"We Need a Popular Discipline": Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative

Alain Badiou

Interview by Filippo Del Lucchese and Jason Smith

Filippo Del Lucchese and Jason Smith: We would like to begin by asking you to clarify the relation between philosophy and politics. What do you mean when you speak, for example, of a militant philosophy?

Alain Badiou: Since its beginnings, philosophy's relationship to the political has been fundamental. It's not something invented by modernity. Plato's central work is called *The Republic*, and it is entirely devoted to questions of the city or polis. This link has remained fundamental throughout the history of philosophy. But I think there are two basic ways of structuring this relationship.

The first way assigns philosophy the responsibility for finding a foundation for the political. Philosophy is called upon to reconstruct the political on the basis of this foundation. This current argues that it is possible to locate, for every politics, an ethical norm and that philosophy should first have the task of reconstructing or naming this norm and then of judging the relation between this norm and the multiplicity of political practices. In this sense, then, what opens the relation between philosophy and politics is the idea of a foundation as well as an ethical conception of the political. But there is a second orientation that is completely different. This current maintains that in a certain sense politics is primary and that the political exists without, before, and differently from philosophy. The political would be what I call a condition of philosophy. In this case, the relation between philosophy and politics would be, in a certain sense, retroactive. That is, it would be a relation in

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which philosophy would situate itself within political conflicts in order to clarify them. Today, in the extremely obscure situation that is the general system of contemporary politics, philosophy can attempt to clarify the situation without having any pretense to creating it. Philosophy has as its condition and horizon the concrete situation of different political practices, and it will try, within these conditions, to find instruments of clarification, legitimation, and so on. This current takes seriously the idea that politics is itself an autonomy of thought, that it is a collective practice with an intelligence all its own.

It is quite clear that today the question is particularly difficult because we are no longer in a situation in which there is a clear distinction between two opposed political orientations—as was the case in the twentieth century. Not everyone agreed on what the exact nature of these opposed politics was, but everyone agreed there was an opposition between a classical democratic bourgeois politics and another, revolutionary, option. Among the revolutionaries, we debated spiritedly and even violently what, exactly, the true way was but not the existence itself of this global opposition. Today there is no agreement concerning the existence of a fundamental opposition of this sort, and as a result the link between philosophy and politics has become more complex and more obscure. But, fundamentally, it's the same task. Philosophy tries to clarify what I call the multiple situation of concrete politics and to legitimate the choices made in this space.

DEL LUCCHESE and SMITH: So you see your own philosophical interventions as taking place within this new situation that you describe as "more complex and more obscure" than the classical confrontation between two opposed political orientations?

BADIOU: Definitely. As a result, I see my philosophy as an inheritor of the great contestatory movements of the sixties. In fact, my philosophy emerged out of these movements. It is a philosophy of commitment, of engagement, with a certain fidelity to Sartre, if you like, or to Marxism.

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What counts is that the intellectual is engaged in politics and commits to or takes the side of the people and the workers. I move in that tradition. My philosophy tries to keep alive, as best it can (it is not always easy), the idea that there is a real alternative to the dominant politics and that we are not obliged to rally around the consensus that ultimately consists in the unity of global capitalism and the representative, democratic state. I would say, then, that I work under the condition of the situation of political actuality, with the goal of keeping alive, philosophically, the idea of the possibility or opening of a politics I would call a politics of emancipation—but that could also be called a radical or revolutionary politics, terms that today are debatable but that represent all the same a possibility other than the dominant one.

Del Lucchese and Smith: You mention Sartre in this context where the name Althusser might have been expected. What is your relation to the Althusserian tradition?

Badiou: The Althusserian tradition is extremely important, and I've devoted several texts to Althusser. If I mention Sartre it is simply because my philosophical youth was Sartrean before my encounter with Althusser. I think the Althusserian current was a particularly important one because it gave a new life and force to the link between philosophy and politics and in a less idealist mode—that is, a relation that no longer passed through the form of consciousness. In Sartre, of course, we still find the classical model of the intellectual understood primarily in terms of consciousness—an intellectual must make contact with the struggle and the workers' organizations, be they the unions or the communist parties. Althusser's greatness is found in the fact that he proposed a new schema in which the relation between philosophy and politics no longer passed through the psychology of the form of consciousness as it still did with Sartre. Althusser begins with the conviction that philosophy intervenes in the intellectual space of politics. When he proposes the formula "philosophy is the organization of class struggle in theory," what does he mean? That class struggle exists and that philosophy certainly didn't invent it. It exists and cuts across intellectual choices. Within the struggle between these choices, philosophy has a special role. It is to intervene and therefore to name, norm, classify, and finally choose in the field of intellectual or theoretical class struggle. Sartre and Althusser are very different, even opposed. But you can reconcile them on one point, namely, that philosophy is nothing if it is not linked to political commitment.

Del Lucchese and Smith: You have called yourself a "communist in the generic sense." But you have also constantly underlined the inability of

classical Marxist theory to produce a truly communist politics. How can "communism" today be the "common name" that opens the future?

BADIOU: I think it is necessary to distinguish Marxism from communism. I don't think it is absolutely necessary to keep the word *communism.* But I like this word a lot. I like it because it designates the general idea of a society and of a world in which the principle of equality is dominant, a world no longer structured by classical social relations—those of wealth, the division of labor, segregation, persecution by the state, sexual difference, and so on. That is, for me, what communism is. Communism in the generic sense simply means that everyone is equal to everyone else within the multiplicity and diversity of social functions. I am still absolutely convinced of the necessity of a radical critique of the division of labor. I believe this is what is rational and what is just. There is no reason why a street sweeper should be hounded by the state and poorly paid while intellectuals in their libraries are honored and at peace—and generally well paid. It's absurd. What I call communism is the end of this absurdity. It's the idea of a society that will find a principle of existence that would be entirely "subtracted" from the crushing weight of the relations of power and wealth and therefore another distribution of human activity. It's in this sense that I am a communist. And I struggle against all those who tell me this is impossible, that inequality is the nature of things and men as well. Sartre says somewhere that if this communist idea did not exist, humanity would not be much better than apes, not much better than a pile of ants.

Marxism, however, is something else—above all when it is a question of the Marxist practices of organization and concrete politics. These practices have given us astounding results, like the possibility of a victorious popular insurrection in 1917 or the possibility of an entirely new organization of workers and peasants in the form of the Chinese popular army. But if we take what Lenin called the "ABCs of Communism," namely, that the masses are divided into classes, the classes are represented by parties, and the parties directed by leaders—well, this is still a great idea, but today it is not useful at all. The organization of the masses is still the fundamental issue. But if you take the disorganized masses of global capitalism as a starting point, you cannot assume that the masses are divided into classes.

DEL LUCCHESE and SMITH: You argue for a "politics without party" and a new model of "organization." How do you distinguish them, and why? And what is the relation between politics and the state today?

BADIOU: The question of organization is still a question of fundamental importance, even for those who maintain that politics shouldn't be or-

ganized at all, as is the case for the great anarchist tradition. The name *organization* designates the collective dimension of political action. We know that organization can take the form of a movement, party, union, or what have you. It's a great tradition. Today, however, we're in a situation in which the long-dominant model of the class party, of the Leninist avant-garde party (in an aesthetic sense as well), is saturated. It's exhausted. My evaluation of the Leninist party is that it was a model whose function was to make a victorious insurrection possible. Lenin was obsessed by the bloody failures of the worker insurrections of the nineteenth century—especially the Paris Commune. This was the first experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to use Lenin's language, and it was a bloody failure. It failed because the movement was undisciplined, divided, and powerless. Lenin therefore advised that there be a high degree of centralization of worker power in a party that would be able to lead and organize the class. And he proved, on the question of organization at least, that it was a good idea. The revolution of 1917 was the first victorious insurrection in the history of humanity. This is why it has such an enormous historical importance—a step had been taken. After the many worker revolts of the previous century, all of which had been crushed with an extraordinary and bloody brutality, the Leninist model finally made possible a victorious revolution.

This model, however, didn't offer much more. With regard to the question of the state and power, of the duration of the power of the state, the model of the party-state ended up showing serious limitations, whether it be what the Trotskyists called the tendency to bureaucratization, what the anarchists identified with state terrorism, or the Maoists with revisionism. None of that is important here. It's clear that the party-state was a failure. From the point of view of taking power, the party was victorious. But not from the perspective of exercising power. So we are in a phase that is or should be beyond the question of the party as a model of organization. That model solved the problems of the nineteenth century, but we have to solve those of the twenty-first.

The form of organization today should be, in my opinion, less directly articulated with or by the question of the state and power. The model of the centralized party made possible a new form of power that was nothing less than the power of the party itself. We are now at what I call a distance from the state. This is first of all because the question of power is no longer immediate; nowhere does a "taking power" in the insurrectional sense seem possible today. We should search for a new form. My friends and I in *L'Organisation politique* call this a politics without party. This is a completely descriptive, negative, characteriza-

tion of the situation. It simply means that we do not want to enter into a form of organization that is entirely articulated with the state. Both the insurrectional form of the party and today's electoral form are articulations by state power. In both cases, the party is subordinated to the question of power and the state. I think we have to break with this subordination and, ultimately, engage political organization (whatever form it may take) in political processes that are independent of—"subtracted" from—the power of the state. Unlike the insurrectional form of the party, this politics of subtraction is no longer immediately destructive, antagonistic, or militarized.

I think the Leninist party was at bottom a military model. And for good reason. This is not a criticism. Lenin was obsessed with one question: how does one win the war? The question of discipline is therefore fundamental, just as it is for an army. You cannot win the war if people do whatever they like, if there is no unity and so on. The problem for emancipatory politics today, however, is to invent a nonmilitary model of discipline. We need a popular discipline. I would even say, as I have many times, that "those who have nothing have only their discipline." The poor, those with no financial or military means, those with no power—all they have is their discipline, their capacity to act together. This discipline is already a form of organization. The question is whether all discipline can be reduced to a military model, the model that dominated the first part of the twentieth century. How can we find, invent, exercise, or experiment with—today, after all, is an age of experimentation—a nonmilitary discipline?

Del Lucchese and Smith: Can you explain a bit more what you mean by "distance from the state"?

Badiou: "At a distance from the state" signifies that a politics is not structured or polarized along the agenda and timelines fixed by the state. Those dates, for example, when the state decides to call an election, or to intervene in some conflict, declare war on another state. Or when the state claims that an economic crisis makes this or that course of action impossible. These are all examples of what I call convocations by the state, where the state sets the agenda and controls the timing of political events. Distance from the state means you act with a sufficient independence from the state and what it deems to be important or not, who it decides should or should not be addressed. This distance protects political practices from being oriented, structured, and polarized by the state. This is why, moreover, I do not think it is particularly important to participate in the electoral process. It has nothing to do with what Lenin called left-wing communism. This process is simply not interesting.

First of all because it represents, for now at least, no veritable perspective on the future—there is no way, in this framework and by these means, that fundamental orientations can be modified. But, more importantly, this process organizes a reorientation toward the state and its decisions. It restricts political independence. Distance from the state therefore means that the political process and its decisions should be undertaken in full independence from the state and what it deems important, what it decides to impose as the framework of the political. I understand *state* here in the large sense, including the government, the media, and even those who make economic decisions. When you allow the political process to be dominated by the state, you've already lost the game because you've abdicated in advance your own political independence.

Del Lucchese and Smith: The electoral timeline seems, nevertheless, to play a certain role in your conception of politics. After all, you wrote a text specifically addressing the recent French referendum on the proposed European constitution.

Badiou: You're right. My position is not a dogmatic one. But, in general, the electoral horizon has no real interest. The example you mention is particularly striking. The No to the referendum, in fact, had no importance at all. The majority of the French declared themselves to be against the constitution. What happened? The government didn't fall, the president didn't resign, the socialists ended up nominating a candidate who was in favor of the Yes, and so on. Little by little, the influence of the French No vote, seemingly so spectacular, was next to nothing. And the reason is that the referendum was called for by the state; the voters were convoked by the state. The politicians on both the Left and the Right had already, and for various reasons, agreed on the Yes, despite the opposition of the majority (this opposition, in turn, had multiple reasons and brought together the extreme Left and the extreme Right). This is a good example, in fact, of what I would call not so much the inexistent but rather the inactive nature of this type of political intervention. That said, nonparticipation in elections is not an important political principle for me. More important is succeeding in creating an organization independent of the state.

Del Lucchese and Smith: In your recent book, *Le Siècle*, you seem to indicate the necessity to make a transition from what you call a politics of "destruction" (which you identify with "fraternal violence" and "terrorist nihilism") to a politics of "subtraction." Can you explain the nature of this distinction in your work?

Badiou: Here, again, the question is at once philosophical and political, strictly linked to the problem of critique and negation. From a philo-

sophical point of view, the symbol for all this was for a long time the relation between Hegel and Marx. For Marx, the dialectical conception of negation defined the relation between philosophy and politics—what used to be called the problem of dialectical materialism. Just as the party, which was once the victorious form of insurrection, is today outdated, so too is the dialectical theory of negation. It can no longer articulate a living link between philosophy and politics. In trying to clarify the political situation, we also need to search for a new formulation of the problem of critique and negation. I think that it is necessary, above all in the field of political action, to go beyond the concept of a negation taken solely in its destructive and properly negative aspect. Contrary to Hegel, for whom the negation of the negation produces a new affirmation, I think we must assert that today negativity, properly speaking, does not create anything new. It destroys the old, of course, but does not give rise to a new creation.

Del Lucchese and Smith: It seems, though, the "big Other" of Hegelian dialectics is Spinoza's ontology. How do you use Spinoza in the context of this critique of Hegelian dialectical logic?

Badiou: The distinction between negation and affirmation in my discourse can, in a certain sense, be traced back to Spinoza. The encounter with Spinoza takes place because of our contemporary need to produce a non-Hegelian category of negation. But my problem with Spinoza is with the ontological foundation of his thought, in which there is still an excessive potency of the One. He is an author whose magnificent propositions I often cite: for example, that a free man thinks of nothing less than death or that the wisest man is the one most recognizant of others. These are magnificent formulations. But at the ontological level—Spinoza's ontology is one of the great non-Hegelian constructions—I think the play between the multiple and the One leans a bit too much to the side of the One. The schema of the infinite plurality of attributes and the expressivity of the multiplicity of modes is, as far as I am concerned, not enough to account for contemporary multiplicity.

Del Lucchese and Smith: You've spoken about the philosophical implications of this distinction between destruction and subtraction. But how do these articulations function at the political level, in terms of political practice?

Badiou: On the political side, every revolutionary or emancipatory politics will have to be a certain adjustment or calibration between the properly negative part of negation and the part I call subtractive. A subtraction that is no longer dependent on the dominant laws of the political reality of a situation. It is irreducible, however, to the destruction of these laws

as well. A subtraction might well leave the laws of the situation intact. What subtraction does is bring about a point of autonomy. It's a negation, but it cannot be identified with the properly destructive part of negation. Throughout the Marxist and Leninist revolutionary tradition of the twentieth century, the prevailing idea was that destruction alone was capable of opening a new history, founding a new man, and so on. Mao himself said: "No construction without destruction." Our problem today is that the destructive part of negation is no longer, in and of itself, capable of producing the new. We need an originary subtraction capable of creating a new space of independence and autonomy from the dominant laws of the situation. A subtraction, therefore, is neither derived from nor a consequence of destruction as such. If we are to propose a new articulation between destruction and subtraction, we have to develop a new type of negation or critique, one that differs from the dialectical model of class struggle in its historical signification.

I think it is possible to observe important symptoms of this crisis of negation today. What I call a weak negation, the reduction of politics to democratic opposition, can be understood as a subtraction that has become so detached from destructive negation that it can no longer be distinguished from what Habermas calls consensus. On the other hand, we are also witnessing a desperate attempt to maintain destruction as a *pure* figure of creation and the new. This symptom often has a religious and nihilistic dimension. In fact, the internal disjunction of negation—the severing of destruction from subtraction—has resulted in a war that in the West is referred to as the war on terrorism and, on the side of the terrorists themselves, a war on the West, the infidels, and so on.

Del Lucchese and Smith: If today you disqualify any emancipatory dimension for a politics of destruction, what then is the place reserved for violence in politics?

Badiou: Here, again, we touch upon the link between philosophy and politics. I maintain that today it is a question of creating independent spaces in such a way that the question of violence takes a defensive turn. In this sense, all the possible forms and experiences become interesting. The first phase of the Zapatista movement is a concrete example of this defensive dimension of violence. But there are many other examples. Perhaps the first figure of this type is found in the initial sequence of the anti-Soviet movement in Poland, at the beginning of the 1980s. It was a workers' movement, and it was not, in fact, nonviolent; they used the strike, for example, as a weapon to pressure the government in negotiations. This was a situation in which the workers had complete control of the factories. This phase didn't last very long, in part due to external

factors, like the influence of the church and Jaruzelski's coup d'état. But this was a moment in which it was possible to glimpse, however briefly, a new dialectic between the means of actions that were classically understood to be negative—the strike, demonstrations, and so on—and something like the creation of a space of autonomy in the factories. The objective was not to take power, to replace an existing power, but to force the state to invent a new relation with the workers. However brief it may have been, this experiment was very interesting. Interesting because it did not follow the classical model of a brutal confrontation between the movement and the state. It was the organization of a differentiated space—immanent, but differentiated—in view of constituting a political site whose collective rule was one of political debate rather than subordination to the questions and agenda of state power.

It is impossible, then, to say that we can exclude all recourse to violence. Take, for example, the phenomenon of Hezbollah and the July 2006 war in Lebanon. The pretextual nature of Israel's aggression was clear; they set out to destroy an entire country because one soldier was taken prisoner. Without wanting a frontal war, Hezbollah was fortunately able to exercise an effective, consistent resistance that turned the Israeli aggression into a fiasco. What is striking about this movement, however, is its difficult relation with the state. Here, we come back to the question of organization. Hezbollah is competing for state power, while nevertheless not reproducing an insurrectional model. They remain in a state of semidissidence and conflictual alliance with the state. In any case, it is clear that every form of negation, including its most extreme, violent forms, can be mobilized in the defense or protection of a new singularity. It is necessary, then, to have a new articulation of the destructive and subtractive parts of negation so that destruction or violence appears in the form of a protective force, capable of defending something created through a movement of subtraction. This idea was probably already present in the figure of the revolutionary base during the Chinese revolution. Mao wrote things like this concerning the role of the army, even if he also developed a strategy that was still oriented toward the seizure of state power. But the relation between armed force—the force of destruction—and popular organization was already complex at this moment, where the role of the army was assigned political tasks in addition to its task of protecting the popular organization.

Del Lucchese and Smith: In your recent *Logiques des mondes*, you speak of political Islamism in terms that associate it with the category of fascism. This formulation is classical enough and can be found as often on the Right as on the Left. But is it possible to understand the successes of

Hezbollah and the Iraqi armed resistance in terms of a merely local dispute? In the case of Hezbollah in particular, is it possible to see a novel form of political organization taking place under the sign of—but not reducible to—a theological articulation of the political?

BADIOU: When I speak of Islamism, Islamist terrorism, fascist groups of a religious character, and so on, I am not referring to large popular organizations like Hezbollah or Hamas or even the many groups that support the current Iranian state. We are speaking of an extremely complex world, composed of figures that are at the same time national and popular. This is not the case with al-Qaeda, which is partially a production of the West itself. The groups I am referring to represent a pure and separate figure of destruction and practice a terrorism that is nonsituated, in which there is absolutely no possibility of glimpsing any constructive figure. The attacks of September 11, for example, were not accompanied by any political discourse addressed to the entire world or with any declaration of war; such declarations are the condition for politics. What we have instead is a violent destabilization whose concept is ungraspable. The only declarations that followed the event were completely rooted in a religious particularism that I read as exclusively negative. I won't have anything to do with this type of practice.

I don't confuse this phenomenon with the theological character of certain mass organizations like Hezbollah in the Middle East. But I do think that the fact that the organizations that are the most active and most rooted in the "people" are of this type is part of what I have been calling the contemporary crisis of negation. In this case, religion presents itself as the surrogate for something else that has not been found, something that should be universalizable, should be able to uproot itself from the particularity of the religious. It is for this reason, I think, that Marx still seems so current. Communism, according to Marx, is essentially internationalist in character. With religious dogmatism, in this case with Shia Islam, we are confronted with a collective messianism that I know and recognize is quite powerful but that is, finally, intrinsically limited. We need to consider these phenomena on their own terms but also understand their limitations. I think these movements represent a passage that bears witness, in a very vivid way, to the limits of our thought on the problems of the negative, critique, and political organization. We have to assume this passage, saluting its vigor (I am quite happy that the organized and popular force of Hezbollah was able to successfully block the Israeli aggression) as well as understanding that, if these "solutions" function within local contexts, there are fundamental limitations with respect to the possibility of universalizing these expe-

riences. This is difficult, but necessary. And I maintain that the current situation is a result of the interruption or breaking down of the revolutionary movement in general in the 1980s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the absence of any renewal of Marxism. The examples of popular organization we know today are, therefore, either extremely experimental and localized (like the Zapatista movement) or theologico-political (like Hezbollah). The contemporary diversity of orientations, with all their sectarianism and particularism, was already present in Marx's time as well, in the least revolutionary periods of the first half of the nineteenth century. And it is probably typical of periods in which it becomes necessary to open a new history, as is our own situation. All these experiences and experiments, then, including those that might seem a little strange or foreign, strong but limited as they are, must be taken into consideration.

Del Lucchese and Smith: Unlike many of your colleagues, you felt it necessary to make an intervention in *Le Monde* on the subject of the revolt of the French *banlieues*. Your verdict: "You have the riots you deserve." What, today, on the eve of the presidential election, is the "postcolonial" situation of the French *banlieues*? More generally, how do you see the relationship between politics and violence in the "*banlieue-monde*"—what Mike Davis has recently called a "planet of slums"—that is in the process of globalizing itself in the twenty-first century?

Badiou: Here we encounter a problem that we might call, in the Leninist tradition, the problem of the masses. That is, how can the political come to really organize or be present among the great masses of the planet? The fundamental problem is how we might enter into relations with this gigantic mass, with a population that is disorganized and chaotic, poor and deprived of everything, and often prey to criminal organizations, religious messianisms, and unchecked destructive violence. This is the calling and task of every contemporary emancipatory politics. After all, we are speaking of billions of people; address this problem or our horizon will remain too narrow. In the nineteenth century, the problem was the arrival of the new proletarian masses on the political scene; in the twentieth century, it was the political emancipation of colonized peoples. In the first case we have the workers' movement, the Paris Commune, and, finally, the revolution of 1917; in the second, the wars of national liberation, Algeria, Vietnam, and the Chinese popular war. But today we can no longer speak either of the working masses, forged in the discipline of the factory, or of the peasant masses, localized and organized on the basis of agrarian relations. The masses we speak of are profoundly atomized by capitalism. They are, for the most part, deliv-

ered over to conditions of existence that are precarious and chaotic. They are a collective figure that still has no name. The category of the subproletariat doesn't work in this case, since that category still presupposes the existence of an organized proletariat—which, in this case, does not exist. These masses are not organized according to the traditional categories of class, and so for the moment they are more or less entirely abandoned to the nihilism of capitalism.

Here the link with the French *banlieues* becomes clear. The distinction between the Third World and the developed countries is increasingly less important. We have our Third World within the developed states. This is why the so-called question of immigration has become so important for us. The United States, for example, this nation of immigrants, is today constructing a wall and reinforcing its border security system against immigration, an action largely agreed upon by the Democrats—not necessarily concerning the wall but the need for a substantial increase in the border patrol. In France, this rhetoric has poisoned political life for some time now. It feeds the extreme Right, but, ultimately, the Left always aligns itself with this rhetoric. It's a very interesting phenomenon because it shows that these destructured masses, poor and deprived of everything, situated in a nonproletarianized urban environment, constitute one of the principal horizons of the politics to come. These masses, therefore, are an important factor in the phenomenon of globalization. The true globalization, today, would be found in the organization of these masses—on a worldwide scale, if possible—whose conditions of existence are essentially the same. Whoever lives in the *banlieues* of Bamako or Shanghai is not essentially different from someone who lives in the *banlieues* of Paris or the ghettos of Chicago. They might be poorer and in worse conditions, but they are not essentially different. Their political existence is characterized by a distance from the state—from the state and its clients, the dominant classes but also the middle classes, all of whom strive to maintain this distance. On this political problem, I have only fragmentary ideas. It's a question that is as difficult as the problem of organizing workers in the nineteenth century. I am convinced it is the fundamental problem today.

There have been important political experiments in this field—with the *sans-papiers* in France, for example. But this is only one part of a problem that is extremely vast. We have no relations with the young people in revolt in the *banlieues*. It is once again a dimension of the crisis of negation. We should absolutely be able to think a subtractive form, however minimal, for this type of population. The *sans-papiers*, for example, should have some form of minimal workers' organization, since

they often work in restaurants or in construction. This is why it is possible to make some progress in their struggle. Another path that is open and important is the problem of gender, with the women of the *banlieues*, who have very specific responsibilities in the social structures of these neighborhoods. Some progress has been made there. But for the most part the problem is still extremely difficult. The efforts of the "*altermondialiste*" movement, for example, have been undertaken on an extremely narrow social base; they never touched upon the broad, popular masses of the entire world. It is, really, a petit-bourgeois movement, even if I salute them in their activity. But its organizational capacity at the most fundamental level of the global situation is extremely limited.

Del Lucchese and Smith: Staying with the idea of subtraction and the global character of the situation it represents, is it possible to conceive of the gesture of migration itself as a subtractive or political one, insofar as it implies putting one's own life at risk in order to imagine and construct a new possibility of life?

Badiou: Yes, without a doubt a subtractive gesture. But I would define it as prepolitical. This is made clear by the difficulty immigrants have articulating a political voice in the countries to which they immigrate. The gesture no doubt implies a predisposition to politics; it has elements of risk, displacement, and departure. It's a gesture similar to that of the workers of the twentieth century who came to the North and its factories from the countryside, though today it is from Africa rather than the south of Italy. It is, therefore, a gesture of subtraction from conditions of poverty, local but diffused on a planetary scale. Those who take this kind of risk can be politicized. What's different and even more complicated is the case of the young people who are born in the country their parents immigrated to, for example in France. They have a divided subjectivity. On the one hand, these people are excluded from political life. But, on the other hand, they themselves have not made this gesture, with all the risks it implies. A part of the population is ready to do what it takes to remain there, even if this means exposing themselves to submission, corruption, and so on. The revolts of November 2005, therefore, are very significant, but nothing came from them. They remain a bitter and negative experience, an experience of abandon; the young people of the *banlieues* were left to themselves, with no opening to anyone else. This cannot be political. To return to Spinoza, the situation is no doubt one in which the masses have sunken into what he calls sadness, in which the negative aspect prevails. The political, instead, is always a trajectory toward someone different. And it is an essential condition. In both directions at once. After May '68, I myself set out to engage workers in

an exchange that required both of us to assume this type of trajectory toward someone else. This is missing with the youths of the *banlieues,* shut up in a collective isolation. Things will probably change, but for the moment this is the reason why nothing came of these revolts. And, for the moment, all they can do is revolt. The repetition of these revolts—as was the case in the large cities of the U.S. in the 1960s—cannot be creative of any politics.

DEL LUCCHESE and SMITH: You mentioned the *banlieues* of Bamako, Shanghai, and Paris. But there are two other *banlieues* that, for various reasons and with specific characteristics, are today in flames: Hezbollah's southern suburbs of Beirut and the Sadr movement's in east Baghdad. In both cases, we find a massive Shiite population, often having arrived through a process of internal migration from the south of Lebanon or Iraq, that is experimenting with new forms of social and political organization as well as a specifically armed dimension. Is it possible to include these two suburbs in the global phenomenon you've been discussing?

BADIOU: Absolutely. It's even possible to say that the young people living in these *banlieues* have worked out a solution for themselves. But these are not young people that have been abandoned to themselves. They have leaders. And they have found, in a certain sense, one form of solution to the problems we have been discussing, namely, how can the young and the poor, those who live in the suburbs and ghettos of large cities, become politically organized? To do that, they had to open a dialogue and accept the organization of certain intellectuals, certain "wise" men; the Shiite leaders, after all, are a bit like philosophers who have become activists. But there is an internal limitation to these movements, bound as they are to religious particularity. It is not even a matter of religion in general, since Robespierre, after all, was the proponent of an abstract god. The problem is particularity. To return to your question, then, I would say that across the globe we can recognize a common situation in which gigantic masses of humans are abandoned to the *banlieues* and ghettos of large cities, and where the old principles of proletarian organization are no longer effective. All the experiments must be examined close-up, including those practiced by Hezbollah in the south of Beirut or by Moktada al-Sadr in east Baghdad. The problem, in each case, is this: what will their relation to the state be? We don't yet know what decisions they will make.

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