

Zizek's comment on Badiou's difference between democratic materialism and  
materialist dialectics

Democratic materialism: bioethics (body, life), bio-materialism  
Individuals and communities

Materialist dialectics: truth, (no substantial existence), subject  
(the universality of truths is supported by subjective forms that cannot  
be either individual or communitarian)

Not so much the opposition of two ideologies or philosophies  
as opposition between non-reflected presuppositions/beliefs  
and the reflexive attitude of thought

Badiou's democratic materialism---answer to the question of our spontaneous  
ideological beliefs: What do I think when I am outside my own  
control? or rather, what is my spontaneous belief?

The opposition—linked to “class struggle in philosophy”  
Most identified by the names of Lenin, Mao Zedong, and  
Althusser

Mao: It is only when there is class struggle that there can be philosophy.  
To Badiou, the key reference—Plato, the first to assert the field of rationality  
freed from inherited beliefs.  
To distinguish logos from mythos (traditional beliefs)

The passage from TWO to THREE: Platonic, proto-idealist gesture  
material reality is not all that there is, that  
there is also another level of **incorporeal truths**  
Zizek: bodies and languages → synonymous with being, its multiplicity, worlds?

**The Three of being, worlds, truths**

(democratic materialism → only the multiplicity of being(differentiated reality)  
and different worlds(linguistic universes)

Our spontaneous ideology: an endless differentiated, complex reality, which we, the  
individuals and communities embedded in it, always experience  
from a particular, finite perspective of our historical world.

Democratic materialism **rejects**: the notion that there can be an infinite universal  
Truth

To reject the Jacobins, who imposed their universal notions of equality and  
other truths on the plurality of French society and thus ended in terror  
(Kantian radical evil)

Today's society: the dynamics of postmodern globalization  
vs. its resistances (conservative-nostalgic, fundamentalist,  
old leftist, nationalist, religious)

the materialist-dialectic: from the TWO to the THREE

the communist politics → not simply the class struggle,  
but the Third moment as the subtraction from the  
Two of hegemonic politics

opposition of market-freedom-democracy and  
fundamentalist-terrorist-totalitarianism

**Yet, this is the false opposition.**

True antagonism is reflexive,

It is between the official antagonism and that which is foreclosed by it.

Not between liberal multiculturalism and fundamentalism

But between the very field of their opposition and the excluded Third  
(radical emancipatory politics)

The Three to three different mechanism

p. 384 1. the traditional matrix of authority

2. the invisible hand of the market (competition)

3. the open political process of social cooperation (decisions, by the  
conscious interaction of individuals)

How Three modes relate to the three sources of social authority:

1. the authoritarian 2. the technocratic 3 the democratic ?

the technocratic authority (rely on qualification)

the authoritarian (selective)

the democratic (everybody should rule)

**These two triads do not directly overlap.**

The Third Moment as the subtraction from the Two of hegemonic politics.

(the opposition: capitalists vs. proletarians (plutocrats vs. Bolsheviks)  
is literally obliterated.

**A must:** to distinguish between “false” and “true” points

between “false” and “true” choices

to bring back the third element whose obliteration sustains the false choice.

not (the enemy of my enemy is my friend): dangerous (like the progressive  
anti-imperialist potential in fundamentalist Islamist movement. Example:

Hezbollah (party of God, Islamist, political, paramilitary  
organization) its ideology: women's emancipation and gay rights  
are nothing but the decadent moral aspect of western

imperialism.

This is the problem today: the antagonism imposed on us by the space of the dominant ideology is **the secondary antagonism** between reactive and obscure subjects, leading their struggle against the background of the obliterated Event.

### Responses to the Event

Hannibal Lecter whose monstrosity could not be reduced to its causes or conditions. (Nothing happened to him. He happened.)

Badiou: “Only if there is a subject, can an Event occur within an evental site.”

Different modes of subjectivity → the modalities by which the subject relates to the Event.

p.387 Badiou’s four responses: the faithful subject, the reactive subject,  
the obscure subject and resurrection

Zizek: there are actually six responses

An Event is necessarily missed the first time, so that true fidelity is only possible in the form of resurrection, as a defense against revisionism.

Difference between the standard capitalist and the Marxist notion of economic crisis

To the standard capitalist, **crises**: temporary, correctable glitches

To the Marxist, **crises**: its moment of truth, the exception

Johnston : using Deleuzian term “minimal difference”

To Zizek: crisis, as occasional contingent malfunctioning of the system

to the notion of crisis as the symptomal point at which “truth”

becomes visible-----→these two are the same

(inherent incalculability to the factors involved in setting the pace of the cadence of socio-political change)

Intention (minor improvement to make better) with its unexpected consequence, a total disintegration

Thus, what may appear as a radical critical stance or as subversive activity → merely the system’s inherent transgression

Sometimes, a minor legal reform can be more subversive than open questioning of the system’s basic presuppositions.

p.391 What is needed: Johnston → pre-evental discipline of time

not the quietest patience, but the calm contemplation of the details of situations, states and worlds with an eye to the discerning of ideologically veiled weak points in the structural architecture of the statist system.

p.392 the “specifically communist form of patience” is not just patient waiting

for the moment when radical change will explode...

Mao's slogan: "from defeat to defeat, to the final victory"

Badiou: the fact that the eventual irruption functions as a break in time, introducing a totally different order of temporality. That is, there is never a "right moment" for the revolutionary event, always, by definition, "premature." Doomed to fail.

"Maturation" is not waiting for the "objective" circumstances to reach maturity, but the accumulation of defeats.

Hegel: revolutionary potential is not there to be discovered as an objective social fact, one "sees it" only insofar as one "desires" it.

Mensheviks and those who opposed Lenin: they simply did not want the revolution.

Capitalism: so global and all-encompassing...there is no "outside."

The task is not to see "outside" but to see in the first place

p.395 What Badiou ignores is the problem of the death drive: not heading toward death, but for immortality, a name for the "undead" eternal life itself.

Tristan: without Isolde, he cannot die, and is condemned to eternal longing; the prospect he dreads is not that of dying without Isolde, but rather that of endless life without her.

P. 395, humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life to excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things.

The excess → the wound: when this wound is healed, the hero can die in peace.

Badiou ignores the eventual dimension of repetition; one may turn to Deleuze against Badiou, because to Deleuze, repetition as the very form of the emergence of the New.

Do we need a new world?

Being, World and Event → do not form a triad:

We have either the opposition of Being and World,

Or the opposition of World and Event

**A true Event, not necessary negative**, but might open up a positive dimension of the New, an Event is the imposition of a new world,  
of a new Master-Signifier

p.397 One should go a step further and introduce the dimension of dialectics:

an Event can be accounted for by the tension between the multiplicity of Being and the World, its site is the symptomal torsion of a World, it is generated by the excess of Being over World.

Badiou: our time is devoid of worldliness, referring to Marx's well-known passage from the communist manifesto about the deterritorializing force of capitalism which dissolves all fixed social forms.

p.398 Badiou: the exceptional ontological status of capitalism whose dynamic undermines every stable framework of representation

p.399 the lessons of the Cultural Revolution (Badiou's "the cultural revolution: the last revolution?

no longer possible to assign either the revolutionary mass actions or the organizational phenomena to the strict logic of class representation.

This text: towards an unexpected parallel with Heidegger

The Cultural Revolution ---Badiou, the same structural place

As the Nazi Revolution for Heidegger

To Badiou: the cultural revolution, showing the impossibility truly and globally to **free** politics **from** the framework of the party-state that imprisons it.

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Thus, it is negative, it resides in its very **failure** which signals the exhaustion of the party/statist logic of the revolutionary process.

p.401 the lesson of the Cultural Revolution

to Badiou, in Logics of the Worlds: impossibility of pursuing radical political activity within the framework of the party-state.

So to Zizek, neither can we practice revolutionary politics outside the party-state framework, nor can we do it within this framework.

The deadlock: at a distance from the state form, outside, but not an outside that is destructive of the state form; rather, a gesture of "subtracting" oneself from the state form without destroying it.

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To Badiou, the Cultural Revolution: in the aftermath of this historical defeat, a political truth can only be generated as (the fidelity to) a local event, a local struggle, an intervention into a

specific constellation.

To Žižek: Does he (Badiou) not thereby subscribe to his own version of postmodernism, of the notion that , today, only local acts of resistance are possible?

Yet, one could not fight capitalism, one fights the US government, its decisions and measures and so on.

For capitalism→to Badiou, the naturalized background of our historical constellation...it is the all-encompassing background against which particular situations emerge.

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Which subtraction?

The lesson of the fall of Communist states is that it is meaningless to “fight capitalism”...it is from this shared space that one should subtract oneself: “resistance presents itself as an exodus, as a departure outside the world.”

Badiou: drawing a line of distinction between communism and Marxism:

He himself a communist (in the generic sense: everyone is equal to everyone else within the multiplicity and diversity of social functions.)

Marxism is something else: what Lenin called the ABC of communism: the masses are divided into classes, the classes are represented by parties and the parties directed by leaders.

p.407 We need a new form of politics: **the politics of subtraction**, political processes that are independent of –“subtracted from”—the power of the State.

p.409 To Žižek, to reply to Badiou’s version of Bartleby politics should be Hegelian: the whole problem of proper measure is a false one. Subtraction is the Hegelian negation of the negation (or determinate negation), in other words, instead of directly negating—destroying the ruling power, remaining within its field, it undermines this very field, opening up a new positive space.

To Žižek, Badiou commits a symptomatic conceptual regression when he qualifies the social-democratic position as a pure subtraction: the democratic subtraction is no subtraction at all. It is “nihilist” terrorists.(fundamentalist)  
Radical destruction overlaps with radical subtraction.

Another pure subtraction is New Age meditative withdrawal: creates a space of its own while leaving the sphere of social reality the way it is.

When could subtraction create a new space? The only answer: when it undermines the coordinates of the very system from which it subtracts itself, striking at the point of its symptomatic torsion.

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Dictatorship of the proletariat: dictatorship does not mean the opposite of democracy, but democracy's own underlying mode of functioning.

Democracy is also a form of dictatorship, that is, as a purely formal determination.

p.413 proletariat → “part of no-part” which stands for universality, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” is the power of universality, where those who are the “part of no-part” set the tone.

Proletariat, not the people

The **proletariat** is the only (revolutionary) class in history that abolishes itself in the act of abolishing its opposites. **The “people”** on the other hand, made up of a myriad of classes and sub-classes, social and economical strata, cannot structurally carry out such a mission.

p. 415 The people is inclusive, the proletariat is exclusive; the people fights intruders, parasites, those who obstruct its full self-assertion, the proletariat fights a struggle which divides the people in its very core. The people wants to assert itself, the proletariat wants to abolish itself.