

THE LURE OF ANTIGONE: APORIAS OF AN ETHICS OF THE POLITICAL

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In examining the centrality of the law in Lacanian theory one is led, sooner or later, to *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Here the law is firmly situated within a conceptual constellation of other crucial concepts such as the Thing, *jouissance*, and sublimation. Furthermore, it is here, already in the first pages of the seminar, that Lacan points to the ever-present association between morality, law, and ethics: "Moral experience as such, that is to say, the reference to sanctions, puts man in a certain relation to his own action that concerns not only an articulated law but also a direction, a trajectory, in a word, a good that he appeals to, thereby engendering an ideal of conduct. All that, too, properly speaking constitutes the dimension of ethics and is situated beyond the notion of command."¹ Following this trajectory, I will discuss some aspects of the ethics of psychoanalysis. The reader, however, should not expect a detailed treatise or a systematic exposition of Lacanian ethics; my aim is much more modest: to articulate a set of aporias in relation to a specific type of appropriation of Lacanian ethics in the service of a politics of radical social transformation.

My main focus will be an article by Slavoj Žižek published in *Umbr(a)* in 1998.² In this essay, a reply to Judith Butler's criticism of Lacan, Žižek's argument revolves around the radical character of Lacanian ethics and aims at demonstrating its revolutionary political potential: what is at stake in Žižek's argument is not only the possibility of resisting, but also of undermining or displacing the existing socio-symbolic network, of radically transforming a given power structure. Žižek distinguishes between an imaginary form of resistance, a "false transgression" that ultimately serves to maintain and reproduce the law, and "the effective symbolic rearticulation *via* the intervention of the real of an *act*."³ This notion of the act thus functions as the nodal point of this syntagm and of Žižek's position in general.

The act is a concept often invoked by Lacan — notice for example the title of his seminar *L'acte psychanalytique*.⁴ It is also central to his

Ethics seminar where Lacan addresses Antigone's act, which pushes to the limit "the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such" since Antigone "incarnates that desire."⁵ In his reading of Lacan, Žižek focuses on the death drive as "the elementary form of the *ethical act*,"⁶ and on the heroic example — the model — of Antigone, arguing that she "effectively puts at risk her entire social existence, defying the socio-symbolic power of the city embodied in the rule of Creon, thereby 'falling into some kind of death' — i.e., sustaining symbolic death, the exclusion from the socio-symbolic space."⁷ In Žižek's reading, there is no ethical act proper without the "risk" of a "momentary" suspension of the big Other. Furthermore, only such a "radical *act*" can engender "a thorough reconfiguration of the entire field which redefines the very conditions of socially sustained performativity."⁸ This is, then, where the political significance of Antigone's act lies: "Lacan's wager is that even and also in politics, it is possible to accomplish a more radical gesture of 'traversing' the very fundamental fantasy. Only such gestures which disturb this fantasmatic kernel are authentic *acts*."⁹ It is also here that Žižek locates a major difference between a deconstructionist ethics of finitude and a Lacanian ethics. In the first case, faced with a constitutive lack, the only ethical option is heroically to assume it: "the corollary of this ethics, of course, is that the ultimate source of totalitarian and other catastrophes is man's presumption that he can overcome this condition of finitude, lack and displacement, and 'act like God,' in a total transparency, surpassing his constitutive division."¹⁰ In contrast, Žižek's Lacanian answer is that "absolute/unconditional acts do occur" and that "the true source of evil is not a finite mortal man who acts like God, but a man who disavows that divine miracles occur and reduces himself to just another finite mortal being."¹¹

However appealing this passionate promise of miraculous change may be, particularly in an era of cynical apathy and pessimism, Žižek's argument raises a number of theoretical and political questions. In what follows, I will attempt to highlight some of the tensions inherent in his argument in order to help clarify the Lacanian ethical position and its implications for contemporary transformative politics. There are at least two important issues in trying to evaluate this position: the first is related to Žižek's particular reading of Antigone; the second concerns the general value for Lacanian theory and for politics of what Simon Critchley has described as the "tragic-heroic paradigm."¹²

I.

First of all, Žižek's discussion of Antigone ignores or downplays important aspects of the tragedy itself and Lacan's commentary. In a nutshell: Can Antigone really be presented as a model for progressive ethico-political action? According to Žižek, such an example can be offered only only by someone who "risks" an encounter with death in order to "momentarily" suspend the

symbolic/legal network and effect a shift in the existing power structure. Does Antigone fulfill these criteria?

Even a cursory glance at Sophocles' text and Lacan's commentary seems to point to the opposite. Antigone does not merely risk an encounter with symbolic death and a momentary suspension of the laws of the city. In opposing the laws of the city, Creon's ethics of the good(s), she incarnates a pure desire, she achieves an *autonomy* so radical that it can only be associated with real death. In the words of the chorus, "a law to yourself, alone, no mortal like you, ever, you go down to the halls of Death alive and breathing."¹³ According to Lacan, Antigone's position is the following: "I am dead and I desire death."¹⁴ In that sense, hers was never a case of risk or suspension. Risk entails a minimum of strategic or pragmatic calculation, which is something alien to Antigone's pure desire. Suspension presupposes a before and an after, but for Antigone there is no after. It is important to distinguish between the two deaths — symbolic and real/actual death — but we should not forget that Antigone opts for both. In that sense, this was never a case of an act effecting a displacement of the status quo. Antigone knows her fate from the beginning — she is involved in a game whose outcome is known in advance — a detail that does not escape Lacan's attention: in almost all of the seven tragedies of Sophocles, "there isn't even the suggestion of a peripetia. Everything is there from the beginning; the trajectories that are set in motion have only to come crashing down one on top of the other as best they can." Moreover, as Lacan points out, "tragic heroes are always isolated, they are always beyond established limits, always in an exposed position and, as a result, separated in one way or another from the structure."¹⁵ Such a position can, of course, function as a radical critique of social structure as such; it is difficult to see, however, how the "inhuman" position of Antigone could point to an alternative formulation of the socio-political structure. The "suicidal heroic ethics" implicit in Lacan's reading of Antigone implies a total neglect of the socio-political world; as Žižek suggests in an earlier text, the motto of such an ethics could only be "*fiat desiderium, pereat mundus*."¹⁶ Antigone's intransigence, her deadly passion, may thus be what creates her tragic appeal, but even by Žižek's 1998 standards, one has to conclude that this makes her unsuitable as a model for transformative ethico-political action.

Unless, of course, one reinterprets her in a substantial way. But then a certain paradox emerges: Antigone can only function as a model for *radical* political action on the condition that she is stripped of her *radically* inhuman (anti-social and anti-political) desire. Žižek's selection of certain terms ("risk," "momentary suspension") seems to perform this function of socializing/politicizing Antigone's pure desire. The tension here is between an admiration for Antigone's pure desire and a simultaneous need to *give way* on her radical desire in order to make it relevant for politics. This is a tension that Žižek himself has accepted as far as his earlier work is concerned — consider, for example, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, in which he acknowledges, in a self-critical tone,

that in the past he has yielded to the “temptation” of complementing or moderating Lacan’s ethics of persisting in one’s desire.¹⁷ Judging from his 1998 *Umbr(a)* article, we can conclude that the tension may be displaced and camouflaged, but not fully resolved.

II.

If Antigone is useful only if reinterpreted in such a way — a way almost antithetical to her profile in the play — why should we retain her as a paradigm of the ethico-political act? *Wouldn’t the truly ethical act be to traverse the lure of Antigone altogether?*

This is not to say that the problem lies entirely with Žižek’s appropriation of Lacan’s commentary and the figure of Antigone. The problem is also the exclusive attention given to the *Ethics* seminar. *Clearly, Antigone is not Lacan’s last — or most insightful — word on the question of ethics.* His position continued to develop in a direction that undermined his earlier focus on Antigone’s pure desire. As Alenka Zupančič has pointed out, this becomes evident, for example, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, where the idea of “pure desire” is radically questioned.¹⁸ Indeed, here Lacan not only denies the possibility of a pure desire of the analyst, but also highlights the alienating character of desire — “*man’s desire is the desire of the Other*”¹⁹ — while also pointing to the interpenetration of law and desire.²⁰ This shift needs to be taken into account when discussing the function of Antigone. Let us examine in more detail some of its implications.

Lacan’s reading of Antigone in the *Ethics* seminar is based on the antithesis between Creon’s ethics of “the good of all,”²¹ and Antigone’s ethics, which is articulated around “a good that is different from everyone else’s,”²² a pure (and thus deadly) incarnation of the “laws of desire.” But is this opposition as radical as it seems at first? What is the exact nature of the antithesis between Creon and Antigone in Lacan’s account? It is primarily an opposition between the order (and the morality) of power and an ethics of pure desire. Creon’s morality is the traditional morality also supported by Aristotle: it “is the morality of the master, created for the virtues of the master and linked to the order of powers.”²³ This order is not to become the object of contempt; Lacan makes clear that his comments are not those of an anarchist, but simply of someone aware of the *limits* of this order. In the *Ethics* seminar, these limits are understood in terms of desire: what is opposed to traditional ethics is the pole of desire.²⁴ The position of power *vis-à-vis* desire has always been the same: “Let it be clear to everyone that this is on no account the moment to express the least surge of desire.’ The morality of power, of the service of goods, is as follows: ‘As far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait.’”²⁵

In this schema, Antigone’s pure desire becomes the model of a radical transgression of the suppression or gentrification of desire implicit in every power structure and in the moral order

sustaining it. Desire is posited as the complete antithesis of the sphere of the goods, as the transgression of power in all its different forms (capitalist or communist):

Part of the world has resolutely turned in the direction of the service of goods, thereby rejecting everything that has to do with the relationship of man to desire — it is what is known as the postrevolutionary perspective. The only thing to be said is that people don't seem to have realized that, by formulating things in this way, one is simply perpetuating the eternal tradition of power, namely, "Let's keep on working, and as far as desire is concerned, come back later." But what does it matter? In this tradition the communist future is only different from Creon's, from that of the city, in assuming — and it's not negligible — that the sphere of goods to which we must all devote ourselves may at some point embrace the whole universe.²⁶

While Lacan's insightful critique of the communist utopia remains important, it is clear that his positing of desire as the antithesis of the order of power and of the service of goods cannot be sustained. It probably belongs to what Žižek has correctly criticized as a "false transgression," which ultimately reproduces the order that it is supposed to undermine. In fact, it is Lacan himself who provides the theoretical tools for such a critique of his earlier work, particularly of his comments on *Antigone*. It is Lacan who highlights the constitutive dialectic between law and desire. In his unpublished seminar on anxiety, delivered only two years after the *Ethics* seminar, one finds a revealing passage: "desire and the law, which appear to be opposed in a relationship of antithesis, are only one and the same barrier to bar our access to the thing. *Nolens, volens*: desiring, I commit myself to the path of the law."²⁷ Desire not only loses its value as a pure force of transgression, but is also revealed as the ultimate support of power and the order of goods. As soon as *jouissance* acquires its central place in Lacan's theoretical universe, desire is revealed as a defense against enjoyment, as a compromise formation, while drive emerges as the nodal point of his ethical thought.²⁸ In that sense, desire can never be a pure transgressive force. Even in perversion, where desire "appears by presenting itself as what lays down the law, namely as a subversion of the law, it is in fact well and truly the support of a law."²⁹ *Desire is the law*.³⁰ It is thus not surprising that *Antigone* eventually links her desire to a certain law, the laws of the gods: "These laws — I was not about to break them, not out of fear of some man's [Creon's] wounded pride, and face the retribution of the gods."³¹

Hence it is not only the order of power that is limited; desire also has precise *limits*.³² It is always conditioned by the structures of fantasy sustaining "hegemonic" regimes — regimes of power, consumption, and even resistance and transgression. It is always stimulated by the imaginary lure of attaining *jouissance*, but it is also sustained by the constitutive inability to realize such a goal. In that sense, desire "succeeds," reproduces itself, through its own failure. This reproduction is not politically innocent. Consumer culture, for example, is partly sustained by the continuous displacement of final satisfaction from advertisement to advertisement, from

product to product, from fantasy to fantasy. The important “by-product” of this play is a specific structuration of desire which guarantees, through its cumulative metonymic effect, the reproduction of the market economy within a distinct “promotional culture.”³³

It is Lacan himself who points the way to traversing the lure of Antigone by shifting his understanding of desire. This shift needs to be acknowledged as the radical break it truly represents. Any attempt to reconcile the “pure” desire of Antigone with the later conceptualization and the critique of illusory desire and/or the ethics of desire with the ethics of the drive — what Zupančič seems to attempt in the last pages of her *Ethics of the Real* — needs to be re-examined and further debated.³⁴

III.

Let us return to Žižek’s discussion of Antigone. His paradoxical idealization of Antigone as a model of radical ethico-political action seems also to conflict with his own Lacanian account of the act as a non-subjective, non-intentional encounter with the real. Antigone’s act is clearly an act of “subjective” autonomy beyond the restrictions of the social world. Isn’t it the case, then, that Antigone’s “heroic” act conflicts with Žižek’s conceptualization of the act as distinct from Will?³⁵ In the *Umbr(a)* text, he makes abundantly clear that the “act as object is also to be opposed to the subject...This act is precisely something which unexpectedly ‘just occurs.’ It is an occurrence which most surprises its agent itself.”³⁶ In *L’acte psychanalytique*, Lacan himself points out that the act entails a certain “renewal” of the subject³⁷ — the act is never an act of which anyone can claim to be the master.³⁸ Is this really compatible with Antigone’s stance? If Žižek’s position is that “absolute/unconditional acts do occur, but not in the idealist guise of a self-transparent gesture performed by a subject with a pure will who fully intends them,”³⁹ then Antigone seems to have no place in his schema. What is needed instead is a non-subjective formal model of the act. What would such a model look like? When Žižek juxtaposes deconstruction with psychoanalysis, it seems that he is indirectly attempting a reply. How does Žižek conceptualize the distinction between the deconstructionist and Lacanian positions? In order to ground his ethics of the political, it seems that he introduces a criterion in terms of the oppositions passivity/activity and negativity/positivity and their philosophical/religious mutations: finitude/immortality and lack/miracle. In short, Žižek’s point is that deconstruction prioritizes lack and finitude as the limit of ethico-political action, and locates the source of evil in any attempt to surpass the subject’s constitutive division and act like God. In stark opposition to such a pessimistic standpoint, Žižek’s response is to reverse the argument, making the true source of evil the assumption of finitude, mortality, and lack as such, ignoring the dimension of “divine miracles.” Let us examine in more detail the terms of this opposition.

First, it is not entirely clear why anyone would associate the logic of lack — of constitutive lack as the support and limit of desire, as its condition of possibility and impossibility — with deconstruction. Lack and its various synonyms, lack in its various guises, is clearly a Lacanian concept, as Žižek himself has pointed out repeatedly. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, for example, one finds the following quotation with respect to the importance of lack, specifically the “lack in the Other”: “Today, it is a commonplace that the Lacanian subject is divided, crossed-out, identical to a lack in the signifying chain. However, the most radical dimension of Lacanian theory lies not in recognizing this fact but in realizing that the big Other, the symbolic order itself, is also *barré*, crossed-out, by a fundamental impossibility, structured around an impossible/traumatic kernel.”⁴⁰ In his *Umbr(a)* text, however, lack and division paradoxically reappear as internal moments of the deconstructionist ethics of finitude. In Žižek’s recent book on totalitarianism, what sounds like the lack in the Other is treated in a similar way: “The deconstructionist political doxa goes something like this: the social is the field of structural undecidability, it is marked by an irreducible gap or lack, forever condemned to non-identity with itself; and ‘totalitarianism’ is, at its most elementary, the closure of this undecidability.”⁴¹ It is difficult to understand why Žižek attributes to deconstruction what he himself has described as “the most radical dimension of Lacanian theory,” the lack in the socio-symbolic Other, as well as the Lacanian “commonplace” of the subject as lack. One can only speculate that this move, visible in many of Žižek’s recent texts, must be related to a general *political* strategy of juxtaposing negativity and positivity, passivity and activity, pessimism and optimism. If his version of radical politics is to be presented as an optimistic politics of the miraculous act — a politics of almost vitalist activity — and if Lacanian theory is to be presented as a support of this politics, then it has to be purified of its stress on negativity and lack.

The problem, however, is that even this purification fails to guarantee the theoretico-political coherence of Žižek’s argument. Passivity, for example, survives to haunt his politics of the act. Even if lack were to be associated with deconstruction, does that transform the supposedly “Lacanian” politics of the miraculous act to a politics beyond passivity? I doubt it, precisely because, as we have seen, the act is not subjective or subjectivized. According to Žižek’s own schema, our relation to acts is always a relation of assumption, of coming to terms with them: “*there are acts...they do occur and...we have to come to terms with them.*”⁴² What, then, is the difference between assuming lack and assuming the act, the event? The only difference seems to be located in the particular content of each experience — and thus Žižek’s argument passes from a more formal level to a level conditioned by concrete experience and its contingent symbolization/evaluation. Let’s see how. Žižek’s argument relies on the opposition between lack, denoting finitude and negativity, and divine miracle, denoting immortality and positivity. The position Žižek wants to attack is the one that advocates an assumption of lack and negativity, while the

position he wants to defend conceptualizes the act as a miraculous event: “[acts] occur, on the contrary, as a totally unpredictable *tuche*, a miraculous event which shatters our lives. To put it in somewhat pathetic terms, this is how the ‘divine’ dimension is present in our lives.”⁴³ Is it possible, however, to sustain such a sharp distinction? I see at least two problems with such a position: one theoretical, the other political. At the theoretical level, it is impossible to ignore the irreducible interconnection between negativity and positivity, lack and desire, death and resurrection. Even in Alain Badiou’s work, which seems to be the source of Žižek’s conception of the event here, the event refers to a real break that destabilizes a given discursive articulation, a pre-existing order.⁴⁴ It has, in other words, a negative/disruptive dimension. It creates a lack in the pre-existing structure. But like Ernesto Laclau’s *dislocation*, it also entails a positive dimension. In Badiou the dislocating event is what (potentially) produces a new form of subjectivity. In that sense, the dimension of the “miracle” — if one wants to use such religious jargon — is most visible in the continuous “transubstantiation” of negative into positive. This interconnection is constitutive of social and political life, and this is not only an ethical but primarily an analytical/empirical observation.

Furthermore, by simplifying the terms of a complex relation, Žižek — at least in his *Umbr(a)* argument — links theory to political experience in a reductive way. The destabilization of the absolute frontiers between positive and negative is bound to contaminate the idea of miracle itself. The implication is that any prioritization of the field of miracles has to confront the question of how to distinguish between true and false, divine and satanic miracles.⁴⁵ We already know this from Christian theology, Church history, and everyday life in religious communities. We also know it from the critique of Badiou’s work. In Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s words: “I can find hardly anything within [Badiou’s] system to protect me from Heidegger’s mistake, when he took the National Socialist ‘revolution’ for an event, and thought that a new process of truth had started. The risk is that the eventuality of the event will eventually be left to subjective decision.”⁴⁶ Simon Critchley similarly asks: “how and in virtue of what is one to distinguish a true event from a false event? That is, I don’t see how — on the basis of Badiou’s criteria — we could ever distinguish a true event from a false event.”⁴⁷ Badiou’s “event” and Žižek’s “act” seem to suffer from the same limitation: as soon as we accept a strict differentiation between positive and negative, good and bad, as soon as we prioritize one of these poles by disavowing the continuous interpenetration between positivity and negativity, we merely displace the problem into the realm of concrete ethico-political experience. *However, the larger problem is that we lose at the same time every theoretical/symbolic resource capable of supporting a proper ethical attitude in this unavoidable encounter with the real.*

As we have seen, Žižek’s conceptualization of a politics of the act seems to be premised on the idea that the assumption of lack and finitude within a political project of social transformation

can have only disastrous or crippling results. Indeed, postmodern pessimism is a problem, but is it to be resolved through a reoccupation of quasi-religious faith? Is it to be resolved through the utopian disavowal of lack and negativity in political discourse? This option is clearly open to us, but it is difficult to see how it would be different from the “false transgression” stigmatized by Žižek. It is also obvious that it would expose the politics of social transformation into an unacceptable risk of *absolutization*. Thus, in opposition to Žižek’s strict differentiation between the ethics of assuming lack and a politics of the act, why not see the assumption/institutionalization of the lack in the Other not as a limit but as the condition of possibility, or in any case a crucial resource, in ethically assuming the radical character of an act, of relating ourselves — as divided beings — to an event. Isn’t something like that happening, for example, when we fall in love, one of the privileged fields in which events take place in Badiou’s view? Although a degree of chance is always operative, falling in love is never merely a chance event. It presupposes a certain preparedness. As Darian Leader reminds us, it has precise conditions of possibility linked to a sense of discontent, incompleteness, and lack.⁴⁸ Similarly, though the cases are not entirely symmetrical, even if “the act as real is an event which occurs *ex nihilo*, without any fantasmatic support,”⁴⁹ *assuming* this act nevertheless entails traversing the fantasy and the assumption of the lack. This is the symbolic matrix within which ethically assuming the act can become possible.⁵⁰ This is perhaps what we can learn from the psychoanalytic act as an act that presupposes a certain reflexivity, an awareness of its own limits, of the fact that it will never lead to the full realization of subjectivity (neither of the analyst nor of the analysand)⁵¹: in the beginning of every new analysis, the analyst authorizes and *risks* an operation, through the institution of the subject supposed to know, knowing well that it will end with his or her own rejection as excrement.⁵² Only thus can the analyst’s assumption of castration and division be *re-enacted* in the subjective structure of the analysand.

As Žižek himself has pointed out in another text, “[t]here is ethics — that is to say, an injunction which cannot be grounded in ontology — in so far as there is a crack in the ontological edifice of the universe: at its most elementary, ethics designates fidelity to this crack.”⁵³ In order for a truly ethical fidelity to an event to become possible, another fidelity is presupposed — a fidelity that cannot be reduced to the event itself or to particular symbolizations of the event, a fidelity to *event-ness* as distinct from particular events, a “fidelity to the Real *qua* impossible.”⁵⁴ Such a standpoint not only presents the necessary symbolic preparations for the proper ethical reception of the act/event, but also offers our best defense against the ever-present risk of being lured by a false event, a satanic miracle, against the ever-present risk of terror and *absolutization* of an event, to use Badiou’s vocabulary.⁵⁵ Of course, one should be aware that fidelity to event-ness, to what ultimately permits the emergence of the new and makes possible the assumption of an act, presupposes a certain betrayal, not of the act itself, but of a certain rendering of the act

as an absolute and divine positivity. In that sense, fidelity to an event can flourish and avoid absolutization only as an *infidel fidelity*, only within the framework of another fidelity — fidelity to the openness of the political space and to the awareness of the constitutive impossibility of a final suture of the social — within the framework of a commitment to the continuous political re-inscription of the irreducible lack in the Other.⁵⁶

Needless to say, I am not offering these reflections as some kind of final statement regarding the issues discussed here. The transformative potential of a Lacanian ethics of the political is a crucial issue that is far from settled. Furthermore, bringing event-ness into consideration renders possible the restructuring of the formal requirements of an ethico-political conception of the act in what some would call a radical democratic direction without yet being able to bridge the gap between theory and politics.⁵⁷ This irreducible aporia is, I think, what ultimately explains Žižek's choice to persist in his references to Antigone as an embodiment of a particular ethico-political position within a formal framework essentially alien or even antithetical to her. But the ethical fidelity to acts/events, which is the point of *Antigone* is clearly not embodied by its title character. *It is rather embodied by tragedy itself as a genre, as a social institution staging again and again the suspension of the socio-symbolic order and permitting a thorough self-reflection on the political order of the city and its moral foundations.*⁵⁸ It is not Antigone but Sophocles who fulfills the criteria set out at the beginning of Žižek's 1998 text. It is the tragedian who assumes and re-inscribes radical socio-political critique within the heart of the city, reproducing democratic society by re-examining again and again — through a series of aesthetico-political *re-acts* — its ethico-political premises. As Jean-Pierre Vernant explains: "What tragedy is talking about is itself [the city, Athens] and the problems of law it is encountering. What is talking and what is talked about is the audience on the benches, but first of all it is the City...which puts itself on the stage and plays itself...Not only does the tragedy enact itself on stage...it enacts its own problematics. It puts in question its own internal contradictions, revealing...that the true subject matter of tragedy is social thought...in the very process of elaboration."⁵⁹



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1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 3.
2. Slavoj Žižek, “From ‘Passionate Attachments’ to Dis-Identification,” *Umbr(a)* 1 (1998): 3-17. Parts of this text are included in “Passionate (Dis)Attachments, or, Judith Butler as a Reader of Freud,” in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 247-312.
3. Žižek, “From ‘Passionate Attachments’ to Dis-Identification,” 5.
4. Lacan, *L’acte psychanalytique* (1967-1968), unpublished seminar, trans. Cormac Gallagher. In this seminar, the paradoxical status of the act as *un fait de significant*, as a language and division effect, is illuminated in depth. Furthermore, the relation between psychoanalysis and politics occupies a prominent place. Not only does Lacan discuss the status of the political act with reference to Lenin, among others, and the “days of October,” but the final sessions of the seminar are also disrupted by the events of May 1968. Respecting the strike called by the SNES (the Union of Teachers in Higher Education), Lacan would in fact suspend his teaching for two sessions of the seminar (8 and 15 May 1968) and offer instead a brief but extremely interesting commentary on the way analysts could become “worthy of the events.” But this is also the seminar in which the analyst’s “refusal to act,” which frustrates the demand of the analysand, is given appropriate attention.
5. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 282.
6. Žižek, “From ‘Passionate Attachments’ to Dis-Identification,” 6.
7. *Ibid.*, 6-7. The example of Antigone is of considerable importance in Žižek’s recent work. See, for example, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001), esp. ch. 4.
8. Žižek, “From ‘Passionate Attachments’ to Dis-Identification,” 7.
9. *Ibid.*, 9.
10. *Ibid.*, 16.
11. *Ibid.*, 17.
12. Simon Critchley, *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), 231.
13. Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1984), 102.
14. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 281.
15. *Ibid.*, 271.
16. Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 69.
17. *Ibid.*, 84.
18. Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000), 3.
19. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 38.
20. *Ibid.*, 34.
21. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 258.
22. *Ibid.*, 270.
23. *Ibid.*, 315.
24. *Ibid.*, 314.

25. *Ibid.*, 315.
26. *Ibid.*, 318.
27. Lacan, *L'angoisse* (1962-1963), unpublished seminar, trans. Cormac Gallagher, 19 December 1962.
28. See Zupančič, 235.
29. Lacan, *L'angoisse*, 27 February 1963.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Sophocles, 82.
32. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 31.
33. For an analysis of advertising discourse along these lines, see Yannis Stavrakakis, "On the Critique of Advertising Discourse: A Lacanian View," *Third Text* 51 (2000), 85-90.
34. Undoubtedly desire and drive are related, but their relation seems to me to escape any logic of *reconciliation* or *supplementation*, which is how Zupančič ultimately views their relation. Her aim seems to be to "reconcile" desire with drive, something attempted through presenting drive as a "supplement" of desire: "at the heart of desire a possible passage opens up towards the drive; one might therefore come to the drive if one follows the 'logic' of desire to its limit" (Zupančič, 238, 239, 243). What is not given appropriate attention here is that reaching this limit entails a *crossing* which radically transforms our relation to desire. In other words, the limit of desire does not connote the *automatic* passage into a supplementary field of reconciliation; it primarily signifies a rupture, precisely because, as Jacques-Alain Miller points out, "desire never goes beyond a certain point." Whereas Lacan's early work and his conceptualization of desire as something "always in violation, always rebellious and diabolical" — a position informing his reading of Antigone — leads to "the confusion between the drive and desire," as soon as desire is reconceptualized as ultimately submissive to a law, a shift of almost "gigantic" proportions is instituted, and this shift must be acknowledged thoroughly. See Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text" in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 422-423.
35. See Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 223.
36. Žižek, "From 'Passionate Attachments' to Dis-Identification," 14.
37. Lacan, *L'acte psychanalytique*, 29 November 1967.
38. *Ibid.*, 24 January 1968.
39. Žižek, "From 'Passionate Attachments' to Dis-Identification," 16-17.
40. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 122.
41. Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 6.
42. Žižek, "From 'Passionate Attachments' to Dis-Identification," 15.
43. *Ibid.*, 17.
44. Many of Žižek's theoretical choices and devices in this and other recent texts seem to be conditioned by a reading of Alain Badiou. The language of *immortality* and *miracles*, for example, is much closer to Badiou than to Lacan. It is true that some of Badiou's work comes very close to a Lacanian problematic and introduces a refreshing tone in contemporary philosophy, which explains the references to his work by Lacanian theorists such as Žižek, Zupančič, and Joan Copjec. However, there are many areas where Badiou follows a direction that seems incompatible with Lacanian political theory. I attempt to highlight some of these

- incompatibilities in “Re-activating the Democratic Revolution: The Politics of Transformation Beyond Reoccupation and Conformism,” *Parallax*, in press.
45. In *L’acte psychanalytique*, Lacan indirectly raises this issue when he discusses the relation between the symptomatic and the psychoanalytic act (see the lecture of 22 November 1967).
46. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, “Cantor, Lacan, Mao, *même combat*: The Philosophy of Alain Badiou,” *Radical Philosophy* 93 (1999): 12.
47. Critchley, “Demanding Approval: On the Ethics of Alain Badiou,” *Radical Philosophy* 100 (2000): 23.
48. See Darian Leader, *Promises Lovers Make When it Gets Late* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997).
49. Žižek, “From ‘Passionate Attachments’ to Dis-Identification,” 14.
50. Ironically, even Antigone’s act is partly conditioned by an acceptance of finitude. In her own words, “Die I must, I’ve known it all my life — how could I keep from knowing? — even without your death-sentence ringing in my ears. And if I am to die before my time I consider that a gain” (Sophocles, 82).
51. Lacan, *L’acte psychanalytique*, 20 March 1968.
52. *Ibid.*, 21 February 1968.
53. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 214.
54. *Ibid.*, 215.
55. See Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 85.
56. This is how I translate in political terms Lacan’s discussion of the psychoanalytic act as an assertion that institutes a space permitting continuous “re-acts.” See Lacan, *L’acte psychanalytique*, 20 March 1968.
57. As Lacan puts it, “the theoretician is not the one who finds the way. He explains it. Obviously, the explanation is useful to find the rest of the path” (*Ibid.*, 19 June 1968).
58. As far as Sophocles’ *Antigone* is concerned, such a logic seems to be embodied by the two figures, Haemon and Tiresias, who are strangely foreclosed in most discussions of the tragedy in order to sustain the seductive lure of the Creon-Antigone couple.
59. Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Greek Tragedy: Problems of Interpretation,” in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 278-279.

