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VIOLENCE

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introduction

Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* (first published in 1922) brings to light the violent precondition of any law or political contract: the act of introduction of a law, that is, of inauguration of any self-organizing principle of a society, carried out by the bearer of sovereignty, is "pre-legal." It is the result of the pure Will (the pure Desire, the Real or the Unilateral Difference) taking place prior to any form of social accord which is, in its determination-in-the-last-instance, a discursive instance. The inauguration of a law is an act of violence and its origin is the pre-discursive domain of sovereignty. In its last instance, any political order and any legal system does not come to being from a certain rational or discursive principle, but rather from the Real-of-Sovereignty.

Amidst the discursiveness of the political stands the bearer of sovereignty as a void, that is, as a stance of pure power devoid of discourse, as the sheer experience of unilateral assertion of will. All law stems from a certain "Because I said so." The latter is a statement that is meager in terms of discursive contents, an apophysis which consists in the empty performative gesture (nonetheless, by recourse to discursive means) of power. It is but a sheer expression of a "unilateral difference" which dispenses with logical explication, with any desire to make sense.¹ It works as Badiou's "void": fidelity to this purely experiential instance, fidelity to that sheer experience of an entirely new *event* is the source of or the cause for generation of an entirely new political truth, of an entirely new law conditioning a new political situation.²

In his *Critique of Violence*, Walter Benjamin explains not only that the Law is enabled and

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the indispensable condition of the law (and the political)

engendered by violence but also continuously sustained by it. He distinguishes between pure (or divine) violence and violence as means, insisting that the latter is always either law-making or law-preserving:

All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving.³

Violence is the "kernel of the Real" of all and any law. Hence, it is the Real of any political system and of all political life, since the political is but a derivative of the more radical concept of the Law. We conceive of the Law as the Norm/activity which enables societal organization whereas we refer to the political in the sense of the ruling Logos which sustains the Norm/activity. (The latter is historically

conditioned and so is the content of the Logos. Still, I understand both terms as universals, although in a purely categorical and formal sense.) The Law is a radical term, in the Laruellian sense of the word, because it is transcendently minimal and descriptive of the Real as lived. That is, it renders the experience, the lived of the Law thinkable in that “transcendentally impoverished” sense, by describing it as an *event* of a barred flow of desire (producing a secondary *experience* of a particular type of frustration) by way of introducing an instance of the Transcendental (the Law itself) as its limit. It is a very rudimentary concept describing an occurrence on the border between the Real (the lived) preceding Thought and Language. It is, to reiterate, radical – minimally transcendental and descriptive of the workings of the Real.⁴

Antagonism is indeed the “kernel of the Real” of the political, as Žižek maintains,⁵ and it does not consist only in partisan politics or in the opposition between different political discourses; on the radical level it consists in the grounding act of violence engendering the Law and the political itself. This grounding gesture of violence is made of the sheer taking place of the decision (to introduce or maintain a certain law, i.e., a certain political Logos), in the political will or desire that only a posteriori develops a discourse around itself.

The pure assertion of will or the unilateral act of manifestation of power aiming at introducing a rule or a norm which is always assigned the status of universal, that is, which is always the Law, works – let us resort to Lacanian parlance – as the thrust of the Real into the *Automaton* of the pleasure principle (the endless signifying chain). Thus it works as trauma, that is, as the trauma par excellence – the Real. The birth of the Law is the working of violence in the radical sense of the word (in the minimally transcendental identity-in-the-last-instance of the notion of “violence”).

A radical concept, according to François Laruelle, is one that represents determination-in-the-last-instance correlating with the Real or the lived (experience) rather than with a

theory which, in its last instance, is part of “philosophy.” Philosophy is but “auto-fetishism” and “self-sufficiency” of reflection.⁶ Thought is but an occurrence of the transcendental, and its subject is inevitably mediated by way of the transcendental or language. A radical concept is, thus, a transcendental instance since it is the product of Thought. Nonetheless, it is transcendently “impoverished.” A radical concept is one which is minimally transcendental and is, therefore, fundamentally *descriptive* of an experienced or empirical reality, one that follows “the syntax of the Real.”⁷ Such is our use of the term violence here: it is determined in the last instance by the effect of Trauma, that is, in its last instance, it is descriptive of the *lived* (of) Trauma:

[...] “trauma” designates a shocking encounter which, precisely, DISTURBS this immersion into one’s life-world, a violent intrusion of something which doesn’t fit in.⁸

It is this disturbance of one’s life-world, “intrusion of something which doesn’t fit in” bringing in a sense of Trauma, that we will call violence here.

And we will claim, along with Benjamin, that all violence “as means” is either law-making or law-preserving. Such is the determination-in-the-last-instance of sovereignty as well: as Schmitt has shown, it consists in the will of the sovereign and its form is an act of decision, an instance which is beyond legal justification and holds a status “analogous to that of the miracle” in theology.⁹ This is the core of sovereignty and the pre-legal source of the Law. The violent, “pre-legal” contents of sovereignty and, hence, paradoxically, of the origin of the Law is most unequivocally and radically expressed in the state of exception. The latter is a situation in a state when all hitherto existing law is suspended in favor of the sovereign’s (or, that of the direct representatives of sovereignty) right to carry out decisions that have direct bearing on the lives of the citizens or the inhabitants of a country. This absence of law is legally established – the sovereign’s suspension (or that of the subjects of sovereignty, of “the citizens,”

re-presented by the parliament) of the legal system becomes a law. It is a certain “non-law,” or, put in a Benjaminian vein, it is a state of law-making violence. The state of exception, and the suspension of law it entails, is habitually vindicated through the instance of “necessity,” explains Giorgio Agamben:

A recurrent opinion posits the concept of necessity as the foundation of the state of exception. According to a tenaciously repeated Latin adage (a history of the *adagia*’s strategic function in legal literature has yet to be written), *necessitas legem non habet*, “necessity has no law” which is interpreted in two opposing ways: “necessity does not recognize any law” and “necessity creates its own law” (*nécessité fait loi*). In both cases, the theory of the state of exception is wholly reduced to the theory of the *status necessitatis*, so that a judgment concerning the existence of the latter resolves the question concerning the legitimacy of the former.¹⁰

Necessity is yet another name for the intervention of the Real into the discursive *Automaton* of a society. It is an event instilling the sense of a “must,” and the latter is a sheer experience, a lived Trauma brought upon by (a) force to which one’s individual desire and intention must succumb. It is the force of the unadulterated taking-place of an event (such as sovereign’s will, a war or a natural disaster) of which only an a posteriori discursive explication is developed and justification of the unavoidable law-making processes is produced. Necessity is habitually deemed to be induced by a threat, it is violence induced by violence. Unlike the philosophical meaning that could be ascribed to the term *ananke* in Antiquity which could also refer to events such as love, in modern legal terminologies necessity is always defined by the potentiality or actuality of negative events, threatening with annihilation. The contemporary colloquial use of the term necessity, however, allows its positive connotations. Yet again, in the Western legal terminology since the Roman law (until nowadays), the figure of necessity par excellence is the state of exception.¹¹

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the idea of pure violence: *in-itself* and *for* the law

In his *Critique of Violence*, Benjamin repeatedly affirms and demonstrates that all violence (“as means”) is either law-making or law-preserving. He claims that if the violence “[...] adds no claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity.”¹²

A few pages further, Benjamin writes:

Lawmaking is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence.¹³

In opposition to the violence which is *always already* law-making or law-preserving, Benjamin introduces divine violence which is “law-destroying” rather than law-making; it is “expiating,” unlike the law-making violence which brings in “guilt and retribution”; it doesn’t threaten but “strikes” and it is “lethal without spilling blood.”¹⁴

In spite of the fact that the “pure” and “law-destroying” violence of expiation is defined as divine, according to Benjamin, a human rendition of it is possible and it is one that can bring about true revolutionary change toward a stateless society or a society which has undergone “the abolition of state power.” So Benjamin concludes:

But if the existence of violence outside the law, as pure immediate violence, is assured, this furnishes the proof that revolutionary violence, the highest manifestation of unalloyed violence by man, is possible [...] Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred execution, may be called sovereign violence.¹⁵

Divine violence is “the sign and the seal” of sovereignty as violence and it can be the source of revolutionary violence. According to Benjamin, this type of violence is different from the law-making or law-preserving type. In spite of the fact that I concur with the distinction, I would, nonetheless, argue that the violence which is used as means of either law-making or law-preserving is not different in its substance or in its determination-in-the-last-instance from

the pure, that is, the “divine violence.” Substantially or in their determination-in-the-last instance, they are the same. Violence in the last instance cannot be defined other than as violence. In the last instance, it is the advent of pure force of (political) desire – it is *always already* pure or divine violence, which only via the instance of linguistic mediation becomes enmeshed with the Law or political discourse.

Benjamin has explained elsewhere that purity does not exist in itself, but is rather the result of a process of purification.¹⁶ A thing is pure relative to something, and always already relative to human intellectual activity, that is, to language.¹⁷ A concept can be “contaminated,” for example the idea of violence can “lose its purity” by virtue of defining it as mere means (of law-making/law-preserving), that is, by way of defining it according to the transcendental rather than the Real. In other words, a concept is “contaminated,” its purity is reduced or it is less radical when the determination-in-the-last-instance is a claim of a certain doctrine, a system of thought – or simply the Thought – rather than a concept “affected by immanence” or by the Real.¹⁸

A concept can be “purified,” that is, seen in its purity, or, put in Laruelian parlance, rendered *radical*, when it is determined-in-the-last-instance not relative to other concept/s but rather by the event of the Real that this concept is aiming at capturing or mediating. Benjamin’s “pure or divine violence” is a radical concept in the Laruelian sense of the world, that is, it is determination-in-the-last-instance by the advent of the Real, by the event of violence taking place stripped of any justification, any “making-sense,” that is, any mediation through language – any “law-making.”

The radical concept is determined and shaped by the “syntax of the Real,” while inevitably making use of the transcendental.¹⁹ The latter, being yet another term for the (Laruelian) “Thought,” is descriptive of the workings of the Real, using concepts (products of the transcendental) as unorganized material (*chôra*) without conforming to conceptual cosmologies

(theories, systems, doctrines, discourses defined as schools of thought). This type of truth-generation is termed by Laruelle as non-philosophical, a process in which Thought succumbs to the dictate of the Real, a process which resorts to philosophy albeit by virtue of introducing that “non-,” that *epoché* vis-à-vis philosophy as a whole.

The radical concept is always the product of a “Vision-in-One,” a thought which is non-relative to the transcendental and correlative only to the Real.²⁰ The Real is the *lived* and it always already precedes – or rather, is beyond (*au delà*) – language, maintains Laruelle. It is thus the sheer experiential or rather the mere “taking place” one is exposed and subjected to. It is homologous to Alain Badiou’s notion of the “evental.” Seen as the sheer “taking place,” seen as an event prior to any language of it, infinitesimally prior to any possibility of being rendered the “means” of the Law, violence appears in its purity. Thus, a non-philosophical reconceptualization of “pure violence” is the product of a “Vision-in-One” which is attuned to the singularity of the event rather than to its relations to other concepts and frameworks of thought the concepts belong to and within which/in terms of which they are thought (philosophical or theoretical systems, schools of thought, doctrines). It is a concept which has been extracted from a philosophy, from a universe of thought and, thereupon, divested of its transcendental status determined within a particular framework of thought.

At this point, it is interesting to note that Benjamin explains the property of conceptual purity in a way that is very similar to the Laruelian process of concept’s radicalization:

It is a mistake to postulate anywhere a purity that exists in itself and needs only to be preserved [...] In other words: the purity of every (finite) being is not dependent on itself [...] For nature, human language is the condition of its purity that stands outside of it.²¹

In fact, Benjamin claims that the property of purity (also as an ontological category) does not exist as an in itself, it is but a concept, an

idea, which has been radicalized, “purified” from all that is not – put in Laruellese – its determination-in-the-last-instance:

[...] at the origin of the creature stands not purity [*Reinheit*] but purification [*Reinigung*]²²

Unlike the pure violence which is “divine” and “expiating,” which is the instance of violence itself taking place (the sheer advent of violence in the form of the Laruellian “Lived”), the violence exercised by the state and its mechanisms of law enforcement, for the purposes of preserving (and/or making) laws, is always “degenerated violence,” maintains Benjamin:

[...] the police intervene “for security reasons” in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists, when they are not merely, without the slightest relation to legal ends, accompanying the citizen as a brutal encumbrance through a life regulated by ordinances, or simply supervising him [...] its [the police’s] power is formless, like its nowhere tangible, all pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states.²³

Within the Benjaminian universe of thought, law, and its enforcement through mechanisms of the state, is always already degeneration of violence since legal violence is “impure.” However, the “greatest conceivable degeneration,” according to Benjamin, takes place in democracies:

[...] it cannot finally be denied that their spirit is less devastating where they [the police] represent, in absolute monarchy, the power of a ruler in which legislative and executive supremacy are united, that in democracies where their existence, elevated by no such relation, bears witness to the greatest conceivable degeneration of violence.²⁴

The level of degeneration is the “greatest conceivable” since the institutions of a democratic state, in their attempt to claim that the violence they produce is not what it is (= violence), that is, feigning it is not through violence that they rule, unavoidably transform it into its own

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reverse – the Law. However, this re-version of violence is a per-version rendering violence invisible, misrepresenting it to be the opposite (law as the “non-violent way” of ruling a state). It is an endless chain of ever more elaborated legal mechanisms whose purpose is to present the violence with which a state is ruled, and its citizens controlled, as non-violence. The transmutation of violence into law is an endless, unstoppable chain of linguistic production which consists in covering the trails of the sheer violence that is always already there and at work under the guise of the Law. This process represents a ceaseless automatism of (auto-)generating legal provisions, policies of institutions and prescriptions of procedures.

Moreover, the Law is always already maintained by force, namely by a system of penalization which also executes physical violence over its subjects (including detention depriving the body of its freedom of movement) and by the constant threat of punishment if not observed. Its power is all-invading through the unstoppably self-reproductive administration. The democratic legal system attempts to neutralize (render it imperceptible and relative and, at the same time, control) the presence of violence inherent in it by way of transforming it into a legal and moral order we will call the Norm(ality), which acts as its proxy. The meanings of the legal and the moral collapse into the meaning of “normality” (as a unity of the practical, the moral, of preserving rights and improving state institutions’ efficiency – all at once) reflected into and by the administrative policies. Considering that violence is inbuilt in the Law, considering also that the administration of a country is also a manifestation and exemplification of its culture (i.e., morals), the administrative procedures and styles represent subtle yet omnipresent exercise of state violence by virtue of transforming it into a structure supposed to represent a universally commonsensical order (and normality).

Can the legal system and the administration be “purified” from the presence of violence, and is this done by reclaiming, reaffirming and re-instituting pure violence? In other words,

must we endorse pure violence in order to invent and establish an administration, a law and institutions that are purified from violence; is a revolution necessary and is it always the product of “divine violence”?

**radical politics and (non-)violence:
if we exclude the metaphysical
grounding instance of violence,
radical politics is non-violent**

One can easily establish an analogy between pure or divine violence, on the one hand, and the Badiouian void as well as the Laruellian/Lacanian Real, on the other. It is the traumatic *par excellence*: the violence that has been “purified” from language is a sheer thrust of *Tuché* into the *Automaton* of the signifying chain, to put it in Lacanian parlance. Having defined the Lacanian Real as traumatic – moreover, as the Trauma itself – Žižek has demonstrated that it is not an abstract instance deprived of qualities. On the contrary, the Real is always already a status assumed by an occurrence that bears a specific name. For example, “antagonism” is the name of the kernel of the Real behind the “political” pertaining to contemporary democracies,²⁵ whereas the repressed Real of the hegemonic political concept defining our contemporary era as neoliberal is called “Capital.”²⁶ In other words, the Lacanian Real, as elaborated by Žižek, is always already an instance occupied by a certain substance. By the latter I mean an event, an occurrence resulting in a purely experiential instance – that is, a certain *lived*, put in Laruellian parlance. The lived that has not been mediated by language, in its last instance, is determined as traumatic. The body in its helplessness, in its state of mere exposure to the Event prior to any subject’s assuming its *always already* masterful position, which is by definition linguistically exercised, is but traumatized. If the event one is subjected to is experienced as a mere “taking-place of the Violent-Itself,” one is faced with the intervention of the Real *par excellence*. Violence is the Real-in-itself. Affliction of pain (causing Trauma) is the sole possible result

of such event. In a political context, its purpose is to impose will and exercise power which is *always already* done through acts of linguistic mediation, that is, acts of “giving meaning” to an event of force by recourse to the Law as its paradigmatic discursive form.

Pure violence is an instance of the Real – as it is also its “substance,” it’s what the Real as sheer Trauma is “made of” – and as such it precedes the Law and all forms of the “political making sense.” The Law (in its widest, abstract sense, encompassing also the meaning of the Political) is a product of the event of decision, of the violent, forceful, “unilateral affirmation of difference.” The decision is a sheer event, a pre-linguistic moment of an “It is so because I say so” inasmuch as a sheer *lived*. And this is what sovereignty consists of. The act of decision, the taking place of a force that carves into the void (the evental is) what is going to become a law, is the “abyss of an empty call.”²⁷ The abyss is made up of a sole substance, namely that of “divine” violence:

[...] the abyssal tautological authority (“it is so because I say so” of the Master) does not work only because of the sanctions (punishment/reward) it implicitly or explicitly evokes [...] what seduces us into obeying it is the very feature that may appear to be an obstacle – the absence of a “why” [...]²⁸

The Real of sovereign power, the Real of the decision that “something is to be so,” precedes its symbolic rendition, its translation into a law and via the Law, its making sense carried out – instituted and sustained – by the Subject of the Law. Indeed, its initial making sense consists in the tautology “it is so because I say so,” as Žižek puts it:

[...] the Lacanian “Master-Signifier” designates precisely this hypnotic force of the symbolic injunction which relies only on its own act of enunciation – it is here that we encounter “symbolic efficiency” at its purest. The three ways of legitimizing the exercise of authority (“authoritarian,” “totalitarian,” “liberal”) are nothing but three ways of covering up, of blinding us to the seductive power of the abyss of this empty call.²⁹

The “empty call” or the “divine violence” is wherefrom all and any law is generated. The sovereign Will mediates itself through Language, that is, transforms itself into a law/the Law, only a posteriori, nonetheless necessarily. Living the Real-in-itself, at its purest, is impossible – it would be a sheer destruction, an uninterrupted Trauma (since all possible interruptions of Trauma can be but linguistic). Divine violence, just as every rendition of the Real, necessarily translates itself into language, and into its paradigmatic linguistic form – the Law. Divine (or pure) violence constitutes the sovereignty and is also the origin of the Law (as the Real unavoidably translates itself into language). This means that “divine violence” cannot be outside the Law since it is the Real which unavoidably must be mediated through language. So, it is inextricable from the Law not only as its means but also as its divine origin. It is what any law is grounded upon and enabled by. It is the “kernel of the Real” of the Law. This implies that we cannot separate the Law and the divine violence ontologically, as the Language cannot do without the “kernel of the Real” which produces it. The Real necessitates the Language, it necessitates its own mediation since, in itself, it is unbearable – the Real is pure Trauma. By way of auto-alienation of the lived³⁰ – analogous to the Hegelian self-negation – or as the result of the Real’s mediation through language (or the Thought, in Laruellian parlance), the fundamentally estranged Subject is produced.

Pure violence – or the violence in-the-Real – is indeed a “divine” instance, one that is certainly not accessible as such to the finite beings that humans are. By pretending to master this linguistic black hole (this *void-*), one can be but engulfed by the Real of the divine violence, paralyzed and rendered split from within, put in a schizoid position. Such pretension can only be hubristic and, hence, bring in the tragic demise of a paradigmatically tragic character – that of the revolutionary subject carrying out divine justice. My contention here is not that the revolutionary political change or a revolutionary subject is impossible. I will claim quite the contrary. I will, however,

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argue that the revolutionary stance is not determined in the last instance by the divine violence. Rather, it is determined as radical political positioning – one “affected by immanence.”³¹ The latter implies that the grounding political concept is correlating with the Real, that it is conditioned by and shaped according to the “syntax of the Real.”³² However, the Real in itself is inaccessible, uncontrollable and lacking the possibility to produce either an agency or an instrument – a “weapon” – of political struggle. The political agency is always the Subject, and it is one linguistically constituted; or, in Laruellian parlance, constituted by Thought whose agency is the “Stranger.”³³ The Real of the divine violence can intervene into the discursive world of the political struggle – it can be the thrust that is the impetus for introducing a revolutionary political stance. While the latter constantly correlates with the Real, it is not the Real itself. It is rather a heterogeneous occurrence, a hybrid which is the product of the intersection between the Real and the Discourse.

Therefore, revolution is *always already* that which contains a certain form of violence inasmuch as it incessantly correlates with the Lived, with the purely evental or experiential – with the Real which is always already traumatic. Revolution also strives not only to bring justice (strike as “divine violence”) but also establish new laws. It is hence law-making. The latter is, as Benjamin has shown, always already determined by violence. Introducing a law is an act of sovereignty which is constituted by the sheer event of a decision, the occurrence of determination and imposition of will. It is the fruit of an unadulterated exercise of power. Yet again, it does not take place in the form of divine or pure violence. That is, it immediately institutes – and, hence, participates in – the heterogeneous linguistico-experiential *topos* of the political by way of introducing the new Law, and the new horizon of that which is politically thinkable.

Any revolution aims at inaugurating new laws – it is about installing a new political order; therefore, it cannot be reduced to pure – or for that matter, divine – violence.

pure violence originating from human vulnerability rather than divine justice

If we adopt the position that any imposition of will, any winning of one will over another, is a form of violence, it will be impossible to claim the possibility of a politics and, for that matter, a world without violence. Is the difference between a peaceful politics and aggressive, military politics only one of quantity – or level of intensity, or of degree – as far as the presence of violence is concerned? Is it a difference in modality or is there a difference-in-the-last-instance? Is there an immanently non-violent politics?

I believe that the latter is possible, although it does not imply that there could be a political order or a world which is entirely and in the absolute sense “violence-free.” Violence must exist in the event of a sovereign decision, that is, of introducing, imposing and enforcing a certain political will. Yet again, this type of violence, in its last instance, is non-political. It is one of a transcendental – or, perhaps, metaphysical – status, one which concerns the relationship established by the World-of-the-Language and the Domain-Beyond-Language. It concerns the ontological abyss out of which a sovereign decision stems, namely the fact that a political “making-sense” and an introduction of a law are a posteriori with respect to the “taking-place” of a decision, to the enactment of force (will or power).

Violence (its presence/absence or form) is not the political determination-in-the-last-instance of a political order, regardless of whether violent or non-violent. Embracement or refusal of violence is not the “thought-force”³⁴ that drives a political Logos and a system of laws. Yet again, there are violent and non-violent political regimes, within which the instance of violence holds a specific position in relation to the discursive or to the political Logos, and to the Law. In a “non-violent” political world, violence does not use the laws as its means. Contrary to Benjamin’s claims, I will argue that repressive regimes are determined in the last instance by reducing the laws to

mere means of violence. (In other words, since violence is always already “divine,” and it is in fact the “divine violence” that is law-making, the mark of a violent politics is the law functioning as “violence-producing,” rather than violence acting as “law-making.”) I will, however, concur with him that a degeneration takes place when one of the two (either violence or laws) is rendered a means to the other – or simply, when the violence becomes something other than the inaccessible Real that has grounded the law-making and Logos-making processes of the political.

Still, it is not merely the violence that degenerates when rendered means of the Law (or vice versa), but another vital force that may be derived from that of violence or be of similar origin – the (anta-)agonism as that which defines politics. Political enmity as the interplay, as the competition and the dialectics between different and opposed political wills, is a form of violence. And it is so in that aforementioned transcendental (or metaphysical) sense – violence as a transcendently minimal instance³⁵ which acts as the force of sovereign decision. This force can be destructive, but it is not necessarily so; that is, the *Desire* which is its determination-in-the-last-instance is life-bringing. The act (the event) of producing a sovereign (political) decision is a gesture of a “unilateral affirmation of difference” (Deleuze), it is life’s auto-affirmation (in Spinozan-like infinite expansion). Thus, it is an enactment of sheer will, an instance of violence but one which precedes language and politics. The utter legalization of the dynamics established by opposed political wills, the suffocation by discursive control of the free and unpredictable circulation of the (anta)agonism which defines the political, is that which is endangered through relentless legalism.

In his book *Violence* (2008), Žižek interprets Benjamin’s concept of “divine violence” as an explosion of “retaliatory destructive rage” (187), as “unjust, as an explosion of divine caprice” (ibid.). Later in the text, Žižek claims that the only human and political renditions of divine violence today would be forms of “violent explosion of resentment” ranging

from “mob lynchings to organized revolutionary terror.”³⁶ Let us recall that we have already established that divine violence takes place as the pure *advent* of the Real. Along the lines of a similar logic, Žižek equates divine violence with the Badiouian “event.”³⁷ Consequently, when one unleashes pure violence, it is done in radical solitude – without the presence of the “big Other”; or, in Žižek’s own words:

Divine violence should be thus conceived as divine in the precise sense of the old Latin motto *vox populi, vox dei*: not in the perverse sense of “we are doing it as mere instruments of the People’s Will,” but as the heroic assumption of the solitude of sovereign decision. It is a decision (to kill, to risk or lose one’s own life) made in absolute solitude, with no cover in the big Other. If it is extramoral, it is not “immoral,” it does not give the agent license just to kill with some kind of angelic innocence. When those outside the structured social field strike “blindly,” demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance, this is divine violence.³⁸

Enacted in radical solitude, without the support of the “big Other,” pure violence, conceived as blind attack “demanding immediate justice,” seems indeed to be carried out as divine. It is an inherently hubristic stance.

That is, the revolutionary subject, having the status of the “divine-justice-bringing Subject,” adopts a godlike stance and perspective – s/he strikes as God would strike since there is no Law s/he fears. The revolutionary subject exercising divine violence is marked by the pretension to directly represent the Law itself. Even if the latter means that there is no longer any law to be respected, the event of executing *justice* is the result of a *decision* (in the Benjaminian or Schmittian sense) based upon a judgment according to which something is *unjust* or *wrong*. Such a decision is a gesture of “undoing a wrong” and it is enabled by the distinction between right and wrong. The act of discrimination between right and wrong, accompanied by an action of punishment, is in itself law-making and law-preserving. The justice and vengeance bringing violence is never pure in the sense of being devoid of any relation to the

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Law. The territory of “divine violence” as such – just as any instance of the Real – is impervious and it must be mediated through Language and, thus, by the Law.

I will argue that, if it is immediate justice or vengeance which is being executed by way of divine violence, the latter is not an event in the Badiouian sense as Žižek would have it. Badiou’s “event” is something which simply occurs and one is never really in control of. If, contrary to this, the divine violence were indeed justice that is carried out, it would not be something which merely *happens to* the subject-executor of justice. As justice made, the divine violence would be the product of the Subject, its invention and its creation – not the unpredictable, stupefying, beyond-sense, ungraspable occurrence of the “void” (which the Badiouian event is).

The event, in Badiou’s theory, always and by definition precedes the Subject. The latter is produced through the relation of fidelity with the former.³⁹ Thus, pure violence *happens to* us, the “human animals.” It is not something we can carry out. It emerges as a “void” amidst a “situation,” and it commands a new “subjectivization.” Or as an incursion of the Real, it radically destabilizes the Subject and generates fundamentally new subjective configurations.

Conceived as the Badiouian event, pure or radical violence can be – let us resort to Žižek’s own words – but an “explosion” of anger, originating from the most rudimentary survivalist stance: “I am striking against you in revolt, because I must stay in life!” It is the “explosion” of the physical, bodily rebellion of the subjugated body against another, subjugating body. Its determination-in-the-last-instance can be defined as life-expansion not destruction (in the form of punishment) in spite of the inevitable presence of destructive effects.

Revolutionary violence stems from the conatus of survival, from the (Spinozan) appetite for life and desire for pleasure. It is an incursion of one’s desire to affirm life and annihilate pain – revolutionary violence is an occurrence of the expansion of life, of the unstoppable appetite toward pleasure and/or an “increased level

of life” (Spinoza). Hence, revolutionary violence is but a rendition of the life force aspiring – putting it again in Spinozan terms – toward its infinity which consists in life’s relentlessly reaffirming life. It is a strike of force aiming against all that which introduces pain into life as an instance of immanent infinity (in spite of the fact that it is embodied by finite beings). Infinity, understood as the mode of intensity not of temporality or spatiality, consists in incessant aspiration, appetite, in life endlessly feeding itself with life. Revolutionary violence as an expansion rather than destruction of life is an expression of the desire to “increase the level of life” (Spinoza) and acts against all that threatens this immanently unstoppable tendency by becoming an obstacle to the auto-generative force life is.

The revolutionary stance is one which is established in fidelity to the event. The latter is a pre-subjective experience, or rather pure experience. It is the lived prior to its linguistic mediation. Its linguistic rendition is, however, inevitable, truth-generation as discursive process is unavoidable. Revolutionary discourse is one which is constantly checked by the sense of fidelity to the event, to the “truth” (= bearing witness to) the experience of the event represents. In its capacity of pure experience, fidelity to the event is an almost bodily knowledge – or rather, it is also bodily. It takes place beyond discourse, in a domain where the distinction between bodily and psychic does not apply – in the domain of the Real. The occurrence of the Uncanny, the thrust of the Real into a political situation, happens at a point when political discourse is shocked by a “radical crisis” (a symptom of the Real that can no longer be accommodated by the existing Symbolic) demanding radical political reversal. The thrust of the Real destabilizes the political subject and provokes in the human animal a sense of threat of physical annihilation. This experience is the source of unheard of and unexpected discursive reversals and for radical re-inventions of the political language. Such a life-expanding stance that is radically human (inherent to the human animal) rather than divine is one of revolutionary potential.

postscript: questions about the “transition” from the radical lived to radical revolutionary concepts

Laruelle, Badiou and Žižek argue for a political thought that would correlate and succumb in the last instance to the authority of the *lived*, the *event* and the *real* rather than to a “transcendental universe.” All three authors insist that whilst the correlation with the Real is necessary – at least for the generation of a revolutionary political truth and event – it is always *in* (by way of and also for) the Language that the revolution takes place.

The question they do not seem to attempt to answer is that of the transition from the mere correlation – an ontological positioning and epistemic posture – with the Real to a thought which is affected by the immanence that the Real (or the event) is. The radicality of a concept – a foundation of a potentially revolutionary horizon of thought – is enabled precisely by its affectedness by immanence. Is it possible to check the factuality of affectedness by the Real, to provide confirmation that the concept we deem radical (potentially revolutionary) is indeed radical, one produced in a process of faithful correlation with the Real? If we could imagine the transition, if we could create the possibility and invent ways of thinking this process of transmutation of the lived (the Real, the event, the pure experience) into thought, perhaps we could also conceive ways of providing confirmation (for a concept’s affectedness by the Real).

The Real is a void. It is “unthinkable” in itself. The Real or the lived necessarily undergoes a process of auto-alienation in order to become thinkable by, for and *as* the Stranger (Laruelle). This, however, does not mean that the Real is unthinkable, impossible to be “touched” by thought, described by it, that is, mediated by the Language. The Real cannot be thought in itself since this is a logical and ontological impossibility. Thought is mediation. Ergo, the Real, or the in-Itself, is not accessed directly. To think the Real is to mediate it, that is, to incessantly alienate it in order to

correlate with it. And it is for this reason that the transition cannot be thought, and its “truthfulness” evaluated. Radical concepts are the product of the sovereignty of the thinking (and revolutionary) subject, they issue from his/her decision to “follow the syntax of the Real” (Laruelle).

The only confirmation of a concept’s radicality, that is, affectedness by immanence, there can be does not take place on the territory of the Language. It is not the product of the Thought. It is unthinkable and the sense is not its “identity-in-the-last-instance.” It is purely experiential, it is lived – in the event of revolution. If a concept and the horizon of thought whose foundation it serves generate an event that produces a reversal, radical destabilization and re-structuring of the Symbolic order or the World (in the Laruellian sense), the pure lived of this event can serve as the confirmation of its radicality. Yet again, this confirmation is not linguistically rendered. It remains unthinkable (in-Itself). The only domain in which we can know “the proof” is the domain of the experiential itself – the Event, the Lived, that is, the Real. To the Thought it represents a *void*. And out of this void only a revolution can be born.



notes

1 See Deleuze.

2 Badiou 173ff.

3 Benjamin I: 287.

4 According to Laruelle, it is precisely the radical dyad of Thought and the Real conveying the unbridgeable fissure between the two terms that, in its most fundamental impossibility, determines the possibility of Thought. Laruelle writes:

It is impossible, even in Freud and in Marx, and even more so within a philosophy, to find radical concepts of the Real and the uni-versal – solely the unconscious and the productive forces, desire and labor. As soon as one arrives at this discovery,

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psychoanalysis and Marxism gain one utterly new sense – a transformation of their theories into simple material [...] These sorts of disciplines require more than just a simple theoretical transformation – a discovery from within a “non-” that would be the effect (of) the Real or its action

or in the French original of the text:

Il est impossible, même dans Freud et dans Marx, à plus forte raison dans une philosophie, de trouver les concepts radicaux du Réel et de l’uni-versel – seulement l’inconscient et les forces productives, le désir et le travail. Mais cette découverte faite, psychanalyse et marxisme en reçoivent après coup plus qu’un nouveau sens – une transformation de leurs théories comme simple matériau [...] De telles disciplines exigent plus qu’une refonte simplement théorique – une découverte en “non-” qui soit un effet (du) Réel ou son agir. (Laruelle, *Introduction au non-marxisme* 61)

5 Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* 259–60.

6 Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie* 17.

7 Idem, *Introduction au non-marxisme* 47.

8 Žižek, *On Belief* 47.

9 Schmitt 36.

10 Agamben, *State of Exception* 24.

11 Ibid. 24–31.

12 Benjamin I: 287.

13 Ibid. 295.

14 Ibid. 297.

15 Ibid. 300.

16 Benjamin, *Briefe I–II*: 206/138 qtd in Agamben’s *State of Exception* 61.

17 Ibid.

18 Cf. Laruelle, *Introduction au non-marxisme* 48.

19 Ibid. 47.

20 Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie* 46; idem, *Théorie des identités* 93ff.; idem, *Introduction au non-marxisme* 47ff.

21 Quoted in Agamben, *State of Exception* 61.

- 22 Benjamin II: 455.
 23 Benjamin I: 287.
 24 Ibid.
 25 Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*.
 26 Butler, Laclau, and Žižek.
 27 Žižek, *On Belief* 120.
 28 Ibid.
 29 Ibid.
 30 See Laruelle, *Théorie des Etrangers*.
 31 Idem, *Introduction au non-marxisme* 48.
 32 Ibid.
 33 See idem, *Théorie des Etrangers*.
 34 Ibid.
 35 Radical concepts are descriptive of the Real, “affected by its immanence,” and, hence, minimally determined by the transcendental; or, in Laruelle’s words, the radical concept is established according to the following procedure:

On dira que la représentation, dans la vision-en-Un, est un reflet non-thétique ou non-positionnel (du) réel, qu’elle est descriptive, en dernière instance du moins, et non constitutive comme prétend l’être la philosophie. (Laruelle, *Introduction au non-marxisme* 57)

- 36 Žižek, *Violence* 193.
 37 Ibid. 208.
 38 Ibid. 210.
 39

I term subjectivization the emergence of an operator, consecutive to an interventional nomination. Subjectivization takes place in a form of a Two. It is directed toward the intervention on the borders of the eventual site. But it is also directed toward the situation through its coincidence with the rule of evaluation and proximity which founds the generic procedure. Subjectivization is interventional nomination *from the standpoint of the situation*, that is, the rule of the intra-situational effects of the supernumerary name’s entrance into circulation. It could be said

that subjectivization is a *special count*, distinct from the count-as-one which orders presentation, just as it is from the state’s reduplication. What subjectivization counts is whatever is faithfully connected to the name of the event. (Badiou 393)

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