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TO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE GOOD: NOTES ON THE ZAPATISMO
ETHIC

On the first of January 1994, as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN) declared war on the Mexican government from the Lacandon Jungle, in the southernmost Mexican state of Chiapas.¹

Led by the enigmatic 'Subcomandante Marcos,' around 3,000 inadequately armed guerilla militants, many indigenous, seized several municipalities, including, for a brief time, San Cristóbal de las Casas. The Zapatistas demanded the cancellation of NAFTA, the dissolution of the Mexican government, and the forming of an egalitarian assembly to be tasked with composing a new constitution. In Mexico and around the world, the Zapatista uprising heralded a new day for the left. The fall of the Soviet Union had been proclaimed as the death of the left, if not the end of history itself, and the apparent victory of the neoliberal order marked the thought of emancipation as impossibility itself. But the rebellion of the EZLN, from the jungles of Chiapas, suggested that another left could be conceived; this left would universalize its struggle, imagine anew the possibility of a novel world distinct from state capitalism, and do so without a centralized party or unified political program.

The President of Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo, sent armed forces – both the air force and the army – to quell the uprising. Thousands of Mexicans protested, taking to public squares in cities and towns across the country to urge Zedillo to halt the military suppression of the Zapatistas. The fighting between the armed forces and the EZLN lasted twelve days, until Zedillo finally relented and agreed to a temporary ceasefire. In response, the Zapatistas held a referendum vote regarding the position they should occupy in Mexico; the majority of Mexicans voted in favor of participatory political action without violent insurrection. Since that referendum, the Zapatistas have not engaged in armed rebellion. Instead, the movement took on other forms of life and located other lines of flight.

The rejection of violent revolution by the Mexican people was definitive, but many nonetheless sympathized with the Zapatistas' cause: to seek justice for the atrocities committed against the indigenous population, to amend the living conditions of the most impoverished, and to address persecution in

¹ This information is from Mora, "Zapatista Anticapitalist Politics and the 'Other Campaign," and Nail, *Returning to Revolution*.

whatever form it might take, at the hands of economic powers, state apparatuses, or other overarching structures. The people had decided that the struggle could no longer be made manifest in the seizing of towns or measured in the count of bodies, but the struggle for the cause itself would continue.

The failure of the Zapatista uprising, the inadequacy of violent means, forced a retreat into the Lacandon Jungle, a region populated largely by indigenous people living in fairly destitute conditions. In the jungle, the Zapatistas formed small, egalitarian communities that amounted to an emancipated zone of relative autonomy. Encircled by the armed forces of the Mexican government and local groups of mestizo and indigenous people who were wary of them, the Zapatistas continued to organize, fostering cooperation and providing communal services for any who needed them.

In 1996, the EZLN signed a treaty with President Zedillo – the San Andrés Accords – which promised state recognition, increased rights for the indigenous Mayan population, and gave an assurance of the right to autonomous functioning within a certain region of jurisdiction. The Congress of Mexico refused to approve the treaty, and Zedillo disregarded it almost immediately, repeatedly transgressing its bounds. Thus, the Zapatistas declared that no further negotiations would take place and retreated once again into the jungle.

For the next decade or so, the EZLN aimed to create radically egalitarian forms of community engagement and management at a local level. Generally persecuted minorities, such as women, homosexuals, indigenous people, etc., were treated as equal and granted the right to speak and be heard as humans among humans, without regard to given qualities or identities. The Zapatistas eschewed political representation and identity politics; in their communities, there was to be no heterosexism, patriarchy, or capitalism, and no privileged race, gender, class, location of origin, or sexual orientation.

As Simon Torrey wrote in a 2006 article: the “philosophy of the Zapatistas is... symptomatic of a more general shift in the underpinnings of the political ‘field’... beyond ‘representation.’”² In other words, the Zapatismo struggle did not merely oppose certain forms of taxonomy and representation, but representation as such, the whole notion of the classification of people into types. In *Change the World Without Taking Power*, John Holloway pursues this thread: “we struggle against being working class, against being classified. Our struggle is not the struggle of labor: it is the struggle against labor.”³

Reestablishing communal organization ‘from the ground up,’ the Zapatistas formed their own social programs and offered utilities, building schools and hospitals which served as alternatives to government-operated institutions. Several principles served to structure these formations: *mandar obedeciendo* (leading by obeying, all are to lead by following the will of the community), *proponer y no imponer* (propose, don’t impose), *antipoder contra*

² Torrey, “‘Not in my Name’: Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation,” 138.

³ Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, 88.

poder (anti-power against power), *todo para todos, nada para nosotros* (everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves), and so on.

In 2000, as the presidential election grew near at hand, the EZLN refused to issue support for any of the candidates, repudiating the notion of election as such. The Zapatistas thought that the act of voting would serve only to reify the apparatus of the state itself, which is to say that there was no vote against the re-inscription of the political schema at work; to vote would be to cast an affirmation of the system that permitted or encouraged such voting. And so, rather than voting, the Zapatistas persisted in their focus at the local level, continuing to manage their communities in relative autonomy and with a relatively horizontal configuration.

In 2006, as the next presidential election approached, the EZLN again refused to endorse any candidate; but instead of subsisting in total locality, they initiated a national campaign: *la Otra Campaña* (the Other Campaign). Travelling across the country as a candidate for the presidency might, the Zapatistas held rallies, met with a large variety of political and social groups fighting persecution and oppression at the hands of the government and economic forces, and attempted to engage 'the Other' in the broadest manner possible. After the election in which they refused to partake, the Zapatistas once again returned to the jungles of Chiapas, where they continue to stand against inequalities and injustices of all sorts both at the local level and on the global stage via the force of inspiration in regard to the theory and praxis of resistance and the struggle for liberation.

Critiques of the Zapatistas, both political and theoretical, abound. In regard to praxis, the politics of the EZLN seems to remain opaque and their fight for emancipation is often considered to be a lost cause, a failure. Their communities strike many as utterly interior, like a set of veritable 'black boxes,' and some find their theoretic position to be under-focused on class struggle, indigenous rights, or the sheer eventuality of what a political upsurge might be, or else hyper-focused on local egalitarianism and morality in lieu of more insurrectionary or 'hardline' politics. For instance, in an article in 2004, Tariq Ali, commenting on the Zapatistas' slogan – 'we can change the world without taking power' – said that,

This slogan doesn't threaten anyone; it's a moral slogan. The Zapatistas – who I admire – when they marched from Chiapas to Mexico City, what did they truly think was going to happen? Nothing happened. It was a moral symbol, it was not even a moral victory because nothing happened.⁴

And it is true, of course, that the declaration of war against the Mexican state in 1994 yielded, due either to an inability to mobilize significant enough numbers or the inadequacy of preparations and resources, a later lack of discernible victory in the San Andrés Accords and the subsequent continuation of a sequestering in the jungles of Chiapas. But perhaps – and this will be one of the theses that I will seek to defend here – the 'success' of

⁴ Quoted in Nail, *Returning to Revolution*, 23.

Zapatismo, of the Zapatista movement overall, has little to do with these material significations.

It is a risk to seek to theorize on the subject of Zapatismo, for the Zapatistas do not require such theorizing on their behalf or for their sake; they do not need us to speak their politics as a condition of our thinking or to proclaim its basis in what would be a support of their praxis. The goal of such theorizing, then, must be to explain the effectiveness of the Zapatistas to us, to we who may doubt it from afar.

The question is not what we can offer the Zapatistas, but rather what their praxis can teach us; and we would do well to remember that learning is always an abnegation, a permitting of a determination by another. Our method of approach therefore cannot be one of extraction and re-assembly, of an abstraction which would be a violence, because it must be determined by that praxis which is immanent to it and precedes it, *viz.*, Zapatismo.⁵

In order to better grasp the effectiveness of the Zapatistas, we need to better understand the relation between ethics and politics, between welcoming the stranger – ‘anyone can be a Zapatista’ – and fighting in the name of a cause. Many critics have noted that the EZLN’s revolution does not have the ecstatic force of an uprising and that it does not appear to desire such force; these critics are disquieted by the apparent preference for absolute hospitality over and above the sort of insurrection that material conditions seem to demand.

In welcoming all, the Zapatistas appear to be granting a place of primacy to ethics vis-à-vis political and collective action, and this proves disconcerting for many revolutionaries on the left, including Marxists, socialists, indigenous activists, and others. Principles such as *antipoder contra poder* – ‘anti-power against power’ – strike some as a refusal to seize the means of production (power); and *todo para todos, nada para nosotros* – ‘everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves’ – looks to some other leftists like utter surrender. The question that we must pose, then, is this: what is the ethic of Zapatismo? And does it permit or lead to the requisite resistance that is necessitated by the facts of material living conditions?

Anyone Can Be a Zapatista'

In welcoming whomever as a Zapatista, declaring that ‘we all must become Zapatistas,’ the EZLN illustrates an ethic of hospitality without regard to given qualities or identities. Their gates might read: ‘let each, no matter who they are, enter here.’ The critiques of such an ethic generally tend to surround a certain impotency: if all are welcome, then how can resistance be possible? And surely, if all are indeed welcome, this includes capitalists, the government, conservatives, nationalists, and so forth; the practicability of revolution seems to then be quite diluted.

⁵ I agree here with Laruelle, when he writes, “I am very ill at ease when philosophy takes charge of the witness’ discourse and makes a philosophy out of it” (Laruelle, *Intellectuals and Power*, 84).

While the resistance of the Zapatistas does not entail the violent force of other revolutionary movements, nor the force it once aimed to demonstrate in January 1994, this does not mean that resistance itself has been set aside, or that its possibility has been attenuated and diminished by the centrality of an ethic of welcoming. The EZLN's resistance embodies, in its unspoken posture of insurrection vis-à-vis the world, the power of a non-capitulation which can be derived from absolute hospitality, from the singular axiom that 'anyone can be a Zapatista.'

In other words, the demonstration of the effectiveness of Zapatismo requires that we be able to show how resistance can be derived from the simple act of welcoming each and every stranger who might be at our doorstep, each and every Other who could be a Zapatista. It must be shown that resistance often follows as soon as I open the door and welcome the strangers who are standing there, whomever they may be and whatever qualities may identify them.

In order to derive resistance from hospitality, it will be helpful to clarify several conceptual terms at our disposal, terms within my own ethical system that will prove useful for our purposes; these terms, with an eye towards the immanent determination of our project by Zapatismo itself, will be explicated in light of several principles of the EZLN, such as *antipoder contra poder* (anti-power against power), *todo para todos, nada para nosotros* (everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves), *mandar obedeciendo* (leading by obeying), the fight against the representation or classification of people, the notion of the *Encuentro* (encounter, gathering), and the idea that a victory in allegiance to all Others does not entail, by necessity, that something eventual has to happen 'in-the-world.'

Let's begin by calling axiomatic a very specific form of welcoming: abnegation. From this axiom-schema alone, we must be able to obtain a 'theorem of resistance.' That is, a logic of dissent or defiance must follow from this axiomatic abnegation at least in some cases, such as that of the material conditions of the indigenous population of Chiapas.

Abnegation can be defined as the axiom-schema which structures, in an axiomatic or transcendental sense, the immanent topology of the 'field of two.' The field of two is the space in which I encounter an Other who is *absolutely* not me. This Other is not different from me by degree, by a set of standard deviations or qualitative stratifications in which the self or that which is self-same is set as the norm or mean, but is infinitely alteritous. In the field of two, I find myself in a position of abnegation vis-à-vis the Other, which is to say that I am compelled to welcome the Other without regard to their qualities, identities, or characteristics.

This Other is simply that which is absolutely not what I am and not of what I am; indeed, I am in some sense Other to myself and so condemned to a position of abnegation in regard to myself as Other. In any case, the field of two is the topology of an absolute hospitality; it is structured by the axiom-schema of abnegation which defines it. Paraphrasing Dostoevsky, Lévinas tells us that the formulation of ethics can be written, "we are all guilty for everything and everyone, and I more than all the others," but it could just as

easily be written, “everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves (*todo para todos, nada para nosotros*).”⁶

The first vocation is the vocation to be, the first answer, to be there. We have always already answered our summons. Prior to all of the answers that may or may not eventually be given, prior to responses that engage responsibility and involve an actually constituted power of response, there is *the response that we ourselves are*, simply through the fact of our being, through the fact of having come to an eternal cry, to the cry that calls to being and to be – a ‘here I am’ provoked by a ‘come here.’”⁷

In other words, if I am to act with a forgetting of my abnegation, it must be a twofold forgetting: to do Evil, which is to forget the two and to act as if the three is its own sufficiency and thus auto-positional, is to lose sight of the Good, the field of two, and to do so twice. If the field of two is structured by the axiom-schema of abnegation – which is the sort of absolute hospitality in which ‘anyone can be a Zapatista,’ in which ‘everything is for everyone’ but ‘nothing is for us,’ embodied in the *Encuentro* or ‘encounter’ – then what is the definitive sense of this abnegation? How can it, in itself, be defined?

The axiom-schema of abnegation can be defined as welcoming – or more generally, acting in remembrance of – the *fashion of the no-matter-what*. The ‘no-matter-what’ is the axiom that defines the manner or ‘fashion’ of the hospitality of the axiom-schema of abnegation in the field of two. This axiom, the no-matter-what, stipulates that abnegation is ‘acted,’ in the sense of ‘always-already-acted,’ by cutting away all of the qualities of a thing to reveal what remains in its non-representationality: a radical insufficiency of qualities. We will call this a ‘quantum finitude.’⁸

A quantum finitude, or the ‘generic,’ is the sense of a thing *x* to which has been applied the razor of the axiom of the no-matter-what, that is to say, a welcoming of *x* in the fashion of the no-matter-what; this is a welcoming which is not *because* of the unique or particular qualities of *x*, and not *despite* these qualities, but is *without regard* to them: anyone, no matter who they may be, can be a Zapatista. This ‘reduction’ to the generic in a welcoming in the fashion of the no-matter-what is embodied by the Zapatistas in the use of ski-masks during rallies and gatherings; this practice, as Thomas Nail writes, “rejects the representation of the person.”⁹

⁶ Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, 105. Evidently, Lévinas’ account of the ethical is a crucial precursor to our own account. That being said though, we differ in a number of significant ways: as opposed to the face of the Other with its unique lineation, our Other is generic or ordinary in the strictest sense; as opposed to the self in the accusative, the ‘me,’ being ‘for-the-Other,’ our self should be read in the dative case, as located in an absolutely abnegational position vis-à-vis the Other and bracketed as such; as opposed to Lévinas’ pernicious anthropocentrism, our Other is anything which is altogether not what I am and not of what I am; etc., etc. For a further consideration of these distinctions, it may be helpful to reference *Angst and Abnegation*.

⁷ Chretien, *The Call and the Response*, 18, emphasis added.

⁸ On the Zapatistas’ rejection of representationality, see Torrey, “‘Not in my Name’: Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation.”

⁹ Nail, “Zapatismo and the Global Origins of Occupy,” 34.

In welcoming a person as non-representable, in an abnegation to the generic Other as without a primary position within the field of three, I effectively strip away all of the qualities of that person, which is to say that I recollect the always-already-acted nature of precisely the sort of as-kesis that is manifested in the Zapatistas' wearing of ski-masks. In wearing the mask, and encountering Others who are masked, I do not lose sight of the hospitality of the field of two and recognize it as the 'presupposed' of the field of three, as determining of its possibility and the possibility of its subject.

The quantum finitude as non-qualitative or non-positional, welcomed in the fashion of the no-matter-what, is the Otherinasmuch as they are recast against their own qualitative sense or position. The recasting of the quantum finitude of the field of two against their own position within the field of three, insofar as the latter is not totalizing of the former, is the immediate 'performance' of alterity; it is in this way that the quantum finitude is the infinity-(of)-alterity, the Other.

Thus, to act in the fashion of the no-matter-what, which is the definitive axiom of the axiom-schema of abnegation that structures the topology of the field of two, is to act 'towards' a thing (in non-relation because difference is not a matter of degree) in light of the recollection of the welcoming of that thing, *qua* generic, in its non-qualitative sense, i.e., the thing as a quantum finitude.

This recollection of the field of two, this attunement of remembering the first abnegation, is a 'fashion' as opposed to a 'modality.' A modality is the mode in which a thing occupies a position of being-in-the-world, of being in the structures of the field of three, or has whatever qualities are particular to it and its classification or given and typifying representation. This given representation is given by a givenness which counts it as ' x '.¹⁰ For instance, the indigenous person is given as such by the givenness of the structure in the field of three that counts the indigenous person as 'indigenous,' and permits no or minimal excess from out of that categorization, totalizing the indigenous person within a taxonomic classification or subsuming them under a normative set of categories of understanding.

This operation of counting the Other is a finitization of their difference such that it is a difference from the one who counts, or from what is self-same to the one who counts, only by degree (which can be either quantitative or qualitative).¹¹ A modality is therefore a sort of interpellation of x by a given structure – a 'third' which gives x as such, as ' x '; it often takes the amphibolous form of having = being.

A fashion can be defined, in the simplest of terms, as a non-modality. It is to a modality what non-Euclidean geometry is to Euclidean geometry; that is, a

¹⁰ And thus, as we will see, the ethical act is a refusal of the primacy of the operation of the count.

¹¹ The operation of the count, which I have elsewhere called a finitizing 'glimpse,' is therefore a movement from infinite alterity to finite difference into and thus within a relational system or network.

fashion is the primacy of the lack of any modality inhabited by a quantum finitude, which precisely in being given in the field of two is given without givenness. Hence, a person in the fashion of the no-matter-what is a person who is first *outside of any modality* and does not inhabit one except secondarily.¹² Of course, a person does have qualities, identities, and structural positions, but these are secondary to their original lack in the field of two, which is a 'fashion' in this sense.

As we intimated previously, the infinite difference between a thing as a quantum finitude and its sense of being given by givenness, its secondary positionality and 'having' of qualities, is the production of the thing as the infinity-(of)-alterity. The gap between the thing qua quantum finitude and the thing qua positioned is the 'performance' of the Other. During *la Otra Campaña* in 2006, the Zapatistas wore ski-masks, applying the razor of the no-matter-what in an as-kesis or 'reduction' to the generic, but they also made speeches, organized protests, and met with other revolutionaries, taking on a clear positionality. The bifurcated nature of *la Otra Campaña* was thus not merely a national campaign to welcome the Other, but the production of infinite alterity itself.

The recasting of the field of three against the field of two, which is the field that is anterior to it and unilaterally determines it while being foreclosed to what would be its determinations, is the production of genuine alterity, but this is only true in some cases. The field of three can only coexist with the field of two such that this recasting is possible insofar as the field of three is not imagined to be totalizing, that is to say, insofar as there is not a twice-forgetting of the field of two.

The field of three is made up of three general terms: a self, an Other, and an analogical link between them; this link can be a structure, an institution, a system, an apparatus, etc. In the analogical schema of the field of three, the self is for-the-Other and the Other is for-the-self; each term is different-by-degree from the other term, and the norm or mean of this difference is set as the self or the self-same. This link interpolates both the self and the Other in the relation, in which these two terms – self and Other – are seen to be *its* terms, inextricable from the nexus itself.

In other words, the self and Other are colonized mutually by each other in their relation; each sets its self or what is self-same to it as the norm; each term is victimized by the other term and is its persecutor. The victimization-persecution dialectic cannot be abrogated in the field of three except by its suspension in the recollection of the field of two, which as an immanent praxis, and not merely a hope, bears within it the *present* possibility of a 'perpetual peace,' or a deliverance from the victimization-persecution cycle.¹³ This recollection of the two would, as François Laruelle writes

¹² "For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the absolute *outside* of pre-critical thinkers: that *outside* which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking it or not; that *outside* which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere" (Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 7, emphasis altered).

¹³ I have critiqued Meillassoux's conception of the God to-come, and the immanent hope in such an advent, on precisely these grounds. Further, hope is possible only

in *Intellectuals and Power*, be “a utopia of the Victim and the intellectual that is grounded upon a refusal of justification through history,” a rejection of the possibility of an ethic in the field of three (being-in-history, being-in-the-world, being-in-the-political, etc.) which therefore necessitates the recollection of that topology which is its ‘presupposed’ determination, viz., the field of two.¹⁴

If the analogical schema of victimization and persecution, of the self-for-the-Other and the Other-for-the-self, is taken to be primary, and thus totalizing of the self and the Other, the field of three becomes the field of three-as-one. While there are three terms in this field – self, Other, and their relation – all three are counted ‘as-one,’ as totalized within the relation itself without the possibility of their excess. All three terms are taken to be entirely within one and the same analogical context inasmuch as the self and Other are of a self-same analogical or qualitative relation (the self totalizes the Other with the quality of ‘for-the-self’). In the three-as-one, the positions of the self and Other are taken to be *auto*-positional.

If the three are counted as one in the field of three-as-one, such a field cannot coexist with the two; thus, the field of three-as-one renders the production of alterity impossible. It is in this sense that we can say that there is no ethic in the three-as-one.¹⁵ Ethics only exists in a field of three if it permits the recollection of the primacy of the two; this is a field of three which does not totalize the self and Other in a subsumption under their relation, a field of three which can coexist with the two insofar as it is secondary to it.

It is for precisely this reason that the Zapatistas’ ethic of absolute welcoming must precede political and positional engagement, for if it were the other way around, such an ethic would no longer be realizable. Ethics and politics, which is to say, the field of two and the field of three, can only coexist insofar as the former is anterior to the latter; otherwise there is only politics, only the three-as-one and all of the injustice and inequality that is born from it.¹⁶

In the coexistent two-and-three, each thing has two senses: as given without givenness, and as given by givenness; as material, and as immaterial; as visible, and as invisible; as ‘like’ or ‘unlike’ me, and as absolutely Other; as objectivated or interpolated, and as immediate-as-lived. In each case, the latter is anterior to the former and the infinite distance between them, the lack of proximity of the former to the latter which is the distinction between a thing in the fashion of the no-matter-what and a thing in-the-world, is the ‘performance’ of the infinity-(of)-alterity, i.e., its production in the recasting of the latter against the former which is primary to it. This coexistent two-and-

because I have already abnegated to its possibility, to the thinkability of the realization of its altogether novel ‘to-come.’ See, for an example of such a critique, *Angst and Abnegation* §I.3. For Meilllassoux’s conception of immanent hope, see Meilllassoux, “Spectral Dilemma” in *Collapse IV* and the translated excerpts of *L’inexistence Divine* in Harman’s *Quentin Meilllassoux: Philosophy in the Making*.

¹⁴ Laruelle, *Intellectuals and Power*, 80.

¹⁵ On the ethic of relational philosophies, or lack thereof, see *Angst and Abnegation* §I.4-6.

¹⁶ Hence, those who criticize the EZLN for setting ethics before politics are fundamentally mistaken.

three is, as we have said, the explicit structure of *la Otra Campaña*, and also necessitates the priority of ethics vis-à-vis politics such that the two are both possible.

We can further specify the relation between a quantum finitude in its non-position in the field of two and its position in the field of three as characterized by an attunement of indifference. A quantum finitude, in recollecting the primacy of the two in which it is whatever it may be, in which it is non-qualitative, is indifferent to its position in the three insofar as the three is thus non-total as a merely partial positioning of it.

The position of a quantum finitude as different by degree in an analogical schema is seen to be partial in a movement from the three to the two, in the application of the axiom of the no-matter-what which is the remembering of a radical qualitative insufficiency, an as-kesis or stripping-away which includes in what it discards as primary the quality of 'positioned in the three' (being-in-the-world, etc.). Difference in the sense of the infinity-(of)-alterity is thus indifferent difference, or unidirectional difference, inasmuch as a quantum finitude unilaterally determines the positional and is foreclosed to what its determinations would be.

The generic is therefore idempotent vis-à-vis its position in the field of three from the vantage point or posture, which appears from within the three as a 'view from nowhere,' of the immediate, lived, and a priori inhabiting of the field of two.¹⁷ Thus, we can say that a quantum finitude is indifferent to its own sense of being given by or in the givenness of the field of three.

The ethical question, then, is essentially the question of whether a thing is totalized or not within the field of three, i.e., whether or not a thing's position in the three is counted as part of a one, whether it is taken to be merely positional, and thus auto-positional, or else recollected as non-positional in the field of two, given in its immediacy without givenness. The ethical task par excellence is the remembrance of one's abnegational position, which entails a welcoming of all Others in the field of two as generic in the fashion of the no-matter-what which is the piety of the axiom-schema of abnegation.

We can thus write the fundamental ethical question as follows: is a thing recollected as welcomed in the fashion of the no-matter-what, or not? Have I lost sight of the Good and done so twice? And evidently, in asking this very question, the recollection is already a matter of course. The Zapatistas' ethic of absolute hospitality, which is, as we have illustrated, a generic ethic, can be distilled into a singular formulation: *to all Others, in the fashion of the no-matter-what*. It is precisely in this sense that 'anyone can be a Zapatista.'

One instance of this ethic can be seen quite clearly in the Zapatismo notion of *horizontalidad* (horizontalism), which is a political formation in

¹⁷ The aprioristic nature of the field of two does not mean that it is immune to forgetting. As Laruelle writes of his conception of the victim, "Philosophy has its victim, but the Victim of philosophy is perhaps the repression of another victim, *too obvious to not be forgotten or unnoticed*" (Laruelle, *Intellectuals and Power*, 81, emphasis added).

contradistinction to the classical political party or revolutionary program. In “Zapatismo and the Global Origins of Occupy,” Thomas Nail describes the impetus for creating such an alternative in the following way:

Horizontalidad emerged, in large part, as an alternative to political parties. Political parties have long been the organizational tools of both the Left and Right for bringing together large groups of people under commonly shared platforms and ideological positions... The party structure is the way in which the power of the state is divided up and executed. But this division is precisely one of its problems. The very nature of parties is to be partisan, oppositional, and divide the people between conflicting positions... There is no real way to change the system of party representation through the election process [which is why the Zapatistas did not put forward or endorse a candidate in 2000 or 2006]. Division and corruption are two major concerns at the core of the party system – and two motives for creating an alternative.¹⁸

In lieu of a political party or a unifying program, *horizontalidad* offers the gathering or assembly: this is a form of direct and egalitarian democracy in which people, with no regard to commonalities or shared qualities and identities, come together to propose solutions to communal issues. As Nail puts it, “In contrast to the oppositional structure of the party, the assembly is not divided by party lines, ideologies, or represented constituents.”¹⁹ Instead, it is a welcoming of each and every person who wishes to be involved, an *Encuentro*.

The structure of the *horizontalidad* is a clear and unambiguous case of a coexistent two-and-three; because the primacy of absolute hospitality is recollected, because each participant remembers the field of two structured by the asymmetrical axiom-schema of abnegation and the piety of its no-matter-what, it is then possible to conceive of a non-totalized and utterly horizontal field of three which is *not* counted as-one. The condition of the possibility of horizontal relations in the field of three is the remembrance of the asymmetrical non-relation of the field of two (hence, *mandar obedeciendo*, leading by obeying, leading after a first abnegation). Asymmetry precedes and unilaterally determines horizontality such that the two can coexist, for if horizontality is taken to be first, it inevitably dissolves into the stratification of political parties and programs. If there is to be ethics and politics in coexistence, ethics must be anterior to and determining of politics.

‘Anti-Power Against Power’

The axiom-schema of abnegation which defines the field of two does not entail a theorem of absolute surrender or capitulation, as many critics of the EZLN’s ‘symbolic morality’ seem to think.²⁰ This is not just a negative claim; as we said previously, we must show that resistance can be derived from a

¹⁸ Nail, “Zapatismo and the Global Origins of Occupy,” 22-23.

¹⁹ Nail, “Zapatismo and the Global Origins of Occupy,” 23.

²⁰ For further examples of such critiques, see Nail, *Returning to Revolution*, especially 1-37.

generic ethic, that it follows from the absolute hospitality of the field of two. In other words, it must be demonstrated that a 'theorem of resistance' can be derived from the axiom-schema of abnegation, that the two permits, at least in some cases, a non-capitulation. This would be the derivation of an 'against-power,' or a resistance to the powers of the field of three which would count its terms as-one, from the 'anti-power' of the field of two; it would be a demonstration of the possibility of *antipoder contra poder* (anti-power against power).

An example should suffice to show that resistance is indeed derivable from the field of two: suppose that, on a cold and rainy day, two strangers approach the door of a building in which a Zapatista *Encuentro* is taking place. The first is an indigenous person and the second has made of all their wealth in a business which usurped the rights of indigenous people. In a recollection of the first abnegation, we let them both in, feed them and fetch them water, and bring warm clothes and blankets – and then we begin talking. Soon enough, we discover that one of our guests is proudly Mayan, while the other cares little for the rights or welfare of indigenous people.

The indigenous person confronts the capitalist on the subject of their seemingly unethical business practices, and the capitalist in turn lashes out, declaring that indigenous people 'don't deserve rights anyways.' The indigenous person remains still and calm, silent before their accuser, unwilling to engage and indifferent to the assault. We find ourselves upset; after all, we have invited both guests into the *Encuentro*, we have shown both of them our hospitality. Who is the capitalist to think that they can torment our other guest? At the same time, we must recollect that we are in an abnegational non-position vis-à-vis the capitalist, as well as vis-à-vis the indigenous person.

So how do we proceed? In the recollection of the field of two, we do not give over the capacity for resistance but rather ground it. The axiom-schema of abnegation in application to both the capitalist and the indigenous person demands, in the very act of remembering this twofold abnegation, a non-capitulation to the violence of either of our guests against the other. In the very act of remembering the abnegation to each, we must fight in the name of the no-matter-what in a defense of both Others without regard to their given qualities.

Abnegation compels us to be true to it by stepping in; we cannot be idle in the face of victimization and persecution but must rather seek to suspend the whole victimization-persecution dialectic – the condition of angst in which each self is both the victim and the persecutor of every Other – by recollecting the primacy of the field of two.²¹ Thus, resistance to the victimization-persecution dialectic can be derived from the axiom-schema of abnegation as theorematic in the case of the violence or colonizing act of one against another.

²¹ For more on the 'condition of angst' described here, the reader may find it helpful to refer to *Angst and Abnegation* §I.6.

Or more exactly, it can be derived from the abnegation of the field of two – where responsibility for the Other is recollected as the only thing (*todo para todos, nada para nosotros*) – and a secondary fact about the world of the field of three into which we have been thrown: there are always multiple Others at the door. Justice can be derived from the charity owed to *all* Others.²²

We can therefore say that it is sometimes the case that acting in the fashion of the no-matter-what, that is to say, recollecting the always-already-acted-ness of abnegation, demands non-capitulation, and it is likewise sometimes the case that it demands capitulation instead. In either case, though, the *capacity* to resist is not at stake; for resistance, when demanded by the ethical, can be definitively derived.

The derivation of the theorem of resistance does not necessarily entail an uprising or a violent insurrection; it does not always demand a repetition of January 1994. There are two reasons for this:

1. Resistance is not ineluctably a collective matter.

Resistance is the determining and ‘invisible’ counterpart in the field of two to what may be, in the field of three – in the ‘visible’ world of relations, positions, and so on – either revolution or apparent conformity. As a theorem derived only from a coexistent two-and-three, resistance cannot be totalized as the inescapable necessity of armed revolution or the like, which would be the counting of the three as-one such that it could no longer coexist with the two. This totalization would be a twice-forgetting of the two. Uprising – which we can define for our purposes as collective action against a structure for the end of changing it in some way – cannot be derived from the axiom-schema of abnegation *with certainty*.

Uprising is a feature of the field of three insofar as it coexists with and does not contradict the field of two, and a feature of the field of three-as-one insofar as it does not coexist with and does contradict the field of two. In the former case, we can say that an uprising is ethical – that is, if it is compatible with resistance in the sense of *antipoder contra poder* – and in the latter case, uprising is unethical in the sense of *poder contra poder* because it renders the coexistent two-and-three impossible.

2. The theorem of resistance is itself secondary, ulterior to the absolute hospitality of the field of two from which it *can* be derived.

Let’s differentiate between a ‘subject’ and a ‘person.’ A subject is a positioned-person, i.e., a person positioned within the field of three – this can be either a coexistent two-and-three or a three-as-one. A person is non-positional in themselves, or in the fashion of the no-matter-what as a radical insufficiency of qualities, as a quantum finitude. In the case in which the uprising-subject imagines the primacy of their subjecthood and thus neglects their personhood

²² “I have tried to make this deduction: justice itself is born of charity. They can seem alien when they are presented in successive stages; in reality, they are inseparable and simultaneous, unless one is on a desert island, without humanity, without a third” (Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, 107).

(say, as a becoming-subject in the fidelity to the ‘truth’ of the uprising²³), they conjure the absolute or total linkage of the analogy or field of three and thus count it as-one in the very act of revolting against it.

As Lacan said, “What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master: You will have one!”²⁴ The distinction between the resisting-person – who is an uprising-subject in some cases but does not take their subjecthood in the field of three to be primary to their personhood (or genericity) as a quantum finitude in the field of two – and the uprising-subject who is totalized as such is a distinction between which principle is absolutized: the uprising-subject who is totalized as such absolutizes the field of three, the analogy and the positions of its terms, such that it is counted as-one, whereas the resisting-person in the fashion of the no-matter-what absolutizes the partiality or contingency of the analogy, i.e., its factual nature as shown in its inadequacy to count or contain its terms as-one. That is to say, the resisting-person absolutizes the recollection of the field of three’s failure to totalize its terms as terms and nothing besides; this is the absolutization of the field of two, of the Other who is the Absolute in the sense that it condemns us to the non-position of abnegation.²⁵

The uprising-subject who is totalized as such makes the structure (such as the state) against which they are revolting into the Absolute, totalizing even their own position in that structure qua ‘uprising-subject.’ Their uprising act against the old master thus necessarily supplants that master with a new one; this is the result of one and the same act. In contradistinction, the ethical act of resistance against the old master, derived from the axiom of the no-matter-what and the coexistent two-and-three, predicated on the recollection of a first abnegation, is a resistance against the primacy of structures as such, of being-in-the-world and so on.

It is a resistance against the absolutization of the field of three into the form of the field of three-as-one and is possible insofar as it is derived from the field of two, that is to say, insofar as it is an instance of *antipoder contra poder*; this field is then one from which we can resist the absolutization of the three and the positions of its terms, from which we can refuse the count-as-one of the field of three. Resistance is therefore subsequent to absolute hospitality by necessity, and is possible, i.e., derivable, only in that case.

Against the critics of the Zapatistas who proclaim that insurrection must come first, before ethical considerations, we can now say that such a prioritization of uprising over and above welcoming leads to the impossibility of the coexistence of the field of two and the field of three, and thus the totalization and absolutization of the three and the positions of its terms in

²³ For an instance of such neglecting, see Badiou, *Being and Event*, especially Meditations 23 and 35.

²⁴ “Revolutionary aspirations have only one possibility: always to end up in the discourse of the master. Experience has proven this. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master: You will have one!” (quoted in Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, 12).

²⁵ As I have said elsewhere, it is precisely in this sense that the Other is the ‘organon of deliverance’ from the field of three and unto the field of two. See *Angst and Abnegation* §II.2 and §III.3.

the three-as-one. In other words, a politics before ethics is a politics without ethics (*poder contra poder*), and cements, in the very best of cases, a master who is more favorable than the previous one; but it can never result in resistance against the totalization of the field of three which allows for a master to arise in the first place. In granting hospitality primacy to resistance – ‘anyone can be a Zapatista’ and ‘*todo para todos, nada para nosotros*’ precede ‘*antipoder contra poder*’ – Zapatismo allows both to coexist.

The topology inhabited by the Zapatistas is the field of the coexistent two-and-three precisely because the two unilaterally determines and is foreclosed to the three, because the three is thus non-total and not counted as-one, which is the absolute fact that leads to the recollection of the field of two, and its axiom-schema of abnegation which locates its piety in the axiom of the no-matter-what.

Allegiance to all Others in the sense of a first abnegation, distilled in the formulation of the generic ethic: ‘to all Others, in the fashion of the no-matter-what,’ is therefore an a priori posture of the defense of all Others and a stance of the resistance which can be derived from it; this is the posture and the stance of the Zapatistas.