How do we recognize strong critique?

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ABSTRACT:
Partially following Gilles Deleuze, I articulate six criteria for a *strong* variety of critique: one which affirms the power of thought in going all the way to the limit of existing societies, situations, institutions and practices. The form of this strong critique is a complex unity of thought and life that can be indicated, as I argue, on the basis of a twofold condition: a contemporary repetition of the classical structuralism that Deleuze develops in the 1967 article "How do we recognize structuralism?" and a formally based reflection on the properly *infinite* dimension of structure and sense. I develop the implications of this strong critique under contemporary conditions, distinguishing it from various alternative current forms of sociopolitical critique and non-critique. In particular I argue that through its articulation of the consequences of constitutive paradox, the structure of the situationally undecidable, and the ineffectivity characteristic of the constitution of sense, strong critique offers appropriate forms of response in thought and action to the structural problems and antagonisms characteristic of contemporary global capitalism.

Keywords:
Critique, Deleuze, infinite, paradoxico-critical, undecidable, ineffective

In his 1965 short monograph *Nietzsche*, Gilles Deleuze indicates the complex condition of a strong variety of critique:

The philosopher of the future is the explorer of ancient worlds, of peaks and caves, who creates only inasmuch as he recalls something that has been essentially forgotten. That something, according to Nietzsche, is the unity of life and thought. It is a complex unity: one step for life, one step for thought. Modes of life inspire ways of thinking; modes of thinking create ways of living. Life *activates* thought, and thought in turn *affirms* life.[1]

This two-step unity of an "active life and an affirmative thinking," according to Deleuze, is the condition under which philosophy can be understood as a force of creation and positive legislation, acting both as the "critique of all established values," and also at the same time

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1 Deleuze 1965, p. 66.

to invent new "values of life that call for another principle."[2] From the perspective of this dual movement of activation and affirmation, the Kantian, limitative variety of critique will always, Deleuze suggests, have failed to go far enough.[3] For if Kant has criticized the pretention of knowledge to exceed pre-established bounds, he has nevertheless never questioned the value of knowledge itself. And if he has aimed to critique the ways in which the interests of reason take it beyond the limits of its proper application, he has never questioned the basis for the drawing of these limits or the designation of their propriety. Indeed, whenever critique operates as negativity and delimitative bounding, Deleuze suggests, the original principle of an affirmative power of critique grounded in life has already been lost.[4] With this operation, reactive forces triumph over active ones, the creation of new values is replaced by the preservation and guardianship of established ones, and the ruinous subjugation of critique to the defense of the existing institutions of state, religion and morality is never far behind. The condition for this transformation of critique into preservation and affirmation into negativity is itself simple and unitary: it is that life and the world are judged from a position beyond both, a "higher" value which makes thought the "measure" and "limit" exercised in the name of it.[5] Nevertheless, the historical triumph of the reactive limitative and negative critique must have its ultimate prior basis in the affirmative forces themselves, and in the original difference which is both their form and their dynamism.

My aim in this essay is to articulate and develop the implications of this strong critique under contemporary conditions, distinguishing it from various alternative contemporary forms of sociopolitical critique and non-critique. With respect to the critical role of thought itself, these positions largely exhibit, as I shall argue, two broad kinds of structures. First, residual forms of limitative or finitist critique confine the pretensions of thought on the structural basis of the faculties of an individual or collective normative subject, or mobilize this delimitation, following Hegel, by deploying ultimately theological figures of the absolute. Second, there is an activist appeal

2 Deleuze 1965, p. 69.

3 Deleuze 1965, p. 70.

4 Deleuze 1965, pp. 73-75.

5 Deleuze 1965, pp. 78-79.

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that predicates itself on the evental grace of a "generic" infinity but thereby also abandons the specific structure of reflexive and internal critique itself. These contrasting forms, of regulative critical finitism on the one hand and noncritical speculative/generic infinitism on the other, produce a twofold political impasse. On the one hand, the regulation of subjective structures in the name of existing institutions functions as the essentially conservative politics of the *telos* of mutual recognition. And on the other the marginal appeal to an activism predicated on the structure of a messianic or eschatological hope summons what thereby can only appear as a "weak" power of thought, subordinated to the exigency of an exterior event, in response to the ubiquity of contemporary resignation. By contrast with these, it is possible formally to indicate the structure of a *strong* critique rooted in the exposure and development of the real contradictions structurally characteristic of the "global" situation insofar as it operatively totalizes itself in the dominant forms of contemporary life. This verifies, as I shall argue, the possibility of a direct and transformative intervention by thought in contemporary life and practice itself.

If the configurations of critique always turns on the forms in which thought's power meets the limit at which it confronts being in itself, then the development of their schemas necessarily involves an investigation of the formalism of limits, borders, totalities and wholes. To indicate the formal structure of strong critique, it suffices, as we shall see, to discern the *fundamental orientations of thought* which unfold the formal ideas of completeness, consistency and reflexivity as they structure the configurations in which the real of being gives itself to be thought. A decisive factor in each case of this "metaformal" reflection is the *infinite* dimension of reflexive form as it operates and problematizes itself in signs, or in language as structure in general. In the 1967 article, "How do we recognize structuralism?" Deleuze articulates this then-"timely" question according to seven interlinked criteria.[6] Each of the criteria turns in one way or another on the distinctive structuralist discovery of a register of the *symbolic* that is characterized neither by the immediacy of the real nor by the mimetic doubling of the imaginary, but rather by the wholly distinct dimension of structures as constitutive systems of differences. Under the heading of the last of the criteria, "From the Subject to Practice," Deleuze emphasizes how the demonstration carried out by Althusser and his collaborators of the structural origin of

6 "How do we Recognize Structuralism?" (Deleuze, 1967).

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systematic contradiction verifies the maxim that "the real, the imaginary and their relations are always engendered secondarily by the functioning of the structure, which starts by having its primary effects in itself."[7] According to Deleuze, the "very special" characteristics of an event that is "interior" to structure and characterized by its proper effect here make for a thinking of the point of the possible transformation of existing societies and systems, thereby defining a "therapeutic or political" "praxis, or rather the very site where praxis must take hold."[8] These last criteria of praxis nevertheless remain, for Deleuze in 1967, the "most obscure" and "the criteria of the future."[9]

It is possible to indicate the basis of a strong critique and practice of the transformation of existing societies, standards, norms and values today, as I shall argue, by means of a contemporary repetition of Deleuze's structuralist gesture, one which also develops the formal consequences of structure's inherent passage to infinity. It is under such a twofold condition of structuralist and meta-formal reflection that, in particular, a form of critique adequately responsive to the most ubiquitous and problematic institutions and practices of contemporary life can today be produced.

First Criterion: Beyond (the critique of) Finitude
If there is to be a principled critique of existing institutions, practices, and social structures today, it must go beyond the classical Kantian form: that of the critique of the exercise of the faculties of a determinate and finite subject. Within this classical form, critique is always the delimitation of the *proper* activities of the faculties, their distinction from one another and the regulation of the pretensions of reason to overstep its own bounds. Reason proposes, as regulative, the principle on the basis of which its finite forms will always point beyond themselves, leading to the limitative criticism of this pretension or, since it can never be separated from the work of reason itself, an interminable dialectic of unavoidable illusion at its core. In Kant's practical philosophy, the manner in which reason reflexively postulates this regulation to itself yields the authority of its self-affection in simultaneously formulating and submitting itself to an interior moral law. The direct political

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7 Deleuze, 1967, p. 191.

8 Deleuze, 1967, p. 191.

9 Deleuze, 1967, p. 192.

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correlate of this private and individual self-submission on the part of the transcendental subject is the distinction Kant articulates in "What is Enlightenment?" between a "public" and a "private" use of reason, and the corresponding maxim of intersubjective behavior: "Argue as much as you like about whatever you like, but obey!"

From a formal point of view, what is essential about this configuration is that the infinite is here allowed to subsist only as the regulative ideal or the infinitely exiguous demand to which finite thought and practice is submitted, whereas it always appears in activity or achieved knowledge only as the *potentially* infinite and never as an actually completed and thinkable whole. This specific conception of the infinite is the index of a singular *orientation of thought*, a distinctive schema of the relationship of thought and being in themselves, one original with Kant and still characteristic of widespread and typical forms of contemporary conviction. On the basis of the manner in which it regulates the elements of a positive and bounded regime of knowledge or thought, it can be called the *constructivist* orientation. What is formally characteristic of this position is that it assays the limit of a determinate and consistent totality of the known or thinkable at a time by means of the external imposition of its distinctive criteria, while meanwhile the contradictions and antinomies of the world as an existent whole are treated as the index and proof of the essential *localization* of this consistent knowledge rather than as real in themselves. Its general structure is not only the basis of Kant's own transcendental idealism, but also that of the various contemporary forms of historicism, pragmatism, and anthropologism characterizing (what is most often understood as) "critical" social thought today.

Another kind of position than Kant's, although one still very much located (as we shall see) within the "critique of finitude" in an extended sense, is produced by construing antinomy and contradiction, by contrast, as real and not ideal, but nevertheless appropriating these structures within a more general logic of the submission of finitude to the infinite as absolute. This position is Hegel's, and it is within its formal outlines that we must understand Hegel's own critique of Kant. Here, in particular, the structure of the dialectic provides a determining basis for the critical limit of finitude to be mobilized in the relentless infinite development of sublation and determinate negation.

Thus developing the implications of the specific reality of contradiction and thereby of the real structural effectivity of an actual-infinite that is no longer only potential, does Hegel's dialectical

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corrective provide, by contrast with the Kantian analytic, the basis for a *strong* critique grounded in the affirmative power of thought? It does not, for what is doubtless a familiar reason. For if the Hegelian dialectic indeed infinitely mobilizes the structure of critical delimitation as determinate negation, it does so only within the ambit of the general form of an infinite determined as *absolute*, or as total and consistent within itself. Thus, although the Hegelian dialectic operates as a "critique of finitude" in a different and more comprehensive sense than Kant's, it is nevertheless still marked as the critique *of* the finite in its relentless inscription of all finite wholes in the ambit and principle of this infinite absolute. The structural basis of this inscription is the dialectical opposition it presents between the finite and the infinite, whereby the unlimited serial development of the finite at first involves a "bad infinite" of empty or merely potential continuation, before being reappropriated by means of its sublation into a "good infinite" that reconciles both the (earlier) infinite and the finite itself.[10]

The idea of an absolute totality with no outside, one which envelops all differences, including that between the finite and the infinite within itself, is the characteristic figure of the infinite within a second orientation of thought, the *onto-theological* orientation. This orientation should certainly be sharply distinguished from the constructivist one, which, as we have seen, by contrast thinks the infinite as never actual but only potential or regulative, and the line of totality as drawn from outside by means of externally posited criteria. Nevertheless, the Hegelian dialectic represents, from this perspective, the most developed possible *combination* of the constructivist orientation which assays thought's power from the perspective of the finite constitution of faculties, and the onto-theological one which subordinates it to the transcendence of an absolute whole and totality. This specific combination in the

overarching medium of the absolute is indeed the only possible outcome of Hegel's attempt to think the absolute itself both as substance *and* as subject. In this combination, what is always missed is the specific structure of an infinite that is never absolute, or a totality that is inscribed only on the basis and with the correlate of its own constitutive inconsistency with itself. Along with this, what is missed on the level of logical determination in the dialectic itself is, as Deleuze himself never tires of pointing out, the principle of a prior insistent difference, founded in the first instance on paradox and kind of structurally irresolvable contradiction to which it gives rise.

We can witness some of the contemporary political consequences of this appeal to the onto-theological absolute by considering its symmetrical effects, on opposite sides, in the positive projects of both "left" (Marxist) and "right" (non-Marxist or liberal) contemporary Hegelianisms. On the "right" side, the problem of reconciling the force and authority of the "normative" with the reflexive structure of autonomy – a problem already posed with Kant's conception of the force of normativity as turning on its recognition by a subject – is seen as requiring, in addition to the regular functioning of a subject's own capacities, her participation in a communal *Sittlichkeit*, or membership in an "ethical community" or "ethical life."[11] This means that in order to be fully autonomous or fully constituted as an agent, one must participate in a "whole complex of practices and institutions" that give our actions and reasons meaning by ensuring the possibility of their intelligibility as such.[12] The Kantian constructivist appeal to the reflexive functioning of the individual subject in giving itself the law is thus seen as necessarily supplemented by the "achievement" of an ethical-social communal form of life that, in the limit, ensures the smooth possibility of the mutual recognition of any subject (in particular, the recognition of the "intelligibility" of their actions and motivations) by any other.[13] The demand of achieving the conditions of such recognition then also motivates the project of completing or maintaining the existing institutions of social or collective life which protect and enforce it.

On the other, leftist side, Slavoj Žižek has suggested that the hope for the transformative achievement of an emancipatory universality

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10 Contemporary Hegelians often argue that the "Absolute" does not figure, in Hegel's thought, as a kind of total overarching principle or final and static position at which thought would finally rest, satisfied with itself in comprehending in ultimate terms the whole of reality: the "absolute knowing" described in the last section of the *Phenomenology* is not absolute *knowledge* and even the "attainment" of the absolute is consistent with its continuing ongoing dynamism after (or even through) that attainment. The point may be granted in the present context, since it does not affect the different structural consideration that is at issue here. In particular, the significance of the absolute-infinite in the dialectic is not, for present purposes, that it represents (or does not) a final stopping point or completed position of total knowledge, but just that it assures that dialectical transitions have a unitary and progressive form determined finally by the dialectic of the finite and the "bad" and the "good" infinite. In any case, since my aim here is not primarily to interpret Hegel but rather just to assay the form and structure of some contemporary projects that see themselves as Hegelian, nothing essential to the argument turns on the question of what Hegel himself meant by the "Absolute".

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11 For this position, see, e.g., Pippin (2008), especially chapters 1, 3, and 4.

12 Pippin (2008), p. 5.

13 Pippin (2008), pp. 240-241.

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can be sustained, not by the idea of such a collective form of mutual recognition or protecting the institutions that consolidate it, but rather by discerning and mobilizing an obscure radical core of traditional theology itself.[14]   The thought here is that the Christian tradition specifically, in its conception of the role of the "concrete universal" and in its founding notion of the sacrifice of God, contains a "perverse kernel" which could be exploited to produce a kind of inversion leading to a new and emancipatory universalism.[15]   From this perspective, what is needed to supplement the individualist Kantian moral demand is thus not a principle of collectivity or mutual recognition, but rather the hope, fascinated by the Christian inversion, supposedly concealed within the possibility of a transformative repetition of the sacrificial founding, or of the manifestation of the absolute in the concrete that it represents.[16]

Both positions can be evaluated in terms of the specific conceptions they imply of the critical power of thought, or (just as much) rather the specific weakness they ascribe to it. In the one case, the power of thought is constrained within the general form of identity that ensures the possibility of recognition, so that thought can only work to confirm or consolidate the institutions that protect and preserve this mutual recognition. In the other, the affirmative power of thought is limited to its being the mechanism of a repetition of the inversion already at the center of Christian theology in its traditional forms, an effect in the light of which any novel effect or creative performance of thought will always appear weak and secondary. Both positions thus measure the power of thought only by means of their constitutive appeal to what is formally a superior, onto-theologically thought infinite absolute, and both leave the power of thought in a desultory or limited state with respect to it. In their dependence, in different forms, on the re-inscription of the infinite absolute at the programmatic center of the critical or transformative projects they entail, neither one approaches the two-step movement of affirmative thought and empowered life which is the dynamic form of strong critique.

14 See especially Žižek (2003).

15 Žižek (2003), p. 6.

16 Žižek (2003), p. 88. For an attempt – which seems to me unsuccessful – to draw on this idea of the "perverse core" in order partially to reconcile Hegel and Deleuze within the project of a "radical" theology predicated on the idea of a "weak" divine power, see Caputo (2011).

Second Criterion: Paradoxical and Contradictory

When a figure of critique grants to thought the power to pass to the limit of what it can do, it already essentially propounds paradoxes of a specific sort. These are paradoxes of the *limit* or *totality,* whereby the thought of the totality of the thinkable already engenders a position that is simultaneously and formally both within and without it. The problem here is not just the familiar one that "to draw a boundary in thought or language is already to go beyond it." More deeply, it is that the constitutive ideas of a totality reflexively thinkable from a position within it already irreducibly produce the structure of in-closure, or of contradiction at the limits.[17]   The structure is paradigmatically exhibited by Russell's paradox of the set of all sets that are not members of themselves. But it has also always been inscribed formally within the critique of reason itself, as is shown by the essential critical role of the Kantian cosmological antinomies and their own formal homologies to the Russell set. Nevertheless the affirmation of a strong power of thought in relation to paradoxes of the limit cannot be formulated by way of the subsequent Russelian or Kantian *limitative* devices that function, once paradox appears, to salvage consistency once more by recapturing it within a limited and regulated realm. Neither a Russellian parameterization of types, nor the idealist delimitation of the phenomenal from the noumenal, permits the ultimate consequences of the paradoxes of limits and totality to be drawn out. Neither, accordingly, can elicit their formal and structural consequences for a critical thought of the constitutive problems of the whole. What is needed to develop these consequences, allowing thought to go to the limit and here encounter its specific "beyond," is rather the affirmation of the original structure of limit-paradox as the really indicative instance of a third basic orientation of thought, what I have called the *paradoxico-critical orientation*. With this orientation, the activity of thought does not cede to the regulation of consistency from an assumed higher perspective or its limitative maintenance within a "merely regulative" employment. Rather, paradox and the irreducibility of its structure are affirmed as the resource of a strengthened and rigorous critical *praxis*, one that liberates the faculties from their transcendental delimitation and unlocks their capacity to deploy their powers at and beyond every legislated and instituted limit.

This is the basis of a critique, resting in the form of the paradoxes

17 For the theory and formalism of in-closure, see Priest (2002).

of the whole, that is thereby para-doxical, in an eminent sense, in providing the structural basis for any possibility of contesting and overturning the *doxa* that reflects the form of the contradictory whole only in a partial, distorted, or "ideological" way. As such, it is also the basis of a form of critical thought that is singularly "appropriate" to the contradictions of global capitalism and capable of responding to them on their own level of definition, promulgation and rationalization. If these structures always rest on a determinate mobilization of the powers of the total, what is most essential is not to locate a simple, foundational outside or "other" simply exterior to global capital (there is no such), but to see how the "totalizing" force of global capital always already implies constitutive paradox and structural contradiction, and inscribes it within the forms of contemporary life. Here, the significance of paradox is, as Deleuze suggests, finally that its analysis allows us to be "present at the genesis of contradiction" and thereby to witness its real and original structural condition.[18]

This is also how we should understand the contemporary relevance of the Althusserian idea of overdetermination, which refers the actual antagonisms characteristic of a given situation back to their structurally determining moment of complex contradiction rather than (as with Hegel) to the always again internalized "dialectical" opposition of given substantive concepts.[19] This does not mean that there is always just one contradiction which takes up all the rest, but rather that the various antagonisms are located on the level of their real *structural* -- which is to say "total" -- determination.[20] The paradoxes of the whole are here specifically related to the *doxa* that reflects the totality on the "ideological" level of denegation or false reflection. Hence Althusser:

In ideology men do express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an *'imaginary', 'lived'* relation. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world', that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation

18 Deleuze (1968), p. 74; compare 'How do we recognize structuralism?' (Deleuze 1967), pp. 190-191: "Let us again consider the analyses of Althusser and his collaborators: on the one hand, they show in the economic order how the adventures of the empty square (Value as object =x) are marked by the goods, money, the fetish, capital, etc., that characterize the capitalist structure. On the other hand, they show how contradictions are thus born in the structure."

19 Cf. Althusser (1962), pp. 100-102.

20 Althusser (1964), pp. 231-32.

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between them and their real conditions of existence.[21]

The ideology which each structured situation inherently produces out of itself is not, thus, to be understood simply as an imaginary or secondary production emergent from the "real" and concrete economic or base relations. Rather, it results from the real order of underlying conditions only insofar as the third order of the symbolic produces the structural condition of excess by which this real is invariably overlain in imaginary forms. If ideology is thus "as such an organic part of every social totality," then its continued and renewed critique requires that the "real conditions" themselves can only be understood in the structural foundations of their inherent presentation of themselves in terms of the more or less mystified self-reflection of the whole.   The characteristic form of this mystification is the production of the *consistency* of the imaginary instance: the inscription of the assumption of a total functioning of the system, or its positive motivation or efficacy, as both complete and consistent in itself. Against this, paradoxico-criticism or strong critique demonstrates the formal and necessary inherence of the paradoxes of the whole in the structure of every "functioning" total system as such, thus evincing the real-structural ultimate condition for both the system itself and its ideological reduplication.

Since the symbolic is a properly infinite dimension, the recognition of an inherent relation of the critical thought of totality to the paradoxes of the linguistic order requires a critical thought of the consequences of the infinite, one which in particular develops the implications of a contemporary -- that is, post-Cantorian -- thinking of its structure. In *Being and Event*, Badiou's development of a meta-philosophical reflection on the spontaneous ontology of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory allows him clearly and unequivocally to reject all forms of the critical analytic of finitude, as well as, in an equally basic gesture, the onto-theological founding assumption of a total and consistent infinite-absolute.[22] In the political case, the dual rejection produces the condition under which Badiou can consider individual structured situations as potential sites for the transformative eruption of an event and the subsequent work, itself actually infinite, which consists in the subject's faithful tracing of the situational consequences following from the pronouncement of its name.

21 Althusser (1964), pp. 233-34.

22 Badiou (1988).

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Badiou is here infinitely more trenchant than are the modern apologists of *Sittlichkeit* when he recognizes, applying classical Marxist categories, that the foundation of the social whole in the form of the State is never the positive principle of a fusional or reciprocal social bond, but rather a function of the prohibition of un-binding: the prohibition, specifically, of the inherent excess which produces the structural "danger" of the appearance of inconsistency itself.[23] And Badiou is again similarly consequent in insisting upon the way in which the Cantorian event renders inaccessible the traditional infinite-absolute, and with it the whole range of onto-theological consequences that have been drawn from it. With Cantor's conception, the concept of the infinite is, by contrast, irreducibly multiplied, for it is no longer possible consistently to think "the" infinite, once and for all, as a singular absolute, but rather only as an endless plurality of ever-increasing transfinite levels, the proper "vertigo of an infinity of infinites distinguishable within their common opposition to the finite."[24]

Does Badiou, then, indeed succeed in indicating the orientation of a strong critical thought equal to the problems of contemporary global capitalism? In, fact, there are many indications that he does not. The most basic of these is the status of the One (or the One-All) itself for Badiou. Early on in *Being and Event*, Badiou declares as a founding axiomatic decision the position that the "One is not" – that is, there is no total universe of all multiplicities, no "One" that gathers together everything that is. Although the claim is presented as a basic and axiomatic decision, Badiou nevertheless argues positively for it on the basis of Russell's paradox and Cantor's method of diagonalization.

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23 Badiou (1988), p. 109.

24 Badiou (1988), p. 146. Badiou does not hesitate to draw the conclusion this implies with respect to the Hegelian "absolute" itself and its motivating basis, in Hegel's system, in the passage from the "bad" to the "good" infinite: Hegel's derivation of the "good" infinite is from the post-Cantorian picture a kind of "trick", an "illusory scene of the speculative theatre." In particular, the passage by which the bad quantitative infinity passes over into the determination of its qualitative character, and thereby produces a "good" quantitative infinity which, as being the "quality of quantity" is itself also, for Hegel, the "good" qualitative one that is associated with the Absolute, must be rejected from a post-Cantorian perspective. The reason is that the quantitative infinite itself, ultimately grounded as it is in the "difference between the same and the same" which results from the iteration of the sign, cannot, as Cantor's open hierarchy of transfinite numbers effectively shows, ever be recaptured into the unity of a single or simple concept. Badiou draws the critical implications of this, right up to the in-consistency of God:
The 'good quantitative infinity' is a properly Hegelian hallucination. It was on the basis of a completely different psychosis, in which God in-consists, that Cantor had to extract the means for legitimately naming the infinite multiplicities – at the price, however, of transferring to them the very proliferation that Hegel imagined one could reduce (it being bad) through the artifice of its differentiable indifference. (p. 170)

These results show, on Badiou's reading, that, on pain of inconsistency, a set of all sets, or a totality of all that is, cannot be ontologically presented, and so it is necessary to adopt the axiomatic devices which prevent any such presentation according to standard set theory within ontology itself.[25] On this picture, ontology, or the theory of being insofar as it can be presented or said, thus limits itself to the presentation of always partial and incomplete situations, whereas being "in itself" or independent of its presentation is understood as "pure inconsistent multiplicity."[26] Although this surrounding inconsistency cannot, for Badiou, ever be directly presented as such, it is nevertheless the exterior basis for the possibility of transformation which shows up, in a local way, with the event – namely the possibility of a kind of punctual and ephemeral appearance, erased as soon as it appears, of the "proper" inconsistency of a situation in the form of its own void element, what is structurally "prohibited" in the existing situation itself.

From the perspective of a strong critique grounded in the structural consequences of limit-paradox as such, what this misses, though, is the way in which the ZF set theory that Badiou considers to capture the structure of ontology is *itself* positively founded on the prohibition of an inconsistency – this time, the inconsistency of the Russell set or of the set of all sets, the One-All. One can argue, as Badiou does, that the Russell paradox metalogically or metaformally demands the unpresentability of the One-All and the consequent axiomatic restriction of the powers of language or formalism to preclude the "formation" or "counting together" of the set of all sets (or any number of equivalently "too large" sets). But the conclusion follows only on the assumption that inconsistency is *as such* unpresentable – that, as Badiou says, presentation is itself committed to the "the most rigid of all conceivable laws", that of formal, deductive consistency.[27] But if there is a type of critique that formulates the structure of limit-paradoxes in order to meet the contradictions characteristic of a situation on the level of their real underlying structure, Badiou's assumptions about consistency, presentation, and the One thus render it unavailable.[28]

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25 Badiou (2005), pp. 42-43.

26 Badiou (1988), p. 25.

27 Badiou (1988), p. 27.

28 More broadly, Badiou's handling of critique generally is itself symptomatic here. In *Being and*

In the opening pages of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou verifies the consequences of this for the position of the transformative subject. Challenging what he sees as the "contemporary axiomatic" of what he calls democratic materialism, which is formulated as the widespread and pervasive assumption that "there are only bodies and languages," Badiou insists upon the alternative principle of what he calls, resurrecting Althusser's term for his own "theory of theoretical practice," a "materialist dialectic" whose principle is, by contrast, "there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths."[29]

Though Badiou thus retains Althusser's terminology, what he thereby designates by it retains little or nothing of the specific sense of intra-situational structural contradiction essential to Althusser's own "dialectical" approach. By contrast with such a principle of change inherent to the situation itself and to be discerned in its structural contradictions, Badiou appeals to the "exceptional" existence of truths

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Event and *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou often presents his own "generic" and "subtractive" orientation as structurally sufficient to exclude critical philosophy in *all* of its forms – not only the classical Kantian one but also those, "from the Greek Sophists to the Anglo-Saxon logical empiricists (even to Foucault)," who have proposed a constructivist or nominalist critical measuring of being on behalf of a delimitative regulation of language and meaning. (p. 288). In *Being and Event,* this exclusion is formally underwritten by a reflection on the implications of Gödel s development of a so-called *constructivist* universe, one in which positive being is limited to what can be constructively designated in terms of an existing language of a regular type. These preconditions of existence in the constructivist universe are sufficient to guarantee that within it, Cantor's continuum hypothesis holds in its general form and, as a result, the entire procedure of "forcing" the production of a generic set, on which Badiou's model of the fidelity of the eventual subject relies, is there impossible. This verifies for Badiou that the event and its subjective fidelity are in a structural sense ruled out by constructivism – that in, in other words, the constructivist "control of being" by means of linguistic protocols and syntactic structures capable of drawing and enforcing a critical line between what is sayable and what is not structurally excludes any possibility of radical and transformative change in the existing situation. If, then, we want to think or develop the principle of such a change, we must abandon the constructivist regimentation and (Badiou assumes) along with, any critical philosophy grounded in linguistic reflection at all. What is essential formally to note here, though, is that Gödel s constructivist universe controls the construction of sets in the regimented way that it does only on the assumption of the *predicativity* of the underlying language. That is, in the constructivist universe, existence is indeed regimented by means of the existing language, but only on the assumption that, in this language, reflexivity or impredicativity is excluded in advance. On the other hand, ordinary language is plausibly massively impredicative, and in such a way as to inscribe reflexivity inherently in the context of its most important phenomena of meaning, truth, and structural authority. If this impredicativity is indeed essential, then Gödel s model of constructivism is not decisive in assaying the possibilities of a critical philosophy based in the structure of language, and another form of linguistic critique, this time based not on the regimented maintenance of linguistic strictures but rather on the positive development of paradox, comes into view. (I develop this critique of Badiou in more detail in my (2012), especially chapters 1 and 9.)

29 Althusser 1963, pp. 171-72; Badiou 2006, pp. 1-4. Notably, Badiou says here (p. 7) that Deleuze, as a "free and fervent advocate of [the] affirmation of the infinite rights of thought" also "embodied one of the orientations of the materialist dialectic," different from Badiou's but united with it in their shared resistance to "democratic materialism".

that can be partially realized in specific historical situations by means of a subject's intervention in the name of an event. These successive interventions each mobilize partially the implications of a structurally superior truth, itself to be seen, in the long traverse of its successive historical unfolding, as an eternal existence situated outside any specific historical situation.

Instead of pointing to the inherence of contradiction, Badiou's approach thus suspends the possibility of change from the traversing inherence of the plurality of extra-situational truths. The power of thought itself in creating or effecting the conditions of change is thereby rendered secondary, oscillating between the intra-situational unthinkability of the situation's proper void point and the imperative that nevertheless renders it formally thinkable, but only as the infinite outcome of a generic procedure. The thought of the individual or collective subject, formally determined by the very structure of the event and the truth it depends on, can only accordingly perform its transformative role by way of a prior "fidelity" to the event's name or (equivalently) its passive agency in facilitating an operation of "grace" which amounts to the advent of the impossible-transcendent in being itself.
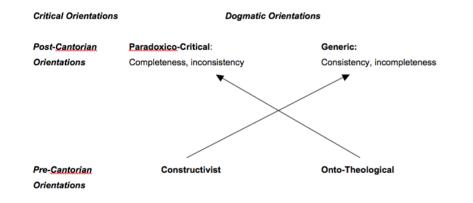
With the identification of this structure of Badiou's "generic" orientation, we can now complete the graph of the four orientations of thought (figure 1).[30] They are discernible according to strength they accord to thought in meeting being in itself, and for this reason, each one can be indicated briefly in terms of the specific figure of the infinite it proposes, and in relation to which it measures the power of thought in relation to existing situations and structures. First, the *onto-theological* orientation understands the infinite as the absolute: complete in itself and having no exterior, the absolute performs a grounding of being in the divine which is as such forever inaccessible to simply finite thought. Second, there is the *constructivist* orientation, where the infinite is thought as merely potential or only regulative with respect to the limitative forms that ensure consistent finitude. Beyond these, the Cantorian discovery of the transfinite points to two further orientations, each grounded in this discovery, although in different and opposed ways. Badiou's *generic* orientation, as we have seen, inscribes the action of the subject and the possibility of situational change within

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30 The four orientations are developed in greater detail in Livingston 2012, especially pp. 51-60 and pp. 248-54.

the vast open hierarchy of the transfinite, maintaining presentational consistency there, however, at the cost of sacrificing the One-All. Finally, though, there is the further orientation that Badiou himself does not generally recognize, namely the *paradoxico-critical* orientation which mobilizes the power of paradox as the structural outcome of the consideration of totality itself.

Of the four, only the constructivist and paradoxico-critical orientations are, in proposing principled internal bases for overcoming the limits of particular situations, genuinely *critical* at all. And because of the way it grounds itself in the formal/structural situation of thought itself in relation to the totality of the thinkable, only paradoxico-criticism is capable of fully affirming a *strong* power of thought whose reflexivity is not modified or delimited by means of any external mandate, even that of consistency. It is an affirmative and mobile position, moving at once all the way to the end to grasp and directly intervene in the whole, and thereby unfolding the consequences of the inherent paradoxicality of its constitution to perform the immediate production of the labor of thought in delivering, there, the new.

Critical Orientations		Dogmatic Orientations
Post-Cantorian Orientations	**Paradoxico-Critical:** Completeness, inconsistency	**Generic:** Consistency, incompleteness
Pre-Cantorian Orientations	Constructivist	Onto-Theological

Third Criterion: Realist, Atheist, Anti-Humanist

If critique is to capable of meeting the problems of the contemporary situation, its principle and schema must themselves be *realist:* formally based, that is, on the situational inherence of the real points of paradox which, although void, nevertheless organize its structure and the provision of its sense. It is thus necessary for strong critique, breaking with idealism and constructivism, to found itself in the structural principle of a *formal realism* indicated on the level of the ultimate provision of intra-situational sense. The best and most

comprehensive schematism of this realism is the one suggested by Michael Dummett in his penetrating discussions of the formulation and consequences of realism and anti-realism generally.[31] It is that of compliance with the law of the excluded middle, so that every claim is understood as *either* true *or* false (or indeed, since it is the law of the excluded middle and *not* that of noncontradiction that is invoked here, perhaps both). This compliance in the case of a particular domain of sentences suffices formally to disjoin the meaningfulness of sentences in that domain from any epistemic or procedural or epistemic criterion, or any attempt to found meaning in the constitutive activity of any subject or agent. Thereby it can discern the real points at which sense is produced, maintained, and can be transformed.

In the course of his twentieth seminar, Jacques Lacan indicates the positive usefulness for psychoanalytic theorizing of mathematical/logical formalisms, contrasting it sharply with the structural idea underlying Hegel's discourse (which is rather, he says, "a plenitude of contrasts dialecticized in the idea of an historical progression, which, it must be said, nothing substantiates for us...").[32] The development of a rigorous formalism is, in particular, indispensable according to Lacan in that it "is the most advanced elaboration we have by which to produce signifierness," or the bare character of transmissible signification as such, prior to and independent of any externally given meaning.[33] Indeed, Lacan suggests, such a "formalization of signifierness" as occurs in mathematical formalism even runs "counter to meaning," almost producing itself as a kind of nonsense or counter-sense (*contre-sens*) nevertheless inherent to the real production of sense itself. According to Lacan, the usefulness of a pure formalism is thus the way it allows symbolism to pass to the limit of its meaning and make visible the insistence, beneath it, of the real. For while "the real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization," it is nevertheless possible (indeed for this very reason) to see in the provision of formalism and its tracing of its own formal limits the possibility of a "model" of the real itself.[34] Here, the purity of a formal/symbolic writing

31 See, e.g., Dummett 1963. I have developed the argument here in more detail in Livingston 2013. Cf. also Livingston 2012, p. 291.

32 Lacan 1973, p. 93.

33 Lacan 1973, p. 93.

34 Lacan 1973, p. 93.

that "goes beyond speech, without going beyond language's actual effects" is, in particular, the key to the positive visibility of those "limits, impasses, and dead ends that show the real acceding to the symbolic."[35]

Turning as it does on the inscription of the structure of paradox whereby noncontradictory formalization itself reaches its specific limit, paradoxico-criticism (or strong critique) develops this suggestion of the use of formalism as a specifically realist position, indeed what can be called a kind of "realism" of the (Lacanian) real. What is decisive here is the way in which formalism itself provides, when pushed to its limits, the basis for a formal indication of the structure of these limits themselves, one which owes nothing to any previous specific principle or criterion of sense, meaning, or signification. If, as Lacan says, it is in this showing of the limits, moreover, that the real accedes to presentation, the only kind of presentation it can have, then a critique capable of accessing the real must itself depend on drawing out the resource of formalism and its own inherent capacity to reflect on its limits. The ultimate significance of this realism of the transit of forms, or of the traversal of the empty signifier as the principle of sense, is that, going all the way to the point of structural paradox, it there unfolds the real itself the only possible presentation by which it can be rendered accessible to thought.

It is in connection with this realist principle that we should understand the political implications of the "paradoxical element" or "empty square" which Deleuze, drawing on Levi-Strauss's "floating signifier" and Lacan's formalization of the "barred' subject as a void place within structure, makes the basis of the positive production of linguistic or structural sense. The paradoxical element is the empty position, in a structure determined by two series as signifiers and signifieds, at which the two series are put into communication and made to resonate. "At once word and thing," the paradoxical element is a name that is, in saying its own sense, "completely abnormal" and therefore nonsense according to the laws that normally regulate the distinction between sense and nonsense.[36] Nevertheless, in indicating the point of paradox which every structure, as dispensing of a totality of signification, bears within itself, it evinces the more basic and mutually implicative relationship of sense and nonsense in which systemic

contradiction and dynamism is founded.[37] It is here, in particular, that one can discern the original structural basis for the production of sense, and thereby the principle, as Deleuze says, of structural transformation: the displacement of frontiers and the animating basis of "permanent revolution."[38]

The recognition of the real and necessary structural inherence of the paradox suffices to overcome any politics, whether of a "transcendent" or "immanent" form, that finds in the human or the divine an ultimate reserve of sense in order to propose a politics of its coherence. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze considers those modern and recent approaches which either ground sense in "a new transcendence, a new avatar of God and a transformed heaven" or, alternatively, locate its basis in "man and his abyss, a newly excavated depth and underground."[39] But what renders the whole previous discussion of sense as "Principle, Reservoir, Reserve," or "Origin" untenable today is the "pleasing...news" that "sense is never a principle or an origin, but that it is produced:" generated, in particular, by structure in its imposition of a "pure counter-sense" which imbricates sense and thereby forms the basis of its concrete structural genesis.[40]

Deleuze's indication here of a structural origin of sense, not in the depths or the heights but on the surface, in the inherency of counter-sense and the structural effects it produces, is as relevant today as it was when he wrote in 1969. For there are now, as then, no shortage of attempts to ground critique and political projects in a humanist piety or a resurrected theology. From the perspective of the affirmation of thought, all of these attempts fall short, since they all demote the power of critical thought to a secondary status, subjecting it instead to the agency of a divine or human principle conceived as operating in the first place to set its imperatives and ends. By contrast with these, in affirming the power of thought all the way up to the structural paradox of the real, strong critique operates to discern the place of the empty square, and thus to orient a *praxis* with respect to the real that appears, uniquely, there. As Deleuze suggests, in this progression to the real that appears as the paradoxical instance itself lies the concrete basis,

35 Lacan 1973, p. 93.

36 Deleuze 1969, p. 67.

37 Deleuze 1969, pp. 48-49.

38 Deleuze 1969, p. 49.

39 Deleuze 1969, pp. 71-72.

40 Deleuze 1969, p. 72.

beyond humanism and theism, for a politics of the future:

It suffices that we dissipate ourselves a little, that we be able to be at the surface, that we stretch our skin like a drum, in order that the 'great politics' begin. An empty square for neither man nor God; singularities which are neither general nor individual, neither personal nor universal. All of this is traversed by circulations, echoes, and events which produce more sense, more freedom, and more strength than man has ever dreamed of, or God ever conceived.[41]

Fourth Criterion: A-subjective

If a strong politics can affirm the power of thought, in itself, with respect to the real of being whose indication is the fixed point of structural transformation, it does not do so by appealing to the action of a subject, its consciousness, or its self-formation in general. The basic reason why a politics grounded in subjective action or "subject formation" cannot serve a thought that goes all the way to the structural-paradoxical inherence of the real is the one already indicated by Deleuze in "How do We Recognize Structuralism?" It is that the primary opposition of subject and object constrains the politics of the subject to the redoubling of the real characteristic of its *imaginary* and *representational* relations, thereby missing the structural-transformative significance of the third register of the symbolic. Because of the way it thus moves within the order of representative redoubling, the politics of the subject cannot do more, on the level of its practical appeal, than invoke an imperative ultimately grounded in the deficiencies of the existing situation as their reverse and shadow. This is already the case when, with Kant, practical philosophy determines the imperative of action as the conformity of subjective motivation with the appeal of a transcendent-universal law whose effectiveness can nevertheless never be finally verified, over against pathological motivations. But it remains equally the case when the subject's effectiveness in relation to the world of objects is submitted to the infinite dialectic of self-recognition (as in Hegel), the local unfolding of a truth by means of the immanent pursuit of its generic procedure (Badiou), or even just its constitution as a "parallax gap" between incommensurable perspectives on the whole (as in Žižek).[42] By contrast with all of these, only a principle of critique that

passes through the properly structuralist moment of properly *symbolic* paradox can also be the positive principle of the active structural production of sense.

In a 2007 interview with Tzuchien Tho, Alain Badiou recalls how his earliest works maintained, under an Althusserian inspiration, the thesis of the inherent opposition of formalism to subjectivity, and hence the necessary exclusion of the subject from the field of formalizable transformations.[43] At this early stage, Badiou says, he saw in the mathematical itself, in particular, the rigor of "the non-subjective, the making possible of a capacity to think outside all intentionality and subjectivity."[44] But it was, according to Badiou, necessary to rethink this when he saw the necessity to "take and maintain some aspects of subjectivity in the elements of formalism itself"; for even if it is not necessary thereby to reinsert intentionality or consciousness, "every philosophy that eliminates the category of the subject becomes unable to serve a political process."[45] This conclusion led Badiou, starting with *Theory of the Subject*, to attempt a formalization of the subject as the point of the effective development of the consequences of the event in a particular situational context. Nevertheless, according to Badiou, this conception of subjectivity, further developed in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* retains "the idea that the relation between the subject and formalism is on the side of formalism and not on the side of the subject," treating the subject only as it is defined by the "new process of formalization" that occurs "where there is an effect of puncture in the particular underlying structure."[46]

As we have seen, Badiou's appeal to the force of formalization

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"gap", "cut", "incompleteness" or "inconsistency" in the real arising from the dissymmetry or mismatch of the One with itself. However, because Badiou does not generally distinguish with respect to this structure between incompleteness and inconsistency, he does not generally present the paradoxico-critical orientation in a form clear enough to distinguish it from (Badiou's) generic orientation, or indeed (especially given his own commitments to Hegel) from the Hegelian combination of constructivism and onto-theology. See Livingston 2012, pp. 300-301 and pp. 328-329. It should also be noted that on the penultimate and last pages of his massive recently published *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (Žižek 2012, pp. 1009-1010), Žižek gestures toward the possibility that "'postmodern capitalism'" as an "increasingly paraconsistent system" must be treated in terms of a paraconsistent or dialetheic logic that affirms the truth of contradictions – essentially the paradoxico-critical orientation.

43 Badiou 2007, p. 88.

44 Badiou 2007, p. 88.

45 Badiou 2007, p. 88.

46 Badiou 2007, pp. 88-89.

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41 Deleuze 1969, pp. 72-73.

42 This is not to say that Žižek does not (indeed quite often) gesture toward something like the paradoxico-critical orientation, particularly in his many formulations of the idea of an essential

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represents in exemplary fashion one way of drawing the implications of an the infinite power of formal thought to go to its own limit and indicate the point of its own inherent impasse, thereby indicating the ultimately determining formal features of political situations and activities. The essential point to make from the position of paradoxico-criticism, though, is just that there are other ways of thinking the relationship between the formal impasses and political transformation than the one Badiou suggests here. In particular, if the critical points of a given situation are to be thought, along paradoxico-critical lines, as the structural points of contradiction and antagonism marking the situation itself in its contradictory totality, then they do not in the first instance depend on or suggest the structural inscription of a broader "process", which then could only be the prerogative of a situationally constituted (or eventually dependent) subject to carry out. It is rather, from this perspective, to be asked what structural dynamisms can be unlocked, what new permutations or developments of difference can be carried out, on the basis of an agency which need not be subjective at all but whose possibility rather results from the formal dynamics constitutive of the larger situation itself.

In contemporary leftist discussions which presuppose the necessity of subjective agency for political transformation, the imperative of finding a subjective position from which this agency can effectively operate often yields a marked sense of disappointment. In the wake of the historical failures of Marxism and the contemporary global dominance of regimes determined by the rule of capital, the imperative becomes that of realizing a motive for action in the figure of a reinscribed eschatological hope or a "realistically" adjusted messianism. The aim of a rhetoric of activism or its political appeal is then determined as that of overcoming "motivational deficit" or producing an appropriate "confidence" capable of realizing the "radical" or "emancipatory" project that is actually already in view, at least implicitly.[47] Posed this way, the problem is not so much creatively to think new social forms or modes of organization, but (much more) to motivate activity leading to the change that one already anticipates or desires. Here, critical thought is once again structurally weak: subordinated to the overarching imperative of political ends already

assumed, it can only have, with respect to the existing situation, the residual function of reassuring a necessarily marginal hope for its eventual transformation.

What this configuration overlooks, however, is the active production of sense, which is not the "hope" for another or different situation but (since there is no separation, here, between the thought of change and the imperative that activates it) the direct transformation of the existing situation by way of creative intervention at its critical points. Here, the two-step unity of which Deleuze speaks between thought and life is immediately the basis both for the thought of new possibilities of life and their positive actualization. For the demonstration carried out by strong (or paradoxico-) critique shows how these inhere in the virtuality and dynamism of the existing structure itself, and thus already provide the sufficient conditions for its transformation.

Fifth Criterion: Undecidable

When paradoxico-criticism locates the fixed points of paradox at which any system which aspires to totality and contains the resources of its own internal reflection inscribes limit-contradictions, it already indicates the contradictory space in which every such system finds the ultimate formal basis for its own positive constitution. The articulation of this original space – in which sense and nonsense interpenetrate and communicate – already points to a more original basis of the positive consistency of situations in an original ungrounding. This is why, when Gödel in 1931 recapitulates Russell's paradox in a different form with his incompleteness theorems, he thereby indicated not only the incompleteness of specific axiomatic systems with respect to what can be seen as truths beyond their ability to prove, but also, more basically, the undecidability that, by its own formal evidence, undermines any claim to determine truth itself completely in univocal, methodical, or axiomatic fashion. Contemporary discourses in a paradoxico-critical mold, most of all Derrida's deconstruction, have mobilized the phenomenon of undecidability as an essential resource of textual interpretation. But what has sometimes been lost here is the formal connection between the undecidable as a structural basis of linguistic meaning and the radical implications of this structure the constitution of communities and structures of political authority.[48]

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47 This suggestion is at least implicit in the preface of Adrian Johnston's (excellent) 2009 book *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Johnston, 2009). For the language of the "motivational deficit", see, e.g. Critchley 2007, pp. 7-8.

48 For a treatment of the connection between the undecidable in Gödel's sense and the undecidable in Derrida's sense, see Livingston 2010.

In his 1990 homage to Derrida, *Pardes*: The Writing of Potentiality, Georgio Agamben points to the practical significance of this twofold connection of undecidability to formalism and political *praxis*:

The concept "trace" is not a concept (just as "the name '*différance*' is not a name"): this is the paradoxical thesis that is already implicit in the grammatological project and that defines the proper status of Derrida's terminology. Grammatology was forced to become deconstruction in order to avoid this paradox (or, more precisely, to seek to dwell in it correctly); this is why it renounced any attempt to proceed by decisions about meaning. But in its original intention, grammatology is not a theory of polysemy or a doctrine of the transcendence of meaning; it has as its object not an equally inexhaustible, infinite hermeneutics of signification but a radicalization of the problem of self-reference that calls into question and transforms the very concept of meaning grounding Western logic . . .

It does not suffice, however, to underline (on the basis of Gödel's theorem) the necessary relation between a determinate axiomatics and undecidable propositions: what is decisive is solely how one conceives this relation. It is possible to consider an undecidable as a purely negative *limit* (Kant's *Schranke*), such that one then invokes strategies (Bertrand Russell's theory of types or Alfred Tarski's metalanguage) to avoid running up against it. Or one can consider it as a *threshold* (Kant's *Grenze*), which opens onto an exteriority and transforms and dislocates all the elements of the system.[49]

In particular, if, as Agamben argues elsewhere, every constituted political or juridical order must be seen as instituted by means of an act of founding constitution which is structurally exceptional with respect to that order itself, then the structure of sovereignty already itself inscribes a more basic structural undecidability in every such order.[50] In response to the threat this poses to the "normative" functioning of constituted regimes, one can, following the strategy of Carl Schmitt, reactively reaffirm the structural necessity for an absolute constituting power capable of deciding the systemically undecidable, thereby also (as Agamben suggests) authorizing the promulgation and regularization of "states of exception" in which force and legitimacy ultimately overlap

to the point of their mutual indiscernibility. Or one can, by contrast, affirm the original and constitutive structure of the undecidable itself and seek to orient a political *praxis* on its basis. This is the principle of a paradoxical "community to come" which institutes, like a paradoxical Cantorian set, the foundational inconsistency of the origin.[51]

Although this *praxis* thus depends essentially on the undecidable, is nevertheless not one of indefinite hesitation before decision, or of an unlimited textualism lacking any possible "passage" to the act. Rather, the affirmation of the original structure of the undecidable is already in itself the "decisive" act, since it already implies, as Agamben says, the *arche* of a transformed life. Its possibility depends crucially on the development and affirmation of the structure of linguistic or symbolic sense in its original relation to paradox, but it does not thereby turn on the contingent features of specific languages or communities. Rather it unfolds the consequences of the original structure of paradox and the problematic it inscribes as the primary universal, or as the very structure of the universal as such.

It is in this way, as well, that we should understand the contemporary critical-political implications of Deleuze's insistence on the priority and objectivity of *problems* in relation to their specifically determined solutions. It is routinely objected, against the Derridean or Deleuzian emphasis on the primacy of difference, that such a conception is all too easily accommodated or appropriated by the narcissistic multicultural logic of contemporary global capitalism. Within this logic, we can all easily and comfortably represent different cultures, languages, "situated" practices, etc., as long as none of these local differences rise to the level of threatening the abstract total order of global capital itself. Some recent applications of Deleuzian terminology, or projects marching under their banner, have indeed seemed to confirm this impression. But early in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze anticipates exactly this danger and indicates how it is overcome on the basis of an insistence upon the priority and positivity of the problem:

There are certainly many dangers in invoking pure differences which have become independent of the negative and liberated from the identical. The greatest danger is that of lapsing into the representations

49 Agamben 1990, pp. 213-214.

50 See, e.g., Agamben 2005.

51 Cf. Agamben 2000, p. 89, where he describes a coming "community without either presuppositions or conditions of belonging" as having the structure of an inconsistent Cantorian set.

of a beautiful soul: there are only reconcilable and federative differences, far removed from bloody struggles. The beautiful soul says: we are different, but not opposed ... *The notion of a problem*, which we see linked to that of difference, also seems to nurture the sentiments of the beautiful soul: only problems and questions matter ... . Nevertheless, we believe that when these problems attain their proper degree of *positivity*, and when difference becomes the object of a corresponding *affirmation*, they release a power of aggression and selection which destroys the beautiful soul by depriving it of its very identity and breaking its good will.[52]

This positivity of the problem, prior to its determined solutions in specific situations, is the form of a power of thought that allows it to contest and criticize every situational principle that seeks to assure the reconcilability of differences within a determined order of identity or correspondence. The significance of this for the contemporary "total" and global regime of capital is clear: that despite the palliative assurances of ultimate commensurability it provides, there remain insistent problems of life that it does not and cannot solve and which, if grasped in their underlying logic, could themselves provide the basis for other structural solutions. The formal principle of this insistence of the problem and its refusal to be exhausted within any single determined structure (and even and especially "total" ones), however, is the inherent undecidability of any total situation which traces to the fundamental basis of its institution. Its affirmation is thus the overturning of the organizing structures of all unitary solutions that reinscribe consistent decidability, the active and "aggressive" power of critical thought of which Deleuze speaks.

Sixth Criterion: Ineffective

I have argued for a strong power of thought in critique, one according to which thought is not separated from what it can do but is able to go all the way with respect to the total situation, to pass to the very limit of formalism in which it inscribes the real. This affirmation of the critical power of thought is sufficient to overcome what Deleuze calls "good sense" and "common sense:" the good sense that seeks to assure the consensus of thinkers with respect to the objectivity of a common world and the common sense that seeks to guarantee the internal unity of

52 Deleuze 1968, p. xx.

the faculties before a recognizable identical object.[53] The affirmation of a strong power of thought thus unsettles each of the determined configurations in which such an image of thought presupposes what thought is or what it should do: any image, that is, which subjects it to the criterion of its effectiveness in serving a previously given or determined end. For this reason, it ultimately indicates the form of a far-reaching critique of effectivity itself. That is, in pointing out the structural undecidability which surrounds and inheres in every totally determined (and self-referential) situation, a consequence (as we have seen) of the very priority of problems as objective and ideal instances, the affirmation of strong critique also points to the specific limitation of all procedures for effectively determining their local "solutions" as total and consistent.

This indication is particularly decisive today, in that it points to the basis for the criticism of everything that seeks, in contemporary institutions, practices, and ways of life, to guarantee and maintain the consistent efficacy of the "solutions" provided by technology, capital, or administrative/bureaucratic forms of order. According to the principle of critique indicated here, any such solutions will only ever be partial, if they can be maintained consistently at all. And the various (overdetermined) rationalizations and ideologies that seek to guarantee their effectiveness are themselves possible only on the basis of their suppression and dissimulation of a more general *ineffectivity* basically characteristic of the original structure of sense.

This original ineffectivity has, once again, a formal motivation in the metalogical results by which twentieth-century formal thought reflects and measures its own inherent limits. Familiarly, Gödel's second incompleteness theorem establishes that no formal system (of a certain minimal degree of expressive power) can guarantee its own consistency by means of an internal proof, unless in fact the system is in fact inconsistent and the guarantee is therefore false.[54] An intimately related result due to Turing establishes the inherent limits of so-called "effective" procedures: those that can be specified by a finite algorithm assured to produce a computational solution to a given problem in a finite number of steps. In both cases, the limit of effectiveness is shown

53 See especially Deleuze 1968, chapter 3.

54 It is in most cases possible to prove the consistency of a system by means of a "higher" or more powerful system, but then the consistency of *that* system becomes open to question, and so forth.

at the point at which a problem is posed which cannot be resolved by finite means and in finite time. The problem nevertheless persists as the point of an irreducible exigency, forever irresolvable by procedural and regular methods.

This formal ineffectivity that is, as Gödel and Turing showed, structurally involved in any formal system with a minimal degree of complexity and self-referential power has an analogue in the "impassivity" that basically characterizes the logic of sense, according to Deleuze. In particular, by developing the structure of the paradox of regress which results from supposing every linguistic name itself to have a sense that is itself, as actual, capable of bearing a name, Deleuze argues that sense as the genetic basis for the powers of the proposition in asserting, manifesting, or denoting must itself be "sterile," impassive, or inefficacious, itself a produced "surface effect" with respect to these activities of the proposition while nevertheless acting as their essential presupposition.[55] Neutral with respect to affirmation or denial, inherent in the proposition and responsible for its potential, sense must nevertheless be "indifferent to the universal and the singular, to the general and the particular, to the personal and the collective" in order to be at the neutral basis of propositions determined articulate in terms of one or more of these oppositions.[56] In taking up this structural position, sense is formally linked to the problem: it poses the paradox in an original form. Here we see the crucial characteristic of what Deleuze calls the "virtual": what is real without being actual, determined and determining without being effective. Everywhere that thought encounters this basic ineffectivity which formally characterizes its constitutive power, it inscribes and confirms the virtuality of structure and its insistence in the real.

How, then, can ineffectivity be adopted as a critical maxim and affirmed as a praxis? There is no general formula for its application, but its implications are to be measured in each determined solution as unfolding the critical consequences of the paradoxical power of thought involved in it. Sometimes the implication is a maxim of withdrawal or punctual refusal, as perhaps with the figure of Bartleby the Scrivener, to whom both Deleuze and Agamben devote exemplary readings.[57] In other cases it is the praxis of an active creation that is implied, the creative legislation of "new values" and the transformation of existing situations according to a basic reconfiguration of their sense. In either kind of case, however, what is essential is, as I have argued, never that thought determines the new in the form of whatever recognizable ends or assumed goals, even (or especially) those formed in the negative image of the existing situational parameters. What is crucial is rather to allow thought to produce, while maintaining its own specific integrity, the unrecognizable as the site of a life to come. There is no fixed formula or method for this production. As with the Nietzschean "revaluation of values" itself, it is not immediately clear whether it can be the basis of an "ethics" or what would be involved in determining it as one; at any rate, the least that can be said is that it is not a moralism. It is nevertheless assertible, on the demonstrable basis of the formal considerations themselves, that in allowing thought to pass beyond all determined criteria it indicates the structure of thought itself in relation to criteria as such and thereby formally reveals its point of contact with the real. That the transformation of structures, practices, and ways of life by means of this contact and around its fixed point be *produced* by thought's power is then the affirmative principle of a politics to come.

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55 Deleuze 1969, pp. 31-33.

56 Deleuze 1969, p. 35.

57 Deleuze 1993 and Agamben 1993.

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