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The World Community and the Closure of the Political: How to Overcome Carl Schmitt

Introduction

Contemporary political theory exhibits a curious attachment to its central concepts, which increasingly function as markers of theoretical battlefields, having long ceased to refer to anything unequivocal but rather denoting an intense degree of equivocation and even antagonism. ‘Essentially contested’, these concepts nonetheless remain too valuable for the critical discourse to be ‘abandoned to the enemy’, as Slavoj Žižek suggests we do with the ‘discredited’ concept of democracy.¹ Yet, this very example proves that despite the utmost heterogeneity of e.g. Jacques Derrida’s, Chantal Mouffe’s or Jacques Rancière’s theories of democracy to its dominant ‘operative concept’, the concept itself is *not* abandoned in critical discourse but rather permanently ‘rethought’, ‘redefined’, ‘reconstructed’, etc. This stubborn commitment to contested concepts is particularly interesting in the light of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s claim that the philosophy is the ‘art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts’.² It is notable that this definition explicitly prioritises novelty over transformation, advocating forming and inventing rather than *re-forming* and *re-inventing* concepts, as is the case with the essentially contested concepts of today’s political theory. Perhaps, the desire to rethink is a symptom of the paradoxical and parasitical dependence of the critical discourse on what it attempts to transcend, a symptom that reveals the disavowed desire for things to remain the same, so that an innocent game of rethinking may safely go on against the background of the stable immutability of what is rethought.³ Moreover, the tireless drive to rethink contested concepts itself functions as the best demonstration of the utmost difficulty, if not the futility, of this enterprise, insofar as no end to this process is visible or even imaginable.

In recent years, ‘the political’ (and more generally, ‘politics’ at large) has become the privileged locus of such rethinking. Despite the undeniable richness of new approaches to this constitutive concept, they are, practically without exception, haunted by the presence of Carl Schmitt. The process of rethinking politics frequently begins with the invocation of Carl Schmitt’s ‘concept of the political’, followed by the discussion of its inadequacy and the outline of diverse pathways of overcoming its conflictual logic. Of course, the very plurality of such narratives demonstrates their ultimate frustration – if, after decades of critical engagement that all too often collapsed into somewhat perverse *exercises* in the friend-enemy distinction, Schmitt’s concept remains the point, from which we must depart (both literally and figuratively) in the task of rethinking the political, it logically follows that as of this moment Schmitt’s conceptual universe has not yet been overcome.

¹ Slavoj Žižek ‘What is to be Done (with Lenin)’, *In These Times*, January 21 (2004).

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994), 2.

³ Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 334-36.

This is all the more quaint, as there is practically not a single approach in political theory that could be called (or, rather, describe itself as) ‘Schmittian’ without numerous caveats (some contributions to *Telos* over the last two decades might qualify, but the process of ‘rethinking’ goes on in these pages as well). It is as if Schmitt’s political theory functions as a *negative foundation* of the current discourse on rethinking the political, i.e. something that must be presupposed and traversed as a precondition of the very act of its transcendence, which ironically appears to lead us nowhere than back to Schmitt. Yet, perhaps the problem of overcoming Schmitt has less to do with the foundational force of his argument than with the paradoxical drive to engage in conceptual contestation. This article will argue that Schmitt’s antagonistic logic of the political can hardly be overcome through its multiple rethinkings, which always end up facing the Schmittian dualism at the end of their conceptual endeavor. Yet, if Schmittian logic of the political is *immutable*, this does not mean that it is *ineradicable*. Rather than tirelessly contest Schmitt’s concept of the political, it might be more productive to question the possibilities of the closure of its logic as such, i.e. to invent a conceptual constellation, in which the logic of the political is no longer operative. In this article, we shall tentatively chart the pathway towards this closure of the political through an engagement with the universalist themes in contemporary continental philosophy, particularly the work of Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou. We shall begin with interpreting the unsuccessful attempts to critically reconstruct Schmitt’s concept of the political, arguing that Schmitt’s existential ontology of alterity renders his antagonistic logic of the political immutable, as long as politics continues to be approached in identitarian and intersubjective terms. In other words, as long as we continue to frame politics within a dialectic of identity and difference, Schmitt’s (in)famous ‘ever-present possibility’ of violent conflict, calling for a friend-enemy distinction, remains immune to any attempt at its transformation. Moreover, we shall demonstrate that the attempt to dismantle this antagonistic structure of intersubjective pluralism through the installation of a ‘world state’ that does away with decentralized sovereignty and offers the universal recognition of identities nonetheless fails to evade the Schmittian logic due to the inherently flawed character of any identitarian universalism. We shall then proceed to the discussion of an alternative understanding of universalism, which may be labeled ‘generic’, which is developed in the work of contemporary continental philosophers, most notably Agamben and Badiou. Self-consciously utopian, generic universalism nonetheless provides the most coherent attempt so far to challenge Schmitt’s antagonistic logic of the political by dismantling the identitarian ontology which grounds it and reconstructing world politics as a radically egalitarian process of the emergence of the world community of ‘whatever singularities’.

Difference, Death and Decision: Schmitt and the Existential Ontology of Alterity

The Persistence of the Political

The function of Schmitt’s logic of the political as a negative foundation of the contemporary critical discourse is particularly evident in those approaches, which, not

content with mere denunciation (which, by definition, has little to do with rethinking)⁴ attempt to critically engage with Schmitt's problematics and liberate the question of the political from a debilitating confinement within the proverbial friend-enemy distinction. Irrespectively of whether these attempts are ultimately sympathetic to or critical of Schmitt, they arguably remain trapped in the Schmittian conceptual universe all the more so as they try to deconstruct it. Let us briefly demonstrate this entrapment with three examples of the critique of Schmitt by Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Derrida. We must emphasise that this discussion by no means exhausts these authors' refined readings of Schmitt but merely identifies in their argument the persistence of the logic of the political that they attempt to overcome.

Chantal Mouffe's critique of Schmitt is arguably one of the most appreciative treatments of Schmitt in the contemporary political theory. Finding much to agree with in Schmitt's criticism of depoliticized liberal universalism, Mouffe nonetheless attempts to rethink Schmitt's concept of the political in 'non-essentialist' terms. For Mouffe, the fundamental weakness of Schmitt's thought is his 'essentialisation' of the friend-enemy distinction. 'His distinction between us and them is *not really politically constructed*; it is merely a recognition of *already-existing* borders.'⁵ In this reading, the friend-enemy distinction as an essentially static concept, a reflection of the allegedly existing state of affairs, rather than a contingent political *act*. It is, however, difficult to find support for this reading in Schmitt's work, particularly insofar as we read *The Concept of the Political* in conjunction with *Political Theology*, understanding the act of the friend-enemy distinction as the prime expression of the sovereign decision on exception.

From this perspective, the friend-enemy distinction is an unfounded yet foundational act of the sovereign decision, which logically 'emanates from nothingness' and therefore cannot find ground or support in the anterior reality and draw on substantive (economic, moral or aesthetic) criteria to define the enemy.⁶ This purely formal decisionism famously led Leo Strauss to characterise Schmitt's conception of the political as 'liberalism preceded by a minus sign'.⁷ Similarly, Slavoj Žižek argues that Schmitt's decisionism is entirely heterogeneous to any form of traditional conservatism but rather unfolds in the thoroughly disenchanted space of nihilism: 'modern conservatism, even more than liberalism, assumes the lesson of the dissolution of the traditional set of values and/or authorities – there is no longer any positive content which could be presupposed as the universally accepted frame of reference.'⁸ In this context, Mouffe's reading of Schmitt as an essentialist is hardly plausible; if anything, Schmitt may rather be read as an extreme and logically consistent *anti-essentialist*, since the progressive denial of essences ultimately leaves one with nothing else than the *pure force of becoming*, which is precisely the sole

⁴ See e.g. Richard Wolin, 'Carl Schmitt: The Conservative Revolutionary Habitus and the Aesthetics of Horror', *Political Theory* 20: 3 (1992), 424-47; William Scheuermann, *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law* (Boulder: Roman and Littlefield, 1999).

⁵ Chantal Mouffe, 'Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy' in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999), 50. See also Jef Huysmans, 'The Question of the Limit: Desecuritisation and the Aesthetics of Horror in Political Realism', *Millennium* 27: 3 (1998): 569-589.

⁶ See Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), 12-13, 30-31; Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976), 21-27, 37-39.

⁷ Leo Strauss, 'Comments on Carl Schmitt's *Der Begriff Des Politischen*' in Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 103.

⁸ Žižek, 'Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics' in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 19.

‘substance’ of Schmitt’s decision.

What is properly modern in Schmitt’s notion of the exception is thus the violent gesture of asserting the independence of the abyssal act of free decision from its positive content. [W]hat really matters is the act as such, independently of its normative content, a purely formal abyssal act of decision, without any grounds in the actual properties and acts of those concerned.⁹

Thus, neither the friend nor the enemy may be argued to pre-exist the act of their distinction, which, as a decisionist act, acquires primacy in relation to its particular content. This reading also problematises Mouffe’s own attempt at mitigating the violent potential of Schmitt’s logic of antagonistic pluralism in her discussion of ‘agonistic pluralism’, which differs from Schmitt’s approach in postulating limits to the friend-enemy antagonism that are provided by the existence of a common symbolic framework, which permits the expression of dissent and manifestations of conflict but does not let them be translated into the violent quest for the elimination of the enemy.¹⁰ This ‘radical democratic’ rethinking of Schmitt maintains the constitutive dimension of antagonism against both the liberal reduction of politics to economic competition and the Habermasian subjection of politics to the utopia of a rational consensus, attained in communicative action guided by the rules of discourse ethics. Yet, on the other hand, against Schmitt’s alleged valorization of ‘frontal struggle between enemies’, Mouffe asserts the possibility of a ‘differential treatment of [the] conflictuality’ inherent in the human condition, whereby a head-on confrontation between enemies give way to a struggle between adversaries that share a common symbolic ground.¹¹ This move is in itself certainly laudable, yet two questions arise with respect to this reading. Firstly, the mitigation that Mouffe proposes as a corrective to Schmitt’s conception is suspiciously similar to what Schmitt himself analyzed at length (albeit in a delimited empirical context) in his studies of the ‘bracketing’ of war in the Westphalian system of the *Jus Publicum Europeum*.¹² There is thus little in Mouffe’s account that is not already present in Schmitt. The second problem is even more serious from a conceptual perspective. What Mouffe proposes is nothing less than the elevation of a contingent empirical condition of the existence of a common symbolic framework, in which antagonism may be reinscribed as agonism, to a transcendental condition of possibility of politics as such. In other words, what is in Schmitt’s writing a ‘special case’, a historically specific arrangement, whose passing Schmitt laments without due attention to the utterly restrictive character of this ‘agonistic’ space which after all did not stretch beyond Western Europe and did not include vast colonial territories, is in Mouffe’s argument a component of the very concept of the political. Yet, to presuppose a priori the existence of such a common symbolic framework is certainly to presuppose too much or, to return Mouffe’s accusation to herself, to ‘essentialise’ the political by recasting an entirely contingent empirical occurrence as an ontological condition of all politics. In short, while Mouffe’s delimitation of the violent potential of the logic of the political is perfectly laudable as a

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ See Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

¹¹ Mouffe, ‘Introduction: Schmitt’s Challenge’ in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 4.

¹² Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Public Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press, 2003)

normative prescription, it fails to overcome Schmitt's political ontology but rather establishes a restricted zone of 'mitigated politics' within its space.

Similarly to Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek's engagement with Schmitt is motivated by the assumption of the relevance of the latter's critique of liberalism in the contemporary context of depoliticisation: 'the reference to Schmitt is crucial in detecting the deadlocks of post-political liberal tolerance.'¹³ Moreover, avoiding Mouffe's misreading of Schmitt as an essentialist, Žižek emphasizes the purely formal and radically undecidable character of the friend-enemy distinction. At the same time, in his effort of rethinking Schmitt's concept of the political Žižek does not seek, as Mouffe does, to mitigate its violent potential but rather to radicalize it even further: '[S]chmitt's well-known answer, radical as it may appear, is not radical enough, insofar as it already displaces the inherent antagonism constitutive of the political on to the external relationship between Us and Them.'¹⁴ In accordance with his own Hegelian-Lacanian ontological stance, which became ever more pronounced in *The Parallax View*, Žižek views political antagonism as strictly internal and constitutive of the social order itself, rather than as a clash between preconstituted forms of order.¹⁵ Every positive order is ontologically split from within and different from itself, and it is to this constitutive antagonism that the name 'the political' must, according to Žižek, be given. With a reference to the work of Badiou and Rancière that anticipates our argument below, Žižek finds ontic manifestations of this ontological crack within a social order in confrontations between the positively structured social body, in which all elements are assigned a determinate locus, and the excluded singular elements that find no particular representation within this body and, for this very reason, are able to stand in for the Universal, no longer conceived as a harmonious unity of particular identities but rather as a violent disruption of every structured social order. It is this vision of 'the political proper'¹⁶ that Žižek advocates as an alternative to Schmitt's own concept, which he considers to be 'the most cunning and radical version of [the] disavowal' of the constitutive antagonism and labels 'ultra-politics'.¹⁷ In contrast to other forms of disavowal, enumerated by Žižek (the *arche-politics* of organic traditionalism, the *para-politics* of reducing political antagonism to the models of 'competition' or 'discussion', the *meta-politics* of conceiving of this antagonism as an epiphenomenon of extra-political processes and the *post-politics* of technocratic administration, supplemented by the 'returns of the repressed' in the form of racism and religious fundamentalism), ultra-politics consists in the reinscription of the internal political antagonism into a conflict between the inside and the outside:

In ultra-politics, the 'repressed' political returns in the guise of the attempt to resolve the deadlock of political conflict by its false radicalisation – by reformulating it as a war between Us and Them, our enemy, where there is *no common ground for symbolic conflict*. [...] The clearest indication of this Schmittian disavowal of the political is the primacy of external politics (relations between sovereign states) over internal politics (inner social antagonism) on which he insists.¹⁸

As we have critically discussed Žižek's attribution of 'ultra-politics' to Schmitt

¹³ Žižek, 'Carl Schmitt', 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 10, 321-27.

¹⁶ Žižek, 'Carl Schmitt', 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29

¹⁸ Žižek, 'Carl Schmitt', 29. See also Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 90-92, 189.

elsewhere,¹⁹ let us merely reiterate that, in a manifest contrast to Žižek's diagnosis, Schmitt's work on international relations focuses precisely on the emergence of such 'common ground' that permits the rationalization of antagonism that Schmitt termed the 'bracketing' of war.²⁰ While the normative deficiencies of Schmitt's valorization of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* are evident, it is impossible to accuse Schmitt of an affirmation of an ultra-political mode of enmity that renounces every attempt at mitigating political antagonism. Nor is the argument about the primacy of 'external politics' entirely unproblematic – while it is undeniable that the primary ontic form that Schmitt's 'friend-enemy distinction' takes in the Western modernity is the conflict between states, Schmitt's political ontology actually precedes (and conditions) the very distinction between the internal and the external. More specifically, Schmitt's interest in the problematic of social turmoil and civil war, evident from *Dictatorship* to *The Leviathan in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, makes it impossible to reduce Schmitt's concept of the political to the affirmation of the ineradicability of interstate conflict.²¹ Thus, Žižek's reading of Schmitt paradoxically ends up confining Schmitt within a highly particular construction of the political that, moreover, was problematized by Schmitt himself in his critique of the violent potential of 'depoliticised' wars undertaken in the name of humanity.²² At the same time, Žižek's own 'radicalization' of the concept not merely remains inside Schmitt's conceptual universe but also ironically exemplifies recourse to ultra-political terms of engagement, particularly evident in Žižek's 'Leninist' turn and his provocative discussions of the role of violence and terror in progressive politics.²³ Isn't Žižek's vision of the conflict between the positively structured social order and its excluded, disavowed Outside that violently affirms its capacity to stand-in for the Whole of this order marked by the greatest possible political intensity? As we have suggested in the introduction, it is as if the attempt to re-think Schmitt's logic of the political leads not to the overcoming but a revolution in the astronomical sense of the word, a movement of negation that travels full circle to arrive where it took off.

Finally, let us address the discussion of the possibilities of overcoming Schmitt's logic of the political in Jacques Derrida's later ethico-political writings. Derrida's engagement with Schmitt seeks to deconstruct his concept of sovereignty as grounded in an 'aporia of decision' and, consequently, the concept of the friend-enemy distinction as radically paradoxical, incapable of grounding any ontic politics.²⁴ This is not the place to address all the intricacies of Derrida's incisive reading of Schmitt, as we merely seek to elucidate the overall logic of his attempt to overcome Schmitt by recasting the aporias of his political ontology as conditions for a radicalized ethics. Similarly to Schmitt's famous insistence on the decision 'emanating from nothingness', Derrida's deconstructionist ethics affirms undecidability as the condition of possibility of every decision. In Derrida's supplementary deconstruction of Schmitt's approach, any decisionism necessarily contains the 'aporia of decision', the passage through the 'ordeal of the undecidable', the experience

¹⁹ Sergei Prozorov, 'Liberal Enmity: The Figure of the Foe in the Political Ontology of Liberalism', *Millennium* 35: 1 (2006), 75-100.

²⁰ See Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 101-126, 184-187.

²¹ Schmitt, *Die Diktatur* (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 1994); Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Symbol* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).

²² Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 52-58, 79.

²³ See e.g. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 320-328, 380-381; Žižek, 'Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate', *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 1: 2 (2007), available at <http://www.zizekstudies.org>.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1996), 114.

of the ‘perhaps’ that is both traversed and effaced (but not annulled) in the act of decision.²⁵ It is this effacement that deconstruction seeks to restore to the decisions already taken in order to reassert their radically undecidable nature, irreducible to the procedure of derivation.

In fact, Schmitt may be considered a devout Derridean in this aspect, given his insistence on the impossibility of grounding a genuine decision. Moreover, as we have argued elsewhere, his understanding of the sovereign decision as both necessary for the existence of any positive order and radically heterogeneous to it resonates with early Derrida’s logic of supplementarity.²⁶ It is rather in assessing the consequences of this originary undecidability that Schmitt and Derrida part ways. In contrast to Schmitt, Derrida is characteristically hesitant to affirm the necessary effacement of undecidability in the very act of making the decision. Instead, his deconstructed decisionism appears to be locked in a self-imposed suspension over the abyss of undecidability in the desire to refrain from the closure that every decision inaugurates, which makes it, in Derridean ethics, *always* inadequate and irresponsible. This appears to make the notion of an ethically responsible decision meaningless in principle, leading to Derrida’s characteristic ‘moral absolutism’ of demanding the impossible, evidenced by his hyperbolic constructions of genuine friendship, gift-giving, forgiveness and hospitality.²⁷ It would therefore be incorrect to view Derrida’s reading of Schmitt as a successful ‘debunking’ – we may in fact doubt that his reading contains anything that is not already present in Schmitt’s conceptual universe. It must be noted that this statement is hardly a criticism of Derrida, if we take seriously his well-known thesis on deconstruction always being an *auto*-deconstruction, whereby the text, as it were, deconstructs itself in a reading that reveals its paradoxes and aporias, rather than passively suffer the critical operations of the reader.²⁸ What Derrida’s ethical affirmation of the ‘impossibility of decision’ establishes is thus not an alternative to Schmitt’s logic of the political, but rather a radically different orientation with respect to the consequences of this logic, which paradoxically chooses (i.e. *decides*) to dwell in the undecidability rather than efface it in the act of decision. In other words, Derrida’s engagement with Schmitt’s political ontology demonstrates its ultimately unfounded character and prescribes as an ethical orientation the *maintenance* of the radical negativity, from which every positive order emerges in the act of decision. Yet, as Giorgio Agamben has repeatedly argued in a critique of Derrida’s deconstruction, a negative (i.e. undecidable) foundation is nonetheless a foundation²⁹ and to illuminate a negative foundation is certainly not the same as to surpass it: ‘[Derrida] believed he had opened a way to surpassing metaphysics, while in truth he merely brought the fundamental problem of metaphysics to light.’³⁰ Resolutely anti-Schmittian as an ethical prescription, Derrida’s approach remains entirely conditioned by a Schmittian political ontology.

²⁵ Ibid., 67.

²⁶ See Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), chapter 4.

²⁷ See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*; Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001). For a critique of Derrida’s ethics see Dominic Moran ‘Decisions, Decisions: Derrida on Kierkegaard and Abraham’, *Telos* 123, 107-30.

²⁸ See Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

²⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 98. See also Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 205-19; *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 155-57.

³⁰ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 39.

Nonetheless, in his failure to surpass Schmitt's logic of the political, Derrida has perhaps come closest to it than other critics by illuminating what is actually at stake in the attempt at such overcoming. In *Rogues*, Derrida undertakes a radical generalization of the concept of sovereignty well beyond the domain of the state, explicitly relating it to the problematics of subjectivity and freedom. For Derrida, sovereignty is inherent in every affirmation of the existence of the self that he terms *ipseity*, a certain 'return' of the subject to itself that permits him to recognize himself as a 'self' or as a selfsame being: 'Before any sovereignty of the state, of the nation-state, of the monarch, or, in a democracy, of the people, ipseity names a principle of legitimate sovereignty, the accredited or recognized supremacy of a power or a force, a *kratos* or a *cracy*. This is what is implied, posed, presupposed, but also imposed in the very position, in the very self- or aut positioning, of ipseity itself.'³¹ It is this originary inscription of power and possession in the very existence of oneself as a subject that allows Derrida to both link 'ipsocentrism' with such more familiar themes of his criticism as the phallogocentric, paternalistic and patriarchal nature of authority and posit ipseity as the ontological condition for any meaningful notion of freedom.

Freedom is essentially the faculty or power to do as one pleases, to decide, to choose, to determine oneself, to have self-determination, to be master, and first of all master of oneself (*autos, ipse*). A simple analysis of the 'I can', of the 'it is possible for me', of the 'I have the force to' (*krateo*), reveals the predicate of freedom, the 'I am free to', 'I can decide'. There is no freedom without ipseity and, vice versa, no ipseity without freedom – and thus, *without a certain sovereignty*.³²

Thus, sovereignty is necessarily inscribed into the elementary structure of subjectivity. The sovereignty of the subject may be denied, disavowed or denigrated, but it must always remain, if only as a foregone possibility, for there to be a subject at all. In his critical reading of Derrida's argument, Friedrich Balke is therefore not exaggerating when he states that for Derrida, 'we are all sovereigns, without exception.'³³ Whatever pathway the critique of sovereignty takes, it is therefore bound to find Schmitt beckoning at its end. Thus, even as Derrida eventually resorts to a more familiar critique of the statist form of sovereignty, the link between sovereignty and freedom remains ineradicable, as he concludes that 'one cannot combat, *head-on*, all sovereignty, sovereignty-in-general, without threatening at the same time, beyond the nation-state figure of sovereignty, the classical principles of freedom and self-determination.'³⁴

Derrida's generalized understanding of sovereignty that nonetheless accords perfectly with Schmitt's definition³⁵ clearly demonstrates the stakes involved in the attempt to overcome the Schmittian political universe and the almost unthinkable nature of this enterprise: 'What must be thought here, then, is this inconceivable and unknowable thing, a freedom that would no longer be the power of a subject, a freedom without

³¹ Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 11..

³² *Ibid.*, 23.

³³ Friedrich Balke, 'Derrida and Foucault on Sovereignty', *German Law Journal* 6: 1 (2005), 71.

³⁴ Derrida, *Rogues*, 158. Emphasis original.

³⁵ For a detailed discussion of Schmitt's concept of sovereignty as constitutive of the subject see Prozorov, 'The Ethos of Insecure Life: Reading Carl Schmitt's Existential Decisionism as a Foucauldian Ethics' in Louiza Odysseos and Fabio Petito, eds, *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt: Terror, Liberal War and the Crisis of Global Order* (London: Routledge, 2007), 222-241.

autonomy, a heteronomy without servitude, in short, something like a passive decision.³⁶ With its hyperbolic pairing of the incongruous, this statement clearly dismantles the facile claims of Schmitt's detractors by demonstrating that rather being an extreme ideological aberration, Schmitt's political ontology belongs squarely to the field of Western metaphysics and thinks this metaphysics through to its extreme limit. In fact, thanks to Derrida's intervention, any alternative to Schmitt's political ontology begins to appear practically unthinkable.

The Danger of the Other

Let us now address the question of what accounts for this impasse of the attempts of critical theory to overcome Schmitt's logic of the political. The simplest answer to this question is that this logic is purely semantic and hence its continuing grip on all attempts to rethink it is more a matter of formal logic rather than of the substantive immutability of the Schmittian logic. It is of course possible to try to solve the problem of the inescapability of Schmitt's conceptual universe by rhetorically demolishing its very structure – Schmitt's concept of the political is after all entirely contained in a binary logic, so that any positive thesis on the substance of the political invites its own negation as a logical correlate in a 'friend-enemy distinction'. As a result, at the end of all conceptual labours of articulating an alternative, it is perfectly plausible to ask Schmitt's critics: 'What's *your* friend-enemy distinction?' and, if no answer is forthcoming, to answer the question in their stead. Thus, for instance, the 'alternative' approaches of Mouffe, Žižek and Derrida may always be recast as friend-enemy couplings of, respectively, agonism vs. enmity, singular universalism vs. particularistic pluralism, the ipsocentrism of sovereign subjectivity vs. 'freedom without autonomy'. Any positive answer to the question of what politics is could therefore be recuperated by the Schmittian logic that posits the antithesis *as such* as the formal criterion of the political. The immutability of the concept of the political would then be merely an effect of an intellectual sleight-of-hand and should not be taken as a genuine problem. Nonetheless, such a resolution would be far too facile, as Schmitt's concept of the political is, for all its formal emptiness, not merely a logical construction. Behind the apparent simplicity of the formal friend-enemy distinction lies a fascinating and austere existential ontology of difference.³⁷ If this concept is indeed ontological rather than e.g. normative, historical or ideological, then its abstract and general status is hardly a drawback but rather a mode of its functioning in the political discourse. As we have seen, Schmitt's political ontology is capable of accommodating a variety of ontic resolutions of the problems of alterity and undecidability, including those that are manifestly inconsistent with Schmitt's own ethico-political orientation.

What is it, then, about this ontology that both makes it capable of accommodating highly different ethico-political stances and ceaselessly invites attempts at its

³⁶ Derrida, *Rogues*, 152.

³⁷ For a more detailed discussion of this ontology see e.g. William Rasch, 'Conflict as a Vocation: Carl Schmitt and the Possibility of Politics', *Theory, Culture and Society* 17, no. 6 (2000): 1-32; Mika Ojakangas, *A Philosophy of Concrete Life: Carl Schmitt and the Political Thought of Late Modernity* (Jyväskylä: Söphi, 2004); Prozorov, 'X/Xs: Toward a General Theory of the Exception', *Alternatives* 30, no. 1 (2005): 81-112; Jesse Sims, 'Absolute Adversity: Schmitt, Levinas and the Possibility of Killing', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 31 (2005): 223-252;

transcendence? In our understanding, it is nothing other than the primacy it grants to *difference* and the consequent a priori construction of political existence in terms of *intersubjective pluralism*. Schmitt's vision of the human condition is characterised by the irreducible presence of radical alterity, which at worst posits the most extreme possibility of violent death (the frontal confrontation between enemies, in Mouffe's terms) and at best creates possibilities of successful delimitation of self and other in a setting of intersubjective equality of the political pluriverse (Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, already present in Schmitt's discussion of the Westphalian system). Contrary to Mouffe's reconstruction of these possibilities as a binary opposition between two 'concepts' of the political, what matters is not a decision in favour of either one of them, but rather the understanding that these two options function as limit points in the continuum that defines the possibilities of political praxis. Schmitt's political ontology is capable of accommodating both 'antagonistic' and 'agonistic' outcomes but forecloses any option *beyond* this continuum.

It is from this perspective that we must briefly return to the notion of the 'most extreme possibility' of violent death that, in Derrida's view, forms the true foundation of Schmitt's political ontology, beyond any determinate figure of the enemy.³⁸ The very question of enmity emerges in Schmitt's work because of what he terms the 'most extreme possibility'³⁹ or the 'real possibility of physical killing'⁴⁰ that arises in every encounter with the Other, whose singularity cannot be subsumed under the immanence of the Same. It is the very *existence* of radical alterity that poses an ever-present *possibility* of killing or being killed, which in turn calls for a decision, in each concrete sense, on whether the Other is the enemy: 'it is sufficient for his [enemy's] nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.'⁴¹ Thus, it is precisely because difference is ontologically prior to identity that the possibility of violent death arises, insofar as no common symbolic framework that would translate antagonism into agonism could be presupposed at the outset. From this perspective, the Schmittian constellation of exception, decision and enmity has little to do with any anthropological or theological account of 'human nature' but rather arises out of a *vigilant receptivity to the existence of the Other*: 'man' is neither good nor evil but simply dangerous because of being different.⁴² As Schmitt famously remarks, 'it is sufficient for his [enemy's] nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.'⁴³ Ontological alterity, the most elementary fact of human existence, in itself generates the logic of the political before and beyond any positive structuration of the political space.

In its prioritization of alterity, Schmitt's ontology ironically resonates with a thinker whom Derrida labels the 'absolute adversary' of Schmitt, Emmanuel Levinas.⁴⁴ Indeed,

³⁸ For a detailed deconstruction of this notion see Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 114- 136. See also Sims, 'Absolute Adversity'.

³⁹ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33. See also *ibid.*, 27-28, 33-35.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴² See Sims, 'Absolute Adversity' for a Levinasian reading of Schmitt from this perspective on enmity. Cf. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 58-66; Leo Strauss, 'Comments on Comments on Carl Schmitt's *Der Begriff Des Politischen*' in Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 93-98 on the abandonment of moral categories of good and evil in favour of the existential category of dangerousness.

⁴³ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27.

⁴⁴ See Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Ojakangas's reading of Schmitt's understanding of the encounter with the other is almost identical to Levinas's famous description in *Totality and Infinity*: 'As a concrete force, the enemy precedes reflection. It perturbs the world of the reflecting self – its otherness and strangeness calls the self into question. The force of the enemy disrupts my identity and no amount of reflection can reduce its difference into an immanence of the same.'⁴⁵ Of course, Schmitt draws entirely different conclusions from this scene of encounter than does Levinas, the most important difference being his insistence on enmity as a relationship of fundamental equality. While for Levinas (and the later Derrida) the asymmetrical relation, whereby the Other calls the Self in question, is a prerequisite for the assumption of a genuinely ethical 'responsibility', for Schmitt any asymmetry, privileging *either* the Self or the Other, paves the way for absolute enmity and the actualisation of the 'most extreme possibility' of existential negation. For Schmitt, being called in question by the Other is neither an ethical nor an aesthetic, but rather simply a dreadful experience of the possibility of violent death. Nonetheless, despite this divergence, the two 'absolute adversaries' share the same ontological scene, the scene that is even more primal than the one in which the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic unfolds.⁴⁶ Preceding the 'risk of death' taken by the future Master and its evasion by the future Slave, there is simply the intense receptivity to the proximity of the other that *calls for some kind of decision*. We may immediately note that this formulation recalls the Levinasian-Derridean notion of 'the Other's decision in me', routinely advanced as an alternative against Schmitt's 'sovereign' decision.⁴⁷ Yet, is there much difference here, given that the sovereign, paradoxically, is always *forced* to decide given the existence of the Other? Of course, the sovereign might very well decide on the existential negation of the Other, but this decision itself is nothing other than a *response* to the Other's presence that 'calls' for decision rather than an act of autonomous subjectivity. We might then suggest that despite evident ethico-political differences, on the ontological plane, in the austere space, in which no ethics or politics is yet formulated, the philosophies of Schmitt and Levinas share the same conditions of possibility.

Schmitt's famous characterization of the sphere of the political as a pluriverse is merely a logical consequence of casting the originary experience of encountering alterity in radically egalitarian terms. Given the impossibility of subsuming the brute fact of alterity under any horizon of sameness, politics is reconfigured as a stage of intersubjective pluralism, in which one's ipsocentric drive for self-determination and self-empowerment is always already put in question by the very same drive on the part of the other. For Schmitt, *all* politics is *identity politics*, in which particular differences struggle for recognition of their positive identitarian predicates, organize themselves into groups, defined by these predicates, and face potential antagonists, organized in a similarly particularistic way. As we have argued above, nothing prevents this struggle from unfolding in either a violently antagonistic or an agonistic mode. What *is* foreclosed in Schmitt's logic is the disappearance of the 'most extreme possibility' *qua* possibility, i.e. the formation of a political entity, in which the problem of difference would not arise. Thus, the central feature of Schmitt's political ontology is not enmity per se, but rather *intersubjective pluralism*, defined by the existence of particularistic and thus exclusive subject-positions,

⁴⁵ Ojakangas, *A Philosophy of Concrete Life*, 153. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 198-236

⁴⁶ See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 31-70.

⁴⁷ See e.g. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 68-69; *Adiou to Emmanuel Levinas*, 23-25; *The Gift of Death*, 71.

from which there necessarily follows the ever-present possibility of violent conflict. Recalling Schmitt's distinction between *hostis* and *inimicus* as models of respectively public and private forms of enmity,⁴⁸ we may suggest that the conflictual potential of his political ontology arises out of this pluralistic constellation, in which the brute fact of alterity becomes the sole criterion of organized collective action, so that any *being-with-others* is always already *being-against*. What is tragic in Schmitt's vision of the political is not that people might dislike each other for whatever reason, but that this dislike functions as a foundation for political organization that recasts existential *alterity* (the most brute and trivial fact of all) as an existential *threat*, translating the ontological dangerousness of (wo)man into conflictual ontic configurations of antagonistic groups of (wo)men. What is tragic is that people can kill or be killed over differences, which are as trivial as they are irresolvable.

It is in this context that we must address Schmitt's own criticism of the attempts to escape his conceptual universe in the liberal and socialist designs of 'world unity', the attempt that also characterizes contemporary political theory, in which the most sophisticated and provocative attempt to overcome Schmitt's logic has been made by Alexander Wendt.⁴⁹ Wendt's argument on the inevitability of the world state makes implicit recourse to the Kojevian thought of the end of history in his characterization of the world state not only in Weberian but also in Hegelian terms as conditioned by the global recognition of all particular differences and their incorporation into a 'universal homogeneous state'.⁵⁰ Schmitt's critique of the eschatology of world unity is well-known and need not be repeated here. Let us merely point out that Schmitt's famous invectives against the political deployment of the figure of humanity and the hypocrisy of liberal pluralism must be understood in the context of his ontology of pluralistic intersubjectivity. For Schmitt, the pluralism of the political sphere is not something to be *fostered* through liberal institutional designs, but something that is *always present from the outset* as a constitutive condition of the political as such. Instead, the cosmopolitan discourse of world unity ventures to efface this condition (and hence, politics as such) through a dual gesture of the institution of a *universal structure of authority* and the *inclusion* of all particular differences into the positive order, guaranteed by this structure.⁵¹ From a Schmittian perspective, both of these moves are impossible and the attempt to undertake them extremely dangerous.

In the 'pluriversal' structure of ontic politics the ontological principle of the equality between the Self and the Other is satisfied by precluding the emergence of a global hierarchy, whereby a particular set of identitarian predicates lays a claim to represent humanity at large. While this pluralism does nothing to eliminate the 'most extreme possibility' of violent conflict, it may at least be expected to suspend its actualization by precluding any legitimate subjection of the other. In contrast, Schmitt approaches the possibility of world unification with an almost existential trepidation: 'What would be terrifying is *a world in which there no longer existed an exterior but only a homeland*, no

⁴⁸ See Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27-29. For a more detailed discussion of this notion see Prozorov, 'Liberal Enmity'.

⁴⁹ Alexander Wendt, 'Why a World State is Inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations* 9:4 (2003): 491-542.

⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion of Wendt's thesis see Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict Between Russia and the EU: The Limits of Integration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), chapter 6.

⁵¹ Schmitt, 'Ethic of State and Pluralistic State' in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 201.

longer a space for measuring and testing one's strength freely?'⁵² Why is a world state in which there is logically 'only a homeland' posited as outright *terrifying*, rather than merely impossible, undesirable or inefficient? The answer is evident from the perspective of Schmitt's ontology of difference and the affirmation of the 'extreme possibility' of existential negation. The effacement of ontological pluralism in the subsumption of alterity under the 'universal homeland' must logically entail the suppression of the concrete difference of the other through the establishment of a global autocracy: 'The day world politics comes to the earth, it will be transformed in a *world police power*.'⁵³ Thus, Schmitt's critique of the discourse of world unity forcefully asserts the impossibility of arriving at a genuinely universal social order through the institution of a global structure of authority. Insofar as it is impossible to eradicate difference, its necessarily violent subsumption under the new unity necessarily brings in the question of resistance to it. Thus, the establishment of a 'domesticated' world unity does nothing to diminish the danger of the advent of the other, but, on the contrary, incorporates radical alterity *within* one's 'homeland' so that the ever-present possibility of violent death can no longer even be *externalised* to the domain of the international. Ironically, the drive of the ideologies of world unity towards the transcendence of the logic of the political brings about nothing other than its intensification, i.e. the 'absolute' or 'last' war of humanity. 'Such a war is necessarily unusually intense and inhuman because, by transcending the limits of the political framework, it simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed. In other words, he is an enemy who no longer must be compelled to retreat into his borders only'.⁵⁴

Schmitt's critique of universalism arguably retains its validity in the contemporary political constellation, in which the paradox of the universalization of a manifestly particularistic form of social order is distressingly evident. Nonetheless, as our discussion has attempted to demonstrate, the problem is not universalism *per se*. Just as the priority of enmity as a political criterion is derivative from a more fundamental setting of the political scene in terms of intersubjective pluralism, the critique of universalism ultimately targets the *identitarian* character of the discourses of 'world unity'. The hierarchical structure of any design of a 'world state' implies the existence of some substantive content, vision or ideology of this order, be it neo-liberalism, social democracy or world communism. This positive or identitarian content must logically be *particular* in origin, yet its deployment in the teleology of world unification must entail its *universalisation*, or in the language of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and especially Laclau's later work, its hegemonic articulation.⁵⁵ Thus, a particular identity that is to be expanded universally, acquires a higher status in relation to its necessarily present competitors. Yet, what are the grounds for legitimising the universalisation of a manifestly particularistic identity or doctrine? After all, no discourse of world unity has ever articulated a preference for the universalisation of *any* type of social order whatsoever, i.e. the argument for world unity cannot be proposed as epistemologically absolute but is always relative to the particular features of the system being universalized. Indeed, as Schmitt has wryly remarked, 'the Kingdom of Satan is also

⁵² Schmitt, *Glossarium* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1988), 243.

⁵³ Schmitt, 'The Legal World Revolution', *Telos* 72 (1987), 80.

⁵⁴ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 36.

⁵⁵ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 134-45; Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 42-43.

a unity'.⁵⁶ Any preference for the universalisation of a particular identity is thus necessarily contingent and, hence, from an epistemological standpoint, *relativistic*. The epistemological paradox of the ideologies of world unity is therefore that their very ambition of universality renders them manifestly relativistic, *pace* all objections to the contrary and the regular charges of relativism brought against the opponents of universalism, including Schmitt. Moreover, things could not have been otherwise, insofar as any identity presupposes an exteriority of difference, from which it is delimited, and thus cannot be universal but only *universalized* through the operation of hegemony.

This is where Schmitt's critique ends and this is, in our view, the point at which a genuine confrontation with the Schmittian logic may begin. The limit of Schmitt's thought is his incapacity to move beyond *identitarian universalism* (which, as we have seen, contains nothing universal) to *proper universalism*, or even reflect upon what form this proper universalism might take, and his consequent retreat into the conservative defense of particularistic pluralism that corresponds to his ontology of difference and allows for some mitigation of the antagonistic logic.⁵⁷ Yet, from the discussion above it is evident that the immutability of this logic hinges on the impossibility of a non-identitarian form of universalism that would not collapse into a universalization of the particular. While this impossibility is taken for granted in Schmitt's work (as well as most efforts to rethink Schmitt), this question is far from settled. If the 'world-statist' universalism fails to transcend the logic of the political because of its residual particularism, which necessarily follows from endowing the world state with a positive identity, then a non-identitarian universalism by definition would succeed in this transcendence. In this manner, the logic of the political would not be reconstructed or rethought, but rather *delimited* or given closure so that the political antagonism is not in any way transformed but rather brought to an end.

It is this possibility that brings us to the reconstruction of universalism in contemporary continental philosophy, which proposes an explicitly non-identitarian understanding of the universal as *generic*. The next chapter is devoted to the discussion of the key features of the generic politics, advanced in the work of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, which redefines the conceptual coordinates of universalism to the extent that the logic of the political is no longer operative.

The World Community as a Generic Procedure: The Self-Effacing Politics of Agamben and Badiou

As we have argued, Schmitt's political ontology only remains tragically immutable insofar as we accept his diagnosis of the impossibility of universalism that does not presuppose its opposite. This means that a successful universalist challenge to the intersubjective pluralist logic of the political must not entail the subsumption of difference under a dominant identity but must rather dispense with the very principle of identity as a politically relevant concept. This anti-identitarian drive characterizes otherwise strongly different approaches

⁵⁶ Schmitt cited in Ojakangas, *A Philosophy of Concrete Life*, 80. See also Jean-Francois Kervegan, 'Carl Schmitt and 'World Unity'' in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 62-63.

⁵⁷ This is also the limit of Laclau and Mouffe's political theory, which can only allow the existence of universality as a result of a hegemonic articulation, which fills the void of the universal with a hegemonized particular content.

of Agamben and Badiou that have recently come to prominence in political philosophy as highly original attempts to reinvent and reinvigorate radical political praxis. Positioning their work squarely against the prevailing tendency in critical political thought to valorize difference or alterity, both authors explicitly denounce particularistic ‘identity politics’ and revive the ambition of a genuinely universalist politics that transcends all identitarian predicates. Yet, rather than negate differences by the installation of a privileged identity or a certain ordered distribution of identities in a disciplinary grid, both Agamben and Badiou posit difference as the most fundamental and also the most *trivial* feature of the human condition, whereby any individual is different from any other as well as from him or herself. This ‘desublimation’ of difference does not do away with pluralism but rather *radicalizes* it to such an extent that it becomes politically irrelevant. If difference is literally infinite, then no politics or ethics could be based on it – what is required, rather, is the constitution of the Same (truths, community) out of this infinite chain of differentiation. It is this task that the two thinkers address in their deployment of the concepts of ‘generic truth- procedures’ (Badiou) and ‘whatever singularity’ (Agamben).⁵⁸ Despite the evident heterogeneity between the two authors (indeed, in Badiou’s terms, Agamben could be held an exemplary ‘anti-philosopher’⁵⁹), both of them affirm what might be called generic politics. Let us begin with a discussion of the emergence of the figure of the generic in Badiou’s philosophy of the event.

Badiou and the Generic Procedure of Politics

Although the concept of the generic finds its most detailed elaboration in Badiou’s magnum opus *Being and Event*, its ethico-political repercussions are most explicitly manifested in his *Ethics*, a passionate polemic against the dominant post-Cold War ethics of human rights and a politics of difference. Against the Levinasian-Derridean ethics, which elevates alterity to a transcendental or even theological status of the ‘altogether other’⁶⁰, Badiou’s point of departure is that difference is the most banal feature of human existence, a brute fact in which no meaningful ethics or politics could be grounded for two reasons.

Firstly, nothing in the encounter with the other guarantees the experience of radical distance, on which Levinas founds his ethics: ‘The other always resembles me too much for the hypothesis of an original exposure to alterity to be *necessarily* true.’⁶¹ This hypothesis can only be fortified by recasting the empirical alterity of the other as a manifestation of the infinite alterity of the *divine*, which indeed introduces an originary asymmetry that may then be investigated with regard to its ethical implications. Thus, similarly to Schmitt, Badiou claims that the empirical presence of alterity in human existence also inevitably introduces the principle of equality, which in itself has no ethical content whatsoever. Secondly, if we refuse to theologize the experience of alterity, it becomes an incoherent

⁵⁸ Our focus on Agamben and Badiou does not entail the exclusive attribution of ‘generic thought’ to these two philosophers. In fact, one might find traces of this approach in all three authors, whose attempts to overcome Schmitt we have addressed above: Laclau and Mouffe’s logic of equivalence, Žižek’s reconstruction of Hegel’s ‘concrete universality’ and Derrida’s premonition of a ‘freedom without autonomy’ all resonate with the theme of a non-identitarian supplement to the positive order of being.

⁵⁹ For Badiou’s critique of anti-philosophy or ‘sophistry’ see his *Manifesto for Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 22-23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22. Emphasis original.

‘pious discourse without piety’, which lends itself to the kind of rhetorical abuse that Schmitt has addressed in his critique of liberalism:

[T]he self-declared apostles of ethics and ‘the right to difference’ are clearly horrified by *any vigorously sustained difference*. As a matter of fact, this celebrated ‘other’ is acceptable only if he is a *good* other – which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us*? The problem is that the ‘respect for differences’ and the ethics of human rights do appear to define an identity! And that, as a result, the respect for differences applies only to these differences that are reasonably consistent with this identity. Ethical ideology is simply the final imperative of a conquering civilization: ‘Become like me and I will respect your difference.’⁶²

Thus, Badiou bluntly declares that ‘the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned.’⁶³ This does not mean, however, that alterity should be effaced or subsumed under a pseudo-universalist identity. Instead, it must be made both ethically and politically inoperative, i.e. recognized as a banal fact of human existence and judged to be irrelevant as a political criterion:

Infinite alterity is quite simply what is. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. Even the apparently reflexive experience of myself is by no means the intuition of a unity but a labyrinth of differentiations. [...] But what we must recognize is that these differences hold no interest for thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon and it is between the Shiite ‘community’ of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas.⁶⁴

We can easily note that in this statement Badiou fully accepts Schmitt’s ontology of difference but rather than draw from this acceptance the immutability of the political, he develops an original strategy of its closure. This strategy, presented in *Ethics* as an ‘ethic of truths’, finds its most detailed articulation in *Being and Event*, Badiou’s staggering reconstruction of ontology in set-theoretical terms and a consequent rethinking of the categories of truth and the subject. For lack of space, we can only sum up the intricate logic of Badiou’s metaontology⁶⁵ in a crude manner in order to illuminate the emergence of the figure of the generic as an alternative to the dialectic of identity and difference. Proceeding from the axiomatic decision that ‘the one is not’, Badiou conceives of every situation as a presentation of pure multiplicity, defined solely by a condition of *belonging*, whereby every multiple is always a multiple of multiples.⁶⁶ This structure of the situation, whereby a multiple is ‘counted-as-one’, is ‘re-secured’ by a second count that Badiou, in an explicit analogy with the political realm, terms the ‘state of the situation’ or its *meta-structure*, which is defined by a relation of *inclusion*, which re-presents the parts or subsets of the situation.⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid., 24-25. Emphasis original.

⁶³ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 25-26.

⁶⁵ As Badiou famously asserts that ‘mathematics = ontology’, his own non-mathematical conceptual elaborations must be in a strict sense meta-ontological. Another reason for adding the prefix is that Badiou’s logic of generic thought, which proceeds from the eruption of the event, is inaccessible to ontological thought, insofar as the event is defined as not belonging to Being *qua* Being.

⁶⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005), 43-45.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 81-83.

The distinction between belonging and inclusion permits Badiou to classify the terms of every situation. *Normal* multiples are those that are both presented in the situation and re-presented by its state, as is the case, for instance, with ordinal numbers. *Excrescent* multiples are the terms that are included in the situation without belonging to it, i.e. are its parts without being its elements. Excrescence points to the excess of the state of the situation over the situation, which in Badiou's reading characterizes the excess of the state over society. Finally, *singular* multiples are those presented in the situation without finding representation in its state. The phenomenon of singularity provides an ontological scheme for the understanding of Badiou's concept of the *event*, as totally singular multiples (i.e. those, none of whose elements are presented in the situation and which are consequently termed foundational or 'on the edge of the void') form what Badiou terms *evental sites*, i.e. multiples which, without guaranteeing the eruption of the event, condition its possibility.⁶⁸ For Badiou, an event is a multiple, composed of the elements of the evental site (i.e. those not presented in the situation), and itself. The latter characteristic of *self-belonging* entails that it does not belong to Being *qua* Being, as the axioms of set-theory explicitly prohibit self-belonging. Thus, the very belonging of the event to the situation, in which it has erupted, is entirely *undecidable* from an ontological perspective and must be decided upon or 'wagered' in the procedure of *intervention*, which, as it were, 'names' the unpresented multiples that belong to the event – a procedure that is 'illegal' from the ontological perspective of the regime of naming or representation, established by the state of the situation.⁶⁹ What happens to the event in the meta-structure of the situation is a *conversion of a singularity into an excrescence*, as the set of parts of the event is a multiple, composed of the site itself, and the singleton of the event – a couple that has never been presented in the situation and between whose terms there is no connection whatsoever.⁷⁰ Formalized in set theory by the axiom of choice, which presupposes the possibility of a multiple, composed of representatives of all multiples, presented in the situation, the procedure of intervention asserts '[t]he existence of representatives without any law of representation',⁷¹ i.e. it asserts the existence of a multiple without the possibility of designating it as *a* being and determining how it *differs* from other multiples.

Thus, the effect of intervention is the pure assertion of the existence of an event. Its consequences for the situation, in which it has erupted, are established in a procedure that Badiou terms *fidelity*, which discerns within the situation and groups together the multiples, whose existence is dependent on the event in question. The result of the procedure of fidelity is thus a set of subsets of the situation, i.e. it is included in the situation without belonging to it. Yet, from the perspective of the state of the situation, the effect of that procedure is strictly nonsensical, as the multiples it groups together cannot be connected on the basis of either belonging or inclusion but is rather *indiscernible* within the situation. The concept of the indiscernible, central to Badiou's generic thought, refers to the part of the situation that cannot be identified by the language of the situation or, in Badiou's technical definition, if 'it does not fall under any encyclopedic determinant',⁷². While what Badiou terms constructivist thought only admits the existence of those parts of the situation that are explicitly identifiable or nameable, reducing the excrescent excess of the state of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 173-177.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 201-206.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 208-209.

⁷¹ Ibid., 229.

⁷² Ibid., 512.

the situation to the minimum, generic thought admits the ‘errancy’ of this excess and thus grants existence to indiscernible parts.⁷³ Moreover, it is precisely the indiscernible that is granted the status of the *truth* of the situation in distinction from the *knowledge*, established in the positive encyclopedic language of the situation. For Badiou, a procedure of fidelity is generic if it contains at least one inquiry (a series of connections between the event and the terms of the situation) that does not fall under any encyclopedic determinant, i.e. that remains indiscernible and unidentified by the intra-situational regime of knowledge. The truth of the situation is the gathering together in a generic procedure of all the terms, whose connection to the event has been established. In other words, the truth is a generic subset of the situation, which, by evading all encyclopedic determinants, remains indiscernible within it. In Badiou’s description, the generic subset ‘contains a little bit of everything [but] *only* possesses the properties necessary to its existence as multiple in its material. It does not possess any particular, discerning, separative property. At base, its sole property is that of consisting as pure multiple, of being. Subtracted from language, it makes do with its being.’⁷⁴ It is evident that the truth as a generic subset is, firstly, radically devoid of identity and, secondly, manifestly universal, i.e. ‘it is the truth of the entire situation, truth of the being of the situation.’⁷⁵

It is crucial that the generic procedure is infinite, so that the truth of the situation is never complete, but rather emerging in fragments, for which Badiou reserves the name of the *subject*. Neither transcendental nor existential, Badiou’s subject is simply the finite part of a truth, produced in the generic procedure. The role of the subject is to realize the indiscernible and decide the undecidable (i.e. the belonging of the event to the situation) in a process that Badiou, following P. J. Cohen, terms *forcing*.⁷⁶ The concept of forcing designates the role of the subject in producing the truth of the situation *as knowledge*, i.e. inscribing the indiscernible or generic subset back within the situation. In other words, forcing establishes the veracity of the particular statement of the subject in the future anterior, i.e. in the situation, in which the infinite truth will have unfolded completely. In set-theoretical terms, this procedure is defined as the generic extension of the situation, which adds to it the generic subset, thereby making the indiscernible intrinsic to the situation, i.e. demonstrating that what was originally only included in the situation as an anonymous nonsensical part actually belongs to the situation as an element.⁷⁷ One can thus establish, through forcing, whether the statement undecidable in the original situation will have been veridical in its generic extension, and in this manner transform the encyclopedia of the situation, creating new knowledge out of the indiscernible truth.

Badiou famously distinguishes four truth procedures: science, art, politics and love.⁷⁸ While love belongs to the situational sphere of the individual and interests no one except the parties to the event of the amorous encounter, science and art are produced by individual means but their effects concern the collective that is ultimately universal. The only procedure, which is entirely collective, is politics, ‘if it exists as generic politics: what was called, for a long time, revolutionary politics, and for which another word must be

⁷³ See *ibid.*, Meditation 29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 525.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, see Meditations 35-36.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 381-85.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 339-42.

found today.’⁷⁹ Thus, while all four procedures are *ipso facto* universal due to their generic status, politics is the only procedure that is also universal in the composition of its subject.⁸⁰

Yet, what is a generic politics in practice? The preceding discussion clearly demonstrates that this politics is entirely divorced from any form of identity politics, both in the narrow sense of the struggle for the recognition of differences and in the more fundamental Schmittian sense of an intersubjective pluralistic antagonism. Badiou’s politics is radically universalist, being addressed to everyone and to no one in particular and, as the production of the truth of the situation, targets or transforms the social order (the situation) in its entirety.⁸¹ Yet, the universal in this context is not a neutral container for the coexistence of particularities nor a new identity under which all differences must be subsumed, but rather a radical difference in its own right, something subtracted from the positive order of being and functioning as an exception to its regime of knowledge. Thus, as Badiou argues, his struggle is that of ‘universalism against universalism’⁸² rather than a retreat into particularism in opposition to the false universalism of liberal capitalism. The difference between the two universalisms is that while the latter contains and conserves differences in its pseudo-neutral framework, generic universalism disrupts the meta-structural regime of the distribution of differences in forcing the belonging to the situation of what was originally indiscernible within it. To reiterate, the universal truth of the entire situation is produced on the basis of the interpretive intervention that names the event, which from the perspective of the situation does not even belong to it. The generic extension of the situation, its moment of universality, is literally produced out of that which was *absent* in the original situation. The universalism of Badiou’s politics is thus radically disruptive or subversive of the situation, or, more specifically, the state of the situation, in its entirety.

Secondly, this politics is radically egalitarian, conceiving of equality as an axiom that founds politics rather than as a contingent effect of political praxis. This egalitarianism, which aligns Badiou’s philosophy with the work of Jacques Ranciere⁸³, follows logically from the understanding of the generic as that which traverses every possible encyclopedic determinant but evades all particular determination. Being nothing but a little bit of everything, the political truth traverses every possible identity and every possible difference, deposing and deactivating them in this very traversal. ‘Inasmuch as it is the subject of a truth, this subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation.’⁸⁴ It is precisely this egalitarian maxim that explains Badiou’s numerical formalization of politics as a move from *infinity* (the infinity of difference, presented in the situation) to *one* (the one of universal equality, embodied by the collective subject of the truth procedure). Thus, even as Badiou rarely addresses the implications of his thought on global politics, choosing instead to focus on concrete local situations, it is evident that the ultimate thrust of his model of politics is necessarily a *world* politics (while local political practices function as finite parts of the infinite truth process) and, insofar as its egalitarian

⁷⁹ Ibid., 340.

⁸⁰ See Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso, 2005), chapter 10.

⁸¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 113-14.

⁸² Ibid., 114.

⁸³ See Jacques Ranciere, *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 1995); Ranciere, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2007).

⁸⁴ Badiou, ‘Bodies, Language, Truths’, lecture delivered at the Victoria College of Arts, University of Melbourne, on September 9th 2006, available at: <http://www.lacan.com/badbodies.htm>.

drive radically disrupts the meta-structure of the situation, *anti-statist*.⁸⁵ Insofar as its declared telos is the formation of the egalitarian figure of the one, we may conclude that unlike Schmitt, whose ethico-political stance consisted in the preservation of the political against pseudo-universalist challenges, Badiou's politics clearly stipulates and actively seeks to attain its own *end*, which we may describe in terms of the formation of the egalitarian *world community*, in which all differences have been deposed and the antagonistic potential of the intersubjective pluralistic logic of the political entirely deactivated, if only because in the complete unfolding of the truth procedure there is only one subject, namely the world community itself.⁸⁶ Thus, while Badiou's politics is certainly militant and his discourse is not at all averse to the rhetoric of radical enmity and even the justification of terror⁸⁷, his primary difference from Schmitt is that his generic politics finds no value in its maintenance and wants nothing but its own end. In a singularly enigmatic statement that we shall return to below, Badiou even provides a glimpse of what follows the eventual completion of the political truth-procedure: 'the political is numerically the inverse of love. Or: love begins where the political ends.'⁸⁸

Thus, we may conclude that Badiou's generic politics both seeks to attain the closure of the Schmittian pluralistic logic of the political, based on the ontology of difference, and self-consciously presupposes its own expiry in the teleological movement from the brute fact of infinite alterity to the formation of a global collective subject. We shall now attempt to elaborate this concept of the world community in discussion of the thematic of the generic in the work of Giorgio Agamben

Agamben and the Community of Whatever Being

The work of Giorgio Agamben has become increasingly prominent in the contemporary field of political theory since the publication of *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the debate around Agamben's critique of sovereignty and his hyperbolic identification of the *nomos* of modern Occidental politics with the Nazi concentration camp has overshadowed Agamben's earlier and more affirmative writings, against whose background the later, critical work becomes fully intelligible.⁹⁰ It is in such

⁸⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the relation of Badiou's politics to the state see *Metapolitics*, chapters 4, 5, 10 and *Ethics*, 95-119.

⁸⁶ This point echoes Badiou's treatment of the political subject in his early work, in which he viewed the proletariat not as an antagonist of the bourgeoisie, but rather as the sole subject of the process of the formation of the egalitarian community. In a striking contrast with Schmitt's vision, Badiou argued for the abandonment of the understanding of politics in terms of an intersubjective duel. See Badiou, *Theorie du Sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 1982) and, for the detailed discussion of this argument, Alberto Toscano, 'The Bourgeois and the Islamist, or, the Other Subjects of Politics', *Cosmos and History* 2: 1-2 (2006), 15-38.

⁸⁷ Cf. Badiou, 'A Musical Variant of the Metaphysics of the Subject', *Parrhesia* 2 (2007), 35: 'The materialist dialectic will assume without particular joy that, up until the present, no political subject arrived at the eternity of truth that it unfolds without moments of terror.' See also Zizek, *The Parallax View*, 326-327; 'Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate' for a discussion.

⁸⁸ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 151.

⁸⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). For the debate on this volume see Andrew Norris, ed., *Politics, Metaphysics and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Matthew Calarco and Stephen Decaroli, eds., *On Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁹⁰ The belonging of the critique of sovereignty to Agamben's wider affirmative ontopolitical project is attested to by the fact that the entire thesis of *Homo Sacer* is already contained in the conclusion to the 1982 book *Language and Death*, 104-6.

early works as *The Idea of Prose, Language and Death* and *The Coming Community*, that Agamben has articulated a vision of a radical overturning of the metaphysical foundations of Western politics that would make possible the appropriation by humanity of its generic being.⁹¹ In the necessarily brief discussion of the strategy of this radical transformation below we shall demonstrate the generic character of the world community that emerges on the ruins of the Occidental ontopolitical tradition.

Although Agamben rarely deploys Badiou's term 'generic' in his discourse on the coming community⁹², his numerous alternative terms (e.g. 'being-such', 'being-thus', 'gesture', 'face' and 'whatever singularity') evidently resonate with Badiou's concept and share a philosophical trajectory, as Agamben regularly refers to Georg Cantor's concept of 'inconsistent multiplicity' and Russell's paradox, which gave rise to the axiomatization of set theory.⁹³ Yet, the philosophical sources of Agamben's project are of a wider range, from Plato, Hebraic mysticism and Dante all the way to Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord.

In order to understand Agamben's reconstruction of the political community in global and generic terms, it is necessary to address his ontology of language, on which his political thought is largely modeled. From his earliest writings onwards, Agamben has sought to articulate the experience of language that speaks without saying anything, but simply communicates its own communicability.⁹⁴ Such an experience of language breaks away from its presuppositional structure, in which the 'thing itself', enunciated in language, is necessarily split into a presupposed subject, of which one speaks, and the qualities, predicated to it. For Agamben, 'the thing itself is not a thing; it is the very *sayability*, the very openness at issue in language, which, in language, we always presuppose and forget, perhaps because it is at bottom its own oblivion.'⁹⁵ The 'Idea of language' is therefore entirely contained in the existence of language itself, the existence of communicability as such, which itself cannot be communicated other than in the form of presupposition that effaces it. The effect of this presuppositional structure of language in Western metaphysics is the consignment of the latter to a radical negativity that for Agamben is not the effect of late-modern efforts to overcome metaphysics by e.g. Heidegger or Derrida, but rather its fundamental feature. In *Language and Death*, Agamben begins with an analysis of the function of indicative pronouns in Hegel and Heidegger to demonstrate the intimate co-belonging of linguistics and metaphysics, whereby the linguistic concept of utterance (or, in the Foucauldian usage, statement), i.e. the act of putting language into action in speech, corresponds exactly with the metaphysical concept of being: 'That which is always already indicated in speech without being named is, for philosophy, being. The dimension of meaning of the word 'being', whose eternal quest and eternal loss constitute the history of metaphysics, coincides with the taking place of language; metaphysics is that experience of language that, in every speech act, grasps the disclosure of that dimension and in all speech experiences above all the 'marvel' that language exists.'⁹⁶ Thus, Agamben is able to recast Heidegger's 'ontological difference' as simply the difference between the pure taking place

⁹¹ See Agamben, *The Idea of Prose* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995); *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁹² See Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 116.

⁹³ See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 71-75; *Means without End*, 89.

⁹⁴ Agamben, 'Language and History' in *Potentialities*, 60-61.

⁹⁵ Agamben, 'The Thing Itself' in *Potentialities*, 35.

⁹⁶ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 25.

of language and the signified content of this experience. The problem with the metaphysical marvel at the pure existence of language is that it is always already characterised by a double negativity that Agamben terms the Voice, the pure intention to signify, capitalized to accentuate its difference from voice as mere sound, emitted by a living being. Firstly, the Voice as the indicator of the taking-place of language is characterized by the removal of the voice as the natural sound and the anticipation of signification and thus located in the gap between the having-been and the not-yet. Secondly, the Voice cannot itself be spoken in a discourse whose existence it indicates.⁹⁷ Thus, the human experience of having language is characterized by a negativity and a scission between being and entity, nature and culture, *phone* and *logos*, etc. Agamben's philosophical project may then be described as an attempt to traverse this space of negativity and return, in a movement of absoluteness⁹⁸, to a human experience of language, deprived of all negativity and of all attempts at a foundation: 'only if language no longer refers to any Voice [...], is it possible for man to experience a language that is not marked by negativity and death.'⁹⁹ What is at stake here is an experience of language that prioritises *having* over *being*, i.e. the appropriation of language by humanity as its *habit* rather than as an elusive negative foundation.

Perhaps in the age of absolutely speakable things, whose extreme nihilistic furor we are experiencing today, the age in which all the figures of the Unspeakable and all the masks of ontotheology have been *liquidated*, or released or spent in words that merely show the nothingness of their foundation; the age in which all human experience of language has been redirected to the final negative reality of a willing that means nothing – perhaps this age is also the age of man's in-fantile dwelling (in-fantile, that is, without Voice or will and yet *ethical*, habitual) in language.¹⁰⁰

Already in the early 1980s, Agamben repeatedly transferred this ontology of language onto the plane of politics as a 'model' for the coming community that is not grounded in any presupposition of identity, norm or value but rather entirely contained in its being-in-language: 'There can be no true human community on the basis of a presupposition - be it a nation, a language, or even the a priori of communication of which hermeneutics speaks. What unites human beings among themselves is not a nature, a voice or a common experience in a signifying language; it is the vision of language itself and therefore the experience of language's limits, its *end*. A true community can only be a community that is *not presupposed*.'¹⁰¹

The experience of pure sayability that signifies nothing is analogous to Agamben's famous figure of a 'happy life' whose only essence is existence itself, 'a form of life, wholly exhausted in bare life and a *bios* that is only its own *zoe*' (1998, 188).¹⁰² The analogy is all the more forceful, insofar as both the pure experience of language and the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the theme of absoluteness as a return of thought to that which has never been see Agamben's essay 'Se' in *Potentialities*, 116-37.

⁹⁹ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 92. Emphasis original.

¹⁰¹ Agamben, 'The Idea of Language' in *Potentialities*, 47. Emphasis original. See also 'Language and History' and 'Tradition of the Immemorial' in *Potentialities*, 48-61, 104-115.

¹⁰² Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188. See Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, chapter 5 for the discussion of the reappropriation of 'bare life' as the primary ethico-political motive of Agamben's thought.

pure experience of existence are made possible by the condition of nihilism that for Agamben marks the veritable end of history:¹⁰³

Now, when all destiny is at an end and all epochal figures – grammars – of Being are exhausted, do we not witness the beginning of a true universal history of a humanity that finally dissolved the secret of its own ‘proper’ identity? This simple figure of fulfilled humanity – which is to say, *human* humanity, would therefore be what is left to say for speech that has *nothing* to say; it would be what is left to do for praxis that has *nothing* to do.¹⁰⁴

The analogy between the pure experience of language and the habitual human praxis without foundations entails the radical deprivation of humanity of any historical task or telos of development, a privation that in Agamben’s logic is equivalent to liberation. It is important to note that Agamben’s ‘linguistic analogy’ is furthest away from the emphasis on communicative action in e.g. Habermas’s discourse ethics, which presupposes the telos of rational consensus that is entirely of no interest or use to Agamben: ‘What is at stake in this experiment is not at all communication intended as destiny and specific goal of human beings or as the logical-transcendental condition of politics [...]; what is really at stake, rather, is the only possible material experience of being-generic.’¹⁰⁵ For Agamben, human praxis, freed from all foundations, including the negative foundation of the Voice, literally *has nothing to do*: ‘Perhaps man – the animal who seems not to be encumbered by any specific nature or any specific identity – must experience his poverty even more radically. Perhaps humans are even poorer than they supposed in attributing to themselves the experience of negativity and death as their specific anthropogenetic patrimony, and in basing every community and every tradition on this experience.’¹⁰⁶ Against the sacrificial logic of the identitarian community, Agamben thus affirms his crucial concept of *inoperosity*, the absence of work or tasks that is inherent in the human condition and is restored to it in the expiry of the epochal sendings of Being:

Politics is that which corresponds to the essential inoperability of human kind, to be radical being-without-work of human communities. There is politics because human beings are *argos*-beings that cannot be defined by any proper operation – that is, beings of pure potentiality that no identity or vocation can possibly exhaust. [P]olitics might be nothing other than the exposition of humankind’s absence of work as well as the exposition of humankind’s creative semi-indifference to any task, and might only in this sense remain integrally assigned to happiness.¹⁰⁷

Agamben’s ‘coming community’ is thus a community devoid of any identitarian predicates, that has liberated itself from historical tasks that both sacralised and sacrificed life and is finally able to dwell in its profane ‘being thus’.¹⁰⁸ The very notion of ‘being thus’ that is Agamben’s equivalent to Badiou’s concept of the generic is strictly analogous with the idea of a pure expressibility of language that expresses nothing but itself. ‘Being thus’

¹⁰³ For the discussion of the specificity of Agamben’s reworking of the Hegelian-Kojevian theme of the end of history see e.g. *The Idea of Prose*, 86-87; *Means without End*, 138-142. See also Stefano Franchi, ‘Passive Politics’, *Contretemps* 5 (2004), 30-41.

¹⁰⁴ Agamben, ‘Se’, 135. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁵ Agamben, *Means without End*, 116.

¹⁰⁶ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ Agamben, *Means without End*, 141.

¹⁰⁸ See Agamben, *Language and Death*, 104-106; ‘Se’, 136-7.

has nothing to do with remaining in any positively determined mode of existence, but rather refer to the singularity of *whatever* being, which is irreducibly potential, i.e. capable of both being and not being. It would certainly be a misunderstanding to read Agamben's affirmation of the 'irreparable' status of one's being-thus as an injunction to stick to a certain actual identity, to be thus and nothing other. Instead, in Agamben's reading, the anaphora 'thus' 'no longer refers back to any meaning or any referent, [being an] absolute thus that does not presuppose anything but is completely exposed'.¹⁰⁹ Agamben's notion of 'whatever singularity' recalls Badiou's concept of a singular multiple, which, as we recall, finds no identitarian representation in the state of the situation but makes do with its pure belonging to it, i.e. simply affirms itself as 'neither this nor that, neither thus nor thus, but *thus*, as it is, with all its predicates (all its predicates is not a predicate). [...] Such a being would be a pure, singular and yet perfectly whatever existence.'¹¹⁰ Similarly to Badiou, Agamben explicitly prioritises anonymous and indiscernible belonging over inclusion in the identitarian meta-structure, what is at stake is the 'appropriation of belonging itself' while rejecting 'any condition of belonging'.¹¹¹ Thus, just as the pure experience of language is only possible by stripping language of all presuppositions, the community of whatever being is constituted not through presupposition, but rather in what Agamben terms 'exposure':

Exposure, in other words being-such-as, is *not any of the real predicates* (being red, hot, small, smooth, etc.), but *neither is it other than these* (otherwise it would be something else added to the concept of a thing and therefore still a real predicate). That you are exposed is not one of your qualities, but neither is it other than them (we could say, in fact, that it is none-other than them). Whereas real predicates express relationships within language, *exposure is pure relationship with language itself*, with its taking place.¹¹²

It is evident that a community exhausted in the shared exposure to the being of language is, to recall Jean Luc Nancy¹¹³, entirely 'inoperative', simply because the 'whatever singularities' that inhabit it have bracketed off all presuppositions that might have constituted the 'work' or 'task' of this community. For Agamben, nonetheless, this condition marks not the end but the very beginning of *ethical* life, which, to be worthy of the name, must be entirely dissociated from any positive identitarian project. 'There is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realise. This is the only reason why something like ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible – there would be only tasks to be done.'¹¹⁴ The only possible ethical injunction in this 'post-historical' condition is for human beings to maintain this experience of 'being (one's own) potentiality, of being (one's own) possibility' rather than appropriate this potentiality as a substantive foundation for a positive identity, which, in Agamben's terms, would be equivalent to a passage into a 'deficit of existence' that he bluntly calls 'evil'.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 93.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis original.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 87.

¹¹² Ibid., 96. Emphasis added.

¹¹³ Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

¹¹⁴ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 42.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

The political stakes of this affirmative strategy are made explicit in ‘Tiananmen’, the concluding fragment of *The Coming Community*: ‘Whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State. Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common, there will be a Tiananmen, and sooner or later tanks will appear.’¹¹⁶ For Agamben, what is absolutely threatening to the state, what the state ‘cannot tolerate in any way’ is not any particular claim for identity, which can always be recognised, but rather the possibility of human beings co-belonging in the absence of any identity: ‘A being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the State.’¹¹⁷ Pace the Hegelian emphasis on universal recognition that is central to e.g. Wendt’s construction of the world state, the problem is not the recognition of every identity, but rather the recognition of the claim to *non-identity* within the identitarian structure of the world state, which in Badiou’s terms would exemplify the eventual convocation of the originary void of the situation. While the pseudo-universal ‘world state’ exemplifies what Badiou terms a ‘constructible’ universe,¹¹⁸ entirely subjected to the authority of language with its differential structure that assigns a locus to any claim for identity, the rupture of whatever singularity stops constructivist language in its tracks as it is literally unnameable in its positive terms.

Thus, Agamben formulates the structure of the ‘coming politics’ in the terms that clearly echo those of Badiou’s anti-statist world politics:

The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization. This has nothing to do with the simple affirmation of the social in opposition to the State that has often found expression in the protest movements of recent years. Whatever singularities cannot form a *societas*, because they do not possess any identity to vindicate any bond to belonging for which to seek recognition.¹¹⁹

Thus, similarly to Badiou, Agamben posits as the key antagonism of contemporary politics a conflict between the statist logic of the political (which, as we have discussed, grounds both the pluralistic setting of international politics and the ambition of a ‘world state’) and the generic ‘world community’, which is distinct from apparently similar constructions in e.g. idealist theories of international relations in explicitly renouncing any foundation or common identity and recognising that all identitarian communities are forever doomed to a violent dissolution. Against the designs for a world community, based on the achievement of universal recognition, Agamben suggests that identities must not be recognised but rather *deactivated*, in the same manner as the pure experience of language deactivates signification, for a genuinely pacific human community to be possible.

There is not and can never be a sign of peace, since true peace would only be there, where all the signs were fulfilled and exhausted. Every struggle among men is in fact a struggle for recognition and the peace that follows such a struggle is only a convention instituting the signs and conditions of mutual, precarious recognition. Such a peace is only and always a peace amongst states and of the law, a fiction of the recognition of an identity in language,

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 85.

¹¹⁸ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 286-294.

¹¹⁹ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 86.

which comes from war and will end in war. Not the appeal to guaranteed signs or images but the fact that we cannot recognise ourselves in any sign or image: that is peace [...] in non-recognition. Peace is the perfectly empty sky of humanity; it is the display of non-appearance as the only homeland of man.¹²⁰

While Agamben's blueprint for global political transformation might appear utterly utopian, his overall logic of argumentation is undoubtedly provocative in demonstrating the possibility of a radically different form of life on the basis of precisely the same things that he sets out to criticise: the state of exception that has become the rule and is therefore unable to function, the sovereign ban which leaves the subjects in a state of bare life that is suspiciously similar to the 'whatever' condition that Agamben affirms, the 'globalisation' project of the 'planetary petty bourgeoisie', which is bent on destroying the very distinctions and identities that sustain its form of political order, etc.¹²¹ Following Holderlin's dictum that 'where danger is, grows saving power also', Agamben paints a convincingly gloomy picture of the present state of things only to undertake a majestic reversal at the end, finding hope and conviction in the very despair that engulfs us. 'For the first time it is possible for humans to experience their own linguistic being – not this or that content of language, but language itself. [...] Contemporary politics is this devastating *experimentum linguae* that all over the planet unhinges and empties traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities.'¹²² Our very destitution thereby turns out to be the condition for the possibility of a radically different life, whose description is in turn entirely devoid of fantastic mirages. Instead, as Agamben repeatedly emphasises, in the redeemed existence 'everything will be as is now, just a little different',¹²³ no momentous transformation will take place aside from a 'small displacement' that will nonetheless make all the difference.

If instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the *already improper and senseless form of individuality*, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety as such, in making of the proper being-thus not an identity and individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity – if humans could, that is, not be thus in this or that particular biography but be only *the* thus, their singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects.¹²⁴

Yet, if we give the name 'politics' to the antagonism between identitarian and generic logics, then the emergence of the community 'without presuppositions and subjects' would entail the end of politics as such, insofar the identitarian logic of the political would finally arrive at its closure. Thus, similarly to Badiou, Agamben's world politics is an activity that presupposes and actively seeks its own end. Unlike Badiou, Agamben's writings are somewhat ambiguous regarding the theme of the end of politics. At a number of occasions, Agamben suggests that politics proper rather only begins with the

¹²⁰ Agamben, *The Idea of Prose*, 82.

¹²¹ See respectively Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); *Homo Sacer; The Coming Community*.

¹²² Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 82.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

emergence of a generic community so that politics ends up synonymous with *ethos* in the sense of the dwelling place of humanity.¹²⁵

At the same time, Agamben's meditations on 'happy life' also provide us with clues for deciphering Badiou's enigmatic formulation 'love begins when the political ends'. To begin with, the concept of whatever singularity is introduced with an explicit reference to love as an experience that is unintelligible in identitarian terms: 'Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favour of an insipid generality (universal love): the lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is.'¹²⁶ Similarly to Badiou,¹²⁷ Agamben rejects the 'fusional' conception of love as an ecstatic synthesis of the Two in the blissful image of the couple and rather approaches love as an experience of a radical disjunction between singularities that are neither subjects of an intersubjective relation nor objects of each other's self-affirmation but rather completely exposed 'whatever beings' that, to be loveable, must remain entirely indiscernible to each other, 'living in intimacy with a stranger'.¹²⁸ In full accordance with Agamben's permanent opposition to the sacralization of human life that inevitably produces a sacrificial politics, love is an absolutely profane experience of generic being-with-others that does away with all distinctions between the proper and the improper, authentic and inauthentic, identity and difference, self and other.¹²⁹ As an experience of the appropriation of the improper, the adoption of ungroundedness and inoperosity by humanity as its ethos, love contains all the prerequisites of 'happy life' as 'an absolutely profane 'sufficient life' that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability – a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold'.¹³⁰ In this manner, love indeed begins (only) when the logic of the political arrives at its end.

Conclusion: Rethinking World Politics

Let us now address the implications of our discussion of generic politics of Agamben and Badiou for the closure of the Schmittian logic of the political. We have demonstrated that both authors successfully target the ontology of difference that provides a negative foundation to Schmitt's political theory by asserting the possibility of a radically non-identitarian universalism that breaks the constellation of ontological alterity, the ever-present possibility of death and intersubjective pluralistic politics. Indeed, both Agamben and Badiou are idiosyncratic in the contemporary philosophical landscape, governed by the idea of finitude, in their refusal to accept death as a politically relevant category, let alone as the organizing principle of political life, which it arguably remains both in Schmitt's theory and in the many attempts to overcome Schmitt. For Badiou, the subject of the truth procedure is not coterminous with the 'human animal' as a mere living organism and (if we

¹²⁵ Agamben, *The Idea of Prose*, 98. See also *Means without End*, 60.

¹²⁶ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 2. Emphasis original. See also *ibid.*, 106.

¹²⁷ See Badiou, 'What is Love?', *Umbr(a)* 1 (1996), 37-53; Badiou, 'The Scene of Two', *Lacanian Ink* 21 (2003), 42-55.

¹²⁸ See Agamben, *The Idea of Prose*, 61.

¹²⁹ See Agamben, 'The Passion of Facticity', in *Potentialities*, 185-204.

¹³⁰ Agamben, *Means without End*, 114.

recall its technical definition as a finite part of the generic procedure) may well be considered immortal: ‘Subjectivation is immortal and makes Man. Beyond this there is only a biological species, a ‘biped without feathers’, whose charms are not obvious.’¹³¹ The ethics of difference is unacceptable for Badiou insofar as ‘its underlying conviction is that the only thing that can really happen to someone is death’,¹³² which entails the commitment to the non-existence of truths and the reduction of the subject to the status of the potential victim. Because of his long confrontation with the paradoxical status of bare life in modern politics as its negative foundation, Agamben is not as eager to dismiss the ‘human animal’ but confronts death from the opposite direction, i.e. from the side of animality itself, in his attempt to remove ‘faculty for death’ as the key feature of the human condition, envisioning the possibility for human beings ‘simply to die, without being called by death’.¹³³ In both cases, death ceases to be relevant as a political principle and, hence, politics stops being subjected to the ‘hypocritical dogma of the sacredness of human life and the vacuous declarations of human rights’.¹³⁴ No longer tied to the irreducible alterity and the fear of death, the politics of Agamben and Badiou displaces the particularistic construction of the friend-enemy distinction with its own version of antagonism, i.e. the opposition between identitarian and generic approaches to the political community. Let us now discuss the implications of this antithesis for the reconstruction of some of the most familiar categories of political theory.

Despite the concept of ‘world politics’ becoming increasingly widespread in the discipline of IR and frequently challenging ‘International Relations’ as more appropriate name of the discipline, the conceptual consequences of deploying this very syntagm have arguably not been fully illuminated.¹³⁵ It is evident that, by semantic logic, a *world* politics must imply some kind of transcendence of the ‘international’, defined in pluralistic and intersubjective terms, yet how this transcendence is to be thought remains rather obscure, the existing interpretations faring better in emphasising obstacles, empirical or conceptual, to this transformation or replaying the classical realist conceptual logic of ‘plural sovereignties/one sovereignty’.¹³⁶ One reason why Wendt’s thesis on the world state is such an important contribution to political thought is that it explicitly posits not only the possibility but also the inevitability of the world state as a resolution of the deadlock of the logic of the political, thus introducing a new form of political antagonism, i.e. the statist-universalist struggle against the particularistic logic of the political, or, simpler: *world politics vs. international politics*. In contrast, our reading of Agamben and Badiou demonstrates that the figure of world politics is itself always already fractured into two opposed positions: the identitarian universalism of the world state vs. the generic universalism of the world community.

Perhaps, only this internal antagonism is worthy of the name of ‘world politics’, insofar as all traces of international intersubjective pluralism have been purged from it. Of

¹³¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 12.

¹³² Badiou, *Ethics*, 35.

¹³³ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 96.

¹³⁴ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 96.

¹³⁵ For the discussion of the problem involved in conceptualizing world politics see R.B.J. Walker “From International Relations to World Politics” in Joseph Camilleri, Anthony Jarvis and Albert Paolini, eds., *The State in Transition: Reimagining Political Space* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 21-38; Walker, ‘International Relations Theory and the Fate of the Political’ in Michi Ebata and Beverly Neufeld, eds., *Confronting the Political in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 212-238

¹³⁶ For the detailed discussion of this conceptual logic see Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict*, chapters 4, 6.

course, the conflict between the world community and the world state is a form of antagonism, easily capable of generating relations of enmity. In this sense, world politics might also appear Schmittian, so that the attempt of generic thought to transcend the logic of the political would arrive at an easily expected failure. Nonetheless, this would be an overly hurried conclusion. Enmity per se is not a political relation; what makes it such in Schmitt's framework is a refined if not duly noted specification of enmity as a *symmetric relation of pluralistic intersubjective equality*. It is this symmetry that is manifestly absent in the confrontation between the world community (of *singularities* that belong to humanity without being included in its identitarian metastructure) and the world state (which functions as the *excrecent* part of the situation that in no way belongs to it, even logically: the state is, after all, not human). World politics is no longer a confrontation, however violent or disciplined, between *particular differences*, but rather, to recall Badiou's distinction, a conflict between *two logics of universalization*, constructible (statist), in which differences are both recognised and assigned a locus in the homogeneous universal order that disavows its own originary particularity, and generic, in which differences are deposed as politically trivial and irrelevant. The difference of this world-political antagonism from the Schmittian political ontology is that this type of conflict is impossible to mitigate in classical Schmittian terms of mutual delimitation of particular differences: there simply isn't space enough in the world for two modes of world order. World politics is then a political conflict between two ways of doing away with the Schmittian intersubjective pluralism that accounts the antagonistic deadlock of politics as we know it.

Thus, Schmitt's political ontology is transcended through the displacement of identitarian pluralism and the relocation of antagonism to the world-political terrain. Yet, this is hardly the endpoint of our enterprise as the ultimate ambition of generic universalism is not only to reshape the field of political struggle but also to *win* it, i.e. to make impossible the establishment of the constructible universe of the world state. It is in this aspect that Agamben and Badiou, in distinct ways, probe the possibilities of overcoming not only Schmitt's particularistic *concept* of the political, but also his *valorization* of the political, evident in his concerns for the catastrophic consequences of the liberal depoliticisation in the early 20th century. While for Schmitt the telos of the political consists in its own maintenance, both Agamben and Badiou posit generic world politics as an activity that seeks nothing but its own *end*.¹³⁷ Just as the world state promises eventual depoliticisation in its claim for the universal recognition of identities, generic world politics must ultimately presuppose its own expiry in the emergence of the world community that cannot be subsumed under any identitarian predicates but is rather exhausted in its whatever being.

Thus, the fulfillment of world politics may be defined as the displacement of all identitarian predicates of human beings and the reorientation of social praxis towards the *generic extension of humanity*, i.e. the forcing of the infinite truth of radical equality in the contemporary global situation. This telos has nothing to do with the utopias of rational consensus, let alone with the chimerical, if not outright obscene idea of a fulfilled

¹³⁷ In this sense, we may speak of the generic world community both as a figure that is logically withdrawn from any possible construction of the political as a friend-enemy distinction and as a figure that exemplifies the enemy *of the political as such*, insofar as it seeks to destroy the very logic that Schmitt constructed in order to mitigate the inherent antagonism of the human condition. On this level, the world community as presented in this article exemplifies the 'absolute enemy' of the Schmittian political orientation. Cf. Ojakangas, *A Philosophy of Concrete Life*, 77-86.

humanity, in which everyone loves everyone else. Instead, this process consists in *persisting* in the fidelity to radical equality of all human beings that is utterly indifferent to their differences. As Badiou has argued, the only imperative of an ‘ethic of truths’ is ‘Keep going!’: ‘Do all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance [as a living being]! Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you.’¹³⁸ Rather than being plagued by the intense receptivity to the existence of the Other, the world community is the potential effect of the infinite process of the construction of the Same, i.e. of the egalitarian and presuppositionless humanity that is completely exposed in its being-thus. Synthesising Badiou’s frequent recourse to name of communism as the generic name for the egalitarian and generic political procedure,¹³⁹ independent of the particular attempt at its actualization, and Agamben’s idea of a ‘happy’ life of love, we might term, only half-jokingly, this community *philo-communist*, a unison of communism and love that would truly satisfy Agamben’s criterion of absolution in definitely ‘never having been’.¹⁴⁰

Although the generic-universalist strategy of transcending the logic of the political certainly hits the right target, this is not to say that it is entirely unproblematic. In fact, this strategy may be questioned from the three standpoints that we have discussed with reference to the failed attempts to overcome Schmitt by Mouffe, Žižek and Derrida. From the perspective of Laclau’s and especially Mouffe’s ‘agonistic pluralism’, generic universalism may be problematized as privileging the logic of equivalence over the logic of difference,¹⁴¹ which poses a threat of the emergence of a binary structure of antagonism, in which differences would not be so much deposed as suppressed. Ironically, it is precisely a Schmittian kind of political realism that would issue a warning about the violent potential of world politics as a conflict between two utterly irreconcilable principles, which can in no way be accommodated. Secondly, a Lacanian type of criticism would challenge the overly abstract conception of the generic subject, particularly in Badiou’s work, which does not account for the ineradicable dimension of negativity at the very heart of the subject, which complicates the subjective fidelity to the generic ‘being-in-common’.¹⁴² Perhaps most seriously, a Derridean criticism might pay attention to the inherent ‘autoimmunity’ of every emancipatory ideal and question the generic world community as to its inherent pervertibility and its capacity of degenerating into its own opposite, i.e. the identitarian world state.¹⁴³ Interestingly, these objections roughly correspond to Badiou’s own typology of the ‘three names’ of Evil, i.e. *terror* (the fidelity to the simulacrum of the event that elevates a particular identity to the universal status), *betrayal* (the disavowal of the event,

¹³⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, 47.

¹³⁹ See Alain Badiou, *The Obscure Disaster: The End of the Truth of State* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming). In this text, communism is frequently used as a synonym of ‘revolutionary’ or ‘emancipatory’ politics as such (and, for Badiou, all politics worthy of the name is revolutionary and emancipatory). For a more specific engagement with communism in the wider context of the philosophical experience of the 20th century see Badiou, *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ See Agamben, *Language and Death*, 95-97; *The Idea of Prose*, 73-75.

¹⁴¹ See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 122-134. Laclau’s more recent work arguably itself prioritizes the logic of equivalence in its reappraisal of populist politics. See Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹⁴² See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 431-435; Žižek, ‘Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism: The Case of Alain Badiou’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 97: 2 (1998), 235-261; Adrian Johnston, ‘There is Truth, and then there are truths, or Slavoj Žižek as a Reader of Alain Badiou’, *Re-Turn: A Journal of Lacanian Studies*, 2 (2005), 85-141.

¹⁴³ See Derrida, *Rogues*, 28-55 for the discussion of the concept of autoimmunity.

followed by the retreat into one's assigned position in the constructible universe or symbolic order) and *disaster* (the absolutization of the procedure of forcing to the 'unnameable' of the situation that presents the truth process as already complete and totalized).¹⁴⁴ What must be emphasized at this point is that, according to Badiou, these figures of Evil only arise on the basis of the prior idea of the Good (i.e. the generic truth procedure) as its contingent risks. In other words, the dangers of terror, betrayal and disaster do not indicate the failure of generic universalism to fully transcend the logic of the political but only become intelligible on the basis of this transcendence. It is then on this very basis that the question of warding off these figures of Evil must be posed.

A more general objection may arise out of the radically utopian character of generic politics. How do we institute the world community in practice or, if its advent is already presupposed by nihilistic and self-destructive drive of global capitalism, how do we know it when it arrives, if, to recall Agamben, the transformation in question consists entirely in the 'tiny displacement' in the situation? In response to this question, it is important to recall Badiou's notion of the subject as a *finite* part of a truth procedure which is itself *infinite*. Thus, the world community is never complete and, moreover, it is difficult to imagine what such completion might mean in the context of the generic procedure: after all, the world community is not a union or alliance of states or regions, nor is it a totality or even a numerical majority of the world's population. Indeed, a claim for a fully constituted world community identical to itself, would be a mark of disaster in Badiou's terms. Yet, its 'incomplete' being, the being-finite of infinity, does not deprive it of its force as, paradoxically at first glance, a subject of its own institution, its own militant *part*. Thus, while the generic-universalist approach of Agamben and Badiou may hardly be translated into a positive programme for a global transformation, it nonetheless directs our attention to concrete local practices that in themselves manifest the existence of the generic world community that remains entirely indiscernible in the political encyclopedia of our times. In fact, Badiou's own radically minoritarian engagement in campaigns against the treatment of undocumented immigrant workers in France and Agamben's famous refusal to accept a US visiting professorship in protest over the biometric processing of all foreign visitors exemplify forms of praxis that force the truth of generic equality in the current situation that is disposed against it.

Yet, we would like to conclude our discussion of generic universalism with an example that exemplifies the operation of the generic procedure of world politics at a truly global level. The 2003 global protest against the invasion of Iraq gave birth to a slogan, which since then has been deployed in other contexts: 'Not in our name!' This curious syntagm arguably acquires its full force precisely by virtue of its repetition in a variety of disparate contexts by entirely disconnected subjects. What is this 'we', which demands that its 'name' not be used to justify the current wars around the globe? What is this name whose utterance by the representatives of the meta-structure of global governance is prohibited in the very act of a negative reference to it? What is this subject that names itself in the very act of subtracting its name from the encyclopedic regime of the current political situation? It is arguably nothing other than the generic world community, which, from the perspective of the state of the contemporary situation, remains radically indiscernible, so that its only name, for the time being, is 'not in our name'. Intervening to declare the event of its emergence, which, to recall Badiou, 'has the nameless as its name',¹⁴⁵ the world

¹⁴⁴ Badiou, *Ethics*, 72-87.

¹⁴⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 205.

community makes do with its pure being beyond the nominative repertoire of contemporary world politics. Yet, in the subtractive utterance of this nameless name, its numerous subjects arguably undergo what Agamben called *experimentum linguae*, the experience of the pure existence of language that is simultaneously the experience of the appropriation by humanity of its generic being.¹⁴⁶ Just as the *experimentum linguae* testifies to nothing more than the elementary and taken-for-granted *factum loquendi* (the fact that language exists, that humans speak and understand each other), the political experiment at work here testifies to the *factum pluralitatis* of the existence of a human community beyond all identity and beyond any possibility of identification, a community whose unnameable name is nothing but the *thus* of its being said in the utterance ‘not in our name!’¹⁴⁷ It is in these singular yet recurrent instances of generic politics that we may catch a glimpse of the transcendence of humanity *towards* its own being such-as-it-is, its return to that which it has never been.

¹⁴⁶ Agamben, *Means without End*, 116.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.