Does Fidelity to Revolutionary Truths Undo Itself?: Systems Theory on Badiou and Žižek

**Abstract:** This article examines Alain Badiou’s and Slavoj Žižek’s advocacy for fidelity to revolutionary truths in light of complex system theory’s understanding of resiliency. It begins with a discussion of how Badiou and Žižek describe truth. Next, it looks at the features that make a complex system resilient. The article argues that if we understand neoliberalism as a resilient system, then the fidelity to revolutionary truths that Badiou and Žižek advocate is not enough, for it doesn’t realize how truths come from the system as a whole. The article concludes by describing how this viewpoint alters discussions of political change.

The concepts of necessary violence and principled confrontation permeate much that’s said in support of revolution. Yet a common critique of revolutions—especially those that “went wrong”—is that they became too harsh, or dogmatic, in fighting for a better society, at times becoming like the hierarchical governments they work to overthrow. This debate, put simply, concerns how violent revolutionaries should be and how far they should go in pursuing their goals. Žižek and Badiou are two thinkers who put no limits on revolutionaries, saying fidelity to a revolutionary principle is what is needed to succeed. Žižek, discussing Badiou, writes, “Radicals…are possessed by what Alain Badiou called the ‘passion of the Real.’ Thus if you say A—equality, human rights, and freedoms—then, you should not shirk from its consequences and gather the courage to say B—that the terror was needed to defend and assert A.”[[1]](#endnote-1) It is easy to sympathize with Badiou and Žižek’s desire to overcome neoliberalism and the damage it does, but can fidelity to a revolutionary truth blind us from the hard work needed to sustain an opposing system? This paper will explore that question in relation to Žižek’s and Badiou’s theories of revolution. It will start by outlining the basics of their systems, including Badiou’s use of set theory and Žižek’s Lacan-inspired psychoanalytic theory. Next, it will develop in detail Badiou’s notion of points in *Logic of Worlds* and Žižek’s defense of violence in several works, most notably *In Defense of Lost Causes*. My critique of Žižek and Badiou will require an exploration of complex systems theory rather than set theory or psychoanalysis, as my thesis is that we should view neoliberal capitalism as such a system, and that by doing so we will see that revolutionary fidelity alone is inadequate to produce radical change. Though neither Žižek nor Badiou say that “all you need is devotion to truth” as such, their situating of truth as a foundation rather than as what I will call later an “organic whole” creates dangers. Specifically, to confront the “truth” of capitalism with the “truth” of communism means ignoring capitalism’s resilience and adaptability, including how it has in the past turned the momenta of anti-capitalist revolutions against themselves and used them to strengthen new forms of capitalism.

**Badiou’s Advice for Overturning the Established Order**

Alain Badiou’s *Being and Event* and *Logic of Worlds* lay out the ontological basis for radical change. His initial insight is that being is paradoxical; it cannot be consistently described as multiple or one. We only *encounter* entities with many traits, but we only *comprehend* these multiples as unities. Badiou concludes that “the one is not” and that oneness is an operation by which being, as a multiplicity, is presented to us.[[2]](#endnote-2) Additionally, there is no way of presenting the totality of existence, since the idea of a set of all sets is inconsistent. Or, as Badiou writes, “I do not have the power to count as one, to count as “set”, everything that is subsumable by a property,”[[3]](#endnote-3) ultimately concluding that “Language…cannot, alone, institute the existence of the pure multiple.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Being is brought into existence out of the unpresentable “nothingness” by giving it a proper name.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The next step in studying the world is developing universals that further organize Being. As all the term “Being” does is make the pure multiple visible, any further knowledge will require dividing the many extant multiples into categories, and there is no right way of doing this. This is where universals come in, as one cannot create a consistent multiplicity without an organizing principle. Every world—an “ontologically closed set”[[6]](#endnote-6)—has, besides the elements that compose it, a transcendental. As Badiou writes, “since the thinking of being cannot on its own account for the world’s manifestation, the intelligibility of this manifestation must be made possible by immanent operations. ‘Transcendental’ is the name for these operations.”[[7]](#endnote-7) Transcendentals create the beings that appear, define their relationships to each other, and provide each with an identity and role. This is each world’s “logic of appearing,”[[8]](#endnote-8) and for each such logic as there is both a maximum and minimum criterion for appearing. The former applies to “apparent[s] whose being-there in the world is attested absolutely”[[9]](#endnote-9) and the latter to beings that “inappear” because their “conjunction with the maximum must be nil.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Every potential being has beings it can testify to, beings it can conceivably exist alongside, and beings with which it is incompatible.

A transcendental must be changed if a radically new world is to be produced. Changing a transcendental requires subjects to activate “truth-procedures” which point to a new world and a different transcendental.[[11]](#endnote-11) Following events which call into question the current transcendental, subjects can discover a new transcendental organizing principle. By necessity, this new principle will change the world and the beings that exist there. An event capable of producing such a change is the appearance of a new multiple that makes use of elements that are part of the extant world, or “a one-multiple made up of, on the one hand, all the multiples which belong to its site, and on the other hand, the event itself.”[[12]](#endnote-12) An event brings together elements already recognized as part of a world, but orders them differently, such that the new being does not appear. An event causes some to question the current transcendental and search for a new one; in fact, the first step in doing so is to give the event a name marking it as distinct from what came before.[[13]](#endnote-13) If the event is successful, the search for a new transcendental will yield one that makes the nebulous multiple of the event appear clearly.[[14]](#endnote-14) It also produces the potential for devotees who will be faithful to the consequences of the discovery,[[15]](#endnote-15) as well as reactionaries and obscure subjects who resist the event’s truth.[[16]](#endnote-16) The world will, over time, become structured according to the transcendental. Among other things, devotees must observe the procedures for bringing the new transcendental into existence.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Badiou illustrates how this theory works in the political realm when he discusses the Paris Commune in *The Communist Hypothesis*. The republican political world prior to the Commune was a transcendental. This world provided an understanding of how government functions, the process by which popular concerns become legislated, and the proper role of citizens. Figures like the police, the judge, and the legislator, were clearly attested to. Other figures were inconceivable, such as the soldier who also writes laws and the dissatisfied, politically active worker. This world was logically ordered and consistent with itself, yet on March 18, 1871, a singularity appeared that was not easily understandable. The politically organized workers who were part of the National Guard (which, under the republican system, was not a worker group) opposed the Thiers-led government and began to run the State themselves rather than through their elected representatives.[[18]](#endnote-18) What appeared was singular; it didn’t fit within the republican world, but nevertheless was recognized as a threat. As Badiou explains, “from the point of view of well-ordered appearing, the possibility of a popular and worker governmental power purely and simply does not exist,”[[19]](#endnote-19) yet March 18th marked “the appearing of a worker-being.”[[20]](#endnote-20) The reaction of the government was to try to minimize this appearance, and to fit it back into their transcendental. They resisted recognizing the group as a set of workers, but insisted they were “reprobates” deserving of punishment.[[21]](#endnote-21) Those faithful to the event realized the worker’s commune could not be made consistent until a socialist transcendental developed in opposition to the republican one. The *Manifesto of the Paris Commune* recognized the events of March 18 not as a crime, but as an event which required a new logic to understand.[[22]](#endnote-22) It states the Commune’s commitment to enacting the politics March 18 implied and to making the previously inconceivable worker-being exist absolutely.[[23]](#endnote-23) As Badiou puts it, while the Paris Commune did not succeed in overturning the ruling class, it did destroy “the political subordination of workers and the people,”[[24]](#endnote-24) a feat which still resonates to this day. The fact that events like the Commune have such long-term ramifications is why Adrian Johnston says truths are “irreducible to the multitude of such differing contexts” and as such are eternal.[[25]](#endnote-25)

Two final points remain to be addressed. First, events, properly speaking, do not belong to a set.[[26]](#endnote-26) Events occur when elements that are part of an established order appear as though they do not belong to that order. When this happens, you have a set that belongs only to itself, and thus a singularity. There is no belonging possible, as no extant transcendental can explain it. As the logic of set theory says that no set can belong to itself, the event has being and disappears immediately. Badiou explains this, writing, “it is impossible to conceive any stabilization of this sudden occurrence of A in its own transcendental field or under the retroactive jurisdiction of its own objectivation. The laws of being immediately close up again on what tries to except itself from them.”[[27]](#endnote-27) The traces events leave behind can, if activated by subjects faithful to the event, help to inaugurate change. What was previously unthinkable becomes thinkable, the “inexistent” that was previously “evaluated by the minimum” criteria for appearing is now “evaluated by the maximum,” and “that which inappeared now shines like the sun.”[[28]](#endnote-28)

Finally, Badiou emphasizes that events begin in points, or material origins where a new transcendental gets its first trial run. The non-being of events means there is no possibility of them producing a new world themselves. This must be carried out by subjects who are faced with a clear choice: refuse the truth the event offers and in doing so betray the legacy of the event, or follow the consequences of the event through the unfolding of the new truth-procedures it dictates.[[29]](#endnote-29) The point is “the local test of the transcendental of a world for the subject of a truth,”[[30]](#endnote-30) and it plays two important roles. First, it formulates the transcendental implied by the event into a universal truth which can be followed. Second, it takes that truth and generates a trial for it at a level where subjects can engage it. Points become the origins which bring new worlds into being.[[31]](#endnote-31)

**Žižek’s Emphasis on Revolution as Terror**

Let’s turn now to Žižek, who wants to “apply the lesson of Hegelian ‘concrete universality’ to ‘radical democracy.’”[[32]](#endnote-32) He begins by employing Lacan’s concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real to describe the different aspects of human experience. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek says the Imaginary is the character of the unconscious, writing that it is “made of ‘imaginary fixations which could not have been assimilated to the symbolic development' of the subject's history.’”[[33]](#endnote-33) By contrast, the Symbolic is “a formal order which supplements and/or disrupts the dual relationship of ‘external’ factual reality and 'internal' subjective experience,”[[34]](#endnote-34) and the Real “that which resists symbolization: the traumatic point which is always missed but none the less always returns, although we try - through a set of different strategies - to neutralize it.”[[35]](#endnote-35) Every Symbolic order is universal, as one cannot include the infinite Real in one’s understanding of existence, since doing so would give it a symbolic structure it cannot have. As Žižek puts it, “there is no ‘neutral’ reality [since] every field of ‘reality’…is always-already enframed.”[[36]](#endnote-36) This leads Žižek to Hegel, since Hegel’s main concern was not with discovering the true, objective nature of reality, but exploring the way in which we come across and subsequently understand the world through dialectical engagement with it.[[37]](#endnote-37) The combination of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary do not together produce a universal understanding of existence, since these are not different parts of the world but different ways humans encounter the world. Universality is an operation of order, which makes it alien to the Real and the Imaginary, both of which resist rational comprehension. Explaining this leads Žižek to Hegel’s notion of concrete universality, or a concept that has meaning by virtue of its being attached to particular things and separated from other universals.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Every symbolic order is both a concrete universal and, as it cannot capture the Real, ideological. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek defines ideology as “the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it.”[[39]](#endnote-39) He goes on to say that recognizing ideology exists does not undo it. The very nature of ideology today is that people cynically recognize that their reality is illusion but continue to operate as though it is not. What produces ideology is not simply one’s beliefs, but one’s practices, and adopting a cynical view towards ideology does not undo it as long as the practice remains.[[40]](#endnote-40) Given the omnipresence of this ideology there is no escaping it, nor is that the goal. Ideology should be embraced as an intrinsic and irreducible part of our politics. The first step in revolution is rejecting the contemporary ideological system and constructing a new ideology that brings into being the framework one wants. Žižek advocates a rehabilitation of “Lenin’s old question ‘what is to be done?’—how do we reassert, on the political terrain, the proper dimension of the act?”[[41]](#endnote-41)

Creating change necessitates fidelity to a new universal. One cannot produce a better society without a determinate vision of the future, and expecting liberal democracy to fix the problems endemic to capitalism is naive. In other words, the revolution is not an addition or handful of modifications, but a subtraction. “The subtraction to be made is one *from* the hegemonic field which, simultaneously, forcefully intervenes *into* this field, reducing it to its occluded minimal difference. Such a subtraction is extremely violent, even more than destruction/purification.”[[42]](#endnote-42) Subtraction is a forceful imposition, for one is not attempting to “live and let live” with other worldviews. Žižek seeks subjects who believe in the value of a new ideology and are willing to follow it to its logical conclusion. These subjects must resist subjects who want to maintain the extant ideology, deny the new ideology, or mystify it through obscure language.[[43]](#endnote-43) Žižek sums this up by saying “Without the Hero, there is no Event.”[[44]](#endnote-44)

Žižek illustrates this last point in his criticism of the multiple attempts to discover where Marxism “lost its way,” writing, “We must reject this entire topic. There is no opposition here.”[[45]](#endnote-45) Marx’s doctine, written for a technologically-advanced industrial society, couldn’t thrive in the backwaters of Russia or the peasant society of China. Lenin’s and Mao’s reformulations were essential, as “It is an inner necessity of the ‘original’ teaching to submit to and survive this so-called betrayal, to survive this violent act of being torn out of one's original context and thrown into a foreign landscape where it has to reinvent itself because *only in this way is universality born*.”[[46]](#endnote-46) The revolutionary legacy bequeathed us by Marxism-Leninism is not its prescriptive statements or the specific steps needed to ensure capitalism’s downfall, but its recognition that something is not right with our age.[[47]](#endnote-47) What must be acknowledged is the necessity of “divine violence” in revolution.[[48]](#endnote-48) Ideas like the dictatorship of the proletariat and the revolutionary terror of 1792-1794 epitomize this concept, as they destroy the foundation of the society that preceded them.[[49]](#endnote-49)

To say that revolutions must be marked by terror means that the truth of one’s revolution must be established everywhere and taken as absolute. There is no attempt at negotiation or compromise since that would reduce the universal truth to something less. This does not necessitate physical violence,[[50]](#endnote-50) since by violence Žižek refers to the actions taken to disrupt a bad ideology and create a better one.This is why revolution doesn’t just alter politics, but “denaturalizes the whole hegemonic field,” revealing in the process “the underlying complicity” of every truth that composes it.[[51]](#endnote-51) The violence being done is what is needed to enact a radical shift of perspective, such that certain beings, ideas, and practices are no longer even potentially existent. It is a reduction of the political field to, as Žižek puts it, ones and zeros. Everything is reduced to its simplest form and determined to either be in favor of or opposed to the new ideology. If in favor, the revolution can accept them, but if opposed, they must be eliminated.

It is at this point that Žižek returns to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is a democratic dictatorship inasmuch as a proletarian logic will be governing the democracy. The way one establishes an effective post-capitalist society is to embrace what he terms the “part of no-part,” or the elements of society that are by their very lack-of-status prevented from achieving a position in the ruling class. It is only by including the classes that are not part of the Symbolic that you will bring about an intervention from the Real, since rehabilitating beings symbolized within the field of politics already will at most represent a modification of the current political ideology, not an overturning of it.[[52]](#endnote-52) Revising a set of extant relations doesn’t establish a new universality; that requires suspending the set of relations altogether. This, according to Žižek, is what the dictatorship of the proletariat offers that the opponents of universality don’t recognize: it is “the tremulous moment when the complex web of representations is suspended due to the direct intrusion of universality into the political field.”[[53]](#endnote-53)

**Resilience in Complex Systems**

In *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy define resilience as “the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances.”[[54]](#endnote-54) This does not mean that resilient systems are static or unchanging, but that they can complete their tasks while adapting to fluctuating circumstances. Neither does being resilient mean you will be able to overcome anything. Resilient systems can be overturned, but this is unlikely to happen from straightforward, linear approaches. Others define resilience as “how…systems can flip from one state to another and how they develop and persist between these transitions.”[[55]](#endnote-55) And based on statements they’ve made, both Badiou and Žižek presumably agree that neoliberal capitalism is itself a complex and adaptable system. Badiou use the term “complex” numerous times to describe the events of May 68[[56]](#endnote-56), and that event was localized in France within a couple months of one year. Neoliberal capitalism is global in its scope, and has persisted in various forms over several generations. Žižek would also seem to agree with this interpretation of capitalism, as he describes the communist revolution as “reminiscent of what systems theory calls an ‘emergent property,’”[[57]](#endnote-57) implying that the system producing it is complex.

In their introduction, Zolli and Healy lay out the various capacities that resilient systems have. The first is the ability of systems to preserve their *adaptive capacity*. They define this as the “ability to resist being pushed from your preferred valley, while expanding the range of alternatives you can embrace.”[[58]](#endnote-58) Systems in generalare not static and uniform, but tend to have a consistent form and purpose. Resilient systems, however, are different; it is possible for them to continue fulfilling their purpose even if their form is changed. Such systems are composed of many different parts which interconnect and can adapt in response to a crisis. Zolli and Healy give the example of a microinsurance program developed in Northern Kenya. The insurance company, Kilimo Salama, insures farmers against bad weather. The company links automated weather sensors to the mobile accounts of the farmers, and if such weather occurs at an unfortunate time, the farmers get a payout. The program has increased the yield of some farmers by 150 percent and has helped the Kenyan farming community develop climate resilience.[[59]](#endnote-59) Because no one institution is controlling everything, but rather a network of multiple agents, resources, and organizations, the farming community can react to each disruption in unique ways. This principle also applies to capitalism, as Joel Mokyr discusses in “Capitalism Reinvents Itself.” Mokyr writes, “capitalism has survived not because it is inherently or invariably viable and efficient, but because it is adaptive: When circumstances have changed, it has simply reinvented itself.”[[60]](#endnote-60) He goes on to say capitalism encourages adaptation, accommodating new circumstances without foregoing the essence of the capitalist system.

How does a system develop its adaptive capacity? Zolli and Healy provide several answers, saying that resilient systems employ *feedback mechanisms*, are capable of dynamic reorganization that *de-couple* parts of the system, and can *swarm or cluster* when under duress. Feedback mechanisms are indicators which “determine when an abrupt change or critical threshold is nearing,”[[61]](#endnote-61) allowing the system to respond. An example is how household thermostats work, measuring temperatures inside and sending a signal to the furnace or air conditioner to turn on.[[62]](#endnote-62) What is important is that the system incorporates new information into its decisions about how to act, modifying its behavior accordingly. Systems may still become critical at times, but feedback loops allow systems to bounce back quicker than they otherwise would. Capitalism demonstrates strong feedback mechanisms in its speedy responses to threats, as it can incorporate and transmit new information almost instantaneously via market prices. Mokyr names these processes “self-adjusting signals”: “They work imperfectly perhaps, but they work better than any other system.”[[63]](#endnote-63)

De-coupling refers to a system’s ability to transform itself in situations when it can no longer function normally. This may mean the system no longer has access to its usual resources or to capabilities on which it depends. Resilient systems have alternative processes which help it fulfill its purpose without interruption.[[64]](#endnote-64) The global housing crisis was a problem because it had multiple interconnected parts which could not be decoupled from one another; as soon as one fell apart, so did the others.[[65]](#endnote-65) By contrast, electrical grids are capable of separating one part from the others, so that in case of a problem the whole grid won’t be affected.[[66]](#endnote-66) This can be illustrated in capitalism by referring to Nicholas Gotts’s “Resilience, Panarchy, and World-Systems Analysis,” where he discusses three regions of capitalism: the core, the periphery, and the semi-periphery. These are, respectively, where the most sophisticated economic activities occur, where low-cost goods are made and resources originate, and where a mixture of the other two processes take place.[[67]](#endnote-67) While these regions are interconnected, the welfare of one does not depend on the welfare of the others. This is shown by the correlation between foreign capital investment and rising CO2 emissions, which Gotts says comes from “the fact that transnational corporations tend to relocate environmentally unfriendly production to countries with fewer environmental controls.”[[68]](#endnote-68) While capitalism may at present need these three regions, none of the regions must be located at a specific place, and there are multiple examples of capitalists decoupling from particular areas only to reestablish somewhere else.[[69]](#endnote-69)

Swarming is the ability of many independent agents to defend the purpose of the system in moments of crisis. These embedded countermeasures activate when needed and are difficult to combat since they are not centrally controlled. Tuberculosis illustrates this, for while a human body can control the disease, it is nearly impossible to eradicate because individual cells can lie dormant for long periods, during which time they can regenerate and develop new tuberculosis cells. Once the cells activate, they allow the body’s immune system to isolate them in the lung, which gives them a place to grow undisturbed. Finally, they burst forth and attack many targets at once, becoming so pervasive that an infected person can spray millions of infected TB bacteria into the air with every cough.[[70]](#endnote-70) The cells act in coordinated ways without one central agent planning everything, just as other resilient systems do. Similarly, the many forces that form markets are capable of decentralized yet coordinated action in order to protect capitalist goals. Leigh Tesfatsion says in “Economic agents and markets as emergent phenomena” that “[r]esearchers now can study a wide variety of complex phenomena associated with decentralized market economies, such as inductive learning, imperfect competition, trade network formation, and the open-ended coevolution of individual behaviors and economic institutions.”[[71]](#endnote-71) Agents in capitalism often act in concert and develop in response to one another. This takes place without any centralized coordination and without the agents being completely aware of what’s happening.

This brings me to an important part of resilience, which is how such systems are both *diverse yet simple*. As Zolli and Healy put it, resilient systems are “diverse at their edges but simple at their core.”[[72]](#endnote-72) DNA provides a clear example, as it is capable of many combinations that yield different results, but at its core it is simple: there are only four different nucleotide bases that compose every gene. The importance of this fact lies in how quickly a system can respond to threats or produce large quantities of a needed resource. If the core of a system is highly complex, it becomes difficult for the system to adapt to unique situations. Yet if the core is simple but the combinations produced are diverse, it becomes easier to manipulate the simple bases in unique ways to produce the best response. A system with a complex foundation becomes concentrated, homogenous, and fragile, for that is the only way to manage it. The simpler the base, the more dispersed the loci of decision, and the more diverse combinations there are, and the more resilient the system.[[73]](#endnote-73) Despite capitalism’s diverse properties, it is simple at its core.[[74]](#endnote-74)

Finally, *resilience and recovery are not the same*. While some resilient systems may constantly return to the same form, many resilient systems regularly reconfigure themselves. They are not perfect, but in making mistakes they recognize the need to adapt.[[75]](#endnote-75) Through failure, a system is able to see how one of its parts is not working as needed, as is no longer required. It can then reorganize and adapt itself so that the unnecessary part of the system is no longer utilized. An example of this is how “technological unemployment” led capitalism to shift after 1914 to new offer new career paths. When machines eliminated industrial jobs, more service industry jobs were created, jobs maintaining technologies were introduced, and job hours were cut back.[[76]](#endnote-76) This preserved the essential form of capitalism while accommodating changing circumstances.

What this analysis of resilience shows is that the truth of a system does not exist simply at its base. It is manifest at every level of the system, and in the multitude of relationships that compose it. This is why I argue the truths of systems are organic wholes, not transcendentals. Simply understanding a system’s transcendental or Master Signifier does not capture the system’s truth. If, as I argue, capitalism is resilient, the response to it must incorporate this fact when responding. Capitalism can still be overturned, but not without developing a resilient movement in response.

**Analysis**

Applying the theory of resilience to Badiou and Žižek work yields an overall critique which pertains to two separate yet interconnected parts of each thinker’s theory. The overall critique is that Badiou and Žižek describe change in straightforward and linear terms, as evidenced by Žižek’s “A necessitates B” justification of terror and Badiou’s claim that failure is always “located *in a point*” which must be “found, and reconstructed” to give rise to a “positive universality.”[[77]](#endnote-77) These terms operate as an ideology that limits what Badiou’s and Žižek’s revolutions are capable of achieving, as ending oppression becomes simply about identifying and overturning a truth (qua transcendental or Master-Signifier). Tracking the source of oppression and bringing about virtue is not this cut-and-dried. This criticism has separate things to say about how Badiou and Žižek formulate the role of truth versus how they describe the manner in which new truths are inaugurated. Regarding the first, resilience shows that being faithful to a truth doesn’t ensure that you are working against the system you oppose, but that you can actively support what you detest in spite of your belief. Regarding the second, a violent and forceful push for one’s truth which eliminates all grey areas can allow for a dynamic system to co-opt or adapt to one’s tactics. I will go through each of these in turn and conclude with some thoughts for improvement.

In arranging worlds around fundamental truths, Badiou and Žižek advocate for revolution to use determinate outcomes rather than an open process of innovation. Badiou calls for those faithful to May ’68 to “be bold enough to have [the] idea” that there is an alternative “to living for oneself, for one’s own interests.”[[78]](#endnote-78) Similarly, Žižek says that communists should hold on to the idea that something is not right with our age[[79]](#endnote-79) and that we must “organize the masses politically.”[[80]](#endnote-80) Fidelity to these ideas necessitates one do whatever is needed to install them as the transcendental (Badiou’s term) or Master-Signifier[[81]](#endnote-81) (Žižek’s) of a new society. Revolutionaries must forego concern with the harmful effects of one’s actions and with considering the opinions of others, as these are distractions that prevent true change.[[82]](#endnote-82) The truth of communism both philosophers advocate is absolute, unquestionable, and universally applicable. Only once this truth is established, and Being is re-sutured or the Real’s disruption is incorporated into the Symbolic, can one finish the revolution by completing the “ordering task of building a new world.”[[83]](#endnote-83) As this account demonstrates, there is a clear line drawn from one’s truth to one’s outcome, and from there to the actions needed to bring that truth into being. While neither Badiou nor Žižek is dogmatic, and both do encourage people to reflect on their previous failures to establish a truth, their manner of thinking nevertheless indicates a linear and straightforward ideology. Among other products of linear thought is the belief that as long as the system you are confronting is massive and elaborate, it should be easier to find a way to challenge it. Adrian Johnston illustrates this point while describing Badiou’s unquestionable faith in the people, writing, “[Badiou believes] the more intricate and developed a system becomes, the more potential bugs, loopholes, and short circuits the system comes to contain…”[[84]](#endnote-84) As I will show, this is only true if the system is not resilient.

These fundamental truths which indicate goals and tactics are never as fundamental as they seem.[[85]](#endnote-85) Because resilient systems are adaptable, what may be true at one point can be altered through the mobilization of many parts of the system independently of each other. Take capitalism’s response to organized labor in the 19th century. Factory conditions were purposefully poor and most jobs unstable, as this served society’s ideological belief about a worker’s role and kept workers from demanding higher wages or benefits.[[86]](#endnote-86) Workers’ advocates (including communists) promoted unionization, so that workers could collaboratively agitate for a better situation. Supposedly, unions could resist the capitalists’ demands for long hours and the terrible conditions in which workers were expected to labor.[[87]](#endnote-87) The idea of unions clearly fits both Badiou’s and Žižek’s fundamental communist truths, mentioned above. And while unions had some success, the resiliency of capitalism undermined the clear program for change that unionizers expected. Eric Hobsbawm, in his book *The Age of Capital*, writes that “so long as [workers] did not organize—*and sometimes even when they did*—the workers themselves provided their employers with a solution to the problem of labour management: by and large they liked to work, and their expectations were remarkably modest.”[[88]](#endnote-88) The attitude workers had towards their labor—pride—was embraced by capitalists as a mechanism for accommodating unionization without undermining capitalism. Hobsbawm mentions how one steel mill superintendent advocated the labor force be composed of Germans, Irish, and Swedes since their attitude towards work would make them see their collective interests and organizing activities as compatible with capitalism. Even highly skilled workers, who were in the best position to unionize since they would be difficult to fire, ended up helping employers by not insisting upon the highest possible price for their work. As Hobsbawm puts it, “this essentially non-capitalist approach to work benefitted employers rather than workers.”[[89]](#endnote-89) Capitalism at the time focused on buying low and selling high, while workers wanted a fair wage for a fair day’s work. Workers resisted the hierarchy of capitalism and being told what to do, preferring the collective of their workshop. While unionized workers were not advocating the overthrow of capitalism, their ethos was opposed to capitalism’s. Yet their belief both in working hard and that doing so would ensure just treatment was exploited by capitalists to achieve considerable profit without properly reimbursing workers. In sum, the anti-capitalist ideology of unions, which encouraged workers to take control over their work to prevent being exploited, was reworked by capitalists to encourage capitalism, as employers could now give workers control over the process of creating a product while still reaping the benefits from selling it. As long as workers were only interested in control over their own production, and were modest in asking for benefits, then no serious threat to capitalism would be mounted, in spite of union activities.

The point here is not that organizing workers is fruitless, nor that the ideals of 19th-century anti-capitalist movements were bad, but that the fundamental truths of Badiou and Žižek will not necessarily overturn capitalism. One can advocate for communal interests, or the mobilization of workers, while still enabling the capitalist bottom line. Of course, it is impossible to reconcile capitalism with the fundamental truths of opposition to private property or alienation, since capitalism is premised on these concepts. However, there is no way to operationalize these truths, and to advocate for communism, that is immune to capitalist appropriation. Every tactic developed to oppose capitalist exploitation—from protest and political advocacy to revolution—has at times been redeployed for capitalist ends (this is not to say that capitalism appropriated each tactic every time it was used, for many tactics have at times been effective). One could argue that not every tactic has been tried. While this is true, an analysis of complex systems upholds the claim that no tactic is going to be universally successful. It is not the specifics of a tactic which cause it to succeed or fail; rather, within complex systems adaptation to any tactic is a perpetual possibility. This is not to say that every tactic *will* be appropriated, but that one can never be sure *going solely by the tactic itself* that it will be successful. The context of a system is just as crucial to the success of a tactic as the tactic itself. Given how radically changeable complex systems like capitalism are, there is no way of immunizing a tactic from appropriation. Fundamental truths, or the means to bring them about, can be appropriated by the system one is opposing, leading one to faithfully support a truth that is working against one’s goal.

Capitalism’s resilience doesn’t just harm one’s fundamental truths; it endangers the methods one uses to institute them. It is true that neither Badiou nor Žižek specifies what tactics revolutionaries should use, but they do provide advice for seeking them. That they don’t specify tactics is clear from the public debate Badiou and Žižek have carried out regarding where previous revolutionaries went wrong, with Žižek insisting that Lenin failed to recognize how his objective truth was “subjectively mediated”[[90]](#endnote-90) and Badiou claiming that the Cultural Revolution demonstrates the bankruptcy of the party State. Despite their willingness to revise previous strategies, both give a thoroughly linear interpretation of how to pursue a truth. One must be willing to see actions in stark terms, or, as Žižek puts it, “to a difference of part(s)/no-part, 1 and 0, groups and proletariat.”[[91]](#endnote-91) With every action, one simply asks, does this help me to achieve my goal or not? Am I refusing to give any ground to my adversary?[[92]](#endnote-92) If something goes wrong, you simply identify the point of failure, determine the problem, and try again. As Badiou says, every point “concentrates the degrees of existence…into only two possibilities.”[[93]](#endnote-93) One is good for a truth procedure and one is bad; the goal in building a new world is to associate “all the ‘good points.’”[[94]](#endnote-94) Did the party fail, or the people? Was too much leeway given, or too little? As a Leninist and Maoist, respectively, both Žižek and Badiou criticize what their ideology’s namesakes did, but only to determine the problem(s) they made and fix them.[[95]](#endnote-95) Both in identifying actions and addressing previous failures, the method**—**and thus their ideology of revolution—is straightforward and linear.

Both the “for or against” account of action and the single origin account of failure ignore dynamism. They suggest revolutionaries execute a firm, constant push in one direction (i.e. towards the proletariat instead of groups, or the good points instead of the bad). If something fails, you determine the factor that caused it and start pushing in the same direction again. When your opponent is dynamic and capable of resilience, your motion in one direction can be used against you or rendered inert. Similarly, just identifying the problem and starting over ignores how the system you’re opposing may have adapted to your initial revolution such that your solution will be ineffective. To illustrate these points, let’s use as an example May ’68. There is no agreement for why the massive protests ended as they did, but three of the main explanations all indicate that the revolutionaries were not thinking in terms of resiliency, and constructed a fragile movement. First, in her book *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, Kristen Ross says that students were not communicating with the media, and this blackout led to the government’s repression and peoples’ hesitancy to embrace the protests.[[96]](#endnote-96) Some demonstrators justified their silence by claiming communication would be tantamount to concession; however, in the context of May *’*68 it meant that the students were cut off from the State and vice versa. Another way of stating this is that the students were not aware of what was on the minds of the State’s officials and had no direct way of informing society about its vision. They lacked feedback mechanisms that would alert them to danger and give them the chance to effectively respond. Second, Ross critically mentions how some historians argue that May ’68 was excessive, such as in the “disorganization suffered by the university,” the “ultrafeminism” of the early women’s movement, the violence carried out by some of the participants, and the affinity of some for totalitarian ideologies.[[97]](#endnote-97) This interpretation of May *’*68’s failure would indicate the movement produced effects it could not adapt to without collapse, or that it was incapable of de-intensifying and de-coupling such that a failure at one point would not affect everything. Third, Badiou’s own explanation for why the movement failed—the students were confronted with problems of organization, ideology, and strategy which led them to imagine “that the pathetic actions of a few groups wearing helmets and armed with sticks could bring down the enormous State apparatus”[[98]](#endnote-98)—illustrates my point. The students had a fragile system organized around a central ideal but incapable of swarming when confronted by the State. What Badiou fails to see is that returning to the point of failure (i.e. his claim we are contemporaries of ’68 “in the strongest possible sense”[[99]](#endnote-99)) and recovering the truth that motivated the students is not enough. Recovering the truth and fixing the problems of last time won’t help if capitalism’s resilience, *in its present configuration*, is not addressed. The protests of May ’68 were confronting resiliency with fragility (in the sense of not being prepared to adapt to the adaptation of capitalism); no amount of pushing in one direction would have changed the outcome.

When resilience is factored in, you can never fully rely on Žižek’s violent method or Badiou’s belief that fixing problems means identifying a point of failure. It is very easy for any action, including ones that seem helpful, to work against you. Zolli and Healy give an example of this early in their book relating to corn prices in Mexico. When NAFTA was originally sold to Mexicans and Americans, it was marketed as a force to bring down prices.[[100]](#endnote-100) The reasoning was that if there were little to no tariffs applied to imported goods, companies could lower their costs when selling them to consumers. Yet in 2007, the framework set up by NAFTA had the opposite effect on corn prices, which led to significant protests across Mexico (called the tortilla riots).[[101]](#endnote-101) The reason is because Hurricane Katrina caused oil prices to skyrocket in the US, leading many agriculture businesses to grow non-edible corn for ethanol to capitalize on rising oil prices. Because they were now producing less edible corn, and because American agricultural businesses had put Mexican farmers out of business, there was much less corn being imported into Mexico. Demand rose significantly, and corn prices along with it. While this example illustrates how NAFTA produced the opposite of its desired effect, at least in this one instance, it also shows the insufficiency of protests that don’t engage resiliency. Protestors at the time railed against the current government and wealthy elite of the country, who were not directly to blame for the crisis (except inasmuch as they supported the system that caused it). A whole constellation of elements—NAFTA, weather patterns, and American businesses, among other things—caused it. Neither the reduction of every action to a “1 or 0,” nor the attempt to trace the problem back to a point, would have solved the problem.

In the realm of revolution, actions that seem to support communism may, for example, trigger a feedback mechanism or de-coupling action. And by reducing each failure to a point one overlooks how many parts of the system produced the point you’re reacting to, as well as the fact that many parts of the system will respond to your action in the point. Without exploring the system’s potential reaction, one will never know whether your action, and the point you’re acting in, have any significance for change. In sum, while Badiou and Žižek may be able to conceive of capitalism in general terms, it is very difficult to predict how it will respond to specific actions taken against it. Communists must think non-linearly, and with an understanding of capitalism’s current capabilities, to be successful. Johnston gives a related critique of Žižek, saying that while Žižek is right that revolutionaries must be ready to go from small, tactical engagements to a large, fundamental change at a moment’s notice, we must also be aware that “the hurling of oneself into a frantic swirl of activities” can itself “forestall rather than facilitate change” since it leads one to believe that one of these frenetic actions will miraculously bring about change.[[102]](#endnote-102) While Johnston is describing ideology rather than the nature of systems, the point is the same—actions taken in support of one’s goal will not necessarily have the effect one wants. That said, I agree with both Badiou and Žižek that this analysis should not encourage pathological inaction. Acting is a crucial part of change, but needs to be done with a greater emphasis on interconnectivity than on truth (understood as a transcendental or Master-Signifier). Johnston again agrees, saying that “any truth can be twisted into a tool for engendering an acceptance of the status quo”[[103]](#endnote-103) As Zolli and Healy conclude, “‘We persist with these linear tools and models even when systems that interest us are complex and nonlinear.’”[[104]](#endnote-104)

**Why this is important**

To show how systems theory offers a better alternative, it is important to review challenges made to this type of analysis. I will look at two: first, Robin James’s claim that using the discourse of resilience avoids systemic critique, and second, Jodi Dean’s argument that complexity theory encourages a hands-off approach to economic regulation. Both authors criticize systems theory for promoting neoliberalism and resisting radical change. In response, I will demonstrate both that systems theory is not necessarily capitalist and that it offers important ideas for how to escape such an economic order.

Robin James argues in “Incandescence, Melancholy, and Feminist Bad Vibes” that resilience is how neoliberalism co-opts feminism by normalizing it as revolutionary. Resilience is capitalism’s response to feminism’s potential to overturn gender-based oppression. Capitalism appropriates and reproduces that potential not as revolutionary but as consistent with oppression. The desire to see strong women succeeding fuels consumption and the objectification of women, turning feminism into a means by which neoliberalism continues. Rather than overturning the patriarchal system, resilience encourages women to be strong in the face of the patriarchy. The focus of feminism switches from a critique of patriarchal oppression into a celebration of proud women. It depicts the patriarchy as a natural thing which women must always strive against.[[105]](#endnote-105) The result is increased damage done to women and the perpetuation of the patriarchal system doing it.[[106]](#endnote-106) James defines resilience as “the ability to bounce back after trauma or crisis” and claims that it is “thought to be the most valuable capacity individuals, populations, and States can possess.”[[107]](#endnote-107) The discourse of resilience has three steps: “(1) perform damage so that others can see, feel, and understand it; (2) recycle or overcome that damage, so that you come out ahead of where you were even before the damage hit; (3) pay that surplus value–that value added by recycling–to some hegemonic institution, like white supremacist patriarchy, or capital, or the State, something like that.”[[108]](#endnote-108) Feminism will need to find a way around the resilience discourse to overcome neoliberalism.[[109]](#endnote-109)

The second challenge to systems theory comes from Jodi Dean, who claims that the idea of complexity feeds into the neoliberal narrative of the “invisible hand” of the market. By all accounts, the economic market is a complex system which is largely unpredictable. Those who advocate neoliberalism claim that because the market is complex and unpredictable, it should not be regulated. The effects of any regulation will be just as volatile as the market itself, so it is best to let the market sort things out. Government officials will be ineffective at best, and harmful at worst, if they try to control the market with laws.[[110]](#endnote-110) If no one can understand the market, no one can be held accountable for wrongdoing. Bank CEOs, mutual fund managers, and other economic elites are just as much victims of economic crises as those who lost their homes, savings, and jobs. Penalizing them for their harmful actions makes an appeal to justice that cannot be supported by our understanding of market systems. Dean is critical of this perspective, saying that it legitimates the capitalist ideology.[[111]](#endnote-111) Dean emphasizes that using complexity in this way just avoids responsibility by pretending that you don’t have to engage in politics. But avoiding politics is itself a type of politics, and it is better to recognize this than to pretend otherwise.[[112]](#endnote-112) Acts will always take place with a background of complexity. This does not make responsibility and appeals to justice irrelevant—it makes them even more important.

Both of these challenges to systems theory are based on the claim that the ideas it puts forth (resilience for James, complexity for Dean) can produce neoliberal outcomes. Yet while both authors show that these ideas can support neoliberalism, neither says that the concepts do so out of necessity. Instead, the authors make a plausible case that these ideas can have this effect. I do not deny that the concepts of systems theory can be used in support of neoliberalism—in fact, I agree with James and Dean about the dangers they point to—but I do reject the claim that systems theory is irreducibly neoliberal. To show why this is the case, we must first compare descriptions of neoliberalism with those of systems theory. Jodi Dean defines neoliberalism as the ideology of the Chicago school (roughly understood to be liberal economic theory and a belief in free markets) combined with the procedures associated with the institution of that ideology (examples of which are “new media celebrations of fast and fluid networks, fantasies of free markets, [and] misplaced critiques of collective ownership and government regulation”[[113]](#endnote-113)). While James does not give an explicit definition of neoliberalism, she describes how the practices of deregulation and capital production overlap with systems of white supremacy and patriarchy throughout her essay.[[114]](#endnote-114) Next, systems theory defines a system as “a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time,”[[115]](#endnote-115) and complex adaptive systems as “a collective designation for nonlinear systems defined by the interaction of large numbers of adaptive agents.”[[116]](#endnote-116) According to one author, dynamic systems consist “of time, a set of state variables, an evolution rule, an initial condition of the states, and a boundary condition.”[[117]](#endnote-117) With these definitions before us, we can now see how similar or co-dependent neoliberalism and systems theory are.

The primary similarity between neoliberalism and systems theory is the description of markets as networks which are “fast and fluid” and systems as sets of interconnected and adaptive agents which produce their own behavior through interaction. It is fair to say that the market neoliberalism fosters is an example of a complex and dynamic system, but it is not accurate to say that they are the same. Unlike neoliberalism, systems theory makes no blanket statements about the propriety of regulation, collective ownership, or capital production. Nor does systems theory embrace a liberal perspective that says the best state of affairs will come from rational individuals making free choices. Neoliberalism’s markets begin with certain agents already decided, and with some relationships predetermined. Systems theory does not require that the agents composing a system have the traits those in neoliberalism’s model do, nor does it demand the same relationships exist. The study of complex adaptive systems includes the study of systems which are highly regulated, where capitalist ownership is not allowed, and where the relationships between agents are not measured in terms of wealth.[[118]](#endnote-118) More importantly, there is nothing preventing systems theory from giving a systemic critique of neoliberalism. This point is echoed by systems theorists such as Doerthe Rosenow, who claims that scientific complexity theory can be a “powerful intellectual resource” for contesting “particular government regimes” such as neoliberalism.[[119]](#endnote-119) Christian Fuchs and John Collier go even further, claiming that contemporary systems theory shows it is “simply wrong to claim as Hayek and others do that the economy can and should be an autonomous system and that state intervention caused the crisis of modern society.”[[120]](#endnote-120) It is true, as James says, that resilience is described as a component of a healthy system, but so are change, adaptivity, diversity, and sustainability.[[121]](#endnote-121) Inasmuch as systems theory provides clues about what characteristics define flourishing societies, it seeks robust and healthy systems that care for every agent as they need. A system that continues harm while encouraging resilience may be preferred over others, but it is not the goal of systems theory. And encouraging resilience does not necessarily prevent systems theory from criticizing the exploitative practices in neoliberalism. Similarly, the existence of complexity in systems theory does not prevent government intervention, nor is that what systems theory says. The goal is effective intervention, and as systems theory shows, that is not something which will necessarily arise through a laissez-faire approach.[[122]](#endnote-122) Systems theory does not prescribe cultivating personal values like resilience or avoiding action; it shows how one should develop a response in a manner that takes into account the dynamics of complex systems.

Systems theory, and its understanding of resilience, offer two benefits to revolutionaries. First, systems theory aids revolutionaries in organizing a resilient movement capable of overcoming capitalism’s resilience. Badiou’s and Žižek’s arguments that all our choices need to be thought of in terms of ones and zeros, yesses and nos, ignores how the option which seems to be best may end up harming us as capitalism adapts and appropriates the tactic we were using. Their straightforward and linear approach, which encourages one to see things in stark terms, does not protect against the dynamics of resilience. A revolutionary approach that incorporates resilience must be more robust. While no tactics will necessarily avoid reappropriation, it is possible to build a movement that can counter it through adaptation. This means the movement must be organized yet decentralized, able to respond to threats quickly, and contain agents capable of working together well in diverse circumstances. It must be grassroots, collaborative, and adept at bringing people together without imposing one specific order upon everyone. Making sure a movement includes these things will help it resist the appropriation that capitalism has achieved many times in the past, as the movement will be capable of adapting in response to capitalism’s adaptation. To give just one example of how this changes the discussion, let’s apply this idea to Žižek’s and Badiou’s ongoing debate regarding the use of the State following the communist revolution. Žižek follows Lenin’s position, saying we should use the State,[[123]](#endnote-123) while Badiou takes a Maoist inspired view that opposes the State as something which constrains a revolution.[[124]](#endnote-124) The idea of resilience, when applied to this discussion, would imply that it is not the State as such which one must embrace or avoid; what is important is the way that one approaches organizing it. If either is organized without care being given to making it resilient, the same outcome that Žižek and Badiou rightly criticize contemporary Russia and China for could happen to their own movements. In practical terms, this suggests several things. Each group within the movement should know the overall plan but be given the freedom to adapt as needed, though they should consider the effects their adaptations have on the whole movement. Because adaptation will occur regularly, lines of communication need to be maintained so that quick responses are possible. Perhaps most important, as many revolutionaries as possible should be well-educated and independent. Revolutionaries should both believe in what they’re fighting for and able to critique their movement. Only with the latter does adaptation occur. While Badiou and Žižek say that universality comes from staying faithful to a truth in light of new circumstances, they provide very little advice for how to adapt. Systems theory shows how adaptation requires one to pay just as much attention to the organization of one’s movement as to the rights and wrongs indicated by one’s truth (for example, a movement may need to let a wrong persist if overturning it would harm the adaptive capacity of one’s movement).

Second, systems theory argues for supplementing Badiou’s and Žižek’s theories of truths such that truths are understood as organic wholes. Badiou and Žižek emphasize that truths are what bring a world together, providing the symbolic structure that makes a world consistent. Being faithful to the event means holding on to the new symbolic structure it indicates; being reactionary means taking the novelty the event revealed and trying to incorporate it back into the pre-evental symbolic structure. Systems theory indicates that truths do not only function at the level of bringing into being a new symbolic structure. The resilience of neoliberalism shows that systems composed of different beings and relationships can still produce the same outcome. A new formal order or set of immanent operations, to use Žižek’s and Badiou’s definitions of Master-Signifier and transcendental, will not necessarily produce the different unities that Žižek and Badiou desire. Without a focus on how systems adapt and react, one’s worldview may create new beings and relationships but yield the same result. Faithfulness can perpetuate the worldview one is resisting, since in a complex system such faithfulness can become a doctrine that the opposing worldview adapts to. Systems theory argues that truths also function at the level of the entire system. In addition to producing and ordering the beings within the system, truths are the system as a whole and thus capable of adapting to events within it. This understanding of truth allows for more change than that given by Žižek and Badiou. When a truth is defined only as that which brings order to being, it won’t be as adaptable as one which can also consider the way systems move. Truths must be seen as organic wholes, not just as transcendentals or Master-Signifiers. Badiou’s and Žižek’s theories of truth don’t properly describe the role dynamism has in producing a society like communism. Systems theory focuses from the beginning on the networks and dynamics that both truths create, and which in turn create truths.

A revolution without novelty, and which keeps in place the integrity of the old world, is not a revolution at all. To the extent that Badiou and Žižek develop theories that create new beings, they promote true revolution. But if all one’s truth does is create new orders, there is no surety that one’s goal will be realized. As has been shown, the creation of new beings, technologies, and organizations has never yet stopped capitalism’s spread. While both Badiou and Žižek recognize the failures of prior movements, they argue that these failures stemmed from not having a determinate enough strategy. I argue that the problem was not a lack of determinacy but a lack of resiliency. It’s not as though people didn’t have enough conviction, or a willingness to explore strategies, in previous eras.[[125]](#endnote-125) Instead, capitalism adapted to the strategy and tactics of the movements, and its resilience overcame their fragility. It is not more determinacy that is needed, but more resilience within the overall frameworks. This requires not just a great idea, but thinking about how to relate the beings created by one’s idea to each other, such that the truth is not just the world’s transcendental (its beings and the truth-processes that produce the world as a set), but its organic whole (the relationships and dynamics that compose the system when it is operating).

1. Slavoj Žižek, “Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao”, *positions* 19 (2011): 672. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 23-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Badiou, *Being and Event,* 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 67-69. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Alain Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 598. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 118. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 138. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 140. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 179. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 180. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 202. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 211. On page 227, Badiou says the event leaves a trace in the axiom of choice. The ability to intervene, and in doing so maintain fidelity to the trace of an event, is produced when ontology declares that intervention is possible and names it choice. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 54 & 58 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 586. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2010), 200-201. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 206-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 210-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 224. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. There is a subtle but important difference between singularities and events worth mentioning. Singularities are recognized as part of a situation, but are not included within it (Badiou, *Being and Event*, 522). Events are multiples composed of singularities as well as themselves (Badiou, *Being and Event*, 506-7). In short, singularities are anomalies, and an event is the occurrence of such singularities, encapsulated under a term like “the French Revolution.” [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 391. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 394. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 400. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 401. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Points are described by Badiou as both places and choices. This is because a point is always where a choice occurs, either to continue with the truth that defines a complex world or to abandon it (*Logic of Worlds*, 406). It is a place that contains both the subject that chooses as well as the subject which is created by the choice (*Logic of Worlds*, 434). It is worth noting that this is different than the original declaration of fidelity to a truth, since choice is when one decides whether or not to stay within a world already constituted. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Slavoj Žižek, “Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!,” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, Verso, 1989), 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. George Di Giovanni, “Introduction” in G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. Goerge Di Giovanni (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2010), xxxv. Hegel’s project moves from the abstract to the concrete, with immediacy playing a role at every point in the development of knowledge. This is what I mean by dialectical engagement with the world. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 603-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Žižek, “Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!,” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 411. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 387. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 386. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Žižek, “Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao”, 681. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Žižek, “Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao”, 681. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Slavoj Žižek, “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance,” *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2002): 566. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 297. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Žižek, “Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao”, 673. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Žižek, “Not Less than Nothing, But Simply Nothing,” *Verso Books Blog* (2012). Accessed online at https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1046-not-less-than-nothing-but-simply-nothing. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 411. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 413. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 415. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. J. Anthony Stallins, Joy Mast, and Albert Parker, “Resilience Theory and Thomas Vale’s Plants and People: A Partial Consilience of Ecological and Geographic Concepts of Succession,” *Professional Geographer* 67 (2013): 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 45, 46, 66. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 392. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 262-264. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Joel Mokyr, “Capitalism Reinvents Itself,” *Current History* 112 (2013): 291. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 195. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Mokyr, “Capitalism Reinvents Itself,” 292. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 80-81. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. N. M. Gotts, “Resilience, panarchy, and world-systems analysis,” *Ecology and Society* 12 (2007). Accessed online at http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss1/art24/. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. N. M. Gotts, “Resilience, panarchy, and world-systems analysis.” [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. That capitalism has not yet shown an ability to overcome climate change does not mean the system isn’t resilient. Resiliency does not mean a system can overcome everything. The fact that capitalism displays all the core features of resilient systems, such as decoupling, is sufficient to demonstrate my point here, which is that capitalism is a resilient system. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 69-70. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. L. Tesfatsion, “Economic agents and markets as emergent phenomena,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 99 (2002). Accessed online at http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.072079199. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. L. Tesfatsion, “Economic agents and markets as emergent phenomena.” [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Mokyr, “Capitalism Reinvents Itself,” 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 66-67. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Žižek, “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance,” 566. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 406. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Lacan describes the Master-Signifier by saying “everything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier…It’s the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively” (Jacques Lacan, *Seminars of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses*, trans. Russell Grigg [London: Routledge, 1993], 268). [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 405; Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 1-2; and Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 399. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. In saying that truths indicate goals and tactics, I am referring to Žižek’s and Badiou’s descriptions of how people respond to events (*Logic of Worlds*, 50-67; *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 387). In elaborating on faithful subjects, Badiou says that the consequences of an event “confront the global situation with singular choices, with decisions that involve the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’” (51), and gives the example of marching south to attack Rome as a consequence of one truth from the past. Žižek says that those faithful to the Marxism-Event must try to bring about communism and Leninism. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, (London: Abacus, 1975), 259. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, 260. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, 260. Emphasis added. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, 261. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 230. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 411. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 264. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 416. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 417. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 276, 277; Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 231-232 [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Kristin Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 187 [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives*, 148-152. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Peter Passell, “INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS; A Payoff for Clinton's Helping Hand to Mexico,” *New York Times* (New York, N.Y), Oct, 12 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change,* 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change,* 168-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Robin James, “Incandescence, Melancholy, and Feminist Bad Vibes: A Response to Ziarek’s *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism,*” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 25 (2014), 120. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Robin James, “Incandescence, Melancholy, and Feminist Bad Vibes: A Response to Ziarek’s *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism,”* 125. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. Robin James, “Resilience, an ideal that hurts more than it helps,” *The Prindle Post*, accessed online at <http://www.prindlepost.org/2015/10/resilience-an-ideal-that-hurts-more-than-it-helps/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. Robin James, “Resilience, an ideal that hurts more than it helps,” [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. Robin James, “Incandescence, Melancholy, and Feminist Bad Vibes: A Response to Ziarek’s *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism,”* 123, 125. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Jodi Dean, “Complexity As Capture - Neoliberalism And The Loop Of Drive,” *New Formations* 80-81 (2013), 147. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Dean, “Complexity As Capture - Neoliberalism And The Loop Of Drive,” 148. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Dean, “Complexity As Capture - Neoliberalism And The Loop Of Drive,” 151. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Dean, “Complexity As Capture - Neoliberalism And The Loop Of Drive,” 138. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Robin James, “Incandescence, Melancholy, and Feminist Bad Vibes: A Response to Ziarek’s *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism,”* 116, 117, 122. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Donna Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (London: Earthscan, 2008), 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. John Holland, *Adaptation in Natural and Artificial Systems* (London: MIT Press, 1992), ix. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. Kunihiko Kaneko, *Life: An Introduction to Complex Systems Biology* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2006), 47 [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. John Holland’s *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (Helix Books, 1995) describes multiple systems that do not follow the neoliberal model. For example, on pg. 101 he discusses a system which looks at how resources are transformed by certain animals to increase the possibility for reproduction. In *The Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2007), Scott Page discusses the importance of regulation with reference to politics in several places (for example, 250-1 and 272-275). In these models and others studied by systems theory, the baseline is not necessarily one of exploitation or deregulation; that is only one possibility among many. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. Doerthe Rosenow, “Dancing life into being: Genetics, resilience and the challenge of complexity theory,” *Security Dialogue* 43 (2012), 544. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. Christian Fuchs and John Collier, “A Dynamic Systems View of Economic and Political Theory,” *Theoria* 54 (2007), 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. For examples, see the work of John Holland, Scott Page, and Jay Epstein, among others. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. Zolli and Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, pg 145-163. Zolli and Healy argue that what is needed to prevent economic catastrophes is a more collaborative approach that encourages a greater sense of equality among society. They describe government intervention as one means by which this goal can be achieved, though they mention other means as well. [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
123. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 402. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
124. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis,* 277. In *Logic of Worlds* (Continuum, 2009), he discusses the tension found within the subject of the state revolutionary on pg. 521. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
125. At the time of the event, there were upwards of 9 million of students and workers were on strike (see Kristin Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives*, 8 and Henry Tanners, “France at a Boil: Old Complaints About Gaullism Erupt Into Action After Students Show Way,” *New York Times* May 20,1968). To this day, the French maintain a distaste for neoliberal economics (“20-Nation Poll Finds Strong Global Consensus: Support for Free Market System But Also More Regulation of Large Companies,” Accessed online at <http://www.globescan.com/news_archives/pipa_market.html> in August 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-125)