

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Three, Number Three

The concept of political subject. The real, the partial, the not-All and retroaction in Žižek , Laclau and Badiou [i]

Roque Farrán (UNC-CONICET)

In this article I work on the differences and convergences I find among these authors, simultaneously, in relation to the concept of political subject through a brief development of their respective theoretical systems and in relation to three key topics: (1) the ontology of the real, (2) partial representation, and (3) the temporal retroactivity of subjectification. In addition, I point to the intellectual's position of enunciation and the possibility of subtracting herself to a prescriptive logic by means of the Lacanian "not-All" and, implicitly, the Borromean knot of the three registers of experience: R, S and I.

I. The ontology of the Real or the incompleteness of the Symbolic

These three authors agree, broadly, in considering that both the analysis of discourse and ideological critique originate from a position that is intrinsic to the very symbolic order and not, for example, from a neutral or transcendent outside (exteriority). None of them falls on the naivety of attempting to capture an objective point of reference beyond the symbolic order in which the discursive is constituted. Nor do they succumb to postmodern relativism, according to which all - and any - political position could be sustainable. They thus conceive of the impossibility of closing the symbolic order as something which is, at the same time, constitutive to itself, i.e., in its properly ontological dimension and not as a mere epistemological limitation. This is why we find such terms as "gap", "failure", "event", "excess", "cut", "suture", "event", "hegemonic articulation" and so on

that come to give an account of some possible orientation to contemporary interventions:

Everything is not worth the same. The first convergence of our authors emerges then from the re-knotting of questions around the subject, truth and politics [iii].

It must be said, however, that despite these similarities, their levels of analysis and points of intervention are quite different: Laclau works specifically on political theory and the social sciences, taking some elements of psychoanalysis, but above all rhetorics and linguistics; Žižek intervenes on the broad politico-cultural spectrum from an angle limited to the philosophical field while also taking elements of psychoanalysis, science and cultural criticism; finally, Badiou addresses philosophical and ontological problems as such, and discusses extensively classical concepts with authors from within the tradition (Plato, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger), as well as taking elements of mathematics, logic, psychoanalysis, etc.. Finally, what these authors have in common is not so much a positive feature which would place them in a defined class, nor is the claim of an inassimilable rest to any logic or concept (as Palti says), which would place them in a neo-Kantian position, but the way they put that rest itself (*l'objet petit a*) to work *in* situation, thus re-designing the *material* layout of the terms with the *dialectic* inclusion of the third excluded.

Furthermore, both Badiou and Žižek share the idea of rescuing "dialectical materialism" as a critical philosophy in the sense given by Althusser [iii], when stating, for example, that philosophy should be thought of as the displacement of "class struggle" or as the "antagonism" taking place in theory itself. From this perspective, the *practice of theory* would then consist of showing over and over again, in all areas of thought possible, and under different conceptual variations, where is the gap through which the constitutive antagonism traverses and contaminates the two positive terms of a naturalized opposition: an ideology that negates its own contingent foundation. The *practice of theory* would amount thus to replacing the clear and differentiated opposition as justified from a given ideological framework with the irreducible heterogeneity that constitutes it. Here we find a slight variation in Laclau who also agrees with this way of understanding the composition of the ideological field. However, as he circumscribes more to the area on which a political philosophy is supported, Laclau's theoretical development seems to go only as far as prescribing and describing the logic of constitution of one (specific) political subject (I.e., the people). This bifurcación is perhaps the effect of the breadth and heterogeneity that each author allows himself to articulate in their theoretical elaborations. From my point of view, Lacanian in focus, the subject can not be defined a priori from any transcendental meta-discourse but comes into play in each unique situation with its own means and language. Hence the *materiality* of this concept (of subject) is expressed in the knotting of heterogeneous registers which are impossible to prescribe for 'every case'. I thus follow here the Lacanian formulation of the Borromean knot where the three registers of experience are articulated: The Real (life / indiscernible), the Symbolic (language / death) and the Imaginary (body / representation) [iv].

For Badiou the present hegemonic ideology is what he understands as democratic

materialism, for which there are only bodies and languages. Although claiming to be plural, democratic materialism is essentially a dualism, because it adheres only to these two registers of experience (body and language). Badiou puts it well in his last great work *Logics of the Worlds*:

Let us accept that by "dialectic", in the direct line of Hegel, it is understood that the essence of all difference is the third term that marks the distance between the other two. Hence to this democratic materialism, to this sovereignty of the two (body and language), it is legitimate to oppose a materialist dialectics, but only if by "dialectical materialism" it is meant the following statement, in which the Three supplements the reality of the Two: *There are only bodies and languages, but there are truths* [v].

We notice that Badiou does not stand for an external opposition but for an immanent exception to the dominant ideology. This is what is implied under the grammatical forcing of "but." There is no way out from ideology (to hide the ideological determination of any discourse is the ideological operation *par excellence*); but even if we name the excluded third, we can still cut across the naturalized binary oppositions and retrace the differences. The simple statement: "there are truths" works as a principle in Badiou and it objects the axiom of democratic materialism: "The law protects all bodies, arranged under all compatible languages" However, Badiou himself moves away from any idea of synthesis, for truths are *heterogeneous*, they are not reducible to a combination of bodies and languages; on the other hand, truths are *material*, they occur in this our world and not in some "transcendental height" or "kingdom of ideas."

Another variant of democratic materialism is: *There are only individuals and communities*, to which dialectical materialist answers: *To the extent that it pertains to a truth, a subject is subtracted from any community and destroys all individuación* [vi]. On a more clearly political sense, Žižek explains this as he comments on Badiou:

That is to say, the hegemonic ideological field imposed on us a field of (ideological) visibility with its own "principal contradiction" (today, it is the opposition of market-freedom-and democracy vs. Fundamentalist terrorist-totalitarianism - "Islamofascism" and so on), and the first thing to do is to reject (to subtract from) this opposition, to perceive it as a false opposition destined to obfuscate the true line of division [vii].

The dominant ideological field configures its own antagonism so the enemies become clearly visible and objectivable; on the contrary, the operation materialist dialectic must perform is to *subtract itself* from this distinction based on the language of the situation and retrace the differences showing, for example, that terrorism and free-market democracy are two complementary sides of the same, and that the third excluded option here is emancipatory (communist) politics. These are the politics that must be thought of and are needed to be invented because they are not given in the situation.

Now, I will briefly outline the theoretical approach of each author.

1. a. Žižek

In *The Parallax View*, Žižek gives us his perspective of dialectical materialism and distinguishes it from the New Age conception of "the polarity of opposites" (yin and yang, etc.). To do so, he says, one must first put the idea of inherent tension, gap, no coincidence of the One with itself [viii]. In order to introduce some minimal degree of conceptual order in the diversity of fields where a parallax gap can appear, Žižek follows three main modes of presentation: the philosophical mode (where he discusses with Kant the difference between the phenomenon and the noumenon, and with Heidegger the ontic -ontological, difference in terms of a parallax); the scientist mode (which follows the current neuro-cognitive approaches to the "third person"); and the political mode (the classical theme of "class struggle" taken as the antagonism constitutive of the social). The simple definition of parallax is that of the apparent displacement of an object caused by a change in the position of the observer. What Žižek points out here is that we are not simply dealing with a perspectivist question (the "same" seen from different points of view), but that the ontological nature of the object itself changes with the displacement: the gap between one point and the other is the *real* of the object, and not a supposedly immutable substance that would lie behind appearances. The philosophical (and political) task that Žižek draws from this concept is that of circulating and traversing the discursive interstices by pointing, over and over again, to the internal dislocation on which discursive objectifications are based. The idea of the "parallax gap" allows him thus to re-draw the distinctions (the cuts) between concepts in such a way as to avoid falling into a simple reduction of one of the terms with the other (ie., phenomenon and noumenon) or into proposing a synthesis to explain them; but in such a way, instead, in which one concept stems from the other as arising from the same gap or impossibility to distinguish them clearly and distinctly from a neutral position. In this way, Žižek shows the very movement of the conceptual outlining in its process rather than assuming that the distinctions are already given as mere operators of classification. The inability to close a socio-symbolic order becomes evident in the movement of change from one position to the other, i.e., from the ontic to the ontological and back again; what changes thus together with the point of view is the very object (the entity, in its impossibility to self-constitute itself, to give an account of being).

b. Badiou

Whilst Žižek works on the *real* from the parallax gap, Badiou does it from the mathematized concept of subject, using the elaborations of Paul Cohen's set theory: the *multiple generic* and *forcing* [ix]. In interpreting this mathematical technique philosophically, Badiou shows the extent to

which the subject constitutes the finite passage or displacement between a situation (structure, law or presentation) and its own generic extension, ie., the situation plus the indiscernible in it: its supplementary truth. *Forcing* is this parallax movement by which the same situation will have changed, will have become another. Thereby, the verification of the statements (the enunciations) that name the addition of a further extension to the situation is subjected to the continuity of the opening to random (hazardous) new encounters whereas the new nominations relate to what does not exist in situation but does exist in the generic extension that includes the *in-counted* (un-counted). However, as the truth is an infinite "not all", so to speak, it also defines an intrinsic limit to language itself and not a transcendental exterior or Kantian regulative idea. At the very moment that a knowledge is closed and its terms and references are hypostasized (as happened with Marxism) the truth is lost, it becomes omnipotent and disastrous.

For Badiou mathematics is ontology, precisely because it explores the domain of the pure multiple, inconsistent, without resorting to linguistic structures allowing to discern and classify what there is. In this sense, he follows the Lacanian dictum: "Mathematics is the science of real." However, mathematics only give Badiou a matrix to generate concepts of being (void, infinity, nature, etc.), and for Badiou it is equally or more important to think of the event, the subject and the truth which not belong to the order of being-qua-being. He therefore produces a complex interdiscursive web that connects the order of being with the order of what is-not-yet but may come to exist from a series of anticipations and retroactions. There are multiple conceptual operators working on the nomination of the indiscernible (or generic). These are operators invented in different generic truth procedures, which, according to Badiou, amount to four: art, politics, science and love. Albeit not so fundamentally different from that of Žižek and Laclau's, the regime of circulation and intervention of Badiou's philosophical dispositive is much larger and heteroclitic to the extent that in many of his books on art, politics, science and psychoanalysis, Badiou has taken care, by incessantly varying the conceptual operators, of elaborating in detail that which is *compossible* (comparable) between these generic procedures.

c. **Laclau**

In turn, in order to deploy his theory of the political, Laclau uses a linguistic ontology in which objectivities and identities are constituted / constructed through differential and equivalent relations. The fact that objects and subjects are defined positionally within a system of differences follows the general desubstantialización of the reference that takes place with the linguistic turn in philosophy. Laclau's theoretical framework is based on sustaining the simultaneous necessity / impossibility of the representation of social totality; or what is the same, of a final closure of the symbolic order. Since identities are defined as differential positions (following here Saussure's definition of the signifier as mere oppositional difference in respect of other signifiers) he must

postulate for a limit that avoids pure dispersion and makes signification possible. Simultaneously, however, in order to define a limit it is necessary to establish (to fix) a (fictional) beyond-the-limit, which is the “constitutive outside / exterior” of the system of particular differences. Such constitutive outside, however, must be once again a difference, for in this ontology there are only pure differences, there are no positive / substantial identities, and in order not to be confounded with internal differences, it must then be an even more radical difference (without particular features: Generic). Hence, with regard to this constitutive and heterogeneous exterior, all particular differential positions are equivalential. It is in this duality of the unstable identity as defined between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence that the antagonism constitutive of the social order is played out. Political antagonism (the political *proper*) emerges thus from the tension generated by the simultaneous necessity / impossibility of closure of the social order: The *impossibility* of a fully constituted, fixed identity and the *necessity*, however, of constructing partial identities. The *partiality* of political identities configure the logic of the “hegemonic articulation” (the part for the whole), which, according to Laclau, follows the same logic of the concept (or *matheme*) *object à* in Lacanian theory. In relation to this rather original Lacanian conception of the object, Laclau proposes the concept of correlative subject: ‘the moment of decision on the indecidible’ also agrees with Žižek and Badiou’s approaches which will be considered in more detail in Section III.

Finally, just in case the use of rhetorics is unclear in Laclau’s linguistic ontology, here is what Laclau himself has to say referring to the importance of a work such as that of Paul De Man [italics mine]:

Times are well bygone in which the transparency of social actors, of the processes of representation, including the alleged underlying logics of the social fabric could be accepted unproblematically. Today, on the contrary, every political institution, each category of political analysis is presented to us as the *locus* of indecidible language games. The overdetermined character of any difference or political identity *opens the space of a generalized tropologic movement* and reveals how fruitful De Man’s intellectual project is in the ideological analysis of the political [x].

Laclau makes use not only of linguistics, rhetorics and psychoanalysis, but even appeals to Western mysticism (Eckhart) in order to conceptually enrich his theory of hegemony. In the case of Laclau, unlike Badiou, one can follow more clearly the repetition of his categories of analysis and conceptual operators (logic of equivalence and difference, antagonism, empty signifier, etc.).

II The partial status of the representative of representation

In the the seminar XII "Key Problems of Psychoanalysis" (May 19, 1965) [xi] Lacan talks about the role of the representative (subject) in the place of (impossible) representation. Previously, he shows the difference in regards of the representation of the world prior to psychoanalysis [italics mine].

The world that is dealt with has never been more apprehensive bus as part of a knowledge... and representation is just a term that serves as a caution to the trickery of such knowlege. Man himself was fabricated... to the measure of such deception. It is clear that he could not be excluded from this representation if we continue to make of this representation the security of this world. *But we are dealing with the subject and the subject, for us, to the extent that it can precisely be unconscious is not representation <but>... the representative ("Repräsentanz") of "Vorstellung" [representation]. [The subject] is in the place of "Vorstellung" which is missing, that is the Freudian sense of the term "Vorstellungsrepräsentanz.* (Lacan, 1965)

Freud had used this term of problematic translation to refer to drives as a limit / boundary-concept between two different orders: soma and psyche. From a different ontological and discursive perspective we could speak – following Lacan- of this heterogeneity of registers by shifting now, *between* signifier and signified. Here we have the *real* of a drive which is neither one nor the other, or which, intertwined, is both at once. The dimension of the (signifying) fault / lack / failure i.e., of the impossible total representation, opens up to a series of representatives (subjects) which will fill in the role of representation in a contingent and temporary manner (signifiers). The tension (and torsion) generated by the *one part* that comes to occupy the place of an impossible totality accounts for the *real* (antagonism) at stake. This is why we are not dealing here, in these formulations, with a mere plurality of language games or the formalist predominance of a "logic of the signifier", but with the tension and antagonism generated by the impossibility of a definite articulation of the three registers (real, symbolic and imaginary), and, as a consequence, of its always precarious, contingent knotting: reunited and lost again. For these authors, the constitutive torsion of the social space, through which political identities unfold in a complex series of successive and retroactive movements, is not a mere language game; to the contrary, it gives account of the *real* at stake (which thus defines their intrinsic materialism). Hence their differences with the political perspectives in the consensualist and multiculturalist strand, for example, for which the plurality of positions does not account for any *real*.

Žižek rightly emphasizes the paradoxical dual status of the *object a* as object-cause of desire and as object of the drive (plus of *jouissance*). In relation to desire (1) the object is thematized as the void that different appearances (gaze, voice, breast, etc..) come to fill in metonymically and by means of substitution / replacement; in relation to drive (2) the *object a* is no

longer the lost object but loss itself: "in the shift from desire to drive we pass from the *lost object* to the *loss itself as an object*." We could also say, shifting to a more epistemological terrain, that we move from the concept of lack of the object to the object *in* lack of a concept.

That is to say; the weird movement called "drive" is not driven by the "impossible" quest for the lost object; it is a *push to enact "loss" - the gap, cut, distance- itself directly*. There is thus a *double* distinction to be drawn here: not only between *object petit a* in its fantasmatic [gaze, voice, breast, etc.] and posfantasmatic [void, loss] status, but also, within this posfantasmatic domain itself between the lost object-cause of desire and the object-loss of drive [xii].

Žižek then continues with the distinction postulated by J. A. Miller between lack and hole. If lack designates a void within a given space (a regulated symbolic order), the hole is even more radical; it is a break that shatters any possible spacial order (where the very symbolic order breaks). Therefore while desire is constituted in relation to a well-defined absence / lack (framed symbolically), drive turns like a whirlwind around a hole (the analogy with the "black hole" of theoretical physics is recurring).

According to Alejandro Groppo, "the difference between a) the object-cause of desire and b) the object of drive in [Laclau's] theory of hegemony operates, let us say, through the difference between metonymy and catachresis. Metonymy involves a distance, a gap, a 'bias / partiality' of the object, which never reaches to 'say it all' while catachresis is a) an object that has no literal term to name it, and b) (more radically) the unnameable as an ontological dimension " [xiii].

We can again delimit / differentiate: (1) *the logic of the signifying game* of metaphorical substitution and metonymic displacement around a lack or void (the empty place of the universal), (2) from the *real gap* that marks out the same movement of the drive around a hole, ie., *not all* subject positions (not all struggles within the socio-symbolic system) are able to give an account of the constitutive antagonism and the (short)circuit of the drive; in this case, of the curvature / bending of social space. Only those positions which are adjacent but internal to the system, those which endure the highest exclusion in the regulated social space, can generate an extended equivalence effect which breaks with the distributive and normalizing logic of intra-systemic differences. This is the brief conclusion we could draw from a crossing *between* the elaborations of Žižek and Laclau beyond and irrespective of their particular differences.

The problem that arises now is how to identify these positions and struggles which really subvert the social order and, in a correlative way, whether it is up to the theoretician or otherwise, to de-limit them in their uniqueness / singularity. This, in turn, brings us even closer to the arduous Lacanian approach regarding the difference between *letter and signifier*, on the one hand, and between the logic of All and not-All, on the other.

II. a. *Litoral* [*]

The first distinction mentioned (letter / signifier) is homologous to that of lack / hole, i.e., the highly symbolic signifying lack is not the same as the real hole outlining the drive. Lacan expresses this as follows: "writing, the letter, is (situated) in the real and the signifier in the symbolic" [xiv]. The most interesting point of this distinction, which achieves to circumscribe the very status of the real better, is the specification that provides to the conceptual analysis in order to take a certain distance from some philosophical and political approaches which, although also proposing in a prevalent way the idea of contingency and a lack of ultimate foundation, still draw very different results (even conservative, i.e., some deconstructivist variants and Laclau himself). Lacan states:

Is the letter not but the litoral that must be founded on the litoral? Because it is something other than a border. On the other hand, have you noticed that they are never mistaken. The litoral is that which establishes a domain which becomes, if you will, a border for the other, but precisely because they have absolutely nothing in common, not even a reciprocal relationship.

Is the letter itself not a litoral [landlocked]? The edge in the hole of knowledge, which psychoanalysis designs it properly when it (a)boards it with the letter, Is it not what the letter precisely draws / traces? (Lacan, 2009: 109)

Here we find again the topic we introduced earlier in terms of the 'concept as adjacent to drive', but now, through a topographical metaphor, Lacan places emphasis on the difference between *frontier or limit*, rather conventional and symbolic, and *litoral or letter*, which albeit they may also function as a limit, account rather for an irreducible heterogeneity of the real edge and the "nothing in common" (water / land, for instance). This enables us to think that there are not only symbolic failures in the social order to be filled in contingently by any part of it, but that there are parts which actually occupy the place of the real edge (parts which are excluded from the geometric provision of the social, "parts with no part") and whose indiscernible status does not obey only to the dimension of the signifying failure / lack but the very hole as such – the hole of knowledge. With this approach we draw closer to the radical position that Žižek often holds, but we will see that it is possible to refine some of the inherent rebuffs that such proximity with the real carries with it, and the self-nomination of exceptionality that it often implies, by including the enunciative position that the logic of not-All demands. This leads us to believe that the enunciative position of the intellectual could take place in this strange form of logic in order to avoid falling in neither prescriptive or normative nor purely relativistic positions.

II. *b. The logic of not-All* [xv]

We now raise the possibility of moving to another discursive economy where the simultaneous negation of any exception, which is correlative to the intrinsic negation of All, instead of leading to homogeneity and thus to the chasing of the different, rather habilitates the affirmation of indiscernible parts at the expense of singular *forcings*.

Lacan calls this the logic of not-All.

I think we can understand in this way that any intervention will depart contingently from multiple historical givens (in the ontological sense that Badiou gives it in terms of "the multiples on the edge of the void"). Yet if this intervention was to be inscribed in a process of cutting and breaking with the situation (the instituted), this is because at some unpredictable point, such intervention will have been substracted to the discernible, I.e., to the very visibility of the prevailing languages.

If we think in terms of the 'logic of the feminine position', as Lacan presents it in his formulas of sexuación, we perceive a radical difference with respect to the way of understanding the universal proposition, depending of which side of the formula we are situated (masculine or feminine side).

We have two logical quantifiers of the proposition: the existential and the universal. What Lacan does is using negation in order to affect these quantifiers differently. Thus, the feminine side of the formulas of sexuación negates the existence of One: *there is no One saying no to the function*; whereas the masculine side affirms this existence, which as exception confirms the rule: *all but one subjected to the condition of specified belonging in the function*.

Therefore it is not the same saying "there is no one who does not fulfil the function" than saying "all fulfil it", although both propositions seem similar in terms of their consequences: the purported generality of the function; the claim that "all", from the male side, requires a constant and fantasmatic omnipresence of the exception as limit providing consistency to the whole and allowing to mark the difference. On the other side, the first proposition -the-feminine- consists of a double negation that is complemented by another: *not-all fulfills the function*. This does not mean at all that some are exempt from it, but that in each of *those ones* that fulfil the function –for there is no exception-, there are parts that are substracted from it: the supernumerary or indiscernible parts to the law, following Badiou's terms. Between One and All parts appear in-counted (un-counted) multiple parts: there is no *one* who does not comply with the law that there are *multiples* which force the law to count and reveal the law's lack in excess (that of the multiples). We can say that one part fulfils the function but *not-all* parts do so (taking now the *not-all* in a positive sense).

Under this unexpected logical modality we could analyze, for example, the negative proposition (order, injunction) "you shall not kill", which has sparked a recent political and intellectual debate about the shared responsibilities in regards of the deaths in the last Argentinian military

dictatorship (1976-1983) [xvi].

From the masculine side "all" will be subjected to this condition as long as the exception remains: the "at least one" that would be authorized to do so, of course, does not mean that it actually does it, not even that it really exists, but that it could choose to do so or not, while it remains strictly prohibited for the rest. This creates an irresolvable tension between the particulars, as desire - unconsciously or not- is built around that exceptional one (S1). That is to say that this formulation allows them *to believe* that this possibility of choice exists in the last instance, but that it is forbidden.

On the contrary, from the feminine side, the impossibility is situated in the starting point: "there is no one who does not kill." It seems a much stronger coercion because there is no exception, "there is nobody who does not kill", but here is the surprise: therefore "not-all can kill." What does this mean? That there would be some (holy saints) that do not kill? No. As we said before, this formulation opens up another possibility in suspending the tension towards the One (there is class of serial killers); and that between One and All the parts that are substracted from the function or rule: neither kill nor not kill. It displaces the localized tension on these (am)bivalent topics remaining able to kill regardless by means of, moreover, displacing the drive toward something else in recognizing the impossibility of not doing it.

In this way we can see how the prohibition actually meets the place of the impossible of the structure: the place where the subject can become active – and can "develop" rather than repeat- in taking up on its own account something it can not be avoided and that, paradoxically, in being taken up finds other possibilities, other *directions / deliberations*. On the contrary, to prohibit something that is possible (or that is fantasized as such) amounts to idiocy, since it generates the corresponding correlative desire of transgression, and the whole system of controls, rewards and punishments, or, more recently, the rampant production of objects of consumption that would come to fill in the void of the structure making the impossible possible (in a manner so crude as deadly). Therefore, given the complexities in which discourses and political positions in our era are articulated, the intellectual should be able to articulate her proposals according to, or following this logic of the not-All, where the affirmation of exceptions immanent to the language of the time occurs at random through singular interventions not regulated by any meta-discourse.

III. The retroactive temporality in which a subject is constituted

The idea of retroactive temporality: the *après coup* or *nachträglich*, is taken up insistently from Freud by Lacan, to give account for of the paradoxical status of the time in which the subject of the unconscious is constituted. It also appears very prevalent in our three authors. With Badiou, the verification of the statements / enunciated that refer to a generic truth and which are *forced* by a subject, takes place in the retroaction of the future past: the multiples which name the enunciated

name *will have belonged* to the generic part (truth) of the situation in the moment this is completed; however, as the truth is constitutively a process of continuous investigations carried out at random (in a hazardous way), in reality the verification is subjected to this unfinished continuity of which the subject is only one finite configuration.

Laclau, in turn, also thinks of the temporality of subjective constitution retroactively, and thus moves away from the figures of the subject philosophically prevalent in phenomenology (reflexive intentional action) and in structuralism (the imaginary effect of ideology).

That's why I would like to question the excluding character of the alternatives you propose -either subjectivity as the passive effect of structures, or else subjectivity as self-determination. This alternative remains entirely within the context of the most traditional conception of identity [...]. That's why the question about who or what makes / transforms social relations is not an appropriate question. It is not that "someone" or "something" produces an effect of transformation or articulation, as if the producing identity was somehow prior to that effect. By contrast, the production of the effect is part of the identity construction of the agent that produces it [xvii]

And Žižek, repeating Lacan, expresses it in this way:

The analysis is conceived of, therefore, as a symbolization of imaginary traces without sense [referring to Lacan's first works]; this concept implies the essentially imaginary nature of the unconscious: the unconscious is made of 'imaginary fixations that could not be assimilated to symbolic development' in the history of the subject; therefore, it is "something that takes place in the Symbolic [Lacan continues] or, more accurately, something that through the symbolic progress that takes place in the analysis, will have been." The Lacanian answer to the question 'From where does the repressed return?' is therefore, paradoxically, from the future. Symptoms are meaningless traces and their meaning is not discovered by digging into the hidden depths of the past, but they are constructed retroactively - analysis produces the thruth. [xviii]

The temporality in which a subject is constituted requires therefore of advanced nominations and retroactive verifications. This open process by which a subject is constituted further requires of concrete, effective interventions; it is not mere passive waiting of an uncertain future -of an event-. What these authors point towards is the political necessity of deciding on an essentially contingent foundation which, therefore, does not guarantee the consequences of the decision.

The subject linked by chance to the event, to the contingent encounter, is very different from the subject "subjected" to structural necessity, be it the Laws of History or the symbolic order in general (structural positions). However, this does not account for something magical or mysterious. As Badiou states:

We should note that in regard to its material, the event is not a miracle. What I am saying is that what an event is always composed out of is a situation, always related to a singular multiplicity, with its state, with the language with which it is connected, and so on. In fact, not to succumb to an obscurantist theory of creation *ex nihilo*, we must accept that an event is

just one part of a given situation, nothing but a fragment of being. (Badiou, 2005)

If it is not 'nothing but a fragment of being' the difference that marks out with the situation, its state and language, relies on the very way in which this fragment is organized.

Žižek even proposes going one step further using an analogy with the theory of relativity, to which he tends to refer often:

... Nothing exists beyond being, which is inscribed in the order of being - there is nothing except the order of being. Here we should recall once again the paradox of Einstein's general theory of relativity, in which matter does not bend space but is an effect of the curvature of space itself: an Event does not bend the space of being through its inscription on it; on the contrary, an event is nothing but this curvature of the space of being. (Žižek , 2006: 202)

This, says Žižek , is "all there is": the non self-coincidence, the minimum difference, the interstice and so on. That is to say: the "parallax gap". The same as for a neutral observer it constitutes "ordinary reality," for the gaze of the engaged participant they are the inscriptions of a fidelity to an event (Žižek , *ibid.*) The problem is that from this perspective there can be no "neutral observer", and therefore neither can it be now confirmed from a second neutral position "which is the same." It is here that Žižek fails to capture the temporal logic of the event. There is nothing outside the order of being (or structure), the event is the same dislocation, the opening, the difference Perfect! But if there is no intervention, if it is actually named or invented there, on the failure of discourse itself, then it will never be recognized from the structure's representative point of view, i.e., the representational meta-structure, the language and the state (as given). This is way we need to rethink the concept of subject and of the intervention that constitutes it in the singular (heterogeneous) situations where it takes place. .

To summarise just in case it is not all that clear yet: the three topics presented here, (1) the ontology of the real, (2) partial representation and (3) the temporal retroaction of subjective constitution, are mutually intertwined. Each of these components re-deploys into the others, and explains them in part; and, conversely, they are also explained by the others. For it is the very impossibility of the closure of the symbolic – the *real*- which generates the necessity for partial sutures which, in turn, produce a correlative effect of contingent signification - and representation-, whilst they are simultaneously being reconstituted in a retrospective manner with new interventions. This mutually knotted scheme of the three registers (which "I have slipped under your feet," as Lacan used to say about Freud), we have found it formulated, under different terms and references, in the three authors referred to. In this consists my humble intervention at this conjuncture. With their own style, each circulates and intervenes on various discursive fields as well as they thereby interpellate different subjects and readings / interpretations. While I have pointed out, for example, the breadth of Badiou's philosophical perspective, I do not think that it would be too much of an input from my part, in this regard, to dwell on extensive comparisons

between their work by seeking to highlight their "minimal differences". This is so because the effectiveness of their theoretical and practical interventions is quite visible through the wide range of critical discourses they make (com)possible in our era [xix]. Finally, the political subject that we think of here will be constituted contingently, in each case, under the singular knotting of the three topics outlined above.

Endnotes

[i] The antecedent of this article is a paper presented in the "IV Coloquio de Investigadores en Estudios del Discurso" and the "I Jornadas Internacionales sobre Discurso e Interdisciplina" entitled: "*Laclau, Žižek y Badiou. Tres perspectivas contemporáneas sobre el concepto de sujeto político*". They were organized by Argentinean section of the "Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso (ALEDar) and Faculty of Languages (Universidad Nacional de Córdoba) April, 16-18, 2009, Córdoba, Argentina.

[ii] I appreciate and thank the comments by Alejandro Groppo to a first draft of this text.

[iii] Something that Žižek points out in "Badiou: Notes From an Ongoing Debate" in *IJZS V1, n°2, 2007, p. 1*.

[iv] See, "El concepto pensado como Nudo Borromeo", *IJZS*, vol. 3, n° 1, 2009.

[v] Alain Badiou, *Lógicas de los mundos*, Bordes Manantial, Buenos Aires, 2008, p.20.

[vi] Ibid. p. 25

[vii] Žižek, *op.cit.* p.3

[viii] See Žižek, S. *Visión de paralaje*, FCE, Buenos Aires, 2006, p.16

[ix] See chapters 31-36 de *El ser y el acontecimiento*, Buenos Aires, Manantial, 1999, p. 363.

[x] Ernesto Laclau, *Misticismo, retórica y política*, FCE, Buenos Aires, 2006, p. 60.

[xi] Online: <http://www.ecole-lacanianne.net/seminaireXII.php>

[xii] Žižek, S., *Visión de paralaje*, FCE, Buenos Aires, 2006, p.104. *The Parallax View*, 2006, p. 62.

[xiii] Alejandro Groppo, personal communication.

[*] translator's note: literally 'litoral' means 'coastline'.

[xiv] Lacan, J. *De un discurso que no fuera del semblante*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2009.

[xv] The formulas of sexualization were presented by Lacan in his Seminar ...*ou pire* and then on *Encore* (both online). In addition, very good comments and philosophical deductions can be found in: Copjec, Jean. *El sexo y la eutanasia de la razón*, Paidós, Bs. As., 2006; Le Gaufey, G. *El notodo de Lacan. Consistencia lógica, consecuencias clínicas*, El cuenco de plata, Buenos Aires, 2007.; Scavino, D. *El señor, el amante y el poeta. Notas sobre la perennidad de la metafísica*, Eterna cadencia, Bs. As., 2009.

[xvi] On-line: <http://www.elinterpretador.net/numero15.htm>

[xvii] Ernesto Laclau, *Nuevas reflexiones sobre la revolución de nuestro tiempo*, Nueva Visión, Buenos Aires, 2000, p. 220.

[xviii] Slavoj Žižek, *El sublime objeto de la ideología*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 87. This quote as well as Laclau's were extracted from the excellent article by Matías González "Reflexiones conceptuales (post) althusserianas: ideología, sujeto y cambio histórico" in *Psikeba. Revista de Psicoanálisis y Estudios culturales*, n° 7, 2008.

[xix] In other articles I have given myself to consider how unfounded can be the critiques they make of their own works (and themselves). See (online) "The concept of citizen in postmarxist theory. The return of the political and the issue of madness". Published in "Internacional Journal of Žižek Studies", 2008, n° 3, vol. 2, Editorial Open Humanities Press ISSN 1751- 8229 and "Alain Badiou and the 'Platonism of the multiple' - or on what the gesture of the re-entanglement of mathematics and philosophy implies", published in "Internacional Journal of Žižek Studies, 2008, n° 2, vol. 2 (also in Spanish).

Bibliography

Alain Badiou (2008) *Lógicas de los mundos*, Bordes Manantial, Buenos Aires.

Alain Badiou (1999) *El ser y el acontecimiento*, Manantial, Buenos Aires.

Alain Badiou. Theoretical Writings. Ed. Continuum, Londres, 2005.

Jacques Lacan, J. *De un discurso que no fuera del semblante*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2009.

Ernesto Laclau (2006) *Misticismo, retórica y política*, FCE, Buenos Aires.

Ernesto Laclau (2000) *Nuevas reflexiones sobre la revolución de nuestro tiempo*, Nueva Visión, Buenos Aires.

Slavoj Žižek (2007) "Badiou: Notes From an Ongoing Debate" en *IJZS V1, n°2*.

Slavoj Žižek (2006) *Visión de paralaje*, FCE, Buenos Aires.

Slavoj Žižek (2003) *El sublime objeto de la ideología*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires.