

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Eight, Number One

Oedipus and the Social Bond in Žižek and Badiou

Daniel Tutt, PhD Candidate, European Graduate School

Introduction

Psychoanalysis, from Freud to Lacan, has relied on the law of the father, what Lacan refers to as the Name-of-the-Father and Oedipal formations in their development of the subject. Critics of psychoanalysis have argued that this reliance on the father, and by extension, the Oedipal formation, reinforces patriarchal authority and repression both at the site of the subject and in society more generally (Butler 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 2009; Borch-Jacobsen 1988). In this essay, I will argue that in Lacan's revision of Freud's Oedipus complex, what Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father, we find a potential for working through repression, hierarchy and the masters discourse. I will argue that for both Badiou and Žižek, Oedipus is an important part of their respective theories of subjectivity, and I aim to show that this is not tied to reinforcing the authority of the father, but is tied to the development of a theory of the subject and emancipatory politics. Despite the fact that we find in Lacan's later work, after 1963 and his refusal to publish the *Non-Existent Seminar* on the Name-of-the-Father (Miller: 2007), and despite the fact that he was continually reluctant to pin the concept down, it remains a crucial theory for psychoanalytic thought after Lacan.

As a primary point of reference, I will examine the arguments that Žižek presents in the conclusion of *Less Than Nothing*, “The Political Suspension of the Ethical.” In this culminating chapter, the question of Lacan’s masters discourse and its relation to the social bond and emancipatory politics is examined, and much of the chapter is foregrounded by Mladen Dolar’s essay, *Freud and the Political*. I conclude by examining a few of the important differences between Badiou and Žižek on the father’s authority and the role of the master in the context of thinking the social bond. This long-standing debate is examined in chapter 12 of *Less Than Nothing*, and we find Žižek’s most sustained critique of Badiou since *The Ticklish Subject* (1999) throughout the text. Both Žižek and Badiou maintain a reliance on the Oedipal formation to ground their different ideas of the subject, however, for both thinkers; the Oedipal dialectic is defective in late capitalism. This defectiveness of Oedipus, for both Žižek and Badiou, is linked to how enjoyment under capitalism is marked by a contradiction between ideological individualism and the way in which the market imposes standardized modes of enjoyment (Žižek 2012: 671). The Truth-Event for Badiou and the act for Žižek is what marks a difference in their thinking on the political, however, for both thinkers the act the Truth-Event lead them to insist on a separation of the political from the ethical (Bosteels 2005: 240 – 241). But they respond to this division of the ethical from the political in different ways, and the consequences of these differences pertain important insights into the question of emancipatory politics today.

The Freudian Question of Liberation and Oedipus

Rather paradoxically, the Freudian school, in all of its diverse manifestations, from Wilhelm Reich to the Frankfurt School, locates the potential for the liberation from repression at the site of the family itself. In the Freudian-Marxist tradition of the twentieth century of the Frankfurt School, psychoanalysis was the theoretical tool used to liberate the authority of the patriarchal family. In texts such as Herbert Marcuse’s *A Study on Authority*, Wilhelm Reich’s, *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, we find radical critiques of repression, and the authoritarian family had become “one of the key bulwarks of revolution” as Marcuse admonishes (Marcuse 2008: 76). It was often the objective of these texts to re-coordinate libidinal relations within the family and to re-conceive of its intimate connection to political subjectivity. In Reich’s *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, the repression that is induced by Oedipal processes at the subjective level was not

totally abolished, and thus Reich sought to preserve a normalized level of paternal authority (Reich 1970: 4). More generally, it is hard to find Freudian-influenced thinkers who did not in one form or another rely on Oedipus as a mandatory process of subjectivity. Overall, we can say that the argument on behalf of Frankfurt School thinkers was that if we were to completely eliminate the paternal authority we would fall into a political stalemate. Rather, the goal was to develop modes of resistance that maintains some proper, and even normative reliance on Oedipal structures.

The first and most comprehensive critique of this theoretical tendency came with Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), a text that sought to modify the terms of the Freudian-Marxist debate about how psychoanalysis can participate in the revolution against repression in society. Here, we find a wholesale rejection of many of these premises of the Freudian project of liberation. In brief, *Anti-Oedipus* took aim at the conservative potential inherent to Freud's work, locating this tendency at the point when Freud discovered the autonomous value to psychic repression as a condition of culture acting against the incestuous drives (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 117). They find in Reich's "productive desire" the beginning point for launching their project, and an emancipatory potential to psychoanalysis, albeit they claim that Reich's approach does not operate effectively to further a revolution in desire" (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 118). In their new framework, Oedipal desire is no longer invented by the unconscious, (as the psychoanalysts claim) but is posited as a discursive invention of psychoanalysts-as-an-institution in capitalist society that relies steadfastly on a metaphysics of Oedipus. Deleuze and Guattari recognize a liberatory potential in Oedipus, but they claim it is relegated to a defective normalization along the "lines of flight" of capitalist production, a process that can only be overcome by the creation of a new practice, what they call "schizoanalysis," and the invention of a new subject, the "schizo subject." Schizoanalysis posits a transcendental unconscious defined by the immanence of the schizo subject (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 23). They identify two problematic forms of Oedipus that psychoanalysis, as a theoretical practice, and as a desiring machine that serves as a handmaiden to capitalist desire flows, creates in society. The first form is the Oedipus of social authority and the Oedipus of familial authority, or what they refer to as the Oedipus of crisis and the Oedipus of structure (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 68). The most essential possibility brought forth by Freud, in their view is the potential inherent in both of these versions of Oedipus to live beyond the Law of the father, and thus to live beyond the Law (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 117).

While Deleuze and Guattari's account is tied to an important political project, it misses an essential feature to the process of Oedipus according to Lacan: the stabilizing role of what the Oedipal drama unleashes for the subject. In this reading, Oedipus does not signify a dependence upon the father as an authoritarian figure alone. On the contrary, Oedipus is what figures a break from the father's authority in a way that disrupts all traditional roles within the family. As Etienne Balibar notes:

The family structure is not based on Oedipus, but Oedipus, to the contrary, inscribes the conflict and the variability of subjective positions into its core and thus hinders any possibility for the family to impose the roles which it prescribes as simple functions for individuals to fulfill 'normality' (Balibar 1997: 337).

Oedipus is what de-roots the family and prevents its normal functioning. Under Oedipus, every subject is placed into an impasse, and no subject can simply occupy his or her place (Dolar 2009: 23). While Deleuze and Guattari's text is clear that their critique was not a critique of Lacan, but rather of "Lacanianism," there has been a new movement to criticize Lacanianism, by thinkers such as Judith Butler—someone who relies on Lacan and psychoanalysis in her own theories. In the context of the postmodern debate about paternal authority, many have accused psychoanalysts, particularly Lacanians of a secret desire secretly to bring the father back to a position of authority (Fort Fin, Michel 2005: 38).¹ In both cases, the function of this father, according to critics, no longer has an emancipatory capacity but remains tethered to the Law of the symbolic father and tied to psychoanalysis' own theoretical necessary conditions, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the "trinity of Lack, Law, and Desire." The trinity forms a theological strain of commitments in psychoanalysis that secures the role of the father as a normative site of integration into the social. As Judith Butler points out:

There is a theological impulse within the theory of psychoanalysis that seeks to put out of play any criticism of the symbolic father, the law of psychoanalysis itself. The theory exposes its own tautological defense. The law beyond laws will finally put an end to the anxiety produced by a critical relation to final authority that clearly does not know when to stop: a limit to the social, the subversive, the possibility of agency and change, a limit that we cling to, symptomatically, as the final defeat of our own power. Its defenders claim that to be without such a law is pure voluntarism or anarchy! (Butler 2000: 21).

We must go further than these critiques by asking, in the so-called death of Oedipus as an operative process of subjectivity today's society, how is a reliance on the symbolic power of the father functioning today apropos politics? Žižek points out in the concluding chapter of *Less Than Nothing*, how many contemporary Lacanian figures such as Jacques Alain Miller depend on an ironist distance to authority figures (Žižek 2012: 906). Miller reads into Lacan's famous statement, "*those who are not taken in err*" that those who don't act as if semblances are real, things may turn for the worse. Miller points out how cynicism consists of constantly seeing the illusion behind the semblance of authority figures. He argues that it is only by invoking a rapport with the power of the function of the semblances of authority that enables enjoyment, which is another way of saying that conveying a healthy recognition of the function and purpose of power figures in everyday social life is what enables the "symbolic fiction" to operate. Miller's reading of authority—which is closely related to the Law of the father—most certainly reinforces Butler's claim that psychoanalysis sees the very maintenance of society through a necessary level of repression. The way that cynicism is conceived in this position, what Žižek refers to as the "ironist" position, functions through the disavowing of the semblances of power in society. Seeing the semblances as empty props in and of themselves is the most dangerous position for the ironist because "if you turn the social turtle on its back, you will never succeed in turning it back on its paws" (Fluery 2011: 96). In typical Žižekian form, he flips the meaning of cynicism around by noting how Lacan's warning "those who are not taken in err" refers not to taking symbolic semblances as real, but in substantializing the Real itself, in reducing the symbolic to a series of semblances (Žižek 2012: 971). Because the status of jouissance in Lacan's *Seminar XX (Encore)* is "a semblance within a semblance," in other words, jouissance does not exist in-itself as Miller would have it, but is "discernible only through impasses of symbolization" (Žižek 2012: 971). The difference here revolves around two different notions of cynicism and their relation to authority as semblance. Bodily jouissance is conceived by Miller in a liberal hedonist mode—to each their own enjoyment. What Miller overlooks is the way enjoyment under capitalism is marked by a contradiction between ideological individualism in which the market imposes standardized modes of enjoyment and bodily jouissance (Žižek 2012: 971).

Lacan and the Names-of-the-Father

While this essay is not the place for an elaborate exegesis of Lacan's work on the Names-of-the-Father, a few fundamental remarks are necessary. Since Lacan's early work in "The Individual Myth of the Neurotic," from 1952, up to his late work on the *Synthome*, he was opposed to any path of normalization of the father function in analytic settings. For example, Lacan progressively sought to distance the Names-of-the-Father from the unconscious. By the time of his work on the *Synthome* in the early 1970's, the Names were isolated to a religious reality, and at one point, Lacan went so far as to claim the Names-of-the-Father to be God (Lacan 1976: 126). Lacan's early work on the Name-of-the-Father in *Seminar III* on the Psychoses was directly tied to how the paternal function had undergone an historical shift in the family role, and how the authority of the father had been altered in modern times (Lacan 1950: 13). This alteration of the paternal function in modernity affected the ego Ideal and led to a restructuring of the "narcissistic subduction of the libido" in the narcissistic field. Thus, to speak of the authority of the father, Lacan situates the father in the context of a larger cultural shift in the way that individualism is constituted in modernity within the transition of authority formations in the nineteenth century. What's crucial in this alteration of the ego Ideal is that it complements the utilitarian social order, and for Lacan, this leads to two types of effects: the first is "possible political catastrophes" and the second is "generalized psychopathological effects" (Lacan 1997: 57). As we find in contemporary fundamentalist movements that seek identification with the primal father of unbridled jouissance, the "political catastrophes" of the decline of the father's authority is most certainly still with us.

In Lacan's re-formulation of Oedipus in *Seminar V*, there are three essential movements, which I will summarize with the hope of not simplifying all together. The first moment of Oedipus is when the child wishes to become the enigmatic signified of the mother so that he/she will then become subjected to the law of the mother. This is the first Oedipal moment because the child has what it wants and has consequently moved out of the imaginary stage into the symbolic, where desire is experienced as desire of the Other. The child develops a type of autonomy in this stage through identification with the law of the mother, which can only be accessed by recourse to the father's function. The second moment is the confrontation with the father whereby the father regulates the union of mother and child, but the child is still under the law of the mother and requires a break from the side of the father. The final movement, and thus the real initiation of the

son/daughter is the father function that enables the son/daughter to break from the second movement by providing a “Yes” to the son’s impasse of jouissance (Lacan 1957: 15). The “yes” of the father is a yes that says: you may form a new jouissance that enables the son/daughter to break from the impasse that Oedipus introduces (Stevens 2007: 5). The extent to which Oedipus becomes re-inscribed onto other objects, and the daddy-mommy-me “complex” proliferates is of course what so deeply concerned Deleuze and Guattari and in many ways it served as the basis of *Anti-Oedipus*’ interrogation of psychoanalysis.

In Lacan’s creation of the Name-of-the-Father, there is a quasi-theological source to the father’s authority that traces its lineage to the quiddity of “I am what I am” in the Old Testament (Miller 2012: 3). As Jacques Alain-Miller claims, the Name-of-the-Father is another name for the death of God in psychoanalysis, which implies that the father, or God in his many dimensions, ultimately makes no difference to the unconscious (Miller 1998: 4). As Deleuze and Guattari note in *Anti-Oedipus*, Nietzsche also knew this truth when he claimed that the news of the death of God is like a violence done to humanity that always manifests the need for a belief, for a prop, for a structure. The Names-of-the-Father can be understood in two different general senses. Firstly, at the level of the name, it deals with how the inscription of a name, a unique name appropriate to the singularity of the subject directs the subject toward an ideal. The “Name” of the father is tied to the three-part father dialectic we find in Freud’s Totem and Taboo, and it represents the symbolic father. We ground the father in name only because the father is the metaphor of the mother’s desire according to Lacan, which represents one of his primary revisions of Freud’s core idea of Oedipus.

In Lacan, the concept of the Name-of-the-Father links the Freudian Oedipus complex to the myth of *Totem and Taboo* and the paternal metaphor. The father plays a crucial role in this process of subjectivity as Lacan points out in Seminar 17: it is the father that is the one who presides over the first identification (Lacan 1991: 88). By Seminar XVII, Lacan reads Freud’s conception of the Oedipus complex as an inherent “unusable quality” for analysts. Lacan’s distancing from Oedipus is done on two grounds: one, in Freud’s time, he had a fundamentally different relation to authority, to the father, and to superego. A quote from Lacan:

A father has, with the master—I speak of the master as we know him, as he functions—only the most distant of relationships since, in short, at least in the society Freud was familiar with, it is he who works for everybody. He has

responsibility for the “famil” I was speaking of before. Isn’t that sufficiently strange to suggest to us that after all what Freud retains in fact, if not in intention, is very precisely, namely, the idea of an all-loving father? (Lacan 1991: 100).

Secondly, Lacan sees in Freud’s interpretation of Dora, Emma, and Anna, each studied and written about in *Studies in Hysteria* with Breuer, that, he claims, “the Oedipus complex substituted the myth of the Oedipus for the knowledge that he gathered from the mouths of hysterics” (Lacan 1991: 99). The problem is that the Oedipus complex plays the role of knowledge with a claim to truth, that is to say knowledge that is located in the figure of the analyst’s discourse on the site of truth” (Lacan 1991: 99). Another important point that Lacan makes apropos Oedipus is that Freud maintains the religious myth through his invention of the father myth, despite the fact that Freud himself argued that the decline of the father’s authority in modernity is what leads to atheism. Lacan reverses this assumption and claims that as soon as the father enters the field of the symbolic, he is castrated. This castration, this dead father, i.e. the Name-of-the-Father indicates the death of God is not a jubilant death of God as we find in Nietzsche. This is the core of the other side of psychoanalysis and one of the key lessons of Seminar XVII. What this means is that we still have to face the law now that the father is dead. It is on the basis of the father’s death that jouissance is prohibited in the first place (Lacan 1991: 120).

Badiou’s Oedipal Dialectic

Badiou’s relation to psychoanalysis and Lacan remains in many ways the centerpiece to his philosophical career beginning with his major text on politics and philosophy *Theory of the Subject*. In an essay entitled “The Son’s Aleatory Identity in Today’s World,” Badiou brings the Oedipal drama into his own philosophical system with focus on the larger question of the crisis of youth identity in today’s times. Badiou’s account of Oedipus is close to that of Freud, and even states explicitly that his reading is a re-reading of Freud’s myths in *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*, but the key difference between them is the way in which Badiou develops the myths as a distinctive, albeit defective, dialectic.

In Badiou’s revision of the Oedipal myth according to Freud, the first act of the drama consists of the son’s fratricidal murder of the father of the horde, to stop his possessive hoarding of all the women. In the second act, the son sublimates a new father onto the symbolic that functions as the Law of society (Lacan 2005: 556). In the third and

final act, the son confronts the father once again, and after undergoing a brutal bodily initiation with the father, enters into the reign of mutual love with the father, and the Oedipal dialectic has reached its end point. These three acts form a dialectic that repeats and creates a *necessary* basis for resolving the impasse of the father to son relation.

The son must pass through these stages not in linear but in logical time: aggressiveness, followed by submission to the Law, and the Christian reign of mutual love. The son's identity today is thus, according to Badiou, deprived of the father of the real and the symbolic (the first two acts) resulting in the son's "permanent adolescence." To apply religious symbolism, the son is in a type of purgatory where his initiation into the reign of mutual love is all that is possible. Badiou refers to this type of existence as an "initiation without initiation" and in an imaginary relation to the father. The son, lacking a passage or confrontation with the first two acts is reduced to what Badiou a body. The son's identity in today's time is reduced to a "permanent adolescence" which has a political consequence for Badiou in so far as the dialectic that initiates the son remains defective, a problem Badiou locates at the site of the "democratic" state and its "gravely affected in its symbolic capacity" (Badiou 2007: 77). The identity instability of the son is "a profound symptom of a problem that affects the State" (Badiou 2007: 78).

It is important to note in this discussion, the fundamental difference between Badiou and Lacan on the question of the subject. For Lacan, the subject exists upon entry into the chain of signifiers, whereas for Badiou, the subject requires incorporation into a truth body and an undergoing of fidelity to an Event, which is more generally understood as a subject thought in the context of language (Lacan) compared to a subject thought in terms of a world (Badiou). Badiou's subject is always a becoming-subject in a given context. The Badiouian conception of the subject is thus always composed with the material of the individual but is posited beyond the individual. Where Lacan's notion of subjectivization, or the traversal of the fundamental fantasy, Badiou's subject begins, more precisely, Badiou's subject begins with incorporation into the process of a Truth.

In Badiou's essay on the son's aleatory identity, the son is reduced to a body and unable to become a Subject because he is deprived of initiation with the father, however, he identifies three body positions of the son today. The first body for the son is what Badiou calls the "perverted body," whereby the initiation with the father is deprived and the son, taking on his body the of the end of the previous dialectic acts out the

aggressiveness he is deprived of. The perverted body revels in the failed dialectic and seeks to simulate an initiation with the father of the horde through body piercing, violence, drugs, etc. Ultimately, what this pseudo initiation revolts from is the predominant subjective body, what Badiou calls the “meritorious body” – following the market’s demand to “Succeed!”

To figure of the perverted body, can be understood with reference to *Fight Club*, where after performing on the market and following his father’s demands, the “anonymous” narrator (played by Edward Norton) and imagined through his supreme alter ego Tyler Durden, (played by Brad Pitt) reaches a pre-mid-life crisis after the meritorious route in life had failed him, leaving him with a resounding emptiness. As he tells his father, who in Badiou’s framework represents the symbolic father operating by the anonymous Law of the market: after graduating college I got a job, and after I got a job, I got married, and so on and so on. But ultimately, the meritorious route provided no initiation, which is why in part he invented the *Fight Club*, to stage a scene for the release of aggressiveness (the first Oedipal movement in Badiou’s account). The actual *Fight Club* provided a perfect stage for the acting out of the father that is suppressed in our times (the father of the horde), that brings the son into initiation with his own aggressiveness.

The second body Badiou makes an account of is the prevailing body the market demands of the son, what Badiou calls the “meritorious body.” The meritorious body is still deprived of a proper initiation with the father of the symbolic that leaves the son in a state of immobility because, as Badiou remarks, “the market is forever immobile, so that which produces Law becomes an immobility” (Badiou 2007: 78). The third body is what Badiou calls the “sacrificed body” that remains tethered to tradition, mortified to live with what a new body can support. This body is the one of religious tradition and following a conservative injunction, trapped with a father of the weak symbolic Law that is ultimately one that does not provide any adequate lever of authority, which the sacrificed body desires.

Initiation Without Initiation: Varsity Blues and Project X

What better way to apply Badiou’s notion of the Oedipal dialectic than by examining how Hollywood portrays the father’s authority. In the genre of teen drama comedies, two films that pose paternal authority and father-to-son reconciliation, Brian Robbins’ *Varsity Blues* (1999) and Nima Nourizadeh’s *Project X* (2012), are worth noting. In *Varsity*

Blues, a high school coming of age story set in a small Texas town, wherein the boys are in revolt against two depictions of the father; their biological fathers, who are in virtually every scene depicted as burned out weak fathers, encouraging competition and other demands that never get met by the boys. The other father figure in the film resembles the Freudian father of the horde, played by the football coach played by Jon Voight. The depiction of the father of the horde, or an ultra-aggressive father figure is very rare in teen drama films, which is why his presence in this film is striking. The film depicts a group of high school senior boys, all stars of the football team in a small Texas town. Like *Friday Night Lights* after it, *Varsity Blues* depicts the glory days of small town high school football stardom, and the immense pressure that is put on the boys to perform at their highest level for the glory and pride of the town. The film's protagonist, Jonathan Moxson "Mox" played by James Van Der Beek breaks the cliché mold of the sacrificed body athlete of tradition. He has pretensions of leaving the small town behind and getting accepted into Brown University to study literature. Mox is able to be a nerd and a tough guy all at once without facing the usual ridicule that comes with the smart jock.

The coach of the team, "Coach Kilmer" played by Jon Voight has for over 25 years been the most winning football coach in school history. Even the boys' fathers, who also had him as their coach when they played for the team, see him as the town's father figure, and his brutal behavior of "winning at all costs" does not go challenged. The film portrays two types of fathers—the actual biological fathers of the boys, who are envious of their son's adolescence, freedom and athleticism. These are the fathers in Lacanian terminology of the anonymous symbolic Law. Coach Kilmer has a different function, he resembles a father of the horde, as his uncontested reign serves as the hidden site of the player's repression and their forced status into what Badiou would call the "sacrificed body." Kilmer keeps his players tied to a ruthless regiment that ends up injuring the star quarterback because he hid his knee injury and forced him to play despite his injury until the second to final game of the season he injures his knee, ruining his football career. Once the starting quarterback is out with an injury, the protagonist "Mox" is brought in as the lead quarterback.

It is at this point that the film stages an Oedipal drama. Mox is the son who leads the rebellion against both the fathers of the symbolic Law (the weak biological fathers) and the father of the horde (Coach Kilmer). At a team BBQ the day before the final game, Mox publicly mocks the father's obscene obsession with the boys' football

stardom by throwing a football into his own father's face, leaving him with a black eye and embarrassed publicly. But there is no discipline Mox faces from this act, and the father's envy of the son's *jouissance* ultimately results in the father's infantilization (Badiou 2007: 77). By the film's end, Mox leads the team in deposing Coach Kilmer from his ruthless drive to win at all costs by refusing to allow him to take the field in the final half of the football game. The last scene of the film shows the boys leading the team to victory without a coach and winning the glory of their town without the authority intervention of the fathers—either the symbolic (impotent real fathers, or the primal father, embodied in the figure of Coach Kilmer).

The film's marketing line, "make your own rules," reveals the fantasy the film presents: a world where authority does not exist and you make it all on your own. This coming of age without initiation fits almost perfectly with Badiou's concept of the non-dialectizable Oedipal drama of "initiation without initiation." But *Varsity Blues* goes farther than this and actually stages and deposes the fathers and thus takes the son's through the Oedipal dialectic. The fantasy enables the viewer to enter a world where they are free of the pressure the sacrificed body faces to live up to tradition, and in this case, of the pressure that comes with having to "win at all costs"—the demand that the primal father (Coach Kilmer) puts on the boys. That the boys win on their own terms, and thus defy tradition, they defy their fathers' *jouissance*, precisely because it is no longer enviable. It is the son's *jouissance* that is the object of envy according to Badiou. What's unique about this particular film is that unlike other films in the post 90's high school drama genre, there is no depiction of outcast kids or nerds in *Varsity Blues*. In fact, the closest to an outcast or nerd depicted in the film is the protagonist Mox, and thus what is missing is the perverted body. The film's ideology is thus at the level of a teen fantasy that clings to the idea that the son can overcome all barriers and invent a new *jouissance* despite the failure of the fathers around them—the fantasy is rooted in a the notion that we no longer need the fathers authority.

In considering the question of the three bodies' of the son, is Badiou not missing a fourth body? If the meritorious body constitutes the predominant body of the market, that must follow the superego injunction "Succeed!" at all costs, is not capitalism now creating conditions for even the meritorious body to face exclusion from even minimal participation in the market? There should be a fourth body, what I call the "non-meritorious body" that is excluded from the market, thrown to the assembly line, forced into unemployment, not eligible for college loans, and thus is outside of the meritorious

society. This “non-meritorious body” is still thrown to the Law of the market, but his capacity is rendered doubly immobile, both by his lack of access to the market, and in his symbolic relation to the market. Badiou’s proposal of a non-dialectizable body relegates the son to a supra-adolescence that is reduced to immobility based on the anonymity of the Law. As Badiou remarks, “the law, because the market produces it, is forever immobile, so that which produces Law becomes always produces immobility” (Badiou 2007: 75).

Ultimately, the impasse the son faces is not located in a defective dialectical initiation with the father. Badiou’s claim is that this impasse must be resolved ultimately by the destruction of the market, but in this destruction, what type of mediator appears to “initiate” the son? What enables the son to “live for an Idea” as Badiou would say? We find in Badiou’s “perverted body” perhaps something close to the subjective position that is able to break with the Law of the market, even though it falls back on pornography, hedonism, and so on. The question of the son’s becoming a Subject is one that strikes at the heart of Marx’s larger project:

Maybe the sons of today, in their identity instability, are the symptom of a profound process that affects the State. It is perhaps in our sons that we can read the result of that long-abandoned prediction of Marx, the decay of the State. Marx had ascribed it under the sign of communism, of revolution, to that which will restore the complete dialectic of our sons in the element of equality and versatile universal knowledge. Do we have today the reactive and decomposed version of this decay? The “democratic” state is in any case gravely affected in its symbolic capacity. Perhaps by our sons are we confronted more than ever with the strategic choice between two conflicting modes of the State: communism or barbarism. (Badiou, 2007: 82 – 93)

The Son’s Catharsis: Project X

Thus far, we have seen how from Badiou’s non-dialectizable account of Oedipus that reduces the son to body of permanent adolescence, the *jouissance* between father and son is reversed: it is the father that now tends to envy the son’s *jouissance*. This means that father-to-son-reconciliation tends to take place in the infantilization of the father, which we saw depicted in the weak fathers in *Varsity Blues*. In *Project X* (2012), the film’s main character is a shy and socially awkward high school senior who, by the pressure of his friends, decides to throw a party when his parents leave town. The father leaves the house without any worry that his son will throw a party because he knows his

son is asocial and a bit of a loser. In the opening scenes of the film, the father tells his wife,

I'm just saying that he's not that type of kid, you know. He's got a couple friends, they're gonna hang out, but they're not gonna do anything. He's a sweet kid, but he's a loser.

The son ends up throwing a party so epic, and so wild that it gets completely out of control and the house is almost burned down. Drugs, alcohol, DJ's, and over 1,500 to 2,000 people ascend on the party causing the police, SWAT, and fire trucks to all respond, and even the nightly news covers it. For the first three fourths of the party, the son is nervously seeking to get everyone to leave, but at a certain moment, he finally submits to the idea that he is the host of the party and he begins to enjoy himself. The crescendo of the party, and of the entire film, takes place when the son stands atop his roof and give the television helicopter hovering over his house the middle finger and dives off the roof into his pool, eliciting a loud applause from the crowds gathered in his backyard. The question is to what extent can we locate this moment of pure hedonistic embrace with the party as the moment of becoming cool—i.e. as the creation of a new *jouissance*? While the son receives symbolic recognition from his peers, lets it all go and jumps off the roof, embracing a side of him he never revealed, does not the real moment of catharsis occur the day after, when his parents arrive home? The father approaches the son, and somehow the son looks different, somehow physically he is more he has a certain confidence about him. The father approaches him in the yard, and behind him, stands their house, which is almost burnt to the ground:

Dad: I just didn't think you had it in you.

Thomas: I know. Sorry I let you down.

Dad: No, I literally didn't think you had this in you. So uh, how many people were here?

Thomas: Uh, 15 hundred. Couple thousand maybe.

Dad: Wow.

Thomas: You should have seen it. It was awesome.

Dad: Well, you're still fucked Thomas.

The nonverbal communication that takes place in this scene is equally significant to the dialogue. The father, also altered by the event of the party, gives the son an unmistakable look of envy for the son's ability to defy his authority and yet also realizes his own self through this action. The catharsis that took place for the son in the midst of his throwing the party occurred precisely at the level of *jouissance* that the son possessed, and the father envied. The act of throwing the party, while it gave the son a sense of self-invention, importantly, it came at the possible expense of losing his father's trust, but this risk had to be crossed in order for the son to invent a new *jouissance*. This point of father-to-son-reconciliation is the crucial psychoanalytic insight that *Project X* offers. The son's action of throwing the party came at the risk of his entire social existence under the service of goods, but this was a transgression that takes place so that a *jouissance* can form for the son. The film's fantasy operates here at two levels, at the point of a transgression to the service of goods, the son passes through the imaginary reconciliation with the father at the level of *jouissance*, but this passage comes at the cost of his ability to fulfill the meritorious body injunction to succeed. This impasse had to be crossed for the son to realize himself. The film's depiction of Southern Californian adolescent hedonism gone wild as it were, should be read in a Badiouian framework as an almost hyperbole of the perverted body in revolt from the meritorious body. The party itself was an initiation into a new body for the son; it was his transition into the perverted body. But the more profound lesson the film reveals apropos the father's authority is that in order to realize his own identity, the son had to defy the father, but his act of defiance came through the reversal of envy for the *jouissance* of the son.

The Father or the Master? Yes, Please!

"A true master is only he who can provoke the other to transform himself through his acts." Hegel

In *The Life and Death of Psychoanalysis: On Unconscious Desire and Sublimation* (2011), Jamieson Webster raises the question of the father and psychoanalysis by invoking Badiou. For Webster, a practicing psychoanalyst, Badiou became the last possible master as he had [in the figure of the philosopher] "disavowed the value of semblance," making him function as the "last master of the primal horde" (Webster 2011:

21). The master and the father are not conflated in Webster's account, nor should they be, but the master and the father of the primal horde maintain a similarity insofar as they are non-castratable. For Webster, the master is that figure who inhabits a space that is an exception to the rule. The "rule" is the deadlock between desire and love, a problem she sees as inherent to psychoanalysis (Webster 2011: 36). It is the figure of Badiou—the philosopher that resolves Webster's deadlock on the side of love that offers the solution. In his refusal to be drawn into the desire of the analyst, the philosopher (Badiou) is placed in the position of the impasse itself, occupying the place of the master.

Badiou, one could say, is the real master that Lacan said everyone has failed to understand – the father of the primal horde. He is the one who outlines the eternal place held by the father in all his many dimensions. He is, if we are to work through a continuing *petit hystérie*, the most important figure for psychoanalysis to begin to understand (Webster, 2011: 99).

Webster's impasse is one that is inherent to the institution of psychoanalysis today. The impasse we've examined in the form of the failed father function is of a different nature entirely, however, are not the two linked in the sense that we can't seem to find a proper relation to the father, and we thus fall back onto the figure of the master to resolve these deadlocks—between desire and love. As Freud claims in *Civilization and its Discontents*, "the impasse between love and desire is our universal affliction under civilization" (Freud 2007: 23). For Badiou, on the other hand, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective, which is the condition of love, the deadlock between the creation of a new *jouissance* and the market's prevention appears to be a new affliction that plagues postmodern subjectivity.

The master is the figure who enables the impasse to generate movement and chance. The father of the horde, as we find in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, is the unconscious father—he is the dead father that is duped into thinking he wasn't murdered in the parricide by the son's. Badiou claims this father can only be accessed via semblance, and Lacan most certainly agrees with this assessment as we saw above. Yet we find in Badiou's account of the non-dialectical situation of the father's authority as it relates to subjectivization, that Badiou opts for a father function that is able to bring stability to the son's identity, but this father function is tied to the project of the state and the abolition of capitalism, and not merely to the inner workings of the family. It is tied to a political project, making the way in which the link to the social operates in the larger

Oedipal situation today, very different and more radical than many Lacanian accounts that don't tie the capitalist discourse into their analysis of Oedipus today.

As we argued above, the Oedipal dialectic disrupts the flow of established identities and sets the family into a tailspin, leading to the pluralized Names-of-the-Father and not merely the Name-of-the-Father in the singular sense as a sole father, but there are many potential (non biological) fathers. When we follow Lacan's work to the end, are we not left with the question of the master as the fundamental challenge to thinking this impasse? In other words, perhaps the primal father and the Master indeed overlap around the question of the social bond and the impasse between desire and love? As Žižek comments in *Less Than Nothing*:

Lacan unveiled the illusions on which capitalist reality, as well as its false transgressions, are based, but his final result is that we are condemned to domination—the Master is the constitutive ingredient of the very symbolic order, so the attempts to overcome domination only generate new figures of the Master. The great task of those who are ready to go through Lacan is thus to articulate the space for a revolt which will not be recaptured by one or another version of the discourse of the Master (Žižek 2012: 616).

In his lecture, "A Reply to My Critics," Žižek notes that his debate with Badiou revolves around the role of the master in facilitating emancipatory political change, but he does not delve into the theoretical and meta-theoretical details of this debate. In what follows, I am to elaborate some of these differences. In the lecture, however, Žižek argues that today we are experiencing the final decline of the figure of the master as the privileged mark of symbolic authority. But the decline of the master brings with it an inherent danger. If we take the reign of the postmodern university discourse based in the regime of expert-based knowledge, what we are left with is what Badiou refers to as an "atonal" presentation of facts and opinions. What this causes, apropos the Names-of-the-Father is paradoxically, an intensification of the father function. As Eric Santner points out, the university discourse elicits a "sustained traumatization induced by exposure to, as it were, fathers who [know] too much about living human beings, and our exposure to this excessive knowledge produces, "an intensification of the body [that] is first and foremost a sexualization" (Santner 2003: 87).

The injunction of the postmodern master, Žižek notes, is "pretend to be free" yet all servitude is disavowed, which goes to show that in society's refusal to privilege mastery, which we see in radical politics for example Occupy Wall Street's refusal to

present strong and charismatic leaders and spokespeople. The discourse of the master, as we find in Lacan's four discourses portends major consequences for emancipatory political change today because it is that which, as he claims to the protestors of his own time during May 68, remains the horizon of political desire. Yet, as Žižek notes, Lacan's statement to the protestors of May 68 should not be read as implying that every revolutionary discourse requires a new master (Žižek 2012: 1007). That the protestors will receive a new master, despite the fact they were not aware of their own demand for one implies that today's disavowal of the Master's discourse is in many ways indicative of the success of the university discourse. The position of thinking as such, dominated as it is by the neutral knowledge of the university discourse means that one's ability to facilitate political change and emancipation is rendered inoperable. As stated above, Badiou refers to this inoperability as "atonal"—a world devoid of passages, situated by a big Other—or socio-symbolic system facing a precarious position, particularly in the position of the master. The ubiquity of atonality in late capitalism as Žižek writes in his short text *Violence*, is

A basic feature of our postmodern world is that it tries to dispense with this agency of the ordering Master-Signifier: the complexity of the world needs to be asserted unconditionally. Every Master-Signifier meant to impose some order on it must be deconstructed, dispersed: the modern apology for the 'complexity' of the world...is really nothing but a generalized desire for atonality (Žižek 2008: 98).

Not only is today's symbolic landscape atonal, but as the Lacanian Dany Robert-Dufour comments, we have experienced a shift in the superego, as we face an absence of a mediating third Other (nation, state, parents, etc.). Dufour argues that today's world is ultra-transcendental, meaning that it functions without any reliance on a big other for the subject (Dufour 2011: 330). The subject is formed in a completely self-referential fashion, in a symbolic where, for the first time in history, the subject can constitute itself, and is forced to found itself, without referring to any third entity. This leads to a problem that Žižek tackles as well, which is that the symbolic order and the public Law; both hide an obscene superego injunction, which is grounded in the imperative to "Enjoy!"

The postmodern subject is faced with the need for a new master, despite the multiple figures that make overtures to mastery in specific biopolitical domains. The master in the postmodern guise is thus a master of the various semblances of "life management": here is how to discipline your body with the correct diet, and here are the

best books to read about classical literature, etc. The life coach is emblematic of the postmodern Master. The profession has grown considerably, in some ways replacing therapists in urban areas in America for example. The life coach presents the coalescence of the father function and the postmodern master in that the role of the life coach is to nudge the subject in the direction of their dreams and desires, for which the subject can't seem to achieve without some coaching. The life coach provides time management consultation to the individual, who is a "client" and not a patient. Is not the underlying function of the life coach to grant permission? You can do it. Go and get the additional degree; you deserve the raise at work and so on. If Lacan characterized the revolutionary situation of May 68 by pointing out to the students and workers that hidden beneath their protest of the state, they secretly desire a new master, today's life coach assumes the position of the master for the subject who openly welcomes a new master. In the case of the life coach, however, because his mastery is invited and the need for a master is avowed, whereas in the revolutionary discourse, the need for the master is disavowed, the life coach presents the capitalist subject overwhelmed by the need for a total master—in the face of too many experts; can I at least find one who can tell me how to navigate through it all and give me the permission to do so? Indeed, if there is anything worth saving in the figure of the Master, it is purely in the Hegelian idea of the master, as the figure who provokes the subject to act, which in the context of emancipatory politics, consists of granting collective groups or single subjects the permission to revolt. But where the life coach master differs from the revolutionary master is in the notion that the life coach master assumes the biopolitical expert role of knowledge, whereas the revolutionary master assumes the position of desire over knowledge. The revolutionary master provokes the subject to invent a new desire of desire, whereas the life coach provokes the subject to burrow further into the university discourse of knowledge over desire.

Bartelby politics, or the politics of refusal to participate in the present political situation of false options, (elections and other technocratic machinery of politics) seems at first glance to disavow a role for the master. The master here might take on the form of the leader who in her charisma can galvanize a wider level of participation in the movement or protest. The master could also, in a more apt psychoanalytic sense, be the one who enables the protestors to "define the demands" of the protest. The resignation of Bartelby in his paradoxically affirmative yet negative statement to the ruling order, "I prefer not to" in many ways still orients much of emancipatory politics. Occupy Wall

Street, and their refusal to define their demands, can be read along a neo-Gramscian understanding of hegemony. For Laclau, the agonistic “empty universals” of the various identity politics (labor unions, student debt activists, environmentalists, etc.) that all made up Occupy, all form a receptacle of agonism/tension that requires time and deliberation (direct democracy) to develop demands in an organic and spontaneous way. The failure of Occupy in this reading was one of not reaching a hegemonic moment wherein the various antagonisms reach a higher sublation and realize demands.

Žižek and Badiou differ from this agonistic democracy vision in their privileging the role of the act/decision. As is well known, Badiou’s event, and Žižek’s act both stem from Lacan’s own conception of the act. For Badiou, a Truth-Event is an exception to the order of being qua being, or what he refers to as “the state of the situation.” The Truth-Event is an *acrhopolitical* movement for the individual; a modification in a world that spurn on a process of Subjectivization, i.e. the Truth-Event transforms the human animal into a Subject. As Žižek notes, this positive establishment of the event is what distinguishes Badiou from Lacan:

That is the difference between Lacan and Badiou: Lacan insists on the primacy the (negative) act over the (positive) establishment of a 'new harmony' via the intervention of some new Master-Signifier; while for Badiou, the different facets of negativity (ethical catastrophes) are reduced to so many versions of the 'betrayal' of (or infidelity, or denial or) the positive Truth Event (Žižek 1999: 185).

Žižek’s conception of the act is quite different than Badiou’s precisely because his allegiance to the core Freudian role of death drive prevents the emergence of any positive change to the constitution of being. For Žižek, every Event/Act ultimately remains a semblance obfuscating a preceding Void whose Freudian name is death drive (Žižek 1999: 154). In fact, Žižek’s primary critique of Badiou’s Event is that the negativity of anxiety and death drive has to be posited prior to the affirmative enthusiasm for the event, as it’s condition of possibility (Žižek 2012: 815 – 816). While Žižek’s point remains at the surface to be mainly meta-theoretical insofar as the consequences of death drive remains the conditions of universalism of Badiou’s Truth-Event, there are perhaps political consequences to follow in Žižek’s critique. The Žižekian act in relation to the Badiouian Truth-Event appears as a more modest ethico-political position considering its allegiance to Lacan’s notion of subjective destitution. In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou develops a new conception of the repetition compulsion vis a vis subjectivization. Through the concept of force, and grounded in the paradigm of Athena over Antigone,

Badiou's event, even though he did not use this term, goes beyond the compulsion to repeat and in this way, we should place Badiou's conception of subjectivization in the same status of the Nietzschean *overman*. For Žižek on the other hand, the act, as it is based in the Freudian death drive, always prevents the emergence of an entirely new Subject. This is why Žižek rejects the very notion of Subjectivization that Badiou ascribes to. It is also, in a somewhat unrelated way, why Žižek critiques Buddhism in *Less Than Nothing* (Žižek 2012: 126). In the Buddhist notion of enlightenment, the subject is taken out of the chain of being, of suffering and so on. The Buddhist notion of enlightenment and the Badiouian Event (in different ways of course) completely overlook the way the death drive serves to always re-inscribe the human animal back into the negative order of being. Yet, perhaps the most important political consequence of this meta-theoretical difference between Badiou and Žižek is that in Žižek's version of the act, political resistance—and change to the socio-symbolic coordinates, i.e. libidinal change to the situation is more frequent. Although both thinkers are opposed to any applied political project of their thinking, the act gets out of the trap that John Caputo places Badiou's Evental politics into when he refers to his philosophy as "messianism" that in its waiting for the event—keeps desire moving. In Žižek's act, on the other hand:

One cannot ever be sure in advance of what appears (within the register and the space of visibility of the ruling ideology) as a "minor" measure will not set in motion a process that will lead to the radical (evental) transformation of the whole field (Žižek 2011: 5).

The Master at the Site of the Social Bond

One of the most enduring tropes of *Less Than Nothing*, and one that is never fully resolved, indeed one that remains an open question throughout is how to think emancipatory political change in relation to the master's discourse. As Badiou states in no uncertain terms, there is no philosophy today unless it has passed through Lacan's antiphilosophy. For Freud, the figure of the master is ambiguous apropos politics and the creation of a new social bond. As Mladen remarks in his text, *Freud and the Political*, "for psychoanalysis there is no such thing as an individual, the individual only makes sense as a knot of social ties, a network of relations to the others, to the always already social Other" (Dolar 2008: 22). The Other is shorthand for the social instance as such, because the individual, the ego, and the subject are inconceivable without a theory of a social tie

in both Freud and in Lacan's discourse. For Freud in *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*, the subject emerges from the "non-subject," neither from the father nor from the brother, and this priority for the subject in Freud falls to the "without father" and the "without authority."

From the perspective of Lacanian sexuation and the feminine *not-All*, the social bond can be thought in two different ways. Importantly, for any psychoanalytic thinking of the social bond—that of an idenitarian bond of a communal, religious or political group or set of individuals, the role of loss at the core of the social bond is of central importance. The social bond has to do with loss because in bonding—or unbonding—loss is a way of coping with the primordial loss, and thus what the promise of society (the social bond) promises for a subject is a filling up of that loss. The subject thus can only exist at the point of the social order's failure to become a closed structure, and the subject enters into social arrangements as a result of its own failure to achieve self-identity. The "male bond" resolves the issue of loss through exclusion, through the exceptionality of the primal father who is not subject to castration. Here, we find in Badiou's example of the bodies of the son, a clear defect to the male bond today. According to the logic of male sexuation, the exclusion of a particular group takes place in order to provide an enemy around which the collective identity of members of the society can resolve the deadlock that the primordial loss invokes. The excluded other thus resolves the deadlock of the social by containing the excess inherent to it. The Jew, the Muslim or the Gypsy in different contexts, become figures that resolve the difficulty inherent to primordial loss.

In the female social bond, there is not one ideal subject for female subjectivity, because each woman is a particular. The female bond is thus rooted in a sacrifice at the heart of the bond, "the logic of the not-all posits that there are only enemies, only outsiders, only exceptions" (McGowan 2013: 152). The female version of the bond thus requires a certain shared feeling of loss. If we take the example of the 9/11 terror attacks, the male version, which is most certainly the way the bond formed—the "us vs. them" discourse, the invasion of Afghanistan and later Iraq—actually ended up reconciling the traumatic event and enabled citizens to enjoy. The female "not-all" presents the truth of the social bond in a different way by facing the loss and appropriating it. As Todd McGowan argues, the female *not-All* remains the challenge of thinking the social bond from a Lacanian view in that, "the authentic social bond occurs only in the shared-experience of loss—that is, only according to the female logic of not-

having” (McGowan 2013: 160). Might we think the female social bond as siding with *eros* over *thanatos*?

It is clear that Freud argues that *eros* is what binds the group together and forms the social bond. Eros is the primitive social bond, or what Borch-Jacobsen refers to as “the primal band.” But the problem of Freud’s work on the social bond is that it is thought largely as a totalitarian social bond. Because subjects “subject themselves” in Borch-Jacobsen’s reading, the totalitarian leader is the leader who is always a narcissistic leader. This impasse of the bond and the role of the leader are never fully resolved for Freud according to Borch-Jacobsen. The lack of individual freedom, “the principal of group psychology” thus results neither from a constraint imposed by force nor from a social contract of the juridical type, nor from a natural suggestibility, but from a sort of seduction destined to extort from each Narcissus the free gift of his freedom (Borch-Jacobsen 1988: 161 – 162).

Love for the leader is the first bond and it is love for the leader that creates equality amongst the group. The organization of the group thus creates the same structure as that of the family. The conclusion Borch-Jacobsen reaches is that the disappearance of any leader: religious, political or ideological causes “an unleashing of violence” which is a phenomenon we are most certainly experiencing today with the defective Oedipal initiation. This panic that the loss of the leader produces is evident in the very last lines of chapter 6 in *Group Psychology*, where Freud states, “libidinal bonds are not the only manner of ties with other people” (Freud 1967: 103). It is the bonds of identification that unite crowds. What produces panic is the release of a libidinal tie to a leader, and not fear that produces panic (Borch-Jacobsen 1988: 165). The disappearance of the libidinal-political bond that ensured the cohesion of the group does not liberate narcissistic egos in a pure and simple unbonding. In a way, it liberates nothing at all, and especially not autonomous subjects (individuals), since panic consists precisely in an unmasterable overflowing of ego by way of (affects of) others; or to put it differently, panic consists in a mimetic, contagious epidemic narcissism (Borch-Jacobsen 1988: 166 – 167).

Individuals are open to one another through the affect of panic in the same way they are drawn together in love. The libidinal tie to the leader produces panic – the moment of bonding and unbonding equally, and the panic bond has to stand in some relation to the violent bond of each against all, which is the second type of unbonding observed upon the withdrawal of the leader (Borch-Jacobsen 1988: 168). As Freud

comments, “It is only in the erotic destruction of the object that death and life come into being” (Freud 1967: 173). The problem that Freud examines apropos totalitarian social bonds is how to transform the double bonds of panic into peaceful social bonds. Freud seeks to show how a non-libidinal bond can enter at a second stage of the process and form a new bond through identification (Freud 1967: 175). Importantly, as we explored above, Freud preserves the Oedipal solution to the impasse at the heart of the bond. But why? According to Borch-Jacobsen, it is because in so doing, it preserves both a theory of the subject and politics:

It is no exaggeration to say that the Oedipal hypothesis intervenes to protect the autarchy of the subject – or, in what amounts to the same thing, the propriety of its defense (its “feelings,” its affects, and so on) – in order to protect it against the possibility of an alteration (which particularly does not mean an alienation) constitutive of its identity, its most proper being (Borch-Jacobsen 1988: 192).

That Freud decides the problem of the social bond with recourse to the Oedipal situation means that Freud begins with peace, to avoid violence. This assimilation of the social is also done so as to avoid the disorganization that the Other brings about. Borch-Jacobsen’s argument demonstrates that identification is what brings rivalry to an end and creates a sense of community that lies in the nature of the tie with the leader” (Freud 1964: 108). Borch-Jacobsen’s reading shows that the bond is formed on an abyssal point of identification, where no Law can serve as the basis of society:

For the Law (the ego ideal, the Other, the Father, the Name of the Father, or whatever one wishes to call it) will always be “I,” the Ego, in my impossible identity. And the basis, the founding bond of society, is thus itself without foundation. The edifice of society has no basis (Borch-Jacobsen 1988: 225).

Freud’s subject is subjected to a relation of voluntary servitude due to the residue of hypnosis that Freud never effectively gets around. In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau critiques Borch-Jacobsen’s reading of the social bond by pointing out that he “does not really question the role of the political in the social tie” and, “conceives of the social as moulded by the political, as depending for its constitution on the presence of a beloved chief” (Laclau 2009: 57). Since in Borch-Jacobsen’s reading, the double is always an automaton, always hateful; we enter into a rivalrous relation at the heart of the social. Laclau points out that in *Analysis of the Ego*, Freud’s analysis of the ego is always already a social analysis. Because Freud seeks a “socialization of the psyche,” by placing a fundamental opposition between “narcissistic psychic acts” and “social psychic

acts,” Freud seeks to “work back to what social relation presuppose” (Laclau 2009: 131). No social relation can come about without understanding who holds the key to the “before” and this same subject also holds the key to the “after.” Freud’s definition of the social bond after all is:

A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego (Freud 1964: 37).

It therefore becomes an admission for Freud that the leader is the key to group bonds, which means that it is impossible for those who have replaced their ego ideals with the leader to be first among equals. This is why it is impossible to think emancipatory change with the master or the leader for Laclau. In a re-formulation of the role of the leader, Laclau identifies three features to the leader as serving as *primus inter pares*, or “first among equals.”

1. There must be something in common which makes identification between members of the group possible.
2. Identification does not take place only between egos, because the separation between ego ideal and ego is far from complete. “Identification in a church has to take place where object-choice has taken place, and object-love where there is identification” (Laclau 2009: 59).
3. The leader leads because he presents features that are common to all. His identity is split: he is father and brother.

Through recourse to his theory of antagonism and discourse theory, Laclau conceives of the leader as the hegemonic identity, which becomes something of an empty signifier.

In Badiou’s reading of the social bond, we find a paradoxical reliance upon the master/leader with a de-privileging of the social as an imaginary realm. Through reference to Lacanian categories of the imaginary, symbolic and real, Badiou argues that there is no such thing as politics, and therefore the bond at the heart of the social must be annihilated. For Badiou:

One has to disconnect politics (*la politique*) from the fiction of the communitarian or social bond as well as from the fiction of representation, that is, from the two main fictions of the political (*le politique*) (Badiou 1999: 115).

It is crucial to see how the birth of community and the social bond is a matter of representation, which is inherently fictional. In other words, only by escaping the logic of representation that politics touches upon the real. This is why, for Badiou, the time of real politics is always what he calls the “future anterior.” A community does not exist in the social prior to its political construction: it is established as a subject only retroactively, through the process of faithfully linking up with a truth-event in the domain of love, politics, art or science.

Since for Badiou, “it is important for an event to arrive to leave aside all facts” (Badiou 1999: 29), the social bond is replaced with the Truth-Event. The social bond takes place as a “sublimated fiction of the political as bond (social relation) and as representation (under and authority)” (Badiou 1999: 31). The realms of identitarian differences (based on culture, race, age, etc.) are rendered completely irrelevant to Badiou since they remain tied to the ontic domain. It is the event that disturbs the ontic domain and politics is what interrupts the fiction of the political in Badiou’s thinking on politics. The radical annihilation of both the social and the political as an imaginary series of identifications as based in identitarian and communicative ties means that for Badiou, politics does not designate power and the police, as Jacques Ranciere claims, but is strictly of the order of truth and of the event. This is why the Truth-Event is rare in Badiou, and this is also why politics in the Badiouian sense is a very rare thing indeed. The disintegration of the social bond is the birth not only of the event, but it is also the terrain for the re-definition of justice for Badiou:

We have too often wished that justice find the consistency of the social tie, while it can only name the most extreme moments of inconsistency (Badiou 1999: 32).

If the preservation of Oedipal relations supports a theory of the subject and politics, as Borch-Jacobsen suggests, both Žižek and Badiou seem to remain committed to Oedipus, despite its defective status. However, instead of recourse to an ethical theory of the social bond that maintains some minimal reliance on the social link—Badiou and Žižek seek a total break with the social. In his concluding chapter of *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek argues that the “political suspension of the ethical” is based both on the consequences of the nonexistence of the big Other, and the way in which contingency of our acts prevents us from distinguishing between moral and political acts (Žižek 2012: 964 – 965). That every ethical and or moral edifice has to be grounded in an abyssal act

which is, in the most radical sense imaginable, political means that there is thus no conflation of pre-ethical questions to the realm of the political for Žižek. The realm of the social and the ethical always conceals, in a similar way that Laclau views the social as the sleeping giant of the political, a hidden political antagonism. As we saw above, the Žižekian wager in this context should not be read as an acrhpolitical act a la Badiou precisely because of the way in which the two thinkers differ around the role or repetition and death drive. The Žižekian act should be understood as a more modest wager at destroying the ruling ideology, to continually try and fail, indeed to fail better.

¹ A recent text by Michel Fort Fin argues this line in a recent text, *Fin du dogme paternal*, critiques Lacanian psychoanalysis for veiling nostalgia for the family of yesteryear. Tort sees in the Lacan's Names-of-the-Father a source of religious significance, and he claims that psychoanalysts are seeking to actively bring the father back to a position of authority by re-conceiving of the symbolic.

References

- Althusser, L. (1992) *The Future Lasts Forever, A Memoir*. Trans by Richard Veal New York, The New York Press
- Balibar, E. (2007) *The Invention of the Superego*, Paris: Apagado.
- Badiou, A. (1999), "Philosophy and Politics," in *Radical Politics* 96 July/August.
- Badiou, A. (2007), "The Son's Aleatory Identity in Today's World" *Lacanian Ink*, New York.
- Badiou, A. (2008) *Conditions*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Borch-Jacobsen, M. (1988) *The Freudian Subject*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bosteels, Bruno. (2005) "Badiou without Žižek" *Durham, NC: Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics* Number 17 (2005), 133 – 134.
- Butler, J. (200) *Antigone's Claim*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2009) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York: Penguin Books.

-
- Dolar, M. (2009) *Freud and the Political*, New York: Theory & Event Volume 12, Issue 3.
- Dufour, D. (2003) *The Art of Shrinking Heads: On the New Servitude of the Liberated in the Age of Total Capitalism* trans. by David Macey Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Freud, S. (2010) *Civilization and its Discontents*, New York; W.W. Norton and Company.
- Freud, S. (1967) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* New York: Liveright Publishing Company.
- Hegel, W. (1983) *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary*, trans. by Leo Rauch, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1976) *Seminar XXIII (1976)* Trans. by the Irish Lacanian Circle, Dublin Karnac Books.
- Lacan, J. (2006) *Ecrits*, Trans. by Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Lacan, J. *Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology*, transl. by Mark Bracher, Russell Grigg, and Robert Samuels in *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society*, vol. 1.
- Laclau, E. (2005) *On Populist Reason*, New York: Verso.
- Marcuse, H. (2008) *A Study on Authority*, New York: Verso Books.
- McGowan, T. (2013) *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Miller, Jacques-Alain (2011) *The Non-Existent Seminar*, Lacan.com
<http://lacan.com/symptom12/?p=17>
- Reich, Wilhelm (1969) *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Canada: Douglas and McIntyre.
- Santner, E. (1996) *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stevens, A. (2007) *Psychosis and the Paternal Function: Can One Choose One's Father?* 12th International Seminar of the Freudian Field, Lacanian Compass 2007 Volume 1, Issue 10.
- Tort, M. (2005) *La Fin du Dogme Paternal*, Paris: Aubier.
- Webster, J. (2011) *The Life and Death of Psychoanalysis*, London: Karnac Books.

Žižek, S. (2013) "A Reply to My Critics," lecture held on February 23rd, 2013 in London at the Birkbeck Institute <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/02/slavoj-zizek-a-reply-to-my-critics/>

Zizek, S. (2012) *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, New York: Verso.

Žižek, S. (2006) *Violence*, New York: Verso.

Žižek, S. (1999) *The Ticklish Subject*, New York: Verso.

Žižek, S. (2011) "Badiou: Notes on an ongoing project," in the International Journal of Žižek Studies.