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*Addendum: Let a thousand flowers bloom!  
- Some Brief Remarks on and Responses  
to Žižek's 'Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing  
Debate'*

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In his new textual intervention “Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate,” (Žižek 2007a) Žižek directly engages with my reading of Badiou elaborated in “The Quick and the Dead: Alain Badiou and the Split Speeds of Transformation.” (Johnston 2007) While agreeing with much of what I advance in this analysis of Badiou’s account of change, he also interjects several points of additional clarification in the course of his commentary, clarifications to which I would like to add my own comments in turn. Citing my remarks about how statist ideology can and does sometimes adopt the strategy either of falsely eventalizing the non-evental (for instance, as in late-capitalism’s dishonest self-portrait of its monotonous whirlwind of constant transformation as involving genuine alteration) or of deceptively depicting the real evental sites embedded within its domain as being devoid of the potential for giving rise to an event *qua* radical rupture with the state-of-the-situation, Žižek stipulates:

Perhaps this line of thought needs just one qualification... Would it not rather be that one of the ideological strategies is to fully admit the threatening character of a dysfunction, and to treat it as an external

intrusion, not as the necessary result of the system's inner dynamics? The model is here, of course, the Fascist notion of social antagonisms as the result of a foreign intruder—Jews—disturbing the organic totality of the social edifice (Žižek 2007a).

The only thing I have reservations about here is the wording of the rhetorical question posed in this passage (“Would it not rather be...?”). When it comes to (as per the title of a 1994 collection edited by Žižek) mapping ideology, the task must involve, due to the insidious, multi-faceted dynamics of ideological processes and strategies, letting a thousand flowers bloom (to paraphrase Mao). In other words, despite this “not rather,” Žižek and I shouldn't be construed as offering competing, mutually-exclusive depictions of ideology. Yes, Žižek is indeed quite correct that, in Nazism, a locus within the socio-political body is (mis)identified as potentially detrimental to the very existence of the system itself; “Jewish-ness” is treated by this particular fascist ideological matrix as, in Badiouian parlance, a possible eventual site (albeit, as Žižek notes, one misrepresented as a foreign intrusion rather than a product of the intimate, immanent dynamics of fascism) that must be dealt with swiftly and harshly in order to squelch any risk of the possibility of it undermining the Nazi life-world. However, this is only one of many tactics for regulating what I have called the “cadence of change” available to a statist system. The two that I identify in my critical reading of Badiou are other available tactics; and, Žižek's utterly crucial and incredibly useful notion of “cynical distance” (as a type of “inherent transgression”) is a further contribution to anatomizing the proliferation of ideological mechanisms, the complex twists and turns, the branching and forking trajectories, within the domains of ideology today (Žižek 2002a: 33, Žižek 2002b:251, Žižek 1992: x, Žižek 1996: 200-201, Žižek 2003: 8).

Given this proliferation, only a parallel proliferation of accounts and analyses within the fields of the theorization of ideology can hope to provide the conceptual resources for grasping our contemporary circumstances. When all is said and done, the sole consistency statist systems care about is the temporal consistency of their own

perpetuated existence; logical consistency amongst the various ideological constellations constructed by such systems is less of a concern. In other words, statist ideologies pay no heed to the constraints signaled in the phrase “not rather” (on yet another level, psychoanalysis proves to be highly relevant to the analysis of socio-political ideologies insofar as the deployment and development of these ideologies, like the primary process mentation-dynamics of unconscious thinking [for psychoanalytic metapsychology, unconscious thinking doesn’t obey the rules, such as the law of non-contradiction, observed by conscious thinking as secondary process mentation], can be comprehended only by an interpretive approach operating outside the constraints of ordinary, quotidian logic). Theory, if it is to have any chance whatsoever of keeping pace with its subtly shifting objects of interrogation, must mirror these shifts through, so to speak, the blooming multiplication of a thousand theories of ideologies.

Before moving on to the next set of important issues, there’s a detail that ought to be noted in passing. Putting his finger on my use of the phrase “minimal difference” in my examination of Badiou (in this case, the difference between the change-category statuses simultaneously assigned to a given multiple by both statist ideology and non-statist views), Žižek observes:

No wonder Johnston uses here the Deleuzian term ‘minimal difference’... when we pass from the notion of crisis as occasional contingent malfunctioning of the system to the notion of crisis as the symptomatic point at which the ‘truth’ of the system becomes visible, we are talking about one and the same actual event—the difference is purely virtual, it does not concern any of its actual properties, but only the way this event is supplemented by the virtual tapestry of its ideological and notional background (Žižek 2007a).

Although the Deleuzian idea of the virtual as employed here by Žižek quite accurately captures the gist of my thesis regarding the double inscription of potentially evental sites (i.e., the claim that multiples harboring the possibility of events can and are situated in at least two typologies of change/transformation at one and the same time), part of my position involves the assertion that, on a certain level, Badiou too presupposes and hints

at this structure of ideological double inscription. As cited in “The Quick and the Dead,” Badiou himself, in *Le siècle*, resorts to speaking of a “minimal” or “miniscule” difference at stake in the “politics of subtraction” (as opposed to the “politics of destruction” driven by the “passion of the real”). If this sort of difference is a hallmark of Deleuze’s philosophy, then, I would claim, there is a Deleuzian line of thought quietly winding its way through specific sectors of Badiouian philosophy. Furthermore, in my view, if Badiou’s notion of a subtractive politics focused on discerning minimal/miniscule differences is to mean anything clear and concrete, it must be linked up with his underdeveloped allusion (located in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* and also cited in “The Quick and the Dead”) to a “figural preparation,” namely, “a pre-evental *figure*” that pre-figures the perhaps imminent happening of an event hovering on the situational horizon. To be more exact, my contention is that these pre-evental harbinger-figures are to be found amongst precisely those multiples subjected to ideological double inscriptions, with the difference-to-be-discerned by the practitioner of a politics of subtraction being that between a multiple’s statist change-category status (whether categorized as evental or non-evental, depending on the particular ideological tactic mobilized) and this same multiple’s other change-category status apparent to a non-statist gaze. To employ Žižek’s own phraseology, this is to look upon one’s political situation with a certain sort of “parallax view.”

Žižek proceeds elegantly to summarize this contention of mine regarding the productive political assessment of this change-category status difference. He describes “the art of a ‘politics of minimal difference’” as:

...to be able to identify and then focus on a minimal (ideological, legislative, etc.) measure which, *prima facie*, not only does not question that system’s premises, but even seems to merely apply to its actual functioning its own principles and thus render it more self-consistent; however, a critico-ideological ‘parallax view’ leads us to surmise that this minimal measure, while in no way disturbing the system’s explicit mode of functioning, effectively ‘moves its underground,’ introduces a crack in its foundations (Žižek 2007a).

He then goes on to invoke my notion of a “pre-evental discipline of time” (as opposed to Badiou’s association of a “discipline of time” exclusively with the post-evental labors of a subject-of-an-event). Regarding this notion—and, Žižek declares that, “Today, more than ever, we need what Johnston calls a ‘pre-evental discipline of time’” (Žižek 2007a)—he warns of the danger that it can be tricked into entering the service of justifying politically disempowering hesitations and inaction:

There is, however, a limit to this kind of strategy: if followed thoroughly, it ends up in a kind of ‘active quietism’: while forever postponing the Big Act, all one does is to engage in small interventions with the secret hope that somehow, inexplicably, by means of a magic ‘jump from quantity to quality,’ they will lead to global radical change. This strategy has to be supplemented by the readiness and ability to discern the moment when the possibility of the Big Change is approaching, and, at that point, to quickly change the strategy, take the risk and engage in total struggle. In other words, one should not forget that, in politics, ‘major repercussions’ do not come by themselves: true, one has to lay the ground for them by means of the patient work, but one should also know to seize the moment when it arrives (Žižek 2007a).

I will start by saying that I completely agree with Žižek’s insistence that the non-statist, pre-evental actor/agent must be ready, willing, and able promptly to alter tactical approaches in response to the unpredictably shifting terrain of unfolding circumstances and situations. Once the patient gaze of the “parallax view” deployed by a subtractive politics of minimal differences senses that, perhaps after a protracted period of waiting to intervene while thinking things through, it has successfully sifted through the veils of ideology so as to single out those intra-systemic nodes really possessing the promise and enjoying the opportunity to be sites of genuine evental change (places where, just maybe, there possibly can occur “a magic ‘jump from quantity to quality’”), then the time to act truly is now (even if, as Žižek points out in his Lenin-inspired rejection of the perspective according to which one must bide one’s time until socio-historical conditions have “matured”/“ripened” and the “right moment” spontaneously emerges out of the defiles of chronological development, right now doesn’t seem to be the appropriate time

to pass from thinking to doing) (Žižek 2002c: 4-5, 6, 8-9, 10, Žižek 2003: 135, Žižek and Daly 2004: 163-164).

However, there are a series of observations I want to elaborate here in response to other aspects of the passage quoted above. To begin with, just as I fully endorse Žižek's vehement demand that the practitioner of a politics of minimal differences be prepared to leap from theoretical assessment to practical intervention when the opening for revolutionarily forcing through a "premature" system-destabilizing dysfunction suddenly presents itself, so too do I concur that my articulations of what is entailed by a "pre-evental discipline of time" could, in certain hands, be manipulated so as to become yet another excuse for sticking forever to the course of minor adjustments and refinements, for remaining stuck in the position that Žižek elsewhere describes as involving the "pseudo-activity" of "aggressive passivity." (Žižek 1997: 112-113, Žižek 2001a: 11-12, Žižek 2004: 72, Žižek 2006: 223, Žižek 2007b) This "aggressive passivity" designates the hurling of oneself into a frantic swirl of activities so as to forestall rather than facilitate change, all the while operating under the illusion that such "active quietism" isn't quietism because, as this variety of self-deception depicts these frenetic endeavors, one of these little activities will somehow miraculously come to catalyze the big "magic 'jump from quantity to quality,'" namely, the unexpected, abrupt stumbling upon a minor action that simultaneously functions as a major act (as per the Lacan-derived distinction between acts and actions). This form of quietism pinpointed by Žižek puts off acts in favor of actions by banking on another form of double inscription: Just as specific multiples can be evental sites or events and non-evental components of a state-mediated situation at one and the same time, so too can a single given gesture simultaneously be an action and/or a (potential) act.

And yet, even though this (potential) double inscription of certain actions (as simultaneously actions and acts) can be and is readily appropriated by varieties of a quietism-in-bad-faith, this doesn't mean that it isn't nonetheless true (recalling that Žižek

himself sometimes declares that an indispensable tenet of any contemporary critical analysis of ideology today must depart from the assumption that one can, as Lacan puts it, “lie in the guise of truth,” that is, marshal truths to the cause of various versions of conscious and unconscious [self-]deception) (Žižek 1999a: 61-62). In fact, as I pointed out in a paper Žižek himself heard at a conference in February of 2003 (a piece which later became the article “The Cynic’s Fetish: Slavoj Žižek and the Dynamics of Belief” published in a 2004 issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* and, in expanded form, serves as the fourth and final section of my yet-to-be-published book, *Vanishing Mediators: Žižekian Meditations*, on his weaving together of late-modern German philosophy [specifically Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Marx] and psychoanalysis), there are also certain risks run by Žižek’s politico-theoretical deployment of the Lacan-inspired notion of the act. Appreciating what these risks are requires briefly sketching the contours of select details of this Lacanian concept:

One remarkable feature of the Act that Lacan goes out of his way to underscore is that this disruptive gesture is not the outcome of prior deliberations on the part of self-conscious reflection... The Lacanian notion of the Act, although lacking much in the way of conceptual specificity and theoretical details, involves two restrictions: one, an Act cannot be anticipated and defined from within the framework of a given symbolic order, since it shatters the parameters of that same framework if and when it happens; two, a subject does not actively perform an Act, since subjectivity is, as Lacan indicates, a passive after-effect of such an event (Johnston 2004: 276).

In several previous contexts—implicitly breaking in certain ways with Lacan, his above-quoted invocation of the “Big Act” in “Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate” avoids the ideological dangers spelled out in what follows below by speaking of such an intervention as being informed and directed by a prior politico-theoretical surveillance of circumstances - Žižek explicitly emphasizes and endorses these aspects of Lacan’s act, insisting that individuals are caught unawares by acts, surprised by the unexpected occurrence of a miraculous, seemingly impossible gesture of separating off from a prior reality-horizon (Žižek 1998: 45, Žižek 1999b: 374-375, 376, Žižek 2001b: 144, Žižek

2004: 80-81). As should be obvious from summarizing this Lacanian notion thus, there is a definite danger that, as with the Badiouian event, the Lacanian-Žižekian act, transposed from the analytic clinic to the public sphere of politics, could easily create the sad sense that there's no hope one's actions can have any effect on the cadence of change (i.e., that one's seemingly small actions are akin to an example from everyday life invoked by Žižek on several occasions: the futile pushing of the "close door" button on an elevator whose doors will close when they close regardless of whether or not the button is pushed—the asubjective genesis of the act/event will happen when it happens regardless of the interventions of individuals). Both Badiou's insistence that subjectivity is strictly post-evental (a consequence of this insistence is that subjects cannot struggle beforehand actively to precipitate the occurrence of an event before it occurs) and Lacan's similar treatment of the subject as a post-act effect (Lacan 2004:366-367, Lacan 1967, Lacan 2001: 375) inadvertently flirt with encouraging quietist discouragement—Lacan and Badiou, given their shared focus on what comes after the act/event and corresponding motivated neglect of what comes before, are each in danger of leaving individuals stranded passively awaiting the apparently *ex nihilo* occurrences of the saving grace of acts and/or events.

To the extent that his own conception of the act closely resembles these aspects of Lacanian and Badiouian thought - again, the most recent indications are that he is moving away from his prior proximity to these two key interlocutors on this point—Žižek likewise offers up a vision of the forces and factors driving transformation that implicitly abandons the conviction that individuals are capable of, under the guidance of deliberate premeditation, pushing for radical act/event-level change before the seemingly unconditioned, quasi-divine blessing of the transformational "*il y a*." From a Marxist-Leninist position, the lowest common denominators shared between Lacanian acts and Badiouian events are quite troubling:

On a purely pragmatic level, such a conception risks conveying a



disempowering message: self-conscious, volitional activity on the part of subjects is pointless, since the event of an Act transpires in the mode of the anonymous 'it happens,' rather than as the outcome of intentionally guided forms of *praxis*. Doesn't the importation of this idea of the Act into Marxism turn the concrete political task of actively plotting revolution and its aftermath into helplessly awaiting an abstract, undefined moment of salvation-yet-to-come? ...Arguing against Hegel's political thought, Marx contends that Geist is a theosophical specter, an ideologically motivated fantasy hiding the fact that human beings shape their own history behind the inverse of this truth (i.e., that there's a transcendent 'Spirit' magically governing the fate of humanity). Wouldn't Marx raise similar objections against the Lacanian-Žižekian Act, since it threatens to reintroduce alienation as a factor obfuscating and undervaluing strategically planned political activities? (Johnston 2004: 277)

These (perhaps dated) remarks are from 2003, and apply to earlier instances in Žižek's work where he associates the Lacanian act with the Badiouian event in the process of promoting a vision of change emphasizing miraculous moments when the seemingly impossible inexplicably becomes an actualized possibility (Žižek 1999: 135, Žižek 2001b: 83-84, 112, Žižek 2002d: 101-102, 130). But, he now declares that, as regards the necessity of passing to the "Big Act" through a kind of rapid *carpe diem* shift of tactics from patient theoretical assessment (steered by analyses stemming from a subtractive politics of minimal differences focused on loci of ideological double inscription) to lightening-fast offensives, "major repercussions' do not come by themselves." In other words, the times both before and after an act/event must each involve their own modes of sustained, disciplined labor, carefully organized struggles dedicated to the promises and potentials of real transformations. Hence, although he continues up through the present to use the term "act" (i.e., the same term that, in his prior writings, is explicitly tied to Lacan's definition of this notion within the parameters of his psychoanalytic apparatus), Žižek's current utilization of this concept-word differs from his previous Lacan-inflected citations of it in one very significant respect: By admitting the need for a "pre-evental discipline of time" (which could also be referred to as a "pre-act" discipline) linked to a probing theoretical assessment of the ideological state-of-the-situation, Žižek moves away from a celebration of the act as an unforeseen, out-of-

nowhere miracle and back toward a more, as it were, sober and atheistic Marxist-Leninist understanding of effective revolutionary interventions as non-miraculous points of culmination condensing a combination of preceding arduous intellectual and practical work with the unpredictable workings of intra-situational chance and contingencies.

In my 2003 reading of Žižekian political thought, I maintain that, just as Žižek is justified in chiding those who avoid taking radical steps due to fear of the unforeseen, possibly-not-democratic future consequences of such gestures as wanting an “act without the act,” (Žižek 2002: 152-153) so too would one be justified in cautioning that a fetishization of the “Big Act” could also lead to quietist paralysis. I justify this contention thus:

Žižek links liberal-democracy’s employment of the threat of totalitarianism to a more fundamental rejection of the Act itself qua intervention whose consequences cannot be safely anticipated. The refusal to risk a gesture of disruption because it might not turn out exactly the way one envisions it should is the surest bulwark against change...(Johnston 2004: 278)

However, as I go on to note:

The problem with Lacan’s opposition between Acts and actions in relation to socio-political commitments is that one might be tempted to vainly await an ‘Act without an action.’ Too sharp a distinction between Act and action enables one to dodge the central question—‘repeating Lenin’ ought to mean tirelessly asking this single question again and again in each new historical context—of ‘What is to be done?’ On the basis of Lacanian theory, one could argue that an Act is something whose occurrence can only be determined retroactively. It isn’t until after a whole series of concrete actions have already been engaged in, and whose effects have temporally unfurled to a sufficient extent, that one is able to assess whether an Act actually did happen. One always recognizes an Act as such after-the-fact... Thus, as Lacan insists, Acts aren’t events brought about in the present by self-conscious volitional agents because, within the immediacy of the here-and-now, subjects aren’t able to determine or decide whether their actions will eventually qualify, through the verdict of subsequent history, as genuine Acts strictly speaking. Subjects must first immerse themselves in action, since, without these particular interventions, there would be nothing to later grasp through hindsight as an Act. Although an Act is indeed not an action (and although far from every action can or does become an Act), there is, nonetheless, no Act without an action. A politics of the pure Act, one that eschews engaging in any

specifications concerning actions to be performed, is an empty 'politics without politics.' The risk that this position refuses isn't the risk of the 'absolute Act' and its always-possible failure—it risks refusing the active specification and performance of actions that might not end up becoming Acts (Johnston 2004: 278-279).

I am now tempted to disagree with one of the assertions in the passage quoted immediately above: My wager nowadays is that it might be possible, through the critical-theoretical vision of a subtractive politics of minimal differences, to recognize a possible act/event before (rather than exclusively after) the fact—or, at a minimum, on the basis of educated guesses, to gamble by treating elements of one's current situational circumstances as potentially evental. Furthermore, the contention here is certainly not that Žižek himself is guilty of promoting a politics-without-politics of the pure act. Instead, the claim is that the strict Lacanian definition of an act (as found in Lacan's teachings from the mid-1960s), if exported to the domain of political discourse, is at least as vulnerable to appropriation by varieties of quietism-in-bad-faith as my suggestion that a subtractive politics of minimal differences should focus on searching for varieties of presently-possible interventions that, although initially appearing to be nothing more than non-evental actions (maybe due to the distorting influences of statist ideology), might perhaps, through the retroactive vindication of post-act/event hindsight, appear to have turned out to be more than mere actions.

This leads to my closing proposition: No critical theoretical analysis of ideology is immune from the threat of being appropriated by ideologically duplicitous rationalizations of quietism. Not only is it possible, as Žižek's Lacanian theory of ideological mechanisms posits, to lie in the guise of truth—any truth can be twisted into a tool for engendering an acceptance of the *status quo* (even if this acceptance is disguised as, for instance, the mocking pseudo-rebelliousness of "cynical distance"). Of course, Žižek is warranted to warn that a pre-act/event discipline of time, practiced by a subtractive politics of minimal differences, is liable to encourage those who secretly or unconsciously wish to be discouraged (i.e., the moderate left-wing quietists-in-bad-faith) to remain complacently in

place while appearing quickly to move “progressively” toward a hazy, vague “somewhere else” through the inactive activity of being “aggressively passive” via enacting a series of actions that they only feign to hope will retroactively turn out to have been acts. Indeed, this form of quietist procrastination, of permanently putting off and interminably delaying the possibility of any real *passage à l’acte*, is easily able to co-opt a pre-act/event discipline of time; such a tactical co-opting is especially appealing to those who wish to see themselves as radical leftists but don’t actually want socio-political reality to call their bluff, to take their actions seriously enough to risk turning them into acts proper. Unfortunately, my reading of Badiou’s account of change even provides such pseudo-radicals with a retort to the labeling of them as “pseudo” by virtue of their alleged aggressive passivity: “Who is to say that our present minor actions won’t become, through the unforeseeable hindsight of subsequent history, major acts after-the-fact? Nothing rules out our being retroactively crowned the truest of radicals by the unpredictable future effects of our current interventions.” No amount of added theoretical stipulations or attached conceptual caveats can eliminate the danger of this ideologically motivated appropriation of the situational surveillance called for by a subtractive politics of minimal differences, an appropriation that perversely twists the reasons behind and methods of this surveillance into apologies for (to paraphrase a famous George W. Bush one-liner coined by his former speechwriter Michael Gerson) the soft defeatism of lowered expectations. This defeatism protests that it isn’t defeatism by paying lip service to the idea that “big changes” are needed today. But, this is defeatism all the same, since it resigns itself to the supposedly unavoidable modesty, while waiting for the forever *à venir* opening for real transformations, of safely keeping its interventions within the sanctioned realm of acceptable debates and reforms.

However, if, apropos Badiou, I am indeed justified in maintaining that events can re-draw the lines of division between events and non-events in various ways (including the possible scenario of the vanishing event in which an event’s ensuing redistribution of

change-category statuses comes to revoke its own evental status in the eyes of those living in its shadow), so too would I equally be justified in maintaining that acts can redraw the lines of division between acts and actions-as-non-acts (allowing for the possibility of a vanishing act). As asserted above, without actions, there are no acts. Moreover, if a vanishing act is granted as a possibility - Žižek's agreement with certain key features of my reading of Badiou requires him granting this possibility—then, looking back to the past, it might very well be the case that many prior gestures meeting the shared Badiouian-Žižekian criteria for qualifying as the event of an act have been later either demoted to the status of non-evental actions (if these gestures managed to get and remain recorded throughout the processes of historical re-transcriptions of the past) or erased from collective memory altogether as seemingly too banal and trivial to merit being noticed. The relatively recent shift in historiographic trends from “big” to “little” histories - this is the shift from tales centered on towering influential figures and spectacularly visible happenings to narratives pinpointing the origin of the way things are to seemingly small factors (James Burke's now-defunct “Connections” column in the magazine *Scientific American* and his public-television mini-series based on the column arguably provide the best popularized version of this historiographic art of unearthing the miniscule differences that ended up making not-so-miniscule differences) - furnishes many possible examples of (to use a phrase Žižek borrows from Jameson) vanishing mediators as evental points retroactively rendered apparently non-evental. In other words, we are haunted not only by the Benjaminian revenants of unfulfilled revolutionary potentials from previous periods of history (Benjamin 1969: 262-263, 264) (Žižek sometimes refers to Benjamin apropos this conception of the relation between past and present) (Žižek 1999: 20, Žižek 2000: 89-90) -we also live amongst the specters of fulfilled upheavals that, in the turbulent storms that ensued, disappeared into historical thin air in part thanks to their very success in changing the world. Succinctly stated,

there are ghosts of consummated revolutions past, not just ghosts of past potential-but-thwarted revolutions.

How is this brief discussion of vanishing acts and self-effacing events relevant and related to the previous observations about ideology critique and its always-possible appropriation by the insidious tendrils of related species of quietism willing and able to lie in the guise of truth? It's difficult to avoid detecting in the Lacanian notion of the act (as well as the Žižekian idea of the "Big Act") tonal resonances evoking the shock of the spectacular, the sublime excess of a violent shattering of that which is - in short, the striking, awe-inspiring grandeur of an absolutely radical and transformative deed. In distinguishing acts from actions, Lacan and Žižek appear to raise the bar for what counts as an efficacious intervention aiming at change quite high—perhaps, if it's a question here strictly of the perceived risk of quietist appropriation, too high. That is to say, just as the situational surveillance of the subtractive politics of minimal differences is vulnerable to being pressed into serving as a rationalizing apology for the soft defeatism of lowered expectations, so too are calls for "passing to the act," through insisting that only a grand gesture can save us now, equally vulnerable to quietist appropriation. In his piece on Badiou, Žižek accurately diagnoses this very danger:

Progressive liberals today often complain that they would like to join a 'revolution' (a more radical emancipatory political movement), but no matter how desperately they search for it, they just 'don't see it' (they don't see anywhere in the social space a political agent with a will and strength to seriously engage in such activity). While there is a moment of truth in it, one should nonetheless also add that the very attitude of these liberals is in itself part of a problem: if one just waits to 'see' a revolutionary moment, it will, of course, never arise, and one will never see it (Žižek 2007a).

It's easy to imagine a "progressive liberal" who succeeds at interminably delaying the performance of anything revolutionary, who remains chronically blind to the possibility for an eventual deed realized within the realm of *status quo* circumstances, precisely because he/she expects (from a pre-act/event perspective) this yet-to-be-enacted intervention to have in advance the glaringly visible features of a dramatic, over-the-top

spectacle. To paraphrase a well-known Kantian declaration, if Žižek is right that the situational surveillance of the subtractive politics of minimal differences without the readiness to seize the moment for the initiation of the “Big Act” is politically empty (*qua* apolitically ineffective), then one would also be correct to say that the readiness to seize the moment for the initiation of the “Big Act” without the situational surveillance of the subtractive politics of minimal differences is blind. One version of the latter position would be the above-mentioned “liberal” unable “to ‘see’ a revolutionary moment.” The Lacanian-Žižekian act, if sought after by a pre-act/event gaze on the lookout for something with the spectacular appearance of a “Big Act” as an *ex nihilo* absolute exit from the constraints of the present, is likely not to appear before this gaze. All it will observe, blinded by the fantasmatic brilliance of the anticipated yet-to-come miracle of the act making the impossible possible, are seemingly less-than-evental sites for interventions that it can’t imagine, that it’s unable to envision, have the slightest hope of becoming acts.

However, this is to fall prey to the error of failing to realize that some of the constituents of one’s situation are probably ideologically double inscribed (or, at least, potentially double inscribable). More specifically, this is the mistake of assuming that an act and/or event will appear to be such (i.e., an act and/or event) within the limited horizon of the present pre-act/event reality as defined and demarcated by the reigning state-of-the-situation. But, as argued, statist ideology can re/present the elements and parts of its situational field as having change-category statuses in such a way that it makes the evental seem less-than-evental and *vice versa* (ditto for acts and less-than-acts). So, in donning the lenses of a critical approach to this ideological distribution of assigned types of potential for change, one has a real chance to see through the representational schemas of the socio-symbolic big Other, to glimpse virtual layers of other possible change-category statuses linked to the factors and forces circulating throughout one’s current circumstances—succinctly stated, to see that what now

appears to be an action or a non-event might harbor the explosive possibility to become something more.

The fact that the various theoretical delineations of the complex *rapport* between ideology and interventions sketched by Žižek and myself are all equally exposed to the omnipresent threat of quietist appropriation forces an important acknowledgement: Correct theories aren't enough. Of course, as should be clear from the preceding discussion, the mere impulse-to-activity by itself, without the guidance of a sufficiently complex and nuanced critique of ideology grounded on a philosophically well-cultivated body of political thought, ends up vainly spinning its wheels and sputtering out in directionless impotence (*à la* aggressive passivity); or, worse still, such intellectually unsupervised urges push people into forms of activism either already integrated into the established system or else ready-made to be easily co-opted by said order. As Žižek emphasizes in one of the extra segments on the DVD-version of Astra Taylor's "Žižek!: The Movie," it's crucial to recognize that, as per the title of this segment, "Theory Matters." And yet, at the same time, no matter how carefully one constructs one's critical conceptual apparatus, there's no sure-fire, one-hundred-percent guaranteed inoculation against the infectious disease of quietism.

When it comes to unconscious convictions and perspectives regarding how things are (convictions and perspectives running contrary to the content of conscious protests that real change is supposedly desired), a cliché saying is quite appropriate (especially in light of Žižek's mention of "will and strength" in the passage quoted several paragraphs above): Where there's a will, there's a way. Each and every theoretical truth about the ideology supporting the present state-of-the-situation can be hijacked by networks of unconscious beliefs and investments in the status quo so as to become a lie in the guise of truth, a "true lie" leading to and fostering various forms of defeatist acquiescence. The only defense against this is the countervailing will, over and above the formulation of correct theories of ideology, to fight against the all-too-human quietist



temptation to capitulate in bad faith to the established order of things. Paraphrasing Kant once again, without theory, the will is blind; but, without the will, theory is empty ... or, even worse, it becomes a dangerously deceptive and dissimulating apologist for power.

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