THE IMPASSE OF LIBERAL (IN)EQUALITY: MATERIALISING EGALITARIAN POLITICS THROUGH COLLECTIVE FIDELITY

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis is concerned with ways in which equality may be materialised through politics. It engages with various strands of literature that have had a profound impact on theoretical considerations of egalitarian politics. The thesis begins by mapping various branches of liberal egalitarianism that all set equality as a political objective. In attempting to substantiate equality through the liberal democratic nexus, these thinkers often construct their egalitarian models alongside liberal values such as individual liberty, autonomy, human rights, and market exchange. These approaches fall short of reconciling their egalitarian ambitions with the inegalitarian tendencies of market exchange, reducing equality to a question of inequalities in the process. Whereas contemporary neoliberal subjects embody the complete marketisation and individualisation of the liberal ideal of autonomy, hence foreclosing its egalitarian potential into purely heteronomous conducts, Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou provide a way out of the impasse of liberal (in)equality. They do so by reconceptualising equality as a starting point rather than an objective of politics. Framed as such, egalitarian politics becomes a fully emancipatory project depending on the work of a subject for its realisation. Although Rancière's egalitarianism is boundless, his account of subjectivation is politically limiting. Conversely, Badiou offers a methodical account of the process of 'becoming subject' rooted in his notions of 'event', 'truth', and 'fidelity'. Focusing specifically on the latter, the last part of this thesis will theorise the notion of faith as a process for the materialisation of egalitarian politics. Against Badiou, political fidelity will be conceptualised as a subjective as well as an objective procedure. The object of political fidelity is the actual constitution of a collective. To the extent that theoretical subjects and truths play a crucial role in enacting egalitarian politics, existing bodies also actively participate in its material elaboration through a distinctive perspective provided by the horizontality of the existing ground, and their capacity to relate as equal through economic production, distribution, and exchange.

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This thesis is of course dedicated to them.

Statement of Authorship

I hereby confirm that this thesis is the product of my own work. All sources used are referenced.

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Pierre Parrouffe

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Introduction

Can equality be realised by politics? This question has captured the imagination of political thinkers for centuries. Unsurprisingly, their answers greatly vary in scope. Even when this question is articulated within contemporary debates, it remains difficult to identify theorists who might agree on a set definition of either equality or politics, let alone the process by which egalitarian politics may effectively be realised. Amongst the multitude of egalitarian frameworks populating political theory, equality may appear as a goal, a starting point, or an obstacle to politics. Suggestions concerning the best way to politically apply equality are even more abundant. Within the conceptual mist generated by the question of egalitarian politics, this thesis aims to provide a thorough theoretical engagement with some of the most stimulating accounts of equality in contemporary political theory. Two theoretical approaches appear especially well suited to discussing the political potential of equality. One may be labelled as liberal egalitarianism and sets equality as a political goal to be achieved in a liberal democratic context. The other encompasses the work of Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou, establishing equality as a starting point of politics understood, in part, as a process of emancipation from the liberal state. Based on the impossibility for liberal egalitarians to decisively resolves paradoxes inherent to the liberal democratic nexus, this thesis follows Rancière and Badiou in recognising the importance of setting equality as a pre-requisite of politics. The confrontation of these two highly contrasted propositions, alongside discussions of neoliberalism and the notion of faith will foreground the possibility to consider the materialisation of egalitarian politics through the figure of a faithful political collective.

This thesis will begin with a discussion of liberal approaches to equality. Liberalism has been and continues to be one of the most influential approaches to egalitarianism. Setting the stage for these models is the liberal democratic nexus. At the core of this modern union lays a desire to uphold individual autonomy without sacrificing the goal of collectively realising the promise of democratic equality. The work of thinkers concerned with the political implications of the historical encounter between democracy and liberalism will be discussed to contextualise contemporary approaches to liberal equality. Through the work of Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet, Norberto Bobbio, or Pierre Rosanvallon, one gains a fuller understanding of the conceptual relationship between democratic equality, individual

autonomy, and market exchange underpinning the liberal democratic nexus.[1] From the philosophical tension between liberty and equality, to the difficulty of reconciling collective and individual goals, these readings reveal contradictions and paradoxes embedded within the liberal democratic framework still affecting the work of contemporary liberal egalitarians.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss liberal egalitarianism through two main approaches: redistribution and recognition. Redistributive considerations of equality and justice encompass the work of thinkers like John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, for whom equality results from redistributing goods, resources, or rights.[2] Although Rawls and Dworkin differ in their approaches, they both construct highly idealised frameworks through which substantive equality may be achieved in a context defined by individual choice and market exchange. On the other hand, proponents of recognition like Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young, and Seyla Benhabib consider equality through the prism of inclusion and identity.[3] In their view, achieving equality depends on further integrating marginalised groups who have been historically excluded from the demos. Such inclusion largely takes place through the expansion of rights and rests on the state's capacity to recognise the claims of identity-based groups. Another significant endeavour is Amartya Sen and Philip Pettit's effort to conceptualise equality as equal freedom, revitalising the notion of individual autonomy through capabilities and republicanism respectively.[4] One thread running throughout all these theories is the difficulty of reconciling market exchange and individual autonomy with the pursuit of substantive equality, an issue these thinkers only provide partial answers to. Despite the great range of egalitarian propositions offered by liberal theorists, their accounts are eventually let down by an unwillingness to question the egalitarian potential of market exchange. Although proponents of recognition like Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young

[1] See Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Society of Equals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2013; Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le politique XIX-XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions de Seuil), 1986; Norberto Bobbio, Liberalism & Democracy (London: Verso), 1990; Marcel Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne, L'avènement de la Démocratie I* (Paris : Gallimard), 2013.

[2] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1999; Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*; and Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy & Public Affairs 10* (1981).

[3] See See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 2011; Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* (London: Verso), 2003; and Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture, Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2002.

[4] See See Philip Pettit, *On the People's terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2012; and Amartya Sen, *Inequality re-examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1995.

attempt to exceed the egalitarian limits of markets, they too tend to consider equality negatively as a result of undermining inequalities.

Liberal conceptions of equality also include those who dismiss equality as a fundamental limit on individual liberty and autonomy such as neoliberalism.[5] Chapter two will discuss neoliberal politics through a conceptual portrait of the contemporary neoliberal subject. By denying the political potential of equality, neoliberal thought is often presented as antithetical to politics. Against this interpretation, neoliberalism will be interpreted as a branch of political economy that rests on a complete marketisation of politics. Addressing the current hegemony of the neoliberal ethos is needed, not only to critique its complete dismissal of collective politics, but also because it sheds lights on the egalitarian shortcomings of liberalism. Neoliberal subjects' openly individualistic and desire-driven conducts signal the complete marketisation of the liberal ideal of individual autonomy, surrendering its early collective and egalitarian objectives in the process.

In the second part of this thesis, Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou will be recognised for offering a way out of the impasse of liberal (in)equality. By establishing equality as the starting point of politics rather than its goal, both thinkers re-substantiate egalitarian politics as a process towards collective emancipation as opposed to a strategy towards undermining inequalities.[6] Whereas Rancière arguably radicalises the egalitarian content of democracy further than any other contemporary thinker, the making of a political subject or 'subjectivation' appears as a full stop in his otherwise ground-breaking political thought. Alternatively, Badiou axiomatizes equality within his mathematical ontology, allowing for a methodical account of political subjectivation as a result of which political materiality may be envisaged. Through the deployment of concepts such as 'the event', 'truth procedure', and 'fidelity', Badiou reignites the political potential of subjectivation left dormant by Rancière.

The third and final part of this thesis comprises of two chapters. Each expands on the notions of faith and fidelity as a process through which egalitarian politics may be thought in the concrete forms of its appearance. Chapter five is dedicated to the egalitarian potential of the notion of faith. Building on Pauline theology and the work of Søren Kierkegaard, Giorgio

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[5] See See Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge), 2001; and Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1962.

[6] See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum), 2007; Badiou, *Logics of Worlds Being and Event 2* (London: Continuum 2009; and Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1999.

Agamben, and Simon Critchley, the argument will be made that a secularised form of faith has the potential to serve as a process for the materialisation of egalitarian politics.[7] Yet, away from Agamben, Badiou, and Kierkegaard, political faith will not be theorised as a purely subjective commitment. Rather, faith redefined as fidelity must also have an objective component if it is to play a part in materialising egalitarian politics. The final chapter of this thesis will be fully dedicated to deciphering the objective facet of political fidelity. Against Badiou's rebuttal of existing bodies in favour of a theoretical political subject, the political potential of existing bodies will be reasserted alongside the subject. Both subject and bodies must be fully integrated within the figure of a collective subject-body when it comes down to conceptualising political materiality. Objectively, the materialisation of egalitarian politics depends on the fidelity of a collective subject-body grounded within a determinate space and set in a specific temporality. This thesis will conclude on the claim that materialising egalitarian politics is contingent on the basal space of the ground, providing a shared perspective to bodies on their possible subjectivation as a collective subject-body, as well as a political economy sustaining the possibility to materially relate as equals.

[7] See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2005; Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso), 2012; Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2009; and Alain Badiou, *St Paul The Foundation of Universalism, t*ranslated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Part I | Equality through the Liberal Democratic Veil: Individual Autonomy and Markets as a Limit

Chapter 1

Aiming for Equality Within the Liberal Democratic Nexus

Introduction

In contemporary political theory, the concept of equality is overwhelmingly discussed through the prism of liberal democracy. Determining the political processes by which equality may materialise demands that the historical and intellectual encounter between democratic thought and liberalism be discussed. In order to thoroughly engage with contemporary egalitarian literature, one must first assess the intricacies of the modern association between these two different philosophical traditions which became conflated to the point of being hardly distinguishable.[8] The complex union of democracy, conveying notions of equality and popular sovereignty, with liberalism emphasising individual liberty, human rights, and economic exchange must not be dismissed as a mere step of democratic history. The emergence of liberal democracy is an unprecedented event signalling the convergence of two distinct political visions. Many thinkers have outlined the philosophical antagonism by which the pursuit of equality inevitably entails a limit on liberty.[9] This fundamental tension emerges as a useful tool to apprehend various strand of egalitarianism within the liberal democratic nexus. Whereas some minimise the philosophical divergence between liberty and equality, others over-emphasise it. Yet, most scholars on both sides of the theoretical spectrum frame

[8] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 2-3.

[9] Modern thinkers such as Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville were aware of this antagonism in their discussions of liberal democracy. As a liberal, Constant outlined the incompatibility of liberty and equality by arguing that the pursuit of equality engenders a subordination of individual liberty to the interest of the totality. [Benjamin Constant, « De la Liberté des Anciens comparée a celle des modernes » in *Collection Complete des Ouvrages* (Paris : Brechet Librairie 1820), 253.]
De Tocqueville also pointed to this contradiction writng that "We encounter in the hearts of men a degenerate taste for equality which inspires the weak to bring the strong down to their own level and reduce men to prefer equality in a state of slavery to inequality in a state of freedom." [Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 67.]
Also see John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1988.

their accounts of democratic equality alongside liberal ideals of individual liberty, autonomy, and market exchange.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the work of authors whose thought rests on a historical account of the convergence of democracy and liberalism. Beginning the chapter with this literature allows for the possibility to introduce crucial resemblances and divergences between the two intellectual traditions. The political philosophy of Pierre Rosanvallon, Claude Lefort, Norberto Bobbio, and Marcel Gauchet will be discussed. From Rosanvallon's historical retracing of equality, to Lefort's conception of democracy as an empty place, Bobbio's consideration of liberalism and democracy as individualistic traditions, and Gauchet's emphasis on individual autonomy and human rights, the egalitarian ideal of a ruling demos always appears mediated and sometimes overwhelmed by liberal notions of individual liberty, autonomy, and market distribution. In the face of economic and political liberalism, equality is often reformulated as a question of individual rights.[10] The value of these historical interpretations of the relationship between democracy and political liberalism is undeniable. Nonetheless, they will be challenged based on their relative omission of economic liberalism, and on their deterministic consideration of liberal democracy as a historical necessity. In response, it will be argued that economic liberalism is crucial in making sense of equality's role within the liberal democratic nexus, while liberal democracy is not an inescapable historical necessity.[11] Providing an account of the historical convergence of democracy and liberalism sets the stage for engaging with contemporary thinkers for whom democratic equality cannot be thought outside the bounds of liberal democracy. Amongst the latter, many political scholars including John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Amartya Sen or Elizabeth Anderson have been concerned with ways to interpret and reinvigorate the notion of equality within a liberal democratic framework. With the exception of Fraser and Young, they may be labelled liberals to the extent that their work displays a deep attachment to individual liberty and an unwillingness to fundamentally question the institution of the market. For most of these thinkers, achieving equality is a political goal essentially compatible with the liberal ethos.

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[10] Norberto Bobbio, *Liberalism & Democracy* (London: Verso 1990), 31-32.

[11] Marcel Gauchet, *Que Faire ? Dialogue sur le Communisme, le Capitalisme et l'Avenir de la Démocratie* (Paris : Philo Editions 2014), 90; Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le politique XIX-XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1986), 28; Norberto Bobbio, *Liberalism & Democracy*, 41.

The first set of liberal egalitarians to be discussed includes the work of John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin who both conceptualise equality through the prism of distributive justice. In their view, justice requires that certain benefits (such as rights, resources, or welfare) be distributed equally.[12] Distributive conceptions of justice and equality are not primarily focused on political equality in its current parliamentary and representative form. In fact, distributivists tend to exceed formal discussions of equality to directly address disparities in individual socio-economic conditions. It is the nature of the goods to be distributed which defines each strand of distributive equality. Resource egalitarians such as Dworkin defend the idea that "people have equal chances to achieve whatever they might seek in life when each person commands equal resources."[13] This approach raises complex issues tied to individual talent, luck, and market distribution. On the other hand, the egalitarian content of Rawls' broad theory of justice is best characterised by the difference principle, according to which socio-economic inequalities should be re-arranged "to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged".[14] For Rawls, such distribution takes place in the ideal context of an 'original position' preceding birth when individuals are fully unaware of their future social position in the world. From this standpoint, rational individuals placed behind a 'veil of ignorance' will be led to adopt a collectivist and egalitarian outlook for every possible future outcome can be envisaged.[15] Dworkin's and Rawls' distributive approaches to equality are best understood in contrast to welfarist and realist considerations of equality. Unlike utilitarians who discuss equality in consequentialist terms as 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number', both Dworkin and Rawls construct an ideal redistributive model with the potential to actively undermine inequalities through a complex re-articulation of state and market mechanisms.[16]

The second strand of egalitarian literature to be discussed in this chapter concerns proponents of recognition such as Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, and Iris Marion Young. These thinkers all point to the necessity of conceiving equality through the active recognition of

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[12] Stuart White, *Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 18.
[13] Richard J. Arneson in *A companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* 2nd ed. Ed. Robert. E Goodin, Philip Pettit and Thomas Pogge (Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2007), 595.
[14] Rawls, 72.
[15] Stuart White, *Equality*, 41; and Rawls, 121.
[16] See Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government, 2nd ed*. Enlarged. (London: Royal Exchange and Lincoln-Inn Fields), 1823; John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" in *Utilitarianism and On Liberty*, ed. Mary Warnock (Malden: Blackwell Publishing), 2003; Robert A. Dahl, *On Political Equality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); and Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

marginalised groups.[17] These groups reflect minority cultural, ethnic, religious, or sexual identities that have historically been ignored and excluded from formal political processes. For supporters of recognition, equality is to be understood less as the result of fair redistribution than as a process of integration and inclusion working towards curbing inequalities and injustices. Whereas many distributivists assume a universalist and idealised standpoint that usually remains blind to individual differences, proponents of recognition argue that individual and group particularities must not be flattened. Instead, they uphold marginalised identities by calling for their active recognition by the state and integration within liberal democratic processes. Inasmuch as recognitive scholars usually acknowledge the egalitarian capacity of states and markets, they demand that the latter be opened to all against any types of exclusion.

The final section of this chapter will be dedicated to thinkers who conceptualise equality as an objective to be achieved through individual autonomy and capabilities. This concerns supporters of equality of capabilities such as Amartya Sen and Elizabeth Anderson as much as republican theorists like Philip Pettit.[18] Although most authors mentioned thus far recognise the political virtues of individual autonomy, these thinkers take autonomy as the primary force towards overcoming the limits set by inequalities upon individuals. Viewed through the lens of capabilities, equality works alongside individual autonomy rather than resulting from an ideal position or a process of integration.[19] The egalitarian task of states and markets is not to restrain certain behaviours or integrate certain groups, but to make sure that individuals are provided with sufficient capabilities, freedom, and opportunities for political participation to achieve their full potential.

Although rich and varied, many of these approaches to equality suffer from a tendency to naturalise market mechanisms. This is done by either overlooking or working around the inegalitarian potential of markets that are indexed on individual liberty and autonomy rather than equality. To the extent that inequalities are legion in a market environment, taking

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[17] See Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*? (London: Verso), 2003; and *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1995.

[18] See Amartya Sen, *Inequality re-examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1995; Sen, "Justice and Identity" Economics and Philosophy Volume 30, Issue 1 1-1-10; Elizabeth S. Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" Ethics 109 (January 1999); Anderson "How Should Egalitarians Cope with Market Risks?" Theoretical Inquiries in Law, Vol 9 number 1, 2008; and Philip Pettit, On the People's terms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[19] Pettit, *On the People's terms*, 5; and Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 31.

markets for granted while promoting egalitarianism inevitably reduces the question of equality to the task of undermining naturalised inequalities. The spectre of the market prevents most of these authors from approaching equality as a positive political category. Instead of presenting themselves as bearers of equality, states and individuals are assigned with the task of 'correcting inequalities' that are inherent to the market context in which they evolve. Despite the sophistication of some of the models deployed by liberal egalitarians, failing to question the desirability of markets forbids the possibility to think equality as a positive category detached from the 'problem' of inequality. This paradox reveals the weight of economic liberalism within the liberal democratic nexus, demanding that the question of equality always be mediated by that of individual liberty and autonomy in a market context.

On the Union of Democracy and Liberalism: The Individual as Mediator

Despite standing as a pillar of western political thought for more than 2000 years, the concept of democracy remains largely interpretative. Generally conceived as a system of government, contemporary thinkers have referred to democracy as a regime, a technique of governing, a power for those who have no legitimacy to govern, or even an ambient milieu.[20] These contrasted interpretations bear witness to the polemical character of the democratic ideal. To gain access to the undisputed meaning of democracy one must return to its etymological roots. Democracy is made up of two ancient Greek words: *demos* meaning the people or the commons, and *kratos* signifying rule, sway, or authority.[21] As Wendy Brown concisely puts it, "The term democracy contains nothing beyond the principle that the demos rules."[22] Any interpretation of democracy the exceeds the equal and sovereign capacity of the people must be confronted to this open, yet irrefutable signification. Apprehended in this

[20] Giorgio Agambden in *Democracy in what State?*, ed. Amy Allen (New York: Columbia University Press 2011), 1; Jacques Rancière, *La Haine de la Democratie* (Paris : La Fabrique Editions 2005), 54. Own translation; and Jodi Dean, *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 80.

[21] "Democracy," in *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118.

About the meaning of the word democracy, Bobbio explains that "Democracy figures in the famous typology of modes of government bequeathed to us by Greek political thought, by which it is defined as government by the many or by most or by the majority or by the poor (but where the poor have obtained the upper hand, this indicates that power belongs to the *pkilhos*, to the masses). In short, democracy, as its etymology tells us, is government by the people, as opposed to government by one or by a few." [Bobbio, 25.]

[22] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 202.

way, democracy stands in sharp contrast to liberalism and its emphasis on human rights, private property, and market exchange.[23] However distinct, the democratic promise of a ruling demos and the liberal ideals of individual liberty and autonomy have become increasingly conflated through the historical development of liberal democracy. Grasping the uncertain status of equality within the liberal democratic nexus demands that complex historical interactions between the two intellectual traditions be clarified.

When investigating the union of democracy and liberalism, few publications are more valuable than Norberto Bobbio's *Liberalism & Democracy*. In this important book, Bobbio retraces the history of liberal democracy, exposing his distinctive vision of the conceptual couple. The Italian thinker is quick to remark that the relationship between the two traditions is extremely complex and far from linear.[24] He clearly differentiates between classical democracy and its modern counterpart on the grounds that ancient Greeks had a more totalising vision of the state.[25] In his view, modern democracy may be regarded as liberalism's 'natural extension.'[26] In *The Society of Equals*, Rosanvallon casts historical light on this claim by outlining the egalitarian sentiment that infused newly formed liberal democracies following the American and French Revolutions:

> Independence is equality as autonomy […] a society of autonomous individuals, and a community of citizens. Equality was thus conceived in terms of the relative position of individuals, the rules governing their interactions, and the principles on which their lives in common were based, and these concepts in turn corresponded to three possible representations of the social bond. The rights of man, the market, and universal suffrage were the underlying institutions.[27]

In the context of late 18th century revolutions, equality was associated with the possibility of gaining independence and autonomy from an oppressive state. Alexis de Tocqueville, a key witness of the emancipatory potential of emerging liberal democracies in

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[23] Chantal Mouffe makes this point very clear in *the Democratic Paradox* when writing that ideas central to liberalism "do not have their origin in the democratic discourse but come from elsewhere", adding later that with liberal democracy "we are dealing with a new political form of society whose specificity comes from the articulation between two different traditions." [Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 4.]
[24] Bobbio, *Liberalism & Democracy*, 1.
[25] Ibid, 31.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Society of Equals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10-11.

France and the United States, depicted the 'democratic revolution' as "an irresistible fact against which it would be neither desirable nor wise to struggle."[28] Equality was contained within the emancipatory promise of a new society of equal individuals founded on human rights, market exchange, and equal political participation.[29] The subject of liberal democracy must be understood "at once individual and people", "both a subject, bearing specific rights, and as a member of a community."[30] In a liberal democratic environment, individual subjects are no longer subjected to the authority of the crown. Instead, they are expected to act as free and autonomous individuals as well as citizens committed to collective life.[31] As Rosanvallon remarks, belonging collectively must be complemented by the capacity to act autonomously "to invent one's life, to exist as a subject responsible for oneself."[32] This tension between collective civic duties and individual autonomy reflects the deeper struggle operating between equality and liberty sustaining the liberal democratic nexus in its entirety. Unlike many liberal thinkers, Bobbio does not treat democracy and liberalism as fundamentally antithetical categories.[33] However, he admits that their articulation demands that equality be mediated by individual liberty, autonomy, and the law.[34]

The political novelty of the liberal democratic proposition is best understood through the concept of autonomy expressed twofold as collectively breaking away from an oppressive state, and individually acting on one's own freedom.[35] This shift towards autonomy is most

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[28] De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 490.

[29] About the conflation of autonomy and equality in the context of the American revolution, Rosanvallon explains that "individual autonomy was seen as essential to the regeneration of the social bond, which would be healthy again only when individuals ceased to be separated by barriers of any kind." [Rosanvallon, 26.]

[30] Ibid, 34.

[31] This double facet of the liberal democratic subject was depicted by de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*: "In civil life, every man can, if needs be, fancy that he is self-sufficient. In politics, he can imagine no such thing. So when a nation has a public life, the idea of associations and the desire to form them are daily in the forefront of all citizens' minds." [De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 604.]

[32] Rosanvallon, 22.

[33] About this, Bobbio explains that "liberalism and democracy have never been radically antithetical, even though it proved difficult and contentious to graft democratic ideals on to the original stock of liberal aspirations, and even though where liberalism and democracy have come together the process has been slow, painful and uneven." [Bobbio, 73.]
For neoliberal accounts of the antagonism between liberty and equality see Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Abingdon: Routledge), 2001; and Milton Friedman *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2002; For a libertarian account see Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.)

[34] Bobbio, 33.

[35] The modern consideration of autonomy, tied to self-determination, is usually associated with Kantian philosophy. A belief in the capacity for self-rule is the prerequisite for an individualistic apprehension of politics. The notion of autonomy projected onto the figure of the individual is arguably the clearest evidence of a philosophical continuity between classical conceptions democracy and the ideal of liberalism. Democracy

legible through the work of Claude Lefort whose account of the emergence of liberal democracy is constructed in contrast to totalitarianism.[36] Lefort's political philosophy is commonly associated with the statement that 'democracy is an emptying of the place of power.'[37] His distinctive outlook on democracy as an empty place is clearly laid out in *Essais sur le Politique XIX-XXe siècles:*

> In contrast with totalitarianism, democracy reveals itself as a society which formally welcomes and contains indeterminacy. […] democratic society institutes itself as a society without a body which annuls the idea of representation of an organic totality. […] the unprecedented and revolutionary trait of democracy is designated by the place of power becoming an empty place.[38]

Following Lefort, the novelty of modern democracy resides in the de-incarnation of the body politic previously personified by the figure of the monarch. The locus of politics shifts from the totalitarian fusing of the state with civil society to the potential of newly gained individual autonomy in an empty and indeterminate place of power.[39] Through his dismemberment, the body of the monarch discharges power onto the demos in all its multiplicity. Whereas the notion of empty place serves as an "image of popular sovereignty", the actual legitimacy of power lays on the autonomous people itself.[40] For Lefort, liberal democracy does not merely inaugurate the process by which power is emptied, but also the phenomenon by which it is dissolved and shared amongst the multiplicity of the demos.[41]

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in its classical form implicitly depends on the idea of autonomy for its theoretical recognition of the political legitimacy of a sovereign demos. On the other hand, liberals uncompromisingly elevate the autonomy of individual subjects as one of its central political purpose. [See Immanuel Kant, *Ethical philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999); and Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*, Columbia University, http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html.]

[36] Nestor Capdevila explains that Lefort perceives the object of totalitarianism as "the fantasy of 'the One' as opposed to the reality of totalitarianism that is always divided and conflictual." [Nestor Capdevila, «Totalitarisme, idéologie et démocratie,» *Actuel Marx* 33 (2003): 171.]

[37] Oliver Marchart points out that this phrase has unfortunately become sloganized by many contemporary scholars who limit their discussion of Lefort's thought to a superficial analysis of this statement. [Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2007), 85.]

[38] Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le Politique XIX-XXe siècles* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1986), *25,27,28.* Own Translation.

[39] Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), 224.

[40] Ibid, 279.

[41] The recurrence of the binary opposition between democracy and totalitarianism in Lefort's work is problematic. It exhibits a central theme in his political thought by which the emergence of liberal democracy is perceived as the historical achievement *par excellence*. [Ibid, 305.]

In this context, equality is identified with the emancipatory and autonomous potential of "proud individuals living as equals [and] not set apart by humiliating differences."[42]

Lefort's account of modern democracy reveals the cruciality of individuality for understanding the political implications of the union between liberalism and democracy. Bobbio clarifies this point by treating individualism as a common theoretical ground between the two traditions in contrast to organicist visions of politics:

> [The] reciprocal relation between liberalism and democracy is possible because they share a common starting-point: the individual. Both are grounded in an individualistic conception of society. The entire history of political thought is riven by the great dichotomy between organicism (holism) and individualism (atomism). […] For organicism, the state is a body, an overall corporate structure made up of pans, each of which has its own destiny, […] Individualism sees the state as a collection of individuals, and as acquiring its form only through their actions and the relations they establish with one another.[43]

As implied in Lefort's argument and clearly stated by Bobbio, individualism appears as a cornerstone of the liberal democratic nexus.[44] Yet, Bobbio emphasises the difference between democratic and liberal brands of individualism, writing that whereas "liberalism defends and proclaims individual liberty as against the state, in both the spiritual and the economic sphere; democracy reconciles individual and society by making society the product of a common agreement between individuals."[45] For Bobbio, the liberal limit imposed on the state is "grounded in the prior liberty of the individual relative to the power of the sovereign."[46] Inasmuch as liberals (both political and economic) tend to designate the state as an impediment to individual liberty and autonomy, democracy on a large scale almost certainly depends on the state in order to realise its egalitarian promise. By conceiving

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Gauchet also appears to support the historical necessity of liberal democracy based on his assessment that the current difficulties faced by contemporary liberal democracies are the result of a crisis of 'growth'. [Marcel Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne, L'avènement de la Démocratie I* (Paris : Gallimard, 2013), 27.]

[42] Rosanvallon, 258.

[43] Bobbio, 41; also see Gauchet, *L'avenement de la Democratie I*, 74.

[44] Lefort's consideration of emptiness as a virtue is only explainable in view of the process of atomisation of power embodied by autonomous self-governing subjects. [Lefort, *Essais sur le Politique XIX-XXe siècles*, 55.]

[45] Bobbio, 43.

[46] Ibid, 18. Also see Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996); Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Book I-III* (London: Penguin Books, 1999); and Wilhelm Von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge university press), 1969.

individual liberty as existing prior to the state, liberal thinkers elevate the project of individual autonomy above all else. Liberalism carries the idea of liberty within its very name. It ambitions to be experienced and realised at an individual level. On the other hand, democratic thought prioritises equality through the collective figure of a ruling demos.[47] Democracy is a fundamentally political project whose survival depends on some form of 'coming together'. Demanding that individuals collectively organise (whether in the form of a state or smaller entities) reveals democracy's conditional attachment to the project of individual autonomy. Democrats must join hands in order to share power equally, hence limiting the scope of isolated individual pursuits.

The liberal democratic nexus rests on several theoretical compromises that aim to overcome the antagonism between individual liberty and the collective expression of equality. Since a restrictive vision of the state may be considered as one of liberalism's most unalterable facets, space for concession must be found elsewhere. For Bobbio, liberalism is compatible with democracy only if the latter is understood in its formal "juridical-institutional sense rather than its ethical sense."[48] Democracy's strong egalitarian promise must be formalised in order to avoid antagonising liberal ideals of individual liberty and autonomy. The contradiction existing between democratic equality and individual liberty may only surpassed through an egalitarian emptying of democracy. Such formalisation of equality takes shape most distinctively within the idea of individual human rights. Rights must not be confused with democratic egalitarianism "whose scope extends to [the] pursuit of the ideal of some degree of economic equalization, an ideal foreign to liberal thought."[49] Away from strong egalitarian promises of a ruling demos and material equality, equality of rights and equality before the law are directly tied to the development of the liberal state.[50] More than any other liberal institutions, human rights embody the modern rapprochement of democracy and liberalism around individual autonomy and the subsequent formalisation of democratic equality.

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[47] For the German sociologist Georg Simmel, the individualist tendencies of the liberal democratic nexus were not fundamentally incompatible with equality to the extent that the individualist perspective assumes that "individuals freed of social and historical fetters would turn out to be essentially similar to one another." [Georg Simmel, *Sociologie: Études sur les formes de socialisation* (Paris: PUF, 1999 (1908)), 702; Also see Rosanvallon, 223.]

[48] Bobbio, 31.

[49] Ibid, 37.

[50] Ibid, 33.

Lefort maintains an unconditional belief in the political potential of individual human rights. In his view, "human rights signal the emergence of a new type of legitimacy and a public space of which individuals are both the products and the instigators."[51] Contributing to the dissolution of the totalitarian myth of a 'people as One', individual rights have the capacity "to exploit the resources of freedom and creativity which are drawn upon by an experience that accommodates the effects of division ."[52] Following the "dissolution of the markers of certainty", rights offer an opportunity to institutionalise individual autonomy in a way that does not compromise individual liberty.[53] Lefort's confidence in rights rests on their dynamic dimension, constituting a generative principle of democracy.[54] For Gauchet, a former student of Lefort, human rights have facilitated the emergence of individual subjects and continue to support the process by which they grow.[55] Although Gauchet recognises the role of rights in autonomising subjects as individuals, he does not share his elder's enthusiasm for their political effectivity.[56] Expressing some restraint towards the capacity of rights to successfully bring about the potential of liberal democracy, Gauchet writes that "whereas the hegemony of human rights, tied to our world's full accession to autonomy enables democracy to justify its status, these rights do not provide democracy with means to effectively handle its destiny in a way that would satisfy its theoretical promises."[57] Inasmuch as the liberal proliferation of rights symbolises individuals' accession to a relatively autonomous state, it

[51] Lefort, *Essais sur le Politique XIX-XXe siècles*, 42.
[52] Ibid, 304 ; and Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, 272.
[53] Lefort, *Essais sur le Politique XIX-XXe siècles*, 29
[54] Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, 259-260.
[55] Marcel Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne, L'avènement de la Démocratie I* (Paris : Gallimard, 2007), 100. Despite clear theoretical divergences, Gauchet shares Lefort's vision of modern democracy as a unique historical event. In *The Modern Revolution I*, he expresses the need for his contemporaries to retake into their own hands the project of historical auto-determination inaugurated two hundred years ago by "the pathway to history". [Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne, L'avènement de la Démocratie I*, 64, own translation.]
The linear historical outlook of both Lefort and Gauchet on democracy clearly sets their work as a continuation of great political thinkers of the 19th century such as de Tocqueville and Michelet. [John B. Thompson in *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, 20.]
[56] This shift on the question of rights between the two thinkers may be partly explained by the time period coinciding with Lefort's publication of *Essais sur le Politique* (1986) and *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (1986). These pieces were written in the late 1970s and early 1980s, at the beginning of a historical process which would eventually end with the dismantlement of the Soviet state and the subsequent triumph of liberal democracy. On the other hand, Gauchet wrote his series *La Révolution Moderne* (2007) after having experienced years of unchallenged liberal democracy, witnessing the deployment of neoliberal policies, and at the dawn of the 2008 global financial crisis. Despite an apparent withholding towards the political effectivity of human rights in their current form, Gauchet paradoxically reasserts his belief in liberal democracy by claiming that political advancement must be equated with the development of the liberal democratic project through the language of rights. [Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne, L'avènement de la Démocratie I*, 52, 54.]
[57] Ibid, 32. Own translation.

does not suffice in effectively realising the democratic promise of a ruling demos. If rights consolidate the place of power left vacant by the totalising 'myth of the One', they also elevate the individual as the only embodiment of politics, hence challenging democracy's collectivist ambitions.[58]

As an institutional enactment of the liberal ideal of autonomy, rights do not in themselves undermine the democratic promise of a ruling demos. In fact, the self-determination of an emancipated demos demands a certain level of collective autonomy. However, liberal rights begin to impede on the materialisation of democratic equality when liberty and autonomy are upfolded as political guiding lights. In this context, the democratic impulse towards a collective 'coming together' is irremediably subordinated to unrestrained individual choices that do not necessarily converge towards the egalitarian ideal of a ruling demos. Substantiating democratic equality would require that collective self-determination somehow interrupts the pursuit of individual autonomy. Instead, the liberal prioritisation of liberty leads to the formalisation of democratic equality in order to prevent it from getting in the way of individual autonomy. For Gauchet, this is the paradox of the liberal democratic nexus by which the divisive effects of unrestrained individualism ultimately affect liberal democracy from within.[59] It also points to another characteristic of liberal thought by which individual liberty and autonomy typically take precedence over equality. This tendency will be illustrated in the discussions lay forth in the following three sections of this chapter.

To the extent that the emergence of liberal democracy represents an autonomisation of subjects through the enactment of individual rights, how is autonomy expressed beyond the language of rights? A decisive way in which liberalism manages to fully appropriate the notion of individual autonomy is through its multidimensionality. The potentiality of autonomous individuals is reflected within the ubiquitous character of liberalism. Aiming to expand the horizon of individual possibilities, the modern project of autonomy cannot limit individuals to a purely political existence. Inasmuch as the democratic ideal of a ruling demos is essentially political, liberal autonomy is reflected in the political sphere as much as in the realm of market exchange. The capacity of liberalism to encompass both political and economic realms tends to be overlooked by contemporary political thinkers who often

[58] Ibid, 100.
For Gauchet rights are from their inception only attached to individuals. [Ibid, 107.]
[59] Ibid, 20, 147.

choose to differentiate between its economic and political components.[60] Liberalism must be considered in both its political and economic dimensions to effectively assess its capacity to support the materialisation of democratic equality. Whereas human rights act as the symbolic expression of the liberal project of individual autonomy, the market is arguably the terrain on which this project is meant to be effectively enacted.

What justifies the claim that markets embody the modern project of individual autonomy more convincingly than human rights or democratic politics? The answer lays in the intricacies of production, market exchange, and consumption. The concept of a 'free' market in which goods can be exchanged with minimal state interference is undoubtedly the most archetypal dimension of economic liberalism.[61] However abstract, the idea of market freedom provides a material face to the notion of individual autonomy. In contrast to the symbolic autonomy contained in human rights, the market rests on a set of concrete relations facilitated by the palpability of goods, the immediacy of economic exchange, and the ability to easily quantify individual benefits through the accumulation of capital and wealth. Following Gauchet, the market establishes itself as the concrete twin of abstract individualism, autonomy becoming quantifiable as a measure of market behaviours.[62] Rosanvallon reminds his readers that early conceptions of the market were formulated as an expression of liberty as well as a vector of equality.[63] Through market exchange, 18th century liberals theorised economic liberalism both as a vehicle of autonomy and a purveyor of reciprocity.[64] Only following the emergence and consolidation of the capitalist mode of production did the market become associated with sprawling inequalities, exclusions, and divisions.[65] The logic of capital, now inseparable from that of the market, has fully eliminated the ideal of reciprocal exchange present in the work of early economic liberals.[66]

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[60] Notable examples include Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 18; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge: The MIT Press), 1998; and John Rawls, *a Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1999.

[61] For classical accounts of the free market see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Amsterdam: Metalibri), 2007; and David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: J.M Dent & Sons), 1911.

[62] Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne I, L'avènement de la Démocratie*, 231.

[63] Rosanvallon, 27.

[64] Ibid, 27.

[65] Ibid, 75. The inegalitarian and divisive effects of capitalism whose full force was most clearly felt throughout the 19th century led to the emergence a new branch of egalitarian thought through the development of communism and socialism.

[66] See Adam Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 (1767)); Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Penguin classics 2010), and Simone

Theoretically compatible with democratic equality, the ideal of market reciprocity has given way to an interpretation of the market monopolised by individualism through the prism of utility, private property, and self-interest.[67] It will be shown in the remaining sections of this chapter that market relations ultimately fall short of realising the liberal ideal of individual autonomy, reducing the question of equality to a 'problem' of inequality in the process.

Where liberal ideals of human rights and minimal state have come to symbolise the political aspirations of the liberal democratic project, the spread of economic liberalism has fixed the emancipatory horizon of individual autonomy on the market and away from egalitarian concerns. One could see within the liberal democratic nexus a type of democratic deference by which democracy does not only theoretically cohabit with liberalism but also allows for a substantial surrendering of its egalitarian project. In a liberal setting where individual liberty takes priority over all else, equality does not fully disappear. Instead it becomes an objective that may be realised as a result of autonomous conduct. If equality is to exceed its formal representation as equality of rights, it requires that autonomous individuals collectively assemble around a 'common good'.[68] An early witness of the crucial role of collective association for liberal democracy was Alexis de Tocqueville.[69] The vibrancy of American associative life inspired the Frenchman to provide a detailed account of the role of associations for realising equality. About this early American specificity, he wrote, "I have frequently admired the endless skill with which the inhabitants of the United States manage to set a common aim to the efforts of a great number of men and to persuade them to pursue it voluntarily."[70] For de Tocqueville, individuals' active drive towards collective assembly directly contributed to strengthening liberal democracies. Conversely, he warned against the danger of disassociation for democratic civic life:

Meyssonnier, *La Balance et l'Horloge: La genèse de la pensée libérale en France au xviiie siècle* (Paris: Les Éditions de la Passion, 1989.)

[67] Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne I, L'avènement de la Démocratie*, 234.

[68] Joseph Schumpeter provides a concise explanation of the notion of 'common good' for early liberal thinkers: "The eighteenth-century philosophy of democracy may be couched in the following definition: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will. It is held, then, that there exists a Common Good, the obvious beacon light of policy." [Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism & Democracy* (London: Routledge), 2003, 250.]

[69] De Tocqueville also addressed the precedence taken by freedom in early liberal democracies when he wrote in the second volume of Democracy in America that "men's taste for freedom and equality are, in effect, two different things and I am not afraid to add that in democratic nations they are also unequal." [De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 584.]

[70] De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 596.

> [Men] all sink into a state of impotence if they do not learn to help each other voluntarily. If men living in democratic countries had neither the right nor the inclination to join together in their political ambitions, their independence would run great risks. […] If they failed to acquire the practice of association in their day-to-day lives, civilization itself would be in danger. A nation in which individuals lost the capacity to achieve great things single-handed without acquiring the means of doing them in a shared enterprise would quickly revert to barbarism.[71]

Although purely speculative, this dystopian picture disturbingly resembles the inanimate state of formal parliamentary representation at work in today's democracies. It also illustrates how in a liberal society regimented by the ideal of individual autonomy, the possibility for substantive democratic exchange depends on people's spontaneous capacity to assemble as a collective. Notwithstanding of its status as a common theoretical denominator between liberalism and democracy, individualism in its deepened form cannot but engender a rejection of the democratic ideal. Through the fragile balancing between autonomous individuality and collective political life, democratic equality becomes at best an elusive possibility.

The liberal democratic nexus works primarily towards materialising, not equality, but individual autonomy. This is done symbolically through the proliferation of human rights and materially through market relations. In this context, realising the egalitarian promise of a ruling demos as well as the possibility of achieving a certain level of material equality tends to be reduced to a question of individual choices. If individuals decide against assembling in order to collectively rule over themselves, then democratic equality will remain in a purely formal capacity for individual liberty and autonomy systematically take precedence over equality in a liberal democratic context. The next sections of this chapter will focus on the work of thinkers who are dedicated to conceptualising equality beyond its formal iteration through human rights and political representation. They remain committed to the liberal democratic project of individual autonomy, maintaining that substantive equality can be achieved under specific conditions that aim to curb inequalities through the reworking of state and market mechanisms.

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[71] Ibid, 597.

Redistributing Equality: Rawls and Dworkin

The egalitarian content of the democratic project embodied by the promise of a ruling demos has been an inexhaustible source of debate for classical and modern political thinkers alike. These discussions tend to be dominated by scholars who aim to reconcile liberal ideals of individual liberty, autonomy, and market exchange with substantive expressions of equality. In the context of this literature, substantive equality denotes a willingness to conceptualise equality beyond rights and parliamentary representation as the pursuit of a certain level of material equality, active inclusion, and/or enhanced political participation. This section will focus on the work of theorists for whom achieving equality rests on a process of redistribution. The distributive paradigm is identified with influential theories of egalitarian liberalism that have emerged in the second half of the 20th century. John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin have had an especially strong impact on the development of this theoretical trend. Whereas Rawls constructs an ideal theory aiming at distributing justice equally according to the 'difference principle' and the 'efficiency principle', Dworkin's resource egalitarianism reframes redistribution around issues tied to individual luck, choices, and tastes.[72] Both approaches may be read as responses to utilitarianism's consequentialist ethics according to which "the greatest happiness of the greatest number should serve as a guiding normative principle."[73] Not content with reducing justice to an aggregation of individual interests, Rawls and Dworkin argue that a fair distribution of socio-economic goods must precede purely individual pursuits in order the limit their inegalitarian outcomes.[74] Deploying sophisticated redistributive frameworks, both Rawls and Dworkin ultimately refuse to question the market as an inegalitarian mode of resource allocation. By naturalising market relations, they are constrained to reduce equality to a set of choices geared towards correcting inequalities rather than actively aiming to materialise equality.

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[72] For Rawls, justice begins with an ideal theory which informs the non-ideal world. He explains that "the ideal conception shows the ranking of the principles of justice in ideal theory reflects back and guides the application of these principles to nonideal situations. [Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 267.]

[73] Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government 2nd ed*. (London: Royal Exchange and Lincoln-Inn Fields), 1823.

[74] On the conflation of equality and justice within models of redistribution, Arneson explains that "the ideal of democratic equality is an ideal of justice as sufficiency: we owe each and every member of society a provision of liberties, opportunities, resources, and aid so that everyone has enough to be continuously enabled to be a full functioning member of democratic society." [Richard J. Arneson, "Democratic Equality and Relating as Equals," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40 (2010): 25.]

Prior to discussing Rawls and Dworkin's egalitarian models, it is crucial to mention utilitarian ethics for both thinkers appear to frame their work against this tradition. Utilitarianism has been one of the most influential branch of liberalism for the last two hundred years.[75] John Stuart Mill arguably produced the most concise exposition of utilitarian ethics in *Utilitarianism* published in 1861.[76] Within this work, Mill was able to clarify and defend the consequentialist essence of the utilitarian position, the claim that an action is right merely by virtue of its consequences.[77] According to utilitarians, the end justifies the means so long as it brings about some form of pleasure or happiness. Early in *Utilitarianism*, Mill introduces the primacy of consequences not only as an ethical rule but also as a natural (observable) ordering of human action:

> All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and colour from the end to which they are subservient. […] A test of right and wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a consequence of having already ascertained it.[78]

Here, Mill plainly exposes the naturalist ambitions and consequentialist core of utilitarianism; the idea that utility-driven behaviour reflects reality as much as it constitutes an ethical good.[79] Whereas the impact of Mill upon the development of utilitarianism is undeniable, the consequentialist roots of utilitarianism emerged from the work of Jeremy

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[75] Alex Callinicos, *Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 42; Bobbio, 58; and Rawls, xvii.

[76] Following the lead of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, his own father, John Stuart Mill eventually outranked his predecessors to become one of the most authoritative political thinkers of the 19th century. [*Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*, ed. Ben Eggleston and Dale Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2014), 4, 62.]
Mill was also one of the few philosophers to have been actively involved in parliamentary politics and a vocal proponent of equality between sexes. [See Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 1988.]

[77] This consequentialist approach to ethics has been fiercely criticised by Max Horkeimer in *Eclipse of Reason: "*one might be tempted to deny any philosophical pedigree to a doctrine that holds not that our expectations are fulfilled and our actions successful because our ideas are true, but rather that our ideas are true because our expectations are fulfilled and our actions successful." [Max Horkeimer, *Eclipse of Reason Oxford:* Oxford University Press, 1947), 42.]

[78] Mill, "Utilitarianism" in *Utilitarianism, Liberty & Representative Government* (London: J.M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1954), 182.

[79] Philip Schofield outlines the naturalist character of utilitarianism when he writes in Utility and Democracy that "Bentham seems to have accepted that it was the consonance of the belief with the reality of the physical world which made it conducive to well-being. In this way, truth was reconciled with utility." [Schofield, *Utility and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20.]

Bentham. With a more frontal approach than Mill, Bentham was able to uncompromisingly convey the individualistic and hedonistic spirit of utilitarianism. His distinctive style is most clear in his discussion of 'private ethics' in *Principles of Morals and Legislation* in which he writes that "ethics at large may be defined, the art of directing men's actions to the production of the greatest possible quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view."[80] This definition simultaneously illustrates utilitarianism's individualistic approach to ethics, while introducing its aggregative consideration of happiness and justice. Whereas Bentham places the pursuit of individual interests above all else, his concerns also laid with the ethical implications of utilitarianism for collective life.

The collective facet of utilitarianism is embodied in Bentham's 'greatest happiness principle' or the idea that if happiness is a good, "each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons."[81] From a utilitarian perspective, the 'common good' is constituted by an aggregation of fragmented individual pleasures. Through this rule, achieving individual ends is elevated as the organising principle of society. The greatest happiness principle shows the strength of Bentham and Mill' belief in the emancipatory potential of individual autonomy. But it also demonstrates their commitment to a form of arithmetic equality by which "everybody counts for one, nobody for more than one."[82] In other words, the egalitarian content of the greatest happiness principle lays in the proposition that one man's happiness is equal to any other when aggregated into a common good. This proposition outlines the supreme role played by individual happiness in this framework. Happiness is considered as the only purely desirable end while all other things "are only desirable as means to that end."[83] Here, desire becomes the primary drive behind autonomy, providing a bridge between an individual and her/his own ultimate end (happiness). For utilitarians there can be no objective measure of equality. Rather, equality is made up of an aggregation of individual ends whose specificity matters little so long as happiness is derived from them. It could be argued that the only objective

[80] About the individualist tendencies of utilitarian ethics, Bentham adds "what then are the actions which it can be in a man's power to direct? They must be either his own actions, or those of other agents. Ethics, in as far as it is the art of directing a man's own actions, may be styled the art of self-government, or private ethics […] [Agents] under the influence of man's direction, are susceptible of happiness. [Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2000), 225.]
[81] Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 210.
[82] Bentham in Mill's *Utilitarianism*, 233; and Callinicos, 42.
[83] Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 210.

facet of equality from a utilitarian standpoint emerges from an equal desire to pursue one's own conception of happiness.

Rawls inscribes his theory as a continuation, not of utilitarian ethics, but of the work of traditional social contract thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, and Kant.[84] These influences ground Rawls' conception of justice firmly within the liberal democratic nexus. A 'well-ordered' democratic society provides the context for his model of 'justice as fairness'.[85] In contrast to utilitarianism's consequentialist ethics, Rawls produces an ideal theorisation of justice and equality concerned with what they ought to be in a liberal democratic context.[86] In the early pages of his foundational opus *A Theory of Justice* Rawls contrasting features of his approach with utilitarianism:

> In utilitarianism the satisfaction of any desire has some value in itself which must be taken into account in deciding what is right. In calculating the greatest balance of satisfaction it does not matter, except indirectly, what the desires are for. […] we ask no questions about their source or quality but only how their satisfaction would affect the total of well-being. […] In justice as fairness, on the other hand, persons accept in advance a principle of equal liberty and they do this without a knowledge of their more particular ends. They implicitly agree, therefore, to conform their conceptions of their good to what the principles of justice require, or at least not to press claims which directly violate them.[87]

Rawls aims to provide a viable egalitarian and liberal alternative to the utilitarian conception of justice as desirable ends. Utilitarianism is concerned by no other motives than the achievement of happiness (which often morphs into the categories of pleasure or well-

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[84] Rawls, xviii.
Rawls is widely considered as one of the most influential political thinkers of the 20th century. A Theory of Justice, published in 1971, undeniably represents one of the most thorough modern conceptualisations of democratic justice. It has been praised by academics and politicians alike, while its intellectual impact on contemporary academic discussions has been enormous. [US president Bill Clinton, upon awarding John Rawls with the 'National Humanities Medal' declared that he was "perhaps the greatest political philosopher of the 20th century". [The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President at Presentation of the National Humanities Medal September 29th 1999": https://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/New/html/19990929.html.];
On the academic impact of John Rawls's theory see The New York Times, "John Rawls, Theorist on Justice, Is Dead at 82," http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/26/us/john-rawls-theorist-on-justice-is-dead-at-82.html.]

[85] Joshua Cohen, "Democratic Equality," *Ethics 99* (1989): 734.

[86] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 63; and *A Companion to Rawls*, 44.

[87] Rawls, 27.

being), disregarding the source of individual desires. On the other hand, Rawls's theory contains an ideal contractual dimension, necessitating a general pre-agreement on the good to be desired and the kind of justice to be achieved. From a Rawlsian standpoint, justice and equality cannot result from purely self-interested conducts. This makes Rawlsian justice a more collective endeavour, aiming to curb the effects of individualistic behaviours by clearly setting out the ideal conditions and the type of agreement that will facilitate justice.

With his ideal theory of 'justice as fairness', Rawls attempts to reconciliate individual liberty and equality.[88] He does so by developing a number of key concepts aiming to clarify and legitimate his position. Within the large pool of original concepts attributable to Rawls, some are crucial for grasping the ideal and egalitarian character of his position. The interdependent ideas of 'original position' and 'veil of ignorance' serve to illustrate the rationale behind one's decision to promote justice. Rawls invites his readers to imagine a situation preceding birth in which an individual has no knowledge of her or his future professional status, nationality, appearance, or social class. He then claims that in this original position, rational individuals placed behind a veil of ignorance will be led to adopt a collectivist and egalitarian outlook, since every possible outcome can be envisaged.[89] This context is the idealised platform on which Rawls introduces his two principles of justice: the efficiency principle and the difference principle. The latter, also referred to as the 'least advantaged' principle, rests on the original position to state that "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged."[90] In other words, an individual in the original position and whose vision is blurred by the veil of ignorance will be led to distribute justice in favour of the least advantaged in order to limit the impact of finding oneself in this position.[91] In a hypothetical situation when individual

[88] Ibid, 179.

[89] White, *Equality*, 41; and Rawls, 121.
Rawls is conscious of the ideal facet of his theory when he writes that "it might be protested that the condition of the veil of ignorance is irrational." [Ibid, 120]

[90] Ibid, 72.

[91] Rawls is considered alongside Jürgen Habermas as one of the main philosophical influences of contemporary theories of deliberative democracy. [See John S. Dryzek, Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance. (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2010).] From the deliberative standpoint, democracy depends on a consensus regarding what constitutes the common good which results from rational and collective deliberation amongst free and equal members of the demos. [Seyla Benhabib, "Towards a deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy" in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), 69; and Joshua Cohen in *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy* ed. Derek Martravers and Jon Pike (London: Routledge, 2003), 345.]

autonomy is constrained by a lack of information on one's future, one is led to choose the most egalitarian distribution of justice in order to limit the risks of ending up in a precarious situation. Following the difference principle, equal distribution results from a constrained choice in which individuals relate to others only by virtue of projecting themselves into precarity.

The difference principle is inseparable from the principle of efficiency which holds that "a configuration is efficient whenever it is impossible to change it so as to make some persons (at least one) better off without at the same time making other persons (at least one) worse off."[92] The efficiency principle is an economic principle based on Pareto optimality stating that resource are allocated most efficiently when markets reach a competitive equilibrium.[93] Rawls provides a detailed account on how goods can be distributed most efficiently through an ideal conception of the market:

> Under certain conditions competitive prices select the goods to be produced and allocate resources to their production in such a manner that there is no way to improve upon either the choice of productive methods by firms, or the distribution of goods that arises from the purchases of households. There exists no rearrangement of the resulting economic configuration that makes one household better off (in view of its preferences) without making another worse off. No further mutually advantageous trades are possible; nor are there any feasible productive processes that will yield more of some desired commodity without requiring a cutback in another. For if this were not so, the situation of some individuals could be made more advantageous without a loss for anyone else. The theory of general equilibrium explains how, given the appropriate conditions, the information supplied by prices

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Joshua Cohen is perhaps the most notorious Rawlsian deliberative democrat. Cohen aims to ground Rawlsian justice by rearticulating it around notions of rational discussions and consensus, which for deliberativists should occupy the democratic space. He clarifies his approach to justice as fairness when writing about the relevance of the notion of the veil of ignorance for democratic politics: "the constraints on arguments that are captured by the veil of ignorance are not founded on the concept of morality or the concept of justice but on the democratic conception of persons as free and equal. So the model of justification associated with justice as fairness – unanimous agreement in the original position – expresses a form of normative reflection suited to a democratic society. [Joshua Cohen "For a Democratic Society," 98.] While both thinkers implicitly acknowledge the centrality of interests in a democratic framework, they aim to rationalise them through the creation of a 'pure' democratic space (the original positon for Rawls and the ecclesia or the forum for Cohen).

[92] Rawls, 58.

[93] Ibid; and Nicholas Barr, *Economics of the Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46-47.

> leads economic agents to act in ways that sum up to achieve this outcome. Perfect competition is a perfect procedure with respect to efficiency.[94]

Although more technical and less justice-oriented than the difference principle, the efficiency principle has implications that directly affect Rawls's egalitarian ambitions. The principle of efficiency is regimented, not by an ideal original position, but by an ideal conception of the market. According to the latter, "the market achieves an efficient outcome even if everyone pursues his own advantage."[95] Idealised as perfectly competitive, open, and efficient, the market is the mode of resource allocation that is most compatible with justice as fairness.[96] The efficient and auto-adjusting qualities of markets have been challenged by a number of renowned economists.[97] Prominent amongst them is Joseph Stiglitz who uses the 2008 global financial crisis to illustrate the extent to which idealised conceptions of markets as efficient and stable fail to accurately portray the imperfect and sometimes irrational reality of market exchange.[98] For Stiglitz, these idealised conceptions remain blind to the inefficient and inegalitarian tendencies of really existing markets.[99] By treating the market as a system of distribution that always tends towards equilibrium, Rawls occults the fact that certain market mechanisms (especially financial transactions and capital appreciation) directly contribute to fostering inequalities.[100] Rawls's belief in market efficiency has theoretical implications for his theory of justice as a whole. The efficiency principle naturalises market exchange, hence legitimising market-induced inequalities in the process. Rawls is faced with the impossible task of undermining inequalities through an account of justice that partially

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[94] Rawls, 240.

[95] Ibid, 316.

[96] About this Rawls declares that "If markets are reasonably competitive and open, the notion of pure procedural justice is a feasible one to follow." [Ibid, 273.]

[97] On the limits of considerations of the markets as efficient see Sanford J. Grossman, and Joseph E. Stiglitz "On the Impossibility of Informationally Efficient Markets," *American Economic Review* 70 (1980): 393–408; Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality How Today's divided Society Endangers our Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 2012; Andrew W. Lo and Craig A. MacKinlay. *A Non-Random Walk Down Wall Street* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1999; Paul Samuelson, "Proof that Properly Anticipated Prices Fluctuate Randomly," Industrial Management Review 6 (1965): 41–49; Burton, G. Malkiel, "The Efficient Market Hypothesis and Its Critics," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (2003): 59-82; and Ray Ball, "The Global Financial Crisis and the Efficient Market Hypothesis: What Have We Learned?" *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance 21* (2009): 8-16.

[98] Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 10

[99] For Stiglitz markets suffer from an inability to solve the issue of unemployment which he considers as "the worst failure of the market, the greatest source of inefficiency, and a major cause of inequality." [Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 9, 26.]

[100] For more on the inegalitarian impact of market exchange, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2014.

rests on recognising the efficiency of an institution that is itself a vector of inequalities. Naturalising the market or ignoring its inegalitarian tendencies is not specific to Rawls's thought, it appears to be a proclivity shared by most liberal egalitarians that remain to be discussed in this chapter.

Although *A Theory of Justice* is a profoundly egalitarian work, it fails to identify the market economy as an obstacle to promoting justice as fairness.[101] Besides, Rawls's distributive framework is only loosely tied to economic equality in that it does not entail a deep reconsideration of the modes of production and distribution of economic goods. Writing about the role of the economic sphere in the promotion of justice as fairness, Jacques Bidet claims that Rawls "shows complete faith in the market economy to assure economic rationality and dynamism."[102] Bidet notes that Rawls's confidence in the market is perceptible in the disjunction between the two principles of justice, attributing the efficiency principle to the economic sphere and the difference principle to the political sphere.[103] This differentiation reflects the priority of liberty over equality in Rawls's theory.[104] The priority of liberty (and thereof, the efficiency principle) is a reminder that Rawls' work remains, despite its egalitarian ambitions, deeply anchored in the liberal tradition resting primarily on individual liberty, autonomy, and the promotion of self-interests.[105] In his view, "liberty can only be restricted for the sake of liberty itself."[106] As a result, equality is mostly discussed through the prism 'equal liberty', or equality mediated by rights, and individual autonomy.[107] The substantive core of Rawlsian egalitarianism undoubtedly resides in the difference or 'least advantaged' principle. Yet, through the veil of ignorance, Rawls portrays individuals as self-interested in a way that echoes the utilitarian characterisation of individuals as utility-maximising agents:

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[101] Callinicos, 50.
[102] Jacques Bidet, *John Rawls et la Théorie de la Justice* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France), 1995.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Rawls describes the priority of liberty within his two principles of justice as follows: "By the priority of liberty I mean the precedence of the principle of equal liberty over the second principle of justice. The two principles are in lexical order, and therefore the claims of liberty are to be satisfied first. Until this is achieved no other principle comes into play. The priority of the right over the good, or of fair opportunity over the difference principle." [Rawls, 214.]
[105] Callinicos, 48.
[106] Rawls, 214. Also see Bryan Barry, "John Rawls and the Priority of Liberty," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1973): 274-290.
[107] Rawls, 194-195.

> A rational person is thought to have a coherent set of preferences between the options open to him. He ranks these options according to how well they further his purposes; he follows the plan which will satisfy more of his desires rather than less, and which has the greater chance of being successfully executed.[108]

As Alex Callinicos rightfully points out, individuals in the original position remain rational in the narrow, utilitarian sense.[109] Regardless of the lack of information provided by the veil of ignorance, agents promote justice as a result of uncertainty in order to minimise the risks (pains) of finding oneself in an unfair position. The difference principle remains the by-product of utility-driven behaviour despite emanating from the idealised space of the original position. Behind the veil of ignorance, motives for achieving justice are negative insofar as individuals are driven by self-interest rather than a fundamental desire to favour the least advantaged. That is not to say that Rawls's account of justice should be conflated with a utilitarian position. When the American thinker constructs an ideal theory of justice mediated by abstract concepts prioritising the most deprived members of society, utilitarians perceive a multiplicity of equivalent ends that are to be aggregated to promote the common good.[110] When Rawls considers that actions must follow from a pre-agreement on what justice represents, Bentham and Mill elevate the ends of human actions as a moral standard.[111] Inasmuch as Rawls favours distributive justice, consequence-oriented utilitarians are merely concerned with the maximisation of welfare.[112] A *Theory of Justice* is a pioneering,

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[108] Ibid, 124.

[109] Callinicos, 45.

[110] Regarding the greatest utility principle, or principle of average utility, both Bentham and J.S Mill were reluctant to associate it to an exclusion of the interest of the minority. About this Schofield writes, "without the potential for such a sacrifice [of minority interests] Bentham's whole utilitarian project would have ground to a halt." [Schofield, Utility and Democracy, 40.]; Also see John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty* & *Representative government*, 75; Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 210; and Henry R. West, "Mill and Utilitarianism in the mid-nineteenth century," in *a Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*, 76.

[111] Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 190.

[112] White, 18.

Discussions of equality centred on the pursuit of welfare or well-being are not limited to utilitarianism. Various respected contemporary liberal scholars like Thomas Christiano have established the promotion of equality of well-being as a cornerstone of their political vision. For Christiano, the aim of democracy and liberal rights should be the attainment of well-being through providing "each person a say in shaping the conditions for the realization of his or her own individual interests." [Thomas Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.] In Christiano's model of equality, interests aimed at the promotion of well-being are realised on the condition that all must be able to "see that they are being treated as equal", since this condition constitutes the "moral foundation of democracy and the basis of liberal rights." [Ibid, 2, 45.] Christiano acknowledges the proximity of his model with the utilitarian positon. [Ibid, 6, 27.] Nonetheless, he consciously attempts to avoid the trappings of utilitarian consequentialism. This is arguably best achieved by

yet controversial egalitarian contribution to the liberal tradition.[113] Building on the originality of the difference principle, Rawls's theory represents an important attempt to re-substantiate equality in a liberal democratic context. Yet, Rawls paradoxically aims to redistribute equality through an institution (the market) and a type of conduct (self-interested behaviour) that are irremediably geared towards promoting inequalities.

Not unlike Rawls, Dworkin defends that theory must begin with an abstract regulating ideal.[114] He also constructs his egalitarian theory within a redistributive framework oriented towards achieving equality beyond its formal consideration through rights and parliamentary representation.[115] Dworkin's egalitarian position came to the fore in the early 1980s with two long articles entitled *What is Equality?* Each article is dedicated to one specific form of equality: equality of welfare and equality of resources.[116] Dworkin's objective with this twofold account of equality is to decide which conception of equality is best suited to an appealing political ideal.[117] Early in the first piece, Dworkin outlines the nuances between his accounts of welfare and resources.

> The first [general theory of distributional equality] (which I shall call equality of welfare) holds that a distributional scheme treats people as equals when it distributes or transfers re- sources among them until no further transfer would leave them more equal in welfare. The second (equality of resources) holds that it treats them as equals

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Christiano's concept of 'equal advancement of interests' according to which "[society's] institutions are constructed so as to make it publicly clear to citizens that their interests are being given equal consideration in their operation." [Ibid, 288.]

[113] Discussing Rawls' radicalism, Bryan Barry goes as far as claiming that the American thinker is the first figure in the individualistic tradition to take "account of the legacy of Marx and Weber by recognising explicitly that societies have patterns of inequality that persist over time and systematic ways of allocating people to positions within their hierarchies of power, status and money." [Bryan Barry, *Justice as Impartiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 214.]

[114] "Legal Positivism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legal-positivism/.

[115] Dworkin is first and foremost a legal scholar. One of the most cited academic in his field at the turn of the century, he is considered as one of the most influential legal thinkers of his time. Dworkin is known to be one of the fiercest opponents of legal positivism, the thesis that "the existence and content of law depends on social facts." [Fred R. Shapiro, "The Most-Cited Legal Scholars," *The Journal of Legal Studies 29* (2000): 410, 424.]

[116] For Rosanvallon the shift between Rawls and Dworkin is tied to the notion of individual responsibility: "Dworkin saw himself as the theorist of the next stage, that is, of a society in which the idea of society makes sense socially only if it somehow incorporates the notion of individual responsibility." [Rosanvallon, 247.] On the same point also see Amartya Sen, *Inequality re-examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 148.

[117] Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 3 (1981): 185.

> when it distributes or transfers so that no further transfer would leave their shares of the total resources more equal.[118]

The contrast drawn between these two forms of equality is subtle but significant. Associating redistributive equality and welfare entails paying attention to each individual's specific requirement, which may greatly vary in scope. On the other hand, equality of resources demands that citizens be provided with equal resources from which they can benefit as they see fit. In his first article, Dworkin attempts to refine the broad concept of welfare into more specific categories. One of the values that he associates to welfare is success. In assessing equality of success, he is confronted with the issue of designating an overarching measure of success as welfare. There must be a shared understanding of what success represents if it is to be designated as the central value from which resources can be equally distributed.[119] Even at an individual level, there can be many of such measures and neither utilitarianism nor welfare economics provide a satisfactory response to this dilemma.[120] Enjoyment is another form of welfare which Dworkin considers. This notion is closer to the utilitarian conception of welfare as the pursuit of pleasures and the avoidance of pains.[121] A significant issue with both enjoyment and success is the existing discrepancy in the level of welfare people attribute to these values.[122] If a substantial portion of a hypothetical population does not consider notions such as success or enjoyment as significant contributors to welfare, then any equalisation by means of redistribution is meaningless. In attempting to theorise the merits of welfare equality, Dworkin is faced with a seemingly unsurmountable issue: generalising a notion (welfare) which mainly rests on subjective preferences.[123]

Ultimately, Dworkin rejects welfare egalitarianism based on what he refers to as the 'expensive tastes argument'. The latter specifies that those with 'champagne tastes' will inevitably require more income to achieve the same of welfare as those with humbler needs.[124] In other words, welfare is an essentially subjective category. Individuals perceive

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[118] Ibid, 186.
[119] Ibid, 209.
[120] Ibid, 210.
[121] See Bentham, *A Fragment on Government*, 2nd ed. Enlarged. (London: Royal Exchange and Lincoln-Inn Fields), 1823.
[122] Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare," 210.
[123] Ibid, 224.
[124] Ibid, 228.

their needs based on their own experiences shaped by their direct environments. This argument is perhaps best explained from a sociological point of view. If welfare is redistributed equally in a society composed of various socio-economic groups who associate well-being to their respective socio-economic conditions, then great inequalities will remain as each group will determine their required level welfare in function of their own past experiences. Even if the general average of welfare rises, those habituated to greater tastes and level of comfort are likely to require comparatively higher levels of welfare than those who have never experienced such comfort.[125] The problem of expensive taste ultimately leads Dworkin to focus his egalitarian ambitions on resources.[126]

Dworkin's account of resource equality is entirely based on a market mode of allocation. In his view, the market is as much an analytical device as an actual political institution that sets the price of resources to be equally distributed.[127] He illustrates his distinctive take on redistribution through the idea of a society-wide auction in which each citizen is assigned identical bidding power. Richard Arneson provides a concise description of Dworkin's complex auction-based system of redistribution:

> In this auction, ownership is interpreted as ownership of hours of time of the person who has the resource, and ownership of time in turn is interpreted as ownership of labour power – the right to demand from the possessor of the resource the highest amount of money that the person could have earned in the labour market working for the length of time that is owned. On this conception any talent an individual possesses that enhances the value of an hour of her labour power is an internal resource that is up for grabs in the imagined auction.[128]

Through this generalised auction, individual talent and time are traded on the basis of equal resources. Unlike Rawls, Dworkin's egalitarian framework entertains an

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[125] The expensive tastes argument is arguably well complemented Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' in which one's conduct is regulated by her/his environment regardless of one's conscious aim or clear regulative rules. For Bourdieu, habitus is a system of "durable, transposable dispositions, […] as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them." [Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 72.]

[126] Elizabeth S. Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" Ethics 109 (January 1999), 293.

[127] Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10 (1981), 284.

[128] Richard Arneson, "Equality" in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy 2nd ed.*, 596.

uncompromising relationship with the market. There is no principle of justice that will redirect market outputs towards the least advantaged members of society. The distribution of goods is regulated by markets on which individuals are responsible for trading their own labour power.[129] Dworkin aims to reconcile individualism with the pursuit of substantive equality through market exchange.[130] A strong critique of Dworkin's model, Elizabeth Anderson, claims that individual market choices cannot provide any indication as to what must be redistributed on a collective basis. Instead, she defends that an egalitarian theory must provide the conditions for pursuing equality collectively.[131]

Especially bothersome to Dworkin's critics, is the importance he attributes to individual luck in his model. Dworkin divides the notion of luck in two categories; 'brute' luck and 'option' luck, each of which are relevant to his action-based model. Option luck includes the outcome of "deliberate and calculated gambles", or one's acceptation of "an isolated risk he or she should have anticipated and might have declined."[132] In contrast, brute luck emanates from risks that are not deliberate gambles.[133] Dworkin favours option luck or controlled risk-taking. He proposes that the state insure individuals against the detrimental outcomes of brute luck to the extent that it is essentially unfair and may affect anybody.[134] Despite this specific case of state intervention, individual responsibility remains the main arbiter of resource equality through the calculation of risks defining option luck.[135] Ultimately, Dworkin's individualistic take on egalitarianism is contained in the statement that "people pay the true cost of the lives that they lead."[136] The auction-based market simply insures that individuals be paid a fair price for their labour power and their inclinations towards risk-taking. Anderson accurately describes luck egalitarianism as a hybrid between capitalism and the welfare state valuing an extreme form of individualism through which people are held responsible for the outcomes of their own actions on a capitalist market.[137]

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[129] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?", 292.
[130] About this point, Anderson writes that "This reliance on markets responds to the objection that egalitarianism does not appreciate the virtues of markets as efficient allocative mechanisms and as spaces for the exercise of freedom." [Ibid.]
[131] Ibid, 310.
[132] Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," 293.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality? Part 2", 292.
[135] Ibid, 298.
[136] Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," 295.
[137] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?", 292.

Whereas Rawls remains dedicated to the pursuit of collective welfare alongside the good functioning of markets, Dworkin treats equality as an outcome of individual market transactions. The collective facet of distributive equality is largely evacuated from his model in favour of a plainly atomistic political ideal. Arneson goes as far as claiming that luck egalitarianism is so bleak and unforgiving that it even betrays liberal ideals.[138] Similarly, Anderson claims that risk and luck are fully incompatible with democratic equality, for the latter takes root in security.[139] Whereas Rawls largely conceals the strong individualistic and market-based dimension of justice as fairness through concepts such as the veil of ignorance and the original position, Dworkin is bolder in his egalitarian consideration of individual responsibility and market outcomes.

Both Rawls and Dworkin aim to substantiate equality through redistributive frameworks that rely on individual autonomy and market exchange. They treat the market as a fair mode of resource allocation, largely overlooking its inegalitarian tendencies. This ultimately leads them to naturalise markets and the inequalities they engender. Both Rawls and Dworkin are committed egalitarians and the sophistication of their redistributive models is undeniable. However, they seem unwilling to confront the paradox according to which their egalitarianism rests on upholding an institution that generates most of the inequalities they aim to undermine. Through this paradox, equality is only revealed as a result of correcting inequalities rather than a positive political ideal. In other words, naturalising markets inexorably reformulates the question of equality negatively as the possibility to curb inequalities in an imperfect but unquestionable liberal democratic context.[140] The same paradoxical logic is at work within the association of individual self-interest and equality. The latter is only achieved as a by-product of self-interested individual choices blurred by imperfect information generated by ideal concepts like the veil of ignorance. Less concerned with issues of redistribution, thinkers to be discussed in the next section focus on achieving equality through the recognition of marginalised identities and cultures.

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[138] Arneson, "Democratic Equality and Relating as Equals", 26.

[139] On the contrast between luck and democratic equality, Anderson writes that "democratic equality, contrasts luck with security. On this view, unlucky distributions are unjust insofar as they disrupt egalitarian levels of security to which individuals are entitled because they need them to stand in relations of equality with others." [Anderson "How Should Egalitarians Cope with Market Risks?", 240-241.]

[140] About the negative implications of redistributive approaches to equality, Rosanvallon writes, "they accentuate the negative, arguing that anything that is not clearly attributable to individual effort should be subject to compensatory redistribution. What they propose is thus a strictly limited form of meritocracy." [Rosanvallon, 247.]

Reclaiming Equality through Recognition: Fraser, Young, and Benhabib

Thinkers such as Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Iris Marion Young, or Charles Taylor argue, albeit differently, that the pursuit of equality rests on recognising historically marginalised cultures and identities through further inclusion. This contemporary intellectual movement has had a palpable political impact on western liberal democracies through the enactment of minority rights such as gay marriage, positive actions, or the expansion of individual rights to previously overlooked identities. This movement has had an even greater impact on civil society through the proliferation of public debates tied to identity politics, religious and LGBTQ rights, or what constitutes offensive language in the public sphere. In view of the increasing confluence of questions of identity and culture with equality, the work of influential theorists who have directed their egalitarian concerns towards these issues must be discussed.

One recurrent theme in contemporary literature on culture and identity is the idea of recognition originating in Hegel's philosophy.[141] In *Redistribution or Recognition*, Fraser provides a clear definition of Hegelian recognition:

> Recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each see the other as its equal and also separate from it. This relation is deemed constitutive for subjectivity; one becomes an individual subject only in virtue of recognising and being recognised by, another subject.[142]

The concept of recognition is relatively straightforward. One can be deemed a subject only after being recognised and recognising oneself as such. Here, equality emerges through the reciprocal act of recognising oneself into others. We are all subjects to the extent that we perform this act of mutual recognition. Taylor remarks that the meaning of the concept of recognition became more specific at the turn of the 18th century, becoming embroiled with liberal democratic ideals. This shift brought about a new form of "individualized identity, one that is particular to me, and that I discover in myself."[143] This reorientation of recognition

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[141] See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[142] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, 10.
[143] Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism Examining the Politics of Recognition*, 9, 28. In response to the amalgamation of identity politics with an atomistic vision of individualism, Amy Gutman considers this association reinvigorates democracy. [Amy Gutmann, *Identity and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 9, 95.]

responds to the individualistic demands of liberalism. The dual dimension of identifying oneself into others as subjects and discovering oneself for one's own sake constitutes the theoretical core of contemporary discussions of recognition. Today, conceptualisations of recognition usually takes shape through "demands for the equal status of cultures and of genders."[144] Recognition in its current form tends to be associated with furthering the inclusion of 'misrecognised' identities and cultures into formal political and economic processes.

Nancy Fraser, arguably one of the most engaging thinkers of recognition, clearly differentiates her view from that of Honneth and Taylor who treat recognition as "the fundamental, overarching moral category, while treating distribution as derivative." Fraser considers recognition and distribution to be matters of justice unlike Honneth and Taylor who tie recognition to self-realisation.[145] This distinctive approach to justice takes root in a belief that notions of redistribution discussed in the previous section and recognition are not mutually exclusive, that their opposition is a "false antithesis."[146] On the contrary, Fraser perceives their association as necessary. Recognition and redistribution form the bedrock of her egalitarian vision embodied within the idea of 'perspective dualism'. The cultural reordering consistent with recognition "may work through a variety of different institutions, including kinship, religion, and the law**."[147]** On the other hand, her approach to redistribution does not fully refute market mechanisms but remains articulated around a strong critique of neoliberalism and the processes of marketisation and financialization it engenders.[148] The central aim of perspective dualism is to challenge the conceptual rigidity between issues of economic redistribution and cultural recognition:

> Redistribution and recognition do not correspond to two substantive societal domains, economy and culture. Rather, they constitute two analytical perspectives that can be assumed with respect to any domain. […] Distributive measures [may be

[144] Taylor, 27.
[145] Fraser and Honneth, 3, 28; also see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: The MIT Press), 1995.
[146] Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition,* 16.
[147] Ibid*,* 51.
[148] See Nancy Fraser "A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi" in M. Burchardt, G. Kirn *Beyond Neoliberalism. Approaches to Social Inequality and Difference* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.); Processes of neoliberal marketisation and financialisation will be further discussed in the next chapter.

used] to redress misrecognition and recognition measures to redress maldistribution.[149]

Fraser rightfully aims to erase the division between the institutional ordering of both redistribution (economic) and recognition (political). She does so by remaining strongly committed to ideals of political recognition and economic redistribution while recognising that neoliberal markets hinder such egalitarian pursuits. Particularly interesting within Fraser's critique of neoliberalism is the argument that marginalised and misrecognised groups have been appropriated by neoliberal markets.[150] Rather than being provided with the levels of political recognition and shares of economic redistribution they need and deserve, minorities are invoked in the name of merit and encouraged to 'rise to the top' in a neoliberal environment.[151] For Fraser, neoliberal excesses foster economic as well as cultural inequalities.[152] From the standpoint of perspective dualism, the modes of neoliberal redistribution and recognition can change. Such shift takes place through a renewed commitment in human rights and redistributive measures that reject the neoliberal ethos and remain under close state supervision.[153] By discussing misrecognition alongside questions of economic redistribution, Fraser demonstrates the extent to which notions of social and economic inequalities are linked. Her account of perspective dualism can be located on the far-left corner of the liberal egalitarian tradition. Remaining committed to the equalising capacity of human rights and tightly controlled markets, she nonetheless rejects the inegalitarian tendencies of neoliberalism.

Other thinkers of recognition have been more inclined to develop their egalitarian models against the work of distributivists. This is the case for Young who conceptualises her 'politics of difference' in response to the shortcomings of redistribution. In her view, redistribution "fails to bring social structures and institutional contexts under evaluation."[154] The social structures to which Young refers here are tied to oppression either conceived as

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[149] Fraser, "Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition," Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Forschungsschwerpunkt Arbeitsmarkt und Beschäftigung, Abteilung Organisation und Beschäftigung, FS I, (1998): 8.
[150] Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born* (London: Verso Books, 2019), 8.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid; and Fraser, "A Triple Movement" in *Beyond Neoliberalism.*
[153] Fraser, "A Triple Movement" in *Beyond Neoliberalism,* 36; and Nancy Fraser "Féminisme, capitalisme et ruses de l'histoire" *Cahiers du Genre* 50 (2011): 169.
[154] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 20.

marginalisation, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, or violence.[155] For Young, distributivists often remain blind to trends of systemic oppression that directly impact distributive patterns.[156] She identifies three pressing issues occulted by distributive accounts of justice: decision making issues or "the rules and procedures according to which decisions are made", "division of labor as an institutional structure [involving] the range of tasks performed in a given position, the definition of the nature, meaning, and value of those tasks, and the relations of cooperation, conflict, and authority among positions", and culture including "symbols, images, meanings, habitual comportments, stories, and so on through which people express their experience and communicate with one another."[157] Young's account of justice aims to expand economic justice while prioritising cultural inclusion. Where Rawls and Dworkin trust the market to assign economic roles and allocate resources efficiently, Young demands that questions surrounding the division of labour and economic domination be reopened. Yet, economic equality is not Young's primary objective. Her account of justice is guided by social equality or "the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society's major institutions, and the socially supported substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices."[158]

Young refutes the universalist tendencies of Rawls's veil of ignorance through which differences become irrelevant.[159] Although Rawlsian justice prioritises 'the least advantaged' members of society, such broad label inevitably flattens identities and particularities into a quantifiable socio-economic category.[160] For Young, differences are crucial for they may be a vector of exclusion. Realising equality does not depend on overlooking or whitewashing differences but on recognising and upholding them.[161] A politics of inclusion is one that aims to break long-running trends of sexist, homophobic, racist, and xenophobic exclusion from liberal democratic institutions. Differences are valued not for identity's sake, but in the name of groups remaining underprivileged and overwhelmingly excluded from most liberal

[155] Ibid, 9.
[156] Ibid, 15.
[157] Ibid, 22-23.
[158] Ibid, 173.
[159] Ibid, 101.
[160] About Young's critique of Rawls, Isabelle Aubert, Marie Garrau, and Sophie Guerard de Latour explain that "According to her, such a theory could not grasp the conditions of social injustice because of its methodological commitment to ideal theory, its use of a distributive paradigm that reduced rights to goods, and its obfuscation of relations of power." [Isabelle Aubert, Marie Garrau & Sophie Guérard de Latour, "Iris Marion Young and Responsibility," *Critical Horizons A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory 20* (2019): 103.
[161] Young, 10.

accounts of equality. For Young, identity can only be defined in relational terms. One cannot individually curate a 'self-narrative' to be presented as identity.[162] As opposed to more recent developments in identity politics whereby gender is treated as an increasingly fluid and changing category, Young frames her account of inclusion according to social difference rather than substantial identity.[163] The politics of recognition cannot be one that pins individual claims against each other.[164] Instead, demands for recognition materialise as "claims against discrimination, unequal opportunity, political marginalization, or unfair burdens."[165]

Defining equality through the recognition and inclusion of marginalised or unfairly treated groups "sometimes requires different treatment for oppressed or disadvantaged groups."[166] This is a paradox of the politics of recognition. Unequal treatment is invoked in the name of equality in order to compensate for past exclusions. An issue with this approach is that it forsakes inclusion to make room for compensation. This has become especially clear through the development of identity politics in recent years. In several instances, legitimate demands for further equality have been accompanied, not primarily by a drive towards further inclusion into an enlarged demos, but by a politics of exclusion from the dominant group.[167] In view of current scholarship, it is unclear how a politics of recognition may redraw the thin line that exists between the logic of inclusion and cooperation on one side, and that of exclusion and compensation on the other. This very contemporary dilemma challenges the work of Young as much as that of Fraser or Benhabib.

Benhabib discusses cultural recognition through a deliberative model infused by the work of Jurgen Habermas.[168] Her interest in associating deliberative democracy with

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[162] On gender fluidity and 'self-narratives' see Afiah Vijlbrief, Sawitri Saharso & Halleh Ghorashi "Transcending the gender binary: Gender non-binary young adults in Amsterdam," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 17, (2020): 89-106.
[163] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2000), 89, 102.
[164] Ibid, 103.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid, 157.
[167] Situations according to which minority groups demand to be 'separate but equal' have especially proliferated in US universities where a few institutions have welcomed racially segregated ceremonies and accommodation in the name of equality. See Ziva Dahl, Observer, "Do Colleges Actually Welcome Segregation on Campus?" 05/28/19. https://observer.com/2019/05/college-campus-segregation-commencements/;
Anemona Hartocollis, The New York Times, Colleges Celebrate Diversity With Separate Commencements, June 2, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/02/us/black-commencement-harvard.html;
And Emily Deruy, The Atlantic, Aug 17, 2016, The Fine Line Between Safe Space and Segregation. https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/finding-the-line-between-safe-space-and-segregation/496289/.
[168] See Seyla Benhabib, *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press), 1997.

discussions of culture and identity stems from an interest in the increased fluidity of nationality, race, gender, or religion reflecting the current trend of globalisation associated with the 'postmodern condition'.[169] Far from considering this development as politically limiting, Benhabib sees in it an opportunity to develop a global "independent public sphere in which questions of identity, legitimacy, and sovereignty can be perpetually debated and discussed."[170] The postmodern shift is significant to the extent that discrediting grand political objectives allows for the possibility to recognise the value of multiple narratives, notably from those relegated to the margins of modernity such as women as well as ethnic and other minorities.[171] In Benhabib's work this transformation is probably best conveyed by a distinction between the demos and the ethnos, "between the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity of a people, and the political constitution of the people as an organized, self-governing body."[172] Differentiating between the demos and the ethnos demonstrates Benhabib's commitment to treat cultural and identity-based groups as political entities in their own rights, or as a demos within the demos.

Like Fraser and Young, the egalitarian facet of Benhabib's model rests on inclusion by providing a political voice to those who previously lacked it. It is articulated around three central concepts: egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and association. Egalitarian reciprocity states that minorities must not be denied any forms of rights granted to the majority, while the two remaining concepts claim that individuals must not be limited to an essential group or identity, and should be entitled to self-identify with

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[169] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture, Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), Vii-Viii.
[170] Seyla Benhabib, "Democracy and Difference: Reflections on the Metapolitics of Lyotard and Derrida," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (1994), 21.
[170] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, Vii-Viii.
[171] Besides Habermas, Benhabib's dynamic view of identity takes root within the work of postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers such as Jean Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. Lyotard's presentation of postmodernity as an era of "incredulity towards metanarratives", as well as Jacques Derrida's concern with the notion of 'otherness' or differance have arguably come to constitute a philosophical platform for contemporary thinkers of identity. Postmodernists have achieved this by 'deconstructing' notions such as progress and truth and by questioning the philosophical value of the modernist category of subject. For poststructuralist thinkers specifically, this endeavour is grounded in the interplay between language and meaning. [See Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), xxiv; Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 2002), 24; and Jacques Derrida, "Differance", http://www.projectlamar.com/media/Derrida-Differance.pdf.]
[172] Seyla Benhabib, "Democracy and Difference: Reflections on the Metapolitics of Lyotard and Derrida," 19.

various groups.[173] In *The Claims of Culture*, Benhabib details how her fluid and inclusive view of cultural identity benefits from deliberation:

> There is no presumption that moral and political dialogues will produce normative consensus, yet it is assumed that even when they fail to do so and we must resort to law to redraw the boundaries of coexistence, societies in which such multicultural dialogues take place in the public sphere will articulate a civic point of view and a civic perspective of 'enlarged mentality.'[174]

One could argue that a model of equality based on culture and identity either depends on the formulation of new rights, or on the recognition and inclusion of those previously not subjected to the symbolic authority of already existing rights. This is consistent with Benhabib's notions of egalitarian reciprocity and freedom of exit and association,[175] two processes by which the law incorporates previously ignored subjects while new 'cultural' rights are enacted. Another plainly liberal aspect of Benhabib's work which might interfere with the pursuit of substantive equality is her prioritisation of individuality. She understands individuality as "the unique and fragile achievement of selves in weaving together conflicting narratives and allegiances into a unique life history."[176] This definition is crucial to grasping Benhabib's specific perception of culture as being "constituted through the narratives and symbolizations of their members" rather than "homogenous wholes."[177] In this atomistic definition of culture, individual autonomy takes precedence over cultural or national memberships. The egalitarian core of Benhabib's model is founded on the capacity of any individual to claim the political relevance of a culturally distinct life experience. In other words, individuals express their political potential by demanding through deliberation that their specific cultural identity be recognised. By invoking the egalitarian virtues of individual choice, Benhabib does not account for the possibility that individuals might favour self-exclusion over inclusion when demanding that their cultural particularities be recognised.

Ultimately, Fraser's perspective dualism, Young's politics of difference, and Benhabib's claim of culture only provide a partial alternative to distributive models of

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[173] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture,* 148-149.
[174] Ibid*,* 115.
[175] Benhabib explains freedom of exit and association as "the freedom of the individual to exit the ascriptive group must be unrestricted." [Ibid*,* 249.]
[176] Ibid*,* 16.
[177] Ibid*,* 61.

equality. Through the prism of recognition, equality still depends on the elaboration of rights, individual choices, and market exchange. Although proponents of recognition call attention to important power dynamics largely ignored by distributivists, they do so in the name of the same liberal ideals. They are confronted to the same contradictions attached to reconciling individual choice with collective equality and compensating for the inegalitarian tendencies of market exchange. Associating recognition to individual choice is an issue to the extent that choice may be directed towards exclusion in the name of equality and difference, hence compromising the objective of achieving equality through inclusion.[178] The atomistic facet of recognition reduces equality to a series of isolated claims demanding that individual or group specificities be formally recognised rather than substantively equalised.[179] The next section will concentrate on the work of scholars who are uncompromisingly dedicated to conceptualising individual autonomy as the main impetus for realising democratic equality.

Creating the Space for Equal Freedom: Sen and Pettit

Both distributivists and advocates of recognition construct their models with a clear egalitarian ideal in sight. For Rawls and Dworkin this ideal rests on a fair and efficient redistribution of social and economic goods. For Fraser, Young, and Benhabib equality reveals itself through the active inclusion of marginalised minorities within political and socio-economic institutions. Whereas both approaches celebrate individual autonomy and the virtues of unaltered choice, they do so in the name of achieving distinctive egalitarian ideals. This section will focus on the work of Amartya Sen and Philip Pettit for whom achieving equality is guided by practice rather than ideality. These pragmatic accounts of equality are dedicated to fulfilling the potential embodied in autonomous conduct more than any of the literature discussed thus far in this chapter. For Sen, achieving equality rests on considering everyone's 'capability to achieve'. In his view, focusing on capabilities "provides a straightforward account of the lack of freedom of the deprived people to achieve those

[178] in *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies,* Jodi Dean goes as far as claiming that identity-based politics erodes politics from the inside by reducing it to individual consumer choice: "That consumer choices may have a politics—fair trade, green, vegan, woman-owned—morphs into the sense that politics is nothing but consumer choices, that is, individuated responses to individuated needs." [Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 11.]

[179] For Slavoj Žižek the drive to associate politics to cultural claims reflects a "postmodern strategy of depolitization and/or victimization." [Slavoj Zizek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso), 67.]

elementary functionings."[180] If equality is framed in terms of capabilities, then liberty will coincide with "the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value."[181] Rather than drawing an ideal path pointed towards realising equality and justice, Sen aims to equalise freedom and let capable individuals act on this equal condition.[182] The idea of equal freedom also resonates with the work of contemporary republicans such as Philip Pettit. For Pettit, the state must guarantee equal freedom so that each citizen can enjoy "non-domination in a sphere of choice."[183] From the republican standpoint, the state and citizenry provide an egalitarian space in which individual opportunities can be realised.[184] Both Sen and Pettit ground equality within a distinct space where individuals are able to achieve a certain level of autonomy. For Sen, this space is that of capabilities, while Pettit locates it within a state-controlled environment.

Sen's work is defined by interdisciplinarity. As a philosopher and an economist, his thought is more attuned to what may constitute a palpable obstacle to achieving equality.[185] This dual intellectual identity, articulated around the themes of justice, equality, poverty, and welfare through the prism of capabilities enabled his work to have more concrete impact than most academics.[186] In *Inequality Re-examined*, Sen identifies two concrete forms of existing diversities that invariably challenge egalitarian pursuits: the heterogeneity of humanity, and the various points of view from which equality can be judged.[187] Human heterogeneity constitutes a practical challenge, while the versatility of equality amounts to a theoretical challenge. Inasmuch as he is interested in theorising equality, Sen is also willing to address the practical challenge raised by existing inequalities. This constant oscillation between theory and empirical awareness echoes the work of Robert Dahl, even if the American thinker draws thicker lines between the democratic ideal and realistic egalitarian possibilities.[188] For

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[180] Sen, *Inequality re-examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.
[181] Ibid, 31.
[182] Ibid, 87.
[183] Philip Pettit, *On the People's terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8.
[184] Kyle Swan, "Republican Equality," *Social Theory and Practice 38* (2012): 432-454.
[185] Sen was awarded a Nobel prize in economics in 1998 for his work on "social choice, welfare measurement, and poverty." Despite his reputation as an economist, Sen is also recognised as a philosopher. Upon receiving his Nobel prize, he commented: "While I am interested both in economics and in philosophy, the union of my interests in the two fields far exceeds their intersection." ["Amartya Sen-Biography", http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1998/sen-bio.html.]
[186] World Bank Live, "Amartya Sen," http://live.worldbank.org/experts/amartya-sen.
[187] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 1.
[188] To the question 'why do people strive for equality?' Dahl responds that "political equality is an ideal we should strive to attain, a moral obligation to act in its support." [Robert A. Dahl, *On Political Equality* (New

Sen, the issue of egalitarian diversity must be addressed by asking 'equality of what?' Only by delimiting some space where all can be equal could an egalitarian proposition be ethically and socially plausible.[189] Distinguishing equality based on categories such as resource, welfare, gender, opportunities, outcomes, or income is a common trend of egalitarian thought. Sen's position differs to the extent that answering the question 'equality of what?' becomes a theoretical priority, overshadowing discussions of why equality is desirable.[190] Diversities constituted by human heterogeneity and types of equality go hand in hand since "equality in one space goes with substantial inequalities in others."[191] Based on this, asking 'what equality?' is the only way to guarantee a theorisation of equality that is sensible to the diversities which define society. Unlike Dworkin or Rawls, Sen is guided by some level of pragmatism leading him to reject purely transcendental egalitarian theories.[192]

Sen addresses the problem of diversities through the capability approach. The latter states that "freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities.[193] Key here is the notion of 'freedom of achievement' through which "achievement is concerned with what we manage to accomplish, and freedom with the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value."[194] Treating freedom in this way, one must be sensitive to individuals' real potentialities in addition to the nature of goods to be distributed or the type of groups and identities to be recognised in order to realise equality.

Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 36, 49.] The originality of Dahl's approach to equality resides in what could be portrayed as a type of realism. The latter is grounded in his unwillingness to idealise democracy, to instead focus on constraints to the realisation of democracy. In his last book, On Political Equality, he identifies six barriers to political equality: The distribution of political resources, skills and incentives, irreducible limits on time, the size of political systems, the prevalence of market economies, the existence of international systems that are not democratic, the inevitability of severe crisis. [Ibid, 50-51.]
In *Democracy and its Critics*, Dahl writes more candidly about his reservations towards ideal theorisations and the importance of experience: "Ideal political systems, and ideal states in particular, have never existed, do not exist, and almost surely never will exist. […] This is simply that, when the idea of democracy is actively adopted by a people, it tends to produce the best feasible political system, or at any rate the best state, taken all around. In this view, many of the philosophical justifications offered for democracy may be true. But they speak to political ideals rather than directly to human experience." [Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 83-84.]

[189] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 3, 12.

[190] About this question Sen writes, "what really distinguishes the different approaches is the variation in their respective answers to the question 'equality of what?'. That question is truly central in understanding the distinctions between the diverse ethical approaches to social arrangements." [Ibid, 129.]

[191] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 123.

[192] Arneson, "From primary goods to capabilities to wellbeing," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 16 (2013): 180, 186.

[193] Ingrid Robeyns, "The Capability Approach (and Social Justice)," in *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy* ed. Gerald F. Gaus, Fred D'Agostino (New York: Routledge, 2013), 456.

[194] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 123.

In the essay *What is the Point of Equality?,* Anderson outlines the benefits of the capabilities approach.

> One advantage of the capabilities approach to equality is that it allows us to analyze injustices in regard to other matters besides the distribution of resources and other divisible goods. One's capabilities are a function not just of one's fixed personal traits and divisible resources, but of one's mutable traits, social relations and norms, and the structure of opportunities, public goods, and public spaces.[195]

The capability approach provides an alternative interpretative framework to the problem of inequality.[196] The egalitarian potential of capabilities is best understood in contrast to Dworkin's approach to resources. In the same way that Dworkin disavows equality of welfare based on the 'expensive taste' argument, his endorsement of resource equality may be rejected from the capability standpoint. Indeed, Dworkin's conceptual auction does not consider one's capability to efficiently conduct beneficial transactions. Instead, Dworkin is merely concerned with equalising initial resources and the market's efficiency in redistributing goods. When discussing Dworkin and equality of resources, Sen explains that freedom of choice entails that we "look at the choices that the person does in fact have, and we must not assume that the same results would be obtained by looking at the resources that he or she commands."[197] Sen is also critical of identity-based egalitarianisms discussed in the previous section. He interprets the decision to focus on specific identities as an act of closure by which the broadness of the world is "eclipsed by the narrowness of divisive temptations."[198] Whether challenging distributive or recognitive approaches to equality, Sen contests ideal theorisations of equality that remain blind to the great diversity and complexity of existing socio-economic relations.

The capability approach stems from a critical assessment of certain liberal theories of equality such as utilitarianism, Rawls' primary goods, or Dworkin's luck egalitarianism.[199] The contrast between these theories and Sen's specific understanding of capabilities comes to

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[195] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?", 319.
[196] Despite the originality of the capability approach, Martha Nussbaum explains that the language of capabilities remains a language of rights. [Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities As Fundamental Entitlements: Sen And Social Justice," *Feminist Economics 9* (2003): 37.]
[197] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 38.
[198] Sen, "Justice and Identity," 9-10.
[199] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 42.

light through his discussion of poverty.[200] Rather than focusing on well-being as a result of distribution (in the form of primary goods for Rawls, and resources for Dworkin), Sen puts an emphasis on poverty which "is not a matter of low well-being, but of the inability to pursue well-being precisely because of the lack of economic means."[201] For Sen, poverty is not simply the result of low income. It is a complex socio-economic variable that affects income as much as one's capability to achieve.[202] This deeper understanding of poverty, which far exceeds income-based definitions, echoes the Marxist concept of class. The proletarian class embodies a set of intertwined social relations which can simultaneously be economically disabling and politically enabling. Economically disabling because workers must sell their labour power to the bourgeoisie, and politically enabling because they are designated as the revolutionary class which is to bring about an egalitarian society.[203] Sen's view of poverty and capabilities clearly is not Marxist. But like the Marxist consideration of class, poverty understood through the capability approach articulates intricate layers of socio-economic as well as political relations.

Sen's emphasis on capability constitutes an important contribution to liberal discussions of equality. Whereas thinkers discussed earlier integrate individual autonomy to their egalitarian models, Sen deepens his exploration of autonomy through the notion of capability. By questioning whether individuals have the capabilities to act upon their autonomous condition, he challenges the idealist ambitions of redistributive and recognitive thinkers. He brings the question of inequality back on the ground by confronting it to the complexity of social relations and the indeterminacy of economic exchange. Inasmuch as Sen questions certain rationalist and universalist assumptions endorsed by most liberal egalitarians, he adopts the same naturalist stance towards market exchange. About the latter, he writes that "to be generically against the market would be almost as odd as being generically against conversations between people."[204] Like most thinkers discussed in this

[200] Harry Frankfurt also extensively discusses poverty in relation to inequalities. However, unlike Sen, he substitutes the issue of inequality to that of poverty. In his view, it is unnecessary for individuals to concern themselves with what others have or do not have. Instead an individual must "make these assessments on the basis of a realistic estimate of how closely the course of his life suits his individual capacities, meets his particular needs, fulfils his best potentialities, and provides him with what he himself cares about. With respect to none of these considerations, it seems to me, is it essential for him to measure his circumstances of anyone else." [Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2015), 73-74.
[201] Sen, *Inequality re-examined*, 111.
[202] Ibid, 112.
[203] See Karl Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, Ch6. (London: Penguin Books), 1990.
[204] Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

chapter, Sen naturalises market relations and henceforth the inequalities they engender. Although Sen's egalitarianism is grounded within the complexity of social relations, it remains blind to the purely individualistic and inegalitarian tendencies of markets. In a naturalised market environment, equality is once again reconsidered negatively through the possibility of compensating for inequalities and poverty while upholding individual autonomy and market exchange.[205]

Not unlike Sen, the republican Philip Pettit is highly critical towards the idealist content of theories of justice like that of Rawls or Dworkin.[206] He compares these theories to "manuals for how we ought to rectify God's failures – rather than real-world manifestos for what the state should do in regulating the affairs of its citizens."[207] One distinctive trait of republican thought is indicting "the evil of subjection to another's will – particularly in important areas of personal choice – as an ill that we all recognize and recoil from and at the same time as an ill that the state is well placed to deal with."[208] By refuting all forms of individual subjection, Republicans defend the virtues of individual autonomy as regulated by concrete but enabling state structures. Here, the state is not perceived as a force of subjection but as a framework that may guarantee a certain level of autonomy amongst individuals. Republican equality systematically realises itself through liberty and autonomy in a state-controlled environment. About the link between individual liberty, autonomy, the state, and equality in republican theory, Pettit explains that "in arguing that the state should be concerned in the first place with the equal freedom of its citizens, republicans held that citizens should each be assured of enjoying non-domination in a sphere of choice that came to be described as that of the fundamental or basic liberties."[209] Guided by the ideal of non-subjection, equality morphs into 'equal freedom', or 'freedom as non-domination.'[210] Although freedom as non-domination clearly resonates with the liberal understanding of autonomy, Pettit claims that within the liberal tradition, "asymmetries in interpersonal power are not in themselves objectionable."[211]

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[205] This is also the position of Elizabeth Anderson who claims that "what we need is a theory of distributive justice for income and wealth that preserves the virtues of markets while imposing egalitarian constraints on market outcomes." [Anderson "How Should Egalitarians Cope with Market Risks?," 243.]
[206] For a mapping of the similarities between the work of Sen and Pettit, see Swan, "Republican Equality."
[207] Pettit, *On the People's Terms*, 126.
[208] Ibid, 1.
[209] Ibid, 8.
[210] Ibid, 5; and Swan, 434.
[211] Pettit, *On the People's Terms*, 11.

Pettit adds to the liberal understanding of autonomy as the expression of individual liberty that follows the dissolution of an oppressive state the necessity to free oneself from the will of other individuals. Through the notion of non-domination, autonomy is largely perceived negatively as the possibility to extract oneself from the will of others. In other words, it is not the enactment of autonomy but the prevention of heteronomy that becomes a priority under the imperative of non-domination. Here, heteronomy must be understood simply as the impossibility to act on one's individual will.[212] Avoiding the trappings of heteronomy, autonomy can be equalised as 'orthonomy' or "self-rule in which you guide what you believe and desire, intend and do, by the values that you endorse, however valuation is construed."[213] In this 'orthonomous' context, equality is not substantive but expressive in the sense that "the state should promote people's enjoyment of undominated choice under the constraint that it treats them as equals, displaying an equal concern for each."[214] Expressed as such, equality is mediated twice. First through prioritising individual autonomy, and then through the state's equalising intervention. Expressive equality is formal to the extent that it remains largely unconcerned with material equality.[215] Pettit clarifies the republican position on material equality in *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*:

> [A] republican regime which seeks to maximize non-domination is bound to avoid initiatives that leave the intensity of non-domination unequal, but no such stricture applies to it leaving the extent of non-domination—in effect, leaving material resources—unequal. Without necessarily having to embrace a material egalitarianism, then, republican consequentialism is required to support what we can describe as structural egalitarianism.[216]

Here, Pettit suggests that that non-domination requires that the state somehow compensate for situations of excessive economic inequalities. This is a welfarist position by which the inegalitarian outcomes of market exchange are structurally compensated by the

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[212] The notion of heteronomy will be further discussed in the next chapter in relation to neoliberalism. Pettit describes heteronomy as "a malaise – […] – that consists in forming a will over the relevant options that is not, as it is often put, your reflective or stable will, your true or real will." [Ibid, 48.]
[213] Ibid, 49, 132, 281.
[214] Ibid, 89.
[215] Fabian Schuppert "Non-domination, non-alienation and social equality: towards a republican understanding of equality," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy 18* (2015): 443.
[216] Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113.

state. With Pettit's republicanism, one is once again confronted to the naturalisation of market relations accompanying the work of most theorists discussed in this chapter. The originality of Pettit's work resides in his uncompromising prioritisation of individual autonomy and state mechanisms in maintaining expressive equality. However, like liberal thinkers, he cannot avoid reducing egalitarianism to a matter of 'correcting' inequalities to the extent that equality is subdued by individual autonomy and that markets are set as unavoidable constraints on achieving substantive equality.

Conclusion

The advent of liberal democracy signals the theoretical conflation of two distinct and sometimes conflicting intellectual traditions. On the one hand, democracy persists as a declaration that the people ought to rule. On the other, liberalism aims to convey the emancipatory potential of individual liberty and autonomy through human rights and market exchange. Whereas the democratic call for a ruling demos requires a certain level of collective association, enacting individual autonomy thrives in non-interference. In order to maintain the individualistic condition of liberal ideality alive, democratic equality must be formalised. Such formalisation takes place chiefly through the enactment of human rights and parliamentary representation. Not content with the relative egalitarian emptying operating within liberal democracies, many contemporary liberal thinkers have attempted to reclaim substantive forms of equality in a liberal democratic context. In this chapter the work of these thinkers was divided in three categories: redistributivists, recognitivists, and thinkers concerned with achieving equality within a non-ideal framework.

Through the notion of redistribution, both Rawls and Dworkin construct sophisticated models aimed towards redistributing justice and equality in a liberal environment shaped by individual autonomy and market exchange. Rawls's 'justice as fairness' rests on the ideality of the difference and efficiency principles to prioritise the interests of 'the least advantaged'. Alternatively, Dworkin focuses his redistributivists ambitions on resources. The latter are to be distributed through a generalised auction where individual time, labour power, and risks are traded 'fairly'. Ultimately, both Rawls and Dworkin explicitly designate the market as the solution to its own inegalitarian excesses. The complex frameworks of distribution they construct serves only to curb the inequalities generated by a naturalised market environment.

With the concept of recognition, thinkers such as Fraser, Young, and Benhabib discuss equality through the possibility to include marginalised groups and identities within liberal democratic institutions that have long excluded them. Whereas Fraser aims to combine her account of recognition to redistributive endeavours through 'perspective dualism', Young proposes a 'politics of difference' in which socio-economically undermined groups are systematically considered prior to discussing justice. Similarly, Benhabib deploys a deliberative framework in which 'claims to culture' can be made in order to promote equal representation. Perhaps more than any other types of liberal egalitarianism, recognitive and identity-based approaches have had a profound impact on contemporary discussions of equality in liberal-democracies. The proliferation of identity politics in public debates has propelled many ideas first elaborated by recognitive thinkers to the forefront of concrete political movements. Interestingly, many of these movements have generated a challenge that neither Fraser, Young, nor Benhabib could foresee: associating equality with the inclusion of specific identities through individual choice in the language of rights risks promoting exclusion from the dominant group rather than the active inclusion of marginalised groups.

The final section of this chapter focused on the work of Sen and Pettit, two thinkers willing to conceptualise equality in less ideal terms. Whereas Sen focuses on individuals' real 'capacity to achieve' in an autonomous context, Pettit describes equality as a situation of 'equal freedom' to be guaranteed by the state. Although both thinkers express valid doubts towards idealistic considerations of equality, they are confronted to the same challenges stemming from prioritising individual autonomy and choice over equality. Like Rawls, Dworkin, and most supporters of recognition, they remain unable to come to terms with the inegalitarian tendencies of market exchange, hence reducing their egalitarianism to a set of methods for reducing inequalities. What emerges from the dialogue established in this chapter is the difficulty of reconciling liberal ideals of individual autonomy, choice, and market exchange with the pursuit of substantive equality. The next chapter will focus on the work of neoliberals for whom the inegalitarian impact of market exchange becomes a political force. It will be claimed through the figure of the contemporary neoliberal subject that the ideal of liberal autonomy has materialised into individual heteronomy, a subjective mode of conduct that thrives in market inequalities and works directly against the possibility to politically materialise equality.

Chapter 2

Neoliberalism and its Subjects: From Autonomy to Heteronomy

Introduction

The previous chapter showed that within the liberal democratic nexus, the question of equality is systematically mediated by that of individual autonomy and liberty. In a context where equality is expected to result from individual autonomy, redistribution and recognition remain overwhelmingly attached to the institutions of the market and human rights. Although advocates of economic redistribution and cultural recognition never fundamentally question the notion of market exchange, they all aim to regulate, adjust, or tame market mechanisms in the name of equality. Despite the eventual impossibility to fully conciliate the egalitarian promise of democracy with market exchange, the models put forward by these thinkers remain guided by the necessity to uphold equality. Neoliberalism represents a clear departure from these approaches. Although neoliberals and liberal egalitarians are both descendants of classical liberalism, they do not share the same concern for the political potential of equality. Where liberal egalitarians rely on the potential of autonomous individuals to come together in order to politically realise equality, neoliberals perceive individuals as competitors whose task is to fulfil their isolated self-interests on a variety of markets.[1]

The broad set of ideas now known as neoliberalism rose from a relatively obscure corner of the liberal tradition to become the overwhelmingly dominant interpretative framework in governance, economics, business, and public discourse.[2] Neoliberalism is underpinned by a radical reinterpretation of liberal ideals of individual liberty, autonomy, and

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[1] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (2009): 117; and Michael A. Peters "The Language of Neoliberal Education," in *Letnik XXIX, številka* ed. Šolsko polje and Mitja Sardo 2018, 64.

[2] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1,3.
John Clark provides an impressive list of contexts to which the term neoliberal has been associated in academic literature: "states, spaces, logics, techniques, technologies, discourses, discursive framework, ideologies, ways of thinking, projects, agendas, programs, governmentality, measures, regimes, development, ethno-development, development imaginaries, global forms of control, social policies, multiculturalism, audit cultures, managerialism, restructuring, reform, privatization, regulatory frameworks, governance, good governance, NGOs, third sector, subjects, subjectivities, individualization, professionalization, normalization, market logics, market forms of calculation, the destatalization of government and the degovernmentalization of the state." [John Clarke, "Living with/in and without neo-liberalism," *Focaal* 51 (2008): 138.]

self-determination.[3] Whilst the epistemic link between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is clear, neoliberal thinkers like Friedrich Von Hayek, Ludwig Von Mises, and Milton Friedman invite their readers to fundamentally reconsider the role of the state, the pervasiveness of the market, and the political status of individual agency. From the neoliberal perspective, the classical understanding of the state as the main allocator of resources is refuted. Its main function beyond maintaining order is to provide "a framework within which free competition could flourish and the price system operate effectively."[4] In lieu of various forms of state interventions, market rationality must be extended to most, if not all, domains of social life.[5] Within this framework, the individual becomes the only locus of economic and political agency. Neoliberalism having become the most impactful branch of liberalism in recent decades, it is vital to assess the status held by equality within the current neoliberal consensus and to determine the forms (if any) of neoliberal politics. What does the popularity of neoliberalism signify for accounts of liberal equality presented in the previous chapter? Can egalitarian politics be recovered in a neoliberal context that is fundamentally hostile to collective endeavours? If not, where does equality stand beyond the current neoliberal horizon? These are all questions that this chapter will aim to address.

The supremacy of individual agency is crucial to neoliberal thought. Liberal egalitarians discussed in the first chapter endeavoured to reconcile individual liberty with collective goals through various models such as the least advantaged principle, the average utility principle, or cultural recognition.[6] From a neoliberal perspective, freedom and responsibility is first and foremost an individual matter.[7] Collective outcomes are subordinated to the autonomous capacity of individuals, and there shall be no attempt to infringe on this capacity beyond what is required by the law. Within this profoundly individualistic context, state interventions become interferences in the natural course of a market that has become the only emancipatory horizon. The state stands as a necessary evil that must be kept at a distance by

[3] See Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique Cours au Collège de France 1978-1979* (Paris : Seuil Hautes Etudes), 2004.
[4] Milton Friedman, "Neo-liberalism and its prospects" in *The Collected Works of Milton Friedman* (Oslo: Farmand, 1951), 92.
[5] Harvey, 3.
[6] See Chapter 1.
[7] About individual responsibility, Hayek writes that "in a free society there cannot be any collective responsibility of members of a group as such, unless they have, by concerted action, all made themselves individually and severally responsible." [Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 15, 83.]

empowered individuals. Consequently, equality is no longer seen as a necessary objective of politics nor, as the utilitarians would put it, as a means to maximise one's utility. Instead, equality becomes a possibility amongst others that individuals may or may not desire to pursue.

The failure of 20th century collectivisms deeply affected the work of early neoliberals like Hayek and Friedman.[8] This transpires in their rejection of the state. The collective capacity of the state, having constituted the core of fascist and socialist societies, was now perceived as a threat to individual liberty. Yet, it would be a mistake to interpret neoliberalism merely as a reactionary ideology as is the case for a lot of critical work produced on the topic.[9] Neoliberalism represents more than the marketisation of the liberal democratic project. In this chapter it will be interpreted not merely as a radically individualistic development of liberalism, but as also as a symptom of the political shortcomings of liberal democracy. Focusing fully on the autonomous capacity of individuals in a market context, neoliberals can bypass the liberal paradox according to which equality must be reconciled with market exchange. Framed in these terms, neoliberalism exceeds its categorisation as a reactive ideology to be understood as a radical attempt to liberate individuals from the clutches of all collectivities apart from the market. Considered as a symptom of the political impotence of liberal democracy, neoliberalism ultimately reveals the impossibility to 'realise' equality through the deployment of individual autonomy. Under neoliberalism, equality and collective politics are set aside in a last-ditch attempt to emancipate individuals, blurring the lines between autonomy and purely desire-driven heteronomous behaviour.

Neoliberal political economy rests on the postulate that individuals are fundamentally unequal.[10] In this state of generalised inequality, politics and market relations are not driven towards collective nor egalitarian objectives, but towards competition. According to Michel Foucault and his intellectual descendants, neoliberalism summons atomised individuals to compete against each other as 'entrepreneur of themselves'.[11] As auto-entrepreneurs, neoliberal subjects are discouraged from entertaining any form of collaborative relationship

[8] Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, *La derniere Lecon de Michel Foucault sur le neoliberalisme, la theorie et la politique*. (Paris : Fayard, 2012). Also see Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*.
[9] Notable examples include Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), and Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).
[10] Lazzarato, 117.
[11] Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 152.

that is purposeless or non-instrumental.[12] The concept of 'entrepreneur of the self' denotes a subjective conduct that goes far beyond the utilitarian appraisal of individual self-interests. For Foucault, the auto-entrepreneur is his "own producer, being to himself his own capital."[13] This concept highlights two distinct facets of neoliberalism; the complete individualisation of all economic and social relations, and the subsequent reinvestment of individualised conduct on a variety of competitive markets. Not only are capital, production, consumption and exploitation individualised under neoliberalism, they are also measured against other individuals' capacity to do so.

Since one of the most distinctive facets of neoliberalism is a profound suspicion of any collective effort incompatible with market logic, the figure of the individual encompasses the potential as much as the limits of neoliberal conduct.[14] If neoliberalism represents the consecration of individualism, then its conceptual intricacies are most legible through the figure of its individual subject. Who is the subject of neoliberalism? In contemporary liberal democracies this figure arguably has two faces: homo economicus, and homo democraticus. The economic individual populates economic models and reflects neoliberalism's total commitment to market forces. It produces, consumes, and competes in a marketised world, striving to overcome obstacles and most importantly other individuals.[15] Homo-economicus is not an unfamiliar figure, it has wandered throughout the history of liberal thought and neoclassical economics in the gaze of a utility-maximising and self-interested subject. Yet, neoliberal economicus may be distinguished from its older iterations based on particular character traits tied to individualisation. One relates to auto-entrepreneurship or the process of not only producing goods but also oneself. This is what Michel Ferrer and Wendy Brown

[12] Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics* (London: Verso, 2017).
[13] Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 232.
[14] About the advantage of focusing on individual rather than collective conduct, Milton Friedman explains that "What is true of individual action is equally true of collective action, except that a majority is perhaps even less likely to consider explicitly the long-term significance of its decision and therefore is even more in need of guidance by principles." [Milton Friedman, "Adam Smith's Relevance for 1976," address to the Mont Pelerin Society, 27 August 1976, box 55, folder 21, Friedman Papers, 2.]
About the process of individualisation which he associates with neoliberalism, Marcel Gauchet writes that "the process of individualisation contains from the beginning a subjective facet that exceeds its objective expression. [Marcel Gauchet, *L'avenement de la democratie IV, Le Nouveau Monde* (Paris : Gallimard, 2017), 609.] Also see Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe Hayek Friedman and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 18.
[15] This competitive aspect of neoliberalism was explicitly acknowledged by Friedman: "[neoliberalism] . It would seek to use competition among producers to protect consumers from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property, and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves. [Milton Friedman, "Neo-liberalism and its prospects" Farmand (1951): 92.

refer to as 'human capital', whose accumulation transforms individuals into investors of themselves.[16] Finally, Byung-Chul Han's concept of 'auto exploitation' or the process by which one becomes "an auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise" can also be associated to the neoliberal economic subject.[17]

The democratic individual, although closely related, is a more complex specimen. It strives to be political in a neoliberal environment that negates equality and politics.[18] In an apparently hostile context, homo democraticus attempts to remain political by turning itself into an exhaustive political unit. Like any other social relation or process, politics is also individualised under neoliberalism.[19] individuals represent the beginning and end of neoliberal politics. Invested in themselves, neoliberal democratic subjects designate their own individual bodies as distinct political spheres. Although neoliberalism is separated from any form of collective endeavour, individuals still relate to each other politically as producers and consumers of political images. In this political market, one interacts merely by seeking confirmation of oneself into others.[20] No longer seen as agents that one can exchange and potentially collaborate with, other individuals represent a multiplicity of mirrors on which one can measure the potential of her or his political convictions. Rather than a proliferation of varied political units, what emerges from these interindividual interactions is what Byung-Chul Han refers to as an 'inferno of sameness', a connected yet excluding relation that "levels essential differences" and ultimately eliminates otherness.[21]

This chapter will be divided in four sections. The first will aim to assess the political significance of neoliberalism in relation to more classic forms of liberalism remaining directed towards politically realising equality. The distinctive features of neoliberal thought will be discussed through the work of classic neoliberal thinkers like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Both Hayek and Friedman laid the theoretical groundwork of neoliberalism by invoking economic liberalism directly against the state and its egalitarian ambitions. Then, the historical and political impact of neoliberalism will be read through the work of Michel

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[16] Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital" *Public Culture 21* (2009): 30. Also see Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.
[17] Han, *Psychopolitics,* 5.
[18] About the complex relationship between politics and neoliberalism, Marcel Gauchet writes, "the political is summoned in the name of its own negation." [Marcel Gauchet, *L'avenement de la democratie IV Le Nouveau Monde*, 66.]
[19] Ibid, 303.
[20] Han, *The Agony of Eros* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 18.
[21] Ibid, 41.

Foucault. Through the notion of 'entrepreneur of the self', Foucault offers an account of neoliberal individualisation and competition that exceeds purely negative critiques of neoliberalism. The third section will attempt to draw a conceptual portrait of homo economicus. The economic subject lays at the core of neoliberalism as a producer, a consumer, but also as a competitor constantly measured and valued in relations to other atomised individuals. The final part of this chapter aims to produce a sketch of homo democraticus in a marketised and largely depoliticised environment. Ultimately, the workings of economic and democratic subjectivities in a neoliberal context signal that the modern divide between reasoned autonomous action and heteronomous desire-driven behaviour no longer holds, declaring the impossibility to achieve equality through the veil of individual autonomy. The hegemony of neoliberal ideals further undermines the possibility of 'realising' equality in contemporary liberal democracies where individualism and market competition reign supreme. As Gauchet concisely points out, "autonomy was thought as the solution, it happens to be the problem."[22] The chapter will close on a call for discussing equality beyond the ideal of individual autonomy and market-induced inequalities.

The Neoliberal Shift

In the space of a few decades, neoliberalism rose to prominence to the point of becoming integrated into the way many understand and experience the world in liberal democracies.[23] In his *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey produces a concise definition of a term that is often misunderstood: [24]

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.[25]

[22] Gauchet, *L'avenement de la democratie IV Le Nouveau Monde*, 635. Own translation.
[23] Harvey, 3.
[24] For Rajesh Venugopal, "neoliberalism is now widely acknowledged in the literature as a controversial, incoherent and crisis-ridden term, even by many of its most influential deployers." [Rajesh Venugopal, "Neoliberalism as concept," *Economy and Society*, 44 (2015): 166.]
[25] Harvey, 2.

To the extent that it is market-driven, neoliberalism is often equated to neoclassical economics.[26] Although the neoclassical consideration of markets as auto-regulating institutions had a profound impact on the neoliberal approach to economics, neoliberalism is more than a mere economic doctrine. It is also a branch of political economy for it concerns itself with the role of states and governments in accommodating market mechanisms and unleashing individuals' economic potential. The concrete political impact of neoliberalism is best exemplified by monetary policies put in place by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan throughout the 1980s. At the heart of their economic policies was an emphasis on market growth fuelled by a steady increase of the money supply, spectacular tax cuts, and market deregulations.[27] With the objective of fighting inflation and freeing individuals from state-imposed regulations, these policies quickly fostered economic inequalities.[28] This was especially true in the United States where 'Reaganomics' radically changed the scope of government intervention into the economy, and redefined the status of individual responsibility in economic relations.[29] As a market-driven branch of political economy neoliberalism aims to greatly limit the impact of state intervention on the lives of autonomous individuals. This is the paradox that reveals the radicality of the neoliberal proposition; disregarding traditional politics and collective action, only to find political answers through market exchange and within individuals interacting in a fundamentally inegalitarian context.

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[26] The economist Hyman P. Minsky defines the neoclassical synthesis as the belief that "fiscal and monetary policy measures can eliminate persistent unemployment and that there are self-correcting forces within decentralised markets that set the economy at full employment." [Hyman P. Minsky, *Stabilizing an Unstable Economy* (New Haven: Yale university press. 1986), 100.] In academic debates, neoliberalism is often used as a synonym for neoclassical economics. [Stedman Jones, 87.]

[27] In *Capital in the 21st century*, Thomas Piketty breaks down the economic beliefs underpinning Friedman's monetary policies: "The crisis was primarily monetary, and therefore its solution was also monetary. From this analysis, Friedman drew a clear political conclusion: in order to ensure regular, undisrupted growth in a capitalist economy, it is necessary and sufficient to make sure that monetary policy is designed to ensure steady growth of the money supply." [Piketty, 712.] On the link between monetary policies and neoliberalism, also see Gauchet, 40.

[28] Piketty empirically confirms that policies implemented by Reagan in the 1980s and picked up by other governments over the last three decades have greatly increased income inequalities in the US: "Since 1980, income inequality has exploded in the United States. Th e upper decile's share increased from 30– 35 percent of national income in the 1970s to 45– 50 percent in the 2000s— an increase of 15 points of national income. if change continues at the same pace, for example, the upper decile will be raking in 60 percent of national income by 2030." [Piketty, 20, 294.]

[29] About the policy shift that followed Reagan's election, Harvey explains that "Corporate taxes were reduced dramatically, and the top personal tax rate was reduced from 70 to 28 per cent in what was billed as 'the largest tax cut in history'. And so began the momentous shift towards greater social inequality and the restoration of economic power to the upper class." [Harvey, 26, 51.]

The core ideas of what is now known as neoliberalism emerged most clearly in the writings of Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman.[30] The political failures of socialism and fascism formed the basis of their deep scepticism towards all forms of collectivism.[31] About this very point, Geoffroy de Lagasnerie notes that early neoliberals saw a direct correlation between the rejection of liberalism and the emergence of totalitarianism.[32] They did so in a way that exceeded a condemnation of the obvious oppressive features of European fascism and Soviet socialism, incorporating Keynesianism and social-democratic ideals within their critique.[33] Hayek, who obtained a Nobel prize in economics in 1974, perceived collective planning as fundamentally incompatible with liberalism.[34] In *The Constitution of Liberty,* he outlines the basis for his unconditional commitment to individual liberty. The latter is seen as "the source and condition of most moral values", implying that we cannot "appreciate the value of freedom until we know how a society of free men as a whole differs from one in which unfreedom prevails."[35] Liberty thereof always responds to its absence in a situation where the state reigns supreme. Throughout Hayek's work, liberty must be understood chiefly as an individual quality. Individuals, not collectivities, bear the responsibility and capability for better decision making.[36]

Hayek's commitment to individualism should not be equated to a utilitarian position tying individualisation to better governance. Through the claim that one cannot achieve freedom if under the influence of someone else's will, Hayek also brings a moral element to his argument.[37] Accordingly, one must object any attempts "to impress upon society a deliberately chosen pattern of distribution whether it be an order of equality or of inequality."[38] Any collectivist endeavour to determine the right course of economic distribution and individual conduct is identified as liberticidal. From this point onwards,

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[30] See Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge), 2001; and Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1962.

[31] Gauchet directly associates the rise of neoliberalism with the degeneration of the socialist project over the same period. [Gauchet, *L'avenement de la democratie IV Le Nouveau Monde*, 99-102.]

[32] Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, *La derniere Lecon de Michel Foucault sur le neoliberalisme, la theorie et la politique*

[33] Ibid.

[34] "The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1974
Gunnar Myrdal, Friedrich von Hayek Press release," 9 October 1974,
https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1974/press.html.

[35] Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 6.

[36] Ibid, 83, 124.

[37] Ibid, 135.

[38] Ibid, 87.

pursuing equality becomes an obstacle to individual emancipation and the good running of the market. Hayek's rejection of egalitarianism also stems from the belief that equality can only be formal (equality before the law) since "not only has liberty nothing to do with any other sort of equality, but it is even bound to produce inequality in many respects."[39] Far from attempting to reach a political compromise between liberty and equality or accounting for their mutual dependence, Hayek believes inequalities to be an inevitable outcome of liberty. It would be self-defeating to attempt to undermine inequalities, for they simply stand as the concrete and inevitable facet of liberty.[40] Rather than a symptom of political wrongdoings, the presence of inequalities confirms that individuals are effectively free.[41] As one of the concrete facets of individual liberty, inequalities act as an empirical catalyst for the deployment of neoliberalism. The threat of totalitarianism under the gaze of collectivism, and the association of individual liberties with inequalities constitute the concrete base of Hayek's unconditional consideration of the market as an emancipatory force for individuals. Away from the rigidity and pre-determinacy of collective planning, the 'free' market offers a framework that can be auto-regulated by individual self-interests, creating "an invisible order, which delegitimates the claim of any human power to take command of society."[42] In Hayek's work, totalitarianism exceeds its Lefortian consideration contained within the monarch's body to include any collective claim over the good running of individual lives.[43]

Milton Friedman is another figurehead of neoliberalism. Member of the so-called 'Chicago School' which he helped turned into the epicentre of neoliberal thought, Friedman obtained a Nobel prize only two years after Hayek, shortly before Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were to make neoliberalism the guiding light of their economic policies.[44] Friedman expressed clear reservations towards collectivism and the state as early as 1951

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[39] Ibid, 85.

[40] For Jason Read, neoliberalism is not merely an ideal theory but also an ideology that ambitions to reveal an realist 'natural' state of affair: "[Neoliberalism] is an ideology that refers not only to the political realm, to an ideal of the state, but to the entirety of human existence. It claims to present not an ideal, but a reality; human nature." [Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6 (2009): 26.]

[41] Writing about Hayek's empirical approach to the market, Pierre Rosanvallon explains that "In his view, the market was not an 'invention' that emerged full- blown from the brain of some economist. It was rather the result of a cumulative, adaptive pro cess based on human experience. [Rosanvallon, 236.]

[42] Ibid.

[43] See Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le politique XIX-XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions de Seuil), 1986.

[44] "The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1976 Milton Friedman", 14 October 1976. https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1976/press.html.

when he dismissed the state's capacity to solve poverty and prevent selfish interests as naïve.[45] In an article entitled *Neoliberalism and its Prospects*, he explained that 'collectivist philosophy' should not be undermined based on its noble objectives but on the failed means used to achieve them.[46] Here, 'the means' are state power and central planning, resulting from the illusion that the economic activity of millions of people could be coordinated efficiently.[47] Not unlike Hayek, Friedman's argument is clearly imprinted by a fear of totalitarianism. In his view, "a state with power to do good by the same token is in a position to do harm; and there is much reason to believe that the power will sooner or later get into the hands of those who will use it for evil purposes."[48] The state and its centrally planned economic policies is seen as a bad bet whose outcomes are at best inefficient and potentially catastrophic. In response to the deadlock of state intervention, Friedman proposed a new type of faith in the market. Under this belief system, state intervention would be reduced to fostering market competition, preventing monopolies, providing a stable monetary framework, and relieving acute misery."[49] The state was to remain present, but only as a passive technician watching the perfect bicycle of the market run its course and allocate resources.[50] Unlike distributivists like Rawls and Dworkin who also recognise the efficiency of markets in allocating resources, Friedman rejects any attempts to substantively curb the effects of market exchange.[51] From a neoliberal point of view market efficiency depends, not on the market's capacity for fair distribution, but on its ability to function independently of state interventions.

Regarding inequalities, Friedman's position is remarkably close to Hayek's. Julio H. Cole summarises Friedman's stance in three points: (1) inequalities are desirable in any healthy economic system, (2) inequalities are unavoidable in a free-market economy, and (3) actual levels of income inequalities are often exaggerated.[52] Two specific beliefs appear to underpin Friedman and Hayek's considerations of inequalities. One is a moral commitment to

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[45] Milton Friedman, "Neo-liberalism and its prospects", 91. 89-93.
[46] Ibid, 91.
[47] Ibid, 90.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid, 92.
[50] The 'perfect bicycle' is a term coined by economist Paul Samuelson to highlight the auto-regulating capacities of the market. See Timothy Sinclair, "The Queen and the perfect Bicycle" (2009) http://insidestory.org.au/the-queen-and-the-perfect-bicycle/.
[51] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; and Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources."
[52] Julio H. Cole, "Milton Friedman on Income Inequality" *Journal of Markets & Morality* 11 (2008): 240.

individual liberty erected against the spectre of totalitarianism. The other recognises inequalities as an empirical sign that individual liberties are effectively unrestrained from any form of collective action. Although a healthy economy is not itself measured on its capacity to foster inequalities, neoliberals perceive inequalities as a consequence of individual liberty which in turn conditions the deployment of market-based neoliberal politics. Inasmuch as totalitarianism represents the concrete failure of collectivist politics, inequalities stand as the concrete face of individual liberties that is the starting point to any form of neoliberal politics. Although equality is not necessarily undesirable for Friedman, it must always be secondary to freedom. Rather than an objective to be achieved, equality may be a possible 'by-product' of neoliberal politics underpinned by a regime of freedom and inequalities.[53]

An important difference between 19th century liberalism and neoliberalism according to Friedman is that laissez-faire has given way to the establishment of a competitive order.[54] No longer a hands-off approach to the market, neoliberalism is an active commitment to the economic and political virtues of competition amongst individuals. This declaration does not only highlight the difference between liberalism and neoliberalism, it also foreshadows the possibility of a neoliberal brand of politics primarily driven by market competition. There remains an undeniable theoretical lineage between classical economic liberalism and neoliberalism. In many ways, neoliberal thought may even be considered as a politicisation and radicalisation of specific facets of economic liberalism such as free market competition and the notion of individual subject. No classical thinker has been more revered by neoliberals than Adam Smith.[55] Both Hayek and Friedman were deeply influenced by Smith's concept of the 'invisible hand' introduced in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*:

> He [the individual] generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it […] he intends only his own gain, and he is in

[53] About equality, Milton and Rose Friedman write that "A society that puts equality—in the sense of equality of outcome—ahead of freedom will end up with neither equality nor freedom.... On the other hand, a society that puts freedom first will, as a happy by-product, end up with both greater freedom and greater equality." [Milton and Rose D. Friedman, *Free to Choose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 148.]
About the precedence taken by freedom over equality in neoliberalism, Michael A. Peters writes that "the market-driven ideology puts an emphasis on freedom over equality where 'freedom' is construed as the capacity to exercise a rational choice in the marketplace based on one's self-interest." [Peters, 64.]

[54] Milton Friedman, "Neo-liberalism and its Prospects", 93.

[55] See Milton Friedman, "Adam Smith's Relevance for 1976," and the Thatcherite think tank "The Adam Smith Institute".

> this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.[56]

What Smith offers with this metaphor is a new conceptualisation of the relationship between individual and collective interests. Individuals pursuing their own ends are also unconsciously promoting the common good, which is the most effective way to fulfil the interest of all. Although Smith still puts a strong emphasis on the value of the common good, his appeal in the eyes of neoliberals resides in his prioritisation of individual interests. This specific point will lead Friedman to label Smith's invisible hand as "a flash of genius."[57] Breaking the myth of this seemingly perfect theoretical matching between Smith and neoliberals, Simon Glaze explains that the link between the two is not as straightforward as it might appear. About the neoliberal appropriation of the invisible hand, he observes that this short passage tends to be isolated from the rest of Smith's argument and hence misunderstood.[58] In certain chapters of *The Wealth of Nations* Smith openly support government interventions and warns against the dangers of self-interested behaviour, contradicting two founding beliefs of neoliberal thought.[59]

Neoliberals' use and misuse of the symbolism of Smith's invisible hand metaphor arguably exhibits the rupture that exists between classical liberalism and neoliberalism. Even for those branches of liberalism that are most closely related to neoliberal thought such as Smithian economics and utilitarianism, the fulfilment of collective interest embodied by the

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[56] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the The Wealth of Nations Books I, II,III,IV, and V* (Amsterdam: Metalibri, 2007), 349-350.

[57] In *Free to Chose: a Personal Statement* Milton Friedman alongside his wife and co-author Rose Friedman explain what is brilliant about Smith's discovery: "Adam Smith's flash of genius was his recognition that the prices that emerged from voluntary transactions between buyers and sellers—for short, in a free market—could coordinate the activity of millions of people, each seeking his own interest, in such a way as to make everyone better off. It was a startling idea then, and it remains one today, that economic order can emerge as the unintended consequence of the actions of many people, each seeking his own interest." [Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose*, 13-14.]

[58] Simon Glaze, "Schools Out: Adam Smith and Predisciplinary International Political Economy," *New Political Economy*, *20* (2015): 686.

[59] Ibid, 686.

Daniel Stedman Jones conquers with Glaze on the point that Smith understands self-interest as enlightened self-interest resulting from "moral cultivation and sympathy", a fundamental feature that has been missed by neoliberal interpretations of Smith. [Stedman Jones, 110.] Also see Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

common good remains the most desirable end for a society. For John Stuart Mill, the utilitarian standard "is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether."[60] Individual self-interests become objectively valuable only when they are aggregated within average utility. For other liberal traditions such as social contract theories discussed in chapter one, limits on individual self-interests are set by the contract itself or other mechanisms that aim to constrain individual pursuits in the name of a common good.[61] The subordination of individual interests to the interest of all by means of politics is a recurring feature of liberalism from Kant and Rousseau to Rawls and Sen.[62] One of the novelty of neoliberalism is to step away from considerations of the common good and equality by merely invoking politics in the name of individual interests.[63]

The radical individualisation of liberal beliefs at the core of neoliberalism may be perceived as an attempt to respond to the collective limits of liberalism. The previous chapter showed how attempting to pursue equality through individual autonomy regulated by markets and human rights has proven to be a strenuous task. More than a mere branch of liberalism, neoliberalism arguably constitutes a reaction to its egalitarian shortcomings.[64] The originality of neoliberalism resides in its complete abandonment of egalitarian and collective pursuits that have traversed the history of political liberalism. In a situation where equality "has ceased to inspire any living faith", neoliberals refocus autonomy towards purely individualistic ends.[65] Through this shift, neoliberalism may be conceived as a critique of political liberalism.[66] This critique is founded on the failure of 20th century's collective experiments as well as the political impotence of the classical association between autonomy

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[60] John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" in *Utilitarianism and On Liberty* ed. Mary Warnock (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 189.

[61] Talking about the liberalism of Kant and Rousseau in relation to neoliberalism, De Lagasnarie writes that "individuality is that against which one must elaborate mechanisms and institutions that aim to produce a unitary and coherent common. The constitution of a 'sovereign people' or a political body is systematically presented as a repression of the particular through the construction of a general framework to which subjects must be subordinated." [De Lagasnerie, Own translation.]

[62] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Penguin Books, 2007); Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin Books), 1998; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; and Amartya Sen *On Inequalities*.

[63] About the political shift between liberalism and neoliberalism, Gauchet declares that "[Neoliberalism's roots are not mysterious, adjoining those of liberalism. The difference here is that the compulsion towards independence takes the appearance of a religious commitment to self-interest and individual initiative." [Gauchet, 651.]

[64] Alen Toplišek, *Liberal Democracy in Crisis*, 74.

[65] Rosanvallon, 8.

[66] Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 42.

and equality. If individual freedom truly is a fundamental imperative, then any attempts to 'correct' or 'solve' inequalities will prove counter productive. Following the neoliberal ethos, autonomy only begins when one is freed from collective constraints, including that of materialising equality. Mobilising the 'free' market and the inequalities it engenders as an emancipatory field, neoliberals fully dismiss the political value of equality.

Neoliberal thought blurs the classical divide between economic and political liberalism while establishing a clear hierarchy between the two. Political answers are to be found within economic liberalism since the market has become the only emancipatory horizon in an environment where collective projects are essentially suspicious, and inequalities display the potential of individual freedom. More than an economic doctrine, neoliberalism is a branch of political economy that has affected public policy more than any other over the last four decades. At its core, it rests on a deep suspicion of collective political projects and state interventions. The transition between liberalism and neoliberalism marks a critical shift from the collective capacity of individuals to autonomously assemble in order to realise equality, to an emphasis on the political and economic virtues of unrestrained individual liberty. From a neoliberal standpoint, equality has very little value. Instead, neoliberal politics may only materialise through further marketisation and individualisation. These processes arguably constitute the concrete facet of neoliberalism, further outlining the impossibility of enacting equality in a neoliberal environment.

Marketisation

So far, this chapter has been dedicated to deciphering the roots and specificities of neoliberal thought. Inasmuch as a theoretical account of neoliberalism is needed, it does not provide the full scope of its political ambitions. Over the last four decades, neoliberalism has come out of its theoretical shell to materialise into a concrete set of policy prescriptions shaping the political economy of contemporary liberal democracies. Based on this abrupt shift, contemporary critics have too often dismissed neoliberalism as a purely destructive force both in thought and practice. Examples include Wendy Brown and Sheldon Wolin's interpretation of neoliberalism as an anti-democratic ideology, Noam Chomsky's view of neoliberalism as an instrument of domination, or Colin Crouch and Naomi Klein's association

of neoliberal practices with human tragedies.[67] The point here is not to claim that these accounts are unfounded, or that neoliberal policies have proved successful. Rather, it is to argue that neoliberalism cannot be effectively criticised, let alone understood, if it is framed merely as a negative and destructive ideology.

About this critical trend, De Lagasnerie remarks that "neoliberal theories are largely perceived as dangerous and reactionary, its authors being portrayed as shady characters and harmful ideologues who played a key role in market deregulation and disengaging from the welfare state."[68] These critical thinkers find themselves speechless in the face of neoliberalism's radicality, having no choice but to return to the comfort of a democracy that 'once was'. These approaches imply a type of critical nostalgia by which highlighting the dangers of the new neoliberal situation necessitates returning to a democratic past that was 'undone' or destroyed.[69] If neoliberalism stands merely as a destructive force, then the objective of politics is to reclaim a past and fuller form of democracy whitewashed by the expansion of neoliberalism. Such nostalgia for a lost democratic ideal is precarious, preventing one from fully grasping the political-economic implications of neoliberalism. Not unlike some of the liberal egalitarians discussed in the previous chapter, critical thinkers mentioned above frame their accounts of democracy away from any clear consideration of its historical association with economic liberalism. As a result, the frontier between economic liberalism and neoliberalism becomes indecipherable. Every market mechanism risk being presented as the toxic intrusion of neoliberalism within an untainted democratic sphere rather an integrant part of the liberal democratic project. Limiting neoliberalism to a type of market nuisance on the good running of democratic politics, these authors largely overlook the radical proposition of neoliberal politics. In contrast to these accounts of neoliberalism rooted in nostalgia, De Lagasnerie argues that one of Foucault's last lesson was to ask, "not

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[67] See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*; Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People*, 25-28; Colin Crouch, *Can Neoliberalism Be Saved From Itself?* (Social Europe Editions), 2017; and Naomi Klein *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books), 2008.
Criticising Klein's negative consideration of neoliberalism as *Shock Doctrine,* Han remarks that "[Shock's] essential trait is negativity. In contrast, neoliberal psychopolitics is dominated by positivity. Instead of working with negative threats, it works with positive stimuli. Instead of administering 'bitter medicine', it enlists Liking. It flatters the psyche instead of shaking it and paralyzing it with shocks. Neoliberal psychopolitics seduces the soul; it preempts it in lieu of opposing it. […] Neoliberal psychopolitics is SmartPolitics: it seeks to please and fulfil, not to repress." [Han, *Psychopolitics,* 36.]

[68] De Lagasnerie, Own-translation.

[69] Ibid.

what liberal logics undo or destroy, but to the contrary ask what they produce."[70] Building on Foucault's account of neoliberalism, it may be argued that neoliberalism rests on two distinctive processes: marketisation and individualisation.

The strength of Foucault's account of neoliberalism resides in his ability to perceive its political ambitions. He introduces neoliberalism, not as an economic erosion of democratic politics, but as a novel form of governmentality rearticulated around market logic. This vision took shape through his lectures at the *College de France* on *The Birth of Biopolitics*:

> The problem of neo-liberalism was not how to cut out or contrive a free space of the market within an already given political society, as in the liberalism of Adam Smith and the eighteenth century. The problem of neo-liberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy. So it is not a question of freeing an empty space, but of taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them to, of projecting them on to a general art of government.[71]

Outlining neoliberalism's specificity in relation to earlier forms of liberalism, Foucault tells us that the aim of neoliberal thinkers is not to implement market mechanisms within a formal liberal democratic framework, nor gear the market towards an equal distribution of resources and goods. Instead, it is to elevate the market as the sole institution from which economic and political life can be thought. Although Foucault associates what he calls "the autolimitation of governments" with the classical liberalism of the 18th and 19th century, he is keen to emphasise that neoliberalism shall not be understood as a mere resurgence of liberalism.[72] The radical project of neoliberalism is to evaluate "whether a market economy can in fact serve as the principle, form, and model for a state which, because of its defects, is mistrusted by everyone."[73] Neoliberalism constitutes a new art of governing which rests on individual self-interests and an unbound faith in the market's capacity to positively impact

[70] De Lagasnerie, Own-translation.
[71] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at the College de France*, 131. On this point, also see Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 657.
[72] For Foucault, one of the originalities of 18th century liberalism is the "autolimitation of governmental reason" by which laissez-faire is introduced to economical but also political reasoning." [Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 22-23. Own translation.]
[73] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 117.

every aspect of social life.[74] Grasping the novelty of neoliberalism is facilitated by using Foucault's notion of 'governmentality'. The latter far exceeds the common understanding of governance as the policy-implementation capacity of a state. Instead, governmentality embodies "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of power"[75] Neoliberal governmentality represents the shift by which populations are no longer considered through the prism of the state as collectivities, but according to the market as individuals. Under neoliberalism, the market is more than a natural or inevitable institution that must be accommodated within a liberal democratic framework. Instead, "one must govern for the market, rather than because of the market."[76]

Neoliberalism requires that markets take precedence over the state, largely stripping it of its supervisory and regulative powers.[77] The expansion of market logic concerns not only the state, but all areas of social life. It is essential to point out that notions of 'marketisation' or 'commodification', denoting an expansion of market logic to non-economic domains, are not a neoliberal invention. It is a facet of capitalism that has fascinated critical thinkers from Marx onwards.[78] Neoliberalism simply constitutes the historical pinnacle of a process that has accompanied capitalism since its inception. Neoliberal marketisation may still be read through these classical critiques of capitalist reification.[79] Perhaps the only shortcomings of

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[74] Harvey, 3; and Stedman Jones, 18.

[75] Foucault, *Security, Territory and Population*, (New York: Palgrave Mac Millian, 2009), 108.

[76] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 121.

[77] Ibid, 116.

[78] Marx, Lukacs, and members of the Frankfurt school like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, have all successively provided convincing accounts of the pervasive effect of capitalist production and consumption on all aspects of human existence long before neoliberalism was even a topic of discussion. [See Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin press, 1990); Max Horkheimer*, Eclipse of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947); and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkeimer, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997).]
In Marx's work, the sprawling capacity of capitalism is chiefly discussed in relation to labour power as an inversion of the worker and the thing that is being produced. In the *1861-1863 Economic Manuscripts* Marx explains that the relationship between labour and production must be understood as an inversion denoting "a personification of the thing and a reification of the person" through which "the capitalist does not rule the worker in any kind of personal capacity, but only in so far as he is 'capital." [Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, Part 3: Relative Surplus Value,
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1861/economic/ch38.htm.]

[79] The concept of reification best represents the all-encompassing potential of capitalism. In *History and Class Consciousness* published in 1923, Georg Lukacs expends the notion of reification beyond traditional relations of production. He claims that the problem of commodities depicted by Marx should not be regarded as a mere economic problem, but "as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects." [Lukacs, 83.] This fundamental problem is the commodity structure's capacity to "penetrate society in all its aspects and to remould it in its own image." [Lukacs, 85.]

applying these approaches to a neoliberal context is their inability to anticipate the absence of any concrete political alternative to the supremacy of market forces in the early 21st century.[80] The hegemonic position of the market under neoliberalism has synchronously accelerated and deepened the effects of marketisation on subjects and their social environment.[81] The neoliberal environment can be defined as a forever expanding market. In its neoliberal form, the market far exceeds its classical consideration as a limited zone of economic exchange. Although market logic remains articulated around notions of production, consumption, and competition, it now provides a framework incorporating most spheres of social life. From amorous relationships to education, from free time to politics, neoliberalism offers the possibility to live one's life according to the dictates of a diversified market, largely detached from the constraints of collective life.[82]

In the absence of concrete collective alternatives to neoliberalism, the market roams free. The hegemonic status held by the market is perhaps the most significant facet of neoliberal marketisation. As a mirror of unleashed individual liberties, the spread of inequalities cements the foundations of an all-encompassing market. In contrast to the liberal consideration of individual autonomy as a pathway to collective life and egalitarian pursuits, neoliberal marketisation begins from a state of inequality amongst atomised individuals. As Maurizio Lazzarato declares, "a government of the market based on competition and enterprise must ensure that all are in a state of 'equal inequality'."[83] Market rationality is not necessarily more effective nor ideologically superior to its collective counterparts. Yet, according to neoliberals only markets have the capacity to guarantee that individual preferences be expressed freely, independently of any collective coercion. The market poses no collective threat to liberty for it is the only institution that does not infringe on individual autonomy. One of the insights of neoliberal thought was to perceive the capacity of markets to contain both collective and heterogenous elements. The appeal of the market rests primarily on the belief that it "may be used for a variety of diverging individual goals", suggesting that "it will never rest on collective goals."[84] From that perspective the market is

[80] Harvey, 3.
[81] Read, 26-27; and Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 21.
[82] About this shift, Gauchet writes that "social actors have ridden themselves from the task of instituting the social by emancipating themselves from a set of duties that emanated from collective life." [Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 616.]
[83] Lazzarato, 117.
[84] De Lagasnerie.

faceless and noisy, both undecipherable and unintelligible.[85] Far from being a hindrance, such heterogeneity means that the market can never be under the influence of a pre-determined collective endeavour. Believing markets to be the only institution capable of channelling unmediated individual preferences, neoliberals declares that marketisation is not only inevitable but also desirable.

By treating market relations as exceptional, neoclassical economists and neoliberal theorists have elevated the market to a sacral entity. This higher status is best exemplified by the neoclassic consideration of markets as 'exogenous', existing outside of all other social relations.[86] At the core of this belief is the idea that "market institutions somehow act exogenously as a structural constraint upon society rather than having been constituted endogenously by society."[87] This possibility goes hand in hand with an interpretation of the market as an already existing 'natural' entity.[88] The market can only stand at a distance from the social world if it precedes it and works independently from it. Framed in these terms, it provides a self-adjusting framework for trade that structures individuals and works autonomously from human (outside) influence. This exogenous reading of the market has been severely undermined by many esteemed political economists claiming that the market cannot be thought as an institution that exists independently of its subjects' social existence.[89] About this presupposition, Michel Callon asks, "If economic theory knows so little

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About the importance of heterogeneity for neoliberal governmentality, Foucault writes, "[the neoliberal art of government] involves, […] obtaining a society that is not orientated towards the commodity and the uniformity of the commodity, but towards the multiplicity and differentiation of enterprises." [Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 149.]

[85] Gauchet applies this heterogeneous facet of markets to neoliberalism itself: "neoliberalism does not speak with one voice. Its influence is specifically blurry, simultaneously ever-present and elusive." [Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 651. Own translation.] Similarily, Jamie Peck considers that neoliberalism "can only exist in messy hybrids." [Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.]

[86] On the exogenous character of neoclassical economics, see Rodney Bruce Hall, "Explaining "Market Authority" and Liberal Stability: Toward a Sociological –Constructivist Synthesis," *Global Society* 21 (2007): 336; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "The Revenge of Homo Economicus: Contested Exchange and the Revival of Political Economy," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7 (1993): 83; and Minsky, 100-103.

[87] Hall, 336.

[88] Foucault associates the natural consideration of the market to 18th century economic liberalism, at the moment when "the market no longer appeared as, or rather no longer had to be a site of jurisdiction. On the one hand, the market appeared as something that obeyed and had to obey 'natural,' that is to say, spontaneous mechanisms." [Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 27, 31.] About the naturalness of the market in a liberal context also see Read, 27.

[89] For critical approaches to exogenous approaches to exogenous approaches to markets, see Michel Callon ed. *The Laws of the Market*, (Oxford: Blackwell), 1998; *International Political Economy and Poststructural Politics* ed. Marieke de Goede (New York Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 134; Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets* (Cambridge: The MIT press, 2006, 19; and MacKenzie, "Opening the black boxes of global finance," *Review of International Political Economy*, 12 (2005): 555-576.]

about the marketplace, is it not simply because in striving to abstract and generalize it has ended up becoming detached from its object?"[90] Beyond the technical implications of this question for economic theory, one can see through these discussions how the neoclassical abstraction of markets as exogenous and self-regulating has impacted the neoliberal consecration of the market as the only potent collective entity. Although neoclassical economists and neoliberals share a similar level of dedication to the market, their objectives are not identical. Unlike neoclassical economics, the ambitions of neoliberalism are not scientific but political. The market does not only reveal precious economic data about the world we inhabit. Rather, marketisation opens a world of possibilities for individuals whose preferences have the potential to be expressed exponentially on a great variety of markets. To the extent that the market represents a perfect snapshot of individual preferences, it may also constitute an unalienable sphere of individual emancipation.

Another distinctive trait of neoliberal marketisation is attached to the fast increasing 'financialization' of the economy. This process denotes an economic displacement away from production towards the realm of finance. Michel Feher defines financialization as an economic shift by which "corporate governance is concerned less with optimizing returns on investment over time than with maximizing the distribution of dividends in the short run."[91] Accordingly, the major preoccupations of corporations become "capital growth or appreciation rather than income, stock value rather than commercial profit."[92] The prominence of finance in the neoliberal economy represents more than a strategic change. It also reveals that economic benefits can be redefined from returns to growth, from capital accumulation to capital expansion. Consequently, the growth and stability of the financial sector has become the main economic aim of neoliberal states.[93] The impact of this economic

[90] Callon refuses to believe that economists can conceptualise the market and its subjects in isolation from a complex set of existing social relations. In his view, there are no grounds to the exceptional and untainted status held by market relations in economic models. [Callon, 2.]
In a similar fashion, Hall questions the neoclassical conception of the marketplace as an aggregation of rational individual agents. In his view, existing markets hardly reflect this rationality, since "market actors do not act on the basis of 'rational expectations,' but on the basis of 'intersubjective expectations' [looking] to one another for signals regarding how to react to market events." [Hall, 453.] The main issue with exogenous approaches to markets is that they exclude the intersubjective dynamics at the core of any social interaction.
[91] Feher, 27.
[92] Ibid. In *Capital in 21st century*, Thomas Piketty convincingly demonstrates that capital's growth rate tends to be higher than income rate. See Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*.
[93] In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith warns precisely of prioritising revenues and idleness over industry and production, a situation that closely resembles the current neoliberal order: "The proportion between capital and revenue, therefore, seems everywhere to regulate the proportion between industry and idleness.

realignment is far-reaching today, Harvey even claiming that neoliberalism means "the financialization of everything."[94]

The implications of neoliberalism's fixation on capital growth and the financial sector may be read through Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century*. In this extensive study of the relationship between capital and inequalities, Piketty remarks that "when the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of growth of output and income […] capitalism automatically generates arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities."[95] If neoliberal financialization entails further emphasis on capital growth, one can project than the gap between capital and economic growth (including output and income from labour) risks widening further. Building on Piketty's analysis, setting up policies focused on capital growth and deregulating financial investments will ultimately lead to an increase in economic inequalities.[96] The discrepancy between income emanating from labour and that stemming from capital can only grow if neoliberal economic policies are directed towards capital expansion. To the extent that capital grows faster than output and wages, "The entrepreneur inevitably tends to become a rentier, more and more dominant over those who own nothing but their labor."[97] Although there has been an increase in economic inequalities in many countries having implemented neoliberal policies, the causation between neoliberalism and the production of inequalities remains hard to evaluate to the extent that the concrete policy application of neoliberal ideals remains relatively recent.[98] Nonetheless, Piketty's comprehensive account of the discrepancy between capital and labour incomes offers an economic framework through which neoliberal financialization may be conceived as a vector of inequalities. Inasmuch as neoliberalism is theoretically rooted in a state of inequalities, its

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Wherever capital predominates, industry prevails: wherever revenue, idleness. Every increase or diminution of capital, therefore, naturally tends to in- crease or diminish the real quantity of industry, the number of productive hands, and consequently the exchangeable value of the annual produce of the land and labour of the country, the real wealth and revenue of all its inhabitants. Capitals are increased by parsimony, and diminished by prodigality and misconduct." [Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 263.]

[94] Harvey, 33.

[95] Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, 1, 25, 34.

[96] Focusing on the French context, the economist Olivier Godechot advances that the finance industry has played "a major role in the return of wage inequality in France." Analysing income, he writes that "although some sectors might be over-represented among the top salaries, like service to business or entertainment, no overrepresentation is as considerable as that achieved by the finance industry in the last 10 years." [Olivier Godechot, "Is finance responsible for the rise in wage inequality in France?," *Socio-Economic Review* (2012): 10, 458, 460.]

[97] Piketty, 571.

[98] For an account of the increase in income inequality in both the US and France since the 1980s see Piketty, 290-295.

focus on capital growth also signals that neoliberal policies have the potential to generate concrete inequalities of income.

The current trend of financialization provides a revealing insight into the essence and pace of neoliberal marketisation. Largely detached from industrial production, marketisation rests on a process of 'capitalisation' rather than 'commodification.'[99] The commodity form, so crucial to Marx's account of capitalist alienation, has not disappeared but carries less symbolic weight in a financialised economy.[100] Financialization increasingly dematerialises capital, resting on elusive 'stocks' and abstract 'funds' rather than the commitment to a specific productive enterprise. In this context, capital growth is attached to a multitude of markets on which investments can be 'diversified', and risks 'spread.' The proliferation of markets is concomitant with capital growth which may itself be identified as a vector of inequalities. In other words, the financialization of the economy, indexing value on capital growth rather than income or profit, rests on the creation of 'new markets' that risk fostering further inequalities. In a neoliberal political economy, marketisation, financialization, and inequalities work hand in hand.

The proliferation of financial services and products has had an enormous impact on the policy prescriptions of states as well as supranational institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the World Bank.[101] In addition to the transformation of established institutions, financialization also entails that financial organisations such as rating agencies have seen their political influence rise exponentially.[102] Marketisation and financialization have overexposed markets and their individual subjects to the forces of competition.[103] At the market level, the collective necessity to produce is subordinated to the imperative of capital growth and the competitive drive to create and perform on new markets. The next section will focus on the subjective effects of

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[99] About the subordination of production to financialisation and marketing, Gauchet writes that "the elaboration of new financial products, leveraged investments, and marketing tend to overcome productive work in the strict sense, reducing it to a secondary function." [Gauchet*, Le Nouveau Monde*, 54. Own translation.]

[100] See Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*.

[101] Harvey, 3.

[102] For more on the political influence of rating agencies see Sinclair, *The New Masters of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2005.

[103] About the concrete detrimental effects of financialisation on wage earners, Lazzarato explains that "financialisation has transformed the pension funds of wage earners and public employees into a fiscal resource for the enterprise, with the consequence that savings are co-opted for the benefit of capital, thus ensnaring the earner in a double bind, at the affective, cognitive and political levels." [Lazzarato, 111.]

these developments. The spread of marketisation and financialization ensures that neoliberal subjects are no longer merely defined as producers or consumers, but also by their competitive potential. Growth (both individual and economic) and competition are arguably the two main modes of conduct systematically displayed on neoliberal markets. Whereas production tends to be a collective enterprise (one that underpins Marxism in its entirety), growth and competition are more consistent with the individualist tendencies of neoliberalism. The speculative, consumer-based, and immaterial inclinations of financial markets provide a perfect foundation for neoliberalism's emphasis on personal growth and competition.

Homo Economicus

The previous section has showed that expanding and financialised markets structure the neoliberal environment. The sacralisation of individual agency against any forms of non-market collectivities pinpoints the effects of neoliberalism to two main levels of analysis; the marketised neoliberal environment, and the individual subject whose experience of the world is shaped by this environment. To catch a glimpse of the impact of neoliberalism on its subjects, one must first recognise the significance of its complete commitment to individualism. Firmly opposed to any form of collectivity, neoliberalism rests on a process of 'individualisation'. For Gauchet, "the reorganisation of collective life around coexisting individuals driven by the urge to defend their rights and pursue their self-interests institutes the basis of neoliberalism's ideological dominance."[104] In his view, the true novelty of neoliberalism resides in the modes of individual expression it generates.[105] The process of individualisation at the core of the neoliberal project signifies that grasping the radicality of the neoliberal proposition requires investigating the distinctive traits of the subjective types it moulds. Contained within a marketised environment, these modes of expressions are most legible through the figure of the economic subject. The neoliberal economic subject exceeds its classical consideration as utility-maximiser. The unprecedented sprawling capacity of the neoliberal market renders the identity of the neoliberal subject fluid and uncertain. More

[104] Gauchet, Le Nouveau Monde, 605. Own translation.
[105] Ibid, 606.

than a cold rational accumulator, contemporary *homo-economicus* takes shape through Foucault's concept of 'entrepreneur of the self.'[106] A product of neoliberal marketisation and individualisation, contemporary economicus is for itself its own capital, producer, and income generator.[107] Through its competitive drive and fixation on individual self-interest, neoliberal homo economicus appears not as an autonomous agent but as a desire-driven heteronomous subject valued on its capacity to surpass others.

Homo-economicus forms the theoretical backbone of most market-based economic models. David Wilson and William Dixon define early conceptualisations of the economic subject not as a type of human being but as an abstraction from it, a human considered merely according to its economic capacity.[108] Homo economicus has changed since its one-dimensional conceptualisation as a mere rational calculator.[109] To understand how economicus conceptually grew from a utility maximising agent to a fluid entity adapting to diversified neoliberal markets, it is vital to retrace its roots. This task is made more difficult by the fact that economicus does not have clear theoretical origins.[110] Whereas Wilson and Dixon locate its genesis in ancient Greece within the writings of Xenophon as a philosophical defence of instrumental conduct, many thinkers are content to attribute its birth to the utilitarian writings of John Stuart Mill.[111] Economicus' uncertain past has also been associated to the work of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith.[112] Overall, the economic subject tends to be an amalgamation of portraits drawn by these classical thinkers. It might equally be represented by Smith's merchant or Bentham and Mill's rational utility maximiser, two figures that had a deep impact on neoclassical economics.[113] What all these accounts have in common is their consideration of individuals as subjects of interests. The scattered and clouded theoretical history of homo economicus arguably limits its study to only two clear

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[106] Ibid, 232.
[107] Foucault, Lecture sur la biopolitique, 232.
[108] Wilson and Dixon, *A History of Homo Economicus* (London: Routledge, 2012), 2.
[109] This is the utilitarian understanding of homo economicus that still dominates academic debates to this day.
[110] About the clouded history of homo economicus, Foucault explains that "there is no theory of homo oeconomicus, or even a history of his notion.10 You practically have to wait for what are called the neo classical economists, Walras and Pareto, to see the more or less clear emergence of what is understood by homo oeconomicus. But this notion was in fact employed even before Walras and Pareto, although it was not conceptualized very rigorously. [Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 275.]
[111] Wilson and Dixon, 23-24; Hayek directly associates the figure of economicus to J.S Mill and the rationalist tradition [Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 61.]. See Xenophon. "Oeconomicus, on the Management of a Farm and Household" in *Xenophon's Minor Works,* trans. J. S. Watson (London: Henry G. Bohn), 1857.
[112] Wilson and Dixon, 29-30, 94.
[113] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 32; also see Smith, *The Wealth of Nations.*

conceptualisations; the subject of interests of classical models and its current neoliberal development.[114]

When surveying debates revolving around homo economicus it is interesting to notice that apart from the work of Foucault and his intellectual heirs, the economic subject is usually reduced to its classical interpretation. In light of these considerations of the economic subject as a stable and invariable entity, many thinkers have outlined the gap existing between the subject of economic models and its empirical counterpart.[115] As Elizabeth Anderson points out, despite having dominated the theoretical world of economics for more than a hundred years, "the evidence against the hypothesis that humans generally are 'as if' expected utility maximisers is overwhelming."[116] Such empirical rebuttal does not mark the end of the conceptual economic subject, nor does it signify that subjects have broken free from the dictates of individual self-interests. Rather, it signals that the conduct of economic agents has changed in accordance with their neoliberal environment. Rather than outlining the empirical discrepancy between classical economicus and contemporary subjects, this shift calls for a new conceptualisation of economic subjectivity fitted to a neoliberal context that exceeds its neoclassical and utilitarian interpretations. Economic subjects have not disappeared, they have evolved in accordance with neoliberal marketisation and must be identified as such.

Not content with the contemporary relevance of the classical figure of homo economicus, Foucault lays the groundwork for grasping the subtleties of neoliberal economicus:

> The characteristic feature of the classical conception of homo oeconomicus is the partner of exchange and the theory of utility based on a problematic of needs. In neo-liberalism […] there is also a theory of homo oeconomicus, but he is not at all a partner of exchange. Homo oeconomicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. […]

[114] Ibid, 32.

[115] A recent series of studies empirically disproves the neoclassical assumptions that individuals are fundamentally self-interested, and that economic preferences are exogenous to other social relations. [Joseph Henrich, Robert Boyd, Samuel Bowles, Colin Camerer, Ernst Fehr, Herbert Gintis, Richard McElreath, "In Search of Homo Economicus: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies," *The American Economic Review*, 91. (2001): 73-78.]

[116] Elizabeth Anderson, "Beyond Homo Economicus New Developments in Theories of Social Norms Philosophy and Public Affairs 29, (2000): 170, 188.

> being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.[117]

Foucault considers homo economicus as an evolutive subject able to adapt to the epistemic implications of the transition between liberalism and neoliberalism. From the rational man of economic exchanges populating microeconomic models, the economic subject has morphed into 'an entrepreneur of the self'. As such, it is guided solely by individualistic considerations. The emphasis Foucault puts on individual ownership is crucial for it designates the individual body as the exhaustive terrain of economic rationality in a neoliberal context. Economic activity is conveyed through and by the individual body presenting itself as a form of micro-enterprise interacting with others in an instrumental capacity. The concrete effects of neoliberal individualisation on subjects become especially clear through the notion of risk. Under neoliberalism, the task of insuring against risks (both individual and collective) is no longer assigned to states but to individuals.[118] Insuring oneself against illnesses, accidents, or damages increasingly becomes the responsibility of individuals who must protect themselves using their private income.[119] In a fully marketised and individualised environment, every aspect of social life takes the guise of an investment whose risks are carried by individuals. To the extent that one is 'free to choose', the state has no place interfering with the outcome of one's decisions regardless of whether the latter generate pleasures or pains. This vision directly contradicts Dworkin's view of the state as an institution insuring against market risks and bad 'brute' luck.[120] In a neoliberal context, luck and risk, like profit and growth are the sole property of auto-entrepreneurs.

Auto-entrepreneurs should not be associated to employees working together towards a common objective within the same firm. Instead, they constitute a "framework of a multiplicity of diverse enterprises connected up to and entangled with each other."[121] Multiplicity also applies to the individual's life itself, reflecting one's connection to a multitude of interested relationships from friendships to retirement plans.[122] About this, Lazzarato explains that "economic man is integrated within the ensemble of the economic not by a

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[117] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225-226.
[118] Ibid, 144.
[119] Ibid, 144; and Lazzarato 118.
[120] See Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources."
[121] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 241.
[122] Ibid.

subtraction of rights but by a multiplication of his own interests."[123] Neoliberal subjects are not fully isolated from each other. They connect in the course of promoting their individual self-interests, a task for which other individuals may be instrumental. Inter-connectedness is undoubtably one of the main collective characteristics of neoliberalism.[124] Whereas individuals should avoid working together towards a common objective that would compromise their individual freedom, they must remain connected to optimise returns on their respective investments. In Lazzarato's words, "it is on condition of preserving one's selfish interests that the multiplication and satisfaction of the needs of the collectivity can happen."[125] The neoliberal ethos simply eliminates the classical connection between individual self-interest and a shared common good so crucial to liberal thought. National prosperity, equality, or collective well-being are no longer desired outcomes or potential after-effects of individual action. Rather, economic action becomes individual action for its own sake. There can be no infringement on self-interested behaviours besides that imposed by the law.

Within a society composed by a superposition of self-interests, Foucault considers that there can be only one true social policy: economic growth.[126] Only this abstract measure of economic 'well-being' has the capacity to aggregate a multitude of diverging interested behaviours.[127] Unpacking the notion of economic growth, one can arguably identify three types of subjective behaviour that sustain it: production, consumption, and competition.[128]

For Foucault, neoliberal subjects still produce but only as a result of consumption.[129] Through the prism of consumption, what is being produced is the subject's own satisfaction and experience.[130] Foucault operates an inversion by which production no longer represents

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[123] Lazzarato, 116.
[124] Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 623.
[125] Lazzarato, 116.
[126] Foucault, *The Birth of Biolpolitics*, 144.
[127] Wendy Brown takes a step away from Foucault by considering that individual self-interests are often sacrificed in the name of macro-economic growth: "I do not think 'interest' adequately captures the ethos or subjectivity of the contemporary neoliberal subject; this subject is so profoundly integrated into and hence subordinated to the supervening goal of macroeconomic growth that its own well-being is easily sacrificed to these larger purposes." [Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 83.]
[128] Consumption and production are classically associated with homo economicus. The advent of liberalism brings competition to the fore according to Foucault. [Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 147.]
[129] Foucault, *Naissance de la Biopolitique*, 232. In *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard endorses the opposite viewpoint when considering production purely in material terms: "The truth of consumption is that it is not a function of enjoyment, but a function of production and, hence, like all material production, not an individual function, but an immediately and totally collective one." [Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 78.]
[130] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 147.

means towards creating value through economic goods, but the end-result of consumption. Following this interpretation, production is displaced twice in a neoliberal context: away from collective work towards individual fulfilment, and from economic means towards individual ends. Neoliberal production is not that of commodities but that of experiences, enjoyment, and individual fulfilment. According to this shift, individuals do not seek capital inasmuch as they become capital in and for themselves.[131] To depict this neoliberal transformation, Michel Feher deploys the concept of 'human capital'. The latter is best understood against the classical consideration of homo economicus. About the specificity of human capital, Feher explains that "an investor in his or her human capital is concerned less with maximizing the returns on his or her investments whether monetary or psychic than with appreciating, that is, increasing the stock value of, the capital to which he or she is identified."[132] Through the concept of human capital, Feher applies the effects of neoliberal financialization to subjective conduct.[133] The concept of human capital may be read as an actualisation of Foucault's theorisation of the economic subject. Instead of behaving like a stable enterprise generating profit, the subject of neoliberalism is closer to a volatile stock, appreciating and depreciating according to market movements.

There are numerous implications to recognising neoliberal production through the prism of consumption and neoliberal conduct through the fluctuations of financialised human capital. One is that neoliberal production becomes a fully individualised process. The production of satisfaction now stems not only from the accumulation of material goods, but from a broader range of subjective experiences. A good example of that was provided elsewhere by Foucault through the notion of 'art of existence'. He describes this 'artform' as intentional actions on the part of subjects seeking "to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria."[134] The notion of 'art of existence' appears

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For Han, excessive consumption is a form of unfreedom: "Excessive consumption amounts to unfreedom: compulsion corresponding to the unfreedom of labour. Luxury as freedom – like play that is truly free – can be thought only beyond the world of work and consumption. Viewed in this light, it stands close to asceticism." [Han, *Psychopolitics*, 52.]

[131] Foucault, *Naissance de la Biopolitique*, 232-233.

[132] Feher, 27.

[133] The process of financialisation had not been associated with neoliberalism at the time of Foucault's lectures on biopolitics. He was not able to incorporate it into his understanding of homo economicus whom he associates to a networked corporation rather than a financial product.

[134] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 10-11.

perfectly compatible with the neoliberal era and the concept of human capital. Being capital in and for itself, homo economicus competes as itself with others while seeking appreciation. Career, social status, belongings, salary, but also appearance, attitude, or culture become markets on which the neoliberal subject 'grows' (gains value) in relation to others. The production of satisfaction emerges not only from consumption, but also from producing and affirming a certain character trait or lifestyle to others that itself represents a form of individual human capital.[135]

Besides production and consumption, neoliberal economicus chiefly relates to others through competition. Foucault was able to foresee that the neoliberal fixation on economic growth would inevitably heighten competition amongst subjects.[136] In his view, the market-driven society imagined by neoliberals is "a society in which the regulatory principle should not be so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanisms of competition."[137] At a subjective level, erecting competition as a core economic principle implies that "friction between units will increase and occasions of conflict and litigation multiply."[138] Linking Foucault's discussion of competition back to the question of inequality, Lazzarato claims that fostering competition is facilitated by the proliferation of inequalities.[139] In his view, "appetites and instincts are not given: only inequality has the capacity to sharpen appetites, instincts and minds, driving individuals to rivalries."[140] Unlike neoliberal theorists who treat

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[135] About this, Lazzarato writes that one "cannot become the new homo oeconomicus without being 'a lifestyle', a 'way of being', a moral choice, a 'mode of relating to oneself, to time, to one's environment, to the future, the group, the family.'" [Lazzarato, 121.]
This reading echoes the work of Thorstein Veblen's concept of 'conspicuous consumption' developed in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* at the turn of the 19th century. In this pioneering work, Veblen aims to study the sociology of consumption amongst wealthy individuals. About the cultivation of taste that it is necessary to have in order to make an impact on others, Veblen writes: "This cultivation of aesthetic faculty requires time and application, and the demands made upon the gentleman in this direction therefore tend to change his life of leisure into a more or less arduous application to the business of learning how to live a life of ostensible leisure in a becoming way." [Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 36, http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/LCS/theoryleisureclass.pdf.]
Another more recent analysis of the subjective tendency to consume in relation and in reaction to others is embodied in Jean Baudrillard's notion of 'sign value'. In his view, nothing produced in late capitalism can escape its valuation as a social sign. He writes that "today consumption […] defines precisely the stage where the commodity is immediately produced as a sign, as sign value, and where signs (culture) are produced as commodities […] nothing produced or exchanged today can be decoded exclusively as a sign, nor solely measured as a commodity. [Baudrillard, "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign", 80.]
[136] For Foucault, neoliberal society is first and foremost subject to the forces of competitions. [Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 152.]
[137] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 147.
[138] Ibid, 175.
[139] Lazzarato, 117.
[140] Ibid.

inequalities as a mere reflection of individual freedom, Lazzarato views them as a condition of competitive markets. If the spread of competition is set as an objective of neoliberal politics, inequalities are needed to generate envy amongst individuals who have less. Lack pushes those individuals to compete for more in order to elevate themselves on the marketplace. Beyond basic subsistence, one's willingness to compete is generated by the realisation that achieving or accumulating more is a possibility. In a market environment, this potential is displayed by inequalities because some must have more in order to motivate others to compete and take their place. Relatively equal individuals are less likely to be competitive since lower inequalities means less discrepancy between individuals and classes, and therefore less incentives to compete for more.

The specificity of neoliberal competition is more easily grasped by interpreting the market as an intersubjective process. Inasmuch as market gains are driven by self-interests, they are also dictated by the behaviour of other actors on that market. Nuancing the neoliberal claim that economic prosperity is a purely individual affair, political economists such as Hall, MacKenzie, or de Goede demonstrate that market transactions are always the result of some form of social interaction.[141] Applying this reading to financialised markets, frictions and conflicts take the form of pure competition necessitating constant and quick responses to the behaviour of other subjects. In the same way that investment bankers try to shortsale borrowed assets before their competitors, the economic subject conceived as human capital will aim to outdo or anticipate the decisions of other individuals on a variety of markets ranging from job hunting to holidaying or fashion.[142] In a financialised context, decisions are made quickly, returns are expected in the short run, and conflicts tend to be more observational than confrontational.

Lazzarato's association of inequality and competition allows for the possibility to deepen the exploration of marketised relationships beyond the necessity to dominate or overcome others economically. In a neoliberal context, individuals observe the successful other not only as a competitor but also as a model. Competition arises not from a natural urge to dominate others, but from the desire to achieve or obtain what one does not yet have that

[141] See Hall, "Explaining Market Authority,"; de Goede, *International Political Economy*; and MacKenzie, *An Engine not a Camera*.

[142] A shortsale can be defined as "The sale of an asset or stock the seller does not own […] generally a transaction in which an investor sells borrowed securities in anticipation of a price decline." [Investopedia "Short Sale," https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/shortsale.asp.]

has been displayed by others. Conceiving of competition as a form of domination, Frederic Lordon adds to that point by claiming that "the primary meaning of domination consists in one agent's having to pass through another to access the object of desire [yet] the intensity of domination is directly proportional to the intensity of the desire of the dominated."[143] Desires generated by a state of inequalities are the primary motor for one's urge to compete with and dominate others. Considering intersubjectivity in this way suggests that competition and gains must exceed their purely economic categorisations. Within diversified neoliberal markets, satisfaction may stem from intersubjective relations such as recognition, kinship, admiration, domination, as well as economic success. Neoliberal markets are polymorphous, pushing the content of competition and the meaning of individual satisfaction beyond their usual economic setting. The paradox of neoliberal competition is that inasmuch as other individuals stand in the way of individual growth; they may also embody success to be reproduced. In a fully marketised and individualised environment, inequalities guarantee that economic behaviour is regulated, not by the state, but by the capacity or incapacity of others to perform.

For neoliberals the spread of competition is a positive opening of market logic. Market competition encourages individual autonomy by providing further opportunities for self-expression. Contrastingly, Byung-Chul Han warns his readers about the illusory character of the subjective developments associated with neoliberalism. Han adds a deeply critical layer to Foucault's commentary on neoliberalism. In his view, Foucault fails to perceive the coercive dimension of the neoliberal imperative to 'be free'.[144] Instead, Han argues that "the freedom of *Can* generates even more coercion than the disciplinarian *Should*, which issues commandments and prohibitions."[145] Whereas the injunction 'should' is limited, 'can' is not.[146] By transforming individual autonomy into a coercive category, "Neoliberalism represents a highly efficient, indeed an intelligent, system for exploiting freedom."[147] The ideological core of the neoliberal project is to free individuals from collective constraints,

[143] Frederic Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital* (London: Verso, 2014), 18.
[144] About Foucault's uncritical stance towards neoliberalism, Han writes that "The neoliberal dictum of freedom finds expression in the paradoxical imperative, Be free. But this plunges the achievement-subject into depression and exhaustion. Even though Foucault's "ethics of the self" stands opposed to political repression and allo-exploitation in general, it is blind to the violence of the freedom that underlies auto-exploitation" [Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 9-10.]
[145] Han, *Psychopolitics*, 1.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid, 3.

subsequently allowing them to compete on a variety of markets and fulfil their economic potential. For Han, the neoliberal project of full individual autonomy has failed. Rather than overcoming collective exploitation, neoliberalism simply individualises it by requiring that subjects be autonomous and efficient. Like everything else, exploitation is now a task assigned to individuals under the neoliberal imperative to 'be free':

> As an entrepreneur of the self, the achievement-subject is free insofar as he or she is not subjugated to a commanding and exploiting Other. However, the subject is still not really free because he or she now engages in self-exploitation— and does so of his or her own free will. The exploiter is the exploited. The achievement-subject is perpetrator and victim in one. Auto-exploitation proves much more efficient than allo-exploitation because it is accompanied by a feeling of liberty. This makes possible exploitation without domination.[148]

What may originally appear as an expansion of individual freedom and autonomy reveals itself to be an individualisation of exploitation. This new form of disciplinary power is what Han labels 'psychopolitics'.[149] Endorsing Foucault's interpretation of neoliberal subjects as 'entrepreneur of themselves', Han warns of the danger of being stuck in the liberticide trap of 'self-optimisation'.[150] In his words, "the self-as-a-work-of-art amounts to a beautiful but deceptive illusion that the neoliberal regime maintains in order to exhaust its resources entirely."[151] From his perspective, self-optimisation and auto-exploitation result from a calculated effort on the part of the neoliberal regime. Observing the economic behaviour of neoliberal subjects, it becomes clear that exploitation has not been eliminated but simply displaced. Using Hegel's master/slave dialectic, Han interprets the neoliberal era as a historical stage where slaves and masters form a unit embodied within individuals themselves.[152] Either as "enslaved masters or slaves who think themselves masters", neoliberal subjects bear witness to the conversion of exploitation from collective over individuals to individuals over themselves.[153] As opposed to being empowering, the

[148] Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 9.
[149] Han, *Psychopolitics*.
[150] Ibid, 28.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Han, The Agony of Eros, 20.
[153] Ibid.

transformation of subjects into individualised 'projects' should be interpreted as "a more efficient kind of subjectivation and subjugation."[154] In the neoliberal realm, the complete individualisation of liberty paradoxically compromises the expansion of individual autonomy.

Building on arguments advanced by Foucault, Lazarrato, and Han, it becomes clear that the neoliberal economic subject has fallen short of fulfilling the ideal of autonomy. Cherished by liberal and neoliberal thinkers alike, individual autonomy has turned into an imperative whose materialisation generates individual conducts that are never truly 'free' from the influence of others. The neoliberal subject embodies the contradiction by which elevating individual autonomy as a societal goal is inevitably sustained by heteronomous relations.[155] Here, heteronomy must be understood both as one's incapacity to be free from the will of others, and in the Kantian sense as "acting in accordance with one's desires rather than reason or moral duty."[156] In regard to others, heteronomy is palpable in the neoliberal subject's inclination to compete with and instrumentalise others in order to foster individual growth. If competition is indeed an objective of neoliberal politics, then its subjects are not truly autonomous nor free for its success depends on overcoming and surpassing others.[157] Inversely, neoliberal competition also requires that more fortunate individuals (those with a higher level of human capital) stimulate others' desires to 'reach higher'. In both cases, other individuals play a crucial role in fostering competition, hence interrupting the ideal of living according to the dictate of individual autonomy. Even from a purely individualistic standpoint, neoliberal homo economicus displays heteronomous tendencies by projecting its desires onto

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[154] Han*, Psychopolitics*, 1.

[155] Echoing Han, Rosanvallon writes about the transformation of autonomy into an imperative under a state of generalized competition: "In principle, autonomy is a value that one seeks to achieve, an ideal synonymous with independence and emancipation. But in the society of generalized competition, it becomes a norm to which one must submit, an injunction that one must obey. The individual's aspiration to find his own way is thus turned against him in a sort of internal perversion of liberty and singularity." [Rosanvallon, 238.]

[156] "Heteronomy" in the Oxford Dictionary of philosophy, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-3?rskey=htnJpB&result=3.
Kant introduces his concept of heteronomy alongside the categorical imperative in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. As opposed to autonomy of the will, which Kant considers as "the supreme principle of morality" and which is a "law to itself", heteronomy is a property of the will which "does not give the law to itself. Heteronomy thereof may be understood as the dependence of the will on external causes. [Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 58, 62; and Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 224.]

[157] On the domination associated with neoliberal competition, Lordon writes that "domination can still be defined as the asymmetrical relation arising from the fact that one person's pursuit of his or her desire passes through another. The dependence of an interest on another person makes the interested person ipso facto dominated and that other person dominating." [Lordon, 77.]

a multitude of markets. As an entrepreneur of itself, the neoliberal subject is pushed towards auto-exploitation by its desire to achieve, accumulate, and overcome others.[158] The intrusion of heteronomy within the collective and individual experience of homo economicus confirms the ultimate impossibility to sustain individual autonomy as a political force.[159] The next section will show that the inevitable degeneration of the ideal of individual autonomy into desire-driven heteronomous behaviours is even more palpable through the figure of homo-democraticus, the political subject of neoliberalism. In a political environment where individuals are expected to collaborate as a collective, the neoliberal subject reduces politics to an individual affair by relating to others purely based on conspicuous desires.

Homo Democraticus

The previous section showed that homo economicus has gone from a rational producer and accumulator of material resources to a unique individual project fluctuating along markets as human capital. The neoliberal shift signals the point where the liberal ideal of individual autonomy became fully indistinguishable from purely desire-driven heteronomous conduct. The 'right' choice so valued by classical liberals has morphed into 'My choice', meaning that one's decision is right so long as it is lawful and individually based.[160] In a fully marketised and individualised environment where subjects are driven by desires and competition, what remains of politics? Far removed from the liberal effort to achieve equality, neoliberal politics truly comes to light through a chain of paradoxes that reveal the heteronomous character of neoliberal homo democraticus. Overly connected to others yet distant from them, conspicuous but private, striving to stand out by resembling others, the political behaviour of the neoliberal subject is defined by heteronomy for it is chiefly guided by desires.[161] Paradoxes here refer not to a tension between individual and collective life (as

[158] About the link between autonomy, heteronomy and desires, Lordon explains that "Desire is never of me and yet always mine, in other words, it never originates exclusively within desiring individuals but is nevertheless absolutely theirs." [Lordon, 67.]

[159] For Gauchet, the political failure of autonomy results from it having always been thought on the basis of heteronomy. [Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 637-638.]

[160] De Lagasnerie.

[161] Lordon uses the term desire to convey the importance of individual preferences within liberal traditions. Whereas interest tends to be associated with utilitarian calculations, it is also "another name for the object of desire and is likewise infinitely varied." The notion of desire carries with it an openness, an unalterable quality that is arguably more fitted to the experience of the neoliberal subject than self-interest. The valuation of

is the case under liberalism), but to one's capacity to be at once guided by its own individual desires and market oneself as an object to be desired by others. As human capital, one appreciates not only by pursuing self-interested goals but also by presenting oneself as valuable in the eyes of competitors. Neoliberal heteronomy elevates individual desire as the only way to relate to oneself and others. In this context, homo democraticus embodies the inevitable transformation of the ideal of liberal autonomy into heteronomous conduct, as well as neoliberalism's complete individualisation of politics.

How does one experience politics in a neoliberal environment founded on a suspicion for collective life, unhinged individualism, and the marketisation of social life? For Wendy Brown, homo democraticus has been eradicated by homo economicus in the same way that politics has been 'undone' by neoliberalism.[162] In her view, the subjects generated by neoliberal marketisations have eliminated the very idea of 'the people' and collective life.[163] In other words, economised subjects stand in the way of the good running of collective politics. This critical reading, although relevant, misses the radicality of the neoliberal proposition. Despite its political shortcomings, neoliberalism cannot be considered as a mere threat to politics. It is much more than a destructive ideology. It would be counterproductive to read neoliberal politics through the prism of classical liberalism and its emphasis on the pursuit of collective goals such as equality.[164] Taking an alternative approach, one may claim that neoliberalism does not aim to 'undo' politics, but instead suggests that individuals in a market framework themselves constitute political answers. Like every other sphere of social life, politics has not been eliminated but individualised in a neoliberal context.[165] This new form of politics must be divorced from any collectivist ambitions, for the individual subject has become the only relevant political terrain. As Gauchet remarks, "the perceptual shift concerning collective unity has enabled the individualisation of politics, separating subjects

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individual self-interests has remained, but the political objectives and the ways in which subjects relates heteronomously to reach these objectives has fundamentally changed. [Lordon, 14.]

[162] About the eradication of the political subject, Brown argues that "towards the end of the twentieth century […] homo economicus finally got the better of homo politicus, usurping its territory, terms, and objects both in the figure of the human and the polity." [Brown, 87.]

[163] Brown, 39.

[164] About the cohabitation of individual self-interests and the common good within liberal conceptualisation of the subject, Costas Douzinas ironically writes that "The liberal subject lives a double life: a daily life of strife in pursuit of personal economic interest and a second life, which, like a metaphorical Sabbath, is devoted to political activity and the 'common good'." [Costas Douzinas in *The Idea of Communism I* (London: Verso), 2010, 91.]

[165] Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 303.

as much as it has freed their individual dynamics."[166] Modelled on human capital, the neoliberal democratic subject becomes the sole producer and consumer of politics on a market of competing individuals. Politics has not vanished, it has morphed into a purely individual enterprise seeking to produce satisfaction heteronomously through fulfilling desires and being validated by others.

Prior to discussing the specific types of individualised conduct generated by neoliberal politics, it is essential to mention the trend of marketisation that has affected electoral politics in recent decades. Attempts by political elites to shape their public image and discourse to appeal to the greatest number of voters has been a feature of parliamentary democracy long before the advent of neoliberalism.[167] However, this practice has conspicuously accelerated in recent years through the idea of political marketing.[168] The latter originates from its corporate counterpart and both practices really took off in the second half of the twentieth century when neoliberal thought was still in its infancy.[169] Philippe J. Maarek defines commercial marketing as "the set of means by which a business venture may create, maintain and develop its market, or, if one prefers, its clientele."[170] Political marketing simply constitutes the transposition of this corporate imperative to the realm of politics.

In a context of marketised politics where political elites consider electoral victory "not only a standard expectation, but also an end in itself", how is electoral politics experienced by the democratic subject?[171] For Colin Crouch, "mass citizens play a passive, quiescent, even

[166] Ibid, 315. Own translation.
[167] As early as 1942 Joseph Schumpeter claimed in Capitalism, Socialism & Democracy that "principles or planks may be as characteristic of the party that adopts them and as important for its success as the brands of goods a department store sells are characteristic of it and important for its success." [Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism & Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 283.]
[168] The political transposition of marketing strategies formerly limited to commercial markets has increased steadily since they first emerged more than five decades ago. Existing political parties in liberal democracies now openly embrace its practice including activities such as "polling, focus groups, listening exercises, segmentation, voter profiling, strategic product development, internal marketing, volunteer management, voter-driven communication", not to mention social media outreach and internet campaigning. [Jennifer Lees-Marshment, *The Political Marketing Game* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.] Political marketing strategies have become so common today that they aim to not only gain a better understanding of public views, but also to "devise communication to change public opinion." [Ibid, 133.]
[169] Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2007), 25.
[170] Philippe J. Maarek, *Campaign Communication and Political Marketing* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2011), 33.
[171] Peter Mair, "Ruling the VOID? The Hollowing of Western Democracy," *New Left review* 42 (2006): 47.

apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them."[172] Han follows a similar route, drawing a portrait of the neoliberal citizen as a passive and disinterested spectator:

> Neoliberalism makes citizens into consumers. The freedom of the citizen yields to the passivity of the consumer. As consumers, today's voters have no real interest in politics – in actively shaping the community. They possess neither the will nor the ability to participate in communal, political action. […] The call for transparency presupposes occupying the position of a shocked spectator. It is not voiced by engaged citizens so much as by passive onlookers. Participation now amounts to grievance and complaint. With that, the society of transparency, inhabited by onlookers and consumers, has given rise to a *spectator democracy*.[173]

Within this detailed description of citizen engagement in the neoliberal age, Han concurrently associates the political subject to a passive consumer and a shocked spectator. Parliamentary politics remains present, but only as a mediocre performance for which spectators have little or no interest besides shock value. Following the thread of neoliberal individualisation, parliamentary politics even in its marketised form can no longer have a monopoly on political life. If neoliberal subjects become capital in and for themselves, political opinions must be capitalised on and displayed to others in a way that inevitably escapes parliamentary representation. Parliamentary politics is not the main political stage of neoliberalism. In its place, the neoliberal subject stands as a political actor as much as a political platform. This brand of individualised politics is clarified by Han's consideration of transparency as a disciplinary dispositive of neoliberalism. Transparency "seeks to supress deviation" in order to achieve general conformity. It does so by establishing total communication, "as if everyone were watching over everyone else."[174] On a transparent market, subjects do not only police themselves to optimise their returns. They also police

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[172] Crouch, 4.
Many critical thinkers have outlined the dangers of applying marketing and advertising strategies to politics. Notable examples include Pierre Bourdieu, "La Représentation Politique," Actes Recherches 26, (1981) ; Sheldon Wolin, Democracy Incorporated (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008; Mair, "Ruling the VOID? The Hollowing of Western Democracy,"; and Crouch, *Post-Democracy*.
[173] Han, *Psychopolitics*, 10.
[174] Ibid.

others according to the general rule that all must be seen. There is no place to hide for homo democraticus, information must be complete for the political market to function efficiently.

In a transparent world, heteronomy takes the guise of visibility. Subject to the gaze of an abstract 'Other', individual behaviour is constantly regimented by the judgements of others. Through the dictate of neoliberal visibility, subjects seek recognition from other individuals rather than the state. The ethical measure of one's behaviour is provided by the amalgamated glare of a multitude of individuals. Gauchet remarks that in this context, the gaze of others is only secondary to the look one imposes on her/himself.[175] Constant scrutiny only leads to further self-discipline for displaying an honest (non-marketised) image of oneself risks depreciating one's human capital. An individual must first self-examine before investing itself on a market. Being recognised by others is greatly facilitated by displaying a curated image of oneself.[176] Through the judgement of others, one also seeks the confirmation of oneself for oneself.[177] The neoliberal subject's constant desire for recognition inevitably embeds one further into narcissism.[178] Through transparency, heteronomy once again reappears twofold as an interruption of individual autonomy by the will (or gaze) of others and as a mediation of one's will through individual desires.[179]

Transparency and interconnectivity erase individual differences. By seeking recognition from the greatest number, one must inevitably conform to the expectations of 'the Other' conceived as an aggregation of individual 'observers'. Driven towards conformism, individuals have no choice but to surrender certain distinctive traits in the process. This has become especially palpable through social media.[180] Han associates social media to a form of 'nearness', seeking to "to bring the Other as near as possible, to close any distance between ourselves and him or her, to create proximity."[181] The paradox of nearness resides in its

[175] Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 621.
[176] For Gauchet, the increasing importance of others' opinions on oneself in a neoliberal context inevitably leads to the subordination of substance to form, and to the proliferation of 'postures.' [Ibid, 621.]
[177] About this, Han writes that "one stays the same and seeks only the confirmation of oneself in the Other." [Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 18.]
[178] Ibid, 3.
[179] Han also associates heteronomy to one's transformation into a thing that possess no autonomy but more transparency: "*persons* are being positivized into *things*, which can be quantified, measured and steered. Needless to say, no *thing* can be free. But at the same time, things are *more transparent* than persons. Big Data has announced the end of the *person* who possesses free will." [Han, *Psychopolitics,* 26.]
[180] Gauchet defines facebook friendship as a contract between 'friends' to mutually look at each other in their singularity. [Gauchet, *Le Nouveau Monde*, 625.]
[181] Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 13.

propensity to atomise individuals rather than bringing them together as a collective.[182] Under neoliberalism, 'coming together' does not concern a group of individuals collectively assembling around a common project. Instead it demands that individual images, things, or experiences be shared to others and turned into human capital. The distance here comes from the fact that 'sharing' is mediated by capital exchange and one's desire for recognition. In other words, proximity is only valuable so long as it contributes to appreciating human capital through higher visibility. Unlike the 'coming together' associated with collective life, nearness only requires atomistic individuals to seek intersubjective recognition. More connected than ever online, neoliberal subjects have never been so remote from each other.

Another paradox emerges from the political behaviour neoliberal subjects stemming from the rapport between recognition, individual singularity, and equivalence. Rosanvallon provides an account of these entanglements in his discussion of neoliberalism as an 'age of singularity':

> To be recognized as being "like" others therefore means to be recognized for the human generality one contains. But this human generality has taken on a broader, more complex meaning. It has come to include the desire to have one's distinctiveness— one's history and personal characteristics— recognized by others. No one wants to be "reduced to a number." Everyone wants to 'be someone'.[183]

Although intersubjective recognition is largely based on individuals' capacity to project themselves into the gaze of others, the neoliberal subject also requires that its singularity be recognised. Han also points to the strange cohabitation of singularity (differences) and sameness in a neoliberal context. However, he refuses to recognise the singularity laid out by neoliberal subjects as genuine. If singularity is engaged on a market as human capital, then it must be consumable. Reified as a marketable character trait, singularity paradoxically comes at the cost of eliminating meaningful differences for its primary goal is to be recognised and categorised by others.[184] In a fully marketised environment, distinctive individual opinions and characteristics can directly contribute human capital growth. Yet, marketisation requires

[182] Ibid.
[183] Rosanvallon, 228.
[184] Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 2.

that singularity be "flattened out into an object of consumption", differences being reduced to signs of equivalence rather than singularity.[185]

The marketisation of homo democraticus into a recognition-seeking subject is palpable through what Jodi Dean identifies as the neoliberal transformation of politics "into commodifiable 'lifestyles.'"[186] Lifestyles offer the possibility to group a multitude of individual opinions into a commodifiable package. Categorised as such, individuals are represented as yuppies, bohemians, vegans, gym bunnies, or eco-friendly rather than singular autonomous beings. Lifestyle politics provides individuals with the "affective thrill of radicality" in an environment where actual political participation is limited.[187] Pre-packaged into distinct lifestyles, political statements are voiced or visibly presented to others without aiming to provoke an actual debate. Social media epitomises this type of communication, providing a controlled environment requiring no real contact or exchange with others. Lifestyle politics offers a simulacrum of collectivity through which isolated individual opinions are flattened and conflated without ever having to substantially confront each other. Contained within a specific lifestyle, individuals seek to identify with others without necessarily cooperating with them. Representing a grouped display of individualised political opinions more than a collective effort, lifestyle politics remains perfectly consistent with the neoliberal ethos by stopping where collectivity begins.[188] If lifestyles were to turn into substantive political statements rather than mere postures, the capital-value of its members would depreciate for it would no longer be marketable. Lifestyles provide neoliberal subjects with the illusion of belonging while guaranteeing that individual preferences be easily equated and grouped into marketable categories.

Individualised neoliberal politics can take many forms ranging from T-shirts displaying a certain message to social media posts, or even sharing pictures online.[189] Although its

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[185] Ibid, 2. For Han it is a function of capital to supresse differences, reducing particularities to the 'inferno of sameness.' [Ibid, 41.]

[186] Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2009, 10.

[187] Ibid, 35.

[188] Kebir Ali associates the democratic subject to one who must constantly be vocal and share her/his opinions: "Political subjects today are not a multitude reduced to silence, they are nor muted subjects to which speech should be restored at any cost, but on the contrary they are subjects who are systematically forced into talking. They have to talk, communicate, exchange, endlessly converse." [Ali Kebir, "For A Critical Genealogy Of Democracy" *Mimesis* (2013): 67-80.]

[189] About the display of political opinions on clothes, Dean writes that "choices of fashion and entertainment could be quickly read as politically significant […] Antiracist? Wear a Malcolm X t-shirt. Gay-friendly? Fly a rainbow flag" [Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 35.]

message can be explicit, neoliberal politics always rests on a representation of oneself. The self-marketised display of subjects' personality, opinions, and achievements is the face of human capital. The moment this display is seen by others, it enters a market with its own specific set of rules, fostering competition amongst subjects. Political correctness, radicalism, conformism, conservatism, open-mindedness can all serve as ideological templates on which subjects affirm their political opinions. Transparent, marketised, and individualised, neoliberal politics generates new political spaces that parliamentary politics often fails to occupy. Altered beyond recognition, individualised homo democraticus nonetheless survives in an environment where collectivist ambitions have disappeared from the political horizon. In the same way that homo economicus has grown from a rational accumulator to an 'entrepreneur of the self', democraticus has developed from an individual striving to find a common ground between her/his self-interests and collective goals to a recognition-seeking individualised political sphere. Because neoliberal politics rests on displaying and marketising one's human capital, it is constantly mediated by the gaze of others. Neoliberal politics is never fully individualised for it must be marketed to and consumed by other individuals. Regimented by desires and the judgement of others, homo democraticus and homo economicus personify the degeneration of the liberal ideal of autonomy into unrestrained heteronomy. More than any other aspects of neoliberalism, the neoliberal subject embodies the heteronomous restructuration of society.[190]

[190] Gauchet, Le Nouveau Monde, 614. Own translation.

Conclusion

In contrast to the political ambitions of classical liberals, neoliberal thinkers deny the political virtues of equality and remain suspicious of any form of collectivity that might threaten individual liberty and autonomy. From a neoliberal standpoint, individuals and markets remain the only vehicles of emancipation. Through this radical reinterpretation of liberal ideals, social relations become fully individualised and marketable. Economic subjects turn into auto-entrepreneurs and auto-exploitators of themselves fully responsible for the growth of their own human capital on a variety of markets. In this context, competition is elevated as the main mode of social conduct by which individuals perceive each other either as obstacles to overcome or models to uphold in an inegalitarian market context. A similar process is at work within the intersubjective relationships of democratic subjects. Unable to approach politics collectively, neoliberal subjects relate to themselves and others either as desiring or desired subjects.

Whereas liberals call upon subjects to realise equality and the common good by means of individual autonomy, neoliberals simply encourage subjects to fulfil their individual desires regardless. In that sense, the shift between liberalism and neoliberalism also announces the transformation of the ideal of autonomy into heteronomous conduct. The collective potential of autonomy has given way to an emphasis on individual desire for its own sake. Whereas liberal egalitarians aim to conciliate individual self-interest and market exchange with equality and justice, neoliberals fully confine emancipation to the domain of the market and unrestrained individual desires. The contemporary spread of neoliberal values opposing any forms of collective politics at once indicates the egalitarian limits of liberal models underpinned by individual autonomy, and the impossibility to conceptualise equality within a neoliberal framework. In other words, the current hegemony of neoliberalism suspends the egalitarian potential of autonomy by reinvesting it fully onto the market as heteronomy. In a world regimented by inequalities and competition amongst individuals, equality is systematically sacrificed. By surrendering collective ideals and subverting autonomy into heteronomy, neoliberalism signals that the liberal project to realise equality by means of individual autonomy has failed.

Trapped into the impasse of liberal equality, one must let go of the possibility to materialise substantive equality in an environment shaped by market exchange and the

inequalities it fosters. How does one recover the concept of equality in the mist of market inequalities and neoliberal heteronomy? Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou propose to treat equality as a starting point of politics rather than its objective. This suggestion represents much more than a mere inversion of the liberal ideal of equality as a goal to be achieved. Starting equal allows for a radical rethinking of the political potential of equality by which subjects are not empowered through individual autonomy, but by acting upon their equal capacity to enact and materialise egalitarian politics. For Rancière, this capacity is the property of 'everyone and anyone' and must be declared to the people in order to interrupt 'the method of inequality' that characterises most liberal thought. The next chapter will be dedicated to Rancière's egalitarian proposition and introduces an argument that will be maintained throughout this thesis: in order to materialise egalitarian politics, one must always begin with equality.

Part II | Restarting Equal: Subjectivation and Emancipation

Chapter 3

Jacques Rancière and the Egalitarian Presupposition

Introduction

Within the liberal democratic nexus, considerations of equality are systematically subordinated to questions of individual liberty and autonomy. This applies to proponents of distributive justice as much as to neoliberals who refute equality in the name of individual liberty and market exchange. For redistributivists such as Rawls and Dworkin, equality may be achieved when certain individual choices and market behaviours are adjusted as means to allocate resources fairly and efficiently. Although laudable, their models suffer from an inability to question the efficiency and inegalitarian potential of markets and a tendency to reduce equality and justice to a question of individual choice. These limitations also apply to Sen's capability approach and Pettit's republicanism. Similar issues arise from the work of Fraser, Young, and Benhabib. By reducing equality to a question of identity and inclusion, they often invoke individual choice and, in some cases, remain oblivious to the inegalitarian impact of market exchange. Besides, reading equality through the prism of identity has the potential to promote inclusion as much exclusion. Putting further emphasis on individual autonomy, neoliberals construct a political economy articulated around individualisation and marketisation. In the neoliberal context, the spread of inequalities supports a state of generalised competition in which individuals aim to 'realise themselves' on a multitude of markets. Whereas proponents of distribution and recognition largely overlook the inegalitarian tendencies of the 'free' market, neoliberals uphold them. The hegemonic status held by neoliberalism exposes the metamorphosis of the ideal of individual autonomy into its heteronomous opposite. Aloof to the task of collectively realising equality, individuals are guided by their desires and that of others in a fully marketised environment.

Even if the democratic promise of a ruling demos has been distorted by its encounter with autonomy and heteronomy, some contemporary thinkers remain uncompromisingly dedicated to its egalitarian development. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of

Jacques Rancière. To briefly summarise Rancière's political thought, one could say that he takes democracy up on its own egalitarian promise. Rather than mediating democracy through questions of liberty or autonomy, Rancière deepens his exploration of democratic equality. The first consequence of this decision is the impossibility to conceptualise equality negatively as a result of curbing inequalities.[1] Instead of perceiving equality as an objective of politics, Rancière treats it as its starting point.[2] Viewed in this way, equality becomes a presupposition that must be continually verified.[3] What exactly does this egalitarian presupposition entail? The philosopher's answer is deceptively simple: "this equality is simply the equality of anyone at all with anyone else."[4] Rancière makes the bold claim that people are fundamentally equal regardless of any individual traits or attributes. Equality no longer is a question of rights, distribution, or recognition to be guaranteed by the state. Rather than a political objective attained by 'correcting' inequalities, equality exists in its own terms and acts as a fundamental condition of politics.[5] Thinking equality as a presupposition enables Rancière to consider its radical political potential fully. Envisaged as a starting point, equality exceeds its usual categorisation as a goal of politics to become an inherently powerful method and conceptual framework breaking with an existing order of inequalities. In the discussion unfolding in this thesis, Rancière's method is crucial for it offers a theoretical pathway out of the impasse of liberal egalitarianism. No longer constrained by the inegalitarian limits of markets and the imperative of individual autonomy, Rancière opens the emancipatory potential of equality by reframing it as the radical proposition that anyone is capable of anything.

Rancière's egalitarian vision comes in plain sight in opposition to Plato's infamous critique of democracy in book VIII of *The Republic*.[6] Whereas Plato rejects the democratic regime based on the anarchical postulate that anyone can rule, Rancière endorses democracy precisely on the same grounds. The anarchical dimension of Rancière's conceptualisation of politics as the rule of 'everyone and anyone' is mainly revealed by this adversarial encounter

[1] Jacques Rancière in Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth*, Recognition or Disagreement a Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality, and Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press 2016), 134.
[2] Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière Creating Equality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 47.
[3] Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 139.
[4] Ibid, 15.
[5] Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 61.
[6] See Plato *Republic* Book VIII; and Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso Books), 2006.

with Plato's philosophy. In contrast, the main intellectual influence of Rancière's egalitarianism is Joseph Jacotot, a pedagogue born two decades before the French revolution whose career was dedicated to creating a method of 'intellectual emancipation'.[7] Rancière honours Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* praising his postulate that students and masters are capable of equal intelligence. Jacotot's notion of equality of intelligence is essential to Rancière's consideration of equality as an emancipatory force. Rancière's intellectual itinerary is evidently not limited to these two thinkers. A former student of Louis Althusser, he eventually shifted away from the work of his teacher to focus on the archival unearthing of the voices of nameless 19th century workers, artists, and thinkers.[8] Rancière's oeuvre oscillates between philosophical commentary and archival work, but it always revolves around the egalitarian promise that anything can be learned from anyone and that politics is the domain of all.

Rancière's political thought is underpinned by a distinction between politics and the police.[9] The police must not be understood merely as law-enforcement, but as the totality of dispositives deployed by the state to manage and order communities. The police is that which counts the parts of a whole, hence congealing existing inequalities and hierarchies.[10] Conversely, politics appears as the actualisation of the egalitarian presupposition breaking with the police order.[11] Unlike previously discussed thinkers, Rancière theorises politics as a rare interruption of the 'normal' police order.[12] Politics understood as a radical rupture with an existing order of inequalities is substantiated by "the inscription of a part of those who have no part" in the police.[13] Treating egalitarian politics as a form dissensus, Rancière constructs a distinctive interpretation of democracy. Rather than being articulated around a consensual demos, democracy (which is always associated to politics in Rancière's work) becomes the scene on which the rift between the logic of the police and the presupposition of equality is played out.[14] Perceiving politics as an interruption of the police's assignment of

[7] See Joseph Jacotot, *Manuel de l'émancipation intellectuelle* (Paris: Mansut), 1845.
[8] Kristin Ross, "Rancière and the Practice of Equality," *Social Text* 29 (1991): 59; also see Jacques Rancière, *La leçon d'Althusser* (Paris : La Fabrique Editions, 2012).
[9] Jacques Rancière, *Aux bords du Politique* (Paris : Gallimard, 2004), 16 ; and Costas Douzinas in *The Idea of Communism*, 102.
[10] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 10.
[11] Rancière, *Aux bords du Politique,* 16.
[12] May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 138.
[13] Rancière, *Disagreement,* 123.
[14] Rancière, *Aux bords du Politique,* 113.

roles and places forbids any rapprochement of politics with a process of identification. As a "mode of subjectivation", politics is antithetical to identity to the extent it refers to a 'supernumerary' collective that escapes any existing categorisation.[15]

Subjectivation is a crucial facet of Rancière's account of egalitarian politics. As a process, it designates the subject as a product of politics. There can be no pre-political subject.[16] In contrast to liberal and neoliberal considerations of the subject as an existing autonomous individual, Rancière sees the subject as neither here nor an individual. Instead, a subject is produced from collectively dismantling the configurations and functions determined by the police order and recognising that equality is 'already here'.[17] Subjectivation begins as a break from the existing police order and continues with the egalitarian establishment of a new collective entity.[18] Despite a clear conceptual scission between subjectivation and identification, Rancière endows the subjectivised collective with the task of speaking on behalf of those who have no part (*sans-parts*).[19] The Rancierian political subject does not endorse a new identity besides that of speaking in the name of those who have none.

Inasmuch as Rancière offers a much-needed re-conceptualisation of equality as a starting point of politics and a radically new portrait of the subject, his account of subjectivation says little about concrete steps to be taken towards realising egalitarian politics. He provides no clear clues regarding the true forms which egalitarian politics may take. Offering a conceptual way out of the impasse of liberal autonomy, Rancierian subjectivation empowers subjects as much as it unsettles the political horizon. This is arguably the particularity of Rancière's political thought. Despite radically opening the concept of equality beyond its liberal considerations, Rancière does not account for the way or the means through which equality may materialise besides the foundational 'staging' of the

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[15] Keith Bassett, "Event, politics, and space: Rancière or Badiou'?," *Space and Polity 3* (2016): 1-14.
[16] Rancière, *Au bords du Politique*, 225.
[17] Rancière *Disagreement*, 40.
[18] Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière : an Introduction* (London Continuum, 2011), 66.
[19] Rancière, *Disagreement,* 8, 88; and Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 239.
Bruno Bosteels provides a concise account of Rancière's consideration of the police, politics and the *sans-parts:* "For Rancière, politics is the clash of two heterogeneous processes-the process of the police and the process of equality. He views the police. as "an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying . . . It is an order of the visible and the sayable." He then uses "politics" to designate "whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration-that of the part of those who have no part." [Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011), 188-189.]

people enabling subjectivation. The point will be made in this chapter that Rancière's radical conception of equality constitutes an important but sudden contribution to political theory. Following the intensity of the egalitarian declaration and the spontaneous constitution of a political subject, equality remains confined to an uncertain political horizon clouded by the anarchical fabric of the demos. To the extent that Rancierian politics is the domain of 'everyone and anyone', it could also be 'anything' so long as it is indexed on the egalitarian presupposition.

In order to convey how Rancière's political thought offers an egalitarian way out of the liberal impasse, this chapter is divided in four parts. The first will discuss Rancière's egalitarian presupposition as a direct theoretical break from authors who define equality merely in relation to inequalities, consensus, and a clear hierarchical model. The strength of Rancière's egalitarianism is most legible when read against thinkers such as those discussed in chapter one who begin with inequalities only to set equality as a goal to be achieved. The second section will concentrate on the relationship between equality, dissensus, and anarchy operating in Rancière's work. Rancierian politics demands a radical rupture from existing situations, revealing the disorder constitutive of 'the people' as much as the fallacy of policed hierarchies generated by states and markets. Then, the discussion will move on to Rancière's commitment to Jacotot's concept of equality of intelligence. If equality can be thought as an emancipatory method, what does it entail and how does it disturb the police's inegalitarian distributions? The chapter will close on a discussion of Rancière's account of subjectivation. Having recognised the necessity of subjectivation for egalitarian politics, it will question whether people's subjectivation into a nameless political collective is a sufficient condition for realising egalitarian politics.

Against the Method of Inequality

The first chapter of this thesis argued that theories of distributive and recognitive justice address equality negatively, or as a result of erasing existing inequalities. The complex models put forward by thinkers such as Rawls, Dworkin, Fraser, Young, or Sen all aim to solve the 'problem' of inequalities.[20] Whereas the work of these scholars is rich and contrasted,

[20] See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; Sen, *Inequality re-examined*; and Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources".

they all build on the assumption that inequalities must be eliminated in order to achieve justice and equality. Whether the goal of equality is attained through distribution or recognition, inequalities remain a starting point. It was claimed earlier that these negative conceptions of equality reveal an unwillingness to question the institution of the 'free' market as a promoter of inequalities. Proponents of recognition and distribution tend to either portray the market as an inevitable entity or work to correct and improve its inegalitarian tendencies.[21] This stance towards the market is problematic for various reasons. First, it prevents theorists from considering equality positively. Erecting the market as an unsurpassable institution is arguably one of the main reasons why these models fail to conceptualise equality as a starting point of politics. The ever-present market solidifies the belief according to which equality is first and foremost a question of correcting inequalities.[22] Another problem with this theoretical postulate is that it forsakes the question of equality to the realm of political and economic liberalism. The democratic promise of a ruling demos is displaced to become a question of rights, distribution, and recognition. Following liberal egalitarians, democrats are theoretically transfigured from those who rule to those who appeal to the state for rights, goods, and recognition.

Having surrendered any egalitarian ambitions, neoliberal politics also begins with inequalities. Yet, rather than trying to solve or correct inequalities, neoliberals treat them as an inevitable reflection of individual freedom.[23] In a fully individualised market environment, inequalities can be instrumentalised to foster competition amongst subjects.[24] Liberals and neoliberals pursue radically distinct political objectives. Yet, they concord on appointing inequalities as the starting point of their respective political projects. For the former, the problem of inequality must be solved through redistribution, recognition, and individual autonomy. For the latter, inequalities encourage heteronomous individuals to develop

[21] Whereas proponents of recognition often omit the political economy of equality, Distributivists tend to articulate their models around market distribution. For distributive accounts see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; and Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources,". For recognition see Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*?; Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; and Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition.*

[22] May associates distributive approaches to justice to the idea of 'passive equality' according to which "some form of equality is to be ensured by an institution for the sake of those whose equality is at stake. It is to be given, or at least protected, rather than taken or enacted by the subjects of equality." [May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 3.]

[23] See Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, and Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*.

[24] See Lazzarato "Neoliberalism in Action Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social,", and Han, *Psychopolitics*.

themselves as capital on a multitude of markets. Whether they are celebrated or frowned upon, inequalities occupy the top of the political agendas of most thinkers discussed thus far in this thesis. Exploring the political potential of the concept of equality entails letting go of its negative consideration. It necessitates moving beyond the appropriation of equality as a question of inequality tied to rights and market distribution, allowing for the possibility to paint an untainted image of a more equal world.[25]

One way to consider equality positively is to treat it as a starting point of politics rather than its goal. In the wake of this theoretical shift, the state can no longer be considered as a corrector of inequalities. In lieu of the state, the empowered subject must be thought as an embodiment of equality rather than its passive recipient. Starting with equality entails that it be already present as a fundamental condition of the demos, regardless of the subsequent presence of states or markets. This approach is radical to the extent that it escapes the conceptual frameworks and social arrangements commonly associated with equality. Rancière's work demonstrates that it is possible to think equality in such uncertain terms. About those thinkers who treat equality merely as a question of inequalities, he writes that "the passion for inequalities is the vertigo of equality, idleness in the face of the infinite task that the latter requires, fear when confronted to what a reasonable being owes to himself."[26] For Rancière, focusing on inequalities reflects an unwillingness to face the possibility that people may be fundamentally equal. In Rancièrian terms, inequalities only exist as a reaction to equality.[27] Taking inequalities as a theoretical premise is equivalent to admitting that the demos is not and cannot be equal.

During a recent intellectual debate with Axel Honneth, one of the most acclaimed theorists of recognition, Rancière explained that he considers inequality as a method rather than an incontestable socio-economic reality:

> They [social scientists] never stopped finding a new type of illusion in the forms of consciousness of those who thought they were acquiring science, a new form of

[25] About the hegemony of inegalitarian considerations of equality, Rosanvallon writes that "Equality has become a sort of remote deity, which is routinely worshipped but has ceased to inspire any living faith. When used at all, it is generally as a sort of negative incantation— 'reduce inequalities'— without a corresponding positive image of a better world." [Rosanvallon, 8.]

[26] Jacques Rancière, *Le maître ignorant cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle* (Paris : Atheme Fayard, 1987), 134. Own translation.

[27] Rancière "The Method of Equality" in Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 140.

> inequality subjecting those who thought they were moving toward equality. They never stopped demonstrating that people were ignorant when they thought they knew something, passive when they thought they were active, subjected to exploitation by the very illusion of being free, and so on. The method for reaching equality in an indeterminate future was in fact a method for postponing it indefinitely.[28]

Rancière presents the method of inequality as fundamentally deceptive. Whereas 'common' people might believe in equality, social scientists endeavour to continuously uncover new forms of inequalities that ultimately prove them wrong. Following this argument, the method of inequality appears to deny equality in various ways. Firstly, it reasserts a clear hierarchical divide between those who know (social scientists) and those who do not (the people being studied).[29] The inegalitarian method also denies equality based on the simple idea that one must believe in inequalities to study them. "Inequality works to the extent that one 'believes' it", 'it' being the very distribution of the positions.[30] To put this point in the language of social science, there is an inegalitarian bias of the observer towards inequalities. Perhaps more importantly, this simple statement demonstrates the importance of the notion of faith for Rancière's approach to equality and inequality. In order to either 'tackle' inequalities or 'see' equality, one must first believe in one or the other.

Through his depiction of the method of inequality, Rancière begins to reveal facets of his own egalitarian method. The method of inequality is itself a reversal of his egalitarianism which depends on an effacement of hierarchies and a belief in foundational equality.[31] From a Rancierian standpoint, equality and inequality are two opposed presuppositions: "there is no path from inequality to equality. There is either a path from equality to equality or a path from inequality to inequality."[32] Regarding the relationship between equality and inequality his position is straightforward; one may decide to believe and therefore start either with equality or inequality. However, the social scientist's drive to uncover inequalities always works against equality. As Alberto Toscano points out about Rancière's position, "in starting from inequality, the social sciences subordinate the possibility of emancipation and equality

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[28] Ibid, 135.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Jacques Rancière : Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 10.
[32] Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 139.

to the reality of hierarchy and disempowerment."[33] The mere act of identifying inequalities forecloses the possibility of recognising the political potential of equality.

The method of inequality is not limited to social sciences, it also applies to the broader category of political philosophy. In his most political work, Rancière explains how most historical political arrangements and the philosophies underpinning them are attached to inequality rather than equality.[34] Whereas political philosophy often concerns itself with equality, it systematically aims to set limits on the equal capacity of the demos.[35] Here, 'concern' must be read pejoratively. For Rancière, political philosophers are often worried and anxious when faced with the possibility that equality may be a fundamental condition of politics. These anxieties stem from the belief that their position is somehow separate from the people who form the object of their knowledge.[36] It is as if existing equality must be tamed in order to be 'properly' investigated and 'theorised' by the political philosopher. Building on Rancière's critique, equality emerges as a paradox of political philosophy. Already present as an essential facet of the demos, the presupposition of equality is denied by philosophers eager to reformulate its essential proposition. For equality to appear under the lens of the social scientist or within the arguments of the philosopher, its overwhelming presence as a condition must first be occulted. In turn, social scientists and political philosophers' template for a 'good democracy' intellectually responds to a self-repeating state of inequalities concealing the ever-presence of equality.[37] Far from a benign methodological error, 'the politics of the philosophers' is "an ideological fallacy that perpetuates relations of domination."[38]

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[33] Alberto Toscano, "Anti-sociology and its limits," in R. Stamp & P. Bowman (eds.), *Reading Rancière* (London: Continuum, 2011), 222.

[34] May explains that for Rancière, "The goal of political philosophy is to create or foster or militate for a police order to ensure that the part that has no part continues to have no part. Political philosophy justifies their having no part." [May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 45.]

[35] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, 63.

[36] Rancière, "The Method of Equality", 138.

[37] Etienne Balibar, "Historical Dilemmas of Democracy and Their Contemporary Relevance for Citizenship," *Rethinking Marxism* 20 (2008): 526; and Kristin Ross, "Rancière and the Practice of Equality," 67.

[38] Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology," *Theory & Event* 6 (2003): https://muse.jhu.edu/article/44780.
In *Disagreement*, Rancière breaks down the process through which political philosophy degenerates into the philosopher's politics: "Faced with the unthinkable political nexus of the equal and the unequal, the program of political philosophy (or rather, of the politics of the philosophers) is defined as the achievement of the true essence of politics […] The solution, in a word, is to achieve the essence of politics by eliminating this difference from itself that politics consists of, to achieve politics by eliminating politics, by achieving philosophy "in place" of politics." [Rancière, *Disagreement,* 63.]

Rancière does not amalgamate the entire spectrum of political philosophy into a single category. Instead, he defines political philosophy's leaning towards inequalities through three historical forms of thought: archipolitics, parapolitics, and metapolitics.[39] He rejects the method of inequality by formulating a thorough critique of these three figures of political philosophy stretching from Plato and Hobbes to Marx and Bourdieu.[40] Rancière's opposition of politics and philosophy is a key facet of his political ontology which offers a crucial leeway into his distinctive understanding of equality.[41] It must be noted that democracy has a political monopoly on Rancière's understanding of equality as a presupposition.[42] Equality is thereof often implicitly associated and even equated with democracy in his work. Taking this conjunction into account, disregarding equality becomes equivalent to hating democracy.[43] Rancière rebukes archipolitics, parapolitics, and metapolitics precisely on these grounds. Amongst the three categories of political philosophy drawn out by Rancière, archipolitics is the most recurrently criticised. This type of philosophy originates with Plato and denotes "the project of a community based on the complete realization of the arkhe of community, total awareness, replacing the democratic configuration of politics with nothing left over."[44] Archipolitics depends on a clear structure in which everyone hold their rank for the good of the community.[45] It is a clearly defined and hierarchical project that enables the 'psychologisation' and 'sociologisation' of politics.[46]

Throughout his critique of archipolitics, Rancière designates Plato as the instigator of the inegalitarian method.[47] This reading is mainly based on Plato's infamous critique of the democratic regime laid out in book VIII of *the Republic*. Plato takes issue with the democratic

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[39] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 65.
[40] Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 81.
[41] Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology."
[42] Despite being fully dedicated to the concept of democracy, Rancière refuses to identify contemporary representative parliamentary states as democracies. In his view current representative states fall under the label of representative oligarchies, or "the exact opposite of democracy." [Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 59-60.]
[43] This particular point is the main thesis of Rancière in *Hatred of Democracy*. See Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*.
[44] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 65.
[45] Ibid, 65, 67.
May points out that Archipolitics is opposed to politics to the extent that it does not assert the equality of everyone and anyone. [May, 43]. On the emancipatory potential of this argument see Rancière, *Le maître ignorant cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle*; and Jacotot, *Manuel de l'émancipation intellectuelle,* xxxviii.
[46] Archipolitics, particularly through the work of Plato, seems to provide a continuous counterpoint to Rancière's egalitarian vision. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 68-69.
[47] Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 30, 42.

regime's propensity to address and value everyone equally. Speaking through Socrates, Plato denounces the democrat's disregard for established identities and hierarchies.[48] He decries the anarchical expression of democratic equality by which the lines between a master and a slave, a teacher and a student, or a parent and a child become blurred. This is only one facet of Plato's effort to undermine democracy, but this argument enables him to claim that the democratic constitution contains every other since it accommodates what everyone wants to see in it.[49] Rancière endorses democracy precisely for the same reasons that Plato rejects it. Against platonic archipolitics, he explains that "politics has no arche, it is anarchical", and that "democracy supports this point."[50] Rancière's view of politics may be read as a complete antithesis of Plato's archipolitics. [51] For the French thinker, politics begins when the part of those who have no part is counted, "when the equality of anyone and everyone is inscribed in the liberty of the people."[52] When Plato and his intellectual descendants see chaos, disorder, and anarchy in the democratic regime, Rancière perceives equality and therefore politics.[53]

The two remaining categorisations deployed in Rancière's critique of political philosophy, parapolitics and metapolitics, are not as crucial in grasping the specificity of Rancière's egalitarianism. Parapolitics is associated with Aristotle and reframes politics as a question of aesthetics, invoking the people while putting them at a distance from decision-making.[54] The good parapolitical regime "is one that takes on the appearances of an oligarchy for the oligarchs and democracy for the demos."[55] Unlike archipolitics, parapolitics does not

[48] On democratic equality's disruption of established identities Plato writes: "a father accustoms himself to behave like a child and fear his sons, while the son behaves like a father, feeling neither shame nor fear in front of his parents, in order to be free. A resident alien or a foreign visitor is made equal to a citizen, and he is their equal. […] A teacher in such a community is afraid of his students and flatters them, while the students despise their teachers or tutors." [Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 233, 562a-562e.

[49] Rancière, *Aux bords du Politique*, 79.

[50] Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," *The Identity in Question* 61 (1992): 59.

[51] Peter Hallward remarks that Rancière's propositions often begins as an inversion of the Platonic position according to which "to each kind of person there is but one allotted task: labour, war or thought." [Peter Hallward "Staging Equality, On Rancière's Theatrocracy," *New Left Review* 37 (2006): 112.]

[52] Rancière, *Disagreement,* 123.

[53] Interestingly, Rancière explains that Plato's unwillingness to recognise that politics could be the concern of everyone is often linked to the notion of time: "Plato tells us that manual workers cannot busy themselves with the common goods because they do not have time to focus on anything else than work. They cannot leave their post because work does not wait." [Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 2000), 13. Own Translation.

[54] Rancière, Au bords du politique, 40; and Rancière, "The People's Theatre: A Long Drawn-Out Affair" *in The Intellectual and his People: Staging the People* 2, 2.

[55] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 74.

fully dismiss the political virtues of equality. Instead, it inscribes them within the police order, distorting and reframing the egalitarian presupposition into the police logic of identification and redistribution.[56] Parapolitics arguably encompasses the work of scholars discussed in chapter one who value equality as a political objective to be mediated by the state rather than an essential presupposition. Alternatively, metapolitics is a discourse on the falseness of politics. It is associated with Marx in that it presents "the truth of politics is the manifestation of its falseness."[57] Viewed this way, politics become a question of uncovering the ideological and alienating forces at work in society.[58] Although critical, metapolitics differs from Rancière's egalitarian vision for it requires political philosophy to messianically announce the truth of the falseness of the people's condition.

Rancière's critique of inequality as a method at work in political philosophy and social sciences introduces his distinctive egalitarian vision. Accepting equality as a presupposition entails first and foremost refuting the position of those who do not take equality for granted. Rather than conceptualising new forms of equality to be pursued, Rancière considers having faith in the egalitarian presupposition to be more critical than elaborating on it philosophically. Presupposing equality primarily means operating "the rupture of the inegalitarian belief or inegalitarian knowledge."[59] Assuming equality might be as easy for those who have no part as it is daunting for those whose legitimacy rests on rank, status, or the possession of knowledge. When in the position of the social scientist or the political philosopher, the difficulty of accepting equality as a presupposition is twofold. It implies recognising that one's own voice does not exceed any others while accepting that equality thrives in disorder rather than order. In other words, there is a subjective as well as an objective element to refuting the method of inequality. Subjectively, lambda citizens must believe in their equal potential while thinkers (possessors of knowledge) must give up their

[56] May, The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière, 44-46.
[57] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 82.
[58] Rancière explains the link between metapolitics and ideology through the figure of Marx: "For the truth of falseness, Marx in his genius invented a key word that all modernity has adopted, at times even turning it against him. He called it ideology. Ideology is not just a new word for simulacrum or illusion. Ideology is the word that signals the completely new status of the true that metapolitics forges: the true as the truth of the false. Not the clarity of the idea in the face of the obscurity of appearances; not the truth as an index of itself and of falseness but, on the contrary, the truth of which the false alone is an index, the truth that is nothing more than highlighting falseness, the truth as universal interference." [Ibid, 85.]
[59] Ibid, 139.

faith in the value of their privileged position.[60] The next section will focus specifically on the anarchical and dissensual dimensions of Rancière's political thought. Enacting the egalitarian presupposition demands accepting the anarchical dimension of a demos that escapes any labels generated by the police order. Unlike thinkers discussed in chapter one who aim to accommodate equality within an existing economic and political framework, Rancière claims that the mere declaration of equality requires the dissolution of all policed hierarchies including those generated by existing states and markets.

Anarchy and Dissensus

It is on the question of order, rank, and competence that Plato and his archipolitical heirs are most reluctant to accept equality as a presupposition.[61] Rancière views Plato's critique of democracy as an attempt to "put an end to politics as it spontaneously and democratically presents itself."[62] This spontaneous state is the 'anarchical autoregulation of the demos.'[63] Rancière associates anarchy with the multiplicity and indiscernibility of the people.[64] Far from a barrier to politics, the anarchical presentation of the demos is the face of the egalitarian presupposition for Rancière.[65] If politics has no *arkhe,* one must accept the anarchical potential of everybody and anybody in order to uphold equality as a presupposition.[66] Through his anarchical consideration of politics, Rancière often introduces

[60] The subjective aspect of breaking with the inegalitarian presupposition is what Rancière refers to as emancipation, or "the decision to verify that there are not two kinds of souls or two kinds of intelligence." The relationship between presupposing equality and emancipation will be further discussed in the second part of this chapter. [Ibid, 140.]

[61] In the early pages of *Disagreement*, Rancière vividly describes what he understands to be Plato's anxiety towards the egalitarian presupposition carried by the democratic regime: "[The problem] is that at the people's assembly, any mere shoemaker or smithie can get up and have his say on how to steer the ships and how to build the fortifications and, more to the point, on the just or unjust way to use these for the common good. The problem is not the always more but the anyone at all, the sudden revelation of the ultimate anarchy on which any hierarchy rests." [Ibid, 16.]

[62] Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 35. Own translation.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid, 12, 13, 35.

[65] Todd May points out that Rancière is one of the few French political thinkers willing to associate his work with the politically charged notion of anarchism: "Among recent French thinkers, only Rancière has been willing to align his thought with the term anarchism. Only Rancière has been willing not only to reject the Marxist spectre which hovers over progressive European thought, but also to refer in a positive way to the tradition that, during most of the twentieth century, was thought to have been left to the dustbin of history." [May, "Rancière and Anarchism" in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene,* ed. Jean Philippe Deranty and Alisson Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 117.]

[66] Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 113.

democracy as an empty 'supplement' founded on "nothing but the absence of entitlement to govern."[67] Following the egalitarian presupposition and the anarchical presentation of the demos, the only entitlement to govern is that which is owned by those "who have no more entitlement to govern than to be governed."[68] To start with equality entails accepting everyone's (in)capacity to rule as the only legitimate political position. For Todd May, Rancière's anarchist consideration of the demos reveals a dual commitment to "a critique of domination in all its forms and an embrace of active equality."[69] Committing to the equal capacity of 'everyone and anyone' serves to identify haters of democracy as much as it clears the path for true egalitarian politics.[70]

Archipolitics is a reaction against the unpredictability and multiplicity of the demos. Its proponents aim to institute the rule of 'the One', providing a clear hierarchical measure of the social and a well-rounded order in which each agent has a specific role and place.[71] Opposing the anarchical multiple to an ordered 'One' is another way for Rancière to demonstrate his commitment to equality as a starting point of politics. Indeed, there is a clear temporality to the idea of presupposing. Whatever is supposed is assumed to already be there. For Rancière equality is always a starting point, it is already present when political thought or action occur. In the same way, the multiple (the two) always precedes the one in his work.[72] The multiple making up the anarchical demos and displaying equality is always antecedent to the constitution of a 'One'. Despite its foundational status, equality is not an ontological principle for Rancière. Inasmuch as equality is not a political goal, nor does it constitute its essence or being.[73] Mitch Rose goes as far as claiming that equality stands as a

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[67] Ibid, 236 ; and Rancière *La haine de la Démocratie*, 48. Own translation.
This reading clearly echoes Lefort's consideration of democracy as an empty space depicted in chapter one. See Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism.*

[68] Rancière, *La haine de la Democratie,* 53.

[69] May, The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière, 93.

[70] Hallward links Rancière's anarchism to his discussions of theatre by associating equality to a stage: "Perhaps the most fundamental, and illuminating, dimension of Rancière's anarchic conception of equality is that which relates to theatre—in both the literal and metaphorical senses of the term. […] Rancière presents it precisely as a pure 'supposition that must be verified continuously—a verification or an enactment that opens specific stages of equality, stages that are built by crossing boundaries and interconnecting forms and levels of discourse and spheres of experience.' As Rancière describes it, thinking is more a matter of improvisation than of deduction, decision or direction." [« Entretien avec Jacques Rancière, » cited in Hallward, *Staging Equality*, 110-111.]

[71] Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 40.

[72] Ibid, 68.

[73] Jean-Philippe Deranty, Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology, and Keith Bassett, 6.

'pre-ontological' category for Rancière.[74] Equality is not a ground but an assumption that can only be practically verified by the demos.[75] Preceding politics and philosophy, equality remains a simple declaration. The act of declaring and verifying equality is the political event itself.[76]

Related to the notion of multiple and the anarchical fabric of the demos is Rancière's claim that politics does not depend on order and coherence, but on disagreement and dissensus. As he writes in *On the Shores of Politics*, "the essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus, the presence of two worlds in one."[77] From Rancière's standpoint, oneness and consensus are forces that work directly against politics. The problem with consensus is contained in the maxim that "the whole is all, and nothing is nothing."[78] Associating consensus with politics presupposes, not equality, but the inclusion of all parties in advance regardless of whether they have a part or not.[79] What is being included is not the people in its chaotic composition, but a clearly categorised aggregation of its parts into one. Striving for oneness in the form of order and consensus allows intellectuals to occult equality to concentrate fully on imposing the rightness of their political visions. Viewed this way, consensus is the result, not of a rational and democratic process, but of a division of the community from itself.[80] It is a distorted amalgamation of the parts and non-parts making up society into a polished whole.[81]

Refuting the political value of consensus enables Rancière to define politics "not as the art of directing communities, but as a dissensual form of human action, an exception to

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[74] Mitch Rose, "Hesitant democracy: Equality, inequality and the time of Politics," *Political Geography* 68 (2019): 101-109.
[75] Samuel A. Chambers, "Neoliberalism to Anarchism and Back to Democracy" in *Reading Rancière*, 32; and Bassett, 6.
[76] Bassett, 4.
[77] Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 241.
[78] Rancière, *Disagreement,* 124.
[79] Ibid, 116.
[80] Ibid, 121.
[81] Ibid, 123.
The consensus-based approach to democracy currently dominates political theory. It is best exemplified by the work of deliberative democrats who support a political vision which rests on the capacity of the demos to deliberate and reach rational consensuses that work in the interest of all. [See Seyla Benhabib, *Towards a deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy*; Joshua Cohen in *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy*; and Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).] Rancière's critical position towards consensus is not isolated. Proponents of agonistic democracy value the political potential of antagonisms against consensus. For a thorough agonistic critique of deliberative democracy see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso), 2000.

the rules according to which the regrouping and directing of human groups is operated."[82] Politics in Rancierian terms is a rupture with what is generally accepted as politics.[83] Rancière's opposition to consensus is not merely limited to its procedural effects. His dissensual standpoint is wider, declaring that politics cannot be limited to a general and consensual agreement on what politics is. From this perspective, politics should be opposed to the congealment characterising social institution such as the state. Politics materialises in rare breaks from the consensual (and therefore imposed) understandings of what constitutes 'good' politics. From a Rancierian standpoint egalitarian politics is rare and sudden, only occasionally altering the pre-assigned categories of the police.[84]

The specificity of Rancière's dissensus-based view of politics evidently raises the question of whether politics is possible in the context of existing liberal-democracies. Rancière's stance on this possibility is categorical; contemporary democracies are effectively post-political and therefore post-democratic.[85] In *Disagreement*, Rancière defines post-democracy as "the government practice and conceptual legitimization of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people."[86] From this standpoint, contemporary democracies are to be interpreted as formal representations of the demos emptied of any egalitarian content. Rancière's dissensual position also questions the compatibility of his radical view of politics with the institution of the state. In this regard, Rancière's answer is once again straightforward: "Every state is oligarchical", and its existence depends on a surrendering of the political.[87] Rancière's

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[82] Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 16, own translation.

[83] According to Hallward, Rancière's conception of equality is disruptive: "Essentially, Rancierian politics remains a general displacement, a removal from what is consensual. [Peter Hallward "Staging Equality, On Rancière's Theatrocracy," 118.] On the question of what exactly Rancière means by dissensus, Gert Biesta rightfully points out that dissensus is not synonymous with the confrontation of interests and opinions. Rather it reflects an interruption, the emergence of a sensible that is heterogenous to a given world. [Gert Biesta, "The Ignorant Citizen: Mouffe, Rancière, and the Subject of Democratic Education," *Studies in Philosophy & Education 30* (2011): 149.]

[84] On the ephemeral condition of politics, Rancière writes, "Politics, in its specificity, is rare. It is always local and occasional. Its actual eclipse is perfectly real and no political science exists that could map its future any more than a political ethics that would make its existence the object solely of will." [Rancière, *Disagreement*, 139. Also see Hallward, "Staging Equality, On Rancière's Theatrocracy," 123; and Toscano, "Anti-sociology and its Limits," 218.]

[85] Rancière, *Disagreement,* 95, 121.
Rancière is not the only thinker to label contemporary liberal-democracies as 'post-democratic'. Other notable scholars who have used that term include Colin Crouch or Chantal Mouffe. See Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*; Crouch, *Post-Democracy*; and Erik Swyngedouw, "Interrogating post-democratization: Reclaiming Egalitarian Political Spaces," *Political Geography 30* (2011): 370-380.

[86] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 102.

[87] Ibid, 109; and Rancière, *La Haine de la Démocratie*, 79.

repudiation of the state sheds light on his understanding of politics as a scission from what is consensually recognised as unsurpassable in politics, namely, consensus, order, and the state.[88]

Rancière's continuous intellectual confrontation with hierarchy and consensus points to another antagonism fundamental to his thought. This theoretical rift opposes the logic of politics and that of police. Rancière separates the two by distinguishing the method in which each counts the parts of a social whole:

> There are two ways to count the parts of a community. The first merely counts real parts, empirical groups defined by differences in birth and social functions, the positions and interests that constitute the social body, excluding any forms of supplement. In addition to this, the second way also counts 'a part of those who have no parts' (surplus). We will call the first way police and the second politics.[89]

Based on this distinction between police and politics, it becomes clear that the three figures of political philosophy (archipolitics, parapolitics, and metapolitics) as well as social sciences correspond to the logic of the police rather than politics.[90] Policing is also a trait of liberal and neoliberal states whose starting point is systematically defined by a state of inequalities.[91] They belong to the police order by "ensuring that the part that has no part continues to have no part", therefore working against the presupposition of equality.[92] On the other hand, the particularity of politics is to give a central part to those who have none. It is "the absence of an entitlement to rule that constitutes the very nature of the political space."[93] Politics speaks on behalf of the uncounted, by neutralising any count of parts.[94] Although antagonistic, the relationship between politics and the police is not purely

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[88] Rancière's designation of representative democracies as oligarchical and his repudiation of the state have led certain scholars to label his politics as unrealisable, limited to the realm of pure idealism rather achievable political reality. About Rancière's egalitarianism, Ella Myers writes that "Rancière presents a seductive political imaginary, but it invites us to hope for little more than an occasional break in the 'inegalitarian machine'." [Ella Myers, "Presupposing equality: The Trouble with Rancière's Axiomatic Approach," *Philosophy and Social Criticism 42* (2016): 55.]

[89] Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 239. Own translation.

[90] Toscano, "Anti-sociology and its limits," 225-226.

[91] For Chambers, "Rancière produces his concept of 'the police' precisely so as to redefine neoliberal consensus models (interest-group liberalism) as nothing more than 'orders of the police'." [Samuel A. Chambers, "Neoliberalism to Anarchism and Back to Democracy," 19.]

[92] May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 46.

[93] Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory & Event 5* (2001): 6.

[94] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 61.

conflictual. Politics depends on its encounter with the police for it lacks an object of its own.[95] As Toscano points out about the police/politics bipartition, "though there may be a worse or a better police there can be no such thing as the overcoming of the split between the two logics."[96] Politics works against the police logic without ever undermining it completely. Politics' sole principle is equality which "is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political."[97] Instead, "all equality does is lend politics reality in the form of specific cases to inscribe, in the form of litigation, confirmation of the equality at the heart of the police order."[98] Henceforth, the notion of police cannot be limited to a negative category. If not the soil from which equality can grow, it is the site on which equality can be seen after its encounter with politics. The conflictual yet nuanced relationship between politics and police illustrates the process by which "politics essentially undoes the given."[99]

The intricate link between equality, politics, and the police is surely best characterised by Rancière's concept of 'repartition of the sensible' (*partage du sensible*).[100] Rancière introduces it as "a relation between occupations and equipments, between being in a specific space and time, performing specific activities, and being endowed with capacities of seeing, saying, and doing that "fit" those activities."[101] In deploying this elusive concept, Rancière ambitiously attempts to theorise the multidimensional link between what is sensorially experienced and what is thought.[102] Hallward explains that every verification of equality is inevitably part of this repartition.[103] The cutting and assemblage making up the repartition of the sensible concerns the social world in its totality regardless of whether it is enacted by the police or politics.[104] Both the police and politics constitute modes of distribution of the

[95] Ibid, 32.
[96] Toscano, "Anti-sociology and its limits," 229.
[97] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 31.
[98] Ibid, 31-32; May defines equality negatively in relation to the police: ""the term equality has no content. It serves instead to mark the refusal of a particular content posited by the police order." [May*, Key Concepts*, 76.]
[99] Paulina Tambakaki, "When does politics happen?" *Parallax* 15 (2009): 104.
[100] The concept of *partage du sensible* is not easily translatable in English. *Partage* can be literally translated as 'sharing' but also contains the idea of breaking or rupture or breaking that is central to Rancière's concept. Instead of the literal translation 'sharing of the sensible', Hallward translates *partage du sensible* as 'repartition of the sensible', remaining faithful to the divisive quality of the concept. [See Hallward, "Staging Equality."]
[101] Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 136.
[102] Ibid; and Swyngedouw, "Interrogating Post-Democratization: Reclaiming Egalitarian Political Spaces," 375.
[103] Hallward, "Staging Equality," 116.
[104] Rancière*, Au bords du Politique*, 240 ; and Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: esthétique et politique*, 12.

sensible.[105] Unlike ideology which also conveys how thoughts translate into actions, the sensible's repartition is not a question of metapolitical knowledge or policed illusion, but of consensus or dissensus.[106] The fate of the sensible is decided prior to its repartition. Like equality and inequality, one either chooses to believe and therefore start with dissensus or consensus. In both cases, a foundational decision determines the sequence of events that follows. The reappearance of the binary opposition between consensus and dissensus within the question of the sensible demonstrates the sheer impossibility to bypass or avoid its repartition. It also shows that the repartition of the sensible does not have to be a process that works against equality and politics. Although a consensus-based police distribution is possible, it will occult the possibility of politics. However, it is equally conceivable that the repartition of the sensible may shine light on the presupposition of equality through dissensus.[107]

Rancière's political thought is positioned not against inequalities, but against the method that enables inequalities to be thought and perceived. Departing from inequalities, consensus, and the police order, he conceptualises equality as a presupposition rather than a goal. Equality does not require to be invented or pursued since it is already a non-political condition of politics.[108] Politics can only take shape against the method of inequality and under the condition of equality revealed by the anarchical composition of the demos. Politics lacks an arche for it rests on the equality of everyone and anyone, including those who have 'no part'. Rancière links equality and politics through dissensus, disorder, and emancipation from policed categorisations. By pre-assigning roles and identities, consensus forsakes equality as a presupposition and forbids the occurrence of politics. The clear conceptual bipartition between consensus/dissensus, police/politics, anarchy/order, serves to illustrate the radically emancipatory character of Rancière's thought. Egalitarian politics is not to be realised within an existing framework. There is no 'safe space' of politics ensuring that deliberation and decisions are taken in an orderly manner. Instead, politics emerges only as a

[105] Bassett defines the police specifically as a mode of distribution of the sensible: "The police refers in a broad sense to a whole order of governance as an ensemble of well-defined parts, places and functions, constituting a particular 'distribution of the sensible' that structures what can be said and seen in a particular context. [Bassett, 2.]

[106] Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement,* 136.

[107] For Rancière, there are two facets to the repartition of the sensible; "on the one hand it separates and excludes, while on the other it encourages participation." [Rancière, Au *Bords du Politique*, 240. Own translation.]

[108] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 61; and Ross, "Rancière and the Practice of Equality," 67.

breaking away from liberal democratic certainty through which the anarchical and polemical voices of the people begin to be heard. Having presented key aspects of Rancière's dissensual thought in light of his rejection of the method of inequality, the next section will concentrate on the emancipatory power and political potential of his egalitarian method.

Equality as Emancipation

Thus far, this chapter has endeavoured to show that Rancière's unique approach to equality is dependent on rejecting inequality as a method, and theoretically relocating equality as a presupposition rather than an objective of politics. It has also discussed the extent to which Rancière's thought rests on the anarchical equality of everyone and anyone and dissensus rather than consensus. Through these radical propositions, Rancière significantly expands the political potential of equality. Starting with equality offers the possibility to conceive of equality positively, independently of any inequalities generated by existing state and market structures. The aim of this section is to show precisely how presupposing equality can become an emancipatory force, allowing for the possibility to conceptualise the materialisation of equality away from the method of inequality characterising liberal thought in its entirety.

Nowhere is the emancipatory potential of equality clearest than through Rancière's engagement with Joseph Jacotot's work. Jacotot was a French thinker and a pedagogue born in 1770 who dedicated his career to developing a method of 'intellectual emancipation.' A devote republican, he served as a parliamentary representative for a few years before fully dedicating himself to research at the university of Louvain.[109] It is there, confronted with the task of writing and teaching in a language he did not speak, that he stumbled upon his method. The latter has three principles: "all men have equal intelligence, every man has received from god the faculty to instruct himself, everything is in everything."[110] Jacotot's ground-breaking method did not go unnoticed, catching the attention of European governments willing to explore the potential of his research.[111] Nonetheless, Jacotots's

[109] Hugh Chisholm, "Joseph Jacotot," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910), 121-122.
[110] Ibid; and Joseph Jacotot in B. Cornelius and Jean Joseph Jacotot, *An account of m. Jacotot's method of universal instruction* (London: John Taylor, 1830), 2.
[111] Chisholm, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 122.

intellectual legacy did not reach far beyond the curious minds of the early 19th century. That was the case until Rancière published *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in 1987, reviving the great legacy of this intellectual maverick. The impact of Jacotot's method on Rancière's egalitarianism is so deep, that Deranty goes as far as claiming that Rancière's most political works *Disagreement* and *On the Shores of Politics* are merely "the conceptual development and re-appropriation of Jacotot's revolutionary politics of education."[112]

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the egalitarian potential and significance of Jacotot's method is to recount one of Jacotot's teaching anecdote. Rancière does exactly that in the early pages of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Unable to speak or understand a word of Flemish and faced with students who had no knowledge of French, Jacotot resolved to assign them to read a bilingual edition of Fenelon's *Telemachus* (the only bilingual publication available at the time), and to produce a summary in French of what they thought they had read.[113] As Rancière points out, "necessity had constrained him to leave his intelligence entirely out of the picture."[114] This frustrating situation forcing Jacotot to leave traditional teaching methods aside turned out to be an extraordinary discovery:

> By chance, a grain of sand had gotten into the machine. He had given no explanation to his "students" on the first elements of the language. He had not explained spelling or conjugations to them. They had looked for the French words that corresponded to words they knew and the reasons for their grammatical endings by themselves. They had learned to put them together to make, in turn, French sentences by themselves: sentences whose spelling and grammar became more and more exact as they progressed through the book; but, above all, sentences of writers and not of schoolchildren. Were the schoolmaster's explications therefore superfluous? Or, if they were not, to whom and for what were they useful?[115]

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[112] For Deranty, Rancière's intellectual encounter with Jacotot singlehandedly re-politicised his work: "The key event that lured Rancière back from historiographical work to political conceptualisation was the encounter with Joseph Jacotot." [Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology".]
Badiou also reads Rancière's egalitarianism through the figure of Jacotot [See Badiou, *Logics of Worlds Being and Event 2* (London: Contunuum 2009), 560.]

[113] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 1-2.

[114] Ibid, 9.

[115] Ibid, 3-4.

Expecting nothing from this experience, Jacotot instead discovered the method that would guide the rest of his intellectual life. It questioned the utility of the schoolmaster's explications, and as a result, the schoolmaster's legitimacy as a possessor of knowledge.[116] Building on Jacotot's discovery, Rancière explains that the master-student relationship is conditioned by the notion of explication: "It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such. To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself."[117] In other words, one's position as a provider of knowledge fully depends on a willing recipient. However, this recipient does not depend on the provider's explications in order to acquire such knowledge. Jacotot and Rancière both claim that masters and students are engaged in a fundamentally asymmetrical and unequal relationship justifying their respective roles. While the teacher systematically gains legitimacy through the act of explicating to the supposedly ignorant, the students are likely to gain nothing from this relationship that they could not have uncovered out of their own will. Besides, students might have more to lose by entering a relationship consolidating their identification as those without knowledge, or as Rancière would phrase it, those 'who have no part'.[118]

Jacotot's method, like many of Rancière's claims, is deceptively simple. Jacotot's discovery far exceeds a mere reversal of the master/student relationship. Starting with the claim of equal intelligence, the method of intellectual emancipation offers the possibility to fundamentally question the police's pre-assignment of roles that Rancière associates with consensus.[119] It is surely this prospect that theoretically brought the two thinkers together more than 150 years apart. Rancière's insight was to perceive that the egalitarian content of Jacotot's work far exceeds the realm of education. Within his reading of Jacotot, Rancière

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[116] Ibid, 4.

[117] Ibid, 6.

[118] In regards to knowledge, Rancière stated in an interview with Nina Power that all his work on emancipation has been "a critique of this presupposition that matters of domination and liberation are matters of ignorance and knowledge." [Rancière in Jacques Rancière and Nina Power, "Interview with Jacques Rancière," *Ephemera* 10: 78.]

[119] In *The Method of Equality*, Rancière reads the method of inequality at work in the police through Jacotot as a type of imposed ignorance: "the method appeared to be a perfect circle. On the one hand, it said: people get pinned down to their place in the system of exploitation and oppression, because they do not know about the law of that exploitation or oppression. But on the other hand, it said: they do not know about it because the place where they are confined hinders them from seeing the structure that allots them that place. In short, the argument read as follows: They are where they are because they do not know why they are where they are. […] It was, strictly speaking, a method of inequality, reasserting continuously the division between the learned ones and the ignorant ones." [Rancière, "The Method of Equality," 134-135.]

focuses on the notion of equality of intelligence. His discussion of the concept revolves around three central themes; language, emancipation, and will. These three elements constitute a strong bond between intellectual emancipation and Rancière's egalitarian politics. The task of this section is to elucidate the specific meanings Rancière attributes to these terms that shed light on his political claims.

The Ignorant Schoolmaster reveals as much about Jacotot's pedagogy as it does about Rancière's political thought, the voices of the two authors becoming increasingly indistinguishable throughout the book.[120] Although the narrator's voice is aptly unidentifiable in this work, language is a crucial component of Rancière's interpretation of equality of intelligence. As he concisely points out, "equality requires a common language", since it is "as a speaking being that man is fundamentally equal to anybody."[121] Viewed this way, language appears irremediably linked to equality, and therefore incorporated within its presupposition. One must start with language in the same way that one starts with equality. Rancière designates language as an essential piece of the egalitarian presupposition when he writes that "the material ideality of language refutes any opposition between the golden race and the iron race, any hierarchy— even an inverted one— between men devoted to manual work and men destined to the exercise of thought."[122] Once again, Rancière attacks Plato's archipolitical dismissal of the demos by arguing through Jacotot that anyone who has access to language also has an equal access to others and to a common understanding the world that surrounds them. What could justify a rigid assignment of social roles and labels (expert/ignorant, manual/intellectual…) if everybody has a shared capacity for language and therefore an equal capacity for comprehension? Rancière's response is that nothing justifies such repartition for "a man can always understand another man's words."[123] Based on this essential postulate on language and intelligence, there can be "no ground whatsoever for the exercise of power."[124]

[120] About this, Tanke writes that "the idea of equality Rancière finds in Jacotot's writings serves as a touchstone for the analyses he conducts of art and politics. In his telling, Rancière's voice mingles thoroughly with Jacotot's own." [Tanke, *Jacques Rancière : an introduction*, 35.]
[121] Rancière, *Au Bords du Politique*, 92, 95.
[122] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 37.
[123] Ibid, 18.
[124] Rancière in *Reading Rancière*, 3.

Starting with equality signifies starting with language. It is only through speech that individuals can relate equally, exposing inequality as a masquerade.[125] Language uncovers the futility of inequality by revealing equality as everyone's capacity to share through speech, a fundamentally human condition.[126] Perhaps the most concrete example of language as a conveyor of equality is the process of learning one's mother tongue. Rancière repeatedly makes use of this case when discussing the role of language in Jacotot's work:

> According to the unequal returns of various intellectual apprenticeships, what all human children learn best is what no master can explain: the mother tongue. We speak to them and we speak around them. They hear and retain, imitate and repeat, make mistakes and correct themselves, succeed by chance and begin again methodically, and, at too young an age for explicators to begin instructing them, they are almost all— regardless of gender, social condition, and skin color— able to understand and speak the language of their parents.[127]

Far from philosophical abstractions, Rancière provides his reader with a concrete and relatable example of equality of intelligence. Learning one's mother tongue prior to having access to instruction is an essentially human trait. Too young for instruction and with limited brain power, infants are equally able to acquire language at a pace far exceeding the assimilation of an 'instructed' second language at an older age. Rancière links his discussions of language to politics through the notion of 'the wrong'. The latter designates the universal form in which politics occurs by expressing equality of "the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society."[128] Breaking down the concept, May explains that

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[125] For Rancière, ignorance stems, not from the absence of instruction but as a result of believing in the 'reality' of inequalities: "We know that it is this that defines the stultifying vision of the world: to believe in the reality of inequality, to imagine that the superiors in society are truly superior, and that society would be in danger if the idea should spread, especially among the lower classes, that this superiority is only a conventional fiction." [Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 109.]

[126] Rancière considers the egalitarian content of language specifically through the act of speaking: "In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same. He communicates as an artisan: as a person who handles words like tools. Man communicates with man through the works of his hands just as through the words of his speech: 'When man acts on matter, the body's adventures become the story of the mind's adventures.' And the artisan's emancipation is first the regaining of that story, the consciousness that one's material activity is of the nature of discourse. He communicates as a poet as a being who believes his thought communicable, his emotions sharable." [Ibid, 65.] Also see Au bords du politique, 95.

[127] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 5.

[128] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 39.

wherever there is an inequality there is a wrong that must be addressed.[129] Only by expressing the wrong caused by inequalities can "the people identify with the whole of the community."[130]

Expressing a wrong is done by manifesting or staging it.[131] Rancierian politics has a clear theatrical dimension, "creating a stage, making a stage visible, making a scene, where previously there seemed to be none."[132] In the name of those who have no parts, actors on the political stage create 'polemical scenes', displaying a wrong and exhibiting the ineffectuality of inequality as much as the essentiality of equality.[133] Staging constitutes another form of language with the potential to express the inegalitarian masquerade to everybody. The difficulty in staging a wrong lays in "knowing whether the subjects who count in the interlocution 'are' or 'are not,' whether they are speaking or just making a noise […] knowing whether the common language in which they are exposing a wrong is indeed a common language."[134] Since one of the traits of political subjects is to break from pre-assigned identities, they often fail to express a single voice on stage. Instead, they speak in "shattered, polemical voices, dividing at each time the identity they put on stage."[135] Yet, the successful staging of a wrong (the presentation of equality) has the potential to reconfigure the order of domination imposed by the police by exposing its miscount.[136] From a Rancierian perspective, the sharing of language plays a key role at various stages of politics. First, it conveys equality by being accessible to all independently of instruction. It also embodies equality by providing the means through which individuals can share and exchange reciprocally. Finally, language contributes to manifesting a wrong whose staging becomes "the original structure of all politics."[137] Following Rancière, language emerges as a bridge

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[129] May, 121.
[130] Rancière, Disagreement, 9.
[131] May, 121.
Rancière's use of the word 'stage' here is no accident. Theatre has a great influence on his work to the extent that vocabulary that is usually limited to theatre or theatre studies often completely integrated to his political discussions. For more on Rancière and theatre see Deranty, *Jacques Rancière : Key Concepts*; Hallward, "Staging Equality, On Rancière's Theatrocracy,"; and Jacques Rancière, *The Intellectual and his People: Staging the People* Volume 2.
[132] Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Ontology." **https://muse.jhu.edu/article/44780.**
[133] Ibid.
[134] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 50.
[135] Rancière, "Preface: Les gros mots » in *Les Scenes du peuple* (Lyon: Horlieu, 2003), 11.
[136] Oliver Davis, *Rancière Now: Current Perspectives on Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 158.
[137] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 39.

between equality and politics. Through the concrete figure of the stage, it also exemplifies how the complex relationship between equality and politics may materialise in concrete reality.

However essential to politics, language itself does not justify the necessity to consider equality as a presupposition conditioning politics. Beyond discussions of language, one could ask what is political about Rancière's egalitarianism. The answer, as often with Rancière, is quite direct. The egalitarian presupposition is political for it puts individuals on the path of emancipation.[138] Rancière defines emancipation as "a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition."[139] The declaration that everyone and anyone is equal must be verified prior to entering the realm of emancipatory politics. Language, though fundamental, appears insufficient in fully effecting the politicisation of equality.

Following Jacotot, Rancière treats emancipation as the verification that "intelligence is the same in all its operations and that it belongs to everybody."[140] Verifying equality depends on the will of individuals to confirm that they are equally intelligent to any other members of the community. Verification is not itself a guarantee for emancipation as "each situation can be dealt with either as an occasion for the verification of inequality or as an occasion for the verification of equality."[141] Verifying that intelligences are equal does not belong to the domain of science, let alone knowledge. Instead, equality creates its own self-generating space that can only be verified through emancipation.[142] In other words, emancipation is the political demonstration of the egalitarian presupposition. Verifying equality rests primarily on a subjective commitment.[143] One must be willing to have faith in

[138] Rancière position on emancipation differs greatly from the use that is commonly made of the term in contemporary political theory and popular culture. Emancipation is commonly associated with the liberation of certain oppressed groups that are defined through identity or class, and the capacity of these groups to achieve equal status with those who are in a position of dominance. For Rancière, emancipation concerns anyone. Emancipation is not merely attached to a levelling out of the social field through reparation, recognition, representation, or redistribution of certain groups, but to declaring that equality is a presupposition that must be verified. As Hallward writes, emancipation is "the blurring of the opposition between they who look and they who act, between those who are trapped by their function or identity and those who are not." [Hallward, "Staging Equality," 115.]

[139] Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization", 58; and Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 18.

[140] Rancière, "The Method of Equality," 139; and Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 18.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Rancière, *Au bords du politique*, 93.

[143] For Hallward, "Rancière's axiomatic conception of equality rightly affirms the primacy of subjective commitment as the basis of emancipatory politics." [Hallward, Staging Equality, 122.]

equality in order to verify it. Emancipation understood in these terms requires that individuals, if not fully emancipated, be open to the possibility of equality as a presupposition. If that is not the case, inequality will be verified in its place. Discussions making up the previous section of this chapter demonstrated that following Rancière, one does not have to fundamentally believe in the political virtues of inequalities to perceive them. Rather, inequalities become apparent when one fails to recognise equality for what it is (a presupposition). Both equality and inequality result from the strength of one's subjective commitment to equality. Either the commitment is strong and emancipation is possible, or it is absent and inequality will be verified in place of equality, rendering emancipation unachievable.[144] According to Jacotot's method, it is not knowledge but rather the belief that "society exists only through distinctions, and nature presents only equalities" that conditions people for emancipation.[145]

Can Jacotot be considered as an ignorant schoolmaster? After all, his innovative method results from years dedicated to theorising education. Rancière understands Jacotot, not as a genius or a savant, but as a type of egalitarian prophet whose power resides in announcing the benefits of his discoveries to the poor.[146] Looking back at Jacotot's role in communicating his method to the people in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière recognises that emancipation under the name of equality cannot be personified by a single individual. Jacotot, just like any of his disciples, only has the power to announce that all intelligences are equal.[147] Jacotot's role in relation to his own method is once again tied to language. The ignorant schoolmaster does not teach so much as he announces the emancipatory power of equality to those who do not play a part.[148] The towering figure of the master is effaced as soon as the messianic statement that 'all intelligences are equal' is uttered.[149] As a self-professed disciple of Jacotot, Rancière has the same task. Remaining faithful the presupposition of equality and Jacotot's method of intellectual emancipation, Rancière has

[144] Toscano, "Anti-Sociology and its Limits," 222.
[145] Jacotot, *Enseignement universel : Musique, 3d ed.* (1830), 194-195.
[146] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 18.
[147] Rancière, *Le maitre Ignorant*, 21.
[148] Politics for Rancière only occurs in a context where hierarchies are absent and little is specified besides the staging of a wrong and the consideration of equality as a presupposition. This relatively evasive consideration of politics leads Hallward to claim that "Rancière's conception of equality, tends towards improvisation." [Hallward, "Staging Equality," 120.]
[149] The egalitarian power of this statement is truly revealed by the declaration that "One could teach what one did not know, […] that a poor and ignorant father could, if he was emancipated, conduct the education of his children, without the aid of any master explicator." [Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 18.]

no choice but to dismiss his authoritative status as a philosopher following the declaration of equality. Recognising equality as a presupposition requires that the categories of status and identity be rendered irrelevant.[150] Only this way can the sensible be redistributed equally and along the lines of dissensus.

Subjectivation and the Political Stage

This chapter attempts to follow the conceptual path drawn out by Rancière's distinctive conception of equality. Abandoning 'the method of inequality' at core of political philosophy and social sciences, one must dissent from the police order's pre-imposed identities. Egalitarian politics requires that the people be accepted in its spontaneous and anarchical presentation. Through the emancipatory claim that anyone is capable of anything, equality can be declared and staged on behalf of 'those who have no parts.' What follows from the declaration of equality is its enactment through a process of 'subjectivation.' Treating subjectivity as a process already entails that subjects are made rather than given. In May's words, "To engage in a democratic politics is not to discover a subject of politics; it is to create one […] Equality is not received, it is made…"[151] In contrast to liberal and neoliberal approaches, the Rancierian subject is not an individual acting autonomously or heteronomously. Fully detached from individualistic concerns, subjectivation deploys the egalitarian presupposition on a 'new' collective political subject continuously working towards creating equality.[152]

Rancière's subject is a complex figure since it must persist as a 'non-identitarian' entity.[153] Although it speaks and acts on behalf of those who have no parts, the subject is not to be confounded with this pre-political category.[154] The political subject cannot be equated to the proletariat, marginalised groups, or dominated classes for it always erases pre-existing

[150] For Rancière subjectivation entails deidentification to the extent that a subject's name must be "different from any identified part of the community." [Rancière, *Disagreement*, 37, 59.] On Rancière's consideration of identity, Oliver Davis explains that "subjectivation is never simply the assertion of an identity but the refusal of an identity imposed by others, by the police order." [Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 376.]
[151] May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 71.
[152] Rancière, *Aux bords du Politique*, 119, 163.
[153] Ibid, 119.
[154] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 88.

categories by enacting a 'third people'.[155] Although Rancière's account of subjectivation remains fully aligned with his ground-breaking conceptualisation of equality, the subject's non-identity and emptiness ultimately makes it impossible to extract a clear picture of what egalitarian politics could be. Remaining faithful to his categorical rejection of 'the politics of the philosophers', and to the anarchical presentation of the demos, Rancière has no choice but to efface himself and his thought after introducing subjectivation. Post-subjectivation politics must remain an open question if it is to be dissensual, spontaneous, and truly in the hands of the people.

Subjectivation begins with one's dissensual extraction form the hierarchical order imposed by the police. As mentioned earlier, the inegalitarian fallacy must be exposed through speech and the enactment of a wrong. Subjectivation only results from successfully exposing the wrong as such.[156] Expressed on behalf of the uncounted, the wrong embodies the confrontation of two worlds, "the world where they [the uncounted] are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something 'between' them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where there is nothing."[157] Subjectivation always begins with the unveiling of the fallacy of inequality. Unlike the metapolitical denunciation of ideology and alienation, there is nothing behind the veil of inequality but everyone's equal intelligence. Staging the wrong does not expose a power-driven conspiracy. It simply displays the police's denial of equality's constant presence. Rose reminds Rancière's readers that "speaking about one's lack of access or belonging is not in and of itself political."[158] Rather subjectivation is activated when those who have no voice are heard by those who do, when those who have no part are finally seen as equal by those who already belong. Only from this rare moment when the whole relates to its most concealed parts, can the police order fundamentally transform as a result of subjectivation. In May's words, "to become a subject is to make oneself appear where there had previously been only categories, and indeed categories that rendered one or one's experience more or less invisible."[159]

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[155] Ibid; and Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction*, 66.
[156] Rose, 13.
[157] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 27.
[158] Rose, 101-109.
[159] May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 71.

Although it might be tempting to simply merge the recurrent figure of 'those without parts' with that of political subject, such conflation would be fallacious. The two categories are evidently not mutually exclusive, but the passive identification of not having a part does not guarantee subjectivation. As Rancière himself points out, "you cannot account for the construction of the political subject out of the suffering of the individuals who are involved in the creation of this subject."[160] The unrelatedness of victimisation and subjectivation is best exemplified by Rancière's distinctive interpretation of the term 'proletariat':

> In Latin, proletarii meant "prolific people"-people who make children, who merely live and reproduce without a name, without being counted as part of the symbolic order of the city. Proletarians was thus well-suited for the workers as the name of anyone, the name of the outcast: those who do not belong to the order of castes, indeed, those who are pleased to undo this order (the class that dissolves classes, as Marx said). In this way, a process of subjectivization is a process of disidentification or declassification.[161]

Here, Rancière presents his category of those without parts under the banner of the proletariat.[162] The originality of this reading resides in the fact that he mobilises the notion of proletariat, not based on class identification, but subjectivation.[163] Proletarians are not political subjects by virtue of being an exploited labour force, but because their (non)position in society may encourage them to emancipate from a consensus-based and inegalitarian repartition of the sensible.[164] Rancière's demand to act 'on behalf of those who have no parts'

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[160] Rancière, "The Method of Equality," 122.
[161] Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 5.
[162] Having emancipated from Marxist theory since his theoretical break with Althusser, Rancière is not fixated on the category of proletariat. He interchangeably uses labels such as 'the poor', the people, or proletariat to refer to those who have no parts. [Rancière, *Disagreement,* 39].
[163] Rancière appears willing to define the category of proletarian and worker more as a process than an identitarian subject: "'workers' does not designate an already existing collective identity. It is an operator performing an opening. The real workers who construct this subject do it by breaking away from their given identity in the existing system of positions." [Rancière "The Method of Equality," 92-3.]
For more on Rancière's discussion of 19th century workers see Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights* (London: Verso), 2012; and Jacques Rancière, *Courts Voyages au Pays du Peuple* (Paris: Point), 2015.
[164] The class-based political subjectivation of the proletariat achieved by reclaiming the means of production from the bourgeoisie is concisely summarised in Marx and Engels's Communist Manifesto: "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible. [Marx and Engels, "Proletarians

is useful to make sense of his rejection of pre-subjectivised identities. Hallward remarks that "a political subject is someone who acts out the principle of equality, who plays the role of those who have no role."[165] Due to the conceptual wall erected between identity and equality, Rancière has no choice but to allow everybody to speak on behalf of those who have no parts. Only enabling those without parts to speak by virtue of them being excluded would mean falling into the identarian trap of policed categories. Political subjectivation requires that one's belonging to a specific class, status, or role be erased. Remaining coherent with Rancière's egalitarianism demands that subjectivation be only "contingently related to pre-existing social identities."[166] Fully coherent with equality as a presupposition, Rancière's notion of acting or speaking 'on behalf of' is more problematic in light of his dismissal of representations. Indeed, is not the capacity to speak on behalf of someone not the very function of representation? In his quest to oppose all types of identity, Rancière seems constrained to commit a parapolitical slip by which politics becomes a question of appearance if only for a moment. Another way to consider this paradox is to treat the staging of equality as a dramatization of politics for the people and by the people. This is Hallward's position, interpreting politics as "the unauthorized and impromptu improvisation of a democratic voice."[167] Yet, in all its spontaneity, Rancière's political staging fails to fully address its relationship with representation.

Subjectivation entails deidentification.[168] It does so by inscribing "a subject's name as being different from any identified part of the community", based on the postulate that "neither the we or the identity assigned to it, nor the apposition of the two defines a subject."[169] This is a complete reversal of theories of recognition discussed in chapter one that aim to turn identity into a fully political category.[170] Engaged in a process of

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and Communists" in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.]
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm.

[165] Hallward, "Staging Equality," 117.

[166] Deranty, *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, 10.

[167] Hallward, « Staging Equality, » 111.

[168] Deranty, Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology, 119; and Rancière, *Au bords du Politique*, 119.

[169] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 37, 59.
In *Disagreement*, Rancière explains that there are virtually no limits to the ways in which a police order might count and therefore identify the sum of its parts: "The sum may be made up of individuals, small machines intensely exploiting their own freedom to desire, to undertake, and to enjoy. It may be made up of social groups building their interests as responsible partners. It may be made up of communities, each endowed with recognition of its identity and its culture. In this regard, the consensual state is tolerant." [Ibid, 123.]

[170] About Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, Rancière writes: "From my point of view, the cost might be the overstatement of identity, thinking the activity of a subject mainly as an affirmation of self-identity. […] The

subjectivation, identities serve no purpose apart from their vanishing. Yet, subjectivation represents much more than an elimination of identities. Joseph Tanke observes that deidentification is only a first step in the making of political subjectivity:

> The process of subjectivation contains two closely related moments. In the first instance there is the movement of dis-identification whereby the eventual subject of politics tears itself away from the identities, capacities, desires, and interests defined by the police. […] The second moment entails the creation of new subjectivities in excess of the parts already identifiable in the community. These political subjectivities revolve around 'impossible identifications,' names belonging to no one in particular […] The impossible identification allows the subject to extend beyond itself. In doing so, it redefines its capacities and insists upon its commonality with others.[171]

Only after staging politics can those with or without part claim to be subjects. Identity, even that which entails no parts, does not survive the process of subjectivation. Rancière confirms this when he writes that a political invention "is neither the feat of the sovereign people and its 'representatives' nor the feat of the nonpeople/people of labor and their sudden 'awareness.'"[172] Rather it is the task of a 'nonidentitary third people' "operating as such or under some other name and tying a particular dispute together on behalf of the uncounted."[173] The third people is the collective political subject able to produce inscriptions of equality detached from any claims to identity.[174] Enacted against identity, subjectivation denotes a political beginning from which "all distributions of social competences and identities" are denied.[175] Breaking from the logic of the police order, the subject is an invention.

'we' is not the expression of an identity; it is an act of enunciation which creates the subject that it names." [Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 86, 92-93.]

[171] Tanke, 66-67.

[172] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 88.

[173] Ibid.

For Rancière, the non identitarian subject of politics cannot be identified also by virtue of being a multiple containing many polemical voices: "political subjectification produces a multiple that was not given in the police constitution of the community, a multiple whose count poses itself as contradictory in terms of police logic." [Ibid*,* 36; and Davis, *Jacques Rancière*, 376.]

[174] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 100.

[175] Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 93.

What defines a political subject besides its 'impossible' relationship with identity? For Rancière, the subject has no self.[176] It must be defined negatively as 'emptiness' or 'absence' insofar as "the 'we' is not the expression of an identity; it is an act of enunciation which creates the subject that it names."[177] The subject generates and defines itself as collective. Neither Rancière nor anyone can claim the collective subject by identifying its parts without undermining the egalitarian promise it contains.[178] Not only would such claim compromise emancipation, it would also relegate Rancière to the position of political philosopher that he so vehemently rejects. The Rancierian subject carries only one name, 'the equal capacity of everyone and anyone.' In accordance with the egalitarian presupposition, May produces a portrait of the subject in contrast to the neoliberal individual: "Rather than seeing others among the demos as competitors for the same scarce, one begins to see them as just like oneself, engaged in the same struggle, confronting the same adversary."[179] Political subjectivation is the taking hold of equality on the subject through its verification. It is the dismantlement of inequalities, hierarchies, and competition through the realisation that all are effectively equal.

By verifying equality, one begins to see oneself in others. The hierarchical divides that once stood between individuals are presented in all their absurdity and arbitrariness. In a world where ranks and status have been erased, collective politics becomes evident for the equal capacity of everyone has been revealed. Individualistic behaviour inevitably becomes nonsensical based on the impossibility to reduce anyone to her or his identity. Conducts associated with marketised neoliberal subjects lose their appeal in a context where one's individuality reflects that of everybody else. The other no longer serves as a measuring stick for one's capital on a field of inequalities. Rather, the other becomes a reflection, for looking at them is fundamentally the same as looking at 'Us'. Far from a set limit on individual potentiality, declaring equality is also a form of individual emancipation. Ironically, the

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[176] Ibid, 122.
Hallward breaks down Rancière's assertion that the political subject is selfless writing that "there is no necessary link between who you are and the role you perform or place you occupy; no one is defined by the forms of thoughtless necessity to which they are subjected." [Hallward, "Staging Equality," 110.]
[177] Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 92.
About this, Deranty writes that "politics is conducted by empty subjectivities, not in the name of a substantive identity." [Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology," **https://muse.jhu.edu/article/44780.**]
[178] For Rancière, "Politics ceases wherever this gap no longer has any place, wherever the whole of the community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over." [Rancière, I, 123.]
[179] May, *Key concepts* in Deranty, 79.

Rancierian subject has the potential to conceptually approximate the liberal ideal of autonomy more than any subjective figure deployed throughout the liberal tradition. Less focused on the opinions and behaviours of other individuals, Rancière's subject is likely to be more detached from competition and desire-driven behaviours. In other words, heteronomy is less likely in a social context regimented by equality as a presupposition.

The Rancierian subject is more decipherable as a moment in time than a personified figure. This moment of clarity is that upon which equality is verified. Beyond the instant of verification, it is difficult to portray Rancière's political subject without venturing into pure theoretical speculations. Since the equal subject has no masters, it creates itself. For Rancière there is no fixed subject, only subjectivations. As poetic as this sounds, considering the subject as a continuous process also exposes the political limitations of Rancierian subjectivation. By remaining sealed-off from any form of identification, the Rancierian subject cannot be conceptualised as a concrete entity. The beauty of subjectivation as an open and spontaneous process only accountable to equality comes at the cost of its enclosing into the realm of pure abstraction. Away from identification and intellectual prescriptions, political subjectivation is on constant hold, awaiting the anarchical awakening of the demos. Nina Power perfectly summarises the difficulty of fully divorcing subjectivation from identity: "Rancière is obliged to resort to the admittedly appealing motif of 'the community of equals', which would either dispense with mastery all together (a totality without a master – a kind of anarchistic utopia) or 'an equality which is held together under a pure empty mark of mastery' (mastery without a master)."[180] As an anarchical figure, the Rancierian subject forbids the conceptualisation of egalitarian politics beyond subjectivation. There can be no speculative political thinking, let alone strategic planning for the post-subjectivation moment.

Fixated on breaking with the logic of the police, Rancière is forced to efface himself as a thinker to let the anarchical demos politically fulfil the egalitarian presupposition. It may be for this reason that he has "little to show us for how the egalitarian moments of eruption and dissensus might establish themselves as a new mode of 'proper' politics."[181] Rancière does not provide a clear picture of what politics could be beyond a total effacement of existing inequalities and identities. It is as if the radicality of his own thought paradoxically prevents him from idealising politics beyond the declaration of equality and the enactment of

[180] Nina Power, "Which Equality?," 76-77.
[181] Ibid, 77.

subjectivation. Unlike most social scientists and political philosophers, Rancière refuses to give way to any forms of inegalitarian bias within his own work, including that which involves his own identity and status as a political philosopher. The result of this commitment is twofold. First, it allows Rancière to open and expand the notion of equality more than any other contemporary thinker. On the other hand, it prevents him from guiding subjects on the path of concretely materialising egalitarian politics. In the words of his friend Alain Badiou, whose account of equality and subjectivation will be discussed in the following chapter, Rancière's system tends to 'pit phantom masses against an unnamed state', hence preventing the possibility of effectively organising politics.[182]

Conclusion

By treating equality as a starting point rather than a goal of politics, Rancière radically widens the horizon of emancipatory politics. Relentlessly discrediting political philosophers and social scientists who aim to uncover or 'resolve' inequalities, Rancière anchors his political thought on an uncompromising commitment to equality and an anarchical consideration of the demos. Building on the argument that aiming to eliminate inequalities ultimately contributes to their proliferation, Rancière radicalises equality into a disturbing force with the potential to shatter categories drawn out from the police order. Through dissensus and the anarchical composition of the demos, pre-assigned identities are rendered irrelevant by the declaration of equality in the name of 'those who have no part'. The strength of this declaration most clearly takes shape through Rancière's engagement with 'the ignorant schoolmaster' Jacotot. Alongside Jacotot, Rancière declares that all intelligences are equal, exposing the masquerade of hierarchies and status based on rank. Following this declaration, politics becomes the domain of anyone and everyone, for there can be no division of competence amongst the demos if politics is to take place. Ensuing from the declaration and staging of equality, politics is conditioned by a process of subjectivation. Resisting any form of identification, the Rancierian subject is not that without parts nor an autonomous individual, but a new collective entity that forms around the verification of equality. The non-identitarian character of subjectivation forbids it from closing upon itself, leaving the task of

[182] Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso, 2005), 121.

creating the new subject to the anarchical demos itself. As powerful and important as Rancière's consideration of equality is, his account of subjectivation is let down by the strength of his commitment to undermining identities at all cost. Ultimately, Rancière's opening of the political horizon appears as a theoretical eclipse. Although beautiful, it vanishes as spontaneously as it appeared, forbidding the possibility to think political materiality in its name. The next chapter will be dedicated to Alain Badiou's conceptualisation of egalitarian politics as a procedure of truth. Like Rancière, Badiou treats equality as a starting point of politics. He also follows Rancière in his consideration of politics as a rare and spontaneous event breaking with the established order of what is generally accepted as such. Yet, unlike Rancière, Badiou is willing to conceptualise egalitarian politics beyond the moment of subjectivation. Through his complex mathematical ontology and axiomatic consideration of equality, Badiou is able to clear a subjective path towards materialising egalitarian politics.

Chapter 4

Badiou and Egalitarian Politics: Being, Becoming, and Appearing

Introduction

Alain Badiou is undeniably one of the leading figures of contemporary French philosophy.[1] This success might first appear as the logical culmination of a prolific and linear intellectual career. It is instead the result of the elaboration of a complex and wide-ranging philosophy whose polemical potential is only exceeded by its sophistication and originality. The son of mathematician, he inherited a passion for this discipline which provides the foundation of his ontology carefully laid out in his magnum opus *Being and Event.* The incorporation of complex mathematical models to philosophy, a gesture quite unique amongst contemporary continental thinkers, is a distinctive trait of Badiou's thought.[2] Mathematics is not the only field to have a bearing on Badiou's philosophy. Discussions of theatre and poetry also regularly appear in is his writings.[3] In fact, interplay between philosophy and other specific disciplines or practices such as Art, Love, Politics, and Science is a cornerstone of his work.[4] He understands these four categories as 'truth procedures' that philosophy must attend to.[5] Here, the term 'truth' is crucial in situating Badiou's thought in relation to his contemporaries. Whereas most French philosophers of his generation notably including Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, or Jean-Francois Lyotard

[1] In France, Badiou is often introduced as the most read and commentated living French Philosopher. See Julie Clarini, « Alain Badiou et le Reveil de la Farce, » http://www.lemonde.fr/enquetes/article/2016/04/08/le-reveil-de-la-farce_4898581_1653553.html.

[2] In *Being and Event*, Badiou explains how his philosophical engagement with mathematics tends to be denigrated by both continental and analytical traditions of philosophy: "the representatives of analytic philosophy, including those in France, attempted to denigrate my use of mathematical formalism. However, due to that very use, the pure continentals found me opaque and expected a literary translation of the mathemes." [Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2007), xiv.]

[3] Badiou has written extensively on theatre and poetry, two artforms that are crucial to his understanding of philosophy. See Alain Badiou, *Pornographie du temps present* (Paris: Fayard), 2013; and Alain Badiou, *Rhapsody for the Theatre* (London: Verso), 2013.

[4] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 16.

[5] About the necessary relationship between philosophy and truths, Badiou writes, "A philosophy worthy of the name—the name which began with Parmenides—is in any case antinomical to the service of goods, inasmuch as it endeavours to be at the service of truths; one can always endeavour to be at the service of something that one does not constitute. Philosophy is thus at the service of art, of science and of politics." [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 343.]

endeavoured to deconstruct truths and grand narratives, Badiou remained philosophically committed to conceptualising the category of truth and faithful to his political ideals.[6]

Inasmuch as art, love, and science remain a passion and a constant source of philosophical inspiration, Badiou is best known for his engagement with politics both in thought and action.[7] A wide range of thinkers and activists have had a lasting influence on Badiou's Philosophy. One may cite Plato and Mao Zedong who remains Badiou's central influences when it comes to political action, Louis Althusser who taught Badiou at the *Ecole normale supérieure*, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Saint-Paul, or Jean-Paul Sartre. Badiou's life as a militant as much as his philosophical work remain irremediably linked to equality and politics. This is best demonstrated by his constantly renewed fidelity in the idea of communism. Fidelity, a key concept of Badiou's philosophy, mirrors the thinker's own commitment to militantism and communism, outlining the proximity of subjective action and thought in his understanding of politics.[8]

The ever-presence of politics in Badiou's work should not be interpreted as belonging to the realm of political philosophy. This is a label which he vehemently rejects and actively undermines.[9] Against this established tradition, Badiou considers philosophy as a means to decrypt the complex and sudden emergence of truth within the four 'generic' procedures of Art, Love, Politics, and Science.[10] Whereas political philosophers endeavour to think politics and its subjects from a privileged intellectual position, Badiou considers political truth to be

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[6] Peter Hallward and Slavoj Žižek provide a great account of Badiou's philosophical positioning vis a vis his contemporaries in their introductions to *Badiou a Subject to Truth.* [See Peter Hallward and Slavoj Žižek, *Badiou a Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press), 2003.]

[7] Badiou is known not only for his philosophical work but also for his fervent political activism which has had a deep impact on his understanding of politics since the 1960s. The chief political inspiration for his militantism was Maoism, brought to light by the events of the cultural revolution in China and, to a lesser extent, the revolts of May 1968 in France. During this period, Badiou contributed alongside Natacha Michel and Sylvain Lazarus to the creation of the Maoist group l'Union des Communistes de France marxiste-leniniste (UCFml), followed in 1985 by the Organisation Politique (OP). [Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2011.]

[8] In an interview with Bruno Bosteels, Badiou himself acknowledged this correspondence between his militant fidelity to the event of May 1968 and his philosophy: "I think that, to use my own terminology, my fidelity to what happened in that period is unquestionable, but it is also profound, because I think that a large part of my philosophy at bottom is an attempt fully to come to terms, including from my own experience, with what happened then, while at the same time explaining the reasons for remaining loyal to those events." [Badiou, 'Can Change be Thought?' in Bosteels*, Badiou and Politics*, 289.]

[9] This rejection is most clearly laid out in *Metapolitics* and will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. See Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso), 2005.

[10] Badiou, *Being and Event*, xviii, 341.

the result of an ephemeral event to which subjects are attached through their fidelity.[11] The notion of event is undoubtedly one of the most emblematic of Badiou's philosophy. It designates the interruption of an established situation through the intrusion of a truth during which what previously seemed impossible becomes a subjective possibility.[12] By discarding philosophies that aim to produce their own truth, Badiou philosophically empowers political subjects by proclaiming them subjects of truth. In his own words, "people think, people are capable of truth."[13]

Badiou's concept of event together with his critique of political philosophy outline his fidelity in the people's spontaneous capacity to politically act upon their equal condition. Politics is no longer thought from above but emerges unexpectedly amongst the people themselves. This approach clearly echoes the previous chapter's discussion of Rancière's egalitarianism. Not only do both thinkers aim to bring political philosophy down from its intellectual pedestal in order to empower political subjects, they also share a fundamental commitment towards equality as the starting point of politics.[14] Conceived as an axiom by Badiou and a presupposition by Rancière, equality fundamentally conditions the existence of politics for both thinkers.[15] The originality of Badiou's approach lies not in his consideration of equality as a starting point of politics but in his willingness to conceptualise and formalise politics beyond the emergence of an event. Where Rancière refrains from thinking politics beyond subjectivation, Badiou constructs a complex but coherent account of post-evental politics underpinned by his concepts of truth, subject, and fidelity. Far from being the pinnacle of politics, the event is merely the emergence of the new whose legacy must be realised by the rigorous work of faithful subject themselves.[16] Although the work of both thinkers carry equivalent theoretical weight in regards to equality, Badiou offers a crucial conceptual opening into the process through which politics may appear in the world, allowing his readers to conceive of politics beyond the mere declaration and 'staging' of equality.

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[11] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 23.

[12] Alain Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 16-17.

[13] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 98.

[14] Badiou clearly acknowledge the similarity between Rancière's and his approach to equality. In *Logics of Worlds*, he writes, "Rancière's conception of equality inspired me, and still does, because of its axiomatic power: equality is never the goal, but the principle. It is not obtained, but declared. And we can call politics the consequences, in the historical world, of this declaration. [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 560.]

[15] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 99; also see Keith Bassett, "Event, politics, and space: Rancière or Badiou'?," Space and Polity 3 (2016): 1-14.

[16] Quentin Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," *Parrhesia 12* (2011): 3.

This chapter is concerned with Badiou's unique and far-reaching conceptualisation of politics as a truth procedure.[17] Its structure follows the chronology of Badiou's process-based approach to politics. It will start with a discussion of Badiou's ontology and his axiomatic consideration of equality. As the fundamental starting point of politics, equality remains present at all stages of Badiou's political discussions, conditioning the philosophical deployment of crucial concepts such as political truth, event, subject, fidelity, and body. The discussion will then move on to the notion of event and its proximity with that of political truth. In this section, the succinct temporality and disruptive capacity of the event will be discussed alongside Badiou's understanding of truths as 'infinite' and faithful subjects as local incarnations of truths. The last section will look at processes by which politics appears in Badiou's political thought. Through the logic of appearance, truthful politics reveals itself alongside the idea of communism in contrast to what he refers to as a life 'emptied of idea' bearing the name of democratic materialism. Despite outrunning Rancière further down the path of egalitarian politics, Badiou remains quite reluctant to conceptualise politics as concrete materiality. Discussed as an idea, a truth, or a subject, Badiousian politics remains largely confined to an objectless world. Refusing to venture into the field of political economy, his discussion of the object of politics is often contained with the notion of the body. Although Badiou discusses the body at length, he does so in a way that systematically subordinates it to the 'truthful' subject. In other words, appearing political materiality always seems to be at the service of absolute political truths and its subject. The body serves to execute political truths but has no substantive role in materialising egalitarian politics. This arguably limits egalitarian politics to a largely transcendent and immaterial process, allowing for the possibility to treat the materialisation of equality from a purely dogmatic standpoint.

Being Equal

Badiou's philosophy is generally associated with the 'ontological turn' in political thought.[18] This intellectual movement is philosophically indebted to the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Lacan, incorporating the work of a wide range of contemporary

[17] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 29.
[18] Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2014), 47.

thinkers including Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agambden, Chantal Mouffe or Slavoj Žižek.[19] In the *Actuality of Communism*, Bruno Bosteels discusses the subtleties and novelty on the ontological turn:

> [contemporary ontology] presupposes neither the presence of being nor the identity of being and thinking as a guide for acting. On the contrary, ontology nowadays, in a well-nigh uniform fashion, tends to be qualified as spectral, nonidentical, and postfoundational. It tries to come to terms not with present beings, but with ghosts and phantasms; not with entities or things, but with events-whether with events in the plural, or, alternatively, with the singular event of the presencing of being as such, which should never be confounded with a given present, albeit a past or future one.[20]

One of the main consequences of focusing on the absence of being rather than its presence has been the impossibility of extracting a determinate form of politics from ontology.[21] This turn has provided significant challenges to contemporary thinkers of emancipatory politics developing their thought alongside or in spite of this spectral ontology. This equally applies to radical thinkers of democracy such as Wendy Brown, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Tony Negri or Jacques Rancière and contemporary communists like Alain Badiou, Bruno Bosteels, Jodi Dean, or Slavoj Žižek. All face the task of thinking politics in the present-absence of a ground.[22]

Taking this turn can easily lead into the intellectual impasse of theorising politics while failing to account for its materialisation. This is one of the main issues with Rancière's egalitarianism. Badiou is willing to provide a solution to this dilemma, making his philosophy one of the most stimulating contribution to contemporary political thought. The full scale of Badiou's distinctive ontology takes shape in *Being and Event,* first published in 1988. In this work, whose title resonates as a response to Heidegger's *Being and Time* and an homage to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Badiou constructs an especially complex ontology through

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid, 43-44.

[21] Ibid, 44.

[22] About this ambiguity Oliver Marchart writes, "the ontological weakening of ground does not lead to the assumption of the total absence of all grounds, but rather to the assumption of the impossibility of a final ground, which is something completely different as it implies an increased awareness of, on the one hand, contingency and, on the other, the political as the moment of partial and always, in the last instance, unsuccessful grounding. [Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press), 2007, 2.]

mathematics. In his view, being is pure multiplicity, implying that ontology considered as the science of being-qua-being is mathematics itself.[23] Badiou's equation of ontology and pure multiplicity is grounded in the mathematical models of Georg Cantor's set theory in which a set is understood as "the grouping into a totality of quite distinct objects of our intuition or our thought."[24] Set theory is concerned with infinite sets, entailing that every set is already part of another set which is itself part of another set… It is axiomatic to the extent that it provides its own set-based universe which has now become a recognised mathematical standard.[25] Writing about the philosophical appeal of set theory, Badiou breaks down its theological tendencies:

> [Cantor] ties the absoluteness of being not to the (consistent) presentation of the multiple, but to the transcendence through which a divine infinity in-consists, as one, gathering together and numbering any multiple whatsoever. […] [Cantor] saw that the absolute point of being of the multiple is not its consistency—thus its dependence upon a procedure of the count-as-one—but its inconsistency, a multiple-deployment that no unity gathers together.[26]

Badiou reads Cantor as a theologian for whom set theory represents "the rational demonstration of the disunion between infinity and the One."[27] Understood in these terms, divine infinity is no longer the sole bearer of the infinity of being. Instead, the latter is carried across by a multiplicity of infinities.[28] Following Badiou's dense philosophical reading of set theory, multiplicity appears as ungraspable and unnameable, transcended only by multiplicity itself. Quentin Meillassoux succinctly summarises Badiou's ontology as the equation of being

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[23] Badiou, *Being and Event*, xiii.
Pure multiplicity signifies that multiples being presented in an ontological situation have no other predicates than their own multiplicity. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 28.] The most crucial implication of pure multiplicity is that 'the one' is not. [Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2014), 23.] Alex Ling breaks down the notion of pure multiplicity and the subsequent absence of the one in non-mathematical language: "if there is no ultimate consistency or unity to being […] then being must be that which 'in-consists' [….] one [what is consistent] is not, strictly speaking, what is." On the other hand, "what is per se is multiple (devoid of any instance of the one, radically withdrawn from all possible unification)." [Alex Ling, in *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts* ed. A.J Bartlett and Justin Clemens (London: Routledge 2014), 49.].

[24] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 38; For more on Badiou's ontological use of Cantor, see Quentin Melllassoux, *Après la Finitude, Essai sur la necessite de la contingence* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2006), 141-143.

[25] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Set Theory." https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/set-theory/.

[26] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 42.

[27] Alain Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités L'être et L'évènement 3* (Paris : Fayard, 2018), 421.

[28] Ibid, 424.

and multiplicity to the point where being is nothing but multiplicity.[29] Bosteels considers Badiou's use of mathematics not to be crucial in grasping his political thought.[30] If that was the case, Badiou's politics would only be accessible to mathematicians able to grasp the complex numerical models deployed in *Being and Event*. It may however be claimed that Badiou's ontology brings forward several concepts and procedures that simultaneously reflect and shed light upon the egalitarian content of his political thought. Viewed through the prism of set theory, mathematics are themselves intrinsically egalitarian.[31] The fundamental notion of pure multiplicity already demonstrates inherent egalitarian traits by disregarding the content of interrelated multiples resisting to the one. Badiou perceives in set theory the potential of freeing ontology from the overbearing spectre of 'the One', opening new possibilities for a philosophical justification of equality.[32] His distinctive ontological approach neither corresponds to a theological ontology of 'the One', nor to a "empiricist or pragmatic ontology founded on relation."[33] Suggesting that the former approach was favoured in the classical age, while the latter defines modernity, he suggests that pure multiplicity has the potential to offer a third ontological alternative.[34] Badiou's application of set theory to ontology already hints at his understanding of equality as a fundamental axiom

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[29] Quentin Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," *Parrhesia 12* (2011): 2.
Perhaps the best way to present Badiou's understanding of being as pure multiplicity in non-mathematical terms would be to equate it to the notion of the Lacanian real succinctly defined as an "impasse of formalization." This enigmatic adage conveys the inaccessible and constantly fluid character of being as pure multiplicity. Badiou often refers to the Lacanian real to refer to his ontology. [Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 88, 163.]
Slavoj Žižek, one of the foremost philosophical disciples of Lacan, explains this interpretation of the real through the latter's status as "thoroughly non-substantial [as] a product of failed attempts to integrate it into the symbolic." [Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 129.]
Related to mathematics the impasse of formalisation is tied to the matheme's attempt to formalise "the real as impossible, as the impasse of thinking." [Samo Tomsic, "Matheme" in *The Badiou Dictionary*, ed. Steve Corcoran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 199.] What emerges from the philosophical analogy between Lacan's real and Badiou's view of being as pure multiplicity is their common ungraspable and unrecognisable dimension, hence impossible to effectively formalise.

[30] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* xviii.

[31] On this point Badiou writes, "in mathematics, regardless of whether demonstrations prove right or false, "all of them in the last resort, speak of the pure multiple, thus of the form in which the 'there is' of being-qua-being is realized." [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 241.]

[32] Keith Bassett considers the egalitarian content of Badiou's ontology in contrast to Rancière's: "Badiou's concept of equality is embedded in a formal and complex ontology of being, whereas Rancière insists equality is not an ontological principle at all, but a presupposition that only exists through its practical verification." [Bassett, 6.]

[33] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 40. Own Translation.

[34] Ibid. About the ontological revolution unleashed by Cantor's set theory Badiou writes, "[Cantor] simultaneously refutes religious transcendence and its Kantian critique, theological dogmatism and modern relativism." [Ibid, 424.]

of politics rather than a formal objective, setting the stage for the primordial role attributed to equality in his political thought.[35]

Apart from the foundational decision to begin with equality, Badiou also shares with Rancière the view that equality is fundamentally incompatible with the notion of pre-assigned identities.[36] About the difficult relationship between truth and identity, he writes that "truth is diagonal relative to every communitarian subset; it neither claims authority from, nor constitutes any identity."[37] Far from being directed to a particular set of individuals, truth is "offered to all, or addressed to everyone."[38] Accepting pure multiplicity as ontology demands that truth be universal, forbidding the possibility that it be intelligible only to particular subsets. The productive relationship between equality and non-identity is palpable in Badiou's ontology through the concepts of 'void' and 'generic multiple'. The enigmatic concept of the void is the 'proper name' of being. It follows "the legislative Ideas of the multiple" as "the pure utterance of the arbitrariness of a proper name."[39] As the proper name of being, the void echoes the unnameable character of being. Yet, far from an empty form, it also embodies inclusion.[40] The void is a foundational multiple. Ontology commences where the void unfolds and subsists in every multiple presentation as "the proper name of being."[41] It is undetectable, shapeless and yet, included in everything.[42] The anonymity and un-particularity of the non-identitarian void allows for its universal inclusion. The void, in its total presence and refusal of belongings, is fundamentally egalitarian. The concept of the void

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[35] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 99.

[36] As discussed in the previous chapter, Rancière considers that subjectivation entails deidentification to the extent that a subject's name must be "different from any identified part of the community." [Rancière, *Disagreement*, 37, 59.]; About this, Oliver Davis explains that "subjectivation is never simply the assertion of an identity but the refusal of an identity imposed by others, by the police order." [Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 376]
On the differences and similarities between Badiou's and Rancière's ontologies, also see Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology" *Theory & Event 6*, (2003): https://muse.jhu.edu/article/44780.

[37] Alain Badiou, *St Paul The Foundation of Universalism,* translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 14.

[38] Badiou, *St Paul,* 14.

[39] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 59.

[40] Badiou provides a clear account of the unique status of the void when he writes that "the void is a subset of any set: it is universally included; – the void possesses a subset, which is the void itself. […] The first property testifies to the omnipresence of the void. It reveals the errancy of the void in all presentation: the void, to which nothing belongs, is by this very fact included in everything. […] The void is thus clearly in a position of universal inclusion" [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 86.]

[41] Ibid, 59.

[42] Bassett, 2.

silently guides Badiou's reader through his specific understanding of equality as an axiom of politics. The void's facelessness and capacity for universal inclusion are two sides of the same egalitarian coin. Naming the void would irremediably limit its impact to particular subsets, prohibiting it from universal inclusion in the process.

In addition to the void, the concept of 'generic multiple' also clearly conveys the egalitarian character of Badiou's ontology. Taking shape in Cantor's 'revolutionary' set theory, the generic multiple shares a number of non-identarian characteristics with the void such as unnameability, un-constructability, or indiscernibility.[43] Anonymity preserves the egalitarian specificity of the generic. In *Conditions* Badiou explains this predicate when he writes that "a truth is essentially generic, implying that it can have no distinctive traits that enable it to be considered hierarchically."[44] The absence of name signals the impossibility of division, classification, and exclusion. Far from reductive, the term generic demands that all multiples be reached by truths. Far from detrimental, non-identity is a prerequisite for universal inclusion in Badiou's work. Beyond anonymity, a multiple can only be generic if it is subtracted from the knowledge of an existing situation. Because "knowledge excludes ignorance" and its ethical maxim is to "act and speak such that everything be clearly decidable", existing knowledge plays a detrimental role in the emergence of truths as generic procedures.[45] As the 'being of a truth', the generic multiple is un-representable but Badiou undertakes to show that it may be thought.[46] The being of a truth is generic to the extent that it is simultaneously indeterminate and complete, occupying the gaps of existing knowledge.[47] There is a superposition of paradoxes in this statement that must be broken down to make sense of the relationship between the generic and truth. First, a generic is indeterminate insomuch as it is absent and thereof indiscernible. However, it is complete in its relationship to truth whose

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[43] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 355.

[44] Alain Badiou, *Conditions* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992), 248. Own translation.
About the egalitarian content of Badiou's Ontology, Peter Hallward explains that "It is a rudimentary principle of Badiou's ontology, that all elements which belong to a situation belong (or are presented in, or exist, or count) in exactly the same way, with exactly the same weight." [Peter Hallward, "Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice," Culture Machine [Online], 4 (2002).]

[45] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 314.

[46] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 16.

[47] Ibid.
In L'Immanence des vérités, Badiou clearly states that "any thought contains a choice between the constructible or the generic." Generic thought is of course rarer since it entails "affirming without proof nor empirical certainty that there exists non-constructability and undecipherable truth hidden behind the veil of the conservative and language-focused established order. [Badiou, L'Immanence des vérités, 237. Own translation]

emergence always breaks with existing knowledge. Truth contradicts knowledge since existing finite knowledge will always be oblivious to the novelty of infinite truths in the generic procedures of Art, Love, Politics, and Science.[48] Inasmuch as knowledge is everywhere present and encyclopaedic, truth only succinctly appears through the occurrence of an event. Both knowledge and truth are opposed in terms of content, temporality, and presence.

From this brief discussion of Badiousian ontology, one can see that equality occupies a crucial role within Badiou's philosophy. Inasmuch as his formal demonstrations suggest a clear egalitarian tendency, Badiou also provides a direct account of the status held by equality within his political thought. Equality is the essential axiom of politics understood as a truth procedure.[49] Anindya Bhattacharyya clarifies the Badiousian understanding of axiom that stems directly from mathematics:

> Badiou's axiomatics derives strictly from modern mathematics, as opposed to the more traditional notion of an axiom. In ordinary speech, an axiom typically means a self-evident first principle, one whose validity is so universally accepted that it does not require any kind of proof. But this is not how mathematicians use the term. When mathematicians call something an axiom, they are not claiming there is anything self-evident about it. Rather the axiom is simply posited as a starting point for logical reasoning. It marks a decision for thought to proceed in one direction and not another, and an inaugural decision at that.[50]

Here the term 'decision' is crucial. Mathematicians designate an axiom that will serve as the foundation of all subsequent calculations. All demonstrations that follow must carry this axiomatic logic in order to be thought. An axiom does not depend on any factors other than its own declaration. Thus it must be understood as a leap of faith on the part of both thinker and subject. To claim that equality is the point from which politics begins requires that one's belief in that axiom be strong enough to generate complete commitment to the

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[48] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 173.
In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou provides a formal definition of 'generic procedure': "We call generic procedure the ontological process of the constitution of a truth, that is the production of a present […] The word generic stems from the fact that […] the object of the world constituted by the ensemble of this production, or the set of the consequences of the evental trace, is a generic set in the sense given to this word by the mathematician Paul Cohen: a set as little determined as possible, such that it is not discernible by any predicate." [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 586.]

[49] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 100.

[50] Anindya Bhattacharyya, "Axiom" in *The Badiou Dictionary*, 21.

procedure it inaugurates. An axiom is rooted in faith for "it can neither be proved nor guaranteed", but truthful politics cannot emerge without it.[51] Politically, axiomatic equality is "the strictly egalitarian recognition of the capacity for truth", contained within the declaration that people think and are capable of truth.[52] Equality appears in Badiou's work as a kind of meta-truth conditioning the truth procedure of politics itself. It simultaneously provides foundation and guidance to the unfolding of a political truth. Equality inaugurates and clears the path for the occurrence of a political truth.

Equality is singular amongst axioms to the extent that it puts 'the people' in charge of its political constitution, for its very essence is based on this popular capacity. The double inclusion of the people, first as subjects conceptually incorporated into the axiom and second as political actors, is unique to the political procedure. Badiou elucidates this unique political property in *Metapolitics*:

> Politics is the sole truth procedure that is not only generic in its result, but also in the local composition of its subject. Only politics is intrinsically required to declare that the thought that it is the thought of all. This declaration is its constitutive prerequisite. […] politics treats the infinite as such according to the principle of the same, the egalitarian principle. […] The infinite comes into play in every truth procedure, but only in politics does it take first place.[53]

Politics conceived as a generic procedure differs from Art, Love, and Science based on its foundational connection to an inherently egalitarian and generic subject. In this context, justice is "the theoretical name for an axiom of equality [referring] to a wholly disinterested subjectivity."[54] Justice simply names the egalitarian axiom and the subjective political procedures it enables.[55] There can be no justice without the prior recognition of the egalitarian axiom. On the other hand, axiomatic equality depends on disinterested subjects

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[51] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 99.

[52] Ibid, 98; About this statement Hallward writes, **"**A generic or axiomatic politics asserts affirms the 'political capacity of all people', the principle that 'everyone can occupy the space of politics, if they decide to do so'" [Hallward, Peter. "Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice".]

[53] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 141-143; Interestingly, Hallward often uses the terms axiom and generic interchangeably. See Hallward, Peter. "Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice".

[54] Badiou *Metapolitics* 100.

[55] In *Metapolitics*, Badiou provides a brief definition of justice as an outcome of political truths enabled by axiomatic equality: "We shall call 'justice' that through which a philosophy designates the possible truth of a politics[…] the qualification of an egalitarian moment of politics *in actu*." [Ibid, 99-100.]

to the extent that it inaugurates a political sequence that concurrently precedes and exceeds subjects. In a context in which symbolisation and representation have no hold, subjects exist as un-particular, faithful, equal, and disinterested. Drawing inspiration from Rousseau's notorious scepticism towards political representation, Badiou posits equality as the fundamental condition of general will.[56] Viewed this way, equality precedes a generic political procedure by presenting itself as an innate condition of the people itself.[57] On the relationship between equality and politics, Badiou writes that "As an intrinsic qualification of general will, equality is politics, such that, a contrario, any in-egalitarian statement, whatever it may be, is antipolitical."[58] This interdependence is supplemented by the belief that politics in its bare form is the existence of the people.[59] The common appears as essentially equal to the extent that it is not 'made' political by an added layer of representation that would negate general will and the intrinsic equality it embodies.

The axiomatic recognition of equality and the subjective empowerment it generates, coupled with the rejection of any types of political representations of the people are arguably the points where Badiou's and Rancière's thoughts are most undistinguishable. By positing equality as a presupposition and a declaration from which politics emanates, Rancière also points to the subject as the political protagonist *par excellence*.[60] His distinctive interpretation of Jacotot's concept of equality of intelligence closely resembles Badiou's axiomatic statement that "people think, people are capable of truth".[61] In both cases the people is trusted to realise its political potential through subjectivation free of any hierarchical guidance. It is henceforth not a surprise to see both Badiou and Rancière vehemently rejecting the tradition of political philosophy. There are clear similarities between both critiques of political philosophy. One is the argument that philosophers cannot and must not generate

[56] Badiou writes about Rousseau that "[his] acuity extends to his perception that the norm of general will is equality. This is a fundamental point. General will is a relationship of co-belonging of the people to itself. It is therefore only effective from all the people to all the people. […] It is because general will indiscerns its object and excludes it from the encyclopaedias of knowledge that it is ordained to equality. […] Rousseau rigorously proves that general will cannot be represented, not even by the State: 'The sovereign, which is solely a collective being, can be represented only by itself: power can quite easily be transferred, but not will.'" [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 347.] Also see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin Books), 1968; For a good analysis of the Rousseauist content of Badiou's thought see Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless*, (London: Verso), 2012.

[57] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 68.

[58] Ibid, 347

[59] Ibid, 348.

[60] See Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* and chapter 3.

[61] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 98.

truths.[62] In other words, philosophy can no longer fully determine its object.[63] Although Badiou and Rancière frame this argument differently, in each case it emanates from a desire to detach the philosopher from the elitist task of shaping and directing subjects towards what is thought to be 'good' politics.[64] Both also agree that political philosophers cannot be separated and placed above the world from which their philosophy springs. In other words, philosophers are not entitled to a privileged political position. they cannot decide what prescribes politics, since that is the task of equality conceived as an axiom or a presupposition.

By deciding to ground both subject and political philosopher in a world of existing truths, Badiou theoretically steps away from Rancière. For Badiou, philosophy must strive to be at the service of truths, proposing a conceptual framework in which "the contemporary composability of these conditions can be grasped."[65] In other words, the purpose of philosophy is to serve the truth procedures of Art, Love Politics, and Science. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rancière usually avoids associating the category of 'truth' to politics.[66] Rancière's reluctance to venture into the land of truthful politics arguably prevents him from conceptualising politics beyond subjectivation.[67] On the one hand, providing an account of truthful politics would contradict his commitment to the anarchical character of the demos. On the other, it would assimilate his work to that of political philosophers aiming to dictate

[62] The clearest illustration of Badiou's rejection of political philosophy may be found in Metapolitics. Throughout the book, the political philosopher is described as having the triple advantage of being first an analyst of the "brutal and confused objectivity which constitutes the empirical character of real instances of politics", then "the one who determines the principles of the good politics", and finally "the one exempt from militant involvement in any genuine political process." [Badiou, Metapolitics, 10.] Each of these positions has a particularly antipolitical resonance for Badiou. The first is the figure of the 'expert' who reacts to empirical trends he or she recognises as desirable or unavoidable. The second figure is the elitist philosopher who can set political standards from a distance, a point of view both separated and higher to that of the politicised people. The third figure depicts an intellectual unwilling to put her/his capacities at the service of a true political cause, refusing her/his political subjectivation. Badiou illustrates his rebuttal of political philosophy through Hannah Arendt's Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy. Based on Kant's simultaneous admiration for the French revolution as a historical occurrence and rejection of its revolutionary actors, Arendt agrees that there is a clash "between the principle according to which you should act and the principle according to which you judge." [Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 12.] From a Badiousian perspective, Kant and Arendt's position is deeply problematic as it detaches the experience of politics from its thought. The philosopher is endowed with the task of thinking and historicising politics in opposition to its imperfect (yet real) manifestation in the world. See Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1992.

[63] Alberto Toscano in Badiou, *Being and Event*, xix.

[64] For Rancière, this position is fundamentally inegalitarian since it emanates from the belief that subjects do not have an equal capacity to think and act politically. [Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, 63; and Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 138.]

[65] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 4, 341.

[66] Nina Power, "Which Equality? Badiou and Rancière in Light of Ludwig Feuerbach," *Parallax* 15 (2009): 65.

[67] See previous chapter for a thorough definition of Rancierian subjectivation.

what is to be the content of politics in place of the people. Conversely, Badiou conceptualises politics beyond subjectivation by recognising that truths may be thought in spite of their unpredictability.[68] Although thinkable truths remain elusive, belonging to Artistic, Loving, Political, and Scientific procedures that escape the creationist ambitions of political philosophers.

Both Rancière and Badiou recognise the need to detach philosophy from its foundational ambition of generating 'pure' truth. The originality of Badiou's proposition is that philosophy operates on the basis of already existing truths that are both the source and target of philosophy.[69] Not unlike equality for politics, truth procedures condition philosophy, providing the raw material for philosophical enquiry. In the case of politics, one must be careful not to assign to philosophy the task of decoding any 'real life' occurrences that are attached to politics in the general sense of the term (parliamentary politics, consumer groups, identity politics…). Politics conceived as a truth procedure is rare, brief, and singular. It is a fragment of truth which allows philosophy to think.[70] The rarity of politics is yet another similarity between the work of Badiou and Rancière.[71] Whereas many contemporary critical theorists consider politics to be everywhere present in the form of power struggles (emblematised by the statement that the personal is political), they both recognise politics as an exceptional and unusual occurrence.[72] Yet, only Badiou is willing to conceptualise politics as a truthful process breaking from existing knowledge and representations.[73] By doing so, he draws philosophy towards a world of existing and absent truths placing the ancestral discipline on level terms with generic procedures. Once relocated, philosophy must identify and interpret the discontinuous evental sequences constituting generic procedures (only philosophy can achieve this task).[74] In other words, philosophy has the noble task of

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[68] Badiou, *Being and Event,* 16.

[69] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, xxxiii.

[70] Ibid, 97.

[71] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 139. Also see Hallward, "Staging Equality, On Rancière's Theatrocracy," 123.

[72] Looking at the evolution of Badiou's thinking regarding the relationship between philosophy and politics, Bosteels writes, "philosophy should no longer abdicate its own powers by subordinating both itself and the four truth procedures to a single one of them, as Badiou himself claims to have done with politics under the influence of Marxism. 'Everything is political;' the recurrent slogan of the 1960s and 1970s, signals precisely such a subordination of philosophy to one of its conditions of existence-a process that Badiou now rejects as a 'suture' of philosophy." [Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 25.]

[73] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 327.

[74] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 94, 97.

designating what is worthy of the name politics. This new object of philosophy is what Badiou calls 'metapolitics'.[75]

Becoming Truthful

The previous section introduced Badiou's distinctive ontology. Approaching ontology through set theory enables Badiou to associate being with pure multiplicity and to desacralize the unicity of 'the One'. A particularity of pure multiplicity is to be neither representable nor unifiable, confirming Badiou's adherence to an ontology of absence rather than presence. This shift enables Badiou to "renounce god without losing any of its advantages."[76] Far from being erased, the transcendent and infinite qualities of 'the One' are split open only to be redistributed amongst nameless multiples.[77] This foundational philosophical gesture sets the stage for Badiou's axiomatic consideration of equality infusing the entirety of his political thought. Moving away from purely philosophical discussions, the following section remains dedicated to unfolding the subtleties of Badiou's egalitarianism. It will do so by discussing how equality subsists within a political truth procedure inaugurated by an event. If equality is a condition of being, what kind of politics can rightfully endorse the label of metapolitics? How, where, and when does such politics occur for Badiou? Who bears the transcendent power of truth? These questions must be answered in order to grasp the singularity of Badiou's account of egalitarian politics.

Because politics emanates from a rare event breaking with the order of existing institutions and knowledge, it is often discussed in relation to what stands in its way. Conceptualising state institutions as obstacles to politics enables Badiou to consolidate his account of politics as a process of emancipation. One overarching entity whose undoing conditions the existence of politics is the state of a situation. It is usually associated to the classical figure of the state and often represents, like knowledge, an obstacle to truth.[78] It was shown earlier that Badiou's consideration of being is different from his qualification of *what*

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[75] Ibid, 152.
[76] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 27 Own translation.
[77] The dismantlement of Oneness into the multiplicity of the people is yet another shared commitment between Badiou and Rancière. For more on this see Deranty, "Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology" *Theory & Event 6 (*2003) https://muse.jhu.edu/article/44780.
[78] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 98.

is in the world. His ontology takes root in absence rather than presence so that *what is* is not being but rather what is presented in a structured situation.[79] This distinction implies that, despite being here, the state of an existing situation does not contain truths. On the contrary, truths emerge as a rupture with a present situation through the incalculable appearance of an event in the domains of Art, Love, Politics, or Science.[80] With the idea that there are no truths in existing situations, Badiou exposes the strange temporality of his political thought. Although truths are measurable in empirical time, they constitute an exception, a break from empirical reality that can itself be grasped from "any other point of time or any other particular world."[81] Political truths are not reflections of existing collective consensuses, political behaviours or opinions, but precisely what breaks the certainty of the existing state of that situation. Ontologically, situations are structured by the operation of 'counting as one' multiples that are presented within it.[82] This operation consists in splitting multiples into consistencies, identifying and counting as one multiples which previously were ungraspable pure multiples.[83] The result of this operation is what a situation presents in the form of a structured presentation.[84] Although pure multiplicity is already present as the name of being, the state attempts to identify, organise, and rename its parts as a means to strengthen its hold over the situation.[85]

The crucial point for Badiou is that the 'count as one' reveals the operation of a second count by which "all situations are structured twice."[86] The second count designates the state's re-presentation of pure multiples already belonging in a situation merely by virtue of being here as such. It is from this 'count of the count' that Badiou differentiates between presentation and representation, structure and metastructure, or a situation and the state of a situation. The state of a situation is associated with the second representative operation since it is not concerned with the elements of a situation, but with "the way these elements are grouped into parts or subsets of this situation."[87] Each operation contains a distinctive

[79] Ibid, 94.
[80] Ibid, xii.
[81] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 33.
[82] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 34.
[83] Ibid, 53.
[84] Ibid, 102.
[85] Ibid, 107.
[86] Ibid, 94.
[87] Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth*, 95.

vocabulary. Whereas *elements belong* to a situation, *subsets* are *included* to the state of this situation.[88] The choice of words characterising the state of a situation hardly conceals Badiou's disdain for the state and political representation.[89] The idea that elements belong to a situation may be associated to an egalitarian and rightful political project, while the inclusion of subsets denotes a mechanical, detached, and almost bureaucratic process.[90] Breaking with pure abstraction, Badiou offers an illustration of the shift between a situation and its state:

> A family of people is a presented multiple of the social situation (in the sense that they live together in the same apartment, or go on holiday together, etc.), and it is also a represented multiple, a part, in the sense that each of its members is registered by the registry office, possesses French nationality, and so on.[91]

Whereas presentation can be associated to what is clearly visible and present, representation denotes a secondary identification, a reification of what has already been presented. More concretely this implies that the oppressive power of the state is revealed by the reifying bureaucratic dimension of recounting or re-labelling its parts. The state of the situation is an obstacle to politics to the extent that it is concerned with the identification of parts, a process that is incompatible with axiomatic equality.[92] Belonging is itself a sufficient process of identification, for the one who belongs is that who is (presented) here.[93]

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[88] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 103.

[89] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 38.

[90] In Being and Event, Badiou directly acknowledges a co-dependence between the notions of equality and belonging. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 415.]

[91] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 174.

[92] Hallward explains the antagonism between Badiou's egalitarian conception of politics and identity or the act of naming: "a political or generic community is a community that exists for as long as it is able to resist naming itself, making itself into an identity." [Hallward, "Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice".]

[93] Two recurring figures of Badiou's political discussions illustrate the cruciality of this break between presentation and representation. One the one hand, the voter is included in the state of a situation since the act of voting quite literally denotes 'the count of the count' at work in statist representation. One's inclusion as a voter does not in any way guarantees political subjectivity for it is irremediably tied to the state of a situation. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 107.] On the other hand, an immigrant here illegally belongs to a situation merely by virtue of her/him being here, just like any other person also present in this situation. [Alain Badiou, "What Is to Be Thought? What Is to Be Done?," 15.] This does not imply that belonging is a synonym of political subjectivity, but that it is one of its conditions. However, inclusion, representation, and the state exclude and prevent political change. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 110.]
The idea of belonging exhibits the axiomatic character of equality at work in Badiou's thought. Whoever is here (presented in a situation) already belongs. It is only through the second count defining state representations that inequalities appear. Three types of structures emerge as a result of the belonging/inclusion dialectic, "the normal, which are presented and represented; the singular, which are presented and not represented; and the excrescent, which are represented and not presented." [Ibid, 100.]

Badiou recognises the conflation between his concept of state of the situation and the classical conception of state when claiming that the rejection of the latter is a prerequisite for the possibility of politics.[94] The characterisation of the state as a hindrance concerns political action as much as political thought. For Badiou, the state is not merely the place of power policing the emergence of alternative forms of politics. Rather, it represents in its very essence the impossibility to think politics and the impasse of equality.[95] The rejection of the state is yet another position that is common to both Rancière and Badiou. Rancière similarly dismisses the political capacity of the state based on its misidentification of the people, leading to policing rather than politics.[96] Surpassing or dismantling the state has also been a common theme of communist literature from Marx to Lenin.[97] However, Badiou also incorporates the sacrosanct institution of party within his political critique, placing him at odds with many contemporary communist thinkers for whom the state and the party do not stand in the way of emancipation and equality.[98] Badiou, like Rancière, designates the state as a 'non-thought', requiring that politics be approached differently.[99] Yet, unlike Rancière or contemporary communist thinkers like Slavoj Žižek or Jodi Dean, he is willing to think and formalise the process by which truthful politics happens and appears beyond the state through the conceptual deployment of 'the event'.

Such classification leaves little to the reader's imagination. Full representation is irremediably tied to the state and the imagery it produces, it is waste since it refutes any form of belonging, closing itself off to equality. At the other end of the spectrum, the singular structure escapes the state completely. It is pure belonging and therefore faithful to the egalitarian axiom. Its singularity mirrors the brevity and novelty that characterises an event through which truth are produced. [Ibid, 101.]

[94] Hallward, "Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice"; and Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 29.

[95] Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 17.

[96] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 109; and Rancière, *La Haine de la Démocratie*, 79.

[97] In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx claims that "in real democracy, the political state would disappear." [Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right 1843." https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch02.htm.]
About the Leninist view of the state, Badiou explains that "for Lenin, the aim or idea of politics is the withering away of the State, the classless society, and therefore the disappearance of every form of State, including, quite obviously, the democratic form. This is what one might call generic communism, whose principle is provided by Marx in the 1844 Manuscripts." [Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 79.]

[98] A notable defence of the cruciality of the party for radical politics can be found in Dean's *the Communist Horizon* in which she dismisses Badiou's rejection of the state and the party. She perceives his emphasis on the subject as an individualisation of communism which damages its essentially collective roots. [Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012), 194-195, 207.] In a similar fashion, Žižek argues that "politics without the organizational form of the Party is politics without politics." [Slavoj, Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates* (London: Verso, 2002), 297.]

[99] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 87.

In a context where political truths cannot emerge from the existing state of a situation, what is the process by which politics comes to light? The answer to that question, as is often the case with Badiou's philosophy, is as enigmatic as it is powerful: "the inception of a politics of its statements, prescriptions, judgements and practices is always located in the absolute singularity of an event."[100] An event is a unique rupture with the existent (normal order) of a situation, it is real change, the possibility of possibilities that previously were unconceivable.[101] Events are always bound to the generic procedures of Art, Love, Politics, and Science. Politically, an event provides a way out of the rigidity of a situation and its state by transcending nameless multiples and re-presented individuals into truthful subjects. The truth of egalitarian politics arises at the junction of an event and a subject's fidelity to that event.[102] Equality arguably appears in three forms within the political procedure inaugurated by an event. It first emerges alongside the event's unveiling of the state's inegalitarian mode of re-presentation, it then shines through the truthful novelty of an occurring event, and ultimately persists through the eternal possibility of a new form of subject-based politics.

The event is undoubtedly the most recognisable concept of Badiou's philosophy. Although it remains consistent with the common usage that is made of the term as "a thing that happens or take place", Badiou's definition is far subtler.[103] Through its unexpected occurrence, an event is "the maximal becoming of the intensity of existence of what was the proper inexistent of the site", absolutizing the inexistent.[104] Put more simply, an event is the "necessary upsurging of that which has no name."[105] Simply by virtue of becoming, an event "is itself more than a fact, which is in turn more than a modification."[106] It is truth in action, for truth requires not only the support of pure multiplicity but also that of an evental occurrence.[107] Evental truth cannot be philosophically thought, nor does it establish itself as the 'to come' of the political. Rather than the culmination of political thought, an event is a singularity "with which a thought begins."[108] It is as spontaneous as it is unexpected since its

[100] Ibid, 23.
[101] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 585; Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 16; Meillassoux, 2.
[102] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 239.
[103] "Event" in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 158.
[104] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 585.
[105] Badiou, *l'Immanence des vérités*, 21. Own Translation.
[106] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 585.
[107] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 430.
[108] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 357.

truthful content materialises as a break from the existing state of a situation, insisting "in exception to the forms of the 'there is.'"[109] A novel event escapes the count of the state, remaining unpredictable as a fact.[110] It startles the state of a situation by emerging as faceless and indecipherable through the means of existing knowledge.[111] Based on Badiou's opposition of present knowledge and absent truth, Hallward points out that the philosopher's motto becomes "trust only in what you cannot see."[112] One must break with empiricism in order to capture the substance of an event as "what subtracts itself from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and the transcendentally discontinuous." [113]

The event does more than merely offer a mysterious counterpoint to the state. In fact, it works directly against the state, revealing the latter's monopoly on the situation and the fallacy of its representative apparatuses. Badiou depicts the confrontation between the event and the state as an interruption through which the state is measured, given a figure, and revealed in its excessive power and repressive facet.[114] It is as if the state was caught out at its own power game by the eruption of an event, its role shifting from that of the measurer to the measured, from the observer to the observed. An event puts the state at a distance and measures it in all its excess.[115] Viewed in this light, a political event first appears as a critical device, deconstructing the state's inegalitarian re-presentation of its parts prior to introducing the real possibility of equality.[116] In order to incarnate the new, an event must

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[109] Ibid, 6.

[110] Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 22.

[111] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 337.

[112] Peter Hallward *Some Reply to a demanding friend* cited in "Order and Event," 121.

[113] [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 387.]
Badiou is conscious of the mysteriousness of his account of event as a radical rupture with whatever one can see or experience in the world. In Metapolitics, he introduces the concept as a kind of empirical inversion: "Ordinarily, conceptual construction is reserved for structures whilst the event is rejected into the pure empiricity of what-happens. My method is the inverse. The count-as-one is in my eyes the evidence of presentation. It is the event which belongs to conceptual construction, in the double sense that it can only be thought by anticipating its abstract form, and it can only be revealed in the retroaction of an interventional practice which is itself entirely thought through." [Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 178.] Here, Badiou turns empiricism upside down by registering truth with what is absent rather than present in a situation. The thinker is well-aware of this reversal when he opposes truth (dependent on the event) with 'the veridical' (tied to the knowledge of a situation). [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 333.] Following Badiousian logic, facts are opposed to truth since they merely name "the consequences of the existence of the state." The knowability and predictability of knowledge so valuable to states plainly contradicts the startling occurrence of an event and the novelty of its truth. [Ibid, 314.]

[114] Badiou *Metapolitics*, 145.

[115] Ibid, 149.

[116] In *Badiou and Politics*, Bosteels provides a concise chronology of the impact of a political event: "this process first assigns a measure to the excess of representation that is, it sets a limit to the power of the state;

first shine light on the (mis)representations of the state.[117] It must reveal the absurdity of the second count operated by the state on its parts, assigning numbers and identities to a collective whose only distinctive trait is that of pure multiplicity. The event's uncovering of the state's miscount also reveals the state's unwillingness to proceed from the egalitarian axiom, choosing to divide and categorise instead of basing its operations on the premise that all are equal and therefore essentially indivisible. In Badiou's work, the projection of the truthful content of an event is clearly facilitated by the state's incurable political impotence. An event conveys equality not simply by interrupting the inegalitarian categories of a state, or through the new political possibilities it offers, but also by containing itself amongst the elements of its site "thus being presented by the very presentation that it is."[118] Presented in these terms, a political event is immanent to itself.[119] It is also immanently egalitarian by breaking the laws of the count to embrace pure belonging. Provided that it has a site, the event is an intrusion of the real of equality into presented reality.[120]

Despite his reservation towards developing an empirical account of the event, Badiou concedes that its occurrence depends on the existence of a site. An evental site is an abnormal multiple, one that is presented but whose content escapes representation, entailing that the site itself is not part of the situation.[121] A site is abnormal since "none of its terms are counted-as-one as such; only the multiple of these terms forms a one."[122] It must be thought less as a geographical location than a moment during which the discrepancy between ontological

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second, it elabors the particulars of the situation to render impossible any inegalitarian statement and make equality possible in this fixed distance […] finally, it seeks to anticipate the generic applicability of the egalitarian statement to the whole situation itself." [Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 271.]

[117] By conceptualising the event as a twofold process, Badiou inscribes his concept within the leftist tradition of critique best symbolised by Marx's meticulous account of capitalism. [See Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books), 1990.] The event reflects a form of dialectical thinking by which truth does not simply materialise but comes about by unveiling the falsehood of an existing order. Perhaps more interestingly, this dual process also echoes the unravelling of historicised revolutionary events. There would have been no storming of the Bastille without the popular acknowledgement that the majoritarian third estate had been purposely kept under the boot of the monarchy and the clergy. The event's correspondence with both doing and undoing reveals its dual dimension. [Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 23.]

[118] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 189.

[119] Ibid, 181.

[120] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 161.

Badiou often refers to events as 'strong singularities'. He explains this association in *Logics of Worlds*: ""we can say that existing maximally for the duration of its appearance/disappearance confers on the site the power of a singularity—but that the force of a singularity lies in making its consequences, and not just itself, exist maximally. We reserve the name 'event' for a strong singularity [*singularité forte*]." [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 374.]

[121] Badiou*, Being and Event*, 175.

[122] Ibid.

being and empirical presence (being-there) is cancelled.[123] About the spatial presence of a site, Badiou enigmatically declares that the evental site is simply a multiple on the 'edge of the void.'[124] A site is "an ontological figure of the instant", appearing "only to disappear."[125] Bosteels calls attention to the fact that set theory does not recognise the existence of previously uncounted multiples that mathematicians label as 'extraordinary'.[126] The event itself is an extraordinary occurrence, a fundamentally "rare sequence through which political truth is constructed."[127] Politics, resulting from an event, is the formulation of "unheard-of and seemingly absurd possibilities", it is 'the art of the impossible', making the impossible (within the state of a situation), possible.[128] A site supports this brief evental moment during which the wall between the politically impossible and empirical reality crumbles, where political truth become palpable if only for an instant. An evental occurrence is always brief and does not in itself define a long political sequence. Rather, it is an ephemeral beam of truth which inaugurates rather than exhausts a political procedure.

In Badiou's work, the event conditions the possibility of egalitarian politics. It does so by unveiling the unfair count of the state, belonging only to itself, and by enacting a truth that transcends its subjects. The notions of event and truth are mutually constitutive. An untruthful event is emptied of any meaning, while a truth will fail to reach its subjects without the support of an event.[129] The notion of truth lingers throughout Badiou's writings. This complete commitment to truth is unusual within the landscape of contemporary theory. As shown in the previous chapter, Rancière whose conceptualisation of equality is closest to Badiou's, refuses to explicitly incorporates the notion of truth to his work. Although Rancière's conception of equality appears to implicitly endorse the status of truth, he discards

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[123] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 369.

[124] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 175.
It was shown in the previous section of this chapter that the void cannot be counted, named, or presented and yet belongs to every multiple. An event cannot fully belong to the void since it must be presented (but not represented, hence its singularity) to interrupt a situation. If it is not part of a situation, an event will not take place. It will only occur if its site is placed on the edge of the void, providing a "point of being of historical presentation" for the event. [Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 72; and *Being and Event*, 201.] Essentially, an evental site exhibits the uncertain place of the event located between its presentation in-situation and the void itself. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 182, 201.]

[125] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 369.

[126] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 2.

[127] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 101.

[128] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 237, 241.

[129] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 364.

the term as too categorical.[130] For Badiou however, there can be no doubts on the existence of truths. For him "there are bodies and languages except that there are truths."[131] Truths theoretically enable Badiou to conceptualise politics beyond the mere declaration or axiomatisation of equality. Although the foundational status held by equality persists as a pillar of Badiou's political thought, acknowledging the presence of truths substantiates his understanding of event, subject, and ultimately politics. To the extent that the egalitarian axiom conditions politics in its entirety, the latter must be substantiated by an evental truth. What makes politics truthful? Badiou explores the depths of this question in his latest publication *The Immanence of Truths*.

Whereas Badiou links the category of truth to other distinctive concepts such as generic procedures and events, his latest book is specifically dedicated to the 'immanence' of truths. As immanent possibilities, truths offer a pathway towards 'infinity':

> Truths are in an immanent relationship with the absolute meaning of their own value. […] the sign of such absolute immanence is provided by the infinite value of a truth. A truth is always witness to the possibility of an imminent transition from finitude to infinity.[132]

Truths are infinite, offering limitless possibilities in a finite world. The exceptional status of truths is conferred by their universal value.[133] When occurring through an event, a truth is infinitely open to all. Unlike the state which addresses each of its parts in different (finite) ways, a truth speaks to its subjects with one universal voice. This truthful voice is universal not only in relation to the totality of subjects it speaks to, but also in accordance to its potential to be "transported, transmitted, translated towards other worlds, possible or real."[134] Inasmuch as the universality of truth is addressed to all, it can also be heard through time echoing the occurrence of a past event. A fundamental condition for the occurrence of all truths is their capacity to overcome finitude.[135] In this framework, the event presents itself

[130] Nina Power, "Which Equality," 65.
[131] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 4.
[132] Badiou, *L'Immanence des vérités*, 12. Own translation.
[133] Ibid, 11.
[134] Ibid, 11. Own translation.
[135] Ibid, 75.

as "an exception within the necessary chain of finitude."[136] Finitude must be understood negatively as what is to be undone by truth, the oppressive limit placed upon human action.[137] Badiou identifies four types of finitudes: religious oppression, state oppression, economic oppression, and philosophical oppression.[138] State oppression and, to a lesser extent, philosophical oppression have already been discussed as obstacles to truth earlier in this chapter. The third and final section of this chapter will provide more concrete examples of state and economic oppression as well as their political alternatives interrupting the normal finite state of a situation by revealing the infinity of truths through an event. The event is a universal window on infinite political possibilities.

In addition to his consideration of truths as infinite, Badiou treats truths as 'absolute'. The event itself is not an absolute beginning, but the truth that it unfolds is.[139] To treat truths as absolute means denying any form of relativism that might deny its universality.[140] Hence, finitude is associated not to the absolute status of a truth (truths having been liberated from the religious imposition of 'the One'), but to the act of questioning the universality and applicability of a truth. Politically, Badiou's absolute commitment to truths is arguably problematic. First, it appears to contradict his consideration of axioms. If, as it was discussed earlier, the egalitarian axiom lays the ground for the very possibility of a political procedure, political truths must correspond to that axiom. Following Badiou's own philosophical framework, only the egalitarian axiom appears as absolute within a political procedure, for there can be no politics in the absence of that axiom. From this postulate, truths can never be fully absolute for their existence is relative to the axiom of equality declaring "a universal capacity for truth", and "a wholly disinterested subjectivity."[141] If either the universal capacity of the people is refuted or particular interests become entangled within the course of a political truth procedure, then that truth will arguably lose sight of its axiom. Badiou forsakes this possibility by absolutizing truths. Yet, by his own account, truths are relative to the existence of an axiom. This would imply that political truths are absolute apart from their

[136] Ibid, 154. Own translation.
[137] Ibid, 250.
[138] Ibid, 62.
[139] About this, Bosteels writes, "Badiou's philosophy, then can be read as an untimely recommencement of the materialist dialectic in the sense in which the latter actually would be a philosophy not of pure and absolute beginnings but of painstaking rebeginnings." [Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 173.]
[140] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 2-4, 50-51.
[141] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 99, 100.

belonging to the egalitarian axiom, a conditionality that Badiou does not acknowledge. This theoretical oversight is problematic, allowing for the possibility that absolute truths may somehow exceed the axiom from which they spring. This possibility can be envisaged at various levels of Badiou's political thought; from his discussions of the truthful subject and his account of political failures, to his interpretation of past political procedures such as the Chinese cultural revolution.

While an event acts as the spectacular eruption of a truth within the false representations of the state, it remains merely a 'moment' of truth. Badiou often reminds his reader that a political truth procedure subsists beyond its evental inception.[142] The transcendental of an event effectively begins, not with an event, but when formerly counted individuals allow their transformation into truthful subjects.[143] Badiou defines the subject as "any local configuration of a generic procedure from which a truth is supported", a "local point of truth."[144] As an incarnation of truth, the subject's distinctiveness is most clearly revealed by its role within a truth procedure. In *Being and Event*, Badiou clarifies the uncertain position of subjects involved in a truth procedure that both includes and exceeds them:

> Being the local moment of the truth, the subject falls short of supporting the latter's global sum. Every truth is transcendent to the subject, precisely because the latter's entire being resides in supporting the realization of truth. The subject is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness of the true. The singular relation of a subject to the truth whose procedure it supports is the following: the subject believes that there is a truth.[145]

Badiou suggests that subjects are connected to truth merely through their faith in its promise. However, the relationship between an event and its subject is complex, depending on the subjective procedures of 'intervention' and 'fidelity', and spreading over a non-linear temporality. However fragile, this connection with the subject is constitutive of the event for it allows the latter to be named and persist through time.[146] A subject's intervention in a political procedure excludes thoughtless action. Subjects will only take part in the procedure

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[142] Ibid, 29; and Being and Event, 392.
[143] Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 13.
[144] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 391; and Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 6.
[145] Ibid, 396-397.
[146] Marchart, 118.

if their intervention is consistent with the political truth initiated by the event.[147] Because of the event's ephemeral dimension, Oliver Marchart explains that it "can only be experienced as something that has vanished." [148] After its eclipse, "it will be recorded in its very disappearance only in the form of a linguistic trace."[149] This evental trace highlights the path that subjects must follow in order to recognise the event as such.[150] Only through the politicised intervention of a subject can an event that has already vanished be named.[151] The subjective impact of an event is located less in its occurrence than in its retroaction.[152] The subject is more than the passive observer of an uncontrollable event. The faithful subject directly contributes to the illumination and enactment of truth embodied in a singular event. There is a clear egalitarian suggestion to the idea that an event effaces itself to leave its subjects with the task of elucidating its truth. Following this logic, truth is not imposed but discovered and acquired. The sum of the processes by which a subject retraces the truth of an event is what Badiou terms 'subjectivation' or the becoming of a subject.[153] Only through this post-evental work can the human animal be "seized and traversed by the trajectory of a truth."[154] This entails that a subject can only be subject to truth; be it amorous, artistic,

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[147] Following Badiou, it appears that intervention without an event is apolitical, while an event which is not named by the intervention of a subject is unrecognisable and ultimately voided. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 182.]

[148] Marchart, 117-118.

About the non-linear temporality of the Badiousian conception of truth, Bosteels writes that truth "emerges not in a unique and instantaneous vanishing act that would coincide with the event itself but rather after the event in an ongoing process of fits and starts} of destructions and recompositions} of backlashes and resurrections}." [Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 173.]

[149] Marchart, 117-118.

[150] For Badiou, one of the outcomes of experiencing the event retroactively is the subjective necessity 'to think' the event. He does not hesitate to define thought as any subjective consideration of truth procedures. Specifically tied to politics, he also points out that a political event can only be thought collectively: "an acknowledgement that if this thought is political, it belongs to all. It is not simply a question of address, as it is in the case of other types of truth." [Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 141.]

[151] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 392; Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth*, 115, 125; Marchart, 120; and Meillassoux, 3. Badiou admits to being inspired by Blaise Pascal's philosophy in his interventionist approach to truth. He writes, "what is at stake here [with truth] is the militant apparatus of truth: the assurance that it is in the interpretative intervention that it finds its support, that its origin is found in the event; and the will to draw out its dialectic and to propose to humans that they consecrate the best of themselves to the essential." [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 222.]

[152] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 222.

[153] Alain Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 14.

[154] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 98.

The distinctive temporality of the subject's retracing of an event can be exemplified by the discovery of prehistoric cave paintings. When an archaeologist uncovers a lost pre-historic site, she/he is confronted to the singular truth of an artistic creation that is tens of thousands of years old. The hunting scenes depicted on the rocky walls are as true and unique as they were at their inception. More importantly, the art establishes a connection between the artist and the modern viewer which spreads over thousands of years. The singularity

political, or scientific. Framed within a truth procedure, the subject becomes the only bridge "between the phenomenal persistence of a world and its evental rearrangement."[155] This subject-based approach to evental truth denotes a new type of materialism by which subject must 'always rebegin' to identify the consequences of an event in one of the four generic procedures.

Intervention and the act of naming do not fully ensure the subjective consolidation of an event. The process of fidelity completes a truth procedure and is crucial in understanding the way politics materialises in Badiou's thought. Retracing an evental truth is itself conditioned by subjective fidelity**,** the subtleties of which are explained in *Being and Event*:

> A fidelity is always particular, insofar as it depends on an event. There is no general faithful disposition. Fidelity must not be understood in any way as a capacity, a subjective quality, or a virtue. Fidelity is a situated operation which depends on the examination of situations. Fidelity is a functional relation to the event. […] What allows us to evaluate a fidelity is its result: the count-as-one of the regulated effects of an event. Strictly speaking, fidelity is not. What exists are the groupings that it constitutes of one-multiples which are marked, in one way or another, by the evental happening.[156]

Here, fidelity appears quite distinct from its prevalent understanding. Badiou refuses to associate it to any subjective capacity. Instead, fidelity finds its footing in evental consequences, counting-as-one the outcomes of an event. Unlike intervention which defines itself in the act of naming the event, fidelity denotes a count. Rather than naming the nameless, it operates a kind of sorting, opening up to "to the general distinction of one-multiples presented in the situation, according to whether they are connected to the event or not."[157] Fidelity concurrently appears as a laborious task as much as a subjective path to truth, for it is "the operator of faithful connection which rules the procedure and institutes

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of the artistic event is inerasable. Nonetheless, this artistic truth would be lost without the archaeologist's discovery and subsequent work (thought) on the historical significance of these specific prehistoric paintings. For a great account of such encounter between pre-historic art and the modern viewer, see Werner Herzog, *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams,* Film, directed by Werner Herzog (2010; New York: IFC Film, 2010).

[155] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 79.

[156] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 233.

[157] Ibid, 235.

the truth."[158] The transcendental of an event truly takes effect in subjective fidelity, since "the faithful subject is nothing but the activation of the present of the truth under consideration."[159] Far from a passive commitment, fidelity refers to an active process by which subjects are constituted as such and truth is activated. Identifying the trace of an event is only the commencement of a subjective truth procedure after which "one must incorporate oneself into what the trace authorizes in terms of consequences."[160] Only through this active commitment is the merging of truth and subject enabled.

Who is the subject of a truth? Badiou's disdain for any form of identification complicates the process of drawing a conceptual subject. The latter must remain abstract since "a subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation."[161] Representing a truthful subject figuratively would compromise Badiou's philosophical project of undermining any form of finitude. However, he concedes that a subject must be a collective being of 'citizen militants'.[162] Militant must be understood here as "militant of truth", a subject dedicated to the activation of a truth procedure.[163] Badiou's commitment to the subject as a collective category reflects his dedication to a form of egalitarianism for which individual agency has little political value.[164] Neither individual nor communitarian but collectively committed to truth, the subject's pronoun is not 'I' or even 'we' but 'aside from' and 'except that'.[165] As a local vehicle of truth, a subject wears the properties of that truth as

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[158] Ibid, 392; and Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth*, 122.

[159] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 72.

[160] Ibid, 508.

[161] Ibid, 9.

[162] Badiou *Being and Event,* 347.
About the political superiority of the collective over individual agency, Badiou writes that "In finitude as much as infinity, a situation's collective resource exceeds its individual counterpart by creating more possibilities." [Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 22.]

[163] Badiou defines a militant of truth as "the political militant working for the emancipation of humanity in its entirety […] the artist-creator, the scientist who opens up a new theoretical field, or the lover whose world is enchanted." [Badiou, *Being and Event*, xiii.]

[164] In *The Communist Horizon*, Jodi Dean mistakenly interprets Badiou's emphasis on the subject as a form of 'individualisation' of communism: "the question of the subject of communism is open and pressing. Yet Badiou's choice of the individual as the locus of such a subject effaces the difference that matters in communist desire: it is and has to be collective, the common action and will of those who have undergone a certain proletarianization or destitution, of those who relinquish their attachment to an imaginary individuality. […] Such an emphasis thereby assents to capitalist form, rendering communism as just another content, an object of individual desire rather than the desire of a collective subject. [Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 194-195.] Badiou's political subject is fundamentally collective and opposed in every way to a desire-driven individual. In her attack, Dean seems to overlook the depth of the constitutive relationship between a subject and evental truth. For Badiou, there is no such thing as an empty and isolated subject.

[165] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 45.

its own. Just like a truth, a subject cannot be named in the language of existing knowledge whose categories it aims to overcome. As such, the subject carries a crucial political role. Conceived as an activator of truths, it is simultaneously constituted and constitutive of truths. Although there can be no subject without the occurrence of a truthful event, a truth will fall into oblivion without the work of faithful subjects. This constitutive element is empowering for subjects are not only subjected to an enacted truth, but an integral and active part of that truth. Once again, Badiou confirms his commitment to equality by putting subjects in charge of their own political destiny.

The event and its subject are entangled in a mutually constitutive relationship articulated around truth. Although there can be no subjectivation without the foundational occurrence of an event, the ephemeral occurence of the latter depends on a subject's fidelity for its historicising. The triad formed of the event, the subject, and truth is not static. The relationship between these three elements is multi-layered and non-linear. By constructing a unique account of this triangular relationship, Badiou manages to empower and transcend the figure of the subject. By vanishing, an event sets the political stage for a transcended and elevated subject. The evental trace merely puts the subject on its tracks. Political truth is not merely the pure consequence of an event but also the result of the work and fidelity of a collective subject. The egalitarian potential of Badiou's conceptualisation of the event, truth, and the subject is considerable. No longer crushed under the weight of theological truth, nor abandoned on the edge of abyssal liberty, the faithful subject of an event can truly enact politics.

The Appearing of Politics

Badiou's account of a political procedure refers to transcendence and as a result does not clearly indicate the process by which egalitarian politics comes to effectively materialise in the world. Badiou aims to fill this theoretical gap in *Logics of Worlds* by developing more concrete philosophical categories such as 'appearing', 'subject-body', 'point', and the object. Beyond a philosophical exploration of materiality, Badiou provides concrete examples of

truthful politics within his more polemical work.[166] Such politics takes shape in 'the idea' of communism, standing for equality and against what Badiou refers to as democratic materialism. Badiou constructs a conceptual account of political materiality rooted in a complete rejection of relativism and an unconditional commitment to the idea of communism. Badiou's rejection of any degree of relativism when it comes to political appearances reveals the limits of his absolute consideration of political truths underpinned by a certain disdain for objective categories such as the body. By requiring that all be transcended by truth regardless of the situation, he allows for the return of a political 'One' dictated less by the egalitarian axiom than dogmatic imperatives. Badiou pushes his conceptual exploration of equality into the fields of political appearances further than any other contemporary thinker. Yet, the material pathways he opens remain obscured by his largely objectless consideration of politics.

The subject, even in its strong Badiousian interpretation, remains a theoretical entity. Badiou reminds us that "the declaration that there is a (formal) theory of the subject is to be taken in the strong sense: of the subject, there can only be a theory."[167] This theoretical limit should not be seen as an obstacle to the materialisation of egalitarian politics. In fact, a subject requires "not only that it have a being, but also that it have an appearing."[168] In *Logics of Worlds,* Badiou builds on the equation of being with pure multiplicity introduced in *Being and Event* to "show how instances of being-multiple might come to appear as situated objects of a world."[169] Deepening his exploration of the subject as a local point of truth he claims that "the appearing of truths is that of wholly singular bodies (post-evental bodies), which compose the multiple materiality wherein special formalisms (subjective formalisms) are set out."[170] Far from denying the theoretical subject an opportunity to exist in the world, Badiou deploys the concept of subject-body which names "the materiality of a subject of truth."[171] The body is simply "The singular object that makes up the appearing of a subject."[172] In an

[166] See Badiou, *D'un désastre obscur*. *Droit, Etat, Politique* (La Tour d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube), 1991 ; Badiou, *De Quoi Sarkozy est-il le Nom?* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Lignes), 2007 ; Badiou, *l'Hypothèse Communiste* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Lignes), 2009 ; and Badiou, *La Vrai Vie* (Paris: Fayard), 2016.
[167] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 47.
[168] Ibid, 49.
[169] Hallward, "Order and Event," 104.
[170] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 9, 27.
[171] Ibid, 483.
[172] Ibid, 453.

objective world, the body literally embodies the truth of a subject.[173] In *After Finitude,* Meillassoux offers a clear account of the relationship between a transcendental subject and its body in a way that appears consistent with Badiou's conceptualisation:

> If the transcendental subject is localized among the finite objects of its world, […] this means that it remains indissociable from its incarnation in a body; in other words, it is indissociable from a determinate object in the world.[…] Objective bodies may not be a sufficient condition for the taking place of the transcendental, but they are certainly a necessary condition for it.[174]

Meillassoux's depiction of the relationship between a transcendental subject and its body is applicable to Badiou's logic of appearance. Although a body cannot singlehandedly incarnate the transcendental capacity of a truth, it is needed for a truth to appear in the objective world. The body offers the objective means through which subjective truth effectively comes to light.

This development is crucial for the applicability of Badiou's political thought. Endowed with a body, a truthful subject is no longer limited to its conceptual form. Truth is also inscribed on the subject's body understood as "a mode of appearance in a world determined by a subject that has developed its fidelity to the trace of an event."[175] The conjunction between a truthful subject and its body (envelope) is materialist "to the extent that it subordinates the universality of a relation to the global being of the world."[176] Through the figure of the body, Badiou attempts to expand the reach of his political theory from realm of pure thought to the material world. To claim that truths appear also entails that they must be subjectively experienced. Badiou labels these experiences "intra-worldly relations" or affects.[177] The appearance of political truth is felt when "a political sequence signals its existence point by point through an enthusiasm for anew maxim of equality."[178]

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[173] Ibid, 222.

[174] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2009), 44-45.

[175] Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," 5.

[176] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 452.

[177] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 76.

[178] Ibid; Badiou also signals how other truth procedures might be experienced: "art by the pleasure of a new perceptual intensity; love by the happiness of a new existential intensity; [and] science by the joy of new enlightenment." [Ibid.]

A body of truth is not any body. In the same way that a subject of truth is not reducible to an individual, a subject-body of truth must prove its fidelity to an evental trace.[179] Badiou names this process 'the point'. More than any other concept, the point illustrates the material applicability of a political truth. A point is "that which the transcendental of a world imposes on a subject-body, as the test on which depends the continuation in the world of the truth-process that transits through that body."[180] The point is the necessary passage of truth from being to appearing in the world. For the body, the point is a simple test with two possible outcomes. Either a body acts as the appearing point of a truth or it decides not to go through the point, betraying the event and cutting evental truth short of appearing.[181] By conceptualising the point as a test of fidelity, Badiou reasserts the absoluteness of truths. This time it is not the axiom but the body that is constrained by absolute truths. The body is confronted with the illusory choice of either complying with a truth or betraying it. The transcendental either imposes itself on the material world or disappears as a result of the subjective imperfections of that world. Badiou defends the point as a binary based on the postulate that the transcendental of a truth itself has a binary structure: it either is or isn't.[182] A body that fails to go through a point persists as a body, but merely as an "inert or inconsequential subjective form."[183] In order to be subjectivised, the body has no choice but to accept evental truth or run the risk of being alienated from any generic procedure. Whereas a truthful subject is constituted by the transcendental of an event, its subject-body is cut-off from any access to truth beyond its consent.

This signifies that the appearing of an event must be perfectly in line with its idea. Subjectively, this entails that a subject-body be required to appear as the mirror image of a theoretical subject in order for politics to materialise. Badiou offers two categories for those bodies that fail the test of the point by refusing to comply with an evental truth: reaction and occultation.[184] Whereas reaction represents a rebuttal of progress (in that case politics), occultation corresponds to a fascist position by which truth is erased.[185] There are several

[179] Ibid, 453.
[180] Ibid, 400.
[181] Ibid, 400, 416.
[182] Ibid, 437.
[183] Ibid, 490.
[184] Ibid, 78.
[185] Ibid, 453.

issues with this account of the body's experience of a point. Inasmuch as Badiou states that bodies ontologically belong to pure multiplicity, he does not hesitate to name and classify them according to their position towards a point.[186] Although Badiou blames the state for hierarchically dividing pure multiples, a similar operation is at work within his logic of appearing. The hierarchy is clear between a body destined to produce a present, deny it, or occult it.[187] Badiou fails to explain why he allows for the counting of bodies while every other level of a truth procedure (axiom, event, subject) escapes that count.

Besides the fact that counting and labelling bodies is philosophically and politically incongruous, it also removes any political agency to subject-bodies. For politics to happen, an event must occur, and a subject must act towards retracing its truth. In contrast, a body has no choice but to accept a truth, reducing the act of appearing to a mere formality within the larger scheme of a truth procedure. Badiou's disregard for objective bodies arguably originates from his unwillingness to mediate the absoluteness of truths. The success of a truth procedure resides in the triangular relationship between an egalitarian axiom, the truth it constitutes, and a subject (both in theoretical and appearing form). The work of a theoretical subject conditions the very success of a political procedure. On the other hand, a subject-body has no power in assessing the mode of appearance of a truth. Being the only entity to gain access to the material outcome of a political event, the subject-body has no say besides acceptance, denial, and occultation. These categories are politically limiting. They could be exceeded by pulling the egalitarian axiom closer to the materialist ground of appearances. This way, the axiom defined by the statement that "people think, people are capable of truth" could be supplemented by the declaration that 'people see, people are capable of recognising truth.'[188] To claim to be materialist means accepting that objective conditions also substantiate politics.

Badiou's political neglection of bodies becomes clearly apparent in his critique of democratic materialism. This term is used to define the contemporary conviction according to which "there are only bodies and languages."[189] It represents the subjective condition of an atonic world, a world devoid of points.[190] In a situation where truth is an impossibility, "the

[186] Ibid, 68.
[187] Ibid, 62.
[188] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 98.
[189] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 1.
[190] Ibid, 420.

body is the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment. Man, under the sway of the power of life, is an animal convinced that the law of the body harbours the secret of his hope."[191] Postmodernism is for Badiou just another name for democratic materialism.[192] He is willing to work against this intellectual current instigated by thinkers like Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, or Lyotard to assert that 'also there are truths.' Abandoning truth in favour of relativism engenders a constant return to the politically limited figures of the body and language.[193] In a truthless world, the democratic subject is misguided towards its own individual self, preferring "itself to every situation."[194] The "identarian fetishism of the individual" is the only possible path in a situation which forbids truths.[195] The main intellectual issue with democratic materialism is its relativist take on the world by which "there exists nothing but opinions."[196] Although valid, Badiou's critique of democratic materialism as an incarnation of relativism often overwhelms his conceptual account of the body.

Democratic materialism reflects the count of the democratic state. It rests on the state's juridical recognition (re-presentation) of the multiplicity of bodies and languages. As Badiou concisely puts it, "everything and every-one deserves to be recognized and protected by the law."[197] 'Everyone' here concerns an accumulation of bodies easily numbered and labelled by the state, a multitude of individuals whose solitary pursuits deceptively pulls them further away from any procedure of truth. It is the simulacrum of freedom offered by the democratic state as well as its representative capacities that are to blame for democratic materialism. Individual bodies are simply products of their re-presentation by the state.[198] Badiou's depiction of democratic materialism should not be considered in isolation but rather

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[191] Ibid, 2.

[192] Ibid, 2, 50.

[193] Analysing the concept of democratic materialism, Meillassoux explains that Badiou is fundamentally opposed to the relativism (cultural or historical) characterising post-Deleuzian philosophy and postmodernism. [Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," 5.]

[194] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 16.

[195] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 112. Own translation.

[196] Ibid, 50. Own translation.

[197] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 2.

[198] On this crucial point, Meillassoux points out that for Badiou "the subject is never constitutive, but constituted", highlighting the materialist dimension of his thought [Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," 5.]; Badiou remains faithful to Plato by emphasising the constitutive power of the formal place of politics (the state) on individual subjects as well as the constitutive dimension of the event on subjects of truth. [Badiou, *La Republique de Platon* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), 423.]

as part of his critique of the contemporary state of the situation bearing the name of democracy.

For Badiou democracy is polyform; existing as a form of state, a companion to capitalism, and subjectively through the figure of desire-driven individuals and democratic materialism. The contemporary democratic situation is that of parliamentary states "governed by three norms: the economy, the national question and, precisely, democracy."[199] Badiou's critique of the state often merges with a disquisition of capitalism and a platonic critique of democracy. He rejects democracy as a regime of individual interests, promoting equivalence rather than equality.[200] This reading is indebted to Plato's dismissal of democracy found in *The Republic*.[201] In the same way that Cantor inspires Badiou's ontology, Platonism constantly illuminates Badiou's critique of democracy. In book VIII of *Republic* Plato depicts democracy as a regime driven by individual desires. [202] A substantial amount of Badiou's political thought has been dedicated to reviving Plato's critical acuity towards democracy. Platonism is the point where Badiou and Rancière's egalitarianism most clearly part ways. Whereas Rancière dismisses the Greek philosopher as an archipolitical hater of democracy, Badiou builds on Plato to deploy his own critique of democracy and subsequent endorsement of communism.[203]

No piece of work embodies Badiou's Platonism more clearly than his 'hypertranslation' of Plato's *Republic*. In his *Republic,* Badiou rewrites and re-actualise Plato's masterpiece, attempting to render Platonism evermore relevant to contemporary audiences.[204] Evidently, this contemporary version of *Republic* is more than a translation.

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[199] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 83.

[200] Alain Badiou in *Democracy in What State?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 11.

[201] See Plato, "Republic" in *Plato's Complete work* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1997.

[202] Through his depiction of democracy, Plato sarcastically asks "isn't the city full of freedom and freedom of speech? And doesn't everyone in it have the license to do what he wants?" Adding that if this is the case, then "it looks as though this is the finest or most beautiful of the constitutions, […] [for a city] embroidered with every kind of character type, would seem to be the most beautiful." [Plato, "Republic" in Plato's Complete work ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1997), 557b.]

[203] See Rancière, *Disagreement*; and Badiou, *La Republique de Platon*.

[204] In his introduction to the English version of Badiou's *Plato's Republic*, Kenneth Reinhard explains the originality and unique appeal of this work: "Badiou's hypertranslation sublimates Plato out of that frequently gauzy history of ideas by dramatizing him as the philosopher who asks us to leave the cave of opinion, the comfort zone of "what most people think," and to participate in the collective construction of some truths from the new perspective that such an exit affords. In this sense, Badiou's hypertranslation lifts the Republic out of the cave of "Platonism" precisely through its fidelity to the Platonic idea." [Kenneth Reinhard in Alain Badiou, *Plato's Republic* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 14.

Badiou directs the Socratic dialogue towards his own philosophical and political interests in equality and communism. This philosophical homage is crucial to exposing Badiou's argumentative proximity with Plato when it comes to democracy. Writing about the transition between oligarchy and democracy, Badiou (interpreting Plato and speaking through Socrates) explains that the shift occurs "when the imperative to enjoy […] becomes an unlimited general imperative."[205] What Badiou extracts from book VIII of *Republic* is that democracy is essentially a regime defined by the freeing of individual desires.[206] This reading enables him to interpret Plato not like Rancière as a hater of democratic equality, but as the first thinker to question the political virtues of democratic individualism.[207]

Democratically liberating individual desires denotes a purely directed and formal type of freedom. For Badiou, democratic freedom is normless since it merely postulates that one may live as she/he desires. The only norm of such freedom is that of secluded private interest, reducing man to pure animality.[208] In other words, liberating desires is a simulacrum of freedom which enslaves rather than enlightens.[209] Subjectively, the life of a democrat "becomes a clandestine exploration of infinite but small pleasures."[210] For both Plato and Badiou, the democrat lives an heteronomous life emptied of truth, confused by the glossy appeal of instant satisfaction.[211] Characterising democratic freedom as a type of unleashed

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[205] Badiou, *Plato's Republic*, 295.

[206] Throughout the history of political thought, Plato's depiction of democracy as an anarchical patchwork of individual desires has often resulted in his labelling as essentially elitist and even proto-totalitarian. [Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006); Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le politique XIX-XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1986); and Kenneth Reinhard in Alain Badiou, *Plato's Republic*.] Such accusations are not completely unfounded, considering that the Greek philosopher ultimately designated aristocracy (the regime of the bests) as the most promising form of government. [See Plato, "Republic", Book VI.] Nonetheless, Plato's readers focusing on the anti-egalitarian, aristocratic aspect of his critique of democracy shield themselves from its more substantive facet. They overlook the Platonic idea according to which the democratic regime entails a liberation of desires attached to the seemingly beautiful. It is from this specific hedonistic ground that democracy can be judged as a regime of equivalence rather than equality. This subjective aspect of Plato's critique arguably exposes its potential for contemporary political thought. It is in the idea that democratic freedom merely concerns 'unnecessary desires', engendering the proliferation of pleasure-seeking behaviour that Platonism truly resonates with the experience of today's liberal-democrats. [Plato, "Republic", 560a-560d.]

[207] The term 'hater of democracy' is often used by Rancière to refer to Plato and his followers whom he interprets as contemptuous of the people and working against equality. [See Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy.*]

[208] Badiou, *La République de Platon*, 464.

[209] About this specific point, Badiou explains that "if a large amount of individual freedom is separated from any types of truth, it will inevitably degenerate into servitude." [Ibid, 467. Own translation.]

[210] Ibid, 459, Own translation.

[211] In Democracy in What State, Badiou considers Plato's decision to concentrate on the subject of democracy rather than its general form pioneering: "Both Plato and Lenin are more interested in the subjective impact of this [democratic] State form than they are in its objective status. Thought must shift the focus from the legal framework to the emblem or from democracy to the democrat." [Badiou in *Democracy in What State*, 8.]

animality implies a regression, while the idea according to which the pursuit of individual pleasures can be liberating exposes the illusory character of democracy. For Badiou, the heteronomous tendencies of neoliberalism such as those depicted in chapter two are essentially attached to the democratic form.

Aside from producing a distinctive type of (non)freedom, democracy promotes purely formal equality, rendering equality and inequality indistinguishable.[212] Democratic equality is artificial to the extent that it applies to anything unequal. Badiou interprets this Platonic assertion through the prism of Marxism, tying the illusory character of democratic equality to "the monetary principle, the universal equivalency or fungibility that bars any possibility of real difference."[213] Here, Badiou associates the illusion of democratic equality to Marx's concept of commodity fetishism through which commodities and labour are indexed only according to their monetary (exchange) value rather than their use value.[214] This conjunction between Plato and Marx discloses two central traits of Badiou's position on democracy. The first is that democracy rather than enabling equality, produces equivalence through quantification (the count of its parts). The second is that in Badiou's political thought, democracy and capitalism are irremediably linked.[215]

Badiou's critique of democracy is not limited to his philosophical engagement with Plato. In his more polemical work, he designates contemporary practice of democracy as "parliamentary fetishism."[216] By denouncing democracy as such, he points to the 'cult of numbers' which characterises the contemporary assimilation of democracy to the 'irrational procedure' of voting.[217] Badiou's rejection of parliamentary politics is simultaneously tied to

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[212] Badiou, *La République de Platon*, 456

[213] Badiou in *Democracy in What State*, 11.

[214] Marx introduces the notion of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*. He grounds this concept in the dichotomy between use value and exchange value. Whereas the use value of a commodity is based on its utility and limited to its physical properties, exchange value is a quantitative relation and is determined by "the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort." Commodity fetishism denotes the supremacy of exchange value in a capitalist economy by which commodities as well as labour all appear equivalent due to value only being attributed quantitatively according to exchange value. [Karl Marx, "Capital Volume one, Part 1, section 4: the fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof." http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4.

[215] In *De Quoi Sarkozy Est-il le Nom?* Badiou treats democracy as a 'consensual representation' of capitalism. [Badiou, *De Quoi Sarkozy Est-il le Nom?*, 122.]

[216] Ibid*,* 7.

[217] Badiou, *Petit Panthéon Portatif* (Paris : La Fabrique Editions, 2008), 9; and Badiou, *De Quoi Sarkozy Est-il le Nom ?*, 7.

his dismissal of the state and his painting of democracy as a regime of interests.[218] Voting is at the heart of the representative process, reducing the state to a "non-egalitarian inventory of human beings."[219] It works against equality by including (counting or naming) those parts that fundamentally belong in a situation. From a Badiousian point of view parliamentary politics is deeply anti-political, overlooking axiomatic equality to conflate a representative count to a transparent expression of popular will. Voting cannot constitute a duplicate of the people's voice. Following Badiou's ontology, voting is a re-presentation of a people already belonging to a situation. Parliamentary politics does not only ignore the first presentation of the people, it annuls the egalitarian potential of the latter by counting its parts through the electoral procedure. The voices of the people are not amplified but muted by being electorally recorded by the state.

The general state of equivalence characterising democracy engenders the confusion of the people with its representation, blurring the differences between a subject and its body, and displaying the pursuit of individual desires as a mode of liberation. Ultimately, Badiou concludes that this state of confusion has elevated democracy to the status of untouchable emblem of contemporary society.[220] Confusing democracy with equality, liberty, and even the common has generated a situation in which one cannot, in good faith, stand opposed to democracy. For Badiou, equality is not democracy. Faced with the democratic emblem, Badiou reasserts his fidelity to Plato by claiming that "everything consensual is suspicious as

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[218] Apart from its statist and representative essence, parliamentarism may also be rejected Platonic grounds. In Gorgias, Plato denounces the persuasive rhetorical powers of sophism and the malleability of doxa, which could be translated as public opinion. [See Plato, Gorgias (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 1987.] Badiou makes great use of Plato's decrying of sophism in his discussions of liberal democracy. In Metapolitics he states that "what is not Platonic is the idea that politics (the 'political life') is forever devoted to opinion, forever disjoined from all truth." [Badiou, Metapolitics, 14.] This 'idea' is directly supported by the sophistry of political philosophy aiming to promote parliamentary politics. [Ibid.] Badiou plainly opposes opinion to truth based on the porousness of immediate and amalgamated opinions. The latter, considered today in the form of close-circuited opinion polls, is usually deemed to be the supreme measure of democratic health in a parliamentary state. In contrast, Plato as much as Badiou opposes the sacralisation of individual opinions to political truth. The Badiousian understanding of doxa and sophism does not amount to scepticism towards the political capacity of the people. This is a typically elitist position which regards the commons as basically uncapable of deciding and acting for itself. Instead, Badiou argues that the problem of parliamentary democracy lays with the sophistry at work in a state that aims towards its own preservation. In his version of Republic, Badiou ironically describes the distractions offered by contemporary sophistry that forbid the presence of genuinely egalitarian and political debates: "Meanwhile, only for show, there are heated 'debates' on minor issues, like the marriage of gay priests or the protection of blue whales. But do not worry, they've still got their so-called freedom!" [Badiou, *Plato's Republic*, 299-300.]

[219] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 94; and Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 403.

[220] Badiou in *Democracy in What State*, 6.

far as the philosopher is concerned."[221] The Badiousian critique of democracy should not be equated to a rejection of the political capacity of the people. It is a rejection of the tainted re-presentation of the people put forward by the state under the emblem of democracy, an emblem so large that it conceals the possibility of realising politics under the true name of equality. For Badiou, this eternal possibility bears the name of communism and always depends on the occurrence of a truthful event.

In addition to democracy's parliamentary relationship with the (representative) state and its heteronomous inclinations, Badiou asserts that democracy should be rejected based on is its acquaintance with capitalism. There is no doubt for him that the individual 'liberty' unleashed in a democratic context is really reduced to "the freedom to trade and consume."[222] Badiou labels the convergence of democracy and capitalism 'capitalo-parliamentarism.'[223] In *D'un Désastre Obscur*, he writes that "capitalo-parliamentarism is the tendentially unique mode of politics, the only one which combines economic efficiency (hence the profit of the proprietors) with popular consensus."[224] The finite regime of 'the One' defining contemporary politics is not democracy in its naked form but the result of its merging with capitalism. It is as if under a regime defined by equivalence rather than equality, even democracy and capitalism have become indistinguishable through a process by which "democracy politically supports and secures the private ownership of the means of production."[225] It is clear here that a consumerism-driven market economy is perfectly fitted to a Platonic critique of democracy as a regime of individual desires. Badiou makes a philosophical leap between Plato and Marx with the concept of capitalo-parliamentarism. Through this critical union, Badiou establishes that truthful politics must stand opposed to both democracy and market capitalism.

Following Badiousian philosophy, what is the true name of politics? For Badiou, egalitarian politics can only bear the name of communism. This response evidently calls for clarifications. Even though Badiou's communism can be sketched from his theoretical

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[221] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 79.

[222] Badiou, *Being and Event*, xii;

[223] In *L'immanence des vérités*, Badiou associates capitalo-parliamentarism with a language of repetition that serves to confuse anything and everything in order to preserve the regime of equivalence at work in markets and democracy. [Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 414.]

[224] Alain Badiou, *D'un désastre obscur. Droit, Etat, Politique* (La Tour d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube, 1991), 37.

[225] Marchart, 113.

discussions of political truth procedures, it must also be presented in the concrete form of its appearance. What does Badiousian communism entail, and what warrants its successful appearance? Badiou generally defines communism as an 'Idea'. During a conference fittingly entitled "The Idea of Communism" Badiou explained his distinctive use of the term:

> [As] the subjectivation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History […] the Idea exposes a truth in a fictional structure. In the specific case of the communist Idea, which is operative when the truth it deals with is an emancipatory political sequence, we will claim that 'communism' exposes this sequence (and consequently its militants) in the symbolic order of History. In other words, the communist Idea is the imaginary operation whereby an individual subjectivation projects a fragment of the political real into the symbolic narrative of a History. It is in this sense that one may appropriately say that the Idea is (as might be expected!) ideological.[226]

Badiou presents the idea of communism as the imaginary supplement of a truth procedure. The idea guides political subjects by inscribing their work into the scheme of a larger communist history. The idea is "an infinite anticipation of the possibility of a generic universe that must be confirmed in the real."[227] Because an idea is infinite, communism cannot be limited to its history nor to its specific historical forms for it is attached to the emergence of the new within a political procedure. Theoretically, the notion of idea can be associated to that of 'principles' or 'direction' following the platonic postulate that true life and true politics depend on an idea.[228] Going against the pejorative resonance of the term 'ideology' in contemporary theory, Badiou simply defines it as "something that has to do with an idea."[229] Considered as an idea, communism conveys the possibility of alterity in the face of the world as it is (capitalo-parliamentarism).[230]

Really existing communisms are just one of the many possible materialisations of its larger idea. Although Badiou considers ideas to be infinite and therefore eternal, any

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[226] Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 13, 14, 15.
[227] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 238.
[228] Badiou, *l'Hypothèse Communiste*, 57. Also see Alain Badiou, *La Vrai Vie*.
[229] Badiou in *The Idea of Communism I*, 16.
[230] Badiou, *l'Hypothèse Communiste*, 81. Badiou considers the central message of democratic materialism to be living "without an idea." [Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 238.]

contemporary engagement with communism must be discussed in light of its historical forms. Only by confronting the consequences of these often-unsuccessful political procedures on existing bodies can Badiou's communism become politically legible. Bosteels rightfully claims that it would be both naïve and ineffective to re-actualise communism without considering its historical iterations.[231] Drawing conclusions from 'really existing communism' is especially crucial for Badiou both as a thinker and a militant.[232] Badiou's take on the history of communism is most clearly laid out in *The Communist Hypothesis*. Conceiving of communism as a hypothesis allows Badiou to suggest that it remains relevant to the contemporary situation, while coming to terms with its past failures. He is clear on the latter point, 20th century communisms have completely failed.[233] He is quick to add however that this failure concerns not the hypothesis or idea of communism, but its materialised sequences. As with the subject and its body, appearances often fail to convey the power of an idea or a theory.

Badiou's definition of the communist idea is coherent with his suggestion that an event can always be resurrected, bringing to light "the egalitarian invariants of every sequence."[234] He illustrates the possibility of ideological resurrection through the historical declination of the 'Spartacus-event'. Starting with a slave rebellion in ancient Rome, the heritage of this event re-emerged with Toussaint Louverture in Haiti when the revolutionary was dubbed 'black Spartacus', and again during the Spartacist uprising in Germany.[235] In each of these cases, political sequences were cut short and ended tragically. Yet, the name 'Spartacus' persisted through time, applying equally to a variety of political events unfolding all over the world. In the same way, Bolshevism and Maoism still belong to the communist idea. For Badiou, what remains from these sequences is not their authoritarian degeneration,

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[231] Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso Books, 2011), 18.

[232] Aside from his militant engagements with Maoism after 1968, Badiou also openly supported the Khmer Rouge Cambodian regime against a North-Vietnamese invasion in a 1979 opinion peace entitled "Kampuchea Will Overcome!". This endorsement remains controversial to this day and never fails to be mentioned in the French media. Interestingly, many of the derogatory pieces focused on Badiou's militancy are often published in left-leaning papers such as *Liberation* or *Le Nouvel Observateur.* [Alain Badiou, "Kampuchéa Vaincra!" Le Monde, 17/01/1979, http://www.gildasbernier.fr/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Alain-Badiou-et-le-Cambodge.pdf.] Also see Sylvain Boulouque, « Alain Badiou, Maoïste Médiatique » 17/01/2012, *Le Nouvel Observateur.* http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/l-observateur-de-la-gauche-radicale/20120113.OBS8731/alain-badiou-maoiste-mediatique.html; and Laurent Joffrin, « Badiou, Hibernatus philosophe » 10/10/2014, *Liberation.* http://www.liberation.fr/chroniques/2014/10/10/badiou-hibernatus-philosophe_1119115.

[233] Badiou, *l'Hypothèse Communiste* (Paris: Nouvelle Editions Lignes, 2009), 10.

[234] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 76.

[235] Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," 7.

but the egalitarian politics which at a certain moment carried their name. An event might be revived by its subjects based on the equality it once embodied.[236] For Badiou, politics must allow for the possibility of "a space for failures" in which the latter will ultimately become an impossibility.[237]

Communist sequences can fail, but the idea of communism is eternal. This account of the idea of communism echoes the uncertain temporality and infinite faithful procedure characterising an event.[238] In his most political and polemical work, Badiou also draws clear conclusions from the failure of specific political sequences. The Chinese cultural revolution remains a constant source of political inspiration for him. In an article written with Bosteels, Badiou gives a concrete account of the appeal of the cultural revolution that includes details of its demise:

> Within this movement an absolutely amazing freedom reigns, tendencies openly confront each other, the journals, tracts, banners and never-ending mural posters multiply revelations of all kinds along with the political declarations. […] Processions with gongs, drums, inflamed proclamations go around until late at night. On the other hand, the tendency toward militarization and the uncontrolled action by shock groups soon make their appearance. The general slogan speaks of a revolutionary fight against old ideas and old customs. Many groups gave this slogan a destructive and violent, even persecutory, interpretation. The hunt against women wearing braids, against lettered intellectuals, against hesitant professors, against all the "cadres" who do not practice the same phraseology as such and such splinter group, the raiding of libraries or museums […] The truth is that, armed only with the slogan of "the fight of the new against the old," many Red Guards gave in to a well-known (negative) tendency in revolutions: iconoclasm, the persecution of people for futile motives, a sort of assumed barbarism.[239]

Despite the freedom unleashed by its political sequence, the cultural revolution's positive revolutionary spirit was quickly undermined by the proliferation of repressive and

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[236] Peter Hallward, "Order and Event," 107.
[237] Badiou, *l'Hypothèse Communiste*, 34. Own translation.
[238] On fidelity as an infinite procedure, see Badiou, *Being and Event*, 337.
[239] Alain Badiou and Bruno Bosteels, "The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?," *Positions: east asia cultures critique 13* (2005): 494; and Badiou, *L'hypothèse Communiste*, 107.

violent practices. It is interesting to note that Badiou always points to the subject-body for the failure of political sequences. He acknowledges that abusive red guards were acting in accordance to the truth of this event, namely fighting for the new against the old by reinvigorating the revolutionary spirit against the increasingly bourgeois tendencies of the existing communist party.[240] Yet, he perpetually points to the subject-body (in that case: 'abusive red guards') to account for political failures. Truth being absolute, failure must be blamed on bodies. We have no choice but to fall back on Badiou's classification of subject-bodies as either reactive or obscure to explain failure. This is a classically dogmatic account of political action which states that 'whoever is not with us is against us.' Insomuch as the truth of the moment is never to blame for failure, one must designate subject-bodies as either reactive or obscurantist. In the case of the cultural revolution, Badiou assigns blame to obscurantist red guards who "devalue an ongoing (and thus unproven or unapproved) fidelity in favour of a rigid conformity to the absolute past of an allegedly original event or revelation."[241] These subjects are deemed obscure based on their "absolute commitment to Mao Zedong's thought", declaring that "one must apply Mao's thought even without understanding it."[242] In other words, the strong but misdirected fidelity of subjects of the cultural revolution is the source of its implosion

For Badiou, neither Mao's political decisions nor the truth it enacted are involved in the demise of the cultural revolution. Appearing subjects are held fully responsible for their inability to grasp the subtleties of this absolute truth. Badiou explains that Maoism was undermined by "its own reactive subject, and then of the becoming-obscure in which, in its extreme forms (the Khmer Rouge and Sendero Luminoso), it was shipwrecked."[243] Assigning blame for political failure merely to the subject-body is insufficient and arguably antagonistic to Badiou's axiomatic deployment of equality. If axiomatic equality postulates that people think and are capable of truth, blaming those same faithful subjects for the failure of a political procedure seems self-defeating. To avoid questioning the absoluteness of political truths, Badiou undermines the egalitarian axiom by questioning the capacity of subjects from whom

[240] Epitomizing the political truth guiding red guards was the eradication of so-called four olds, 'old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.' In other words, any nonproletarian obstacle to the 'youthful' spirit of the cultural revolution was to be desecrated or undermined. [Guo Jian, Yongyi Song, and Yuan Zhou, *The A to Z of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 70.]

[241] Hallward, *Badiou: Subject to Truth*, 146.

[242] Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste*, 122. Own Translation.

[243] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 502.

that truth is activated.[244] Against Badiou's quasi-dogmatic position, it may be claimed that avoiding the transformation of communism into its authoritarian ghost does not depend on further consolidation of truth, but on reasserting equality as a fundamental axiom through the political potential of the subject-body.

Conclusion

Throughout his philosophical discussions of being, becoming, and appearing, Badiou deploys one of the most stimulating contribution to contemporary political thought. Within his mathematical ontology, Badiou is able conceptualise equality as a foundational axiom which systematically sets truthful politics in motion. Against identities assigned by the state of the situation, pure multiplicity defines the generic condition of all engaged in a political procedure. Badiou finds an ontological opportunity to secularise infinity through the concept of the pure multiple. The transcendent power of a political truth emerges with the occurrence of an event, or a truthful display of infinite possibilities. The evental moment is as bright as it is brief. True egalitarian politics occurs at the intersection of a simultaneously succinct but eternal event and its subject. From the event's vanishing there remains only a 'trace' that political subjects must follow to gain access to its truth. Through this retracing, largely defined by the procedures of 'intervention' and 'fidelity', the subject directly works towards enacting egalitarian politics. More than any other Badiousian concepts, fidelity embodies the sequence by which one becomes subject as much as he or she concretely intervenes in materialising egalitarian politics.

Considered as a secularisation of religious faith founded on 'the One', political fidelity constitutes the subjective process *par excellence* for Badiou. The great potential of his consideration of fidelity as a politically empowering process is only interrupted by his disdain for any objective consideration of politics, be it attached to the body, political economy, or simply imperfect materialisations of absolute truths. This is arguably the main issue with Badiou's political thought. His subject-based account of egalitarian politics remains largely objectless. This is an issue for two reasons. On the one hand, it prevents one from providing

[244] It is interesting that the historicised communist subjects whom Badiou now designates as reactionary (erratic red guards, Khmers Rouges, agents of the Stalinist state) were also all identifying their victims as reactionary agents working against an unfolding political sequence.

an account of fidelity as an objective process for the materialisation of politics. On the other, it elevates subjective transcendence as the only mode of access to political truths independently of any objective factors. As a result, Badiou appears unphased by the possibility that a political truth be objectively enforced on existing bodies. While theoretical subjects play a substantive role in enacting a political sequence, bodies simply formalise it. Refusing to do so condemns one to a life emptied of all meaning or truth.

Badiou's subordination of bodies to subjects is also palpable in his discussion of democracy and communism. Badiou rejects 'democratic materialism' through a re-actualisation of Plato's critique of democracy. Democratic materialism denotes the possibility to live a meaningless life reduced to the dictates of bodies and language. In contrast, communism persists as an eternal idea whose resurrection is necessary for the very possibility of egalitarian politics. Here again, there is a clear hierarchy between the subjective commitment associated with communism as a transcendent idea and the accessible, yet purely formal reality of bodies and language related to democratic materialism. Badiou systematically prioritises a quasi-theological approach to politics measured against the strength of one's subjective commitment. The theological dimension of egalitarian politics will be the topic of the next chapter. Through the work of St Paul, Kierkegaard, Agamben, and Critchley, the potential of faith as a political process will examined. Building on Badiou's discussion of fidelity, the next chapter will propose that religious faith be differentiated from political fidelity based on the possibility to treat fidelity as a process containing both a subjective commitment to truth and an objective step towards materialising a political collective.

Part III | The Egalitarian Leap: Materialising the Collective Subject-Body through Political Fidelities

Chapter 5

Faith and Equality

Introduction

The question of whether equality can be materialised through politics has traversed the four previous chapters of this thesis, each reflecting a distinct theoretical approach to the concept of equality. The first chapter was concerned with the work of thinkers who set equality as a goal to be achieved through individual autonomy in a liberal democratic context. The discussion then moved on to the fading role of equality within the current neoliberal consensus where fulfilling the economic potential of atomised individuals reigns as the main political objective. Chapter three focused specifically on Jacques Rancière's redefinition of equality as a starting point of politics from which anyone is capable of ruling. The fourth chapter centred on Alain Badiou's conceptualisation of equality as an axiom conditioning the emergence of a political event to which subjects must remain faithful for political truths to appear. Beyond the great range of possibilities enabled by these propositions, it is striking to observe that each of them incorporates a distinct form of belief or faith in the political capacity of either individuals or collectives. For liberal egalitarians, such belief is directed towards individuals' autonomous capacity to organise collective life to achieve equality without compromising individual liberty. Alternatively, neoliberals strongly believe in individuals' propensity to fulfil their desires and economic potential in an open and extensive market context. Rancière's faith is directed towards equal intelligence and the subsequent possibility to realise the democratic promise of a ruling demos free of any form of representation. Finally, Badiou invokes faith through subjective fidelity as a crucial step in the process of achieving truthful politics. However diverse, all these examples signal the possibility to discuss egalitarian politics through the notion of faith.

The objective of this chapter is to assess the importance of faith for egalitarian politics. Engaging with the work of St Paul, Søren Kierkegaard, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Simon Critchley, faith will be interpreted as a profound yet uncertain process with the potential to impact not only faithful subjects but also the objective conditions of the world in which it is practised.[1] The discussion laid out in this chapter will not revolve around the intellectual leap faith required from political thinkers to conceptualise new egalitarian frameworks. Rather, it will concentrate on the possibility that faith, considered as a collective process, may contribute to the materialisation of egalitarian politics. In other words, it will argue that faith as a process is well suited to mobilise a collective around an egalitarian ideal. Unsurprisingly, theorisations of faith are predominantly theological. Within this chapter, theological approaches to faith will be represented by the work of St Paul and Kierkegaard. Paul was an apostle. Author of the oldest extant Christian document, his writings on faith have never ceased to fascinate theologians and political thinkers alike for almost two thousand years.[2] His message of love and equality, as well as his radical relationship to faith still resonate today in a way that far exceeds the realm of Christian theology. Kierkegaard was a philosopher and devote Christian who, perhaps more thoroughly than any other modern thinker, deepened the intellectual exploration of faith as the highest subjective commitment. For Kierkegaard faith is a supreme passion, a relationship of subjective inwardness on which knowledge has no hold.[3] Beyond their capacity to associate faith with love, equality, and passion against the certainty of existing knowledge, these two thinkers should be studied based on the profound impact they maintain on contemporary political theory.

Although modernity is classically read as a progressive evacuation of the religious from the political stage, there appears to be a revival of interest in the relationship between politics and theology amongst contemporary thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and

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[1] See St Paul, "Letter to the Romans" in *The Holy Bible English Standard Version* (Crossway Publishers), 2001; Alain Badiou, *St Paul The Foundation of Universalism* Translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2003; Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2005; Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso), 2012; Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2009.

[2] Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians dating back to 50 AD is generally thought to have been the first written record of the Christian tradition. [Robert Wall, *New Interpreter's Bible Vol. X* (Abingdon: Abingdon Press, 2002), 373.] Jacob Taubes goes as far as claiming that Christianity "has its origins not properly in Jesus but in Paul." [Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of St Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 40.]

[3] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific practice*, 28, 46.

Simon Critchley.[4] These thinkers are particularly interested in the political potential of Pauline theology.[5] The meaning of Paul's conversion to Christianity, the temporality of his messianism, the inclusiveness of his message, and the relationship he establishes between faith and law are all facets of Paulinism that resonate with contemporary politics. Inspired by the openness and egalitarian content of Paul's teachings, Badiou treats the apostle as the founder of universalism. Pauline theology exerts a deep influence on Badiou's philosophy, informing his conceptualisation of the event, as well as his account of subjective fidelity, and truth.[6] In *The Time that Remains*, Agamben takes interest in the temporality (the 'time of the now', and the 'time that remains') of Paul's messianism.[7] On the other hand, Critchley builds on the work of Paul, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard to argue for the benefits of a godless faith to be directed towards a necessary political fiction.[8] All these contributions help elucidating a problem opened in the previous chapter regarding the subjective commitment needed to think equality as an axiom, politics as an event, and subjective fidelity as a process of truth. The unlikely encounter between radical political thought, Pauline theology, and Kierkegaard's philosophy clears new conceptual avenues for egalitarian politics that risk remaining indiscernible from the viewpoint of more rigidly secular political thought. The theoretical paths opened by this intellectual encounter are abundant; from the possibility to consider faith itself as an egalitarian political process, to differentiating between objective and subjective levels of faith, and conceptualising fidelity as a form of political faith for a godless world.

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[4] The argument according to which modern politics establishes itself as a weighing out of religion has been extensively discussed by Marcel Gauchet. See Gauchet, *Que Faire ? Dialogue sur le communisme, le capitalisme et l'avenir de la démocratie* (Paris: Philo Editions 2014), 39. Own translation; also see Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1999; and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Church, State, Resistance Political Theologies and Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2006, 103.]

Many modern thinkers have nuanced this antithetical account by arguing that there remains a theological element to modern politics. From Rousseau's Civil Religion, Spinoza's theological-political treatise to Carl Schmitt's Political Theology, the theoretical intersection of religion and politics has consistently remained an area of interest for political theorists throughout the years. [See Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* ch4 (London: Penguin Books, 1968; Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2007 (1670); Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005),]

[5] Brian Britt, "The Schmittian Messiah in Agamben's The Time That Remains" *Critical Inquiry 36* (2010): 262.

[6] See Alain Badiou, *St Paul The Foundation of Universalism*.

[7] See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*.

[8] See Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless*.

In order to assess the significance of faith for egalitarian politics, this chapter is divided in three sections. The first will consider the egalitarian content of faith through its relationship with love, knowledge, inclusion, identity, and temporality. This will be achieved by analysing the message of Paul's letters and its contemporary (re)interpretations. By conceiving of faith as inseparable from love and inclusion, and antithetical to established knowledge and identities, Paul radically opens the egalitarian potential of faithful commitment. The second part of this chapter will be dedicated to differentiating between the objective and subjective dimensions of faith. Through Kierkegaard's work, it will be shown how faith may be considered as the fullest form of subjective commitment. It will also be claimed alongside Critchley that Agamben and Badiou's radically antinomian readings of Paul's relationship to the law can be misguiding.[9] The point will be made that subjective faith must be supplemented by an objective component that may take the form of a law or an axiom embedded in the constitution of a political subject-body. The chapter will close on the necessity to differentiate between faith, which is attached to the figure of 'the One' and therefore fundamentally theological, and fidelity conceptualised as a political type of secular faith. Instead of being invoked through the unicity of 'the One', political fidelity is a process grounded in what Badiou refers to as 'pure multiplicity.'[10] Conceiving of political fidelity in these terms, 'the people' simultaneously become subject and object of their own fidelity through the figure of the collective subject-body.

The Egalitarian Core of Faith

Why focus on faith when discussing the concept of equality? There are many theoretical pathways between politics and theology that do not traverse the notion of faith. As Carl Schmitt famously declared, "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."[11] In a context where many theorists decide to either oppose politics and religion or draw them closer together, faith arguably engages the two

[9] Etymologically, antinomian signifies 'against the law' in Greek (*Anti*: 'opposite', 'against' + *Nomos:* 'Law'). The term has been associated with Paul throughout the history of Christianity. It signifies that "Christians are by grace set free from observing any moral law" and can therefore be justified by faith. [*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by F.L Cross (London: Oxford University Press), 1958, 62.]
[10] See Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum), 2007.
[11] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5, 35.

traditions on a much deeper level.[12] Faith is the uncertain link between a subject and what he or she designates as true. Agamben succinctly defines Pauline faith (*pistis*) as "the act of recognising something as true."[13] Defining faith as one's recognition of the true outlines its infinitely radical proposition: that a promise and its realisation may be part the same process.[14] Framed as a such, faith encompasses not only belief but a profound commitment to a truth and its materialisation in the world. The idea of subjective commitment is perhaps where the concepts of faith and belief part ways. Whereas beliefs can be brittle and only require passive engagement, faith arguably demands that subjects be actively committed to what has been recognised as true. For Critchley, the singularity of faith lies in its potential to serve as an enactment of the subject merely through declaring the true.[15] Viewed in this light, faith is a performative process that "brings the subject of faith into being."[16] Paul is often seen as the first theologian to have understood faith as a bridging of thinking and doing, a position that has inspired all thinkers to be discussed in this chapter.[17] Viewing faith as a performative process connecting an idea to its active subjects can have strong implications for the study of politics. By offering itself to all and promising to empower subjects, faith already contains a strong egalitarian core that must be studied if one is to assess its potential as a political process.

Far from the pessimism of John Grey who in *Black Mass* considers faith as an essentially eschatological and destructive act that can be indifferently attached to religion or political utopias, Agamben, Badiou, Critchley, Kierkegaard, and Paul show that faith can be treated as a collective process that is both enlightening and empowering for subjects.[18] This shared position points to the possibility of considering the act of faith as an essentially egalitarian gesture based on its accessibility and inclusivity. An early exposition of the egalitarian content of faith can be found in Paul's *Letter to the Romans* in which the apostle

[12] Recent scholarship taking a stance towards the necessity to take to draw politics and religion closer notably include Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2011; and Clayton Crockett's Radical Political Theology (New York: Columbia University Press), 2011.
[13] Agambden, *The Time that Remains*, 113.
[14] Ibid, 91.
[15] Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless*, 164.
[16] Ibid, 13.
[17] Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, 117.
[18] See John Grey, *Black Mass Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin Books), 2008; Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great* (London: Atlantic Books), 2007; and Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bentam Press), 2006.

is keen to emphasise that Christ's message is addressed 'to all'.[19] In the first chapter, Paul declares that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him."[20] Paul emphasises how identity is rendered irrelevant by the act of faith, putting all believers on an equal footing in the eyes of god. Later in the chapter he asks: "is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, […] since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith."[21] This egalitarian message of inclusion through faith is reiterated several times throughout Paul's letters. Faith appears as a new beginning from which identities are rendered irrelevant. This 'clean slate' approach to faith is reasserted once again in Paul's *Letter to the Corinthians*:

> Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.[22]

It is essential to put Paul's egalitarian message into context to grasp its radicality. Paul's indifference towards circumcision provoked outrage amongst other apostles like James who still valued Judaic rituals such as circumcision.[23] Paul's openness towards non-Jewish followers earned him the epithet of 'apostle of the gentiles'. Not only is faith and therefore salvation open to all who wish to commit to Christ, according to Paul egalitarian inclusion conditions the truthfulness of a subject's conviction. In order to be effected, faith must first be shared amongst equal subjects. About Paul's institution of equality as a condition of faith,

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[19] For Jacob Taubes, the word 'all' (*pan*) occupies a crucial role within Paul's work. [Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of St Paul*, 26.]
[20] St Paul, "Letter to the Romans" in *The Holy Bible English Standard Version* (Crossway Publishers 2001), 1:12.
[21] Ibid, 1:29-30.
[22] St Paul, "First Epistles to the Corinthians" in *The Holy Bible English Standard Version* (Crossway Publishers 2001), 7: 18,19,20.
[23] The confrontation of Paul and Peter (under the influence of James) on the issue of circumcision is told in *Galatians 2:* "But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision." [St Paul in *Holy Bible, New Living Translation* (Carol Streams: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc), 2015.] About Paul's relationship to other early Christians, Jacob Taubes points out that he had never belonged to the twelve apostles and even persecuted the congregation. [Taubes, 14.]

Badiou writes that "For Paul, universality mediates identity. It is the 'for all' that allows me to be counted as one. Wherein we rediscover a major Pauline principle: The One is inaccessible without the 'for all.'"[24] For Badiou, 'The One' designates the figure of god that is only recognisable by all and for all. Paul appears to have been a huge influence for Badiou's understanding of equality as an effacement of identity depicted in the last chapter.[25] Convinced by Paul's radical egalitarianism, Badiou goes as far as claiming that Paul is 'the founder of universalism.'[26] This interpretation has earned him a fair share of criticism from thinkers such as Agamben and Critchley who argue that Paul did not have any universalist ambitions.[27]

Also intrigued by the relationship between equality and identity, Critchley chooses to focus on Paul's association of the faithful with the poor and the miserable. In *The Faith of the Faithless,* he argues that "Paul's politics is a building-up of an unwanted offscouring that belongs neither to the world of the Romans nor of the Jews: an unclean husk, peel or skin scale, that which is sloughed off and thrown away, the human dregs and nail clippings of the world—the shit of the earth."[28] For Critchley, marginals who do not belong anywhere form the base of Paul's political message.[29] In this reading, the egalitarian content of Pauline faith is revealed by identifying with those who have nothing rather than discarding identity altogether. This echoes the discussion laid out in chapter three of the Rancièrian consideration of 'those who have no part' on behalf of whom equality must be declared.[30] Following Critchley, it does not suffice to say that all are equal in the face of faith. One must also empathise with those who have nothing and accept that their condition could be that of everyone. In his *Letter to the Corinthians*, Paul confirms the role of the poor in conveying the strength of his message: "when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like

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[24] Badiou, *St Paul*, 97.
Badiou's universalist interpretation of Paul is strongly criticised by Agamben who claims that "The universal is not a transcendent principle through which differences may be perceived-such a perspective of transcendence is not available to Paul. Rather, this 'transcendental' involves an operation that divides the divisions of the law themselves and renders them inoperative, without ever reaching any final ground." [Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 52].
[25] See Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso), 2005.
[26] See Badiou, *St Paul*.
[27] Agamben, the time that remains, 52.
[28] Critchley, 159.
[29] Ibid. About the economic dimension of Paul's message, see Bruce Longenecker's *Remembering the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2010.
[30] See Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1999

the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. […] I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children."[31] More than a clear designation of the poor as a 'chosen' people, Paul appears to send a message of humility and equality through these verses: subjects are all equally powerless when confronted to the greatness of god. Far from limiting, Paul finds in this realisation a form of empowerment by which weakness can become strength.[32] The socio-economic hierarchy between rich and poor is rendered irrelevant by the recognition of god as the maker of all things. The egalitarian content of Pauline faith interreacts with identity in two interrelated ways. First through the declaration that truth is accessible to all who dare to have faith regardless of status or origin, and then through one's capacity to identify with those who have nothing, for we are all weak in faith, but such weakness and humility is a strength.

Moving on from identarian concerns, temporality also plays an important role in conveying the radicality of Paul's approach to faith. Although symbolically crucial, Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is not his spiritual starting point. [33] Badiou and Agamben call attention to the fact that Paul's faith is founded on the Christ's resurrection.[34] Agamben attributes Paul's retroactive commitment to the resurrection to the fact that he never physically met Jesus but only encountered him spiritually as the messiah.[35] From Paul's conversion onwards, there appears to be a temporal mismatch between Paul's Christian life and Jesus's existence pre-crucifixion. Paul's un-relatedness to Jesus as a living being undeniably influenced his decision to base his faith on the Christ's resurrection. Within Paul's story, the declaration of faith once again appears as a new beginning. This pushes Badiou to interpret the resurrection as a Christ-event that conditions the entirety of Paul's intellectual legacy.[36] In his view, the core of Paul's message takes root in the declaration of his faith in the

[31] St Paul, "First Epistles to the Corinthians", 4: 13,14.
[32] Ibid, 12: 10.
[33] About this inaugural event, Badiou writes that "Paul draws from the conditions of his 'conversion' the consequence that one can only begin from faith, from the declaration of faith", since "the sudden appearance of the Christian subject is unconditioned." Badiou aims to show the importance of the unconditionality and unpredictability of the inaugural occurrence of Christian faith to Paul. Although Paul's declaration of faith had no grounds, that same faith will condition the rest of his Christian life and forever provide consistency to his teachings. Had this accidental coming of faith not interrupted Paul's life, he would have remained a lambda Roman citizen committed to Judaism. [Badiou, *St Paul*, 17-18.]
[34] Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 126; and Badiou, *St Paul*, 14.
[35] Agamben, 126. For Taubes, the fact that Paul did not journey with Jesus unlike the twelve original apostles placed Paul on the path of becoming "a new kind of apostle." [Taubes, 14.]
[36] Badiou, *St Paul*, 45.

Christ-event, for truth is a process, and not an illumination."[37] An illumination would have elevated Paul's conversion to the status of event. Instead, Paul simultaneously declares and addresses his faith to the Christ-event of resurrection.

The temporality of Pauline faith is not merely oriented towards the past of the Christ-event. For Critchley, there is a struggle at work in Paul's message concerning "the meaning of the future and the exact extent of the shadow that the future casts across the present: eschatological struggle."[38] Pauline faith as conceptualised by Critchley does not only refer to a past event, but also to a future that signals the end of times. This position is shared by Agamben who is concerned with the time located 'in-between' the declaration of an event and the final moments of history in what he refers to as 'the time that remains.'[39] In his book of the same name, Agamben clarifies that this precarious time is not to be conflated with the eschaton (the end of times). Rather, "What interests the apostle is not the last day, it is not the instant in which time ends, but the time that contracts itself and begins to end (*ho kairos synestalmenos estin*; Cor. 7:29), or if you prefer, the time that remains between time-and its end."[40] Whereas Badiou disregards the eschatological dimension of Pauline faith, Critchley and especially Agamben pay close attention to this particularity of Pauline 'Messianic time'.[41] For Agamben, Messianic time starts with an evental opening and ends with the eschaton, emphasising that more time is required in order to truly achieve salvation.[42] Like Badiou and Critchley, Agamben recognises that faith is put in action by its declaration.[43] Yet he considers that 'the time that remains', being only conceptualizable in relation to an end-point, is that in which faith is effectuated.[44] What Agamben points to when referring to remaining time or messianic time is most clear when considered in light of Paul's reference to 'the time of the now' (*ho nyn kairos*).[45] Agamben breaks down the significance of this concept by contrasting

[37] Ibid, 15.
[38] Critchley, 162.
[39] See Agamben, *The Time that Remains*.
[40] Ibid, 62; Also see St Paul, *"*First Epistles to the Corinthians*",* 7:29.
[41] Agamben defines messianic time as a "part of secular time which undergoes an entirely transformative contraction […] the time that time takes to come to an end, or, more precisely, the time we take to bring to an end, to achieve our representation of time." [Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 67.]
[42] Ibid, 69.
[43] Ibid, 90.
[44] Ibid.
[45] About the category of 'now-time', Walter Benjamin writes, "Now-time, which, as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation, coincides exactly with the figure which

the figure of the apostle concerned with 'the time of the now' to that of the prophet concerned with a time that remains 'to come'.[46]

Agamben's temporal distinction between the figures of the apostle and the prophet is crucial in understanding the radicality of Paul's egalitarian message.[47] Living in the 'time of the now', an apostle waits neither for the end of time nor the arrival of the messiah, for the messiah has already come (at the point of resurrection marking the Christ-event). In this context, faith is not a simple declaration but also represents the activation of this declaration.[48] In other words, 'apostolic faith' is a procedure that is activated in the present provided that an event has taken place and that the 'time of the now' is not eternal. This distinction is crucial, allowing faith to become an active procedure rather than mere hope.[49] Following Agamben's reading of Paul through the concept of time, faithful subjects are called not only regardless of who they are, but also based on their presence in now-time and in view of 'the time that remains'.[50] Accepting this position relocates the egalitarian message of

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the history of mankind describes in the universe." [Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" in *Selected Writings Volume 4 1938-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), 396.]

[46] Agamben writes about the difference between apostolic and prophetic times that "each time the prophets announce the coming of the Messiah, the message is always about a time to come, a time not yet present. This is what marks the difference between the prophet and the apostle. The apostle speaks forth from the arrival of the Messiah. At this point prophecy must keep silent, for now prophecy is truly fulfilled. (This is how one should read its innermost tension toward closure.) The word passes on to the apostle, to the emissary of the Messiah, whose time is no longer the future, but the present. This is why Paul's technical term for the messianic event is ho nyn kairos 'the time of the now'; this is why Paul is an apostle and not a prophet." By recalling that there is a clear temporal gap between the messianic message of an apostle and that of a prophet, Agamben alerts his readers to the fact that "the widespread view of messianic time as oriented solely toward the future is fallacious." Paul is the main instigator of this revelation, relocating the messianic moment in 'the time of the now'. [[Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 61, 77.]
Walter Benjamin has also made use of Paul's 'time of the now' which he associates with messianic time or "the figure which the history of mankind describes in the universe." [Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", 396.]

[47] Like Agamben, Critchley also locates the figure of the apostle (and therefore Paul) in the present while the prophet is tied to a future event. [Critchley, 172.]

[48] Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 90.

[49] One must be careful to not associate 'messianic time' with chronological time. Agamben explains that messianic time, which incorporates 'the time of the now' and 'the time that remains' is "something like a time within time-not ulterior but interior." To put it differently, messianic temporality is attached to a subject through faith. One cannot have access to the temporal breach opened by the Christ-event without a subjective commitment to faith. [Ibid, 67.]

[50] For Agamben the Pauline subject is embodied by the figure of the 'remnant', whose faith is not only conditioned by Christ's resurrection but also by the 'time that remains'. Agamben defines the remnant as "the figure, or the substantiality assumed by a people in a decisive moment, and as such is the only real political subject." [Ibid, 57.] Critchley reminds his readers that the figure of the remnant was used by Paul who "sought to build up communities that, in his words, would be a 'remnant, chosen by grace'". [Critchley, 158.]
For both Agamben and Badiou, the subject is a collective entity. The difference being that for Agamben, the subject is pressed for time to achieve salvation.

Pauline faith from the horizon of a returning messiah to the concrete reality of faithful subjects. Paul's message must perform in the now, especially since 'the time that remains' is limited. In a sense, Paul grounds faith in the materiality of existing time. About the importance of immediacy for faith, Kierkegaard writes that "in immediacy, the wish is to be capable of everything, and immediacy's faith, ideally, is actually to be capable of everything."[51] Here again, the dividing line between remaining faithful to a promise and the materialisation of that promise appears to be extremely thin. If faith is anchored in an immediate and universally accessible world, it then has the potential to have a concrete impact on its subjects. Settled in the immediacy of now-time, faith is not a passive commitment to a returning prophet, but an active process which may empower or at least guide subjects. About this correspondence between thought and action inaugurated by Paul, Badiou writes that "The word *pistis* (faith, or conviction) designates precisely this point: the absence of any gap between subject and subjectivation […] (activating) the subject in the service of truth, forbidding him rest, the One-truth proceeds in the direction of all." [52] Inasmuch as it is 'for all', Paul's message is also activated 'in the now' by faithful subjects.[53]

Alongside identity and temporality, the egalitarian content of faith becomes clearer in contrast to knowledge. The antagonism between faith and knowledge has been a topic of great interest for Kierkegaard. In the early pages of *Concluding Unscientific Practice*, he depicts what he understands as a mutually exclusive relationship: "(knowledge) lying at the door of faith and coveting it, he (the faithful) is in such a precarious position that much effort, much fear and trembling, will be required if he is not to fall into temptation and confuse knowledge with faith."[54] Despite the uncertainty that faith brings, provoking fear and trembling to its subjects, it remains a much more powerful act than the acquisition of knowledge. Kierkegaard conceives of knowledge as an illusion that can only be acquired

[51] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific practice*, 387.

[52] Badiou, *St Paul*, 81.
On this understanding of faith as a bridging of thought and action, both Agamben and Badiou seem to follow the footsteps of Walter Benjamin who claimed that "The messianic world is the world of universal and integral actuality. Only in the messianic realm does a universal history exist. Not as written history, but as festively enacted history." [Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", 404.]

[53] Kierkegaard also emphasises the effective impact of faith in the present when he writes that faith "accentuates actuality, existence, and paradoxically from the ethical, accentuates another's actuality, not one's own." Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Practice, 487.]

[54] Ibid, 26.

through approximations.[55] In contrast, faith is presented as a direct link between a truth and its subject, a tremendous force "that turned fishermen into apostles, that can move mountains – if one has it!"[56] Kierkegaard's commentary on knowledge distinctly echoes Rancière and Badiou's reservation towards this category.[57] However, the particularity of Kierkegaard's argument is to uncompromisingly elevate faith as the deepest form of subjective commitment. Knowledge is not undermined based on it reflecting a current situation, but because it obstructs the great power of faith through its approximations. One of the traps of overly relying on knowledge is to forget "what it is to exist and what inwardness means."[58] Inwardness conveys both passion and subjectivity and is most decisively expressed through faith.[59] Kierkegaard even portrays the acknowledgement of one's ignorance as a form of blessing, writing that "what distinguishes intellectual giftedness is the ability to present ever more clearly that it is and remains a secret for those who exist", adding that it is "nevertheless a blessing, situated at the extremity of existence, to relate to this secret without understanding it, only having faith."[60] The passion of faith, despite carrying with it a load of uncertainty and fear, can be read as the truest expression of subjectivity.

Kierkegaard's opposition of knowledge and faith is essential for it helps uncovering another intrinsically egalitarian dimension of faith. If both knowledge and faith are understood as subjective processes aimed at attaining a form of truth, faith appears significantly more inclusive in several ways. Whereas knowledge acquisition requires a significant amount of time and resources, faith is directly accessible to anyone brave enough to believe. The act of faith only demands that a subjective leap be made since its process remains limited to the relationship between a subject and a truth. On the other hand, knowledge represents not only a temporal challenge but also an intellectual and social one, for one must be in the right dispositions (financial, educational, cognitive) to acquire it.

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[55] Ibid, 68. Outlining the limits of knowledge, Kierkegaard writes, "even with this almost extraordinary knowledge or knowledgeable proficiency, I can in no way consider death something that I have understood." [Ibid, 139.]

[56] Ibid, 28.

[57] Using a language that echoes Rancière's discussion of Jacotot's equality of intelligence, Kierkegaard explains the futility of hierarchical divides in a faithful context: "The true knight of faith is a witness, never the teacher […] He who desires only to be a witness confesses thereby that no man, not even the most unimportant man, needs another's participation or is to be devalued by it in order to raise another's value." [Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 80.]

[58] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Practice*, 220.

[59] Ibid, 29, 33.

[60] Ibid, 180.

Knowledge is not a given nor is it ever given to any subject. It is deeply mediated by a multitude of objective factors that must be overcome if one is to gain access to its (approximate) truth. The objective mediations underpinning knowledge forbid many subjects from having any relationship to truth conceived as an outcome of learning. The radicality of faith lies in its capacity to deliver truth to all in an accessible way and independently of any objective interferences. Where knowledge demands time, selection, and division, faith simply requires a subjective commitment the leap. In its objective simplicity, the process of faith is far more inclusive than knowledge acquisition. Not only is the egalitarian content of faith rooted in the universality of its message, it also persists more concretely in the objective conditions of gaining access to truth through the act of being faithful. These objective conditions are minimal, demanding that one declares her/his commitment to truth. Unclouded by objective mediations, faith opens a subjective pathway to truth that is equally accessible to all. The objective content of faith will be further discussed in the following section.

It would be a mistake to read faith through the prism of equality without accounting for the type of intersubjective relationships it promotes. Here again, the intellectual input of Paul and Kierkegaard is fundamental. According to Taubes, Paul commits a revolutionary act by conflating Jesus's dual commandment to love god and to love your neighbour as yourself into the unique commandment to love one's neighbour.[61] To love Christ by loving one another is a recurring motif in Paul's writings. In *Galatians* the apostle declares that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love."[62] Love thus acts as a complement to faith, a substantiation of the faithful promise. Writing about Paul, Critchley explains that "Faith without love is a hollow clanging that lacks the subjective commitment to endure."[63] Not only is love part of Paul's message, it is also a necessary component of the process of faith as the "fulfilling of the law."[64] What does it mean to love in the context of faith? For Critchley via-Paul it requires "an openness to love, love as giving what one does not have and receiving that over which one has no power."[65] For Taubes it

[61] Taubes, 40; and Crockett, 11.
[62] St Paul, "Galatians 5:5-7" in *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers), 2009.
[63] Critchley, 165. Love plays in important role in Critchley's faith of the faithless. Early in the book he makes the claim that "the question 'how to live?' has become the question 'how to love?' Love is not just as strong as death—it is stronger." Critchley, 20.]
[64] St Paul, "Letter to the Romans" in *The Holy Bible English Standard Version*.
[65] Critchley, 7.

signifies that "the other person is needed", that "I am not I, but we are we", and finally that "in our need we are together in the body of Christ."[66] In both of these interpretations of love through faith, what emerges is a sense of selflessness and reciprocity, as well as the acknowledgement that we all equally belong as faithful subjects. Kierkegaard follows a similar route by claiming that "he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith reflects upon God."[67] The combination of love and faith offers the possibility that individual concerns be redirected onto others who together embody the figure of god.

Love provides a crucial conceptual link between faith and equality. Through the commitment to "love thy neighbour as thyeself", the faithful recognise that their individuality does not exceed that of any other.[68] To love as a subject means "that I am not centred on myself" for the neighbour matters just as much as I do.[69] Love appears as a humbling and selfless process for both Paul and Kierkegaard. Far from a constraining commandment, it may be interpreted as an egalitarian opening in both thought and action. Insomuch as faith is directed to god, it is also directed to others with whom the faithful commitment is shared. Through the prism of love, the figure of god can have a humbling function, leading subjects to treat each other as equals in the existing world based on the impossibility to entertain an exclusive relationship to god as individuals.

Through the writings of Paul, Kierkegaard, and their contemporary readers, faith appears as a process embodying intrinsically egalitarian characteristics. Starting with Paul's announcement that the message of Christ must be accessible to all, the process of faith excludes the overvaluation of rigid identities and hierarchies. The declaration of faith itself constitutes a new collective identity in which the faithful are united rather than opposed. The temporality of Pauline faith is also of great political importance to the extent that it summons its subjects to live and act in the 'time of the now'. No longer fixated on the horizon of a returning messiah, subjects are empowered to collectively materialise Christ's truth in the world. Faith also reveals its egalitarian potential when considered in relation to knowledge. Whereas knowledge acquisition is a tenuous and selective process, faith enables subjects to gain access to truth merely by virtue of its declaration. As truthful process, faith appears

[66] Taubes, 56.
[67] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, 37.
[68] "Matthew 22:39" in *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers), 2009.
[69] Taubes, 55.

significantly more inclusive by involving subjects who might have been forever left on the shores of knowledge. Finally, the egalitarian core of faith comes in plain sight when read through the prism of love. If to be faithful entails loving others as oneself, then faith must be selfless, humbling, and egalitarian.

Subjective and Objective Fidelities

The previous section aimed to present the egalitarian content of faith in relation to inclusion, knowledge, temporality, and love. This section will focus on the objective dimension of faith. Thinkers discussed in this chapter approach faith primarily as a subjective process. There can be no doubts that an act of faith rests primarily on a subjective commitment to truth. What is the objective status of a process of such subjective intensity? Answering this question is crucial for the possibility to consider faith as a process for the materialisation of egalitarian politics. Kierkegaard builds a strong case against the possibility to understand faith in objective terms. Instead, subjectivity which he often refers to as 'inwardness' is itself truth.[70] In Paul's letters, the presence or absence of an objective facet of faith is chiefly contained within discussions of the relevance of law in relation to faith. This is undeniably one of the most debated topic of Pauline theology. At its core, this debate opposes the antinomian readings of thinkers like Marcion, Agamben, and Badiou who always place faith above the law, and those of Critchley and Taubes for whom the law remains a crucial element of Paul's approach to faith. Within Paul's work, the law arguably represents the exterior, non-subjective angle of faith. To talk of the objective content of faith, one must mention the notion of proof to which most of the thinkers named above seem opposed to. Inasmuch as objectivity shall not be limited to scientific proof, the latter is often invoked as a challenge to faith's subjective leanings. The question of objectivity is complex and ultimately condemned to remain unclear. Yet, it will be argued that equality conceived as an axiom (or law) coupled with the materialisation of a collective subject-body constitute the objective side of faith in a political context.

Kierkegaard's work is essential for anyone interested in discussing faith through the objective/subjective dichotomy. In his view, only subjectivity conveys for true power of faith

[70] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Practice*, 174.

based on the assertion that "Christianity is spirit; spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity in its essential passion, at its maximum an infinitely personally interested passion for one's eternal happiness."[71] Through these associations, Kierkegaard elevates faith as "the highest passion of subjectivity."[72] Faith, subjectivity, inwardness, and passion are so closely tied together that they often blur into one in his writings. To recognise faith as the deepest expression of subjectivity comes at a cost: objective uncertainty. If faith is constituted by the "contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty", to have faith also denotes an inability to grasp god objectively.[73] Faith for Kierkegaard is an inward passion on which objectivity has no claim.[74] He illustrates his position on objectivity through the notion of knowledge: "to believe with the understanding cannot be done at all, because the one who believes with the understanding talks only of job and wife and fields and oxen and the like, which are not at all the object of faith."[75] The aim of faith is not to generate an intelligible law of conduct for everyday life. Instead, "faith always thanks God," and is "always in deadly peril in that collision of finite and infinite."[76] Not content with conceptualising faith as a subjective process, Kierkegaard warns against the dangers of attempting to understand faith in objective terms. The claim to objectivity will always get in the way of eternal happiness, for "this happiness inheres precisely in the infinite, personal, impassioned interest, and just this is what one gives up in order to become objective, just this what one lets objectivity trick one out of."[77]

Kierkegaard is aware of the audacity of his claim against objectivity. He often treats faith as an absurd yet truthful process. In *Fear and Trembling,* he illustrates this apparent paradox through 'the binding of Isaac', by which Abraham is ordered by god to sacrifice his son Isaac before being stopped by god right before the act.[78] About this dramatic episode, Kierkegaard writes that Abraham "had faith by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation

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[71] Ibid, 29.
[72] Ibid, 110. Earlier in the book, Kierkegaard also defines faith as "the most decisive expression of subjectivity." [Ibid, 33.]
[73] Ibid, 171-172.
[74] Commenting on Kierkegaard's approach to faith, Badiou writes that "We thus see that belief is the subjective form of the True, whose proper pathos is that of the absurd as the holding fast of objective uncertainty. But what does this holding fast mean? Simply that absolute choice never offers the least objective guarantee." [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 430.]
[75] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific practice*, 195.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid, 24.
[78] "Genesis 22: 2-8." In *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers), 2009.

was out of the question, and it certainly was absurd that God, who required it of him, should in the next moment rescind the requirement."[79] Faith is absurd inasmuch as it pushes Abraham to go against any objective measure of righteousness. In the eyes of the law this act is proscribed by the commandment that 'thou shall not kill'. Abraham's commitment cannot be read as a self-interested act. Objectively, Abraham has nothing to gain from sacrificing his son. Yet, the sacrifice is commanded by god and enabled by faith. The absurd of faith is precisely the impossibility to objectively recognise its truth.[80] Faith should not be associated to categories "that lie within the proper domain of the understanding", such as the improbable, the unexpected, or the unforeseen.[81] Faith is not a mistake or a miscalculation, but an objective absurdity that nonetheless embodies the truth of subjectivity. The paradoxical nature of Kierkegaard's subjective approach to faith is probably best embodied in the statement that "when the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd."[82] Truth is only truthful in the eyes of the subject who has been touched by faith.

Kierkegaard often conflates the absurd with the 'paradox' of faith.[83] This paradox states that if one has an absolute duty to god, then "the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal and as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute—or else faith has never existed."[84] Alastair Hannay explains that in case faith is not regimented by this paradox, Abraham "must be considered either a criminal or a lunatic" since his sacrifice cannot be justified.[85] As the highest passion of subjectivity, faith must elevate the subject above the universal in order to establish an absolute relationship between truth and subject. If such elevation is proscribed, then the power of faith will crumble. Kierkegaard's unconditional commitment to subjective faith inevitably raises the possibility of opposing faith to reason.[86] Based on his close reading of Kierkegaard, C.S Evans explains that "there is no conflict between faith and reason if reason can accept the

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[79] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 35.
[80] In the case of Christianity, Kierkegaard considers that "The absurd is that the eternal truth has come about in time, that God has come about, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come about just as the single human being, indistinguishable from any other." [Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Practice*, 177]
[81] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 46.
[82] Kierkegaard quoted *in Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries: Theology* edited by Jon Bartley Stewart (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 85.
[83] C.S Evans, "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith," *Religious Studies 25* (1989): 350.
[84] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 81.
[85] Alastair Hannay, in *Cambridge Critical Guide to Fear and Trembling* ed. Daniel Conway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 8.
[86] On the question of reason, see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard and Philosophy* (London: Routledge), 2003.

limitations of reason."[87] The purpose of faith is not to supersede reason but to provide another pathway to truth, one on which subjectivity is never compromised. On the conflict between religious narratives and reason, Badiou explains that "the dispute on the religious narrative is a dead end simply because the narrative is the object of the faithful's desire, and that is precisely where faith resides. Thus, the subjective power of faith cannot be discussed in rational terms."[88] This perfectly conveys Kierkegaard's understanding of faith as a profoundly subjective force destined to remain absurd from an objective and rational perspective.

In Paul's letters, the question of objectivity arises in his discussion of the relationship between faith and law. Whereas Pauline faith can be defined as a deep subjective commitment to Christ's resurrection, the law stands as the objective and external representation of god's commandment. Paul's ambiguous approach to the law mainly takes shape in his *Letter to the Romans*. It remains a source of great debate amongst theorists and theologians whether the message contained in this letter effectively pins faith against the law.[89] Early in the letter, Paul is careful to differentiate between those merely 'hear' the law and those who perform or actively realise the law:

> For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. […] For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. […] They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.[90]

In these verses, the law appears as a spirit to be realised through the actions of the faithful. A gentile can carry the law without having formally acquired it, simply by acting in accordance to it. Rather than a heavy commandment imposed by god, Paul suggests that the law may naturally be reflected in the behaviour of those who have faith regardless of how

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[87] Evans, 356.
[88] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 158. Own translation.
[89] Taubes remarks that Paul's use of the term law is itself subject to interpretation: "It's not easy to sort out what Paul means when he says 'law'. Does he mean the Torah, does he mean the law of the universe, does he mean natural law? It's all of these in one. Everything is bound up with everything else." [Taubes, 24.]
[90] St Paul, "Letter to the Romans", 2: 13-15.

they came to it. This view is illustrated by Paul's comments on circumcision which physically marks the difference between Jews and non-Jews, embodying the commitment to mosaic law. He declares that "circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision", later asking "if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?"[91] Here, Paul does not fundamentally reject circumcision. Instead, he suggests that it acts as a secondary symbolic recognition of the law. Preceding this secondary recognition is the rightful behaviour of the faithful acting according to the law without necessarily being aware of it. If indeed "a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter", does this signify that faith always takes precedence over the law?[92] To the extent that indifference towards circumcision and therefore identity represents an opening of faith, does it also signal a disavowal of the law? Paul clarifies his position in the seventh chapter of his *Letter to the Romans:*

> But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. […] What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." […] But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. […] I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.[93]

Here, Paul denounces the corrosive effects of the law. He implies that one who has been touched by grace no longer requires the direction of the law, for faith alone suffices. Through his uncertain position on the law, Paul pushes one to differentiates between the objective (symbolic) status of the law and its subjective experience through faith. Considering that law may also reflect sin, he implies that the subjective (interior) procedure of faith is a more truthful process than the objective enactment of the law.[94] The law structures the social

[91] Ibid, 2: 25-26.
[92] Ibid, 2: 29.
[93] Ibid, 7: 6-10.
[94] Agamben interpret Pauline messianism not as a destruction of the law, but rather as a "deactivation of the law, rendering the law inexecutable." [Agamben, The Time that Remains, 98.]

as much as it disrupts an existing faithful procedure. Badiou goes as far as claiming that Paul's reflection on the law "points toward a theory of the subjective unconscious."[95] Without venturing so deeply into the human psyche, it is apparent that Paul confronts the subjective experience of religion to its early structuring process taking shape in mosaic law.

In the centuries following Paul's *Letter to the Romans,* many have opposed law and faith based on radically antinomian interpretations of his verses. This trend was inaugurated by Marcion of Sinope, a 2nd century theologist who saw himself as Paul's disciple and for whom grace alone was the true essence of the gospel.[96] Critchley explains that "in Marcion's eyes, Paulinism represented a great revolution that had, already at the beginning of the second century, been betrayed and that required reformation."[97] Reformation in that case meant reasserting the Pauline distinction between law and faith.[98] This reading remains very much alive in contemporary theory. For Agamben, Paul's treatment of faith "is tightly interwoven with a critique of the law."[99] Interpreting Paul's verses on circumcision, he writes, "that which, according to the law, made one man a Jew and the other a goy, one a slave and another a free man, is now annulled by the vocation."[100] Agamben often interprets the law through the prism of identity and the divisions it deploys. In this context, faith demands expropriating old categorisations such as circumcised/uncircumcised or free/slave in order to renew the messianic commitment.[101] Agamben's critique of the law focuses primarily on this identarian element. Interpreting Paul's ambivalence towards the law, he explains that "the law can be brought to fulfilment only if it is first restored to the inoperativity of power."[102]

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[95] Badiou, *St Paul*, 80.

[96] Taubes, 56; Critchley, 199.

[97] Critchley, 199.

[98] Ibid.
Paul's radical gesture towards faith against the established church leads Critchley to interpret Paul as the instigator of the "spirit of reformation." [Critchley, 155.]; Most notably, Paul inspires Martin Luther to claim that "the truth of the Gospel is, that our righteousness comes by faith alone." [Martin Luther, *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Lafayette: Sovereign Grace Publication, 2001), 100.]; Antonia Szabari refers to Luther's writings as a 'theology of the performative'. She explains this idea is tied to Luther's approach to faith when she writes that "it takes a corresponding consciousness, the assurance of the human subject of the continuity and the transparency of the promise, to recognize the divine promise. This recognition is what Luther calls faith, and faith manifests itself in the subject's dealings with the revealed God (*deus relevatus*), as well as in his social dealings with other subjects. Antonia Szabari, "The Scandal if Religion" in *Political Theologies and Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 127.

[99] Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 91

[100] Ibid, 23.

[101] Ibid, 26.

[102] Ibid, 98; About this effacement of the law, Agamben specifies that "the messianic is not the destruction but the deactivation of the law, rendering the law inexecutable." [Ibid.]

The law represents the old world of identifications whose deactivation conditions the deployment of faith as the true messianic force. In other words, the objective facet of the messianic (law) exists only to provide momentum to the subjective power of faith.

Badiou offers another radically antinomian interpretation of Paul's letter. From his standpoint, the Christ event interrupts the previous regime of discourse thereby relieving subjects of the law.[103] Only after being relieved from the burden of the law can one emancipate from slavery and truly become a 'son'.[104] For Badiou, Paul's message is clear: one must be saved from the afflictions of the law by committing to the Christ event through faith, since "for Paul there is only faith."[105] Not unlike Agamben, Badiou conceives of the subjective power of faith as a new beginning that delegitimises old objective commandments of the law. He opposes the law not directly to faith but to grace, for "grace is the opposite of law insofar as it is what comes without being due."[106] The unforeseen Christ event coordinates faith and grace in a way that renders law entirely superfluous.[107]

Badiou's antinomianism is also clearly palpable through his amalgamation of law and sin. It was shown earlier that Paul considers law as a mirror image of sin, for "if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin".[108] Badiou develops a radical interpretation of this association, arguing that "sin is the life of desire as autonomy, as automatism", while "The law is required in order to unleash the automatic life of desire, the automatism of repetition."[109] Although Paul's position on the sinful content of the law is relative (sin merely "seizing an opportunity through the commandment"), Badiou conquers that the law does not only reflects the danger of sin, but also directly produces a regime of desires that conditions it. He even goes further by claiming that "sin is the life of death […] that of which the law and

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[103] Badiou, *St Paul*, 48.
[104] Ibid, 49.
[105] Ibid, 49.
[106] ibid, 77.
Grace can be defined as a divine favour. Ian A. Macfarland defines grace in Pauline terms as a gift detached from any merit: "Paul thereby seeks to highlight the status of grace as an unmerited gift rather than a reward that is earned (Rom. 4:4, 16). Because it originates with and is secured by God prior to any human merit or demerit, grace is the sole basis for human beings' ability to stand before God (Rom. 5:2)." [Ian A. McFarland, "Grace" in The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 201.
[107] Badiou, *St Paul*, 75. Badiou bases his analysis on Paul's declaration that we are "no longer under law but under grace." [St Paul, "Letter to the Romans," 6:14.]
[108] Ibid, 7:7.
[109] Badiou, *St Paul*, 79.

the law alone is capable."[110] In Badiou's view, the law does not merely reflect the possibility of sin but itself constitutes a sinful construct that offers nothing more than the perspective of a life of death, constituting the subject as powerless.[111] In contrast to this grim prospect, faith constituted by the Christ event represents a new form of law belonging to life and the spirit of Christ.[112] This reading of Paul clearly resonates with Badiou's understanding of politics as a purely subjective process. The objective status occupied by the law in Paul's teachings converges with the role played by state of the situation in Badiou's work. Mosaic and Roman law, like the capitalo-parliamentary state, is what must be ruptured by the occurrence of a messianic event whose success depends on the faith and commitment of subjects.

Critchley provides an interesting counterpoint to Agamben and Badiou's antinomian readings of Paul as an adversary of the law. He writes that "If the law was not fully within me, as the awareness of my fallenness and consciousness of sin, then faith as the overcoming of the law would mean nothing."[113] Critchley seems to integrate Paul's consideration of the law within a dialectical relationship with faith, showing how both dimensions play a part in the fabric of subjective consciousness. In his view, the Paulinism of Agamben and Badiou is more of "a crypto-Marcionism that risks a radical antinomianism in its attempt to break the connection between law and faith."[114] Critchley's critique is substantiated by Paul's declaration that although there is only one god "who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith", we must not "overthrow the law by this faith" but uphold it.[115] Even according to Agamben, this verse "makes for the stumbling block of every reading of the Pauline critique of the law."[116] Despite Paul's foundational approach to faith as a subjective process of truth, could the objective status of the law remain an active component of that process? Paul offers no clear arguments against this possibility.[117] Even

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[110] Ibid, 83.

[111] Ibid.
This bleak portrayal of lawful and sinful life directly echoes Badiou's Platonic consideration of democratic materialism as a life emptied of meaning discussed in the previous chapter. See Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* (London: Continuum, 2009), 1-2, 509-511.

[112] Badiou, *St Paul*, 87.

[113] Critchley, 203.

[114] Ibid, 15.

[115] St Paul, "Letter to the Romans," 3: 30-31.

[116] Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 98.

[117] Reading Paul's *Letter to the Galatians 3:11-12*, Agamben writes, "the apostle seems to aporetically exclude any hierarchical relation between faith and law: 'But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, 'The just shall live by faith.' And the law is not of faith, but 'He who puts these precepts into practice shall live through them'." [Ibid, 94.]

after centuries of antinomian interpretations of his work of which Badiou's and Agamben's are some of the latest iterations, Paul's message remains ambiguous enough so that the objective status of the law cannot be completely excluded from the process of faith. [118]

Paul's antinomian readers are furthered challenged by his declaration in chapter ten of *Letter to the Romans* that "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."[119] To conceive of Christ as the *telos* of the law implies that the law (*nomos*) and Christ's resurrection (Christ event) are two sequences of the same process. Concentrating on this very passage, theologian Charles Lee Irons believes that Paul "presupposed that the object of law was righteousness."[120] Although "believers are not righteous by doing the law personally", Christ has realised the object of law in the form of righteousness and in the name of the faithful.[121] In light of this reading, the law appears not as an obstacle to faith, but as a precondition of Christ's sacrifice and subsequent resurrection. This position remains consistent with Agamben and Badiou's consideration of the law as 'old' in relation to the novelty of Paul's consideration of faith.[122] However, unlike Agamben and Badiou's antinomian readings, it does not imply that the law is obsolete, challenging their interpretation of faith as a deactivation or erasure of the law.[123] As Critchley points out, "for Paul, we do not escape from the law", it remains present within subjects throughout the faithful procedure.[124]

Paul and Kierkegaard both put a strong emphasis on the subjective content of faith. Ultimately, faith primarily rests on the relationship between a truth and its subject. The subjective power of faith is undisputable for most thinkers discussed in this chapter. Yet, grasping its objective status is a more perilous task. Against Kierkegaard and antinomian readings of Paul, it is possible to claim that faith depends on some form of *nomos* that does

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[118] Critchley associates the huge spectrum of interpretation of Paulinism with the figure of Marcion: "Paul's Epistles have shown themselves to be susceptible to the widest and wildest interpretations, simplifications, and distortions. From the time of the subsequent writing of the Gospels, through to the Acts of the Apostles and the so-called heresy of Marcion onwards, there has seemed to be something infinitely malleable about the subtle antithetical complexities of Paul's thinking, what Luther called "an unheard-of speech." [Critchley, 157.]

[119] St Paul, "Letter to the Romans," 10:4.

[120] Charles Lee Irons, "The Object of the Law is Realized in Christ: Romans 10:4 and Paul's Justification Teaching," *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 6 (2016): 33-54, 33.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26; Britt, 278; and Badiou, *St Paul*, 49.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Critchley, 203.

not compromise its subjective strength. In a political context, this role is arguably fulfilled by equality.

The two preceding chapters have shown how for both Rancière and Badiou, equality stands as the precondition of politics. Their accounts of politics as a subjective process depends on a consideration of equality as an objective certainty. For politics to have a chance of occurring, equality must be present and recognised. Although Badiou clearly lays out his axiomatic account of equality, its link with political truths and the process of subjective fidelity demands further clarifications. Approaching equality as the axiomatic guarantee of politics thought as a subjective process suggests that faith be present at two distinct levels. First objectively as the recognition of equality as the unconditioned axiom or law of politics, and subjectively through committing to a political truth that conforms to that axiom.[125] Far from an empirical fact, equality results from its deployment as an axiom to which one must be faithful to enable politics.[126] To declare like Badiou that equality is merely given as an axiom is insufficient, for axioms must be believed and followed in order to be effected. Against the antinomianism of Kierkegaard, Agamben, and Badiou, it may be argued that the subjective strength of faith depends on a *nomos,* taking the form of a law for Christianity and an axiom for politics, in which subjects must place their faith for a truthful procedure to be activated and materialise through the constitution of a collective subject-body. Based on the limits of purely subjective and antinomian considerations of faith, the next section is dedicated to conceptualising its objective counterpart. Building on Badiou's conceptualisation of fidelity discussed in chapter four, it will be argued that fidelity must be further differentiated from religious faith in 'the One' for it to fully reveal its political potential. One way to achieve this is to consider the necessity to materialise axiomatic equality through the constitution of a collective subject-body as the object of political fidelity.

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[125] Kierkegaard himself associates objective faith with axioms when he asks "What does that mean, objective faith? It means a sum of axioms." [Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Practice*, 181.]

[126] Badiou is clear that although equality opposes identity and is a precondition of politics, it is hardly detectable empirically: "That every truth procedure collapses differences, infinitely deploying a purely generic multiplicity, does not permit us to lose sight of the fact that, in the situation (call it: the world), there are differences. One can even maintain that there is nothing else." [Badiou, *St Paul*, 98.] Critchley also contrasts his interpretation of faith as a performative force to empirical truth: "We are dealing here […] with a performative idea of truth as troth, an act of fidelity or 'being true to,' rather than a propositional or empirical idea of truth" [Critchley, 165.]

Political Faith in a Godless World

The contemporary dialogue opened by political theorists with theology is both necessary and fruitful. There is an undeniable paradox in the decision of using Paul or Kierkegaard's discussions of faith to contribute to political theory. Yet, what results from this unique intellectual encounter is the proposition that considering faith as an egalitarian and inclusive process of truth can be equally relevant to religion and politics. It is vital to point out that neither Agamben, Badiou, nor Critchley's work should be considered as instances of Christian illuminations. Agamben is interested in the novelty, impact, and uncertain temporality of Paul's messianism. For Badiou, the religious content of Paul's letters remains a fable.[127] He reads Paul as "poet-thinker of the event" rather than a spiritual guide, filtering out beatification to retain the philosophical and political force of his message.[128] For Critchley, faith is a process that should concern the 'faithless' as such. Therefore, it cannot be "the abstraction of a metaphysical belief in God."[129] In no way do these accounts generate a movement away from secularism. Instead, they set up the space for a deep engagement between theology and political thought that would have been prevented had the wall erected between progressive politics and religion not been breached.

If political faith is to remain a secular process despite its close conceptual resemblance with religious faith, what are its distinctive traits? A theoretical sketch may be extracted from Badiou's notion of 'fidelity'. As an adjective, the word is difficult to translate from French to English. In most of Badiou's translations, *fidèle* is simply transcribed as 'faithful'. In English, the term faithful can be equally applied to any kind of relationship; be they amorous, friendly, religious, or political. However, the French adjective *fidèle* tends to be used more secularly as a synonym for commitment. One can be *fidèle* in love, friendship, politics, but its link with religion is secondary. The term conveys notions of reliability, consistency, and strength of character but hardly divine attachment. Religious faith is plainly expressed by the word

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[127] Badiou, St Paul, 4.

[128] Ibid, 2; For Badiou, the true power of evental truth is revealed by abandoning the content of the fable which "leaves as its remainder the form of these conditions and, in particular, the ruin of every attempt to assign the discourse of truth to preconstituted historical aggregates." [Ibid, 6.]
Despite Badiou's close affinity with Paul, Christopher Watkins refuses to consider Badiou's work as theological: "Just because Badiou uses the term 'grace' or 'faith', it does not mean that his writing is theological.
[Christopher Watkins, *Difficult Atheism Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 98.]

[129] Critchley, 18.

croyant (believer).[130] This etymological detail far from being irrelevant, is essential if one aims to differentiate between religious and political forms of faiths.

Badiou does not explicitly differentiate between the processes of faith and fidelity. In fact, many ideas at the core of Badiousian political thought may be interpreted as a secularisation of Paul's apostolic message.[131] In an inversion of Badiou's critical distance towards the substance of Paul's faith, one may say that communism is 'the fable' of Badiou's egalitarian political thought. Yet, Badiousian fidelity displays characteristics that are not applicable to faith in the way in which it has been discussed thus far in this chapter. In *Being and Event*, Badiou explains that "fidelity must not be understood in any way as a capacity, a subjective quality, or a virtue." Instead, "fidelity is a situated operation which depends on the examination of situations. Fidelity is a functional relation to the event."[132] This clarification presents fidelity as a rational process resulting from the careful consideration of situations and the evental occurrence. As it was claimed in the previous chapter, fidelity must be understood as multi-layered process of truth, not an illumination descending from god. Rather than being left in awe by the sublime glory of god, the subject of truth is put to work by her/his fidelity to the event. About the type of transcendence characterising fidelity, Hallward writes, "truth does not descend from on high, a ready- made revelation", instead "only the work that declares it constitutes it" as truth.[133]

One must be careful not to over-rationalise the subjective process of fidelity, keeping in mind that for Badiou "there is no proof of the event."[134] A political event, just like the Christ-event, is not justified by proof but by faith. Christopher Norris writes about Badiou's concept of fidelity that "it has to do with those aspects that involve truthfulness to some idea,

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[130] Larousse, « fidèle, » http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/fid%C3%A8le/33594.

[131] Badiou himself appears to find the origin of his concept of event within Paul's writings. The brevity that Badiou assigns to the event is applicable to the Christ's resurrection (Christ-event) as much as any revolution or social dynamic that falls under the label of a political event. What remains from the event is a symbolic memory or, as Badiou calls it, a 'trace'. The trace is the crucial link between a subject and an event that has already occurred, it is what paves the way for the enactment of a truth procedure. For the trace to be meaningful, it must be followed by a subject. This subject takes on the appearance of a faithful Christian for Paul, and that of a militant for Badiou. Both being only attached to an evental truth by retracing its active substance through faith. In his antinomian reading of Paul, Badiou treats fidelity as 'the law of truth': "I call this universal power of subjectivation an evental fidelity, and it is correct to say that fidelity is the law of a truth. In Paul's thought, love is precisely fidelity to the Christ-event, in accordance with a power that addresses the love of self universally. Love is what makes of thought a power, which is why love alone, and not faith, bears the force of salvation." [Quentin Meillassoux, "History and Event In Alain Badiou," 3; and Badiou, *St Paul*, 90.]

[132] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 233.

[133] Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 122; and Badiou, *Saint-Paul,* 53-55.

[134] Badiou, *St Paul*, 49.

hypothesis, theory, project, undertaking, or political cause that requires an investment of intellectual or political faith. beyond what is presently justified by the best available proof-procedures or total evidence to hand."[135]

Another way to distinguish between faith and fidelity resides in the possibility for multiple political truths to emerge, while religious truth remains singular. This is a theme explored by Badiou in his latest publication *L'Immanence des vérités:*

> If there are indeed truths and not The Truth, it is because the absoluteness of a truth does not mean that a single truth is absolute. If that was the case, we would have to conclude that only the absolute is true, a statement that has clear theological implications. The laborious fidelity underpinning the becoming of truths is located in-between existing multiplicities, of which truth are a part, and the absolute, to which truths are connected merely by means of belonging to these multiplicities.[136]

Badiou's point here far exceeds a mere quantitative distinction between a singular religious Truth and multiple political truths. It reflects an attempt to philosophically acknowledge the 'death of the One' or the 'death of God' "without sacrificing the existence of truths nor their absoluteness."[137] In the absence of a single transcendent figure, god's place is not emptied but replaced by pure multiplicity. Although pure multiplicity is ungraspable and infinite, it is ontologically reflected by the existence of 'the people' constantly defining politics.[138] This gesture has tremendous political implications. The dislocation of Truth into the realm of pure multiplicity signifies that faith is no longer directed upward to god but horizontally towards others who together constitute pure multiplicity. This shift arguably allows for the possibility to distinguish faith from fidelity. Whereas religious faith demands that the difference between subject, truth, and the figure of god be clear, proclaiming the 'death of the One' transcends pure multiplicity, rendering these divisions superfluous. If faithful (*fidèle*) subjects are contained within pure multiplicity, then they are not only the

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[135] Christopher Norris "Fidelity" in *The Badiou Dictionary*, 132.
[136] Badiou, *L'immanence des vérités*, 379. Own translation.
[137] Ibid, 11. Own translation. About this very point, Norman Madarasz explains that "The hypothesis of a return of Gods ought to be ruled out, as it is the illusion arising from Being when captured under the equivalence of the One and the Infinite. The option of thinking Being un der the concept of pure multiplicity is sufficient to main tain philosophy within an atheistic fold. [Norman Madarasz in *The Badiou Dictionary*, 146.]
[138] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 348. For Badiou, subject-bodies exists both ontologically as pure multiplicity and logically as a form of transcendental appearing. [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 68.]

subject but also the object of that fidelity. Inasmuch as political truth retains the transcendent potential of religious truth, it emerges from the people and demands that fidelity be invested by political subjects themselves. The figure of the people must remain present at every stage of the political procedure. From the inception of egalitarian politics within pure multiplicity, to the process of fidelity through which subjects are also the object of their own faith, and eventually to the appearance of political truths through subject-bodies, the people must be defended as the transcendent of a political truth procedure.

Fidelity must be distinguished from faith based on it being practiced by transcending subjects politically realising themselves as a collective rather than faithful recipients of a truth emanating from god. As an axiom, equality conditions the process of fidelity in its entirety. Necessary for the very possibility of a political event, equality also persists as the objective facet of fidelity, and eventually takes shape in the materialisation of a political truth through a collective. To think of equality through objective fidelity signifies that faithful (*fidèle*) subjects are aware of and believe in the cruciality of equality for politics. In the same way that for Paul non-Jews may respect mosaic law without formally acknowledging it, political subjects embody equality merely by virtue of being there. However, it is especially crucial that political subjects acknowledge the objective status of equality by recognising their own potential as a collective. Assuming that subjects are also objects of their own fidelity, rejecting the axiomatic status of equality is equivalent to doubting their collective political capacity, undermining the political procedure altogether. If fidelity is considered as a subjective as well as an objective procedure, then equality must also be materialised through the constitution of a collective subject-body. To the extent that equality already traverses subjects and bodies merely by virtue of them being there, politics does not. The materialisation of egalitarian politics rests on the active engagement (works) of both subjects and bodies in a way that exceeds Badiou's account of evental retracing. The objective implications of attempting to materialise egalitarian politics will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Fidelity conceptualised as a secularisation of faith closely resembles Critchley's notion of 'faith of the faithless'. Critchley rightfully points out that "unbelievers still seem to require an experience of belief."[139] He treats faith not as a metaphysical belief in god, but as "fidelity to the infinite demand" on the part of the faithless. Building on the paradoxes of Pauline

[139] Critchley, 3.

theology by which 'weakness is strength' and 'slaves are free', Critchley elevates the faithless as those whose faith is strongest.[140] Unlike Badiou, Paul, or Kierkegaard, Critchley stays away from the notion of truth to instead treat the object of faith as a 'supreme fiction'. He defines the latter as an "ethical commitment towards a possibility as yet unknown and inexistent in the situation, but still powerfully imagined."[141] Deploying the figure of the faithless allows Critchley to view faith with a certain theoretical detachment. This distance enables him to uncompromisingly link faith to fiction. From his standpoint, "in the realms of politics, law, and religion there are only fictions."[142] Coherent with his appreciation of paradoxes, he sees fictions as a sign of strength, not weakness.[143] Although Critchley's assessment of fiction is valid and necessary, fiction and truth do not have to be mutually exclusive. Going back to the process of fidelity, political truths must assume a quasi-fictional status to the extent that they are not plainly experienced through the event, but within the faithful procedure that aims to retrace that event.[144] This applies to the Christ-event as well as political events for which truth is not achieved until the subject has become an active part of the procedure. Besides, as it was claimed in the last chapter, the absolute status of a political truth is only conditioned by its conformity to the egalitarian axiom and the capacity of its subjects to effectively materialise its promise through a collective body. Failure to do so will only result in the degeneration of truth into pure fiction. The fictional content of truths can only remain temporary, for fidelity redefined as both a subjective and objective process consolidates truths as truthful by laying the ground for their effective materialisation in the world.

To conceive of fidelity as secular political faith does not entail a type of messianism by which a political truth becomes the 'to come' of politics. The idea of 'democracy to come' was first introduced by Derrida in his later work, most notably in *Spectres de Marx.* Derrida explains the concept as "an idea-event whose injunction commands to brings about that which will never present itself in full presence, [democracy to come] is the appearance of this gap between an infinite promise and its necessary set forms which are necessarily inadequate in measuring this promise."[145] The chronology of democracy to come is that of a messianic

[140] Ibid, 249.
[141] Ibid, 245.
[142] Ibid, 91.
[143] Ibid.
[144] See Badiou, *Being and Event*, and previous chapter.
[145] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris; Galilée, 1993), 111. Own Translation; Paul Patton breaks down Derrida's understanding of democracy to come when he writes "'democracy to come' does not refer to a

hope forever in waiting.[146] It contains an unbridgeable gap between democracy's messianic promise and its imperfect materialisation. From this standpoint, one must wait and hope for the arrival of a democracy that will always fall short of its egalitarian promise. This type of faith may be termed 'prophetic' for it is generated, not by the occurrence of an event, but by the absence of that event. From its inception, prophetic faith is strengthened by the absence of the messianic either through longing for a past that has vanished or a future that is yet to come.[147] In contrast, Agamben reminds us that Paul's messianic time "does not imply attachment or nostalgia; quite the opposite, for the recapitulation of the past is also a summary judgment pronounced on it."[148] From Paul's standpoint, the past serves to consolidate the primacy of the present. This is the spirit that has inspired this chapter to conceptualise faith as an active process of politics. From the intrinsically egalitarian dimensions of faith tied to accessibility and immediacy, to its dual engagement with subjects at the objective and subjective level, and ultimately to the possibility of conceptualising political fidelity as a process elevating 'the people' as the subject-object of politics, fidelity reveals its potential as a deeply empowering political process.

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determinate future form of democracy because the 'to come' in this phrase does not refer to a future that will one day become present but to a structural future that will never be actualised in any present. Rather than a future present it refers to the absolute future of pure invention, the unforeseeable and wholly other." [Paul Patton, "Derrida, Politics and Democracy to Come," *Philosophy Compass 2* (2007): 772.] Similarly, Robbins explains that "[Derrida's] eye is always set toward the future, its standard of law the impossible call for justice and equality. As such, there is a permanent breach between democracy as it is practiced and as it is imagined. After all, there are no actually existing democracies. [Robbins, Radical Democracy and Political Theology, 28.]

[146] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 111. Own Translation. The forever postponed temporality of democracy to come is brilliantly contained in this Franz Kafka's sentence: "The messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last." [Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, 1946.]

[147] Theoretical accounts of the messianic are still predominantly turned towards the absent past or future of politics. This is especially clear for most proponents of 'radical democracy' like Wendy Brown, Sheldon Wolin, Michael Hardt, or Antonio Negri. Frustrated with the inability of contemporary neoliberal states to fulfil the democratic promise of a ruling demos, they conclude that true democracy remains 'to come'. [See Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.]

Theories of radical democracy demonstrate that prophetic faith can take the form of both anticipation and nostalgia. Anticipation is linked to the elaboration of an unprecedented form of democracy, while nostalgia invokes the return of the original 'purer' direct democracy associated with early Athenian democracy. [See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books), 2015.]

[148] Agamben, The Time that Remains, 78.

Conclusion

Defined as what stands between a subject and its truth, faith expands far beyond its theological consideration to reach the field of egalitarian politics. The relationship between faith and equality is multi-layered. It begins with the intrinsically inclusive message of Pauline theology by which faith is addressed 'to all' regardless of origins, identities, or affiliations. Form his conversion onwards, Paul treats Christian faith as an egalitarian opening of god's message to which all have access so long as they commit to its truth. This inclusive dimension is supplemented by the specific temporality of Paul's messianism. Rather than patiently awaiting the return of the prophet, Paul begins from the event of Christ's resurrection to ground faith in 'the time of the now'. Paul's inclusive consideration of faith as an active process grounded in 'now-time', coupled with Kierkegaard's account of the subjective strength gained from leaping into faith has traversed the work of many contemporary political theorists such as Agamben, Critchley, and Badiou. Through the figures of both Paul and Kierkegaard, they explore the political potential of the faithful procedure in relation to love and inclusion and in contrast to identity and knowledge. Whereas rigid identities and knowledge are rendered irrelevant by faithful commitment, the act of loving others as oneself and including all within a defined belief system deeply resonates with egalitarian thought.

Both Agamben and Badiou provide a profoundly antinomian reading of Paul's letters. In their view, Paul's account of faith rests purely on subjective commitment, challenging the objective commandments of the law. In a different way, Kierkegaard also dismisses the possibility to associate faith with any form of objective imperative that might mediate its promise. In contrast to these antinomian readings, and in line with the political aspirations of this thesis, it may be claimed that axiomatic equality and the potential to materialise egalitarian politics through a collective subject-body together constitute the subject as much as the object of a secularised political faith. This argument allows for the possibility to step away from Badiou's absolute consideration of truths. Following this shift, political truths are no longer simply realised and enforced subjectively, but also objectively measured against their conformity to the egalitarian axiom and their capacity to materialise through a palpable and inclusive collective. Following this argument, Badiou's concept of political fidelity must be further secularised. Proceeding from the 'death of the One', fidelity becomes a procedure attached to transcendent political truths and subjects as much as existing bodies and political

materiality. If truthful egalitarian politics is to effectively appear in the world, then fidelity must also be conditioned by this material possibility. The next chapter will focus specifically on the materialisation of egalitarian politics. If fidelity concerns theoretical subjects as well as existing bodies, it will be claimed that political truth is likely to materialise through a collective merging of these two figures.

Chapter 6

Forming the Political Collective:

Grounded Bodies, Reciprocal Exchange, and Contingency

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to decisively address the research question underpinning this PhD project. Having stepped away from the impasse of liberal understandings of equality as a goal to be realised by autonomous individuals, endorsed Rancière and Badiou's axiomatic considerations of equality, and established fidelity as the process through which equality may politically come to light, the following chapter aims to discuss egalitarian politics through the prism of materiality.

Several gaps within strands of literature discussed earlier point to the necessity of deploying a materialist account of egalitarian politics. Chapter one showed that sophisticated liberal theorisations of equality tend to be let down by a generalised unwillingness to question the status of a 'free' market as the main field of political possibilities. Neoliberal approaches also display clear political shortcomings by denying the virtues of equality only to empower heteronomous individuals in a fully marketised environment. On the other hand, Rancière appears reluctant to further clarify the political implications of his ground-breaking account of equality. Unafraid to venture deep into the fields of axiomatic equality and truthful politics, Badiou then leans towards dogmatism when claiming that a subject-body faced with a political truth stands with its 'back to the wall', confronted to the false choice of either joining or abandoning an absolute truth.[1] A clear pattern emerging from these discussions is a generalised unwillingness to consider egalitarian politics in its concrete material form within a framework that clearly exceeds the limits set by liberal markets. Even within Rancière and

[1] Badiou frames this image around his concept of the point as a test for politics: "A point is not that which a subject-body 'freely' decides with regard to multiplicities that appear in a world. A point is that which the transcendental of a world imposes on a subject-body, as the test on which depends the continuation in the world of the truth-process that transits through that body. A subject-body comes to face the point of the point, in the same sense that we could say it finds itself with its back to the wall." [Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2007), 400.]

Badiou's radical propositions, equality is only elusively linked to its mode of appearance and remains fully detached from any type of economic materiality.[2] This issue far exceeds the domain of political economy and concerns political materiality more generally understood as the concrete emergence of political forms. By avoiding conceptualising egalitarian politics far beyond its ideal presentation, these thinkers risk dissociating political thought from its grounded materialisation.[3] Two main theoretical positions arguably arise from such dissociation. The first fails to effectively challenge the market's inegalitarian tendencies in the name of equality.[4] The other is a type of theoretical dogmatism according to which political truths and ideas take precedence above all else, including equality.[5] In both cases, the role played by an empowered collective in materialising egalitarian politics remains largely unexamined.

This chapter aims to provide an account of political materiality that takes shape within notions of collective body, space, economic exchange, and temporality. Interrogating egalitarian politics throughout these concrete categories under the banner of materialism remains rare in contemporary political theory. Even amongst those like Badiou who have reclaimed the term, materialism usually entails no physicality nor grounding.[6] Yet, it is precisely from these intrinsically material grounds that politics is to be judged if it is to be grasped beyond its philosophical and theoretical forms. The previous chapter was a first step in this direction through the claim that politics rests on objective fidelity, and that existing subject-bodies must actively work towards materialising egalitarian politics of which they are both subject and object. Yet, to state that politics depends on a secular form of faith remains

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[2] About Badiou's economic position, Hallward writes, "true politics can begin only at a distance from the economy." [Peter Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press 2003), 237.].

[3] The instigator of this type of materialist critique is undeniably Karl Marx who in his Theses on Feuerbach famously declares that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." [Karl Marx, "Thesis on Feuerbach" in *Marx and Engels Collected Works Volume 5* (London: Electric Book, 2010), 5.]

[4] This stance has been discussed in chapter one through the work of liberal egalitarians and chapter three on Rancière's egalitarianism.

[5] This is Badiou's position (see chapter four)

[6] Iain Hamilton Grant, "Does Nature Stay What-it-is?: Dynamics and the Antecendence Criterion" in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Bryant, Levy, Srnicek, Nick, and Harman, Graham Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 69.
On this issue also see Galen Strawson, *Real Materialism and other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University press), 2008.
Badiou's materialism is chiefly articulated around the notion of appearance put forth in *Logics of Worlds*. See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds Being and Event 2* trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum), 2009.

largely constrained to the domain of thought. Whilst collective fidelity is a theoretical leap towards bridging the gap between the ideal and material facets of egalitarian politics, it tells little about the foundations of that bridge and what lays on the other end.[7]

Building on the notion of objective fidelity in a collective, the first question relating to political materiality that should be addressed is: who is the 'We' of politics? Against the liberal emphasis on autonomous individuality, Badiou and Rancière respectively suggest that politics be 'for All' and the domain of 'everyone and anyone'.[8] This assessment, although valid regarding axiomatic equality, does not reveal the concrete set of processes by which 'everybody' becomes engaged in a political sequence. In contrast to Badiou's contempt for the objective category of body and liberalism's individualistic leanings, the first section of this chapter will defend that the collective subject underpinning politics results from a set of complex interactions between bodies and their subjectivation. Rather than a given all-inclusive category, the 'for All' of a political idea may be measured against its capacity to effectively include all bodies into a defined collective. This claim entails that the state of universal belonging contained within the notion of axiomatic equality is not a sufficient guarantee for the materialisation of politics. Conceived as active political agents, bodies must recognise themselves within a collective for politics to effectively unfold. Only through this process of continuous inclusion can the theoretical category of 'everybody' come to tangibly stand for everyone. The constitution of a political collective is material to the extent that it actively engages existing bodies on a given ground. Viewed in these terms, the 'coming together' of bodies into a collective constitutes an essential form of political materiality. Upholding the role of existing bodies in realising politics should be understood as a materialist rather than a realist position to the extent that bodies interact with ideality in addition to the world 'as it is.'[9]

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[7] For Ray Brassier, "It falls to conceptual rationality to forge the explanatory bridge from thought to being." Ray Brassier in "Concepts and Objects", in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, 47.

[8] It is essential to remember that for both Rancière and Badiou axiomatic equality is all-encompassing in the sense that it concerns and applies to all. Axiomatic equality denotes a universal condition as much as a shared capacity for politics. Rancière considers that "equality is simply the equality of anyone at all with anyone else." [Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 15.]; For Badiou, "equality means that the political actor is represented under the sole sign of the uniquely human capacity", capacity here referring to "the strictly egalitarian recognition of the capacity for truth." [Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso 2005), 97-98.]

[9] About realism Pam Morris rightfully points out that "the term realism almost always involves both claims about the nature of reality an evaluative attitude towards it. [Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2.

The second section of this chapter will focus on political materiality in terms of spatiality. Where does politics takes place? A good starting point to answering this immanently complex question are Edmund Husserl's *Foundational Investigations* read through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interpretation.[10] Husserl distinctively challenges the mode of thinking enabled by the 'Copernican revolution' in astronomy by which the earth comes to be understood as a decentred element that "contains only bodies" in the universe, rather than the universe's central axis.[11] Husserl's challenge is not scientific but philosophical. It is directed towards the ways in which one is able to think about one's position on earth, and the position of that earth in the universe opened by the Copernican shift. Husserl proposes "a restitution of a sense of the earth as ground beyond Copernicus."[12] Rather than thinking the earthly ground (*boden*) as just another object, Husserl suggests that it be perceived as the pregiven ground of all experiences and possibilities (*Erfahrungsboden*).[13] Husserl does not concern himself with questions relating to equality or politics. Nonetheless, he suggests the existence of an essential material base to which thought and materiality are irremediably tied. His phenomenological account of the earthly ground provides a useful starting point to conceptualising political spatiality. When stripped of its metaphysical ambitions, Husserl's interpretation of the ground as a field of possibilities and experiences provides a tangible space from which the appearance of concrete political forms may be apprehended through the figure of the body. The givenness, spread, and horizontality of the ground materially

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[10] See Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature" in *Husserl Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (Indiana: University of Notre Dame press, 1981); and The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism; and Quentin Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, *Essai sur la necessite de la contingence* (Paris : Editions du Seuil), 2006.

[11] Gabriel Catren in "Outland Empire: Prolegomena to Speculative Absolutism," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, 335; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "resume of the course," in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* By Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ed. Leonard Lawlor and Betina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 2002), 9-10.
Thomas S. Kuhn provides a concise summary of Nicholas Copernicus's revolutionary astronomical proposal: "In 1543, Nicholas Copernicus proposed to increase the accuracy and simplicity of astronomical theory by transferring to the sun many astronomical functions previously attributed to the earth. Before his proposal the earth had been the fixed center about which astronomers computed the motions of stars and planets. A century later the sun had, at least in astronomy, replaced the earth as the center of planetary motions, and the earth had lost its unique astronomical status, becoming one of a number of moving planets." [Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1995 [1957]), 1.

[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "resume of the course," 67.

[13] Ibid, 67, 69; Merleau-Ponty, "Husserl's Concept of Nature," in *Text and Dialogues*, trans. Drew Leder, (New Jersey: Atlantic Highlights, 1992), 166; and Dylan Trigg, "The role of the earth in Merleau-Ponty's archaeological phenomenology," *Chiasmi International: Trilingual Studies Concerning the Thought of Merleau-Ponty* (2014): 249.

reverberates the ontological consideration of equality as an axiom of politics. Viewed in this way, the ground may be conceived as the elementary field on which political thought and materiality intersect often imperfectly and always transiently. It will be claimed that the ground sustains bodies as much as it provides them with a perspective on themselves as a collective and their environment. The spatiality of the ground, together with the figure of the body, allow for the possibility to conceive of egalitarian politics in material terms. They do so in a way that exceeds market-based considerations of equality, while grounding the emancipatory potential of politics considered as a truth procedure.

Having established bodies and the ground as two essential material categories of politics, the third section will focus specifically on political economy as a mode of interactions amongst grounded bodies. Within the liberal democratic nexus economic relations tend to be reduced to market exchanges. On the other hand, economic questions remain largely absent from both Rancière and Badiou's accounts of equality. Contra these two approaches, it will be claimed that economic interactions are crucial in consolidating egalitarian politics both by enabling bodies to relate to each other reciprocally, and by constituting key links between a collective and the material ground on which it stands. The discussion will be built on Karl Polanyi's distinction between formal and substantive economics and the tradition of economic anthropology that followed.[14] Following the substantive view from which economic exchanges are treated in their most elemental form, two types of material relations may be pinpointed as especially relevant to egalitarian politics: the mode of extraction of resources from the ground, and the equal distribution of these resources. Whilst economic extraction proceeds from ground to body (extracting from the ground) to guarantee the subsistence of all and sustain a collective, distribution concerns the collective organisation of bodies themselves. It will be argued that reciprocal economic exchange and equal distribution help sustain not only bodies in their bare forms but also political collectives.

The last section of this chapter will focus on the contingent character of political materiality. Following Quentin Meillassoux, contingency will be interpreted as the process by

[14] In "The place of economies in societies", Polanyi explains how substantive economics "derives from man's dependence for his living upon nature and his fellows [referring] to the interchange with his natural and social environment, insofar as this results in supplying him with the means of material want satisfaction." [Karl Polanyi, "The place of economies in societies" in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, ed. Polanyi, Conrad M Arensberg and Harry W. Pearson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1957.), 243.

which an event can equally "emerge, subsist, or perish".[15] The point will be made that the materialisation of politics is sustained by the uncertain objective fidelity of bodies standing on a ground with finite resources. Viewed contingently, it is not guaranteed nor fundamentally necessary that a political sequence will persist through time. Such timely persistence is contingent upon objective fidelity in a collective and the sustenance of the ground. Ultimately, egalitarian politics may be realised through a constantly expanding collective body, the horizontality of the ground, and reciprocal economic exchange. Yet, from a theorist's standpoint it is essential to approach political materiality with some humility. This is necessary for reasons that have already been mentioned in previous chapters. On the one hand, one cannot assume that autonomous individuals are on a straight path to politically realising equality. On the other, there is a clear contradiction in the idea of 'forcing' a truth on unwilling bodies in the name of equality. By conceptualising existing bodies as active agents of their own subjectivation and maintaining that the materialisation of politics always remains contingent upon a fragile collective and the ground on which it stands, this chapter aims to present the sketch of a political vision in which equality is never compromised but whose materialisation is not guaranteed.

Recognising the Collective Subject-Body

The last chapter established that the political materialisation of equality rests on a process of fidelity. Conceived as a secular form of faith, political fidelity is directed towards pure multiplicity rather than the messianic promise of 'the One'. Fidelity evidently denotes a strong subjective commitment so vividly depicted by thinkers such as Paul, Kierkegaard, Badiou, and Agamben through their portrayals of the leap of faith.[16] In addition to this subjective facet, it was argued that political fidelity must also be attached to some form of objectivity. Whereas subjective fidelity simply refers to the relationship between a subject and a truth, its objective counterpart is arguably bound to the appearance of a political collective. This chapter will argue that the realisation of such collective cannot be grasped merely through concepts such as axiomatic equality, subjectivation, or fidelity. Although

[15] Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 52.
[16] See Chapter 5.

necessary, it is insufficient for an account of political materiality to simply declare that a political subject may exist in the world. Looking at egalitarian politics through the prism of materiality requires that the process by which bodies are subjectivised into a visible collective be discussed. Claiming that fidelity is objectively attached to the concrete realisation of a political collective opens the conceptual door to such discussion. Underpinning the latter is a fundamental question: who is the 'We' of politics?

The question of collectivity has been addressed in various ways by the literature studied in preceding chapters. For most liberal thinkers, a political collective may be equated to a sum of autonomous individuals collaborating towards a common goal. For neoliberals, the 'We' is replaced by an 'I' referring to individuals' capacity to realise their potential in a fully marketised environment. For Rancière, political subjectivity is the domain of everyone and anyone indiscriminately. For Badiou, politics is addressed 'to All' but depends of the work of a faithful militant-subject of truth.[17] It was established earlier that Badiou's axiomatic approach to equality and his account of the processes of subjectivation and fidelity should be upfolded. In contrast to the liberal ideal of 'reaching' equality, axiomatic equality is already here waiting to be politically enabled through fidelity. This reading is essential but tells us very little about the moment when existing bodies come to form a collective. This sequence embodied by the act of 'coming together' is neither given nor evident.[18] For most liberal and neoliberal thinkers, the question of collectivity is diluted into that of individual autonomy. In contrast, Rancière remains theoretically elusive by claiming that political subjectivation results in the enactment of a 'third people'.[19] Whereas Badiou offers a clearer account of subjectivation, he proposes an overly deterministic path that one must follow to realise the promise of a political event.[20] Alternatively, it will be suggested that the process by which a political collective is formed denotes not only a 'coming together', but also confrontation of existing bodies to their ideal presentation as collective subject. In this chapter, the question of collectivity will be considered alongside concrete interactions between bodies and their subjectivation as a collective through the prism of objective fidelity.

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[17] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 347.

[18] Roberto Esposito defines a community as "what belongs to more than one, to many or to everyone, and therefore is that which is 'public' in opposition to 'private' or 'general' (though also 'collective') in contrast to 'individual'." [Roberto Esposito, *Communitas The Origin and Destiny of Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.]

[19] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 88.

[20] See Badiou *Being and and Event*, Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, and chapter four.

The political relationship between bodies and their subjectivation excludes any form of individualism. As Fredric Jameson concisely puts it, "only the collective is truly political."[21] Rebutting the political potential of individualism has been a clear trend thus far in this thesis. This has been done by questioning the capacity of individual autonomy to realise egalitarian politics. It was argued that erecting individuality as the main vehicle of political subjectivity, as is the case within the liberal democratic nexus, risks separating politics from the people it wishes to represent.[22] Largely detached from collective political life, individuals evolving in a neoliberal context are less autonomously driven to realise equality than heteronomously pressed to realise their desires on the marketplace. As collective life becomes increasingly atomised into individual units, the market economy is transfigured into the sole horizon of human emancipation. This deceitful form of emancipation merely concerns individuals whose capacity to 'realise themselves' is continually tested on various types of markets.[23] Throughout the theoretical endeavour to 'start with equality', both Rancière and Badiou are able to re-centre their political thought on the collective capacity of 'All'. A shared theoretical aversion for the category of identity pushes them to stretch their understanding of collectivity to generic categories encompassing 'everybody' and 'All'. Whereas Rancière does so by recognising the anarchical character of the demos, Badiou treats truthful politics as universal.[24] Although both maintain, albeit differently, that politics is the result of subjectivation, they fall short of concretely explaining how bodies come to form a subjectivised whole containing every-body. One way to fill that gap is to reconceptualise Badiou's category of the appearing body as an active political agent.

For Badiou, the appearance of a political truth in the world is "determined by a subject that has developed its fidelity to the trace of an event."[25] From his standpoint, subjects must force the veracity of a truth.[26] Since political truths exist as an exception to what 'there is', subjective forcing is necessary to break the order of bodies and languages.[27] The

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[21] Fredric Jameson, *The Ancient and the Postmoderns*, (London: Verso books, 2015), 105.
[22] See Marcel Gauchet, *La Révolution Moderne, L'avènement de la démocratie IV Le Nouveau Monde* (Paris : Gallimard), 2017.
[23] See chapter two.
[24] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 9.
[25] Meillassoux," History and Event In Alain Badiou," 5.
[26] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 407, 417.
[27] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 4-8;
In *Badiou and Politics*, Bruno Bosteels explains Badiou's concept of forcing: "One of the keys in the radical critique of Badiou's thought is precisely the notion of forcing, in the sense that a procedure of truth would in and of itself do violence to the truth - meaning, of course, to another truth, which is also the truth of the other,

confrontation between thought and what 'there is', or between subjects and existing bodies is violent in Badiou's work. Badiousian subjectivation does not rest on a peaceful alliance between subjects of truth and existing bodies. Rather, a political sequence is activated by replacing impotent bodies with truthful subjects.[28] More than collaborating entities, bodies and subjects correspond to two antagonistic states of human subjectivity in Badiou's work. Inasmuch as subjects are endowed with the task of realising politics following an event, bodies are largely emptied of political meaning. Not only do existing bodies originally stand outside of a political sequence, they might even prove detrimental to it.

Badiou's contempt for the category of appearing body is best exemplified by his concepts of 'full body' and 'faithful body'. A full body is seen as essentially obscure and useless based on its inability to recognise political truths as absolute and eternal.[29] In other words, the appearing body has no political function or signification as such. If a body remains 'full-bodied' and fails to move towards subjectivation, it will be pushed on the side-lines of a political sequence. The same dynamic is at work within the notion of faithful body. Whereas the latter is treated as a positive category, a body is only faithful under the condition that it is erased.[30] Here, Badiou suggests that bodies must be repressed to make room for political subjectivation. Even notions of subject-body or 'body-of-truth' denote a body subjected to truth rather than an empowered subjectivised body.[31] Chapter four showed that within the subject-body nexus, existing bodies were systematically blamed for political failures. By refusing to fully comply with the deployment of a political truth, objective bodies inevitably interrupt or corrupt a political sequence.[32] Concurrently, the content of a political truth remains absolute and hence unquestionable. [33]

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and not the truth as defined by Badiou." [Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics (*Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 178.

[28] About Badiou's conceptual relationship to the body, Bruno Besana writes that Depending on the inconsistency of an evanescent event, the subject for Badiou is shaped by a logic of subtraction, formal construction and generic address, which functions independently of - when not against - the limits, finitude and contingencies of the body. Badiou's concept of the subject starts from a fierce opposition to the classic theme of embodiment. [Badiou dictionary, Bruno Besana 'Body and identification', 30.]

[29] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 66-67, 490.

[30] Ibid, 67.

[31] For Badiou, "a subject-body comes to face the point of the point, in the same sense that we could say it finds itself with its back to the wall", refusal to do so results in either disaster or betrayal. [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 400.]

[32] See Badiou's account of the Cultural Revolution in *The Communist Hypothesis*. [Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso), 2010.]

[33] See chapter four.

Although Badiou claims to break with dogma by removing his evental account of politics "from the ascendancy of the One", the spectre of dogmatism still roams within his absolute consideration of political truths as well as his account of the supremacy of the faithful subject over meaningless bodies.[34] The clear hierarchy established between subjects of truth and objective bodies in Badiou's political thought has repercussions that far exceed this conceptual relationship. What emerges from the lack of reciprocity between subjects and bodies in his work is a deep suspicion towards entities and bodies that exist prior to the eruption of an event.[35] This is an issue since it forbids the possibility to frame the realisation of politics in material terms beyond the figure of the truthful subject. In the same way that a faithful Christian is touched by grace, Badiou's political subject follows a truthful trace with little or no regard for those bodies that stand in the way.[36] Yet, if politics is indeed 'for All' and concerns every-body, existing bodies should be included in a political sequence beyond their instrumentalisation as mere recipients of truth.

Inasmuch as the Badiousian definition of the body as a singular object making up the appearing of a subject must be reasserted, its political potential remains to be thoroughly explored.[37] For Badiou, the political capacity of bodies merely results from their subjectivation. The post-evental body is "the foam, the wave, the wind, the salt and the rocks required by the metamorphosis of the sea, the storm-event, whose trace is the vital upsurge of the poet and the poem."[38] Like a rock or a wave in clear weather, the body indolently awaits the looming political storm. However, the body is not any object. Bodies, even in their pre-evental form, move, exchange, collide, and converge with each other. Unlike a rock or sea salt, human bodies cannot be reduced to their chemical composition or physical properties. Endowed with language, motion, faith, and a unique perspective on the world that surrounds them, bodies are not essentially 'inert', 'inactive', nor 'inconsequential'.[39] Instead, they have a part to play at every stage of a political procedure. The body must be reaffirmed in its objective simplicity as moving and speaking physical object as much as through its political potential as a subject 'in the making'. Neither a comprehensive political unit, nor an inanimate

[34] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 387.
[35] This is also palpable in Badiou's account of the state of a situation. See Badiou, *Being and Event*.
[36] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 400, 416.
[37] Ibid, 453.
[38] Ibid, 467.
[39] These are three adjectives Badiou uses to describe bodies that refuse of deny evental truth. [Ibid, 490-491.]

object, the body nonetheless remains a vital component in the objective composition of a truthful collective.

Breaking with Badiou's dismissive account of bodies does not question the cruciality of his work for this thesis. Not only does he provide the most thorough account of axiomatic equality and political subjectivation in contemporary theory, he also lays the groundwork for the consideration of fidelity as political faith after the death of 'the One' developed in the previous chapter. The point is not to refute the Badiousian account of subjectivation altogether, but to claim that it may benefit from reasserting the active role of objective bodies in realising egalitarian politics. This chapter defends that bodies are, alongside space and economic exchange, essential to discussing equality in material terms.[40] Thereby, it is crucial to assert that un-subjectivised bodies or 'bare bodies' are not politically impotent. Rather, they are equipped with a capacity for language and movement, as well as a unique perspective on the constitution of a collective subject-body to which they must be included for politics to effectively materialise. An interesting counterpoint to Badiou's consideration of bodies may be found in Meillassoux's *After Finitude*. Although Meillassoux does not refer his discussion of bodies to political possibilities, he acknowledges that the 'taking place' of the transcendental (represented here under the banner of politics) is conditioned by an interdependence between body and subject:

> Granted, the transcendental is the condition for knowledge of bodies, but it is necessary to add that the body is also the condition for the taking place of the transcendental. That the transcendental subject has this or that body is an empirical matter, but that it has a body is a nonempirical condition of its taking place - the body, one could say, is the 'retro-transcendental' condition for the subject of knowledge. We will invoke an established distinction here and say that a subject is instantiated rather than exemplified by a thinking body.[41]

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[40] Whereas bodies contain the very possibility of materialising a political collective, the ground provides a concrete base from which political appearances may be thought objectively. On the other hand, re-founding economic relations away from market exchange opens the theoretical door to conceiving of material existence in reciprocal and egalitarian terms.

[41] Meillassoux, *After Finitude an Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2009), 45-46. Meillassoux adds that the possibility to consider bodies outside of the subjective frame of reference is one of the particularities of his 'speculative idealism': "what distinguishes transcendental idealism from speculative idealism is the fact that the former does not posit the existence of the transcendental subject apart from its bodily individuation - otherwise, it would be guilty of speculatively hypostatizing it as an ideal and absolute

Following Meillassoux, the objective world is no longer reduced to the sum of its interpretations by conscious subjects. More than a mere display of the knowledgeable subject, the body conditions and performs that subject in the now. In the current discussion this implies that subjectivation is not a sufficient condition for the taking place of egalitarian politics. Rather, the materialisation of equality depends on the successful encounter between a truthful subject and an objective body. If this connection is missed, the subject will not be instantiated, and politics will not take place.

The previous chapter established fidelity as a procedure containing both subjective and objective elements. The subjective facet of fidelity straightforwardly refers to the transcendent relationship between a subject and a political truth. This Badiousian understanding of the subject must be maintained. The possibility of political truths relies on this subjective commitment. To say that fidelity is subjective refers an inward leap towards truth that cannot be rationalised. Although secularised, subjective fidelity retains the Kierkegaardian absurdity of religious faith.[42] It is absurd to the extent that commitment is strong even when the collective subject only exists as a theoretical entity that is yet to appear.[43] In many ways, this thesis and the arguments it supports constitutes a case of subjective fidelity. Inwardness, theory, and political ideality all stand on the side of subjective fidelity. On the other hand, objective fidelity rests on the active intervention of existing bodies in a political procedure set in motion within a particular time and space.[44] Rather than an inward commitment attached to a theoretical subject, the objective iteration of fidelity refers to bodies' outward commitment towards an appearing political collective on the ground. Bodies, the ground, and contingency are all constitutive categories of objective fidelity.

If a subject-body is in the process of being constituted as a collective, then fidelity also becomes objective for it is no longer simply attached to a truthful promise but also to the palpable materialisation of that promise. If egalitarian politics has a chance of materialising, then fidelity will inevitably exceed its categorisation as a purely subjective commitment given that the constitution of the collective is already taking place (appearing) in front of every-body. This taking place or taking shape of the collective is specifically the point when bodies

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subject. Thus, the subject is instantiated rather than exemplified by thinking bodies." [Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 45.]

[42] See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling.*

[43] On the Badiousian consideration of the subject as a theoretical entity see Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 47.

[44] See chapter 5 for more on collective fidelity.

become materially entangled in a political sequence. Such entanglement occurs regardless of whether bodies have been subjectivised so long as the constitution of a collective is taking place. It is vital to separate objective fidelity from notions of proof and miracles attached to theological discussions laid out in the previous chapter.[45] Divorced from the ascendency of 'the One', objective fidelity is a faith in 'Us', in our collective capacity to realise equality. Unlike religious faith, no divine sign is required to strengthen fidelity since its object (every-body that will come to constitute a collective subject-body) is already present here on the ground. The object of fidelity is not revealed through some divine apparition, but by the converging movements of bodies on the ground. Looking up for guidance is no longer required for the ideal subject and material object of political fidelity are equally contained within the collective subject-body.[46] There is no urge to prove or demonstrate through miracles that we exist to the extent that all bodies already relate materially to each other in space and time regardless of whether egalitarian politics is present or not. The constitution of a collective is neither proof of equality nor a miracle, but simply a step in the materialisation of egalitarian politics.

Earlier it was maintained alongside Badiou that egalitarian politics rests on the constitution of a collective subject-body.[47] Yet, it was also argued against Badiou that political subjectivation cannot be forced, implying that bodies have an active role to play in the process of their own subjectivation. Conceived objectively, fidelity is a commitment taking place through movement and observation rather than vocation.[48] Whereas subjective fidelity reflects an inward commitment to truth, its objective counterpart rests on the ability of existing bodies to look outward to recognise themselves within a collective subject-body.[49]

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[45] On Badiou's account of 'proof' see Peter Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2003), 228.

[46] To conceive of the collective as a new subject draws resemblances to what Rancière refers to as a 'third people'. However, in this case the new entity taking shape in a collective subject-body does not aim to tie "a particular dispute together on behalf of the uncounted", but simply stands as the new collective subject-object of a political sequence. [Rancière, *Disagreement*, 88.]

[47] Steven Corcoran defines the subject-body as "an alternative mode of appearance, one determined by a subject that, endowed with a body, is incorporated into that world, duly reorganised around the production of a new present." [Steve Corcoran, 'Appearance-Existence' in *The Badiou Dictionary*, 18.] Meillassoux explains the concept as "a mode of appearance in a world determined by a subject that has developed its fidelity to the trace of an event." [Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou," 5.]

[48] For Husserl, moving bodies carry the actuality of their possibilities: "Bodies exist actually in open possibilities which are realised in their actuality, in their motion, change (nonchanged as a possible form of change). Bodies are in actual and possible motion and -there is- the possibility of always open possibility in actuality." [Husserl, "Foundational Investigations" in *Shorter Works*, 223.]

[49] Badiou emphasises the importance of appearance and visibility for the subject-body when he writes that "the subject-body must be visible to everyone in the world as a continuous present." [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 501.]

Rather than a subjective leap, objective fidelity is a step towards the constitution of a political collective enabled by the corporeal realisation that it is worth taking part in the political sequence unfolding. Neither forms of fidelity can be considered separately for there can be no recognition and therefore no movement without subjective truth, nor materialised politics without the collective movement of bodies. Conceived both as a subjective and objective process, fidelity is not blind faith for it also refers to the movement of bodies taking place on the ground.[50] Whereas subjective fidelity rests on the statement that 'this is truth', objective fidelity starts with the realisation that 'this is Us'. Existing bodies, subjectivised or not, always bear witness to the concrete deployment of a political collective. They are the faithful (*fidèle*) agents of objective fidelity. Enabled by what materialises in front of their eyes rather than a transcendent truth, bodies have an impact on the unfolding of a political sequence simply by being there and sensing of what is taking place. Far from representing obstacles to truthful politics, bodies may be conceptualised as active political agents benefitting from their grounded experience. Not settled on a predetermined course to either oppose or facilitate egalitarian politics, existing bodies will support their subjectivation into a collective if objective fidelity is sustained. Their original position, standing outside of a political procedure, is not necessarily a hindrance. Rather than an empty reflection of mere presence, such position offers a viewpoint from which the egalitarian potential of a political collective taking place can be evaluated.

Having accepted transcendent truths as necessary yet insufficient conditions for the materialisation of egalitarian politics, how is bodies' objective fidelity sustained? One way to answer this question is to recover two notions discussed in previous chapters: recognition and inclusion. Within the framework of objective fidelity, recognition does not refer to the state's capacity to register particular identities, cultures, and claims. Unlike thinkers discussed in chapter one like Fraser, Taylor, or Benhabib, recognition here points to bodies' capacity to recognise themselves within the ideality embodied within the collective subject being constituted.[51] Recognition framed as a condition of objective fidelity could be considered as an inversion of its conventional interpretation. Here, there is no demand to be recognised by

[50] Meillassoux associates faith to an unfortunate form of fanatism whereby "The victorious critique of ideologies has been transformed into a renewed argument for blind faith." [Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 67.]
[51] See Charles Taylor, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1992; Nancy, and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* (London: Verso), 2003; and Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture, Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2002.

the collective, let alone the state. Instead, recognition is a task assigned to bodies referring to their capacity to see themselves as part of a collective.[52] Through objective fidelity, bare bodies are summoned to ask themselves 'is this Us?' when confronted to the formation of a collective rather than affirming that 'this is me' in the hope that such individual or group identities will be collectively recognised.[53] Viewed in these terms, recognition is not directed towards distinctions and differences. Rather, it is attached to what is shared between bodies and subjects and amongst bodies themselves. Recognition politically empowers bodies by keeping them in charge of their inclusion within the collective unfolding in front of their eyes. Bodies may recognise themselves in this collective endeavour as much they might reject it. In both cases they remain sovereign in this decision. Through the prism of objective fidelity, there is no ground for forcing a political truth upon bodies insofar as they have the capacity to identify what is taking place and whether they wish to be part of it. If bodies fail to recognise themselves within a collective, objective fidelity is inevitably compromised. In that case, fidelity remains merely as a subjective procedure, hence limiting its political potential.

The materialisation of a collective acts as a mirror for un-subjectivised bodies. This mirror does not only reflect bodies in their bare state, but also a projection of what they may come to constitute together as collective subject-body.[54] By witnessing the deployment of a collective, bodies objectively gain access to the political potential of their subjectivation. This temporal shift is the reason why it is insufficient to refer to the constitution of a collective merely through the concrete encounter between subjects and bodies in a given space and time. The act of recognition demands that bodies project themselves onto the potential of a political collective, denoting the merging of present materiality with future ideality. The encounter between political materiality and ideality is embodied within the deployment of the collective subject-body itself. Upon recognising themselves into a collective, subjectivised

[52] Merleau-Ponty discusses bodies' mutual identification in relation to the ground when writing that "through my corporeality […] I can put my experience into relation with theirs. (identify with other living beings)." [Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the Course", 71.]

[53] Following an intellectual tradition that stretches from Plato to Rousseau and Badiou, it is important to point out that the process through which bodies recognise themselves within a collective does not constitute a form of representation. Rather, bodies accept or refuse to be part of the presentation of a new collective which is judged on its capacity to include 'every-body'. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 347; Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*; and Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin Books), 1968.]

[54] Although projection is used here in positive terms, the psychoanalytical understanding of projection is usually pejorative. Dylan Evans defines projection in Lacanian terms as "a defence mechanism in which an internal desire/thought/feeling is displaced and located outside the subject, in another subject." [Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2006), 154.

bodies can make a concrete step towards the becoming of egalitarian politics by politically and economically enacting the political truth to which they are faithful. The ideality and potentiality contained within the subject-body is a reminder that considering bodies as active political agents is a materialist rather than a realist position. To the extent that bodies adhere to a collective, they do not merely move towards an entity that is objectively there. They also advance towards their subjectivation and a political procedure that is 'in the making' rather than finite. Upon recognising themselves within a collective, bodies do not only make a commitment to the world as it is. Their fidelity also concerns the potential materialisation of infinite egalitarian possibilities of which their collective movement is only a single step.

It has been argued in this chapter that the materialisation of egalitarian politics depends on objective bodies' capacity to recognise themselves within a collective subject. In addition to this argument, it is vital to provide an account of how a collective may objectively come to be equated to every-body. This is a question that evades most of the literature discussed previously. For liberal egalitarians, such collective is an abstract goal that may be achieved under the condition that autonomous individuals are provided by the state with certain means, capabilities, or levels of recognition.[55] For Rancière, equality is already here. However, politics demand that a non-identitary 'third' people rises in opposition to the count of the police.[56] For Badiou, the emergence of a political event aligned to axiomatic equality breaks with the categorisations of the state.[57] As a result, universal belonging is a sufficient condition for political subjectivation so long as a community resists the trap of reducing itself to an identified part of the whole.[58] For both Rancière and Badiou, political subjectivity rests on everybody's capacity to be there as equal and reject any form of identification. Although this shared position is coherent with axiomatic considerations of equality, it does not account for the process through which a collective effectively comes to light. Establishing bodies as active and *fidèles* political agents is an attempt to provide a clearer account of this process. Another is to recognise that pure belonging and resistance to identification merely outline

[55] For more on redistribution and recognition refer to chapter one.
[56] Rancière, Disagreement 88, 100; and Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement a Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality, and Identity*, 93.
[57] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 6.
[58] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 110; and Peter Hallward, "Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice" *Culture Machine* [Online], 4 1 Jan 2002.

the contours of a collective. The picture becomes clearer by reclaiming the importance of inclusion in materialising a collective subject that objectively concerns every-body.

Chapter four revealed Badiou's tendency to antagonise notions of belonging and inclusion. In *Being and Event* he explains that 'presentation', 'count-as-one', and 'belonging' are on the side of a situation, while 'representation', 'count of the count', and 'inclusion' are aligned with the state of a situation.[59] Building his political thought against the state and the representations it entails, Badiou often associates inclusion with the state's superfluous count of what has already been counted. The state is concerned with identifying parts in subsets, in turn including them within its situation.[60] Alternatively, belonging incarnates equality and constitutes a key facet of his ontology.[61] Although Badiou does not reduce all of what takes place in a situation to the act of belonging, he still considers inclusion as a political impasse.[62] Opposing universal belonging to inclusion inevitably requires that some bodies be excluded when egalitarian politics effectively appears. Whereas Rancière dismisses sceptics of the all-encompassing power of equality as elitist 'haters' of democracy, Badiou labels those bodies who refuse the legacy of an event as either 'obscure', or 'reactive'.[63] Implicitly for Rancière and explicitly for Badiou, the deployment of equality leaves those who do not recognise its elemental power on the margins of history, hence contradicting its fundamental promise. Building on the argument that bodies are active political agents endowed with the capacity to recognise themselves within a collective, it may be added that sustaining this collective rests in part on its capability to include every-body. Far from denying the importance of belonging for axiomatic equality, inclusion into a collective subject-body is necessary if bodies are considered as more than passive recipients of truth.

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[59] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 103.

[60] Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth*, 95; and Badiou, *Being and Event*, 103.
About the gap between belonging and inclusion, Badiou explains that the coercion consists in not being held to be someone who belongs to society, but as someone who is included within society. The State is fundamentally indifferent to belonging, yet it is constantly concerned with inclusion. Any consistent subset is immediately counted and considered by the State, for better or worse, because it is matter for representation. [Badiou, Being and Event, 107.]

[61] Ibid, 415; and Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 168.

[62] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics,* 169-170. See Badiou, *Logics of Worlds.*

[63] See Rancière*, Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso), 2006;
For Badiou, a body's subjectivation produces three results of which only one (faithful subject) is politically potent. On the other hand, a reactive subject is destined to deny a present while an obscure subject occults it. [Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 62, 67.]

Not unlike the point made earlier on recognition, it is essential to reject the definition of inclusion as the incorporation specific identities within a collective.[64] Inclusion should be thought beyond its purely ideological consideration conveyed through multiculturalism or identity politics.[65] Instead of a directive idea reducing egalitarian politics to the recognition and integration of distinct individual or group identities, inclusion may be considered in simpler terms as the concrete measure of a political collective. If egalitarian politics is indeed 'for All', then the scale and therefore the strength of a collective should be measured according to its capacity to include every-body.[66] In this context, inclusion refers less to labelling and identification than to the ultimate necessity of including every-body within a collective regardless of specific identities. Considering inclusion in quantitative terms as an 'infinite measure' contrasts sharply with Badiou's reduction of inclusion to a process of dividing and labelling parts by the state. Through this redefinition, the process of inclusion remains generic in the sense that it is oblivious to particularities and classifications.[67] In its basic form, inclusion conveys identification only insofar as it registers the concrete presence of bodies 'in' or 'out' of a collective. Against the temptation to recognise outsider bodies (who do not recognise themselves within the collective) as either obscure or reactive, inclusion is a reminder that if egalitarian politics is 'for All', then it must objectively strive to include every-body. Inasmuch as recognition reveals the subjective facet of objective fidelity through the figure of the body, inclusion provides an objective (quantitative) measure of the egalitarian potential of a collective, having a direct impact on bodies' fidelity.

Considered as the measure of a collective, inclusion evidently denotes a count. Yet, this count is infinite for its limit is the inclusion of every-body and there will always remain bodies to be included within the collective. This applies to the continuous appearance of new bodies (new-borns, international expansion of the collective…), as much as the constant presence of outsider bodies for whom recognising the political potential of the collective taking place is an impossibility. Upholding inclusion as a vital process for the materialisation

[64] See chapter 1.
[65] Ibid.
[66] This was surely best worded in the opening lines of Aristotle's Politics: "Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good." [Aristotle, Politics Book I part 1 (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 1999), 3.
[67] For Badiou, the generic is an unnameable, un-constructible, and indiscernible multiple. [Badiou, *Being and Event*, 335.]

of equality significantly challenges the more exclusive accounts of equality provided by Rancière and Badiou. Rather than a monolithic sequence that one disregards at its own perils, egalitarian politics is objectively measured on its capacity to include every-body within a collective. Framed in these terms inclusion arguably remains consistent with axiomatic equality, acting as a step towards the materialisation of egalitarian politics rather than its end-point. Actually, inclusion has no end-point if it is set as the infinite measure of bodies within a collective. Besides, there can be no subjectivation and therefore no inclusion within a collective subject-body without the existence of a political truth that is itself ordained to axiomatic equality. Not the starting point nor the ideological core or the objective of egalitarian politics, inclusion is the quantitative measure of a collective's capacity to incorporate every-body. Inclusion persists as a politically potent concept if considered away from the recognition of specific identities or its reduction to a form of systematic representation. As a simple yet infinite measure of the reach of a collective, inclusion objectively reflects the egalitarian potential of a political sequence unfolding through bodies. Reaching far beyond identity, inclusion together with recognition stand as the objective test of the declaration that politics is 'for All'.

To say that political fidelity is objective as well as subjective requires the appearance of a concrete collective which empowered bodies may or may not choose to belong to. Only through concrete interactions between bodies and a collective being subjectivised can politics begin to materialise. Such interactions take shape through bodies' capacity to recognise themselves and their potential in the collective subject-body being constituted in front of them, as well as the propensity of that collective to include every-body. Far for detrimental to egalitarian politics, objective bodies are the primary condition for its materialisation. The next section will be dedicated to framing the collective subject-body within a definite space. It will designate the ground as the only space capable of containing and sustaining an infinitely inclusive subject-body.

The Horizontal Ground as Political Space

So far, this chapter has discussed political materiality through the relationship between objective bodies and the possibility of their inclusion within a collective subject-body. To the extent that bodies and their subjectivation into a collective constitute both the subject and object of egalitarian politics, bodies were presented as an essential form of political materiality. Through their objective fidelity resting on recognition and inclusion within a collective, bodies engage the first step towards the materialisation of egalitarian politics. Yet, even in their collective subjectivised form, bodies are not a sufficient condition for the taking place of egalitarian politics. Although the collective embodiment of a political truth is crucial, bodies interact with other palpable objects that also have an impact on the unfolding of a political sequence. The notion of space offers a way to conceptualise such objects without undermining the cruciality of human bodies for politics.[68] Building on the previous discussion it will be claimed that bodies do not merely interact with each other and their potential subjectivation into a collective, but also with the terrain on which they stand and move. In its most basic form, the material space that conditions the totality of bodily movements is the ground. Considered as an essential space, the ground must be discussed if equality is to be reflected into material political forms.

When Badiou declares "anyone who lives and works here belongs here", where are we?[69] What material space is extensive enough to contain all those who belong equally and sustain the constitution of a collective? This question may be answered alongside Husserl's late discussion of the spatiality of nature found in his *Foundational Investigations*. Outlining the significance of this text, Merleau-Ponty explains that Husserl's philosophical starting point is to reclaim the cruciality of the earthly ground against a Copernican understanding of earth as a body floating amongst others in the universe.[70] Attempting to overcome the Copernican reduction of earth to just another planet, Husserl presents earth as

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[68] This argument presented in this chapter treats the body as a human category and clearly rejects the contemporary trend of posthumanism. For more on Posthumanism see Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 2013; and Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Ecologies Complexity and Process after Deleuze* (London: Rowman and Littlefield), 2018.

[69] Badiou, "What Is to Be Thought? What Is to Be Done?," *Whorecull 3* (2002): 15.

[70] About this particular point, Merleau-Ponty explains that "For the Copernican human, the world contains only 'bodies' […] through meditation we must again learn of a mode of being the idea of which we have lost, the being of the 'ground', and that of the earth first of all- the earth where we live, that which is this side of rest and movement […] which bears all beings above nothingness." Merleau-Ponty "Resume of the Course," 9.

an entity that is "pregiven to experience", and whose surface forms the ground of all possibilities.[71] For Husserl, who often uses the terms earth and ground interchangeably, "the earth does not move and does not rest; only in relation to it are motion and rest given as having their sense of motion and rest."[72] From a Husserlian standpoint, the earth is not any-body.[73] It is "the experiential basis for all bodies in the experiential genesis of our idea of the world."[74] In other words, it is the all-encompassing earthly body which grounds and enables all other bodies.[75] For Dylan Trigg, Husserl's earth displays two levels of foundation. Firstly, "the Earth is a foundation in that it renders movement and rest possible by establishing a relational axis between the body and the Earth as ground." Secondly, "it constitutes the specificity of the body as having an origin" to the extent that human bodies remain tied to earth.[76] Not only is the restful earthly ground a base for all bodies, it is also the plane on which any sort of bodily movement is enabled. This Husserlian account of the ground as essential materiality is directly relevant to conceptualising the spatial facet of egalitarian politics. Neither Husserl nor Merleau-Ponty connect their philosophical approach to any political endeavour. Notwithstanding, conceiving the ground through its basal and static materiality allows one to gain access to its simplicity and givenness. To the extent that the ground is there and remaining, bodily movement is possible.

As Merleau-Ponty concisely points out, an earthly body's destination is always tied to the ground.[77] In his view, what must be recovered from Husserl and reasserted against post-Copernican thought is an understanding of earth as being "on the side of rest and movement […] something initial, a possibility of reality, the earth as a pure fact, the cradle, the basis and

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[71] Trigg, "The Role of The Earth In Merleau-Ponty's Archaeological Phenomenology," 249.

[72] Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature", 223. The statement that 'the earth does not move' should not be understood as a scientific discreditation of modern astronomy. Instead, Husserl's objective with this proposition is to philosophically set the earth as a basic ground of experience. The earth's immobility reflects a paradox by which "if the Earth is not in movement, then this is only because it is the very ground for the possibility of movement, and thus for experienceIt is precisely from the earth's restfulness that the earthly ground becomes a ground of experience." [Trigg, 251.]

[73] Juha Himanka explains that the earth constitutes much more than a thing or even a body in Husserl's phenomenology: "The phenomenological starting point of Husserl's argumentation is to see that the earth originally, in the first level of its constitution, is not a thing […] All of us, including Copernicus himself, do not originally see the earth as a body." [Juha Himanka, "Husserl's Argumentation for the Pre-Copernican View of the Earth" *The Review of Metaphysics* 58 (2005): 633.

[74] Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature", 223.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Trigg, 253.

[77] Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the Course", 70.

the ground of all experience."[78] Framed in this way, the ground (*Erfahrungsboden*) becomes the exclusive material plane on which all human activity takes place. In the context of this chapter, the ground will be interpreted as a constitutive structuring of bodies' experience of spatiality.[79] Following this statement can easily lead to absolute considerations of the ground as a sort of 'hyperobject'.[80] However, it is vital to maintain a certain intellectual distance towards the ground. No political guidance can be expected from its content. This task is assigned to the subject-body roaming on its surface. The ground conditions bodies' experience simply by virtue of its static and constant presence. Regardless of what unfolds on its surface the ground continues to support bodies, providing a platform for their movements. It should be read through this basic yet constant capacity to support bodies. The only political function of the ground is to serve as a foundational space for bodies.

In addition to its overarching spatiality, the ground also displays a unique temporality. Being anterior to all life, there could be no-body without it.[81] If the earthly ground is the original material 'arche', then it is also "the reserve from which all life, all future, all history can issue."[82] Not only is the ground everywhere supporting us according to Husserl, it is also everlasting. As an object in and for itself, the ground subsists whether bodies are present or not. For Husserl, the ancestrality of earth (existing prior to any human experience) truly reveals the archetypal status of the ground.[83] Not unlike Husserl and Merleau-Ponty,

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[78] Merleau-Ponty, "Husserl's Concept of Nature," 46.
Husserl's treatment of the ground as pre-existing foundation deeply contrasts with the contemporary trend of post-foundationalism mentioned in previous chapters. Whereas post-foundationalism designates "a constant interrogation of metaphysical figures of foundation – such as totality, universality, essence, and ground", Husserl takes a different route by establishing the ground not only as a 'figure' of foundation, but also as a material plane of experience. Building on Husserl's work offers the possibility to reject the idea that politics is founded on an abyssal ground. Instead the point can be made that politics emanates from an existing and unconditioned ground. Whereas many contemporary thinkers tend to think of the ground as a theoretical construction, Husserl treats the ground as earthly materiality. Following Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the ground is neither an idea nor a construction. It simply is here, immobile, and at the basis of all bodily movement and thought. [Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press), 2007, 2-3.]
[79] Husserl quoted in Trigg, 251.
[80] Hyperobjects are usually described as "entities of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place." [Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2013).
[81] Trigg, 256.
[82] Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the Course", 74.
[83] About the significance of the earth's pre-human temporality, Trigg explains that "the Earth beckons both a memorial and immemorial timescale, both a destructible and indestructible materiality, which at no point can be localised as a 'correlate' to human experience alone, but instead marks an irrecoverable depth anterior to human experience." [Trigg, 263.]

Meillassoux also highlights the philosophical importance of recognising earth's ancestral temporality in *After Finitude*. His approach to this question is chiefly illustrated by the notion of 'arche-fossil', which he defines as "materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life."[84] For Meillassoux, the arche-fossil's strange temporality represents a challenge to the philosophical impossibility of thinking of a world before human consciousness. Across its ancestral temporality, the arche-fossil embodies the possibility "to get out of ourselves, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not."[85] It challenges what he terms 'correlationism' by materially giving access to a world that subsists without being given.[86] Meillassoux's account of the arche-fossil may be linked to Husserl's conceptualisation of the ground in several ways. First, both Husserl and Meillassoux seem willing to think human experience in relation to a material space that exceeds theory, a material kernel of objectivity that can never be fully appropriated or properly understood by thought alone.[87] Another interesting connection lies in the embeddedness of the arche-fossil within the earthly ground itself. When discovered, the arche-fossil reveals not only its own ancestrally but also that of the ground. Located deep into the ground, the fossil bears witness to the elemental spatio-temporality of the ground. It was here long before humans walked the earth and remained grounded and static until its excavation. Ultimately, no other object embodies the Husserlian understanding of the earth as foundational ground more convincingly than the arche-fossil.

For both Husserl and Meillassoux, thought and human bodies are grounded by an absolute materiality that simultaneously precedes and exceeds them. About the absoluteness of the Husserlian ground, Merleau-Ponty remarks that "the study of the *Sinnesboden* [ground of senses] is to be taken literally: natural *boden* (the earth) and cultural-historical *boden* which is built on the earth […] the figurative sense of *boden* is the literal one."[88] The ground is

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[84] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 22.
[85] Ibid, 48.
[86] Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 39, Own-translation.
Meillassoux's *After Finitude* is aimed more specifically at Kant's Copernican revolution best captured by the assertion that "it is no longer the mind that conforms to objects, but rather objects that conform to the mind." [Levi Bryant, Nick Srnircek, and Graham Harman in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, 4.] Meillassoux labels the mode of thought introduced by this revolution 'correlationism'. The latter designates the idea according to which "we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other." [Meillassoux, *After Finitude,* 1.]
[87] Meillassoux refers to "the eternal in-itself, whose being is indifferent to whether or not it is thought. [Ibid, 104.]
[88] Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the Course", 67.

simultaneously material and figurative for it conditions the totality of human possibilities in thought and action. On the other hand, Meillassoux directs his materialist speculations towards the absolute reality of an "entity without thought."[89] Even if unthinkable, such absolute reality can be glimpsed at through Meillassoux's discussions of the 'arche-fossil'. Within the Husserlian ground and Meillassoux's 'entity without thought', the absolute returns as essential object rather than subjective truth. Faced with the return of 'the One' in the form of the ground, it is crucial to reiterate that the conceptual framework established thus far in this thesis rejects any form of absoluteness that does not concern 'All'. The distinction established in the previous chapter between religious faith and political fidelity and the account of objective fidelity provided in the previous section would be theoretically compromised by fully endorsing Husserl's absolute consideration of the ground. The point is not to recognise the ground as the material guiding light of egalitarian politics. Instead, the objective of this section is to recognise the basal position of a ground that 'does not move' for every-body and at every movement. As an immobile yet ever-present form of materiality, the ground does not dictate the content nor the direction of a collective subject-body. However, it sustains that subject-body simply by containing all bodies along its horizontal spatiality and by providing a grounded and objective point of view that is shared by All.

Where does equality stand on the ground? If it is understood in Badiousian terms as a fundamental ontological category, then equality must be present everywhere there are bodies and sets. However, chapter two showed how this claim does not take root empirically in a neoliberal context that denies the political value of equality. Away from purely empirical considerations, egalitarian spatiality may be conceptualised in relation to an already existing ground to which all bodies are attached merely by 'being there'. If the ground is there supporting all bodies in equal measures, then it is not merely immobile and ancestral, but also essentially equalising. The egalitarian facet of the ground is most clearly expressed through its horizontal prefiguration.[90] As a horizontal plane, the ground supports all bodies equally.

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[89] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 62.
Meillassoux defines speculative materialism as follows: "Every materialism that would be speculative, and hence for which absolute reality is an entity without thought, must assert both that thought is not necessary (something can be independently of thought), and that thought can think what there must be when there is no thought. The materialism that chooses to follow the speculative path is thereby constrained to believe that it is possible to think a given reality by abstracting from the fact that we are thinking it. [Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 36.]

[90] Merleau-Ponty refers to the ground as a horizontal entity that expresses both ontic and ontological possibilities: The world is constituted according to a horizontality in which something existent is constituted as

Being static, it does not suggest any hierarchies but only rests there. The ground simply provides a material space that is common to all, remaining shared across its extensive spatiality and ancestral temporality. Although some of its parts may be appropriated, it remains open in its overarching totality. Regardless of the type of movement being deployed on the ground, all bodies remain attached to it simply by 'standing there'. In that regard, the ground always persists as a common ground for bodies regardless of what is taking place on its surface. To say that all bodies present on the ground move on the same horizontal axis does not suggest that all thinking produced on the ground is egalitarian or equivalent. Far from being a guide, the ground should be understood as a perpetual material presence on which bodies must interact to generate movement. The ground remains a neutral space. The fact that it is always shared by every-body establishes the ground as a basic yet universally inclusive space.

The ground's equalising presence is significant at two basic levels when referring to the materialisation of egalitarian politics. First, it materially supports, sustains, and connects every-body along its horizontal spatiality. If every-body is on an equal footing by virtue of being grounded, what is being shared is not only a space but also a collective and basic experience of the world. Whereas sharing emanates from notions of belonging and inclusion, it also stems from a common 'grounded perspective.' Understanding the significance of such perspective requires returning to Husserl's declaration that 'the earth does not move'. Being static and ancestral, the ground provides a point of view that remains unchanged through time. Rather than as a pure scientific fact, the staticity of the ground is the be understood through its relationality with bodies. There is no denying on Husserl's part that earth rotates

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actual within the ontic possibilities prefigured at any time; the world is prefigured and is subsequently conceptualised and expressed in judgements by ontology; the form of the world is taken into consideration along with its ontic possibilities. […] One would have to take up the concrete relation of these two orders by turning both of them not into a physical world relative to the idealistic, but into two correlative aspects of being. [Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the course," 75-76.]

The question of 'being there' or *Dasein* and the ontic has been most extensively discussed by Heidegger in *Being and Time.* Dasein is "a pre-ontological understanding of being". [Heidegger, Being and Time, 35.] This philosophical category is crucial to Heidegger's fundamental ontology "from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein. Dasein accordingly takes priority over all other entities in several ways. The first priority is an ontical one: Dasein is an entity whose Being has the determinate character of existence. The second priority is an ontological one: Dasein is in itself 'ontological', because existence is thus determinative for it." [Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 34.]; In light of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson explain the distinction between ontic and ontological as follows: "Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with Being; ontical inquiry is concerned primarily with entities and the facts about them." [John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson in *Being and Time*, 31.]

around its own axis, hence generating movement. Rather than providing a scientific challenge to post-Copernican contributions to astronomy, Husserl constructs a phenomenological framework conceptualising the earthly ground specifically through the point of view of bodies that inhabit it. As Merleau-Ponty summarises, "To the degree that I adopt the Copernican constitution of the world, I leave my starting situation; I pretend to be an absolute observer."[91] From a Husserlian position, such scientific detachment is impossible for the earthly ground is not to be interpreted from infinite space but from the perspective of bodies themselves on the experiential ground (*Erfahrungsboden*). Trigg acknowledges this anthropocentric take on the ground writing that "if the Earth is not in movement, it is only because it is the very ground for the possibility of movement, and thus for experience."[92]

The assumed anthropocentricity or body-centricity of Husserl's account of perspective is not anti-scientific but humble. Far from a weak spot in his conceptualisation of grounded bodies, humility is one of its main strength. Of the ground, we know only our point of view. Hence, we perceive the ground as static for it is all we can experience as bodies. The fact that earth rotates at approximately 1037 miles per hour is empirically inaccessible to bodies standing on its surface.[93] Inasmuch as bodies cannot experience a political truth prior to their encounter with a subject, neither can they understand earth's movement without embracing the absolute position of a detached external observer so crucial to the scientific method. Following a Husserlian account of the ground allows for a humble consideration of bodies detached from any form of absolute gaze. Neither is the body an absolute observer nor the ground an absolute object. Instead, the potential of bodies resides in their material experience of the ground as such and the perspective that ensues from this foundational bond.

The static horizontality of the ground unknowingly provides bodies with some degree of objectivity on what is taking place on its surface. This basic shared perspective does not suggest that bodies are limited to a single viewpoint on themselves or their environment, nor that the ground provides the 'One' true perspective. Instead, it conveys the location from which bodies collectively bear witness to what is taking place around them and amongst

[91] Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the course," 9-10.
[92] Trigg, 251.
[93] Nasa Image/Poetry, "What is the speed of the Earth's rotation," https://image.gsfc.nasa.gov/poetry/ask/a10840.html.

themselves. To the extent that the ground and the perspective it offers persist in time and space, it is also part of the process by which concrete political forms effectively appear. Conceived in these terms, grounded perspective helps clarifying the complex relationship between moving bodies and their subjectivation into a collective. Although fundamental, grounded perspective does not guarantee nor specifically directs the movement of bodies.[94] Because the ground is always static, objective fidelity exceeds grounded perspective by demanding that bodies move on the ground, potentially towards the constitution of a collective subject-body.

The connexion between the ground and bodies standing on its surface generates a constant perspective from which the constitution of a collective may be apprehended. Far from taming the political potential of faithful (*fidèles*) bodies, the materiality of the ground can potentially contribute to it. Through the prism of objective fidelity, grounded perspective may help clarifying the process by which bodies objectively recognise themselves (or not) within a collective subject-body. Although Husserl never alludes to politicised bodies, he acknowledges the perspectival potential of the ground in his *Foundational Investigations:*

> The entire physical perceptual field as a constituted manifold of things that appear in perspectives is a harmonious unity of perspectivity; one perspectival style governs and continues to govern throughout the changing perceptual field. Its changes can occur by the entry of the perceptual appearance of things not already in the field, or by the withdrawal of those previously in the field.[95]

For Husserl, perspective remains grounded regardless of whether things enter or exit the perceptual field. Perspective remains irremediably tied to the static ground. Objects enter and exit the field, but perspective is constant so long as bodies remain in contact with the ground. The ground's horizontality assures a continuity of perspective amongst bodies that remains undisturbed by objects entering and exiting its temporal flow.[96] Grasping appearing objects also denotes a sense of immobility on the part of bodies. Equipped with a certain perspective, a body is not just another moving object but also a restful witness able to sense

[94] For Husserl, the earthly ground conditions the conduct of any bodies whether they move or rest. [Himanka, 636.]
[95] Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature," 239.
[96] Ibid, 246.

what is taking place on the ground. Politically, what is taking place is the constitution of a collective subject-body.

Several aspects of Husserl's depiction of perspective are directly relevant to providing an account of recognition on the ground. One is the 'harmonious unity of perspectivity' obtained from the ground. Across its horizontality, the ground provides a shared perspective that is unique to equally grounded bodies. More interestingly, Husserl also speaks of both perspectivity and perceptuality when referring to the ground. Whereas perspectivity refers to the act of viewing something from a specific position, perceptuality denotes the act of recognising an object through senses more generally. Perceptuality offers the possibility to open grounded perspective to senses other than just vision. As Husserl points out, "bodies of any size whatever still could not and could never be inaccessibly far from our senses."[97] Understood in this perceptual way, grounded perspective may be directed not only towards what is visible, but also less straightforward types of appearances such as affects or feelings.[98] This perceptual opening of perspective offers the possibility to corporeally relate to political materiality in a multi-sensory way that is not constituted merely by the act of seeing but that of sensing more generally.

This multi-faceted account of perspective provides an additional layer to the process of recognition described earlier. If grounded perspective is indeed perceptual, then bodies act not only on what they see but also what they feel in the broader sense. In the event of the materialisation of a collective, perceptuality signifies that the physical and ideological movement of a collective subject-body is sensed by bodies in a way that is not necessarily visible. In the same way, inclusion and rejection is felt as much as it is seen. One does not only become part of a collective by being formally included in it. Being grounded, bodies themselves have the capacity to sense whether they belong in that collective or not. This sensing emanating from a shared grounded perspective is crucial factor in determining objective fidelity. If bodies standing on the ground sense that they do not belong within a collective, then no recognition is possible, and fidelity loses its objective dimension. Such sensing is evidently hard to verbalise but consolidates existing bodies as the only agent capable of providing an objective point of view on a political sequence taking place through a collective.

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[97] Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature," 229.
[98] On the notion of 'sensing' see David Chandler, *Ontopolitics in the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge), 2018.

Having recognised the importance of the ground in supporting bodies and providing them with a static perspective, it is essential to maintain that bodies must be subjectivised for egalitarian politics to take place. Neither bodies nor the ground suffice for the materialisation of egalitarian politics. The latter still requires the formation of a collective subject. The figure of the subject resides outside of the frame of Husserl's account of perspective. In his *Foundational Investigations*, Husserl largely conceptualises the subject through the notion of 'absolute ego'. The latter "lives and precedes all actual and possible beings."[99] For Husserl, both the ego and the ground are transcendental.[100] In fact, the ground acts as a fatherland of the ego and both persist in time and space regardless of whether life is present or not.[101] For Trigg, Merleau-Ponty radicalises Husserl by bypassing the idealism of the ego and "returning to the primal arche of the Earth itself."[102] One must follow Merleau-Ponty in reaffirming the ground as primal materiality independently of any transcendental ego or subject. The point here is not to deny the possibility of such subjectivity, but to set the ground as the basic and humbling material basis of all bodily experience of which subjectivation is only a possibility.

The risk with recognising the ground as ancestral object, independently of whether bodies or subjects roam its surface, is to elevate the ground and objects more generally as a new transcendental.[103] Doubts that were cast on Badiou's absolute consideration of truth and its subject are equally applicable to the treatment of objects as a transcendental category. An

[99] Husserl, "Foundational Investigations," 131; and Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the course," 76.
[100] Gabriel Catren, "Outland Empire: Prolegomena to Speculative Absolutism," in *Speculative Realism*, 336.
[101] Merleau-Ponty, "Resume of the course," 67; and Husserl, "Foundational Investigations," 131.
[102] Trigg, 258.
[103] Such position is best represented by Object-Oriented Ontologists. Following this recent theoretical trend, the category of subject is either broadened to non-human entities or dismissed all-together. In Alien Phenomenology, Ian Bogost provides a concise definition of Object-Oriented-Ontologies (OOO): "OOO puts things at the center of being. We humans are elements, but not the sole elements, of philosophical interest. OOO contends that nothing has special status, but that everything exists equally—plumbers, cotton, bonobos, DVD players, and sandstone, for example. [Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What it's Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minesota Press, 2012), 6.; Also see Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican Books, 2018.)] Unlike Bogost's suggestion that every-thing should be included within the subjective field, and that The philosophical subject must cease to be limited to humans and things that influence humans, it must be maintained that conceptualising politics requires to treat subjectivity as a limited category that applies specifically to human bodies.[Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 10, 23.] Although non-human grounded perspectives exist, they reflect a different relationship with the ground that escapes the human gaze. Grounded perspective is what one sees merely by virtue of 'being there.' However, different type of bodies (animals, plants, inanimate objects) each have distinct perspectives from a grounded position.

example of this is provided by Meillassoux who argues for the possibility of an a-subjective point of view that remains unregulated by an 'Idea of knowledge':

> What do we mean by 'taking place'? We mean that the transcendental, insofar as it refuses all metaphysical dogmatism, remains indissociable from the notion of a point of view. Let us suppose a subject without any point of view on the world - such a subject would have access to the world as totality, without anything escaping from its instantaneous inspection of objective reality. But such a subject would thereby violate the essential finitude of the transcendental subject - the world for it would no longer be a regulatory Idea of knowledge, but rather the transparent object of an immediately achieved and effective knowledge.[104]

Although this chapter follows Meillassoux in reformulating the relationship between objects and subjects, it does not deny the cruciality of a process subjectivation for egalitarian politics.[105] Grounded perspective arguably provides the conceptual tools to reassess the relationship between subject and object in regard to politics. Recognising the value of empowered bodies' common grounded perspective demands that politics no longer be considered merely as subject-dependent.[106] This position is not antithetical to the category of subject.[107] Instead it suggests that human objects (bodies) standing on the ground are in a privileged position to assess the appearance of political subjectivity on that ground. The formation of a collective subject-body remains the objective facet of the process of subjectivation. It refers to the appearance of a political collective mediated by bodies' basic yet crucial grounded perspective.

The concept of ground provides the material means to reassert equality whilst avoiding the dogmatic trappings of an all-powerful subject of truth. Egalitarian politics does

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[104] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 44.

[105] As Bryant rightfully points out about the latter view, "the question of the relation between the subject and the object is a question of how the subject is to relate to or represent the object." [Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (London: Open University Press, 2011), 7.]

[106] Peter Hallward, "Anything is Possible: A Reading of Quentin Meillassoux's After Finitude" in *Speculative Realism*, 140.

[107] The political impact of dismissing the category of subject in the name of objects is probably best conceptualised by Levi R. Bryant in *The Democracy of Objects*: "to think an object for-itself that isn't an object for the gaze of a subject, representation, or a cultural discourse. This, in short, is what the democracy of objects means. The democracy of objects is not a political thesis to the effect that all objects ought to be treated equally or that all objects ought to participate in human affairs. The democracy of objects is the ontological thesis that all objects, as Ian Bogost has so nicely put it, equally exist while they do not exist equally." [Levy R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (London: Open University Press, 2011), 11.

not take hold on the ground simply by breaking the order of bodies being there, imposing itself through the work of faithful subjects. It does not take root on a virgin field nor does it claim dominion over docile bodies awaiting enlightenment. Instead, the ground is a test conducted by perspectival bodies who must always retain agency over their own subjectivation against any absolutisation. Having presented bodies as active political agents, recognised the primordiality of the ground in providing a static perspective, and upfolded the compatibility of the objective ground with political subjectivity, it is imperative to provide an account of how these figures materially interact.

For a Grounded Political Economy

The previous section established that far from merely 'being there' the ground presents itself as a field on which objective bodies and political subjects interact. It was argued that a possible result of this confrontation is a process of political subjectivation enabled by bodies through the construction of a collective subject-body. Inasmuch as the current conceptual framework provides an account of the process whereby egalitarian politics may materialise on the ground, it does not yet paint a clear picture of what political materiality is. The appearance of a collective subject-body also rests on concrete material relations. Claiming that egalitarian politics necessitates a renewed engagement with materialism calls for an account of political materiality that exceeds abstract or speculative constructions. Failure to do so would reduce materialism to something existing outside of any matter, palpable materiality, or concrete relation.[108] What then may be recognised as a concrete form of political materiality? Once again, one must look to the ground for answers. Insofar as the ground generates perspective, supports bodies in their movements, and provides a field on which bodies and truthful subjects intersect, it also generates and sustains any form of political materiality. Accepting that egalitarian politics is not only thought but materialises through a collective subject-body entails recognising that such collective must be sustained. Furthermore, if egalitarian politics belongs to all who stand there as equals then bodies must be equally sustained. This claim inevitably reframes the question of egalitarian politics in political-economic terms. The possibility of a grounded political economy may be extracted

[108] Iain Hamilton Grant, in *Speculative Realism*, 69-70.

from Karl Polanyi's 'substantive' understanding of economics and the work of economic anthropologists like Susana Norotzky and Maurice Godelier.

Chapter one demonstrated the extent to which liberal approaches to equality always derive their distributive models from a relatively 'free' and naturalised market economy. Equality is systematically set as a goal to be achieved to compensate for the inegalitarian outcomes of market exchange.[109] In chapter two, neoliberalism was interpreted as a branch of political economy that treats the market as a political force, thriving in inequalities and fully denying the political potential of equality. It was concluded that neither liberal nor neoliberal understandings of the market offer a political economy that is fitting to an axiomatic conception of equality. On the other hand, neither Rancière nor Badiou theoretically venture into the realm of political economy, divorcing their egalitarianism from any economic ambitions.[110] Polanyi's critique of the classical understanding of the market potentially offers a response to this economic deadlock. For Polanyi the economic logic underpinning free market liberalism is 'formal'. Formalised economic relations are all ultimately reduced to means-end relationships regimented by a situation of choice.[111] Whether choice is indexed on natural laws or market laws, it always denotes a rational choice of means in relation to ends.[112] Narotzky explains that formal conceptions of economic relations are only applicable "in a society where the market mechanism is the dominant means of allocating land, labour and goods."[113] Following Polanyi's categorisation, none of the thinkers discussed thus far fundamentally challenge this formal understanding of the economy. As a political economist, one of Polanyi's objective was to develop an understanding of economics that is not irremediably tied to the market. This endeavour clearly resonates with Marxism. Yet, unlike Marx, Polanyi's ambition was not to demonstrate that relations of production underpin the structure and social consciousness of society as a whole.[114] Instead, he aimed to show that

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[109] For more on economic redistribution and cultural recognition, refer to chapter one.

[110] Bassett, 3.
For Žižek, separating politics and economics inevitably naturalises the capitalist economy. [See Slavoj Žižek *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso), 2008.]

[111] Karl Polanyi, "The Place of economies in societies" in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* ed. Polanyi, Conrad M Arensberg and Harry W. Pearson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1957), 243.

[112] Ibid, 245.

[113] Susana Narotzky, *New Directions In Economic Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press 1997), 2.

[114] Karl Marx, "Preface of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface-abs.htm.

economic relations are embedded in other social institutions and cannot be analysed separately.[115]

Through the notion of embeddedness, Polanyi arguably provides a challenge to the classical market-based understanding of the economy as well as its Marxist alternative. About the relation between Marxist and Polanyian political economy, Godelier writes that "Polanyi must take the credit for having shown that the economic does not always occupy the same sites and social relations throughout history and that it changes its forms according to whether or not it is 'embedded' in the operation of kin or politico-religious relations."[116] For Polanyi there is no separate economic sphere. Economic relations do not constitute society nor individual choice. Rather, economics is embedded in sets of complex social relations. Accordingly, there must be "an elaborate social organization to take care of such aspects of economic life as the division of labour, disposal of land, organization of work, inheritance and so on."[117] Building on the embeddedness of social and economic relations, Polanyi returns to a 'substantive' understanding of economic relations. The latter revolves around humans' interaction with their natural environment and other humans "insofar as this results in supplying him with the means of material want satisfaction."[118] From this basic standpoint, economic relations simply denote interactions between bodies amongst themselves and their environment as a means to produce and reproduce material life.[119] Unlike market-based understanding of economics, the substantive view entails no scarcity of resources, marginal utility motivation, or even trade.[120]

Polanyi's substantive view provides the tools to think of economic relations as fundamentally embedded within a larger political procedure. It sets the basic foundations for developing a political economy that is not merely focused on market competition nor the impact of relations of production, but the fundamental concordance of economic production

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[115] Narotzky, 3.
[116] Maurice Godelier, *The Mental and the Material Thought, Economy, and Society* (London: Verso, 1986), 19.
[117] Polanyi, *The Livelihood Of Man* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 53; and Narotzky, 7.
[118] Polanyi, "The Place of economies in societies", 243.
[119] Narotzky, 7.
[120] Ibid, 2.
For Polanyi, trade and markets are co-dependent to the extent that "all trade is market trade." [Polanyi, "The Place of economies in societies", 258.] Marginal Utility may be defined as "the additional satisfaction or benefit (utility) that a consumer derives from buying an additional unit of a commodity or service. The concept implies that the utility or benefit to a consumer of an additional unit of a product is inversely related to the number of units of that product he already owns." ["Marginal Utility", in Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/marginal-utility.]

and distribution with a political sequence unfolding.[121] Polanyi's substantive economics together with his notion of embeddedness are compatible with the account of the ground and political materiality developed thus far in this chapter. To the extent that the substantive view strips economics down to its core objectives (subsistence, basic material needs), it renders the deployment of a grounded political economy possible. Rather than putting markets in motion and enabling individuals to fulfil their self-interests, a grounded substantive view suggests that economics takes place from the ground up and remains embedded within egalitarian politics. Far from a separate sphere of social life responding to its own rules and constituting specific economic subjects, economics depends on the ground for extracting material resources and on the collective subject-body to regulate economic life. Understood in these terms, economic relations are conditioned twice: first by the carrying capacity of the ground, and then by the egalitarian regulation of economic relations.[122] Narotzky lays out a substantive model that seems particularly fitted to the portrayal of grounded bodies presented earlier:

> Economic activities are those which are directed toward the satisfaction of material needs in human populations. This perspective presupposes the existence of a given 'natural' context, an environment, where human groups dwell, which is there to be acted upon and from which they can extract what is needed for a living. […] humans are mainly treated as just one species interacting with other species in space and through time.[123]

In the context of this chapter, the 'environment where human groups dwell' may be associated to the ground and the bodies it contains. The primordiality of the ground suggests

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[121] The point made on relations of production here refers to Marxism and historical materialism. Marx and Engels briefly summarise their historical method in *The German Ideology: "*The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production." [Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968, 8.]

[122] Narotzky defines carrying capacity as "the capacity of the resources located in a given area to carry a maximum size of human population is the carrying capacity of that geographical space", adding that "carrying capacity must be understood in a global, historical and political, context." [Narotzky, 14, 92.]

[123] Ibid, 8.

that no economic relation can avoid taking place on its surface. Moreover, it entails that economic resources can only emanate from its core. The notion of resource extraction is especially helpful when drawing the sketch of a grounded political economy. Extraction here does not refer to a specific industry such as resource-mining. Instead, it concerns the production of economic resources in its entirety for the latter is always directly or indirectly associated with the ground. Understood in this way, economic extraction refers to the totality of resources emanating from the ground that directly contributes to the subsistence of all and to the sustainability of a collective subject-body in accordance with the carrying capacity of that ground. Economic materiality is the result of extraction either directly through agriculture and mining, or indirectly through production in the form of industry, manufacturing, and services. In the latter case, value is not indexed on exchange but on the extent to which extraction directly contributes to the subsistence of all and the sustainability of a political collective.[124]

A few elements of this definition of economic extraction must be unpacked to be legible in relation to the ground. The claim that economic resources result from extraction refers to the fact that all types of substantive economic materiality retain a foundational link to the ground. Crops directly emerge from the ground's surface, feeding livestock and sustaining human bodies. Any item incorporating wood, metal, or fuel for its production emanates from the ground or grounded objects such as trees or minerals. The ubiquitous materiality of the ground perfectly illustrates the elementary character of the substantive view from which economic activity simply refers to the satisfaction of material needs. Fulfilling these needs does not entail that value be appropriated and exchanged on a market, but simply that material resources be extracted from and distributed to all on the ground. Polanyi was a strong critique of the commodification of both man and land at work in market economies. In *The Great Transformation* he wrote: "man under the name of labor, nature under the name of land, were made available for sale; the use of labor power could be universally bought and sold at a price called wages, and the use of land could be negotiated for a price called rent."[125] For Polanyi land is a 'fictitious commodity' that does not belong on

[124] The use value/exchange value dichotomy is one of the basis of Marx's critique of political economy. See Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books), 1990.
[125] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation The Political and Economic Origins of our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 136-137.

any marketplace.[126] According to substantive economics, what is being extracted from the ground is not value but materiality. Hence, the ground cannot be fully appropriated for it is the source of all life and thereof all material production.

Substantive political economy concerns essential economic relations. In doing so, it respects the integrity of the ground as foundation. However, political economy cannot simply be indexed on the horizontality of the ground. In addition, it must conform to axiomatic equality and respond to certain inter-body interactions if it is to play a part in the constitution and sustenance of a collective. In that regard, two specific types of economic behaviours stand out: reciprocity and distribution. For Polanyi, reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange are the three main economic patterns traversing societies through time.[127] Exchange is associated to the formalism of market economies, reducing individuals to economic trading units autonomous from one another.[128] Reciprocity is closer to a symmetrical relationship. It contrasts with market relations of interest for it requires no payment, but only that the 'favour' be returned.[129] Still referring to a form of exchange, it does so on the basis of "equality, complementarity, and voluntary interdependence."[130] True reciprocity is unconceivable in a society where others are not perceived as equals. If I am unable to give in the same way that I take, then 'the other body' cannot be my equal for I cannot reciprocate. Here, the discrepancy is not financial but of trust. The collective decision to be economically interdependent from each other is interrupted by one's withdrawal from that pact. Not unlike politics, reciprocity depends on the assumption that equality is 'already there'. Through reciprocal exchange, one assumes that disinterested giving has a shared value that will ultimately be returned.[131] Perfectly fitting to an axiomatic understanding of equality, reciprocity is fully incompatible with a liberal conception of equality as a goal to be achieved. If equality is 'not there yet', there can be no trust and therefore no ground for reciprocal exchange.

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[126] B. Christophers "For real: land as capital and commodity" in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41 (2016): 134. Christophers also points out that for Marx land is not a fictitious commodity, but a fictitious form of capital. [Christophers, 134.] On the question of land commodification, also see David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (London: Profile Books, 2010).

[127] Narotzky, 48.

[128] Jean-Michel Servet, « Le principe de réciprocité chez Karl Polanyi, contribution à une définition de l'économie solidaire » in *Revue Tiers Monde* 2 [Online] (2007), 255-273, 23.

[129] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 51, 53.

[130] Servet, 28. Own translation.

[131] For more on gift economy, see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (Abingdon: Routledge), 2002.

For Polanyi, reciprocity and redistribution are often linked. Servet defines redistribution in Polanyian terms as "a principle founded on a logic by which political and collective goals condition both production and the movement of wealth."[132] Redistribution refers to the process by which one group divides and allocates goods according to "custom, law or ad hoc central decision."[133] Polanyi speaks of redistribution rather than distribution to the extent that allocating resources depends on a centre point to which resources converge before being distributed.[134] This centre point is usually associated to a state or some level of government. Within the current discussion, it is necessary to talk of both distribution and redistribution to the extent that economic extraction begins before a political collective has been consolidated on the ground. In fact, resources must be extracted to operate this consolidation. Even without any clear form of political centricity, resource extraction must conform to the horizontality of the ground and be distributed equally to bodies. Although grounded extraction precedes the full materialisation of a collective subject-body, it must still operate according to the egalitarian axiom. In a pre-political world, economic extraction remains embedded within the horizontality of the ground to which all belong merely by 'being there'.

In reference to the point made earlier regarding the importance of not conflating presentation and representation when it comes to the constitution of a political collective, it is necessary to differentiate between distribution and redistribution in reference to political economy. The concept of redistribution establishes a clear hierarchy between the central institution (state or market) in charge of collecting resources and reinjecting them into society as goods and services. On the other hand, treating economic relations through the notion of distribution clears the conceptual path for a less formal understanding of economics. Distribution does not refer to any centralised system of allocation, but simply to the act of sharing resources. By once again returning to a more basic level of economic interaction, it is possible to reclaim bodies as active economic agents. Redistribution rests on a system of allocation that is largely separated from bodies beyond their intervention as producers, consumers, or collectors of welfare. In the same way that bodies cannot be mere recipient of truths, they do not have to be reduced to producers and consumers of resources. Drawing an

[132] Servet, 22. Own translation.
[133] Polanyi, "The Place of economies in societies," 253.
[134] Servet, 22.

early sketch of an egalitarian political economy is better served by the idea of distribution for the absence of a given all-encompassing allocator of resources pushes one to treat bodies beyond the producer/consumer dichotomy. Within a substantive account of distribution, bodies may be treated as extractors, producers, benefiters, and distributors. In the same way that bodies have the capacity to recognise themselves within a collective, they can extract, produce, and distribute resources in the name of that collective. The collective subject-body, not the state nor the market, must retain control over the production and allocation of resources if a political economy is to be considered egalitarian.

The question of economic materiality is irremediably linked to that of economic exchange. It was argued earlier that reciprocity is the mode of exchange that most closely corresponds to a political economy ordained by equality. Nonetheless, reciprocity denotes much more than mere economic exchange. Going back to the perceptuality associated with bodies' grounded perspective, economic exchange also impacts the ways bodies relate to each other and the resources they extract from the ground, produce, and distribute.[135] Reciprocal economic exchange is also a way for bodies to materially relate to a collective subject-body. If economic extraction, production, and distribution does not incorporate 'All' based on reciprocal exchange, then it will forbid certain bodies from inclusion within the collective subject-body. If bodies are unable to materially relate to the collective in equal measures, they will be more likely to reject it. To the extent that economic reciprocity is undermined, so is inclusion.

The substantive approach to economics allows for the possibility to conceive of a grounded political economy that is indexed to equality. Economic groundedness emanates from the notion of resource-extraction by which economic materiality is produced. Such political economy cannot accommodate markets. Instead it is underpinned by processes of reciprocity and distribution through which equality is upheld. The substantive notion that economic relations are always embedded with the socio-political context in which they take place is also crucial for the account of political materiality presented in this chapter. To the

[135] Once again, this reading of the interdependence of economic and social relations is fully indebted to Marx. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* he writes, "social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist." [Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy Ch.2,* https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/pov-phil/ch02.htm.]

extent that egalitarian politics must be realised by bodies on the ground, it depends from its inception on economic extraction. Far from implying that particular modes of economic extraction shapes political relations in their entirety, the basality of extraction implies that politics and economics are embedded and always implicate each other according to equality. Economic extraction sustains bodies to the same extent that it sustains a political collective. Conversely, a collective subject-body dictates the terms by which resources are to be extracted from the ground and distributed reciprocally on its surface.

The Political Collective as Contingent

What follows the construction of a collective subject-body on the ground? The question of the 'day after' will never cease to stimulate the imagination of those committed to political emancipation. Assuming that egalitarian politics is finally there, do we as subject-body reach a utopian plateau? Or, should we reiterate and force an eternal political truth regardless of past failures?[136] The uncertain temporality of a collective subject-body is best understood through Meillassoux's conceptualisation of contingency. The latter may be briefly defined as "the possibility whereby something can either persist or perish, without either option contravening the physical invariants that govern the world."[137] One must be careful when incorporating Meillassoux's notion of contingency within discussions egalitarian politics. Based on his rebuttal of correlationism, Meillassoux does not believe that political subjectivities may be thought. As Badiou rightfully points out, "Meillassoux's demonstration establishes that only one thing is absolutely necessary: the contingency of natural laws", thereof the thinking of contingency cannot be subject-dependent.[138] Alongside Badiou, it was claimed earlier that politics requires the intervention of a faithful (*fidèle*) subject. There is a clear disagreement between Badiou's account of egalitarian politics and Meillassoux's philosophical deployment of contingency. This disagreement may arguably be mitigated by the perspectival understanding of the ground and the conceptualisation of bodies as active political agents developed throughout this chapter. Although the present account of political materialism articulated around bodies, the ground, and axiomatic equality remains somehow

[136] On this question see Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis. (*London : Verso), 2010.
[137] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 89.
[138] Badiou's preface in *Après la Finitude*, Own Translation.

attached to the correlationist tradition that Meillassoux aims to overcome, it may benefit from being read through the prism of contingency.

In *After Finitude* Meillassoux declares, "we must think an absolute necessity without thinking anything that is absolutely necessary." In other words, we must assert the necessity of an absolute without falling back into the dark waters of dogmatism.[139] The paradoxical necessity for a non-absolute absolute takes root in the notion of 'facticity' by which thought is unable to uncover the reasons "why what is, is."[140] Facticity designates a form of essential ignorance.[141] Whereas facticity may easily be dismissed as a type of intellectual resignation, it can also be read as a conveyor of humility when read through the prism of contingency. Meillassoux introduces contingency through this paradox:

> It is by exposing the weaknesses in our own arguments that we will uncover, by way of a meticulous, step by step examination of the inadequacies in our reasoning, the idea of a non-metaphysical and non-religious discourse on the absolute. For it is by progressively uncovering new problems, and adequate responses to them, that we will give life and existence to a logos of contingency, which is to say, a reason emancipated from the principle of reason.[142]

The current presentation of the ground as an ancestral and un-subjectivised field already belongs to the factual domain of the 'unknown known.' To the extent that the ground simply is there, it has no ontological justification. Bodies, political truths, and subject-bodies interact and move on its surface, but the ground provides no thought besides its ancestral and foundational materiality. The force of unknowability and unpredictability resides precisely in the concept of contingency. The power of contingency is perhaps best read as a form of humility whereby 'We' as a collective have no way to know what might or might not happen. Overcoming the feeling of anxiety generated by this statement, Meillassoux frames contingency in positive terms:

> The term 'contingency' - designates a pure possibility; one which may never be realized. For we cannot claim to know for sure whether or not our world, although it

[139] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 58.
[140] Ibid, 88.
[141] Ibid, 74.
[142] Ibid, 125.

> is contingent, will actually come to an end one day. We know, in accordance with the principle of unreason, that this is a real possibility, and that it could occur for no reason whatsoever; but we also know that there is nothing that necessitates it.[143]

Through this definition, Meillassoux talks of contingency in eschatological terms as the impossibility to know when our world will end. This clearly echoes Agamben's consideration of the Pauline 'time that remains' discussed in the previous chapter, when the inevitability 'end-time' empowers the faithful to live 'in the now.'[144] It is crucial to point out that contingency is a wide category that does not necessarily rest on this eschatological dimension. Contingency concerns destruction as much as preservation or emergence.[145] Etymologically, contingency comes from the Latin *Comingere* meaning 'what is coming' and clearly conveys the potentiality of emergence.[146] Far from debilitating, contingency contains the promise that things might always be otherwise.[147] Even at its most restrictive, contingency arguably constitutes a politically empowering force. In the same way that eschatological struggle has the potential to recentre the faithful in 'now-time', contingency may empower bodies by freeing them from the pressure of realising a definite and rigid political truth. To the extent that axiomatic equality is maintained as a primordial ontological category, contingency implies that political subject-bodies may not endure but also that it may re-emerge in a more inclusive form. This position is likely be dismissed as correlationist to the extent that it relies on an ontological argument as well as a subject.[148] However, the ontological consideration of equality can be linked to contingency if considered alongside the givenness of the ground. If equality is suggested by the ungraspable capacity of the ground to support bodies (horizontality), then the materialisation of egalitarian politics is contingent on that ground and bodies that roam on its surface. Inasmuch as equality is always there so long as there is a ground and bodies, egalitarian politics contingently responds to these two entities.

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[143] Ibid, 103.
[144] See chapter five, and Agamben, *The Time that Remains.*
[145] Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 86.
[146] Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 149;
Johnston criticises Meillassoux for the proximity of his account of the potentiality of contingency to the postmodern approaches of the 'to come'. [Johnston, "Hume's Revenge: À Dieu, Meillassoux? » in *Speculative Realism*, 109.]
[147] Martin Hägglund, "Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux" in *Speculative Realism*, 131.
[148] For Meillassoux, "metaphysics culminates in the ontological argument, viz., in the claim that this or that entity must absolutely be because it is the way it is. The ontological argument posits a necessary being 'par excellence' insofar as the essence of this being provides the reason for its existence." [*After Finitude*, 56.]

Meillassoux chiefly conceptualises contingency as a temporal category. Through the prism of contingency, time acts as an indeterminate agent of destruction or hope. In a beautiful passage, Meillassoux illustrates the contingent character of time:

> If we look through the slit opened up onto the absolute, we will discover in it a somehow menacing power – something deafening capable of destroying things as much as worlds; capable of engendering illogical monsters; capable of never acting, yet also of realising every dream but also every nightmare; capable of disorderly frenetic change, or, conversely capable of producing a universe that remains motionless down to its ultimate recesses. […] [A] power without norms, blind, extracted from other divine perfections and becoming autonomous. A power without goodness nor wisdom, unable to provide thought with the veracity of its distinct ideas. It is indeed something like Time, but a Time that cannot be thought through the physical based on its capacity to destroy while being determined.[149]

This powerful account of time is a reminder that attempting to materialise egalitarian politics should always be a humble process. Whatever politics is being deployed on the ground; it risks being swallowed by time at any moment. The collective subject-body is never eternal and will ultimately fail the test of time, remaining merely as ruins contained within the ancestral spatio-temporality of the ground and the collective imaginary. Although time has the potential to outlive all things, grounded perspective will persist so long as there is a ground and there are bodies. This statement does not imply a return to the Husserlian ego seen as an absolute gaze existing parallelly to the ground. Rather, it denotes that if bodies and the ground objectively persist in 'being there' over time, the potential for the emergence and persistence of a collective subject-body also remains. This implies that perspectival bodies are witness not only of their own subjectivation, but also of the contingent character of a collective subject-body and the process of materialising politics more generally. In that sense, the collective subject-body itself is a contingent (*un contingent*). Whereas subjects remain committed to a truth through their fidelity to an event, bodies need to perceive equality taking place on the ground to sustain their fidelity and allow for their subjectivation as collective subject-body. The subsequent decision to continue or abandon a political

[149] Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 87-88. Own translation.

sequence is not rational but attached to sensing that what is happening on the ground is indeed equality in action. The perceptual perspective of grounded bodies may itself be considered as contingent for it destructs or uphold political subject-bodies for reasons that cannot be appropriated by thought alone. Bodies are simply moving and sensing from the horizontality of the ground. If the ground reflect contingency, so do bodies.

Alongside time, spatiality may also be used to illustrate the power of contingency. Through the essential figure of the ground, space may or may not support a political collective or a certain mode of economic extraction. The ground entertains a contingent relationship with the mode of economic extraction taking place on its surface. It may itself deny certain forms of economic extractions exceeding its carrying capacity, or exhausting its limited resources. The contingency of time, space, and hence political subject-bodies reinforces the idea that egalitarian politics is rare. Its rarity does not only stem from the scarcity of political events, but also from the conditionality of bodies' objective fidelity and the capacity of the ground. Thinking the political subject-body materially signals the impossibility to consider it in absolute terms. Relying on existing bodies and the ground as much as truthful subjects for its materialisation, the political subject-body should be thought as a contingent (*un contigent*).

Conclusion

Materialising egalitarian politics is an uncertain process involving not only axiomatic equality, political truths, and faithful subjects, but the objective forms of the ground, bodies, and political economy. Attempting to deduce the materialisation of egalitarian politics from the egalitarian axiom, one is pushed to reconsider Badiou's account of existing bodies as passive enablers of absolute truths. Beyond its consideration as an apolitical entity constrained to either go with truth or live a meaningless life, the figure of body opens the door to conceptualising truthful egalitarian politics in materialist terms. Empowered as active political agents, bodies interact with their potential subjectivation through objective fidelity. It was argued that such fidelity depends on two processes, recognition and inclusion. Establishing these two concepts as conditions of objective fidelity, their liberal interpretations must be rejected. Rather than a demand made in the name of individual or group identities, recognition here refers to bodies' capacity to recognise themselves (or not) within an

unfolding collective subject-body. Either bodies decide that 'this is Us' and willingly accept to participate in the political sequence, or they fail to recognise themselves and remain outside the bounds of that collective. If it is to concern 'All' or 'anyone', the materialising subject-body must also be measured on its capacity to include every-body. Rather than a case by case inclusion based on specific identities determined by race, gender, sexuality, resources, or capabilities, bodily inclusion refers to the quantitative inclusion of all bodies regardless of identity. Specific identities are irrelevant if inclusion is thought as an infinite count. There will always remain bodies to be counted, but the collective is measured in relation to its infinite capacity to include them all. Framed as such, recognition and inclusion form the basis of bodies' objective fidelity in a collective.

Discussing political materiality entails tying egalitarian politics to a specific spatiality. It was argued that only the ground constitutes a shared space extensive enough to contain the materialisation of politics ordained by axiomatic equality. Through Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's work, the ground was recognised as the material basis of all experience including politics. Maintained as an essential material plane rather than a transcendental entity, the ground embodies the space in which bodies interact with their subjectivation through fidelity. Providing a basal and constant perspective to all bodies on what is taking place on its surface, the ground is the central stage of egalitarian politics. Based on this account of bodies and the ground, it was claimed that a collective subject-body cannot be sustained without a political economy that is itself prescribed by axiomatic equality. Building on Polanyi's critique of formal (market-based) economics and his endorsement of substantive economic relations, one can extract the theoretical skeleton of what an egalitarian grounded political economy may be. Still following Polanyi and to a lesser extent Marx, it was argued that a grounded political economy rests on a mode of resource extraction that respects the carrying capacity of the ground, establishes bodies as equal agents of production and distribution, and redefines economic exchange through reciprocity.

To the extent that egalitarian politics may materialise, one must remain humble regarding the collective subject-body's capacity to persist in time and space. Following Meillassoux, bodies, as well as the ground on which they stand, may be considered as contingent. No matter the political procedure unfolding, it will ultimately remain contingent on bodies, the ground, and subjectivation. Hence, considering the collective subject-body as a material possibility entails recognising that it nonetheless always remains a contingent (*un*

contingent). Through the figure of the collective subject-body, egalitarian politics will break the endless horizon of pure possibility. However, the materialisation of such an event requires the inclusion and subjectivation of objective bodies within a collective that is ordained not only by equality and political truth, but also by the horizontality of the ground and reciprocal economic exchange.

Conclusion

Insomuch as equality consistently allures political thinkers, it often escapes or exceeds political thought. The question of equality requires introspection as well as the capacity to relate to others as oneself. It is precisely from this dual dimension, blurring demarcations between individual and collective life, that equality simultaneously fascinates and disturbs political thinkers as much as political actors. Equality fascinates by embodying the possibility to fundamentally rethink social relations through the erosion of differences and discrepancies amongst individuals. It disturbs for precisely the same reasons. These paradoxical feelings are attached to the theoretical and political potential of equality. Feelings of fascination and fear towards equality have traversed this thesis through a wide range of conceptual iterations, many of which cannot be reduced to either positive or negative considerations. Rather, equality is often invoked before being put at a distance. It is as if glancing at the political promise of equality, one must immediately look away to resist what either appears as sublime light or corrosive brightness. What remains from this encounter are fragments of equality relocated in distinct theoretical frameworks.

Throughout the range of literature discussed in this work, equality has been defined as a goal to be achieved by autonomous citizens, a dangerous limit placed upon individual liberty and self-fulfilment, a fundamental declaration without which emancipation is unthinkable, and an axiom allowing for the formulation of political truths. Two main theoretical trends emerged from these readings. The first, revealed in chapter one and two, reduces equality to the task of undermining or upholding inequalities. It may be associated to the liberal and neoliberal traditions respectively. Within these approaches, equality is systematically invoked negatively through the lens of inequality and sometimes denied in the name of liberal autonomy, identity, market exchange, and individual self-interests. In contrast, Rancière and Badiou are dedicated to presenting equality as an unquestionable starting point of politics. Their political thoughts demand that equality be declared as such for only this declaration sets subjects on the path of emancipation. Within these two contrasting trends, a quasi-theological distance is maintained towards the realisation of egalitarian politics. For liberals and neoliberals, this distance is generated by the impossibility to consider equality outside the bounds of inequalities generated by market exchange and individual

autonomy. For Rancière and Badiou, equality is abstracted by a shared unwillingness to consider egalitarian politics in material terms.

Liberal egalitarians are committed to the goal of politically undermining existing inequalities. Within liberal democracies where the egalitarian promise of a ruling demos tends to be formalised beyond recognition through parliamentary representation and human rights, they maintain that substantiating equality can still be achieved alongside liberal ideals. Their rich models aim to reconcile liberalism's individualistic leanings with a collective incarnation of politics and justice whose central aim is to undermine inequalities. This is done by redistributing goods, resource, welfare, or capabilities, or by recognising marginalised identities that have historically not been considered as equals. Although their commitment to reducing inequalities is not in doubt, their models suffer from several shortcomings. First and foremost, they display a generalised unwillingness or indifference towards questioning markets' efficiency in allocating resources. Not only do liberals remain relatively oblivious to markets' inegalitarian outputs, they also tend to naturalise markets and inequalities in the process. This is especially palpable in the work of Rawls and Dworkin who attempt to curb market outcomes while never questioning their inegalitarian impact. Liberal egalitarians also limit their models to idealised situations in which inequalities are only challenged as a result of self-interested individual choices. This also applies to proponents of recognition for whom inclusion results from the state's acknowledgement of claims made by or on the part of marginalised groups. An issue stemming from associating inclusion to individual choice is that exclusion may be designated as the preferred tool to promote justice. Ultimately, the prospect of substantiating liberal equality is compromised by the impossibility to question the virtues of individual autonomy, choice, and market exchange in the name of equality.

Constructing their political vision in part on the shortcomings of liberalism, neoliberal thinkers fully deny the political potential of equality. Rather than a merely destructive ideology, neoliberalism is a branch of political economy that designates markets as vectors of individual emancipation. In a neoliberal context, every sphere of social life becomes a potential market on which individuals may wish to advance their self-interests. Marketisation elevates, not equality, but pure competition as a societal goal. To the extent that competition is fostered by a regime of inequalities by which individuals aim to acquire what they do not yet have by overcoming others, neoliberal thinkers like Friedman and Hayek treat inequalities favourably as a reflection of individual liberty resulting from the natural play of market

exchange. Foucault and his intellectual followers remark that economic conducts associated with neoliberalism differ from classical considerations of homo economicus as a utility-maximising subject. Instead, the neoliberal subject is an 'entrepreneur of the self' producing capital for and as itself. Production is no longer limited to commodities but also the individual as 'project'. Endowed with the task of increasing its own capital value, homo *neoliberalis* is fixated on being 'liked' by others while competing to fulfil its own individual desires. This also applies to political behaviours where individual opinions are 'shared' without any need to interact with others. Ultimately, the current neoliberal hegemony signals the metamorphosis of the liberal ideal of autonomy into its heteronomous opposite. Existing neoliberal democracies do not correspond to the liberal ideal of autonomous individuals concurrently driven by private interests and the collective realisation of the common good. Rather, they reveal a sum of atomised individuals heteronomously driven by their desires and that of others in a marketised regime of inequalities. Most importantly, the neoliberal situation indicates that attempting to realise equality through liberal means is a political impasse.

Decisively stepping away from liberal concerns, Rancière and Badiou radically open up the emancipatory potential of equality by treating it as the starting point of politics rather than its goal. Declaring the equal capacity of 'everyone and anyone', Rancière embraces the demos in its anarchical composition and its potential to dissent from the police order. Both Rancière and Badiou conceptualise equality against the limits of existing identities. From their standpoint, categorisations in place belong to the existing state of a situation or police order that must be overcome to make room for egalitarian politics. Although close at many levels, Rancière and Badiou's egalitarianisms theoretically part ways on the question of subjectivation. Whereas for Rancière political subjects are constituted through the staging of a wrong, speaking on behalf of those 'without parts', Badiou introduces the subject through the concept of 'event'. Following a succinct and unexpected political event, subjects must retrace truth through their fidelity to that event. More than Rancière, Badiou is prepared to thoroughly conceptualise the subjective process by which politics may appear in the world. Through his axiomatic consideration of equality and his understanding of politics as a truth procedure driven by fidelity, Badiou provides a framework from which thinking the materialisation of egalitarian politics becomes possible. Although Badiou guides his readers out of the impasse of liberal (in)equality, his egalitarianism too often retains properties of the transcendental 'One' that he tries to overcome. In his absolute account of political truths,

Badiou forecloses the possibility to conceptualise equality in material terms. By systematically subordinating existing bodies to theoretical subjects, he produces a largely objectless account of politics that risks remaining blind to the dogmatic leanings of a political 'One'.

Building in part on Badiou's concept of fidelity, faith was discussed for its potential as a political process. With St Paul, faith appears as a deeply inclusive process empowering subjects 'in the now' rather than in a distant prophetic future. Open to all so long as they are faithful, the egalitarian potential of Pauline faith continues to inspire political thinkers today. When Paul is read alongside Kierkegaard, faith is unveiled as the deepest form of subjective commitment between a truth and its subject. For Kierkegaard, faith is in many ways superior to knowledge. Immediacy and accessibility constitute another egalitarian characteristic of faith. Inasmuch as knowledge acquisition requires time, resources, and intellect, faith reveals its truth to all willing to make the leap. Against purely antinomian readings of Paul, it was argued that faithful commitment requires an objective component. For politics, the object of faith reformulated secularly as fidelity is attached to the egalitarian axiom and the materialisation of a collective subject-body. To the extent that 'the One' is evacuated, political faith summons the political collective 'Us' not only as its subject but also as its object.

The last chapter of this thesis was dedicated to elucidating the material facet of egalitarian politics. Beginning with the collective to which objective fidelity is attached, it is essential to identify the 'We' of egalitarian politics. To the extent that a theoretical subject does not necessarily correspond to politics 'in action', the figure of the body must be recovered. Insofar as bodies are present on the ground, they must participate to their own subjectivation into a collective. Not only is asserting or enforcing a political truth on bodies self-defeating, it also contradicts the egalitarian axiom from which politics emanates. Two processes characterise the role of existing bodies in materialising egalitarian politics, each of which conditions their objective fidelity: recognition and inclusion. Whilst recognition refers to bodies' ability to recognise themselves within a subjectivised collective, inclusion measures the collective's capacity to include every-body. Besides the figure of the body, political materiality also refers to the spatiality of the ground. Only the basal ground provides a space shared by all able to sustain the materialisation of a collective subject-body. From the ground up, bodies get a perspective on a political sequence unfolding, either recognising themselves within the political collective or refusing its truth. Egalitarian materiality is also conveyed through economic exchange. Following Polanyi and his notion of substantive economy,

bodies relate as equals through reciprocal exchange, equal distribution, and shared production.

Equality can be materialised by politics. Rising above the mist of liberal inequalities, we must be willing to restart as equals stripped of identarian concerns. Committed to equality and the political truths it may generate, we must also direct our fidelity towards the objective realisation of these truths, for egalitarian politics demands a leap of faith as much as a step forward. Taking this step on the ancestral ground, we advance towards a novel collective subject. It is there, faced with the groundwork of a contingent subject-body that we may decide, ‘this is Us’.

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