

A New Approach to Representations of Revolution

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

at

Rhodes University

by

Matthew Burke

February 2014

Supervisor: Professor Mike Marais

Abstract

This project asserts that revolution is characterised by the expression of unthinkable possibilities, and so addresses the paradox implicit in any attempt to ‘write revolution.’ That is, how does one represent revolution without reducing it to an ordered term of reference, and thereby subduing its radical character? Additionally, can transformative action be conceptualised as a creative project to which an ethical subject may, and in fact should, be drawn? To answer these questions, my investigation develops in three strands. I combine the radical theory of Alain Badiou with similar affirmations of revolutionary intervention from Slavoj Žižek and Paulo Freire, and so create an aesthetic that affirms revolutionaries as agents of supplementary creativity. My first purpose is thus to establish revolution as a productive enterprise that enables peace, rather than a destructive undertaking that introduces violence. This done, I apply the resultant conceptual tools to literary representations of radical transformation, and demonstrate that my aesthetic enables new readings of the literature of revolution to which it is applied. In the course of my analysis, I also evaluate the suitability of Badiou’s ethic as a standpoint from which to engage with literature on revolution. Ultimately, then, the aesthetic I construct not only contests the notion that radical transformation is always destructive, but also renders one sensitive to revolutionary literature’s excessive and supplementary dimensions.

Acknowledgements

To underscore the necessity of understanding evolutionary theory in the context of deep geologic time, James Jeans proposes a thought experiment wherein relentless monkeys are set at typewriters. The proposition thus enabled is that the unlettered essayists would, in the fullness of infinity, produce all the works of the British Museum. While the proportionately trim document that has come of my efforts cannot confirm Jeans' thesis, it is nonetheless obvious that he neglects to envision the heroic supervisory agent presupposed by a primate mass-production of cuneiform dunnage. I can now say that I have some idea of the qualities required and tested by the attempt to lift glimpses of sense from a sustained codification of the untrue.

The extraordinary patience and boundless generosity with which Professor Mike Marais has overseen this project are truly humbling. The field of literary representation often induces one to speak of the inexpressible, but in this case my appreciation of his efforts is properly beyond words. It will have to suffice that I am far from alone in saying that he is the best teacher I have ever had.

I would also like to thank my parents, who first rode me on their shoulders to a protest march, and without whom this thesis would not have been possible.

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Introduction

At a conference on creativity and revolution in Cairo in 2012, I asked my hosts if a visit to Tahrir Square was a survivable ambition. They replied that a conservative faction would be demonstrating there, and so it was safe to proceed. When I asked why this was so, I was told that ‘nothing’ happened when the conservatives were out in force. Conversely, if the liberals took to the Square, their opponents would rally forces with which to attack them, and so ‘liberal’ protests had become synonymous with ‘disorder.’ Contained in this equation of inaction with peace is the theoretical animating principle of this project: to resist the notion that ‘peace’ prevails when a totalising monologue goes uncontested, and the corollary, that an attempt to initiate a counter-discourse is the ‘cause’ of violence.

At stake, then, are one’s interlinked conceptions of ethical behaviour and violence. If one equates the conservative reification of what is with the preservation of ‘peace,’ then the ethical agent is characterised by immobility. Similarly, if transformative activity is cast as unethical, then ‘violence’ is the preserve of those who call for, instead of those who prevent, the world to come, that is, a world characterised by possibility. However, as evidenced by the virtual synonymy of revolution and destruction, language and literature are complicit in and constitutive of the notion that radical transformation is always inimical. That is, the representational order maintains the *image* of ‘violent’ change that mandates the endurance of the *status quo*. The irony here is that the richness of language and the production of literature are enabled by the excess that escapes any ‘final’ attempt at representation, and so the attempt to reify reality gestures towards the very possibilities that a ‘peaceful’ monologue of power seeks to exclude. Against these perceptions, I undertake to establish a theoretical framework which affirms that the capacity for radical creativity identifies not only the ethical subject, but also all of humanity. My purpose is to demonstrate that the ability to transform reality is not a surplus facility, but the true premise of ethical engagement. Accordingly, I follow Rousseau’s critical observation that “One may live at peace even in a dungeon,” and so aim to show that peace is not realised by interminable ‘stability,’ but occurs in a world open to and continuously transformed by the expression of radical possibilities (“Of the Social Contract” 14). By implication, I show that there is a fundamental difference between the destruction of true peace by the ‘peaceful’ installation of invisible violence, and the ‘violent’ interruption of the silence made ordinary by structural inequity. This project therefore asserts that literature is able to interrogate institutionalised violence, and the ‘peace’ that it produces, by exposing the lived reality of oppression and announcing the irrepressible possibility of transformative

action. Importantly, my claim is that revolution is to be understood as a creative enterprise, not a destructive one, and that true revolutionaries are ethical agents who ‘illegally’ supplement, rather than wreck, reality. What I offer, then, is an aesthetic of revolution that establishes the conditions of violence which necessitate collective intervention, and affirms the ethical imperative of creative interference.

In order to establish an ethic that affirms the necessity of transformative creativity, I draw upon the works of three philosophers. Alain Badiou argues that humanity is a species of transformation, a standpoint from which good and evil are to be recognised, respectively, as behaviours that advance and abort radical possibilities. As such, he insists that a human being is not a body to be protected, but an agent of infinite potentiality whose irruptive expression calls her into being. If one is to think through the human being, he argues, then possibility must supersede refuge as one’s conceptual basis. From this premise, Badiou provides a startling new vision of ethical engagement as a positive, engaging enterprise.

With Badiou’s ethic in place, I turn to Slavoj Žižek’s exposition of systemic violence. By demonstrating that the ‘peaceful’ functioning of ‘ordinary’ political and representational systems often renders endemic violence imperceptible, Žižek rigorously interrogates the dichotomy between peace and violence. In the process, he allows one to reconsider the ‘peaceful’ context in which an agent begins to act, and so the ethical premises of transformative action. Most tellingly, Žižek contends that violence cannot but accompany a notionally post-political situation in which politics are emptied of their content and abandoned in favour of satisfied inertia. What he makes plain is that those who have been silenced, to say nothing of those who do not care to speak, are made the invisible constituents of a monologue that voices their ‘assent’ to that which stultifies them. Since this conditioned inertia is the antithesis of the transformative activity that Badiou advocates, the violence of which Žižek speaks is directed at the quintessential capacity that the former identifies. Quite simply, if Badiou adumbrates a new ethical terrain, then Žižek reveals how violence intrudes thereupon.

I conclude my theoretical constellation with the revolutionary thought of Paulo Freire, who agrees that the attainment of transformative agency is the fundamental human task, and that the ‘ordinary’ preventatives of creative expression are to be identified as species of violence. However, Freire goes beyond theory and responds to oppression with a radical pedagogy, replete with a sensitive understanding of how repression daily reproduces the psychological confines that sustain it. That is, he not only suggests how oppression might be overcome, but also provides insight into the psychic process that enables people to remake

their world. Accordingly, Freire's militant manifesto contributes to my theoretical approach to revolution, and bridges the gap between it and the literary representations of those who engage in revolutionary activity.

Having established my theoretical framework, I apply it to three depictions of revolution. Since I undertake to construct an aesthetic that affirms the creative character of revolution as well as revolutionaries, I have selected texts that portray acts of radical transformation. The first of these, Alejo Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of This World*, takes the Haitian Revolution as its focus. Here my unique conceptual structure allows me to resist the readings of the text that find it an inadequate representation of history, and which aver that it is a pessimistic denigration of the remarkable events that it illustrates. Because my purpose is to construct an aesthetic characterised by supplementation and excess, in which the unbidden supplementation of reality interrupts the 'ordinary' apprehension of all that 'should' be, I claim that the literature of revolution necessarily exceeds history. In other words, a representational mode that declares the immutable 'realism' and 'order' of the *status quo* is easily allied to violence, and thus tends peacefully to denigrate and exclude that which is other to its monological version of reality. Indeed, I argue, Carpentier uses magical realism to emulate and elucidate the revolutionary imperative to 'disbelieve reality.' I also maintain that his novel presents a way of representing revolution without stifling its radical excess. As such, I aim to offer a new reading of the novel, and one that does not decry its representational project.

Thereafter, I set out to read James McTeigue's film *V for Vendetta*, which has repeatedly been labelled a glorification of terrorist violence. What this unidirectional criticism makes plain is the need for a thoroughgoing analysis of how ethical agency and violence intersect in the film. Consequently, I demonstrate that revolutionary aggression does not simply rehearse the constricting violence to which it responds, and that it is able to restore the possibility of creative transformation which the latter denies. As such, my chapter on the film seeks to develop the conceptual vocabulary of violence that Žižek provides, which, in turn, enables me to discuss the interplay of violence and aggression that the text represents. Since *V for Vendetta* ends just as a revolution against oppression is triggered, it illustrates the process by which people unite in radical unity and interrupt the systematic violence that sustains a regime.

Where *V for Vendetta* is about resistance to a violently oppressive state, José Saramago's novel *Seeing* describes a notionally 'peaceful' capital city that is beset by the consequences of an 'unlawful' democratic ballot. Accordingly, he perfectly exposes the

violent expectations that underpin the institutions that purport to guarantee peace, and the raw force that is unleashed when these expectations are not performed into reality. What Saramago reveals is that state power requires that possibility be elided by uniformity in order to guarantee the endurance of that which is contingent. As I argue, the violence of expectation is twofold because it aborts possibilities in advance and conceals the latent violence that underwrites the conservation of power. Ironically, then, if one refuses the ‘peaceful’ performance of statist inertia in order to articulate the terms of true peace, one is cast as a ‘violent adversary’ of that which one seeks to make possible.

In sum, this project aims to make two contributions. By aligning and expounding the theories of Badiou, Žižek and Freire, I create a theoretical framework purposed to facilitate the critical reading of literature of revolution. That is, I set out to gather enabling terms that describe the existential and philosophical commitment to radical transformation, and thereby to adumbrate a language of revolution. Accordingly, I establish an aesthetic that is grounded in the possibility of radical transformation, and which identifies the human being as an agent of revolutionary creativity. Because this aesthetic explores the representations of those united by a belief in the possibility of change, it also has the potential to affect the reader, who necessarily possesses the defining capacity for creativity that animates those of whom she reads. From this conceptual standpoint, I am able to offer unique readings of the literature that I examine.

Finally, I should add that both *V for Vendetta* and *Seeing* have attracted almost no critical attention beyond brief media reviews, resulting in a critical gap that invites the thoroughgoing analyses offered by this project. Furthermore, very little critical material in English is available on *The Kingdom of This World* and *Seeing*. Accordingly, my study supplements existing commentary on all three works, and, in fact, presents the first close readings of the latter two. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis is also the first sustained assessment of the relevance of Badiou’s philosophy to the reading of literature.

Chapter 1: A Theoretical Approach to Revolutionary Creativity

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to align the thought of three radical theorists – Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek and Paulo Freire – so as to gain an understanding of the ethic of emancipatory action, as well as the complex role that language plays in both sustaining oppression and enabling liberation. In order fully to appreciate the radicalism of these theorists, it is necessary to provide a brief exposition of what might be called the ‘contemporary ethical orientation,’ that is, the understanding of ethical behaviour with which their thought breaks. While all three of these theorists explicitly and implicitly define the contours of an ethical approach, it is significant that the two most contemporary (Badiou and Žižek) both find it necessary to depart from the ‘ethic of the Other’ as espoused by Emmanuel Levinas.

As such, I begin with a brief account of Levinas’s ethical conception (which it is difficult to see as anything but a beautiful theory of responsibility). The question here concerns the ‘political fate’ of this ethic, against which Badiou and Žižek find it necessary to define themselves. Since it is the ‘political fate’ of this ethic that is at stake, I follow this exposition with a discussion of Simon Critchley’s thoughts on the fate of the Other, which provides the impetus for a rethinking of what it means to practise ethics in politics.

While there are numerous strong links and cross-pollinations among the theories of Badiou, Žižek and Freire, I situate them in relation to one another so as to move from the general to the particular. Through the works of Alain Badiou, I introduce a startling new account of ethics in general, wherein concepts such as Human Rights and alterity are curiously discarded in order to clear the way for a wholly new understanding of Good and Evil, the implications of which are especially provocative apropos of radical action. Having established a broad ethical framework, I then narrow the focus of the inquiry to the question of violence by referring to Slavoj Žižek’s commentary thereupon. Through this discussion I hope to provide an understanding of both the clandestine and overt operation of violence in society, its relationship with language, and, most radically, the question of whether an emancipatory movement which itself takes up violence simply participates in the very crime which it seeks to resist. Finally, I focus on the experience of oppression as a lived reality via a consideration of Paulo Freire’s deeply humanistic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire writes authoritatively on the psychological conditioning of oppressed and oppressor that a repressive political situation initiates and sustains. *Pedagogy* therefore enables a nuanced understanding

of how people are invaded and determined by culture, and of how this invasion may be undone and culture remade.

1.2 *Levinas*

Emmanuel Levinas centres his ethic on the notion of alterity, the ungraspable nature of the human Other. The Other's infinity of being exceeds one's faculties of comprehension, and thereby precludes one from locating it in knowledge. Since the Other cannot be conceived of, it cannot be represented – indeed, the attempt to apprehend it and achieve a “relationship of knowing” amounts to a totalising domination which destroys otherness (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 45). As it exists beyond the horizons of the knowable, the Other is encountered as a precious trace, which the ethical subject cannot but follow. Its excession of linguistic capability therefore means that it cannot be presented, that it is always elsewhere.

Nevertheless, it is precisely this excession that enables the human subject to encounter the Other immediately, that is face to face. “Face,” then, is the name Levinas gives to the “way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me,” (50). Put differently, the Other's face is the medium through which one encounters the immediate proximity of ineffable infinity. It is this disarming encounter that takes one hostage, and compels one ethically to pledge oneself to the Other, “whose exceptional presence is inscribed in the ethical impossibility of killing him in which I stand,” and whose appearance “marks the end of powers.” As Levinas adds, “If I can no longer have power over him it is because he overflows absolutely every *idea* I can have of him” (87). In meeting the Other, to which one is subjected, the only course of action is to assume infinite ethical responsibility for it.

In short, Levinas's ethic insists upon the primacy of the Other, who interrupts one's conceptual framework and the autonomy on which one's agency is premised. The philosopher describes, beautifully so, an ethical stance attendant upon self-negation. Importantly, in terms of my discussion, this conception of ethics is premised on an irreducible tension, as opposed to dialectic, between the ethical and political administered world of the ‘Same.’ Levinas resists what he refers to as the self-assured “imperialism of the same” (“Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity” 50), in which the subject is ‘for itself,’ a conception that fixes all else in relation to the self as ‘prime.’ But, in knowing or representing itself, “it possesses itself, dominates itself, extends its identity to what of itself comes to refute this identity” (*Totality and Infinity* 87). For Levinas, the notion of the Same is thus fundamentally opposed to the Other, and to approach another person as the Same is to perform the violent

antithesis of ethical behaviour. What this chapter seeks to articulate is, by contrast, an ethical philosophy which resurrects the Same, showing it to foster both a deep ethical commitment and a uniquely enabling basis for political engagement. As such, the nature of Levinasian ethical openness – as well as the movement from Levinasian ethics to political activity – needs to be discussed and problematised.

1.3 *Critchley's Critique of Levinasian Politics*

Simon Critchley describes Levinas's ethic as "terribly compromised by his conception of politics" (*Five Problems* 172). There exists a necessary progression from ethical abstraction to political activity, which is to say from thought to action, and to Critchley's mind Levinas navigates the passage "too traditionally, too narrowly, too abstractly" (173). While Critchley identifies five areas of contention in this regard, I shall discuss only those three which are germane to my purposes in this study, namely: fraternity, monotheism, and the state of Israel.

The first of these contentions alludes to Levinas's repeated use of the term *fraternity*, which, according to Critchley, reveals "the utterly classical politics of friendship [. . .] which underpins Levinas' work" (173). Levinas describes the Other as "from the first the brother to all the other men," signifying that, "at the level of politics, the ethical relation is translated into what I would see as a classical conception of political friendship as fraternity, as a relation between brothers, between free equals who also happen to be male" (174). The infinite scope and nature of both the Other's appearance and the relationship compelled thereby is thus given a definite limit, and the conceptually infinite distance invoked by otherness is practically collapsed to the stone's throw between familiars. In short, how other is the Other, and does this ethic function if the Other is more other than fraternity implies?

One means of ensuring the ethical purchase of the Other is through the use of God as an absolute guarantor. According to Critchley, this is precisely what Levinas seeks to achieve: "the universality of fraternity is ensured through the passage to God, which incidentally recalls the classical Christian, essentially Augustinian, conception of friendship" (174). Critchley goes on to say that "the Christian has friends only insofar as that friendship is mediated through the presence of God, which means that all humanity is my friend and no one is my enemy – such is, for Carl Schmitt, the essentially depoliticising logic of Christianity" (174). What concerns Critchley is the alleged necessity of routing the ethical relation through a theological mechanism which risks being wholly outside the worldly encounter with another person. Depoliticisation is the key term here, and it signifies a lack of

engagement with what is; a programme of directing the self towards the hereafter rather than the present. If there can be no conception, or representation of the Other, what can the ethical subject do but have faith? Conversely, what happens if the Other appears, but one simply does not believe? The danger of this line of thought is that it imprisons the ethical subject within an “‘unrelating relation’ which no one can encompass or thematise” (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 295). Seen thus, the subject is set down in a crystal palace, and dares not act for fear of unwittingly destroying an invaluable entity of which she can have no enabling knowledge. Potentially at least, Levinas’s notion of the Other fails to translate from a mystical concept into a workable, liveable one, and as such risks contributing to the disabling obfuscation of real political engagement.

Finally, otherness’s difficult translation from theory into practice is captured in what Critchley calls “the *political fate* of Levinasian ethics, namely the vexed question of Israel” (*Five Problems* 175). Critchley argues that it is important to bear in mind the status that Levinas affords this state: “Israel is the name for any people, Levinas insists, any people that has submitted to the Law, non-Jewish as well as Jewish” (qtd. in *Five Problems* 175). The problem with this argument is that it risks equating “the nonplace of the ethical relation to the other” with “the place of Israel’s borders.” In effect, then, Israel becomes both the place of realisation of Levinas’s ethic, and a closed fraternity which deals viciously with those outside it. Critchley’s suspicion of “this double function, this *glissement de sens*, with regard to Israel,” leads him to wonder why “Levinas did not feel able to condemn the murder of Palestinians in the camps of Sabra and Shatila? Is that [also] why Levinas said that in alterity I also find an enemy?” (175).

Further, Critchley cites Levinas’s careless statement, “I often say, although it is a dangerous thing to say publicly, that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest – all the exotic – is dance” (qtd. in *Five Problems* 176). Such exclusionary statements render difficult the idea that the Other, in visiting himself upon me, compels ethical responsibility. Moreover, if I regard the Other – who utterly exceeds my comprehension – as an enemy, then it would seem that I regard him as an enemy *ipso facto*, and so establish an ‘innate’ enmity without any examinable preconditions. If I find the Other to be my enemy, then this is an enemy who exceeds my conceptual grasp, meaning that there is no internal process of ‘making-enemy’ which I can interrogate and find false. The risk is that I encounter precisely that which a repressive and divisive political state would visit upon me: an absolute enemy.

In sum, Critchley wishes to avoid the potentially disabling movement of ethical interaction through ungraspable non-relation, and the attendant risk of making it impossible to conceive of people as united agents of ethical action. He adumbrates a solution in linking “what Levinas sees already in *Totality and Infinity* as ‘the anarchy essential to multiplicity’ to the multiplicity that is essential to politics” (qtd. in *Five Problems* 183). Thinking people as this powerful, interruptive multiplicity is the first premise of a politically effective ethic. And, while a great deal of examination and deliberation must precede and accompany any sound political action, it does not seem that people could easily become this great multiplicity without at some point casting off the radical doubt that seems attendant upon the unknowable Other.

Quite simply, Critchley is not convinced that the Other, as an ethical injunction, invests people with (or even permits) the *power* to enact radical transformation and thus, in some sense, to destroy what is. Whereas Levinas’s ethic risks entombing the ethical subject within structures that she dares not act upon, Critchley calls for a vigorous investigation of existent structures, which eschews the statist exclamation: ‘you will ruin everything!’ That is, the latter invites one to rethink “ethics as an anarchic, metapolitical disturbance of the antipolitical order of the police,” and thereby to break with the disabling tradition of reducing the political to the social, of “*la politique*” to “*la police*” (182). The tradition in question is that in which people are ‘ordered’ according to their prescribed social function, and thereby distanced from their ‘potential selves’ as transformative agents.

Unsurprisingly, as Critchley puts it, “[w]hat such a tradition of political thinking fears most is the people, the radical manifestation of the people, the people not as *das Volk* or *le people* shaped by the state, but as *die Leute*, or *les gens*, the people in their irreducible plurality” (183). At stake here is the ethical ‘permissibility’ of radical collective mobilization required for people to break through the limits of their situations. Accordingly, Critchley identifies the need for a radical politics which continuously impels creative inventions within the political realm by disrupting depoliticising ‘order.’ This politics should espouse an ethic that is able to respond to “the utter singularity of a particular and inexhaustible context” (174), rather than ethics in general. Instead of accommodating themselves to a few vast ethical norms, people must possess both the responsibility of deciding what must be done in *this* lived situation, and the freedom to act upon the situation as ethical agents. If real transformation always ‘destroys’ the old, then creative destruction cannot constitute an *ipso facto* ethical wrong. In short, Critchley argues that radical action must not be precluded from the realm of ethical behaviour, and so a people’s radical remaking of their world cannot be

disregarded as illegitimate. It follows that such an enabling politics would centre on the question of the *demos*, the people:

Who are the people? They are not the alleged unity of a race, the citizens of a nation-state, the members of a specific class like the proletariat, or indeed the members of a specific community defined by religion, ethnicity, or whatever. The people cannot be identified and policed by any territorializing term. Rather the people is that empty space, that supplement that exceeds any social quantification or accounting. The people are those who do not count.

(*Five Problems* 183)

Such a radical theory is found by Critchley in the writing of Alain Badiou, whose work provides a necessary departure from the ‘deconstructive’ tradition of contemporary philosophy. According to Critchley, contemporary philosophy is characterised by

a sense of frustration and fatigue with a whole range of theoretical paradigms: paradigms having been exhausted, paradigms having been led into a *cul-de-sac*, of making promises that they didn’t keep or of simply giving some apocalyptic elucidation to our sense of imprisonment.

(“Terrible Situation” 3)

Against this grain, “Badiou’s work is something very different. [. . .] It is overwhelmingly conceptually creative and also enabling and empowering” (Critchley “Terrible Situation” 3-4).

1.4.1 *Foundations of Badiou’s Ethic*

Badiou explicitly breaks with the “contemporary ethical orientation” (*Ethics* 7), which he sees as tied to a vapid moralism that fixates upon the primacy of evil. In his view, this orientation posits “a general human subject, such that whatever evil befalls him is universally identifiable” (7). The implication is that Good derives from Evil, so that banishment, not creation, becomes the core ethical edict. In terms of Badiou’s critique, by way of example, all-important Human Rights are no more than banal “rights to [corporeal] non-Evil” (9). What compels Badiou’s departure from the ethic of Human Rights is its reduction of humanity to the assaulted body, in which “the status of victim, of suffering beast, of emaciated, dying body, equates man with his animal substructure,” and so “reduces him to the level of a living organism pure and simple (life being, as Bichat says, nothing other than ‘the set of functions which resist death’)” (qtd. in Badiou *Ethics* 11). In Badiou’s estimation, the right to survival, while no doubt crucial, is not the site of a compelling ethic – it is not a

point of origin which enables one to conceive of a human being as an agent of radical creativity. To invoke the proverbial distinction between living and being alive, there is more to human existence than corporeal adequacy.

Consequently, to think a human being in terms of a body to be safeguarded, instead of as a creature of transformative possibility, is to foreclose the imaginative enterprise of bringing new ways of being into existence, the very enterprise towards which Critchley urges one. In effect, to declare that not-death is the most important right, in terms of what needs to be *pursued*, is to declare the end of humankind's continuous self-invention, an invention which is possible only because a human individual, although capable of being reduced to a body, has the ability to exceed physicality. Accordingly, Badiou urges one to think of ethics as more than corporeal security.

To be sure, humanity is an animal species. It is mortal and predatory. But neither of these attributes can distinguish humanity within the world of the living. In his role as executioner, man is an animal abjection, but we must have the courage to add that in his role as victim, he is generally worth little more. The stories told by survivors of torture forcefully underline the point: if the torturers and bureaucrats of the dungeons and the camps are able to treat their victims like animals destined for the slaughterhouse [. . .] it is because the victims have indeed become such animals. What had to be done for this to happen has indeed been done. That some nevertheless remain human beings, and testify to that effect, is a confirmed fact. But this is always achieved precisely through enormous effort, an effort acknowledged by witnesses (in whom it excites a radiant recognition) as an almost incomprehensible resistance on the part of that which, in them, does not coincide with the identity of victim. This is where we are to find Man, if we are determined to think him [*le penser*]: in what ensures, as Varlam Shalamov puts in his *Stories of Life in the Camps*, that we are dealing with an animal whose resistance, unlike that of a horse, lies not in his fragile body but in his stubborn determination to remain what he is – that is to say, precisely something other than a victim, other than a being-for-death, and thus: *something other than a mortal being*.

(11-12)

The recognition of an 'Im-mortal' is the premise which enables Badiou's new conception of humanity. For him, the human being is unique in its ability to privilege a cause or idea above the pursuit of its ordinary, self-preservative interests. Badiouian Im-mortality therefore requires one to break from mortal, passively self-interested inaction, and to dedicate oneself to a radically creative process that exceeds, or even imperils, one's ordinary interests. Immortality is achieved in the disruptive movement from inert satisfaction with what is, a status that Badiou equates with mortal animalism, to the visionary pursuit of what could be. That is, a person's Immortality is affirmed at "the instant in which he affirms himself as someone who runs counter to the temptation of wanting-to-be-an-animal to which circumstances may expose him" (12). Becoming Immortal means acting in a way that

radically decentres the self; and, insofar as it compels one to exceed the comforting range of possibilities defined by the *status quo*, it means acting in spite of oneself in order to determine, rather than be determined by, one's situation.

Despite the radical demand placed upon the subject, "we know that every human being is *capable* of being this Immortal – unpredictably, be it in circumstances great or small" (12). What Badiou asserts is the essential character of the human being as an agent of infinite transformation, which he summarises in his assertion "that Man *thinks*, that Man is a tissue of truths" (12). By contrast, if individuals concern themselves only with mopping up the *a priori* evil which contemporary ethics identifies from atop static structures, how is transformation to be identified as an essential human good, and accorded ethical purchase? To Badiou's mind, contemporary notions of ethical behaviour are distanced from imaginative engagement, with the result that "the price paid by ethics is a stodgy conservatism," which "prohibits every broad, positive vision of possibilities" (14). This ethic is a function of totalised satisfaction, of *I know*. But the human being, "as Immortal, is sustained by the incalculable and the un-possessioned"; meaning that creative activity, the ongoing invention and discovery of new forms of human experience, is "sustained by non-being," by the world yet to come (14).

So, Badiou's founding proposition is that humanity is a species of creation and possibility, which means that true ethics begins as a person's imaginative contemplation of living another way. Therefore, "to forbid him to imagine the Good, to devote his collective powers to it, to work towards the realisation of unknown possibilities, to think what might be in terms that break radically with what is, is quite simply to forbid him humanity as such" (14). Far from the banal right not to be assaulted, it is the right to creation which fundamentally defines the human condition. It is this new conception of ethical possibility which leads Badiou to posit the resurrection of sameness as an ethical ideal, and thereby to suggest a unifying and empowering notion of ethical activity.

1.4.2 *The Return to Sameness*

With the capacity for Immortality established as the quintessential human facility, Badiou explains how this capacity induces ethical relations between subjects. His argument is that the possibility of Immortality unites individuals in collective pursuits from which no one is excluded, and so Immortality arouses a shared inner faculty that convokes sameness.

In brief, sameness means that the category of the Other does not exist. By collapsing this dominant category, Badiou both clears the way for a new ethical statement and reacts against the state of current ethical discourse. As Critchley implies, Levinas's ethic is vulnerable to distortion: the impossibility of grasping alterity means that an ethic founded thereon always risks descending into vapidness. For Levinas's ethic to function, Badiou argues, the Other's face "must attest to a radical alterity which he nevertheless does not contain by himself" (22). Badiou's concern is that Levinas's ethic "requires that the Other be *carried by a principle of alterity* which transcends mere finite experience" (22). Like Critchley, Badiou sees the Other as guaranteed by "the 'Altogether-Other', and it is quite obviously the ethical name for God" (22).

In addition, Badiou departs from the premise of alterity precisely because it has itself been distanced from ethical responsibility. The Other has, in Badiou's evaluation, become a term which guarantees distance between people, and allows them to move 'respectfully' past one another without encountering an ethical injunction. Responsibility for the Other has been translated into 'respect for difference,' touting as its ideal "'tolerance', which consists of not being offended by the fact that others think and act differently from you" (20). The problem is that the distinction between cultural difference (ordinary pluralism) and radical difference (which compels ethical responsibility) has been eroded, collapsing the latter into the former. "The problem," per Badiou's understanding, "is that the 'respect for differences' and the ethics of human rights do seem to define an *identity*," and so the former "applies only to those differences that are reasonably consistent with that identity" (24).

Badiou's argument here is that difference has become a culturally loaded term, one that operates in dialectical relationship with 'tolerance,' and so constructs a tolerant 'us' and a different 'them.' The divisive relation between self and other 'prepares' one for the potentially affective encounter with radical difference precisely by rendering one highly aware of cultural difference and the need to be tolerant of it. Consequently, the (in)tolerant fixation upon banal difference effectively obfuscates real engagement among people, and forecloses the affective dimension of interpersonal encounters. One then has what Badiou calls the "right to difference" (20), which really means the entitlement to hold other people at a 'respectful' distance. Ironically, then, an 'ethical' awareness of difference becomes the very means by which to exclude people. Like Critchley, Badiou is disquieted by the notion of an encounter between the subject of an ethic founded in alterity and a person who is physically, culturally, and politically beyond the modest limits of the *good Other* (24).

The concern here is that the legacy of Levinas's ethic is the investment of superficial difference with great importance, such that the intolerant but 'respectful' recognition of difference becomes the locus of ethics. And yet, this activity necessarily inscribes divisive barriers which the very notion of ethical 'respect' has no guarantee of dissolving. What this notional respect craves is integration, so that everyone is included, so that the Other becomes worthy of respect precisely by *suppressing* its difference (24). Respect for difference is therefore the demand for various forms of superficial uniformity. Moreover, this false 'engagement' proclaims transcendentalism where only the trite exists, and so does not *move* people to any worthwhile action. Since alterity requires the power of infinity to decentre, disarm and compel the person who encounters it, we need thoroughly to interrogate this infinity.

For Badiou, encountering infinite cultural difference (the locus of contemporary ethics) is the most basic fact of experiencing the modern world. As a consequence, he articulates a startling ethical claim:

Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there 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, and Rimbaud was certainly not wrong when he said: 'I am another.' There are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself. As many, but also, then, *neither more nor less*.

(25-26)

Our task is to recognise that "these differences hold no interest for thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind" (26). To predicate ethics here is to fall into "culturalism, in truth a tourist's fascination for the diversity of morals, customs and beliefs" (26). As such, "the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned. For the real question – and it is an extraordinarily difficult one – is much more that of *recognising the Same*" (25). Badiou's counter-principle is this: "since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so then differences are precisely what truths depose, or render insignificant.[. . .] Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*" (27).

At this point, I want to approach the Same in two distinct (though ultimately almost identical) ways. Quite simply, the Same is the most basic fact of human existence, a fact which becomes obscured as one takes up a position amongst reified systems of difference. The ethical task then becomes to see through imputed layers of (banal) division, and to

recognise this sameness. In Badiou's ethic, the Same "is not what is," that is, "the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what *comes to be*" through the experience that "a truth is *the same for all*" (27). So sameness (not difference) is the *true* basic fact of humanity, a fact of which we become aware through "our [collective] capacity for truth – our capacity to be that 'same' that a truth convokes to its own 'sameness'" (28). Most importantly, a truth unites individuals by bringing them into a collective endeavour. Instead of an ethical subject taking responsibility for a pitiable Other, what sameness achieves is the communion of people working together, and thus moving side-by-side into the new world which their labour produces.

So it is through the pursuit of a truth that we become the Immortal, possessed by the quintessential human spirit of possibility and creation, and are thus brought to an unshakable recognition of sameness. But what *precisely* is a truth, and moreover how does Badiou situate it within an ethical framework?

1.4.3 *Being, Event, Subject, Fidelity, Truth*

In Badiou's estimation, the human animal is 'at rest' in the ordinary mortal situation, and concerned only with prosaic needs and wants: an animal which "gets by as best it can" (41). This state is radically disrupted by an experience which cannot "be reduced to its ordinary inscription in 'what there is,'" and so challenges the individual to rethink the parameters of the situation and her being therein (41). The individual, as an 'ordinary multiple' within the situation, is thus convoked to enter into the composition of a *subject*: "everything he is – his body, his abilities – is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path" (40). This radical happening which disrupts an ordinary multiple's relation to its situation is called an event. An event is a supplementary experience that exposes the ordinary individual to radical new possibilities, and new ways of being, that simply do not exist within the current situation. Badiou cites as examples of such experience: "The French Revolution of 1792 [. . .] Galileo's creation of physics [. . .] a personal amorous passion, the creation of Topos theory by the mathematician Grothendieck, the invention of the twelve-tone scale by Schoenberg..." (41).

Crucially, an event appears briefly and then disappears. It is a flash of 'something else' which announces that things could in fact be very different, and having done so, leaves the individual to her own devices. In effect, an event is a vision of the world as it could be, as it is not yet, which compels the individual to creative activity. A subject's labour could thus

be described as the task of bringing the radical fiction to which she has been exposed into actuality.

So, an event convokes an ordinary individual to seek to become an (Immortal) subject through the pursuit of a truth. This pursuit stems from “the decision to relate henceforth to the situation *from the perspective of its eventual supplement*” (41), an underlying commitment which Badiou calls fidelity. Fidelity to an event thus means that the individual must

move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by *thinking* (although all thought is a practice, a putting to the test) the situation ‘according to’ the event. And this, of course – since the event was excluded by all the regular laws of the situation – compels the subject to *invent* a new way of being and acting in the situation [. . .] An eventual fidelity is a real break (both thought and practised) in the specific order within which the event took place (be it political, loving, artistic or scientific) [. . .].
(41-42)

A truth, then, is what fidelity to an eventual break “*produces* in the situation” (42). It is the effect of which the compelled subject’s labouring fidelity is the cause. Badiou calls a truth an *immanent break*: “‘Immanent’ because a truth proceeds *in* the situation, and nowhere else – there is no heaven of truths,” and a ‘break’ because “what enabled the truth-process – the event – meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation” (42-43).

The ethical subject is the bearer of fidelity, one who seeks to produce a truth within a particular situation. It is then important that this subject “in no way pre-exists the process” of eventual fidelity – “[h]e is absolutely nonexistent in the situation ‘before’ the event” – and thus “the process of a truth *induces* a subject” (43). Crucially, Badiou’s subject is neither reducible to the psychological subject, nor congruent with either Descartes’ reflexive subject, or Kant’s transcendental subject (43). What one has is a subject in excess of the determinable preconditions of her actions: in brief, she becomes that which defies her reality’s governance.

Badiou eschews the notion that the subject’s actions might be reducible to the determinism of the ‘ordinary’ situation, and so resists ‘historicisation’ of the event by the state-of-the-situation.¹ It is important to Badiou that a true event is entirely supplementary, announcing something which cannot be inscribed within what already is, and which mandates that the subject cannot pre-exist the event. For instance, the subject of a loving encounter “is *not* the ‘loving’ subject described by the classical moralists” (43). Whereas the

¹ Badiou’s state-of-the-situation deliberately invokes and challenges both the existent situation and the political State as guarantor of ‘stability.’

‘ordinary situation’ would subsume this event under the “logic of passion,” that of which Badiou speaks “has no ‘natural’ pre-existence. The lovers as such enter into the composition of *one* loving subject, who *exceeds* them both” (43). Similarly, “the subject of a revolutionary politics is not the individual militant,” but rather “a singular production, which has taken different names (sometimes ‘Party’, sometimes not)” (43), and which exceeds those who bear its labour.

It is in the fidelity to excess that these partisans are propelled into what Badiou would call the Immortality of radical human creation. With this understanding – that an event compels an ordinary individual to divest herself of fixture within the governing state-of-the-situation in order to pursue fidelity to a truth – it becomes possible to elucidate a general ethic to guide the induced subject.

1.4.4 *The Ethic of Truths*

What makes Badiou’s philosophy so enabling is his ethical maxim, that is, “*keep going!*” (*Ethics* 52). If transformative action is an imperative, then Badiouian ethical behaviour is that which “enables the continuation of a truth-process,” or, “to be more precise and complex, *that which lends consistency to the presence of some-one in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth*” (*Ethics* 44). The key concepts here are the “some-one,” who is “consistent.” Badiou uses the term “some-one” to indicate the simultaneity of the mortal and Immortal selves. Some-one thus indicates that ordinary mortality and radical immortality necessarily cohabit, a condition that finds expression in

this spectator whose thinking has been set in motion, who has been seized and bewildered by a burst of theatrical fire, and who thus enters into the complex configuration of a moment of art. Or this assiduous student of a mathematical problem [. . .] at the precise moment enlightened by its solution. [. . .] Or this militant who manages, at the end of a complicated meeting, to find the simple words to express the hitherto elusive statement which, everyone agrees, declares what must be pursued in the situation.

(45)

Again, this some-one is at once himself, what Badiou has already called the basic human substructure, and in excess of himself, “because the uncertain course of fidelity *passes through him*” (45). Fidelity to a truth is therefore a radical and predictable becoming, since the ordinary, unwary multiple is not “in a position *to know that he was capable of this co-belonging to a situation and to the hazardous course of a truth, this becoming-subject*” (46). In

the most profound sense, then, “[t]o enter into the composition of a subject of truth can only be something that *happens to you*” (51).

The second aspect of Badiou’s ethical formulation, consistency, stems from this “*law of the not-known*” (46). Since ethical consistency vests in the act of sustaining the break with the situation and persevering against that which would undo the subject’s fidelity and so abort the production of a truth, the injunction at hand is simply “do not give up on that part of yourself that you do not know” (47). Ethical consistency means believing in oneself, even as one takes up the thoroughly unfamiliar “ordeal” of finding oneself in excess of both the familiar self and one’s society, while still embedded in both (47). The experience of consistency is thus a mediation of the ordinary and that which exceeds the ordinary.

One must therefore find a means of “*linking*” the ordinary situation, in which one is inevitably embedded, to the fictional scenario that the event visits upon the subject, in such a way that the situation is drawn towards the supplementary fiction (47). Instead of shying away from the interruptive ability which the subject finds herself to be possessed of, Badiou’s imperative is to “[d]o all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you” (47).

While the methodology of this undertaking will vary according to the attributes of the some-one, the underlying principle remains to *oppose the suppression of the not-known*. And so Badiou’s ethic is founded on the tension between, on the one hand, a person’s quelling submersion in the ordinary, “his belonging to the situation, or what we might call the *principle of interest*,” and, on the other, “consistency, the linking of the known by the not-known,” according to which the labouring individual exceeds himself and so acts upon the situation that seeks to (re)produce and delimit static subjects (*Ethics* 48)

Therefore, as an ethical subject in the grip of an event, I discover that “[a]ll my capacity for interest, which is my own perseverance in being, has *poured out* into the future consequences” (50) of pursuing a truth. In order to maintain such a radical stance, it is necessary to keep the event ‘alive’ within the subject, until (through fidelity) it enters the situation as a truth. Because an event announces a new way of being, to which the subject must be faithful, “Never forget what you have encountered” is Badiou’s adjuration (52). But this holding-to is not a function of memory or nostalgia; it is a futural commitment to a new way of being that “consists of thinking and practising” the self “according to the Immortal which it holds” (52). The experience of ethical consistency is therefore a continuous encounter with the adversity of continuing ‘life by other means,’ and so, whether by “the sleepless fury of a thought, or [. . .] some radical political engagement [that] proves

incompatible with every immediate principle of interest [. . .] I find myself compelled to measure life, my life as a socialised human animal, against something other than itself” (60). This state of ongoing ‘disruption’ is what Badiou terms the Good.

Yet, having formulated powerful, enabling ethical concepts which deliberately depart from “the impotent morality of human rights” (71), Badiou must carefully navigate the question of Evil, and provide adequate tools by which to recognise his version thereof. It is important to bear in mind that Badiou’s Good, from which Evil is derived, and never vice versa, “exclusively concerns the rare existence of truth-processes” (60). Put otherwise, it is only the seizure by an event and the pursuit of a truth which elevates the human animal to a height at which actions enter the realm of Good and Evil. The human being ‘at rest’ is simply beneath these categories. In order to approach the question of Good and Evil, though, it is first necessary to understand what compels an event, and how the radical power of a truth operates.

1.4.5 The Void, Truth and Knowledge

From what I have said, it should be clear that an event both occurs within a given situation, and explodes the established knowledges that make sense thereof. It is both situated and supplementary (68). From the perspective of the situation, an event is a happening which forces a radical reconfiguration of that which it supplements precisely because it is illegible according to its rules. Such a profound refashioning of a situation by a truth is enabled by what Badiou terms the void inherent to every situation. A situation is comprised of ordinary (“stable”) multiples, that, in their formation, present a structured “plenitude” that will always have, at its core, a “‘situated’ void” (68), in much the same way as a galaxy might be anchored by the force of a black hole. An event then “names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation” (69). For example:

Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name ‘proletariat’, the central void of early bourgeois societies. For the proletariat – being entirely dispossessed, and absent from the political stage – is that around which is organised the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital.

(69)

Put differently, the void is that which readily exists within the situation, but is not ‘accounted for’ within it. Whether the void is unconsciously repressed or simply undiscovered, its revelation changes the conceptual parameters of the situation. In announcing the

incompletion of the situation, an event paves the way for the coming of a truth, which not only “punches a ‘hole’ in knowledges,” but “is also the sole known source of new knowledges.” As Badiou adds, “a truth *forces* knowledges,” and so “reworks that sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning” (70).

Further, in Adrian Johnston’s estimation, a truth intervenes in the situation’s transcendental regime, which is “the framework, always tied to a particular world,” that “determines the distribution of assigned degrees of existence to [. . .] entities enveloped by this worldly scaffolding” (*Political Transformations* 24). Precisely because a truth renders present that which the transcendental regime cannot account for, the radical appearance of a void propels the unacknowledged into existence and so shakes up existent determinations as to who and what counts. In other words, the power of a truth comes from its ability to disorganise and then *reorganise* the situation in which it detonates (80).

Unsurprisingly, then, it is in language that a truth finds the locus of its power. A truth passes through the established “language of the situation,” which underwrites “the pragmatic possibility of naming the elements that compose it,” and re-examines these elements “*from the perspective of the event*” (81). As a consequence, “a truth *changes the names* of the elements in the situation” (82). The implication is that, alongside a ‘some-one’ who is simultaneously part of the situation and engaged in a radical departure therefrom, there must exist, “in addition to the language of the objective situation [. . .] a subject-language [. . .] which enables the inscription of truth” (82). Because of this dual signification, “[t]he language of a declaration of love may be very banal indeed (‘I love you’, for example), but its *power* in the situation is entirely distinct from the common usage of these same words” (82). Put differently, words have an ‘ordinary’ usage, which Badiou would equate with the realm of opinions, but are capable of being ‘possessed’ by an event and imbued with the transformative power of a truth. This “contact with the subject-language” (83) is what forces the established referents within a situation to change, and so the language of a truth-procedure enables the symbolic intervention that an event mandates.

1.4.6.1 Evil in the Ethic of Truths: Simulacrum and Betrayal

Having established that Badiouian Good occurs when Immortal subjects arise in response to events and carry out supplementary labours, it is now possible to locate Evil within Badiou’s ethic. For my purposes, it suffices to discuss only two ways in which the Good is subverted.

The first of these, a simulacrum, is a false event which founds violent division. For Badiou, “[w]hat allows a genuine event to be at the origin of a truth – which is the only thing that can be for all, and can be eternally – is precisely the fact that it relates to the particularity of a situation only from the bias of its void” (73). An event’s address does not discriminate between individuals, as it explodes out of the in-existent, out of that which exceeds society’s capacity for division, and therefore “neither excludes nor constrains anyone” (73). By contrast, a simulacrum is the pernicious counterfeit of an event, and serves conservative violence rather than creative sameness.

The danger of a simulacrum is that it directs itself not towards the void and so the world to come, but instead towards the “plenitude,” the “‘full’ particularity or presumed substance” of the situation (72). Therefore, while the simulacrum manifests as a break within a situation, it is not a form of creation, and thus incapable of producing truths (73). Where the force of an event is spent in the labour of bringing something into existence, the force arrogated by a simulacrum will be expended upon the existent situation. This is why the counterfeit event will almost certainly bring about violence and atrocity. The example to which Badiou often returns is that of Nazi Germany, specifically the ‘National Socialist revolution,’ and the horrors committed under the banner of this hideous simulacrum.

First of all, Badiou claims, one must recognise that “[n]obody desired the being-together of the German people more than Hitler” (65). Nazism was a false rallying call, a summons to action that was not universally addressed, and served to ‘unite’ Germany around the image of the Aryan subject as constructed against the figure of the Jew. Instead of a void, the Nazi simulacrum named the readily existent Jewish people as its eventual ‘discovery.’ Nazi ‘unity,’ “the [Aryan] space of a being-together,” required an enemy to convoke its false togetherness, and thus required the “construction of an exterior that could be monitored from the interior” (65).

What is critical to realise is the efficacy of the counterfeit, which is rendered possible because:

all the formal traits of a truth are at work in the simulacrum. Not only a universal nomination of the event, inducing the power of a radical break, but also the ‘obligation’ of a fidelity, and the promotion of a *simulacrum of the subject*, erected – without the advent of any Immortal – above the human animality of the others, of those who are arbitrarily declared not to belong to the communitarian substance whose promotion and domination the simulacrum-event is designed to assure.

(74)

That is, the twisted fidelity of a simulacrum induces labour not by “the universality of the void, but by the closed particularity of an abstract set (the ‘Germans’ or the ‘Aryans’)” (74). In short, the subject of a simulacrum labours towards “the unending construction of this set,” a task of violence which requires “‘voiding’ what surrounds” the false interior (74). From the empowered standpoint of this hyper-inscribed set, “what is addressed ‘to everyone,’” the others, the ‘enemies’ against whom the self-affirming plenitude construct themselves, “is death, or that deferred form of death which is slavery in the service of the German substance” (74). In effect, the Nazis were trying to create a void which would anchor their insubstantial ‘essence,’ a ‘nothing’ which their crimes would bring into existence by destroying what (that is, who) was. It is precisely the attempt to ‘create’ such a void which marks the site of Evil.

However, even as one begins to speak of the possibility of overcoming situations of atrocity and oppression through eventual fidelity, the counterfeit is quick in its attempt to clone the radical nature of a subject’s labour. For the very “fidelity to an authentic event names the adversaries of its perseverance,” and thus “the ethic of truths is always more or less militant, combative” (75). It is “the struggle against all sorts of efforts at interruption, at corruption, at the return to the immediate interests of the human animal, at the humiliation and repression of the Immortal who arises as subject” (75). Another of Badiou’s startling breaks with the ethic of ‘human rights’ is therefore that the ethic of truths names enemies.

Crucially, though, the simulacrum and the ethic of truths conceive of and act towards their stated enemies in vastly differing ways. It is worth quoting Badiou at length in this regard:

For however hostile to a truth he might be, in the ethic of truths every ‘some-one’ is always represented as capable of becoming the Immortal that he is. So we may fight against the judgements and opinions he exchanges with others for the purpose of corrupting every fidelity, but not against his *person* – which, under the circumstances, is insignificant, and to which, in any case, every truth is ultimately addressed. By contrast, the void with which those who are faithful to a simulacrum strive to surround its alleged substance must be a real void, obtained by cutting into the flesh itself. And since it is not the subjective advent of the Immortal, so fidelity to the simulacrum – that appalling imitation of truths – presumes nothing more about those they designate as the enemy than their strictly particular existence as human animals. It is thus this existence that will have to bear the return of the void. This is why the exercise of fidelity to a simulacrum is necessarily the exercise of terror. Understand by terror, here, not the political concept of Terror [. . .] but the simple reduction of all to their being-for-death. Terror thus conceived really postulates that in order to let [the] substance be, *nothing* must be.

(76-77)

In sum, a simulacrum proposes a false, destructive event that unites counterfeit subjects in a task of violence directed at arbitrarily designated members of the ordinary plenitude. Because

of these necrotic premises, a simulacrum is the chilling antithesis of the true event's universal call to creative purpose. This, then, is Badiou's first and most dire conception of Evil. As he puts it, "Evil is the process of a simulacrum of truth. And in its essence, under a name of its invention, its terror is directed at everyone" (77).

1.4.6.2 Betrayal

The second nomination of Badiouian Evil occurs in the breakdown of fidelity. Its basis is the crisis of the 'some-one' who takes up the hazardous course of being faithful to an event. Because an event engages the universal facility of Immortality, Badiou claims that "[e]veryone is familiar with the moments of crisis faced by a lover, a researcher's discouragement, a militant's lassitude, an artist's sterility" (78). What is at stake is the collapse of the subject, and thus the reversion of the 'some-one' to uninterrupted ordinary interest. In short, betrayal is the abdication of the composition of the Immortal. This is precisely what the ethic of truth's maxim – *keep going!* attempts to stave off.

In addition, Badiou insightfully notes that betrayal of a truth is not mere renunciation, but obliteration, since "[t]he denial of the Immortal in myself is something quite different from an abandonment, a cessation: I must always convince myself that the Immortal in question *never existed*" (79). In other words, as long as one gives recognition to the existence of an Immortal facility, one will be compelled to resume fidelity. In order to negate this summons to action "I must become the enemy of that truth whose subject the 'some-one' that I am (accompanied, perhaps, by others) composed" (79). The need to oppose a truth-procedure in order to break from its grasp, Badiou observes, is vindicated by reality: it explains "why former revolutionaries are obliged to declare that they used to be lost in error and madness, why a former lover no longer understands why he loved that woman, why a tired scientist comes to misunderstand, and to frustrate through bureaucratic routine, the very development of his own science" (79-80). The Evil of betrayal therefore manifests as a resignation to mortality and a "return to the 'service of goods'" (80); that is, it extinguishes the personal consequences of the event and marks a retreat into the plenitude of the situation.

1.4.7 Triggering and Resurrecting Events: Johnston's Commentary on Badiou

As regards pragmatism of radical theory, Adrian Johnston's concern is that "Badiou and Žižek tend to favour models of change that risk discouraging in advance precisely the sorts of

efforts at transforming the world of today that they so ardently desire” (xxviii). Johnston’s claim is that Badiou and Žižek premise their philosophies on events that compel radical subjectivity, in the absence of which the ethical subject is potentially left in limbo. The core of the problem is how both writers conceive of change. Badiou’s event, and the comparable act in Žižek’s theory, both seem to posit an unforeseen and unforeseeable irruption which propels transformation. Simply put, the question becomes: what is the individual meant to do before the event? Furthermore, whatever happened to gradual evolution?

At this point, one encounters the difficult notion that ‘genuine’ events are entirely self-igniting, with no precursors or micro-scale initiators. However, Johnston does note the following remark by Badiou in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*: “We can say that every event admits of a figural preparation, that it always admits of a pre-evental *figure*” (qtd. in Johnston 20). It would seem, then, that “primers or triggers prefiguring events, perhaps can be discerned, thus allowing for a foreseeing of event-level happenings” (Johnston 20).

Specifically, as regards the possibility of pre-evental activity, what Johnston homes in on is the reference to an “evental site” in Badiou’s *Logiques des mondes*:

I will term *evental site* an entirely abnormal multiple; that is, a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation. [. . .] As such, the site is not part of the situation. I will also say of such a multiple that it is *on the edge of the void*, or foundational.

(qtd. in Johnston 26)

What one has, given the existence of that which gestures towards a situation’s void, is a condition of possibility for pre-evental activity. Later in *Logiques des mondes*, Badiou introduces the term ‘point,’ which he parses as a node of instability and “multiform impurity” present in “the varying degrees of existence and plethora of appearances distributed across a world by its structuring transcendental regime” (qtd. in Johnston 63). Simply put, these points indicate the ‘tonality’ of a site, and so gesture towards the possibility of an event; they are the interstices and inconsistencies in the composition of the situation from which an event bursts forth. If evental sites and points of volatility do exist, and quietly render their situations vulnerable to the immanent eruption of an event, then there is indeed pre-evental labour to be done.

Accordingly, Badiou seems to imply that, while the *subject* cannot pre-exist the event, a militant should still be able to begin a pre-evental investigation of the situation with a mind to uncovering an evental trigger in the form of a point. The militant’s first task is to affirm that society is a malleable process, for the state-of-the-situation deliberately presents itself as

complete and perdurable. As Johnston puts it, “States-of-situations and transcendental regimes of worlds proclaim that their present is without points,” that is, atonal, and so “attempt to mask the latent presence of intra-systemic nodes of volatile tension [. . .] so as to cultivate their appearance of possessing an enduring monolithic solidarity invulnerable to disruption and subversion” (73). The irony here is that the attempt to contrive an appearance of immutability reveals the self-conscious frailty of that which presents itself as ‘inevitable.’ As Badiou identifies, “the declaration of the atonality of a world cannot but be ideological” (qtd. in Johnston 73), since the conservation of the interests that comprise the situation are at stake.

Of importance here is that, in spite of appearances, and precisely because of them, pre-evental labour requires a kind of advance fidelity to the possibility of possibilities. It is thus crucial for the militant to view the state-of-the-situation as a fiction, performatively sustained by individuals’ reluctance to interrogate the transcendental regime. Since inaction performs the *status quo*, the active militant readily discovers that a regime “is never so deeply entrenched as it would like to appear in the eyes of its subjects” (30), and so pre-evental investigations of the situation are never “point-less” (73).

The principle of this belief in possibility is encapsulated in Mao’s assertion that “all reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful [. . .]. [I]t is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful” (qtd. in Johnston 54). While the pragmatic danger of the state’s repressive dimension must be recognised, the *idea* of the state as insurmountable must be discarded if a genuine political event is to be triggered. A real political event, to Badiou’s mind, forces the state into an open encounter that undermines the idea of its monolithic power. By forcing the reaction of agents of the state, ethical subjects reveal the fact that situations are performatively sustained by *people*, and nothing more. As Badiou observes:

The real characteristic of the political event and the truth procedure that it sets off is that a political event fixes the errancy and assigns a measure to the superpower of the State. It fixes the power of the State. Consequently, the political event interrupts the subjective errancy of the power of the State. [. . .] Empirically, this means that whenever there is a genuinely political event, the State reveals itself. It reveals its excess of power, its repressive dimension. But it also reveals a measure for the usually invisible excess. For it is essential to the functioning of the State that its power remains measureless, errant, unassignable. The political event puts an end to all this by assigning a visible measure to the excessive power of the State.

(qtd. in Johnston 39)

To illustrate how a state's power is, in its excessive appearance, subverted by quantification, Johnston cites the image of “the lone protestor facing the column of People's Liberation Army tanks [. . .] during the Tiananmen Square happening in China,” an icon which “epitomizes this effect whereby state power is strangely diminished at the very moment it displays itself in all its raw, ferocious strength” (40). As opposed to the normative, vertical power relationship between government and individuals, what one has is the sudden and radical adequation of the state and people.

In other words, Johnston confirms that “the Badiouian political event reduces the state apparatus from a Symbolic authority to an Imaginary rival, from a quasi-omnipotent mediating medium to a less-than omnipotent external adversary” (40). This deposition of institutional power is then the first condition of possibility for a truth-procedure that nominates the state as its conquerable enemy, and for a people – “those who do not count” – to unite in the radical transformation of a world which they claim as theirs, (see Critchley *Five Problems* 183). Again, transformation presupposes possibilities, and it is in the possibility of possibility that subjects of radical politics must place their faith. As Johnston says:

For this sort of work, one must, at a gut level, believe that true points exist in one's seemingly point-less pre-evental world and that what one selects as promising true points really are true. That is to say, one must have the confidence to disbelieve ideological depictions of the times, especially times tied to potential or actual transformations. [. . .] Although nobody knows for sure in each instance of each battle waged in wars (however hot or cold) for change, one thing is certain: from the patient perspective of philosophy, time never sides with those who bet on the smooth stasis of any purported “end of history.”

(80-81)

Alongside the necessity of pre-evental activity, I would like to discuss the way in which an ‘extinct’ truth might be reanimated. Due to the nature of Badiouian Good and Evil, that is, the possibility of a truth being either pursued or eschewed, human existence is not characterised by a steady accumulation of resolute truths. Rather, human progress is more akin to a multi-directional tug-of-war, with contested truths at the point of intersection between the forces of fidelity and denial. This reliance on the consistency of ethical subjects means that the “the historical destinies of truths” are not at all certain (48).

As such, it is often necessary again to take up a collapsed truth-procedure. Resurrection, a term from Badiou's *Logiques des Mondes*, is the revivification of an abandoned truth-procedure, a renewal of action in “a new world” (qtd. in Johnston 47). The

invocation of a “new world” indicates that resurrection is not to be equated with repetition. A precise re-enactment of a truth would be impossible, since its contextual immanence will always produce new consequences. That is, the results of a truth vary according to the site of its resurrection. Johnston captures this unrepeatability through reference to Heraclitus’s idiom that “one can never step into the same river twice” (49). The reinsertion of a truth procedure into the ongoing flux of life, which constitutes the “varying plethora of possible worldly frameworks,” means that the implications of a truth “will be novel each time it’s resurrected” (48). In essence:

To resurrect a previously interrupted event-subject-truth sequence [a faithful truth-procedure] is to resume continuing the unfolding of an aleatory trajectory of enquiring and forcing, to take further steps along uncharted paths unfurling in new worlds (i.e., not to repeat in the sense of re-traversing a well-trodden path in the same old world as before).

(51)

1.4.8 Literature

Having sketched the fundamentals of Badiou’s ethic, I would like to make plain what I identify as its relevance to the study of literature. What I want to explore is the idea of the *event* of reading – that is, reading as something that *happens to* one, an affecting encounter with ‘something else.’ My question in this regard is: can a text ‘contain’ an event and thus compel fidelity to the production of a truth – in either the situation to which it refers (and) or any part of the world in which an analogous situation exists? By the same token, can a writer who has identified a situation of oppression write that situation in such a way as to bring the reader to an encounter with the void, and thus an event? In specifically Badiouian terms, can a writer write an individual as the Immortal ‘some-one’ who, in labouring towards a truth which has a universal appeal, *convokes the reader to the sameness of that truth*? Thus, if we are all essentially the same when we stand together, can the reader be brought to this affected sameness of political engagement through the event of reading? Put differently, can a writer produce the ‘subject-language’ through which a truth is inscribed, a language the power of which forces the situation to change? Moreover, can a writer *create*? Importantly too, can a past truth be written in such a way that it regains life in the text? Can a text contain a truth which will be resurrected in the act of reading? Further, once an event has occurred and a void has been momentarily revealed, can the writer play a crucial role in the naming of this

void and the solidifying of individuals into evental subjects? Might it be possible for the writer to write the subject(s) of an event as a fiction which individual readers will become?

Again in Badiouian fashion, I want to answer in brief: *Yes! Keep going!* The claim that I wish to advance is that fiction is the quintessential space for the expression of supplementation. A subject who labours after the seizure of an event attempts to work the radical fiction which she has encountered into the situation. Whether held in the imagination or written down, the realm of fiction is where the ‘something else’ first comes to be. Thus, fiction is the locus of originary opposition to the state-of-the-situation and the assignments of the existent transcendental regime. The writer is eminently suited to the task of beginning the pre-evental scan of society for evental sites and points of volatility, precisely by representing and supplementing the situation in fiction. As expressed most fully through speculative fiction, what one has in literature is a place of testing, in which entire worlds and societies can be re-written, in which the quietly powerful question ‘What if?’ can be asked. In this way, every act of fiction is a thought-experiment within which a fictive crowbar is inserted into the fiction of the state-of-the-situation and jiggled.

1.4.9 Conclusion

The unique accomplishment of Badiou’s philosophy is the articulation of an ethic that fearlessly affirms the capacity for radical transformation as the defining human trait. Furthermore, since an event’s summons to Immortal sameness is universal in address and fundamentally creative in purpose, the ethic of truths is properly inclusionary. Accordingly, Badiou resolves the two most salient problems that Critchley has with Levinas’s ethic. That is, the ethic of Immortality does not have the potential for exclusionary circumscription that has befallen the ‘respect for difference,’ and Badiou’s insistence upon transformative action gives ample impetus for real ethical activity. It is the strength of these qualities that makes him an apposite basis for my project.

1.5 Slavoj Žižek on Violence

I would now like to complement the ethical foundation established by Alain Badiou’s philosophy with the commentary provided by Slavoj Žižek’s understanding of violence. My goal is to explore the ways in which violence is systematically sustained, and therefore how society generates a multiform demand for ethical injunction. Furthermore, I attempt to

elucidate how the ethical subject might seek to undermine systemic violence, and whether it is possible to do so without becoming complicit in that which one resists. In short, a reading of Žižek's *Violence* permits one to move from Badiou's general ethic to the question of an ethical engagement with violence – a question of which any emancipatory thought must take notice.

Žižek argues that one must break from the fascination with *subjective violence*, that “performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (1), in order to perceive the originary *objective violence* embedded in the ‘ordinary’ operation of political and economic systems, as well as the functioning of language, which usually underpins agential violence. Subjective violence seizes one's attention precisely because it is a visceral and ultra-visible disturbance of the ‘ordinary’ order, while objective violence “is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent” (2).

Already one notes here an obvious similarity to Badiou's concept of the void and the ‘situated’ elements organised around it. Just as the state-of-the-situation obfuscates the attempt to perceive the void(s) inherent to it, the frantic imperative of subjective violence prevents us from thinking about the objective violence which sustains it. Beyond its absorbing visual excess, the apparent ‘lack’ of a systematic cause makes subjective violence appear as a deeply irrational explosion of action. Thus, when subjective violence is perceived in isolation, a sympathetic investigation of its causes is often replaced by the indignant rhetorical question: ‘what on earth did you do this for?’ In other words, subjective violence becomes something that ‘they just do.’

By this I mean that, where a situation of objective violence generates responses in the form of subjective violence, the victims of the repressive situation become typecast as ‘inherently’ violent. What is lost when one views the situation from a statist perspective is the reality of violence directed towards people by the ‘invisible’ processes that generate and sustain an ostensibly ‘peaceful’ world, and thus the radical imperative to remake that world. Just as entrenched situations purposely obfuscate their tonality, so too does institutional power conceal the violence that underwrites its ‘peaceful’ endurance. The split between objective and subjective violence is therefore really a divide caused by conditioned perception, a deliberate economy of visibility and invisibility. In short, to fixate upon the surface of subjective violence holds one's attention firmly within the bounds of the existent transcendental regime, and keeps people and their worlds invisible.

Therefore, if one's task is to perceive that which the violent operations of the state-of-the-situation have excluded, then one must first tear away from the petrifying Medusan gaze

of subjective violence. This is why *Violence* “casts six sideways glances” in order to perceive objective violence (3). Of these, I will discuss Žižek’s commentaries on the problem of the Neighbour as Other, exacerbated by contemporary fear-politics and the violence embedded in language; the expectation of the ‘domesticated’ Other, which sustains a ‘tolerably minimal’ relationship between subject and Other; the pseudo-ideology of tolerance; and finally the concept of aggression, with which the ethical subject is able to confront violence.

1.5.1 *Post-Political Bio-Politics and the Other*

Žižek contends, rather sweepingly, that the increasingly “predominant mode of politics [. . .] is a politics which claims to have left behind old ideological struggles,” in favour of “expert management and administration,” holding as its highest goal “the regulation of security and the welfare of human lives” (40). This is what is meant by post-political bio-politics: a profoundly depoliticised, stripped-out apparatus, in which the pursuit and torpid enjoyment of commodities becomes the highest ‘political’ goal. In Badiou’s terms, what is sought by post-political bio-politics is an unashamedly atonal society, a world without causes. Once achieved, the “only way to introduce passion into this field, to actively mobilise people, is through fear, a basic constituent of today’s subjectivity,” and so “bio-politics is ultimately a politics of fear; it focuses on defence from potential victimisation or harassment” (40). Like Badiou, Žižek abhors the adequation of humanity with the dying body, because this equation forecloses on the political imagination and results in a politics of fear which precludes transformative engagement. Accordingly, he asserts that pervasive fear

is what separates a radical emancipatory politics from our political status quo. We’re talking here not about the difference between two visions, or sets of axioms, but about the difference between politics based on a set of universal axioms and a politics which renounces the very constitutive dimension of the political, since it resorts to fear as the ultimate mobilising principle. [. . .] it is the frightening rally of frightened people.

(40-41)

What a climate of fear invites is the conflation of that which is ‘different’ and that which is ‘dangerous.’ Those who are perceived as different, and whose difference is underscored by the project of cultural ‘tolerance,’ become those of whom society is most suspicious. Thus, as Žižek observes:

Today's liberal tolerance toward others, the respect of otherness and openness towards it, is counterpointed by an obsessive fear of harassment. In short, the Other is just fine, but only insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as this Other is not really other. [. . .] What increasingly emerges as the central human right in late-capitalist society is *the right not to be harassed*, which is a right to remain at a safe distance from others.

(41)

Carefully cultivated and sustained fear, then, is what erodes the ethical purchase of innate sameness by classifying people according to difference. 'Respect for difference' thus means the 'right' to reify banal permutations, simply what there is, into real barriers between people. Within the right not to be harassed one finds at work the frantic desire not to be exposed to the affective dimension of human beings outside the subject's comfort zone. If one joins the contemporary entitlement to cultural enclaves with the end of causes, what emerges is the foreclosure of all sameness, because no radical endeavours exist to unite people and so extract them from petty separatism. So by asking for the 'right' to live in atonal times, unaffected by transformative events and experiences of shared humanity, the depoliticised 'individual' fulfils the state's abortive *expectation* of an inert populace.

Žižek thus finds it necessary to depart from Levinas's notion of the Other in much the same way as Badiou does. With the 'right to difference' established, the Other is no longer the ineffable being which takes the ethical subject hostage and compels authentic responsibility. And so, "[h]orrible as it may sound, the Levinasian Other as the abyss of otherness from which the ethical injunction emanates and the Nazi figure of the Jew as the less-than-human Other-enemy originate from the same source" (55-56). In order to illustrate the fate of the Other, Žižek substitutes in the figure of the Neighbour, an unsettlingly different yet proximate invader from whom the contemporary citizen has the right to maintain distance, and whose over-proximity she is secretly allowed to resent. In her very being-different, in the impossibility of sharing sameness with her, "a Neighbour is one who by definition *smells*" (166). That is, the "figure of the Neighbour" is that with which one cannot be united.

1.5.2 *Keeping up Expectations: The Problem of Language*

If the post/bio-political individual's imperative is to keep the Neighbour at a precise ethical distance, then how best to prevent an encounter that might shake up this static non-relation? An effective method is expectation, which aborts the affective encounter in advance by fixing the Neighbour within a relational structure, so that, like psychopath Patrick Bateman, when

the ‘face-to-face’ encounter comes, “*I simply am not there*” (Ellis 201). That is, because the subject ‘knows’ the Neighbour in advance, a show of vacuous and impersonal ‘respect’ suffices to conclude her engagement with this preconceived figure. Interestingly, this erasure occurs within the realm of linguistic-symbolic reference, “what Heidegger would call ‘our house of being’” (Žižek, *Violence* 1). That is to say, the Neighbour-Other is kept inexistent through the violent collusion between language and the degrees of existence doled out by the transcendental regime.

By affirming that language is deeply implicated in violence, Žižek persuasively invalidates the ‘commonsensical’ belief that speech is always a peaceful act, and that an exchange of language inherently rejects the possibility of violence. What Žižek asks one to consider is whether “humans exceed animals in their capacity for violence precisely because they *speak*” (61). Citing Hegel, he argues that “there is something violent in the very symbolisation of a thing,” since language “simplifies” it, “destroying its organic unity,” and inserting it “into a field of meaning external to it” (61). In short, language creates what it describes, and so does violence to that which it purports ‘accurately’ to represent. Specifically, the construction of the Neighbour as an object of distant ‘respect’ also reduces the person that one might encounter to a figural generic which one does not encounter.

The linguistic marginalisation of another person’s subjectivity is of dire consequence precisely because “[a]n enemy is someone whose story you have not heard” (Brown, qtd. in Žižek, *Violence* 6). Representational essentialism inserts the *figure* of the Neighbour into one’s “house of being,” and so precludes the opportunity for others to construct themselves in the dialogue of an authentic encounter. So, for instance, Žižek contends that “[w]hat the perpetrators of [anti-Semitic] pogroms find intolerable [. . .] is not the immediate reality of Jews, but the image/figure of the ‘Jew’ which circulates and has been constructed in their tradition” (66-67). Further, as “the truly trenchant dimension of racism” reveals, language not only creates essentialist images, but forces these ‘representations’ upon those whom they ‘signify,’ so that “white racist ideology exerts a performative efficiency. It is not merely an interpretation of what blacks are, but an interpretation that determines the very being and social existence of the interpreted subjects” (72). Far from a guarantor of peace, then, language is able to render subjectivity and construct reality, and thus violently to determine who exists, as well as how they experience the world and are experienced by others with whom they ‘share’ it.

However, Žižek is here concerned not with the simple erasure of people from the symbolic, but with their hideous overdetermination by language. At its worst, representation

elides individuals and cultures by replacing them with what he calls *the subject supposed to*, that is, an overdetermined figure replete with behavioural archetypes that ‘confirm’ and satisfy the worst racist fantasies. In other words, the *subject supposed to* is not constructed in order to ‘cleanse’ the symbolic regime of a social set, but to celebrate and *maintain* a hateful and humiliating image that ‘peacefully’ and ‘realistically’ occupies space within the representational order.

By way of example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans, the media reported a savage and anarchic meltdown of law and order which centred on the figure of the *subject supposed to loot and rape* (98). After the natural disaster, Žižek writes, one was bombarded with accounts of a parallel catastrophe in the form of black violence: an outbreak of rape, killing, looting and lawlessness (97-99). And yet, two weeks later the superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department admitted that there existed “no official reports to document any murder,” and not one “case of rape or sexual assault” (98). What occurred in the wake of Katrina’s destruction was the controlled deployment of the figure of ‘the black’ into the symbolic terrain of predetermined otherness beyond white social order. And so “*the subject supposed to loot and rape*” emerged as the ‘realistic’ confirmation of what ‘blacks’ do when returned to ‘their’ ‘natural’ condition (98).

The outrage of this particular representational crime is that, by virtue of its extraordinary context, it purports to show a ‘privileged’ insight into the ‘real’ character of black people, whom it asserts are ‘always’ teetering on the edge of savagery. By implication, it is not the false racist production that is ludicrous; instead, there are not ‘enough chances’ to see and so describe ‘them’ as they ‘really are.’ Of course, this preposterous ‘realism’ depends upon a foundation of racist fantasies, which it redoubles until even the most uncommitted xenophobe feels himself (regrettably, but nonetheless) ‘correct’ in the placement of his prejudices. The *subject supposed to* thus radically supplants that which it ‘represents,’ and motivates so profound a misreading of reality that Žižek concludes that “*even if ALL reports of violence and rape proved to be factually true, the stories circulating about them would still be ‘pathological’ and racist*, since what motivated these stories was not facts but racist prejudices” (99-100). Again, what is here undeniable is that language does not innocently describe the external world; it oversees the representational strategies that determine both the content and import of reality. In the form of *the subject supposed to loot and rape*, one is faced with the true horror of symbolic essentialism: the image of a crisis, in response to which another person’s ethical responsibility should be most engaged, becomes precisely the enabling condition for contempt and ‘righteous’ abandonment.

1.5.3 Tolerance, Sameness

Žižek shares Badiou's impatience with the imperative towards tolerance, which he sees as an ersatz and inert form of ethical and political engagement. Again, the problem with tolerance is that it presupposes antipathy, and so calls upon everyone to be 'respectful' (that is, keep at a proper distance) so that an ambitionless and isolationist world remains in 'harmony.' Incredibly, post-political bio-politics addresses a 'subject' who wants to be left alone to get on with doing nothing, and invites individuals to reify the atonality of their situation by performing *themselves* as antithetical to change. As a result, real socio-political problems resulting from division and dehumanisation disappear into the vague category of 'intolerance' (140), the implicit solution to which is for people somehow to be 'nicer' to each other while avoiding real political engagement.

When real socio-political inquiry is prohibited as 'disrespectful,' one forgets that "the ultimate source of barbarism is culture itself, one's direct identification with a particular culture, which renders one intolerant towards other cultures" (141). That is, as one takes up a position within society, one is implicitly directed to treat as Other those against whom that society has defined itself. Put differently, one's absorption into a transcendental regime, complete with the pre- and over-determined degrees of existence that it allocates to people and ideas, as well as the *language* which sustains these gradations, is the primary source of the violence inherent to social life. Against the taxonomies of cultural difference Žižek offers a call to sameness conceived of from the premise that

Actual universality is not that deep feeling that above all differences, different civilisations share the same basic values, etc; *actual universality appears* [. . .] *as the experience of negativity, of the inadequacy-to-itself, of a particular identity.* The formula of revolutionary solidarity is not "let us tolerate our differences," it is not a pact of civilisations, but a pact of struggles which cut across civilisations, a pact between what, in each civilisation, undermines its identity from within, fights its oppressive kernel. What unites us is the same struggle. [. . .] In other words, in the emancipatory struggle, it is not the cultures in their identity which join hands, it is the repressed, the exploited and the suffering, the "parts of no part" of every culture which come together in a shared struggle.

(156-57)

Here Žižek seems to take the same basic premise as Badiou's sameness, that a person *is a tissue of truths*, but Žižek's sameness is realised differently. That is, where Badiouian Immortality convokes a collective undertaking, Žižekian sameness unites those who have

been violently excluded from the radical expression of their humanity. Seen thus, atrocity begins when people are forcibly reduced to their mortal bodies, and so forbidden to constitute themselves in the world. If the great universal struggle is that in which all pursue the right to *speak*, then Žižek has in mind a union of the silenced, the denied-Immortals who scream against their reduction to mere bodies. Moreover, since acts of violence and brutality are the subjective manifestations of an originary *objective* violence, Žižekian sameness is the struggle to emerge from the void of one's society, and so escape a condition of symbolic erasure that makes possible all material abasements.

1.5.4 *Violence and Aggression*

How, then, to respond to those who violently maintain barriers to sameness? Furthermore, how does one respond to the violent oppressor who comfortably identifies himself with the oppressive regime? Badiou has already told us that his ethic names enemies (crucially though, these enemies exist only as long as they fight against emancipation, and no one is excluded from an event's universal address), and that it is militant and combative in nature. What Žižek allows one to approach more clearly is the uncompromising question: 'May I kill?'

Early in *Violence* Žižek sets up a distinction which echoes throughout the rest of the text "between the 'aggression' that effectively amounts to a 'life-force' and the 'violence' that is a 'death-force'" (63). Violence is then the adjunct of the state-of-the-situation: it is regulative, repressive and *changes nothing*. That is, violence has no creative dimension, and does not aid any supplementary process. By contrast, aggression explodes precisely out of the vitality of life that refuses to remain voided, and which demands a space for true *change*. Aggression therefore shares the quality of Divine Violence, which emerges as "an expression of pure drive, of the undeadness, the excess of life which strikes at 'bare life' regulated by law" (198). In response to institutional stultification, one must think through aggression as the enabling condition for a previously impossible coming-to-be: that is, as the condition of possibility for *creation*.

Of course, as one verges upon this properly dangerous terrain, it becomes necessary to confront the denunciatory cry of the state's agents, the rallying call against action condensed as 'You cannot do this!' One must have the courage to disregard the 'advance knowledge' that revolutionary action is never authentic, that it is always only a violent and unlovely asset-grab by 'the poor.' Interestingly, Žižek simply returns the 'realist's' question,

and so exposes its imbrication in statist discourse. For example, he asks how the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk is able to denounce

every global emancipatory project as a case of envy and resentment? Wherefrom his obsessive-compulsive urge to find beneath solidarity the envy of the weak and their thirst for revenge? [. . .] What if *this very urge is sustained by a disavowed envy and resentment of its own, the envy of the universal emancipatory position*, which is why one HAS to find some dirt in its foundation which would deprive it of its purity? The object of envy here is the MIRACLE of ethical universality which cannot be reduced to the distorted effect of “lower” libidinal processes.[. . .] What is truly traumatic for the subject is not the fact that a pure ethical act is (perhaps) impossible, that freedom is (perhaps) an appearance, based on our ignorance of the true motivations of our acts; what is truly traumatic is freedom itself, the fact that freedom IS possible, and we desperately search for some “pathological” determinations in order to avoid this fact.

(194-96)

What Žižek here indicts is the false attempt to assert the ‘security’ of mortality over Immortal possibility. Accordingly, one must resist the “pathological” construction of the revolutionary as *the subject supposed to break things*, a representation that equates supplementation with destruction and proceeds from the “resentment” that inert individuals feel towards the radically creative subjects who vastly exceed them. From the perspective of the state-of-the-situation, which takes the passive mortal as the ‘peaceful’ zero-level of behaviour, revolutionary activity creates a ‘downward’ gamut of damage and ethical decline. The resultant ‘ethic’ espouses Badiouian Evil precisely because it calls for a ‘peaceful’ return to mortality, and so mandates the collapse of Immortal fidelity.

In response, one should assert not only the enlivening spectrum that supplementary action enables, but also that the genuine revolutionary is *necessarily* a profound humanist, a vision expressed most beautifully by Robespierre, who affirms that

there do exist, I can assure you, souls that are feeling and pure; it exists, that tender, imperious and irresistible passion, the torment and delight of magnanimous hearts; that deep horror of tyranny, that compassionate zeal for the oppressed, that sacred love for the homeland, that even more sublime and holy love for humanity, without which a great revolution is just a noisy crime which destroys another crime.

(qtd. in Žižek, *Violence* 203)

Similarly, Che Guevara states that “[at] the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality” (qtd. in Žižek, *Violence* 203). The conception of the revolutionary as one who is driven to action by ethical sensitivity foreshadows Paulo Freire’s statement that a truly radical action changes a situation for all, and so takes on the universal dimension of an act of love. The paradox is that armed resistance compels a

subject to avail herself of a state of being which will permit an effective resistance. That is to say:

Hatred is an element of struggle; relentless hatred of the enemy that impels us over and beyond the natural limitations of man and transforms us into effective, violent, selective and cold killing machines. Our soldiers must be thus; a people without hatred cannot vanquish a brutal enemy.

(Guevara, qtd. in Žižek, *Violence* 203)

In Badiou's terms, the terror of a simulacrum can only be met by those in excess of themselves as mere 'ordinary multiples.' Since terror exercises its violence upon, and raises its false subjects 'above,' those whom it names as animals, these victims, unless they respond as Immortals with the force of something other than animals, will be destroyed as animals. Crucially, this is not a mere adequation in which 'might makes right.' Because the revolutionary truth-procedure names no one its enemy, its call to humanising actions is universal. The implication is that the radical agent must constantly reflect upon her actions, and remain profoundly aware that, since she claims no essential enemies, she cannot reduce those she fights to figural absences. Indeed, she must remain ethically 'haunted' by those whom she resists if she is to discharge her true purpose of changing society for all. In other words, the bursts of combative "hatred" required to meet oppressive forces must occur only as painstakingly circumscribed interruptions in a resolve of sensitive ethical responsibility. As Guevara puts it: "One must endure – become hard, toughen, without losing tenderness" (qtd. in Žižek, *Violence* 204). It is the difficult and paradoxical, but non-negotiable, task of the revolutionary to bear a tender humanity through a time of conflict.

It follows that revolutionary aggression has an ethical dimension precisely because it is animated by an inclusive vision of society, and is bound to a profound sense of humanity and, most importantly, a self-conscious limit. Paradoxically, radical action is capable of restraint because its aggression is compelled by a concrete experience of *reality*, whereas violence seeks the erasure of the constructed figure which it also endlessly manufactures. Consequently, the agents of violence are always driven to more vicious means of 'discovering,' in ordinary multiples to whom terror is subsequently addressed, some evidential 'trace' of the figure that sustains their enterprise. Taking control of the transcendental regime away from such people is thus the first condition for a society open to Immortal supplementation.

1.5.5 Conclusion

Žižek's discussion of violence successfully interrogates the assumption that the "smooth functioning" of political, linguistic, and socio-symbolic systems is to be equated with peace (2). As such, he implicates the 'standards' of nonviolence in the production and upkeep of invisible objective violations. What comes into view is the originary point of systematic violence to which 'incomprehensible' subjective action responds. At stake here is not the juvenile question 'who started it,' but the possibility of discovering people's true ethical purpose when they resist the 'peaceful' mechanisms that elide possibilities and void people.

1.6. Freire

I wish to conclude this chapter with an exposition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paulo Freire furnishes one with an insightful and affective account of how oppression is experienced and overcome. His psychologically astute *Pedagogy* reveals that the deformities of oppression inflict oppressed as well as oppressor, and suggests that it is precisely there – in *people* – that the solutions lie. Freire's text is characterised by his depth of concern for those who have been robbed of their humanity, and the priceless esteem in which he holds critical education and existential self-discovery. While his passion for the destruction of oppression is unmistakable, it is tempered by a moratorium on the enactment of mindless revenge. These qualities are what make *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* a foundational text in any study of oppression as a lived reality.

1.6.1 Outline of Freire's Pedagogy

Freire's starting premise is that "while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation" (25). Humanity's purpose "is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity" (25-26). Already one sees an existential demand for self-determination, in accordance with which Freire asserts that the people's struggle against oppression "is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order" (26). Thus, he vehemently rejects *the subject supposed to be subjugated* as an

‘inevitability,’ and avows the power of people to condition material society as well as their symbolic existence within it.

Any emancipatory project must therefore rework the oppressor–oppressed dialectic’s prominence within the transcendental regime. The problem, and germ of solution, is that the oppressed are the living-voided, which means that they are both invisibly situated within the situation and supplementary to it. In other words, the oppressed are symbolically inexistent *and* undeniably *there*, and so they haunt the situation of oppression with the possibility that they might emerge from the void. From the oppressor’s perspective, the dispossessed “are ‘ungrateful’ and ‘envious’ [. . .] potential enemies who must be watched” (41). This constant tugging on the relation which fixes oppressor vis-à-vis oppressed induces anxiety and fear on the part of the former, compelling them to violence and “false generosity,” the giving of which marks the preserve of the oppressor (26).

The oppressor’s ability to visit violence upon the oppressed with impunity jars with the simultaneous imperative to dispense generosity, and so gestures towards the paradoxical ‘acknowledged invisibility’ of the oppressed. Evident here is a perverse pact, in terms of which the oppressors, who cannot do without serfs, agree to be ‘kind overseers’ if the oppressed, existentially destroyed by their conditions, ‘peacefully’ accept servitude as their destiny. The link between violence and false generosity is undeniable, and it is important that the latter be understood not as ‘charity’ but as the objectively violent trickle-back of *all* that the oppressors have stolen from their subjects; so the ‘largesse’ of the oppressor’s aid seeks to disguise the crime that enables it. Moreover, this repugnant economy involves not only material goods, but also all that the oppressive regime gathers to itself. ‘State security,’ for example, underwrites the violence with which oppressors retain power while purporting to ‘protect’ those whose safety is daily violated.

To break the violent non-relation between oppressors and oppressed is thus “the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed,” in the realisation of which they “liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (27). The first obstacle to be overcome is “adhesion,” the oppressed individual’s inability to externalise and reject the oppressor as her “model of humanity” (26-27). Without this assertion of self, the oppressed do not imagine into being the ‘new person’ who exceeds the relational structure of oppressed and oppressor (28). The existential paralytic here is the “fear of freedom” which afflicts oppressed and oppressor equally: the former because freedom would require them to eject the oppressor as ‘model of humanity,’ and so abandon the prescriptive performance-identity of the *subject supposed to*, and the latter because they too would have to find new selves beyond the

oppressor–oppressed framework, and would have to give themselves up to an authentic encounter with their former slaves (28). For both oppressors and oppressed, the freedom that *neither* possesses is “the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (29).

Accordingly, Freire’s primary line of inquiry is this:

How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which *to be* is *to be like* and *to be like* is *to be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible. The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.

(30)

The fascinating claim here is that dehumanising oppression leaves discernible marks upon the consciousnesses of all those whom it absorbs, and that, as one discovers these signs of intrusion, it becomes possible to claim knowledge of self, and so to enable self-determination. What one has is the *event of self*, that is, in Badiou’s terms, the discovery that one is in fact capable of being an Immortal *and therefore* that one must radically oppose the situation which keeps one from being so. Or, as Žižek might put it, the institutional suffering which one experiences as a result of being rendered a symbolic ‘figure’ confers a universal right to resistance. Again, oppression creates the means of its own downfall by relying on sustained obfuscation of reality which, when revealed, makes powerful adversaries of its cowed victims. However conceived, what is critical is that the oppressed come to recognise the terrible *contingency* of their situation, and so “perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (31).

Equally, the oppressor must come to realise that oppression is a blade without a handle, and that she too bears “the marks of oppression” (40). Like her subjugated counterpart, the oppressor is enjoined to interrogate the conditions under which she ‘belongs’ to the situation in order to break therefrom. However, merely “[d]iscovering himself to be an oppressor [. . .] does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed,” for “[s]olidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solitary; it is a radical posture” (31). The radical commitment to solidarity, in which the oppressor gives himself up to an encounter that exceeds all of the subject-positions to which he is accustomed, is the essence of *communion* (43).

Communion, which one might parse as the dialogue enabled by sameness, reveals the universal address of the struggle for liberation and underscores the possibility of defying the transcendental regime's prescriptive terms. That is, *the subject supposed to oppress* is *also* a vestigial figure. This is why Freire describes the existential self-discovery of oppressed and oppressor as "a profound rebirth" (43).

However, Freire goes beyond the existential necessity of freedom, and concretely describes a model of liberatory praxis. This struggle to cast off the mindset and conditions of oppression occurs in two stages:

In the first, the oppressed unveil the situation of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted.

(37)

So, first the oppressed reflect upon themselves and their situation, and so discover the objectively violent premises that construct and sustain the 'destiny' of oppression, and then, having affirmed themselves as agents of possibility in a malleable world, they seek to trigger an event in order to transform the state-of-the-situation.² Throughout his *Pedagogy*, Freire insists on this double-movement in which reflection and action exist in continuous dialogue.

In addition, any revolutionary leadership must think and act *with* the oppressed, so that the revolution itself takes on the collectively existential and dialogical qualities of the pedagogy. A revolution carried out *for* the people, using 'them' as tools of mass action without evoking their critical awareness or existential self-creation, amounts to a revolution *without* the people (48). The oppressed "cannot enter the struggle as objects in order *later* to become human beings," (50). This is crucial – the existential awakening of the oppressed *must* precede and inform the political revolution, so that the revolution is carried out with the cognisance of the people.

Significantly, Freire does not disparage aggression, which he locates as the response to objective violence, since "[w]ith the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has *already* begun" (37). While the oppressed will no doubt be termed the criminals, it is impossible for them to initiate violence precisely because "[t]here would be

² That is to say Freire advocates pre-evental action as an answer to the question "how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution?" (36).

no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation” (37). Freire affirms that violence is instigated and wielded by

those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognise others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited, unrecognised. [. . .] It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent, who, with their power create the concrete situation which begets the “rejects of life.” It is not the tyrannized who initiate despotism, but tyrants.[. . .] It is not those whose humanity is denied them who negate humankind, but those who denied that humanity (thus negating their own).

(37)

Just as aggression seeks an end to the entrenched conflict that necessitates it, rather than domination over the opposition in that conflict, so too “the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress [and] restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression” (38). As such, the clash between oppressor and oppressed is emblematic of that between aggression and violence.

However, not all former oppressors welcome liberation (39). The very emergence of the former oppressed as civic equals to their deposed masters

appears to the former oppressors as a profound violation of their individual rights – although they had no respect for the millions who suffered and died of hunger, pain, sorrow and despair. For the oppressors, “human beings” refers only to themselves; other people are “things.” For the oppressors, there exists only one right: their right to live in peace.

(39-40)

This is an acute insight into the mindset conditioned by, and which longs for, post-political bio-politics. A mind that casually assents to oppression is one which wants to be left alone in order to enjoy its accumulated possessions in a state of ‘peace,’ and so demands ignorance of the objective violence which permit its way of life. Moreover, superficial uncreative consciousness equates accumulation with existence because, if the central right is to be left alone to enjoy one’s stuff, then it must follow that the more stuff one has the more extensive one’s right to exist, and to do so in isolation from the bereft. It goes without saying that these people cannot be allowed to direct society.

1.6.2 Dialogue

To Freire's mind, oppression's most dire effect upon the oppressed is that it deprives them of their *word*. Described as "the essence of dialogue itself," the word is the basic constituent of self-creation, and a crucial element of the quest for liberation (68). As Freire puts it, "To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it" (69). The ability to speak a word means that one is not reduced to mere mortality, but able to intervene in the world and so express oneself as a being with the potential for Immortal consequence. Because of its radical dimension, "[t]here is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis," and so "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (68).

The word, and the transformative praxis that it compels, are thus analogous to Badiou's truth and truth-procedure. As such, the process by which a word unfolds adumbrates and helps one understand the development of a (political) truth-procedure. Within the word one finds "two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers" (68). This dialectic should be understood as progressive, so that the interaction between thought and action compels *further* thought and action, and so forth. Since the dialectically interacting constituents of the word render it an ongoing process of reflection and action, this Freirian term accords with Badiou's understanding of the Good as the experience of 'continuous disruption.' As such, when "action is sacrificed," what one has is "*verbalism* [. . .] an alienated and alienating 'blah' [that amounts to] an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action" (68). Equally, "[w]ithout reflection, action becomes *activism*, which achieves little because it is not shaped and directed by the true praxis.

Because a word is a collective enterprise, reflection and action cannot be internal to an isolated subject, but must occur as a dialogue in which people reflect on their situation together, and then act jointly to change the world. Moreover, this 'great conversation' brings together those who seek creative and supplementary endeavours, and so fosters a tonal community of Immortals. Such a community is united by the capacity for "hope," which is "rooted in" the participants' "incompletion, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others" (72). Accordingly:

Dialogue cannot exist [. . .] in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love.[. . .] Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation.[. . .] If I do not love

the world – if I do not love life – if I do not love people – I cannot enter into dialogue.

(70-71)

True existential engagement with people in the discovery of the world is characterised by a thoroughgoing openness, by the willingness to be *suffused* with radical thought and compelled by the incompleteness of the world. By contrast, there can be no dialogue if one attempts to fix the boundaries of one's knowledge about the world and oneself. As Freire asks, "How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness?" (71). That is, one must be open to the possibility of having oneself renamed and supplemented in order to experience the co-operative reinvention of the world. Therefore, one who adheres to the state is a "naïve thinker," for whom "the important thing is accommodation to this normalised 'today,'" whereas, "[f]or the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality" (73). Here Freire affirms Badiou's ethic, and asserts a striking link between naïve thinking and the abdication of the quintessential human trait. For him, the human is uniquely able to "treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of his reflection; this capacity distinguishes him from the animals" (78).

It is impossible for animals "to 'take on' life" and, because "they do not 'take it on,' they cannot construct it, they cannot transform its configuration. Nor can they know themselves to be destroyed by life, for they cannot expand their 'prop' into a meaningful, symbolic world which includes culture and history" (79). By implication, those who do not critically engage with culture, history and the socio-symbolic are simply *consumed* and *defined* by these forces, and do not perceive the ways in which "their relations with the world and others" are infiltrated and redirected (80). In other words, ignorance of the invisible processes that produce reality means that one is oblivious to, and cannot intervene in or against, the derivations of 'essential' ontology.

Further, without critical thought it becomes impossible to perceive what Alvaro Pinto calls the "limit-situations" which indicate not "the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin" (qtd. in Freire 80). In other words, a passive individual will encounter a social limit as an absolute demarcation of impossibility, and thus will not really approach it. A critically engaged subject, however, will respond to a limit-situation with a "limit-act," which is "directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the 'given'" (qtd. in Freire 80).

Freire uses Lucien Goldman's terms "real consciousness" and "potential consciousness" to describe the split between politically active and passive minds (qtd. in Freire 94). The first, which cunningly awards itself the suggestion of 'realism,' is conditioned by the *status quo*. Unsurprisingly, real consciousness cannot perceive the "untested feasibility" of possibilities beyond what is, and it abhors the enabling, paradoxical imperative to *imagine reality* (qtd. in Freire 94). Only potential consciousness can fictively project beyond the limits of society, and so compel the ethical subject to discover the "hitherto unperceived viability" of that which is not yet (94).

1.6.3 Conclusion

While Freire complements and confirms the radical theories of Badiou and Žižek, he contributes a working pedagogy and an insight into the psychology of oppression hitherto missing. That is, his humanistic philosophy allows one to understand the psychic demands attendant upon the lived resistance to oppression, and so provides a material account of what Badiou and Žižek describe. He therefore not only contributes to the theory, but also bridges the gap between theory and literature, because his pedagogy enables one better to analyse the representation of radical subjects who engage in transformative revolutionary acts. In this regard, his understanding of how a subject moves from mental subjugation to potential consciousness is especially valuable.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to establish a theoretical framework that is able to provide an understanding of revolutionary activity. From Alain Badiou is drawn an ethic that nominates Immortality as the most defining human quality, the expression and negation of which creates Good and Evil. As such, the theoretical framework that I have adumbrated is grounded in radical transformation, which is conceived of as an obligation, not a depredation. With the addition of Slavoj Žižek's writing on violence, I have brought into view the forms of invisible violence that necessitate the subject's intervention, and established that the aggression of this intercession does not repeat the violence which it resists. Lastly, I have argued that Paulo Freire corroborates Badiou's assertion that transformative action is the principal human commission. From this premise, he develops a pedagogy that makes plain the psychological

damage inflicted by oppression, and details how the collective assertion of self that abolishes oppression is achieved.

Chapter 2: Invoking and Sustaining the Impossible in Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I set out to read Carpentier's novel with reference to the theoretical context established by the previous chapter. I hope to demonstrate that the concepts drawn from Badiou, Žižek and Freire enable a new approach to representations of radical action. Before engaging with the text, I contextualise the Haitian Revolution in order to show that it was an event that disrupted Western epistemology and historiography. Finally, I discuss Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's reading of the novel, and posit an alternative one that is informed by an understanding of Badiou, Žižek and Freire. Paravisini-Gebert criticises the text for its uneven adherence to historical accuracy and completion, and concludes that Haiti, in Carpentier's depiction, is lost to the hopeless repetition of cyclical oppression, liberation and renewed oppression. Similarly, González Echevarría, described as "perhaps the most perceptive reader of *The Kingdom of This World*" (Paravisini-Gebert 118), cites the novel as staging cycles of "ritualistic repetition" (qtd. in Paravisini-Gebert 118), and therefore imprisoning the Haitian Revolution in a closed cycle of oppression from which there can be no escape. When read in such ways, it is possible to dismiss the text as "a product of its time" (Paravisini-Gebert 126). By contrast, I demonstrate that approaching *Kingdom* via Badiou, Žižek and Freire allows a more complex understanding of people engaged in liberatory action. In short, my intention is to redeem Carpentier's representation of the Haitian Revolution by showing it not to be pessimistic or moribund.

Since the events it narrates are driven by the interpenetrating struggle between liberation and oppression, Badiouian Good and Evil, *The Kingdom of This World* confronts its reader with a jagged, circuitous narrative trajectory that can be read as a closed system in which no development takes place. However, I demonstrate that this novel evinces a communal *Bildung* that is represented by the development of the character Ti Noël's potential consciousnesses. Instead of privileging the text's macro-scale interactions between oppression and liberation, my reading investigates the ways in which it represents the Haitians as agents that bring about and experience revolution, as well as resurrecting it in the face of renewed oppression. The lived philosophy of radical action that I have drawn from Badiou, Žižek and Freire enables such a reading. Accordingly, my interpretation proceeds from the ways in which the Haitians awaken as agents of possibility, and traces the arcs of

pre-evental labour, evental fidelity, betrayal and resurrection that appear in the text. I therefore conduct a close analysis that shows that the so-called cycles of liberation and oppression in the novel should instead be seen as the ‘hazardous course’ of a radical fidelity to freedom that is never abandoned by the Haitians.

The notion of a closed system in which a community interminably defeats and is defeated by oppression, without either it or its oppressors altering the terms of their conflict, calls to mind the variously attributed definition of insanity as the attempt to affect different results from the same actions. By contrast, Badiouian fidelity is necessarily progressive and adaptive. As pointed out by Johnston, where fidelity to an event is exhausted and the associated truth-procedure abandoned, to resurrect the latter is not to enact repetition but to continue “the unfolding of an aleatory trajectory of enquiring and forcing, to take further steps along uncharted paths unfurling in new worlds” (*Political Transformations* 51). My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that the Haitians’ fidelity to the possibility of creating new worlds is what compels the reading of their actions as the single, hazardous course of undying fidelity – that which necessarily resists cyclical interment.

2.2 Context: *The Haitian Revolution as Incomprehensible Fact*

Before embarking upon a reading of Carpentier’s text, it is necessary to place its content within its historical context. The impact of the Haitian Revolution simply cannot be overstated. Apart from establishing the first black republic, a result of the first successful slave revolt, the Haitian people’s commitment to freedom arguably reshaped the course of political events in the Western Hemisphere. For example, Thomas Reinhardt argues that this revolution was a key factor in the development, even existence, of the United States. In the 19th century, Napoleon was ardent in his desire for a French empire that encompassed the Americas. Since he had “Europe’s most powerful army at his disposal” (Reinhardt 247), this was not an unreasonable ambition. In his quest for North America, however, Napoleon decided upon “a small detour,” the purpose of which was to “end a tiresome little slave revolt in one of the French colonies in the Caribbean,” an aside which, he projected, would require no more than six weeks to complete (247). However, “[t]wo years and almost 60 000 dead French troops later,” his forces and aspirations mauled, Napoleon was forced to abandon the idea of “a transatlantic France” (247).

If the Haitian Revolution is such a crucial event, why then has it been so long ignored by Western thought? This is the question that Reinhardt poses in an article entitled “Haiti –

200 Years of Forgetting,” and to which he finds the answer that history is a record of one’s successes, “and France, England and Spain definitely lost in Haiti” (249), too simplistic. He argues persuasively that there was no conceptual framework within which Westerners could understand the event. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot famously states, the Haitian Revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened” (qtd. in Reinhardt 73). From this premise, Reinhardt develops a thesis that is germane to the theoretical structure that I have outlined:

Knowledge (be it scientific or philosophical) doesn’t evolve in a steady progression. It doesn’t follow a straight path from past to future. It takes detours, makes wrong turns, gets stuck in dead ends, and starts over again. At any moment in history, there are ideas that can be thought and others that simply can’t. Well of course they can. But they won’t make any sense in the opinion of most contemporaries. To think them, one has to break with the very foundations of contemporary knowledge. An earth orbiting the sun? That’s not just an astronomical statement. It shattered fundamental truths of theology and philosophy as well. If you happen to live in, say, 16th century Europe, it was not a thought that you would come up with easily.

(250)

What Reinhardt elucidates here is effectively an account of how a Badiouian truth operates – that is, by exploding the precincts of the known through radical supplementation. He affirms the near-impossibility of anticipating eventual transformation if one is deeply embedded in history and culture. In other words, the extent to which one is conditioned by Lucien Goldman’s real consciousness will determine the extent to which a Badiouian event will appear inexplicable. Put differently, the state-of-the-situation in Haiti, the existent Western transcendental regime, and the range of existential possibilities afforded slaves as well as black people, could not account for what happened in Haiti. As Reinhardt explains,

Slaves could run away, alright. They could kill their overseers [. . .]. They could even gang up against their masters and burn down whole plantations and cities [. . .]. But they were certainly not capable of organising themselves and combating (let alone successfully) a well-trained European army. Yet they did. Here was the West, equipped with a whole ontology based on the notion that Blacks are inferior to Whites, unable to take care of themselves, naturally designed for slavery, the bottom rung of the ladder of human evolution – and these Blacks kept winning battle after battle. They defeated the French, they defeated the British, they defeated the Spanish. It could not be.

(250)

The extant expectation of, and ontological boundaries predicated upon, the *subject supposed to be slave* were thus interrupted by the appearance of thinking individuals who demanded freedom and became powerful in their common cause. Even the slaves’ unity of purpose

baffled the Europeans, since blacks “did not even have a word for freedom in their languages” (251). Accordingly, the West would either have to expand its ontology, and be drawn into a deeply traumatic sameness with blacks, who had made plain their potential for Immortal subjectivity, or “trivialise the facts” (251). Needless to say, the latter option prevailed. When mentioned at all, the Haitian Revolution was called anything but a revolution, and was, instead, branded with terms that connoted no more than violent racial disorder, as is apparent in Kleist’s reference to “the time ‘when the blacks killed the whites’” (qtd. in Reinhardt 251).

Other texts diminish the Revolution’s importance by concentrating on “isolated persons or events,” and thus “empty them of their revolutionary content” (252). So, for example, biographies of revolutionary leader Toussaint L’Ouverture extract him from the context of cultural beliefs that informed his exceptional actions. By rendering him exceptional, that is, “so outstanding a Black person,” the “fact that he was Black” is obliterated, and he is held “dangling above his own history, and moreover that of his people. Quite simply, “he acts *like* a European, and succeeds *as* a European” (252). Toussaint’s appropriation by whiteness suspends his predetermined, figural, (non)subjectivity as a slave, thereby allowing him to be captured within the French revolutionary notion of a ‘universal’ (that is, white) individual who fights for his self-evident Rights. European colonial history asserts its centrality by casting any successes, even those won against it, as a function of having imitated whiteness. When dropped back into his socio-historical context, he becomes what Freire would call an inauthentic, divided being, invaded and determined by a European model of humanity, and thus precluded from attaining autonomy. The biographies that Reinhardt describes seek to portray Toussaint as a mimic, and, by extension, to render the Haitian Revolution a derivative response to, rather than a supplementary destabilisation of, colonialism.

In addition, the Haitian Revolution itself is often explained away as a nexus of coincidences that had little to do with the strategic prowess of slaves seeking their freedom. Most importantly, the idea that the revolution took place as the result of a communal yearning for the freedom that slaves were very much capable of conceptualising and actualising proves too much for Western historiography. As Reinhardt notes, the revolution

is explained as an overreaction to individually suffered atrocities [. . .]. Its success is put down to interference from other European forces in the conflict and further explained by overemphasising European losses through yellow fever and tropical climate. True, these authors concede, the European armies were defeated – not by a

superior Black army, however, but by an unhappy coincidence of bad weather, mean bugs, and competing European powers.

(252)

Seemingly, then, the notion that the slaves could render their reality the malleable object of reflection, and act upon it so as to bring about transformation, is absent from the range of possibilities that Western ontology afforded black people. ‘They’ simply could not occupy the same existential range as whites. This disavowal of what must be the core significance of the Haitian Revolution, the potential for black people, as ordinary multiples, to be convoked to the composition of Immortal subjectivity, explains what Reinhardt considers to be “one of the strangest details of the French campaign”:

When, in November 1803, the leader of the French army, General Rochambeau, finally gave up fighting, he negotiated a 10-day armistice with Dessalines, and then surrendered to a British fleet cruising offshore. At this time, Rochambeau had been fighting against a Black army for about 2 years. One might think that this would have been time enough to realise that his enemies had neither White faces, nor were they fighting under the Union Jack. But having been beaten by Blacks, very obviously, was not something that he considered a possibility.

(252-53)

What Rochambeau’s stubborn oblivion makes plain is the sheer conceptual illegibility of the Haitians’ exercise of collective agency. A systematised force of organised, ‘European’ black people would have been staggering enough, but the Haitians exceeded this mimetic comparison and defeated their enemies by sustained belief in that of which the Europeans knew nothing.

What Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*, “the only sustained literary rendering of the Haitian Revolution” (Paravisini-Gerbert 114), provides is an account of how this seeming impossibility came to be. In its representations, the text reclaims the subjectivities that history has hollowed out, and shows how a complex interaction of humanistic and supernatural beliefs enabled, as well as sustained, the revolution. While the novel is far from unproblematic, it nonetheless affords one a glimpse of those who lived perhaps the most incredible event in the history of liberatory action. Theirs is a foundational story of a people’s unshakeable belief in themselves as the engineers of their own autonomy, of a singular resistance to oppression that was sustained by their faith in the power of their humanity. Haiti’s revolution did not merely ‘upset’ the colonial project, or ‘disrupt’ notions of whiteness vis-à-vis blackness, but produced a subject of truth that exceeded the mould of ‘normal’ black slave behaviour to the extent that it exploded what it meant to be a black person and a slave. Instead of accepting the false destiny accorded them, the Haitians

revealed themselves as an autonomous community that was capable of intervening in the production of reality.

2.3 *Magical Realism and Fidelity to Evental History*

I have suggested that the significance of Carpentier's novel arises from the historical fact that Haiti, in Badiouian terms, has been a thoroughly tonal site. As Edwidge Danticat points out, when President Aristide was forcibly deported by United States Marines in 2004, he invoked the nation's history by emulating the words spoken by Toussaint L'Ouverture, one of the leaders of Haiti's famous revolution, when he was captured and exiled: "In overthrowing me, you have only cut the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring again from the roots, for they are numerous and deep" (viii). It is this self-aware tradition of commitment to freedom that makes Haiti an invaluable site for the study and representation of emancipatory action. When Carpentier visited the island in the 1940s, "he found himself in daily contact with something he called the *real maravilloso*, or the 'real marvellous,'" an experience deepened by a sense of "treading on land where thousands of men anxious for freedom had believed" (Danticat x). Since the very people of Haiti live out the interaction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, magical realism, according to Danticat, "lives and thrives in past and present Haiti, just as it does in this novel" (xi). What is fascinating about Carpentier's text is its assertion that the Haitian Revolution was enabled by this fantastic sense of magical possibility.

Consequently, Carpentier's passage through Haiti literally produced the literary genre of magical realism, in which the ordinary and the extraordinary naturally coexist (see Faris and Zamora 5). Of course, a reader grounded in expectations of realistic representation will be unsettled by the unremarkable appearance of the magical alongside the quotidian, in which the former interrupts the latter and produces the impossible from within the mundane. As such, Matthew Strecher defines magical realism as "what happens when a highly detailed setting is invaded by something too strange to believe" (25). Of course, what magical realism challenges is the reader's delimitation of the possible and the impossible, by which she cordons off that which is to be believed from what must be dismissed. Encountering magical realism therefore exposes one's assumptions about the ambit of possibility, and so compels one to confront the cultural and literary norms that underpin the production of one's 'reality.' This means that there is an ethical dimension to the reading of magical realism, as the reader simultaneously encounters that which exceeds her version of reality, and those to whom the

‘impossible’ is perfectly natural. A belief in the normative ‘purity’ of experience or representation becomes impossible, and the reader, in reading of those who live other possibilities, is required to expand her frontiers of possibility.

Because Carpentier’s novel seeks to represent a revolution inspired by a sense of magical possibility, his method of writing must itself stage a disruption of Western modes of representation. By juxtaposing the ways in which colonisers and colonised interpret events, especially magical happenings that interrupt realist colonial representations of Haiti and thus the primacy of the coloniser’s experience, Carpentier is able to make his text enact “the split perceptions of postcolonial cultures, and so to undermine purist representations of the world” (Boehmer 236). Indeed, magical realism is itself a paradox, a collision and interruption of realities that disables the notion that the only valid perceptions and representations of colonial reality are those ‘ordered’ in such a way as to affirm the coloniser’s position.

In other words, the plurality innate to magical realism disrupts the singularity of colonial histories and representations. As befits Carpentier’s project, the representational mode of magical realism enables Haiti to be written in a way that disrupts its apprehension by colonial representation. Just as Badiouian “being-two” involves an individual being part of a particular situation while simultaneously dedicating herself to creating possibilities beyond it, so too the belief that a slave colony could become a site of freedom creates a radical split in how the island is perceived and represented. Carpentier’s magical realism, then, is not merely a literary device, but a representational mode that provides profound insight into how revolution might be written.

The problem inherent to a project such as Carpentier’s is that the very act of writing necessarily seeks to reify and capture the subject of its representation. To ‘write revolution’ therefore risks undermining the event’s excessive dimension by yoking that which has the potential to supplement reality to the order of realist representation and thus quelling its radical nature. This is precisely why Badiou decries the historicisation of an event in order to ‘understand’ it. Magical realism, however, necessarily resists a determinate reading experience by confronting the reader with impossible happenings that she cannot control through expectation, which is to say advance knowledge, or render ‘comprehensible’ through rigorous rereading from within an unchanged episteme. Carpentier’s text is therefore able to decentre both Western–colonial representations of Haiti as well as readers implicated in the literary traditions that produced such representations. Accordingly, this novel represents the Haitian Revolution without fatally diminishing its radically interruptive, evental nature. By implication, the task that Carpentier sets before the reader is to read of magical and

supernatural phenomena without dismissing them as naive or ‘unrealistic,’ and in doing so to gain belief in the possibility of the impossible.

If the text’s representational mode indeed summons the reader to the fidelity that it represents, then it follows that a revolution’s textual representation is one way in which the event “ripples” outwards, addressing itself to all, and sounding new calls to reinvent reality. By encountering the text, the reader is exposed to the shivering tonality of Haiti as an evental site. She witnesses the sameness of evental fidelity that was shared by the Haitians and, potentially at least, becomes a subject off whom the novel’s tonality resounds. “For is there anything more timely and timeless,” the text asks, “than a public battle to control one’s destiny, a communal crusade for self-determination?” (Danticat xii).

2.4 *The Early Chapters: Potential Consciousness, Pre-Evental Courage, and the Origins of Simulacrum*

In this section, I discuss how the recovery of elided African history awakens the slaves’ potential consciousnesses and, coupled with the facility of the imagination, enables them to imagine existential possibilities beyond slavery. This self-empowerment induces pre-evental militancy and convokes the slaves to sameness. My argument is that the revolution, as represented by Carpentier, has its roots in communal interactions between history, the imagination, and belief in magical possibilities through the power of Vodou.

The opening chapters of *The Kingdom of This World* stage a series of divergences in the ways that characters experience their environment. That is, they provide interpretations of reality, as well as historical narratives which, in their sheer plurality, challenge the centrism of imperial consciousness. The novel’s focaliser, the young slave Ti Noël, accompanies his master, Lenormand de Mézy, to the town of Cap Français. From the outset, the setting is clearly European colonial: de Mézy makes purchases in “ringing *louis d’or*,” before going to a barber who subscribes “to the *Leyden Gazette* for the enlightenment of his educated customers” (Carpentier 4). As he considers his surrounds, Ti Noël’s imaginative ruminations provide one of the novel’s most striking images. He sees four, decidedly lifeless, wigged wax heads on a counter in front of the barber’s shop, and notes that

[b]y an amusing coincidence, in the window of the tripe-shop next door there were calves’ heads, skinned and each with a spring of parsley across the tongue, which possessed the same waxy quality. [. . .] Only a wooden wall separated the two

counters, and it amused Ti Noël to think that alongside the pale calves' heads, heads of white men were served on the same tablecloth.

(4-5)

The slave also observes that the proximity of “jars of gum Arabic, the bottles of lavender water, the boxes of rice powder, close neighbours to the kettles of tripe and the platters of kidneys, completed, with this coincidence of flasks and cruets, that picture of an abominable feast,” the work of “some experienced, macabre cook” (5). Ti Noël’s mental ability to dissolve symbolic divides, and thereby to identify the inextricable link between the vaunted and the macabre, suggests the burgeoning of a consciousness that is able to decode reality, and thereby to perceive voids.

Symbolically, by refusing to acknowledge the barrier between the two, Ti Noël draws the visage of ‘civilised’ colonial whiteness into a confrontation with the death and grotesquery that is its denied corollary. Also, if there is a hint of cannibalism at work here, it acts to subvert colonial discourse about the ‘primitive’ and ‘cannibalistic’ Caribbean. ‘Cannibal’ is a corruption of the word ‘Carib,’ the Caribs being indigenous Caribbeans who were virtually annihilated by white colonials (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Empire* 145). The replacement of ‘Carib’ with the figural ‘cannibal’ purports to justify the colonial ‘civilisation’ of the former, which is to say their extirpation. Quite plainly, it is the colonisers who are the initiators of parasitic objective violence, and so Ti Noël perceptively locates colonial whiteness as the cannibalistic force that strips lives and cultures down to glaring, macabre skulls.

So, by the supplementation of an imaginary tablecloth, the very face of sedate Western civilisation is forced to encounter its excess, and therefore to admit the duplicitous nature of its ‘improving’ enterprise. Because colonialism claims its ‘civilising’ mandate from the violent foreknowledge that only a savage nothingness exists beyond its borders, the operation ‘unofficially’ erases lives and cultures as it advances. This erasure brings to mind the wives of European monarchs, who “buried foetuses in a convent whose cellars were filled with skeletons” (Carpentier 11). The image of discarded bodies secreted beneath an institutional structure suggests that European society voids those with whom it is incommensurate, and further conceals this crime by rendering lives, and deaths, invisible. This censorship undergirds the representational component of the colonial project, and obfuscates the concentrated “horror” which bursts forth in Kurtz’s famous utterance in *Heart of Darkness* (147).

By implication, the hidden skeletons in Europe and the obvious but socially invisible framework of slavery in Haiti are drawn into a relationship that reveals the latent reality of colonialism: violence and atrocity. In short, the appearance and reality of colonialism are starkly different. Through his deliberate reference to the frailty of the wall dividing the two worlds, Carpentier foreshadows the explosion of unaccounted-for Haitian culture into the domain of its hyper-visible imperial counterpart. When juxtaposed with a skinned skull, the crowded image of the “abominable feast” makes plain the excess that exists parallel to the imperial view of reality (Carpentier 5). This disregarded excess reminds one that Critchley identifies the people as those “who do not count,” and who have “no right” to intervene in the production of their reality (*Five Problems* 183). That is, the ignorance of absolutist colonial consciousness gestures towards the tonality of Haiti as an evental site, and so, in Badiou’s words, what is intimated is the coming-to-be of the present but unaccounted for: the void.

Also, while waiting for de Mézy, Ti Noël sees a copper engraving that depicts “a kind of French admiral or ambassador being received by a Negro framed by feather fans and seated upon a throne adorned with figures of monkeys and lizards,” and is told that the monarch depicted is “a king of your country” (6). This inscription reminds Ti Noël of the stories told by fellow slave Macandal, later to become an important pre-evental leader:

[T]he Mandigue Negro would tell of things that had happened in the great kingdoms of Popo, of Arada, of the Nagos, or the Fulah. He spoke of the great migrations of tribes, of age-long wars, of epic battles in which the animals had been the allies of men. He knew the story of Adonhueso, of the King of Angola, of King Da [. . .].

(7)

Macandal’s narratives also place the slaves’ mythical forebears in contrast to the feeble European monarchs, “wigged in false hair,” and as likely to be found “effeminately pointing a leg in the measures of a rigadon” as suffering a scolding at the hands of “any trumpery friar” (8).

While this oppositional contestation might be dismissed as being determined by that which it resists, Freire would concur that even a structured, binary encounter deposes the *image* of the unassailable oppressor, and so levels the skewed psychological-symbolic terrain that seeks to render such a confrontation unthinkable. Indeed, the symbolic power of the white European had to be worsted to make possible, in C.L.R. James’s words, “[t]he transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day” (*Black Jacobins* ix). In Goldman’s terms, what one has is the inception of “potential” consciousness,

and thus a powerful challenge to “real” consciousness (qtd. in Freire, *Pedagogy* 94). So, the “deep wisdom of Macandal” imbues the slaves with a history of self that undermines that given by their masters, and awakens the slaves to existential possibilities other than slavery (Carpentier 8). Thus conceived, history functions not as a ‘stabilising’ force that establishes arcs of predetermination, but as a radical impulse that denies the supposed inevitability of the state-of-the-situation. Such history expands the bounds of present ontology by gesturing towards ‘previous’ lives lived according to Immortal principles that, in the ‘realistic present,’ seem so radical and revolutionary as to be properly futural.

But, despite the stirring of his mind and imagination, the young Ti Noël’s thoughts remain framed and interrupted by the presence of de Mézy. The slave’s reverie begins when he is left alone, and is curbed when he hears “the voice of his master” (9). Though outwardly subservient, Ti Noël’s perceptions of reality are altered by the twin thrusts of history and imagination: de Mézy emerges from the barber’s shop with his face bearing “a startling resemblance to the four dull wax faces that stood [. . .] smiling stupidly” (9). Furthermore, the master purchases a skinned calf’s head from the tripe-shop, and hands it to his slave, who imagines that it resembles the bald head beneath his master’s wig (9). Also poignant is Ti Noël’s interior ability to render the symbolic figure of the master an object of reflection and ridicule rather than as an icon of unapproachable power. Plus, when the slave mentally uncovers de Mézy, the master’s head he imagines is tellingly similar to an article of the abominable feast.

The development of Ti Noël’s consciousness is furthered by Macandal, who creates a sense of communal Haitian identity, and so undermines the ‘inevitability’ of black slavery, through the exercise of “his narrative arts” (*Kingdom* 13). Inhabiting “different personages” as he moves through his accounts, Macandal is first and foremost a storyteller and guardian of the subjectivities that comprise his narratives. While feeding cane into a mill, he imparts his wisdoms to Ti Noël, upon whom they have a profound effect:

he realised that Cap Français [. . .] was a trumpery thing compared with the cities of Guinea. There, cupolas of red clay rose above great fortresses surrounded by battlements; the markets were famous beyond the limits of the deserts [. . .]. In those cities the workmen were skilled in working metals, forging swords that cut like razors and weighed no more than a wing in the hand of the user. [. . .] Wheat, sesame, and millet were stored in great depots, and trade was carried on from kingdom to kingdom [. . .]. Under palm-frond covers slept the giant drums, the mothers of drums, with legs painted red and human faces.

(14)

Here, Ti Noël's ability to reflect upon his reality, to locate the physical edifices of colonialism in an economy of contestation with the accomplishments of an elided African history that must be *imagined*, reveals the development of his potential consciousness. In addition, where Macandal's accounts of the slaves' forebears were previously steeped in myth, they now turn to concrete descriptions of peoples and their societies. The colonial 'achievement' at the Cap, and by extension throughout Africa, is rendered a brutal farce when confronted with African feats of engineering, architecture, craftsmanship, blacksmithing, agriculture and trade.

More important than these material achievements, though, is that the recovery of elided history summons a purposely suppressed life-world, and thereby goes beyond the diachronic 'comparison' that maps European technologies over African ones in order to justify the former's domination of the latter. What is evident is that in order for colonialism to 'discover' a barbarian void beyond its borders it had first barbarously to destroy the civilisations it encountered. While colonial discourse asserts an innate, binary division between itself and its 'primitive' subjects, this constructed essentialism demands the destruction of that which would equate it with its subjects. That is, it seeks to destroy all physical as well as representational evidence of human sameness.

By implication, what one has is the devastating invention, through physical violence alongside the violence of colonial representation, of a *subject supposed to be slave*, and thus the establishment of a void. When this void is revealed by Macandal's restorative history, slavery as an ordained 'destiny' is deeply undermined. In the case of Ti Noël, Macandal's narratives expose his developing consciousness to untested feasibilities. An important detail, in this regard, is Macandal's invocation of sleeping drums, key instruments in the performance of Vodou ritual. By implication, the task set before the slaves is to cast off the false mortal 'destiny' violently contrived by the image of the slave-subject, and to take up their Immortal selves through the collective power of Vodou.

Tellingly, the imaginative flight of consciousness that Ti Noël and Macandal undertake contrasts with, and compels sympathy towards, the irremediable plight of an "old horse" that is forced to "circle the mill at a pace that habit had made mechanical" (13). Here the condition of slavery is mirrored by the horse's very reduction to its "animal substructure," a degrading condition that renders it a mechanical component of the machine it drives. Importantly, just as Ti Noël's meditation is bracketed by the presence of de Mézy, so too is Macandal's narrative interrupted by the mechanism at which he is forced to work. The fatigued horse stumbles and falls, at which the "sudden tug of the rollers" pulls Macandal's arm into the machinery and crushes it "up to the shoulder" (14-15). Particularly striking is the

image of an “eye of blood” beginning “to widen in the pan catching the juice” (15), which intimates that, like a product of the colonial system, the slave himself has been reaped and processed.

Indeed, the violence with which Macandal is wrenched into the device, and therein mutilated, marks the impossibility of a ‘peaceable’ experience of forced servitude. So, while slavery might take the form of invisible objective violence in a ‘lenient’ master, or slaves whose conditions outwardly resemble those of ordinary labourers, the necrotic essence of the enterprise is indisputable. Quite simply, there is no place of nonviolence within a system that accepts human beings as property. This is why Rousseau asserts, in *Principles of the Right of War*, that slavery is a condition of warfare. Following Aristotle, he reminds one that “in order to authorize the cruel treatment meted out to the Helots in Sparta, the Ephors on taking office would solemnly declare war upon them” (168). However, this “declaration was as superfluous as it was barbaric,” for “a state of war necessarily existed between them, for no other reason than that they were respectively the masters and the slaves” (168). Macandal’s dismemberment is therefore not an industrial ‘accident,’ but the true operation of a mechanism that harvests the living.

What is fascinating is that, with substantial irony, Macandal’s disablement becomes the enabling condition for his revolutionary action. As a result of having been “[i]ncapacitated,” he is placed in charge of “pasturing the cattle” (Carpentier 17). When pushed to the margins of the plantation, he is afforded a measure of freedom, a space beyond the immediate realm of his master. Thus disregarded by the state-of-the-situation, he unearths “the existence of certain plants to which nobody else paid attention,” and discovers “the secret life of strange species given to disguise, confusion and camouflage, protectors of the little armoured beings that avoid the pathways of the ants” (17). At various points throughout the novel, Carpentier uses ants’ systematic, hierarchical social system as a metaphor for oppression, and later compares the “big-headed” ants, those that prevent deviation from the colony’s established paths, to de Mézy’s overseers (170). The plants discovered by Macandal, then, are the shields of creatures seeking to exist outside the ants’ inscribed pathways – creatures that live in alternate, subversive corridors of being. Such plants are described as “plait[ing] themselves in slimy tangles far from the sun [. . .] pushing through the ground in the shape of ears, ox-tongues, wrinkled excrescences, covered with exudations, opening their striped parasols in damp recesses” (18).

Natural imagery is here characterised by excess, in the form of fantastical grotesquery, which repels keepers of the *status quo*, be they ant or human. The inference is that the unity

shared between multiples that exceed their normative situations extends into the natural world. As with Žižek's "parts of no part" (*Violence* 157), the creatures that obfuscate themselves from the ants, the plants that protect them, and the one-armed slave are all germane beings. The novel thus naturalises revolution against oppression, and associates it with life and vitality, which in turn renders slavery unnatural and necrotic. When Macandal seeks out these "spurned growths" (Carpentier 17), he implicitly enters the hidden domain of that which exists beyond the state-of-the-situation, and in this void discovers powerful natural poisons with which to destabilise the regime. The suggestion is that the land of Haiti itself contributes to its own tonality by participating in its peoples' pursuit of freedom. In other words, as a place that has been 'poisoned' by slavery, the island necessarily develops nodes of contagion that, if found, might be turned upon the source of the invasive crime.

Indeed, the naturalisation of revolution is again affirmed when Ti Noël helps Macandal to test a poison on one of de Mézy's dogs, and also on "the two best milch-cows on the plantation – the white-tailed ones brought from Rouen" (20, 26). These animals are implicated in the processes of violence and industry that sustain colonialism, and, moreover, are markedly foreign. The dogs' foreignness and association with violence are made plain later in the novel by the importation of hundreds more mastiffs to help quell the revolution (83). Ti Noël accounts for the deaths of the milch-cows to de Mézy with the argument that animals "brought in from foreign parts" are typically unable to "distinguish between good grass and certain plants that poisoned their blood" (26). The implication here is not only that colonial slavery amounts to an invasion of Haiti, but also that slavery and colonialism do not belong, cannot be countenanced, anywhere in the world.

Interestingly, Macandal's last action before deserting the plantation is to stand "for a long time looking at the mills, the coffee- and cacao-drying sheds, the indigo works, the forges, the cisterns, and the meat-smoking platforms" (20). After contemplating these physical structures of slavery, he declares that "The time has come" (20), and takes to the mountains, proclaiming the start of his pre-evental acts of subversion. As a militant who has investigated the situation as best he believes he can, Macandal must now take a leap of faith and 'arbitrarily' declare the beginning of pre-evental labour in the hope of triggering an event. The decision to begin one's labour is the type of singular, uncertain decision that grows out of belief in the possibility of change and the need to begin acting from this premise alone. Macandal's departure from his position as slave is therefore also the point at which he commits himself to Badiou's "hazardous course" of radical action.

When he detects Macandal's escape, de Mézy dismisses his loss of a "one-armed slave" as "a trifling thing" (21). He claims absolute knowledge of his former slave, believing that "[a] one-armed man was nothing but a one-armed man," and not worth risking the loss of "a couple of good mastiffs whom [he] might have tried to silence with his machete" (21). Moreover, the plantation owner reasons that "with so many plantations on all sides, the crippled one would not get very far" (21). He thus believes Macandal to be geographically and ontologically encircled by the system of slavery upon which the supposedly inescapable relationship between master and slave is built. Now twice disregarded and allowed freedom to move within the 'confines' of the regime, Macandal himself becomes a sort of void, a non-place that enables a return in the form of a resounding blow against the existent.

For Ti Noël, Macandal's departure means "the disappearance of all that world evoked by his tales. With him had gone Kankan Muza, Adonhueso, the royal kings, and the Rainbow of Whidah" (23). In the absence of a sense of the world-beyond, Ti Noël sinks back into what Badiou would call his servile "animal substructure," as emerges from the way in which he lives "with his animals, whose ears and perineums he kept scrupulously free of ticks" (23-24). Though his potential consciousness has been awakened, it is not yet capable of self-substantiation, and so he remains in this 'unconscious' state until summoned by Macandal, who reveals the pre-evental handiwork that he has undertaken since his escape. As part of a "long, patient labour," Macandal has visited "the plantations of the Plaine one by one, establishing direct contact with all who worked on them" (25).

Apart from the "long, patient labour" that enables the slaves' apparently 'sudden' uprising, it is important to note that the confederates begin to subvert their social roles, their accorded positions within the state-of-the-situation. Through their allegiance to the possibility of freedom, the slaves become more than the degrees of existence doled out to them by the transcendental regime and begin to take on a pre-evental excess. A gardener is now no longer just a gardener, but a subversive informer, saboteur, spy, and revolutionary in waiting. Significantly, the cause of liberation invokes a unifying sameness amongst the slaves, cutting through lines based on race, gender and culture. It ceases to matter whether a slave has Fulah, Congolese, Angolese, mulatto, or, in fact, any other cultural affiliation (25). All are called as multiples of a tonal site, and as those who have undergone the universally unliveable experience of the denial of life. That is, the slaves are united in Badiouian as well as Žižekian sameness. As regards the latter, it is poignant that many of the militants appear damaged and misshapen by slavery: the "bowlegged Fulah" and "one-eyed Jean-Pierrot" are summoned along with those "whose buttocks were zebra-striped with scars" (25). So, the willingness to

pursue an Immortal purpose and the need to escape a brutal situation of denied Immortality, the violence of which affirms that all people suffer in the same way, are the drivers of this union.

While the militants themselves remain socially invisible, continuing to perform their position as slaves, the product of their labour takes on a destabilising, pre-evental subjectivity. When deployed, Macandal's poisons are depicted as an animated entity that crawls "across the Plaine du Nord, invading pastures and stables" (26). This personification develops the suggestion that it is the land itself that brings forth the means of insurrection into the realm of agency. Again, Carpentier naturalises the revolution. What the Haitians carry out is therefore not an abhorrent crime against the 'civilised' colonials, but rather a natural reaction to the unnatural condition of slavery. There is also a likeness between the image of living, sentient poison that stands for the slaves' actions, and Badiou's notion of the "singular production" of a Subject (*Ethics* 43): the overarching entity that is comprised of, yet exceeds, individual Immortal multiples. It is appropriate that a pre-evental Subject should emerge, given that the slaves have begun to organise themselves and challenge their situation with strategic action and deeds that were thought 'impossible' of them. Moreover, because the evental site's capacity for destabilisation has been tapped in such a way as to render the campaign covert, the poisoning is perceived by the colonists as a function of place, rather than people.

The split between colonial and revolutionary consciousness is evident in the ignorance of the colonists, who do not know "how [the poison] found its way into the grass and alfalfa, got mixed in with the bales of hay, climbed into the mangers. The fact was that cows, oxen, steers, horses, and sheep were dying by the hundreds, filling the whole countryside with an ever-present stench of carrion" (Carpentier 27). Because they have yet to reveal themselves as anything but slaves, the militants remain a void that interrupts the regime. When littered with carcasses, the ostensibly 'peaceable' colony is revealed as a place of systematic enslavement and death. In other words, the slaves render the island a visible icon of the invisible objective violence at work there and, like Ti Noël's imagined tablecloth, draw the artifice of colonial civilisation into confluence with its reality of death and atrocity.

Since the campaign of poison aims to render the enterprise of colonial parasitism potentially fatal, it is not long before, to the colonists' "general horror," it becomes known "that the poison had got into the houses" (28). So Macandal's pathogens violate the interior domestic spaces that exist only as a by-product of the violation of the public space outside them. The colonists find themselves stalked by an animated poison

which lurked, as though waiting to spring, in glasses on night tables, soup tureens, medicine bottles, in bread, wine, fruit, and salt. [. . .] In the shadow of the silver crucifixes that moved up and down the roads, green poison, yellow poison, or poison that had no colour went creeping along, coming down the kitchen chimneys, slipping through the cracks of locked doors [. . .].

(28-29)

Especially salient, in this respect, is the image of poisons moving unseen alongside the settlers' funeral processions: the poisons literally parallel and haunt colonialism with its attendant fact of unnatural death. Moreover, the impossibility of keeping the poison out, exemplified by the fate of the Du Périgny family, who "found it in a keg of cider that they had brought with their own hands from the hold of a ship that had just docked" (30), mocks the notion of colonial rule in Haiti.

What the colonisers experience is the impossibility of insulating themselves from the locus of the colonial crime, of retreating into a secure conservatory amongst the ravages of slavery. That is, the colonists' translocation of currency, architecture, and geographical references duplicates European symbolism and 'civilises' the colony. By cutting through the security of simulacra engendered by the creation of a 'little Europe' on the island, the poisons yielded by the land singularise and particularise Haiti. Each death seems to tell the colonists: *you are here*, and, in a complete annihilation of the experience of home and belonging, *you are going to die here*. The effect of the poisoning is to return the 'civilising' message of colonialism in what Žižek would call its inverted, true form: it is now the proponents of institutional misery, not the slaves, whose lives are vitiated and who experience themselves as a terrorised and impotent class. Differently put, the poison makes plain the true condition of the slave colony: a place that "[p]utrefaction had claimed [. . .] for its own" (30). Further, as Badiou would put it, the slaves' campaign forces a reaction from the colonial regime, and thus gives measure to its heretofore immeasurable, seemingly omnipotent power. The "garrison of the Cap," which would usually possess vast symbolic power, is reduced to "ridiculously threatening an intangible enemy with dire death" (29-30).

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the interactions between the slaves and the figures of excess in which they believe. Under threat of execution (which is carried out anyway) "the bowlegged Fulah" reveals that "Macandal, the one-armed, now a *houngan* of the Rada rite, invested with superhuman powers as a result of his possession by the major gods on several occasions" and "[e]ndowed with supreme authority by the Rulers of the Other Shore," is "the Lord of Poison" (30). Again, the invocation of the powers of the Other Shore serves to link the slaves to a history that subjectivises and empowers them, but this 'place

beyond' also invokes a radical excess, an imagined realm of freedom populated by gods whom the faithful will be able to summon through a true event.

Furthermore, the 'identification' of Macandal as the Lord of Poison is worth discussing. As I have argued, the animated poison that assails the colonists is akin to a collective Badiouian Subject, and is therefore irreducible to the individual subjectivities that constitute it. While Macandal's discovery of the island's latent poisons is noteworthy, as are his pre-evental labours, he alone could not have produced the excessive presence of a Subject. The Lord of Poison, that is, the singular fiction representative of an 'inexplicable' and seemingly inexorable force of lethality, could only be the result of secretive collective action. Macandal cannot literally be the Lord of Poison, and to read him as such would be to vaunt the lone individual over the community that supports him. This literal interpretation would ignore all those who contribute their fidelity and radical action to the production of the Lord of Poison, and cheapen Macandal's own fidelity as well as his belief in his comrades.

With regard to the latter, it is ironic that "the bowlegged Fulah" (30), explicitly mentioned as one in whom Macandal placed his faith, reveals him as the Lord of Poison. Himself a labouring constituent of the fiction that is the Lord of Poison, the Fulah cannot externalise this Subject or reduce it to an individual. In effect, the Lord of Poison is inside the Fulah and Macandal equally. The "one-armed" is no doubt an effective leader, but his leadership should be understood as Freirian: it proceeds from within, not atop, his companions, in whom it must have profound faith and upon whose faith it is contingent. Here Macandal's loss of an arm is significant in that it both makes possible his enabling marginalisation and locates his actions within a communal Subject that arises from the work of many hands, and so exceeds the capacities of the individual. For example, Mme Lenormand de Mézy's death is occasioned by "tasting a particularly tempting orange that an ever-obliging limb had put within her reach" (29). The first inference to be drawn from this description is that the arm of a 'servant' placed the fruit before her, which suggests that the severed, fictional 'hand' of Macandal is ever-present in the actions of his followers.

Significantly, during Macandal's four-year absence, the slaves use the natural environment as a means of affirming his presence. It is believed that he has "recovered his corporeal integrity in animal guise," and is able to traverse the island with "wings one day, spurs another" (36). As such, the slaves share "with great rejoicing, the strangest news: a green lizard had warmed its back on the roof of a tobacco barn; someone had seen a night moth flying at noon; a big dog, with bristling hair, had dashed through the house, carrying off a haunch of venison; a gannet – so far from the sea! – had shaken the lice from its wings over

the arbour of the back patio” (35). Each of these unusual, transgressive sightings is read as a visitation by Macandal, who, it is thought, watches “over his faithful to find out if they still had faith in his return” (35). By connecting Macandal, a symbol of fidelity and Immortality, to the natural world, the Haitians affirm their connection with the evental site. Courage is maintained through the knowledge that, having freed himself from human form, “the one-armed was everywhere [. . .] he had made himself master of the courses of the underground streams, the caverns of the seacoast, and the treetops, and now ruled the whole island” (35-36). Transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary allows the slaves to continue to believe in the coming of the impossible, the visitation of the supernatural upon the existent.

When Macandal returns to human form his presence unites those nearby in a cry for freedom that, “as though wrenched from their vitals,” evokes “the rending despair of peoples carried into captivity to build pyramids, towers, or endless walls” (42). There is a sharp contrast between the slaves’ invocation of an eternal sameness with all those who have experienced slavery, and the reaction of those who fear nothing more than the freedom of their slaves: the colonials become necessarily fearful of their position in relation to those they have enslaved, and are found clinging to their “muskets, blunderbusses, and pistols” (42).

Just as the island’s poisons visited the exteriorised necrosis of slavery upon the colonists’ domestic spaces, the slaves’ cries invade the slavers’ interior, and are perceived as an attack on the ‘normative’ silence that affirms the non-relation between masters and slaves. To use Žižek’s terms, the colonists encounter a portent of aggression, the radical demand for transformation, and respond with violence in order to sustain the *status quo*. To hold slaves is to commit an atrocity which can only go unmarked as a crime as long as the criminals themselves have a violent grip upon the transcendental regime, and so the colonists are locked into the performance of their position, which is itself dependent upon maintaining the institution of slavery. The strength of this performative deadlock is precisely why, according to Freire, it is only the oppressed and those who truly commune with them that are able to free both themselves and their oppressors.

However, the colonists fail to realise that violence, actual or symbolic, will not extinguish the Haitians’ desire for freedom. Though Macandal is captured and displayed for public execution in order to dishearten his followers, the slaves heap scorn upon their masters’ foolishness. They believe that, when bound atop a woodpile in order to be burned, Macandal will simply escape into the “mysterious world of the insects” (45). Indeed, he slips his bonds and takes to the air, “flying overhead,” before plunging into the “black waves of the sea of slaves” (46). That is, he dissolves into sameness with his followers, uniting them in the

“single” exclamation: “Macandal saved!” (46). In the ensuing chaos, the fate of his body goes largely unnoticed: “held by ten soldiers, he had been thrust head first into the fire, and [. . .] a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry” (46). When the commotion subsides, all that remains is “the fire [. . .] burning like any fire of good wood [. . .]. There was no longer anything more to see” (46).

Two sets of perceptions emerge from this event. The slaves rejoice at the colonists having been “outwitted by the Mighty Powers of the Other Shore,” and their faith in the possibility of rebellion is strengthened by Macandal’s having remained in “the Kingdom of This World” (46). The display of colonial violence is thus rendered ironic, and actually strengthens the slaves’ resolve to labour towards the transformation of their world. By contrast, de Mézy retires, having drawn from the day “a number of philosophical considerations on the inequality of the human races,” particularly the Negroes’ supposed indifference to the torture of one of their fellows, “which he planned to develop in a speech larded with Latin quotations” (46-47).

What is important is how the incident is received as a performative injunction. The slaves are summoned in order to witness, and have their fidelity broken by, the symbolic execution of Macandal. Similarly, the white plantation owners arrive in order to witness the destruction of that which has disrupted the order of their ‘peaceable’ lives, and to be affirmed in their position as masters by the dismay of their slaves. However, the slaves reject what the colonists understand as the symbolic import of Macandal’s execution, and preserve him as an Immortal presence. Although Macandal’s body is burned, the whites are therefore unable to undo the fidelity that his actions have inspired in his followers. In other words, de Mézy’s expectation is undermined: because he has expected reassurance from colonially ‘civilised’ – cowed – black slaves, he leaves disgusted. The irony is that what he expects to see is the efficacy of colonial atrocity, and it therefore follows that it is *he* who is a member of the true barbarian class. In being able to resist the intended consequence of Macandal’s execution, the slaves retain their fidelity and belief in the novel’s first Subject, the Lord of Poison. Since, as I have argued, the Lord of Poison is a pre-evental Subject who inhabits and is produced by the labour of the Haitians, what this means is that the slaves continue to believe in themselves as agents of possibility.

As Badiou would say, ordinary multiplicity and sameness mean that “the One is not” (*Ethics* 25). There is no ‘super multiple’ without whom a truth-procedure necessarily collapses. I am not suggesting that revolutionary leaders need efface themselves, but rather that the strength of radical action should be located in the plurality of its agents. This belief in

an agential community fosters a resilient communal sense of hope and, as shown, thwarts reactionary attempts to equate the loss of an individual with the cessation of a truth-procedure. While Macandal is at the symbolic forefront of the slaves' pre-evental labours, it is telling that individual leaders become less and less conspicuous in the novel. If the authentic leaders of revolution merge into sameness with the people who share it with them, it follows that those who exclude themselves from this communion by committing Badiouian evil become hyper-visible. Significantly, then, shortly after Macandal's death the reader is introduced to Henri Christophe, later to emerge as the island's first black ruler, and a cruel betrayer of the revolution.

So as to understand the latter's latent complicity in oppression, it is important to note the images of colonial appeasement and whiteness that accompany his introduction into the narrative:

The Negro's dishes were famous for the perfection of their seasoning when he was trying to please a guest newly arrived from Paris, or in his *olla podria*, for the abundance of ingredients when he was catering to the appetite of some hungry Spaniard [. . .]. Moreover, Henri Christophe, in his high white cap, in the smoky kitchen, had a magic touch with turtle vol-au-vent or wood pigeons. And when he put his hand to the mixing bowl, the fragrance of his puff paste carried as far as the rue des Trois Visages.

(Carpentier 51-52)

What this description makes plain is that while the slaves are engaged in remaining faithful to the process of their liberation, Christophe is actually revelling in his position as colonial subject. He welcomes and immerses himself in the very cultures that oppress him. It is telling that the banquets he prepares delight his colonial patrons, and so implicate him in the transformation of the island into a 'little Europe.' Christophe's affirming colonial preparations therefore contrast with the unsettling grotesquery of the "abominable feast" (5), and reveal him to value colonial sensibilities above the slaves' freedom. Throughout the novel, he tries to distance himself from the supernatural beliefs and magical possibilities that characterise the revolution and, by separating himself from Vodou, the people's magic, he also separates himself from the Haitians themselves. Given his distance from those with whom he ostensibly 'shares' the revolution, he may be regarded as one who enacts a revolution *for* the people, which is to say without them. This early glimpse of Christophe as a comprador, who does not share the slaves' thirst for freedom, anticipates his later betrayal of the Haitians' revolutionary event.

In this section of the chapter I have shown how the slaves' pre-evental actions are the result of their ability to imagine existential possibilities other than slavery. By recovering African history they come to realise themselves as agents of change, and cast this belief in terms of the power of Vodou. Importantly, the slaves' pre-evental fidelity is able to survive the absence and later execution of Macandal, and is therefore vested in the people themselves. To use Freire's terms, one has the makings of a revolution that belongs to its people, instead of being carried out for them.

Thus united, the slaves begin to live out a radical fidelity in which the pragmatic possibility of magical happenings constantly interrupts the 'monolithic' stasis of their situation. As such, Carpentier's magical realist mode characterises the events that it represents. Further, the extent to which characters admit the possibility of ordinary miracles correlates with their fidelity or, in the case of Christophe, betrayal.

As concerns the reader, I have indicated that Carpentier's use of magical realism conditions the task he sets before her: to read of the impossible without dismissing it from the standpoint of the existent, and so to share a belief in the possibility of possibilities with those of whom she reads. That is, the reader's reading must mimic the Haitians' fidelity. Both labour to overcome the limits of real consciousness, and thus begin to move into a common space of excession. In other words, the opening chapters of the novel begin to establish the reader's openness to extraordinary possibilities alongside the roots of revolution that are enabled by this mode of thinking.

2.5 *Event and Revolution*

Having discussed the origins of the Haitians' pre-evental labour I am now able to examine Carpentier's representation of the Revolution itself. My intention is to show that the beliefs which convoke the slaves to communal agency are carried into the event that they enable. Put differently, I am here concerned with the Haitians' ethical consistency, the ways in which they sustain their radical break from the state-of-the-situation and so remain in excess of themselves. As suggested earlier, the essence of the Haitians' fidelity is the belief in possibility that they begin to live out. Their ability to suspend belief in the strictures of reality facilitates their co-belonging to ordinary reality *and* the 'impossible' possibilities that these strictures elide. With this in mind, in this section of my chapter I trace the importance of Vodou as a communal system of faith in the world-to-come. This conception of fidelity enables a fusion of the notion of a true event with the summoning of the mighty African gods.

Accordingly, Vodou both serves as the locus of individual Immortality and provides the towering Subject-figure(s) that exemplify the might of those who unite in sameness.

If the task of the revolutionaries is to maintain the excess of evental fidelity, then Carpentier's is to write of them without diminishing their radical dimension. To do so the author portrays the great victories of the Haitian Revolution as supernatural events, and so imbues the revolutionaries with the kind of measureless force that, in Žižek's estimation, is used to give state authority the appearance of omnipotence. By means of this utter reversal of power relations, I shall argue, Carpentier successfully depicts the Haitian Revolution as a true event, that is, a time in which individuals commune and remake their world.

From the outset, the revolution is conceptualised as a communal undertaking. The slaves assemble in a "congress of shadows," at which "Bouckman, the Jamaican," delivers a "final admonition": "The white men's God orders the crime. Our gods demand vengeance from us. Destroy the image of the white man's God who thirsts for our tears; let us listen to the cry of freedom within ourselves" (60-61). The repetition of the first-person plural is interesting, as it denotes a community built upon individual responses to slavery as well as a collective belief in the impossible. This is a collective that does not eschew personal experience, but is called into being by it. What the Haitians form is a movement that mobilises the power of secular resistance *and* supernatural belief. So, at this gathering, the revolutionaries call upon the ancestral gods and name the "general staff of the insurrection" (61-62). Thoroughgoing practicality, including 'civilised' strategic terms and concepts which the colonials would think their subjects incapable of using, unites with a powerful declaration of humanity and an unshakeable belief in supernatural sanction.

The slaves' willingness to stand together in order to spark the eruption of a liberatory event has remarkable results that are deftly represented. Carpentier's narrative switches to the consciousness of Lenormand de Mézy, and finds him condemning the "Utopian imbeciles in Paris" who have dared "to dream of the equality of all men of all races" (65). Because radical thought and action are premised on discovering and creating new ways of being, revolution is a radical project of the imagination. It is always a utopian enterprise. By contrast, de Mézy is utterly affixed within the state-of-the-situation: he is an ardent opponent of radical possibilities and a believer in the verity of racist taxonomies. This makes it magnificently ironic that he is poised on the brink of an event that was, in the words of Laurent Dubois, "the most concrete expression of the idea that the rights proclaimed in France's 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were indeed universal" (3). Whereas the address of their French counterparts had been confined to white European men, the Haitian revolutionaries

were able to extend the import of the French Revolution into the properly revolutionary message that *all* people are united in the declaration of universal humanity. Or, to use a Badiouian formulation, the inner facility of Immortality that opens the communal field of sameness and deposes difference is truly universal. It is precisely his violent opposition to such articulations of shared humanity that renders de Mézy a criminal, and his colonial enterprise a series of systematic crimes.

Tellingly, the revolution begins as the interruption of a casual, vengeful rape. The “sound of a conch-shell trumpet” arrests the slave owner’s intention to alleviate his frustration by “forcing one of the girls” (Carpentier 66). The call is answered by identical ones sounding across nearby farms, “as though all the shell trumpets of the coast, all the Indian *lambis*, all the purple conchs that served as doorstops, all the shells that lay alone and petrified on the summits of the hills, had begun to sing in chorus” (66). In a literal show of tonality, the industries of slavery become the very place from which the call to resist slavery sounds forth. Ironically, the slaves seize tools from the houses of the overseers, turning the implements of slave-labour into the weapons of liberation. It is interesting to note that “[t]he bookkeeper,” who appears with “pistol in hand,” is the “first to fall” (67). With the fall of an armed accountant one has an image of a violent transcendental regime founded on slavery being undone. The wider suggestion is that the vast ontological and epistemological order, the racial-colonial transcendental regime, is coming down at the hands of the ‘unlikeliest’ of revolutionary forces. And, to make an idealistic point, the implication here is that revolutionary aggression need only be directed at those who actively fight against liberation, who make of themselves armed agents in the service and preservation of violent social systems.

Indeed, though the jubilant revolutionaries charge “toward the big house, shouting death to the master, to the Governor, to God, and to all the Frenchmen in the world” (67), most of the freedom-seekers take to the cellars, in which a surge of sensory satiation takes place. Broken casks “gush wine,” “demijohns of brandy” and “carboys of rum” are dashed against the walls (67), and a “naked Negro, as a joke,” jumps into a “tub full of lard” (68). The imagery of the “abominable feast” is evident here: an excess of life that crashes, “[l]aughing and scuffling” (67), into the colonial order that has suppressed it.

The import of the Haitians’ uninvited appearance is that once they explode out of the void and into conceptual existence as agents within the state-of-the-situation, they cannot be again reduced to invisible beings. So, while de Mézy is much reassured to hear that Bouckman has been captured and executed “on the very spot where Macandal’s flesh had

become stinking ashes,” and takes this to mean that the “horde” has been defeated (70), the revolution has taken on a communal force of purpose that is not contingent upon its leaders. The prowess of the revolutionaries, coupled with the utterly unthinkable nature of a successful black uprising against white rule, haunts the fleeing settlers with the psychically intolerable sense that “Anarchy was conquering the world” (71).

It is at this time, when the colonists’ very conceptual world is shaking, that the word “Voodoo” becomes known to the colonial consciousness (72). Discussing the uprisings with other colonists, de Mézy becomes dimly aware of the revolution’s antecedents, to which he had paid no mind. He finally realises that “a drum might be more than just a goatskin stretched across a hollow log,” and that “[t]he slaves evidently had a secret religion that upheld and united them in their revolts” (72). What is evident is the colonists’ woeful ignorance of Vodou, the Badiouian subject-language that resignifies the former slaves as agents of possibility and, conversely, ends the symbolic mastery of the colonists. So the former plantation owner is expelled from the colony by that which exceeds Haiti’s definition, linguistically and existentially, as a colony.

Worth noting is that just as many of the newly liberated slaves’ first impulse is to partake in a sensory celebration of *life*, the former colonials experience the end of their regime as a release from the master–slave dialectic. Many of the old plantation owners escape to Cuba, where they try to create a new life. The edict, “*Love, by its laws, desires us to enjoy / A happiness that never ends*,” becomes the deposed colonists’ new creed, and in keeping with it an “air of license, of fantasy, of disorder” rushes through the city (78). Freedom from the shackles of colonialism is seemingly as liberating and life-compelling for the former colonists as it was for the former slaves. For all their necessarily vicious defence of it, the toppling of the necrotic regime produces an explosion of vivacity and a thirst for new experiences among the colonisers.

As Freire would argue, the implication here is that the oppressed have freed themselves *as well as* their oppressors. Only the slaves’ determination to abolish the entire system of slavery can liberate those who are predisposed to fear and hate each other by their positions as masters and slaves. By contrast, the colonials cannot comprehend the possibility of abandoning their positions as slaveholders. While Hegel has already shown that the master is dependent upon the slave’s recognition of him as master, and is therefore also a slave of sorts (111), it is worth considering that, when faced with the possibility of his slaves’ freedom and therefore humanity, the fearful master ultimately becomes the slave of slavery.

Accordingly, the colonial attempt to retake the island takes the form of an attempt to force mortality upon the slaves. In Cuba, Ti Noël witnesses hundreds of mastiffs being driven into the hold of a ship bound for the colony. Once again, dogs serve as a metaphor for savage colonial violence, and are represented as creatures eager to “bite their keepers and one another” (Carpentier 83). What is suggested is therefore an attempt to re-brutalise and animalise Haiti through indiscriminate violence. The last point is nowhere more obvious than when Ti Noël overhears the dogs’ intended purpose: “To eat niggers!” (83). From a Badiouian perspective, this imagery of animalistic violence is a frightening response to those who have transcended both their accorded position as ‘human’ slave-animals, and the immediate interests of their animal substructures. Yet for all its excess, the show of violence reveals the dire condition of the military attempt to retake Haiti. To use Badiou’s terms, in its very excess of violence the colonial institution reveals itself, and gives measure to its power. While the symbolic value of importing vicious mastiffs specifically to kill and consume people is unnerving, if stripped of its representational connotations, what remains is simply the colonists’ desperation – they are sending a boatload of *dogs* to Haiti as part of their campaign.

Moreover, Ti Noël encounters the Negroes of the Dufrené family, who have “brought great news from the Cap” (84). Although the substance of this news is not revealed, the inference is that the revolution continues unchecked, borne along by faithful subjects. At this point, however, the narrative takes an interruptive leap, focusing upon Pauline Bonaparte’s journey to, and sojourn in, Haiti. As Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert points out, where one might expect to find accounts of Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ military victories over colonial forces, one encounters instead Pauline’s “peculiar career as an ersatz creole” (116). Between the “great news from the Cap” and the first description of Pauline’s embarkation, there is a paragraph break, a literal gap in which the revolutionaries’ martial successes lie unspoken.

Broadly, Paravisini-Gebert’s contention is that Pauline’s ‘replacement’ of Dessalines, and her ability to participate in Vodou rituals, undermines Carpentier’s project. However, I would suggest that Carpentier has not inadvertently allowed Pauline to erase the Haitian Revolution, and that her presence in the novel can in fact be read as a repetition of the misapprehensions that disable the colonists. In my view, her arrival on, and expulsion from, Haiti are symbolic of the ejection of colonial rule. The success of the revolution, the arrival of the African gods and the “great news from the Cap,” are the very conditions of impossibility for Pauline’s colonising presence. Because her excessive, fatuous presence contrasts so

deeply with the powerful absences that characterise the revolution, it is necessary to read Pauline carefully and with a mind to irony.

From the outset, Pauline Bonaparte is depicted as both a colonial subject and an infuriatingly stupid person. The chapter in which she appears is entitled “The Ship of Dogs,” and yet only one-and-a-half pages are dedicated to the vessel carrying mastiffs to Haiti, with the rest describing Pauline’s journey as part of a French expeditionary force. One immediately notices the (un)subtle ridicule of the girl who “felt a little like a queen on that frigate loaded with troops bound for the Antilles” (84). Carpentier’s critique of Pauline quickly renders her absurd, and inasmuch as she feels herself its leader, derides the voyage of colonial reassertion. She is revealed as one “never over-gifted with memory,” who had “held up the departure of an entire army because of a childish whim to make the trip from Paris to Brest in a litter” (84-85). Though married to General Leclerc, and of “tender years,” she is described as “a connoisseur of male flesh” (85), and delights in the attention that she imagines the crew lavishes upon her. So, while Haitians’ imaginations allow them to articulate and create the unknown, Pauline’s self-absorption limits her to trivial fantasies in which she is the sole interest of “hundreds of men” (85). A saccharine narcissist, she is given to “feigned mediations” before the crew, allowing the wind to “ruffle her hair and play with her clothes, revealing the superb grace of her breasts” (86). Her distasteful character is rounded out when, on a whim and “laughing like a child” (87), she pours several buckets of fresh water over her shoulders – a terrible waste aboard ship. If the Ship of Dogs, as a metaphor for the colonial forces bearing down upon the island, is perceived as her ship, then the expedition is characterised by ignorant, wasteful self-absorption, a summation of characteristics that are as applicable to Pauline as to the colonial endeavour.

Furthermore, she attempts to apprehend Haiti through the expectation of a fetishised colonial adventure, carefully planning elaborate outfits in which to perform the colonial experience, having “been briefed in all such matters by the Duchess of Abrantès” (85). As she approaches Haiti, the indigenous sea-life excites in her the prospect of a tropical escapade:

It was garlanded with what seemed to be clusters of yellow grapes drifting eastward, needlefish like green glass, jellyfish that looked like blue bladders, dragging after them long red filaments, repulsive, toothed garfish, and squids that seemed entangled in the transparencies of bridal veils.

(86)

Before Pauline nears the island she is thus enthralled by its exoticism. When she reaches “the Cap and the Plaine du Nord, with the background of mountains blurred by the mist rising

from the canefields,” she is “delighted” by her surrounds (87). She finds these places a wonderful complement to her reading of “*Paul and Virginia*,” and her experience of “*L’Insulaire*, a charming Creole *contredanse* of exotic rhythm published in Paris on the rue de Saumon” (87). What Pauline attempts to do is to understand Haiti as an affirmation of the European stories about the island, and so to live out a colonial-literary fantasy.

Accordingly, she not only attempts to elide the miraculous happenings at the Cap and on the Plaine, but also undertakes to colonise the reading of the reader, who has already moved through the events that have taken place there. Pauline’s vulgar intrusion thus renders the reader resistant to her colonising presence, and this resistance parallels the Haitian opposition to colonialism. Instead of debasing Carpentier’s representation of the Haitian Revolution, Pauline actually compels the reader’s fidelity to what he or she has read, and what has been read is that which supplements and destabilises the colonial episteme. The reader thus enters and becomes immersed in the conceptual battleground presented by the text: he or she reads *alongside* the Haitians and joins them in a kind of sameness.

Just as the Haitians claim their island as an evental site that they must defend against recapture, so too the text becomes a contested site that the reader is required to claim by rejecting Pauline and the colonial narratives that shape her understanding of the island. Insofar as it attempts to bear invaders of the Haitians’ as well as the reader’s labours, the Ship of Dogs affines the two in the task of repulsing it. This task is aided by the fact that once on the island Pauline remains markedly separate from the place at which she has arrived. When Leclerc talks “with furrowed brow of slave risings,” she prefers not to take him “too seriously,” being “much moved by the reading of *Un Nègre comme il y a peu des blancs*, the lachrymose novel of Joseph Lavallée,” and “enjoying to the full the luxury, the abundance that surrounded her [. . .] feeling herself part Virginia, part Atala” (88). Although standing upon the very soil of Haiti, she fails to experience it directly, and is able only to see the place as a validation of her cultural expectation. Like the colonists before her, who constructed a ‘little Europe’ on the island, Pauline lives within an inherited version of Haiti, and feels herself to be an amalgamation of fictional colonisers.

Dissatisfied with her masseuses, Pauline employs Soliman, a “former attendant of a bath-house, who, besides caring for her body, rubbed her with almond cream, depilated her, and polished her toenails” (88-89). Just as Christophe delights in his capacity to delight colonial sensibilities, Soliman is utterly contented with his position as Pauline’s masseur and actor-slave. He becomes integral to her fantasy, and serves as the embodiment of exotic male sensuality. This relationship is wholly different from the slavery that generates, in Žižek’s

terms, an aggressive demand for *life* from the enslaved, and thus compels constricting acts of violence from the enslavers. What Pauline and Soliman play out is a mocking reproduction of what has happened in Haiti. A prime example of their performance occurs when she uses a green switch to whip him “without hurting him, for the fun of seeing the faces of feigned suffering he made. As a matter of fact, she was grateful to him for the loving care he lavished on her beauty” (89).

Pauline’s “tropical dream” is interrupted when her French coiffeur is struck down by disease and collapses, “vomiting up nauseous, half-clotted blood” (90). As Haiti begins to assert itself over the invaders, Leclerc insists upon relocating to the neighbouring island of La Tortue, but he too succumbs to infection. Believing that only Soliman has the power to save Leclerc and safeguard La Tortue, Pauline places her faith in the former’s ability to manipulate the powers of Vodou. Soliman, in whom she invests more trust with every impotent ritual that he enacts, becomes “the real master of the island” (93).

Rather than looking at Pauline’s childish wantonness, though, Paravisini-Gebert, referring to the pair’s attempts to invoke the power of Vodou, dismissively claims that the

caricaturesque metamorphosis of Pauline into a Vodou *serviteur* is indeed more significant that [sic] her surrender to indolence and sensuality in the tropics. Inspired by terror and not by faith, it speaks of the practices of Vodou as superstitious mumbo jumbo, practiced – with positive results in as much as she survives – by a harebrained coquette and her manipulative servant.

(126)

I am not convinced that Pauline Bonaparte’s time as an “ersatz Creole” undermines Carpentier’s project at all. Her interest in Vodou stems primarily from a desire to save Leclerc, whose death brings her to the “verge of madness” (95), and prompts her rapid exit from the Caribbean. Paravisini-Gebert and I thus seem to disagree on the condition of success for Pauline’s attempt at practising Vodou. Furthermore, I do not see why Pauline’s actions should be read as anything but vagaries and disingenuous performances that render her colonial apprehension of the island completely ridiculous. From the outset, Carpentier is at pains to depict her as a “harebrained coquette,” and for a reader to give her undertakings much import is perhaps to misunderstand her role.

In my reading, this character serves as a vehicle to convey failed attempts at colonisation and simulacra. She is never more than a tourist in Haiti, just as Soliman is no more than a token slave. Neither is able to invoke the mighty powers of the Other Shore which come to the aid of the revolutionaries. In this regard, it is worth noting that Soliman’s

rituals are directed towards keeping back “the plague from the other shore” (93). The Other Shore of Africa is immediately different to the other shore of Haiti, and thus the Haitians’ call to ancestral powers from Africa contrasts sharply with Soliman’s plea that germs stay away.

Instead of abasing the true practitioners of Vodou, Pauline only (further) abases herself through a pathetic attempt at invoking powers that she has no claim to, and of which she is not vaguely worthy. Her failed mimicry of Vodou recalls the “worthless incantations of a Breton sailor, a necromancer and healer” (29), who attempts to halt Macandal’s campaign of poisoning. Moreover, her expulsion underscores a triad of failures: as an affirmation of the discursively created colonial subject, one who would fetishise Haiti, and a hijacker of Vodou ritual. Significantly, Pauline represents the newfound inability of colonials to arrive at a preconceived version of Haiti that has been created through fetishised, racist accounts of the island. Carpentier deliberately steeps her in colonial fiction, and makes her “tropical dream” pointedly short. Again, the implication is that, with the expulsion of white colonialism, it becomes impossible for a European coloniser to confirm a linguistic expectation of the island because Haiti has asserted and singularised itself. Pauline Bonaparte’s ejection is the cultural counterpart to the defeat of colonial armies. In effect, the Haitians drive out both colonial armies and colonial ideas about Haiti.

In my reading of his novel, Carpentier has used Pauline to stage a clever play on expectation. Just as the reader who reads from a position informed by history expects the heroic appearance of Dessalines, so too is Pauline predisposed to experience a particular version of Haiti, with the result that she never truly experiences it at all. Carpentier prevents the reader from reading like an unwitting historical coloniser, as this would render the text, and by extension literature, a merely mimetic slave to history. By departing from historical ‘correctness,’ Carpentier suggests that the Haitian Revolution exceeded history. As a true event, the revolution exploded the very knowledges that comprise history and historiography. This is why Pauline’s departure marks “the end of such common sense as still existed in the colony” (95). When they drive her out, Haiti and the Haitians expel the archetype of colonial practice and make themselves the excess that defeats European historicisation of Haiti. The revolutionaries are therefore powerful in their absence and immeasurability: they are the incontestable absence that makes impossible Pauline’s presence. Her arrival is prefaced by news of the revolution’s success, and her departure signals a shift in the narrative to descriptions of the inability of colonial powers to retake the island.

In addition, Pauline’s expectation of Haiti as a stage of delight, which in turn conditions her expulsion from an “abominable” site that will not accommodate her fantasies

(95), creates a pattern of approach and rejection that has substantial implications for the novel's reader. Carpentier's use of magical realism means that the text itself requires the kind of departure from established epistemes that characterises an event. Although the reader must supplement her knowledges in order to engage with the novel, it is possible for this supplementation to occur as an experience of enrichment, a humbling expansion of her conceptual borders that enables communion with the Haitians. To read in this way means initiating a dialogue with the text, and, as Freire has established, dialogue is impossible where "I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness" (*Pedagogy* 71). If the reader is willing to give herself up to what she encounters in the text, if she comes to believe in the impossible possibilities unlocked by magical realism, then she will have entered into a kind of shared belief in Vodou – the people's magic. The attainment of such communion is the task that Carpentier sets before the reader, and the reader's success or failure in this regard will profoundly alter how she responds to the text and, more importantly, how the text responds to her.

However, should the reader approach the novel as Pauline does Haiti, from a position of expectation that she is unwilling to abandon, then she will find her reading, and by extension herself, destabilised through a series of encounters with events that she cannot comprehend. Just as Pauline flees Haiti a terrified and emaciated creature after the collapse of her expectation, so too a reader who resists the expansion of her consciousness will be put to flight by the text.

In a parallel to the failure of Pauline's colonial voyage, the seemingly horrific 'ship of dogs,' filled with creatures intended to be "puking niggers" (96), has little effect. Moreover, a force from Martinique, "with a cargo of poisonous snakes which the general planned to turn loose on the Plaine" (97), fails to affect the revolution. Because the ancestral gods have arrived, the snakes, "creatures of Damballah," die "without laying eggs," and disappear "together with the last colonists of the *ancien regime*" (97). The powers of Vodou have claimed the island, and the final success of the revolution against white colonial rule is therefore staged as a combat of supernatural forces, in which "Ogoun Badagri guided the cold steel charges against the last redoubts of the Goddess Reason" (97). Again, supernatural power is invoked alongside the "cold steel" of radical human action. The efficacy of this alliance is attested to by the aesthetically striking victory of the god-Subject Ogoun Badagri over Goddess Reason. Reason, the quintessential Enlightenment faculty, is defeated by that which it cannot apprehend. Despite their claim to possess this great, civilising social tool, the colonists are driven out by that which radically supplements their knowledges, and thus

renders them vulnerable in their incompleteness. From the potent dual voids of slavery and Vodou bursts a spirit that permitted freed slaves to defeat armies of the greatest nations on Earth.

Interestingly, Carpentier invokes Biblical imagery to describe the revolutionaries' victories in battle. He asserts that the actions of the Haitian Revolution should be remembered alongside "all combats deserving of memory because someone had made the sun stand still or brought down walls with a trumpet blast," since "in those days there were men who covered the mouths of the enemy cannon with their bare breasts and men who had the power to deflect leaden bullets from their bodies" (97). When he places the Haitian revolutionaries alongside the iconic besiegers of Jericho, Carpentier deftly stages a tremendous validation of the slaves' actions. By implication, de Mézy's 'savage snake worshippers' can no longer be seen as those who 'require,' and are thus able to be subjugated by, the 'civilising' Christian-colonial message. In seeking their freedom, the Haitians are drawn into sameness with Joshua and his followers (Josh. 6.1-27). The early Christians' escape from slavery in Egypt, and conquering journey to Canaan, are paralleled by the Haitian's pursuit of freedom. Also, the destruction of Jericho's walls by supernatural means is akin to the role that Vodou plays in the 'impossible' events of the Haitian Revolution. Their common excess brings the two liberatory movements into a shared space that cuts across cultural, historical, religious and racial divides. Ironically, this parallel casts the white masters not as civilising Christians but as the enslaving Egyptians from whom the true Christians had to escape, and who, on attempting to recapture their slaves, were expunged from the Earth by the Christian God. With simile and an invocation of sameness, Carpentier therefore interrupts the very terms of the Christian-colonial enterprise, and relegates the proponents of slavery to a subordinate position within their own history. Badiouian sameness allows those who deny the denial of their humanity to inhabit the stories of others who have sought their freedom, and thereby subverts the use of such stories as weapons of 'civilising' oppression.

My aim in this section of my chapter has been to demonstrate that Carpentier's representation of the Haitian Revolution venerates the event as well as its agents. Specifically, I set out to show that his elevation of the communal over the individual and magic above historical accuracy results in a uniquely powerful and apt portrayal of revolution. After the stage of pre-evental activity in which slaves of various national and racial groups unite, one has the revolution in which they truly assert themselves as Immortals and so utterly depose the nominal cultural differences between them. This fully-formed evental sameness makes it apt that the revolution's most important

struggles are represented as the coming of the Subject Ogoun Badagri, who is summoned and sustained by the Haitians' Immortal fidelity.

2.6 *Betrayal, Simulacrum, Terror, Resurrection*

At this point in the narrative, one has witnessed the success of the revolution as expressed through the expulsion of de Mézy and other colonists, the defeat of Goddess Reason, and Pauline Bonaparte's failed attempt to render Haiti a place of colonial fantasy. Having considered his treatment of revolution, what I now discuss is Carpentier's apt representation of betrayal and simulacrum. Since revolution has been associated with magic and the supernatural, that which interrupts the order of the real and, to some extent, resists representation, it follows that simulacrum would be articulated precisely as the return of the real, the reassertion of the state-of-the-situation. Such is the tension inherent in magical realism: a radical interchange between absence and presence, measureless miraculous possibility and reified state-declared impossibility. As I have argued with regard to the revolution, individual leaders become increasingly absent as people combine and produce a collective Subject that stands for all its constituents while also exceeding them. This is the power, and humility, attendant upon the recognition of sameness. By contrast, the 'order' of Henri Christophe's regime is characterised by a surfeit of presence reminiscent of Pauline Bonaparte's immoderations. Christophe utterly rejects Vodou and sameness: he proclaims his innate singularity and inscribes his excessive presence through divine rule, revives vicious class distinctions, and uses the resultant slave labour to construct palatial buildings in his honour.

Carpentier represents this betrayal and descent into simulacrum aptly. In an interruptive leap, the narrative leaves the revolution and shifts to Ti Noël's return to Haiti, some time after the end of colonial rule. The effect of this interruption is to disrupt the trajectory of eventual fidelity and revolutionary victory along which the Haitians, and the reader, have been moving. Ti Noël's arrival is anticipated to be a joyous homecoming that will reinsert the old former slave into the site to which he has borne tireless fidelity, and allow him to live in a place of freedom at last. Because it upsets this expectation of place and possibility, the narrative effectively demonstrates the dire effect of betrayal upon faithful subjects, and thus aptly represents the hazardous, jagged course of a truth-procedure.

One must remember that Henri Christophe, now the ruler of Haiti, has largely been absent from the novel. He is introduced as a comprador, and emerges later as a tyrant and

betrayal of the revolution. If one follows Badiou's understanding of history as not a single chronological continuum but the multiplicity of events which people live through, then Christophe's betrayal of the revolution explains his absence from the text's 'history.' In his infidelity, he throws himself 'back in time,' wiping out his previous achievements as a leader and, more importantly, the radical beliefs that enabled them.

Worse still, Christophe's simulacral regime has the same regressive effect upon the whole of Haiti. Importantly, though, he does not simply put Haiti back into its pre-revolutionary, colonial mode of being, but re-enslaves a people who cannot but remember the success of, and possibilities made tangible by, their revolution. Just as Macandal's African histories were of instrumental value in undermining colonial slavery, so too is Christophe's kingdom haunted by the history that must suppress. His regime is perceptibly founded on both the defeat of white colonialism and the betrayal of the Haitian revolution. Accordingly, in Badiou's terms, he splits time and thereby enables his own downfall. For although he subjugates the Haitians and enchains them to their past position as slaves, the people remain faithful to their event, and painfully conscious that their eventual future has been stolen from them. It is this movement from the despair of betrayal to the renewed fidelity of resurrection that Ti Noël and the Haitian people must navigate.

The former slave, thinking himself free at last, exults in having "set foot on a land where slavery had been abolished forever" (102). He feels that Haiti has been forever established as "the land of the Great Pacts," since "Dessalines's victory was the result of a vast coalition" of gods, and one between gods and men. His mistake is to think that an event is self-supporting, rather than something that must be defended and carried forward if it is to survive. In fact, the text provides unsettling indications that iniquity has taken hold of the island. Ti Noël observes that "plants and trees seemed to have dried up, to have become skeletons of plants and trees in earth that was no longer red and glossy, but had taken on the look of dust in a cellar" (102). The former slave's abiding impression is of a landscape composed of "sharp edges, thorns, briars, evil saps" (102).

Along with the land's corruption, the people of Haiti appear subjugated and reduced to mortality, as emerges from the fact that "[t]he few men Ti Noël encountered did not reply to his greeting, plodding by with their eyes to the ground like their dogs' muzzles" (102-103). Insofar as imagery of the natural world is linked to the vitality of the revolution, the ravaged site to which Ti Noël returns hints that the site of the Haitian event has been polluted by betrayal and simulacrum.

When the former slave comes across Negro workers labouring under the “vigilance of [black] soldiers carrying whips,” he concludes, with substantial irony, that the workers must be “[p]risoners,” guilty of some offense (107). In other words, he misperceives the slavery before him as a subjective response to crime, rather than as evidence of systematic, objective violence. It is telling that immediately after encountering these slave-labourers, Ti Noël is “awed by the most unexpected, most overwhelming sight of his long existence”:

Against a background of mountains violet-striped by deep gorges, rose a rose-coloured palace, a fortress with ogival windows, rendered almost ethereal by the high socle of its stone stairway. [. . .] As he drew nearer, Ti Noël could make out terraces, statues, arcades, gardens, pergolas, artificial brooks, and box-wood mazes. [. . .] white-uniformed officers busily came and went, young captains in bicornes, reflecting the glitter of the sun, sabers rattling on their thighs. Through an open window came the sound of a dance orchestra in full rehearsal.

(107-108)

Beyond the staggering magnificence of the palace, what astounds Ti Noël is that “this marvelous world, the like of which the French governors of the Cap had never known, was a world of Negroes” (108-109). However, this is a false statement because, while inhabited by black people, Christophe’s kingdom is obviously modelled on European culture, architecture, religion and hierarchy. It is a Badiouian simulacrum *and* a cultural simulation of the old regime. The beliefs which enabled the seemingly miraculous feats of the revolution have been erased from the transcendental regime by Christophe, an obvious Europhile, and instead of building a society upon the communal values that characterised the revolution, the comprador-ruler has simply inserted black people into the Christian-colonial structures of the old masters. He has failed, gravely so, the charge of keeping leadership in the service of the people, and has precluded the continuous invention of reality. The fact that the fortress is defended by cannon bearing “the still unproved motto of *Liberté, Égalité*” reveals that instead of continuing to expand the radical import of the French Revolution, what is in evidence is the antithesis of all revolution (114).

Indeed, Ti Noël’s vision of the palace is interrupted by a beating, after which he is taken to the foot of the mountain upon which Christophe’s citadel is being constructed, given a brick, and the instruction: “Take that up, and come back for another” (110). His plea, “I’m too old,” brings a cudgel down upon his skull, and the re-enslaved man is forced to join a procession of suffering made up of “children, pregnant girls, women, and old men, each of whom carried a brick” (110). The misery experienced by the newly oppressed contrasts

sharply with the “little Princesses, Athenaïs and Améthyste, dressed in guipure-trimmed satin,” blithely engaged in “playing battledore and shuttlecock” (110-11).

With his distaste for anything not European, the monarch’s only concession to the power of Vodou is to have several bulls slaughtered each day, “so that their blood could be added to the mortar to make the fortress impregnable” (114). Yet Christophe’s attempt to practise the Haitian people’s liberating magic recalls Pauline Bonaparte’s ersatz attempts at ‘Voodoo,’ and so the monarch’s insincere dabbling in the Haitian people’s magic underscores his distance from the authentic communion that it requires.

The dire separation of Christophe from the people is further underscored in the way that his eminence is premised on the demise of their Immortality, a point that Carpentier makes through the use of ant imagery. From the base of the citadel, Ti Noël sees “coming up the flanks of the mountain, by every path and byway, thick columns of women, children, and old men, each with a brick to be left at the foot of the fortress, which was rising like an ant-hill, thanks to those grains of fired clay borne to it unceasingly, from season to season, from year’s end to year’s end” (116). The reduction of the Haitian people to ants, each individual being worth no more than the brick that she carries, makes plain the acts of animalisation and voiding that have founded the regime. When one considers that Macandal discovered the island’s latent poisons, with which to begin *pre-evental* acts, amongst the creatures who avoid the ants’ regime, then the reduction of the Haitians to ants has noteworthy implications. Indeed, Ti Noël realises “that the chamber-music orchestras of Sans Souci, the splendor of the uniforms, and the statues of naked white women soaking up the sun on their scrolled pedestals among the sculptured boxwood hedging the flowerbeds were all the product of a slavery as abominable as that he had known on the plantation of M. Lenormand de Mézy” (116). The particular cruelty attendant upon a revolution betrayed by its inheritors is likened to a depraved family, in which, “the children [. . .] beat the parents, the grandson the grandmother, the daughters-in-law the mother” (116-17).

As already evident in the corrupted natural environment to which he has returned, Christophe’s latest show of terror has markedly disfigured the town itself:

It was as though all the windows and doors of the houses, all the jalousies, all the louvers, were turned towards the Archbishop’s Palace with an expectation so intense that it distorted the façades into human grimaces. The roofs stretched out their eaves, the corners peered sharply forward, the dampness painted only ears upon the walls. At the corner of the Palace, a square of new cement had just dried, blending with the mortar of the wall, but leaving a small opening. Out of this hole, black as a toothless mouth, burst from time to time howls so horrifying as to send a shudder through the entire population and make the children sob. [. . .] Then they turned into weeping, a weeping that came from the depths of the breast, with the whimpering of a child in the

voice of an old man, which was even more unbearable than what had preceded it. [. . .]
.] Nobody slept in the Cap.

(124)

The splendid royal fortress is thus paralleled by the cement structure in which “Corneille Breille [. . .] confessor of Henri Christophe” is “buried alive [. . .] for the crime of having wanted to go to France knowing all the secrets of the King” (124-25). While the towering fortress is built in terrified silence, the walled-in node of suffering at the centre of the Cap is the only place from which sounds of torment issue forth. The Capuchin’s death-chamber becomes the glamorous royal palace’s inverted *doppelganger*: that is, a cement cube of structural suffering, the true product of Christophe’s regime. In effect, the title of this chapter, *The Immured*, refers to the fate of the Haitian people and their revolution as much as it does to Breille.

Yet, the very excess of repressive violence, deliberately placed at the centre of society, develops into a powerful void, prompting resistance from social as well as supernatural forces. At the Mass of the Assumption, Christophe feels himself encircled by a people “sullen with evil intentions” (130), an enslaved populace who begin to announce their enslavement through non-participation in the tyrant’s regime. Most startling, however, is the interruption of his ceremony by “another priest,” who appears “as though conjured out of the air, with part of his shoulders and arms still imperfectly fleshed out” (131). The spectral Capuchin, whose mutilated form and invulnerability to symbolic execution recall Macandal’s qualities, visits his suffering upon Christophe. From the “lipless, tooth-less mouth” of the returned priest, a gash “as black as a rat-hole,” comes “a thundering voice [. . .] making the stained-glass windows tremble in their lead frames” (131). Like Macandal, Breille turns the force of his agonised, deliberately symbolic death back upon Christophe, and he too enacts a supernatural escape that resurrects the Haitians’ liberatory truth.

In conjunction with Breille’s supernatural visitation, the monarch hears a “rhythm” sounding in his ears, which “might have been that of his own veins or that of the drums being beaten in the hills” (132). What one has here is the symbolic return of the tortured priest sparking a renewal of fidelity, of worldly, transformative labour. Just as the colonists were struck with panic at their slaves’ longing for freedom, so too is Christophe terrified and psychically oppressed by the return of Vodou, which renders him “a sack of chains” (133). Furthermore, the liminal sound of drums invades Christophe’s palace, fusing with the *Ave Maria* being said, and “arousing unacknowledged resonances in more than one breast” (134). Again one has an interjection of plural experiences which, throughout the novel, have

signalled a challenge to the 'pure' vision of reified power, and so served as a portent of rebellion.

The next day, scrutinising the changing of his grenadier guard for any lapses in discipline, Christophe has his expectation of a regime-affirming performance disrupted. Instead of sounding their prescribed call, his military drums resound with "a syncopated tone in three beats produced not by the drumsticks, but by hands against the leather" (137). Thus, new revolutionaries appropriate and reinterpret the regime's symbolic apparatus, and thereby begin to resurrect the Haitians' liberatory truth. Accordingly, the drums, turned to the service of Vodou, are sounded by living hands instead of colonial instruments. When he recognises the ritual beat, Christophe screams, "They are playing the *mandoucouman*," as revolution erupts around him. Just as the symbolic bookkeeper was the first casualty of the revolution, in this overturn of the symbolic order a "colour ensign," custodian of the royal insignia, slashes "the flags of crowns and dolphins," while "a general rout of uniforms" before "the sound of military drums beaten by fists" ensues (137).

With the collapse of his symbolic regime, Christophe is rendered powerless through the lack of anyone willing to perform his power: the "absence of courtiers, flunkies, and guards" makes "an oppressive emptiness of corridors and rooms" (138). By contrast, the seemingly omnipresent sound of drums announces the revolutionaries:

Calling to one another, answering from mountain to mountain, rising from the beaches, issuing from the caves, running beneath the trees, descending ravines and riverbeds, the drums boomed, the *radas*, the *congos*, the drums of Bouckman, the drums of the Grand Alliances, all the drums of Voodoo. A vast encompassing percussion was advancing on Sans Souci, tightening the circle. [. . .] The King returned to his chamber and his window. The burning of his plantations had begun, of his dairies, of his canefields. [. . .] The north wind lifted the burning husks of the cornfields, bringing them nearer and nearer. Fiery ash was falling on the palace terraces. [. . .] The bulls' blood that those thick walls had drunk was an infallible charm against the arms of the white men. But this blood had never been directed against Negroes, whose shouts, coming closer now, were invoking Powers to which they made blood sacrifice. [. . .] All the mirrors of Sans Souci were simultaneously ablaze. The whole building disappeared under this chill fire, which reached out into the night, making each wall a cistern of twisted flames.

(141-43)

Surrounded by the victims of his terror, his domain consumed by fire and his fortress wreathed in ethereal flames, Henri Christophe is overwhelmed by the Immortal subjects who resurrect the revolutionary Haitian truth-procedure. Ironically, after committing suicide, his body is sunk into a mass of mortar, becoming "one with the stone that imprisoned it" (150). Whereas Breille's entombment was a symbolic atrocity that produced a supernatural,

liberating excess, Christophe's cement interment is just that. In effect, the immurement of the tyrant binds him within the constricting, absolute terms that characterised his rule.

Disappearing into the grand symbol of his simulacrum, the king is "fused with the very stuff of the fortress, inscribed in its architecture, integrated with its body bristling with flying buttresses" (150). He is sent back into the icon of the crime that he inflicted upon his people.

With the end of Christophe's reign, Ti Noël moves into the ruins of de Mézy's farmhouse. He becomes a kind of comic ruler, bedecked in one of Henri Christophe's dress coats accompanied by a straw hat, and lightly presides over a somewhat anarchistic commune. The former slave issues "edicts of a peaceable government," appoints "any passer-by a minister, any hay-gatherer a general," and is found "distributing baronetcies, presenting wreaths, blessing the little girls, and awarding flowers for services rendered" (166). His jestful 'authority' mocks the very institution of authority, and thus denigrates those who consciously seek power over others. One is here reminded of the ignominious chanty with which Ti Noël mocks colonial regency, and of his song "that was all insults to a king" (126), devised after his experience of slavery under Christophe. His cognitive *Bildung* shows in his realisation that "That was the important thing: to [abase] a king" (126). He mounts a critique of reified power and especially of divine rule, in which an ordinary multiple claims to be imbued with a sanction that a multiple cannot possibly possess, and which cannot but lead to the suffering that he has experienced under colonisers and betrayers.

By extension, Ti Noël rejects the divisive taxonomies of race and class that regimes enforce in order to secure their power. Divine rule is the antithesis of leadership that recognises its position as contingent upon, and so in constant dialogue with, the people. In short, a regime necessarily rejects the premise of sameness, namely that truths can be proclaimed by anyone and summon all to action. Ti Noël expresses communitarian belief in people by his willingness to distribute titles at random, and in so doing suggests the tenuous status that 'titles' should hold when not called into being as part of an ethical community. This stance recalls the radical essence of ancient Athenian democracy, the belief, as captured by C.L.R. James, that "the ordinary citizen was [. . .] able to perform practically all the business of government," and consequently that the government was to be no more than "The public assembly of all the citizens" (*Every Cook Can Govern* 13). The emphasis on inclusive, communal politics seen here is certainly germane to the spirit of the Haitian Revolution, which Ti Noël has come to associate with a fluid relationship between people and leadership. Whereas Christophe's palace was founded upon the exclusion of the Haitian people, Ti Noël's abode often fills with "the countryfolk," who bring "their reed pipes, their *cháchás*,

and their drums” (166). The exhausted, much-embattled man has reached a place of peace in which “no tyranny of whites or Negroes” threatens “his liberty” (166).

However, Ti Noël’s state of serenity is disrupted by the arrival of “the Surveyors,” terrorising “beings who pursue the calling of insects” (169). These professional quantifiers are described as men “who stretched long cords along the ground, drove stakes, carried plummets, looked through telescopes, and bristled with measuring rods and squares” (169). The Surveyors represent a repossession of the peacefully ungoverned Plaine by the forces of mastery, stratification and empirical apprehension. Though Ti Noël addresses them sharply, the Surveyors ignore him, going “here and there insolently, measuring everything and writing things in their gray books with thick carpenter’s pencils” (169). In their wilful ignorance of the *life* that exists before them, the Surveyors are alarmingly colonial, but also, like their predecessors, obviously vulnerable to supplementation. Enraged to hear that the invading empiricists speak French, a language which recalls his days of slavery, Ti Noël orders them from his land (170). Once again he is voided, that is, grabbed by a Surveyor, removed from “the field of vision of his telescope,” and beaten with the assessor’s “measuring stick” (170). From the outset, the telescope and measuring stick emerge as the tools with which the new order will be constructed: a narrow lens defining the scope of inclusion and a quantifying stick with which to mete out punishment to those who do not take the place they are accorded in the emergent system. Ti Noël discovers that the land is overrun with Surveyors, “and that mounted mulattoes, wearing shirts open at the throat, silk sashes and military boots, were directing vast operations of plowing and clearing carried out by hundreds of Negro prisoners” (170).

Whereas on his return to Haiti Ti Noël mistook slaves for criminals, he immediately recognises the objective violence at hand and that the whip is “now in the hands of Republican mulattoes, the new masters of the Plaine du Nord” (170). The perceptive former slave despairs at “this endless return of chains, this rebirth of shackles, this proliferation of suffering, which the more resigned began to accept as proof of the uselessness of all revolt” (172). With his Immortal fidelity waning, weighted with exhaustion, Ti Noël decides to lay his “human guise” aside and take refuge in the animal world (172). He thus literally buries himself within various corporeal substructures. Although he takes on several animal forms, none of his metamorphoses liberates him. In one such attempt, he joins an ant colony, but, in keeping with the ant imagery in the text, finds himself subordinate to larger ants which bear a foul resemblance to “Lenormand de Mézy’s overseers, Henri Christophe’s guards, and the mulattoes of today” (170-171).

The last of Ti Noël's attempts to enter an animal community sees him rebuffed by a flock of geese, and so he begins to interrogate his actions. He comes to understand that "his rejection by the geese was a punishment for his cowardice. Macandal had disguised himself as an animal for years to serve men, not to abjure the world of men" (178). As importantly, he realises that turning himself into an animal removes only his ability to intervene in the world, not his responsibility to do so. This revelation has a profound effect upon him:

He lived, for the space of a heartbeat, the finest moments of his life; he glimpsed once more the heroes who had revealed to him the power and the fullness of his remote African forebears, making him believe in the possible germinations the future held. He felt countless centuries old. A cosmic weariness, as of a planet weighted with stones, fell upon his shoulders shrunk by so many blows, sweats, revolts. [. . .] But man's greatness consists in the very fact of wanting to be better than he is. In laying duties upon himself. In the Kingdom of Heaven there is no grandeur to be won, inasmuch as there all is an established hierarchy, the unknown is revealed, existence is infinite, there is no possibility of sacrifice, all is rest and joy. For this reason, bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World.

(178-79)

The development of Ti Noël's consciousness reaches an apex at this point. As is made plain by his experiences within human and animal realms, an individual cannot elude society. There is no realm in which one is free of social and historical interpellation, no place of social excession in which to dwell. Whereas Macandal's metamorphoses were a means to subvert the colonial regime and bolster the resolve of those who resisted it, Ti Noël has simply been hiding in his base form. He has temporarily succumbed to Badiouian Evil by betraying his fidelity and laying down the Immortal subject within himself. In his attempt to abjure the world of men, he has renounced the constitutive element of his humanity: the ability to envision and to create.

Quite simply, one can live only in the kingdom of this world, and must strive to supplement and better it through continuous exertion. There is no point of rest, because eventual fidelity and potential consciousness compel labour that does not end, insofar as the world always remains radically incomplete. In other words, the task of hauling supplementary truths from the conceptual Kingdom of Heaven to the Kingdom of This World is never complete, inasmuch as both the former and latter are infinite in scope as well as possibility. And because of human beings' finitude, the little time that we have, it is imperative to *act* in order to bring *some* truths into the world, to imbue our finite experience with snatches of

infinity. Perhaps most importantly, it is vital to act in the face of atrocity, to prevent life itself from being stolen through institutional crimes.

With his fidelity renewed, Ti Noël finds the sky “dark with the smoke of fires as on the night when all the conch shells of the hills and coast had sung together” (179). Again, a resurrection of the Haitian people’s truth-procedure seems to be at hand. What occurs, though, is a kind of assimilation into the eventual call to action. With his commitment to resurrect the Haitians’ truth-procedure affirmed, and having reached a point of existential epiphany, Ti Noël roars

his declaration of war against the new masters, ordering his subjects to march in battle array against the insolent works of the mulattoes in power. At that moment a great green wind blowing from the ocean, swept the Plaine du Nord, spreading through the Dondon valley with a loud roar. And while the slaughtered bulls bellowed on the summit of Le Bonnet de l’Évêque, the armchair, the screen, the volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, the music box, the doll, and the moonfish rose in the air, as the last ruins of the plantation came tumbling down. The trees bowed low, tops southward, roots wrenched from the earth. [. . .] From that moment Ti Noël was never seen again [. . .].

(179-80)

Whereas Henri Christophe is imprisoned within the mausoleum created by his reign of terror, Ti Noël seems to coalesce with, and dissolve into, a mighty spirit of commitment to freedom that sweeps across and infuses Haiti. Just as Macandal merges with his comrades, so too Ti Noël vanishes with a final cry of renewed fidelity. Throughout the novel Ti Noël has stood for the cognitive development and commitment to freedom espoused by the Haitian people. He is not lost in death, but rather becomes a kind of archetypal figure, the ‘Old Man of Haiti.’ The supernatural events that accompany his passing, and the enigmatic green wind into which he disappears, summon and affirm the magical history that Haiti has become possessed of during the course of the novel. Like the true histories expressed in Macandal’s stories, the green wind signifies the creation of a history of Haiti that is founded on the possibility of extraordinary possibilities, and so destroys the reified, paralysing colonial ‘history’ that preceded it.

Significantly, the reader has witnessed the creation of this true history and, as I have argued, has been compelled to take responsibility for it. In order to read of the Haitians in such a way as to encounter fully the magical excess that characterises them, she has had to undergo a textual-evental supplementation. That is, the reader is required to believe in the impossible just as the Haitians do. The implication is that when Ti Noël diffuses into his comrades and the site of their radical undertaking, he addresses Haiti, the Haitians, *and* the

reader. This is how the text confronts one with the fact that “the essence of a revolution lies not only in its instantaneous burst of glory, but in its arduous ripples across borders and time” (Danticat x). An event has no end-point at which it will be satisfied precisely because it is a fiction that advances ever ahead of reality, and to bear fidelity to one is continuously to encounter the unsatisfactory condition of the world as seen from the perspective of the event. Like a true event, the text urges one ever onward; its Badiouian injunction is to ‘Keep going!’ It insists that magical possibility is not a rarefied moment but the quintessence of the human condition. This is why it is important that the novel ends with renewed opposition, *another* confrontation with oppression and reification, and thus another temptation towards betrayal and capitulation, all of which must be resisted by the faithful. *The Kingdom of This World* charges its reader with the duty of finding her Immortal self, whatever form it might take, in the world that she occupies.

2.7 *A Response to Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert’s Reading of Carpentier*

I am now in a position to compare my reading of the novel with one that finds it wanting and moribund. In Paravisini-Gebert’s estimation, Carpentier’s text is “a fractured tale whose fissures may be read as subverting the adherence to the facts of Haitian history and its primary sources that the author claims for his text” (114). Her principal concern is the way in which “the erasure of the leaders of the Revolution from the text, particularly that of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, reveals Carpentier’s hopelessness concerning the Haitian land and its people” (114). Given Dessalines’ near-absence, coupled with the nonattendance of Toussaint, the question that arises is how to approach a text about the Haitian Revolution that is without its two most striking agents.

Moreover, Paravisini-Gebert maintains that, although Carpentier appears sincere in his “fascination” with the Haitian Revolution (118), he renders the Haitian people a mass of “exotic otherness” (121), fetishising and demeaning them. Crucially, her reading proceeds from the premise that the novel must be read in terms of a Spenglerian understanding of history as a “cyclical repetition of a pattern of oppression, revolution, and renewed oppression” (117). Clearly, then, her interpretation is necessarily at odds with a reading that proceeds from Badiou, Žižek and Freire’s insistence upon the possibility of possibilities.

My own line of inquiry has proceeded from the following question: with the text’s incompleteness being obvious and accepted, can it be read in a way that does not find it hopelessly lost to a system of closed cycles? In other words, can Badiou, Žižek and Freire

provide conceptual tools that render one sensitive to the excessive and transformative dimension that defines a radical act, and so mandate that a successful representation of revolutionary action requires one to ‘write revolution’ in such a way that the event exceeds the text which purports to ‘contain’ it? In the previous sections of this chapter, I have demonstrated that these theorists enable a close reading that, to some extent, redeems the text.

Given my approach to the novel, it follows that I also find myself in disagreement with Paravisini-Gebert’s contention that Carpentier “presupposes for Makandal and for Haiti an essential otherness, a primitivism that surfaces in their inability to inhabit their own history as a process understood rationally but only through the prism or [sic] magic and religious faith” (118). By implication, Paravisini-Gebert does not engage with the development of Ti Noël’s consciousness. In my view, the text inscribes a clear trajectory of cognitive progression from the young slave listening to Macandal’s historical narratives, and in turn beginning to reflect upon his reality, to the old man experiencing an instant of epiphany that is described as the finest moment of his life. Additionally, Macandal’s subjectivising histories, although infused with myth, are not just a fanciful prism. In his narrative evocation of the slaves’ history, he summons a life-world made concrete by architecture, trade networks, feats of blacksmithing, agriculture and agrarian strategy. As I have demonstrated, his stories are compelling precisely because they summon the possibility of another society: a functioning, worldly, and yet *wondrous* society, rather than a mere hodgepodge of intertwined fables.

I also find myself at odds with González Echevarría’s claim that

Carpentier’s concept of the marvelous or of magic rests on an ontho-theological [sic] assumption: the existence of a peculiar Latin American consciousness devoid of self-reflexiveness and inclined to faith; a consciousness that allows Latin Americans to live immersed in culture and to feel history not as a casual [sic] process that can be analyzed rationally and intellectually, but as destiny.

(qtd. in Paravisini-Gebert 118-19)

Since I have adduced ample evidence that the momentous revolution that takes place in the novel is the result of critical thought, planning, complex organisation, pre-evental weakening of the colonial regime, and tireless evental fidelity, I must conclude that Echevarría’s statement lacks textual support. If the Haitian people, as they are represented in the novel, had not been able to externalise and reflect upon slavery, understanding it as a contingent atrocity and not an historical destiny, there would not, and perhaps could not, have been anything like the Haitian Revolution. So the “faith” to which Carpentier’s Haitians are putatively “inclined” is perhaps best read as revolutionary belief in the possibility of possibilities, rather than as an

article of abeyance. This is precisely Paulo Freire's most fundamental point, the development and persistence of which I have tracked through the novel: oppressive situations are overthrown when people realise themselves capable of devising supplementary actions that explode existent transcendental regimes and thereby alter the conditions of the agents' existence. Moreover, the representational context of colonial slavery makes it imperative to reject as false the colonially constructed figure of the subject *supposed to be slave* – a refutation that does not replace one “destiny” with another, but instead requires a radical form of human agency that dispenses with the notion of “destiny” itself.

As I have already intimated, Paravisini-Gebert also accuses Carpentier of infusing the Haitians with otherness during Pauline Bonaparte's (failed) communion with the powers of Vodou. According to this critic, Pauline's undertaking

[i]nverts and subverts the alliance of Makandal, Boukman, Dessalines, and Henri Christophe with the Iwas that had come to their aid in turning the tide of colonial rule, fetishising the rituals of possession and communion with the gods into an inane version of a *danse macabre* that titillates the reader with images of a naked white woman prostrate in abjection before her loin-clothed black savior brandishing a bleeding chicken. It is a fantasy of barbaric otherness [. . .].

(126)

I do not agree with Paravisini-Gebert's understanding of the facts of this scene. Carpentier describes Soliman as “circling in a strange dance around Pauline, who was kneeling on the floor with her hair hanging loose [. . .]. A decapitated rooster was still fluttering amid scattered grains of corn” (94). There is no naked prostration, and no brandishing of the rooster. And, to reiterate an earlier point, Carpentier's disparagement of Pauline is so obvious that to invest her with meaning as a capable Vodou medium, rather than a facile imitator, seems strange. Instead of inscribing the Haitians with “barbaric otherness,” this scene is simply the last of Pauline's failures to apprehend Haiti and the Haitians.

In line with her contention that Carpentier has rendered the Haitians essentially Other, Paravisini-Gebert is suspicious of those instances in which the novel reveals parallel experiences. She argues that the Haitians' alternative interpretations of reality allow them to be read as unwittingly naive, and maintains that even in his

depiction of Makandal's execution of [sic] in the novel, which is intended to signal the extraordinary power of the slaves to maintain their faith in Makandal's survival despite the reality before them, Carpentier still inscribed the scene with their otherness. After all, the slaves may be deluded by faith into believing in Makandal has survived [sic]. The planters and soldiers of the text and most importantly, Carpentier and his readers know he has not.

(126)

Again, I want to argue that another interpretation of Macandal's 'demise' is possible. In my reading, I have already described the way in which he 'escapes' into his subjects, vanishing into sameness with them and enduring in their continued fidelity. He continues to be referenced throughout the novel, and belief in the work of destabilising oppression that he began thus plays a considerable role in enabling the revolution. Since the very reason for his public execution is to abort the revolution through a show of symbolic violence, to burn the revolution, so to speak, it is important to bear in mind that the reader is part of a gathered audience that is being taught an instrumentally deliberate lesson. In the text, this audience divides between two interpretations. Some agree with de Mézy's thesis that Negroes are inhumane and uncaring beings, an affirmation of slavery and the *status quo* that falls neatly into the category of Goldman's "real consciousness." Alternatively, the slaves believe that Macandal has escaped, crucially remaining within The Kingdom of This World, and entirely subverting the display of colonial violence. In other words, the reader can adopt something akin to "potential consciousness."

Although sympathetically aligned with the slaves, the reader is, of course, able to perceive both interpretations, and knows of Macandal's fate. In Paravisini-Gebert's reading, the text bottlenecks the reader by presenting her with two binary terms. However, it seems that a reader should be able to lament Macandal's death *and* to celebrate the inability of the regime symbolically to extinguish the significance of his Immortal subjectivity. Put differently, the reader can sympathise with what has happened *while also* repudiating its symbolic import, and thereby refusing to participate in the performative lesson that the colonial regime intends to visit upon its audience. What then occurs is a suspension of belief in the symbolic, no matter how rooted in reality, in order to ensure the continuation of a process which explodes that very reality. In sum, whether intentional or not, Carpentier's text brings the reader to a striking encounter with the type of consciousness required by eventual fidelity. In this regard, it is important to remember that Macandal's death does not go entirely unnoticed. Although "very few" slaves witness it, it *is* witnessed nonetheless (46). And so the slaves themselves may be said to have, at least potentially, exercised the same mediation of reality and the symbolic.

From my discussion in the previous section of this chapter, it should be clear that I also find it difficult to agree with Paravisini-Gebert's reading of Ti Noël's final days, specifically her argument that

He, like Makandal before him, metamorphoses himself into animals and slips into death, not before learning that the meaning of his toil in the kingdom of this world is that of understanding that action (revolution in the case of Haiti) is the most appropriate response to the human predicament.

(120)

In my reading, Ti Noël's animal metamorphoses are nothing like those of Macandal. While both make use of the animal realm, there is an acute difference in their reasons for doing so – a difference of which Ti Noël becomes patently aware, and which shames him, prompting deliberation and further development on his part. The realisation that he has begun to decline as an ethical agent, as he did after Macandal's disappearance, provokes both a profound epiphany and a regeneration of fidelity. At the apex of the development of his consciousness, Ti Noël is simultaneously aware of "the heroes who had revealed to him the power and the fullness of his remote African forebears," and "the possible germinations the future held" (178). The moving combination of remembrance, fidelity and hope which renews his Immortality, and infuses it into the Haitian site (and, perhaps, the reader's consciousness), goes almost unnoticed by Paravisini-Gebert.

In her reading, Ti Noël is stripped of the development of his consciousness and becomes an insane old slave, pathetically aping a king from a crumbling farmhouse filled with stolen junk, "whose most relevant pro-active deed is that of raping his master's wife" (Paravisini-Gebert 120). As I have demonstrated, though, the text itself describes Ti Noël as Macandal's confidante and assistant: after all, he aids in testing the poisons on one of de Mézy's vicious hounds, and himself poisons "the two best milch-cows on the plantation" (26). Notably, too, he conceals the fact that they have been poisoned, ironically attributing the cows' deaths to their unfamiliarity with Haiti's dangerous plants, thereby giving the toxins time to spread. Besides the rape of Mlle Floridor, he is not mentioned in the uprising against de Mézy, but then no other slave is. Before he is taken to Cuba, there is nothing to preclude one from reading him as a meaningful member of the armed groups that comprise the uprising. Later, he is explicitly named as having been "among the ringleaders in the sack of the Palace of Sans Souci" (163), and remains a tireless keeper of eventual fidelity throughout the novel. More important, however, is the emblematic purpose that Ti Noël serves.

Since Carpentier has chosen to tell the story of the revolution from the perspective of an ordinary person, as opposed to that of its leaders, his focaliser necessarily remains "in the periphery of history" (Paravisini-Gebert 120), something which need not render him pathetic. Given his function as "Carpentier's everyslave" (119), it follows that the development of his

consciousness symbolises the growth of a wider potential consciousness, and a collective resolve to resist oppression. Carpentier wisely chooses to tell the story of the Haitian Revolution through the eyes of an ordinary Haitian, a choice in line with contemporary subaltern studies, and so invokes the power of a *people* instead of the isolated prowess of a few leaders. What is achieved is the sense of “a communal crusade for self-determination” (Danticat xii).

I also want to interrogate the absence of Dessalines from the text. Throughout the novel, I have suggested, an economy of presence and absence is at work. Carpentier has chosen to represent the Haitian Revolution from the perspective of an ‘ordinary’ agent, and so indicates that his text will privilege an understanding of the revolution as a collective undertaking, a project of sameness. Those who oppose and undermine the revolution, by contrast, are cast in terms of the excessive presence that they impose by seeking power over others. What I find interesting, within the terms of this economy, is the way that Dessalines is referenced in the text. He is described as a leader whose victory is enabled by the Great Pacts, the vast coalition of gods that aids the revolutionaries. If Vodou and fidelity are to be read as intertwined, as in my reading they are, then Dessalines’ presence would cast him as the leader with whom the gods allied themselves. But this interpretation would render him profoundly singular, and so disrupt sameness with the simplistic notion that the victories of the revolution were utterly reducible to his agency. As I have argued, individual leaders recede as the revolutionaries unite in sameness. The fact that Dessalines’ minimal appearance occurs at a moment of communal triumph, then, is a tremendous validation of his role.

In other words, rather than approaching the novel as an historical roll-call, it is important to read it with a mind to the relationship between the said and the unsaid, coupled with an awareness that literature often moves beyond history. As Marcella Bertuccelli Papi would say, Dessalines *is missing* (2); that is, his absence is structured in a way that *alerts* the reader to his refusal and, while keeping him beyond the text, allows his historical presence to emerge through the revolutionary actions of a people united in radical belief. By privileging the collective over the individual, the novel gestures towards history without becoming its mimetic slave.

Similarly, I want to suggest that Carpentier’s use of magic or minimal reference to represent the revolution should not be read as revealing a hopeless, deluded reliance upon blind faith. When, for example, the palace of Sans Souci disappears under sheets of spectral fire, its walls throbbing with encircling drumbeats, this does not indicate that the ‘deluded’ slaves understand their actions only through the prism of faith. Rather, by withholding the

details of their actions, Carpentier keeps the Haitians' revolutionary power within the nebulous, immeasurable realm of excess. This judicious deployment of presence and absence, realism and magic, contrasts with the reified presence which quantifies the power of the text's despots and leaves them open to supplementation.

Finally, the author's emphasis on collective belief in possibility invites the reader to engage in the text's interplay of magic and realism, and so draws her into communion with the slaves. For example, when the defunct edicts of Christophe turn to "stone," we are told that they no longer dwell "among us" (Carpentier 171). Although not repeated, the use of the collective noun convokes shared experience and links the Haitians, Carpentier's narrator, and the reader in a form of textual-experiential sameness. When one reads the last few pages of the novel, in my experience at least, one therefore does so with a sense of being conjoined to what is described. This is precisely why the excessive, magical renewal of fidelity with which the novel 'closes' is so brilliant – it pushes the conflict at hand out into the 'invisible pages' beyond the text, and so convokes the reader to the fidelity the text describes.

So, if this novel is ultimately an unsatisfying experience, it is because it induces precisely the dissatisfaction that is the birthplace of thought, action, and supplementation as espoused by Badiou, Žižek and Freire. *The Kingdom of This World* is a text that summons other texts. At least, such a reading is perhaps more useful than condemning the novel to the past.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Carpentier's representational mode and carefully managed absences enable him to write of revolution without diminishing the radical excess that characterises it. I hope to have confirmed that approaching *The Kingdom of This World* through a combination of Badiou, Žižek and Freire's work yields an understanding of the text that supplements existing approaches to it. Specifically, my aim has been to show that the novel need not be read to represent the Haitian Revolution as a series of closed cycles that oscillate between oppression and liberation. This argument is uniquely enabled by Badiou's understanding that an event unfolds along a circuitous, hazardous course, and Freire's meditation on the development of "potential consciousness." Since, as Johnston asserts, the resurrection of a Badiouian truth-procedure is not repetition, but a new departure from what is, it becomes possible to read Carpentier's representation of the Haitians' successive acts of liberation as widening an existential gyre, rather than repeating a closed cycle of oppression

with brief interludes of emancipation. In addition, an awareness of Freire's pedagogy allows one to trace Ti Noël's emblematic *Bildung* through the text, and so to conclude that, as represented in the novel, the Haitian people, typified by him, are the conscious agents of their existential freedom, not creatures of destiny who become powerful disrupters as a result of their sheer delusion. This is the point that I have tried to establish in this chapter and, in doing so, I hope to have made some progress towards redeeming Carpentier's text.

Chapter 3: Violence and Aggression in *V for Vendetta*

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the representation of revolution and revolutionaries in the film *V for Vendetta*. My aim is to show that the theoretical concepts that I have elucidated enable an interpretation of the film that would add to existent commentary on, and enable the first sustained reading of, the production. I explore in depth the questions that the film asks about one's response to violent oppression, particularly whether or not force can be a productive rejoinder, what the meaning of 'terrorism' is in such times, and how aggression interacts with the symbolic in the effort to confront oppression.

My claim is that the distinction Žižek draws between violence, a statist tool of reification, and aggression, which seeks to explode the violent constraints of a regime, is crucial to one's reading of the film. Just as important are the interactions between invisible objective violence and its hyper-visible subjective counterpart, specifically the ability of the latter to reveal the malignant presence of the former. Aggression, I shall argue, blasts open existential spaces which regimes seek to hold shut; it not only interrupts the "silent obedient consent" (*V for Vendetta*) that oppression extracts and sustains, but seeks to undo the mechanisms that manufacture this assent. Because authoritarian violence intervenes on behalf of the state-of-the-situation in order to sustain the mute 'peacefulness' of objective violence, acts of subjective revolutionary aggression expose the violent terms of the 'peace' which sustains oppressive regimes. Such deeds give the lie to the notion that they have interrupted a state of peace, and so they reveal, rather than initiate, violence.

The effect of such a 'disclosure' is important, ironically so, because it is not a revelation. To live under a regime is to experience the weight of 'invisible' systemic coercions, which are enforced by acts of state violence and the ever-menacing threat thereof. The interactions between the state's various types of violence are key here. Objective violence forecloses political and existential possibilities on a structural level. Subjective violence extirpates active dissent through ferocious, deliberately visible acts, as well as 'invisible' covert means. The latter, as Žižek identifies, creates the illusion of the state's omniscience and omnipotence, exemplified by authority's apparent ability to have dissidents vanish without trace. Lastly, the state employs symbolic violence in order to draw people into complicity with its crimes. Tyranny and simulacrum articulate themselves in the language of community, and so speak of a fabricated 'us' against an arbitrary 'them.' A discourse of

enmity emerges and seeks to reify the false unity of those whom the state claims as its own, and thereby to justify the persecution of those who are excluded in order to sustain the 'community.' If the simulacral state is to survive, it is important that this rhetoric should remain inexhaustible – the state's enemies abound, traitors lurk and plot, the brink of collapse nears – so that a state of crisis may continue in perpetuity. A state of crisis endlessly validates measures to enforce a farcical division between those who are safeguarded and those who are destroyed, in the name of safety. The people are thus presented with a difficult, self-referential binary: perform the state, replete with relational structures that predetermine one's friends and enemies, or become the enemy against which the state affirms itself. Effective resistance to this kind of 'peaceful' regime is not simply a matter of relation, of adopting an oppositional position. Instead, one must attack the foundational myths that sustain an oppressive society. Whereas antagonism potentially affirms the state's interior/exterior dichotomy, exposure of a simulacrum's void explodes the very terrain of these oppositions, and so radically destabilises the system.

Oppression therefore emerges as the ultimate expression of post-political bio-politics: the displacement of causes and political values by an obsession with security and authoritarian 'peace.' In such a context, the vestigial form of politics practised by individuals whose political allegiances and ethical responses are given by the state is not a politics. Under such circumstances, silence and assent are the price of 'peace,' and so the oppressive apparatus manufactures the conditions of its reification. Through their silence, and the acquiescence that is inferred therefrom, people perform and reproduce the state's power. Notably, one can assent through silence or echo the words of the state with a voice that is not one's own. However, it seems that individuals cannot but be aware that their relationship with the state is conditioned by the fear of drawing its attention. That is, people accept the 'peaceful' *status quo* as given precisely because to speak against it is to be marked as 'violent.' They are brought to mimic the state's repressive function because they have to suppress what they know in order to live under the violent entity with which they have become complicit.

So the divisiveness of oppression acts upon self and society simultaneously. It shackles them together in a way that reinforces its own position. The performance that oppression extracts from the individual is not elicited by fear alone; it is underwritten by the construction of a false social context which manipulates the relational premises of one's identity and desire to belong. That is, the performance of the state becomes a public task that invades each individual with the sense that all other individuals genuinely endorse the state-

of-the-situation. Each person is quieted by her projection of the state's gaze into the eyes of every other person. The violent contradictions of an authoritarian state create a general condition of internalised unease, a 'public' affliction that no *one* dares to express and so make public. Public space then becomes the locus of individuals who are mutually and internally divided by the need to perform what they know to be a lie without acknowledging that it is so. They become communally isolated bearers of the unspeakable.

The individual who 'announces' the unjust rapacity of a regime therefore radically interrupts the precarious silence that characterises and sustains a simulacral community. Such an individual must be declared an outsider, an enemy of the *volk*, and eradicated by the state as an act of 'service' to its community. In other words, the person who speaks the truth against a climate of prevarication does not reveal the injustice at hand, but instead interrupts the silence that sustains it, and so opens a 'disorderly' space in which the collective acknowledgement of social catastrophe becomes possible. This person speaks a powerful *no* against the 'yes' extracted from and sustained by the community's silence, and so gives the animated 'yes!' to other possibilities, to life, that the state precludes. She lays bare the fact that state power is contingent rather than absolute, and that the sponsored identities out of which a simulacral community erects itself are performative instead of essential.

The implication is that an exclamation which interrupts the interlinked performance of state and suborned populace is profoundly evental in nature, since it voices and gives life to an 'impossible' yet unconsciously longed-for existential possibility, a society that is realised by the very notion that it is unrealisable. In the electrifying moment of her utterance, then, the individual exposes herself to reprisal at the hands of those who continue to perform the state, but also invites the possibility that the same words might resonate with others and summon a true community, one founded upon dialogue and communion instead of silence and division. Emergent signs of resistance cannot but make an oppressed people aware that their silent approval of death is only possible because of a collective fear of demanding the resumption of life. Precisely because it announces the possibility of refusing to perform the state, and so performing the self against the state, the first *non serviam* is an individual flight that risks unlocking the collective imagination.

Of course, this imagery is profoundly Badiouian. What one has is the tension between the preservation of one's stunted existence as a being who grubs after self-interest within the confines of the state-of-the-situation, and the risk of obliteration that accompanies one's attempt to intervene in the production of a violent society. This is the rupture that separates mortality from Immortality, and creates the condition of 'being-two.' Rather than a separation

of body and mind, one might call this condition a conflict between the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’ self, the anxiousness of the ‘animal substructure’ when it becomes host to the fugitive thoughts of the Immortal.

How, then, does one respond to a regime that brutally suppresses dissent? Two points must be borne in mind if such a question is to be answered. As per Žižek and Freire, the advent of structural violence means that a state of hostility is already in effect. Aggression is contingent upon repression and so cannot be originary. Moreover, it is important to consider the characters of violence and aggression. Violence is characterised by excess. When it enters the service of power and control, it completes a triad in which each term seeks to expand the capacities of the other two. It demands, in Žižek’s words, “always more and more” (*Violence* 63).

By contrast, aggression must seek to limit its enterprise if it is to serve as a means to liberation. As Badiou has affirmed, while the Ethic of Truths might name enemies, it does not declare pogroms; it is based on an inclusive proclamation and has no need of exclusionary, destructive premises. The essential difference between aggression and violence is that aggression is futural in orientation: it seeks to clear cordons so that the advance of *life* can resume, and is therefore necessarily aware of its own provisionality. In other words, aggression has no interest in institutionalising itself as a binary response to violence. Quite simply, aggression is a Samsonite gesture that seeks to explode the structures of violence *and* to exhaust itself in the moment at which it does so. Given that it is conceived of strategically, that it looks forward to its own end, it does what violence cannot precisely because it looks forward to its own end.

By contrast, violence fixates upon the conservation of the present and seeks to arrest change at all costs. Since life is inherently incomplete and open to new possibilities, violence requires ever more force with which to contain it. As such, violence lies easy with power and seeks to install itself as that which presides over the state-of-the-situation, while aggression aims to break the grip of violence as the first condition of possibility for an intervention in the *status quo*. Put differently, aggression is the manifestly ‘unlawful’ demand for true peace precisely because objective violence conceals itself in the ‘peace’ fashioned when cruelty is rendered invisible by operation of the law.

The implication is that new ways of ‘speaking’ against a violent regime must be found. Where objective, symbolic and subjective violence combine as the conditions of ‘peace,’ then the peaceful act of protest becomes profoundly inadequate, if not suicidal. For a counter-narrative that interrupts and impugns the state’s monological master-narrative to

emerge, what is sometimes required is an anonymous, disembodied voice that brings the state to an encounter with its excess without inviting the destruction of the speaker who has forced the confluence. Moreover, the ethical community that Immortal politics summons and unites must sometimes remain unidentifiable as a community.

My key assertion, then, is that a measure of aggression, even if manifested in wholly peaceful expressions, is inextricably linked to revolution. Since it springs from the lived experience of an intolerable present, revolution's radical demand for change is necessarily rendered insistent by the natural urgency of human beings who find themselves in a state of emergency. The very intention to effect revolutionary change is aggressive, and easily misperceived as violent because it seeks to interrupt and supplement the 'peaceful' operations and interests of the *status quo*. Radical transformation requires that the supposedly solid and immutable structures of society be exposed as contingent and movable. But this does not mean that what exists must be smashed and remade from ruins. Instead, society is mentally rendered into its conceptually 'liquid' form, and so that which once appeared perdurable emerges as workable. This is how elements of the transcendental regime can be submitted to alteration without requiring that all institutions be dissolved. The notion that revolution is eternally synonymous with breakdown is a supporting fantasy of the state-of-the-situation, and exists to abort change in advance by equating aggression with violence and making criminals out of those who oppose 'peaceful' crimes. In fact, the invisible menace of the extrajudicial policeman, armed and endlessly enabled by secret evidence, profanes society far more than does a liberatory interruption of the 'peace.' Revolution should be understood not as a destructive act that undoes society, but an accomplishment of human creativity that overcomes systematic opposition to the articulation of new possibilities.

It is these conceptions of revolution and revolutionaries that inform my reading of *V for Vendetta*. As a consequence, I necessarily disagree with critics who have labelled the film a simplistic applause of violent terrorism. Such reviewers make plain their reductionism in their very titles. Nicholas J. Xenakis' article "T is for Terrorist" accuses the film of "spewing its jeremiad" in a manner that divorces fiction from reality (135), and Joe Morgenstern, in "V for Violent, Vapid" asserts that the work "celebrates terrorism as a necessary evil." Similarly, Douglas Bulloch states that "V for Vendetta has been directly criticised for its open approval of symbolic terrorism, and it would be unwise for the film-makers to dispute this charge" (431).

These criticisms not only do not allow for a distinction between violence and aggression, but also recontextualise the film. Released in 2006, *V for Vendetta* has

consistently been read against the backdrop of the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks. Thus, the application of the words “terrorist” and “terrorism” serve to link V to the violent fanaticism of Al-Qaeda, and so rubbish the attempt to understand him as an ethical agent. ‘Terrorist’ becomes a generic term that signifies an enemy of life, and so necessarily excludes the possibility of a human being acting in the name of humanity. What one has here is the kind of totalising language that erects a relational structure and so preconfigures one’s relationship with those it describes. In order to instruct the reader as to the nature of ‘real’ terrorism, Xenakis refers repeatedly to the horrors of the Iraqi insurgency, and claims that

while too much order can be a bad thing, so can too little [. . .]. When a population takes up arms, chaos and terror are just as likely to ensue instead of freedom. Baghdad may be exactly what London looks like after the curtain closes on the Wachowskis’ film.

(138)

Besides the fact that the film’s populace does not have to take up arms precisely *because of* V’s actions, the sentiments expressed here are revealing. As with the conflation of revolutionary and terrorist, Xenakis’ refusal to acknowledge the singularity of political sites allows him to hold Baghdad aloft as the quasi-inevitable consequence of any militant response to oppression. He is also suspicious of the film’s tagline, “People shouldn’t be afraid of their governments, governments should be afraid of their people,” and concludes with the tiding that the “Iraqis are not in fear of their government, they are in fear because they lack one” (138). So Xenakis discards the radical democracy of the first quote in favour of the ‘realism’ of the second. It is not Iraq’s political difficulties after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s ‘orderly’ regime that I wish to question, but the suggestion that *any* radical politics is to be associated with the apocalyptic. Implicit in this logical fallacy is the aforementioned conception of revolutionary spirit as will to chaos, which suggests that revolution favours the annihilation, rather than reinvention, of structures. This is far too simplistic. The film’s tagline is adapted from John Basil Barnhill’s statement, as part of a debate with Henry Tichenor, that “Where the people fear the government you have tyranny,” and, conversely, “Where the government fears the people you have liberty” (34). These words evoke the properly radical sentiment that a democratic government should be kept ever mindful that its powers, and existence, are contingent upon the watchful concurrence of the people.

Briefly put, the state must exist as a profoundly dialogical entity. In Badiouian terms, where it claims and silences individuals as part of its relational structures of inclusion and exclusion, the monological Evil of simulacrum is at hand. By contrast, when individuals

claim the state as their own, and act upon it in such a way as to keep open the continuous renegotiation of its transcendental regime, the Good results. So oppression, not rebellion, vitiates the legitimacy and existence of state power. The opposition to tyranny that rehabilitates government and redeems the law by rendering it lawful simply has nothing to do with terrorism, and the attempt to affine the two is emblematic of the conflict between ‘real’ and ‘potential’ consciousness.

By now it should be clear that my reading of *V for Vendetta* will be informed by an awareness of the distinction between violence and aggression and, indeed, will elucidate the way in which the latter serves as a response to the former. In short, my interest is in the film’s portrayal of the ethical predicament faced by one who seeks to dismantle the violent ‘peace’ of invisible oppression, which routinely kills its questioners. Accordingly, my reading of the film develops in two parts. The first sets out how violence and aggression figure in the film, and the second shows how trajectories of fidelity and sameness are rendered possible by such acts of aggression.

3.2 *State Violence and Revolutionary Aggression*

The narrative of *V for Vendetta*, which imagines a dystopian Britain that has fallen into totalitarian autocracy, is driven by the eponymous character V’s political campaign to unite the British people against tyranny by blowing up the Houses of Parliament, and his personal vendetta against the architects of the institutional crimes that founded the regime. An examination of the film’s title helps adumbrate the task before V. “Vendetta” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1290) derives from the Latin *vindicta*, the “ceremonial act [of] claiming as free [. . .] one wrongly enslaved,” *vindex*, “defender, protector,” and *dicere*, “to say, to speak; name” (*Myetymology*). By implication, then, V does not simply commit himself to vigilante justice, but undertakes to intervene in his society’s transcendental regime. That is, his actions must enable unsanctioned speech, and thereby interrupt the silence that reifies state authority and the subordination of the individual. Moreover, his campaign must change the very meaning of, and interactions between, words such as state, citizen, justice, security, freedom and expression. What is sought is a communal break from the state’s dominion over these terms (which enables it to issue names and assign violent exclusion as it sees fit), after which it becomes possible to invest them with their properly radical import. Interrupting the state’s relational monologue, replete with its binary structures and asphyxiating existential limits, is thus the obvious and daunting price of freedom.

That the attainment of freedom is a futural task is made obvious in *V for Vendetta*. From the outset, the film's futuristic Britain is represented as a simulacrum, a false society openly premised on violent exclusion. Tellingly, one's introduction to this society is concurrent with an experience of its totalitarian propaganda. Lewis Prothero, "The Voice of London," appears on television to remind the country of those who "had to go" in order for the new society's founding gesture of exclusion to be performed: "Immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, terrorists, disease-ridden degenerates" (*V for Vendetta*). As these figural terms of exclusion are listed by Prothero, it becomes apparent that each symbolises itself and also all of the others.

What one has is violent adequation: the false, hostile oneness attributed to those outside a simulacrum in order to push its constituents together in an equally fabricated 'sameness.' The motto of this society, "Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith," is therefore deeply ironic, since whatever strength of unity it engenders is utterly dependent upon those whom it seeks to exclude. The contingency of this false national identity is evident in the need to assert British 'togetherness' through the ubiquitous appearance of the national motto, and television programmes and official meetings that end with the declaration "England prevails."

Throughout the film, the relentless injunction that the British remain 'united' underscores the contingency, and hence provisionality, of a 'community' established through fear politics. Tyranny's endless need to posit enemies in order to sustain itself also obfuscates the fact that it is the true enemy of its people. Oppression never protects 'its' people, never keeps them 'pure' by performing dreadful tasks on their behalf. Rather, institutional cruelty renders people complicit in its actions. Society cannot compartmentalise its use of force – excessive violence always diffuses back into the space that it purports to make safe. And, because of the fictive distinction between those whom it safeguards and those whom it attacks, the coercive state's myriad forms of violence and control mean that the experience of oppression becomes an ordeal that is common to all.

To better explore the implications of a state's turn to oppression, I now introduce Massimiliano Tomba's discussion of *Gewalt*. This term translates as both power and violence, though one "must not think of two sides of violence, the institutional and the anti-institutional," but rather the dialectical play of violence that underlies "the violent character of law" (Tomba 126). This means that, as Balibar asserts, the "intrinsic ambiguity" of *Gewalt* is that it refers "to the negation of law or justice and to their realisation or the assumption of responsibility for them by an institution" (qtd. in Tomba 126). As such, state *Gewalt* marks

the achievement of dominion over force by which the state establishes itself as an “accomplished fact,” and the extralegal excess that accompanies the total absorption of force by state institutions.³ Importantly, the state expropriates violence in order to extinguish the interpersonal “vendetta,” and so state *Gewalt* has “nothing to do with moral order,” but instead seeks to prevent the breach in the state’s dominion over force that occurs when “an individual decides to ‘take justice into her own hands’” (133). What I want to investigate is the converse, in which the state holds a “monopoly of violence,” and has achieved “the total razing of every extra-statist power” (129-30), but has patently failed to supply, or actually vitiated, the ‘lawful peace’ that would justify these expropriations.

In other words, how does one respond to the violent regime characterised by a “permanent state of exception,” in which, “for security reasons,” the “indivisible nexus” of legal norms and ‘extraordinary’ exceptions means that invisible violence and lawful crimes *are* the standard sustained by state *Gewalt* (128, 133)? Similarly, what is the status of vendetta when the law is not a stable code ‘under’ which one may shelter, nor that to which one may cede the pursuit of justice, but a mercurial cipher *from* which the people are anxious fugitives?

My argument is that an oppressive state fails to abolish the experience of injustice that initiates vendettas. By its very nature, a violent state compels its citizens to respond ‘unlawfully’ in order to save themselves and to remake their society. As a violent simulacrum, the oppressive state engenders two categories of vendetta, because it voids people and reduces them to endangered bodies, and also prohibits the expression of Immortal humanity. That is, it necessitates Badiouian as well as Žižekian sameness. Accordingly, there are two interpenetrating tasks before those who confront oppression: to nullify the state’s mechanism of violence, and to intervene in a symbolic order that conflates the not-yet with the illegal. With this in mind, I now turn to two early scenes in *V for Vendetta* that explicate these intersecting struggles.

V’s meeting with Evey Hammond, the film’s focaliser, is occasioned by an encounter with state-sanctioned violence. Evey is caught outside during curfew, and set upon by a group of thugs who attempt to rape her. However, when she draws a canister of pepper spray with which to ward them off, the men produce badges that identify them as paramilitary Fingermen, and inform Evey that having “threatened” them invites the use of their “judicial

³ Here Tomba cites police officers who themselves break the speed limit in order to apprehend a driver who has done so, or who intervene with greater violence in order to break up a demonstration (130). He shows that “only by its own violation can the law be maintained” (130).

discretion,” which she “get[s] to swallow” (*V for Vendetta*). As evidenced by the legal as well as symbolic transposition of judicial power and the men’s erections, state license turns an act of lawful aggression into criminal behavior, and twists reprehensible violation into an act of law enforcement.

What is horrifying here is that resistance to bodily invasion can be punished with the same, so that crime and punishment are visited upon the same person. Put differently, to defy the ordinary flow of institutional violence, the lawful *Gewalt*, is to be attacked as a violator of the ‘peace.’ The naturalisation of such exploitation clearly proceeds from the ‘order’ of the nightly curfew, and is an unspoken ‘benefit’ of being a uniformed state criminal. In sum, the terror of this encounter is its foundation in the state’s ‘peaceful’ functions, which is to say its repeatability.

When V intervenes, he immediately slices through the badge which purports to make the rapists’ actions ‘legal.’ Importantly, this small act is his only ‘violent’ one because, as the viewer’s sympathy attests, V’s subsequent actions are validated by the natural imperative to intervene against rape. That is, the only thing ‘destroyed’ is the icon of lawful criminality and, stripped of ‘purifying’ authority, the Fingermen are simultaneously unmasked as vicious thugs and responded to accordingly. In delivering the aggressive response that was precluded by Evey’s recognition of the Fingermen’s authority, V’s intervention disrupts the ‘peaceful’ exercise of violence, and thus averts violation.

Moreover, his force serves as a comic foil to the Fingermen’s violence. Throughout the film, his martial prowess emerges performatively as vaudeville, which means that his aggression is not simply captured within the binary logic of force and counterforce, but instead mocks and satirises the state violence to which it responds. This point is underscored through V’s appropriation and subversion of their language. His physical aggression is accompanied by speech and so, in a thoroughly Freirian mode, he literally reflects upon his actions *while* he acts. This becomes evident in his response to the violent Christian maxim “Spare the rod, spoil the child,” which the Fingermen adopt as their epithet. Were they to desist from their attack, the Fingermen believe, they would have failed to vitiate an interruption of their state-ordained power and, following the adage’s puritanical logic, thus ‘spoiled’ Evey by allowing her to believe in the right to such a challenge. When V strikes down the last Fingerman, ironically using the thug’s steel baton, he repeats the first half of the axiom, but his actions completely reconfigure its meaning. Quite simply, if he had spared the Fingermen his aggressive intervention, they would have been free to despoil Evey. Again,

V does not simply meet force with counterforce, but instead uses aggression to deconstruct the internal logic of the violence to which he responds.

This interplay between violence and aggression emerges in all of V's acts, and so undermines the binary opposition between supposedly legitimate state violence and illegitimate terrorism. That is, the state's monopoly on force extends into the realm of language, and eventuates as the power to name any opposition illegitimate, and thereby to legitimate its destruction. In opposing this unchecked mandate, V does not simply slay opponents. He fights for the right to respond to the state not as its terrorised and silenced subject, but as part of a citizenry whose interruptive voice is both heeded and recognised as essential to the Good. That is, he seeks to undo the transposition of citizen and terrorist that is subtended by the state's simulacral logic that someone who assents to its degradation is included, and one who opposes moral decay is violently excluded. Because he undertakes to reclaim the meaning of words such as citizen, justice, law and state, his campaign is deeply concerned with the symbolic order.

However, even as V disrupts state violence, he remains aware of the ambiguous *Gewalt* that informs this act. For example, when he appears on the 'stage' formed by the Fingermen's attack, he does so while quoting the second scene of *Macbeth*, and compares his own blade to the "brandish'd steel" of this play's eponymous character (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.2.20). There are several noteworthy implications here. By referencing Shakespeare's play, he signals a situation of legalised injustice, in which "Foul is fair, and fair is foul" (1.1.11). Consequently, he unmasks the oppressive state and responds to it as an agent, but also recognises that he is here *cast* by the state as a necessary rejoinder to its evil. In other words, the thugs, the woman whom they drag down an alley, and the hero who must intervene are all stock characters, and so V's intervention here is part of an atemporal performance – while it is a thoroughly moral act, it is also without systemic consequences. As long as the system of violence prevails, the 'play' of responding to *a priori* evil remains endless. Rather than taking up the individual vendettas created by the oppressive state's absurdist production of daily violence, and so becoming a scripted character induced by cycles of force and counterforce, V's task is to pursue the public's true vendetta against the violent and illegitimate institution at the heart of these cycles. So it is necessary to move from mortal resistance to Immortal revolution, from acts that stand against violence to those that explode the terrain and symbolic license of the encounter.

Accordingly, it is important to understand V's symbolic role as an agent of aggressive change. Walter Benjamin's question of how to end the cycles by which one "suppress[es] in a

revolutionary way the preceding power,” so as to found a “new legal order in which the new *Gewalt* will find justification,” is central (Tomba 134). Precisely because the initially heroic Macbeth’s position *as* hero locates him *vis-à-vis* the tyrant whom he casts down, he himself is invited to become the tyrant who must be overthrown.⁴ The ‘oppositional stability’ is why Benjamin asks one to consider how to break the “dialectical alternation between a *Gewalt* that imposes law and one that preserves it” (Tomba 141).

The answer, it seems, is to conceive of victory as the breakthrough into a space of supplementation beyond the cycle of regime and overthrow. Indeed, this type of triumph does not consist in the slaying of enemies, but the opening of possibilities beyond the endless structured encounter with enemies. As such, it contains the essence of aggression: a struggle that annuls the violent capacities of all, and creates a space beyond the intractable conflict of oppositional terms in which mutual displacement from the hierarchical terrain of power allows the possibility of communion. Rather than a position of victory, which requires the victors to preserve the vanquished as both a term of reference and a justification for their own power, this space is one in which all are radically supplemented. So, whereas successful violence gathers ever more power to wield against what is, and so cannot dispense with its notional adversary, aggression seeks to decentre the very framework of the encounter. Such supplementation ends the conservation of terms that underlies the hero–villain dialectic, which admits of no true progression. An end to this static dialectic requires an Immortal intervention in the symbolic order to resignify the terms that stabilise oppositional structures.

The need to intercede in the realm of signification accounts for V’s destruction of the Old Bailey. Once again, his aggression is staged as a performance – a “very special concert,” he tells Evey, in which “percussion instruments” will take the fore (*V for Vendetta*). Here implicit is an understanding that radical aggression can serve a creative purpose. Beyond the (nonetheless important) idea that aggression always tries to open spaces in which new possibilities emerge, the equation of explosives with musical instruments and the destruction of a historic building with an open-air concert suggests a visceral, arresting encounter. What one has is a sense of the *spectacle* created by destroying a building so heavily imbricated in history, culture, politics and power relations that its destruction is an unthinkable act. The sheer *illegality* of such an action cannot not draw wide attention, and so force those ‘outside’ politics to witness, and thus participate in, an act that parades the possibility of political agency.

⁴ Shakespeare presages Macbeth’s dialectical movement from hero to villain by having him rewarded with the title of one of his slain foes, such that what the traitor “hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won” (1.2.70).

Consequently, Douglas Bulloch argues that the film's "visceral politics" are the means by which it "enlists and mobilises viewers at a visceral level to reject political apathy and to enact a democratic politics of resistance and revolt against any state that would seek to silence dissent" (39-40). His claim is that "the affective dimensions of embodied experience" can be thought of "as incipient attitudes, as energies, intensities, and sensations that function as the first step towards an evolving attitude" (50). As such, the film's "atmosphere colored by fear, anxiety, and distress," has the same oppressive effect upon the viewer as its reality does upon the citizenry (46). By implication, the picture's affective cinematography, like magical realism in *The Kingdom of This World*, convokes the audience to sameness with those whose resistance to oppression it denotes. Therefore, the spectacular, *visceral* interruptions of oppression's monologue announce the possibility of transformative agency, which calls the people *and* the viewer "to action" (46).

Moreover, Žižek rightly points out that to fixate upon subjective violence is to avert one's gaze from its objective counterpart, the fascinating 'mystery' of the former depends on the invisibility of the latter (*Violence* 1). As I have suggested, obliviousness to violence does not easily coexist with the experience of oppression; people know, even if unconsciously, that existential barriers have been erected around them, and feel a depressing presence that in turn carries the possibility of its absence. In other words, oppression means that objective, systematic violence is not intangible, and thus an explosion of subjective resistance necessarily gestures towards the entrenched criminality that is the cause of which aggression is the effect.

So, when V dedicates his "concerto" to the figure of Lady Justice atop the Old Bailey, "in honour of the holiday she seems to have taken from these parts, and in recognition of the impostor that stands in her stead" (*V for Vendetta*), he reveals his purpose: to force an encounter with the hitherto unspeakable state of injustice. Once again, his aggression emerges as a flourish of Vaudevillian performance. Just after bells announce the morning of November 5th, Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture begins to play in the streets, issuing from the same network of speakers that announce the nightly curfew and other repressive messages. V thus appropriates the regime's oppressive apparatus, and turns it into a means of expression that overtly interrupts the silence of the nightly curfew. Ironically, the more extensive the system of control, the greater the audience to whom one might appeal by subverting such a system. In time with the Overture's crescendo, the figure of Lady Justice explodes, followed by the entire Bailey structure. Importantly, a close-up shot shows the engraved edict, "Protect the Children of the Poor & Punish the Wrongdoer," as it bursts into rubble.

By demolishing a symbol of justice and fairness, V radically alters London's physical symbolic terrain, and aligns material-symbolic reality with the transcendental regime that speaks through it. Quite simply, he destroys an icon that is radically dissonant with the existent reality of oppression and, moreover, has been appropriated by the state as part of its false assertion of 'pure' English culture. The important implication, here, is that a monument to justice becomes not only meaningless but actively deleterious when society itself has been violently debauched. It is not that the symbol's import is lost, but that it *remains*, and so proclaims the veritable justice of the endemic crime. In addition, the truly peaceful reclamation of symbol by a united citizenry is rendered impossible by violence. Therefore, while V places the charges that level the structure, and so align the Old Bailey with the existent regime, it is the state that has destroyed this symbol of justice.

In addition, the fanfare of music, fireworks, and explosions interrupts the nightly curfew with a display of what Žižek would call life-affirming aggression, since a curfew is itself a literal example of constrictive statist violence. By contrast, flooding the streets with music creates a natural invitation, an instinctively joyous and carnivalesque inclusionary gesture. Thus, as people tentatively take to the streets, and therefore violate curfew, V begins to foster the ethical community that will later stand in solidarity before the Houses of Parliament. In effect, he combines a spectacular act of transgression with a momentary reclamation of public space *by* the public. The collective isolation crafted by oppression is thoroughly undermined, and what one has, in the moment when people literally step into an illegal space together, is the mutual recognition of collective illegality that is the foundation of sameness and solidarity. In short, V's act of unmistakable aggression begins to spark fidelity.

However, as Freire cautions, mere action is not sufficient to initiate revolution. A constant interaction between action and reflection is required in order to achieve the praxis of transformation. V must therefore use the opportunity to speak that the hyper-visible destruction of the Old Bailey allows. As the regime hastens to call the incident an "emergency demolition," and thereby to enclose it within the ambit of its force, it is imperative that he proclaim the act's true meaning, namely that the tyrannical state is not an unassailable entity. His charge, particularly when read from a Badiouian perspective, is to make the break in the state's monologue of power and discourse endure.

To this end, V seizes the national television broadcaster's transmission tower, and avails himself of the all-pervasive emergency channel. As with his takeover of the public announcement system, his appropriation of the emergency channel renders its extensive,

monological, authoritarian address ironic, and reveals how a regime's appetite for control renders it a tonal site. Indeed, when it is discovered that the broadcast cannot be shut down, Dascomb, head of propaganda, defends himself against the High Chancellor's ire with the words: "You designed it, sir, you wanted it foolproof, *you* told me 'every television in London.'" Furthermore, V's interruptive appearance on public media screens set above the motto "Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith" portentously appropriates these words, and repurposes them to signify faith as belief in the possibility of the impossible through collective action, instead of the endurance of the existent by silent observance. The greatest irony, however, is that his use of the all-arresting emergency channel to expose the country's descent into tyranny is the most apt use of a system ostensibly designed to raise alarm during a national crisis.

The message that V broadcasts is effective because it expresses sympathy with those who, in the face of terror, renounced their potential for Immortality and hid in their 'animal substructures,' while also asserting the need for radical change in the present. It thus invokes both elements of Badiouian "being-two." V actually apologises for his interruption, and says that he does "appreciate the comforts of everyday routine, the security of the familiar, the tranquility of repetition," and that he enjoys the stability of ordinary multiplicity "as much as any bloke." However, he also asserts that the false luxury of inertia cannot go on unbroken, and says that the time has come for the citizenry to break the silence regarding the state-of-the-situation, and have "a little chat":

There are of course those who do not want us to speak. [. . .] even now, orders are being shouted into telephones, and men with guns will soon be on their way. Why? Because while the truncheon may be used in lieu of conversation, words will always retain their power. Words offer the means to meaning, and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth. And the truth is, there is something terribly wrong with this country, isn't there?

V thus forces people to confront the unspoken reality of their situation, to name and discuss the objective violence at work in their society. Such a directive is possible only because people are ineluctably aware that their society is founded upon oppression. Further, he calls upon individuals to trace the genesis of the current situation, and to perceive their role in establishing and sustaining the regime. While he asserts that "there are those more responsible than others," he unsettles the population by revealing that "if you're looking for the guilty, you need only look into a mirror."

This interruptive injunction seeks to render the populace aware of their implication in history, language and culture. Specifically, it is the people themselves who allowed the regime to emerge, and it is they who performatively sustain it through their silent assent. What one has is an exposition of how tyrannical power is often not seized but given, and how the ostensibly ‘peaceful’ realm of language functions to install objective violence. Because oppression can then claim to have come about ‘without’ violence, it establishes itself and its subsequent excesses as ‘lawful’ measures given the ‘unlawful violence’ of those who oppose it.

This political infiltration is similar to the tale with which Žižek begins *Violence*. Like the thief who is never caught – no matter how thoroughly searched – because the stolen item is the wheelbarrow he ‘inviolately’ trundles before him (1), language is the medium which steals violence *into* the popular consciousness, and so recalibrates the public conscience. In other words, there is no such thing as ‘just’ talking, and so, as Žižek suggests, it is false to assume that the presence of speech indicates the renunciation of violence (61). Perhaps most important, here, is the realisation that political ‘silence’ means not the peaceful end of dispute, but the totalising preponderance and ceaseless replay of a single violent narrative. The task of the citizenry is, accordingly, constantly to interrogate the intrinsically violent facility of language, and so to engage in relentless dispute with power. This is what it means to keep the flux and play of language alive, and doing so can only be the appointment of the people, manifested in the plurality of dialogue. To give up this radical duty by relinquishing one’s position in language to a censor, one who will ‘purify’ discourse on ‘behalf’ of society, is to invite precisely the monologue that oppression craves – a charge conspicuously abandoned by those V addresses.

By establishing his audience’s ethical failure, V’s address underscores the corollary: a dire need for ethical responsibility and Immortal action. He claims responsibility for the destruction of the Old Bailey, an act through which he “sought to end” the political silence that not only affirms the state and obfuscates its atrocities, but also allows the values of freedom, justice and truth to be abrogated (*V for Vendetta*). As such, he calls for an ethical community that will begin the task of reconstituting these principles and remaking society. Indeed, he invites people to step into the dangerous sameness of Immortality by joining him in resurrecting Guy Fawkes’ attempt to destroy parliament. Interestingly, he adds that

if you’ve seen nothing, if the crimes of this government remain unknown to you
then I would suggest you allow the fifth of November to pass unmarked. But if you
see what I see, if you feel as I feel, and if you would seek as I seek, then I ask you to

stand beside me one year from tonight, outside the gates of Parliament, and together we shall give them a fifth of November that shall never, ever be forgot.

Once again, V articulates an effective ethical demand by placing the torpor and existential oblivion of the mortal pack mentality alongside a summons to the hazardous course of Immortality. The implication is that the radical stance of the latter is required to overcome the atrocities enabled by the former. In addition, the genius of prefiguring a political event is that doing so inverts and disquiets the political silence that sustains a regime. Each day that passes becomes a political juncture, an example of the state's failure to abort the event. So the ordinary passage of time comes to symbolise the imminence of possibilities, instead of the reified impossibility of opposing the state. As High Chancellor Sutler makes plain, from the perspective of the state-of-the-situation, the "three hundred and forty-seven days" that pass between the broadcast and the end of the film amount to "three hundred and forty-seven failures!"

The manner in which the narrative develops from this point onwards is worth discussing. After his revolutionary broadcast, V embarks upon a campaign of assassination against those responsible for the state's early atrocities. In pursuit of him is Chief Inspector Finch, whose willingness to seek out the truth without regard for its political implications distinguishes him as a tonal individual. Thus, as V kills prominent Party affiliates, he prompts Finch to investigate the elided histories of these votaries, and so it is by our access to Finch's inquiries that we learn of the terrible atrocities that are the regime's void.

The fascinating inference here is that assassination becomes the condition of possibility for the emergence of a narrative of society that is other than the state's narrative of itself. To liberate a society means to make plain its history, and so render history that which informs the ongoing development of society, rather than that which haunts its reification. In other words, an exposition of what V calls the regime's "ancient history" is indispensable to the project of collapsing tyranny in the present, and thus making possible the future. Sometimes, the film suggests, when the very powerful have grown comfortable with administering atrocity, the only way to enable liberation is to kill these guardians of toxic and implacable monologue. Ironically, there is a creative element to such killing, because each death becomes a point of entry into the history that the living agents of death would never broach.

When V kills Delia Surridge, for example, he leaves her deeply revealing diary for Finch to discover. As the latter opens the diary he cues a voice-over by Surridge, and so triggers disruptive emergence of a suppressed narrative. In sum, while death is usually

associated with the descent from narrative into silence, the reverse movement becomes thinkable when life is contained and asphyxiated by a few who think nothing of dealing out death. Under such conditions, aggression is not a violation of 'peace' but an urgent emergence of *life*, analogous to the way growing things break concrete.

It is also important to consider the singular combinations of people and events that V generates in carrying out these assassinations. Nothing less than their deaths could bring the most eminent Party members within the ambit of a police investigation, no official below the rank of Chief Inspector would likely be trusted with the material to pursue such an investigation, and only a Badiouian agent would continue to follow the 'hazardous course' of an enquiry into what has been assiduously occluded. Their willingness to privilege a literal truth-procedure above their own survival aligns V with Finch, and establishes a link between the former's 'terrorist' acts and the 'sanctioned' investigations that they compel.

Finch is unique because he takes responsibility for that which he unearths. Indeed, the information that he happens upon possesses him and compels him to help interrupt rather than comply with history. Thus, for instance, when Chancellor Sutler demands that the Chief Inspector put the contents of Delia Surridge's diary "out of his mind," this is precisely what he is not able to do. His tonality is signalled early when he, on being required to repeat the words "England Prevails" at the end of a briefing, gives only a cursory mutter. Curiously, V seems oddly aware of Finch's tonality. When the latter asks him why he waited years before launching his plan, V, who is ironically 'disguised' as an informant, responds: "You, Inspector, I needed you." While this may seem a utilitarian connection, it is in fact a relationship based upon profound respect. What V is saying is that he was able to rely on an ethical response from Finch to that which was placed before him. Such confluence of purpose makes it difficult to separate V's 'terrorism' and Finch's investigation into a structure of primary and secondary cause and effect, and, instead, shows that the two are mutually dependent.

At the core of Finch's investigation is the Larkhill Detention Centre, almost all record of which is, as he discovers, "deleted, omitted, or missing." Ironically, the obvious effort to erase the facility from history attests to its existence as a node of the regime's void. Finch becomes aware of Larkhill when V strikes down Lewis Prothero, "The Voice of London," and former Commander of the camp. Tellingly, on confronting Prothero, V insists upon using his former military title, and refers to himself as "the Ghost of Christmas Past." This scene is interrupted by flashes from Larkhill, in which Prothero admires himself in his uniform and uses a stun gun to make a hooded prisoner writhe.

Implicit here is a Badiouian understanding of time as not single chronology but a multiplicity of times, driven forward by events and, conversely, suspended by simulacra. According to Badiou, what exists are “histories in the plural [. . .] namely, multiple strata of temporalized truth-trajectories (in the realms of art, love, politics, and science)” (Johnston 11). This means that each event creates a ‘time’ that has its universal import open to all, such that any real democracy has a truth-share in the French Revolution, while a geocentrist in whatever age necessarily ‘predates’ and resists the eventual observations of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler. So, while an Immortal labours in fidelity to a true event, a false subject constrictively ‘pursues’ the malign course of a simulacrum. Because Lewis Prothero still draws his position from the atrocities that empowered him and his accomplices, the violently propagandist “Voice of London,” is indistinguishable from the commander of a death camp. A ‘former’ votary of atrocity, he has simply reconfigured himself into a ‘peaceful’ public face, yet one whose mandate of violence is unchanged, and whose appearance as the “Voice of London” attests to the social depredation that he has helped achieve. Differently put, the process by which a torturer and executioner melds himself into a ‘peaceful’ functionary of the transcendental regime perfectly illustrates the movement from subjective to objective violence.

As the “Ghost of Christmas Past” (*V for Vendetta*), that is, an agent who forces a traumatic confrontation with the past upon those he encounters, V perceives the breadth of violent history that sustains and protects Prothero. There is, he says to Evey, “no court in this country for men like Prothero,” precisely because their excess of power and violence immunises them from every form of accountability except that which aggressively bypasses their power structures. When V points out that he “might have killed the Fingermen” who attacked Evey, but “heard no objection” to that use of force, he indicates what she fails to see: that the objective ‘peace’ under which the regime persists is every bit as violent as the subjective attack upon her. In other words, assassinating Prothero in his shower is not a needless crime, but instead carries all the moral impetus of fighting rapists in an alley. Given this stark reality, when Evey asks the ethical question, “are you going to kill more people?”, V gives the radical, and perhaps only, answer: “Yes.”

It is interesting to note how Evey’s reluctance to abet killing unfolds. Finch discovers that the highest-paid individual at Larkhill was Father Lilliman, now a Bishop, who drew an enormous salary as a monitor for human rights violations at the facility. Ironically, his remuneration and position are evidence of the regime’s willingness to reward those who *allow* crimes against humanity. Fittingly, then, he first appears in conversation with his aide,

who is charged with arranging his “final remittance.” The aide discloses that there was “some confusion at the agency,” and that a “new girl,” who is “a little older,” has been provided for the paedophilic Bishop. This scene is interesting to consider vis-à-vis Evey’s encounter with the Fingermen because it transpires that she has smuggled herself into Lilliman’s bedroom by posing as his “last little joy.” Whereas her ‘crime’ was to oppose her rape at the hands of the Party’s Fingermen, she is, tellingly, able to gain direct access to one of its spiritual leaders by masquerading as one who is willing to accept sexual violation.

Though the institutionalisation of abuse is here again at issue, what is more disturbing than the Bishop’s predilection for juvenile sexual ‘partners’ is the existence of a social mechanism that supplies them. In this scene, as in the one in which Evey is almost raped, organised atrocity alters the meaning and consequence of language. Despite her agreement to help V, anxiety compels Evey to admit, with the hope of receiving amnesty, that she is part of a “terrorist” design to kill Lilliman. She seeks a return to the tranquillity of ordinary mortality, and would rather be enfolded by lawful oppression than pursue the illegal course of liberation. The state of ‘peace’ to which she would restore herself is, however, rendered entirely farcical by the irony of her situation. Quite simply, she asks to be taken back into the ‘peaceful’ fold of the state while costumed as an underage schoolgirl in order to appeal to the sexual appetite of a paedophilic Party member who fully intends raping her. This irony grows as Evey’s claims are received by the Bishop as a “delightful” variation on the “confession game” that he is accustomed to playing with his victims. Her true confession fails because of the fixed, generic manner in which Lilliman relates to her. Though he compliments her on her “imagination,” the Bishop is so overcome with lewd desire that he cannot take cognisance of any narrative other than that which satiates his desires. His mindset here reflects the state’s monological fixation upon the discourse of its own unrestrained power, which seeks to render all positions outside the state–servant binary invalid, and which obsesses over the relational structures that affirm it.

While Evey’s ‘confession’ is rendered ironic, its failure does reveal a system of language that is saturated with objective violence. Because the normalisation of atrocity defines the power relations between state agents and subjects, as well as the language of their interactions, Evey’s plan to comport herself as one willing to satisfy Lilliman’s desires and then to ‘emerge’ interruptively from this guise assumes a flexibility of relation that violent oppression elides. As with the Fingermen, once she is in the Bishop’s presence, there is nothing she can say that will *not* invite him to rape her. When Lilliman tries to remove Evey’s clothes in order to “procure [her] confession,” she fights back and strikes him in the

groin, which brings from him a furious cry that declares the violent, fixed terms in which he conceives of and relates to her: “You little bitch, you fucking little whore!”

The Bishop’s vicious outburst thus exposes the violence encoded in his supposedly peaceful and respectful introduction to Evey, in which she curtseys and acknowledges him as “your Grace,” and he welcomes her as his “child.” Rather than an ethical relation, this exchange indicates that both parties have taken up their ‘proper’ positions within a structure that both guarantees violation and ensures that it is never recognised as a breach of the ethical ‘order.’ If one perceives the objective violence built into Lilliman’s speech, then it becomes obvious that “my child” and “you fucking little whore” are truly interchangeable signifiers. It is also worth noting that only an aggressive subjective response is able to arrest and expose Lilliman’s objective violence. Because his deleterious language and preconceived systems of relation make an encounter in dialogue impossible, the presence of an aggressive agent alone is sufficient to interrupt him.

It is also important to note how violent religious discourse, exemplified here by Lilliman, is central to the regime’s simulacral identity. A totalising, conformist ‘relationship’ with the church is implicit in the motto, “Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith,” and so Christianity, it would seem, functions as a term of inclusion that enables the exclusion of all those who, as Prothero states, “had to go” in order for a false community to arise. Used thus, ‘Christian’ is not a singular term of inclusion that excludes ‘Muslim,’ but part of a simulacral, totalitarian *identity* that induces violence towards anyone outside its address.

These terms of violent conservatism are precisely what Badiou refers to when he says that the ‘community’ purported by totalitarianism will depend on the simulacrum of a subject: one who labours in fidelity to a false event, and whose actions are concerned with the conservation of what is, asserted over and against what could be. As a facet of such an identity, ‘Christianity’ has less to do with an interest in the teachings of Jesus than an obsession with not being a Muslim, a homosexual, or, the most abhorred and flexible term, a terrorist. The prime article of ‘faith’ espoused by the Church, and repeated by Lewis Prothero, is that God “tested us, and we came through.” In other words, the Norsefire regime is divinely ordained, a society “watch[ed] over” by God Himself. Tellingly, the God invoked clearly watches over this society to the exclusion of others, as emerges when Prothero compares the ‘peace’ enjoyed by England to the crises, likely fabricated, of civil war and social breakdown in the “godless” US. Exclusion and violence cannot not be at the core of a society that arises in fidelity to the quintessential ultraconservative task of purifying itself of that which is other to its plenitude, and thereby emerging as an ‘untainted’ society that is

worthy of its divine appointment. This is the full import of Prothero's claim to be a "God-fearing Englishman" and "goddamn proud of it." The only 'gods' created by this prayer to violent exclusion are people like Sutler and Prothero, who are empowered by discursive violence and safeguarded by institutional atrocity. Such is the nature of Lilliman's enterprise.

The irony concomitant on the normalisation of atrocity is that the ethical address of language is stunted for all. Lilliman's fate demonstrates this point, as becomes apparent when an audio surveillance van drives past his window just as V forces a lethal pill upon him. The listeners hear the plea, "Don't do this, I beg of you," and the answering command, "Open your mouth and stick out your tongue," but regard this exchange as nothing more than the 'ordinary' occurrence of "children's hour at the abbey." V's intervention thus turns Lilliman's violence back upon him and, with seamless irony, forces him to experience the violation that he has visited upon others.

While the deaths of Prothero and Lilliman gesture towards an atrocity at Larkhill, it is the demise of Delia Surridge that brings Finch to confront the crime at the centre of his society. He gains possession of her diary, which recounts her time as head of medical research at the facility and details the several months of brutal human experimentation that she oversaw. Conducted in the name of national security, this project resulted in the deaths of almost all the 'undesirables' sent to the camp, and enabled the creation of a unique and terrifying virus. The individual whose modified blood bore the virus also developed advanced "kinesthesia" and enhanced reflexology as a result of the mutations that were forced upon him. Surridge describes this inmate as one imbued with "the key to our dreams," and notes him simply as "the man from room five" – a cell marked with the Roman numeral V. Seemingly, the project creates both the means to totalitarian power and the excess of this power in the form of an individual who, precisely because he shares its origins, will be able to expose the regime to a radical event.

Significantly, in this regard, Surridge's last entry occurs on November the fifth, when several explosions tear open the medical wing of the facility. This is, chronologically, V's first act of 'terrorist' aggression. Instead of a celebratory fanfare of music or fireworks, what one has here is the pure life-force that characterises aggression; V simply blasts open the facility with improvised explosives so that he and any surviving inmates might escape. When he emerges, terribly burned, he confronts Surridge with a stare that emanates "not from eyes, there *were* no eyes," but from the force of an aggressive, inimitable encounter with violated humanity. That is, V forces Surridge to meet him outside her subject position as head of medical research and the language of national security that enables her to respond to him as a

cell number, a *subject supposed to be abused*. Indeed, in one entry, she admits that the inmates appear “pathetic” to her, and that she finds herself “hating them.” Once again, it is aggression that disrupts the ‘peace’ and ‘order’ of these state-ordained binary relations between lawful criminals and their ‘deserving’ victims. As a result of her unexpected, discursively ‘naked’ encounter with the effects of her actions, the last entry in Surridge’s diary makes plain that her structures of ethical relation have been radically disrupted: “Oh God, what have I done?”

The implication of this apposite ethical question compels Finch to ask his own: “what if the worst, the most horrifying biological attack in this country’s history was not the work of religious extremists?” He therefore interrogates the incident that founded the regime’s public history: a terrorist attack that claimed eighty-thousand lives, and whose excessive violence enabled the excesses of Norsefire. As V later tells Finch, Norsefire was no more than a small party of conservative, religious ultranationalists who carved an establishing void out of their own society through mass murder. Once Prothero and Lilliman had furnished Sutler’s emergent organisation with the means to biological devastation, it was Mr Creedy who suggested that the target “should not be an enemy of the country, but the country itself.”

What is staggering here is the willingness of such individuals to slaughter the very people whom they purport to protect *in order* to protect them. This is the quintessence of violence: the animated individual is only ‘really’ trustworthy when she is dead. The very flow of excess and possibility that characterises and vitalises life draws the gravest suspicion from those fanatically committed to conservatism, and only the utterly reified are spared the obsessive inquisition of such conformists. Precisely because it is more concerned with those it kills than those it safeguards, with what it excludes than what it produces, a violently simulacral society is, with substantial irony, principally and perpetually ‘about’ the very people it claims to despise. A violent regime is simply obsessed with negation, and because what it seeks to extirpate is the *figure* of that which it despises, its violence is endless. Simply put, that which it seeks to destroy is located within its own collective mind. Žižek correctly locates such an “excess of envy” in Rousseau’s “distinction between egotism [. . .] and *amour-propre*, the perverted preferring of oneself to others in which a person focuses not on achieving a goal, but on destroying the obstacle to it” (*Violence* 91). This is why Norsefire so eagerly voids its ‘own’ people in order to empower it to seek the ‘disavowed’ Other. Seen thus, the instantiation of a ‘pure’ English culture is actually secondary to the energetic hunt for any hint of that which the regime claims to abhor. The terror of such a regime is truly, as Badiou would affirm, addressed to everyone.

This capacity for rapacious violence is what necessitates V's aggression, which in turn makes possible the iconic march to the Houses of Parliament at the end of the film. As November approaches, Finch contemplates the near-certainty that Sutler will respond to any collective protest with mass slaughter. In other words, if the monological power relations established by people who 'communicate' through violence are not interrupted, a massacre is simply inevitable. With Sutler in command, Creedy as head of security, and Parliament surrounded by military forces, Finch is right to predict the outcome of the rally as cognate with "[w]hat usually happens when people without guns stand up to people *with* guns" (*V for Vendetta*). By the time the protestors gather, however, V has engineered the deaths of Sutler and Creedy, and so curtailed the state's monological ability to assert the legality of atrocity. Quite simply, the assassination of Sutler precludes him from doing "the only thing he knows how to do," and so enables possibility by interrupting violent certainty. Thus, as the crowd looms before the military barricades, senior officers urgently request "orders" and, through their tones, reveal the agential choice between 'illegal' humanity and obedient inhumanity that has been forced upon them by the removal of violent authority.

Thus V truly unmask the regime by precipitating a political event that forces the state to emerge, to muster itself as a quantifiable force and to *face* the people. Again, as Badiou shows, this move from objective coercion to subjective might actually deposes the state by stripping away the aura of omniscience and omnipotence fostered by surveillance and secret police. The state is, in other words, forced to appear and bare its fangs, but even as it presents its most ferocious measure it is reduced to the status of an opponent instead of master. Moreover, this violent display is unequivocally aimed at the population itself, and so makes plain that the state is not an excessive yet justified guardian of 'its' people, but a malign force prepared to savage any who oppose it. Even though the people have not learned, as the viewer has, of the events at Larkhill and the biological attack thereby enabled, they still encounter the void of their society – that no one is safeguarded by its literal and fatal preference for cultural 'purity' over the diversity of real lives – since they face it in the streets. Indeed, Sutler's last address plays into empty rooms and spaces; his simulacral summons to false unity turns back on him because the people have, as he ironically urges, truly united. Thus, as Sutler's recording gives his "most solemn vow: that justice will be swift, it will be righteous, and it will be without mercy," he is deposed from his monological position and subjected to the terms of his own edict by V. In other words, Sutler's capacity for violent monologue is interrupted, and he is brought to a dialogical encounter with a demand for true justice.

The consequent absence of the authority that secures monological violence averts the butchery that would ‘ordinarily’ result from the people’s radical encounter with the ‘order’ of their society. When there is “no response” from Sutler or Creedy, the field commanders, left to their own humanity, stand the troops down. What transpires is a spectacle of peace, as the protestors vault the barricades and, with only incidental jostling, pass *through* the barrier of guns and soldiers’ bodies. From the spectacle, it is manifestly clear that V’s actions have enabled sameness. Since those few who crave the sort of power that carnage underwrites have themselves been killed, true peace becomes possible. Just as the unexpected presence of V’s scorched body compels an ethical response from Delia Surridge, so too the sudden absence of “orders” from above fails to guarantee, and thus radically destabilises, the entire structure of violent relations and subject positions that flows from Sutler’s emplacement as High Chancellor. Precisely because V precipitates a radical uncertainty as to whether or not the structure of objective violence that would render genocide lawful is functioning, he forces the military to respond not as a force of state security facing an enemy, but as human beings who suddenly find themselves pointing rifles at other human beings without a discoverable reason for doing so.

In addition, when the military stands down and lets the protestors pass, it commits, from the perspective of the state-of-the-situation, the profoundest offence. As the organ of state most capable of dealing out violence and fear, its ‘failure’ to commit the murders that would prolong the simulacrum means that the soldiers and officers are drawn into the same illegal space as the marchers, and so join them in sameness. Appropriately, a soaring shot of those gathered around the Houses of Parliament renders protestors and soldiers indistinguishable. Instead of inciting the people against the military, by sabotaging the mechanism of violent relations, V collapses the totalitarian arrangement of oppositional forces and so convokes the soldiers to sameness with the people *from whom* they are drawn. So V does not, as pessimist critics might claim, start a civil war, but unites the people in order to make possible the excision of that which truly vitiates peace.

As was the case with the destruction of the Old Bailey, Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture fills the streets, and is heard for the first time since Sutler had it blacklisted. This music therefore frames the ‘illegal time’ with which V interrupts the regime’s immobile chronology, and signifies the arrival of the prefigured event that has haunted the regime. Given the presence of an Immortal citizenry ready to imbue the act with meaning, what one has here is a Freirian dialect of action and reflection, in which belief in the possibility of transformative acts combines with the determination to carry the revolutionary import of such

acts through to its properly radical conclusions. Without such fidelity, the protestors would witness no more than a bombing, the demolition of a building, rather than a stirring affirmation of the truth that political engagement must always occur as the experience of transformative vitality, and any regime that seeks to deny this certainty through terror cannot cry moral depredation as it is swept away. By implication, the destruction of Parliament should be understood as a communal intervention in the symbolic regime. Just as the oppressive regime appropriates the Old Bailey, and thereby symbolically razes this icon of justice, what ‘really’ destroys the Houses of Parliament is the radical manifestation of the people in an Immortal assembly which the imputed significance of the building seeks to preclude.

This public intervention in the symbolic puts one in mind of the royal reaction to Pierre Beaumarchais’ revolutionary work *Le Mariage de Figaro*. The radical vision of the play so appalled Louis XVI that he declared that the Bastille would have to be destroyed before such a piece could be performed (Campan 112). Betrayed here is Louis’ true meaning: it is not only the physical edifice that would be endangered by revolutionary fidelity, but also the entire transcendental regime that invests symbols with meaning. So it is not just a building that would have to go, but the King himself.

The same logic pervades the film’s depiction of revolutionary fidelity. A peaceful revolutionary gathering that marks a radical departure from institutional violence is possible only *after* the demise of those who would butcher such a body of people. There are two noteworthy implications here. First, the peaceful assembly enabled by aggression in turn allows the destruction of Parliament to be witnessed as a spectacle, something that occurs *vis-à-vis* a participatory audience. Thus, the import of the demolition as a symbolic act is maximised. As V puts it, “The building is a symbol, as is the act of destroying it. Symbols are given power by people. Alone the symbol is meaningless but, with enough people, blowing up a building can change the world” (*V for Vendetta*). In Badiouian terms, the explosion signifies the beginning of a new history. The destruction of the Houses of Parliament is such a fantastic historical break, such a visceral *event*, that it inscribes its meaning physically and conceptually upon the site of its occurrence as well as upon the ethical community gathered before it. This is why, in Evey’s words, “no one will ever forget that night, and what it meant for this country.”

Again, this contemplative audience is possible only because peace has been enabled by aggression, and so what one has is a celebration and reclamation of the public space. The people thus celebrate the symbolic meaning as well as the lived experience attendant upon the

negation of violence: being outside after dark and not being arrested, joining in solidarity and not being shot, constituting themselves as a people without being violently dissolved. As the public is recovered by a reconstituted community, the total ownership of space that oppression exacts is fractured, and thus private space is reclaimed alongside the public. Under oppression there exists no public/private distinction, nor is there only 'public' space. What one has is the state's monological right to survey, dominate and enter all areas of its province. To lock the door to one's 'home' at night, or to take a walk 'outside,' are equally vestigial gestures. Only the radical constitution of the people as a public force can ensure that the mortal rights of the individual are granted to all. Simply by starting to *live* these fresh possibilities, the citizenry begin the praxis of feeling their way back into the embodied experience of freedom.

Further, any credible morality must be able to envisage its own use of aggression, since, without the means to interrupt a monologue of violence, one has only the contemptible situation in which true inaction passes for ethical response. In other words, the 'invisible resistance' of strict pacifism itself amounts to at least complicity with, if not a species of, objective violence.⁵ Briefly put, a peaceful stance does not mean that one is a moral *luftmensch* who responds to the world with the 'fairness' of neutrality, one before and through whom evil may pass unchallenged. Peace must entail a vigorous labour of reflection and action, a living dialect whose values compel it to name enemies and vitiate their attempts to envenom the realms of language and politics. Even Mohandas Gandhi admitted that, if reduced to "a choice between cowardice and violence," he "would advise violence," precisely because "abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature" (144). If the violence referenced here is understood as aggression, then I concur with this statement, and with Gandhi's sentiment that "Life itself involves some kind of violence" (144). This *force* of vitality is the antithesis of subjugation.

By contrast, violent regimes know that they are ensconced within the necrotic, and so dread an encounter with those who do not countersign the language that justifies death. Once they carry out atrocities, regimes are haunted and irrevocably committed by what they have done. This is the terrifying nature of relentless killers like Sutler, Prothero and Creedy: entombed within their subject-positions, they will never stop exacting murder. While

⁵ By this I mean to oppose the pacifist assumption, blind to objective violence, that conflict 'begins' at the point of intervention. That is, the false and self-absorbed statement that if one does nothing then nothing will happen – when instead something will *keep* happening.

Surridge is comparably guilty, a confrontation with the reality of her cruelty brings from her what is impossible in her superiors: the want of an *end*. Unlike those who cannot see outside their subject-positions in order to acknowledge their crimes *as* crimes, and must simply be sacrificed to their own violent logic, Delia asks V whether it is “meaningless to apologise” (*V for Vendetta*), the most sensitive question that someone in her position could proffer. She does not ask for the absolution that no one victim could presume to confer, but instead gives herself up utterly in *recognition* that what she has done exceeds the linguistic gesture of forgiveness. As the false subject of a simulacrum, a kind of ‘Evil-Immortal,’ she laboured in fidelity to exclusionary violence and produced a virus that enabled the unspeakable. Contained here is the germ of radical Evil: not the mere belief that ends excuse means, but the *creation* of means that envisage horrific new scales of misery. As such, she does not pretend that her death is an act of violence that outrages a prevailing moral order, and so takes responsibility for the instantiation of violent crime that she enabled. The question she murmurs once she senses that V has entered her bedroom, many years after the atrocity she committed against him and in a society shaped by that very crime, is profoundly arresting. Her words are equally those of a disconsolate mass murderer upon the return of a singular victim, and the response of inexhaustible violence to the aggression finally able to euthanise its hatred: “It’s you, isn’t it? You’ve come to kill me. [. . .] Thank God.”

This section of my chapter has sought to describe the interactions between violence and aggression in *V for Vendetta*. The distinction between violence and aggression demonstrates that the substance of this film is not, as many reviews assert, the banal thrust and counter-thrust of violence against violence. I hope to have shown that an assertion of the rights of the infinite against the meaninglessness of the never-ending constitutes a measured response to unbounded brutality rather than a trade in equivalent terms. With the creative dimension of aggression now evident, and its crucial ability to avert the violent abortion of possibilities established, I continue to discuss the trajectories of fidelity and sameness enabled by aggression.

3.3 *Being-Two, Fidelity and Sameness*

V for Vendetta is about the resurrection of Guy Fawkes’ radical attempt to initiate transformation as a lone agent. V wears a Guy Fawkes mask, and his *modus operandi* is the destruction of buildings which have deep symbolic import. The film’s very first scene shows Guy Fawkes’ failed attempt to destroy the British Parliament. Throughout the pursuit and

hanging of Fawkes, Evey's voice-over avers that "we are told to remember the idea, not the man, because a man can fail. He can be caught, he can be killed and forgotten; but four hundred years later, an idea can still change the world." This split captures the "being-two" that characterises Badiouian Immortality – that is, the frail physical being subject to its worldly needs, and the uniquely human agent able to dedicate herself to radical possibilities. Such "being-two," and its implications for their success or failure, enables both the abandonment and resurrection of truth-procedures.

Yet alongside V's resolute campaign lies a moving human story, and even as the opening voice-over invokes a separation of mortal person from Immortal conviction, it asserts that "ideas do not bleed, they do not feel pain, they do not love." Indeed, V's internal tension proceeds from his "being-two," the divide between himself and his sworn vendetta. As such, *V for Vendetta* provides an insight into the 'hazardous course' of violent resistance to violent oppression, a necessarily paradoxical "being-two" captured in Che Guevara's personal motto "One must endure – become hard, toughen, without losing tenderness" (qtd. in Žižek, *Violence* 204). V's task is to enact the denouement of a violent regime without simply becoming a term within the operation of its violence.

Moreover, he is astutely aware of his performative role. He retains his mask throughout the film, and introduces himself to Evey as a "*dramatis persona*." In effect, then, he identifies himself as a construction, a fiction that embodies precisely what the regime has excluded. As he declaims, his "visage, no mere veneer of vanity, is a vestige of the *vox populi*, now vacant, vanished" (*V for Vendetta*). V's countenance thus responds to the state of injustice he perceives, and against which "[t]he only verdict is vengeance; a vendetta, held as a votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous." So the vaudevillian strangeness of his very appearance indicates that he belongs not to the state-of-the-situation, but to a vision that radically exceeds it.

V's performance also mimics and thus reverses the supposedly 'omnipotent' power of the state. When faced with his enemies, he moves and fights with virtually incontestable speed and skill, assassinates officials and explodes buildings with impunity, and repeatedly subverts the regime's media systems. Yet the "being-two" that underlies this semblance of invulnerability is nowhere more apparent than when he faces Creedy and his security detail. V's unstoppable advance, which reduces the latter to the question, "Why won't you *die*?", is explained by the Immortal rationale that "beneath this mask there is more than flesh; beneath this mask there is an *idea*, Mr Creedy, and ideas are bulletproof!" Only once Creedy is dead

does V unbuckle and discard his bloody, heavily gouged armour. As his own death soon thereafter indicates, his mortal life is the price of so complete a performance of Immortality. In contrast to this fearsome display of aggression is the mortal whom Evey comes to know.

V's disarming mortality emerges when he is at home: he wears a floral apron over his dark suit while he cooks, and boyishly fences against a suit of armour to re-enact scenes from his favourite film, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which he is delighted to watch with Evey. His mortality is paralleled by that of Gordon Deitrich, a happy-go-lucky television producer with "the most watched show on air." Both take Evey into their homes, serve her identical breakfasts, and reveal dangerous collections of contraband art along with prohibited cultural artefacts. While V's Guy Fawkes mask is an open reflection of injustice, the invisible mask of heteronormativity worn by Deitrich, a homosexual, is a mortal survival strategy, since an expression of Immortal love would see him "without a home, let alone a television show."

The *doppelgänger* effect here evident places V's hyper-visible campaign in relation to the multiplicity of furtive, urgent acts that resist the suppression of life. Because all four categories of an event radically challenge limit-situations, it is impossible to prohibit one in isolation. Although oppression's most formal enemy is political Immortality, it must also seek to quell the necessarily political implications of art, love, and science. This desiccation of the ability to reach for Immortality is, for Badiou, what marks a site of human degradation.

At this point, it becomes necessary to discuss the effects of the state's desire to extirpate Immortality. In short, a design that renders much of human expression illegal cannot but result in a vast and invisible constellation of 'illegal' transgressions that expose the violent absurdity of the law. When Evey asks V how he came to steal his possessions from the Ministry of Objectionable Material, for example, he responds that one "can't steal from the censor," and so he "merely reclaimed them." Just as resistance to systemic violence affirms life over death, and so is not simply destructive, to steal from a mechanism of erasure is also not a crime, but rather an ethical injunction. Moreover, V's terminology satirises the "Reclamation," that is, the state's campaign of cultural purification, which is to say cultural and social annihilation. While the diversity and flux of life so obviously render the endeavour farcical, enough power and violence make a maladroit, Procrustean attempt at cultural 'purification' a possibility. In other words, what one has is the necessarily violent attempt to make real the worst and most implausible 'certainties' of racism, monotheism and ultranationalism, condensed as the ascendancy of a 'pure' *volk*.

By contrast, V and Deitrich have accomplished true cultural reclamations that ironise and undermine the state's project. They take responsibility for that which has been excluded

because it has been excluded, and so share profound sameness which, since each purposely owns what it is illegal to possess, unites them in Immortality. Whereas the state is obsessed with the myth of cultural purity, the homes of V and Deitrich, as fugitive reflections of themselves, are hosts to that which exceeds the state-of-the-situation. Their very identities, which privilege supplementation and inclusion over ‘stability’ through exclusion, are radical departures from the simulacral ‘self’ that the state promotes. For example, Deitrich has a fourteenth-century Qur’an but, when asked if he is Muslim, replies that he does not have to be in order “to find the images beautiful or its poetry moving.” Expressed here is free, supracultural openness to alterity, in which appreciation and participation do not necessitate a position of cultural subscription and so exclusion. This lived preservation of difference and divergence is the anathema of totalitarianism; it is the creed of those who recognise that the ambiguity, plurality and uncertainty of colour are infinitely more beautiful than the horrific sureties of black and white.

Yet, for all his sensitivities, Deitrich ultimately errs in his estimation of the state’s willingness to suppress criticism, and his fate underscores the often suicidal nature of open, peaceful resistance to conscienceless violence. What one has is the impossibility of truly nonviolent opposition, that which is based upon satire, laughter and irony, to a deadly and literal-minded regime. Deitrich’s mistake, which in turn underscores the quintessence of totalitarianism, is his faith that humour will not invite violence, a grave misunderstanding of the form of ‘peace’ that prevails in the country. Convinced that he will face no more than a fine, he discards the “censor-approved” script for his programme and airs an episode that lampoons Sutler and ridicules the claim that V has been “neutralised.” In retaliation, Creedy arrests, beats and detains Deitrich, who is later executed when his Qur’an is found. The overlapping terms of exclusion that underlie the regime’s power are readily apparent here. Gordon Deitrich is persecuted as a homosexual, arrested as a high-terrorist, and executed as a ‘Muslim.’ His richness of character multiply convicts him of deviance from the state’s monologue of the ‘individual’ and, crucially, shows the generic end to which uninterrupted violence puts any opponent. On this last point, it is instructive that Deitrich is arrested and hooded in a manner that precisely recalls the way Creedy’s black bags “erased” Evey’s activist parents “from the face of the Earth.” Since the ‘order’ of the regime is yet unchanged, its violent response to opposition remains constant.

To resurrect her parents, that is, to take up radical fidelity and labour towards the world that they sought to make possible, and thereby to exceed the regime that made their vision illegal, is the task with which Evey is charged in the film. Her life marks a schism in

time because she stands for a generation that remembers the rise of Norsefire, the transcendental regime that accompanied it, *and* what that regime undid: that is, a society which laboured towards inclusiveness, wherein Immortality would beckon to people of all creeds and unite them in radical expressions of love, art, politics and science.

If a society is to be resurrected, what is required is not the reconstitution of its institutions, but people's renewed inhabitation of the vision of which that society was an inadequate, though ever-improving, worldly expression. Conversely, a regime must undo the vision which animates the society it destroys, and thereby complete the substitution of security-sponsored conservatism for the world of possibilities. If one accepts that sameness and Immortality have some universal import, then an open Badiouian society would be one open to excession, and thus capable of transcending its particularity by means of a supplementary contribution to the world. Similarly, the intention to exclude supplementation amounts to an attempt to take a site out of the world, and so make it a private fiefdom in an arrested Badiouian warp. Fear is the capital of such an endeavour. Sustained terror renders the preposterous terms of oppression reasonable, and maintains a simulacral regime until the memory and vision of those who resist its founding propositions are lost.

Precisely because fear underwrites the anxious 'peace' at hand, Rjurik Davidson is incorrect to say that "apathy" is the political sentiment which paralyses the society that the film represents (161). True apathy is a lazy, complacent gesture towards available political processes, rather than the nervous inertia made general when political expression, which is to say politics itself, is violently abolished. Instead, what one has in *V for Vendetta* is mortal fear that daily aborts the Immortal movement needed to reinstate politics. Evey's position at the beginning of her relationship with V is characterised by the tension between her memory of her parent's bravery, their Immortality, and her admission that she is "scared all the time" (*V for Vendetta*).

Evey's fidelity is tested when she is snatched and hooded as she attempts to escape Deitrich's house. Taken to a location reminiscent of Larkhill, she refuses to reveal information about V, and is water-tortured and left in a bare cell. During her detention strong images of Žižekian sameness emerge. Her head is shaved, and she is given only an orange smock to wear, visually aligning her with the detainees at Larkhill. In her orange smock, then, Evey joins a procession of victims that stretches back to the state's inception, and forward into its uninterrupted 'future.'

V himself exemplifies this sameness-of-exclusion. One never learns the act or quality which saw him sent to Larkhill, and so he represents all those against whom the regime

defined itself. He is the positive term of which institutional hate is the negation. Moreover, the price of his escape is that he emerges from Larkhill burned beyond recognition by the explosions that free him, and so, shorn of all physical markers except humanity, he anonymously confronts atrocity with the fact of violated flesh.

Furthermore, V loses all memory of himself and his history as a result of the experiments performed on him. He cannot be located within race or culture, and is truly one of the “parts of no part” that unite in Žižek’s sameness (*Violence* 157). In this way, he stands for all those who experienced, and continue to experience, state atrocities. Especially striking with regard to the notion of sameness is a flashback image of smocked and hooded people confined in numbered, waist-high Perspex boxes at Larkhill. This is precisely what Žižek discusses. Where Badiouian truths depose differences through an assertion of universal human facilities, Žižekian sameness occurs through the shared experience of denied humanity, regardless of how that humanity is denied. In the Perspex boxes are the anonymous victims of state terror, the immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, ‘terrorists’ and so on – people whose ‘crimes’ are diverse but whose degradation is obvious and identical.

The power of this sameness is shown when Evey receives a letter through a crack in the wall between cells, which begins with the admission that “there’s no way I can convince you this is not one of their tricks, but I don’t care, I am me. My name is Valerie, I don’t think I’ll live much longer and I wanted to tell someone about my life” (*V for Vendetta*). What is moving about this letter is precisely the trust that comes of Žižekian sameness, the mutual understanding that results when people endure atrocity together, here underscored by the conditions of Valerie’s narrative, her awareness that “[t]his is the only autobiography that I will ever write, and God, I’m writing it on toilet paper.” This is sameness based on recognition of how fragile we are as isolated, connection-seeking beings: the truly universal fact of human experience.

As a lesbian, Valerie faces social hostility, parental rejection, and institutional persecution, yet refuses to identify herself as a deviant, a wrongdoer. One’s integrity, she writes, is the most important thing in the world, “[i]t is the very last inch of us, but within that inch, we are free.” It is from this last inch of herself that Valerie writes, and because all prisoners have been reduced to their bare Immortality, the illegality of their being, she is able to place her narrative in the hands of a stranger and know that it has been received by someone with whom she shares sameness. Valerie’s story is voiced over Evey’s water-torture, so that the two blend into one another and evoke solidarity in the face of generic violence. At one point the dustbin into which Valerie’s father throws her photograph becomes

the pail of water into which Evey's head is forced. The suggestion here is that both women are punished for the same 'crime.' As their names suggest, Evey is violently affined with V, Valerie, and the other victims of the regime.

Interestingly enough, there is also Badiouian sameness here at work. Evey is punished for her refusal to give V up, just as Valerie remains faithful to the event of love she experienced with Ruth. Ruth grew Scarlet Carsons for Valerie in their window box, and their flat "always smelled of roses." But after the regime came to power

there were no roses anymore. Not for anyone. I remember how the meaning of words began to change. How unfamiliar words like 'collateral' and 'rendition' became frightening. While things like Norsefire and The Articles of Allegiance became powerful, I remember how different became dangerous. I still don't understand it, why they hate us so much.

Again, while a simulacrum purports to safeguard the community it carves out, its terror is in fact addressed to everyone, and suppression of difference quickly becomes the extirpation of all Immortality.

The opening lines of Persian poet Ahmad Shamlu's "In This Blind Alley" afford a glimpse of the hatred that oppression has for life's spontaneous excess, and so invoke the repeatable conditions of hate under which Ruth and Valerie's love was destroyed: "They smell your breath / lest you have said: I love you" (1-2). What is also important in Valerie's above words is the easily accomplished shift from "different" to "dangerous," and the cruel bewilderment of ordinary multiples whose struggles towards Immortality arbitrarily render them a regime's enemies. Further, it is evident that sanctions upon one province of Badiouian event always suggest that other forms of Immortality have been prohibited. For example, it is impossible to institute violence against women who share an event of love without instantiating parallel vitiations within the realms of art and politics. The multiform consequences of violence are what make Žižekian sameness between the "parts of no part" possible (*Violence* 157). In addition, Valerie's final words are a blend of both types of sameness in that they express knowledge of having laid down her life in the pursuit of an event, and the ability to trust in an unseen person who is also not a stranger because she has been stripped of her humanity as a result of another act of Immortality:

I shall die here. Every inch of me shall perish, every inch but one. An inch: it is small and it is fragile, but it is the only thing in the world worth having. We must never lose it or give it away. We must never let them take it from us. [. . .] But what I hope most of all is that you understand what I mean when I tell you that even though I do not know you, and even though I may never meet you, laugh with you, cry with you, or kiss you, I love you. With all my heart, I love you. — Valerie

What one has here is the enduring ‘ordinary miracle’ of human connection, the ineradicable counter-narrative that frustrates every excess of totalitarianism and finds its way through the walls of a death camp on pieces of toilet paper. The fundamental message delivered by oppression is *you are alone*. Even its summons of unity necessarily indicates the ease with which one can be cut out of the herd. *Oppose us and you will die alone* is therefore the true prospectus of totalitarianism. By contrast, the life-affirming condition of solidarity means that, even in the moment when victims are gathered to be exterminated, one finds oneself in the company of anonymous friends and comrades. The effect of such togetherness shows when Evey is given a final chance to cooperate, and responds with the assertion that she would rather “die behind the chemical sheds” than abandon her fidelity.

At this point, her interrogator promptly allows Evey to leave, following which she finds herself in V’s home, and discovers that it was he who kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured her. V explains that Evey had expressed a desire to be like her parents, to find her Immortality and “live without fear.” His purpose was to create the conditions under which she might attain such freedom. It was, therefore, her faithful resilience that compelled him to prolong her ordeal.

Of course, Evey’s first response is that V has forced her to experience a violent sham. What makes the difference, however, is the complex authenticity of her ordeal. V reveals that Valerie’s letter is real, written just before her death at Larkhill. She had passed it to him just as he passed it to Evey. The effect of the letter, specifically the sameness that it convokes and the way that it reinforces the latter’s Immortal fidelity, is thus authentic. One has the universal dimension of denied humanity and the particularity of a site of oppression. Further, because the regime that persecuted and killed Valerie is still in operation, the experience that Evey undergoes is not dislocated from the violence that killed Valerie and tortured V. The oppression that Evey felt on a daily basis as a member of the ‘protected’ plentitude is exactly the force that nominated Valerie as an outsider and killed her. While the violence to which V subjects Evey is no doubt problematic, the way in which he uses “a lie to tell the truth” remains compelling. Quite simply, because the violent response of a simulacrum to its opponents is generic and static, it is authentically replicable by those who have experienced it. V therefore uses the pronoun “they” to align those who killed Evey’s family with the fictional yet veritable agents he performs, and thereby locates what her family underwent alongside her own experience:

They took your parents from you. They took your brother from you. They put you in a cell and took everything they could take except your life. And you believed that was all there was, didn't you? The only thing you had left was your life, but it wasn't, was it? [. . .] In that cell you found something that mattered more to you than life.

As V suggests, what cannot be fabricated is Evey's authentic response to her interrogation. This is why he maintains that what she discovered in her cell had "nothing to do" with him. With Valerie 'beside' her, she finds Immortality and places the possibility of change above the conservation of her life. That is, Evey gives herself to the counter-narrative that V exemplifies and, like him, is profoundly affected by Valerie's silenced and excluded life-narrative. Valerie's words sustain V and Evey during their captivity, and compel them to Immortal action that will enable the Immortal lives that the regime obliterates. This is why V places a Scarlet Carson, tellingly thought to be extinct by the regime, alongside each Party member he assassinates. He thus punishes them for both their destruction of mortal creatures, and their attempt to eradicate the necessarily transcendental expression of radical humanity, and leaves a vestige of that which exceeds the regime and so has the radical potential to destabilise it. The Scarlet Carsons that V grows are therefore a means of haunting the regime with the excessive beauty of that which it has failed to extinguish.

When Evey and V discuss the latter's vendetta, it emerges that he conceives of himself and his undertaking as a rejoinder to the state's violence. "What was done to me created me," he says, and then adds that "every action will create an equal and opposing reaction." As Evey points out, his assertion that "What was done to me was monstrous," must imply that the state "created" him as "a monster." It follows that V binds himself within the regime's logic and allows himself to be determined by its treatment of him. As he later admits, he sees no place for himself in the world that he will help bring into being. Because of his oppositional position, which is suggested by his ability to perform and so reproduce the state's violence upon Evey, he is, far from an imperturbable hero, consumed with self-loathing.

When Evey leaves, V hurls his Guy Fawkes mask, the symbol of his fidelity, into a mirror and weeps. The difficulty of "being-two" is strongly apparent here. This is one of his deeply human moments, and an insight into the terrible toll that his experiences of atrocity and his will to destroy the regime have taken on him. Though he is here unmasked, one never sees his face or learns anything of his history. As his name suggests, V performs an

Immortal role to the exclusion of his mortal self. Such incessant performance means that his mask becomes his face, just as his project of revenge is his only history of self. Although one glimpses his inner self through his affinity for literature, irony, music, and art, one never knows who V is. Perhaps most painful is that he falls deeply in love with Evey, and yet seems to refuse this event of love by sacrificing himself to Creedy.

As Evey's fidelity implies, by the end of the film, the populace has risen to political consciousness and gained the will to join V in sameness. This common cause is actuated by him through the distribution of several hundred thousand Guy Fawkes masks, cloaks and hats. Thus, when the people appear, they do so in literal sameness, wearing the very countenances of radical dissatisfaction that indicate the necessity of a political event. Accordingly, they enter into the composition of a united Subject that depends upon, and yet exceeds, each individual militant. It is therefore important that Evey loads V's body into a subway train packed with explosives that carries him into the very explosion that signals the event to which he has given himself. That is, he disappears as a symbol at the very moment that the new world he has helped make possible is broached, and so subtracts himself from that which he has helped create. Whether consciously or not, V disappears as the One, the 'original' of which his comrades might be misperceived as inferior copies, and thus underscores the revolution as a communal project in which all are required to occupy the hazardous space of Immortality. As such, when Finch asks Evey who V was, she replies that "[h]e was Edmond Dantés. And he was my father [. . .] my mother, my brother, my friend. He was you, and me. He was all of us." Because V performs an Immortal self to the exclusion of mortal identity, he makes himself an atemporal, anonymous Subject-figure that stands for, and beside, all those who have resisted the regime.

Shortly thereafter, and without knowledge of V's death, the people remove their masks and emerge from performative sameness into shared fidelity, and so, standing united in illegality, they depose the differences between ordinary multiples. They do not 'discard' the visages that they wear, but signal that the masks' radical import is borne within, not merely affixed before, each militant. What one has is thus the making of a new society at the hands of new people. In this moment, the people take responsibility for a revolution carried out by, not for, them.

The demonstrators also make plain the way a Subject-figure is comprised of multiple small fidelities, a configuration with profoundly equitable, democratic implications. Additionally, the shared status of 'enemy' and the embodied experience of anonymous solidarity are profoundly inclusive, non-hierarchical and, even though the appearance of

identical masks might render this point counter-intuitive, non-totalitarian. Because the masks depose physical difference as well as history, they abolish subject-positions and elide taxonomy based on internal hierarchy. The 'real' V could be any member of the crowd, and, since no one knows what he looks like, this diffusion of power is not arrested when the people unmask themselves. So the futural, creative orientation of sameness admits of equality in a way that profoundly opposes the divisive gestures of historical positionality.

This emphasis on inclusion and the creation of possibility is elucidated if one scrutinises the emergence of individuals from behind their masks. Finch's deputy, who at one point holds V at gunpoint, is emblematic of those who exchange their state-ordained positions for radical communion with the people. This is no mere opportunism, since the outcome of the march remains wholly unpredictable, but rather an assertion of the self as realised in and constituent of a radical community, as opposed to the stunted being that the state engenders. Moreover, the former policeman is not responded to as a policeman, but rather included as an agent in excess of himself, which is to say that it is his potential self, not his historical position, that here functions as his social referent. However, the most striking indication of the revolution's creative potential is its resurrection of the regime's victims. Deitrich, Valerie, Ruth and other 'impurities' who were excluded and destroyed by Norsefire unmask themselves, and stand in sameness with those who now unite against the violent discriminations that destroyed these invisible comrades.

While this visitation underscores the emergent dissolution of totalitarian 'identity' politics, its greater significance is that the foreclosed channels of Immortal expression have begun to reopen. What one has is not the literal resurrection of individuals, but the possibility of living the political, artistic, loving and scientific acts of excession and dissent for which the deceased were killed. Just as the departed haunt the present with an impossible supplement, so too one has the renewed assertion of fictional possibilities over the limits of material realities, a radical belief that marks the revived movement of Badiouian time. The appeal of this meeting of the living and the 'once-living' is that it disrupts the traditional distinction between the natural order of the former and the unnatural appearance of the dead. In this exposition of Badiouian time, one has the victory of those whose crime was vested in the attempt to live, in the past, present, and hence future, over the truly unnatural votaries of death and existential necrosis.

Implicit in this temporal conflation is an understanding of history and historical agents as irruptive living forces, who charge the present not with the conservation of the past, but with a duty of continuous disruption and creation. Fascinatingly, Evey's declaration

that V will never be forgotten suggests that he might be among these revenants, a spirit simultaneously embodied by the living and present among the ‘returned-to-life,’ who urges the present onwards.

Since it represents pre-evental activities that lead to an event, *V for Vendetta* necessarily ends at a point of incompleteness. Just as an event is not an experience of satisfaction, but rather an injunction to assiduous and ongoing labour, the revolution at the end of the film does not indicate victory, but rather possibility. As illustrated by the fireworks that cast a ‘V’ above the exploding parliament, and fade after momentary signification, V does not seek to institute another *Gewalt*, but to enable a properly revolutionary interruption of authority. That is, he resists the cycle of domination and overthrow against which Benjamin warns. Accordingly, he does not lead the rise of a ‘new’ power, but engineers a *space* in which the people are immortally constituted and the oppressive regime is radically suspended. Furthermore, having architected this space, it is profoundly telling that V absents himself from it. Like a “Lacanian analyst,” he is aware that he has become a term in an intervention that can only reach a terminus of self-substantiation once he has structured an exit from it (Johnston 159). So, V gathers the elements that enable a caesura of possibility and then, by means of a “vanishing analytic act,” “de-idealize[s] himself” as a “saviour” upon whom deliverance is contingent (159). That is, while the people place their fidelity in the Subject-figure that is V’s countenance, he returns this faith several fold by entrusting them to exceed him.

It is then important to remember that Evey speaks the voice-overs that open and close the film from an unknown point in the future. In each statement, she declares that the fifth of November will never depart from public memory, just as V will remain embedded in hers. What one has is a voice from an indeterminate future that declares fidelity to a radical past. In other words, it is the continuously evoked presence of this revolutionary ‘past’ that enables both the voice that speaks from and gestures towards a Badiouian future. Evental history fosters the progression from silence to dialogue because it keeps society in the impossible company of ‘past’ Immortals, and charges people with the task of radical discussion that sustains openness and tonality.

With this sort of future possible, it is deeply disparaging to ‘imagine realistically,’ as Xenakis seems to do, that a shattered Baghdad would result from the revolution that the film presents. Such an image of ruin lies close to the spectre of ever-imminent oblivion incessantly deployed by Sutler to remind the people “why they need us,” and therefore serves the confines of real consciousness as well as the myth of the regime as inevitable

necessity. By the end of the film, however, ordinary people have learned to question the invented statement that only a violent state can safeguard them against the potential ravages of the world. A break from oppression's apocalyptic 'vision' of what could be, itself a conveniently urgent reason for the authoritarian conservation of what is, is therefore central to the real articulation of unlived possibilities.

3.4 *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have demonstrated that oppression's monologue of violence and 'impossibility' always requires a measure of aggression to overcome. The aggressive surge of *life* inhabits any demand for or articulation of that which exceeds the state-of-the-situation, and can be found in all of Badiou's four provinces of truth. A novel and a political protest may be equally possessed of this aggressive will to imagine, which is the dire allergen of totalitarianism. While there is an extreme duty of circumspection involved, violent oppression can therefore forge situations in which killing abuts and enables the creative process. So an ethical agent may be required to confront the gun with the pen *and* the gun in order to enable the ascendance of the former over the latter. Again, oppression vitiates, inverts, and collapses conceptual relationships such as those between peace and violence, security and lawlessness, silence and dialogue. Given such conditions, radical aggression becomes thinkable as that transient force which unshackles Badiouian time and enables a world in which love, art, politics and science are possible.

Chapter 4: Expectation and Indifference in José Saramago's *Seeing*

4.1 Introduction

Where *V for Vendetta* is about responses to a violent regime that has long established and hardened itself, José Saramago's novel *Seeing* imagines the swiftness with which a contemporary democracy might descend into violence if challenged by 'its' *demos*, its people. As *Seeing* details, if the democratic system is repurposed to the 'peaceful' conservation of power, then subjective violence will be directed against those who actualise democracy's potential for radical change. The text represents a general election in which the people refuse to ratify the *status quo*, the state's response to which exposes the potential violence contained within the peace of democracy.

Throughout his novel, Saramago investigates the way in which expectation is built into gestures that purport to offer radical choice, and therefore compromises, even excludes the very breach of possibility that the electoral act is meant to present. Expectation is allied to violence in several ways. Primarily, it is often a force that preserves the *status quo* and aborts the future in favour of the past, by asserting what is over what could be. This not only reifies power relations, but also forecloses on ethical engagement in the present. As I noted in my first chapter, Paulo Freire maintains that true communion and dialogue can only exist when people are able to give themselves up to an encounter. Communion is therefore impossible when individuals root themselves, and each other, within the oppositional categories that history advances. Most importantly, expectation serves to underwrite the stability of an existent order, and seeks to elicit an existential performance that reproduces that order. To exceed one's expected behaviour, to deviate from what one is *supposed* to do, is then to 'betray' the transcendental regime and so 'invite' violence. From the perspective of the state-of-the-situation, the radical supplementation of Badiouian Good is therefore seen as 'destabilising' evil.

Expectation thus precludes the anarchic interruption of power structures that democracy protects. Accordingly, one must consider the extent to which democracy simply allows people to perform freedom without necessarily supplementing the political state-of-the-situation. I do not mean to suggest that elections are meaningless. My claim is instead that an election is the formal expression of pre-existing political avenues, or the lack thereof. Without active politics that radically enrich the spectrum of electoral possibilities, the ballot is simply an invitation to endorse the current representatives of established organisations,

and is itself a genuflection towards, rather than a challenge to, history. That is, a vote does not itself presuppose political engagement or the expression of radical choice. As Žižek's post-political bio-politics make clear, one could find oneself confronted with an unsatisfactory political climate *and* a selection of electoral choices that contain no possibility of supplementation. It is, in other words, quite possible to have an election without politics.

In *Seeing*, Saramago imagines an event through which citizens expose and depart from a democratic system that has become so imbricated in history and the conservation of the *status quo* that it does not function as a democracy. Since *Seeing* is the counterpart to Saramago's earlier novel *Blindness*, it is necessary to examine the relationship between these two texts. *Blindness* is set in an unnamed city that is beset with an epidemic of sightlessness, from which moral depredation and frantic state brutality eventuate. As in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, one is subjected to a vision of the world "shrinking down" as 'surplus' morality is discarded (McCarthy 88). In order to align the reader's experience of *Blindness* with its content, Saramago denudes his prose of almost all punctuation and formatting, with the effect that each page becomes a turgid wall of featureless content. This form forces the sighted reader to experience the groping unsteadiness that accompanies sudden blindness, and results in an unsettling, visually asphyxiating reading encounter.

I approach sight and sightlessness from a Badiouian perspective, which is to say that I align blindness and seeing, respectively, with mortality and Immortality. Having "eyes in [one's] head" is not just a mortal condition of bi-ocular serviceability (Orwell 51), but the possession of an interrogative facility by which one investigates what is and, more importantly, imagines what could be. By way of example, the inmates of Plato's *Cave* are physically sighted, but the literal constraints upon their range of sight enforce a profound misperception of the world (81). Crucially, they are made to think themselves true perceivers of reality, which allows the unseen masters to modulate what exists for the prisoners, and the degree to which it does so. Such inability to interrogate or supplement the state-of-the-situation is thus deeply allied to the condition of mortality.

Blindness is then the preserve of the symbolically existent, that which is given by the state-of-the-situation and underscored by its transcendental regime. In short, political sightlessness afflicts those who are inured within the existent. The point at which society goes blind, so to speak, is the moment at which Badiouian time stops, and all that is becomes all that can be. Blindness is therefore identifiable in a society that adheres to the precepts of its history, which is to say one that conceives of history as that which reifies, rather than propels, development. It is therefore telling that *Blindness* is the literal history of

Seeing and, throughout the latter, history both delimits the notionally futural democratic gesture and is invoked in opposition to the event which the novel describes.

It is noteworthy that Saramago writes *Seeing* in the enucleated style of *Blindness*, and retains the unnamed capital as the site of its events, which occur four years after those of the latter. Since the constricting form of *Blindness* invades and encodes the ostensible freedom of *Seeing*, a tension is immediately set up between blindness and seeing, violence and peace. As one opens the novel, the very structure of *Seeing* declares the presence of an inbuilt sightlessness that conditions the supposed 'vision' of the society in question. Accordingly, while the novel's first pages describe preparations for an election, it becomes obvious that objective violence permeates and delimits the democratic peace about to be performed.

Moreover, there is a Badiouian dimension to the form of *Seeing*. Given that the comma, capital letter, and occasional paragraph break account for most of its punctuation and formatting, one has a text that *physically* discourages its reader. Better put, the text literally challenges the reader's mortal vision, and so establishes a tension between its dispiriting physical form and the imperative to persist *against* this exhaustion. Insofar as it creates the conditions which summon the Badiouian imperative to persevere, the text enjoins the reader to participate in the same sort of struggle that it represents. The need to see 'through' the curtain of Saramago's deliberately gruelling prose, and so to recognise the profound narrative borne by it, echoes the contest between mortality and Immortality that underpins true politics. What one has is the exhausting physicality of the written word deliberately set against the artistic encounter with the text.

To see is therefore always to see beyond, and so to perceive that which is beyond the given and established. Immortal vision means to see the unrealised, and thereby to change the parameters of what is. To see is also to imagine, and so render into being, that to which the blind are averse. On the last point, it is important to remember that repression always gestures towards the very terms it excludes, and so makes an ephemeral presence of that which it absents. The presence of this absence means that the task of radical supplementation is, to some extent, already included by the very mechanism that nominates it for exclusion. One then has a system of established oppositions, in which the militant's programme of action is established within the compass of the situation. It follows that an obsessive protection of what is cannot but suggest that which is not-yet. This is not to say that profound insight and bravery are not required of those who mount such resistance, as regimes are by definition violently predisposed against the expression, and even existence,

of creative vision. Violence therefore produces blindness *and* visits suffering upon those who cannot but see beyond its terms. The conservative and constrictive nature of violence extinguishes thought through fear and propaganda, but its true political function is to substitute blindness for sight, and so to establish sightlessness as the objectively violent characteristic of society's inchoate vision. In other words, societal blindness is profoundly communal – it is the basis for inter-performative agreement on the sufficiency of what is, the unnecessary dangers attendant upon movement beyond the *status quo*, and so the need to suppress all those who agitate for the possibility of possibilities. This is why seeing is a necessarily dangerous enterprise: it resists and displaces all those conditioned by blindness, as well as the transcendental regime anchored by inertia. Institutional blindness is thus the guarantor of violence towards those who refuse to blind themselves, who cannot but see and imagine beyond.

However, sightless mortal conservatism is perhaps more intractable when not visibly guarded by subjective violence. When sight is diminished through gradual socio-political stultification, there is no suggestion of an absence, no prohibited-beyond, precisely because people believe themselves to be living a time of peace and so consider themselves possessed of unfettered sight. As I have suggested, this prevarication is insidious because it turns objective violence upon the imagination and the Immortal, both of which it seeks to abrogate. What one has is the absence of absence, an end to Badiouian supplementation, and so a 'conclusion' to the process of creation driven by human incompleteness. In other words, violence against the world to come negates, in advance, the evidence that a crime has occurred, precisely because it destroys the conceptual position from which one might imagine and articulate another world. Undoing the very possibility of possibilities effectively guarantees the persistence of what is, and amounts to perhaps the most insidious form of invisible violence. It is this programmed reinstallation of the present that Saramago explores, and seeks to undo, in *Seeing*.

4.2 *Election and Event*

From the start of his novel, Saramago makes plain the limits of the election that he represents. A self-referential political structure, consisting of the "party on the left," the "party on the right," and the "party in the middle" (*Seeing* 1-2), awaits affirmation by the electorate. The implication here is that the ballot holds no real power, no disruptive potential to reconfigure the political state-of-the-situation. Instead, the type of depoliticised vote that

this arrangement ensures is able only to alter the posture of the power structure that it serves to affirm. In other words, the people are *supposed* to (re)perform the state's legitimacy, in return for which they are permitted to perform themselves as "the supreme defenders of democracy" (5-6).

This interlocked performance, which serves to reproduce the state-of-the-situation, is what Žižek calls an empty gesture. Such gestures inhabit the "paradox of willing or choosing freely what is in any case obligatory," and serve to maintain "the appearance that there is a free choice when there isn't one" (*Violence* 161). When freedom is notionally offered, with its 'voluntary' deferral already established by the terms of the offer itself, what one has is "symbolic exchange at its purest: a gesture made to be rejected" (162). Of course, the symbolic heft of such an exchange is that it, again paradoxically, *achieves* nothing, being merely a loud agreement as to the sufficiency of the *status quo*. As Žižek states, the "magic of symbolic exchange is that although we are where we were at the beginning, there is a distinct gain for both parties" (162).

In the election that Saramago imagines, for example, the structured 'choice' between the "p.o.t.l.," "p.o.t.r.," and "p.i.t.m." guarantees that a political bloc will retain its power (2),⁶ and allows people to believe that this conservation of authority is the result of their political agency. That is, only those who the peoples' votes empower, as distinct from the people themselves, are really possessed of political agency. Simply put, routine passage through the empty electoral gesture means that people can be ruled by a static class while still regularly performing their freedom. However, this psychological comfort indicates that the radical potential of the democratic process is replaced with "democratic normality," a "balanced, sensible" and thus profoundly undemocratic *expectation* of how people and power interact (55). With the vote long established as the quintessential gesture of democratic freedom, it becomes perversely thinkable that any political expression which rebuffs the expectations of power, and therefore 'misuses' the vote, is a violent attack on freedom and democracy. Objective violence thus finds two avenues of expression within democratic 'normality.' Elections themselves become empty gestures that affirm, rather than renegotiate, power relations. And, since the vote is the notional guarantor that 'peace' prevails, any attempt to assert politics outside the electoral space is cast as violent and illegitimate 'street' action. The real *demos*, then, may not truly manifest itself either within

⁶ No doubt Saramago intends the ridiculous phonetic pronunciations which these acronyms invite. At one point, incensed supporters of the *status quo* begin "honking rhythmically" the four identical beats that are homonymous with these parties (89).

or without the electoral space. This is the essence of a political space without politics, wherein history triumphs over possibility. Like the presiding officer of “polling station fourteen,” the election is itself ostensibly “guided by the strictest sense of independence,” and therefore “should, in short, always observe decorum” (1). History thus cinches the radical democratic import that notionally resides in the electoral process.

The effect of replacing possibility with expectation, and therefore animation with reification, is the creation of a process that cannot but mistrust life. As in *V for Vendetta*, conservatism is here again suspicious of the potential life has to depart from history’s foregone conclusions. This is why the vacant ballot box is described as “pure, immaculate,” and unpolluted by “electoral shenanigans” which, one is told, can be committed not only “before” and “after” the voting process, but “during” it – which is to say that a ‘contaminant’ might be introduced by means of the democratic act itself (3-4). By implication, the appearance of people who might vote ‘incorrectly’ cannot but sully, to some extent, an empty ballot box that is already ‘filled’ with history awaiting affirmation. In order to produce this preordained result, it would be better if no actual people had to be consulted at all.

However, when voters do not appear on the morning of election day, the party representatives liken their situation to that of “shipwreck victims in the middle of the ocean, with no sails and no compass, no mast and no oars” (6). So, while the preponderance of history tempts those who occupy its institutions to think their positions and functions perdurable, they are here forced to recognise, however dimly, that their power is dependent upon those who perform its authority. This is perhaps Saramago’s most important point: when power is able to make ephemera of the radical gestures that underpin its prerogative, those very gestures begin to totalise, rather than democratise, authority.

As such, when party representatives at the still-bereft polling station fourteen issue personal summons to members of their families (8), they do not call for people to hold back “the many tyrannies that exist in the world” as much as to affirm the particular state in which the officials themselves are invested (6). It is both important and portentous that this unspoken order goes mostly unanswered until, as if propelled by “some irresistible order” (17), the electorate descend upon their polling stations *en masse*, a move of inexplicable solidarity that forces the interior ministry to extend “the deadline for voting by two hours” (16). In short, when the people go to vote, they do so on their own terms, disrupting the chronological frame through which they are meant to pass. Moreover, they constitute themselves as a political presence with a unity of purpose which a democracy ought *not* to

find unsettling. Nonetheless, that the state-of-the-situation has apparently had its terms extended is strikingly obvious in the actions of those who stand to benefit from such stasis. The “parties on the right, in the middle and on the left” exchange “congratulatory statements” amongst themselves, in which it is “affirmed that democracy” has cause to “celebrate” (15). Especially poignant is an image of two national flags which sponsor and backcloth, respectively, “the president in his palace and the prime minister in his mansion” (16). Keeping these individuals literally and figuratively unmoved is thus the predetermined purpose of the election.

However, a count reveals that, with “very few spoiled ballots and very few abstentions [. . .] more than seventy percent” of the votes are blank (16). What has occurred is perhaps a truly democratic act: an election in which political expectation is vitiated, and in which mass passage through the democratic gesture is no guarantee of a historically ‘stable’ outcome. The electorate’s article of ‘disobedience’ is that they have *accepted* the offer of democratic expression meant to be rejected – an offer made only in the foreknowledge that it will be returned as pure and immaculate as the empty ballot box. It is the vastness of this expectation that renders the political space tonal and therefore vulnerable to supplementation.

So, when the voters cast blank votes, they supplement the very electoral categories meant to capture and produce their assent, and so turn the blank vote into a new kind of *positive* expression. Tellingly, the voters’ perfectly legal and properly radical democratic expression is likened to the destructive, overreaching ambition of Icarus (46). That is, “irrevocable rights” with radical import and disruptive potential are guaranteed to remain unrestrained as long as they are also unused (86). From the perspective of the state-of-the-situation, a citizen’s “inalienable right” to make of the ballot what she will is “to be used only in homeopathic doses, drop by drop,” and one expressly cannot “come here with a pitcher filled to overflowing with blank votes” (45-46). Moreover, “simple common sense” avers that blank votes should remain a liminal “symbol of what could be,” and should never be equated with “a possible, concrete reality” (86). When the voters discard this limit they transform the blank vote from a vestigial term, which the transcendental regime includes only to curtail, into an active political tool which signals supplementary (dis)engagement, not participatory apathy. This is why I slightly disagree with Žižek’s word “abstention” to describe the voters’ actions (*Violence* 216), since this term might, albeit limitedly, reinscribe the people’s actions within existent categories. That said, Žižek is of course aware that

evident here is engagement by disengagement, in which widespread aversion produces, rather than resigns, agency. In his reading of the novel, he argues that the

people effectively dissolve the government – not only in the limited sense of overthrowing the existing government, but more radically. [. . .] It [the state] is compelled to confront the fact that it exists, that it exerts power, only insofar as it is accepted as such by its subjects – accepted even in the mode of rejection. The voters’ abstention goes further than the intra-political negation [. . .] it rejects the very frame of the decision.

(216)

In other words, in Saramago’s novel, a democracy is confronted with the extent to which it has departed from its basis in critical approval. This encounter is precipitated by inexplicable social and political cohesion at a political site, the capital, where the meaning and import of a tonal node within the transcendental regime is radically changed and a void exposed. What is at hand is something very much like an event. Appropriately, an air of “political agitation” pervades the capital “like a gunpowder trail in search of a bomb,” and the critical question “[w]hat will happen when the election is held again” goes whispered, “so as not to wake the sleeping dragon” (18). This imagery suggests an upheaval ahead, not behind, and prompts one to ask whether the first election is to be called the event, or if this title belongs to the second vote, a notional chance to restore democratic history, at which the supplementation of the first is expanded and repeated. Put differently, is the initial election better described as pre-evental labour that later produces an event? On balance, I think not. The very purpose of the second election is to collapse the significance of the first and, while it is again thoroughly appropriated by blank votes, to say that it is the point at which the event is ‘confirmed’ is to accord the state its sought-after role as symbolic mediator.

Perhaps more interesting is that the second election introduces the state’s security apparatus, first manifested by an ominous surveillance of electoral proceedings, from which “[n]o one is safe” (21). This is the beginning of the state’s movement to encircle and interrogate the evental site, an attempt at “deciphering the mystery” (41) by which blank votes did not “fall from the skies or rise up from the bowels of the earth,” but emanated from the “unpatriotic hands” of “eighty-three out of every hundred voters” (27-8). The relationship between the state and these situated but supplementary agents, or rather the state’s efforts to force the emergence of an identifiable opponent, is what my discussion now addresses. Once again, it is evident that expectation prefigures the state’s response to those who obey or violate its precepts. It is important to realise here that both support and

opposition ratify the state. How the citizenry collapse and frustrate these expectations is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

4.3 *State vs. Ethical Community*

Throughout the novel, what riles the state to the point of madness is the united indifference of the people to establishing themselves as an oppositional term. When interrogated as to their political and electoral intentions, they respond with “impenetrable silence” (25), enigmatic deflection (98), or simply assert that such information is rightly private (41). No purchase can be gained upon the “clandestine organization out to destroy state security and [. . .] the legitimacy of the democratic system” (76), because no such faction exists. As becomes obvious, the state is not panicked by the cunning of its opponent, but the realisation that there is none against which it can perform itself as a state. The citizens of the capital, and, by implication, the rest of the country, plainly have no need of an authority that they can do without, and so irrelevance, not opposition, is the enemy that the state cannot confront. What results is a campaign of self-affirmation by which the state, ironically, exposes its objectively violent parasitism.

Indeed, it is this democracy’s profoundly undemocratic violence that exposes its authoritarian void. Having afforded itself the totalising conclusion that any political excess amounts to “terrorism, pure and unadulterated” (32), the government detains five hundred citizens for questioning. Whether consciously or not, this design attempts to circumscribe an emergent ‘sample community’ against which state power may perform itself and simultaneously expose the conspiracy against its authority. The crucial implication here is that reaffirmation of the state’s legitimacy is coincident with the discoverable existence of a ‘terrorist’ movement. In other words, the state tacitly admits that it is not of itself a necessary presence, which unconsciously bifurcates its alternatives: either the recognition of its void or the frantic manufacture of enemies.

While it is no surprise that the latter course prevails, what is interesting is the recurrent false division that is drawn between those whom oppression protects and attacks. This fallacy is nowhere more apparent than when an interrogator agrees to exchange places with a detainee, and has himself attached to a polygraph. In a demonstration of what it means to be a “truthful man” (48), the agent denies having cast a blank vote with such precipitous violence that his response registers as a lie. The very question carries a self-fulfilling presumption of guilt that the interrogator’s electronic counterpart vindicates.

Contained in perhaps the most unnerving passage of the novel is the conclusion of this logic, perfectly expressed by Saramago's claustrophobic prose: "they'll ask if you're alive and you'll say, of course I am, but your body will protest, will contradict you, the tremor in your chin will say no, you're dead, and it might be right, perhaps your body knows before you do that they are going to kill you" (45). Again implicit here is the crime of being alive, a felonious lived excession of all that 'ought' to be, which is sinisterly 'detected' by capricious and expectant mechanical means. Such is the 'right' of power, condensed as the violent tautology that the state's "aim is true" (77), a phrase that suggests that those that it targets are known in advance to be guilty. This chronological paradox marks the totalitarian power of a state to violate individual history and assign essential ontology at any moment.

Yet, for all its power, the state is unable to discern or impute the outlines of an oppositional community, and so the entire capital is labelled a "termites' nest of liars" (44). With no discernible opponent, the city is placed under military blockade but, when it becomes (ironically) obvious that the supposed enemy is "not outside but inside," it is the government that flees the city (50, 52). What makes this withdrawal ironic is, of course, that it is predetermined, even called for, by the indefinable community that it seeks to circumscribe and undo. Quite simply, the attempt to reject those who have *already* expressed indifference cannot but fail, and the government's departure only rehashes the exhausted assumption that an ungoverned people will ultimately invite the state's return through repentance or belligerence.

Because the president's address to the capital is shot through with this irony, its logic turns back upon itself. He likens the voters to a "prodigal son" who has broken with "centuries and centuries" of history in order to pursue "the tortuous road of subversion and indiscipline" (85, 84). At the core of this patronising invocation of history is a paternal demand for affirmation, which is why the president vows that the government will return as soon as the citizens "deserve the forgiveness which, despite all, we still wish to bestow upon you" (86). Ironically, the president is effectively reduced to the status of a child who 'hides' from his parents in order to experience the thrill of being sought and found so as to affirm the familial bond. This is the inverse of the presidential claim to be "a father abandoned by his beloved children" (83). Indeed, it is the people who have quietly claimed political adulthood. Their indifference also inverts the president's cautionary claim that the capital is now "a lawless city," without "a government [. . .] to stop you in your tracks and offer you sound advice," and that it will descend into the sort of dictatorship that will suppress democracy as in "the days of authoritarian rule" (85).

The irony of this collusion between expectation and objective violence is perhaps most evident in the prediction that “there will be no elections, or if there are, they will not be free, open and honest like the elections you have scorned” (85). Here the president inadvertently describes the desiccation of the democracy over which he presides, and adumbrates the depredations that will be unleashed in its name and that of peace. Differently put, what one has here is simply power making threats in the name of its power. This is why the government’s departure only heightens its obsession with the capital. The city is a symbolic node that demonstrates the civic possibility of *not* performing state authority – the possibility, that is, of a void which would collapse the essential state–individual dialectic. Clearly, the blank vote makes of the capital a radial point around which the government “thrash[es]” like “a fish on a hook,” unable to fathom “how a little piece of bent wire” so arrests it (96).

It is important to note the nature of the open community against which the government tries to position itself by fleeing the city. First, John Gray is simply wrong to term the citizens’ inexplicable unity “communism.” Saramago’s political allegiances, Gray claims, must mean that his work is “shaped by the most stupendous illusion of the 20th century” (66). It seems that history has dictated the terms of this classification. That is, any opposition to capitalism *must* be called communism, and, since capitalism has *historically* defeated (Soviet) communism, any adherence to the latter is to be deprecated. The result is that any revolutionary politics is “delusive and absurd” (66), a verbatim line of real consciousness that denies the possibility of possibilities. Beyond the totalising binary at its core, the error of this thinking is that it admits of no Badiouian resurrection, and so cannot *imagine* the ways in which Marxist thought might irrupt in ‘new worlds,’ radically different forms of collective politics. Moreover, Saramago is aware that “even the most perfect and polished of ideas can fail” (*Seeing* 55), and so supplies an adroit counterstroke to any claim of uncritical ideological myopia.

In short, it is the political *imagination* of *Seeing* that provokes Gray’s ire. The novel’s ‘unrealistic’ portrait clashes with his sense of a question already resolved, in terms of which any attempt to build a society “without power” ‘must’ ‘realistically’ conclude with a descent into “tyranny” if it is to be believable (Gray 66). This expectation eerily recalls the “fugitive president’s ill-intentioned prognostications” (*Seeing* 86), which constitute an attempt to circumscribe possibility with a litany of notional terrors that lie in wait beyond the known. Finally, it seems flawed to describe communism as a system ‘without’ power, since the accumulation of absolute power was the foundational gesture of the regimes that

Gray decries. This is why one of the most trenchant critiques of communism is the book of essays titled *The God That Failed* (Koestler et al). Clearly, the inexplicable cohesion of people who unite towards communal betterment *without* descending into squalor or cruelty is the ‘unthinkable’ thought that “real consciousness” derides. It is precisely because the capital’s inhabitants cannot be meaningfully described by the state’s lexicon that they are labelled via negation – initially as “the worst possible insult in the vocabulary of democratic jargon, Illegals, illegals, illegals” (*Seeing* 89), and thereafter as “blanker[s]” (106). Most certainly, this is not communism.

Rather, what this group of people “really determined to change their lives” (37) achieve is a truly open society that responds with peaceful largesse to every insult and attack. As an interaction between the president and the captain of a military roadblock reveals, the very personnel charged with establishing the boundaries of this community cannot be known not to have voted alongside those whom they now ‘contain’ (78-79). The gentleness with which the citizens render the capital an open site, and so keep its borders porous, shows most in their response to those who abjure them. When the government abandons the city, for example, they do so according to a plan shrouded in “absolute secrecy” (69). However, their undisclosed routes are spontaneously illuminated “by lanterns, lamps, spotlights, torches, candelabra,” which form a “great river of light” that marks “the deserters’ escape route so that they [will] not get lost” (73). Ironically, such open assistance, visually reminiscent of “Christmas” (73), triggers the ‘fear’ of opposition at the centre of the furtive manoeuvre and causes state vehicles to collide recklessly. Yet no opposition emerges even as the heads of state find themselves exposed by their self-imposed gridlock, a position of unexploited vulnerability which makes plain that the “official convoys were foolishly fleeing from nothing” (74). Of course, the ‘nothing’ from which the government flees is actually its own contingency, which it exposes even as it departs, and so the state defeats itself *but* does so before a people who refuse to place themselves in the oppositional position required to claim a victory.

In other words, it is possible for entrenched expectation to be so potent that withheld affirmation, or simply the lack of affirmation, induces a floundering collapse in the face of an attack that is not an attack. When it undoes expectations that underpin objective violence, indifference, whether or not intentional, amounts to a form of aggression. This is surely what Žižek means when he concludes *Violence* with the statement that, occasionally, “doing

nothing is the most violent thing to do” (217).⁷ So the citizenry occupies a truly peaceful position outside the realm of violence, precisely because it is unfixed by the binary offer of subjective violence, in the form of war, or objectively violent ‘peace’ vested in democratic decorum. Those united in supplementary action cannot be subsumed by ‘peaceful’ elections, or induced to act so as to justify “a bloodbath” at the hands of “the army and the air force” (*Seeing* 92, 96).

By contrast, the conservatives who remain in the capital become a vestige of their governors, in that their communities harden into ever more closed and hostile irrelevance. They are identifiable by their sense of “a painful bereavement” at the government’s departure (87), and they share an unrequited antagonism towards the other citizens of the capital. For example, while the rest of the city takes to the streets in a celebration of unnamed unity, those with “very firm political views,” who vote “for the parties they had always voted for” (87), become literal hostages to history. Unable to frame an unsupervised crowd as anything but a riot, that from which they exclude themselves in advance, the conservatives fear imminent harm from “the ignorant masses,” whom they *expect* to demolish the “sacrosanct doors” of their homes in order to vandalise the “family memories” behind them (87). These are people petrified by the freedom in which they are suddenly immersed, a liberty to which they respond with the enmity of “real consciousness.”

Accordingly, when the conservatives attempt to flee “the sodom and gomorrah of [the] day,” the government attributes this flight to a laudable “thirst for freedom” (146). The irony is that what those propelled by “the unsullied memory of their ancestors” seek is a release from true freedom, a return to the “bastions of legality” that the government represents (147). Once again, this departure is perceived as a necessary response to imagined hostility, with the result that a hysterical attempt to invoke an oppositional community takes place: “They’ll puncture our tyres [. . .], They’ll erect barricades on the landings [. . .] they’ll jam the lifts, [. . .] They’ll hold grandpa hostage” (131). The irony is that the notional boundary which establishes a ‘subversive’ interior and a ‘lawful’ exterior is created and policed only by the forces of conservatism. Quite simply, none of the city’s inhabitants cares about the conformists’ intention to steal away. However, since the government cannot distinguish between ‘traitors’ and loyalists, *it* halts and then rebuffs this second convoy, the members of which must return to the city. The obsessive suspicion and seamless transposition of friend and foe at work here is seen in the fate of the first vehicle to turn

⁷ As conceived here, violence is meant as the disruptive force of aggression.

back, the occupants of which are labelled “[c]owards, black sheep, blankers, bastards, spies, traitors, sons-of-bitches,” the multifarious yet self-identical enemies of “us decent folk” (142).

It is with precisely the opposite of this fixed antagonism that the city responds to those forced to return, and here one has perhaps the clearest exposition of violent expectation in the novel. Of course, the state hopes that the ‘blankers’ will meet the conservatives with violence, and so precipitate an intervention. A journalist ostensibly reluctant to “think the worst,” describes these events as follows:

[W]here are the police who should be defending innocent people from the barbarous treatment these others are preparing to mete out to them [. . .]. Two cars stopped outside the building. [. . .] Then the people on the pavement went over to them, This is it, this is it, we must prepare for the worst, screamed the reporter, hoarse with excitement, then the people [. . .] began unloading the cars and carrying into the buildings in broad daylight what had been carried out under cover of a dark and rainy night. Shit, exclaimed the prime minister, and thumped the table.

(150-51)

The state is here present only as spectral, self-interested malice, a force that decries peaceful coexistence and desires harm for the innocent, who include the very people whom it purports to protect. Whereas governance is meant to elicit civility, here authority is that which elides and protests against acts of decency. That is, the malicious expectations of “those who would have preferred some blood to be spilt” collapse into self-defeat before people who come merely “to offer whatever help their strength [permits],” and who are, contrary to expectation, deliberately “careful with grandpa” (153).

What is clear is that the capital’s citizens have no need of authority in order to retain, and moreover to expand, the ambit of moral decency. At the quotidian level, commerce, traffic and trade all continue to function, “there are no violent muggings,” no “shoot-outs or knife-fights” (107), and none of the presaged “thieves or rapists or murderers” descends upon the city (86-87) – except those who do so by order of the state. In a genuine attempt to degrade the capital and its inhabitants, at one point, the interior minister orders all refuse collectors to go on strike (94). However, their functions are soon filled by legions of women, “armed with brooms, buckets and dustpans” (92), who take up the collective charge of public maintenance. Since these women take one’s “patch” to mean the space “from the front door as far as the middle of the road,” they rework the divide between public and private, and so assume responsibility for “the interests of the community” alongside their own (92-93). And this true display of civic duty compels the refuse workers to discharge

their own community roles, though, importantly, they do so without, and in fact against, the mandate of the state. Accordingly, they distil the city's sentiment that external authority is not a necessary condition for decency, as emerges from the statement that "[i]t was the uniforms that were on strike [. . .] not them" (93). Of course, the interior minister sees, in the abandonment of a strike *against* civil integrity, not "a demonstration of solidarity with the admirable women," but an act of "criminal complicity" with those able to perform the state without its power (94).

This logic of violent expectation culminates when the government stages a 'terrorist' bombing of the capital's metro system, which results in "thirty-four" deaths amongst loyalists and 'traitors' alike (121). So the state *becomes* the imputed 'terrorist' organisation of which it can find no trace, and to which it can attribute no crime. Tellingly, it is with the words of Conrad's Kurtz, "Horror, horror," that the local council leader describes the bombing (114). Just as Kurtz reveals the unspoken barbarism at the core of the 'civilising' colonial project, so too the council leader recognises the violent void around which his country's 'democracy' orbits.

Moreover, the aftermath of the blast precipitates a series of actions through which the citizens interrogate the savagery of unchecked authority. For example, the explosion literally strips the council leader of the trappings and underlings who imbricate him in state power, and renders him "a filthy, stinking tramp, a sad man on the verge of tears, a ghost" (114). And it is from this position outside the taxonomy of power that "the man who had been the council leader" is able to put his belief that "I am speaking to the person directly responsible for the blast" to the interior minister (116, 115). This is a radical statement of truth, the disruptive character of which stems from the fact that it simply eschews the normative, censorial rules of address that underscore hierarchies. That is, when the council leader abandons his position as council leader, he no longer responds to the interior minister *as* interior minister. Just as the blank votes establish the political voice of those who cast them, and remove power from those poised to receive affirmation, it is the interior minister who is radically decentred when his notional 'subordinate' withdraws from the position of subordination. That power is performative and relational, and so precisely *not* perdurable and essential, could not be made more obvious.

Again, the former council leader does not join a 'communist' movement. He rejects the charge that he has "gone over to the left" (127), the implication of which is that he has simply shifted position within the self-referential structure of p.o.t.r, p.o.t.l. and p.i.t.m. Instead, he has departed from the horizontal, ruling-class configuration shared by these

parties, and from the vertical taxonomies of power that they secure. As he says to a journalist who is “confused” by his ‘lack’ of positionality: “Careful now, moral confusion, because I’m assuming that your confusion is moral, is the first step along the path to disquiet and after that, as you yourselves are so fond of saying, anything can happen” (128).

Throughout the novel, the epithet ‘anything can happen,’ which links possibility to invidiousness and power to safety, functions as the media’s cry that havoc impends. The paradox is that the position of power that most ‘enables’ change is also the very point at which one is so interpellated by the demands of power, notably the conservative imperative to ensure stability, that one is effectively paralysed. It is this empowered inaction-before-power that the former council leader rejects.

In so doing, he joins a community that does not take up an oppositional position, and so does not close its borders. This is perhaps best evinced at the funeral of the blast victims, who are drawn from across the political spectrum. Of particular interest, here, is that some families with “right-wing allegiances,” who “had voted as their parents and their grandparents had,” believe that their bereavement really is the “work of a terrorist group with, as all the media [affirm], links to the conspiracy against the present government” (121). With biting irony, these people bury their lost in private, “historic family vaults” (121), and so literally entomb them within the very history that has killed them.

By contrast, what the ‘blank’ mourners carry out is a moving, inclusive and collective response to the profligate annihilation of fellow humans. Žižekian sameness is profoundly apparent in that the mourners will privilege no individual speeches, since they each have their “own grief” and “all feel the same sorrow” (123). This flattening of hierarchical entitlements produces the ethical statement that “[o]ne can show no greater respect than to weep for a stranger” (124), an axiom which cannot but erode the divisive and affirm the possibility of solidarity. And because this comradeship is not oppositional, the massive assembly that occurs after the funeral fails to “live up to [the] expectations” of those who, again, expect violence (129). What occurs is not “an anti-government demonstration,” but rather a “demonstration of grief” (127). That is, the government’s assumption that the gathering of mourners is situated in opposition to the state amounts to the avowal of a bad conscience. Simply put, the expectation that a collective expression of grief should be first thought of as a response to the state is itself a tacit admission of culpability. It follows that a mechanism which permits the dictum that “there are cases when the sentence has been handed down before the crime has even been committed” is also found, by reverse operation of the same, to declare its guilt in the very *expectation* of a backlash *against* its ‘covert’

crimes (229). Once again, it is the citizens' spontaneous and peaceful non-affirmation that brings into relief the violent enormity of the state.

One of the most interesting features of *Seeing* is that the narrator admits an inability to bring the "extraordinary tale" of impeccable civil solidarity to a close (170). This is, of course, a point in favour of Saramago's political vision. While such a conclusion might horrify John Gray, I take it that the very inability to terminate this narrative in a 'realistic' fashion attests to the supplementary character of the work. In *other words*, quite literally, what one has is a writer in excess of himself. The result is that the second half of *Seeing* is about the interior minister's design to 'prove' the doctor's wife, the only character to retain her sight in *Blindness*, responsible for the present epidemic of so-called "white blindness" (77). There is a structural irony here, in that Saramago declares his supposed 'inability' to provide a proper finale, and thereafter supplies a violent as well as false 'empirical' mission which attempts to validate a foregone conclusion. Whether intentional or not, though likely the former, both the author *and* the extraordinary content of the novel mock and resist those who are dissatisfied without taxonomical realism. Quite simply, a reader who feels relief at the commencement of a detective story replicates the actions of the supplemented government. If the familiarity of the conventional is experienced as an 'escape' from the indeterminacy which characterises the novel's politics, then this reader casts a kind of *de facto* vote for the p.o.t.r.. In fact, this very conservatism is at the heart of the notional investigation.

It is interesting to note that the two 'crimes' which render the doctor's wife the object of state scrutiny – namely, that she somehow kept her vision during a time of sightlessness, and that she was able to kill a serial rapist precisely because of her sight – are profoundly life-affirming actions. The first of these crimes is simply no crime at all, and the second encapsulates the difference between violence and aggression. That is, her sight allowed the doctor's wife to end a *system* of rape-barter by dispatching the "ringleader" of a group of blind men who, having taken control of all available supplies, "were demanding women in exchange for food" (215). Clearly, sight here functions as the enabling condition for an act of aggression that undoes a scheme of "pure horror" (224). In other words, the doctor's wife, who had already been brutally raped (215, 224), killed not in private self-defence but to protect a *community* of which she was a part. As in *V for Vendetta*, the implication is that killing can serve as an act of moral perspicacity when it debilitates systemic violence.

Juxtaposed to this ethical aggression is the violence that underwrites the preordained mission to 'discover' the proximate cause of the blank votes. The interior minister,

codenamed “Albatross” (205), dispatches a police superintendent, with the “grotesque” nomenclature “puffin” (212), to perform this task. So what one has here is the heavily imbricated positionality from which the former council leader recuses himself. This avian code-language works with a pre-existent hierarchy of relational protocols that guarantees subordination, and allows nonsensical orders to be carried out unexamined. That is, an obfuscatory *lingua franca* is possible only in the wake of totalising statements such as “you’re a police superintendent and I’m the Interior Minister” (258), from which it follows that when “the interior minister cease[s] to be an albatross, then the police superintendent will cease to be a puffin” (245). But it is the character of this language that is most chilling because, beyond the usual euphemisms and substitutions, it is simultaneously childlike and utterly deleterious of innocence. What one has, as the saying goes, is an invitation for adults to be *as cruel as children*. The result is a means by which “people in government [are] never put off by absurdities,” because “they make use of absurdities to dull consciences and destroy reason” (268). Though it requires hierarchical power to function, it is this very language that seems responsible for the worst excesses of authority. In other words, the interior minister is far more nefarious when he abandons the open protocols of government and codes himself as ‘Albatross.’ This is the double language of power, which is to say that authority within and obedience to power are marked, respectively, by the ability to articulate and to interpret unquestioningly this secret and ‘guiltless’ back-channel dialect.

At the core of such violent language is the man identifiable only by his “blue tie with white spots,” the state’s anonymous non-state actor who moves only in the violent interstices between “department[s]” (238). This is an agent who mirrors the code-language which calls him into being: employed but never claimed, directed by authority but endlessly “not from our” division (238). Whatever function he might serve, he is at root the killer who “has been doing this for years and always does his work well” (306).

The superintendent’s ethical integrity, by which he simultaneously reclaims and sacrifices himself, is therefore contingent upon his escape from the violent code-language in which he is implicated. Significantly, he suffers terrible dreams in which an albatross violently blinds the screaming doctor’s wife (240, 247). The ‘unconscious’ consequences of his real endeavour thus force the superintendent to acknowledge what he cannot not already know, after which he is compelled to *imagine* the appalling ordeals through which the doctor’s wife guided her group of survivors (260). That is, this vision renders the superintendent aware of his present ethical failure, his ongoing moral blindness, as emerges from his following realisation: “We are born, and at that moment it is as if we had signed a

pact for the rest of our life, but a day may come when we will ask ourselves Who signed this on my behalf” (260). It is from this Freirian position of imagination and reflection that the superintendent is forced to act in a way that will end his tenure as a policeman, and enable an ethical assertion of self. To this end, he delivers to a major newspaper a full disclosure of the mission upon which he has been dispatched.

It seems that the qualities embraced by the former superintendent are those with which the reader may perhaps navigate the thoroughly contested space that is the novel’s ending. That is, *Seeing* closes at a point of precarious ambivalence, and so denies the reader a satisfactory ‘conclusion’ to the confrontation that it represents. The capital claims itself as a vital entity, and is personified as an agent that “has taken the matter into its own hands and set hundreds of photocopiers working,” with the result that thousands of illegal copies of the former superintendent’s disclosure “float down” from tall buildings and “glide like doves” through the air (295). As if to suggest that he has enabled true peace, one print “rests for a moment on the superintendent’s shoulder,” and avows that, despite the state’s attempt to censor the report, “nothing is lost” (295). Radically different from the violence of the earlier bird imagery, these peaceful portents, which are also akin to the blank votes, mean that the truth is literally everywhere, and that the production of reality has literally passed from the hands of the government. While the avian code-language imprisons and determines the superintendent, this “white magic” makes of him a “different man” possessed of “a different mind [. . .] seeing clearly what had been obscure before, amending conclusions that had seemed rock-solid and which now crumble between the fingers” (295). He has, therefore, cast off the blindness that signals his imbrication in the state-of-the-situation, and taken up the dangerous facility of political sight. However, the very next day, just as the former superintendent relaxes in a moment of emancipated bliss, one is told that “[t]he man wearing the blue tie with the white spots came up and shot him in the head” (301). Furthermore, the doctor is taken into an indefinite form of detention (306), his wife is executed by the man in the blue tie with the white spots (307), and the shots that kill her are welcomed by two blind men for the silence that they restore (307).

Similarly, on the macro-scale, “half the population” has taken to the streets,⁸ soon to be joined by “the other half,” and the “worthless” interior minister faces a “brutal dismissal” (304). However, the prime minister, who has also been made the minister of justice by disgusted resignations within the cabinet, simply takes on the surplus portfolio of the

⁸ It is unclear whether this refers to the population of the capital or the entire country.

interior, and marks this absurdist concentration of power with the words “don’t you worry, I’ll take care of everything” (304).

How should one read this site of contestation? As I have suggested, Saramago’s text challenges the reader in a Badiouian fashion. If the first of these trials is to overcome the arduous opacity of the physical book, then the second is surely to persevere in one’s fidelity to that which the living text represents. By this I mean that, as in the other works under discussion, the reader is in this novel required to imagine that the impossible has the potential to interrupt the real. Her imagination, or potential consciousness, becomes a contested site in which the text attempts to assert the plausibility of ordinary miracles. It is fidelity to the *vision* contained in what has been read towards which the text gestures the reader. Therefore, it does not seek to push the reader towards ‘one’ imagined version of events, however triumphant, but compels her to *see* the multiplicity of potential happenings on the verge of which the narrative ceases. In other words, Saramago clearly wants the reader to *imagine* a *struggle*, and so make of her mind a site of reflection and imagined action, rather than to erect an instant utopia and so have done with the unnamed capital. Surely this is what Saramago means when he writes that “[w]hat we dream also happens” (251), an ostensibly unimpeachable statement, except that it is immediately haunted by the superintendent’s nightmare, in which the albatross blinds the doctor’s wife. Because of this ambiguity, reality must be continuously interrogated. That is, only true sight, coupled with Immortal courage and unity, will suffice to invite the unseen rather than to renew the existent.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to explore the complex ethical terrain established when ‘peace’ and ‘law’ are infused with various measures of invisible violence. As I have shown, it is the task of every citizenry to maintain watchful dialogue with and renegotiation of power, so that authority does not become a violent dominion that only aggression will break, or a facile barrier that stultifies the advance of life. While Xenakis is right to remind one that terrorism might result when people are without a government, it seems at least equally likely to occur when a government is too much in want of a people.

Conclusion

At the outset of this project I undertook to establish a conceptual framework that would confirm revolution as a radically creative endeavour, and to demonstrate that this theoretical constellation enables new readings of revolutionary literature. I now offer a summative account of the aesthetic of revolution that I have created.

The ethical subject begins as “some-one,” a mortal being with a universal but unrealised capacity to exceed the conservation of her immediate interests in order to pursue a vision of what could be. By reflecting upon her situation and dialoguing with others, she breaks from the confines of “real consciousness” and begins to explore the imagined possibilities created by “potential consciousness.” As such, she enters into unity with other militants who collectively affirm the tonality of the state-of-the-situation, and unmask the objective violence that belies the ‘peaceful’ post-political inertia at hand. These militants take up the pre-evental search for a point that gestures towards the void of their situation, and so seek out that which will radically supplement the existent order and reconfigure its transcendental regime. This done, the revolutionaries trigger an event, the radical vision of which has a universal address, and commune in sameness with other Im-mortals who enter into the praxis of continuous reflection and action that identifies a truth-procedure. Ethical consistency, which requires them to labour in fidelity to the evental fiction to which they are hosts, then becomes the charge of the Immortal subjects. They must refuse to betray their radical vision of what could be, and are called upon to avoid the descent into simulacrum. Differently put, the revolutionaries are required to meet violence with aggression, and so to overcome their enemies without entrenching a friend-foe dialectic that cinches the event’s universal address and announces a pogrom. The measure of revolutionary victory is therefore the creation of spaces wherein the once-unthinkable spectrum of expression, realised in love, politics, art and science, becomes available to *all*. This is how people inscribe a supplementary truth and change the world in a way that is both radical and gentle.

In the course of adumbrating this theory of revolution, I have established conceptual markers which plot the subject’s irruptive course from inertia within a seemingly perdurable situation to a transformative articulation of the world beyond. My claim is not to have instantiated a totalising model that ‘maps’ or ‘defines’ revolution, for such an attempt would undermine its very purpose. Rather, my theoretical contribution is a language of enabling terms that is sensitive to the paradox implicit in any attempt to describe revolution. In

response to the question of how to read revolution, then, I offer only the movable grammar of an answer.

That the conceptual language I have gathered has critical application is evident in the literary readings it has enabled in this study. While its vocabulary is drawn on throughout my readings of the various texts, the latter have all rendered different elements of my theory salient, and so demonstrated that it has the requisite adaptability to enable interpretations of diverse representations. In the case of *The Kingdom of This World*, Badiou's understanding that an event unfurls along a "hazardous course" combines with the notion of resurrection that Johnston elucidates, and shows that this text does not have to be read as staging closed cycles of emancipation and oppression. Furthermore, its emphasis on the development of "potential consciousness," which signals the Freirian ability to reflect upon and alter reality through collective agency, dispenses with the notion that it casts the Haitians as credulous actors who reject slavery out of faith. In other words, my conceptual approach overcomes the two most trenchant premises of the argument that Carpentier's depiction of the Haitian Revolution is a pessimistic and essentialist enterprise.

Similarly, my reading of *V for Vendetta* challenges the recurrent criticism that the film simply applauds terrorism. As Badiou avers, a simulacrum has no creative potential, and so produces a counterfeit 'community' that is premised upon state terror – from which no one is safe. The simulacral state therefore fails to provide the security that is its *raison d'être*, and maintains itself by manipulating the symbolic order so as to enable the endless manufacture of enemies. What Žižek proves is that such a state is a hub of invisible brutality, the violence of which is separable from the aggression required to overcome it. By taking up the distinction between violence and aggression that Žižek leaves undeveloped, and showing it to consist in the former's predilection for excess and the latter's will to end the structured encounter between the two, I have shown that the film does not celebrate violence, and that aggression may serve to enable the creative possibilities that violent conservatism abhors.

In my final chapter, I demonstrated that Saramago's representational project in *Seeing* is germane to Žižek's concept of objective violence. Both assert that expectation overdetermines what is achievable in a situation, and so suspends the possibility of supplementary engagement. The key contention here is not simply that political monologue compels the exclusive performance of its mandate, and so leaves other possibilities fallow, but that it actively destroys all potentialities with which it is not cognate. That is, a totalising narrative that directs people to renew the authority of power cannot *not* produce forces that police and guarantee the endurance of that which purports to be elected. Perhaps Saramago's

most telling point, however, is that when peace is suborned by violent expectation, then properly peaceful withdrawal from the affirmation of power is equated with violence. The implication here is that even indifference causes an interruption of and a response from an institution that demands visible passivity, and so one's negation of the call to reproduce the existent constitutes a negative form of activity. Conversely, insentient and unsuspecting participation in political, cultural and representational structures does not amount to 'nothing,' but reliably renders one an active constituent of invisible malice that only true ethical engagement will uncover and address. Contained here is the ethical premise from which Badiou, Žižek and Freire proceed: rather than remove the impetus from violence, inertia propels it. Quite simply, ethical behaviour is not an article of absenteeism from what is, but an illegal appointment with the world as it is not yet.

As I have shown, all the representations of revolution that have been analysed in this study possess a facility that compels the reader to participate in that which they describe, and all end at points of incompleteness. The inference here to be drawn is that the praxis of reflection and action is an unending labour that rightly admits of no terminus, and so one must constantly seek out and sustain radical engagements across the Immortal spectrum of art, love, politics and science. To do anything less is to defer the astonishing opportunity to be alive, and the potential to be an Immortal participant in the universal.

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