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LOVE, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND LEFTIST POLITICAL ONTOLOGY

"Love may be a stumbling block for ethics, unless love simply puts ethics into question by imitating it." – Maurice Blanchot¹

In his essay, "Potentialities," Giorgio Agamben divides philosophy into two lines, what he names the line of "transcendence" and the line of "immanence." He writes of "a line of immanence (Spinoza, Deleuze, Foucault and Nietzsche) and a line of transcendence (Kant, Husserl, Levinas, Derrida)." ²

What characterizes each group are a common set of theoretical tendencies in how they theorize ontology, or being qua being. Procedures of division, antagonism, or contingency characterize the sphere of ontology in the camp of transcendence, and their concepts tend to rely upon a strong theory of the act/event. For the immanence camp, on the other hand, ontology has completely absorbed the sphere of the political and a rupture with ontology is typically rendered impossible. In the *Empire* series, Hardt and Negri are clearly working within the immanence camp.

For example, they conclude that ontology has absorbed the political completely; therefore, all that is political is also biopolitical.³ Similarly, Agamben's own political ontology has drawn out the consequences of this immanence-based orientation towards ontology as his thinking examines the subjective and juridical status of human life outside of the hegemonic juridical order. Yet for Agamben, *homo sacer*, or the excluded citizen, is both within and outside of the biopolitical order, inhabiting the threshold between bare life and socio-political life. Every effort to re-think this political space must come with a clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinctions between *zoe* and *bios*.

Agamben argues that we must think ontology and politics beyond any relation of difference, which is why he aims to think the political as a non-relation and goes even further than Heidegger in seeking a "new non-foundational and non-relational ontology."⁴ This makes a theory of the event nearly impossible in Agamben's work, and this tendency is common amongst the immanence camp more generally.

¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Pierre Joris (Barrytown: NY, Station Hill Press, 1988), 40.

² Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 23.

³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2000, 26.

⁴ Carsten Strauthausen, "Neo-Left Ontology", *Postmodern Culture* 16 (2006): 3, 22.

I. A Theory of Transcendence: Leftist Political Ontology

Oliver Marchart and Carsten Strauthausen have named a certain post-Marxist strand of contemporary political ontology in continental thought ‘leftist ontology,’ a specific type of political ontology that has largely abandoned the Marxist idea of the “relative autonomy” of cultural politics (i.e. of thought) vis-à-vis the economy. Leftist political ontology in contemporary theory, “considers the potential productivity of thought to disrupt the status quo, including its economic structure.”⁵ According to Frederic Jameson, leftist ontology “stops dialectics, embraces paradox, and ruptures thought.”⁶ It inaugurates a different kind of thought on ontology because it thinks thought’s relation to being differently than the long line of left-Heideggerianism, and this difference implies a new and distinctive role for the foundation of the social domain and for the domain of the political.

This essay does not seek to provide an exhaustive account of leftist ontology; rather, it seeks to lay down the basic contours of its thought and its consequences for thinking politics and ontology. While leftist ontology is largely seeking a way out of Heideggerian ontological difference, it is important to sketch out the ways that the spheres of the “social”, “politics” and the “political” are developed in relation to ontology. In general, the social is thought as synonymous to the realm of politics in the “ontic” sense – consisting largely of a play of differences among finite beings.

One of the defining characteristics of leftist ontology is that thought can only occur if thought itself identifies substance rather than form, i.e. if thought identifies with and alters the ontological (the political) and not only the ontic (the social). The political is thus thought as the sphere of the ontological, similar to what Heidegger referred to as *Beyng*, or a sphere where a deeper form of ontological rupture or change comes about. Thought, as such, now contains the capacity for thinking political change. Another way of stating this is that thought must act as a part of substance (the political/ontological) rather than try to merely reflect the social, which is defined as the “state of the situation” for Badiou, or what Ernesto Laclau simply refers to as the “social.”

Despite strong resistances to Heideggerian ontology, particularly in Badiou’s and Žižek’s work, it is still nonetheless helpful to frame the return to ontology in leftist ontology more broadly along the Heideggerian distinction between the ontological and the ontic. In this framework, the social is a neutralized sphere of being(s), where there exists, to use the metaphor of signifier relations, an inability of any master signifier to assume a quilting point. The relation between the ontic (social) and the ontological (political) can be thought using Saussure’s curve, which Lacan highlights in *Seminar III* on psychosis.

The top curve consists of a flow of objects, feelings, crying, etc. what Lacan calls “thoughts,” while the bottom of the curve

⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁶ Ibid, 15.

contains signifiers—each in isolation to one another and metonymically separate. For the psychotic, a quilting point, or a button tie between the two curves, or something that can produce meaning, occurs when there is a linkage between a signifier and a signified, but this never occurs and remains omitted in the field of psychosis. This same relation can be graphed onto the social and the political, wherein the social is a realm of pure signifiers in metonymic relation to one another, while the ontological is composed of pure affective, imaginary signified relations.

The signifier is what Lacan says “polarizes meanings, hooks onto them, groups them in bundles,”⁷ and while a signifier polarizes meanings, it is also what creates meanings.⁸ In leftist ontology, the social is a psychotic formation, stunted from achieving emancipatory potential, which is why a theory of transcendence, or thought as break and rupture is so central to thinking political ontology.

II. Love Beyond Tragedy: Towards a Humanized Political Love

How does psychoanalysis connect with the field leftist ontology? Where might psychoanalysis be aligned within the two lines of transcendence and immanence that Agamben sketches? When Lacan was asked whether psychoanalysis has an ontology, he responded that the unconscious has an ontological function, but he stated that, “the gap of the unconscious may be said to be pre-ontological.”⁹

As Justin Clemens has persuasively argued, what psychoanalysis gives to the question of ontology is love, despite the well-known maxim that love is always giving what one does not have. While love is the central affect in psychoanalysis as it is what makes up the transference relation between the analyst and the analysand, there are two different types of love according to Lacan: love of *eros* and love at the site of the social bond. In his *Group Psychology*, Freud argues that it is the love for the father that sustains the social bond.

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen develops an important, albeit controversial, argument in *The Freudian Subject* that counters Freud’s central claim of love’s role at the site of the social bond. For Borch-Jacobsen, the social bond of love with the father leaves no room for thinking an egalitarian, or even an emancipatory social relation as he argues the father is in all cases reducible to a totalitarian leader. While he claims that Freud maintains a reliance on Oedipus and castration as a solution to the impasse of the violence inherent to every social bond, it is the very basis of Freud’s theory of desire—which he sees as mimetic and inherently narcissistic—that ends up demanding a totalitarian master or father to cement the social bond.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses Vol. Book III (Bk. 3)*, trans. by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 291.

⁸ Ibid, 292.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Co.), 1981, 30

Putting Borch-Jacobsen's critique to the side for a moment and turning to Lacan's use of love, we find an all-together different set of theoretical approaches to the question of the social and the social bond. The argument in what follows is that Lacan's theory of love places love as a solution to the problem of jouissance and to the break of imaginary servitude that riddles political emancipation projects. The consequences of this are that psychoanalytic love is compatible to a theory of transcendence, where breaks, cuts and ruptures with ontology are central operations.

Nowhere is this use of love as a political operation more apparent in the work of post-Lacanian, or Lacanian influenced thinkers 'love-as-transcendence' in the thought of Žižek, Zupančič, Badiou and Nancy, a highly diverse set of thinkers who each share an important theoretical touchstone in Lacanian psychoanalysis such as Žižek, Zupančič, Badiou and Nancy. These highly diverse set of thinkers each share an important theoretical touchstone in Lacanian psychoanalysis, despite their theoretical differences and debates amongst one another. After developing a footing in leftist ontology and Lacan's theory of love, we will turn to each of these thinkers to more closely examine how love is deployed in their thinking on the political and the question of the subject.

Whether Lacan's teachings present us with a more radical politics of emancipation from capitalism is at best an ambiguity in his work, and at worst, political emancipation is a pessimistic position on the side of impossibility. In *Television*, Lacan famously said that to denounce capitalism, "I reinforce it – by normalizing it, that is, perfecting it."¹⁰ Lacan thus paints the revolutionary as a tragic heroine, who learns that "human jouissance depends on a transgressive movement that ultimately reaffirms the very laws, social norms, or taboos against which it is directed."¹¹

Lacan famously told the protestors, who crashed his seminars during the May 68 period, many of whom were asking for clarification on what he means by his theory of the "Name-of-the-Father;" that they secretly desire a new master, despite their aversion to masters. There is a certain cliché of Lacan's point as it pertains to the question of mastery, but it nonetheless presents us with the haunting question of whether all political emancipation is dependent on a master in order to facilitate a break, to pose a rupture with a social order, and to open a new space of desire.

As Peter Starr argues in his essay "The Tragic Ear of the Intellectual," Lacan's warning to the revolutionaries of May 68 indicates the revolutionary subject's very inability to replace the master's injunction. Starr comments that the "liberationist ideology" of the 68'ers "veils the master's power, thereby fulfilling the foremost precondition to its continuing function as power."¹² The problem Starr pinpoints in Lacan's discussion of the master's discourse is the way that, "the very intensity of the revolutionary

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment* (Boston MA: MIT Press), 13-14.

¹¹ Peter Starr, *Logic of Failed Revolts: French Theory After May 68* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 57.

¹² Ibid, 57.

desire that the rebel sends into the communal system comes to repeat itself, on the far side of the Other's lack of response."¹³ The rebel or revolutionary shows a love for escaping the master's discourse, but this love for an escape or rupture with the master's discourse always goes to present the revolutionary with "the specular image of the rebel's ego ideal."¹⁴

As Starr points out:

The knowledge of a fully self-present and potentially consummate revolutionary moment, which the militant originally supposes of the Other, can only be a narcissistic illusion, an inverted reflection of the revolutionary's ego ideal in the placid mirror of the subject presumed to know.¹⁵

To return to the question of love, we find that love is what enters at the point of inevitable specular misrecognition to sever and break with this imaginary conflict. As Lacan comments: "psychoanalysis alone recognizes the knot of imaginary servitude that love must always untie anew or sever."¹⁶ In his later work when the category of pleasure and jouissance become more and more prevalent, love is an affect capable of humanizing an otherwise monstrous jouissance, and I argue that this humanization of love is what enables psychoanalysis to think politics outside of the tragic key.

What interests us in this context is how a 'humanized love' is related to leftist ontology, specifically in the line of transcendence as we have outlined it above. The first indication of Lacan's use of love beyond tragedy comes about in *Seminar VIII* on transference, where he claims that love makes the Real of desire accessible without its tragic dimension. This transition is evident in the turn from ethics to love in *Seminar VII* on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* in 1965, to Seminar VIII in 1966 on transference love. As Zupančič has pointed out, Lacan's ontological theory of jouissance during the ethics seminar, results in a "heroism of lack" paradigm, wherein all objects lack and "reality is constituted based on a lack in the Real."¹⁷

Politics is tragic for a would-be revolutionary because to follow the maxim from the ethics seminar, "do not compromise on your desire" the result is self-defeat and tragedy. However, if we add the condition of love to this situation, the subject's relation to desire and to jouissance is transformed. Because jouissance in this tragic mode always relegates the Other to the Real, the Other materializes its presence as an excess. Thus, to renounce jouissance, there is always some surplus enjoyment left over and this means that every resistance to power will thus always result in both subjectivation and de-subjectivation, since some

¹³ Ibid, 58.

¹⁴ Ibid, 59.

¹⁵ Ibid, 59.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink, New York (New York: W.W. Norton and Co.), 1999, 81.

¹⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real* (New York: Verso, 2008), 241.

remainder of the primordial lie (of desire) always clouds the scene of action (the ethical).

But in the second period of Lacan's ontology, he formulates jouissance as that which subtracts from lack, which is what the concept of the drive is aiming at.¹⁸ Pure desire, or monstrous jouissance, what Freud calls the *das Ding* (the Thing) is found at the end of the metonymic chain of desire—always pushed to a “that's not it.” To think the final “that's not it” would be to think the abolishment of the cause of desire itself. In this second period, Lacan's maxim, “do not compromise on your desire” is achieved by sacrificing the cause of one's desire itself. This moment of pure desire occurs in the frame of the subject's fundamental fantasy, and it occurs as a psychoanalytic act on the side of drive.¹⁹

When Lacan writes in the unpublished seminar *Angoisse*, “only love-sublimation makes it possible to humanize jouissance,”²⁰ we should immediately note how different this version of sublimation is from the type of sublimation he speaks about in the *Seminar VII* on ethics, which is tied to sublimation as a raising of the object to the dignity of the Thing. This earlier type of sublimation is based on the model of elevation of the idealized object. Love-sublimation, on the other hand, makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire.

This is a type of sublimation that “humanizes jouissance” as Lacan states,²¹ and this capacity for love to humanize jouissance means that there is a split at the heart of love, similar to comedy. The split inherent to love – and what makes it such an interesting ethico-political category – is its capacity to both rupture the subject in the Real, while also maintaining a rapport with the most banal object in the Other. The Other is sustained in love while the Real is touched, but this touch [tuché] does not result in a thrown out of jointness of the subject, as we find in the ethics seminar. Love is no longer on the side of the impossible desire that one must follow into the depths of the unknown as we find in the Greek models of Antigone and Oedipus, but is now, because of love, the site of work and of struggle.

In this context, it's helpful to distinguish desire from love, and what better way to frame the difference than with reference to Plato's metaphor of love in the *Symposium*. Plato's short fable imagines a hand reaching out to clutch a rose, wherein the rose represents beauty and the desired outcome of reaching out for the rose is that the hand receives the rose in an embrace, and thus attain the object of desire. But imagine that instead of the clutch-taking place, what actually takes place is that the rose reaches back to the hand that reaches for it and embraces the hand in another type of embrace than the one desired. It is this alternative embrace that produces love for Plato. The lesson is clear: love is not achieved when the hand that reaches for the beautiful rose meets

¹⁸ Ibid, 242.

¹⁹ Ibid, 244-245.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, unpublished seminar, lecture from May 13, 1963.

²¹ Alenka Zupančič, “Investigations of the Lacanian Field,” *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics* 17, 140.

the rose itself, for this would be desire.

Love occurs when the hand that reaches for the beautiful rose experiences a second hand –from the rose itself – that reaches back to it and grasps it. In this fable, love does not elevate the One of desire, which would have been the outcome of the unity of the object of desire with that of the desiring subject wishing to obtain it. Love is rather that which gives the subject a rapport with desire. If the rose was obtained it would not satisfy desire, as desire always slips away into the metonymic chain, where it can never be pinned down, and is in a continual relation of “that’s not it.”

Desire is always a desire of the Other, making its object unobtainable in a way different than that of love. Love is of the Two precisely because it sustains desire and gives the subject a link to their desire. This is why love is such a crucial affect for working through Lacan’s ethical maxim, “do not compromise on your desire” as it enables a proximity to the *das Ding* of desire—that monstrous desire where the Other (the Neighbor) resides.

III. Love-as-Transcendence

As we have developed at the outset, the concept of transcendence is what constitutes a break from the domain of the social, and as we find in Lacan’s work, love is an ethical procedure that both severs the knot of imaginary servitude to the Other and humanizes the monstrous *jouissance* of the Other.

If we consider Hegel’s political and ethical thought, we also find a political ontology that develops out of the master slave dialectic. The master slave dialectic is a theory that accounts for a mode of coming into being with the Other. In Jean-Luc Nancy’s reading of Hegel, *The Restlessness of the Negative*, he argues that love is the operative term in the encounter with the Other for Hegel. But love, Nancy notes, is a tautology in Hegel, as the work of the negative must manifest itself as struggle, and love becomes the truth of struggle.

Love is a tautology because love is what realizes love—in a dialectical fashion—through the upheaval of its own struggle over the appropriation of the common.²² To apply this dialectic to leftist ontology, love is what opens a wedge between the two domains of the social and the political, opening the space of the common, or the sphere of the political. When Hegel writes that the absolute is close to us,²³ this is an indication of Hegel’s Christian integration of love into his larger philosophy. Love is central to Hegel’s theory of becoming, as “love designates the recognition of desire by desire,” and since “desire is the tension of the coming of the Other as the becoming of the self” love is a negativity-for-itself.²⁴

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1977, 535.

²³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* New York, NY: Verso, 2010, 88.

²⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 63.

Desire, unlike love, demands nothing but the Other, whereas love is a source of becoming itself. This is why Hegel defines the position of love as beyond any notion of alterity and he grounds his theory of love on the reciprocity between two agents. Perhaps Hegel's most precise definition of love is, "having in the other one's own subsistence,"²⁵ – i.e. love maintains an ethical status in relation to his larger theory of ethical life.

Nancy's conception of the common in the *Inoperative Community* is formed by subtraction, and we must read this as a revision of Hegel: that the community is subtraction itself.²⁶ Nancy's conception of subtraction is a revision of Hegel as it thinks the "we" with no reference to Hegelian objective spirit, and thus unlike Hegel, Nancy posits a non-relational ontology, through a re-interpretation of Heideggerian *Mitsein* (being-with). Nancy's non-relational ontology collapses alterity, and in its wake, otherness is stripped bare, and what emerges in this space of break is love. As Nancy writes: "The encounter with the Other only takes place with the stripping bare of every cultural predicate: love is indissociable with the nudity of the other's taking place."²⁷

In his masterful essay, "Shattered Love" Nancy writes that love is that which exceeds the sublime. Love is *an act* of transcendence that fulfills nothing: it cuts, it breaks, and exposes so that there is no domain or instance of being where love would fulfill itself. Love happens endlessly in the withdrawal of its presentation:

The love break simply means this: that I can no longer, whatever presence to myself I may maintain or that sustains me, pro-pose myself to myself (nor im-pose myself on another) without remains, without something of me remaining, outside of me. This signifies that the immanence of the subject (to which the dialectic always returns to fulfill itself, including in what we call "intersubjectivity" or even "communication" or "communion") is opened up, broken into – and this is what is called, in all rigor, a transcendence.²⁸

From a Lacanian perspective, love is thought as a mode of transcendence. As Alenka Zupančič writes, the true miracle of love consists in, "preserving the transcendence in the very accessibility of the Other."²⁹ Desire would be what we might intuitively think of as love, which is the transformation of some banal object into a sublime object,³⁰ but with love there occurs a montage of two semblances: the banal and the sublime object. Zupančič writes:

²⁵ Ibid. 86 – 87.

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, xxx.

²⁷ Ibid. xxvii.

²⁸ Ibid. 97.

²⁹ Alenka Zupančič, *Investigations of the Lacanian Field*, (Durham, NC: Polygraph : An International Journal of Culture and Politics Number 17 (2005), 133 – 134.

³⁰ Ibid. 144.

The miracle of love consists in “falling” (and in continuing to stumble) because of the real which springs from the gap introduced by this “parallel montage” of two semblances or appearances, that is to say, because of the real that springs from the non-coincidence of the same. The other that we love is neither the two semblances (the banal and sublime), but neither can love be separate from them. Love is nothing other than what results from a successful (or “lucky”) montage of the two. In other words, what we are in love is this other as minimal difference of the same that can itself take the form of an object.³¹

Love is always the reverse of a fetish whose logic goes: “I know very well that this object is a normal object, but I still nonetheless believe that it has magical powers.” The logic of love, as it pertains to the fetish, is rather: “I know very well that this beloved is just another human being, but I still believe that she is just another human being.” For Nancy, love is a constant withdrawal from the field of immanence and signification, meaning that there is always some-thing outside of me in love. Similarly, Zupančič’s Lacanian influenced conception of love results in the objective outside of the subject through a minimal difference of the same.

IV. Žižek’s Radical Love

Žižek links love to his larger revision of Lacan’s psychoanalytic act. Love is tied to Žižek’s act insofar as the passage, or traversal of the fantasy entails an affirmation on behalf of the subject that the big Other does not exist. Love emerges at this abyssal point of non-identification. To examine Žižek’s theory of radical love, I aim to place his work into relation with psychoanalyst Eric Santner, as it provides a helpful counterpoint position where Žižek’s theory becomes clearer. In Santner’s theory of love, he argues that subjectivity, or what he calls “seduction” is one that consists of a negative solidarity with the family/community/institution and these attachments are always sustained by a transgressive enjoyment structure sustained by fantasy.

Santner’s ethics is less politically engaged than Žižek’s, and it seeks different ways to release from the hold the Other has on one’s superego in this situation of seduction. In order to release the subject from the excitation of its superego demands, the time and space of this release ends up becoming the very time and space of the ethical encounter. Santner’s ethical encounter is an opening of space where new possibilities of being-together, of responsiveness to the Other, can arise.³²

In the three-part essay collection *The Neighbor*, Santner applies a reading of the Jewish mystical philosopher Franz Rosenweig’s conception of “divine love.” By invoking divine love, Santner is

³¹ Ibid. 135.

³² Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 20001, 103 – 104.

concerned with re-animating the death-driven deadness of the socio-symbolic order, or life that has been thrown by the crisis of symbolic identity and investment into institutions. Similar to Žižek's project in Christian materialism, Santner looks to religious sources, mainly the seminal twentieth century Jewish mystical text by Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*. The possibility of reawakening the subject is what Santner refers to "divine love", a psychoanalytic technique of identification that consists of moving beyond the "undeadness of biopolitical life."

Like sublimation, Santner's divine love is thus the name for an ethical strategy that resembles that of Žižek's albeit diverts from it in terms of the way it handles the engagement with the symbolic. Divine love is a moving beyond that entails a transformation of the institutional flux that interpolates the subject and brings that subject into the midst of life, i.e. in relation to their neighbor. This movement beyond is what Rosenzweig refers to as "falling in love," a situation that involves more than just positive affirmation of being – falling in love, or might we say, "loving thy neighbor as thyself" is a subsumption into the too muchness itself. Divine love is a subsumption into *das Ding*, but inhabited with an inherent positivity, having negated the institutional flux of biopolitical dead matter. Santner's divine love is ultimately a form of singularization, a form of singling out of the subject, not of excluding.³³

Žižek argues that Santner's divine love is in fact aligned with a "heroism of lack" mode of ethics, which he identifies as an improper reading of Lacan's ethics. Žižek's version of "shrugging off the fantasy of the other," or "desublimation" in contrast to Santner is one that results in a traumatic situation. As Žižek notes, "the gap separating beauty from ugliness is thus the gap that separates the real: what constitutes the real is the minimum of idealization the subject needs to sustain the horror of the real." This ugliness of proximity of the neighbor ends up requiring a sublime distance to maintain the neighbor's fantasy frame. Once the neighbor approaches their status of ugly existence in the Real, Žižek characterizes the encounter as traumatic. This shrugging off, or de-subjectification from the Other must also be understood intersubjectively.

To understand Žižek's key divergence with Santner, we must turn to his re-definition of love based on his reading of St. Paul's foundation of the Christian community. As Žižek states, "Lacan's entire theoretical edifice torn between these two options: between the ethics of desire/Law, and lethal suicidal immersion into the Thing?"³⁴ and as such, love is what emerges as the third option to get the subject out of the ethical impasse at the core of Lacan's ethics. To pass through the ethical impasse into a form of Pauline agape, Žižek claims the subject arrives at a sort of mystical communion involving, "a passing through the zero-point of night of the world."³⁵

³³ Eric Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 65 – 67.

³⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, New York, NY: Verso, 1999, 201.

³⁵ Ibid, 165.

It is this intense confrontation with the Hegelian “night of the world” and negation that Žižek closely aligns with the radical acts that St. Paul’s community of believers enacted. St. Paul’s ethics presents the paradigm for “unplugging” from the big Other’s hold on the socio-symbolic, which is after all the primary aim of Žižekian ethics. Paul’s “unplugging” is achieved only by “throwing the balanced circuit of the universe off the rails.”³⁶ Love is linked to Christianity and to the Christian community that Paul founded as love is non-dialectical, serving as the ground-level abyss of the Christian community. As Žižek notes, love is for Hegel a term that designates the mediation of opposites, love thus shows that there is no third that mediates two struggling opposite forces.³⁷

As stated above, with desire, there is always a gap between the object of desire and its cause, whereas with love the object is not split off from its cause. With love, “the very distance between the object and cause collapse,”³⁸ and the most frequent example Lacan refers to is that of courtly love, the way in which the lady is brought to the level of das Ding, her proximity is denied of its *jouissance*. Žižek wavers between preferring to simply “exist as a lacking subject” over and above the Antigone version of desire induced symbolic suicide. Žižek’s ethical position...

...in no way condones suicidal persistence in following one’s Thing; on the contrary, it enjoins us to remain faithful to our desire as sustained by the Law of maintaining a minimal distance to the Thing – one is faithful to one’s desire by maintaining the gap that sustains desire, the gap on account of which the incestuous das Ding forever eludes our grasp.³⁹

The core ethical question for Žižek revolves around immersion into the Thing or allegiance to the ethics of desire/Law. Unplugging in this Paulinian mode offers the kind of radical break with the symbolic coordinates via love that Žižek finds satisfactory to completely change the coordinates of the fantasmatic supplement of the desire system. Unplugging is what Rosenzweig and Santner refer to as “revelatory conversion,” or an opening to and an acknowledgement of the Other qua stranger, the Other who’s face manifests a “spectral aura” of *jouissance*. Unplugging results in a freeing of *jouissance* where the Other is externalized, a process that in psychoanalytic terms is actually a freeing of psychosis.⁴⁰

V. Badiou: Love as Minimal Communism

In Badiou’s conception of love he radically eschews prior definitions of love that were held at the level of consciousness, as we find in romanticism, hermeneutics and religious discourses of

³⁶ Ibid,165.

³⁷ Slavoj Žižek *Less Than Nothing*, New York, NY: Verso, 2012, 112.

³⁸ Slavoj Žižek *The Ticklish Subject*, New York, NY: Verso, 1999, 165.

³⁹ Ibid, 121.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 86.

love, is overturned with a conception of love as linked to the subject and what Badiou calls ‘truth effects.’ Badiou argues that if love is “consciousness of the other as other” as we find in Hegel and Lacan, then the other is necessarily identifiable in consciousness as the same. In contradistinction to this position, for Badiou, love is of the “scene of the Two,” which means that love is not about a learning of the sexes, but is about “thought and identification with thought.” Since no subject can occupy male or female love produces a truth founded upon a disjunction of Lacan’s maxim “there is no sexual relation.” That there is no rapport at the level of sexual difference is for Badiou the site of love as the production of a new law.

As he remarks in his text on *St. Paul*: “Love is a-cosmic and illegal, refusing integration into any totality and signaling nothing. It delivers no law, no form of mastery.”⁴¹

Love is always an un-binding and a break from the social bonds that are tied to the Law of the symbolic. Love is exposed in its resistance to the law of being and thus, far from ‘naturally’ regulating the supposed relation between the sexes, love is what makes truth of the (social) un-binding.⁴² Therefore, love “produces a truth of the situation in such a way that the disjunction is constituted as law. The truth composed by love proceeds to infinity”⁴³ – and paradoxically, “the scene of the two” that love emerges from, has no third. Similar to Badiou’s atheism, there is no third mediation point (the big Other, God, etc.) that situates or establishes the meaning of love in its own field of expression. Love always remains tied to the logic of the two.

As one of Badiou’s four ‘truth conditions,’ love is what might include religion and psychoanalysis, two discourses that Badiou claims are incapable of producing new truths. But love on the other hand, produces new truths because it is a subjective encounter. Love is what Badiou calls a “minimal communism,”⁴⁴ Because love is a process-oriented encounter, grounded in the scene of the two, the implication is that love is no longer a solitary and private-intimate experience but is elevated to a universal experience. As Badiou states:

From the moment that a truth of the situation proceeds as disjunct, it also becomes clear why every truth is addressed to everyone and guarantees the uniqueness of the humanity function $H(x)$ in its effects. For, as soon as it is grasped in truth, it immediately re-establishes that there is only one situation.⁴⁵

Similar to Lacan’s theory of sexuation, the feminine position appears on the side of truth, and the feminine destination targets being as such, whereas the masculine targets “the changing of the

⁴¹ Alain Badiou, *St. Paul and the Foundation of Universalism* trans. by Ray Brassier Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 42.

⁴² Alain Badiou, *Conditions* New York, NY: Continuum, 2008, 187.

⁴³ Ibid, 194.

⁴⁴ Alain Badiou, *Praise of Love*, New York, NY: Verso, 2011, 90.

⁴⁵ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2008, 189.

numbers, the painful fracture of the One by the supposition of the Two, and this is essentially logical.”⁴⁶ The conflict of knowledge that love opens thus shows that the One of a truth is also exposed simultaneously as logical and as ontological at the same time.

For Badiou, the feminine position is what knots the four generic procedures together of politics, art, science and love. In each of these conditions, or generic procedures, truth is tied to a process of fidelity to a Truth-Event centered on a naming process. While the naming of politics always involves a fidelity to the name of equality, it is the name of humanity that love names for Badiou. Thus, the condition of love is based on the declaration that humanity exists!⁴⁷

But does Badiou’s positing of sexual difference relegate man to the same phallic position as many accused Lacan’s idea of sexual difference as promoting? In Badiou’s conception of sexual difference, he maps sexual difference onto his larger, process-based approach to eventual truth production, and this superimposition of sexual difference runs less of a risk of falling into a static conception of sexual difference. I argue that Badiou complicates Lacanian sexuation by his very definition of subjectivation, where a subject is presented that is capable of thinking beyond the polarized masculine/feminine dichotomy.

As Lindsay Hair points out, in defense of Badiou’s subtle position on this question:

Badiou’s project to explore the notion of love as a Thought specifically attempts to exclude all elements of identificatory appropriation, whether imaginary or phenomenological, yet the fragments of experience constructed by the fidelity of the amorous pair remain sexed, despite the fact that the “truth” of the encounter, as participating in a universal, is of course unsexed, and does not fall under the structuring laws of the symbolic.⁴⁸

In all the writings of Beckett, one feature remains unchanged: love begins in a pure encounter, which is neither destined nor predestined except by the chance crossing of two trajectories. Prior to this meeting, there is only solitude. No Two, in particular no sexual duality, exists before the encounter. Sexual difference is unthinkable, except from the point of view of the encounter as it unfolds within the process of love. There is no originary or prior difference that conditions or orients this encounter. The encounter is the power from which the Two, and thus love itself, originate. This power, which nothing precedes in its proper order, is practically without measure. It is, in particular, incommensurable with the power of feeling and the sexual and desiring power of the body.

The feminine polarity combines both wandering and narrative. It

⁴⁶ Ibid. 194.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 196 – 197.

⁴⁸ Lindsay Hair, “The Philosophy of Alain Badiou” Polygraph, “I Love (U)” (Durham, NC: Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics Number 15/16 (2004), 39.

Tutt: *Love, Psychoanalysis, and Leftist Political Ontology* concurs not with the fixity of the name, but with the infinity of its unfolding in the world, in the narrative of its unending glory. It does not stick to the sole prescription without proof but organizes the constant inquiry and verification of a capacity. To be a “woman,” in the context of love, is to move about under the custody of meaning, rather than of names. This protective effort implies the wayward fate of inquiries, as well as its perpetual recounting in a story. Happiness is not in the least associated with the One — the myth of fusion. It is rather the subjective indicator of a truth of difference, of sexual difference, that love alone makes effective.

VI. Badiou and Lacan: Love and Subjectivation

To understand the different conception of love in Lacan and Badiou it is important to start with un-packing their different conceptions of the subject. Lacan's conception of the subject remains limited for Badiou as it is still conceived in terms of the individual. For Badiou, “the individual, in truth, is nothing,” whereas the subject should be understood in a wider sense, “as a network of capabilities that allow you to think, create, share, act collectively to go beyond the singularities – one body, one identity, social position, drives – but that is not reducible to it.”⁴⁹

Badiou's subject is thought in the context of what he refers to as a “world,” and not solely in terms of language as we find in Lacan. In “Meditation 36” on Descartes and Lacan in *Being and Event*, Badiou presents what is perhaps his most crucial departure from Lacan, which has to do with the notion of truth as cause of the signifier. Lacan returns to Descartes because the subject of psychoanalysis is the subject of science, and through Descartes, Lacan maintains his attachment to the “enunciation as subject”—in other words, Badiou's subject is no longer tied to the “cause of the signifier” as we have in Lacan.⁵⁰

In *Being and Event* the subject is thought along the status of a procedure – of a configuration in excess of the situation. The subject is “at the intersection of knowledge and truth via language but is suspended by a truth whose finite moment it is.”⁵¹ This moment of suspension, what Badiou refers to as “fidelity” to an event, is what shifts the coordinates of truth; making the subject a producer of the truth itself. This is why, in *Being and Event*, Badiou defines subjectivation as the “interventional nomination from the standpoint of the situation, that is, the rule of the intra-situational effects of the supernumerary name's entrance into circulation.”⁵² Subjectivation is thus a special count; distinct from what Badiou calls the “count-as-one” that orders presentation, just as it is from the state's re-duplication. What subjectivation counts is “what ever it (the subject) faithfully connected to the name of the event.”⁵³

At the end of analysis, love arises at the moment of rest after what

⁴⁹ Badiou, A. and Roudinesco, E. (2012) *Faut-il brûler la psychanalyse?*, Le Nouvel Observateur <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/le-dossier-de-l-obs/20120418.OBS6476/faut-il-bruler-la-psychanalyse.html>

⁵⁰ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* New York, NY: Continuum, 2005, 431.

⁵¹ Ibid, 392.

⁵² Ibid. 393.

⁵³ Ibid. 393.

Lacan calls the ‘pass.’ Mladen Dolar compares subjectivation in Althusser and Lacan, by noting that Althusser cannot think in his notion of ideological interpellation is precisely the two moments of subjectivity in Lacan. The first is a moment of rest, which is one amidst subjectivation, and the second is a moment of being a subject prior to recognition, and it is this crucial moment that Althusser leaves out. But the important question Dolar asks as it relates to our question is where does love enter in these two movements of subjectivation in Lacan? As is often the case, Lacan points the way to a new conception of love, this time thought as the moment of rest in the process of subjectivation.

Here is a quote from Dolar that articulates Lacan’s theory:

Love can function as a mechanism of ideology; it can serve as a link between the most private and a social bond, only because it can successfully produce that passage from the outer into the inner and at the same time cover it up. Love masks the external origins of subjectivity, concealing it not behind the illusion of an autonomous subject as a *causa sui*, but quite the contrary, by offering one’s being to the Other, offering one’s own particularity in response to the external contingency. The rest of the Real beyond the signifier demands the offering of that rest in the subject, the part of the “individual” that could not be subjectified, the object within the subject, and with that gesture, the rest is dealt with and the Other is sustained. The opacity of the Other is made transparent by love, the lawless becomes the lawful.⁵⁴

For Lacan, love arises at the moment of rest, in the first movement of subjectivation, whereas for Badiou, love is a break with the state of the situation (representation). My claim is that for Badiou, as with Žižek and Nancy, love is what permits the break (or transcendence) with the domain of the social. Love-as-transcendence is the transition from the social to the political, making love more than an affective procedure, but the crucial link to a theory of subjectivation.

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⁵⁴ Mladen Dolar, *Beyond Interpellation* (Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1993), pp. 75-96 Published by: University of Nebraska Press), 83.