, then the effect of an effect, and its positing a metalepsis, or the substitution of an effect for a cause. (“Deconstructing Historiography” 12-13)

In keeping with the deconstructive strategy, Spivak reduces the subject to an imaginary construction, an end product of a series of contingent processes, wholly determined and deprived of the capacity for action. Then what does the condition of subalternity signify in relation to the subject-effect? In Spivak’s view, the subaltern signifies precisely the point of failure, not the failure according to representation but the failure of representation itself. Whereas the former means that this failure is *intelligible enough* to be registered as a failure in representation; the failure of representation suggests a more radical experience that cannot be narrativized into discourse: “the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic” (16).<sup>56</sup> Thus, for Spivak, the subaltern marks the point of impossibility of turning the subject-effect into the subject-cause. Resistance, again, signifies the maintaining of the irreducible gap between being and thinking or between the real and representation (Bosteels, “Thinking” 238-239). Together with her famous example of a young Bengali girl committing *sati*-suicide in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak presents two ways of understanding the subaltern. On the one hand, the subaltern cannot speak because she is doubly marginalized and her protest can only be registered in suicide. On the other hand, the subaltern is an ontologically dignified name pointing to the limit of representation. Resistance, in both cases, resists its own

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Sakai’s discussion of the two modalities of failure in homolingual and heterolingual addresses in *Translation and Subjectivity* (6-7).

representation. And the question of an effective movement of decolonization is, once again, consigned to an order of secondary importance.

Finally, it is also evident when Naoki Sakai who, in an implicit endorsement to Nancy's equation of community with resistance, locates the subject in "the *oscillation or indeterminacy of personality in translation*," or assigns the subject to "a *singular* that marks an elusive point of discontinuity in the social" (13). Or when he claims that oriental resistance, if it is to remain free from assimilation into the West's subjectivity, can only assert itself by resisting the very idea of subjectivity: "Resistance comes from a deeply rooted fear of the will to represent everything....a desperate effort to resist subjectivity, to resist subjection to subjectivity, and finally to resist subjection to the subject" (175). In Sakai's view (or rather in his reading of Takeuchi), oriental resistance, in its vulgar sense, refers to a way of practicing resistance by way of modernization: "The truth of modernity for the non-West, therefore, is its reaction to the West....the Orient had to modernize and adopt things from the West in order to resist it, the modernization of the Orient attests to an advantage or success for the West, and, therefore, it is always Westernization or Europeanization" (171, 172). Here Sakai relies on a version of the derivative argument. Oriental resistance, when it takes the form of nationalism, is destined to perpetuate the subject-constitution of the West because nationalism is part and parcel of the legacy of the West's political modernity and carries with it all those metaphysical connotations we have so far discussed. In Sakai's words, "[t]he *modern* nation must be an embodiment of the will...the subject of the nation is, at any time, self-determination (the determination of the self as such) and the determining self (the self that determines the self)" (167). Thus, the moment the Orient takes the modern nation (a particular political formation coming out of the West) as the method for resistance, it immediately absorbs itself into the West's universalist discourse – hence, the



structural impossibility of oriental resistance in this derivative form.

In order not to reflect and reinforce the Western assumption of the self, the notion of oriental resistance has to be cast anew. For Sakai, the object of resistance is not the invading foreign power but the temptation of thinking emancipation with categories (e.g. nation, will, subjectivity) procured from the tradition of Western modernity. From this point of view, a genuine oriental resistance starts and ends with an acknowledgement of the impossibility of emancipation. Resistance therefore means not to commit the same error of the metaphysics of subjectivity. Probably this is why “despair” is made into *both* a quintessential political *affect* and a political *end*. Coming from a clear-sighted recognition of the slave’s wretched status of being forever tied to the master’s signifying system, the politics of despair embraces this recognition as an end in itself, which leads to the formulation of resistance as resisting subjectivity. By calling this mode of resistance postmodern, Sakai effectively invalidates a conceptualization of resistance from the perspective of political modernity (e.g. such as the idea of a self-instituting sovereign subject and the emancipatory struggle between two antagonistic forces), in favor of a postmodern reflexive examination of the presupposition of oriental resistance. Insofar as the politics is conceived of merely as a matter of avoiding the worst, the question of decolonization would be reduced to a defensive ethics of *fighting against* and never an affirmative politics of *fighting for*. No wonder the politics of the common can only articulate itself as an elusive mark, an evocative pronoun, or a sign of self-destitution that appears only to disappear. Decolonization, in the final analysis, is just another name for deconstruction.

On the question of colonial modernity and decolonization, Dirlik urges us to recognize that colonial modernity inevitably involves the following paradox about the nation-state: “The ‘janus-face’ of the nation-state may be most clearly visible in colonial states where the nation is

indispensable in warding off one kind of colonialism while it seeks to make possible its resistance by a colonial appropriation of local differences” (“End of Colonialism” 26). Therefore, “decolonization cannot be limited merely to an escape from Euro-American colonialism into some imagined national culture but must go further to question the colonizing implications of the idea of a national culture backed up by the power of the nation-state” (31). And yet such a critical awareness, for Dirlik, does not force us to conclude that genuine liberation lies in total disengagement with the legacy of modernity. Although modernity in the colonial society is filtered through the lens of coloniality, this suggests not the failure of the Enlightenment project but rather its non-realization as it has been practiced and implemented by the imperialist powers: “If colonialism has undermined the best ideals of an Enlightenment utopianism...by mobilizing them in the service of world conquest, the same ideals have inspired struggles against colonialism at home and abroad, not to speak of the critical perspectives we bring to the appreciation of modernity. Those struggles, too, are by now part of an unfolding modernity” (26).<sup>57</sup> On this view, modernity is not to be evaluated simply by *how* it has been transplanted onto other parts of the world; modernity also has to be judged by *what has been enabled by the concept of modernity as a historical and political consciousness*. Thus, if colonization is the byproduct of modernity, the question of decolonization then cannot be answered without thinking *with* (rather than against) modernity.

The desire to restore the universalist ideal of Enlightenment humanism is not uncommon amongst colonized intellectuals. But this phenomenon has generated critical rejoinders from

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<sup>57</sup> In another place, Dirlik uses even stronger terms to call into question postcolonialism’s unjustified critique of the Enlightenment: “‘Forgotten’ in the process is that the same Enlightenment was also the source of new critique of oppression and exploitation in societies both in and outside Europe. It produced not just conservative and liberal arguments for the conquest of the world, but also anarchism, Marxism, feminism, secularism, and dare I say, postcolonialism. To deny that the Enlightenment is to deny the historicity of the very critiques directed against it” (*Postcolonial Aura* xi).

other scholars. Ashis Nandy, for instance, disparagingly calls Fanon an official dissenter: “Let us not forget that the most violent denunciation of the West produced by Frantz Fanon is written in the elegant style of a Jean-Paul Sartre. The West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation” (xii). Here and elsewhere in his analysis, Nandy establishes a chain of equivalence between the West, modernity, and coloniality, and all these terms are deemed as condensed expressions of a series of empirical facts, deeds, and thoughts (e.g. colonialism, its interpretation and the process of modernization). It should be pointed out that Nandy is not alone in locating modernity in a geographical space and endowing it with a set of features, both empirical and metaphysical.<sup>58</sup> However, modernity, I shall argue, has no objective referent and is not synonymous with the West and coloniality. In his important study of modernity as a form of temporal consciousness, Peter Osborne argues that modernity

sets up a differential between the character of its own time and that which precedes it. This differential formed the basis for the transformation in the late eighteenth century in the meaning of the concept of ‘progress’ and ‘development.’

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<sup>58</sup> The concept of alternative modernity as promoted in subaltern studies is also premised on the same implicit equation between the West, modernity and modernization. Modernity, under the scrutiny of subaltern studies, is no longer a historical form of temporalization. In the eyes of the subaltern scholars, modernity is fastened onto an objective referent; it is synonymous with the geographical location called Europe and is consubstantial with its sociological articulation in the form of modernization. The fastening of this equation is precisely that which makes alternative modernity *alternative*. As Harootunian explains,

By hypostatizing the unity of the “West” or even “Europe” as the place of modernity, postcolonial discourse has inadvertently recuperated some of the more baneful features of the very binarism that has imperially reduced the rest of the world to the status of a second term. *Paradoxically, this tactic incorporates the idea of late development as a guarantee of qualitative difference that allows its proponents to envision something called an “alternative” modernity.* What distinguishes this alternative modernity is its spatial location, a place that is not Euro-America, and thus the authority of its claim to an identity that is uniquely different. (emphasis added, “Some Thoughts” 35)

The spatial turn in social sciences and humanities is also noted and criticized for its incapacity to think time and change, see Ross 2009.

which makes them the precursors of later, twentieth-century concepts of modernization....Once the practice of such comparisons was established in anthropology, colonial discourse *par excellence*, it was easily transferable to the relations between particular social spheres and practices within different European countries themselves and thereafter, once again, globally, in an expanding dialectic of differentiation and homogenization....modernity is *not*, as such, a project, but merely its form. It is a form of historical consciousness, an abstract temporal structure which, in totalizing history from the standpoint of an ever-vanishing, ever-present present, embraces a conflicting plurality of projects, of possible futures, provided they conform to its basic logical structure. (16-17, 23)<sup>59</sup>

In Osborne's account, modernity is a temporal form that "embraces a conflicting plurality of projects" but is itself not a project. Therefore it is one thing to claim that modernity is the form that makes possible the phenomenon of colonialism but quite another to assert that modernity is the form exhausted by or reducible to one of its possible historical expressions in colonialism or modernization theory. Rather than looking for alternative modernities, a better question to ask is probably what are alternative possibilities enabled by modernity.

If modernity is the ruling ideology, it is not necessarily the ideology of the ruling West. Balibar has put forth an interesting thesis concerning Marx's proposition in *The German Ideology* that the dominant ideology is always the ideology of the dominant class. According to Balibar, Marx's assertion cannot be true; the dominant ideology has to be the ideology for the *dominated* group:

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<sup>59</sup> For a relevant account of the conceptual history of modernity, see Reinhart Koselleck 2002, Ch. 9 and 10.

But contrary to what Marx believed, the “dominant ideas” cannot be those of the “dominant class.” They have to be those of the “dominated,” the ideas which state their theoretical right to recognition and equal capacity. More precisely, the discourse of hegemonic domination has to be one in which it is possible to appeal *against a de facto discrimination to a de jure equality*...since it is they which, now as ever, constitute the recourse against failure to apply them. All protest can then turn into legitimation since, against the injustice of the established order, protest appeals not to something heterogeneous to that order, but to identical principles. (POS 7; see also 164)

Following Balibar, if we posit Enlightenment humanism as the ruling ideology behind the imperialist expansionism of the West, this ruling ideology, articulated in the language of universalistic values, provides the colonized with justification for the right to revolt, or the right to have rights. When the oppressed group is systematically deprived of the right to have rights, they are no longer bound by the colonial regime that has failed to live up to the universal principle of equaliberty. The oppressed are justified to revolt not because they are the victims of colonial injustice but because they are the stand-in for the wrong done to the principle of equality by colonialism. Assuming the role of a victim, the oppressed can only hope to appeal to the moral conscience of those in power, rendering liberation a matter of morality. In contrast, Balibar argues that the universal right to equality has always been a *political* issue, for it is “never something that can be bestowed or distributed; it has to be won” (166).

If the dominant ideology is necessarily the ideology for the dominated group, this invites us to reconsider postcolonialism’s critique of modernity and the Enlightenment. To be sure, ideology functions most effectively when it is sustained by a minimal gap between word and

deed. As Sartre notes in his preface to *WE*, “liberty, equality, fraternity, love, honor, country, and what else? This did not prevent us from making racist remarks at the same time: dirty nigger, filthy Jew, dirty Arab” (lviii). Despite this, the gap also indicates the non-realization of an ideal, which, in turn, sets off the process of over-identification that, for the dominated group, becomes an empowering justification for the right to revolt or the right to politics. What Nandy overlooks when he sarcastically calls Fanon an official dissenter is that the thing Fanon identifies with is not the superficial techniques and styles of French composition, nor is it a wholesale acceptance of the standardized interpretation of colonialism (a point made amply clear in his critical engagements with Sartre); it is rather in the axiomatic articulation of universal equality, in the affirmation of man and in the temporal consciousness of modernity to break free from the past where we can locate Fanon’s indebtedness to the ideals of Enlightenment humanism.

In the game of colonialism, Nandy identifies two key players: the player, the colonizer, and the counterplayer, the official or “ornamental dissenter” (xiv). In Nandy’s view, the player and the counterplayer depend on each other and both contribute to the smooth functioning of the colonial state. In order to escape the vicious circle of the West’s universalism, Nandy calls for a third figure, the “non-player,” as a genuine outside to the overarching determination of the West (xiv-xv).<sup>60</sup> What Nandy fails to grasp in Fanon is precisely the possibility of the counterplayer who, despite the initial co-option in the game of colonialism, is able, through overidentification with the ideals of Enlightenment humanism, to transcend the initial determination and effect a

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<sup>60</sup> In defense of Fanon, Ato Sekyi-Otu wonders “[c]ould it be that Fanon’s critical vision is informed by what Nandy himself calls a ‘higher-order universalism,’ one that, quite apart from the constraints of history, is free from cultural xenophobia?” (262n22). I think Sekyi-Otu is right to suspect Nandy’s representation of Fanon, but his intimation that Fanon might be closer to “the non-player” than Nandy would allows Fanon to be seems questionable to me. To defend Fanon against Nandy’s charge does not necessarily mean that it has to be done on Nandy’s own terms, that is, to place Fanon on the side of the non-player in order to clear Fanon of the charge of being an official dissenter.

genuine change without resorting to some notion of outside (the non-player). Simply put, what Nandy fails to grasp is the subversion through overidentification, which indicates the possibility of the effect overtaking its cause. Once we factor in this possibility, Fanon's appeal to the ideals of Enlightenment universalism appears in a new light: what he rushes to defend is not an Europe that embodies and validates these ideals; Fanon defends the universality of these ideals whose historical implementation has witnessed a colossal failure in the hands of Europeans, and now it is up to the Third World to reclaim these ideals on behalf of the whole of humanity: "The Third World is today facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to....if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers" (*WE* 238-239).

The subversion resulted from the phenomenon of the oppressed over-identifying themselves with the ruling ideology suggests the possibility of an effect overtaking its cause, which is not just a theoretical speculation but empirically testified in struggles carried out by various dominated groups.<sup>61</sup> As Michael Omi and Howard Winant noted this in their study of the racial formation in America:

the effort to possess the oppressor's tools – religion and philosophy in this case – was crucial to emancipation (the effort to possess oneself). As Ralph Ellison reminds us, 'The slaves often took the essence of the aristocratic ideal (as they took Christianity) with far more seriousness than their masters.' In their language, in their music with its figuring of suffering, resistance, perseverance, and

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<sup>61</sup> Another example of the subversive effect of overidentification can be found in Žižek's "Foreword" to Alenka Zupančič's *Ethics of the Real*: "one should...assert the right to Sameness as the 'fundamental right of the oppressed': like ex-Yugoslav self-management, the colonialist oppressor also fears above all the realization of its own official ideological request" (xi). See also Žižek 1999, 255-256.

transcendence, in their interrogation of a political philosophy which sought perpetually to rationalize their bondage in a supposedly ‘free’ society, the slaves incorporated elements of racial rule into their thought and practice, turning them against their original bearers. (67)

Let’s revisit the question of oriental resistance. Sakai argues that his view of oriental resistance is found in the work of Takeuchi, particularly Takeuchi’s theorization of modernity. However, Sakai’s reading is rendered partial by his elision of the subject-formation in Takeuchi’s thinking (which is mentioned in passing and summarily ignored). Due to his reluctance to make room for the possibility that *the content may outgrow the form*, Sakai believes that the dream of emancipation through the Western form inevitably drags oriental particularism into a complicit relationship with the West’s pseudo-universalism, much in the same way that defines the relation of the player and the counterplayer in Nandy’s game of colonialism. I will argue that Takeuchi’s notion of “Asia as method” suggests precisely the possibility that the effect may outgrow its cause<sup>62</sup> and it can then be shown that Sakai’s reading of Takeuchi amounts to a gesture of theoretical hijack, annexing Takeuchi’s theory of the subject to Sakai’s own subjectless (i.e. subject-qua-resistance) theory of translation. In a shorter but more even-handed reading, Shu-mei Shih proposes a continuist approach that sees Takeuchi’s “What is Modernity” and “Asia as Method” as articulating a consistent theory of decolonization. Like Sakai, Shih is well-aware of the significance of the reflexive work of examining the presupposition of oriental resistance:

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<sup>62</sup> Apropos of the possibility of the effect outgrowing its cause, Takeuchi writes: “Rather the Orient must re-embrace the West, it must change the West itself in order to realize the latter’s outstanding cultural values on a greater scale. Such a rollback of culture or values would create universality. The orient must change the West in order to further elevate those universal values that the West itself produced” (165).



The sign of resistance which [Takeuchi] identifies in Lu Xun is the despair that comes from the slave's full comprehension of his own predicament and from his recognition that salvation is impossible. Unlike the Japanese who are slaves to the West without knowing it, Lu Xun acknowledges the condition of the self as slave, and hence shows a critical spirit that promises – quite paradoxically – a future beyond subjection. In this way, despair becomes a form of resistance. (“Theory, Asia and the Sinophone” 471)

And yet unlike Sakai, Shih does not see despair as Takeuchi's final words on the issue; nor does she posit despair and subjectivity as two irreconcilable options. Instead of seeing despair and subjectivity as an either/or choice, Shih suggests that despair can be considered a form of resistance only in the sense of being its moment, not its end. If what Takeuchi means by “Asia as method” cannot be defined in precise terms, it, at very least, suggests the possibility that the effect can outgrow its cause – that is to say, the Orient as the effect of the West can nonetheless outtake the West as the cause and become itself “a method.”<sup>63</sup> As Shih writes,

The title of the essay [“Asia as Method”] clearly implies that Asia can be the base from which methods are derived, in opposition to the notion that the West must always serve as the origin of concepts and methods. What is intriguing in his

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<sup>63</sup> The possibility of the effect outgrowing the cause, or the content overtaking its form, is also suggested in the following passage from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required world-historical recollections in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase. (Marx 597)

It should be pointed out that this lines from Marx also serve as the epigraph to the conclusion of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.

seemingly resistant formulation, however, is the fact that Takeuchi considered this to be a possibility only after Asia had engaged fully with the West. To be more precise, Asia must “re-embrace the West”...and help transform it in order to allow for the creation of a truly universal humanity....“Asia as method” is projected into the future as a potentiality that can be realized only when Asia has achieved this kind of critical subjectivity. (471-472)

A continuous approach would allow us to appreciate the reflexive work of examining the presupposition of oriental resistance without taking on the air of radicalism by reductively dressing up subjectivity, will, and emancipation in metaphysical garb. Rather than treating subjectivity as a *problem*, Takeuchi and Shih see it as a *problematic* to be considered from both critical and political perspectives.<sup>64</sup>

By taking a critical look at Bhabha, Spivak and Sakai, we gain a glimpse into the impact of deconstruction on cultural discourses and understand why the privileged terms within this ethical universe are “to-come,” “not-yet,” “stillborn” or the likes, terms that stress the centrality of potentiality in a movement of constant withdrawal from the schema of actualization.<sup>65</sup> This does

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<sup>64</sup> As the 21<sup>st</sup> century is often dubbed as the Asian century, “Asia as method” has become a new academic buzzword in recent years. The concept is proposed by Takeuchi and has yielded many productive theoretical discussions, but it has also found other confounding uses. For example, one self-appointed “critical Chinese intellectual” has envisioned his own Asia as method with an emotional justification that Asia can serve as “an emotional signifier to call for regional integration and solidarity” (*Asia as Method* 213). Ironically, the same Chinese critical intellectual criticizes the nativist movement for the same reason that the movement capitalizes on people’s hurt emotions. Furthermore, what would a practical realization of “Asia as method” look like? The said critical intellectual argues that “[f]or those of us living in Asia, Asia as method is not a self-explanatory proposition....we had few contacts among ourselves. If we met at all, it was New York, London, or Paris. At its most basic, Asia as method means expanding the number of these meeting points to include sites in Asia such as Seoul, Kyoto, Singapore, Bangalore, Shanghai, and Taipei” (212). Seriously? Not only are there already numerous conferences or other forms of gathering taking place in those locations, it is not at all clear how the alleged inclusion of the meeting sites in Asia would bring about deimperialization.

<sup>65</sup> Consider the following sentence from a subaltern historian, which is virtually a restatement of deconstruction-inflected ontological criticism:

not mean nothing is actualized; it means rather that what is actualized is precisely this *nothing*, which is to be understood in its active and dynamic sense as an enabling limit, pure potentiality or the abyss of freedom that serves as both the condition of possibility and impossibility for the emergence of a representable *something*. Again, we find ourselves caught in the same aporia; for the only thing that deserves actualization is the event of being (or the event *as* being) which, paradoxically, cannot endure sustained actualization lest it reify itself into a figure; therefore, its actualization reveals itself only in the fleeting moment of dissociation that severs the connective tissues of a communal body, or undoes the representational system of counting and classification. And this encounter with the event of being gives rise to the ecstatic experience of singularity *without the subject* (Nancy, *Inoperative Community* 7).

In a similar vein, Derrida calls the encounter with the event of the other *a decision*. However, Derrida's notion of decision is a radically reformulated notion of decision; it departs from the humanist conception of decision that supposes a pre-given subject as an agent in full possession of a will. In its hegemonic usage, the subject is perceived as a calculable unit, an agent initiating a chain of actions or the "doer" behind the deed.<sup>66</sup> By calling the encounter with the event of the other a decision, Derrida subverts the hegemonic conception of decision in

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For a possibility to be neither that which is waiting to become actual nor that which is merely incomplete, the possible has to be thought of as that which already actually *is* but is present only as the "not yet" of the actual. In other words, it is what makes not-being-a-totality a constitutional characteristic of "now." (Chakrabarty 250)

Or else he would speak of the singular as a point of "obscurity," a site of "scandal" or "a limiting concept" (82-90, *passim*).

<sup>66</sup> For a critique of this assumption, see the first essay of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (§13) and *Will to Power* (§666). Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit* developed in the first conversation of *Country Path Conversations* (also in *Discourse on Thinking*) is another line of thought that engages the question of willing without presupposing an autonomous subject. For a comprehensive look at the etymology and genealogy of the subject category, see Balibar, et al. 2006. For a general account of the faculty of the will, see Arendt 1978, 2nd volume.

humanism. “*A theory of the subject,*” he writes, “*is incapable of accounting for the slightest decision*” (*PoF* 68) because this is not the decision the subject consciously decides but the other’s decision that undermines the putative autonomy of the subject: “The passive decision, condition of the event, is always in me, structurally, another event, a rending decision as the decision of the other. Of the absolute other in me, the other as the absolute that decides on me in me....the decision is not only always exceptional, *it makes an exception for/of me.... In sum, a decision is unconscious*” (68-69). Peter Hallward describes the recent development in modern philosophy as defined by a shared renunciation of the subject and the will:

Structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers, by and large, relegated volition and intention to the domain of deluded, imaginary or humanist-ideological misrecognition. Rather than explore the ways in which political determination might depend on a collective subject’s self-determination, recent philosophy and cultural theory have tended to privilege various forms of either indetermination (the interstitial, the hybrid, the ambivalent, the simulated, the undecidable, the chaotic...) or hyper-determination (“infinite” ethical obligation, divine transcendence, unconscious drive, traumatic repression, machinic automation...)....Nietzsche’s whole project presumes that “there is no such thing as will” in the usual (voluntary, deliberate, purposeful...) sense of the word. Heidegger, over the course of his own lectures on Nietzsche, comes to condemn the will as a force of subjective domination and nihilistic closure, before urging his readers “willingly to renounce willing.” Arendt finds, in the affirmation of a popular political will...the temptation that turns modern revolutionaries into tyrants. For Adorno, rational will is an aspect of that Enlightenment pursuit of

mastery and control which has left the earth “radiant with triumphant calamity.” Althusser devalues the will as an aspect of ideology, in favour of the scientific analysis of historical processes that proceed without a subject. Negri and Virno associate a will of the people with authoritarian state power. After Nietzsche, Deleuze privileges transformative sequences that require the suspension, shattering or paralysis of voluntary action. After Heidegger, Derrida associates the will with self-presence and self-coincidence, a forever futile effort to appropriate the inappropriable (the unrepresentable, the equivocal, the undecidable, the differential, the deferred, the discordant, the transcendent, the other). After these and others, Agamben summarizes much recent European thinking on political will when he effectively equates it with fascism pure and simple. (“Will of the People” 19)

In light of this recent philosophical development, we observe that the ontology of the common can articulate itself only through the impasse of being, and the only possible experience of the common is to be found in the subjectless experience of ecstasy; community in this post-metaphysical space is *thinkable*, paradoxically, only as the interruption of thinking. Or to put it another way, it is thinkable only as a *non-thought*<sup>67</sup> and that is why communities are often formulated in terms of inoperativity and disaggregation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> “Thinking is always thinking on the limit. The limit of comprehending defines thinking. Thus thinking is always thinking about the incomprehensible – about this incomprehensible that ‘belongs’ to every comprehending, as its own limit” (Nancy, *Experience of Freedom* 54).

<sup>68</sup> Consider the following statements, all of which point to a movement toward the inoperative, the unthought, or the disaggregate: “‘Political’ would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing” (Nancy, *Inoperative Community* 40); “Those who love only in cutting ties are the uncompromising friends of solitary singularity. They invite you to enter into this community of social disaggregation” (Derrida, *PoC* 35). In the same spirit, Sakai declares that “the Japanese language and the Japanese ethos were *stillborn*” because the common is not the result of aggregation: “[i]n a nonaggregate

The pervasive influence of poststructuralism on the theory of decolonization can be acutely felt in the production of knowledge in what is now known as postcolonial theory. Ella Shohat has noted that the “post” in postcolonialism can be read in two distinctive senses. It can either be a chronological marker signifying that which comes after in history or a conceptual marker signifying “disciplinary advances characteristic of intellectual history” (101). Our concern is with the second sense of the “post” as a moment in the intellectual history. Anticolonial nationalist discourse operates with the three worlds paradigm which, due to its homogenization of differences and its failure to account for the process of hybridization, is dispensed with in postcolonial theory. Conceptually speaking, the prefix “post” suggests moving beyond the militant discourse of Third World nationalism. Since this going beyond is allegedly an intellectual advance, postcolonialism then becomes a term endowed with “the professional prestige and theoretical aura” (100). Given the institutional ascendancy of postcolonial studies, considerations of decolonization have turned away from concrete socio-political analyses and focus exclusively on taking care of the multiple, the singular, the heterogeneous, the hybrid, and the ambivalent. As such, the theory of decolonization becomes almost synonymous with deconstruction. Within the bounds of this theoretical equation, whoever takes side with anticolonial nationalist struggle is likely to incur criticism of being outdated, anachronistic, rudimentary, pre-critical or simply not sophisticated enough. Even someone like Benedict Anderson who tries to rescue nationalism from the politics of ethnicity<sup>69</sup> cannot avoid being

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community...our togetherness is not grounded on any common homogeneity” (*Translation and Subjectivity* 2, 7).

<sup>69</sup> Anderson distinguishes nationalism evoked in the national liberation movement and official nationalism which rests on a non-progressive use of ethnicity. See the first chapter of *The Spectre of Comparisons* “Nationalism, Identity, and the Logic of Seriality” in which Anderson attempts to formalize this difference through two types of seriality, the unbound seriality (nationalism) and bound seriality (identity politics).

accused of being “utopian,” which today is only a polite way of dismissing people as naively idealistic:

He [Anderson] continues to believe that the politics of nationalism and that of ethnicity arise on different sites, grow on different nutriments, travel through different networks, mobilized on different sentiments, and fight for different causes....Utopian? Yes. And there lies, I think, a major theoretical and political problem....Anderson’s posing of the opposition between nationalism and ethnicity can be traced, therefore, to the distinction between popular sovereignty, enshrined in classical nationalism’s equation of the people with the nation, and governmentality, which really came into its own in the second half of the twentieth century. But how are we to understand this opposition? As an opposition between the good and the bad? Between something that should be preserved and something else to be abjured? (Chatterjee, “Anderson’s Utopia” 130, 132)<sup>70</sup>

Chatterjee, committed to the view of finitude, further criticizes Anderson for proposing a standardized conception of politics. Whereas for Anderson, nationalism, when put to

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<sup>70</sup> The next chapter will engage with their debate, albeit from a different angle. Suffice it to say that Chatterjee here is guilty of representing Anderson in a bad light. Just consider the following quotations where Anderson discuss how nationalism and the politics of ethnicity are intrinsically bound up with each other: “in the ‘nation-building’ policies of the new states one sees *both* a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth. In turn, this *blend* of popular and official nationalism has been the product of anomalies created by European imperialism” (emphasis added, *Imagined Communities* 113-114). Far from positing them as opposed, Anderson actually sees them as growing on the same nutriment, only that they are put to different uses. As he urges us to remember, “[t]he key to situating ‘official nationalism’...is to remember that it developed *after*, and *in reaction to*, the popular national movements proliferating in Europe since the 1820s” (86). It is thus Chatterjee himself who creates his own imaginary enemy. To what end? Maybe just to appear a little bit more sophisticated than the binary logic he attributes to Anderson when he in fact is the author of this binary construction.

emancipatory use, has a universal dimension, Chatterjee counters this view and argues that politics is not universal: “Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian” (132).

Likewise, whoever believes in the therapeutic power of violence is likely to put him/herself in an extremely awkward position in our post-revolutionary Thermidorian era. Terror, in fact, has existed and long been used as a political means and therefore should be judged in its proper political context. And yet more often than not the use of violence and terror has been subject to moral judgment and condemned on the ground of its violation of the sanctity of life.<sup>71</sup> Hannah Arendt seems to fall into this moralistic trap when she accuses Fanon of “glorif[ying] violence for violence’s sake” (*On Violence* 65). Today, more and more people accept Arendt’s assessment and call on a reevaluation of Fanon’s work, less impassioned claims and more measured analysis. This has become a new trend in Fanon studies. People are embarrassed by the Fanon who proclaims his full immersion in negritude: “I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am” (*BSWM* 114); they are left flabbergasted by the logic of Manichaeism in Fanon’s rhetoric: “there are two camps: white and black” (*WE* xii) and “the last shall be first” (2). But they do not stop reading Fanon because those are merely instances of anomaly. There is a sanitized version of Fanon, someone who is no longer a champion of violence’s cleansing power but someone who is cleansed of his passionate attachment to violence and identity. This sanitized Fanon is someone blessed with the insight that “[t]he black man is not. No more than the white

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<sup>71</sup> As Badiou has noted, “the use of terror in revolutionary circumstances or civil war does not at all mean that the leaders and militants are insane, or that they express the possibility of internal Evil. Terror is a political tool that has been in use as long as human societies have existed. It should therefore be judged as a political tool, and not submitted to infantilizing moral judgment” (“On Evil” par. 14); More recently, Badiou argues that “terror is the projection onto the state of a subjective maxim, the egalitarian maxim” (*LoW* 25). The destruction of an inegalitarian state of knowledge through the imposition of an egalitarian maxim is necessary terroristic from the point of view of the existing state.



man” (*BSWM* 206),<sup>72</sup> someone who proclaims that nationalism if not transformed into social justice would lead to a dead end (*WE* 144).

Žižek is certainly right to point out that we are living in “an age of decaffeinated belief.”<sup>73</sup> So rampant is this phenomenon to have objects rid of their harmful property (e.g. coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, war without casualties, revolution without revolution, etc.) that people now want to have a Fanon without anger (Chen Kuan-hsing)<sup>74</sup> or a Fanon who is a

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<sup>72</sup> For example, in “Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon,” Judith Butler analyzes the rhetorical modes of address in Sartre’s preface to *WE*. Despite her careful reading of Sartre’s preface, Butler concludes her essay with an argument affirming the philosophical maturity (or perhaps superiority) of *BSWM*. According to Butler, although *BSWM* chronologically predates *WE*, “philosophically, *Black Skin, White Masks* would have to follow *The Wretched of the Earth*. The effort to ‘touch’ the ‘you’ in *Black Skin, White Masks* would appear to be very different from the contact that constitutes violent negation” (229). Taking as the focus of her analysis Fanon’s final prayer in *BSWM* “O my body, always make me a man who questions!” (206), Butler elevates the prayer’s questioning stance into a philosophical corrective to *WE*: “He [Fanon] asks for recognition neither of his national identity nor his gender, but rather a collective act of recognition that would accord every consciousness its status as something infinitely open” (227).

<sup>73</sup> Žižek. “Passion In The Era of Decaffeinated Belief.” *Symptom* 5 (2004). Web. Accessed 02 Aug. 2011.

<sup>74</sup> Chen Kuan-hsing draws on various theoretical sources, including Fanon’s theory of decolonization, to deconstruct the discourse of nativism in Taiwan. But his reading of Fanon appears, in my view, quite dubious. Consider the following passage:

If “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon,” as Fanon argues, *the emergence of multiple subjects can also bring violent effects*. On the one hand, the emergence of multiple subjects challenges the unifying imperialization of the subject. On the other hand, such a challenge forces the emerging subject groups to shoulder the pressure of the intense confrontation. In relation to their opponents, the cultural resources and historical traditions of the subaltern subjects are indeed rather shaky....Once *the desire for insertion in the social space* prompts an attack on the symbolic order, the psychic condition of the subaltern subject in question becomes extremely fragile, and she or he is forced to either activate psychological defense mechanisms or face the possibility of breakdown. (emphasis added, 72-73)

The analogy in the passage above is illegitimate. When Fanon states that decolonization is a violent phenomenon, he has in mind the colonized’s (un)conscious duplication of the very same Manichean structure and their appropriation of the language of violence in an effort to produce a “cleansing” or “therapeutic” effect through a progressive use of identity. Decolonization is then a violent phenomenon precisely because it is a kind of violence reflected back to the colonizer (or the initiator of violence) in order to put an end to the violence (both physical and psychological) imposed upon the colonized (see my discussion of the subjective Two in Ch. 2). Now Chen Kuan-hsing relies on the language of force in Fanon’s theory of decolonization but empties out its militant commitment in order to squeeze it into the

poststructuralist *avant la lettre* (Bhabha).<sup>75</sup> Even Balibar, despite his full acknowledgement of the right of the oppressed to revolt, is convinced that Fanon exemplifies a kind of subjectivism run amok, a form of political voluntarism which is philosophically impoverished and yet commonly practiced in Third World anticolonial struggles: “Here the subject is no longer force as organized power or force, but force as an ‘absolute praxis’ that itself, immediately, effects the spiritual liberation of the colonised at the same time that it turns the accumulated capacity for terror against the coloniser” (“Reflections” 122). In Balibar’s view, the phenomenon of political subjectivism is a mere conversion of objective violence (i.e. the institutional violence of colonialism) into subjective violence. Fanon’s political subjectivism thus remains deeply conservative as it positions itself merely as a response to objective violence. Balibar is certainly justified to be wary of the exhaustion of violence as an end in itself, an “absolute praxis” without an organized form and hence merely insurrectional and not political. But he does not seem to take note of the full extent of Fanon’s thinking of violence and ends up representing Fanon in a rather limited fashion as does Arendt.<sup>76</sup>

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cultural relativist framework. It is unclear how the colonized in Fanon’s discussion of violence are comparable to the multiple subject positions with which Chen wishes to provincialize the logic of homogenization when, in fact, Fanon describes that at its initial phase, the violent encounter between the colonizer and the colonized are defined through “an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity” (*WE* 46) or that “[d]ecolonization unifies this world by a radical decision to remove its heterogeneity” (10). This is, of course, not Fanon’s final words on the topic of decolonization, but it does show the extent to which Chen’s reading omits the political and antagonistic context of the quoted passage. So what becomes of Fanon’s theory of decolonization when he is no longer angry? Gone is the colonial world’s embattled situation and in its place we have the psychic drama of identification in which the power of violence is located exclusively in the hands of the colonizer and the colonized become merely victims of such violence: “the psychic condition of the subaltern subject in question becomes extremely fragile, and she or he is forced to either activate psychological defense mechanisms or face the possibility of breakdown.”

<sup>75</sup> See Bhabha’s foreword “Remembering Fanon” to the British Pluto edition of *BSWM*.

<sup>76</sup> Terror and violence used for a political purpose has to be strictly distinguished from the irrational, vengeful, and trigger-happy type of violence; whereas the former is capable of transforming itself from reactionary to actional, the latter remains essentially a reactionary and reactionary force. Fanon condemns the wanton exercise of violence for fear of the boomerang effect that will eventually catch up with the perpetrators of violence: “Because we want a democratic and a renovated Algeria, because we believe one

The same can be said of the reception of Badiou's work by his fellow philosophers. In *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben makes a reference to Badiou in relation to the idea of "whatever singularity":

Whatever singularities cannot form a *societas* because they do not possess any identity to vindicate nor any bond of belonging for which to seek recognition. In the final instance the State can recognize any claim for identity – even that of a State identity within the State....What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form a simple presupposition). The State, as Alain Badiou has shown, is not founded on a social bond, of which it would be the expression, but rather on the dissolution, the unbinding it prohibits. For the State, therefore, what is important is never the singularity as such, but only its inclusion in some identity, whatever identity (but the possibility of the *whatever* itself being taken up without an identity is a threat the State cannot come to terms with). (85)

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cannot rise and liberate oneself in one area and sink in another, we condemn, with pain in our hearts, those brothers who have flung themselves into revolutionary action with the almost physiological brutality that centuries of oppression give rise to and feed" (*DC* 25). This critique of violence, however, is a measured critique directed at a form of violence that consumes itself in its own realization. And yet, from a political point of view, violence receives a different consideration. Fanon explains the rationale for the use of terror:

Having to react in rapid succession to the massacre of Algerian civilians in the mountains and in the cities, the revolutionary leadership found that if it wanted to prevent the people from being gripped by terror it had no choice but to adopt forms of terror which until then it had rejected. This phenomenon has not been sufficiently analyzed; not enough attention has been given to the reasons that lead to a revolutionary movement to choose the weapon that is called terrorism....The decision to kill a civilian in the street is not an easy one, and no one comes to it lightly. No one takes the step of placing a bomb in a public space without a battle of conscience. (54, 55)

Gibson 2003, Ch. 5 offers an excellent analysis of the function of violence in Fanon's theory of decolonization.

Nancy, too, suggests that Badiou is not much different from Heidegger as both are thinkers of the event, only that Badiou does it “in a cooler mode” and Heidegger “in a more pathos-laden mode” (*Sense of the World* 175n19). To be sure, the proximity between these thinkers is undeniable, especially when the comparison is carried out on the basis of their shared critique of the One (in the form of the state or presence). However, much in the same way that people want to have a Fanon without anger, both Agamben and Nancy want to have a Badiou deprived of the theory of forcing. And yet when we group them under the general rubric of “the thinkers of the event,” the distinctive contours of their thinking begin to fade into insignificance. Given that today almost every major philosopher coming from the tradition of continental philosophy touches on the theme of the event and therefore can be advertised as “the thinker of the event,” this label would become meaningless were it not accompanied by further distinctions (Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* 181-185).

### **III. Rescuing Politics from Ontology**

What do all these mean? It means that in a postcolonial, post-metaphysical and post-Cartesian age, decolonization has to be thought with a new conceptual model other than the one inherited from the humanist liberation discourse in the mid-20th century. It also means that it has become customary to criticize identity for the sake of criticizing identity, or inversely, celebrate hybridity for the sake of celebrating it. Unless you were someone like Hallward who, prior to his commitment to publish on issues concerning activist philosophy, has impeccable academic credentials in high theory, you would likely incur criticisms of being engulfed in the passion of identity by a group of interlocutors who will, in a well-meaning manner, point out to you about the pitfalls of nationalism. There is, of course, much truth in bringing to task the structure of

violence embedded in every construction of identity. Yet, the fact remains that despite the widespread recognition of the structure of fiction in the construction of an individual identity or a historical community, there is an undeniable discrepancy between what is uttered in postcolonial/poststructuralist theory and what is acted out in the actual practice of resistance. That is to say, for all the criticisms levied against subjectivity/identity (e.g. its putative autonomy and closure, its binary configuration and the unjustified subjection of the other) and for all the luster subject/identity has lost as an analytical category, it has nonetheless survived as a political category.<sup>77</sup> This paradox is most acutely felt in critical discourses addressing issues of domination and social justice. The paradox resides in the fact that while it is undeniable that the root of colonialism, ethnocentrism and nationalism can be traced back to the metaphysics of subjectivity, it is crucial also to recognize that political struggles undertaken by minorities inevitably engage questions like will and self-determination, and these questions can barely be posed without a theory of the subject. As Dirlik observes, “[i]n academic circles engrossed with postmodernity/postcoloniality as conditions of the present, it is almost a matter of faith these days that nations are ‘imagined,’ traditions are ‘invented,’ subjectivities are slippery (if they exist at all) and cultural identities are myths. Claims to the contrary are labelled ‘essentialisms,’ and dismissed as perpetuations of hegemonic constructions of the world” (*Postcolonial Aura* 220). And yet “claims to the contrary” keep popping up as an indubitable testimony to the staying power of subject/identity. “As if by some devilish design to mock the postcolonial argument,”

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<sup>77</sup> A note on terminology and usage is needed here. In most of philosophical discussion, subjectivity is not necessarily the same as identity; it very often signals the latter’s condition of possibility or its limit. In contemporary cultural discourse, terms like subject, subject position and identity are not rigorously distinguished, oftentimes interchangeable. In order to facilitate a more general discussion. I will follow the protocol of their respective practice for as long as it takes until it becomes necessary to insist on the terminological distinction, which I will argue later in my elaboration of Badiou’s politics as a truth procedure.

Dirlik continues, “cultural politics in our day exhibits an abundance of such claims to cultural authenticity” (221).

Why is this discrepancy? Why do we feel impelled to acknowledge, on the one hand, the deconstructive questioning of subjectivity/identity in ontology and, on the other, the incontestable presence of subjectivity/identity in politics? The problem, in my view, is not so much that deconstruction and its theoretical progeny fail to offer us a critical perspective of thinking the common as that it attempts to get to the *essence* of the common (the singular, the ecstatic, the heterogeneous, the “perhaps,” etc.) and aspires to present the *recognition* of this essence as always already a way of *doing* politics. Thus, we find in Derrida and Nancy political vocabularies such as democracy, justice, freedom or equality signaling exactly the same ontological openness or the same eventual rupture of the singular and the ecstatic. And all these terms, in one way or another, refer to *the power of unbinding*:

The *justice* necessarily in question here...concerns a just measure of the incommensurable. For this reason...*justice* can only reside in the renewed decision to challenge the validity of an established or prevailing “just measure” *in the name of the incommensurable*. The political space, or the political as spacing, is given from the outset in the...of the common (absence of) measure of an incommensurable. Such is, we could say, the first thrust of freedom. (Nancy, *Experience of Freedom* 75)

But the deconstructive strategy of uncovering the originary indeterminacy as the constitutive (non)ground of the communitarian figuration is not without its own limit. If we look at the object of deconstruction, we find that it is not *any particular thing or phenomenon* that is subject to deconstruction; what is being deconstructed is rather *a certain desire to be autonomous, self-*

*instituting and sovereign or a certain longing for the lost origin.* When this logic is pushed to the extreme, anticolonial struggle and colonial domination become two interchangeable rubrics for they evince the same metaphysical desire for closure. Sutured to ontology, politics becomes a matter of taking care of the incommensurable and the conception of injustice is also formalized into that which designates the foreclosure of this gap. What then constitutes a political crime? A political crime, for Derrida, consists in the forgetting of the gap which is “the crime *against* the possibility of politics...the crime of stopping to examine politics, reducing it to something else and preventing it from being what it should be” (*PoF* ix). Thus, in Žižek’s view, deconstructionists “remain within the confines of the pessimistic wisdom of the failed encounter...deconstructionists draw the conclusion that the principal ethico-political duty is to maintain the gap between the Void...and every positive content giving body to it” (*Ticklish Subject* 133-134). Given its absolutization of justice/injustice in terms of the maintaining/foreclosing of the gap, the deconstructive interruption of myth risks turning itself into a new dogma, that is, into the myth of interruption.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The danger of erasing the specific in postcolonial studies has also been noted by Shohat: “As a descriptive catch-all term, ‘hybridity’ per se fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooption, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (110). It should be pointed out that rejecting “hybridity” as an all-encompassing umbrella term on account of its erasure of the specific context of power is not the same as rejecting the phenomenon of cultural exchange or the process of creolization:

I admit that it is a good thing to place different civilizations in contact with each other; that it is an excellent thing to blend different worlds; that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen. But then I ask the following question: has colonization really *placed civilizations in contact*? Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of *establishing contact*, was it the best? I answer *no* (Césaire, *Discourse* 33).

Césaire’s observation remains as valid today as the day it was uttered. A similar situation faces the aboriginal population in Taiwan today: assimilate or die. President Ma Ying-jeou, then the incumbent mayor of Taipei, said to the aboriginal petitioners:

Since you have lived in our city, you are our people; since you have come to Taipei, you are Taipei people, and *I will treat you like human beings, like citizens; educate you and*

Derrida once asked “what would a ‘history,’ a science, or a historical action purporting to be resolutely and ingeniously extradiscursive or extratextual *actually do*?....What else could they do without attempting to read all the apparently contradictory possibles (‘relation without relation,’ ‘community without community,’ etc.)....Let us answer: they could do very little, almost nothing (*PoF* 81). Indeed, there is something irrefutable in Derrida’s claim that without “read[ing] all the apparently contradictory possibles,” the supposedly realistic or “extradiscursive” political discourses would achieve very little, almost nothing. But we must ask what is the political valence of democracy-to-come when it indulges itself in those contradictory possibles and yet can only muster itself to “invent the least bad solution” (Derrida, *For What Tomorrow* 76; see the section epigraph). Perhaps, not much either. My contention is that the ontology of the common opens up a door for liberation while closing another the moment it aspires to present itself as already a political intervention. The consequence of the ontologization of politics is to put politics in a historical vacuum, disregarding different contexts of power, specific sites in which events occur, and issues concerning organization and sustainability.<sup>79</sup> For

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*provide you with opportunities*. I think this is how it should be done, and the aborigines need to adjust themselves to the new attitude: I come to this place and I have to play by its rules (emphasis added).

你既然來到我們的城市，就是我們的人，你既然來到台北，就是台北人，我把你當人看，我把你當市民看，要好好把你教育，提供機會給你，我覺得應該這樣子做，所以我覺得原住民的心態要從那個地方調整：我來到這個地方，我就要照這個地方的遊戲規則來玩。

The hypocrisy of “the respect for the other” is in full exposure in the passage above: the only other worthy of respect is the other who “plays by the rules.” As Badiou has long noted, “foreigners are only tolerable so long as they ‘integrate’ themselves into the magnificent model presented to them by our pure institutions, our astonishing systems of education and representation” (*St. Paul* 8-9). The video clip of Ma’s response is available on YouTube at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdTVLb-w2A>> Web. 11 Nov. 2012.

<sup>79</sup> For Badiou, the event is always local, never global: “Every radical transformational action originates *in a point*, which, inside a situation, is an evental site....The event is attached...to the place, to the point, in



the thinkers of the ontological politics, there is only one event which is none other than the event of being (Left-Heideggerians) or the event of the other (Levinasians/Derrideans), both pointing to the singular locus of the incommensurable beyond determination and signification. This translation of ethical inquiry into political intervention, characteristic of the post-war continental philosophy (e.g. in the works of Derrida, Nancy, Agamben and Roberto Esposito), ushers in a new direction in political philosophy. This group of thinkers, according to Balibar, distinguishes themselves from traditional political philosophy by thinking politics in terms of impolitics:

The question of impolitics is the question of the negative or the void that comes to inhabit the heart of politics as soon as the substantive absolutes around which the hierarchy of values and the organizational projects (the common good, the divine plan, the will of the people) are suspended or destroyed....This explains, for example, the privileged role Esposito attributes (in Bataille's wake) to the critique of the category of sovereignty. *The problematics sketched out here has an ethical dimension, undeniably, but what sets it apart is that it grounds its formulation of ethical questions neither in anthropological idealities nor in formal imperatives, but solely in the limits or aporias of the political itself.* (emphasis added, "Political Philosophy" 99)

Resisting organizational projects, the ontological politics refrains from formulating a conception of justice and emancipation by way of anticipatory or purposive action. If the common belongs to the domain of politics, it "necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called 'unworking'...which no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension" (Nancy, *Inoperative Community* 31).

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which the historicity of the situation is concentrated. Every event has a site which can be singularized in a historical situation" (*B&E* 176, 178-179).

Inoperativity or unworking inscribed at the heart of the common then precludes the production of the self-identical commonality from which not even the Marxian category of the species being is immune.<sup>80</sup>

There is a historical justification not to succumb to a prescriptive politics that calls for collective political projects through the exercise of the will. In the wake of grand political experiments, revolutionary or otherwise, in the 20th century, there is a pervasive sense of despair in the post-revolutionary era:

Contaminated by fascism, notions of decision and resolution were abandoned in favor of a generalized indecision. Contaminated by imperialism, the category of the universal was dissolved in favor of the fragmentary, the particular, or the contingent. The pursuit of clarity and distinction was eclipsed by a determination to bear witness to an apparently more fundamental obscurity or paralysis – thought confronted by situations in which it is impossible to react (Gilles Deleuze), demands that cannot be met (Emmanuel Levinas), needs that can never

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<sup>80</sup> The famous hunter-fisher-critic passage from *The German Ideology* offers a glimpse into a life without estrangement, a life of a generic being (Marx 160). In “Compearance,” Nancy comments extensively on the Marxian emancipatory project. Marx’s problem, according to Nancy, is to arrive at an in-common (the species being) by bringing to an end alienation (i.e. separation created by the capitalist logic) without realizing that a more primordial separation (i.e. spacing or incommensurability) cannot be annulled even when the external separation created by capitalism is brought to an end:

For Marx, and for all the kinds of communism that we have known, this could only be determined in aiming to end the “political”...The political realm was a realm “separated” from the real activity of humans, and necessarily confiscated by the ruling class...as such, the political sphere must come out from its separation....The “realization” of politics is for Marx his nonseparated future, and its effectuation, by impregnation, in all the spheres of human activity. In other words, it is the *polis*, coextensive to the whole of the real life of the community. But this coextension can be understood in two ways. Either the *polis* is in the end the same as the sum or the combinatorial of all the activities...or that which is here called “polis” represents something that does not let itself confused with any combination of activities or assumely distinct relationships. In this case, *polis* or “politics,” designates precisely this element that is distinct from all others (in this, then, ‘shared’) which is nothing other than the ‘in-common’ of all the rest – and compearance. (388-389)

be reconciled (Jean-François Lyotard), promises that can never be kept (Jacques Derrida). (Hallward, "Politics of Prescription" 770)

This deep suspicion over a prescriptive politics is also reflected in Nancy's critique of Badiou's communist hypothesis. We have previously commented on Nancy's attempt to bridge the distance between Badiou and himself with reference to their shared critique of the metaphysical One. But their similarity ends when we take into account the prescriptive (or post-evental) dimension of politics. In Nancy's view, the common is the originary sociality of being, *always already given*:

That's why "communism" must not be put forward as a "hypothesis," as we see in Alain Badiou – a political hypothesis that is then to be verified by a kind of political action that is itself caught in the schema of a classic struggle – but must instead be posited as a given, a fact: our first given. Before all else, we are in common. Then we must become what we are: the given is an exigency, and this exigency is infinite. (*Truth of Democracy* 54n6)

In place of the communist hypothesis, Nancy proposes the democratic exigency which, as the event of May '68 shows, is "a feeling, a disposition...or an ethos" comporting the self to the originary given in which "preference was given to greeting the present of an irruption or disruption that introduced no new figure, agency, or authority" (10, 14).<sup>81</sup> As such, the post-evental and non-ontological aspects become an issue of little or no importance in Nancy's democratic exigency.

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<sup>81</sup> Lacan's attitude toward May '68 also displays pessimism as to the liberatory aspiration that would have come about as the result of the revolt: "What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one" (*Seminar XII* 207).

We have mentioned that the consequence of this non-prescriptive ontologization of politics is to have politics existing in a kind of historical vacuum. Let me illustrate this with another example. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy explains the historical context in which the book was composed:

I want to emphasize the date on which I am writing this. It is the summer of 1995, and as far as specifying the situation of the earth and humans is concerned, nothing is more pressing...than a list of proper names such as these, presented here in no particular order: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Rwanda, Bosnian Serbs, Tutsis, Hutus, Tamil Tigers, Krajina serbes, Casamance, Chiapas, Islamic Jihad, Bangladesh, the Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, Hamas, Kazakhstan, Khmers Rouges, ETA militia, Kurds (UPK/PDK), Montataire, the Movement for Self-determination, Somalia, Chicanos, Shiites, FNLC-Canal Historique, Liberia, Givat Hagadan, Nigeria, the League of the North, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sikhs, Haiti, Roma gypsies of Slovenia, Taiwan, Burma, PLO, Iraq, Islamic Front Salvation, Shining Path, Vaulx-en-Velins, Neuhof....Of course, *it would be difficult to bring this list to an end if the aim was to include all the places, groups, or authorities that constitute the theater of bloody conflicts among identities, as well as what is at stake in these conflicts.* These days it is not always possible to say with any assurance whether these identities are intranational, infranational, or transnational; whether they are ‘cultural,’ ‘religious,’ ‘ethnic,’ or ‘historical’; whether they are legitimate or not – not to mention the question about which law would provide such legitimation; whether they are real, mythical, or imaginary; whether they are independent or

‘instrumentalized’ by other groups who wield political, economic, and ideological power.... (emphasis added, xii-xiii)

Notwithstanding Nancy’s earnest attempt to contextualize the philosophical writing with a series of proper names referring to actual places, sites, movements, and organizations, these proper names ultimately “constitute the theater of bloody conflicts among identities.” This is where an ethics lacking a proper appreciation for the context of power and other post-evental, procedural and organizational aspects shows its limit and starts to falter as ethics itself becomes coterminous with politics.<sup>82</sup> I do not think that what is written here can be taken as an expression of contempt for the said conflicts among identities. But it is certainly not an endorsement. The point is rather that when they eventually come to belong to the same theater of bloody conflicts among identities, the specificity each proper name bears is relegated to an order of secondary importance. I do not feel qualified to say anything on this long list of proper names, except perhaps the one about Taiwan in the summer of 1995. Taiwan exists in Nancy’s text as a name of a place where the conflicts among identities occurs, but it is not entirely clear what exactly Nancy has in mind for his inclusion of Taiwan into this theater of conflicts. An educated guess

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<sup>82</sup> The same perhaps can be said of Nancy’s plea for the NATO’s military intervention in Libya in “What the Arab Peoples Signify to Us?” published in the *Libération* newspaper. Nancy’s article draws a harsh critique first from Badiou (“An Open Letter: Reply to Nancy’s ‘What the Arab Peoples Signify to Us?’”) who reprimands Nancy in the strongest terms for failing to recognize the difference between insurgents in Libya and those in Egypt and Tunisia and for calling for the West’s intervention; then from Gianni Vattimo (“Philosophers at War”) who chides Nancy’s assessment and endorses Badiou’s critique. I am not overly familiar with all the details in the debate, so I will leave readers to judge for themselves. But it seems to me that this could be yet another example demonstrating the limit of thinking politics without taking into account people’s prescriptive capacity to institute themselves as sovereign. Because of Nancy’s reluctance to address the post-evental and the organizational aspects of a political movement, any insurrection, regardless of its composition and internal dynamics, signifies the same “disposition” or “ethos.” This is probably the reason why the Libyan uprising is likened to the events in Egypt and Tunisia, for they are *in common* insofar as the bringing down of the Gaddafi regime connects the Libyan uprising to other political struggles against the authoritarian regimes. Whether the downfall of the Gaddafi regime results from the people’s capacity for self-determination or is part of the larger scheme manipulated by the West becomes a nonissue when inconsistency (or the power of unbinding) is the only concern for Nancy. For an alternate take on the debate, see Matthews 2012.

would be the missile crisis (aka The Third Taiwan Straits Crisis) prompted by President Lee Teng-hui's visit to his alma mater Cornell University in the United States. Taiwan under Lee's rule kept its distance from China and focused on the domestic process of democratization. There were, of course, conflicts among identities: a sizable population then still saw themselves as the descendants of Yan and Yellow Emperor (炎黃子孫) and dreamed of the eventual reunion with China; others opposed the internal process of democratization either because it jeopardized their vested interests, or due to a nostalgic hanging on to a fading era symbolized by the Chiang family which would be emphatically put to an end with the large-scale process of democratization.<sup>83</sup> China responded to Lee's rule in general and his provocation to visit Cornell in particular by launching missiles into the waters surrounding Taiwan from the summer of 1995 to the first ever democratic presidential election in March 1996, with the aim of influencing the electoral result through military intimidation.

Before the tribunal of ontology, the bloody conflicts of identity can but plead guilty to the charge. And yet with hundreds of missiles deployed near the coastline, it seems to me that at stake is more than "the theater of bloody conflicts among identities" and it does not make much sense to speak of "being singular plural" when the identity "Taiwanese" could very well have assumed a progressive function in the fight against military intimidation. But given that the context of power is of secondary importance in Nancy's philosophy, identity, regardless of the use it is put to, easily gets frowned upon for blocking the sharing of the democratic opening of possibilities. When justice, freedom and equality are conceived solely as a fidelity to the preservation of the gap, or when the democratic exigency becomes our ultimate political horizon,

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<sup>83</sup> Ironically, Taiwan's incumbent President Ma Ying-jeou, among the fiercest opponents to the institution of democracy including the democratic presidential election, is now reaping the fruit of the seeds he never sowed.

we end up with a conservative politics (despite its apparent radicalism) fetishistically safeguarding the radical ontological opening, forgetting that injustice not only takes the form of the identitarian closure of ontological opening, but also registers on the existential level when a people's claim to self-determination is under constant threat from an invading power. Thus, I agree with Parry when she warns that "it is surely necessary to refrain from a sanctimonious reproof of modes of writing resistance which do not conform to contemporary theoretical rules about discursive radicalism" (43). Politics is not merely a matter of safeguarding the opening and therefore cannot be reduced to an ethics of fighting against identity and closure. The question is rather to look at under what political circumstances and toward what political vision is identity mobilized, and the question of evil or injustice cannot be formally determined without considerations of the specific political project involved:

What does "respect for the Other" mean when one is at war against an enemy....Very often, it is the "respect for Others" that is injurious, that is evil. Especially when it is resistance against others, or even hatred of others, that drives a subjectively just action. And it's always in these kinds of circumstances...that the question of evil can be truly asked for a subject. Evil does not exist either as nature or as law. It exists, and varies, in the singular becoming of the true.

(Badiou, "On Evil" par. 28)

What Badiou means by the communist hypothesis involves a general movement from preemption to prescription. It determines justice and injustice according to the immanent unfolding of a specific political procedure. A politics is just if the subject intervenes in the situation and sets about forcing the inegalitarian situation to fall in line with the egalitarian principle; it is unjust when the post-evental intervention is interrupted by reactionary resistance

(often based on some interest-driven reasons) or occulted by obscurantist mysticism.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, “[t]here is no natural definition of evil; evil is always that which, in a particular situation, tends to weaken or destroy a subject....evil does not exist except as a judgment made, by a subject, on a situation, and on the consequences of his own actions in this situation” (par. 27). Thus, in Badiou’s view, Marguerite Duras’ participation in torturing the traitors during the French resistance to the Nazis is not only justified; it is even a politically just decision. This partisan view of justice is shared by Fanon: “Truth is what hastens the dislocation of the colonial regime....Truth is what protects the ‘natives’ and undoes the foreigners. In the colonial context there is no truthful behavior. And good is quite simply what hurts *them* most” (*WE* 14). Consequently, the ideas of justice and injustice cannot be absolutized through formalization.<sup>85</sup>

But this is not the same as asserting a relativist conception of justice/injustice (e.g. justice is mere opinions and varies in different circumstances). Justice for Badiou is traversed by both historical variants and a universal invariant.<sup>86</sup> The egalitarian political maxim is the universal invariant undergirding the idea of justice (or the idea of communism): “justice, which is the philosophical name for the egalitarian political maxim, cannot be defined. For equality is not an objective of action, it is its axiom” (Badiou, *Metapolitics* 99).<sup>87</sup> This egalitarian edict gives

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<sup>84</sup> On different subjective figures in Badiou’s philosophy, see Book 1 of *LoW*.

<sup>85</sup> One could, of course, cite the example of Badiou formalizing evil in terms of the desire to name the unnameable, but this formulation has disappeared in Badiou’s more recent writings.

<sup>86</sup> “There is in fact a historical dimension of a truth, although the latter is in the final analysis universal...or eternal” (IC 2).

<sup>87</sup> Badiou’s affirmation that equality is an axiomatic supposition rather than a goal shows his indebtedness to Jacques Rancière. As Rancière is the first to maintain, “equality was not an end to attain, but a point of departure, a *supposition* to maintain in every circumstance....Never would equality exist except in its verification and at the price of being verified always and everywhere” (*Ignorant Schoolmaster* 138). However, they differ in the way this axiom is to be interpreted. For Rancière, equality amounts to the processing of a wrong and politics is identical to the enactment of this axiom. Politics, then, consists of a series of intermittent interruption through which an unequal distribution of the visible is exposed and a



politics a dimension of universality and eternity despite the infinite complexity of different circumstances from which each historical enactment of this maxim emerges.<sup>88</sup> And yet unlike the ontology of the common in which the particular belongs to the domain of the ontic which is perceived as secondary to the primacy of the ontological,<sup>89</sup> the particular entertains a different relation to the ontological invariant (the generic equality) in Badiou's philosophy. Admittedly, there is no such thing as identity politics or cultural politics in Badiou. Nevertheless, culture, history, and identity are not relegated to something of secondary importance; they are the sites and the materials that localize a truth procedure and allow truth's eternity to unfold as a real and infinite process in a world. Thus, between particularism and universalism, Badiou steers clear of both extremes:

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particular wrong is processed. "Praxis might, then, entail a kind of watchfulness or attention to these intermittent manifestations, to the moments when such demonstrations are produced" (Ross 29) and "politics is a matter of acknowledging a generalized disauthorization or delegitimation more than it is a matter of participating in antagonistic processes whereby people come to be newly authorized by a militant affirmation of principle" (Hallward, "Staging Equality" 155). In Badiou's view, the declarative structure of equality in Rancière is consumed within its own effectuation (Badiou, "Lessons" 43). Hence, Rancière's conception of politics remains *a negative universal* as its articulation is registered only through interruptive markings (e.g. disconnection, disqualification, disauthorization, delegitimation, etc.). For Badiou, the declaration of equality is the *condition* that makes possible the *production* of political emancipation. But it is important to insist on the gap between the condition and the production because this gap is the space of freedom that gives rise to the sequence of political prescriptions. That is to say, the militant's explorative investigation into the sequence of emancipatory politics (i.e. the production or the effectuation of politics) is conditioned by and yet not reducible to the moment of declaration.

<sup>88</sup> In *Second Manifesto*, Badiou comments on the shift of emphasis from universality (*B&E*) to eternity (*LoW*). The concept of universality, according to Badiou, places more emphasis on the being of the generic whereas eternity concerns the result produced in the world: "While the generic designates what a truth *is* in so far as it is distinguished from all other types of being, the body and its orientation designate what a truth *does* and, hence, the way in which it shares...the fate of objects in the world" (127-128); "For some years now...I have more readily emphasized truths' *eternity*. This is because universality is a question of form (the form of generic multiplicity) whereas eternity has to do with the process's effective result" (129).

<sup>89</sup> Even in a highly sympathetic reading of Agamben, Jessica Whyte points out that Agamben's inattentiveness to the context of power and his inability to theorize identity in ways other than its nullification constitutes a blind spot of his politics: "in focusing on forms of praxis premised on the spectacular nullification of identity and sense, he provides a one-sided image of our world, which is inattentive to the ways in which identities continue to be invested with meaning" ("A New Use of the Self" par. 30).

[A]gainst those, the culturalists, relativists, people preoccupied with immediate bodies and available languages, for whom the historicity of all things excludes eternal truths. They fail to see that a genuine creation, a historicity of exception, has no other criterion than to establish, between disparate worlds, the evidence of an eternity. And that what appears only shines forth in its appearance to the extent that it subtracts itself from the local laws of appearing. A creation is trans-logical, since its being upsets its appearing. (*LoW* 513)

In this passage, Badiou stresses the ontological category of the generic (“since its being upsets its appearing”) as the basis of his polemics against culturalism. One is tempted to argue that Badiou comes dangerously close to an ontological politics with his emphasis on being’s generic indiscernibility. Before we jump to this conclusion, let’s examine what Badiou says immediately after:

[A]gainst those for whom the universality of the truth takes the form of a transcendental Law, before which we must bend our knee, to which we must conform our bodies and our words. They do not see that every eternity and every universality must appear in a world and...be created within it. Since a truth is an appearance of being, a creation is logical. (513)

Apparently, we are dealing with two heterogeneous levels here: being and appearing. On the one hand, “[a] creation is trans-logical, since its being upsets its appearing.” On the other, Badiou asserts, “[s]ince a truth is an appearance of being, a creation is logical.” Rather than a pair of contradictory formulations apropos of being and truth, they are actually two compatible formulations – the first an ontological formulation (concerning the being of truth, or the generic) while the second a phenomenological one (concerning the truth of being, or truth’s appearing in

a world). The ontological thesis allows Badiou to assert truth's indifference to differences. However, this only amounts to a negative gesture of de-classifying the existing classification and would bring Badiou much closer to Derrida and Nancy should the notion of the generic remain his sole contribution to politics. What sets Badiou apart is his firm conviction that the inconsistency of the generic can be consistently deployed and thereby appear in a world through the prescriptive measure undertaken by the militant subject. In this regard, truth's eternity does not reside in a state of timelessness nor can it be equated with an atemporal Form hanging in an asphyxiating realm of idealism. As Adrian Johnston points out, Badiou's truth is to be conceived as a situated eternity:

[T]he truths reveals by and issuing forth from events are timeless, trans-world fragments of eternity. Although "an eternal truth is enveloped in different linguistic and conceptual context," it is nonetheless eternal insofar as it is irreducible to the multitude of such differing contexts, to the plurality of spatiotemporal worlds across which truths cut like bisecting diagonal lines escaping capture by the planes through which these lines slice. Unlike the transcendent eternal truths of Socrates and Plato, these Badiouian truths can and do appear directly within worlds, although, despite this appearing, they remain unconquerably resistant to absorption by their various enveloping socio-symbolic contexts. (47)

Truth's eternity then consists in truth's capacity to establish a connection between different worlds that might be geographically poles apart, and temporally centuries apart. So truth is eternal because, in addition to its singular formation in a world, it also contains a trans-worldly (or trans-logical) dimension beyond the world of its singular happening, and this trans-worldly

function resides in its “inviolable availability” to be reactivated in different worlds and under different circumstances (*Second Manifesto* 129). The repetition of each singular production of a truth is inventive, not sterile because truth remains in each instance of its enactment both *a new* truth and an *eternal* truth; it is a new truth for the mobilization of the historical, cultural and human resources that make up the materiality (or the body) of a truth varies case by case; it nonetheless remains eternal as these singular instances are joined together by their commensurability with the generic of the egalitarian maxim: “Through their commensurability with a truth, anonymous individuals are always transformed into vectors of humanity as a whole” (*St. Paul* 20).

For Badiou, identity is an object of knowledge in the sense that the cluster of meanings associated with identity is not only specific to the situation but also specified by the representational regime of a situation. Thus, identity itself cannot form the basis of an emancipatory politics. As Badiou cautiously remarks: “‘immigrant,’ ‘French,’ ‘Arab’ and ‘Jew’ cannot be political words lest there be disastrous consequences. For these words, and many others, necessarily relate politics to the State, and the State itself to its lowest and most essential of functions: the non-egalitarian inventory of human beings” (*Metapolitics* 94).<sup>90</sup> Politics, in contrast, is “self-determined as a space of emancipation subtracted from the consensual figures of the State” (90). From a strictly ontological point of view, identity is to be dismissed in a similar fashion that the ontic is relegated to something of secondary importance in the ontology of the common. However, Badiou’s assertion that communal predicates cannot be political words does not preclude a different relation between the particularism of identity and the universalism

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<sup>90</sup> The masses themselves, in their static being, their structural positioning, their statist placement, constitute the historical world. It is from their basis that any figure of the State draws its sustenance, and it is from the consensus that holds them together that any given social being receives its definition. These splined masses do not *make* history so much as they *are* history” (Badiou, *ToS* 63).

of politics other than that of negation or equation. It should be noted that although ontology is the discourse of being-qua-being, that is, the discourse of pure multiplicity, “[t]he process of a truth...entirely escapes ontology” (*B&E* 355).<sup>91</sup> That is to say, cultural identity, while not itself a politics, can nonetheless be incorporated into the body of a truth and acquire a generic function to outgrow its placement within a specific situation. Thus, when it comes to the effective operation of a truth procedure, Badiou does leave room for the possibility that cultural identity could be a local name that initiates a political sequence.<sup>92</sup> It is worth quoting the passage in full:

The progressive formulation of a cause which engages cultural or communal predicates, linked to incontestable situations of oppression and humiliation, presumes that *we propose these predicates, these particularities, these singularities, these communal qualities, in such a way that they be situated in*

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<sup>91</sup> It is well known that Badiou’s two major works *B&E* and *LoW* deal with ontology and phenomenology respectively. Oftentimes, it is assumed that these two formal theories, ontology and phenomenology, are Badiou’s major concerns. The real stake in Badiou’s philosophy, however, has to do with *the possibility of change*. In order grasp the real thrust of Badiou’s intervention, we must understand that ontology and phenomenology are the conditions for change but not its actualization. In *The Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou compares his three major inquiries (ontology, phenomenology and truth) to Kant’s three critiques:

Against Kant, we must maintain that we know being qua being, just as we no less know the way in which the thing-in-itself appears in a world. The Mathematics of multiplicities and the logic of worlds designate, were we to adopt Kant’s terminology, our first two ‘critiques.’ The third critique consists of the theory of the event, truth, and the subject...and is what any contemporary philosophy worthy of the name takes as its veritable goal – to answer the question: how are we to live, such that our life measures up to the Idea? (49-50)

The trajectory of *B&E* is to go from ontology to its impasse and eventually to theory of the event, truth and subject. Ontology is crucial to Badiou’s thinking of change because it articulates an extensional logic of grouping that has no qualitative basis. This is supplemented by Badiou’s phenomenology that tries to explain the world’s structuring principle in which an object’s existential intensity is measured relative to its placement within the structure. However, what is really at stake is that beyond the operation of counting and the measurement of existential intensity lies a real possibility of change.

<sup>92</sup> In his book on St. Paul, Badiou explains, through the example of Paul, how truth’s universalism coexists with the particularism of people’s customs and their ways of life; see Ch. 10.

*another space and become heterogenous to their originary oppressive operation.*

I never know in advance what quality, what particularity, is capable of becoming political or not; I have no preconception on that score. What I do know is that *there must be a progressive meaning to these particularities, a meaning that is intelligible to all.* Otherwise, we have something which has its *raison d'être*, but which is necessarily of the order of a demand for integration, that is, of a demand that one's particularity be valued in the existing state of things. This is something commendable, even necessary, but it is not in my opinion something to be inscribed directly in politics....I would call "political" something that, in the categories, the slogans, the statement it puts forward, is less the demand of a social fraction or community to be integrated into the existing order, than something which touches on a transformation of that order as a whole. (emphasis added, "Politics and Philosophy" 118-119)

In the progressive use of identity, we encounter again the motif of the effect outgrowing its cause ("we propose these predicates, these particularities, these singularities, these communal qualities, in such a way that they be situated in another space and become heterogenous to their originary oppressive operation"). The earlier passage from *Metapolitics* unambiguously states that cultural identities cannot be political words. But it is worth noting that they cannot be political words because *they are subject to the counting mechanism of the State.* But in "Politics and Philosophy," Badiou admits that "no category is *in itself* blocked from its possible politicisation. Even 'Arab,' even 'Islam,' even 'Jew,' even 'French,' can, at a given moment, have a progressive political signification" (120). For example, today "French" has been used to authorize discrimination, but it does not mean that the word "French" is inherently non-political.

As Badiou points out, “French” used to carry a progressive signification of anti-Nazi resistance (120). Therefore, there is no pre-existing criterion to judge whether a cultural predicate is inherently political or not. Badiou is not saying there is no judgment at all; whether a word that signifies particularity can partake of the universal depends on the scope of its inclusion: is it intelligible only to those on the inside or is it intelligible to all? A progressive use of particularity involves not just those who bear that particular predicate (e.g. Black, woman, Jews, French, Taiwanese, etc.). Particularity provides the necessary condition for the initiation of a political sequence, but then the particular identity is suspended (not abolished) through an establishment of a short circuit between particularism and universalism wherein the particular takes on the universal import issuing a call that can be answered by all. Therefore, while it is important to make the distinction between culture and politics, it would be off the mark to insist on their opposition. Cultural identity is the fact of life, but politics belongs to the realm of doing.<sup>93</sup> Ultimately, for Badiou, culture and politics are not to be conceived as two separate terms engaging in a relation of negation, subordination, or contradiction. Rather, the proper way to frame the issue is to look at culture in terms of the degree of its politicization: “in the end, between this particularity present in the practical, concrete support of any political process, and the statements in the name in which the political process unfolds, I think there is only a relation of support, but not a relation of transitivity....You can’t go from the one to the other, even if one seems to be ‘carried’ by the other” (119).

By way of conclusion, when Badiou speaks of the communist invariant or proposes the communist hypothesis, the idea of the common implied by these terms has to be strictly distinguished from the idea of community as the collective realization of a property, which, in

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<sup>93</sup> “It is according to the modality of their stable placement that the masses are history, whereas it is in their appearing-disappearing that they make history” (Badiou, *ToS* 64).

his view, still informs the Marxist philosophy of history: “The tragedy of the communist Idea in its secularized form is that...it submitted politics to a sense of History. This Idea of communism named the community as beholden to its own real necessity” (*Conditions* 150). Communism for Badiou is not the final stage of Marxist political economy. Before Marxism becomes a science of capital or a metaphysics of history, it is first and foremost a politics.<sup>94</sup> Politics, in Badiou’s view, is therefore not the ideology that conceals the real of the social relations of production; it is rather to be identified with courage and enthusiasm with which Marx proclaims that the central task is not to interpret the world but to change it. Jason Barker has noted that “Marx’s ultimate objective was the transformation of society....Whether such transformation was to happen ‘all at once’...or by degrees....did not alter the basic principle that some sort of ‘progress’ should be involved. Such progress arguably lies at the heart of any would-be politics of emancipation, since without the power to bring new worlds into being politics can only stand opposed, and has nothing to fight *for*” (“Translator’s Introduction” xxiii). Consequently, if Marxism has anything to do with the communist hypothesis, it is because Marxism “is identified with rational political struggle for an egalitarian organization of society....[with] the organized knowledge of the political means required to undo existing society and finally realize an egalitarian, rational figure of collective organization” (*RoH* 8-9). On this view, the communist hypothesis is more than the guardian of pure multiplicities. In addition to the shepherd taking care of being,<sup>95</sup> the communist is the militant prescribing new egalitarian measures into existence. And to be a communist

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<sup>94</sup> One of the persistent charges made against Badiou (mostly from the Marxist circle) is that his theory of change smacks too much of subjectivism at the expense of objective analysis of political economy. On this point, see Antonio Negri 2010; For Badiou’s replay, see *RoH* 7-8. For commentaries on the related issues, see, for example, Bosteels’ *Badiou and Politics* 280-283; Nina Power 2012; Alberto Toscano 2006.

<sup>95</sup> I am referring to Heidegger’s famous line: “Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being” (“Letter on Humanism” 245).



subject means to inscribe oneself into the operation of the general becoming of humanity which consists in “[h]umanity’s forward march towards its collective emancipation” (IC 4). A critique is the necessary condition for rendering visible measures of constraints unjustly inflicted upon humanity’s forward march, but to attain a sufficient condition for humanity’s collective emancipation, we need a supplementary account of forcing to bring into actuality a just existence which would otherwise remain spectral, short of a politics of prescription.

Deconstructive criticism helps the oppressed understand the contingent nature of the external determinants. Decolonization, however, runs deeper than an ethical recognition of a relation of non-relation, the non-closure of identity, and the contingency of the One. The elementary definition of decolonization has been laid out by Fanon when he insists that decolonization “is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints” (6) and its minimal demand consists in the realization that “the last shall be the first.” Or as Badiou puts it in a different language but to the same effect, “a *change of world* is real when an inexistent of the world starts to exist in this same world with maximum intensity” (*RoH* 56).<sup>96</sup> Thus, from the standpoint of decolonization, it is not enough to alert people to the fact that most of the world’s problems have been resulted from thinking the common in identitarian terms or that reality has a fictive structure. The fact is that if this script of this fiction is badly written, this is the point of departure to be *reckoned with* and *dealt with*; if the situation we are facing is an unjust world, this is the starting point, not the givenness of ontological sociality or being-with, for any political investigation.

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<sup>96</sup> The following is Badiou’s formal definition of the inexistent: “we will call ‘proper inexistent of an object’ an element of the underlying multiple whose value of existence is minimal. Or again, an element which, relative to the transcendental indexing of this apparent, inexists in the world” (*LoW* 322).

There is a need not to confuse the political prescription with the ethical imperative and there is also a need not to oppose these two. Any choice that engages with one at the expense of the other is likely to encounter a dead end. If we concern ourselves only with the extradiscursive without a proper recognition of the aporetic, such a politics will, as Derrida presciently puts it, “deck itself out ‘realism’ just in time to fall short of the thing – and to repeat, repeat and repeat again, with neither consciousness nor memory of its compulsive droning” (*PoF* 81). In order to avoid the compulsive droning of pseudo-activism, it is crucial that we step back and take note of the aporetic. Žižek, who is in constant disagreement with Derrida, comes close to this Derridean point when he states:

[T]he danger is not passivity but pseudo-activity, the urge to be active and to participate. People intervene all the time, attempting to “do something,” academics participate in meaningless debates; the truly difficult thing is to step back and to withdraw from it. Those in power often prefer even a critical participation to silence - just to engage us in a dialogue, to make sure that our ominous passivity is broken. Against such an interpassive mode, in which we are active all the time to make sure that nothing will really change, the first truly critical step is to *withdraw into passivity* and to refuse to participate. This first step clears the ground for a true activity, for an act that will effectively change the coordinates of the scene. (*How to Read Lacan* 26-27)<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> There is something in this attitude of radical passivity resembling Lacan’s discourse of the analyst: “Lacan’s fundamental thesis is that the Master is by definition an *imposter*....Therefrom the Lacanian notion of the analyst *qua envers* (reverse) of the Master: of somebody who holds the place of the Master, yet who, by means of his (non)activity, undermines the Master’s charisma, suspends the effect of ‘quilting,’ and thus renders visible the distance that separates the Master from the place it occupies” (Žižek, *Enjoy* 103).

If, on the other hand, we devote ourselves only to the reckoning of the aporetic, we risk a pure politics aligned with the sanctimonious position of the beautiful soul who refrains from taking any action for fear that its purity may be tainted by action but who is nonetheless quick to condemn those who act.<sup>98</sup> But there is another problem that runs deeper than the avowed inactivity in this beautiful soul syndrome. Žižek has noted something hysterical in the beautiful soul (*Tarrying with the Negative* 267n26; see also *Sublime Object* 215-216). This reference to the beautiful soul and the hysteric could be useful in explaining why the thinking of the aporetic alone is insufficient to bring about radical change of the world. Hysterical provocation, comparable with the interruptive force of the event, is ambiguous:

That is the vicious circle of hysteria: on the one hand hysteria is secondary, a reaction against interpellation, a failed interpellation, a rejection of the identity imposed on the subject by the predominant form of interpellation, a questioning of this identity...at another, more fundamental level, however, hysteria is primary, it articulates the radical, constitutive uncertainty as to what, as an object, I am for the other; and the symbolic identity conferred on me via interpellation is a response, a way out of the deadlock of hysteria. In other words, one could say that hysteria expresses the feminine subject's refusal of the predominant patriarchal symbolic order, the questioning of the authority of the Name-of-the-Father; however, one should simultaneously assert that this symbolic paternal

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<sup>98</sup> “The ‘beautiful soul,’ lacking an *actual* existence, entangled in the contradiction between its pure self and the necessity of that self to externalize itself and change itself into an actual existence, and dwelling in the *immediacy* of this firmly held antithesis – an immediacy which alone is the middle term reconciling the antithesis, which has been intensified to its pure abstraction, and is pure being or empty nothingness – this ‘beautiful soul,’ then, being conscious of this contradiction in its unreconciled immediacy, is disordered to the point of madness, wastes itself in yearning and pines away in consumption” (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* ¶668).

authority itself emerges in order to render invisible, to “gentrify,” the impasse of hysteria. (*Indivisible Remainder* 164-165)

Considered secondary, the hysterical outburst is only a reactionary provocation. Considered primary, the hysteric’s provocation indexes to a constitutive limit in response to which the symbolic emerges as a defensive mechanism. It is not difficult to guess which view the deconstructive ethics sides with. The problem is that even in the second scenario when hysteria is considered primary, the force of its subversion is undercut by the structural logic of causality: “the problem with this doctrine [of structural causality] is precisely that, while never ceasing to be dialectical in pinpointing the absent cause and its divisive effects on the whole, it nevertheless remains tied to this whole itself and is thus unable to account for the latter’s possible transformation” (Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* 84).<sup>99</sup> In order not to repeat pseudo-activism and radical passivity, I will argue that we need to think the ethical exigency and the political hypothesis as themselves also forming a dialectic, that is, ethics and politics are made in service of each other, not in place of each other. Thus, we need to think the actual and the aporetic apart and together in the same dialectical symphony. After all, as Badiou reminds us, “[w]e must conceive of a truth both as the construction of a fidelity to an event, and as the generic potency of a transformation of a domain of knowledge” (*Infinite Thought* 58).

In the next chapter, I embark on an elaboration of Badiou’s politics as a truth procedure and Fanon’s theory of decolonization. The main questions concern consistency and sustainability in politics. In the first approach, I examine Badiou’s two political axioms of equality, demonstrate the intensive (negative) and extensive (affirmative) aspects of each axiom, and underline their commensurability that allows Badiou to conceive of a political truth procedure as

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<sup>99</sup> For a detailed analysis of the limit of the structural dialectic and the notion of absent cause, see Part II of Badiou’s *ToS*.

a consistent articulation of the generic inconsistency. To complement Badiou's theoretical discussion, I look at Fanon's writings on the Algerian Revolution. I argue that we need to resist a facile dismissal of Fanon's deceptively simple account of anti-colonial nationalist struggle. I show that Fanon has always been wary of the staying power of the insurrectional force of anticolonial resistance and has urged nationalism to evolve into a sustainable form of politics. However, the impasse of anticolonial nationalism cannot simply be refuted as an unfortunate stage in the process of decolonization; anticolonial nationalism, when treated both as praxis and thought, can effectuate a movement of what Badiou calls torsion that transforms an objective determination into a subjective production, and forces a historical situation to expand toward the direction of generic equality.

## Chapter 2

### History between Determination and Freedom: Toward a Dialectical Conception of Decolonization

#### I. Who Comes after the Subject?

It is thus convenient to define philosophy's modern period by the central organizational use to which the category of Subject is put...Is the modern period of philosophy over? Which is akin to saying: Does the act of proposing, for our time, a space of compossibility within thought of the truths which proliferate there, demand the maintenance and usage of the category of Subject, even profoundly altered or subverted? Or, on the contrary, is our time one in which thought demands the deconstruction of this category?

Alain Badiou, *The Manifesto for Philosophy*

Nothing, then, is more absurd – widely held as the idea may be – than to believe such a politics to be “subjectless” (it is history which is without a subject). I shall argue, rather that, every concept of politics implies a concept of the subject, which is specific in each case.

Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*

In the discussion of issues pertaining to decolonization, the category of subject occupies a rather paradoxical position. It is regarded, on the one hand, as an indispensable category for serving the liberatory goal of the colonized, and, on the other, an indisputable category underpinning the metaphysics of oppression which, in turn, serves as the ideological impetus allowing the West's imperialist imaginary to take a concrete form in its worldwide colonization project. Insofar as decolonization is concerned, the subject category then constitutes a conceptual dilemma, if not an embarrassment. As a result, the question has not received adequate theorization and has largely been downplayed or evaded.

This dilemma can be perceived on two levels. From a logical point of view, there is always a lingering doubt about the derivativeness of employing the master's tool to fight against the master. Chatterjee, for example, takes issue with the "modular" character of nationalism proposed by Benedict Anderson:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain "modular" forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?...Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (*The Nation* 5)

In his influential study of nationalism *Imagined Communities*, Anderson asserts that nation, nationality, and nationalism "are cultural artefacts" that have come into being in the 18th century through "the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces" (4).<sup>100</sup> The historical forces Anderson identifies in this complex crossing include the waning of religious imaginings and the demise of superterritorial dynastic order; these, together with the emergence of capitalist production, the new communication technology, and an awareness of

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<sup>100</sup> Unlike earlier theories of nationalism, Anderson's thesis of nations as imagined communities distinguishes historical communities from natural communities; whereas the latter is defined on the territorial, linguistic or cultural basis, the former posits no intrinsic relation between nation and geography/language/culture/ethnicity. Although such a relation can be retroactively established, it is, precisely on account of its retroactive production, *no longer natural*. Anderson is not the first to underscore the fictive structure of the nation. Ernest Gellner has noticed that nations are inventions. But, in Anderson's view, Gellner's definition of the nation as an invention is compromised by a moralizing critique: "The drawback to [Gellner's] formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity,' rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'" (*Imagined Communities* 6). For Anderson, moral judgment (falsity/genuineness) has no bearing on the way communities are imagined for "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6).

linguistic finitude, provide the objective conditions of possibility for a people to become a people: “What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (42-43).<sup>101</sup>

The controversial aspect of Anderson’s analysis lies in the fact that although the historical formation of the nation is the result of multivalent overdetermination, the nation, once formed, acquires a “modular” character and can be transplanted to other places with vastly different social, cultural and political systems (4). This is the point Chatterjee calls into question. To be sure, Chatterjee does not wish to deny the enabling aspect of anticolonial nationalism, but the nationalist imaginations in the Third World, he argues, are empowering only because of their deviation from the universal module put forth by Anderson: “The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the ‘modular’ forms of the national society propagated by the modern West. How can we ignore this without reducing the experience of anti-colonial nationalism to a caricature of itself” (*The Nation* 5).<sup>102</sup> Given the modular character of a historical model originated in Europe, what is supposedly a liberating enterprise (a successful result of which would bring into existence national subjectivity) turns out to be a nightmarish extension of colonial domination into the mind of the colonized, so much so that “[e]ven our

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<sup>101</sup> Balibar’s idea of nationalism as a fictive ethnicity puts forth an argument to the similar effect: “nationalism cannot be defined as an ethnocentrism except precisely in the sense of the product of a *fictive ethnicity*. To reason any other way would be to forget that ‘peoples’ do not exist naturally any more than ‘races’ do, either by virtue of their ancestry, a community of culture or pre-existing interests. But they do have to institute in real (and therefore in historical) time their imaginary unity *against* other possible unities” (*Race, Nation, Class* 49).

<sup>102</sup> Again, in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Chatterjee goes as far as accusing Anderson of “sociological determinism” that fits all 20<sup>th</sup>-century nationalisms to a universal sociological constraints of the modern age: “instead of pursuing the varied, and often contradictory, *political* possibilities inherent in this process, Anderson seals up his theme with a sociological determinism” (21).



imaginings must remain forever colonized.” The logic of the Third World nationalist imagining, according to this argument, is forever haunted by its derivativeness and can only play the late-comer’s game of catching up or following. In light of Chatterjee’s persuasion, the problematic nature of nationalism lies in the fact that the colonized are condemned to resist the colonizer with the very same weapon that has condemned them to the status of the colonized in the first place. Consequently, national self-determination is autonomy without substance. For, when it is achieved, if ever, it is achieved within pre-existing coordinates that still universalize everything coming from Europe.

In addition to the modular character of Anderson’s model, another problematic assumption can be found in the exclusive identification of nationalism with its political articulation: “To be fair to Anderson, it must be said that he is not alone to blame. The difficulty, I am now convinced, arises because we have all taken the claims of nationalism to be a *political* movement much too literally and much too seriously” (5). The political movement Chatterjee speaks of here refers to the sociological process of the coming-into-being of a popular secular political consciousness as well as the institution of secular political bodies such as the formation of the National Indian Congress. The restriction of an understanding of nationalism to its sociological articulation, in Chatterjee’s view, disregards the cultural and the spiritual dimension of nationalism. He then argues for a more comprehensive understanding of nationalism that would include both the material and the spiritual domains: “By my reading, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual” (6). What Chatterjee describes as the material and the spiritual domains can be more easily understood as the institutional and the

cultural spheres; the former is “the domain of the ‘outside,’ of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology” and the latter “an ‘inner’ domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity” (6).<sup>103</sup> Although the colonized reform the traditional institutions in accordance with a secular vision of political modernity, these reforms are merely imitation of the external, both inevitable and insufficient. Secular political reform is inevitable due to the fact of colonialism and to the imposed transmission of secular political values that goes hand in hand with colonialism; and yet it is insufficient because the political contestation issued from these political reforms are doomed in advanced because of their derivative nature.<sup>104</sup> In Chatterjee’s view, genuine resistance has to be located elsewhere, that is, at the level of the spiritual: “nationalism declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain....although the need for change [i.e. secular political

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<sup>103</sup> A similar thesis is proposed by Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* in his distinction of history into History<sub>1</sub> (the secular universal narrative of capital) and History<sub>2</sub> (the spiritual or the diverse ways of being human). These two histories coexist and intersect. H<sub>2</sub> here serves a similar structural function as the heterogeneous or the singular in the deconstructive criticism, as that which is already *given* as well as that which supplements H<sub>1</sub> and prevents history from being totalized by a linear universal narrative:

Futures that already *are* there, the futurity that humans cannot avoid aligning themselves with, are what I have called History 2. These futures are plural and do not illustrate any idea of the whole or one. They are what makes it impossible to sum up a present through any totalizing principle. They make the ‘now’ constantly fragmentary, but the fragments are not additive; they do not suggest a totality or a whole. The constant and open-ended modification of the future that ‘will be’ by the futures that ‘are’ parallels the ongoing modification of History 1 by History 2s. (251)

See Žižek’s *Living in the End Times*, 280-286 for a critique of Chakrabarty’s distinction of H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>. For a critical evaluation of Subaltern Studies and a defense of the radical Enlightenment project, see Vivek Cibber 2013.

<sup>104</sup> For many subaltern studies historians, modernity opens up a space of freedom (i.e. autonomy and liberation from traditional constraints), but its realization also entails new dangers. Thus, the phenomenon of political modernity is both indispensable and insufficient (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* 5-6, 72, 86-88, 239, 244). It is those knowledges and institutions bestowed by political modernity that make the modern emancipatory discourse possible. However, political modernity and its secular narrative of emancipation relies on a historicist assumption that seeks to “erase the question of heterotemporality from the history of the modern subject” (239). To provincialize Europe, in one of its senses, means to de-monopolize the secular narrative of progress and take cognizance of the heterogeneity of the past, the spiritual and the singular.

reform] was not disputed, there was a strong resistance to allowing the colonial state to intervene in matters affecting ‘national culture’” (6).<sup>105</sup> In this account, national culture as the domain of the spiritual is where anticolonial resistance is to be found.

This brings us closer to the second dilemma I want to emphasize. Rather than concerning ourselves with Chatterjee’s attempt to locate the nationalist resistance in the cultural domain as distinct from its secular political articulation, I would take this opportunity to call attention to the two domains he identifies – the institutional and the cultural – and try to think the question of decolonization in relation to these two domains. What is curiously missing here is that between the institutional and the cultural, nationalism does not feature as an insurrectional and combative movement toward the construction of collective subjectivity of a nation, a phase prior to nationalism’s statist reification and dependent on the vitality of cultural resources for its nutrient;<sup>106</sup> it is also a phase central to Fanon’s theory of decolonization and to Badiou’s account of the militant subject’s production of a truth. Therefore, in addition to the statist construction and the culturalist expression of nationalism, I would like to add a third category, the category of the subject, to designate a third possibility of nationalism which refers to the subjective capacity for anticolonial militancy and functions somehow like a vanishing mediator between state and culture. If the moment of nationalism’s anticolonial militancy is the moment of the evental

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<sup>105</sup> Fanon, in contrast, refuses to see culture *in itself* as the site of resistance: “the existence of a nation is not proved by culture, but in the people’s struggle against the forces of occupation. No colonialism draws its justification from the fact that the territories it occupies are culturally non-existent. Colonialism will never be put to shame by exhibiting unknown cultural treasure under its nose....The culture with which the intellectual is preoccupied is very often nothing but an inventory of particularisms” (*WE* 159-160).

<sup>106</sup> Arjun Appadurai describes how the state and the nation are locked into each other’s deadly embrace: “The relationship between states and nations is everywhere an embattled one....in many societies the nation and the state have become one another’s projects. That is, while nations...seek to capture or co-opt states and state power, states simultaneously seek to capture and monopolize ideas about nationhood....state and nation are at each other’s throats, and the hyphen that links them is now less an icon of conjuncture than an index of disjuncture” (39).

rupture or the moment that reveals the inconsistency of colonial authority, the second dilemma then concerns whether it is possible to sustain in an affirmative and consistent way the eventual opening of equality in the name of which anticolonial resistance wages war against the colonial state. In other words, it concerns how to give consistency to inconsistency without being pulled toward the direction of statism or culturalism: in the first case, anticolonial nationalist struggle would evaporate into a transitional stage toward nationalism's eventual statification; in the second, it becomes a tool susceptible to ethnocentric appropriation that uses nationalism to elevate the particular into the position of the dominant.<sup>107</sup> Although statism and culturalism constitute Scylla and Charybdis of nationalism, they are nonetheless two indispensable moments for us to think the consistency of inconsistency. That is to say, no consistency is conceivable without a reference to the state. That is why politics cannot be without the state although this by no means precludes the possibility of conceptualizing *a politics at a distance from the state*. Similarly, any cultural system necessarily inscribes particularistic values or prescribes particular ways of life in its composition as markers of difference vis-à-vis other cultural systems. Yet in contradistinction to the primacy of difference in the discourse of culture, politics is fundamentally the right to equality, that is, the right to sameness. This, however, does not mean that culture and politics are irreconcilable or destined to contradict each other.<sup>108</sup> For all its

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<sup>107</sup> For a brief and accessible account of the hegemonic suturing of one dominant particular over the field of linguistic and cultural practices in China and overseas Chinese-speaking communities, see Shih 2011; for a more comprehensive account of the same theoretical issue, see Shih 2007, Chow 2000.

<sup>108</sup> For a Badiouian example, see *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. In Badiou's view, a political truth is irreducible to cultural differences, but they are not defined by a relation of negation either. In *Saint Paul*, Badiou explains how apostle Paul exemplifies a militant subject of truth by remaining *indifferent* to the existing differences prescribed by the state: "A truth is of itself indifferent to the state of the situation....This means that it is subtracted from the organization of subsets prescribed by that state" (15). This attitude of indifference is not a sign of contempt; it is, in fact, the ultimate respect one can show to cultural differences because it is by remaining indifferent to differences that one can hope to create new differences: "This is the reason why Paul...not only refuses to stigmatize differences and customs, but also undertakes to accommodate them so that the process of their subjective

aspiration to egalitarian sameness, politics always starts out in a specific context, at a specific site, and therefore always a localized procedure despite its inherent universalism. Culture therefore is an indispensable site by virtue of which a universal politics of equality unfolds itself. Although skeptics would point to the danger of the dominant particular being taken for the universal, this caution, too, does not preclude the possibility of a different conception of the universal which not only coexists with the particular but enables the particular to thrive as such.<sup>109</sup>

To summarize, the second dilemma bifurcates into two lines of inquiry:

1. From the particularity of cultural identity to the universality of equality: here the problem concerns the scope and the depth of decolonization. Should decolonization be considered merely as the liberation of a people of a nation under colonial oppression? Or should decolonization be thought of as a realization of the collective emancipation of humanity where each historical enactment of emancipation represents a concrete fragment of this collective endeavor? Both Fanon and Badiou reply that the struggle against injustice does not set its sights merely on the struggle for the liberation of one particular group; what matters in decolonization is not the independence of a particular nation since the struggle “belongs in the general process of man’s liberation” (Fanon, *TAR* 145) and what connects these individual instances of struggle into a coherent articulation of an emancipated humanity is the fact that

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disqualification might pass through them, within them. It is in fact the search for new differences, new particularities to which the universal might be exposed, that leads Paul beyond the eventual site properly speaking (the Jewish site) and encourages him to displace the experience historically, geographically, ontologically” (99).

<sup>109</sup> Fanon, for example, writes: “To fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow. One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people’s struggle for liberation” (Fanon, *WE* 168). Another line of inquiry can be developed in relation to Hegel’s formulation of transindividualism “*Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist*” [“‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’”] (*Phenomenology of Spirit* ¶177).

their right to politics is violated: “The colonized have this in common, that their right to constitute a people is challenged” (145). Or, in Badiou’s words, truth is universal and eternal not because it is an abstract ideal applicable to all situations in all times: “truths are eternal because they have been created [in a particular historical site] and not because they have been there forever” (*LoW* 512). Moreover, “its process of creation is of such a nature that it can be understood and used in individual and symbolic contexts that are as vastly distant as they are different, in space, as in time” (*Second Manifesto* 21). Truth’s universality then consists in the “inviolable availability” (129) of a politics of equality to be enacted by the revolutionary subject according to the specific resources available at a given historical conjuncture. As Badiou points out, “[t]hat the event is new should never let us forget that it is such only with respect to a determinate situation, wherein it mobilizes the elements of its site” (*St. Paul* 25). Through this dialectic of the universal and the particular, the subjective and the objective, each subjective enactment of universal emancipatory politics then becomes a local instance of truth that anticipates the completion of an emancipated humanity. Ultimately, it is the question of whether it is possible to conceive something like a universal singularity where a group of the oppressed localized in a particular historical situation comes to be identified as the stand-in for the whole of humanity.<sup>110</sup> Fanon also answers in the affirmative: “The process of liberation of man, independently of the concrete situations in which he finds himself, includes and concerns the whole of humanity” (*TAR* 144). And yet this universal solidarity in no way erases the

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<sup>110</sup> This type of being-in-common is often distinguished from the idea of community. Using women’s struggle for example, Balibar argues that women’s struggle creates “a *solidarity*...without creating a *community*”: “Inasmuch as women struggling for parity transform resistance into politics, they are not trying to win particular rights for a ‘community,’ which would be the ‘community of women.’ From the emancipatory standpoint, *gender is not a community*....Women’s struggle for parity, therefore...creates a *solidarity* (or achieves citizenship) without creating a *community*” (*POS* 168). Cf. Laclau 2005, Ch. 4 and 5.

specificity of each individual struggle. Fanon recognizes that the solidarity between the blacks in Africa and those in the United States does exist but their existential conditions and objective problems are fundamentally different (*WE* 153-154).<sup>111</sup> This concept of the universal singularity thus expresses a concrete register of universality and must be set apart from the concept of abstract universality or that of communitarian/particularistic identity. Finally, this vision of universal equality operates under an axiomatic assumption of presentative equality in which the only recognizable relation is that of belonging. Therefore, what matters in presentative equality is the fact that each element is counted as one, not *how* they are counted. But in an actual historical situation inevitably structured in representational terms (i.e. ordered through division and classification), presentative equality can assert itself only negatively by way of excluding exclusions.<sup>112</sup>

2. From inconsistency (pure presentation as declared in the principle of equality) to consistency (representation as the function of the State which is essentially inegalitarian): the key issue in this line of inquiry has to do with the reversibility of nationalism as a weapon for liberation and counter-revolutionary nationalism as an instrument of oppression. Critics often cite a prevalent phenomenon that after the anticolonial revolution, people in Third World countries were still mired in systematic oppression and waiting in vain for the redistribution of justice because the national bourgeoisie who took over the nation were never intent on liberating the people as they only wanted to take the place of the former colonizers and became the ruling class. On this view, nationalism that used to serve as the rallying cry for anticolonial

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<sup>111</sup> The same dialectic of solidarity's internationalism and the specificity of each oppressed group's existential problems also informs Fanon's comparison of anti-Semitism with racism against the black. See *BSWM* 69, 95, 140-143.

<sup>112</sup> For the Lacanian approach to the question of equality and human rights, see Renata Salecl 1994, 133; Reinhard 2005, 51-61.

liberation underwent statification and was reduced to an ideological tool appropriated by a class of power-hungry native elites. Conceived as such, nationalism inevitably enters a vicious cycle of reproducing that which it seeks to revoke, a phenomenon that has proved disconcerting to many postcolonial critics. The problem is that unless we agree to a view of politics as incessant enactments of rupture (which, as explained in the first chapter, we do not), we necessarily have to confront the question of consistency and include the role of the state in our consideration of politics. Given that the state is, by definition, inegalitarian, the question becomes how to prescribe a politics away from the state's prescription of differences, or, how to deal with the question of the sustainability of presentative equality in the domain of representation. The question is therefore not just equality at the level of pure presentation but how equality *appear* at the level of representation. The differences between these two is that whereas presentation asserts the generic property of belonging, representation confronts an addition question: not only that each element is counted equally as one insofar as it belongs to a situation, but also how this presentative equality can *appear* in a situation which is inevitably structured by a representational regime, that is, in a situation that recognizes not just the fact that one belongs to a situation but also *how* one belongs to a situation. For example, if the maxim of presentative equality states that "everyone who is here is from here" or "whoever lives here belongs here," the question is how this maxim is to be prescribed in a society that recognizes a person not so much by virtue of his/her belonging here as *how* he/she is represented in a situation (whether he/she has proper citizenship, legal immigration status, or the right to work, etc.). This is the question formulated by Fanon in terms of the transformation of anticolonial nationalism into an elaboration of social and political consciousness, or a question Badiou elaborates with his idea of "the prescription at the distance from the state."



The first dilemma about the derivativeness of the nationalist discourse has received consideration in Chapter 1, especially the section on the possibility of the effect overtaking the form. This chapter will focus on the second dilemma and the two lines of inquiries it generates. I draw on Fanon's theory of decolonization and Badiou's concept of politics as a truth procedure to reflect on issues mentioned above.

## **II. Badiou and Fanon: Intersecting Thoughts**

The idea of establishing a theoretical as well as political alliance between Badiou and Fanon does not make immediate sense. This is largely due to a misconception of Badiou belonging to a lineage of obtuse French philosophers affirming anti-humanism, which is at odd with Fanon's humanist commitment. In Badiou's case, his anti-humanist proclivity is even worse as he, in an attempt to reaffirm Galileo's claim that the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics, tries to capture being with the language of set theory. Nothing can be further from the truth in this popular representation of Badiou. Not only does Badiou emphasize that set theory is not being per se but merely a *discourse* on being-qua-being (*B&E* 7), he is also arguably the only major French philosopher today still avowing his fidelity to Sartrean humanism. This fidelity to Sartre is something rare and courageous in an age when the Sartrean categories (e.g. subject, freedom, commitment, etc.) are increasingly falling out of favor, if they are not already dead. These categories are often the target of academic derision and dismissed on account of its crude subjectivism, a somewhat pre-critical attitude unfitting for the postmodern or postcolonial condition.

Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have pointed out in their introduction to *The Creolization of Theory* that the radicality of Derridean *différance* has its own historicity and

needs to be understood in its historical context of emergence. They argue that the intellectual genealogy of what has come to be known as French Theory (with its theoretical obsession with difference, otherness and alterity) is indebted to Third World liberation movements that took place a decade earlier. However, with the migration of French Theory to U.S. universities, the link between *différance* and emancipatory struggles motivated by concrete differences is often disregarded, if not outright suppressed (14-19). In this regard, it is important to bust the myth of Badiou as an anti-humanist whose formalism is detached from actual historical struggles and situate him squarely within the context of Third World liberation movements in the mid-20th century. In her thoughtful consideration of Badiou's relation to the humanism/anti-humanism debate, Nina Power asserts that when it comes to politics (one of Badiou's four truth procedures) Badiou belongs to the tradition of "political humanism" (187).<sup>113</sup> But there is a twist to it: just as Fanon's humanism is not a mirroring of Sartre's, the humanism/anti-humanism debate in Badiou's work cannot boil down to an either/or choice between Sartre and Althusser. A glimpse

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<sup>113</sup> Another way to approach the humanism/anti-humanism debate in Badiou is to explore the specific meanings and values attached to each term. Badiou makes constant references to the dimension of the inhuman/antihuman, which, however, should not be taken as a contrary to his commitment to political humanism. The human that is contrasted with the inhuman is the human defined in line with democratic materialism. In Badiou's view, democratic materialism, whose motto is "there are only bodies and languages," reduces the human to a finite existence confined to corporeal and symbolic systems (*LoW* 1-9, passim). Against this democratic materialist background, the inhuman comes to stand for *the human beyond finitude*; it refers to the subject's capacity for truth and commands the human to exceed the constraints of bodies and languages. Ultimately, far from the opposite of the human, the inhuman signals the becoming-true of humanity: "a truth is that by which 'we,' of the human species, are committed to a trans-specific procedure, a procedure which opens us to the possibility of being Immortals. A truth is thus undoubtedly an experience of the inhuman...[and] it is impossible to possess a concept of what is 'human' without dealing with the (eternal, ideal) inhumanity which authorizes man to incorporate himself into the present under the sign of the trace of what changes." (71, 511). Or elsewhere Badiou speaks of antihumanism as a political category designating the right to sameness: "Philosophically named, an emancipatory politics comes within an antihumanism of the same. And it is from this anti-humanism, through which the same is only supported only by the void of all difference in which to ground Man, that humanity issues. Humanity, prior to the real forms of egalitarian politics, simply does not exist, either as collective, or as truth, or as thought" (*Conditions* 175).

For Badiou's explanation of his recourse to religious references (e.g. immortality, truth, glorious body, conversion, etc.), see *Second Manifesto* 141n1.

into Badiou's intellectual trajectory reveals his peculiar blend of humanism and anti-humanism. On this score, Badiou himself is perhaps his own best commentator when he half-jokingly speaks of the privilege of being the senior member of his generation:

So what did this [being older than the rest of his generation] mean? It meant that, in a way, they had not had the time to be Sartreans. They had not really been Sartreans, and they also had not known any political situation in which they would have had to think in the categories proper to Sartre. As for me, I had known a very powerful political situation, the Algerian war, and I believe that it makes a big difference to have known this situation, in which progressive positions could be taken up from within the philosophical categories that were Sartre's own. These were the categories of commitment, of anticolonialism, and the kind of Sartrean thesis that held that colonialism is a system,<sup>114</sup> which can be thought in his texts of that period. ("Can Change Be Thought" 242)

A biographical anecdote notwithstanding, this piece of information allows us to differentiate Badiou from other French philosophers; it also establishes a link between Badiou and Fanon because they both, while not exactly the followers of Sartre, work with Sartrean categories and are thinkers who think their time. And this results in a different way of doing theory. Again, Badiou summarizes his method best:

I found in Sartre's theory of practical freedom...something with which to engage myself politically, in spite of everything in the situation. This does not keep me from taking my distance from Sartre, nor from participating in that generation of

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<sup>114</sup> On the systematic nature of colonialism, Sartre writes: "you begin by occupying the country, then you take the land and exploit the former owners at starvation rates. Then, with mechanization, this cheap labour is still too expensive. You finish up taking from the natives their very right to work. All that is left...is to die of starvation" (*Colonialism and Neocolonialism* 45-46).

mine which indeed started to take a major interest in the question of the structure. But in the end, I entered in this debate from the point of view of Sartre, whereas for most others in my generation this question of the structure has been their immediate philosophical education, so that they really entered the debate *against* Sartre and not *from* Sartre. (242)

On the rarified shore of theory dominated, as it was in the 1960s, by the question of the structure and textuality, Badiou's seniority allows him to think *from* Sartre rather than *against* Sartre. We find in Badiou a way of doing theory that acknowledges the important conceptual advances made by structuralist and poststructuralist debates, but this acknowledgement is not made at the expense of those Sartrean categories informed by anticolonial struggles in the 1950s but widely regarded as outmoded and theoretically inadequate by the time the event of '68 was on its last legs.<sup>115</sup>

Situating Badiou in the Sartrean context clears the ground for a productive Badiouian reading of the Fanonian politics of decolonization as well as for a Fanonian rendition of the Badiouian politics as a truth procedure; it also helps clarify different grounds covered by ethics and politics in their respective treatment of the relation of non-relation. Whereas for the ontology of the common the exposition of the relation of non-relation constitutes a mode of intervention and delivers ethics to the domain of politics, Badiou is reluctant to facilitate such a changing of places between ethical intervention and political intervention:

Because if you intervene with respect to a paradoxical situation, or if you intervene with regard to a relation that is not a relation, you will have to propose a new framework of thought, and you will have to affirm that it is possible to think

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<sup>115</sup> See Peter Starr 1995, 1-11.

this paradoxical situation, on condition, of course, that a certain number of parameters be abandoned, and a certain number of novelties introduced. And when all is said and done, the only proof for this is that you will propose a new way of thinking the paradox. (*Philosophy in the Present* 81)

To propose a new way of thinking the relation of non-relation means taking a step further than pointing out the essential incommensurability and having the courage to prescribe a new framework of thinking the relation of nonrelation. Considered thus, we can draw a preliminary conclusion concerning the relation between theory and practice: unlike many who are inclined to absorb practice into theory, Badiou posits a relation of dialectical mediation between theory and practice, for if critical thought entails a thinking of a relation without relation, the philosophical categories inherited from Sartre allow Badiou to prescribe what a relation without relation would pertain in the actuality of politics.

In our discussion of anticolonial nationalism, this is the moment when we are obliged to confront the question that if the effectiveness of anticolonial nationalism requires the political mobilization of those Sartrean categories, how should we deal with the impasse of the nationalist movement? Should we, as has often been practiced nowadays, adopt a detached theoretical attitude toward nationalism's underlying metaphysical dualism and conclude that its practice of resistance is the product of a bygone era and no longer valid for our present world which is infinitely more complex and therefore demands the surpassing of the old antagonistic practice?<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The idea that the world today is infinitely more complex than the past has for many people become an irrefutable truth (e.g. Chen Kuang-hsing's *Asia as Method*). Most of the time, however, this is assumed rather than ascertained, except with some vague references to the deterritorializing effects of globalization (e.g. the large-scale exchange of goods and people at an increasing speed creates a condition of postmodernity that imposes its own logic of fragmentation, hybridity, etc. in contradistinction to the unity of the subject in political modernity). Not only is this assumption underhandedly affirm, despite its overt disapproval, an evolutionary outlook, the feverish drive to invent new terms, to become ever more sophisticated often end up proving its "newness" by negating the universal, the anachronistic, or the

Or should we recognize that theory and practice are so locked up in a dialectical embrace that giving priority to either is to lose sight of the constitutive dependency of each on the other? If the first approach gives primacy to theoretical thinking, the second approach posits a mutually generative relationship wherein theory accommodates constant changes and modifications via practice and practice is given focus and orientation to keep it from institutionalization into solidified state apparatuses or degeneration into random acts of violence, the venting of frustration, and other interest- or emotion-driven activities. This second option, in my view, defines both Fanon's and Badiou's political thought.

Both Fanon and Badiou allow me to formulate a non-metaphysical conception of the subject, which is made possible by two key aspects in their thinking. First, both affirm the prescriptive function of politics and insist that decolonization (or genuine change) is not a matter of theoretical reflection but of practical *production*.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, a prescriptive politics is structured in binary terms, albeit its binarism passes through the figure of a subjective Two rather than that of an objective Two. An account of the subjective binarism gives rise to a conception of anticolonial resistance which cannot be reduced to a mere defensive violence to colonialism's offensive violence. Rather, this new conception of anticolonial struggle is initially determined by the objective condition (i.e. the colonial situation) as its reaction but is able, through an operation of what Badiou calls *torsion*, to redetermine the initial determination, thereby changing the

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untimely. For a rebuttal of the thesis that today's world is more complex, see Žižek's *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, 6; the Ch. 1 of Badiou's *RoH* (against Toni Negri). More generally, Badiou has recently claimed that "[t]here have been few, very few, crucial changes in the nature of the problems of thought since Plato" (*LoW* 510).

<sup>117</sup> That's why we should be wary of making *BSWM* the definitive statement of Fanon's thinking about decolonization in which Fanon still wishes to destroy the damaging psychoexistential complex the blacks suffer by way of critical reflection: "the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. *I hope by analyzing it to destroy it*" (emphasis added, 12). This optimism of the intellect disappears in his subsequent revolutionary writings and is replaced by the optimism of the will.

representational regime governing the colonial world as a whole. The subject, in this view, is not a autonomous agent initiating a chain of actions free from objective determination; the subject designates rather an operation of *forcing* that emerges from a specific historical situation and yet is able to outgrow the givenness of historicity,<sup>118</sup> and brings about a change in the structure of the situation. The subject, to borrow an effective formulation from Sartre, is that which “succeeds in making what he has been made” (*Basic Writings* 308). This new conception of the subject is non-metaphysical in that it is neither self-enclosed nor self-sufficient: for, on the one hand, the subject emerges from a specific situation shaped by historical forces; on the other, the subject changes itself in the very process of changing the world. This dialectic of givenness and freedom in anticolonial nationalist struggles is made out by Fanon as follows: “When the nation in its totality is set in motion, the new man is not an *posteriori* creation of this nation, but coexists with it, matures with it, and triumphs with it” (*WE* 233). The structure of torsion in Fanon’s theory of decolonization is also noted by Parry when she argues that Fanon’s decolonization “projects a development inseparable from a community’s engagement in combative social action, during which a native contest initially enunciated in the invader’s language culminates in a rejection of colonialism’s signifying system” (28).<sup>119</sup>

This conception of the subject also differs from a certain poststructuralist/psychoanalytic conception that either posits a subjectless politics or equates the subject with the void or

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<sup>118</sup> I use the term “historicity” in the sense of the complex set of cultural, economic and sociological circumstances whose interaction forms the historical background of one’s existence. This term is distinguished from “historicism” which, in one of its predominant usages today, designates a linear, teleological temporal consciousness. See Chakrabarty’s note on the term “historicism” in *Provincializing Europe*, 22-23.

<sup>119</sup> Marx’s famous pronouncement comes immediately to mind and remains all the more relevant than ever: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 595).

negativity. Its difference, however, should be understood as a going beyond rather than a negation. As Badiou writes, “what is demanded of us is an additional step in the modern [conception of subjectivity], and not veering towards the limit” (FOS 93). The problem with thinking emancipation in ontological terms is that emancipation can only be conceived in the register of a *permanent* revolution. Thus, for Nancy, the spirit of democracy is captured in Pascal’s motto that “man infinitely transcends man”; politics, accordingly, can only be thought as iterations of the instances of self-transcending, and political fidelity would be registered in the opening itself rather than in the consequences authorized by the opening.

Two things should be noted here: first, the idea of a permanent revolution risks reducing revolution to a metaphor devoid of practical effectiveness; second, the predicate “permanent” signifies a state of ongoingness but is taken in a repetitive rather than procedural sense. Perry Anderson has argued against the idea of the permanent revolution, which, in his view, is fundamentally oxymoronic. As he points out, “[r]evolution [in its political sense] is a term with a precise meaning: the political overthrow from below of one state order, and its replacement by another” (112). “Against these slack devaluations of the term with all their political consequences,” Anderson continues, “it is necessary to insist that revolution is a *punctual* and not a permanent process. That is: a revolution is an episode of convulsive political transformation compressed in time and concentrated in target, that has a determinate beginning – when the old state apparatus is still intact – and a finite end, when that apparatus is decisively broken and a new one erected in its stead” (“Modernity and Revolution” 112). Anderson is certainly right to drive home the point that a political revolution is punctual and has a *before* and an *after*, although I have my doubt whether this after can ever be a “finite end.” Still, what I want to suggest here is that Anderson’s insistence on the divisive character of the revolution is also an



attempt to revive the figure of the Two (e.g. struggle, division, antagonism, etc.) which today has become a lost art of politics, recalled only to be reminded of its anachronism and of the blood spilled in its name.

Although this figure of the Two is worth saving for its political values, it has to be reconceptualized. Insofar as the Two is conceived within the terms of the governing law of a situation, the force of division of this Two can only be reactionary. For example, in classical Marxism, the struggle is posited between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; this division, however, is an objective one because the dualism is informed by Marxism as a science of capital. According to this scientific discourse, the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is reflective of the real (or objective) contradiction of capitalism's economic exploitation. For Badiou, this objective contradiction defines no real politics because the proletariat is inscribed within the capitalist configuration as the *other* term of the contradiction and its otherness is *objectively placed* by the situation rather than *subjectively produced* to intervene in the situation. In this schema, the political capacity of the proletariat is fundamentally limited as it can articulate itself merely as *a placed response* to the bourgeois determination of the world. Badiou distinguishes the objective Two from the subjective Two; the elementary difference between these two forms of dualism lies in the fact that while the objective Two is a status or a placement, the subjective Two is a production: "the real Two is an [evental] *production*, a political production, and not an objective or 'scientific' presupposition....If the Two is foreign to any objective foundation of the political...it is because these procedures aim at *indiscerning* existential or popular subsets, and not at hurling them 'against' what dominates their situation" (*Manifesto* 90-91, 95). Consequently, "[t]he proletariat, subjectively constituted, is not the accomplishment of the internal concept of the bourgeoisie" (*ToS* 18).

In order to think the subjective Two, Marxism can no longer be chained to a metaphysical design and pretends to be the science of capital; its teleological philosophy of history has to be abolished as well. Nevertheless, there is still something in Marxism worth preserving. For instance, Marxism's revolutionary eschatology is to stay in spite of – or rather because of – its being stripped of its scientific character and predictable outcome. Quentin Meillassoux explains the importance of keeping alive of the eschatological hope for revolutionary politics:

A large portion of ex-Marxists have renounced eschatology because they consider it a religious residue, and among the principle sources of the promethean disaster of real socialism. Badiou's uniqueness seems on the contrary to consist in the fact that he isolates from Marxism its eschatological part, separates it from its pretensions – which he judges to be illusory, based on economic science – and delivers it, ardently, to subjects distributed among all kinds of struggles, political as well as amorous. For Badiou, instead of critique dissolving the religious illusion of eschatology, the new-irreligious eschatology of the event deploys its critical power on the lifeless present of our everyday renunciations. (10)

An eschatology without religious residues, without telos and without a developmental scheme nonetheless retains its political valence for it allows Badiou to conceptualize a revolutionary temporality, one that injects a dose of optimism in the form of anticipatory certitude into “the lifeless present” of the status quo.<sup>120</sup> In Badiou's view, Marxism can only be understood in one sense, as an organized body of knowledge affirming the communist hypothesis which is “identified with rational political struggle for an egalitarian organization of society” (*RoH* 8).

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<sup>120</sup> Revolutionary optimism or the idea of anticipatory certitude in Badiou is developed from Lacan's essay “Logical Time”; see Badiou's discussion in *ToS*, 243-258. See also Lacan's “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty” in *Ecrits*, 161-175. For an account of Badiou's politicization of Lacan's logical time, see Hoens and Pluth 2004.

This Marxist eschatology, or revolutionary optimism, is crucial to the subjective production of the Two, in the absence of which Marx would not have the confidence to claim that man is capable of making history by outgrowing the givenness of objectivity. From the point of view of the subjective production, the proletariat as a category undergoes drastic change in its signification. If the proletariat objectively designates a socio-economic class, *it subjectively refers not to a class but to a procedure that gathers together indiscernible figures not counted by the situation, thereby forming an indiscernible generic subset in the situation of 19th-century Europe*. Thus, the proletariat in Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844* is not a societal category; it designates "generic humanity, since it does not itself possess any of the properties by which the bourgeoisie defines...Man" (IC 9n10):

Marx calls humanity in the movement of its own emancipation "generic humanity"...the name "proletariat" is the name of the possibility of generic humanity in an affirmative form. For Marx, "generic" names the becoming of the universality of human beings, and the proletarian historical function is to deliver the generic form of the human being. So Marx's political truth is on the side of genericity, and never on the side of particularity. ("Non-Expressive Dialectics" 18).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For other articulations of the proletariat as a subjective category, see Badiou 2006, 105-108, 334; Žižek 2007, 110; Balibar 2002, 173; Rancière 2007, 33-34. Above are just a few of numerous references to the proletariat as the paradoxical class in the philosophical discourse of emancipation. Chen Kuan-hsing, on the other hand, exemplifies a culturalist approach. His understanding of the working class in the Marxian discourse is at once justified and myopic. According to Chen, the working class "was the founding moment of modern identity politics, in the critical and oppositional senses of the term" (*Asia as Method* 69; 69-72 passim). For Chen, the critical enunciative position outside capitalism embodied in the working class remains the most important legacy Marxism bestows upon the subsequent attempts to engage the question of decolonization. Chen's decision to call the working class an identity politics is motivated by a desire to situate Marxism in its historicity, and the purpose is to keep the baby of the oppositional spirit while throwing out the dirty water of universalism (e.g. the universal subject and the teleological view of history). His intention is justified insofar as the abstract universalism is concerned. His solution, however, remains deeply myopic. Chen's solution betrays a typical culturalist allergy to *any*

Since the proletariat is no longer a particular class but a generic subset, the meaning of resistance changes as well. If the subjective Two conceived on the basis of genericity “aim[s] at *indiscerning* existential or popular subsets, and not at hurling them ‘against’ what dominates their situation,” resistance, then, cannot be thought in terms of action/reaction, which ultimately confirms the primacy of the first term (e.g. the bourgeoisie or the colonizers) it revolts against. “The true contrary of the proletariat,” Badiou explains, “is not the bourgeoisie”:

It is the bourgeois world, imperialist society, of which the proletariat...is a notorious element, as the principal productive force and as the antagonistic political pole. The famous contradiction of bourgeoisie/proletariat is a limited, structural scheme that loses track of the torsion of the Whole of which the proletariat *qua* subject traces the force. To say proletariat and bourgeoisie is to remain within the bounds of the Hegelian artifice: something and something else. Why? Because the project of the proletariat, its internal being, is not to contradict the bourgeoisie, or to cut its feet from under it. The project is communism, and nothing else. That is, the abolition of any place in which something like a proletariat can be installed. The political project of the proletariat is the disappearance of the space of the placement of classes. It is the loss, for the historical something, of every index of class. (*ToS* 7)

The importance of Badiou’s analysis of the proletariat and its revolutionary project in this passage is the idea of placement. Placement is a form of objectivity which means roughly the

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universalist conception of politics, which in fact begs more questions than it answers. For instance, in what sense does the identity of the working class constitute an enunciative position *outside* capitalism when the very existence of the working class is the product of capitalism? This is a problem I believe that Badiou and Fanon are able to answer with the idea of universal singularity and the subjective production of the Two.

subjection to external determination. When the proletariat is seen as a placed category in the role of the antagonistic other against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat is relegated to a sociological category without a subject. That is to say, the placement according to which the proletariat is pitted against the bourgeoisie has one essential presupposition: the existence of capitalist relations of production. This explains why Badiou writes that the bourgeoisie is not the true contrary to the proletariat, and the project of the proletariat revolution is not to usurp the place of the bourgeoisie but to destroy the capitalist world that makes possible the placement of these two antagonistic classes. Badiou's formulation does not presuppose the proletariat as an intrinsically revolutionary force; rather, the proletariat takes on the role of the revolutionary subject only when they are able to overcome the objective placement in compliance with the logic of the capitalist world.

We should understand Badiou's attempt to conceive "a finally objectless subject" in the same vein. What he has in mind is not an autonomous and self-determining subject totally detached from a given objective determination. The subject constitutes rather an *exception* to the laws of objective determination which, in the case of today's democratic materialism, is composed exclusively of bodies and languages.<sup>122</sup> An exception is distinct from an objection. The logic of exception necessarily comes with a prior acknowledgement that the world is indeed,

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<sup>122</sup> In Badiou's theory, the relation between the subject and the object (or democratic materialism in general) is defined not in terms of rejection but according to the logic of exception: "*There are only bodies and languages,*" Badiou writes, "*except that there are truths*" (4). Being immanent to the world, truths necessarily affirms "what there is" in the world. Therefore, the exception of truths is not the exception that transcends the *fact* of the world. Badiou agrees that there are bodies and languages, individuals and communities: "We admit therefore that 'what there is' – that which makes up the structure of the worlds – is well and truly a mixture of bodies and languages" (4). Yet, the syntax of exception suggests there is something other than "what there is," and this otherness signals an immanent gap from which truths emerge, and from which truths can be interrogated and developed by the subject. For Badiou's polemic against democratic materialism, see the "Preface" to *LoW* and Ch. 1 of *Second Manifesto*. Bosteels, while in general agreement with Badiou's critique of democratic materialism, questions whether Badiou is justified to subsume historical materialism under the rubric of democratic materialism, see *Badiou and Politics*, 213-220.

as democratic materialism would have it, made up of languages and bodies, of individuals and communities, of corporeal experiences and symbolic networks. But the subject's exception to the laws of a situation indicates that bodies and languages are "not-all" to the world, nor do they constitute the world's unsurpassable horizon, for the exceptionality of the subject is an operation that exceeds the configuration of linguistic, corporeal, and symbolic finitude posited in democratic materialism. In this sense, a finally objectless subject suggests not a status, but a subjective procedure through which the subject's autonomy is first axiomatically declared amidst the forces of objective determination and then attested to through the subject's enactment of his/her exceptional capacity to break free from the constraints of culture, language, history, economy, and identity.

Isn't exactly the same logic also operative in Fanon's theory of decolonization? Despite one popular representation of Fanon's anticolonial project as Manichaean and, as a result, unable to avoid the political ineffectiveness intrinsic to the action/reaction model of resistance, the dualism envisioned by the Fanonian politics never exhausts itself in its reaction to the colonial offensive. Fanon is aware that "there is always resentment in *reaction*" (BSWM 195) and unless the colonized dispose themselves beyond reaction and victimization, there will be no hope for genuine decolonization. However, the insufficiency of the action/reaction model is never to be simply denounced in Fanon's thinking of decolonization. What I would suggest is that it is crucial to make the distinction between the initial *insurrectional* stage and the later *political* stage, where the former is overwhelmed with negative, albeit justified, emotion of anger and resentment, the latter channeled these pre-political affects into an organized action in an effort to raise the political consciousness for collective emancipation.

But it is as crucial not to make this distinction too rigorous into something like a radical break. Contrary to another popular representation of Fanon that casts him in a role of a crypto-poststructuralist, the impasse of the action/reaction model is not to be transcended and left behind. *The impasse is rather to be insisted upon to such an extent that resistance, which is initially only reactionary, spirals back to the system that posits resistance as one of its terms, and applies the force of resistance back to the system itself (rather than to another term posited by the system) so as to change the whole fabric of social relations defined in accordance to the system's regime of representation.* The spiraling back of the force onto the system itself forms the passage of torsion Badiou mentions in the passage above. Torsion is to be distinguished from simple repetition as it sets in motion a movement “combining the notion of the circle and that of the leap” (*ToS* 123), through which “force reapplies itself to that from which it conflictually emerges” (11). The spiraling movement of torsion allows us to reconceptualize a notion of force other than the one put forth in the ontology of the common. Torsion differs from the ontological understanding of force in that the latter is concerned primarily with upsetting the fixity of determination while the former goes a step further than the interruption of determination by reapplying the force back to determination itself and redetermines the initial determination. The idea of forcing, in this regard, can be summarily phrased as the determination of determination. Insofar as the politics of decolonization is concerned, the value of Badiou's theory of torsion/forcing lies in its attentiveness to the objective forces of determination and its optimism in the subjective determination of the objective determination, hence offering itself as a new dialectical conceptualization of history between determination and freedom. As Bosteels explains,

In the end the difficulty with the notion of forcing consists in thinking at the same time the event in the situation, without falling into pure immanence [i.e. determination], and the event outside the situation, without invoking an absolute transcendence [i.e. freedom]. This comes down to following a kind of spiral trajectory through the oppositions of inside and outside, of immanence and transcendence, of constructivism and mysticism – all the while avoiding the radical answer, which today has become somewhat of a commonplace and which consists in reducing this relation of internal exclusion to a purely structural given. (*Badiou and Politics* 192)

With the help of Badiou's notion of torsion, we can make sense of Fanon's claim that "[d]uring the insurrectional stage every colonist reasons on the basis of simple arithmetic" (*WE* 43) and that the psychology of colonization dictates that "[i]n an initial phase, it is the action, the plans of the occupier that determine the centers of resistance around which a people's will to survive becomes organized" (*DC* 47). But this only gives an account of the objective determination of the site from which anticolonial struggles develop and it is never an account of what a politics of emancipation would eventually lead to.<sup>123</sup>

Convinced that the colonial world is divided into two, or that between the colonizer and the colonized there is no room for rational discussion,<sup>124</sup> Fanon nonetheless points out that this

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<sup>123</sup> Badiou describes the immediate riot in the same manner; an immediate riot is violent and spontaneous, it suffers from lack of concept and orientation, and it reacts against the provocation of power (*RoH* 21-22). But this is only the initial phase of the revolt which could possibly develop into a more encompassing historical riot and eventually organized into a sustainable politics.

<sup>124</sup> "Challenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints. It is not a discourse on the universal, but the impassioned claim by the colonized that their world is fundamentally different" (Fanon, *WE* 6); "Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses" (Césaire, *Discourse* 42).



division is not objectively determined according to race, ethnicity, the colonial context of power, not even the international context of cold war geopolitics. This point is emphatically stressed by Fanon when he reconsiders the dynamic and ever-changing composition of the colonizer and the colonized. If in the initial phase, “there are two camps: white and black” (*BSWM* xii) and “there are neither good nor bad colonists: there are colonists” (Sartre, “Introduction” xxv), this initial objective and unequivocal determination of the Two collapses as the revolutionary process gets under way, during which “[t]he outlines and paradoxes of the world stood out in sudden sharpness” (Fanon, *DC* 158). Fanon realizes that the colonizers are not composed entirely of white Europeans, nor are the colonized exclusively black Africans: “The people who in the early days of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manichaeism of the colonizer...realize en route that some blacks can be whiter than the whites” (*WE* 93). Likewise, the European minority in Algeria are not “an undifferentiated whole” belonging to the side of the colonizers. Fanon calls this initial binarism “an extreme oversimplification” (*DC* 158) and yet he is not ready to jettison the insurrectional force promised by political antagonism because it is in this insurrectional force where revolutionary optimism is to be found.<sup>125</sup> Thus, Fanon proceeds to underscore the subjective production of the Two.

In Fanon’s view, the category of the Algerian is a subjective category, referring not to ethnicity or nationality, nor to the colonized natives as represented in the colonial imagination. The Algerian indexes rather to the *being* of the situation because they are the wretched of the earth *indiscernible* according to the encyclopaedic determination of the colonial situation. These

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<sup>125</sup> Rancière describes the division in class struggle as “the humanizing power of division” (*On the Shores of Politics* 33). “The humanizing power of division” is also a fitting description for the function of the subjective production of the Two in Fanon. For if the Manichaean division is that which dehumanizes the colonized, the colonized can only hope to humanize themselves by passing through the same dualistic division. The colonized, as the motto offered in Wagner’s *Parcifal*, can only be healed by the spear that smote them.

people form a generic subset subtracted from colonial knowledge because these people, despite their presence, are not represented in the colonial situation. As a function of representation, knowledge consists of two operations: discernment and classification (Badiou, *B&E* 328-329).<sup>126</sup> Knowledge discerns and classifies according to this or that specific property, but the wretched of the earth have no discernible properties in common except for the bare fact that they *are* or that they *belong* to the situation.<sup>127</sup>

Since this part has no particular expressible property, its entire being resides in this: it is a part, which is to say it is composed of multiples effectively presented in the situation. An indiscernible *inclusion*...has no other ‘property’ than that of referring to *belonging*. This part is anonymously that which has no other mark apart from arising from presentation, apart from being composed of terms which have nothing in common that could be remarked, save belonging to *this* situation; which, strictly speaking, is its being, qua being. But as for this ‘property’ – *being*; quite simply – it is clear that it is shared by *all* the terms of the situation, and that it is coexistent with every part which groups together terms. Consequently, the indiscernible part, by definition, solely possesses the ‘properties’ of any part whatsoever. It is rightfully declared *generic*, because, if one wishes to qualify it,

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<sup>126</sup> For an account of the coloniality of power and the geopolitics of knowledge, see Mignolo 2000 and 2002.

<sup>127</sup> In Badiou’s view, ontology is not being-qua-being but the discourse of being and it is always a situation. Given that we are thinking being in ontological terms (i.e. in a situation), to exist means to belong to a situation. In this regard, being and belonging are the same from an ontological point of view: “in a situation ‘being’ and ‘being-counted-as-one-in-the-situation’ are one and the same thing” (*B&E* 339).

all one can say is that its elements *are*. The part thus belongs to the supreme genre, the genre of the being of the situation as such. (*B&E* 339)<sup>128</sup>

Fanon would concur that the wretched Algerians touch on the being of the situation by virtue of their sheer belonging to the situation. Aside from their *being there* in the colonial situation, there is really nothing we can say about their political existence at the level of representation. Because the degree of their political visibility is almost nil, their complaints and protests are dismissed as mere noises. In the eyes of the colonial regime, these wretched of the earth constitute a group of people on the edge of the void. They are, properly speaking, the inexistents in the world of colonialism. But they are at the same time the truth of the situation because they reveal the pure generic nature of being as such. That is to say, they touch on the being of the situation and constitute a generic subset because the only “property” shared by the colonized people is *being* as such, which is at the same time shared by all the members of the colonial situation. That’s why they can be referred to as *the being of the colonial situation*.

This, however, tells only half the story because although the generic subset affords a glimpse into the being of the situation, it has yet to attain the status of a politics and it can only become so when *the being of truth* is put to political deployment and appears as *the truth of being*.

Fanon claims that these wretched of the earth is not of the order of representation; they are rather themselves the site in which truth immanently deploys itself: “They do not say they represent the truth because *they are the truth in their very being*” (emphasis added, *WE* 13). Fanon’s truth, as Gibson argues, can only be understood in one sense, that is, as “commitment”

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<sup>128</sup> Or as Badiou puts it in *LoW*: “given a world...a generic multiplicity is an ‘anonymous’ part of this world, a part that corresponds to no explicit predicate. A generic part is identical to the whole situation in the following sense: the elements of this part – the components of a truth – have their being, or their belonging to the situation, as their only assignable property” (36).

(“Living Fanon” 7). This is a political commitment following the implications revealed by the being of the situation; it gathers together those elements positively connected to the cause of the revolution and separates itself from those negatively connected to the event. A new conception of the Two, one which is subjectively produced, comes into view with this ongoing study of the implicative structure of the event.<sup>129</sup> Thus, Algeria – like the word *negritude* which is “bigger than Africa”<sup>130</sup> or Dien Bien Phu which is larger than Vietnam (*WE* 30-31) – exceeds the denotative function of this proper name and comes to stand for a word that concentrates the experience of the struggle for emancipation. This experience of genericity is shown in the memorable ending of Stanley Kubrick’s *Spartacus*. As Meillassoux points out, when all rebelling slaves declare themselves as Spartacus (“I am Spartacus”), the proper name Spartacus is no longer attached to an actual empirical person. The name Spartacus loses its properness and

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<sup>129</sup> On the implicative structure in Badiou’s thinking of the triplet of event, subject and truth, and how Badiou’s implicative structure differs from his contemporaries, see Hallward’s “Depending on Inconsistency.”

<sup>130</sup> Manthia Diawara’s elaboration of the idea of *negritude* remains one of the most illuminating, pointing both to its strength and potential danger:

The idea that *Negritude* is bigger even than Africa, that we were part of an international movement which held the promise of universal emancipation, that our destiny coincided with the universal freedom of workers and colonized people worldwide, gave us a bigger and more important identity than the ones available to us until then through kinship, ethnicity, and race. It felt good to be in tune not only with Sartre himself, but with such world-renowned revolutionaries as Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Albert Camus, Andre Malraux, Fidel Castro, Angela Davis, Mao Tse-Tung, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Frantz Fanon. The awareness of our new historical mission freed us from what we thought then were the archaic identities of our fathers and their religious entrapments; freed us from race and made us no longer afraid of the Whiteness of French identity. To be now labelled the saviors of humanity, when just yesterday we were colonized and despised by the world, gave us a feeling of righteousness that bred contempt for capitalism, racialism of all origins, and tribalism. In fact, the universalism proposed by Sartre became for some of us a new way of being radically chic, of jumping into a new identity in order not to deal with race, which was not mentioned except during discussions of racism. It was not until the mid-sixties, when we became sufficiently immersed in Black American popular culture, that race reappeared as a significant element of culture. (“Pan-Africanism and Pedagogy” par.15)

becomes generic (7). The name comes to symbolize the totality of experiences of a revolutionary body composed of a growing number of slaves in ancient Rome who declare their fidelity to the axiom of equality. As an active element of this fighting body, each member can therefore claim the identity of Spartacus. To evoke the name of Spartacus – either in the immediate present or the distant future (e.g. the Black Spartacus of the Haitian Revolution) – means to transmit the totality of experiences equal to this name. This experience is not to be annexed to the experience of liberal individualism, as some prediscursive experience accessible only to an individual.<sup>131</sup> Experience here is probably best understood in the original active sense given to German word *Erfahrung*, that is, as experience made up of inquiries and movements (Koselleck, *Conceptual History* 45-46).<sup>132</sup> This is then an experience *acquired* in the active process of collective struggle rather than the experiential datum given to the individual. As such, there is always some transindividual dimension in this experience, a dimension of sharing indispensable for the experience of the common: “My comrade is one who, like myself, is only a subject by belonging to a process of truth that authorizes him to say ‘we’” (Badiou, *The Century* 102).

If we look at the history of liberation movements from this point of view, the proper name in which the revolutionary experience is concentrated cannot simply be dismissed, as is often practiced today, as the cult of personality. It is in the spirit that “[i]f you tremble with

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<sup>131</sup> For an effective criticism of this idea of experience, see Joan Scott’s seminal article “The Evidence of Experience.”

<sup>132</sup> Experience construed as *Erfahrung* seems to comply with *enquête* in French as both suggest a continuous movement of investigations. Bosteels has pointed out that *enquête*, translated as investigation or enquiry in English, is an important term in the French Maoist context which has informed Badiou’s usage of the term, see *Badiou and Politics* 112-114. Cf. Hallward has noted that many of Badiou’s contemporaries also resort to a non-individualist notion of experience: “the central categories deployed by all these thinkers are shot through with the vehemently experiential quality of *jouissance* or its equivalent. In each case, the approach is based on a sort of obscure experience, one that conveyed some sort of demand at the same time that renders this demand essentially problematic if not ‘impossible’” (“Depending” 16).

indignation at every injustice, then you are a comrade of mine” that the name Che Guevara becomes generic (qtd. in Latner 112). This move toward the generic also finds expression in what Karl Jaspers calls the metaphysical guilt:

There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty....Metaphysical guilt is the lack of absolute solidarity with the human being as such....This solidarity is violated by my presence at a wrong or a crime. (*German Guilt* 26, 65)

The humanity’s sharing of a collective destiny is couched in similar terms by Fanon: “The collective struggle presupposes a collective responsibility....Yes, everyone must be involved in the struggle for the sake of the common salvation. There are no clean hands, no innocent bystanders. We are all in the process of dirtying our hands in the quagmire of our soil and the terrifying void of our minds. Any bystander is a coward or a traitor (*WE* 140). It is the same conviction that is behind Fanon’s utterance that “[e]very time a man has brought victory to the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to enslave his fellow man, I have felt a sense of solidarity with his act” (*BSWM* 201). And on account of his continuing commitment to the idea of solidarity, Fanon, despite his Martinique nationality, is without doubt also an Algerian. When Fanon looks at the European minorities in Algeria, he also points out that many of them are important contributors to the revolutionary cause and “their action should not be differentiated from that of any other Algerian” (*DC* 152).<sup>133</sup> Most importantly, this

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<sup>133</sup> Other relevant questions concerning the issue of solidarity and internationalism include whether or not the European Left could be unambiguously taken as the allies of anticolonial struggle waged in the Third World. This issue is quite complex and draws varying responses from Fanon. On the one hand, he would acknowledge the general support from his socialist comrades in Europe and also appeal to the moral

subjectively produced category is able to attain self-determination by setting its aim not at the negation of the colonizer nor the affirmation of the colonized in Algeria under colonization, but at *the world of colonialism* that makes the objective compartmentalization of the colonizer and the colonized possible in the first place: “The enemy of the African under French domination is not colonialism insofar as it exerts itself within the strict limits of his nation, but it is the form of colonialism, it is the manifestations of colonialism, whatever be the flag under which it asserts itself” (*TAR* 171).

The subjective production of the Two also paves the way for the creation of a new humanism beyond the logic of the colonial placement. “To believe one can create a black culture,” Fanon writes, “is to forget oddly enough that ‘Negroes’ are in the process of disappearing, since those who created them are witnessing the demise of their economic and

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conscience of the European masses: “This colossal task, which consists of reintroducing man into the world, man in his totality, will be achieved with the crucial help of the European masses who would do well to confess that they have often rallied behind the position of our common masters on colonial issues. In order to do this, the European masses must first of all decide to wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty” (*WE* 61-62). On the other hand, he would caution against any hasty optimism of their alliance: “In a colonial country, it used to be said, there is a community of interests between the colonized people and the working class of the colonialist country. The history of the wars of liberation waged by the colonized peoples is the history of the non-verification of this thesis” (*TAR* 82). Or, on the one hand, he would condemn Sartre for his objectification of negritude into a term in the dialectic (*BSWM* 111-114; see also Sartre’s “Black Orpheus” 48-49). On the other hand, he is in general agreement with Sartre that emancipation ultimately concerns the collective emancipation of humanity and not just the emancipation of a particular group, race, or continent. In the final analysis, it boils down to the terms and presuppositions with which the European support enters the struggle. If their support means that Third World liberation struggle is to be assimilated into the “universal convulsion” of the cold war opposition between capitalism and socialism (*WE* 36) or into an objectified dialectical progression (*TAR* 170, 173), then the history of anticolonial liberation struggle is indeed a non-verification of their putative solidarity. The following lines from Césaire capture the tension at stake:

I believe I have said enough to make it clear that it is neither Marxism nor communism that I am renouncing, and that it is the usage some have made of Marxism and communism that I condemn. That what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism. That the doctrine and the movement would be made to fit them, not men to fit the doctrine or the movement. (“Letter to Maurice Thorez” 149-150).

cultural supremacy” (*WE* 169). With the demise of the world of colonialism, both the colonizer and the colonized disappear: “After the struggle is over, there is not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized” (178). What decolonization ushers in is therefore not a reversal of orders but an era of a new humanism. This is a humanism that is universal in scope for it does not aim merely at humanizing the colonized but also at “discover[ing] the man behind the colonizer” who happens to be the victim of his own violence (*DC* 32).<sup>134</sup>

If Fanon is still relevant to us today it is because Fanon shows us that “the will to transform [colonial] relations needn’t be bound by an obligation to fight on their terms, or by their means” (Hallward, “Fanon and Political Will” 223). And this, *pace* Nandy, does not necessitate the creation of a third term (i.e. the non-player) in order to bypass the structure of binarism.<sup>135</sup> Fanon’s solution is to think the third (freedom) from within the Two, provided that this Two is radically reconceptualized. It is only when the category of the colonized is able to be subjectively surpassed that they can hope to transform the situation *in toto*, not just reversing colonial relations while keeping the structure intact.

In addition to the insistence on the subjective production of the Two that enables the inscription of the subject into history and bring about radical restructuring of a world, the second key aspect I find illuminating in Badiou and Fanon is that they both engage with the question of sustainability (or consistency) by asking “what is to be done?” in order for the insurrectional form of resistance to evolve into politics proper. The following are two considerations on the issue of consistency, one starts out from a Badiouian point of view while the other is discussed in

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<sup>134</sup> On the boomerang effect of violence, see Césaire 2000, 35; Albert Memmi 1991, xvii.

<sup>135</sup> See Nandy 1983, xiv-xv; also my discussion in the first chapter.



relation to issues of decolonization in Fanon. The division is only meant for the organizational purpose and I make liberal use of Fanon to illuminate a Badiouian point and vice versa whenever the occasion demands it.

### III. The First Consideration: Badiou and The Politics of Prescription

[M]y conviction was that political continuity is always something necessarily organized....Philosophically, the difference between putting the organizational principle in suspense and its occupation of a central place in political preoccupations has considerable impact in the treatment of the relation between event, participation, body, and consequences.

Alain Badiou, "Lessons of Jacques Rancière"

A prescriptive politics...busies itself with the invention of newly effective, newly *deliberate* ways of intervening in a situation....Prescriptive autonomy, in other words, necessarily presumes *some* kind of qualitative leap in the constitution of the subject, a leap adequate to enable its relative freedom from causal or presubjective determination. Without such freedom we cannot say that people make their own history; we can merely contemplate the forms of their constraint. And however radical or indignant such contemplation, by itself it will always fall short of the political as such.

Peter Hallward, "Politics of Prescription"

I have suggested above the importance of punctuality in Anderson's assertion and also expressed my reservation about whether there is a finite end. Perhaps it is not so much a disagreement than an attempt to inquire into what happens after the event, that is, what would become of the relationship between egalitarian politics and non-egalitarian statism. Oliver Feltham, one of Badiou's translators, poses a following question:

If a truth procedure simply replaces one state with another state, one ordering mechanism with another such mechanism, then all states can be understood as being originally counter-states. All established political institutions could be analysed and defended as extended faithful enquiries into the consequences of an

original event. In the hands of these exegetes, Badiou's philosophy would thus end up by producing an apology for modern parliamentary democracies. (*Badiou: Live Theory* 118)

This is, of course, a hypothetical question raised by Feltham to clarify Badiou's idea of the generic extension. This is nonetheless an important question if we want to avoid a cyclic understanding of change, according to which the new consistency would simply assume the same statist function, albeit with new rules and new priorities. My doubt over whether there is a finite end is this: when seen from the point of view of the *long durée*, wouldn't this endless cycle of rupture and consistency, of revolution and order, make for a different type of permanent revolution? That's why the question of sustainability should also be taken into account in our consideration of decolonization.

One of the major distinctions Badiou makes in his work is the distinction between the event and the truth: "a truth is realized as multiplicity and not as punctuality" (FOS 94). On the surface, this suggests that a truth procedure ends up with a consistent multiplicity (i.e. another state) while the event, like the Lacanian real, makes a hole in the encyclopedia of knowledge. But Badiou adds a twist to it by introducing the figure of the subject, radically reconceptualized this time, to serve as the mediator between truth (consistency) and event (inconsistency)<sup>136</sup> and also to reorient the post-evental fidelity in a direction that brings consistency to inconsistency. In Badiou's politics, consistency is not opposed to inconsistency as is often hinted at in the language of a radical break. There is indeed a break but not in the sense of effecting the annihilation of an old order and the creation *ex nihilo* of a new order. In Badiou's philosophy, the

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<sup>136</sup> Apropos of the mediating role of the subject, Badiou writes that "the subject is dependent on an event and only comes to be constituted as a capacity for truth" (*The Century* 100).

break (or the event) is recognized as such only through the subject's retroactive intervention<sup>137</sup> and the subject's intervention is conceived as an operation or a procedure that involves a sequence of actions and an ongoing series of enquiries.<sup>138</sup> As the mediator between the event and the truth, the subject "is neither a result nor an origin. He is the local status of the procedure, a

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<sup>137</sup> Although it is correct to say that there will be no subject without an event, it is equally correct to say that there will be no event without the subject, for "[the event] can only be *revealed* in the retroaction of an interventional practice" (B&E 178). An event in its being is ephemeral and can only be recognized as such after the fact. The formal definition of the event is given as follows: "*I term event of the site X a multiple such that it is composed of, on the one hand, elements of the site, and on the other hand, itself*" (179). Take the French Revolution as an example, a sociological explanation will try to give an inventory of all the empirical facts including all the social upheavals leading up to 1789 and beyond. This approach only accounts for elements of an evental site, but the existence of an evental site does not guarantee its becoming an event. If we break down the formal definition into two parts, we can say that the sociological approach which exhausts itself in the inexhaustible sets of empirical facts only satisfies the first criterion but fails to explain how an event can be composed not just of elements of the site but also of *itself*. To meet all the requirements in the formal definition, the French Revolution must reveal itself not just as a series of empirical facts but also *as itself*. In other words, the French Revolution becomes the French Revolution only "in the retroaction of an interventional practice" or when it articulates itself into existence as a supernumerary to the situation:

When, for example, Saint-Just declares in 1794 'the Revolution is frozen,' he is certainly designating infinite signs of lassitude and general constraints, but he adds to them that *one-mark* that is the Revolution itself, as this signifier of the event which, being qualifiable (the Revolution is 'frozen'), proves that it is itself a *term* of the event that it is...Of the French Revolution as event it must be said that it both presents the infinite multiple of the sequence of facts situated between 1789 and 1794, and, *moreover*, that it presents itself as an immanent résumé and one-mark of its own multiple. The Revolution, even if it is interpreted as being such by historical retroaction, is no less, in itself, supernumerary to the sole numbering of the terms of its site, despite it presenting such a numbering. The event is thus clearly the multiple which both presents its entire site, and, by means of the pure signifier of itself immanent to its own multiple, manages to present the presentation itself, that is, the one of the infinite multiple that it is. (180)

<sup>138</sup> According to Feltham, "the only way to develop a modern de-substantialized non-reflective concept of the subject is to restrict it to that of a subject of praxis ("Translator's Preface" xxxi). From this point of view, we can argue that the Badiouian subject is a non-metaphysical and totally de-substantialized concept. The Badiouian subject is none other than the fidelity to a series of enquiries and consequences following the event. In other words, the local investigations conducted by the subject become the very fabric of the subject, being nothing less than its positive constitution as a capacity for truth. This explains why the subject for Badiou is neither an origin nor an end. The subject here is understood rather as a *path* toward truth, and any individual, regardless of how one is objectively determined in terms of race, class, status, etc., becomes a subject of truth when they set themselves on this path and decide to incorporate themselves into the subjectivizable body of truth. The following observation of anticolonial nationalism from Fanon is an eloquent articulation of the becoming subject of the individual in fidelity to a truth: "Since individual experience is national, since it is a link in the national chain, it ceases to be individual, narrow and limited in scope, and can lead to the truth of the nation and the world" (WE 140-141).

configuration which exceeds the situation” (95). The subject therefore cannot be understood in terms of radical autonomy or radical passivity. In fact, the subject is dialectically conceived as both at once: on the one hand, the subject is passive because he/she allows the individual self to be traversed by the capacity for truth: “Whoever is the subject of a truth...knows that...he is traversed by an infinite capacity. *Whether or not this truth...continues to deploy itself depends solely on his subjective weakness*” (emphasis added, *St. Paul* 54). On the other, the subject is autonomous as “a configuration which exceeds the situation.” This is because the subject, unlike the individual, “is of the order not of what is but of what happens” (*The Century* 100). The enquiries made and the consequences explored are supported by the subject’s wager that something extraordinary has occurred, and it is this leap of faith that renders the subject independent from the laws and the objective determinants of the existing order. “A fidelity,” Badiou emphasizes, “is not a matter of knowledge. It is not the work of an expert: it is the work of a militant” (*B&E* 329). Or as Bruno Besana explains, “the subject is identified not by the *place* that it occupies in the situation (as for an object) *vis-à-vis* the determinations of its state, but by a set of *action* that it performs, and that depend strictly upon something that *happens*, that is in excess over the situation” (40).

In Badiou’s view, there is an essential correlation between truth and subject. The subject is the local fragment of a truth: it is truth “*locally born out*” (FOS 93). The subject, moreover, is at once induced by the process of truth<sup>139</sup> and also constitutes itself as a capacity for truth. We can infer from these formulations that the subject is not causally determined by truth despite being *induced* by truth. If the subject is induced by truth and is put in service to truth, it is precisely because the subject is not subservient to truth. Had it been the case, the subject would have been

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<sup>139</sup> The subject, Badiou claims, “in no way pre-exists the process [of truth]....We might say that the process of truth *induces* a subject” (*Ethics* 43).

held hostage to a utopian conception of truth, which will be a pre-given goal to be either fulfilled or approached asymptotically. However, truth for Badiou is never pre-given; it is, like the subject, also a process.<sup>140</sup> And yet truth differs from the subject in one essential way: “a truth is an ideal collecting of ‘all’ the evaluations [made by the subject]: it is a complete part of the situation. But the subject does not coincide with this result” (96).

A few important observations can be inferred from Badiou’s description of the relation between truth and subject. If the subject is an accumulative process of local investigations, truth is then the anticipated completion (“an ideal collecting”) of these investigations. Truth as the anticipated completion of the subject’s local enquiries is *the result* of the subject’s ongoing investigations, but “the subject does not coincide with this result.” The noncoincidence leads to an infinite process of verification. As Badiou explains, “[b]etween the finite of its act and the infinity of its being, there is no measure. This lack of measure is also that which relates the verifying exposition of the evental axiom to the infinite hypothesis of its completion” (*Conditions* 125). And yet this formulation of the infinite process of a truth procedure invites a further consideration: how does this noncoincidence differ from the structure of aporia and incommensurability in Derrida and Nancy? The first thing to note is that the infinity in Badiou is not the infinity of iterative ruptures but the infinity of the generic extension. To unpack what Badiou means by the generic extension, we need to distinguish two levels of analysis: being and appearing.

In Badiou’s discussion of politics, the difference between being (ontology) and appearing (phenomenology) pertains to the difference between two axioms of equality: (1) people are equal; (2) people think. In the introduction I have mentioned that the ethical turn is founded on a

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<sup>140</sup> As Badiou writes, “truth is a process, and not an illumination” (*St. Paul* 15)

relation of incommensurability between being and thinking. This post-metaphysical stance would be challenged by Badiou who, on the one hand, agrees with the post-metaphysical critique of Parmenides that being is not One (i.e. not an immutable essence) and that being-qua-being is multiplicity; on the other hand, against the post-metaphysical critique, he asserts that being can be thought, not just as pure multiplicity (via set theory) but also as change in the realm of the visible when the inexistent rises up and starts existing with maximal intensity. Badiou's intervention resides in an important distinction between *ontological becoming* (being-qua-being) and *phenomenological change* (the becoming-visible of the inexistent). Put succinctly, if becoming *is*, change *happens*. In Badiou's politics of truth, the emphasis shifts from the *place* of taking place to the place of *taking place*. Becoming in and of itself does not amount to change. Badiou refuses to equate the negative with the transformative. To be sure, the recognition of the immanent negativity awakens us to the possibility of transformation, but we should not lose sight of the fact that negativity itself does not necessitate such a transformation; and we would be looking at chaos not change if our eyes are set on only negativity without a proper concern with consistency. However radical it may be, a real change for Badiou is always a measured change, meaning that its radicality lies in giving a measure to ontological inconsistency. This important distinction between ontological becoming and phenomenological change is condensed in Badiou's two axiomatic formulations of equality in politics.

The axiom of generic equality that "everyone is equal" is "a *negative* universality" (*Second Manifesto* 126) that expresses the ontological indifference to representational differences. Badiou's ontological formulation of the generic as the basis of this axiom of equality is characterized by the logic of extensionality rather than that of intensionality.<sup>141</sup> The advantage

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<sup>141</sup> On the difference of intensionality and extensionality in set theory, see Badiou's discussion of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell in "Meditation Three" of *B&E*, particularly 39-40. Briefly,

of defining the set in terms of extensionality is that it does not construct a set (e.g. a collectivity, a nation, a community, etc.) on the basis of a discernible property. Thus, elements of a set are strictly equal in that they are not differentiated from one another according to qualitative differences; their equality, on the level of presentation, is justified in set theory wholly by virtue of their belonging to a set. Belonging, as the sole relation recognized in ontology, simply means anything being counted as one in a set. In Badiou's set theoretical configuration, the set (or the One) is the *result* of the operation of counting, not the organizing principle that collects elements (as in the logic of intensionality).<sup>142</sup> There is, however, another level, the level of representation. This is the second count through which the initial elements of a set (i.e. those elements belonging to a set) are *counted the second time*, but this time according to non-egalitarian criteria (e.g. those categories in the census such as gender, race, ethnicity, profession, etc.). Hallward draws out the political implications of the representational ordering:

Egalitarian presentation...is in every set supplemented by the re-presentation of each element, organized in such a way as to guarantee a dominant, hierarchical *order* to the structure of the set. This meta-structure is what Badiou calls the "state" of a situation. In our set of students, for instance, each counts as one in terms of his or her presentation in a classroom, but the configuration of the

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An intensional notion of set presumes that a set is the collection of objects that are comprehended by a certain concept. The sets of prime numbers, of red things, of people living in London, are intensional in this sense. Versions of intensionality were defended by Frege and Russell. In today's standard version of set theory, however, [the notion of extensionality prevails]...the axiom of extensionality, simply declares that "a set is determined solely by its members." Under the axiom of extensionality, sets  $y$  and  $z$  are the same if they have the same elements, regardless of how these elements might be related or arranged. (Hallward, *Badiou* 86)

For a useful introduction to set theory, see the appendix in Hallward 2003.

<sup>142</sup> "What has to be declared is that the one...solely exists as *operation*. In other words, there is no one, only the count-as-ones" (Badiou, *B&E* 24).

education system will also ensure that each student can be ranked in terms of aptitude or achievement....In any human or historical situation, the meta-structure will be organized in such a way as to secure the stability and dominance of its ruling group, or class. (“Depending” 14)

After the second count, those elements initially presented in a situation are now *re-presented* in the *state of the situation*. The key to this distinction is that in the set theoretical universe, the number of ways in which elements of a situation can be ordered is always larger than the number of elements presented in (or belonging to) the situation. Not only does the representational ordering impose a structure of hierarchy, the discrepancy creates the possibility of certain elements being presented but not represented. Those who are presented but not represented are the *inexistent* in the world.<sup>143</sup> Historically, women, the black, the colonized, the proletariat, the aboriginals and the *sans-papier* are elements being left out in the realm of political representation. They exist in either the domestic or socio-economic sense, but they do not exist in a proper political sense.<sup>144</sup> Apropos of this contradiction, George Orwell perhaps puts it best in his allegorical novella *Animal Farm*: “All animals are equal, but *some* animals are *more equal than others*.” In a hypothetical situation without representation, equality is the equality of pure presentation since each presented element is “considered to be identical to the simple fact of belonging to this world” (*Second Manifesto* 125). And yet given that the world (or a situation) is always already structured in representational terms on top of presentative equality, generic equality can only be asserted negatively in a representational situation, as “the *equal capacity of*

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<sup>143</sup> The *inexistent* does not mean the lack of existence. It refers rather to a multiple-being in the world with an existential intensity close to zero. “*Its existence*,” Badiou claims, “*is a non-existence*” (*Second Manifesto* 58). In other words, the *inexistent* *is* in the world but not *visible* in the world.

<sup>144</sup> “There is no doubting the social and economic being of the proletariat. Rather, what was doubtful...is its political *existence*....From the point of view of their political appearing, they are nothing” (Badiou, *Second Manifesto* 61).



*each element* of the situation to dismantle the system of evidence upon which the mode of organization of the situation relies” (Besana 42). That’s why Badiou names this generic capacity to *indiscern* categorical distinctions a negative universality. In this light, we can even go so far as to claim that this is the same function Rancière assigns to the politics of equality: “The essence of equality is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders” (*On the Shores of Politics* 32-33). And this function is embodied in the word “people,” which according to Rancière, “is a generic name...that, enacting the egalitarian trait, dispute[s] the forms of visibility of the common and the identities, forms of belonging, partitions, etc., defined by these forms” (*Dissensus* 85). Insofar as the focus of the generic is on the dysfunction of the instituted regime of power, its breach, its internal ambiguity, or its constitutive limit, we can even generalize this experience of delegitimization and disidentification to the extent that also includes the function Derrida assigns to friendship, Nancy to inoperativity, or Balibar to equaliberty.<sup>145</sup> Thus, in its negative form, the axiom of generic equality locates the inconsistency in excess to the current mode of representational organization. The limit of this axiom is that it remains purely formal and lacks specificity; it reveals the *being* of the situation but does not explain how the generic being of multiplicity can appear in the world in a consistent manner other than that of ephemeral disruption. To summarize, the axiom of generic equality that “people are equal” is a negative universality: negative because it manifests itself in the form of

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<sup>145</sup> Equaliberty is the central political category for Balibar and is theorized in many of his works. In brief, the ideas of equality and freedom are coextensive with each other not because they are essentially the same but rather because they are *historically* discovered as the same: “What it is based on is the historical discovery...that their *extensions* are necessarily identical...neither freedom nor equality can exist without the other, that is, that the suppression or even the limitation of one necessarily leads to the suppression or limitation of the other” (*Masses Classes, Ideas* 48, 212). Equaliberty is, in Balibar’s view, an indispensable category for revolutionary struggle because the ideal universality of this category affirms the people’s right to politics or the right to have rights. Although its manifestation can only take the *negative* form (i.e. through struggles against measures of inequality or constraint), the principle can be declared and enacted “at any moments, in situations as diverse as can be desired” (48), which constitutes the dimension of its ideal universality.

interruption; universal because it also unifies different worlds and disparate situations on the basis of their commensurability with the generic.

The axiom of prescriptive equality that “people think,” on the other hand, refers to the affirmative capacity that gives body to the negative universal of generic equality in order to bring about change in the representational structure of the world: “While the essence of a generic multiplicity is a *negative* universality (the absence of any predicative identity) the essence of a body of truth is in certain capacities – in particular, the capacity to deal with a whole series of *points* in the real” (*Second Manifesto* 126). These points are the decisions made by the militant subject in the dialectical unfolding of an immanent truth procedure in which the subject has to decide whether to remain faithful to a truth or to fall back on the status quo. If the first axiom focuses on the eventual rupture of the generic being of truth, the second axiom stresses the post-evental consequences; if the first axiom operates with such categories as pure multiplicity, event and void, the operators for the second axiom are subject and truth. All these serve to underscore the dialectical interaction in Badiou’s thinking which involves both the negative and the affirmative. As Johnston writes, “an event’s value resides in its sustained implication-effects rather than its evanescent disruptiveness” (49). For Badiou, the axiom “people think” means the people are capable of treating the point, making enquiries concerning the implications of an event, and “prescribing a possible” distinct from the existing system of knowledge (*Metapolitics* 32). Badiou argues that thought is the distinctive human capacity (97-98) and it is the capacity to prescribe, in actuality, the consequences the axiom of generic equality authorizes; these consequences are infinite but they would remain extinguished were it not for the axiomatic affirmation of people’s capacity to think and prescribe a new possible. By making “people think” an axiomatic statement, Badiou is committed to a view that individuals are capable of becoming

subject, that is, they are capable of being traversed by a truth and become its carrier. As an ontological category, the generic functions as a negative universality immune to predicative identity. But as a capacity for truth, the subject is that which localizes and gives body to the generic. The appearing of the generic being of truth then depends on a subjectivizable body to elaborate and prescribe the space of freedom opened up by the generic. Freedom, in this view, cannot be thought merely in the register of delegitimization or dislocation.<sup>146</sup> Freedom is only half said when it remains a negative universal in the form of a void or the indiscernible (which is another name for the generic);<sup>147</sup> it becomes fully said, although also rarely said, when the consequences of the negative universal is given affirmation by the subject in the phenomenological world of appearing. Freedom then pertains “directly to that of incorporation (to a truth),” which suggests that “freedom presupposes that a new body appear in the world” (*LoW* 34). Infinity thus refers not to the infinite iteration of breaks and ruptures, but to the unlimited consequences of an event and to the subject’s immanent deployment of prescription with regard to these unlimited post-evental consequences: “Saying that a truth is infinite is saying that its procedure contains an infinity of enquiries” (*B&E* 333). And what is prescribed in each local instance of the subject’s enquiries is a new extension of the egalitarian maxim to the statist configuration of social relations.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> “freedom expends itself in the withdrawal from every determination” (Nancy, *Experience of Freedom* 57).

<sup>147</sup> “‘Generic’ and ‘indiscernible’ are concepts which are almost equivalent. Why play on a synonymy? Because ‘indiscernible’ conserves a negative connotation, which indicates uniquely, via non-discernibility, that what is at stake is subtracted from knowledge or from exact nomination. The term ‘generic’ positively designates that what does not allow itself to be discerned is in reality the general truth of a situation, the truth of its being, as considered as the foundation of all knowledge to come. ‘Indiscernible’ implies a negation, which nevertheless retains this essential point: a truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge” (*B&E* 327).

<sup>148</sup> Balibar’s discussion of the intensive and extensive aspects of ideal universality (see *POS* 165-166) share many characteristics of what Badiou calls the generic extension. Balibar points out that the idea of

After examining these two axioms of equality and the two levels of analysis (being and appearing) they correspond to, let's take another look at how truth appears in a world by way of the subject. That a truth is an anticipated completion of enquiries made by the subject has to do with the eschatological hope mentioned in Meillassoux's passage above. Badiou's eschatology differs from the messianic promise of democracy-to-come in one crucial aspect: whereas Derrida's democracy-to-come focuses on spectrality, Badiou's truth concerns the question of actuality. This contrast is foregrounded when we consider the following two statements from Derrida and Badiou respectively:

[T]he idea...of democracy to come....is the opening of this gap between an infinite promise....and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise. To this extent, the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined mesianic [sic] hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 81)

[T]he communist Idea is the imaginary operation whereby an individual subjectivation projects a fragment of the political real into the symbolic narrative of a History....What *does* exist, however, under the real condition of organized political action, is the communist Idea, an operation tied to intellectual

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equaliberty is characterized by a unique logical form, "a self-refutation of its negation" (3), and the universality of equaliberty signifies both ideal universality and "a historical process of the extension of rights to all humanity" (*Masses, Classes, Ideas* 212).

subjectivation and that integrates the real, the symbolic and the ideological at the level of the individual. (Badiou, IC 5-6)

Simply put, the idea of democracy-to-come haunts the metaphysics of presence by undercutting its ground and exposing the presence to its constitutive limit; the emphasis is on a to-and-fro movement that forms a knot keeping the actual within the spectral, but there is no room for the anticipatory certitude of any form of actuality, for an actuality without spectrality inevitably betrays the idea of democracy-to-come which is at the same time the idea of justice that has “no horizon of expectation” (“Force of Law” 256). The idea of communism, on the other hand, anticipates a fictional completion of generic truth, on account of which “an individual subjectivation projects a fragment of the political real into the symbolic narrative of a History.” On account of truth’s anticipatory completion, the communist idea can exist in actuality “under the real condition of organized political action.” If the idea of communism promises justice, it is because justice is the name for “the qualification of an egalitarian moment of politics in *actu*” (*Metapolitics* 99). The emphasis here is placed on a torsion-like movement that actualizes the communist idea (viz. generic equality) bit by bit through the real of the organized political action. Truth’s anticipatory certitude thus involves both the act of undercutting (i.e. “the imaginary operation” of the subject’s wager on the generic indiscernibility) and the political procedure that responds to this act through retroactive determination. In other words, the anticipatory certitude of truth’s completion retroactively imposes itself on the existing structure of relations, thereby verifying the non-verifiable wager made by the subject: “With [the subject’s wager] the infinite procedure of verifying the truth begins, or, that is, the examination in the situation of the consequences of the axiom. This examination, in turn, is not guided by any established law. Nothing can govern its trajectory, since the axiom sustaining it is decided

independently of any appeal to the norms of evaluation” (Badiou, *Conditions* 123). Without the post-evental procedure of verification (or its actualization), the eschatological hope would remain as empty as it is elusive. But this eschatological hope can transform itself into revolutionary optimism when it inscribes in the present a future anterior temporality verified in the subjective procedure of fidelity, in the absence of which, the present would remain lifeless, either extinguished or occulted.<sup>149</sup>

Truth’s anticipatory verification of the non-verifiable wager is the temporal basis for Badiou’s idea of forcing. The idea of forcing is intimately linked to the structure of torsion mentioned earlier:

The verb *to force* indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks that sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning. If a truth is never communicable as such, it nevertheless implies, at a distance from itself, powerful reshaping of the forms and referents of communication. (*Ethics* 70)

At the most fundamental level, the idea of forcing refers both to a *break* in the established order of things and to a *change* in the very structure of the symbolic order that governs the degree of appearing (i.e. the relative visibility) of each object within it. To force therefore involves a dual temporality of anticipatory certitude and retroactive determination, a temporality grammatically expressed in the tense of the future perfect.<sup>150</sup> To unpack the intricacies of the future perfect, we

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<sup>149</sup> On Badiou’s expanded figures of the subject (faithful, reactionary and obscure) and their different production of the present, see *LoW* 45-66.

<sup>150</sup> “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object. What is realized in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming”

need to understand that truth as a completed fiction is not an actuality; what is actualized has to do with the effect a truth induces in a world. And this effect can only be brought about through the subject's laborious process of verifying the non-verifiable wager he/she makes in relation to what has happened. Badiou agrees with two of Lacan's aphorisms concerning truth.

I. "a truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge" (*B&E* 327).

II. "every truth has the structure of fiction" (Lacan, *Seminar VII* 12).

The first statement reveals that the relation between truth and knowledge is a negative one. For Badiou, truth not just makes a hole; it makes a "generic hole in knowledge" (*B&E* 432). The generic is indiscernible for reasons we have explicated above. The essential point is that the generic punches a hole in knowledge because it resists knowledge's ranking and indexing. However, knowledge's impotence to get to the real is a thesis that almost all major contemporary French philosophers would agree. What sets Badiou apart is his further elaboration of the second statement that "every truth has the structure of fiction." The assertion that truth has the structure of fiction has to be strictly distinguished from the standard postmodern platitude to the effect that the fictional structure of truth is taken to devalorize truth or suggests the non-existence or the impossibility of truth. Badiou's affirmation that truth has the structure of fiction, on the contrary, aims to valorize the existence of truth in the world. Truth has the structure of fiction because truth is *in its being* a generic infinity, the completion of which can only be represented in the fictioning of the future perfect.

The generic being of a truth is never presented. A truth is uncompletable. But what we can know on a formal level, is that a truth will always have taken place as a generic infinity. This allows the possible fictioning of the effects of such a

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(Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" 247). Hallward's "The Politics of Prescription" provides an excellent account of anticipatory certitude.

truth having-taken-place. That is, the subject can make the hypothesis of a Universe where this truth, of which the subject is a local point, will have completed its generic totalization. I call the anticipatory hypothesis of the generic being of a truth, a *forcing*. A forcing is the powerful fiction of a *completed* truth. Starting with such a fiction, I can *force* new bits of knowledge, without even *verifying* this knowledge. (*Infinite Thought* 65; see also *Conditions* 126)

The anticipated certitude thus means that the full realization of generic equality is a fictional construction because it is never fully realized but the presupposition of its completion *will have produced* the effect that retroactively forces truth upon the state of knowledge to extend the bounds of visibility beyond its existing coordinates. The retroactive imposition of the fiction of a completed truth onto the existing knowledge forces knowledge to be adequate to the generic or equalitarian principle of truth.

It is important to distinguish, without making them separable, *the being of truth* and *the truth of being* in the dialectics of forcing. The being of truth refers to the ontological category of the generic infinity. The truth of being concerns how the generic can be reapplied back to a world or a situation, that is, how it can *appear* in a world. In order for truth to appear in a world, something in that world has to be destroyed. But destruction, as Bosteels suggests, is to be understood in the following sense: “Destruction...would be only a reactive name for the fate of that part of knowledge that no longer will have qualified as truthful or veridical in the extended situation in which an event has taken place” (“Translator’s Introduction” xii). Forcing thus negates a part of knowledge that is no longer adequate to generic equality and this force of negation would not be possible without the anticipated affirmation of the generic totalization of a completed truth. As Badiou puts it, “[t]he negation of being-there rests on the affirmative



identification of being qua being” (*LoW* 105). Negation (or destruction), then, is the upsurge of being – which, in politics, is given the name generic equality – in the realm of appearing structured by a regime of representation. The upsurge of being in appearing negates a part of knowledge only to force a new knowledge (or a new consistency) into existence which, unlike the state’s organization of knowledge, would preserve the eventual trace by giving consistency to inconsistency.

Badiou’s theorization of consistency allows him to speak of truth’s actualization in a world. What is actualized in a truth procedure, to reiterate, is not the truth in its anticipated completion but the infinite subjective procedures it induces that force a given state of knowledge to transform and extend what Rancière calls “the distribution of senses.” When the completion of a truth is anticipated, the subject is endowed with a kind of revolutionary optimism that allows the unfolding of the subjective process, comprised of enquiries, to retroactively determine (or force) a given inegalitarian distribution to change in line with what this optimism prescribes. The task of forcing knowledge to expand itself in order to be adequate to a truth therefore falls on the subject. As Badiou puts it, the “taking-place” of a truth in a world “is given in the finite act of a Subject” (*Conditions* 125). As such, the subject is a temporary localization of truth because truth is indiscernible in its being, but it *appears* in the world only through the mediation of the subject.

Ed Pluth and Dominiek Hoens compare the anticipatory certitude that sustains the subject’s fidelity to truth to the attitude of a political enthusiast:

The enthusiast knows he or she is making claims that cannot be proved, but is courageous enough to proceed and is confident that the claim is true and that sufficient reasons for it will show up. The enthusiast is by definition modest. He or she has neither the modesty of someone who decides nothing...nor the modesty

of the fanatic who says that he or she is sure about claim but that it is only a subjective point of view and that, of course, others may have another opinion....The enthusiast is modest in making a claim precisely because of how he or she is positioned “on the way to” truth. Or put differently, the enthusiast leaves the gap between the singular decision and a universal truth open until the situation changes in such a way that the singular can be universally assumed as “a given.” (188)

To be on the way to truth means to position oneself as a militant subject pursuing truth’s consequences (*B&E*) or to incorporate oneself into the subjectivizable body of truth (*LoW*). To incorporate oneself into the subjectivizable body of truth means continuously declaring oneself on the side of the evental trace, declaring one’s fidelity to the consequences authorized by the trace; it means to give the vanished trace a consistency in a world, to make it, through the mobilization of materials available in a world, *appear* or *exist* in a world: “A body is really nothing but that which, bearing a subjective form, confers upon a truth, in a world, the phenomenal status of its objectivity” (*LoW* 36; see also *Second Manifesto* 89-91). When an individual incorporates him/herself into the body of truth, he/she can be said to undergo subjectivization. An individual becomes a subject when he/she decides to become the material support of a truth procedure, which amounts to saying that he/she has taken side on issues in regard to the instituted order of a world and to its distribution of power, knowledge, and resources. The subject is then the operation that allows the being of truth to appear as the truth of being. That is, if the being of truth identifies the trace of the event, the truth of being is the working through of the implications authorized by the evental trace. The transition from being to appearing is important for us to differentiate Badiou from his contemporaries. As Badiou

maintains, “[i]t is not enough to identify a trace. One must incorporate oneself into what the trace authorizes in terms of consequences” (*LoW* 508).

So how does Badiou escape the danger of a cyclist understanding of change? Badiou differentiates two types of consistency: (1) consistency according to the statist prescription; (2) consistency of inconsistency (IC 9; *Metapolitics* 151). The first type of consistency pertains to the function of the state: “the State is that which prescribes what, in a given situation, is the impossibility specific to that situation, from the perspective of the formal prescription of what is possible” (IC 7). The state prescribes what is possible, thinkable, audible, or visible in a situation.<sup>151</sup> Within the space of possibility prescribed by the state, each element is given a place relative to its degree of visibility within a given regime of representation. This provides a measure of stability and consistency, albeit of an inegalitarian sort.

The second type of consistency belongs to the function of the subject. The consistency prescribed by the subject does not mimic its statist counterpart by erecting a rivaling regime of representation; it coincides rather with the subject’s faithful pursuit of the post-evental consequences. If the event reveals the generic being of a situation (or the situation’s inconsistency), the post-evental fidelity would provide a measure of consistency to the

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<sup>151</sup> Prescriptions according to the state in Badiou can be compared with the function Rancière assigns to the police, which “defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying...it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another is noise” (*Disagreement* 29). In his speech at an Occupy Wall Street event, Žižek illustrates how the parameters of the possible is prescribed by liberal democratic capitalism today:

What do we perceive today as possible? Just follow the media. On the one hand, in technology and sexuality, everything seems to be possible. You can travel to the moon, you can become immortal by biogenetics, you can have sex with animals or whatever, but look at the field of society and economy. There, almost everything is considered impossible. You want to raise taxes by little bit for the rich. They tell you it’s impossible. We lose competitiveness. You want more money for health care, they tell you, "Impossible, this means totalitarian state." There’s something wrong in the world, where you are promised to be immortal but cannot spend a little bit more for healthcare.

inconsistency by applying the axiom of generic equality to a situation, and in each of its enactment, the representational regime prescribed by the state will be forced to alter and expand its parameters regarding what is possible and impossible in a situation. Thus, real change is to be conceived as an extension in the sense that the new consistency is not produced as a replacement of the statist consistency but as its supplement.

Any conception of change is in a certain sense violent and the generic extension is no exception, for it involves the destruction of a part of knowledge or of a certain mode of appearing. The obvious question is that change by definition runs counter to the idea of consistency. So the question is whether it is possible to give consistency to inconsistency. This is, I believe, Badiou's major intervention in the theory of change. Badiou has warned that it is necessary to fight on the two fronts: "a true leftist revolution fights the Right as well as the official Left" ("Lessons" 41). If the conservative Right are those intent on the preservation of the status quo, the official Left would be the anarchist sector who fights for the sake of fighting. To avoid these two extremes, Badiou conceives of a genuine change as a measured change.<sup>152</sup> The

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<sup>152</sup> Even today someone like Bruce Robbins still paints a simplistic picture of Badiou being an ultra-leftist who believes in a miraculous overturn of the world: "In fact much of what passes for left-wing thinking in a country without an organized left is daydreams of the end of the world featuring mysterious, all-powerful messiahs – think of Hardt and Negri's 'multitude.' Žižek and Badiou operate at a higher level, but they too are drawn to scenarios in which Everything Is Suddenly and Utterly Changed." See his review "Balibarism" in *n+1*, 16 (2013) Apr. 5, 2013. Web. Accessed Apr. 10, 2013. While Žižek might be guilty of charge on occasional basis, it is ludicrous to characterize Badiou as such. All of Badiou's thinking on politics has to be situated in a procedural framework and based on the militant subject's persistent commitment. Then where is the messiah who miraculously descends to the world? "The idea of an overturning whose origin would be a state of totality is imaginary," Badiou writes in *Being and Event*. Moreover, "[e]very radical transformational action originates *in a point*, which, inside a situation, is an evental site" (176). Politics is never an intrinsic necessity of a situation. Because of its non-intrinsic nature, change cannot be thought of as an attribute of being. Politics as a truth procedure belongs to the order of that which is not being-qua-being. The emphasis of Badiou's politics is therefore placed on the process of working through the consequences initiated by the occurrence of an event. The point not to be missed is that *the event by itself does not create change*. The myth of the event as a miraculous rupture making a sudden, revelatory entrance into the world should be conclusively dismissed here. As one of the most perceptive readers of Badiou, Bosteels has insisted on the absurdity to characterize Badiou's politics the way Robbins does. In his view, a strict distinction has to be made between truth and being: "A truth

insurrectional mode of politics is important, but it is primarily driven by negativity and lacks sustainable ideas and organization. That's why it is crucial for the insurrectional riot to be developed into an organized politics lest it become a politics of exhaustion consumed in its own negativity. Badiou's contribution consists in introducing the possibility of giving consistency to inconsistency in the wake of the insurrectional mode of resistance. So what constitutes a genuine change in a world? If change necessarily involves destruction and violence, this does not mean that it necessarily involves physical or material destruction (though this aspect is by no means ruled out either). With the reshaping of the logic of a world after the subject's effectuation of the generic extension, what happens is perhaps already described by Benjamin: "Everything will be as it is now, just a little different" (qtd. in Agamben, *Coming Community* 52). Yet, this slight displacement is nonetheless important and could be more violent than physical violence because what is displaced in this slight displacement is the very transcendental logic that structures a particular world.

Badiou's account of post-evental consistency allows for a new conceptualization of politics which, in a spiraling movement, dialectically conjoins the negative universal of generic indiscernibility and the subjective fidelity that sustains and gives body to the generic, thereby making the generic appear, in the form of extension, in a world. Although the generic extension expresses a universal idea, its enactment is each time specific as regards the issue and the method. There is no universal or programmable prescription, for each prescription is local and "always relative to a concrete situation" ("Politics and Philosophy" 113). In other words, a political prescription always has a specific site, has to do with a particular issue, and is "caught

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does not coincide with the gap or impasse in the structure, nor should we identify the void, on the edges of which an event occurs, purely and simply with the truth of the situation of which this gap would be the symptom." (*Badiou and Politics* 187).

up with the process of mobilisation, of building a movement, etc.” (113). For example, on the issue of the *sans-papiers*, a prescriptive measure cannot simply advocate revolts against the state or preclude the state from its struggle. Today, Badiou argues, “the singular form of their struggle is rather to create the conditions in which the state is led to change this or that thing concerning them, to repeal the laws that should be appealed, to take the measures of naturalisation that should be taken, etc. This is what we mean by *prescriptions against the state*” (114). Or, apropos of the land question faced by the dispossessed farmers or indigenous populations, Hallward describes how the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil enacts a prescriptive politics at a distance from the state:

Among the most consequential ongoing efforts is the massive Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil: rather than persist in the futile pursuit of land reform through established re-representative channels, the MST has organised the direct occupation of farmland by the landless poor themselves, allowing some 250,000 families to win titles to over 15 million acres since 1985. What the MST has understood with particular clarity is that legal recognition can only be won as the *result* of a subjective mobilisation which is itself indifferent to the logic of recognition and re-representation as such. The remarkable gains of the MST have been won at what Badiou would call a “political distance” from the state, and depend upon its own ability to maintain a successful organising structure, develop viable forms of non-exploitative economic cooperation, and resist violent intimidation from landowners and the state police. (Hallward, “Equality and Justice” par. 9)

These two examples show that a prescriptive politics does not operate within the logic of the state; nor does it operate outside the logic of the state. A prescriptive politics is at a distance from the state, meaning that it refuses to participate with options and terms offered by the state and yet still engages with the state from a distance. We can summarize the difference between these two consistencies or two types of prescription by saying that if the state prescribes what is possible or thinkable in a situation, the subject prescribes “the possibility of possibilities” (Badiou, IC 6).

The difference between these two levels of possibility can be grasped with the help of Lacan’s discussion of *vel* or the forced choice. The logic behind the state’s prescription is similar to that of the *vel* of alienation Lacan discusses in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Lacan formulates the *vel* of alienation in terms of money and life: “*Your Money or your life!* If I choose the money, I lose both. If I choose life, I have life without the money, namely, a life deprived of something” (212). What characterized the forced choice in this instance is not the fact that one is forced to choose one of the alternatives, but rather that one is forced to choose *only* life. This is because the alternatives of the choice are not two equal options. Whereas the choice of money is an *object* of choice, the choice of life is *both* the *object* of choice and the very *condition* that sustains the possibility of choosing. Alenka Zupančič explains this perverse logic of forcing in the *vel* of alienation:

The paradox of the forced choice comes from the fact that one of the alternatives between which we are required to choose is at the same time the universal (and quasi-neutral) medium of choice itself; it is at one and the same time the part and the whole, the object of the choice and that which generates and sustains the possibility of choosing....In the disjunction “Your money or your life,” it is life

which is at the same time the part and the whole – it is the indispensable condition of choice itself. (215)

With slight variations, the same perverse logic of forcing operates in the state's prescription concerning what is possible/visible/intelligible in a world. It does not matter what one chooses among different options within the regime of the possible prescribed by the state because this choice is always already forced into a pre-given framework (e.g. parliamentarianism) that sustains the very possibility of choosing. Far from the only *vel* put forth by Lacan, there is actually another lesser known formulation of the *vel*:

For example, freedom or death! There, because death comes into play, there occurs an effect with a rather different structure....You choose freedom. Well! You've got freedom to die. Curiously enough, in the conditions in which someone says to you, freedom or death!, the only proof of freedom that you can have in the conditions laid out before you is precisely to choose death, for there, you show that you have freedom of choice. (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 213)

In Lacan's view, there is a significant difference in the logics behind these two *vels*. In the choice between money and life – or, to the same effect, freedom and life<sup>153</sup> – one is condemned before anything else to a structure of primary alienation. In the second *vel*, however, a different logic of

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<sup>153</sup> Lacan provides a Hegelian rendition of the first *vel* of alienation. The choice is now between freedom and life but the same logic prevails: "It is in Hegel that I have found a legitimate justification for the term alienating *vel*. What does Hegel mean by it? To cut a long story short, it concerns the production of the primary alienation, that by which man enters into the way of slavery. *Your freedom or your life!* If he chooses freedom, he loses both immediately – if he chooses life, he has life deprived of freedom" (*Seminar XI* 212). This forced choice is also at work in the colonial situation. As Sartre points out, "If [the colonized] resist, the soldiers fire, and they are dead men; if they give in and degrade themselves, they are no longer men. Shame and fear warp their character and dislocate their personality" ("Preface" 1). The *vel* of alienation in the colonial situation takes the form of the choice between freedom and life, if one chooses freedom, one loses life ("If they resist, the soldiers fire, and they are dead men"); if one chooses life, one chooses a life deprived of freedom ("if they give in and degrade themselves, they are no longer men"), that is, a degraded life, the life of subhumanity.



forcing emerges. In the choice between freedom and death, the only way to obtain freedom is not by choosing freedom. Freedom is itself ambiguous. Just like the workers in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century capitalist world whose only freedom is the freedom to sell their labor, freedom could mean the freedom to fight for one's life just as it could mean the freedom to die. Freedom itself does not guarantee effective freedom; it could just as well mean its own negation, that is, the freedom to voluntary enslavement.<sup>154</sup> So in the choice of freedom and death, the only way to prove that one has freedom is to choose death. On the surface, death is the negation of freedom. In this *vel*, paradoxically, it is death that guarantees freedom. Because in the second formulation one does not choose among the objects of choice which nonetheless presupposes a framework sustaining the possibility of choosing. In the second *vel*, one aims rather at the possibility of possibilities, that is, the very possibility of choosing itself. The paradox here lies in the fact that in choosing death, one gains freedom because freedom gained in the choice of its negation (death) is not the freedom to do this or that (e.g. freedom to die, to sell labor, to starve, etc.) but the freedom of pure choice. In short, it is a freedom not made within a presupposed framework dictating the possibility of choosing but a freedom directed at the very possibility of choosing.

The different logics of forcing behind these two *vels* help us understand the difference between the statist and subjective prescriptions. The real change the subject prescribes is not about making modifications while secretly endorsing the statist framework that sustains the possibility of choosing. When Badiou claims that the subject prescribes the possibility of

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<sup>154</sup> “Freedom, for example, a universal notion comprising a number of species (freedom of speech and press, freedom of consciousness, freedom of commerce, political freedom, and so on) but also, by means of a structural necessity, a specific freedom (that of the worker to sell freely his own labour on the market) which subverts this universal notion. That is to say, this freedom is the very opposite of effective freedom: by selling his labour ‘freely,’ the worker *loses* his freedom – the real content of this free act of sale is the worker’s enslavement to capital. The crucial point is, of course, that it is precisely this paradoxical freedom, the form of its opposite, which closes the circle of ‘bourgeois freedoms’” (Žižek, *Sublime Object* 16-17).

possibilities, it refers to the subject's enactment of a pure choice, a choice *at the level of* the possibility of choosing itself, rather than *within* the possibility of choosing. It is, in other words, not the choice to choose something but *the choice to choose*.

Thus far we have considered the question of consistency in Badiou's work and identified its principal features. The new consistency in the form of the generic extension is a non-statist consistency prescribed by the subject and addressing itself at the level of the possibility of possibilities. Although Fanon has never systematically theorized these issues as Badiou has with his theory of event, subject and truth, these same concerns nonetheless occupy an important place in his thinking of decolonization. What follows is a critical engagement with Fanon's thought of decolonization in relation to the following three issues: (1) revolutionary optimism; (2) the transition from the insurrectional to the political, or, from inconsistency to consistency; (3) the possibility of possibilities.

#### **IV. The Second Consideration: Fanon and The Rationality of Revolt**

From the point of view of political tactics and History, the liberation of the colonies poses a theoretical problem of crucial importance at the current time: When can it be said that the situation is ripe for a national liberation movement?...We shall see that for the politically committed, urgent decisions are needed on means and tactics, i.e., direction and organization. Anything else is but blind voluntarism with the terribly reactionary risks this implies.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Let's start with the question of revolutionary optimism, an issue Badiou theorizes with the notion of anticipatory certitude. Fanon, too, ask "when can it be said that the situation is ripe for a national liberation movement?" Another way of putting it is to ask: does a revolution demands favorable objective condition for it to succeed? This question appears again and again just about whenever a revolutionary movement is around the corner. On the eve of the most

violent anticolonial revolt in the history of Taiwan, the question is posed by Hanaoka Ichiro [花崗一郎] as he approaches the rebel leader Mona Rudao [莫那魯道], questioning his rash decision to confront the colonizer via armed struggle instead of waiting for another 10 or 20 years when the objective conditions become better and more tolerable. The same question is put to Rosa Luxemburg who answered her critic by asserting that revolution is by nature premature. In Žižek's account of Luxemburg, this episode reveals one essential truth about revolution, namely, its untimeliness:

If we merely wait for the “appropriate moment” we will never live to see it, because this “appropriate moment” cannot arrive without the subjective conditions of the maturity of the revolutionary force (subject) being fulfilled....The opposition to the “premature” seizure of power is thus revealed as opposition to the seizure of power *as such, in general*: to repeat Robespierre's famous phrase, the revisionists want a “revolution without revolution.” (*Sublime Object 62*)

That a revolution is always premature is because there is no objective criteria to help us identify the most opportune moment for its coming. Therefore it requires a kind optimism – similar to what Badiou calls “anticipatory certitude” or what Žižek describes in the passage above as the fulfillment of “the subjective conditions of the maturity” – to force the process of becoming mature of revolution's prematurity.

“Optimism in Africa,” Fanon contends, “is the direct product of the revolutionary action of the African masses....there is not an objective optimism that is more or less mechanically inevitable, but that optimism must be the sentiment that accompanies the revolutionary commitment and the combat” (*TAR* 171, 173). Fanon has long recognized that revolution is a

matter of subjective endeavor, a struggle against objectivity: “For the colonized subject, objectivity is always directed against him” (*WE* 37) and the intellectuals’s “preoccupation with objectivity constitutes the legitimate excuse for their failure to act” (24). It is only when the colonized have enough conviction that the emancipatory politics in which they are engaged is a self-legitimizing enterprise,<sup>155</sup> whose rightfulness *will have come to pass* despite all the objective determinants that would indicate otherwise that they subjectively transform themselves into the historical agents of emancipation. Without such revolutionary optimism, all revolutions can only be considered as revolutions without revolution.

The reason that the timing of revolution is always premature is due to the perspective from which it is judged. It is always the perspective of the status quo that judges any act of subversion as criminal and unlawful. When the participants of a would-be revolutionary movement see their own activity from the point of view of the status quo, their activity then appears premature precisely because it is not a part that can in any case be incorporated into the framework of the dominant narrative. That is why Žižek claims that any argument based on the thesis of “prematurity” betrays a more fundamental assumption objecting to any radical change since the enunciative position it adopts already pronounces any act of insurgency as outside of the order and as such illegitimate. This should come as little surprise for revolution is by definition an upheaval to the status quo, a hole in the existing state of knowledge. And should it no longer be premature, its maturity would coincide with the dissolution of the dominant apparatus, spelling out its ruin with the coming-into-being of revolution’s maturity.

Regrettably, the situation has since become considerably worse. In today’s global capitalism, the central question is no longer whether or not a revolution is premature but *whether*

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<sup>155</sup> On the autonomy of politics, Badiou writes: “politics, when it exists, grounds its own principle regarding the real, and is thus in need of nothing, save itself” (*The Century* 63).

*or not it has any right to exist.* In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, revolutions in the name of national self-determination are still a viable option to counter the colonial offensive because its subjects are firmly convinced of the justness of their action. Other than Third-World anticolonial struggle, communism was then still a possibility offering a different (non-exploitative) vision of organizing the relations of production. But under the shadow of capital-driven neocolonialism, this revolutionary optimism has all but vanished as the ex-revolutionaries had turned back on their own cause with personal confessions denouncing the atrocity of their previous deeds and presented themselves as model subjects who had finally come to their senses. Dirlik has noticed the waning of revolutions as a global phenomenon following the ascendancy of the postcolonial condition:

It is quite apparent that revolutions are no longer possible to entertain as political events because they are against the law. The historical understanding of past revolutions follows suit. Revolutionary histories appear presently as histories of failures – or much worse. The single power that dominates the world order has renamed as terrorism any act of insurgency against the order....the revolutions of the formerly colonial or the Third World had been renounced already by those who had made them, whose claims to revolutionary spaces outside global capital appeared increasingly by the 1970s not as a fulfillment of the utopian promises of revolution but as imprisonment in perpetual backwardness. Since then, the initiative for development has passed from the advocates of national revolutionary purity to those more open to colonial hybridization, whose very hybridity qualifies them for leadership in national incorporation in global modernity. (“End of Colonialism” 16)

In a time of “an *extinguished present*” without a possible future, Fanon’s revolutionary optimism remains all the more relevant for today.<sup>156</sup> The enabling aspect of Fanon’s thinking of decolonization is that it helps revive the Marxist tradition that engages the question of change not away from the objective historical determination but *through* determination and *beyond* determination.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, the revolutionary movement is a process immanent to itself, whose

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<sup>156</sup> The phrase is from Badiou in his discussion of the reactive form of the subject (e.g. the *nouveaux philosophes*) who denies the existence of an event and can produce only “an *extinguished present*” (*LoW* 54-58 passim).

<sup>157</sup> A variation of the prematurity thesis is put forth in Chen Kuan-hsing’s *Asia as Method*, a book that draws on Fanon’s theory of decolonization and starts with an epigraph of the famous passage about history between determination and freedom from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. One of Chen’s central arguments is the idea that decolonization in Asia is impossible without proper objective conditions. Chen believes that the task of decolonization in Asia was interrupted during the cold war and it can only be resumed again under the conditions made possible with the spread of global capitalism (e.g. unrestricted mobility among people and goods, the greater regional integration, etc.). We do not think that Chen’s position can be interpreted as an expression endorsing capitalist exploitation; it merely states that the importance of the objective conditions for the reflexive work of decolonization/deimperialization to take root. This, however, is precisely his problem. In his account, the decolonizing momentum initiated after the Second World War is interrupted during the cold war. Therefore, the reflexive process (that comes after the formal independence of a nation-state) is interrupted and can be resumed only after the condition of globalization sets in: “Only after the cold war eased, creating the condition of possibility for globalization, did decolonization return with the full force of something long repressed” (4). Suppose that we do not compromise on the elementary definition of decolonization as a process of liberation from objective determination imposed from without by colonization and other factors in complicity with colonialism, it then can be argued that the lesson Chen learns from Marx is the lesson of determination rather than that of freedom. It is not to say that the cold war context is not the objective condition with which any account of decolonization in Asia has to reckon; it is rather to question if decolonization is the struggle for self-determination against forms of constraint, how can we possibly qualify anything as belonging to the process of decolonization when it has to wait for a certain objective condition (which itself constitutes a form of constraint) to arrive before decolonization can resume and proceed? My question is simple: why call it decolonization when one actually means determination? In Fanon’s view, “[a]n end must be put to this cold war that gets us nowhere” and “the underdeveloped countries have no real interest in either prolonging or intensifying this cold war. But they are never asked for their opinion. So whenever they can, they disengage. But can they really do so?” (*WE* 61, 41). Obviously, to Chen’s credit, the colonized cannot disengage themselves from the “universal convulsion” (36) of the struggle between capitalism and socialism that forms the ideological background of the era. But this does not mean that they are hapless victims, hopelessly sucked into the ideological whirlwind of its times. Fanon tells us in no uncertain terms that

[the colonized subject] is aware of the exceptional nature of the current situation and that *he intends to make the most of it*. . . . The underdeveloped countries, which made use of the savage competition between the two systems in order to win their national liberation, must, however, refuse to get involved in such rivalry. The Third World must not be

success and failure is only to be judged by its own immanent deployment, not by the opposing ideology or by the psychologization of personal confessions.

“Society,” Fanon argues, “does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are prepared to shake the worm-eaten foundations of the edifice” (*BSWM* xv). Revolutionary optimism in shaking the rotten foundation of the colonial edifice through the will of the people, however, cannot be reduced to blind voluntarism. As Fanon notes, “reality requires total comprehension. An answer must be found on the objective as well as the subjective level” (xv). For Fanon, revolutionary optimism means taking into consideration two contradictory demands, seeing men both as a product of their objective environment and also as a subjective force shaping the environment. Thus when Fanon declares that “I am my own foundation” (*BSWM* 205), he is referring to a kind of subjective autonomy similar to what Badiou means with the idea of an objectless subject. By saying “I am my own foundation,” Fanon is not denying that man is also a product of his objective environment. Quoting Nietzsche, he acknowledges the factivity into which one is born and of which one has no choice: “The misfortune of man is that he was once a child” (206; see also xiv). But Fanon never sees the past, the status quo, or the objective environment as the unsurpassable horizon of human existence and he never stops repeating the possibility of redetermining determination: “I am not a prisoner of History...I must constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists of introducing invention into life” (204). We can tentatively suggest that Fanon’s revolutionary optimism is not blind voluntarism; it is an optimism fully aware of the

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content to define itself in relation to values which preceded it. On the contrary, the underdeveloped countries must endeavor to focus on their very own values as well as methods and style specific to them. (emphasis added, 34, 55)

It is hard to miss the irony here. Suffice it to note the obvious: whereas Fanon insists on the possibility of the force of decolonization to interrupt the geopolitical determination of the cold war, Chen urges us to see the determining force of the cold war that interrupts the process of decolonization.

transindividual constraints imposed on human existence, of men as existing in a world where their lives and modes of behavior are conditioned by material resources available at a given historical moment, by the knotting of different ideological and symbolic forces, and by the complex network of relations and the multiplicity of their interactions, all of these larger than the individual: larger because they are *outside* the individuals, *between* the individuals and *beyond* the individuals. And yet, despite all these, revolutionary optimism stubbornly believes in the subjective capacity to carve out a space of freedom in circumstances inherited from the past and conditioned by external forces. In a nutshell, *revolutionary optimism articulates the subject into existence in a history where there is no subject.*

The Fanonian subject in this sense is not given in advance; it is rather to be conceived as a project in a strictly Sartrean sense. Sartre, in a beautiful passage, outlines his dialectical conception of a project:

For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made....Starting with the project, we define a double simultaneous relationship. In relation to the given, the praxis is negativity; but what is always involved is the negation of a negation. In relation to the object aimed at, praxis is positivity, but this positivity opens onto the “non-existent,” to what has not yet been. A flight and a leap ahead, at once a refusal and a realization, the project retains and unveils the surpassed reality which is refused by the very movement which surpassed it. (*Basic Writings* 308)

“The double simultaneous relationship” Sartre speaks of above corresponds to Fanon’s characterization of man as both negation and affirmation (*BSWM* 195, 197). It should be noted that man in question is not the man of liberal individualism (e.g. an isolated monad) nor is it the



man of totalitarian collectivism (e.g. a dispensable cog in the state machine). Fanon's new man is coextensive with the subjective process of emancipation and therefore cannot be reduced either to an autonomous or to an anonymous individual: "When the nation in its totality is set in motion, the new man is not an posteriori creation of this nation, but coexists with it, matures with it, and triumphs with it" (*WE* 233)

Just as the force of objectivity is inevitably transindividual,<sup>158</sup> so is the force of subjectivity that eventually leads to the creation of a new humanism. If this point is not stressed sufficiently enough in *BSWM*, it has by the time Fanon writes *WE* become an article of faith. The transindividual dimension of the subject-formation can be gauged on three levels:

1. At the immediate level when an individual decides to incorporate him/herself into the organization of the struggle, he/she is introduced to a different vocabulary, a vocabulary of fraternity which, prior to the individual's participation, has been systematically suppressed and maligned by the colonizers: "'Brother,' 'sister,' 'comrade' are words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie because in their thinking my brother is my wallet and my comrade, my scheming" (*WE* 11).
2. At the level of anticolonial resistance rallied around the idea of the nation, the transindividual dimension takes place in a relation of support in which the nation constitutes a network of relations that enables the individual to fulfil him/herself as a sovereign subject and the individual gives substance to the nation as his/her decision to participate is that which carries the nation forward: "Since individual experience is national, since it is a link in the national chain, it ceases to be individual, narrow and limited in scope, and can lead to the truth of the nation and the world" (*WE* 140-141).

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<sup>158</sup> On transindividualism, see Balibar 2007, 30-32; 2002, 27-28, 66-67, 156-173; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 182.

3. At the level of transnational and transhistorical solidarity, the individual guided by the project of humanity's collective emancipation connects him/herself to a collective endeavor in which each specific enactment embodies a piece of confirmation of this universal ideal. The transindividual aspect is experienced at this level as solidarity which is in each case conjunctural rather than genealogical and which also registers a form of being-in-common based on the presupposition of the trans-worldly availability of equality: "There is a kind of collective endeavor, a common destiny among the underdeveloped masses....What we want to hear are case histories in Argentina or Burma about the fight against illiteracy or the dictatorial behavior of other leaders. This is the material that inspires us, educates us, and greatly increases our effectiveness" (*WE* 143).<sup>159</sup>

By way of conclusion on revolutionary optimism, we see that Antonio Gramsci's slogan "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" receives eloquent renditions in Badiou's account of truth and Fanon's account of decolonization. For Badiou, "[o]nly a will inhabited by its consequences can politically overcome the objective inertia of the state" (*LoW* 22). For Fanon, the will of the people rationalizes the revolt. If the national bourgeoisie are incapable of changing the colonial situation, it is because they have no confidence in people's capacity to prescribe a new possible and because they fail to "rationalize popular praxis" (*WE* 98). If the revolution is always premature, it is because it is premature from the point of view of the current order of things and also because there is no pre-given blueprint guiding the way of revolution, no "determinant in the last instance," no cunning of reason, no hidden hand pulling the strings. There is, however, a "determinant in the first instance" in the form of the will of the people

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<sup>159</sup> "The African peoples are concretely involved in a total struggle against colonialism, and we Algerians do not dissociate the combat we are waging from that of the Rhodesians or the Kenyans" (Fanon, *TAR* 172).

(Hallward, “The Will of the People” 17), the presupposition of which will retroactively justify popular praxis.

Revolutionary optimism in the form of putting the trust in the will of the people to produce a new world is essential for the project of decolonization because it is this optimism that legitimizes the praxis independent of the colonial order’s legitimating framework, which is in its essence illegitimate from the point of view of generic humanity. Gibson has argued that reason in the context of Fanon’s writing is “fundamentally linked to freedom and in opposition to unreason and unfreedom of neocolonial globalized capitalism” (“Living Fanon” 6). Reason, then, has less to do with deliberative reasoning than with the unflinching reclamation of man’s right to equality and freedom. Thus, when Fanon calls out, “[a]re there...not enough people on this earth resolved to impose reason on this unreason” (*DC* 31), he is not urging the colonized people to enlighten themselves in a course set by European civilization so as to drag themselves out of precolonial backwardness. He is rather urging the colonized to enlighten themselves through their own praxis. We might take issue with whether popular praxis always has to pass through the medium of the party or take the form of physical violence (Hallward, “Fanon and the Political Will” 223; Fanon, *WE* 44, 52), but it is clear that for Fanon a fundamental optimism in popular praxis is the condition for people to educate and enlighten themselves. This semantic change in the import of “reason” is already hinted at by the end of *BSWM*:

We would not be so naive as to believe that the appeals for reason or respect for human dignity can change reality. For the Antillean working in the sugarcane plantations in Le Robert, to fight is the only solution. And he will undertake and carry out this struggle not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but

because quite simply he cannot conceive his life otherwise than as a kind of combat against exploitation, poverty, and hunger. (199)

Decolonization cannot be achieved by merely possessing an enlightened mind; it can only be achieved through popular praxis and reason will come to pass as a result of this praxis, not the other way round.

Reason resides in popular praxis but praxis is not solely driven by emotions made up of anger, resentment or hurt feelings. Praxis, for Fanon, rests on an axiomatic assumption that people are capable of educating themselves and prescribing their own destiny: “To politicize the masses...means driving home to the masses that *everything depends on them*, that if we stagnate the fault is theirs, and that if we progress, they too are responsible, that there is no demiurge, no illustrious man taking responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people and the magic lies in their hands and their hands alone” (emphasis added, *WE* 138). Fanon’s axiom that “everything depends on the people” is comparable to Badiou’s two axioms of equality, as it gives primacy to people’s (negative) capacity to revolt against oppression, to transcend objective constraints that have thus far pulled them back; as well as to their (positive) capacity to give consistency to inconsistency, to prescribe the direction and organization of the movement and fight *for* a new mode of being-in-common. And it is Fanon’s hope that the Algeria he fights for is an Algeria in which those who are here are from here: “*in the new society that is being built, there are only Algerians. From the outset, therefore, every individual living in Algeria is an Algerian. In tomorrow’s independent Algeria it will be up to every Algerian to assume Algerian citizenship or to reject it in favor of another*” (*DC* 152).

This brings us to the next issue concerning politics’ consistency and its sustainability. In his recent book on the Arab Spring *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou distinguishes the

insurrectional riot from the historical riot, and these two further from politics proper. The key criterion for such distinctions is the question of organization which depends on how people deal with the implicative structure of the evental opening initiated in a riot.<sup>160</sup> If we look at the context of the anticolonial struggle in Fanon's discussion, the implicative structure of anticolonial resistance involves such questions as: why resistance has to be national and not ethnic, racial, or continental when the colonial denigration of native cultures is always on the continental rather than national scale? What are the theoretical and practical justifications for violence? Is the negotiated settlement an acceptable form of decolonization? What is the relation between the intellectuals and the masses, between the party and the people? What kind of solidarity is to be forged amongst people from different classes, from the interior area and the city, or between the colonized in one nation and the colonized in another nation, or between the colonized and other oppressed groups?

Above are the issues Fanon touches on in his works, and some of these have already received considerations in our previous discussion. Instead of attempting to address the rest one by one, I would approach the issue of consistency by exploring the implications of the following

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<sup>160</sup> On the question of organization, it is crucial to note that Badiou is not speaking of organization as a permanent necessity for the existence of politics, as this would bestow on the party an a priori status to provide guidance for political action. For Badiou, the party politics of Leninism is saturated and no longer an adequate mode of politics for today. Today, Badiou argues, politics manifests itself in the mode of "a politics without party." Organization is also indispensable in this mode of politics. But rather than a permanent necessity, organization in a politics without party is immanent to political struggle. In "Changing the World" Conference held at Pasadena in 2012, Badiou elaborates on the relation between these two senses of organization in terms of strategy (a politics with party) and tactics (a politics without party). In his view, strategy and tactics are not opposed to each other, but their relation is not straightforward determination either. It is not that strategy provides general guidance for local, tactical maneuvers; nor that tactics presupposes the dispensability of the strategy. Rather, the new organization is to think strategy as immanent to tactics, not its condition. That is to say, local tactics is the place where politics starts. However, the aim of politics is not to remain local and tactical; politics strives for the generalization of tactics into a strategy. And the new form of organization Badiou has in mind is when tactics can at once answer to the local specificity of a situation and acquire a universal import. On politics without party, see the special issue on *Alain Badiou and Cultural Revolution* in *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13.3 (2005).

two passages. The first passage shows a historical pattern from inconsistency to consistency in which the progressive anticolonial nationalist struggle degenerates into a conservative state-building project. The central question in this line of inquiry is the notion of work, and I argue that Fanon works out a dialectical and redemptive conception of work that affirms the people's will to transcend the givenness of a situation and prescribes a space of (negative) freedom that touches on the possibility of possibilities. In the second passage, Fanon calls for a new conception of nationalism which would preserve the egalitarian thrust behind anticolonial nationalist struggle. This new conception requires nationalism to be elaborated as *thought* rather than merely praxis, and even less a form of association based on some commonality. Once nationalism is elaborated as thought, it evolves into a social and political consciousness affirming the idea of justice/equality and giving consistency to this idea. Nationalism as a form of thought therefore prescribes a distance between insurrection and institutionalization since the consistency is here conceived as the consistent articulation of the egalitarian inconsistency rather than the transition from revolutionary inconsistency to statist consistency. Moreover, an elaborated nationalism inscribes a new relationship between the intellectuals and the masses by presupposing the people's capacity to learn, understand, and further elaborate the infinite implications of the egalitarian maxim. Once nationalism is elaborated as thought, it can be said to elevate itself into a new humanism without having to cast off the particularities embodied in nationalism. The new humanism affirms people's capacity to prescribe a new possible, a possible Fanon envisions as "an Algeria open to all, in which every kind of genius may grow" (DC 32):

1. From Inconsistency to Consistency:

[T]he leader can be heard churning out the history of independence and recalling the united front of the liberation struggle....the leader asks the people to plunge

back into the past and drink in the epic that led to independence....During the struggle for liberation the leader roused the people and promised them a radical, heroic march forward. Today he repeatedly endeavors to lull them to sleep and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to take stock of the immense distance they have covered. (*WE* 114)

## 2. The Consistency of Inconsistency:

Nationalism is not a political doctrine, it is not a program. If we really want to safeguard our countries from regression, paralysis, or collapse, we must rapidly switch from a national consciousness to a social and political consciousness. The nation can only come into being in a program elaborated by a revolutionary leadership and enthusiastically and lucidly appropriated by the masses....If nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead end. A bourgeois leadership of the underdeveloped countries confines the national consciousness to a sterile formalism. Only the massive commitment by men and women to judicious and productive tasks gives form and substance to this consciousness. (142-144)

Let's take a closer look at the first passage. Before independence, the leader "roused the people and promised them a radical, heroic march forward." After the nation's leap toward independence, the masses saw the withdrawal of the colonizer's flag but they soon realized that national independence is not identical with decolonization because what they had achieved is only formal independence, one without substance. Decolonization is deprived of its substance as soon as the leaders are gripped by the comprador mentality, intent on engaging in profit-seeking

activities. During the revolution, people were aroused to take action and in so doing they mounted themselves onto the stage of history. After the revolution, the leaders, confronted with the promise they barely keep, asked the people to remember the past and indulge in the glory of the revolution in order to make them feel comfortably numb about the present and the future.<sup>161</sup> Or else, the leaders asked the people to work themselves to death under the pretext of modernizing the young nation in order to catch up with the West. So when the people woke up in the morning after the sweet dream of revolution, they saw the flag raising up on the native soil but they also found themselves on the wrong side of history; rather than the subject of history, they continued to endure a prolonged status of subjection. The change before and after independence thus remains largely inconsequential and should be understood as changing hands or the changing of the guards as the people continued to be treated like an infantile in need of a guardian: “For the bourgeoisie, nationalization signifies very precisely the transfer into indigenous hands of privileges inherited from the colonial period” (*WE* 100).

The impasse of nationalism ends up reproducing the colonial structure, albeit this time in an autochthonous form. What is revealed in the leaders’ attitude to the masses is a flawed conception of decolonization. Decolonization is a process that cannot be reduced to a matter of legality. Decolonization covers all aspects of life, primary among which are the changing of overall social relations and material conditions. Decolonization, furthermore, requires us to look

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<sup>161</sup> This prescriptive and organizational aspect through which anticolonial struggle (or any eventual happening) transforms itself from an insurrectional movement to a sustainable political movement is often neglected in the discussion of Fanon’s work. Although a revolutionary event is important, it is as important to pursue its consequences lest the event peaks at its insurrectional moment and vanishes afterward. This question of sustainability is also driven home in Žižek’s address to the crowd at Occupy Wall Street Movement: “The only thing I’m afraid of is that we will someday just go home and then we will meet once a year, drinking beer, and nostalgically [sic] remembering ‘What a nice time we had here.’ Promise yourselves that this will not be the case. We know that people often desire something but do not really want it. Don’t be afraid to really want what you desire.”



beyond these tangible domains and into its epistemological dimension as *a way of thinking*. Granted that these domains are often so intertwined that the fulfillment of one lends itself to the fulfillment of others, it is nonetheless crucial not to mistake their mutual implication for mutual necessitation as if the realization of one condition necessarily implies the realization of all. When we look at decolonization as a way of thinking, the pitfalls of the national consciousness espoused by the conservative leaders come sharply into view.

The problematic nature of this type of national consciousness lies primarily in arrogating the power of the people for the state's consolidation of power, thus translating the work of liberation into the work of enslavement. When the newly independent nation subscribes to the sociological discourse of modernization and envisions itself as a late comer striving to join the march of progress, decolonization is immediately out of the question because the internalization of the modernization discourse, after conferring a consistent profile onto different geocultural spaces, forces into a diachronic design various simultaneously existing units; according to this design, each placed unit is differentiated according to its proximity to the modern (the closer the better), a marker represented by and synonymous to the civilizational achievement of Western Europe, connoting a sense of superior standing in material, technological, scientific, institutional, sociological, and ideological domains. Once this ranking is established through the imposition/internalization of a diachronic design on other simultaneous entities, those removed from the modern will be denied of their coequality despite their simultaneity with the modern,<sup>162</sup> such that Africa today is perceived as primordial and premodern despite the fact that Africa exists contemporaneously with Europe, America or Asia.

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. Johannes Fabian 1983.

The work demanded of the newly liberated people to modernize themselves at a frenetic pace is not the same kind of work seen in the anticolonial struggle. Instead of bringing about decolonization, the desire of the post-independent nation to modernize and keep abreast with the West ushers in a new era of slavery. Work is thus turned into an instrument of enslavement and contributes to the emergence of a new kind of class, a paradoxical class of “free slaves” (23). Fanon is wary of this development and insists that decolonization will never be achieved without also changing the way of thinking: “The agenda [in the early years of independence] is not only to pull through but to catch up with the other nations as best one can....Posing the problem of development of underdeveloped countries in this way seems to us to be neither right nor reasonable....Today we should proceed differently. We must not say to the people: ‘Work yourself to death, but let the country get rich!’” (52, 135). In order for nationalism to cast off its derivativeness, the leaders and the people must realize that “the European game is finally over....The notion of catching up must not be used as a pretext to brutalize man, to tear him from himself and his inner consciousness, to break him, to kill him” (236, 238). “No,” Fanon declares, “we do not want to catch up with anyone. But what we want to is walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times” (238). In Fanon’s view, the meaning of work cannot be settled easily. It is a double-edged sword that leads either to emancipation or enslavement. Work promises redemption only when people realize that “work is not a simple notion, that slavery is the opposite of work, and that work presupposes freedom, responsibility, and consciousness” (133). Without this realization, liberation can only be a shadow of itself, and amounts to liberation in name and not in substance. If the leaders continue to abuse the will of the people under the pretext of modernizing the nation without providing conditions for nationalism to evolve into a political consciousness, without explaining to people (or allowing people to

explain) what is to become of new social relations, new distribution of senses and resources, their actions effectively betray the axiom that “everything depends on the people,” and can only lead to a state of prolonged subjugation rather than the start of decolonization.

When Fanon makes “everything depends on the people” the axiom of decolonization, he has in mind a different concept of work, one that is prescribed by the people. “*Leader*,” Fanon explains, “comes from the English verb ‘to lead,’ meaning ‘to drive’ in French. The driver of people no longer exists today. People are no longer a herd and do not need to be driven. If the leader drives me I want him to know that at the same time I am driving him” (*WE* 127). Genuine revolutionary work is a condensed expression of the people’s will against systematic injustice and their aspiration for a new present. “The militant,” Fanon proclaims, “is one who works” (44). It is, however, not the work that demands people to fall in line and obey; it is rather the work that originates in the people, develops with the people, enriches the people, and in the very same process subjectivizes the people: “When the nation in its totality is set in motion, the new man is not an posteriori creation of this nation, but coexists with it, matures with it, and triumphs with it” (233).

If this new concept of work is still caught up in a structure of sacrifice, this sacrifice has to be placed in its proper perspective. First of all, it is not sacrifice associated with ontotheology or the metaphysics of the same (Nancy, “The Unsacrificeable” 22-25). It is rather a notion of sacrifice that shares, to a great extent, with what Benjamin calls “divine violence” in which sacrifice is accepted as a form of “pure power over all life *for the sake of the living*” (emphasis added, “Critique of Violence” 297). Within the purview of Benjamin’s thought, life being sacrificed is “mere life” while life for the sake of which sacrifice is made is “just existence”:

The proposition that existence stands higher than a just existence is false and ignominious, if existence is to mean nothing other than mere life. It contains a mighty truth, however, if existence, or better, life...means the irreducible, total condition that is “man”....Man cannot, at any price, be said to coincide with the mere life in him, no more than with any other of his conditions and qualities, not even with the uniqueness of his bodily person. (299)<sup>163</sup>

Life as the total condition of being human is also what Fanon has in mind when he says that decolonization “reexamine[s] the question of man,” strives to “invent a man in full” and introduces man in his totality as an affirmation (*WE* 236). Thus, Fanon points out, in the case in which the militant sacrifices life in order to safeguard it, we are dealing with a different structure of sacrifice: “The *fidai*...has a rendezvous with the life of Revolution, and with his own life. The *fidai* is not one of the sacrificed. To be sure, he does not shrink before the possibility of losing his life...but at no moment does he choose death” (*DC* 57-58). Ultimately, to borrow Benjamin’s

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<sup>163</sup> In the conclusion of *LoW*, “What is It to Live,” Badiou also maintains that “[l]ife is a subjective category” (509) irreducible to mere physical existence. To live is not a biological process because life is irreducible to the mere prolongation of the biological functioning of the body. To live is not to live for mere existence; to live is to live for the idea of generic equality, to live *now* for *a new present*. At the opposite end, democratic materialism posits life as mere existence entangled in symbolic and cultural systems. On this view, we arrive at a conception of the body, a finite body which is, alternately, the site of difference, the site of inscription, or the site of exploitation: it is the site of difference because body is the place where signs of individuation is expressed through idiosyncratic marks of enjoyment and suffering; the corresponding ethical and juridical imperatives are “the respect for differences.” The body is also the site of inscription because it is not an originary given and can be accessed only through symbolic mediation; as such, the body is the place in which each individual entertains a singular relation to the shaping forces of social norms and communal ethos. Finally, the body is vulnerable to decay and various forms of exploitation. At the level of materiality, the body is subject to torture and physical violence; it is also considered the bearer of flesh that necessarily ages, decays or changes with the passage of time; the body in this sense is a living body, subject both to the internal process of atrophy as well as the infliction of abuse from without. Protection and preservation of the sacredness of life then become the first principle of the humanist hypothesis to be acknowledged and, if possible, implemented at all costs. As a result, the body in this democratic configuration can only be conservatively defined, as something to be *protected from harm*, thereby “reduc[ing] humanity to an overstretched vision of animality” (2).

distinction, if the work of catching up with the West *demands* sacrifice, the work of the militants *accepts* it (“Critique of Violence” 297).

Marx once warned in the context of the proletarian revolution that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve the political instrument of their emancipation” (Marx 629). Marx’s utterance remains pertinent in the colonial context. The deformation of anticolonial liberation struggle into native elites’ effort to consolidate the state power and maximize profits for themselves occurs so often that it has many postcolonial critics growing wary of this recurring historical pattern and calling into doubt the political valence of nationalism if it eventually means a relapse into another system of oppression. If the first obstacle that prevents an effective process of decolonization to take root through the medium of nationalism has to do with the way the notion of work has been misappropriated by the leaders, the second obstacle involves a way of thinking that inscribes an insurmountable division between the elites and the masses and presupposes a unilateral transmission of knowledge from the former to the latter. Insofar as the people are treated as a bunch of unenlightened masses, there can be no hope for decolonization.<sup>164</sup> The division between the leaders and the masses reflects a

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<sup>164</sup> It would be erroneous to assume that the situation discussed here pertains only to the underdeveloped countries under authoritarian rule. Even in a democratic society like Taiwan, the tendency to treat people like a bunch of uneducated and uneducable idiots is in blatant display everyday. Not long ago, Taiwan’s Executive Yuan released an advertisement for “Economic Power-up Plan” [行政院經濟動能計畫推升方案]. The ad features four people of different generations, different genders, and from different walks of life, each wearing a perplexed, head-scratching expression with hundreds of words and technical terms flying past them. The voiceover states that the administration really wants to explain to the people where the nation is heading but those details are just too complex and technical to be grasped by the (feeble-minded) masses. The ad urges people to trust the administration and ends with an imperative “Just Do It!” The subtext is, of course, that the people are not intelligible enough to understand these issues, and all they have to do is to put their trust in technocracies and follow their guidance. “The political education of the masses is meant to make adults out of them, not to make them infantile,” Fanon counters (*WE* 124). “Resorting to technical language means you are determined to treat the masses as uninitiated.... You can explain anything to the people provided you really want them to understand” (131). This means that the

colonial mentality internalized by the upper echelons, who lose sight of the fact that decolonization, if it is to live up to its name, is the task of undoing division and hierarchy imposed from both within and without. That is to say, internal hierarchization cannot be put into practice under the pretext of fighting external hierarchization without violating the spirit of decolonization. This, however, does not mean that no distinction is made between the leaders and the masses or that anticolonial struggles can proceed on the basis of the people's will alone without the need for tactics, strategies and organizations; it means rather that their relation has to be brought to bear on the same axiomatic presupposition that "everything depends on the people," only that this time we need to look at the will of the people not solely as a negative praxis of undoing the system of discrimination but also as a thought of self-prescription.

Aware that the degree of people's commitment to decolonization corresponds to the degree of their comprehension of the revolutionary ideas, Fanon stresses the importance of "the edification of man through revolutionary teachings": "work is not a physical exercise or the working of certain muscles, but that one works more with one's brain and one's heart than with muscles and sweat" (*WE* 133). And this is the point the second passage about the need for nationalism to evolve into a social and political consciousness attempts to address. It should be noted, however, that this second passage is as frequently quoted as it is quoted out of context. Fanon's plea for a move beyond the negativity of the anticolonial resistance toward a more encompassing sense of social justice is often taken to be his mature point of view, a view linked to the idea of a new humanism elaborated in *BSWM*, the darling text of many critics (e.g. Bhabha, Butler, Chen etc.) who see in this book a more conceptually refined articulation of

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problem we face today is not so different from that faced by Fanon; it also means that the threat of colonialism does not always come from a foreign power for it could just as well dwell within the mind of those who are supposed to serve the people. For a relevant discussion of the function of state propaganda, see Chomsky 1991.

Fanon's theory of decolonization, despite the book's chronological anteriority to *WE*.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, scholars seize on this opportunity to read the second passage as evident of Fanon's critique of anticolonial nationalism as if it were an embarrassing stage that could and should be circumvented. But they seem to forget that while Fanon alerts us to the dangers of anticolonial nationalism's impasse, he also calls attention to the danger of bypassing this stage and jumping directly to the development of a social and political consciousness:

The Africans and the underdeveloped peoples, contrary to what is commonly believed, are quick to build a social and political consciousness. *The danger is that very often they reach the stage of social consciousness before reaching the national phase.* In this case the underdeveloped countries' violent calls for social justice are combined, paradoxically enough, with an often primitive tribalism. (emphasis added, 143)

In the absence of anticolonial nationalist struggle which, as mentioned earlier, is a condensed expression of the universal politics of equality, justice is relativized to such an extent that it becomes a defensive articulation of restoring a particular group's dignity, emotion or interest. As such, justice is oriented toward a will to revenge and is reduced to a matter of getting even with enemies.

If we are to unpack the meaning of nationalism's development into a social and political consciousness or what Fanon alternately refers to as the creation of a new humanism, we need to take note of two things in the second passage. First, nationalism is a political movement but it is also a form of *thought* that requires elaboration. Second, the national consciousness would

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<sup>165</sup> *Black Skin, White Masks* was originally published as *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc* by Editions de Seuil in France in 1952. *The Wretched of the Earth* was first published in French by François Maspero éditeur under the title *Les damnés de la terre* in 1961.

remain sterile without people's commitment. And these two statements cannot stand alone on their own because people cannot fully commit themselves to the cause (thereby giving substance to nationalism) in the absence of thought and thought has no material existence without people's commitment. Therefore, it is essential that the idea be transmitted to the masses, so they understand what they fight for and why they fight. But the gist of Fanon's dialectical thinking cannot be expressed in a straightforward thesis that posits humanism as its ultimate end. The real issue, I argue, is not so much that the social and political consciousness is the answer to the dead end of nationalism as *the way in which social and political justice has to emerge out of nationalism's own impasse*.

This means that we need to refrain from the customary practice in Fanon studies built on the false choice between an anticolonial Fanon and a postcolonial Fanon, claiming either to be the truth of the other.<sup>166</sup> To assert that political justice has to emerge out of anticolonial nationalism's own impasse is the same as asserting that these two Fanons are dialectically intertwined to such an extent that political justice would be inconceivable in the absence of the insurrectional phase of anticolonial nationalism; similarly, anticolonial nationalism would

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<sup>166</sup> In his now canonical biography of Fanon, David Macey notices that

The "post-colonial Fanon" is in many ways, an inverted image of the "revolutionary Fanon" of the 1960s. Third Worldist readings largely ignored the Fanon of *Peau noire, masques blancs*; post-colonial readings concentrate almost exclusively on that text and studiously avoid the question of violence. The Third Worldist Fanon was an apocalyptic creature; the post-colonial Fanon worries about identity politics, and often about his own sexual identity, but he is no longer angry. His anger was a response to his experience of a black man in a world defined as white, but not to the "fact" of his blackness. It was a response to the condition and situation of those he called the wretched of the earth. The wretched of the earth are still there, but not in the seminar rooms where the talk is of post-colonial theory. They came out on to the streets of Algiers in 1988, and the Algerian army shot them dead. They have subsequently been killed in the thousands by authoritarian Algerian governments and so-called Islamic fundamentalists. Had he lived, Fanon would still be angry. His readers should be angry too. (27-28)

On the battle of these two Fanons, see also Neil Lazarus 2011, Ch. 4.



amount to reactionary and reactional venting of violence were it not for the organization of the movement into a consistent articulation of nationalism as thought. In order to think these two Fanons together, we need to adopt a different perspective. Earlier I have discussed Badiou's relation to Sartre. My conclusion is that Badiou has remained faithful to those political categories proposed by Sartre because, unlike his contemporaries, he enters the debate *from* Sartre, not *against* Sartre. The same can be said of my approach to reading Fanon. In order to fully appreciate the force of Fanon's thinking of decolonization, we need to adopt a perspective that think the impasse of anticolonial nationalism from the perspective *of* anticolonial nationalism and not *against* anticolonial nationalism. That is to say, we need to enter the debate from the point of view of what Badiou calls "maximal interiority" (*The Century* 5) and think an era or a movement from the point of view of its own subjectivity.<sup>167</sup> The perspective of maximal interiority is distinct from the Rankean historicism in that it does not strive for empathetic identification in order to think the era according to its own presuppositions.<sup>168</sup> The problem with the Rankean model is that while it also can be qualified as a perspective of maximal interiority, this perspective is devoid of a transformative capacity.<sup>169</sup> Thinking an era according to that era's presuppositions, Rankean historicism renders history a descriptive totality without an outside, that is, a history without a subject.

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<sup>167</sup> In "Notes from the Underground, Fanon, Africa, and the Poetics of the Real," Miguel Mellino makes a similar connection between Badiou and Fanon, urging the reader to understand the revolutionary subjectivity in Fanon from the point of view of maximal interiority, that is, the point of view of "the passion for the real" as the main affective drive behind the 20<sup>th</sup> century's grandiose political experiments (68-69).

<sup>168</sup> Rankean historicism sees a historical era as a self-contained unit, fully comprehensible and functional according to its own presuppositions. This view has often been turned into a kind of justification for today's "culture of respect" in which thick contextualization leads to an extreme form of particularism with separatist overtone. This view has been criticized by many, notably in Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History."

<sup>169</sup> On this point, see Ross' "Historicizing Untimeliness," 26-27.

It is also to be distinguished from the position of neutrality that characterizes most of the historical writings that think a historical era outside the era's own historicity.<sup>170</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, this neutral stance judges, for example, the 20th century as “an accursed century” before the tribunal of the number: “The balance sheet of the century immediately raises the question of counting the dead. Why this will to count? Because, in this instance, ethical judgement can only locate its real in the devastating excess of the crime, in the counting – by the millions – of the victims” (2). Such a method subsumes politics under the dictatorship of morality and judges politics not for the ideas that mobilize a political movement but for the number of the dead committed in its name. After all, what can be more neutral than the number of the dead committed in the name of race, progress, or even revolution? On this view, there is no difference between communism, fascism and colonialism for they are brothers in crime, namely, the crime against humanity.<sup>171</sup> When the crime against humanity is measured by the sheer number of the dead or by a morality affirming the sanctity of life – they are two sides of the same humanitarian coin – then anticolonial resistance can be thrown in for good measure, for it is also built on the same sacrificial structure which has to be brought to the moral foreground so as to obscure the emancipatory desire of the struggle.

The method of “maximal interiority,” in contrast, takes into account *both* the *objective* conditions that constitute the socio-historical constraints of an era and the *subjective* production

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<sup>170</sup> In addition to the Rankean and neutral variations, there is a third kind of historicism associated with Hegelianism and Marxism that posits the becoming necessary of a contingent historical process. This is Chakrabarty's primary target in his project of provincializing Europe. Unlike the Rankean view which is self-enclosed, the Hegelian/Marxist historicism (at least in their scientific version) maps out in advance history's progressive movement. History will inevitably run its course, thanks to the cunning of Reason (Hegel) or the structural changes in the productive forces and the relations of production (Marx). In all these historicist accounts, the question of subjectivity remains unaccounted for.

<sup>171</sup> This indistinction leads Badiou to denounce those who use the category of totalitarianism to group together vastly different political movements. On Badiou's clarification of the difference between the new man produced in fascism and communism, see *The Century*, 65-66.

of the new. This method sees an era or a movement according to the immanent deployment of its subjective thought and does not pass judgment on moral grounds. We know that Fanon, in the passage above, urges a move toward social justice and humanism and this move toward justice and humanism entails a subjective production of a new possible. It is therefore important not to lose sight of a crucial distinction between the subjective production and the objective dispensation when it comes to the idea of justice in Fanon. Justice or humanism in Fanon is not objectively defined, less about the dispensation of law than a subjective production of generic equality; whereas the former (i.e. formal equality or equality before the law) is essentially a matter of integration in which equality is ensured and granted by an institution, the latter starts with a self-legitimizing declaration of equality. Oftentimes, we shall admit, the realization of one helps the realization of the other. But the point not to be missed here is that justice for Fanon is the name of the desire for universal equality and is to be situated at the level of what we have previously called “the possibility of possibilities.” That is to say, emancipation cannot be achieved by choosing from a plethora of options offered by the state; it is not a road “less traveled by,” to use a metaphor from Robert Frost, since a less-trodden path still presents itself as one of the pre-given options offered by the world. Emancipation, in contrast, is “a road made by walking.” The Spanish poet Antonio Machado is our supreme guide here: “Traveller, your footprints/Are the path and nothing more;/Traveller, there is no path,/The path is made by walking.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> To do justice to Sakai, I want to mention that Sakai ends his discussion of the politics of despair with a quotation from Lu Xun: “hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made” (qtd. in *Translation and Subjectivity* 176). Granted that Lu Xun’s insight is also to be situated at the level of the possibility of possibilities, Sakai’s reading is nonetheless made in the absence of a prescriptive function, without which we might soon realize that the road indeed is made by walking and yet it does nothing to prescribe a different road other than those prescribed by colonialism and

In the colonial situation the colonized cannot achieve decolonization by channeling their grievances through legitimate means because the very idea of legitimacy is already discriminatory – that is, colonial legitimacy, founded on the basis of colonial differentiation, is always already that which renders universal equality illegitimate in the first place. No genuine political change can be achieved by appealing to the measures prescribed by the state. Such measures amount, in a nutshell, to changing the terms without changing the structure. As Feltham observes in his analysis of the aboriginal politics in Australia, “[p]olitically one cannot hope for anything more on the part of these procedures [of representation] than a slight rearrangement of the hierarchy of ‘places’ in the situation; places being understood as political levels of priority, power and interest. In other words, procedures of representation can never lead to anything other than the reform of a political situation; its basic structures remain the same” (“Singularity Happening” 230). Whether or not decolonization touches on the level of the possibility of possibilities can be judged by whether the decision is compromised by other objective considerations. The damaging effect of compromise for the task of decolonization is underlined by Fanon. Compromise usually takes the form of negotiated settlement between the former colonizers and the native elites. The native intellectuals would preach to their people that negotiation can proceed only on the condition that people accept the legal means of channelling their grievances. That is why the reformist approach (e.g. the Movement for the Establishment of a Taiwanese Parliament) championed by Lin Xiantang [林獻堂] and his Taiwanese Cultural Association [文化協會] is to be suspect as a proper gesture of decolonization. Working within the boundaries set by the colonial regime already concedes too much ground for any meaningful

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imperialism. Machado’s poem is translated by Asa Cusack. “Traveller, There is No Path.” *A Minimum of Poetry*. Web. 05 Aug. 2012. <[http://minimo.50webs.org/caminante\\_eng.html](http://minimo.50webs.org/caminante_eng.html)>.

struggle against colonialism. It might be unfair to deny all the contributions made by the reformist intellectuals in the 1920s, but it is also important to point out the underlying assumption of their activities. For whatever they have done, they have done it with a prior acceptance of the overarching determination of the Japanese colonial state in Taiwan. Therefore, their contribution should be understood as a defensive gesture of minimizing the detrimental effects of colonialism rather than an active undertaking to bring colonialism to an end. They might have made suffering more tolerable, but it is still suffering under colonialism nonetheless, and does not really touch on the level of the possibility of possibilities. In Fanon's judgment, "because they have always been careful not to break ties with colonialism....They are losers from the start" (*WE* 24, 25). Their role, furthermore, becomes even more ambiguous if we take into account a certain exchange mechanism between the colonial government and the colonized elites. The colonial government enlisted collaboration from the local elites to ensure a smoother penetration of its high-handed colonial policy. As Wakabayashi Masahiro points out, "the Japanese colonial authority in Taiwan also took advantage of these people who possessed 'fame and property' by using their social influence to smooth Japans' domination of the island" (25). In exchange, the colonial authority granted their requests such as the establishment of public school.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> That decolonization cannot be achieved through negotiated settlement is a point deliberately obscured in Chen's *Asia as Method*. The blind spot in Chen's decolonization project is his reluctance to confront the status of Chiang Kai-shek's KMT when they took over Taiwan after WWII. The question of decolonization in Taiwan is complicated because *Taiwan never earned independence from the Japanese*. In fact, Taiwan was effectively *handed to* Chiang Kai-shek by the Allied even before the end of WWII (on the problematic nature of this transfer of power, see George H. Kerr's *Formosa Betrayed* 25). Curiously enough, this part of history is never seriously confronted by Chen in his book that allegedly deals with the question of decolonization in Taiwan. The terminological sleight of hand Chen plays in *Asia as Method* is that he consistently refers to KMT's rule as the *authoritarian* rule, differentiating it from the *colonial* rule of the preceding Japanese regime. Even when the word "colonial" or "colonialism" is used to characterize the KMT rule, it is used with scare quotes or accompanied by notes questioning whether it is justified to describe KMT as a colonial regime (11-12, 20, 55-56, 274n3).

Back to the question posed earlier: in what sense can we consider the will of the people also as a form of thought? This question has to do with the issue of political sustainability, one that concerns the dialectical relation between anticolonial nationalism and its transformation into social justice. The question can be put in this way: how do we resist the lure of equating subjectivism with the outburst of revolutionary violence and extend subjectivism from insurrection to the production of a new way of being-in-common? In short, how do we go from rupture to consistency without lapsing into a cyclist conception of change, or, *how do we give consistency to inconsistency?* That is to say, if the impasse of nationalism lies in the reversibility of nationalism's progressive insurrectional force and its subsequent regressive institutionalization, the question we need to address is how to conceive of a humanism that installs a new form of consistency which is distinct from the statist consistency of the national bourgeoisie.

My contention is that Fanon's humanism occupies a similar conceptual space Badiou assigns to truth, for both humanism and truth are premised upon a fundamental optimism in the complete realization of equality and also upon a fundamental trust in people's capacity to prescribe the ideal of universal equality in the historical process of its actualization. Humanism, in this sense, is an affirmative and consistent articulation of the generic principle of equality. But this does not mean that nationalism, owing to its parochial narrowness, has to be cast off in order to pave the way for the universal address of humanism. The same dialectic of the universal and the particular that makes the proper name such as Algeria or Spartacus an encompassing signifier is also at play here. Humanism is not the opposite of nationalism; it is rather nationalism explained and given thought to in the subjective process prescribed by the masses. Nationalism becomes humanism when nationalism becomes "the collective thought process of a people to

describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong” (*WE* 168). Once nationalism is elaborated as a form of thought, it can be said to elevate itself into a new humanism without having to cast off particularities embodied in nationalism.

Nationalism cannot evolve into humanism without a corresponding change in the way knowledge transmission is carried out between the intellectuals and the masses. In *What is to Be Done*, Lenin says that “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”<sup>174</sup> For Fanon, theory and praxis, too, are inseparable for praxis is blind without theory and theory is empty without praxis. In light of the historical pattern of the first model in which nationalism’s impasse is reached in the process of its unthought perversion into statism in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, the relation between the elites and the masses is defined by a unilateral mode of knowledge transmission, in which the elites are the guardian of revolutionary knowledge by dint of their superior intellect and political savviness, and the masses are deemed “as a blind, inert force of intervention” to be “held on a leash” by the vanguard party (*WE* 76, 125). Under the assumption of this division, the elites exploits “in a kind of immoral Machiavellianism” (76) the revolutionary force embodied in the people and make no attempt to organize, humanize, and politicize the masses: “They exploit this godsend, but make no attempt to organize the rebellion. They do not dispatch agents to the interior to politicize the masses, to enlighten their consciousness or raise the struggle to a higher level” (70-71).

Nationalism is bound to arrive at its own impasse if this kind of transmission and interaction remains unchanged. Fanon has persistently rejected the idea that the masses are the spontaneous blind force that can be enlisted for the revolutionary cause and channelled into whatever direction dictated by the vanguard party. This view has to be abandoned because “[t]he

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<sup>174</sup> Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. “What is to Be Done?” *Marxists Internet Archive*. Web. 21 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/i.htm>>.

people must understand what is at stake” (136); they need to know what they are fighting for, why they are fighting, and how they should proceed: “The more the people understand, the more vigilant they become, the more they realize in fact that everything depends on them” (133). And yet the revolutionary knowledge about these issues is not to be *found* or *discovered* in some textbooks or manuals out there for people to pick up; nor is it written in a blueprint devised by the vanguard intellectuals. There is no road map for revolution, for “the road is made by walking.” Revolutionary knowledge is a special kind of knowledge; it is to be acquired dialectically *in* and *through* the process as the people who carry the process are simultaneously enlightened by the process of which they serve as the agents. Fanon’s dialectical conception of knowledge transmission spells out the flow of knowledge in terms of a mutually enriching exchange in the immanent deployment of politics’ own procedure, during which people educate themselves through their praxis such that they are at once the recipient and the producer of knowledge. As Fanon points out, “[t]he flow of ideas from the upper echelons to the rank and file and vice versa must be an unwavering principle, not for merely formal reasons but quite simply because adherence to this principle is the guarantee of salvation. It is the forces from the rank and file which rise up to energize the leadership and permit it dialectically to make a new leap forward” (138).

Since the transmission of revolutionary knowledge is no longer conceived as a one-way transmission, it also means that patience, along with anger, shame, courage, enthusiasm, etc., has to be considered a powerful political affect, for the patience with the masses is not time wasted for idle chitchat, but time well spent for their awakening and humanization:

In an underdeveloped country experience proved that the important point is not that three hundred people understand and decide but that all understand and



decide, even if [sic] takes twice or three times as long. In fact the time taken to explain, the time “lost” humanizing the worker, will be made up in the execution. People must know where they are going and why...this lucidity must remain deeply dialectical. (135)

In the anticolonial context, humanization and politicization go hand in hand, or we can even say that humanization is impossible without politicization because the colonized cannot humanize themselves unless they become aware of injustice and decide to take action against it. Balibar has persistently called into question the conventional prioritization of human rights over political rights. In political philosophy and elsewhere, people tend to regard human rights as more fundamental than political rights, in fact the most fundamental of all and hence the presupposition of all other rights. Balibar, however, casts doubt on this conventional wisdom as he notes a reversal of their relation in modern politics defined by the rise of the nation-state. Drawing on Arendt’s observation of the phenomenon of the stateless persons in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,<sup>175</sup> Balibar concludes that

the history of nation-states has produced a reversal of the traditional relationship between “human rights” and “political rights”...*Human rights* in general can no longer be considered a mere prerequisite and an abstract foundation for political

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<sup>175</sup> Arendt notes that the stateless people is “the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics” (353). For this group of people, “loss of national rights was identical with loss of human rights” (371). That’s why even today when the deterritorializing impact of globalization is felt everywhere, it is still doubtful whether we can speak of a politics of emancipation while keeping the nation out of the picture. Thus, “the nation is still important in resistance to imperialism. Despite a great deal of abstract talk about ‘global civil society’ or ‘diasporic public spheres,’ democracy is still inconceivable without reference to the nation” (Dirlik, “End of Colonialism” 14n20). Or, as Badiou points out, it makes no sense to speak of freedom in terms of a cosmopolitan existence without borders, our immediate concern lies rather in treating questions that have to do with people inside the border and want to remain inside: “To proclaim the slogan, ‘an end to frontiers,’ defines no real policy, because no one knows exactly what it means. Whereas, by addressing the question of how we treat the people who are here, who want to be here, or who find themselves obliged to leave their homes, we can initiate a genuine political process” (“Politics and Philosophy” 117).

rights that are set up and preserved within the limits of a given national and sovereign state...it has become the opposite, as the tragic experiences of imperialism and totalitarianism in the twentieth century made manifest. We discovered that political rights, the actual granting and conditions of the equal citizenship, were the true basis for a recognition and definition of “human rights” – to begin with, the most elementary ones concerning survival, naked life. (“Outlines” 17-18)

Balibar alerts us to the fact that the human condition for the wretched of the earth inevitably demands a recognition of the political condition which it is inextricably tied to. The implication of his reconceptualization of the relation between human rights and political rights cannot be underestimated for it displaces the question of man from its habitual locus in morality and situates it now firmly in the political struggle for the right to have rights.<sup>176</sup> Consequently, we

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<sup>176</sup> Radical thinkers, such as Badiou, Rancière, Žižek, Neocosmos and others, have all argued against the idea of human rights and humanitarian intervention. Generally, they perceive a complicity between the discourse of human rights and the discourse of victimization, the dire consequence of which is the negation of man’s political capacity for self-determination and self-emancipation. Rancière, for example, suggests that “[t]he age of the ‘humanitarian’ is one of immediate identity between the ordinary example of suffering humanity and the plentitude of the subject of humanity and its rights” (*Disagreement* 126). Human, on this view, is cut off from its polemical or litigious element (similar to what Balibar calls the insurrectional element of democracy) and become a mere attribute of the subject man. And this attribute carries with it the connotation of suffering, reducing man to the state of animality. Along the same line, Žižek identifies an attitude of condescendence in NATO’s humanitarian intervention in Kosovo:

[W]hen NATO intervened to protect Kosovar victims, it ensured at that same time that they would remain victims, inhabitants of a devastated country with a passive population – they were not encouraged to become an active politico-military force capable of defending itself. Here we have the basic paradox of victimization: the Other to be protected is good in so far as it remains a victim...the moment it no longer behaves as a victim, but wants to strike back on its own, it all of a sudden magically turns into a terrorist, fundamentalist, drug-trafficking Other. (*Universal Exception* 148)

In the same critical spirit, Badiou writes,

Since the barbarity of the situation [of victims in the third world] is considered only in terms of “human rights” – whereas in fact we are always dealing with a political situation, one that calls for a political thought-practice, one that is peopled by its own

cannot hope to achieve a new humanism simply by virtue of an appeal to the abstract conception of man; we can only hope to attain it through praxis and thought, and both of these rest on an axiomatic affirmation of the will of the people and their capacity to prescribe a new possible.

For Fanon, nationalism, in the context of Algeria's anticolonial struggle, is the method the colonized adopt for their politicization, which is at the same time their enlightenment and humanization:

The living expression of the nation is the collective consciousness in motion of the entire people. It is the enlightened and coherent praxis of the men and women....If the national government wants to be national it must govern by the people and for the people, for the disinterested and by the disinherited. No leader, whatever his worth, can replace the will of the people, and the national government, before concerning itself with international prestige, must first restore dignity to all citizens, furnish their minds, fill their eyes with human things and develop a human landscape for the sake of its enlightened and sovereign inhabitants. (*WE* 144)

This new possible – the nation as “a human landscape” – will have come to pass when the people are “man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” 396) and prescribe a subjective path through which the impossible descends into the possible.

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authentic actors – it is perceived, from the heights of our apparent civil peace, as the uncivilized that demands of the civilized a civilizing intervention. Every intervention in the name of a civilisation *requires* an initial contempt for the situation as a whole, including its victims. (*Ethics* 13)

See also Neocosmos 2009; Chatterjee 2004, 98-100.

With this in mind, I move to the next chapter and read Wu Zhuoliu's *The Orphan of Asia* as an allegorical narrative of the becoming subject of an individual through the personal journey of the protagonist Taiming. In my reading, I do not wish to fit the novel into the theoretical design I have tried to lay out above. The novel's relevance to my theoretical discussion is to be understood in a different way. I do not wish to argue that Taiming's story exemplifies a kind of prescriptive politics in the manner of Badiou or Fanon. What I try to achieve instead is to show the process of subjectivization on the basis of which a prescriptive politics *will have become possible*. The novel ends on an ambiguous note without the actualization of a new possible. Still, it is urgent to seize on this ambiguity in order to reorient the perverse obsession with the orphan metaphor that has become Taiwan's collective political unconscious and to reintroduce the figure of the subject into history. In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson suggests that

[t]he type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting of restructuring of a prior historical or ideological subtext, it being always understood that 'subtext' is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality...but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact. (81)

My reading is, to a certain extent, indebted to Jameson's understanding of interpretation, but it is also a departure from it. The target of my reading is less the literary text than the interpretative framework in which the literary narrative is embedded. But the aim of my reading is not to claim that history is the ultimate horizon of interpretation; it is rather to inscribe the figure of the subject into history and prescribe the possibility of reconfiguring the unconscious structure of a people. In addition to Jameson's motto "always historicize!," today, more than ever, we need to

be attentive to the latent social and historical subtexts and not be afraid to prescribe something new to the givenness of a literary or historical imaginary – for this reason, *always politicize!*

## Chapter 3

### “Tiger’s Leap into the Past”: The Politics of Redemption in *The Orphan of Asia*

#### I. To Compare or Not to Compare, That Is a *Political* Question

In his recent article “Why Compare?” R. Radhakrishnan sets out some of ethical dilemmas for disciplines of comparative studies. Radhakrishnan starts with an anecdote of a seemingly innocuous encounter with a local Indian autorickshaw driver, disputing whether the rigor of an orderly lane system is superior to the disorderly creativity of Indian roads where the driver’s way of life is characterized by the freedom of driving expressed through aggressive overtaking of other vehicles. Who, as those of us who have grown accustomed to the discipline of law and regulation, would prefer the latter to the former? As Radhakrishnan himself acknowledges, his intuitive response, a preference of the former to the latter, is itself a mode of comparison, both tendentious and combative.

Though the story recounted by Radhakrishnan has a quotidian quality, the stakes are high for comparative studies. The encounter illustrates two fundamental dilemmas. The first involves a recognition of the inevitable implication of comparison in an uneven structure of dominance. A ground of comparison is required for things to be comparable. Ideally, it should be an even ground, but it is safe to say that the reverse has often been the case. The developmental epistemology in modernization theory, for example, has shown that comparison is less about productively comparing A and B than about subjecting B to the homogenizing logic of A. As a result of this developmental scheme, B’s coequality is denied and it can only play a late comer’s game of catching up, a game that has already subscribed to a universal modularity that fits all.

Then “how can ‘equal comparisons,’” Radhakrishnan asked, “be undertaken in an unequal world?” (462). The task of comparison is always caught in a dual demand of generality and singularity. Without an even ground, comparison becomes a value-laden judgment. Yet even with an even ground, we are running the risk of decontextualization and the erasure of singularity. Are there ways to negotiate between the cognitive demand of abstraction in order for things to be comparable and the ethical demand of recognizing each entity’s singularity?<sup>177</sup> Or do they necessarily exclude each other?

The second dilemma, related to the first as its consequence, has to do with the *raison d’être* of comparison. Given comparison’s internal tension and its inevitable involvement in a world structured by asymmetrical relations of power, *why compare?* If Radhakrishnan asks this question in a highly self-reflexive and sobering tone in an effort to alert us to the inherent danger of comparison, Susan Friedman offers an equally critical and yet more enabling approach to the question by shifting the focus from “why compare?” to “why not compare?”. Friedman acknowledges many pitfalls and adverse possibilities inscribed into the very nature of comparison, such as the hierarchization of cultures, ethnocentrism in the guise of universalism, the risk of deracination of a local entity from its geohistorical specificity. Despite all these, there is an imperative to compare. According to Friedman, there are three dimensions that make comparison essential for human existence. Cognitively, comparison is the way the brain functions. Socially, comparison is the building block of the self/other relation indispensable to

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<sup>177</sup> If modernization theory imposes a pattern of generalized abstraction and a unified teleology in order to render things comparable, Leopold von Ranke’s method of historicism occupies the other extreme, as it attempts to fulfill the ethical demand of respecting the other’s singularity by judging each culture or historical period according only to its own presuppositions. See also my discussion of the limit of Rankean historicism in Ch. 2.

the process of identity formation in an individual or a group. Finally, the political and epistemological consequences of not comparing outweigh the inherent dangers of comparison.

In Friedman's view, comparison is always Janus-faced. If there are ethico-political concerns raised by comparing, there are also other ethico-political issues entailed by a refusal to compare. Comparison could be both damning and liberating – damning because it could be appropriated for hierarchical classification to implement a set of norms and deviations, from which the reign of oppression is only a short distance; liberating because wrongs cannot be addressed without first perceiving, by way of comparison, the discrepancy between what is and what should be. Hence, politically speaking, “acts of comparing are also crucial for the registering of inequalities and for struggles against the unjust distribution of resources” (Rita and Friedman vi) and “[t]o refuse comparison is also a political act, one that can potentially reinstate the pre-existing hierarchies by not challenging them” (Friedman 755).<sup>178</sup>

Comparison's double-edgedness resides in the way decontextualization functions. There are dominant and subordinated aspects of decontextualization. The most salient feature of decontextualization is that it deprives the object of analysis of its social, cultural and historical coordinates, rendering it cognitively comparable with another object from an entirely different context. But one can also argue that while itself constituting an erasure of local specificity, decontextualization could also be put to emancipatory use, for it offers an opportunity to break free from the circularity of one's frame of reference. Decontextualization, however, is not an end in itself but a means toward *recontextualization*. This process of moving in and out of a

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<sup>178</sup> Friedman's formulation resembles what Karl Jaspers calls “the metaphysical guilt,” a sense of guilt resulted from the violation of solidarity that reaches out to the whole of humanity: “There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty” (26). See also my discussion of universal singularity in Ch. 1.



phenomenological world is both dynamic and interminable; it transcends a specific local context only to enter it anew. It is this process of decontextualization and recontextualization that constitutes the interventionist thrust of comparison and makes comparison an essential political category.

Concerns raised and potentials identified by Radhakrishnan and Friedman are lessons to be kept in mind for comparative studies. Questions with regard to the method of comparison through which pitfalls can be minimized and potentials actualized mean that a comparative methodology cannot settle for mere enumeration of similarities and contrasts, which would compromise the ethical responsibility of a comparative undertaking and leave the enterprise at a purely descriptive level. The question is what methods we can propose for a productive engagement with comparative thinking. For the project of comparatizing Taiwan, one such example is the concept of minor transnationalism put forth in the volume of the same title coedited by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih. Minor transnationalism offers a corrective to Anglophone postcolonial discourse that privileges a center/periphery model and a vertical transnationalism at the expense of horizontal networks and connections established by minorities (7-11). Based on a less rigid understanding of the interplay between multifarious registers (e.g. the local, global, national, postcolonial), Lionnet and Shih present an innovative way of looking at comparison from the perspective of horizontal cultural transversalism that “includes minor cultural articulations in productive relationship with the major (in all its possible shapes, forms, and kinds), as well as minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether” (8); their concept of transcolonialism also allows for an acknowledgement of the minor status shared by minorities without flattening out the distinct process of minoritization each undergoes. Minor transnationalism thus offers a compelling and viable model for Taiwan to situate itself in an

increasingly globalized world without always bypassing China as its major frame of reference. For example, minor transnationalism would allow the indigenous communities in Taiwan to establish alliances with other Austronesian peoples across the Pacific, or Taiwan to engage itself with other Sinophone communities. It thus offers new avenues for people to creatively initiate different connections and conjunctures in their own projects of comparatizing Taiwan.

However, it is often the case that comparison is carried out as a spatial mode of analysis, and the question of time does not seem to gather the same amount of attention. The current spatial turn in humanities and social sciences seems to mandate comparison between different geocultural localities, downplaying the importance of thinking comparison along the line of temporality.<sup>179</sup> Occasionally, comparisons are conducted on a transtemporal basis, comparing two historical eras, with an assumption of each era as a separable and unified moment. In contrast to a transtemporal approach, I would like to tease out the possibility of an *intra*-temporal comparison that interrogates the relation of the three temporal modalities, past, present and future, not as a chain of succession but as a field of interaction, with an emphasis on the intimations their interaction holds for the possibility of transformation. To this end, I rely on Walter Benjamin's revised materialist historiography as elaborated in "On the Concept of History" and Convolute N of *The Arcades Project*.

The major advantage of employing Benjamin's conception of history is threefold: it provides us with a conceptual framework for conceiving the coexistence of different times; an

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<sup>179</sup> One of the reasons that time has not been a major point of reference for comparative studies is due to critics' wariness of evolutionary discourse in light of the postmodern debunking of the linear narrative. On the advantage of thinking in spatial terms, see Foucault 1980, 69-71. Harootunian, on the other hand, calls attention to the subordination of time to space in evolutionary temporality. In his view, the division of time into a line of progression (e.g. from the premodern to the modern) contains a strategy of classification which is based on an assumption of "the static synchronicity of the spatial" ("Some Thoughts" 30). Therefore, evolutionary temporality is more of a spatial category than a temporal one because the temporal logic of succession is premised upon a spatial logic of unity.

ethical framework in which the oppressed past can receive a hearing; and a political framework from which a revolutionary consciousness can emerge in and for the present. These three temporal aspects intersect and form a constellation where the present touches the past, and the contemporaries armed with a materialist outlook, as Benjamin foresees, will realize that they are “man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (“On the Concept of History” 396).

In Benjamin’s historical materialism, thinking history is inseparable from thinking politics. To do justice to history means to acquire a historical consciousness where “[p]olitics attains primacy over history” (*Arcades Project* K1,2). Michael Löwy has argued that one cannot dissociate Benjamin’s theses on history from his political commitment to the oppressed and his desire to retrieve the utopian potential buried in the past “for the aim of these views is not so much to promote a new aesthetic theory as to raise revolutionary consciousness” (206). But this is a revolutionary consciousness that relies on a theology to render possible “the messianic arrest of happening” (“On the Concept of History” 396). The accent placed on the interruptive force of the messianic power is unmistakable. As Benjamin puts it, “[m]y thinking is related to theology as blotting pad is related to ink. It is saturated with it. Were one to go by the blotter, however, nothing of what is written would remain” (*Arcades Project* N7a,7). And the story of a little hunchback that opens the theses not only confirms the primacy of theology in Benjamin’s thinking, it also makes theology a kind of foundation for politics: “The puppet, called ‘historical materialism,’ is to win all the time...if it enlists the services of theology” (“On the Concept of History” 389). Although the emphasis on interruption is liberating, the theological language of redemption still sits uneasily with secular emancipatory projects, especially the implications that come with the reference to messianism.

Adorno's remark might help shed some light on why a perspective of redemption is necessary for those in despair and perhaps also for secular liberation movements in general:

The only philosophy that can be practiced responsibly in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, that reveal its fissures and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will one day appear in the Messianic light.

(247)

When we make a judgment on the condition of suffering, we are, in a sense, already seeing the event in a redemptive light; for to describe something as oppressive and exploitative is already to offer an interpretation as to why such acts or conditions constitute a violation (of rights or humanity, etc.). Eagleton is therefore correct to suggest that “[o]ppression is not there before our eyes in the sense that a patch of purple is” (149). A judgment is made with a set of assumptions (in our case, the perspective of redemption), and it is against the background of these assumptions that the contour of injustice finds its definition.

In addition to the critical function of identifying instances of injustice, Benjamin's language of messianic redemption, according to Osborne, also serves to forestall the immanence of a willed redemption found in Hegel and Marx: “Only if the Messianic remains exterior to history can it provide the perspective of a completed whole (without the predetermination of a teleological end), from which the present may appear in its essential transience, as radically incomplete” (147).<sup>180</sup> The messianic exteriority to history, however, is not a transcendence over

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<sup>180</sup> There is an essential implication between the philosophy of history and theology. As Karl Löwith notes, when the philosophy of history is understood as “a systematic interpretation of universal history in

and above history; it is rather a subtraction from the historical forces that provide conditions for oppression and inequality to thrive; otherwise, there is only conformism to the existing exploitative structure. But in order for Benjamin's politics to have real efficacy, the Messianic cannot remain a force of interruption that "blasts open the continuum of history." Osborne reminds us that "unless the Messianic timelessness of the image (representative of the perspective of redemption) somehow reacts back upon the phenomenological present which it interrupts, imbricating itself into its narrative structure, we will be left with a purely interruptive conception of now-being as an exit from history into an essentially mystical space of experience" (152). The transformative capacity of now-time (the messianic time of now or *Jetztzeit*) lies in this movement back to the time of the phenomenological present. On this view, now-time serves a double function, simultaneously putting into question the dominant assumptions of a given historical narrative while "rais[ing] the prospect of the re-establishment of a narrative temporality, energized, enriched and thereby transformed by the disruptive after-image of the 'now'" (154). It is through this movement in and out of a given historical configuration that history undergoes politicization and becomes something that can be *made* by human beings.<sup>181</sup>

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accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning" (1), it effectively acquires a theological dimension because it has become a teleological movement toward fulfillment and salvation. The danger inherent in the philosophy of history in Hegel and Marx also lies in their postulation of an immanent development of history in which the perspective of redemption (the absolute spirit in Hegel and communism in Marx) is transmuted into a process of becoming-necessary of redemption.

<sup>181</sup> Also pertinent here is Marx's famous statement that "[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 595). The tension between historical determination ("under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past") and freedom ("men makes their own history") is also at stake in Benjamin's conception of the messianic time which is presented as a transformative capacity to re-determine the givenness of an era, so that men is simultaneously the product and the producer of history. See also my discussion of determination of determination in Ch. 2.

Without this movement, now-time would amount to a “*mere* ‘time-lag’,” lacking “transformative effect on modes of identification and action” (156).

## II. Rescuing History from the Past: Legacy vs. Project

What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by certain strain in their dissemination, their ‘enshrinement as heritage.’ – They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them. There is a tradition that is catastrophe.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

In his recent talks, President of the Republic of China, Ma Ying-jeou vowed to make his term the beginning of “a golden decade.” As if mindful of meaning’s relational property, Ma made sure that the signification of “the golden decade” could stand out more prominently by contrasting it with “the lost eight years”<sup>182</sup> under the two terms of the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) administration. What is interesting about this distinction is not so much Ma’s striking a cheap political score at the oppositional party’s expense as the underlying logic that sustains his argument. The immediate context of Ma’s discourse is the prospect of the nation’s economic prosperity in the wake of the historic free-trade pact (Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, ECFA) with China. Greater regional economic integration to help Taiwan stay competitive in the new century is just one aspect, albeit the major one, that falls under the general rubric of Taiwan’s soft power which aims to promote integration in other areas ranging from greater social harmony to visa-free travel to other countries. Notwithstanding the

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<sup>182</sup> The term refers primarily to the seclusive measures the previous administration took in relation to China. While these measures are usually regarded as a stance to assert Taiwan’s sovereignty, they are also seen by many as a self-imposed and conservative gesture to isolate Taiwan from the international community. The latter view espouses a problematic equation between China and the whole of the international community, which is often explained by the fact that China’s emergence as the world’s second superpower increases its wherewithal to dominate Taiwan in international relations.

variety of items that can be listed or advertised as achievements of soft power, they tend to share one thing in common, that is, the desire for integration.

As a powerful subtext informing the distinction between the golden decade and the lost years, the idea of integration prompts us to critically reflect on its ramifications. The immediate concern is with the slippery passage from the desire for integration to the desire for homogenization. To reveal the gravity of this concern, I want to call attention to a recent Dapu farmland dispute which shows a total disregard for people's land rights and has resulted in the state's forceful takeover of the land. The expropriation order is an attempt to make room for industrial development, and the rhetoric used to justify the decision was monolithically articulated in economic terms. This decision displays both the insensitivity and brutality of state power. One can hardly miss the irony here: the soft power in foreign affairs needs to be hardened up on domestic matters. When the excavators came to the soon-to-be-harvested rice paddies, we witness a clash not just between two forces but also two forms of temporalization – the time of capital and the time of the farmers – existing side by side; or to be more accurate, the domination of one over the other, as physically manifested by the presence of 200 police officers and 20 excavators against a group of aged farmers.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> This assimilatory logic is also elaborated by Harootunian. Following Kosellek, Harootunian calls for “an awareness of simultaneously differing forms of temporalization within a single space” (“Some Thoughts” 25). But these forms of temporalization are also caught up in a web of geopolitical determinations. In other words, different forms of temporalization, contemporaneous as they may be, are not equal from the standpoint of power relations. Harootunian points out that due to the history of imperialism and colonialism, the Euro-American values have forced those living under their spheres of influence to live their lives comparatively against the background of those values. This forced comparison provides an occasion for discriminatory classifications, the effect of which lingers even into the so-called postcolonial phase. On this view, modernization theory not only imposes a diachronic design on different regions of the world and ascribe different values according to each region's distance from the modern (i.e. Europe); its logic is also at work *within* each region as the contemporaneous forms of temporalization are subject to the same discriminatory measures.

There is, of course, a rationale behind the state's wanton exercise of power. Time is figured here as the time of accelerated accumulation of capital, and it works to erase temporal irregularities that stand in its way. It is only on account of this conception of time that the farmland should be expropriated for "better" (read: more profitable) use. The struggling farmers who refused to give up their land were perceived and treated as a problem; and yet, *there is no controversy*, declared the director of the local Economic Development Department, because everyone was acting according to the law. Indeed, there is no controversy from the perspective of law,<sup>184</sup> but one would be reduced an automaton if everything is governed by law. If law is already disposed toward capitalist time, everything that falls out of the orbit of capitalist time is already guilty by default. However, the time of farmers ticks differently than capitalist time. Their time is determined as much by the means of production as by the seasonal cycle, climate contingencies (e.g. drought, rainy season, typhoon), and their sound judgment which is the fruit of years of experience. Moreover, there are other intangibles: the farmland is not just a work place but also a living space where customs are observed and social connections made. For many, the land is the entirety of their *Lebenswelt*. As such, there is no scientific method measuring what farmland means to farmers as there is what a science park to the nation's economy. When the desire for integration means the eradication of its internal contradictions, of multiple but coexisting forms of temporalization, of different modes of organizing one's lived experience in relation to modernity, it qualifies as a moment of great danger that should not pass without our taking cognizance of it.

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<sup>184</sup> Since protests or acts of insurgency are by definition aiming against law, attempt to understand them from the standpoint of law fall into the trap of tautology. See my discussion of the timing of revolution and the argument against the "prematurity" thesis in Ch. 2.



This incident reveals the coexistence of different times within a single space, the recognition of which constitutes the first level of comparative temporality. If we analyze the desire for integration at a deeper level, that of cultural memory, we find that anxiety over integration has a long history stretching back to the orphan metaphor canonized by Wu Zhuoliu's *The Orphan of Asia* 《亞細亞的孤兒》, a metaphor whose afterlife has outstripped its metaphorical nature and taken on an existential weight thanks to the repeated instances of isolation or failures of integration that function as a series of empirical verification of Taiwan's existential plight. Popular reception of Wu's *The Orphan of Asia* often follows this interpretative pattern in which the trope is seen as more constitutive than constituted; the orphan is often seen as an a priori category whose validity is subsequently borne out by the sorry development of Taiwan's diplomatic relations rather than a category constituted by the dynamic interplay among forces specific to the colonial situation in Taiwan.<sup>185</sup>

Critical reception, likewise, is trapped within the parent/child dynamics that has structured the way Taiwan is imagined. If we follow the psychoanalytic distinction between imaginary identification and symbolic identification, at stake is not merely how people in Taiwan perceive themselves (e.g. rootless, unrecognized, abandoned, etc.) but also the point from which they are being observed to appear as an orphan to themselves. Hence, the imaginary identification with the orphan has already presupposed a symbolic identification with a parental gaze from which Taiwan appears to itself as an orphan. This distinction helps us make sense of Chen Yingzhen's influential reading of *The Orphan of Asia*. Chen's reading focuses on Taiwan's diasporic attachment to China. In his view, Taiwan's orphan mentality is the result of its

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<sup>185</sup> Lo Da Yu's 1983 classic song *The Orphan of Asia* reflecting the mood of helplessness and despair following a series of diplomatic setbacks in the 1970s stands testimony to the novel's enormous influence on the cultural memory in Taiwan.

dispossession from mainland China, and this feeling of being forsaken ends with the protagonist Taiming's eventual return, an ending that suggests a sort of ethnic solidarity between China and Taiwan in their concerted anti-imperialist war effort. There are quite a few problems with Chen's reading: not only does Taiming's ambivalent attitude toward China and the exclusionary logic of Chinese nationalism remain unaccounted for in Chen's appeal to a common ancestral root, the question of identity is conveniently worked out by a return to the motherland which, supposedly, would bring to an end Taiming's profound sense of abandonment.

Chen's reading, while unsatisfactory on many levels, represents a common way of dealing with legacy of isolation in Taiwan. It can be argued that President Ma's "golden decade" rhetoric grows out of a similar impulse to overcome the sense of abandonment. Although it is today couched in socio-economic terms, the same anxiety to overcome the history of loss constitutes a powerful subtext to the periodization of the golden decade. Since the orphan as a concept-metaphor is so entrenched in Taiwan's cultural memory, it justifies our speaking of its enshrinement as cultural heritage. By heritage I mean that the signifier "orphan" has assumed the role of *point de capiton* (the quilting or nodal point),<sup>186</sup> whose function is to structure a discursive field, which would remain polysemic and dispersive without such a structuring element. That is to say, even itself being a site of contestation, the concept-metaphor of the orphan has to be accepted first before one can proceed to its negation, negotiation, modification, or affirmation.<sup>187</sup> What is disturbing is the manner in which the past is figured in this temporal

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<sup>186</sup> On the structuring function of *point de capiton*, see Žižek's *Sublime Object*, 95-97; Laclau and Mouffe 2011, Ch. 3. The concept was first introduced by Lacan to explain the absence of the paternal signifier in psychosis.

<sup>187</sup> Žižek points out that the structuring function of *point de capiton* should not be mistaken for the suppression of other differences: "The dialectical paradox lies in the fact that the particular struggle playing a hegemonic role, far from enforcing a violent suppression of the differences, opens the very space for the relative autonomy of the particular struggles" (*Sublime Object* 97). In other words, insofar as

relation. The past is treated as a legacy whose inertness is constantly affirmed by its putative completion. From this point of view, the past is recognized as a period preceding the present, but there is no recognition of the past in its active sense as that which contains possibilities for transformation, possibilities that can be remembered (in the Benjaminian sense of awakening) or critically appropriated for political purpose in the present. In other words, the past is conceived merely as a legacy, never a project.<sup>188</sup>

How can the past be remembered as a project? For Benjamin, history as a form of remembrance [*Eingedenken*] has to be understood in terms of critical awakening rather than empathetic reliving: “Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was.’ It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (“On the Concept of History” 391). Benjamin’s understanding of history contrasts with the narrativized version of history for his is a politicization of history and is committed as much to interpretation as to intervention. Benjamin’s theses thus provide us with a means to establish “a unique experience with the past” (396) by subtracting a particular image in the tradition from the dominant discourse of history. This new temporal modality has to be strictly distinguished from the homogenous, empty time. According to Benjamin, “[h]istory is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*]” (395). In the temporal scheme of the homogenous, empty time, time is conceived as a linear progression composed of a series of isolated “presents.” *Jetztzeit*, in contrast, is framed by a different temporal logic. Against the homogenous, empty time with its “servile integration in an

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the horizon of intelligibility structured around the quilting point is accepted, differences will be allowed to thrive within that particular discursive field.

<sup>188</sup> See Dirlik 1997, especially the last Ch. “The Past as Legacy and Project.”

uncontrollable apparatus,” its “additive” logic, and its blind belief in the ideology of progress, Benjamin postulates a constructive principle for historical materialism (393, 396):

Materialistic historiography...is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized into a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object only where it encounters him as a monad. (396)

Within the temporal structure of the homogeneous, empty time, one simply cannot create new possibilities outside those circumscribed by the existing regime of knowledge. In order to enact new scenes in history, the constructive principle of historical materialism has to start with an act of destruction. Hence, Benjamin insists on the moment of rupture, a moment “pregnant with tensions,” as the ground upon which history can be rescued from homogeneity. In such a moment, historical materialists take note of “the sign of a messianic arrest of happening...in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history” (396). Žižek has suggested that as a result of this rupture the totality of signification that constitutes the background of a historical era’s horizon of intelligibility is suspended:

We can now see what we are dealing with in the isolation of monad from historical continuity: *we isolate the signifier by placing within parentheses the totality of signification*. This placing of signification within parentheses is a condition *sine qua non* of the short-circuit between present and past: their synchronization occurs at the level of the autonomy of the signifier – what is

synchronized, superimposed, are two signifier's networks, not two meanings.  
(*Sublime Object* 157)

What we learn from the monadological structure of *Jetztzeit* is that it is both destructive and constructive: destructive because it “blast[s] a specific era out of the homogenous course of history,” and constructive because it establishes a relation of synchronicity between past and present which provides “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” 396). The constructive principle of historical materialism demands an act of actualization that involves recognizing in the past the sign of an unfulfilled possibility and rendering that possibility politically relevant *in* and *for* the present. Actualization thus evinces a mode of transmission otherwise than the linear model that has defined the mode of transmission that sees the past as legacy. For the transmission of *Jetztzeit* is not determined by the present's understanding of the past but rather by the past's claim to the present: “The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption...like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply. The historical materialist is aware of this” (390). Notice that it is not the present that has a claim to the past but rather the other way around. However, the past is not presented as an unalterable legacy weighing “like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (Marx 595). The past in this case is a reservoir of virtual possibilities “citable in all its moments,” (Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” 390) and yet its reenactment (i.e. its citability) still requires a decision in a present determined by its own historical circumstances.

The present does not decipher the past to consolidate its power or justify its rule; it is rather, as Žižek suggests, “biased” toward the oppressed (*Sublime Object* 153), and looks toward

the oppressed past for a new view into the present.<sup>189</sup> “The concept of a present,” Benjamin writes, “is defined by Turgot...as an essentially and fundamentally political concept. ‘Before we have learned to deal with things in a given position,’ says Turgot, ‘it has already changed several times. Thus, we always find out too late about what has happened. And therefore it can be said that politics is obliged to foresee the present’” (“Paralipomena” 405). Paradoxically, to foresee the present one has to cast one’s glance backward, on a past, in order to create and construct a new present:

The seer’s gaze is kindled by the rapidly receding past. That is to say, the prophet has turned away from the future: he perceives the contours of the future in the fading light of the past as it sinks before him into the night of times. This prophetic relation to the future necessarily informs the attitude of the historian as Marx describes it, an attitude determined by actual social circumstances. (405)

In this new mode of transmission, the non-contemporaneous element of “what-has-been” is carried over to the present and fulfilled in now-time. Diachrony no longer defines the relation of past and present; no longer are past, present and future construed as separate segments following successively from one to the other. The new constellation defines the relation of present and past in terms of synchronicity characterized by its citability; a synchronicity whose structure is indexical rather than sequential, whose mode of transmission is short-circuited rather than progressive. The dialectic of decontextualization and recontextualization I mentioned above which makes comparison a method for politics is also at work in this constellation:

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<sup>189</sup> To give a new cadence to the signification of redemption, I agree with Harootunian that, actualization, pace Žižek, is less about redeeming a failed revolutionary attempt in the past than about initiating a new revolutionary sequence “put into the service of contemporary political mobilization” (“The Benjamin-Effect” 78).

1. Decontextualization: the present extracts and resuscitates the failed and repressed utopian potential in the past.
2. Recontextualization: the present *reads* the virtual into existence and *cites* it in a new context in order to have political bearing on the present.

In this dialectic, the past is repeated but repeated *anew*. Herein resides the power of remembrance: “What science has ‘determined,’ remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete” (*Arcades Project* N8,1). Remembrance, in this regard, is a project, not a legacy.

As the concept-metaphor of the orphan has gradually morphed into a crippling inhibition in people’s collective memory, I wonder whether it is time to traverse the fundamental (orphan) fantasy that has hitherto structured the way the Taiwanese imagine themselves by taking a “tiger’s leap into the past” (“On the Concept of History” 395) in order to rediscover that fragment of an unacknowledged past that would translate a despondent legacy into a living project and afford us an opportunity to begin the beginning again. This capacity to transform a legacy into a project is not given and needs to be invented. In the movement from legacy to project, there is also a crossing of the threshold where thinking history itself becomes a way of doing politics. This constitutes the second level of comparative temporality in this chapter: an act of actualization that involves recognizing in the past the sign of an unfulfilled possibility and rendering that possibility politically relevant *in* and *for* the present. Harootunian points out that the actualization of the past’s unfulfilled potential operates on two levels:

One level dealt with moments in the past in which participants in an epochal event acted in such a manner as to suggest they were repeating a past in their own

present for quite specific political effects<sup>190</sup>....*The other level is that of the moment in the historian's discourse that results in a decision actively to intervene by wresting an experience from the past for the purpose of political mobilization in the present.* Whether actors are believing they are repeating a past or historians are reading earlier efforts to reinstate a moment in the present as an act of repetition, *a performative is being enacted to achieve the effect of producing a construction either in or about history and capable of serving a specific political interest.* (emphasis added, "The Benjamin Effect" 67)

Insofar as the interpretive intervention is concerned, a literary scholar, not unlike a historian, can rescue an experience from the past for the purpose of its mobilization in the present. In light of this interpretive intervention, the task of my reading is to revisit the ending of Wu Zhuoliu's *The Orphan of Asia*, not by denying everything that has been said or written about the novel; nor do I wish to belittle the magnitude of pain and suffering for those who lived through the period or could relate themselves to that experience. I admit that my reading is "biased," geared as much toward intervention as interpretation, if only such division still holds water today. Therefore, in my reading I do not draw on the totality of context to grasp the conditions and contradictions that give rise to the formation of a triply-split consciousness (for this, one can consult Leo Ching's *Becoming "Japanese"*). My approach is to focus on the last section of the novel and locate in it a fragile egalitarian aspiration that has remained obfuscated in the cultural memory of later generations.

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<sup>190</sup> The Haitian Revolution led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, or "the Black Spartacus," in the last decade of the 18th century is an example of the first level of intervention in which the participants repeated a past in order to create a new present. See Badiou's discussion of Toussaint L'Ouverture in relation to his notion of resurrection in *LoW*, 64-65.



The ending of the novel is highly ambiguous and yet remains critically underexamined. It is often declared that the story is about the psychological damage wrought by Japanese colonialism, about the neither-nor dilemma faced by the colonized subject. In the critical reception of the novel, however, there is a problematic elision of Taiming's rumored activism, which presents an image of solidarity and liberation contrary to the discourse of the orphan and its concomitant discourse of self-victimization that have come to define the cultural landscape of Taiwan since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Critics do not pay much attention to the ending partly because it makes no sense for Taiming to become actively involved in the patriotic anti-Japanese struggle in China after he has been rejected as a spy; partly because it is difficult to assign any type of agency to a person gone mad. The possibility of Taiming's political engagement thus lives on as a missed and unfulfilled element in the text. And this unfulfilled element, I argue, marks a turning point when resentment and self-pity start giving way to redemption and self-determination.

To assert the centrality of this unfulfilled element is not to disregard the past and its legacy, but rather to insist on *the excess of the possible over the factual*. The possible is comprised of forgotten and unfulfilled promises subordinated to the dominant narrative, which nonetheless could be reactivated by the present generation, not in the name of completing the missing piece of the past, but for the sake of introducing a new possibility in the present. History, as such, is not written by the victor to justify a new rule; nor does it, like the owl of Minerva, take flight only at dusk.<sup>191</sup> History takes on a prescriptive political function insofar as the past

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<sup>191</sup> In *The Element of the Philosophy of Rights*, Hegel assigns a retrospective function to the philosophy of history: "philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform this function. As the *thought* of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state....When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk" (23).

that history remembers is reenacted *in* and *for* the present. “Without such freedom [of prescription],” Hallward points out, “we cannot say that people make their own history; we can merely contemplate the forms of their constraint” (“Politics of Prescription” 781).

### **III. Abandonment between Loss and Freedom: Beyond the Prison House of Identity**

[M]an is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does....every man, without support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man....That is what “abandonment” implies, that we ourselves decide our being.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*

It has often been said that Wu Zhuoliu immortalizes his novel *The Orphan of Asia* simply by giving the work such a memorable title. It is just as often assumed that the orphan consciousness so poignantly depicted in the novel is a true representation of the suffering Taiwanese abandoned by their national mother (China)<sup>192</sup> and discriminated against by their colonial father (Japan). The prolonged dwelling in this sense of abandonment results in a state of melancholia which, according to Freud’s metapsychology, splits the ego from within through the introjection of the lost loved object into the ego: “Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object” (168). The judgment passed on the ego gives expression to guilt and gnaws at self-esteem. This sense of guilt and unworthiness is not simply the product of the subject’s failure to emulate an ideal image of Chineseness or Japaneseness, which nonetheless implies the possibility of closing up the gap. The guilt is rather to be situated at a more

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<sup>192</sup> It should be noted that a Han-centric understanding of the Taiwanese is the underlying assumption behind the discourse of the orphan. The status of the aboriginal peoples remains undetermined, if not excluded, in this scenario.

fundamental level. As Žižek points out, “the guilt materialized in the pressure exerted on the subject by the superego is...not the guilt caused by the failed emulation of the ego ideal, but the more fundamental guilt of accepting the ego ideal (the socially determined symbolic role) as the ideal to be followed in the first place” (*Ticklish Subject* 268). The distinction between the imaginary identification and the symbolic identification is operative here since the problem is not that the Taiwanese are unworthy of love because they do not possess certain qualities of Chineseness or Japaneseness; at issue is rather that the Taiwanese have accepted the parental gaze in the first place, which then serves as the presupposition in order to cast themselves in the image of the orphan. The moment Taiming identifies with the parental gaze as the ego ideal to follow, he places himself in an impossible situation in which he is guilty no matter what: on the one hand, as a colonized subject, he is unable, despite his best efforts, to put behind him the suspicion of him working as a spy for the Japanese; on the other hand, as an ethnic Han Chinese, he is judged unfavorably for backward traditionalism embodied in Taiwanese society and treated as an inferior being under Japanese colonial rule. Hence, the impossibility of either becoming Chinese or Japanese.

While a psychoanalytic approach enables us to grasp the psychology of guilt inscribed in the discourse of the orphan, the analysis remains at the level of contemplating the forms of constraints. What often remains obscure in the discourse of the orphan is an alternative conceptual genealogy that sees abandonment not as an occasion for despair but as an opportunity for freedom. Critical commentaries have hitherto remained silent on this possibility. Although it is not uncommon for a nativist literary historiography to characterize literature of the Japanese colonial period as protest literature,<sup>193</sup> it remains to be seen in what sense *The Orphan of Asia*

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<sup>193</sup> This view is promoted by Ye Shi-Tao in *The Chronicle of Taiwan Literature*.

can be considered as registering a protest in ways other than excessive indulgence in the status of victimhood. Critics have identified the author's act of writing under severely unfavorable circumstances as a heroic demonstration of anticolonial defiance, but they seem to have little to say about the spirit of revolt implied in the novel's ending. In fact, the ending of Taiming's rumored return to China is so confounding that it leads critics to question the forced and arbitrary design of this ending. As Liao Hsien-hao, one of the leading literary scholars in Taiwan, observes, "the fact that the novel ends with Hu [Taiming] returning to China to join the Chinese fighting against the invading Japanese seems a bit forced to many" (65). Had Taiwan and China not politically separated as they were in reality, Liao continues, the ending would not have generated so much controversy: "Sutured both by the traditional (Han) Chinese cultural identity and the identity provided by a stable modern Chinese nation state, the Taiwanese could very well have felt secure....But the civil war changed everything" (65). Liao's remark shows not only the controversy surrounding the novel's ending; more importantly, it shows that at the center of this controversy is the issue of identity, be it cultural or statist.<sup>194</sup>

An emphasis on the primacy of identity in reading *The Orphan of Asia* is useful to the extent that it clarifies the unresolved and unresolvable tension experienced by the colonized subject. The problem is that such an interpretative approach, while attentive to the subjection of psychic life to the geopolitics of its times, constitutes its own stumbling block, for it is precisely

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<sup>194</sup> There is an intimate connection between cultural identity and its statist representation. According to Badiou, the essential function of the state is to discern cultural identities in such a way that they can be hierarchically arranged. In Badiou's technical language, if each cultural community is counted as one in presentation (the initial count), it is counted again by the state in representation (the count of the count). For example, ethnic communities are counted equally as one in the initial count, but they are *counted again* according to, for example, their degree of education, their socio-economic status, their professional achievements, their receptiveness to the ideology of political liberalism, etc. The second count then makes possible hierarchical arrangements between different cultural communities, depending on their closeness to the supposed norm. Thus, in Badiou's view, the function of the statist representation is "the non-egalitarian inventory of human beings" (*Metapolitics* 94).

this insistence on the process of determination, renunciation, negotiation, and recognition in the coming-into-being of an emergent identity that fails to account for Taiming's eventual return to China. Hence, the arbitrariness of the novel's ending.

This is probably the most dubious aspect in current scholarship. Critics readily accept the framework of identity as the novel's unsurpassable horizon. The problematics of identity has therefore received in-depth analyses from different perspectives, but the assumption of identity as the structural coordinates of this line of investigation is never put into question.<sup>195</sup> Must we read the ending as Taiming's embrace of *one identity* or his ongoing negotiation between *different identities*, however dynamic the processes of their negotiation would be? What if the ending remains inexplicable precisely because it does not fit into this interpretative framework or because *it is no longer to be read in identitarian terms*? That is to say, what if the ending is a political articulation, not of an identity, nor its abolition, nor the difficulties involved in the negotiation between different identities, but rather a political articulation of common humanity in the face of injustice? It should be noted that nothing is arbitrary in itself; things appear arbitrary only when they fail to comply with a given interpretative structure. Should this be the case, we must then resist dismissing the ending with a convenient label "arbitrariness" and start examining the unspoken assumption that has informed the novel's reception to date.

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<sup>195</sup> Borrowing the categories from Raymond Williams, Ching has argued that the question of the colonized's consciousness formation has to be seen as a dynamic process of negotiation between the residual Chinese culturalism, the dominant Japanese colonialism, and the emergent Taiwanese consciousness. Ching, despite a thoughtful and nuanced analysis, still describes the ending in identitarian terms (albeit by way of equivocation): "The ambivalent ending of *The Orphan of Asia*, in which Tai-ming is 'rumored' to have left for China after his mental breakdown, indicates not a rejection of all identities or a sublation into Chinese identity; rather, it signifies the equivocal and historical affiliation with and dissociation from China effected by Japanese colonialism" (209). On Williams's dynamic model of change (the emergent, the dominant and the residue), see Williams 1973.

I have previously mentioned the idea of protest literature in relation to *The Orphan of Asia*. What does the word “protest” signify to us? A protest is, no doubt, a declared objection. There are ways of declaring objection. One could, for example, protest by enumerating instances of injustice. In this sense, protest literature aims at exposing the mechanism of power that contributes to unjust social arrangements. But then we would be left with a depoliticized form of protest that contemplates one’s suffering rather than prescribing one’s freedom. If, however, we take seriously Taiming’s rumored activism, we would be offered a glimpse into a politicized form of protest that does not feed on one’s victimized status, but rather asserts an idea of justice based on the declaration of common humanity. This possibility of articulating a politics of the “we” beyond its identitarian permutations will be the idea that guides my reading of Wu Zhuoliu’s *The Orphan of Asia*.

#### **IV. The Politics of the “We”: Recasting the Idea of Fraternity in *The Orphan of Asia***

*The Orphan of Asia* presents a powerful indictment of both Japanese colonial epistemology and the exclusionary Chinese nationalism through an allegorical account of a personal history in the process of acquiring self-consciousness. Throughout most of the novel, the question of knowledge is articulated in only two registers: nostalgic longing for Chinese traditionalism and eager anticipation of Japanese modernity. What is repressed in this epistemological scheme is Taiwan as a site of knowledge production. In his intellectual pursuit, Taiming is wavering between Chinese traditionalism and Japanese modernity. Compared with these two systems of knowledge, local knowledge embodied in the daily practices of the villagers appears less refined and even vulgar.

The colonial power matrix is at once supporting and supported by a nexus of ideas institutionalized into a system of knowledge conditioning the way in which the colonized perceive the world. In the novel, subalternization of local knowledge is carried out through educational and legal means. In the early years, it is still possible for the villagers to maintain their customs amidst the threat of colonial violence. However, with the intensification of Japan's war effort, villagers are forced to speak Japanese, adopt Japanese surnames, or wear one-piece as the sartorial sign of loyalty. Zhida's change from a law enforcer to a law interpreter is particularly illuminating in this regard. The colonial administration manages the colonized population through a mixture of non-hegemonic and hegemonic modes of dominance. Zhida's change from a law enforcer to a law interpreter marks a shift toward the latter mode of dominance. Zhida's change underlies not just the introduction of the modern concept of law but, more importantly, its infiltration into villagers' way of life. When Zhida is a police deputy, he is just a fear-inducing figure. At this stage, conformity is undergirded by the presence of law and the effectiveness of law hinges on its degree of visibility (e.g. the physical presence of a policeman or the public display of law enforcement). When Zhida becomes a law interpreter, he fundamentally restructures the way villagers live their life. It marks the beginning of a shift from external observance of the law to internalization of the law. Zhida's new role represents not just law and order as externally enforced. What takes place is a more fundamental change at the level of social interactions. Local disputes, for example, which used to be mediated and solved by the village arbitrator, now have to be brought to the court.

This example reveals that crucial to coloniality of power is an insistence on suppressing or eradicating other forms of knowledge not concurrent with colonial epistemology. Under such overarching coloniality of power, is it possible for the Taiwanese to articulate themselves as a

new locus of enunciation? Taiming's changed attitude is suggestive here. At first, Taiming upholds the purity of intellectualism and refuses to acknowledge that knowledge is inevitably interwoven into the socio-historical conditions of its times. In the past, confronted with colonial violence and its internal contradictions, Taiming seeks refuge in knowledge. Later when his mother is brutally beaten by a construction worker, Taiming is described as "the only one the incident had been able to hurt" (86). The hurt Taiming experiences here is less the hurt of witnessing one of his family members being bullied and treated unjustly than the hurt coming from an awareness of his own insignificance and inability to act. Aware of the limit of his power and at the same time frustrated by its limit, Taiming allows contradictory impulses to ferment in his mind. If doubts over the action he should have taken have in the past been subdued by the pursuit of knowledge, these doubts do not simply disappear; they are simmering at the back of his mind, "waiting to be stirred up by fresh information, new turbulence" (87).

Taiming's experience in China deals another blow to his intellectual idealism. Memories of ancestral tradition lead Taiming to an imaginary construction of China, only to be counterposed by the grim reality of a China caught up in the fervor of war and nationalism. A contradiction-free existence in hopes of which he sets off for China turns out to be as contradiction-ridden as in colonial Taiwan or metropolitan Japan. First, Taiming is advised not to reveal his Taiwanese identity, for fear of arousing suspicion. Later, when he is held in custody, Taiming manages to persuade the interrogator of his innocence. However, under war circumstances, interpersonal trust is not enough to get Taiming off the hook. These incidents further exasperate Taiming's feeling of ambivalence and eventually lead him to realize the impossibility of suturing himself either to a Chinese or Japanese identity. But the impossibility of



becoming either Japanese or Chinese allows something different to take root in Taiming's mind. As Liao Ping-hui observes,

Japanese colonialism's culture left the Taiwanese themselves in limbo – neither belonging to the universalist category of being culturally Chinese nor possessing a Taiwanese particularism that colonization was attempting to repress. To claim a Taiwanese identity in China during the 1930s was to put oneself in the dangerous position of being a spy and a traitor, a position on which Wu later elaborated in *Asia's Orphan*. With all these complexities in mind, Wu never let his nostalgic feeling for China get in the way of confronting the mainland and directing his gaze inward, to reflect on Taiwan's alternative modernity in response to Japan and China. (291)

Whether the inward gaze amounts to an alternative modernity is beside the point here. Nevertheless, the inward gaze allows Taiming to affirm Taiwan as a locus of enunciation, and this affirmation crystallizes into concrete expressions after Taiming returns from China. From then on, the subaltern perspective starts gaining purchase and gradually becomes the lens through which Taiming looks at his surroundings. For example, in contrast to his previous idolization of “Japanese scent,” Taiming now compares those sympathizers of Japanization unfavorably to local peasants:

the Japanization movement was a policy that weakened the Taiwanese, but although they appeared emasculated, such was not the case; only those blinded by the lure of fame and riches had been corrupted, and the majority of Taiwanese, especially the peasants, were as sound and uncorrupted as ever. Although they

had neither knowledge nor learning, their lives were firmly rooted in the earth.  
(197-198)

However, it is precisely at this point that a nativist reading of *The Orphan of Asia* falters. For how are we to reconcile the affirmation of Taiwan as the locus of enunciation with the image of insanity, the image of insanity with the rumor of Taiming's subsequent political engagement in China? A mixture of feelings – the hurt derived from being the victim of inequality, the guilt of being born Taiwanese, and the shame of watching his fellow Taiwanese suffering and capitalizing on each other's suffering – seems to paralyze Taiming into a state of inaction. Where these emotions come together without resolution, they explode into a fit of madness – a logical culmination of the neither-nor dilemma, as critics would say. The arbitrariness of Taiming's rumored activism thus appears more as a blunder than a finishing touch to Wu Zhuoliu's masterpiece. Yet, things take on a different dimension when we consider the process of Taiming's subjectivization, especially in the chapter five of the novel.

In the first four chapters, we are informed of Taiming's naive affirmation of Japanese colonial modernity and Chinese traditionalism, his shifting bouts of emotional self-flagellation, and his wavering between indecision and resolution. These all contribute to our impression of Taiming as an orphan of Asia. Surprisingly, with the imminence of the Pacific War, the tonality of the novel takes an unexpected turn toward optimism, as the chapter four ends on an auspicious note:

“The darkness of the present day is a predawn darkness,” he [Taiming] said to himself, “and in due course, it will pass.” This was the conclusion that Taiming finally managed to reach. He felt an invigorating vitality permeat[ing] his body,

and when he suddenly woke up, dawn had already broken with a streak of light in the sky. (198)

In the next chapter, we start getting a picture of Taiming waking himself out of the slumber of indecision. Taiming's subjectivization, however, does not run straight from passivity to activity. He demonstrates both cunningness and presence of mind in the process of awakening. Before he openly declares his anticolonial stance, he has learned to lie low while staying resolute: he is described as "a mongoose, calmly waiting to catch his prey off guard" (201). This is the first time Taiming is associated with a metaphor that has any predatory connotation. Immediately following this is the famous passage describing Taiwan Lianqiao's upward movement as an intimation of its vitality and will to thrive. Deeply impressed by the plant's unwavering will, Taiming decides "to emerge from his passivity and take as active a stance as possible within the existing circumstances" (202). This passage is important for two reasons: first, it continues the affirmative tonality of this chapter but translates the dark connotation of the previous mongoose metaphor into a positive assertion of freedom; second, as appealing as the direct assertion of freedom may be, Taiming is well aware of the colonial situation which he lives in. Rather than a sign of resignation, Taiming's awareness signals his judiciousness that if freedom is to be achieved, it is to be achieved within specific circumstances not of his own choosing. This shows that Taiming's determination is at once resolute and practical. The practical wisdom that characterizes Taiming's thinking at this stage is mirrored by the farmers' strategy to cope with food shortage during wartime. Taiming is invited to a midnight feast by the farmers where he witnesses their solidarity and a different way of practicing resistance under duress:

everyone anticipated even worse times ahead, and they were keenly aware of the need to rally together as a community. This was how the weak resists. Like the

starving chicken in the fable that persists in stealing food no matter how much it is beaten, starving people, too, have no fear. It was a lesson for Taiming.  
(translation modified, 220)

As open confrontation is out of the question, this group of farmers nonetheless possesses the weapon of the weak (e.g. the black market and the practice of secret butchering) to resist the injustice of the wartime rationing system. The effectiveness of such passive resistance is open to debate.<sup>196</sup> The point here is simply to indicate a progressive development toward self-determination, a development that takes root not just in Taiming's appreciation of local culture, but also manifests itself in praxis.

Thus far we have learned of Taiming's changed attitude, but yet to see him putting into action his new-found determination. The opportunity comes when he is summoned to attend a meeting of the Homeland Defense Volunteers' Association. In order to excuse himself from labor, Taiming pretends that he has been troubled by stomach problems. Later he admits to himself that it is a lie, but "[t]his is not shrinking from difficulty – this, too, is a form of passive resistance" (230). This example is crucial because here we are given the first glimpse into the practical, sly perhaps, side of Taiming's resoluteness. If he is able to feign sickness and regards it as a form of passive resistance, the distance from feigned sickness to feigned madness might not be as unbridgeable as it first appears, and it is not wholly unimaginable that he will take a step further if his purpose would thereby be achieved.

After the event of his feigned sickness, Taiming becomes more proactive in his approach. When Zhigan's son Daxiong decides to enlist in the army, Taiming is sent to dissuade his nephew from making such a rash decision. As he tries to talk some sense into Daxiong,

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<sup>196</sup> On non-confrontational forms of resistance, see James C. Scott 1990.

Taiming's rhetoric becomes unusually passionate. We are told, that "[t]his time...he had a clear objective: to save a young man from the depths of delusion" (240). This example marks a further development in the process of Taiming's radicalization. He is no longer satisfied with passive resistance. He now takes a proactive stance in preventing something terrible from happening. Also noteworthy is the reasoning behind Taiming's rhetoric. As he argues, "[t]he mass murder that had taken place during the war had been rationalized and even made heroic in the name of 'the nation'....Taking 'the nation' as a presupposition had distorted the study of history; textbooks were nothing more than propaganda meant to justify the nation and to protect its power" (240). In the present context, the purpose of Taiming's critique is to expose the myth of the nation which has been appropriated for propaganda to facilitate the implementation of a conscription system. We should keep this passage in mind because the same critique of the nation will reappear with slight variations after Taiming is declared mad.

Finally, if we are to identify one event as the last straw that breaks the camel's back, it is the death of Taiming's brother Zhina. Zhina is forced to sign for volunteer labor, only to be sent back a dying man on a stretcher. After Zhina's death, Taiming vows to "confront a problem he had long avoided" (243). Although the text does not reveal the exact nature of this problem, it is safe to infer that it is the problem of resistance because this is the only problem that has troubled him and assailed his conscience throughout the novel. This would provide a motive for Taiming's return to China because under Japanese colonial rule, there is little prospect of developing a forceful form of resistance in the colony. Under such circumstances, Taiming's indirect and disguised form of resistance would amount to a few harmless scratches on the crust of colonial machinery. Once we accept this motive, our next task is to answer why madness. Feigning madness, undoubtedly, is a good option for Taiming to achieve freedom of movement

and speech. Improbable as it may sound, a madman is one of the least constrained figures in society. In its forced transition to modernity, colonial Taiwan did not undergo the same kind of discursive construction of madness as analyzed in Foucault's work, mainly because the distinction of normal and abnormal in colonial society is undercut or overshadowed by a deeper and more far-reaching distinction between colonizer and colonized such that madness – put in the same category of those afflicted with physical disabilities<sup>197</sup> – hardly perturbs the powers that be. Consequently, Taiming's deranged behavior affords him a measure of impunity:

He [Taiming] wandered around the neighborhood day after day. He scrawled "Daylight bandits" on the bulletin boards of the fish farms and estates. This briefly became a problem, as it was clear to whom those words referred, but once it became known that it was the work of a madman, people gave up trying to stop him. There were days, as well, when he just sat meekly in the hall. In due course, the people of the village, busy with their own comings and goings, no longer took much notice of Taiming. And at some point, he disappeared from the village completely. (247)

Other clues in support of Taiming's voluntary enactment of madness can also be found in the text. First, rather than losing sight of the condition of coloniality, Taiming takes advantage of the impunity accorded to insanity and turns it into an opportunity to reclaim the right to freedom of speech, as evident in the way Taiming goes unpunished despite his acts of disseminating the ugly truth about colonialism, thereby raising the consciousness of other villagers. In fact, we can even go so far as to argue that communication between Taiming and villagers has never been so

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<sup>197</sup> According to colonial demography, mad men were put in the same category [不具] as those who were physically handicapped (e.g. the blind, the deaf and the mute). This seems to suggest that madness had yet to acquire the connotation of moral degeneration and was therefore not the primary target of state intervention (e.g. intense confinement or corrective measures).

facilitated such that the message delivered in Taiming's delirious talk "fill[s] all the onlookers' hearts with emotion" (245) and draws hundreds of people to see the anti-authoritarian verses written on the wall (247). Second, Taiming performs a symbolic gesture that merits our attention. Taiming paints his face red in imitation of Duke Guan Yu. This symbolic gesture is highly suggestive because the red-faced Duke Guan Yu is one of the most famous historical figures in the Chinese folk tradition, renowned for his military prowess, for being a man of action rather than a man of contemplation. Finally, as I have pointed out, if we examine the content of Taiming's speech before and after he is declared mad, we discern the continuation of the same motif (i.e. the critique of the isomorphism between colonialism and nationalism, both fastened onto an exclusionary identitarian logic) in these two phases (240, 328).

Although madness affords a certain degree of mobility and freedom, it is not transgression in any radical sense. Or to put it another way, madness is itself out of joint in the colonial order of things, but it does not throw the colonial order out of joint. Therefore, it is only an inverted image of freedom. That is why even if we accept the thesis of Taiming's feigned madness, we still have to account for the nature of his return to China. Is it, as Chen Yingzhen wishes to believe, a return to the motherland, a return that marks an end to Taiwan's orphan mentality? Instead of reading the ending as a return to the root, I propose that it is a return *by route of China* toward a universal emancipatory politics. The anti-Japanese struggle Taiming partakes of transcends narrow patriotic nationalism and gestures toward a universal maxim that presupposes equality of humanity regardless of their differences. More importantly, Taiming's return to China after being rejected as a spy suggests that this time he does not wait for others' approval for participation. It is crucial to point out that Taiming is not participating in Chinese nationalist struggle against Japanese invasion; rather, he is participating in anticolonial struggle

carried by Chinese nationalism. His return presupposes that participation in anticolonial struggle is open to all and requires no external mandate. This reading of Wu Zhuoliu's *The Orphan of Asia* would allow us to articulate a new model of politics free from the undue indulgence in one's dejected condition. If the orphan mentality carries with it the shame of being denied, of watching wretchedness piling up skyward, of being powerless in the face of adversity, we should never stop reminding ourselves of a lesson from Marx that "[s]hame is already revolution of a kind...Shame is a kind of anger which is turned inward. And if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> *Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, March 1843. Web. 5 Oct. 2010 <[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43\\_03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_03.htm)>



## Chapter 4

### From a Multilated Body to a Subjectivized Body: The Politics of Materiality in Li Ang's

#### *Visible Ghosts*

*The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, given them space.*

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

In a conversation with Li Ang, the author mentioned in passing that *Visible Ghosts* 《看得見的鬼》 was written as a tribute to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. How Li Ang paid her tribute to the Italian master was not elaborated in the conversation. Taking our cue from Li Ang's intimation, we would, most likely, meet a dead end while looking for some structural homology or similarities in terms of narrative modes; chances improve if we move beyond a search for explicit references and focus instead on the impetus that gives rise to the questioning stance in both literary works. One of the most salient features in Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is its intense scrutiny of the nature of representation through an imaginative eye that sees a porous passage between the fabulous and the real. Such a focus on the function of representation, its susceptibility to manipulation and its being the condition of possibility for staging the scene of reality is indeed no less prominent, albeit in quite different ways, in the stories collected in *Visible Ghosts*. But there is in Li Ang's *Visible Ghosts* a further radicalization of the slippery ground on which both representation and the real rest. What stands out in *Visible Ghosts*, I argue,

is *both* a thesis on representation as the ontological fabric of the world *and* another thesis on the possibility of weaving anew the very ontological fabric found lacking or constraining in a given historical situation. If *Visible Ghosts* is indeed meant as a tribute, it could be seen as one not simply in the sense of being indebted to a particular influence through a series of superficial echoes or a pale imitation of the original; rather it is a tribute in the sense of thinking with Calvino and beyond Calvino, for what is achieved in Li Ang is not just to find a silver lining in the inferno, but to locate this trace of the non-infernal by seizing upon it and forcing it to transform the very conditions that make an inferno an inferno.

This chapter reads Li Ang's *Visible Ghosts* in hopes of demonstrating a militant political procedure whose aim is set on a radical transformation of the regime of representation governing the world of Lukang Town from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 20<sup>th</sup>. My approach is to look at two distinctive ways in which the body is conceived in two of the stories, "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo" <頂番婆的鬼> and "The Ghosts of Bujiantian" <不見天的鬼>. <sup>199</sup> In these two stories, Li Ang presents two distinct configurations of the body. In "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," Li Ang enacts a feminist gesture of demystification; the body in the story is initially figured as a passive, suffering body, and the removal of external constraints is concomitant with a moment of liberation. The notion of emancipation beyond this gesture of demystification is dialectically conceived requiring a recognition of alienation and its overcoming. Once the body is freed from various forms of domination, we can say that the process of de-alienation is accomplished and liberation achieved. This vision of liberation continues into the first part of "The Ghosts of

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<sup>199</sup> "Dingfanpo" is a denigratory name given to aboriginal women who are left to survive on the frontier as their male tribal members were pushed further back to the mountainous areas under the pressure of the Han settler's territorial advance. "Bujiantian" is a geographical location designating the area of the main commercial street of Lukang town. Its literal meaning is "being sheltered from the sky," referring to the architectural design of the area.

Bujiantian” in which the dialectic of law and desire becomes all the more prominent as resistance is registered in the transgressive body in excess to the law. There is a tendency in Li Ang to give in to an undue celebration of a politics of transgression. Oftentimes the process of liberation is emphasized by way of sexually explicit accounts, detailing the protagonist’s experiments with sexuality under the reign of libidinal drives. But underneath such celebration is an unspoken and problematic assumption of an originary body given to polymorphous perversity. What is missing here is a recognition that the very desire is generated by the law itself. It is only in the second part of “The Ghosts of Bujiantian” that Li Ang overcomes this morbid fascination with sexual transgression and provides us with a new conception of the body, one that articulates a transformative politics of materiality and rejects a conception of the body as the locus of symbolic inscription, material exploitation, or drive circulation.

### **I. “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo”: The Mutilated Body and Its Discontents**

In many of Li Ang's fictional works, the body figures as the site of symbolic inscription and material exploitation. In "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," Li Ang tells the early history of Han settlement in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Lukang Town and explores the impact of the settlement on the lives of the aboriginal population, including forced assimilation and tribal displacement; those who stayed in the plains region (known as cooked aborigines) would face cultural assimilation, while those who refused assimilation (raw aborigines) would be pushed back deep into the mountainous areas. The story features two aboriginal prostitutes who, exhorted by a Dutch missionary, wish to reclaim the land usurped by the Han settlers. But they are charged with seditious intent and punished for their transgression. At this point, readers are introduced to the practice of *lingchi* which aims not only at punishing transgression but also at its symbolic

determination.

Li Ang describes how the body is punished and sexualized:

To draw attention to the vulva used exclusively for the male pleasure of sexual penetration upon which their livelihood depends, the Master ordered the executioner to cut ten vulva-like openings on their [Yue-zhen/Yue-zhu] private parts as an indication of the shortage of the genital organs that can be used for sexual intercourse and hence for more economic transactions, and then stuff the flesh and blood transplanted from the mutilated parts into the breasts [so as to make their size grossly out of proportion]<sup>200</sup>

為彰顯宣告賺食查某陰部永遠都在讓男人操插進入，幾個都不夠用。大老爺著令劊子手在月珍/月珠下體，分別切開十道切口，從中取出血肉填充胸乳，還要切出的洞口能像原來的陰部。(31)

Why add insult to injury? If the point is simply to punish transgression, there is no need to go through all these procedures to sexualize the body in order to inflict not just pain but also shame on the condemned. Apparently, the infliction of pain serves an additional function to inscribe a message on the body. The body then becomes both a carrier of flesh and a medium for communication.

In her study on pain, Elaine Scarry has pointed out that the universal feature of pain is its unsharability. According to Scarry, there are contextually varied responses to the experience of pain – for example, one culture might vocalize pain through cries whereas others choose to suppress it through endurance – but the universal feature shared by all these cultures is pain's utter resistance to language. Due to pain's resistance to language and its lack of referential

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<sup>200</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

content in the real world, pain is non-communicable and non-sharable.

It is important to note that Scarry's thesis is about the impossibility of fully expressing the realness of pain through symbolic objectification, not a thesis about the impossibility of its objectification. Therefore, as Scarry points out, if the realness of pain is that which remains mute and inexpressible, it is nonetheless susceptible to objectification and manipulation by power (14). It is at this point that the focus shifts from the neutrality of pain (its resistance to language) to the ideological use that pain can be put to. In Scarry's view, the materiality of the body is susceptible to ideological articulation when the injured body is appropriated as the material support to reinforce an ideological or cultural construct. As a result, the muteness of pain (pain's resistance to verbal objectification) is given a voice, albeit a voice from without. This voice is not intrinsic to the experience of pain; it is rather a symbolic design imposed on pain in order to make it communicable.

In the passage from "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," the practice of *lingchi* is precisely a form of torture that exemplifies the instrumental use of the body, for, to quote Scarry again, "it allows real human pain to be converted to a regime's fiction of power" (18). We are now in a better position to understand why the body in "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo" is not only punished but also sexualized, for it is not just the body that the punishment aims at, but *a certain image or perception of the body* (i.e. the prostitute's debased body) which is created through the very destruction of the body.

Thus far we have tried to prove that the incontestable presence of the body's materiality can be appropriated *for other purposes*. Before we settle for the interpretive frame provided by Scarry, let us turn to another theoretical paradigm of the practice of *lingchi*. The one I have in mind is the Bataillean model that locates transgression in the very experience of suffering. From

a Bataillean point of view, transgression resides not in the fact for which the body is punished, but in the incontestable presence of the punished body. In other words, the mutilated body is simultaneously the site of suffering and transgression. In *Pathos of the Real*, Robert Buch notes that in Bataille's aesthetics of transgression the spectacle of violence produces two opposing effects. On the one hand, violence evokes the real of the corporeal existence; on the other, extreme violence also gives rise to a sense of spectral unrealness of suffering, eclipsing the regime of representation in the symbolic order (17). The real of violence is thus ambiguous due to this split between the immediacy of the corporeal presence and the impossibility of representing such corporeal intensity. The split that refers both to the certainty of one's corporeal existence and its resistance to symbolization is not unlike the paradox described by Scarry. And yet there is one important difference between Scarry and Bataille. In Scarry's account this paradox is neutral whereas in Bataille the paradox itself already constitutes an act of transgression.

From a Bataillean point of view, violence inflicted on the body has the visceral quality of approaching the immediacy of the corporeal presence, and this immediacy carries a transgressive function of undoing the symbolic order. However, it is difficult to detect in the extremity of suffering depicted in the passage from Li Ang's "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo" the spirit of transgression underlying Bataille's schema. Instead of undoing the symbolic order, the suffering body in Li Ang's story is actually the form through which the symbolic order inscribes its message on the body.

To account for the insufficiency of Bataille's account of violence and transgression, Buch turns to Jerome Bourgon's study of the Chinese legal tradition. In Bourgon's account, what distinguishes Chinese legal punishment from the Western conception of punishment is its

preoccupation with literalness: "the execution is only the realisation of a legal message, stressing the equivalence between the 'name' of a crime and the 'punishment'" (qtd. in Buch 34). Bourgon's account highlights one essential feature of *lingchi* unheeded in Bataille's economy of suffering, namely that the suffering body, rather than suspending the symbolic function, might just as well serve as the medium for the transmission of the legal message. The pain and agony that undo the symbolic order in Bataille's aesthetics of transgression are rarely the case in the Chinese practice of *lingchi*. What we find is not the violence that brings the order to ruination, but the violence of the order itself. Thus, the scars on the mutilated body are not the real that resists symbolization but "the marks of shame" 「恥辱痕跡」 voicing "miserable and yet resigned cries" 「淒慘的、無言的嘴，持連地控訴著荒天的悲情」 (32). In this regard, the scars might be accorded the status of the symptom in psychoanalytic theory, as a signifying formation or a coded message in the field of the Other.<sup>201</sup> Or, to use Walter Benjamin's famed distinction, what we witness here is not the divine violence of justice but the mythical violence of law.<sup>202</sup>

There is yet one more turn of the screw in Li Ang's story. In Bourgon's account, there is a correspondence between crime and punishment such that the wounds and scars literally reflect the crime of the condemned. However, in "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," the literal reflection is already a distortion. If the punishment is meant to reflect to the crime, we must take note of the logical sleight of hand by virtue of which the punishment retroactively determines prostitution as the crime of moral turpitude when in fact the actual transgression consists in the aboriginal women's political claim. The sexualized body thus serves two functions, one moral and the other political. On the one hand, the prostitute's body, wantonly employed in immoral sexual

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<sup>201</sup> For an overview of the symptom in psychoanalysis, see Žižek 1992.

<sup>202</sup> On the distinction between mythical and divine violence, see Benjamin 1986.

activities, comes to signify moral depravity. On the other hand, once the body is reduced to a prostituting function and subject to moral condemnation, the whole trial tacitly glosses over the political significance of the initial transgressive act (i.e. aboriginal land claims), thereby reducing an act of decision (the act of voicing that claim) to a social placement (the status of being a prostitute).

The substitution of position for action suggests that although the aboriginal women were socially and economically presented, they were not *represented* in the political sense. Their position is therefore comparable to the proletariat of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western Europe, for, despite the undeniable fact of their economic productivity, they are, politically speaking, *nothing* from the point of view of the dominant ideology. The motif of visibility/invisibility in *Visible Ghosts* works simultaneously on two levels. On the most immediate level, visibility refers to one's sensory perception; any living being existing in space and time and in possession of a physical body is *visible* because his/her movement and presence can be registered by the perceptive organs of another living being. In this sense, ghosts are invisible because they do not exist in the same space-time coordinates of the living beings and their movement is unconstrained by the law of physics.

But the motif of visibility/invisibility operates most effectively on the level of representation. On this level, the degree of visibility is determined by one's proximity to or distance from the dominant regime of representation. In the case of our aboriginal protagonists in "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," they are forced into a life of invisibility because they are deprived of their right to politics, that is, their right to resist the land expropriation. Here visibility has to be construed in the representational rather than ontological sense. It is not that the aboriginal women *are not* seen by others; it is rather that they are *not seen* by others. Being invisible is thus



the result of the discriminatory measure of “reverse hallucination” on the part of those who refuse to see the person who actually *is*.<sup>203</sup> In addition to being the victims of Han-centrism, the aboriginal women are pushed further down the representational ladder, as the marks of inferiority are triply stamped upon them – as woman, aborigines, and later the colonized. They are, from the standpoint of political representation, the superfluous being, as they have close to nil representational visibility in a symbolic order sutured to patriarchy, Han-centrism, mainland-centrism, and colonialism. Together with the graphic image of aboriginal women’s grotesquely dismembered and sexualized torsos, Li Ang offers a victimized presentation of the body as vulnerable to both physical and symbolic violence.

The violence of representation, however, does not end with the death of the protagonists. After they become ghosts, their story is evoked on two occasions. The first occasion is of particular interest to our analysis. The forgotten history of their rebellion resurfaces during the early years of the White Terror.<sup>204</sup> The only difference is that this time the aboriginal women are remembered not as prostitutes but as political dissidents: “Never once is their ‘profession’ mentioned” 「然沒有任何傳言曾提及這番婆『賺食』出身」 (29). The memory of their past transgression offers an emotional outlet for political dissidents who suffer persecution under the newly arrived KMT regime (Kuomintang or the Chinese Nationalist Party). The act of recalling this episode seems to suggest that history has finally righted the wrong and justice has made its belated arrival. But the act of recalling receives a rather ambiguous treatment in the text, so much so that the memory of the aboriginal women’s courageous claim might not serve as progressive a political function as initially indicated. If the idea of emancipation is our primary concern, it

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<sup>203</sup> On the phenomenon of reverse hallucination, see Ackbar Abbas 1997.

<sup>204</sup> The White Terror refers to the period of political persecution under martial law from 1949 to 1987.

becomes imperative for us to inquire into the nature of this remembering. Of great importance are questions concerning implications of this act of memory and the consequences it induces. At first glance, the evocation seems to assume the function of a retroactive determination of signification by elevating the status of the female ghosts from that of a passive victim to that of a political martyr. Before we jump to this conclusion, let us consider the following passage: “Living in fear of the high-handed rule of the White Terror that came in the wake of the great arrest, people of Lukang town constantly reminded themselves of an adage that ‘children should keep their ears open but keep their mouth tight,’ and therefore refrained themselves from commenting on current political affairs” 「於大逮捕後隨來的白色恐怖高壓統治，鹿城人謹記『囡仔人有耳無嘴』，絕口不論時政」 (29). Once we take into consideration that the fear of persecution still casts an ominous shadow over the repressed memory of the aboriginal women’s courageous deed, it behooves us to reconsider our previous assertion concerning the representational function of the evocation as that which confers proper recognition (or visibility) on the aboriginal womens’ right to politics. I would suggest that this episode is narrated with an added layer of ambiguity because the text underscores that the rebellious spirit behind the land claims is reactivated only to be compromised *on the affective level* by the pathos of victimization that offers a point of empathetic identification between the marginalized victims then and now.

As the inspirational story for political dissidents, the story of the their rebellion paradoxically prevents the oppressed population from actualizing the very attitude (i.e. the courage to stand up against the oppressor) that catches their attention in the first place, thereby turning the act of memory points into a psychology of compensation. The phenomenon of a compensatory psychology for the oppressed is well-documented. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon has a famous passage describing the colonized’s need for the dream of aggressivity

to compensate for the reality of subjection:

The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning. (15)

Given that the story of rebellion that inspires is at the same time the story that immobilizes, the same compensatory psychology seems to be at work behind the act of memory, thus rendering the subsequent representation of the repressed truth *politically problematic*.

Toward the end of the story, the female ghosts come to terms with their mutilated body. Nevertheless, the body remains, throughout the narrative, a passive body, a site of suffering, exploitation, and inscription. The body's fragility is immediately confirmed with the graphic depiction of its mutilation; the body also carries the signifying function because the valve-like openings confer meaning, in the register of moral condemnation, on the inexpressible rawness of the body's corporeality. In the final analysis, if we want to come up with a conception of politics in "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," this politics can only be negatively defined, as a politics for which there is injustice to fight *against*, but no justice to fight *for*.

Today, Badiou observes, "injustice is clear, justice is obscure. Those who have undergone injustice provide irrefutable testimony concerning the former. But who can testify for justice?" (*Infinite Thought* 69). In "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo," the undeniable certainty of physical and symbolic violence provides irrefutable testimony to injustice, on the basis of which

the idea of justice is inferred as the negation of injustice. The problem is that once we settle for a definition of justice as the negation of negation, we risk rendering derivative the idea of justice by subjecting it to a model of resistance in which the quest for justice inevitably presupposes the primacy of oppression from which justice derives its *raison d'être*. From this point of view, thinking resistance in terms of the negation of negation would condemn us to a form of political life unimaginable without an a priori concession to the system of oppression as the ultimate horizon of our political vision. Given that resistance is articulated as a placed response, the extent to which such resistance is capable of bringing about a genuine transformation becomes questionable.

Nevertheless, I think it is possible to think injustice not as the *condition* for justice, but as an *occasion* for justice. That is to say, politics starts with the processing of a particular wrong but only on condition that it admits the universalization of particularity. As Jacques Rancière suggests,

Politics is the practice whereby the logic . . . characteristic of equality takes the form of the processing of a wrong, in which politics becomes the argument of a basic wrong that ties in with some established dispute in the distribution of jobs, roles, and places. Politics occurs through specific subjects or mechanisms of subjectification. These measure the incommensurables, the logic of the mark of equality or that of the police order. *They do this by uniting in the name of whatever social group the pure empty quality of equality between anyone and everyone, and by superimposing over the police order that structures the community another community that only exists through and for the conflict, a community based on the conflict over the very existence of something in common*

*between those who have a part and those who have none.* (emphasis added, 35)

Rancière's formulation stages anew the relation between the universal ("the pure empty quality of equality") and the particular (the particular social group engaging in the dispute against the distribution of senses), not by opposing the universal to the particular but by bringing each to bear on the other. From this point of view, each particular enactment of politics (i.e. the processing of a wrong) becomes a local instantiation of humanity's collective emancipation, provided that the dispute is not exhausted by the particular political demand made by a specific group; rather, the oppressed group engaged in a particular dispute in a given historical context can be identified as the stand-in for the whole of humanity because the particular here is put to progressive use and becomes an occasion for initiating a universal politics of equality. In other words, politics starts with the processing of a specific wrong which involves the dispute over the distribution of resources. The specific wrong notwithstanding, politics is also immediately universalizable. Although those who suffer the wrong are, numerically speaking, in the minority, the very breach of the universal principle of equality concentrating in the figure they symbolize politicizes their particularity, thereby making them a stand-in for the universal. Ultimately, this new relation allows us propose the idea of concrete universality wherein a dialectic of the universal and the particular is posited as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive.

We have mentioned that when the dispute over the unjust distribution of resources is exhausted by the particularity of a group's demand – that is, when the significance of the dispute pertains only to the specific group in question – we will have a conception of politics based on the specificity of the demand, not a politics of emancipation based on universal equality. There are two fundamental problems with the politics of demand. First, it deals with what the victimized groups are entitled to or what is owed to them. The group making the demand,

regardless of the content of that demand, is uniformly on the receiving end. What is assumed in the politics of demand is an unspoken hierarchy that assigns to the state the role of the giver/protector and to the people the role of the receiver/victim seeking integration into the existing social order. Kelly Oliver has pointed out the structural inequality implied in a politics based on the demand for recognition:

If recognition is conceived as being conferred on others by the dominant group, then it merely repeats the dynamic of hierarchies, privilege, and domination. Even if the oppressed people are making demands for recognition, insofar as those who are dominant are empowered to confer it, we are thrown back into the hierarchy of domination. That is to say that if the operations of recognition require a recognizer and a recognize, then we have done no more than replicate the master-slave, subject-other/object hierarchy in this new form. (9)

The second problem is that politics construed as such has meaning only to the specific group making the demand and lacks a universal dimension that can appeal to everyone. A rampant phenomenon in the politics of demand is that its rhetoric is often framed in such a way that it is accessible only to those who are directly affected. Although the particularism contextualizes the political dispute in its concrete historical circumstances, its exclusivist proclivity also frustrates the possibility of a common political project. For the processing of a specific wrong to be considered as justice or politics proper, it is essential that the wrong transcend (*without abolishing*) the specificity of self- or group-interest. In this way, the processing of a wrong, rather than a *condition* for justice, provides an *occasion* for generic equality to be enacted in the historical processes of righting the wrongs of injustice.

The distinction between the particularistic politics of demand and the universal politics of

equality offers us another critical perspective to investigate the question of emancipation in “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo.” Thus far we have considered the story’s limited conception of justice by examining the implications of the author’s presentation of the body; we have also looked at how the memory of the rebellion can be put to conservative use, impeding rather than prodding the raising of the political consciousness among the villagers. This limited conception of justice is also reflected in the way the dialectic of the universal and the particular is configured in the story.

Previously, I have argued that justice in “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo” is negatively defined in terms of the negation of negation. I will go a step further and assert that not only is justice *negatively* defined, it is also *narrowly* defined, as the partial concern for personal revenge eventually trumps the initial impartial concern for equality that has served as the impetus behind aboriginal womens’ land claims. Since justice is consigned to a matter of personal revenge, the dimension of universal equality undergirding the initial claims loses its purchase accordingly. Thus, we read “[e]ven seeing with their own eyes how the Japanese implemented policies prohibiting opium, cut off men’s pigtailed, tortured and incarcerated people, the female ghosts did not care to pay extra attention because the victims were either Han Taiwanese or those cooked aborigines” 「如此眼目親見日本人禁大煙、剪掉男人的辮子，嚴刑酷打、囚禁許多人。由於對象都是漢人，要不就是十分漢化的漢番，女子鬼魂也不曾多加在意」 (25). The passage reveals an important subtext of the strained relation between Han Taiwanese or assimilated aborigines and raw aborigines. The introduction of this attitude of indifference complicates the relations of domination in colonial Taiwan. “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo” covers the period from the late Qing to around 1970s. The fact that female raw aborigines are persecuted at the hands of Han settlers and not the subsequent Japanese invaders provides a

rationale for the ghosts' indifference to the suffering of Han Taiwanese under Japanese colonization. But if we situate our analysis beyond the immediacy of experience and consider the particularity of personal grievances from the point of view of structural domination, the attitude of indifference then suggests a flawed conception of justice, blinded to the fact that the source of oppression in "The Ghosts of Dingfanpo" is to be located in political systems built on social relations of domination that serve to perpetuate first the ideology of Han-centrism and later Japan's colonial modernity.

## II. "The Ghosts of Bujiantian": Li Ang's Phenomenology of the Ghosts

Now I turn to the second story "The Ghosts of Bujiantian." Again, my analysis focuses on Li Ang's presentation of the body, and the primary concern stays with different permutations given to the idea of justice.

"The Ghosts of Bujiantian" starts out, as is the case with other stories in *Visible Ghosts*, with two distinct narrative lines, each recounting the personal history of one protagonist (Yue-hong and Yue-xuan). As the story progresses, the two narrative lines gradually overlap and eventually become indistinguishable from each other. In "The Ghosts of Bujiantian," the moment of merging takes place in the third section when the handkerchief/folding fan falls from the window; the mishap of the inadvertent dropping of an object by each protagonist bifurcates into two possible outcomes – the handkerchief/folding fan falls on the face of a vagabond *or* on the face of a local hoodlum – which ultimately fold back into a single narrative, stressing the marginality of women in patriarchal society. The unfolding of this sequence of events reveals that suicide committed by the protagonists is prompted by the vanity on the part of the male family members and by the demand for female chastity in late Qing society. It is against this



patriarchal background that Li's first presentation of justice is to be situated.

Emancipation is first indicated through the freedom of movement. No sooner have Yue-hong/Yue-xuan becomes a ghost,<sup>205</sup> she starts taking advantage of the liberty accorded her to explore places previously off-limits to her. The one I want to single out is the family's book chamber that houses official documents, literary classics and also excerpts with explicit accounts of pleasurable sexual experiences. As the female ghost eagerly exposes herself to new knowledge, it gradually dawns on her that the demand for female chastity and subservience serve no end other than the family's wish to fashion their ways of life in accordance with the social mores and courtly manners of mainland China.

This revelation of patriarchal injustice sets the tone for the author's initial conception of justice. For the female ghost, the acquisition of knowledge is effective in raising consciousness of patriarchal oppression, which would later evolve into a conception of justice as tantamount to sexual awakening. Thus, we are treated to passages describing the female ghost's experiments with carnal activities. It is interesting to take note of Li Ang's presentation of the body here; the body figures in these experiments as a container of libidinal drives. With a right move and a right position, the body can turn itself into a vast erogenous zone, pulsating with the drives' uninhibited circulation. The body thus appears as the locus harboring primordial drives which are subsequently suppressed in a petrifying, life-denying culture and should be restored to its original vitality.

There is, however, a second way of reading this episode. The text also implies that the unbounded pleasure experienced by the body is not at all primordial. In the previous approach, pleasure is primordial, something given in advance. Liberation, accordingly, is to be achieved

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<sup>205</sup> I will use the singular henceforth since the two narrative lines have been converged.

through *a return* to this primordial state of affairs. From this point of view, the object of desire is the object which is lost and to be found again. This initial approach contains an essentialist assumption of an original state that can be restored or returned to. However, according to the psychoanalytic theory of desire, the origin as the fantasmatic object is itself a mirage. What is lost is in fact *a lack*. The elementary difference between loss and lack is that whereas the loss presupposes an originary object, the lack gives rise to a construction. And fantasy plays a constitutive role in the way our desire is constructed. According to Žižek, it is only through fantasy that we know how to desire: “fantasy does not simply realize a desire in a hallucinatory way....a fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its co-ordinates; that is, it literally ‘teaches us how to desire’” (*Plague* 7). The point about desire, Žižek explains, is not *what* I desire, but *how do I know I desire that object in the first place*: “fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is rather: *how do I know that I desire strawberry cake in the first place? This is what fantasy tells me*” (7). If Žižek is right about the role of fantasy in the construction of our desire, it would suggest that the pleasurable experience is already mediated because how the female ghost experiences pleasure is conditioned by what is written in those erotic writings; thus pleasure is always already symbolically mediated because the manner in which pleasure is to be felt and the position with which one can maximally intensify pleasure, and ultimately what constitutes pleasure as such, are prescribed in advance in the erotic discourse which, as the female ghost would find out later, is but a discourse of male fantasy.

As this moment of sexual awakening constitutes a transgressive attempt to settle accounts with manifest injustice of the prohibitive measures on woman's conduct, it simultaneously presents itself as a way of thinking liberation. But we must conclude that this vision of liberation

is a restricted one, for it is hampered by the dialectic of law and transgression. Transgression arising out of this dialectic remains deeply conservative because it is on account of the existing power's oppression that transgression acquires its force. Moreover, the assumption in this dialectical configuration contains an unfounded belief in a pre-given something which is subsequently worked upon by the system of oppression. But it is revealed, with the help of psychoanalysis, that the transgressive desire is generated through the prohibition of the law, that is, the terms of transgression are already inscribed in the existing power structure. Consequently, transgression amounts to little more than the perverse underside of the law. As Suzanne Barnard suggests, "[d]esire is...always inextricably caught up with the symbolic Other that brings it into being and, as a result, within a morbid circuit of prohibition and transgression" (173).

What stands out in "The Ghost of Bujiantian" is that Li Ang does not stop at her protagonist coming to an awareness of the conditions that contribute to her personal suffering. In the first moment of liberation, the body is figured as the site of discrimination and domination. Liberation, accordingly, is conceived as a life independent of such constraints. However, this is not Li Ang's last word on the subject. The turning point occurs when the female ghost encounters a procession of numerous indistinguishable ghosts marching stoically in the street. This group of ghosts "emerg[es] incessantly from the dark recesses of a void like being poured out from nowhere" 「無止盡的自黑暗的街廓湧出，如同被自某處傾倒出」 (100) and their faces are featureless and devoid of any emotions. They literally "look like white radishes" 「平白的一截臉面 — 像蘿蔔一樣」 (100). Without knowing why she is drawn to this group of nameless ghosts, the female ghost decides to inquire into how this collective comes into being and where the procession is leading to. After the encounter, the liberating power of sexual awakening is called into question; it is even considered, at one point, as being detrimental to her

investigation: “Bent on pursuing the truth [concerning this group of the indistinguishable ghosts], the female ghost found herself constantly distracted by various things. The one that distracts her most was the bumping noises from the bed planks clustering in her ears when the procession of ghosts started marching on Wufu road at night” 「醉心追求真相的女子鬼魂，發現自己經常性的得受到各式干擾。最令她分心的，是一入夜，正是魂們出遊的時刻，『五福路』長條街屋裡，幾乎是每進每落，都要傳來床板碰撞的聲音，匯聚起來於女子鬼魂的耳中」

(105). The distracting noises are made by people engaging in sexual intercourse. Since this is the first time the female ghost ventures outside the family’s premises, these scenes provide an occasion for her to empirically verify her newly acquired knowledge about sexual pleasure. Much to her dismay, there is a huge discrepancy between what is promised in the erotic writing and what she actually witnesses in reality: “There were indeed entangled bodies but no such fancy positions as scissor and doggy styles. . . . No, there was only a plain missionary position where a man’s cumbersome body with legs stretching straight pressing upon the body of a woman who just lies flat” 「是有一對交纏的身體，然不見『倒掛金鉤』、『老漢推車』等等姿勢. . . 啊！不，只有一副男人笨重的身軀，雙腳平伸，壓著下面也是平躺的女人」

(105-06). What is missing here is the sublime experience matching the extravagant description of carnal enjoyment as depicted in the erotic writing. Disenchanted, the female ghost concludes that what she reads in the book chamber is nothing but the discourse of male fantasy.

The mentioning of those noises is important for yet another reason. Previously, active engagement with sexual activities are considered emancipatory. Now it is presented as an obstacle interfering with the female ghost’s investigation. By highlighting the first conception of liberation as both insufficient and distracting, the female ghost’s foray into the world can be seen as a break in the narrative. What happens afterward is not simply a renunciation of the initial

conception of the body, but also a development of a new conception of the body that goes beyond the dialectic of law and transgression, constraint and freedom, toward a new political articulation of justice where the space of freedom is created through subtraction from, rather than opposition to, the existing state of knowledge.

In her attempt to understand the phenomenon she witnesses on Wufu road, the female ghost first decides that something like war must have happened to this group of ghosts: “only great disturbances like war could inflict such human losses and produce so many wandering ghosts” 「只有戰亂才會造成如許多遊魂」 (110). This conviction alone sets off a series of local investigation to determine what has happened to these nameless ghosts. It should be noted that while her investigation is an attempt to make knowable the ghosts she encounters in the street, it is not an attempt to make it knowable within the interpretative frame provided by the official discourse. This subtraction from the dominant discourse is emphatically stressed when the female ghost seeks recourse to the existing knowledge in a futile attempt to determine what has happened to the group of ghosts. No sooner has she turned to knowledge than she meets a dead end: “The name ‘Taiwan’ did not appear in those ancient classics until the island was assimilated to the Qing Dynasty” 「是啊! 根本沒有古籍提到『台灣』這樣的名字, 要直到清朝才將台灣收入清帝國版圖」 (104).<sup>206</sup> She then remembers that “local officials dispatched from the mainland are entrusted with the duty to compose official histories at various local levels. How would these documents, absent from the family’s book chamber, record the events of the island? Could they be used to explain what happened to the procession of the ghosts in the street?” 「女子鬼魂到是憶起 . . . 曾聽聞唐山派來統治的地方官, 銜命寫府志、縣志、廳

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<sup>206</sup> Taiwan was assimilated into the Qing Dynasty in 1684.

志。而這些不會再藏書閣內出現的書，會怎樣記載島嶼的事蹟，可以用來解決這一街遊走的魂魄？」(104)。The female ghost pores over historiographies written by local officials, but to no avail. The preliminary conclusion we can draw here is that the significance of the procession she encounters in the street is not registered in the existing encyclopedia of knowledge. It is, as it were, indiscernible from the point of view of official knowledge.

Despite the impotence of the official discourse to account for the (in)existence of these wandering ghosts, the female ghost goes on to determine – thanks to a prolonged process of investigation by way of the subaltern discourse circulated amongst ordinary folks – that this group of ghosts are the bearer of the trace of a past political event. After carefully considering the geopolitical specificity of the site, the female ghost comes to the conclusion that these ghosts are the casualties of the suppression of the Lin Shuangwen rebellion.<sup>207</sup> This remarkable reconstruction of history on the basis of subaltern knowledge significantly alters the conceptual contour given to the idea of justice. After her decision that those nameless ghosts were the subjects of a previous political event, the female ghost encounters the procession for the second time. In her first encounter, these ghosts are featureless and “look like white radishes.” But in her second encounter, she immediately recognizes unique traits inside the ensemble of the previously faceless ghosts. No longer a group of ghosts with no distinguishable marks, they are singularized by the wounds and scars on their fragmented bodies: “Once inside the group, the female ghost suddenly realized although their facial features are vague, each can still be clearly distinguished because each was marked by distinct scars they suffered while alive” 「如今，就置身魂群裡，女子鬼魂赫然發現，眾魂們儘管面目模糊，但個個皆能清楚明辨，因著每具魂身生時受到

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<sup>207</sup> The Lin Shuangwen Rebellion took place between 1786-1788 in central Taiwan; it is the largest popular revolt under Qing rule.

殘害的部份，仍歷歷清晰」(119-20).

If, in the first encounter, that the indistinguishable ghosts look all the same signals an effacement of historical specificity, the second encounter reestablishes a determinate outline for each wandering ghost. But this cannot be interpreted merely as a return to the particular because, unlike the graphic depiction of the mutilated body in “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo,” the particularity of each ghost’s suffering in “The Ghosts of Bujiantian” receives only minimal descriptive treatment. Although the wounds and scars are singularized for each ghost, the fact of this minimal treatment also suggests a departure from the obsessive concern with the particular. I would suggest that the focus here is displaced from the individual experience of suffering to the common structure that makes possible each individual experience of suffering. This new focus also invites a new way of thinking justice, for the knowledge of the structural dimension of oppression no longer defines the horizon of justice, and it is toward the changing of the representational structure that the idea of justice is mobilized.

Thus, without indulging herself in the scars of the past, the female ghost decides to pursue what can be done in light of the implications authorized by her encounter with this procession of the wandering ghosts. Taking the event of Lin Shuangwen’s rebellion as the point of departure, she starts composing a history from below, recording all the major popular uprisings of the past two hundred years under the Qing rule, in hopes of, to use a fitting phrase coined by Badiou, “producing to murmur of the indiscernible.”<sup>208</sup> For the construction of a

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<sup>208</sup> The text in the original language is 「女子鬼魂要書寫的，便是這些竊竊私語中的講古憶往，不同於縣誌、鄉誌、廳誌出現的私語心聲」(116). A more faithful translation would be “this was what the female ghost wanted to write, the murmur of the past unaccounted for in the official discourses.” I substitute “the murmur of the indiscernible” for “the murmur of the past” for reasons that will be explained later. Badiou’s phrase is taken from *Handbook of Inaesthetics*: “what a truth rests upon is not consistency, but inconsistency. It is not a question of formulating correct judgments, but rather of producing the murmur of the indiscernible” (33-34).

subjectivizable body, Badiou writes, “[i]t is not enough to identify a trace. One must incorporate oneself into what the trace authorizes in terms of consequences” (*LoW* 508). And it is through this act of incorporation that an individual becomes a subject. What complicates the issue here is that in the second encounter with the trace of a past political event, the female ghost *momentarily* immerses herself into the procession, only to emerge out of the procession through a decision not to *be* part of it but to *do something about it*. Had the female ghost succumbed herself to the galvanizing force of the trace and became one of the indistinguishable multiple, we would have had something like the ontological politics spoken above, not an efficacious body that pursue “what the trace authorizes in terms of consequences”; we would have had an interruption of the existing structure of knowledge, an upsurge of something indiscernible, but not a construction of an affirmative politics that would change the structure of knowledge that renders those wandering ghosts invisible in the first place. Therefore, the female ghost’s decision to construct a new history, a fiction of resistance,<sup>209</sup> around bits and pieces of information gathered in the subaltern discourse, allows her to advance an affirmative notion of justice, one that is neither ephemeral nor epiphanic. This time justice is less a revelation than a laborious process of elaboration in which the post-evental consequences are worked through and put into effect by *re-determining* the previous determination.

According to Badiou, “[i]n this production of a murmur of the indiscernible, what is decisive is the inscription, the writing, or...the letter. Only the letter does not discern, but instead effectuates” (*Handbook* 34). Writing, as Badiou conceives it, is to be distinguished from

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<sup>209</sup> The subaltern history is a fiction because the accounts recorded in the female ghost’s writing are not necessarily more veridical than the official accounts. As she admits, she is uncertain whether “the stories [of the female rebels] she heard on Wufu road correspond to actual historical figures, or whether they are imaginary projections by virtue of her empathetic identification” 「她們的事蹟，是來自『五福路』傳言真有其人，還是，有部分自身感同身受地參與想像」 (123).



symbolic inscription on the body or the official discourse of knowledge, for the latter serve the function of discernment which the former tries to undo. Unlike knowledge that discerns and divides, what is written in the production of the indiscernible is a different type of inscription that challenges divisions and hierarchies of a given situation. In our example, classics and official accounts found in the chamber not only discern the difference between man and woman (e.g. prohibition on women and the discourse of male fantasy), mainland China and Taiwan (e.g. knowledge is constructed by people dispatched from the mainland only), normalcy and exception (e.g. rebellions are unrecorded in official historiography); the first term of each pair is also conferred with higher visibility or higher existential value. In the production of a murmur of the indiscernible, knowledge that discerns is suspended and the resultant production “is addressed [to all] without division” (34).

Recall our analysis of “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo”: the writing on the body surreptitiously displaces the focus from *the act of voicing political claims* to *the fact of being a prostitute*. Badiou’s conception of the writing serves exactly the opposite function by restoring the focus back to action, for Badiou’s writing is something that “effectuates” – it is, in other words, a *doing* rather than a *placing*. The subaltern historiography composed by the female ghost is based on the murmur of a past unaccounted for in the official discourse. The female ghost tries to give voice to the voiceless Taiwanese under the Qing dynasty by composing a history from below. Nevertheless, a history from below cannot avoid being a form of discernment. How then can we understand the female ghost’s writing of the indiscernible as something different from the official historiography?<sup>210</sup> The point not to be missed here is that the new knowledge is produced

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<sup>210</sup> “The operator of faithful connection designates *another mode of discernment*: one which, outside knowledge but within the effect of an interventional nomination, explores connections to the supernumerary name of the event” (Badiou, *B&E* 329).

to supplement the official account, not to substitute for it. Therefore, the production here is to be construed in terms of a generic extension. Put it another way, we can see each instance of the oppression of the Taiwanese under Qing rule as a particular instance of injustice or a particular organization of discernment prescribed by the official knowledge. This new history produced by the female ghost is a new consistency prescribed in accordance with the generic principle of equality. What matters in the female ghost's attempt to construct a history from below is not so much the content of this new history – a subaltern history recording all popular revolts of the Taiwanese under Qing rule in the past two hundred years – as her attempt to consistently extend the bounds of representation to those who are excluded and appear invisible in the current regime of representation.

The most prominent feature of her rewriting of history is the universalization of the particular. The new historiography attests to the particularity of Taiwan under Qing rule, but this particularity is transcended (or *in-discerned*) on two levels. First, the particular instance of injustice is transcended through an identification of the universal invariant that characterizes the matrix of all types of oppression: “All the invaders are fundamentally the same. Other than the names, places, and times, there is no difference between Taiwanese people's resistance to the Qing dynasty in China and to the Japanese foreign invasion. They are the resistance to the same endless killing and tyrannical subjection of the people” 「所有的入侵者基本上一樣，只消改動人名、地名、發生時間、台灣人民浴血抗爭清王朝、與對抗異族日本入侵、差別不大。同樣是無盡的殺戮與高壓欺凌」 (134). Although the procession is specifically linked to the event of Lin Shuangwen rebellion, the consequences authorized under the name Lin Shuangwen goes far beyond its historical occurrence. Recall our discussion of “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo,” our conclusion is that the idea of justice is narrowly and negatively defined as the negation of

personal injustice. And this incapacity to transcend the particular explains why the female ghosts in “The Ghosts of Dingfanpo” fail to perceive oppression beyond Han-centrism because oppression is there affectively defined as an experiential category rather than a structural function. Second, the particular is also transcended by an affirmative gesture that refers equality back to one’s choice rather than one’s position. This dimension of universal equality is borne out when the female ghost decides to devote herself to a cause unrelated to her personal experience, her social placement, or her immediate self-interest. Although this is a choice made in specific circumstances, it is not mandated by one’s status or placement in the world. It is therefore an active form of equality prescribing the choice to choose.

Since, in “The Ghosts of Bujiantian,” justice is affirmed as an axiom of equality beyond the morbid obsession with suffering, the concept of the body, accordingly, receives a radical reconceptualization. The body refers not to a living or suffering body; nor is it conceived in libidinal terms as a material receptacle for drive circulation. The body in the second moment of liberation refers rather to the capacity to actively concentrate objects around the eventual site and produce a new form of knowledge that will transform the existing regime of representation. A body is not necessarily a human body; any object in proximity to the site (including human bodies) can enter into the composition of a subjectivizable body insofar as it is efficaciously identified with the production of a new form of writing that affirms the genericity of equality. The body then consists of objects that offer themselves as the material support of the position taken in relation to this affirmation. In “The Ghosts of Bujiantian,” the position is taken in the form of forcing into existence a new historiography. As far as the coming-to-pass of this new

knowledge is concerned, roof panels<sup>211</sup> on which the history of past revolts is written are no less efficacious than the female ghost herself in the composition of a subjectivizable body, as both work for the happening of knowledge's infinite extensionality.

In the final analysis, Li Ang pays her tribute to Calvino by thinking with Calvino but beyond Calvino because she does not simply “*seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno*” (Calvino 165). Li Ang is more ambitious. She wishes to transform the very conditions that make an inferno an inferno and conceive a new way of being-in-common in which the determination of the inferno can be re-determined through the construction of a new present.

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<sup>211</sup> “Underneath every roof panel a heart-wrenching tale about the island is inscribed” 「每片屋瓦下的屋面板，存留的是一段段血淚交織的島嶼事蹟」 (138). Also noteworthy is the fact that toward the end of the story, roof panels, together with the female ghost's literal merging with the root ridge, function as the barricade thwarting the Japanese colonizers' attempt, as part of their modernization efforts, to burn down the building.

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