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Act or Revolution? Yes, Please!

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In the context of the current crisis of global capitalism, it is crucial to determine what is the state of Marxism. Certainly, it is true that in recent decades Marxism has suffered a notable series of attacks, but in no way may we conclude that for this reason Marxism no longer constitutes a legitimate political and intellectual option. As Perry Anderson fittingly pointed out, “to be defeated and to be bowed are not the same” (Anderson 2005: XVII). In permanent crisis and despite all adversities—Marxism persists. Thus, adopting the standpoint of an “intransigent realism” (Anderson 2000: 10) which makes possible “refusing any accommodation with the ruling system, and rejecting every piety and euphemism that would understate its power” (idem), it is valid to question if Marxism has theoretically and practically recovered from a crisis that was supposedly fatal. In fact, has Marxism been able to respond to the challenges posed by Post-Structuralism and

Postmodernist discourse? Has it repelled the attacks that were inherent in the postulates of the so-called Post-Marxism?

As a part of a larger effort to answer these questions, this paper deals with the work of Slavoj Žižek. What distinguishes the Slovenian philosopher from other contemporary thinkers that try to normatively undertake a defense of Marxism is that he is not precisely a Marxist. Essentially, Žižek is part of the Lacanian left (Stravarakakis 2007). But at the same time he is a very distinctive Hegelian that belongs to the field of Materialist Theory of Subjectivity (Johnston 2008). Nevertheless, in recent years Žižek has showed increasing fidelity to the Idea of communism and the radical emancipatory politics. Within this context, he has strayed from his previous interests in the development of ideology critique and has carried out a noteworthy number of original contributions to both the vicissitudes of Marxist theory and the political practice that the times in which we live require.

Specifically, Žižek has endeavored to establish a Theory of the Act, which without entirely abandoning the postmodernist horizon has achieved the neutralization of the most prominent attacks launched by Post-Marxism and has vindicated the concept of the socialist revolution. Next, I will genealogically reconstitute the conceptual components of the Theory of the Act. However, before this it will be necessary to specify the nature of the ontological materialistic foundations on which Žižek's perspective lie. Only then, will I be in conditions to focus on the relationship between Žižekian theory and the construction of radical emancipatory politics.

In order to accomplish these objectives, in the following pages I will implement a historical intellectual methodology that attempts to reconstruct Žižek's work as an intentional unity situated within the theoretical and political coordinates of his time. By definition, this method tries to "locate specific contradictions of argument where they occur, generally treating them not as random lapses but as symptomatic points of tension" (Anderson 1992: X). In terms of Isaac Deutscher, this task consists in to rise *au-dessus de la mêlée* and "watch with detachment and alertness this heaving chaos of a world, to be on a sharp look out for what is going to emerge from it, and to interpret it *sine ira et studio*" (Deutscher 1984: 58). Nevertheless, the present paper does not constitute a dialogue between two different perspectives—Žižek's philosophy, on the one hand, and intellectual history, on the other. Paraphrasing the Slovenian thinker himself, what follows certainly is

“an *encounter* between two incompatible fields” (Žižek 2003a: XI)—that is to say, a historical intellectual attempt to trace the boundaries of an “encounter with the Real” (Žižek 1992: 101) of Slavoj Žižek.

RSI, or the Foundations of a Materialistic Ontology

The Theory of the Act furthered by Žižek is formed in the shadow of a materialistic conception of ontology. To understand this, it is crucial to review the diverse theories of the event developed by French intelligentsia since May 1968. In recent decades, the thinker native to Ljubljana has refined a sophisticated conceptual apparatus. With it he has been able to confront the idealistic arguments that lay to rest the economical dimension and—as a consequence—give supremacy to the dimension of the political. As Žižek sees it, the different post-Althusserian, post-Marxist, Marxist post-structuralist and radical-democratic movements, share a same premise: “the irreducibility of the event to some positive order of being” (Žižek and Daly 2004: 135-136).

Žižek emphatically opposes the point “that event is something that emerges out of nothing” (ibid: 136). In fact, because the conventional event logic it is “too idealistic” (ibid: 137), he has made an effort to outline a materialistic program that allows the conception of the unity between being and event. In this context, Žižek has increasingly appealed to the Lacanian notion of *la doublure*, “the redoubling, twist or curvature in the order of being which opens up the space for event” (idem).

Using this concept of *la doublure*, Žižek does not beget another post-Marxist theory. Indeed, he does not maintain that by means of a *point de capiton* in the political arena it is viable to retroactively reconstruct the symbolic order. Rather Žižek pursues the possibility of an Act realization that can twist or curve the register of its symbolic inscription. The hypothesis that provides fundament to all Acts is that always, necessarily, in *le Symbolique* there lies an “insurmountable *parallax gap*, the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible” (Žižek 2006: 4).

In other words, what this Žižekian materialistic conception of ontology supposes is the awareness of the inexistence of the *grand Autre*—that is to say the knowledge of the

radical inconsistency of the All, the knowledge of the incessant fiction of the symbolic order, and so on. In contrast with the idealist, the materialist understands that what is experimented is always open. For the materialist, “it is the ‘All’ itself which is non-All, inconsistent, marked by an irreducible contingency” (ibid: 79). And the index of the inconsistency of the All, the proof of its non-totality, the testimony of its basic short-circuit, etc. is none other than the event: the material emergence of event in the order of Being. Regarding this subject, in *Organs without Bodies*, Žižek remarks:

The materialist solution is thus that the Event is *nothing but* its own inscription into the order of Being, a cut/rupture in the order of Being on account of which Being cannot ever form a consistent All. There is no Beyond of Being that inscribes itself into the order of Being. There “is” nothing but the order of Being. One should recall here yet again the paradox of Einstein’s general theory of relativity, in which matter does not curve space but is an effect of space’s own curvature. An Event does not curve the space of Being through its inscription into it: on the contrary, an Event is *nothing but* this curvature of the space of Being. “All there is” is the interstice, the nonself-coincidence, of Being, namely, the ontological nonclosure of the order of Being (Žižek 2003a: 107).

Translating all this into the logic of Lacanian registers of *le Réel*, *le Symbolique* and *l’Imaginaire (RSI)*—that is into the logic of those registers connected by that *nœud borroméen* whose link indicates the structure of speaker-being and defines the specificity of *objet petit a*—it may be sustained that of the three Žižek gives primacy to the dimension that negates the order of meaning, that dimension which negates what cannot be incorporated into it and, *vis-à-vis*, establishes the contours within which meaning itself functions. According to Žižek, *le Réel* persists as a lack and all ideological fantasies—which as such belong to the field of *l’Imaginaire* but happen in the field of *le Symbolique*—exist as an answer to this lack which imposes negation boundaries and, simultaneously, constitutes the discursive significant order. Thus according to the Lacanian perspective, the eminently symbolic order which makes up social reality is the site where the intent to establish an elemental consistency that can withstand the corrosive effects of *le Réel* takes place. In other words, the site where the ideological attempt to inhibit the traumatized nucleus that cannot be symbolized, explained, internalized or accepted happens. Since the publication of *The Ticklish Subject* and the *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* debates, Žižek has conceived this nucleus as basically one: the class struggle, “the fundamental social antagonism (...) that divides the social edifice from within” (Žižek 2000a: 124), overdetermining it but also distorting it.

The distinctive mark of Žižek's interpretation of *RSI* registers is that not only is *le Réel* that which cannot be symbolized or is essentially distorted but *le Réel* also is, fundamentally for Žižek, what distorts reality. In short, Žižekian perspective implies that *le Réel* would be conceptualized as a traumatic social antagonism that fixes the limits of possible symbolizations. The kernel that is inherent and immanent to *Symbolique* occurs as a gap or a breach because *le Symbolique* itself introduces it into reality. Thus one could say that in our contemporary societies there is a trauma (capitalism), a *le Réel* (social antagonism of class struggle), a truth (the ideological distortion of diverse class perspectives) and also a primary *point de capiton* (liberal democracy).

According to this reading of Lacanian *RSI* registers, the problem with *le Réel* it is not that does not take place, but, on the contrary, that it happens:

for Lacan, the Real is not impossible in the sense that it can never happen—a traumatic kernel which forever eludes our grasp. No, the problem with the Real is that it happens and *that's* the trauma. *The point is not that the Real is impossible but rather the impossible is Real.* A trauma, or an act, is simply the point when the Real happens, and this is difficult to accept. Lacan is not a poet telling us how we always fail the Real—it's always the opposite with the late Lacan. The point is that you *can* encounter the Real, and that is what is so difficult to accept (...) So, to be clear, the Real is impossible but not simply impossible in the sense of a failed encounter. It is also impossible in the sense that it is a traumatic encounter that *does* happen but which we are unable to confront. And one of the strategies used to avoid confronting it is precisely that of positing it as this indefinite ideal which is eternally postponed. One aspect of the Real is that it's impossible, but the other aspect is that it happens but it is impossible to sustain, impossible to integrate (Žižek and Daly 2004: 69-71).

In Žižek, the possibility of the Act is basically based on the thesis which postulates that as a consequence of the constitutive inconsistency of the symbolic order it is viable to confront *le Réel*. However, what must be added is that because the Act cannot be reduced to the *passage à l'acte* or to Acting-out, to a point the Act presupposes the logic of the feminine *jouissance*. Bear in mind that *jouissance*, enjoyment, does not imply transgression; this applies to feminine as well as to masculine sexuality. In its foundational tenet, enjoyment is "*something imposed, ordered*—when we enjoy, we never do it 'spontaneously', we always follow a certain injunction" (Žižek 1992: 9). Occasionally, in feminine sexuality the nature of "this obscene call, 'Enjoy!'" (ibid: 9-10) whose psychoanalytic name is, of course, *superego* is revealed. In effect, when the symptom of man—that is woman—attempts to achieve *jouissance*, the inconsistency of the *grand*

Autre, the inconsistency of symbolic order, is unveiled. As a consequence, a space is opened for the confrontation of *le Réel* and the realization of the Act.

The Theory of the Act and its Conceptual Components

Considered from the standpoint of the symbolic coordinates from whence it emerges, the Act is impossible. From a particular point of view, a particular parallax view, the Act consists of a retroactive possibility, *a posteriori*: it declares itself impossible.

An act does not simply occur *within* the given horizon of what appears to be 'possible'—it redefines the very contours of what is possible (an act accomplishes what, within the given symbolic universe, appears to be 'impossible', yet it changes its conditions so that it creates retroactively the conditions of its own possibility) (Žižek 2000a: 121).

To explain this retroactive possibility of the impossible that is intrinsic to all Acts, in his texts Žižek frequently uses the Antigone myth and cinematographic examples such as the self-destruction of Keyser Söze in *The Usual Suspects* (1995) or the beating that Edward Norton's character inflicts on himself in *The Fight Club* (1999). However, the most illustrative example is perhaps the one Lacan gave in 1979 when suddenly from one day to another he dissolved the *École Freudienne de Paris*, "his *agalma*, his own organization, the very space of his collective life" (ibid: 123). Certainly, what he makes clear for those who act is the necessity of assuming a risk, the necessity of confronting Hegel's *Nacht der Welt*, the necessity of taking a step into the void without any guarantee of success. Only then, through the confrontation of a dead end alley is it possible to "clear the terrain for a new beginning" (idem). That is to apprehend a new beginning as none other than an essentially radical and foundational gesture that effectively belongs to the order of the new: a gesture that neutralizes the field of possible symbolizations and by doing so gains access to the impossible and with it to *le Réel*.

It is precisely in this sense that for Žižek it is imperative to defend one of the most characteristic mottos of 1968:

The Left has a choice today: either it accepts the predominant liberal democratic horizon (democracy, human rights and freedom...), and engages in a hegemonic battle *within* it, or it risks the opposite gesture of refusing its very terms, of flatly rejecting today's liberal blackmail that courting any prospect of radical change paves the way for totalitarianism. It is my firm conviction, my politico-existential premiss,

that the old '68 motto *Soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible!* still holds: it is the advocates of changes and resignifications within the liberal-democratic horizon who are the true utopians in their belief that their effort will amount to anything more than the cosmetic surgery that will give us capitalism with a human face (Žižek 2000b: 326).

However, the retroactive alteration of the symbolic order is not in and of itself sufficient to concede a particular phenomenon the status of Act. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek affirms: “it is crucial to introduce a further distinction: for Lacan, a true act does not only retroactively change the rules of the symbolic space; it also disturbs the underlying fantasy” (Žižek 1999: 200). Indeed, *la traversée du fantasme* is the other integral part of an Act.

In this sense, it must be pointed out that a key component of the Act is the disturbance of the ideological fantasy which regulates the balance of symbolic order and reinforces the idea that the Act cannot be subsumed to the *passage à l'acte* or to the Acting-out. The Act shares with the *passage à l'acte* the non-sending of an encrypted message to the *grand Autre* and also the circumstance of implying a sort of exit from symbolic scene (the Acting-out, as analysts well know, involves neither of these). But there is an important difference between them: who really acts assumes responsibility for his actions—that is to say, recognizes, identifies and defends their actions. In psychoanalytic therapy, the *passage à l'acte* entails a defensive way out of the symbolic order which, as a consequence of its non-re-elaboration of desire and fantasy, does not mean a step-forward toward a cure. Contrarily, when an Act occurs, its subject “*posits himself as his own cause*” (Žižek 1999: 375), and, as a result, the subject achieves control of the effects of his unconscious desires and fantasies. This is precisely the singularity of *la traversée du fantasme* in which all authentic Acts must be founded: as a corollary of the non-sending of an encoded message to the *grand Autre*, he who acts resolutely assumes his responsibility in revealing the ideological character of the symbolic field which supports the (false) elections that in its contexts appear as possible.

The third and last conceptual component of the Act is given by the circumstance that it has no intrinsic temporality. In this regard, Žižek vindicates decisionism close to that which Rosa Luxemburg upheld “against the revisionists” (Žižek 2003b: 133).

The time of the Event is not another time beyond and above the “normal” historical time, but a kind of inner loop within this time (...) When we observe the process from a distant of a vantage point, it appears to unfold in a straight line; what we lose from

sight, however, are the subjective inner loops which sustain this “objective” straight line. This is why the question “In what circumstances does the condensed time of the Event emerge?” is a false one: it involves the reinscription of the Event back into the positive historical process. That is to say: we cannot establish the time of the explosion of the Event through a close “objective” historical analysis (in the style of “when objective contradictions reach such and such a level, things will explode”): there is no Event outside the engaged subjective decision which creates it—if we wait for the time to become ripe for the Event, the Event will never occur (ibid: 134-35).

The preceding highlights an emergent quality of the Act: he who acts takes a risk, steps into a void and commits to it but without legitimization, in a Pascalian sort of wager. The actor seizes the moment because it is clear tomorrow will be too late. In other words, the Act entails the firm conviction that no permission is required of the *grand Autre*—the Act *ne s'autorise que d'elle-même*: “the search for the guarantee, is the fear of the abyss of the act” (Žižek 2002a: 8). The ripe moment must not be awaited; there is no such thing as a time of the Act. There are no grand secrets: an Act consists of an opportunity that emerges or, rather, an opportunity that one causes to emerge and as such must be taken.

Thus, the Lacanian maxim *ne pas ceder sur son désir*, the maxim which alleges that one must not surrender to desire—surrender to the mandate of the *grand Autre*—is what guides the Žižekian Act. Certainly, the Act implies that even if the cause is lost, it is necessary to demonstrate fidelity and forge ahead. As Žižek pointed out in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, the “past defeats accumulate the utopian energy which will explode in the final battle: ‘maturation’ is not waiting for ‘objective’ circumstances to reach maturity, but the accumulation of defeats” (Žižek 2008: 392). Only this persistence in true desire is what can be used to “guiding ourselves on nothing more than ambiguous signs from the future” (Žižek 2012b: 135).

Repeating Lenin... and Trotsky!

In summary, the Žižekian Act is delimited by a materialistic conception of ontology and it is based on the gesture making retroactively possible what appears impossible, the disturbance of ideological fantasy and, finally, the commitment that the subject assumes upon acting. It is necessary to state that, contrary to what may be expected, this Theory of the Act is far from a post-Marxist variant of politics. Žižek’s initiative is dedicated to laying the foundations of a materialistic and political Act. It represents a neutralization of

postmodern challenges launched against Marxism at the theoretical level by philosophers such as Ernesto Laclau, and it also represents a tacit alliance with the type of radical emancipatory politics associated with figures such as Lenin or Trotsky.

In this regard, the motto that Žižek adopted as a corollary of the *Contingence, Hegemony, Universality* debates is emblematic: repeating Lenin. In his afterword to a compilation of Lenin's writings and also in a book that was dedicated to Stalin's personage (Žižek 2001), Žižek arrived at a firm conclusion: "Today, more than ever, we should go back to Lenin" (Žižek 2002b: 273). With this call to Lenin, Žižek supports the rejection of capitalism and its democracy and he reiterates his critiques of multiculturalism and post-politics. He recognizes the redemptive character of violence and he answers those who demonize the Party as Robespierre when responding to the Girondists—"You want a revolution without a revolution!" (ibid: 297). The main reason for this repeat of Lenin is a very important affinity between Lenin and the Lacanian ethic. For Žižek the thought of Lenin:

is simply that there is no big Other; you never get the guarantee; you must act. You must take the risk and act. I think that this is the Lenin is truly a Lacanian Lenin. In the same way that Lacan says the analyst is authorized only by him—or herself—, Lenin's message is that a revolutionary *ne s'autorise que de lui-même*. That is to say, at a certain point you have to assume responsibility for the act (Žižek and Daly 2004: 164).

Even though Žižek promotes the reloading of Lenin (Budgen, Kouvelakis and Žižek 2007), he does not seek to be tied to the tight framework of Leninism—"a thoroughly *Stalinist* notion" (Žižek 2002b: 193). For him:

Repeating Lenin does not mean a *return* to Lenin—to repeat Lenin is to accept that "Lenin is dead", that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrously, but that there was a utopian spark in it worth saving. Repeating Lenin means that we have to distinguish between what Lenin actually did and the field of possibilities that he opened up, the tension in Lenin between what he actually did and another dimension: what was "in Lenin more than Lenin himself". To repeat Lenin is to repeat not what Lenin *did* but what he *failed to do*, his missed opportunities (ibid: 310).

This rejection of a traditional Leninist meaning is not an abandonment of Marxism. Žižek refuses "the search of the moment of the Fall" (Žižek 2007a: 1). For him all this subject must be resolutely rejected: "the Fall is to be inscribed into the very origins" (idem). Furthermore, "even if—or, rather, especially if—one submits the Marxist past to a ruthless critique, one has first to acknowledge it to as 'one's own', taking full responsibility for it, not

to comfortably get rid of the 'bad' turn of things by way of attributing it to a foreign intruder" (idem).

It is along these lines that Žižek defends Trotsky when he wrote *Terrorism and Communism*, which is, in fact, a curse for the Trotskyite tradition. As Žižek understands it, the Trotsky of Party government and revolutionary terror—that is, the Trotsky far-removed from the myth which conceives him as a democratic figure, supporter of psychoanalysis, friend of surrealists, lover of Frida Kahlo, etc.—“stands for an element which disturbs the alternative ‘either’ (social-)democratic socialism or Stalinist Totalitarianism” (Žižek 2008: 232). For Žižek, there is no Trotsky other than this cursed one. Indeed, only this Trotsky is the one that should be redeemed:

Trotsky is the one for whom there is no room either in pre-1990 Really Existing Socialism or in past-1990 Really Existing Capitalism, in which even those that are nostalgic for Communism do not know what to do with Trotsky's permanent revolution—perhaps the signifier “Trotsky” is the most appropriate designation of that which is worth redeeming in the Leninist legacy (Žižek 2002b: 305-306).

As a matter of fact, confronted with Stalin—where “‘Lenin lives forever’ as an obscene spirit which “does not know it is dead’, artificially kept alive as an instrument of power” (Žižek 2007b: XXXII)—Trotsky represents the site where Lenin lives “in so far as he embodies (...) the ‘eternal Idea’ of universal emancipation, the immortal striving for justice that no insults and catastrophes manage to kill” (ibid: XXXI).

The Right Hypothesis

And with this eternal Idea we confront the decisive point of Žižek's Leninist phase. Recently, his Theory of the Act has been increasingly interwoven with what Alain Badiou described as the right hypothesis.

The communist hypothesis remains the right hypothesis, as I have said, and I do not see any other. If this hypothesis should have to be abandoned, then it is not worth doing anything in the order of collective action. Without the perspective of communism, without this Idea, nothing in the historical and political future is of such a kind as to interest the philosopher. Each individual can pursue their private business, and we won't mention it again... But holding on to the Idea, the existence of the hypothesis, does not mean that its first form of presentation, focused on property and the state, must be maintained just as it is. In fact, what we are ascribed as a philosophical task, we could say even a duty, is to help a new modality of

existence of the hypothesis to come into being. New in terms of the type of political experimentation to which this hypothesis could give rise (Badiou 2008: 115).

It is true that in his last book *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek dedicated a considerable number of pages specifying his disagreements with Badiou. However, it is also undeniable that since his break with Laclau he has been developing a strong bond with the French philosopher. The reason why this bond has coalesced is that Badiou revealed to Žižek the nature of “the *politics of (universal) Truth*” (Žižek 1999: 132)—that is to say, what is “politics proper” (ibid: 208):

The moment in which a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests but aims at something more, and starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space. There is a clear contrast between this subjectivization and today’s proliferation of postmodern ‘identity politics’ whose goal is the exact opposite, that is, precisely the assertion of one’s particular identity, of one’s proper place within the social structure. The postmodern identity politics of particular (ethnic, sexual, etc.) lifestyles perfectly fits the depoliticized notion of society, in which every particular group is ‘accounted for’, has its specific status (of victim) acknowledged through affirmative action or other measures destined to guarantee social justice (idem).

As an answer to the postmodern conception of the political, Badiou has developed a conceptual framework where the notion of the Idea plays a central role through the endowment of Fidelity as support for the Subject. In consonance with the French philosopher, Žižek has pointed out that those Ideas which are true, at the same time, are “eternal, they are indestructible, always return every time they are proclaimed dead” (Žižek 2008: 5). And there is an Idea that precisely because it is eternal—that is, because it is transhistorical, because its universality cuts across specific historical words and particular horizons of meaning—it has central importance: the Idea of communism. The Idea that condenses “the ‘four fundamental concepts’ at work from Plato through the medieval millenarian revolts and on to Jacobinism, Leninism and Maoism: strict *egalitarian justice*, disciplinary *terror*, political *voluntarism*, and *trust in the people*” (Žižek 2009: 125). Particularly that “platonic Idea which persisted, returning again and again after every defeat” (ibid: 126). Expressly what is specifically intrinsic to the eternal Idea of communism is its subsistence: “it survives the failures of its realization as a specter which returns again and again, in an endless persistence best captured in the (...) words from Beckett’s *Worstward Ho*: ‘Try again. Fail again. Fail better’” (ibid: 125).

As Žižek indicates, to conceive communism as an eternal Idea implies the realization “that the situation which generates it is no less eternal, i.e., that the antagonism to which communism reacts will always exist” (ibid: 88). This affirmation permits the insistence that in communism in a strictly Marxist sense: “there are social groups which, on account of their lacking a determinate place in the ‘private’ order of the social hierarchy, stand directly for universality” (ibid: 99). There are what Jacques Rancière calls the “part of those who have no part” (Rancière 1999: 11). For Žižek what is definitively substantive is to show unconditional solidarity with this part of non-part and its position of singular universality.

Nevertheless, who or what in contemporary global society embodies this part of non-part? Laclau’s critique regarding the “blind alley” (Laclau 2005: 238)—where Žižek in his attempt to outline “any concrete historical actor for his anti-capitalist struggle” (idem) or to “provide any theory of the emancipatory subject” (idem)—seems to have a moment of truth. Indeed, the Slovenian philosopher is a bit ambiguous and imprecise when he tries to define the nature of the part of non-part of social body.

In defense of Žižek, it must be said that he does not believe, as Badiou does, that politics are unable to intervene “in a ‘world-less’ universe” (Žižek 2009: 127). For him, the task of politics does not consist of creating new worlds, new *points de capiton*, and so on. According to Žižek, what politics truly has to do is “to distinguish between ‘false’ and ‘true’ points, ‘false’ and ‘true’ choices, that is, to bring back the third element whose obliteration sustains the false choice” (Žižek 2008: 385-386). It is an error, thus, to accept the State as a fact and to operate away from it. This logic must be dismantled, rejecting its false election terms (that is, in the State or out the State).

For Badiou currently it is only possible to create political truth being faithful to a local event, a local struggle, etc. This reveals that he has adhered to a version of postmodernity where the only possibility is a local act of resistance. Thus, paradoxically, Badiou has ended up coinciding with Laclau but through different paths: the first through the autonomism, the second through a gradual reformism. In the same sense, both resign themselves to anti-capitalist politics. Laclau’s radical democracy and Badiou’s communism retreat from the horizon of Marxism.

Žižek’s Leninist phase is an indicator that in his confection of the Theory of the Act he is far from Laclau or Badiou. In his singular way, Žižek remains faithful to the political

project of Marxism. In this sense, it is extremely emblematic that the thinker from Ljubljana maintains that the dictatorship of proletariat constitutes “the only true choice today” (ibid: 412). This insistence in the proletariat refutes the accusation that he does not conceive a subject for his emancipatory struggle. In short, there is none other than the proletariat—the part of non-part in contemporary global society—which embodies the subject of Žižekian Act; there is no other than the working class which is in conditions of revealing the contradictions of the symbolic order and showing what is *le Réel* which overdetermines and distorts it (that is, obviously, the antagonism of class struggle).

Final Words

Nevertheless, Marxism does not involve a series of political aims alone: it also implies a scientific project and a philosophical one. As to the scientific project, I already said that Žižek’s premises do not adjust to the conception of historical materialism: essentially, they are inscribed in an eminently materialistic ontology which is articulated through Lacanian motifs. Further to the philosophical project, it is apparent that in works like *The Ticklish Subject*, *The Parallax View* and recently *Less Than Nothing* Žižek has sought to rehabilitate “the philosophy of *dialectical materialism*” (Žižek 2006: 4) through the vindication of a “Hegelian-Lacanian position” (ibid: 5). If all this is considered, it becomes evident that Žižek’s relationship with the paradigm of Marxism is certainly more ambiguous than it seems at first glance.

In its own way, the Žižekian Theory of the Act is determined by this ambiguity. At the same time, this theory rejects and accepts the postulates of Marxism; it contradicts and admits the problematic antagonism of class struggle; it questions and reaffirms the historical materialistic conception of social change. Thus confronted with the dilemma *Act or Revolution*, as Slavoj Žižek we must follow Groucho Marx’s lead: a refusal of choice. When faced with the question “Tea or coffee?” (Žižek 2000a: 90) Groucho refuses to choose and responds with a resounding “Yes, please!” (idem).

In spite of its ambiguity, the Theory of the Act studied in preceding pages constitutes a useful contribution that, hopefully, will be taken into account to accomplish the duty of our time: the reconstruction and reformulation of the principal thesis of Marxism. Ultimately, only through the completion of this duty will it be possible to assume

a truly radical emancipatory position that can confront the “new epoch of interesting times” (Žižek 2011: 403) in which we are living with the current crisis of global capitalism.

Notes

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