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Generic universalism in world politics: beyond international anarchy and the world state

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Even though the notion of 'world politics' has become increasingly widespread in the discipline of International Relations, its deployment in the disciplinary discourse has been highly problematic. This article argues that the impasse of the discourse on world politics is owing to its commitment to a political ontology of identitarian pluralism, most forcefully articulated in the work of Carl Schmitt, which limits the political imagination to the binary opposition of the preservation of international anarchy and its hierarchical domestication in the world state. As long as politics is cast in identitarian terms, it is impossible to conceive of the universal dimension of political praxis other than in terms of the universalization of some particular content, i.e. as a hegemonic project. We shall then outline the pathway towards a non-identitarian understanding of world politics through an engagement with the universalist themes in the philosophy of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben. We shall reconstitute the authors' alternative to identity politics that rehabilitates the notion of universalism from 'postmodern' criticism and reconstructs the category of the universal in non-identitarian or generic terms of indiscernibility and 'whatever being'. The paper concludes with a discussion of the practical dimension of generic world politics as a radically egalitarian process of the emergence of the world community of 'whatever singularities'.

Keywords: universalism; anarchy; sovereignty; Schmitt; Agamben; Badiou

Introduction

Even though the notion of 'world politics' has become increasingly widespread in the discipline of International Relations (IR) and frequently challenging 'International Relations' as a more appropriate name of the discipline, the consequences of deploying this phrase have arguably not been fully illuminated (see Walker, 1995). It is evident that, by semantic logic, a

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world politics must imply the transcendence of the 'international', defined in terms of the anarchic pluralism of particularistic political entities, in favour of some form of political universality, yet how this transcendence is to be thought remains rather obscure. Indeed, both the desire for such transcendence and its ultimate frustration have characterized the discipline since its very emergence, which is reflected in the perpetual replay of the original idealist–realist 'debate' throughout the history of IR theory, whereby every affirmation of the possibility of the transcendence of international anarchy through various designs for a universal polity is necessarily countered by the denial of such a possibility in various versions of the realist argument (see Walker, 1993; Guzzini, 2004). IR theory is thus a discourse driven by the frustrated desire for the transcendence of its object and only retains its disciplinary identity insofar as this desire remains frustrated (see Bartelson, 2001: 182–188).

This frustration is manifested in a persistent hold of the pluralistic and anarchic structure of the international realm on our political imagination, so that all politics that we can conceive of, is in a sense, 'international politics', i.e. pluralistic interaction between particularistic entities (Bartelson, 1998: 325–326). Given this ontological presupposition, the political domain may be structured either *anarchically*, with no overarching authority over these particularistic entities, or *hierarchically*, through the establishment of some universal structure of authority. In the former case, the possibility of a universalist politics is excluded from the outset, the only universality admissible in such a structure being that of anarchy itself. In the latter case, the immutability of anarchy is rejected in favour of the possibility of a universal political community that is to be brought about by 'domesticating' the international and 'hierarchizing' anarchy, moving from a pluralistic coexistence of particular identities to their ordered subsumption under an overarching structure of authority. Yet, this approach, which continues to conceive of politics in terms of relations between particular identities and which we shall therefore term 'identitarian universalism', merely replicates on the *worldwide* scale the structure of authority that previously characterized particular political entities existing *in* the world. Insofar as attempts to domesticate the international remain grounded in the pluralistic political ontology that founds it, they easily lend themselves to criticism as either entirely unrealizable in practice or realizable only in the form of violent world domination (see Morgenthau, 1955: 468–469; Waltz, 1979: 208). In this manner, the 'ritual of affirmation and denial' (Walker, 1993: 182) of world politics continues in a predictable manner, the object of discourse becoming ever more elusive and ineffable.

It is the contention of this article that this impasse is owing to the commitment of the discourse on world politics to a political ontology of

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identitarian pluralism, which limits the political imagination to the binary opposition of the preservation of international anarchy and its hierarchical domestication in a variably conceived world state. Since the 1980s 'identity politics' has been a highly influential field of study in IR and political science, marking the move beyond both liberal individualism and Marxist class analysis towards the understanding of politics in terms of the complex interaction between plural particularistic identities, perpetually reconstructed in the struggles for their recognition, inclusion or legitimization. While this discourse of identity politics has tended to focus on minority identities of various types in their confrontation with existing hegemonic orders, our application of identitarian pluralism as an ontological principle rather than an ontic characteristic of contemporary societies, seeks to highlight the more general significance of the understanding of politics as a relation between particular identities that the specific empirical focus of 'identity-political' studies frequently obscures. As we shall demonstrate in this article, the entire discourse on world politics in IR theory is ontologically 'identity-political', both when it denies the possibility of transcending the anarchic pluralism of the international realm (identitarian particularism) and when it ventures to do so by reconstructing the international in accordance with the hierarchical structure of domestic politics (identitarian universalism).

As long as politics is confined within this dualism, it is impossible to conceive of political universality other than in terms of the *universalization* of some particular content, i.e. as a hegemonic project. Any advance in conceptualizing world politics in non-hegemonic terms must therefore necessarily traverse the stage of overcoming this commitment to the identity-political ontology. Thus, the impasse of the discourse on world politics has less to do with the affirmation of universalism *per se*, which is evidently a precondition of any meaningful statement on the subject, than with a specific variant of universalism, which remains grounded in the 'international' pluralistic ontology and therefore does not truly break with the particularism it claims to transcend. While at first glance the valorization of international anarchy and the attempt at its domestication in a world state appear to be diametrically opposed positions, they both depart from the conception of politics as a relation between particular identities and only diverge on the *form* this relation must take (anarchic pluralism vs. hierarchical order).

The argument of this article is structured in two parts. In the first part we shall elaborate the problem of identitarian universalism by re-engaging with Carl Schmitt's seminal critique of 'world unity', which remains one of the most forceful denials of the possibility of a genuine political universalism and, by implication, of world politics. We shall argue that it is Schmitt's existential ontology of identitarian pluralism, which grounds the more substantive claims of his political thought, that renders the

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particularistic antagonism of identity politics immutable. As long as politics continues to be approached in identitarian terms, universalism is only conceivable in terms of a hegemonic project of the universalization of a particular identity and world politics is necessarily equivalent to global domination. Thus, the proper target of Schmitt's criticism is not universalism as such but rather the enfolding of universalist claims within the identitarian structure of the political, which Schmitt considers both logically paradoxical and politically dangerous.

We shall then proceed to a critical engagement with Alexander Wendt's thesis on the inevitability of the world state that is arguably the most powerful contemporary attempt to transcend the international through the domestication of anarchy. We shall demonstrate that Wendt's attempt to subsume the antagonistic pluralism of the international under the hierarchical structure of the world state suffers from the inherently paradoxical character of any identitarian universalism, which shares the ontological terrain with the very particularism it attempts to confront. Only by abandoning the identitarian political ontology as such may the binary conceptual logic of anarchic particularism vs. hegemonic domestication of the international be overcome, opening the possibility of a properly universalist world politics.

In the second part of the article, we shall outline the pathway towards a non-identitarian understanding of world politics through an engagement with the universalist themes in the philosophies of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben. We shall reconstitute the authors' alternative to identity politics that rehabilitates the notion of universalism from 'postmodern' criticism and reconstructs the category of the universal in terms of indiscernibility and 'whatever being'. We shall argue that due to its disposition of 'indifference to difference' this mode of universalism that we shall term 'generic', provides the most coherent attempt so far to overcome Schmitt's political ontology and rethink world politics as no longer a hegemonic project of hierarchical domestication but rather an egalitarian process of the emergence of a global non-exclusive community of 'whatever singularities'. In the conclusion, we shall address the practical dimension of generic world politics through a reading of the anti-war 'Not in our name' movement as a fragment of this infinite process.

Difference and death: Schmitt's existential ontology and the impasse of identitarian universalism

The dangerous other and the political pluriverse

Carl Schmitt's thought is presently undergoing a major renaissance in political philosophy and IR theory, yet his influence on contemporary

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political philosophy has arguably been far wider than is generally assumed (see McCormick, 1997; Cristi, 1998; Scheuerman, 1999; Ojakangas, 2004; Odysseos and Petito, 2007). While the more substantive claims of Schmitt's theory, particularly his post-World War II work on 'concrete-order thinking', have only a limited resonance in today's discussions, the political ontology outlined in the Weimar-period work exerts a profound influence on late-modern political imagination, even if and especially when it is unacknowledged or explicitly denied. Indeed, the very persistence of the criticism of Schmitt's concept of the political testifies to its ultimate frustration – if, after decades of critical engagement that all too often collapsed into somewhat perverse *exercises* in the friend–enemy distinction, Schmitt's concept remains the point, from which we must depart (both literally and figuratively) in rethinking the political, it follows that as of this moment Schmitt's conceptual universe has not-yet been overcome.

This is all the more quaint, as there is practically not a single approach in contemporary political theory that would describe itself as 'Schmittian' without numerous caveats.[1] It is as if Schmitt's understanding of politics in terms of the friend–enemy distinction that renders hollow any design of a universal political community functions as a *negative foundation* of the current discourse on the political, i.e. something that must be presupposed and traversed as a precondition of the very act of its transcendence, which ironically appears to lead us nowhere other than back to Schmitt. What accounts for the impasse of the attempts to overcome Schmitt's logic of the political? The simplest answer is that Schmitt's logic is purely semantic and hence its continuing grip on all attempts to transcend has nothing to do with substantive differences in understanding politics. Indeed, the binary structure of Schmitt's concept of the political ensures that any positive thesis on the essence of the political, including its universalist formulations, would invite its own negation as a logical correlate in a 'friend–enemy distinction'. As a result, at the end of all conceptual endeavors of articulating an alternative to Schmitt, it is perfectly plausible to ask Schmitt's critics: 'What's *your* friend–enemy distinction?' and, if no answer is forthcoming, to answer the question in their stead. Any positive answer to the question of what politics is, could therefore be recuperated by the Schmittian logic that posits the antithesis *as such* as the formal criterion of the political. The immutability of the concept of the political would then be merely an effect of an intellectual sleight-of-hand and should not be taken as a genuine problem.

[1] See Scheuerman (1999) for a detailed analysis of the profound influence of Schmitt's thought on such seminal 20th century thinkers as Joseph Schumpeter, Friedrich von Hayek, and Hans Morgenthau, whom most of us would evidently hesitate to call 'Schmittians'.

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Nonetheless, such a resolution would be far too facile. Schmitt's concept of the political is, for all its formal emptiness, not merely a logical construction. Behind the apparent simplicity of the friend–enemy distinction lies a fascinating, if austere, existential ontology that is only rarely given justice in the readings of Schmitt (see Rasch, 2000; Ojakangas, 2004; Prozorov, 2005; Sims, 2005). This political ontology is capable of accommodating a variety of ontic modes of political praxis, including those that are manifestly inconsistent with Schmitt's own normative orientation and aim to function as alternatives to 'Schmittian' politics, e.g. Chantal Mouffe's 'agonistic pluralism' (1999, 2000), Slavoj Zizek's reaffirmation of revolutionary class struggle (1999, 2006) and Jacques Derrida's ethics of deconstructed decisionism (1995, 1996).[2]

What makes this ontology both capable of harboring most diverse forms of politics and permanently subject to attempts at its transcendence, is nothing other than the primacy it grants to *difference* and the consequent *a priori* construction of political existence in terms of *identitarian pluralism*. Schmitt's vision of the human condition is characterized by an irreducible presence of radical alterity, which at worst posits the possibility of violent death in a frontal confrontation with the enemy and at best creates possibilities of successful delimitation between Self and Other in a minimally ordered 'anarchic' setting that ensures the preservation of pluralism and intersubjective equality. The latter option, which defines Mouffe's theoretical project of agonistic pluralism as an alternative both to the liberal depoliticization and to the extremism of 'Schmittian' politics, is in fact already present in Schmitt's own theory as a special case of the 'bracketing' of war in the Westphalian system of the *Jus Publicum Europeaum* (Schmitt, 2003). Contrary to Mouffe's reconstruction of these possibilities as a binary opposition between two different *concepts* of the political, these two options rather function as limit points in the *continuum* that defines the possibilities of political praxis. Schmitt's political ontology is capable of accommodating both 'antagonistic' and 'agonistic' outcomes but forecloses any option *beyond* this continuum.

It is from this perspective that we must revisit the notion of the 'most extreme possibility' of violent death that, in Jacques Derrida's view, forms the true foundation of Schmitt's political ontology, beyond any determinate figure of the enemy (Derrida, 1996: 114–136, see also Sims, 2005). The very question of enmity emerges in Schmitt's work because of what he terms the 'most extreme possibility' (Schmitt, 1976: 38) or the 'real

[2] For the discussion of Mouffe's and Zizek's criticisms of Schmitt see Prozorov, (2006a) and for a detailed analysis of the relation between Derrida's ethics and Schmitt's concept of the political Prozorov (2007: Ch. 4).

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possibility of physical killing' (Schmitt, 1976: 27–28, 33–35) that arises in every encounter with the Other, whose singularity cannot be subsumed under the immanence of the Same. It is the very *existence* of radical alterity in its brute facticity that poses an ever-present *possibility* of killing or being killed, which in turn calls for a decision, in each concrete sense, on whether the Other is the enemy: 'it is sufficient for his [enemy's] nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible' (Schmitt, 1976: 27). Thus, it is precisely because difference is ontologically ineradicable that the possibility of violent death arises, insofar as, *contra* Mouffe, no common symbolic framework that would translate antagonism into agonism could be presupposed to be given at the outset. From this perspective, the Schmittian constellation of exception, decision, and enmity has little to do with any anthropological or theological account of 'human nature' but rather arises out of a *vigilant receptivity to the existence of the Other:* 'man' is neither good nor evil but simply dangerous because of being different (Schmitt, 1976: 58–66; Strauss, 1976: 93–98). Ontological alterity, the most elementary fact of human existence, itself generates the logic of the political before and beyond any positive structuration of the political space.

In its prioritization of alterity, Schmitt's ontology ironically resonates with a thinker whom Derrida (1999) labeled the 'absolute adversary' of Schmitt, Emmanuel Levinas. Indeed, Mika Ojakangas's summary of Schmitt's phenomenology of the encounter with the other is almost identical to Levinas's famous description in *Totality and Infinity* (1969: 198–236): 'As a concrete force, the enemy precedes reflection. It perturbs the world of the reflecting self – its otherness and strangeness calls the self into question. The force of the enemy disrupts my identity and no amount of reflection can reduce its difference into an immanence of the same' (Ojakangas, 2004: 153). Of course, Schmitt draws entirely different conclusions from this scene of encounter than does Levinas, the most important difference being his insistence on enmity as a relationship of fundamental *equality*. While for Levinas and the later Derrida (1995, 2001) the asymmetrical relation, whereby the Other calls the Self in question, is a prerequisite for the assumption of a genuinely ethical responsibility, for Schmitt any asymmetry, privileging *either* the Self or the Other, paves the way for the absolutization of enmity and the actualization of the 'most extreme possibility'. For Schmitt, being called in question by the Other is neither an ethical nor an aesthetic, but simply a terrifying experience of the possibility of violent death. Nonetheless, despite this divergence, the two 'absolute adversaries' share the same ontological scene, the scene that is even more primal than the one in which the Hegelian

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Master–Slave dialectic unfolds (cf. Kojève, 1969: 31–70). Preceding the 'risk of death' taken by the future Master and its evasion by the future Slave, there is simply the brute fact of the proximity of the other that *calls for some kind of decision*. We may immediately note that this formulation recalls the Levinasian notion of 'the Other's decision in me', routinely advanced as an alternative against Schmitt's 'sovereign' decision (Derrida, 1995: 71, 1996: 68–69, 1999). Yet, are these notions all that different, given that the sovereign subject is paradoxically always *forced* to decide, given the anterior existence of the Other? We may then conclude that despite evident ethico-political differences, on the ontological plane, where no ethics or politics is yet formulated, the philosophies of Schmitt and Levinas share the same conditions of possibility.

From this perspective, Schmitt's famous characterization of the ontic sphere of the political as a *pluriverse* (Schmitt, 1976: 52–59) is merely a logical consequence of casting the originary experience of encountering alterity in egalitarian terms. Given the impossibility of subsuming the brute fact of alterity under any horizon of sameness, politics is reconfigured as a site of identitarian pluralism, in which one's drive for self-determination is always already put in question by the very same drive on the part of the Other. For Schmitt, *all* politics is *identity politics*, in which particular differences struggle for recognition of their positive predicates, organize themselves into groups, defined by these predicates, and face potential antagonists, organized in similarly particularistic ways. As we have argued above, nothing prevents this struggle from unfolding in either a violently antagonistic or a mitigated agonistic mode. What *is* foreclosed in Schmitt's logic is the disappearance of the 'most extreme possibility' *qua* possibility, i.e. the formation of a political entity, in which the problem of difference would not arise.

Thus, the central feature of Schmitt's political ontology is not enmity *per se* but rather *identitarian pluralism*, defined by the existence of particularistic and thus exclusive subject-positions, from which there necessarily follows the ever-present possibility of violent conflict (Schmitt, 1976: 27–29; cf. Derrida, 1996: 245–248). The conflictual potential of Schmitt's theory arises out of this constellation, in which the brute fact of alterity becomes the sole criterion of organized collective action, so that any *being-with-others* is always already *being-against*. What is tragic in Schmitt's vision of the political is not that people might dislike each other for whatever reason, but that this dislike functions as a foundation for political organization that recasts existential *alterity* (the most brute and trivial fact of all) as an existential *threat*, translating the ontological dangerousness of (wo)man into ontic configurations of antagonistic groups of (wo)men that pose a danger to each other's existence. What is

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properly tragic is that people can kill or be killed over differences, which are as trivial as they are irresolvable.

Against world unity: why a world state is terrifying

It is easy to see that this political ontology grounds the conceptual logic of anarchy/hierarchy that, as we have argued, limits the possibilities of conceptualizing world politics to the choice between the affirmation of particularism and the hegemonic domestication of the international. It is in this context that we shall now revisit Schmitt's own critique of political universalism in order to demonstrate that his famous argument about 'world unity' as neither possible nor desirable, is only valid for an identitarian form of universalism that shares the basic features of Schmitt's political ontology. It is thus the abandonment of this ontology as such, i.e. overcoming *both* Schmitt and his identitarian-universalist critics, that paves the way towards a proper universalism that is irreducible to a hegemonic project of the universalization of the particular.

In recent political theory, the most sophisticated and provocative attempt to overcome Schmitt's pluralistic ontology has been made by Alexander Wendt (2003). Wendt's argument on the inevitability of the world state makes implicit recourse to the Hegelo-Kojèvian thought of the end of history in his characterization of the world state not only in Weberian but also in Hegelian terms as conditioned by the global recognition of all particular differences and their incorporation into a 'universal homogeneous state', universal in the sense of non-expandability and homogeneous in the sense of non-transformability (see Kojève, 1969: 92–95). Departing from the quasi-Hobbesian construction of the international domain in terms of 'simple difference' and universal enmity, Wendt offers a teleological vision of the transcendence of the pluralistic political ontology in five stages, marked by the progressive transfer of the monopoly on legitimate violence to the supranational authority, and the continuous struggle of individuals and groups for universal recognition.[3] At the final stage, as sovereignty is transferred from individual states to

[3] For a more detailed discussion of Wendt's thesis see Prozorov (2006b: Ch. 6). Wendt's account of the Hegelian state highlights the requirement for its universality, i.e. its embrace of the entire human race, but does not address the requirement of homogeneity, i.e. the dialectical overcoming of all particular differences of, e.g. class, race, etc. Instead, Wendt asserts the possibility of maintaining pluralism and heterogeneity in the world state by extending universal recognition from individuals to groups (see Wendt, 2003: 510–516). This move is nonetheless problematic from a Hegelian perspective, since it is precisely the particularity of group identities that must be overcome to make possible the universal recognition of men as Individuals, and no longer representatives of given particularistic 'species' (families, races, classes) (cf. Kojève, 1969: 236–238).

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the global system of collective security, which thereby ceases to be an intersubjective forum and becomes a supreme subject of politics in its own right, the anarchic domain of the international is allegedly transcended, bringing to an end politics and history as we know them (Wendt, 2003: 527–528). Wendt's reasoning has arguably been anticipated by Schmitt, in whose argument all forms of cosmopolitanism venture to efface the pluralistic condition of the international through a dual gesture of the institution of a *universal structure of authority* (the Weberian state, in Wendt's terms) and the *inclusion* of all particular differences into the positive order, guaranteed by this structure (the Hegelian state of universal recognition) (Schmitt, 1999: 201). From a Schmittian perspective, both these moves are extremely dangerous, insofar as they attempt to dispense with the ontic structure of international anarchy while doing nothing to transform the pluralistic political ontology that underlies it.

In the pluriversal structure of international anarchy, the ontological principle of equality between Self and Other is satisfied by precluding the emergence of a global hierarchy, whereby a particular set of identitarian predicates lays a claim to represent humanity at large. While this pluralism does nothing to eliminate the 'most extreme possibility' of violent conflict, it may at least be expected to suspend its actualization by delegitimizing from the outset any subjection of the Other to the universalized identity of the Self. In contrast, Schmitt approaches the possibility of world unification with an almost existential trepidation: 'What would be terrifying is a world in which there no longer existed an exterior but only a homeland, no longer a space for measuring and testing one's strength freely?' (Schmitt, 1988: 243). Why is a world state, in which there is logically 'only a homeland', posited as outright *terrifying*, rather than merely impossible, undesirable or inefficient? Against a facile understanding of Schmitt as a preacher of pure belligerence, who would perversely find the end of violence in a global homeland terrifying, the attention to Schmitt's existential ontology leads us to a different answer. Any monistic resolution to the problem of difference does nothing other than lead to the actualization of the 'most extreme possibility' through either the annihilation of the Other or its violent resistance.

The effacement of ontological pluralism in the subsumption of alterity under the 'universal homeland' must entail the suppression of the concrete difference of the Other through the establishment of a global autocracy: 'The day world politics comes to the earth, it will be transformed into a world police power' (Schmitt, 1987: 80). In terms of Wendt's distinction, Schmitt recognizes the possibility of the institution of the Weberian world state with a caveat that this entity could 'only loosely' be called a state (Schmitt, 1976: 57), but denies any possibility of its attainment of the

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Hegelian universal homogeneity in a non-violent manner or, more precisely, approaches, in the manner that is in fact faithfully Hegelian, any such attainment as *extremely* violent.[4] We need only recall the way the historical struggle for recognition in the Hegelian dialectic *ends*: 'In truth, only the Slave 'overcomes' his 'nature' and finally becomes Citizen. The Master does not change: he dies rather than cease to be Master. The final fight, which transforms the Slave into Citizen, overcomes Mastery in a *non-dialectical* fashion: the Master is simply killed and he dies as Master' (Kojève, 1969: 225, note 22, Emphasis original). The promise of reciprocal recognition in the universal homogeneous state at the end of history manifestly excludes, in the most radical sense of physical annihilation, at least one identity, that of the Master, and it is this annihilation that simultaneously grounds the universality of the state of the former slaves as its constitutive exception and obstructs this very universality by rendering it dependent on the prior operation of violent exclusion. When this logic is transferred from the scene of the Master–Slave dialectic to the anarchic international pluriverse, the problem of the constitutive exception is only exacerbated, insofar as the sheer plurality of the struggles for recognition in global politics complicates the unequivocal distribution of the roles of Master and Slave, leaving the question of who *exactly* gets to be recognized and who gets to die forever open.

Thus, Schmitt forcefully asserts the impossibility of arriving at a genuinely universal social order through the institution of a global structure of authority. Instead, insofar as it is impossible to eradicate difference, its necessarily violent subsumption under the new unity necessarily brings in the question of resistance to it. Thus, the establishment of a 'domesticated' world does nothing to diminish the danger of the advent of the other, but, on the contrary, incorporates radical alterity *within* one's 'homeland' so that the ever-present possibility of violent death can no longer even be externalized to the domain of the international. In his argument for the world state, Wendt appears to recognize this possibility, claiming that 'a world state would differ from anarchy in that it would constitute such disruptions as crime, not as politics or history. The possibility of crime may always be with us, but it does not constitute a stable alternative to a world state' (Wendt, 2003: 528). However, the actual choice here is not between the world state and crime but between casting resistance as *legitimate* under

[4] See e.g. Kojève (1969: 225–231, 248), footnote 34 for a detailed analysis of the role of violence in the Hegelian dialectic. The impossibility of a pacific reconciliation of differences has been recognized by Hegel (1979: 355–363) in his insistence on the revolutionary character of the historical dialectic of the real and his conjunction of 'absolute freedom' attained in the struggle for recognition with the terroristic 'fury of destruction' (cf. Badiou, 2007b: 51–54).

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the pluriversal structure of anarchy or *criminal* under the hierarchical structure of the universal homogeneous state, which is by definition non-transformable and free from strife. If resistance to hegemony, which has indeed defined politics and history as we know them, is recast as crime, then, quite irrespective of its internal constitution, Wendt's world state appears indistinct from Schmitt's 'world police power', which 'simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed. In other words, he is an enemy who no longer must be compelled to retreat into his borders only' (Schmitt, 1976: 36). Ironically, the drive of the world-statist universalism towards the transcendence of the logic of the political brings about nothing other than its intensification, i.e. the 'absolute' or 'last' war of humanity that, akin to the Napoleonic wars in Hegel's lifetime, claims to bring history and politics to an end in an 'unusually intense' exercise of violence.

Yet, why cannot the unification of humanity under the world state be attained in a non-violent manner, as Wendt's teleology suggests? What makes Wendt's version of universalism problematic in the context of Schmitt's ontology is the *move* from particularistic pluralism to the universal structure of authority (Wendt's fifth stage), which cannot be accounted for other than in particularistic terms (see Prozorov, 2006b: 148–149). Just as Schmitt's affirmation of enmity as a political criterion is derivative from a more fundamental ontological setting, the violent character of 'world-statist' universalism arises out of its commitment to the ontology of identitarian pluralism, which it attempts to confront at the ontic level. Simply put, the reason why Wendt's argument lends itself to an easy Schmittian critique is that it unfolds in the very same ontological space of identity politics as Schmitt's realism.

While the incommensurability of Schmitt's and Wendt's normative standpoints is self-evident, the ontological distance between their arguments should not be overestimated, insofar both authors ground their politics in the ontology of pluralistic particularism. While Schmitt affirms a pluralistic international politics on the ontic level that corresponds to this ontological presupposition, Wendt opts for an ontic alternative to anarchy that ontologically remains trapped in particularism, as long as it endows the world state with substantive predicates of any kind. As 'domesticated' anarchy, the world state must necessarily be characterized by some positive predicates of its own, otherwise it would be indistinguishable from a well-managed anarchy, marked by the coexistence of particularities, none of which attest to the universal status. Whatever these predicates might be, they are necessary for the 'system [to] itself become an "individual"' (Wendt, 2003: 525). Since individuality is only

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conceivable by differentiation from others, these positive predicates are logically *particular* in origin, yet the formation of the world state involves their ascent to the universal status. Yet, what are the grounds for legitimizing the universalization of a manifestly particularistic identity? After all, no design of world unity has ever articulated a preference for the universalization of *any* type of social order whatsoever. Indeed, as Schmitt has wryly remarked, 'the Kingdom of Satan is also a unity' (Schmitt cited in Ojakangas, 2004: 80, see also Kervegan, 1999: 62–63). The individuality of the world state can only be *universalized* through the operation of hegemonic articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 134–145; Laclau, 1996: 42–43), which necessarily involves the paradox of the constitutive exception that in the Hegelian dialectic is exemplified by the murder of the Master.[5] Insofar as its individuality is cast in positive terms, the world state is only thinkable as a hegemonic project.

This is where Schmitt's critique of universalism ends and this is, in our view, the point at which a genuine confrontation with the Schmittian ontology may begin. The limit of Schmitt's thought is its incapacity to move beyond identitarian universalism (which, as we have seen, remains contaminated by particularism) to proper universalism. Finding terrifying the hegemonic unification of the world, Schmitt's thought hurriedly retreats into the conservative defense of the particularistic pluralism of the international that at least allows for some mitigation of the 'most extreme possibility'. For Schmitt, the best (world state) is literally an *enemy* of the good (the Westphalian pluriverse), insofar as this quasi-universalism consists in the destruction of the ontic manifestation of the very ontological structure of identitarian pluralism that makes it possible in the first place. As long as we continue to conceive of universalism in terms of the universalization of some positive content and therefore as *derivative* from particularism, the logic of Schmittian criticism appears entirely immutable and the perpetual replay of the discursive ritual of affirmation and denial of world politics is assured. Yet, from the discussion above it is evident the

[5] While Kojève cannot avoid the problem of the non-dialectical end of history, he is nonetheless able to sideline the question of hegemony by explicitly linking the universal homogeneous state to the post-historical disappearance of humanity as such and, with it, of the problem of alterity inherent in the human condition. It simply does not matter to Kojève that the universal homogeneous state effaces difference through hegemonic universalization, because this state is no longer populated by human beings. For this reason, he has infamously held the Napoleonic Empire, the Stalinist USSR and the post-World War II USA to be virtually indistinct as post-historical states that administer homogeneous post-human populations (see e.g. Kojève, 2001). Since Wendt refuses to follow the idea of the end of history to this logical, if unsavory, conclusion, his argument necessarily brings in the problem of the hegemonic universalization of the particular predicates of the world state *qua* 'individual'.

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problem is not universalism *per se* but the paradoxical dependence of world-statist universalism on identitarian particularism that turns it into a hegemonic project. Thus, the immutability of Schmitt's political ontology hinges on the impossibility of a non-identitarian and hence non-hegemonic form of universalism. While this impossibility is taken for granted in Schmitt's work as well as most critiques of Schmitt (cf. Ojakangas, 2003), this question is far from settled. If the 'world-statist' universalism fails to transcend the 'pluriversal' logic of the political because of its residual particularism, which necessarily follows from endowing the world state with a positive identity, then a non-identitarian universalism would, by definition, succeed in this transcendence and become capable of thinking world politics anew without relapsing into contradictions that are perpetually rehashed in the idealist/realist debate.

It is this possibility that brings us to the reconstruction of universalism in contemporary continental philosophy, which proposes an explicitly non-identitarian understanding of the universal as *generic*. The next chapter is devoted to the discussion of the key features of generic politics, advanced in the work of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, which redefines the conceptual coordinates of universalism in order to render the logic of the political inoperative.

Generic universalism and the world community

Badiou and the universality of the indiscernible

As we have seen, a successful universalist challenge to the pluralist-identitarian logic of the political must not entail the subsumption of difference under a hegemonic identity that asserts the universality it can never attain but must rather dispense with the very principle of identity as a politically relevant category. This anti-identitarian drive characterizes otherwise different approaches of Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou that have recently come to prominence in political philosophy as highly original attempts to reinvent radical political praxis in the condition of the eclipse of revolutionary politics amid the alleged triumph of global capitalism.

Positioning their work squarely against the prevailing tendency in critical thought to valorize difference, both authors explicitly denounce particularistic identity politics and revive the ambition of a genuinely universalist politics that is markedly indifferent to any positive predicates that define one's identity. Yet, rather than subsume difference under a hegemonic identity, both Agamben and Badiou posit difference as the most fundamental and also the most *trivial* feature of the human condition,

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whereby any individual is different from any other as well as from him/herself. This 'desublimation' of difference does not do away with pluralism but rather radicalizes it to such an extent that it becomes politically inconsequential. If difference is literally infinite, then no politics or ethics could be based on it – what is required, rather, is the constitution of the Same out of this infinite chain of differentiation. It is this task that the two thinkers address by the development of extensive and idiosyncratic conceptual apparatuses that we shall discuss below. Since conceptual innovation, that in the argument of Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 2) defines philosophy as an art, is the crucial aspect of Agamben's and Badiou's thought, the reader is kindly asked to bear with the unusually heavy use of specialized jargon in the following pages, since any attempt to translate the concepts under consideration into 'ordinary language' would efface all that is *extra*-ordinary about them.

Let us first address Badiou's reconstruction of universality in non-identitarian or 'generic' terms. In his *Ethics*, Badiou (2001) ventures a passionate polemic against the dominant post-Cold War identity politics and the ethics of human rights that are both conditioned by the ontology of identitarian pluralism and the ethical valorization of difference. Against the Levinasian–Derridean ethics, which elevates alterity to a transcendent status of the 'altogether Other', Badiou's point of departure is that difference is the most banal feature of human existence, a brute fact, in which no meaningful ethics or politics could be grounded for two reasons.

Firstly, nothing in the encounter with the Other guarantees the experience of radical distance, on which Levinas founds his ethics: 'The other always resembles me too much for the hypothesis of an original exposure to alterity to be *necessarily* true' (Badiou, 2001: 22, Emphasis original). The Levinasian hypothesis, whose difference from the Schmittian insistence on the fundamental equality of the Self–Other relation we have addressed above, can only be fortified by recasting empirical alterity as a manifestation of the infinite alterity of the *divine*, which indeed introduces the dimension of transcendence that may then be investigated with regard to its ethical implications. In the absence of this sublimation of otherness, the encounter with alterity has no ethical content whatsoever. Secondly, if we refuse to theologize the experience of alterity, this ethics becomes an incoherent 'pious discourse without piety', which lends itself to the kind of rhetorical abuse that Schmitt has addressed in his critique of liberal universalism: 'this celebrated "other" is acceptable only if he is a *good* other – which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us*?' (Badiou, 2001: 24–25, Emphasis original).

Thus, Badiou bluntly declares that 'the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned'

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(Badiou, 2001: 25). This does not mean, however, that alterity should be effaced or subsumed under a pseudo-universalist identity. Instead, it must be made both ethically and politically inoperative, i.e. recognized as a banal fact of human existence that is irrelevant as a political criterion:

> Infinite alterity is quite simply what is. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. […] But what we must recognize is that these differences hold no interest for thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon as it is between the Shiite 'community' of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas (Badiou, 2001: 25–26).

We can easily note that in this statement Badiou fully accepts Schmitt's ontology of identitarian pluralism, which resonates with his own mathematical ontology of infinite multiplicity, but rather than draw from this acceptance the immutability of the political pluriverse, he develops an original strategy of its closure. This strategy, presented in *Ethics* as an 'ethic of truths', finds its most detailed articulation in *Being and Event* (2005a), Badiou's staggering reconstruction of ontology in set-theoretical terms and a consequent rethinking of the categories of truth and the subject on the basis of the concept of the event. For lack of space, we can only crudely sum up the intricate logic of this work in order to illuminate the emergence of the figure of generic universality (see Prozorov, 2008a for a detailed discussion). Proceeding from the axiomatic decision that 'the one is not', Badiou conceives of every situation as a pure multiplicity, defined solely by a relation of *belonging*, whereby every multiple is always a multiple of multiples. This elementary structure of the situation, whereby a multiple is 'counted-as-one', is always subjected to a second count that Badiou, in an explicit analogy with the political realm, terms the 'state of the situation' or its *meta-structure*, which is defined by a relation of *inclusion*, which represents the subsets of the situation, i.e. the possible compositions of their elements (Badiou, 2005a: 81–83).

This distinction between belonging and inclusion permits Badiou to isolate *singular* multiples that belong to the situation without being included in its state. If the singularity of the multiple is absolute, i.e. if it belongs to the situation as 'all of a piece', with none of its own elements presented in it, it serves as an *evental site* of the situation, the locus of a possible eruption of an event (Badiou, 2005a: 173–177). For Badiou, an event is a paradoxical multiple, composed of the elements of the evental site and itself. Since the axioms of set theory explicitly prohibit self-belonging, the ontological status of the event in the situation where it erupted is entirely undecidable and must consequently be 'wagered' on in the procedure of *intervention*, which

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'names' the unpresented multiples that belong to the event as a matter of sheer 'choice', not guided or guaranteed by any rules of representation.

The effect of intervention is then the pure assertion of the existence of an event, e.g. the declaration of a revolution or a manifesto of a new art form. Its affirmative consequences for the situation, in which it has erupted, are established in a procedure that Badiou terms *fidelity*, which groups together the multiples, whose existence is dependent on the event in question. The result of this grouping is an *indiscernible* subset, which cannot be identified by the language of the situation or, in Badiou's technical definition, 'does not fall under any encyclopedic determinant' (Badiou, 2005a: 512). Just as from the perspective of established regimes in politics or art, revolutionary praxis appears to be nothing but trouble-making and innovative art nothing but an incomprehensible mess; the subset formed in the practices of fidelity cannot be identified by any positive predicates of the situation. In Badiou's description, this subset that he terms *generic* 'contains a little bit of everything [but] *only* possesses the properties necessary to its existence as multiple in its material. It does not possess any particular, discerning, separative property. At base, its sole property is that of consisting as pure multiple, of being. Subtracted from language, it makes do with its being' (Badiou, 2005a: 371).

Badiou terms this generic subset the *truth* of the situation, in distinction from its positive 'encyclopedic' *knowledge*. It is evident that as an indiscernible subset, truth is radically devoid of identity since it cannot be subsumed under any particular predicate but traverses all of them to the minimal degree necessary for its existence to be determined. Secondly, insofar as it contains 'a little bit of everything' without being anything in particular, truth is manifestly universal, i.e. 'it is the truth of the entire situation, truth of the being of the situation' (Badiou, 2005a: 525). By conjoining the universal with the indiscernible, Badiou is able to avoid the paradox of identitarian universalism, whereby the hegemonic universalization of particular content necessarily excludes the constitutive exception: the truth is not derivative from any particular content but rather constituted by utmost indifference to it. The third characteristic of truth is its infinity, which is derived logically from its indiscernibility, as any finite subset could be counted and thus discerned by the encyclopedia of the situation.

Thus, the truth of the situation is never complete, but rather emerging in fragments, for which Badiou reserves the name of the *subject*. It is important to note that Badiou's subject neither expresses truth in his creative activity nor discovers it by his use of reason but rather *embodies* truth as such. The subject is simply the finite fragment of the truth, i.e. a set of statements, practices or organizational forms that have been produced in

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the context of the unfolding of the generic 'truth procedure'. In Badiou's terms, this unfolding is defined as the *generic extension* of the situation, which *adds* the generic subset to the initial situation, thereby rendering the indiscernible subset immanent to the situation as its element. Through a process that Badiou, following P.J. Cohen, calls *forcing*, generic extension allows one to determine the positive, encyclopaedic veracity of a particular statement of the subject (a fragment of truth) under the hypothetical condition of the complete unfolding of the infinity of truth (Badiou, 2005a: 429). In this manner, new positive knowledge is created on the basis of the indiscernible truth, much as the sheer negativity of the revolution grounds the positive construction of the post-revolutionary order.

Badiou famously distinguishes four truth procedures: science, art, politics, and love. While love belongs to the situational sphere of the individual and interests no one except for the parties to the amorous event, science and art are produced by individual means but their effects concern the collective that is ultimately universal. The only procedure that is entirely collective is politics, 'if it exists as generic politics: what was called, for a long time, revolutionary politics, and for which another word must be found today' (Badiou, 2005a: 340). Thus, while all four procedures are *ipso facto* universal due to their generic status, politics is the only procedure that is also universal in the composition of its subject (see Badiou, 2005b: Ch. 10).

Yet, what is a generic politics in practice? The preceding discussion clearly demonstrates that it is entirely distinct from any form of identity politics, both in the narrow sense of the struggle for the recognition of differences and in the more fundamental Schmittian sense of a pluralistic antagonism. Badiou's politics is radically universalist, addressed to everyone and to no one in particular and, as the production of the truth of the situation, targets or transforms the social order (the situation) in its entirety. Yet, the universal in this context is neither a neutral container for the coexistence of particularities nor a new identity under which all differences must be subsumed, but rather a radical difference in its own right, something *subtracted* from the predicates of the situation and functioning as an exception to its regime of knowledge (Badiou, 2003b: 105–120). Thus, as Badiou argues, his struggle is that of 'universalism against universalism' (Badiou, 2001: 114), rather than a retreat into a Schmittian particularism in opposition to today's identitarian universalism, exemplified by Wendt's world state.

Let us now summarize the difference between the two forms of universalism. Firstly, while identitarian universalism contains and conserves differences in its quasi-neutral framework of the universal homogeneous state that is sustained by the elimination of the constitutive exception, generic universalism disrupts the state of the situation in forcing the belonging to the situation of what was originally indiscernible within it.

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The truth of the situation is produced on the basis of the interpretive intervention that names the event, which, from the perspective of the situation, does not even belong to it. The unfolding of the universal truth of the situation is thus literally conditioned by what was *absent* in it. Thus, contrary to the Hegelian pathos of recognition, Badiou's universalism shows no interest whatsoever in the mediation between already-existing differences but rather seeks to subvert the existing order in its entirety by the production of *new* elements that subtract themselves from the overall regime of representation. Just as St. Paul, held by Badiou to be the exemplary figure of generic universalism (Badiou, 2003a), proclaimed that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female' (Gal. 3: 28), Badiou seeks to deactivate or render inoperative the existing particularities as utterly irrelevant for the truth procedure, which traverses all these differences without allowing itself to be identified by any of them. While identitarian universalism *hegemonizes* a particular content, generic universalism *neutralizes* it.

Secondly, the infinite character of the generic truth procedure entails that, unlike identitarian universalism, Badiou's project has nothing to do with the goal of the political unification of humanity. In fact, the universal homogeneous world state, proposed by Kojève or Wendt, is strictly unthinkable from the perspective of Badiou's set-theoretical ontology, characterized by the axiom of the inexistence of the Whole. There can be no 'universal set' to which everything belongs – this is the requirement of the axiomatic set theory that spares it from the logical paradoxes of self-reference (Badiou, 2005a: 38–48, see also Badiou, 2003b: 194–197).[6] Badiou's universalism paradoxically proceeds from the affirmation of the *non-existence of the universe*, which reorients its project from the unification of humanity under the aegis of the world state or some other equivalent of the universal set to the painstaking process of the generic truth procedure that constructs the indiscernible subset, which subtracts itself from any recognition by the state of the situation.

Thirdly, unlike identitarian universalism, which replaces the anarchy of the political with a hierarchical structure of authority, generic politics is radically egalitarian, conceiving of equality as an axiom that founds politics

[6] From the perspective of axiomatic set theory the world state is impossible for two reasons. Firstly, the existence of such a universal set would invite Russell's paradox, since it would be possible to separate within it the set of all sets that do not belong to themselves, which contradicts its own definition. Secondly, if a universal set existed, it would be possible to isolate its power-set (set of all its subsets), which would by definition also be a subset of the original universal set. This would conflict with Cantor's theorem of the point of excess, according to which the power-set always contains at least one more element than the original set.

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rather than as a contingent effect of political praxis. This egalitarianism, which aligns Badiou's philosophy with the work of Jacques Ranciere (1995; 2007), follows logically from the understanding of the generic as that which traverses every possible encyclopedic determinant but evades all particular determination. 'Inasmuch as it is the subject of a truth, this subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation' (Badiou, 2006). It is precisely this egalitarian maxim that explains Badiou's numerical formalization of politics as a move from *infinity* (the infinity of difference, presented in the situation) to *one* (the one of universal equality, embodied by the collective subject of the truth procedure).

Thus, even as Badiou rarely addresses the implications of his thought for global politics, choosing instead to focus on concrete local situations, it is evident that generic politics is necessarily a *world* politics and, since its egalitarian drive disrupts the state of the situation, an *anti-statist* politics (see Badiou, 2005b: Chs. 4, 5, and 10; 2001: 95–119). Insofar as its declared telos is the formation of the egalitarian figure of the one, we may conclude that, unlike Schmitt, whose ethico-political stance emphasized the *preservation* of the political against pseudo-universalist challenges, Badiou's politics clearly stipulates and actively seeks to attain its own *end*. This end of politics is thinkable in terms of the emergence of the egalitarian *world community,* in which all differences have been neutralized and the antagonistic potential of the identitarian and pluralistic logic of the political deactivated, if only because in the future anterior of complete unfolding of the truth there will have been only one subject, namely the world community itself (cf. Toscano, 2006).

Recalling Badiou's insistence on the infinity of the truth procedure and his understanding of the subject in decidedly non-anthropological terms, we must emphasise that the Badiouan figure of the world community has nothing to do with the unification of the population of world, which is of course finite, into a universal set, which is ontologically proscribed from existence. The world community is not the finite sum-total of the world's individuals but an infinite subset of the diverse subjects of the truth procedure of world politics, which possess no discernible predicative traits. It is the complete unfolding of this infinity that forms the telos of Badiou's politics, which thereby becomes truly self-effacing. Thus, while Badiou's politics is certainly militant and his discourse is not averse to the rhetoric of radical enmity and even the justification of terror (Badiou, 2007a: 25), his key difference from Schmitt is that his generic politics finds no value in its perpetuation and wants nothing but its own end. In an enigmatic statement that we shall return to below, Badiou even provides a glimpse of what follows the eventual completion of the political truth procedure: 'love begins where the political ends' (Badiou, 2005b: 151).

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

Agamben and the community of whatever being

Agamben's work has become increasingly prominent in the contemporary field of political theory since the publication of *Homo Sacer* (1998).[7] Unfortunately, the debate on Agamben's critique of sovereignty and his hyperbolic identification of the *nomos* of modern politics with the concentration camp has overshadowed his earlier and more affirmative writings, against whose background the later work becomes fully intelligible.[8] It is in these early, more 'first-philosophical' works (1991, 1993, 1995) that Agamben has articulated a vision of a radical overturning of the metaphysical foundations of Western politics that would bring to a standstill the logic of sovereignty, actualized in the state of exception.

Although Agamben rarely deploys Badiou's term 'generic' (see Agamben, 2000: 116; 2007: 58), his numerous alternative terms (e.g. 'being-thus', 'gesture', 'special being', 'face', and 'whatever singularity') evidently resonate with Badiou's concept and share a similar philosophical trajectory, as Agamben regularly refers to Cantor's concept of 'inconsistent multiplicity' and Russell's paradox, which gave rise to the axiomatization of set theory (Agamben, 1993: 71–75; 2000: 89). Yet, the philosophical sources of Agamben's project are of a wider range, from Plato, Hebraic mysticism and Dante all the way to Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord.

In order to understand Agamben's reconstruction of the political community in global and generic terms, it is necessary to address his ontology of language, on which his political thought is modeled. From his earlier writings onwards, Agamben has probed the possibility of overcoming the constitutive divisions of Western metaphysics (existence-essence, nature-culture, sound-language) that establish fractures and separations within human existence, endowing it with a negative foundation. In *Language and Death* (1991) Agamben demonstrates that the pure experience of language as intention to signify remains unspeakable in concrete acts of speech,

[7] For commentaries on this work, see Norris (2005) and Calarco and DeCaroli (2007).

[8] The belonging of the critique of sovereignty to Agamben's wider affirmative ontopolitical project is attested to by the fact that the thesis of *Homo Sacer* is already contained in the conclusion to the 1982 book *Language and Death* (1991: 104–106).

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functioning as an ineffable negative presupposition, just as Being in Heidegger's notion of ontological difference serves as a negative foundation of beings. 'That which is always already indicated in speech without being named is, for philosophy, being. The dimension of meaning of the word 'being', whose eternal quest and eternal loss constitute the history of metaphysics, coincides with the taking-place of language' (Agamben, 1991: 25).

The effect of the presuppositional structure of language in Western metaphysics is the consignment of the latter to a radical 'double negativity' that for Agamben is not the effect of late-modern efforts to overcome metaphysics by, e.g., Heidegger or Derrida, but rather its original principle. Agamben terms this negative structure the Voice in the sense of the pure intention to signify, capitalized to accentuate its difference from voice as mere sound, emitted by a living being. Firstly, the Voice as the indicator of the taking-place of language is characterized by the removal of the voice as the natural sound in the anticipation of signification and is thus located in the gap between the having-been and the not-yet, just as Agamben's famous figure of bare life that finds its locus in the gap between *zoe* and *bios*, biological and political life. Secondly, the Voice cannot itself be spoken in a discourse whose existence it indicates and thus remains silent, just as the figure of the law in *Homo Sacer* that 'remains in force without significance' (Agamben, 1991: 84, cf. Agamben, 1998: 49–62). Thus, the human experience of having language is characterized by negativity and a radical scission that Agamben's philosophy attempts to mend by reclaiming a human experience of language, deprived of all negativity and of all attempts at a foundation: 'only if language no longer refers to any Voice […], is it possible for man to experience a language that is not marked by negativity and death' (Agamben, 1998: 95).

To overcome this metaphysical structure of negative presupposition, Agamben affirms the possibility of the experience of language as such (*experimentum linguae*), not of this or that signified content but of the pure possibility of signification, of communicability itself (Agamben, 1999: 60–61). In this manner, the unspeakable would be brought to speech and language grasped as a habitual ethos of the human being. Already in the early 1980s, Agamben repeatedly transferred this ontology of language onto the plane of politics as a 'model' for the coming community that is not grounded in any presupposition of identity, norm or value but rather entirely contained in its being-in-language:

> There can be no true human community on the basis of a presupposition – be it a nation, a language, or even the *a priori* of communication of

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> which hermeneutics speaks. What unites human beings among themselves is not a nature, a voice or a common experience in a signifying language; it is the vision of language itself and therefore the experience of language's limits, its *end*. A true community can only be a community that is *not presupposed* (Agamben, 1999: 47, see also Agamben, 1999: 104–115).

The experience of pure sayability that signifies nothing is analogous to Agamben's more famous figure of a 'happy life' whose only essence is existence itself, 'a form of life, wholly exhausted in bare life and a *bios* that is only its own *zoe*' (Agamben, 1998: 188). The analogy is all the more forceful, insofar as both the pure experience of language and the pure experience of existence are made possible by the condition of nihilism that for Agamben marks the veritable end of history (Agamben, 1995: 86–87; 2000: 138–142, see also Franchi, 2004), i.e. the destitution of epochal traditions that leaves speech with 'nothing to say' and praxis with 'nothing to do' (Agamben, 1999: 135). Yet, rather than infer from this the impossibility of ethical or political action, Agamben draws the opposite conclusion: 'if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible – there would be only tasks to be done' (Agamben, 1993: 42). Contemporary nihilism offers the possibility of reinvigorating ethics and politics on the basis of the originary 'inoperability' of the human condition, which has for the centuries been veiled by religion or ideology: 'There is politics because human beings are *argos*-beings that cannot be defined by any proper operation – that is, beings of pure potentiality that no identity or vocation can possibly exhaust' (Agamben, 2000: 141).

Agamben's 'coming community' is thus a community devoid of any identitarian predicates, that has liberated itself from historical tasks and is finally able to dwell in its 'being-thus' or 'whatever being'. These concepts function as strict equivalents to Badiou's concept of the generic as an indiscernible subset, insofar as what is affirmed in them is existence as such beyond any possibility of identification, i.e. the fact *that* something is in the absence of any specification of *what* it is. Being-thus has nothing to do with sticking to what one is in positive terms, since 'thus' here 'no longer refers back to any meaning or any referent, [being an] absolute thus that does not presuppose anything but is completely exposed' (Agamben, 1993: 93). Identitarian predicates are not abandoned in favour of others or subsumed under a hegemonic universality but rather simply exposed in the aspect of their existence: 'exposure, in other words being-such-as, is not any of the real predicates (being red, hot, small, smooth, etc.), but neither is it other than these (otherwise it would be

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something else added to the concept of a thing and therefore still a real predicate)' (Agamben, 1993: 96). Similarly to Badiou's generic subset, which, as we recall, finds no identitarian representation in the state of the situation but makes do with its pure belonging to it, whatever being simply affirms itself as 'neither this nor that, neither thus nor thus, but *thus*, as it is, with all its predicates (all its predicates is not a predicate). […] Such a being would be a pure, singular and yet perfectly whatever existence' (Agamben, 1993, Emphasis original). Similarly to Badiou's rejection of the affirmation of particularism in identity politics, Agamben explicitly prioritizes anonymous and indiscernible belonging over inclusion and representation, seeking not to attain the reciprocal recognition of identities but rather to render inoperative their functioning as presuppositional foundations of particularistic communities.

The political stakes of this affirmation of whatever being are made explicit in 'Tiananmen', the concluding fragment of *The Coming Community*: 'Whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State. Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being-in common, there will be a Tiananmen, and sooner or later tanks will appear' (Agamben, 1993: 86). In contrast to the Hegelian emphasis on universal recognition that is central to Wendt's world state, Agamben's community does not demand the recognition of every identity, but rather affirms its whatever being-in-common as *non-identical* to every state, or, in Badiou's terms, subtracts itself from every encyclopedic determinant. It is precisely this affirmation that makes it the 'principal enemy' of the state form as such. For Agamben, what the state 'cannot tolerate in any way' is not any particular claim for identity, which can always be recognized, but rather the possibility of human beings co-belonging in the absence of any identity: 'A being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the State' (Agamben, 1993: 85).

Agamben formulates the structure of the 'coming politics' in the terms that clearly echo Badiou's anti-statist world politics: 'the novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization' (Agamben, 1993: 86). While the state, including its hypothetical global form, operates through granting or withholding recognition of identities, the generic community, which is by definition global and non-exclusive, deactivates identities in the same manner as the pure experience of language deactivates signification. In Agamben's argument, it is only such deactivation that makes possible a

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genuinely pacific world community that is not at the permanent risk of a violent dissolution:

> Every struggle among men is in fact a struggle for recognition and the peace that follows such a struggle is only a convention instituting the signs and conditions of mutual, precarious recognition. Such a peace is only and always a peace amongst states and of the law, a fiction of the recognition of an identity in language, which comes from war and will end in war. Not the appeal to guaranteed signs or images but the fact that we cannot recognise ourselves in any sign or image: that is peace […] in non-recognition. Peace is the perfectly empty sky of humanity; it is the display of non-appearance as the only homeland of man (Agamben, 1995: 82).

While Agamben's blueprint for global political transformation might appear utterly implausible at first glance, his overall logic of argumentation is undoubtedly provocative in demonstrating the possibility of a radically different form of life on the basis of precisely the same things that he set out to criticise. Following Hölderlin's dictum that 'where danger is, grows saving power also', Agamben paints a convincingly gloomy picture of the present only to undertake a majestic reversal at the end, finding hope and conviction in the very despair that engulfs us. '[F]or the first time it is possible for humans to experience their own linguistic being – not this or that content of language, but language itself. Contemporary politics is this devastating *experimentum linguae* that all over the planet unhinges and empties traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities' (Agamben, 1993: 82). Our very destitution thereby turns out be the condition for the possibility of a radically different life, whose description is in turn entirely devoid of fantastic mirages. Instead, as Agamben repeatedly emphasizes, in the redeemed world 'everything will be as is now, just a little different' (Agamben, 1993: 57), no momentous transformation will take place aside from a 'small displacement' that will nonetheless make all the difference. This small displacement consists in abandoning all attempts at designing positive alternatives to the destitute forms of politics (e.g. the world state as an alternative to anarchy) and appropriating the space of the 'improper', of crisis, decay or exhaustion of all past essences as a dwelling space for a community, whose essence is entirely contained in its existence:

> [I]f instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the *already improper and senseless form of individuality*, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety as such, in making of the proper being – thus not an identity and individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects (Agamben, 1993: 64).

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If we give the name 'politics' to the pluralistic antagonism between particular identities, then the emergence of the community 'without presuppositions and subjects' would entail the end of politics as such, insofar the identitarian logic would no longer be operative in the community that has dispensed with the struggle for recognition in favour of the exposure of its whatever being. Thus, similar to Badiou, Agamben's world politics is an activity that presupposes and actively seeks its own end. In fact, Agamben's work also provides us with clues for deciphering Badiou's enigmatic formulation 'love begins where the political ends'. His concept of whatever singularity is introduced with an explicit reference to love as an experience that is unintelligible in identitarian terms: 'Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favour of an insipid generality (universal love): the lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being-such-as it is' (Agamben, 1993: 2). Similar to Badiou (1996, 2003c), Agamben rejects the 'fusional' conception of love as an ecstatic synthesis of the Two in the blissful image of the couple and rather approaches love as an experience of 'living in intimacy with a stranger' (Agamben, 1995: 61), i.e. the being-in-common of singularities that are neither subjects of an intersubjective relation nor objects of each other's self-affirmation but rather 'whatever beings' whose intimacy consists in the sharing of their mutual indiscernibility. In full accordance with the ethical privilege granted by Agamben (2007: 73–92) to the profanation of the sacred, love is presented as an absolutely profane experience of generic being-in-common that does away with all distinctions between the proper and the improper, authentic and inauthentic, identity and difference (see Agamben, 1999: 185–204). As an experience of the appropriation of the improper, love contains all the prerequisites of the 'absolutely profane "sufficient life" that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability – a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold' (Agamben, 1993: 114). For this reason, love is what remains when the logic of the political arrives at its end.

The world community and the logic of the political

We have demonstrated that both Agamben and Badiou seek to overcome the identitarian political ontology that grounds both the Schmittian valorization of the anarchic pluriverse and the Wendtian domestication of anarchy in a world state by articulating a generic form of universalism that breaks the constellation of ontological difference, the ever-present possibility of death and the politics of identity, either pluralistic or hegemonic.

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Indeed, both Agamben and Badiou are singular figures in the contemporary philosophical landscape, governed by the idea of finitude, because of their refusal to accept death as a politically relevant category, let alone as the organizing principle of political life, which it arguably remains both in Schmitt's theory and in the numerous attempts to overcome Schmitt within an identitarian ontological context. For Badiou, the subject of the truth procedure is not coterminous with the 'human animal' and (if we recall its technical definition as a finite part of the generic procedure) may well be considered immortal: 'Subjectivation is immortal and makes Man. Beyond this there is only a biological species, a "biped without feathers", whose charms are not obvious' (Badiou, 2001: 12). Identity politics is unacceptable for Badiou insofar as 'its underlying conviction is that the only thing that can really happen to someone is death' (Badiou, 2001: 35), which entails the commitment to the non-existence of truths and the reduction of the subject to the status of the potential victim. Because of his long confrontation with the paradoxical status of bare life in modern politics as its negative foundation, Agamben is not as eager to dismiss the 'human animal' but confronts death from the opposite direction, i.e. from the side of animality itself, rejecting the Heideggerian 'faculty for death' as the constitutive feature of the human condition and affirming the possibility for human beings 'simply to die, without being called by death' (Agamben, 1991: 96). For both authors, death ceases to be relevant as a political principle and, hence, politics stops being subjected to the 'hypocritical dogma of the sacredness of human life and the vacuous declarations of human rights' (Agamben, 1993: 96).

Yet, the rejection of death as a political category goes beyond the abandonment of the rhetorical claims of the contemporary hegemonic discourse of global politics and intervenes in the ontological terrain, which, as we have seen, is defined by the 'most extreme possibility'. What generic universalism achieves is the reorientation of political praxis from the Schmittian decisionism, i.e. the process of determination amid radical indeterminacy, of taking the risk of deciding on the undecidable, to the painstaking process of the fragmentary emergence of the world community defined in non-identitarian terms (see Prozorov, 2007b). We have seen how the necessity of taking this risk of decision, concretely exemplified by the contingency of the friend–enemy distinction, arises due to the presence of irreducible alterity that brings in the possibility of violent death. Any identitarian politics is thus necessarily marked by the intense receptivity to the existence of the Other. It is precisely this receptivity that is abandoned in the generic universalism of Agamben and Badiou, which is rather marked by a singular disposition of *indifference to difference*. This indifference evidently does not entail the hegemonic depoliticization

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that Schmitt feared but rather reorients politics from the mediation of difference towards the construction of the Same.

No longer tied to irreducible alterity and the fear of death, the politics of Agamben and Badiou displaces the particularistic construction of the friend–enemy distinction with its own version of antagonism, i.e. the opposition between identitarian and generic approaches to the political community. This dualism disturbs the familiar oppositions between international politics and world politics, anarchy and hierarchy, realism and idealism by fracturing the figure of world politics itself into two opposed positions: the identitarian universalism of the world state vs. the generic universalism of the world community. As we have demonstrated above, only the latter position breaks with the identitarian political ontology and can therefore be considered 'properly' universal and *world*-political, insofar as it does not seek to domesticate the international through the universalization of particular content but rather deactivates this particular content in the generic truth procedure that constitutes a non-exclusive world community of whatever singularities. From this perspective, the key antithesis of contemporary global politics is not between the defenders of international anarchy and the proponents of the world state, who, as we have shown, occupy the same ontological terrain, but rather between identitarian and generic approaches to politics as such.

Yet, isn't this antithesis still a Schmittian one? Does not the opposition between identitarian and generic politics function as yet another version of the friend–enemy distinction? This is not the case for the following reason. As we have argued above, for Schmitt a political relation is necessarily characterized by equality and symmetry between opponents, both perceived in the positive terms of their identitarian predicates that make their antagonism 'concrete' (Schmitt, 1976: 30). It is this symmetry that is manifestly absent in the confrontation between identitarian and generic modes of political praxis that lacks the 'concrete clarity' that Schmitt considered necessary for the political relation (Schmitt, 1976: 67). While the essence of political praxis for Schmitt consisted in the *discernment* of the enemy amid the indeterminacy of the pluriverse, the generic community is by definition *indiscernible* in identitarian terms, which certainly makes it a scandalous figure from a Schmittian perspective.

As Mika Ojakangas (2004: 77–86) has demonstrated, Schmitt's theory of the political was articulated against the background of a similarly scandalous figure, concretely personified during the Nazi period by the 'assimilated Jew', whose alterity is not articulated in positive terms and who therefore withdraws from any political relation whatsoever. Recalling Agamben's understanding of whatever singularity as 'absolutely irrelevant' to the state and hence intolerable for it, this indiscernible figure

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is elevated by Schmitt to the status of the 'absolute enemy' (see Ojakangas, 2003). Yet, what is this 'absolute enemy' the enemy *of*? As a figure that is logically impossible to reduce to a side in the friend–enemy distinction, the generic subject, be it the assimilated Jew, the Tiananmen protesters or the world community, can only be the *enemy of the political* as such, insofar as it destroys the very logic that Schmitt constructed to mitigate the inherent antagonism of the human condition. Since the enemy of the political cannot, by definition, be a political enemy, the generic community exits the terrain of the political and brings its logic to a standstill.

Conclusion: generic politics as a practice

Our description of generic world politics cannot but appear hopelessly utopian in the contemporary political landscape, where identity politics continues to define both the relations between the states and the political relations within them. Nonetheless, we must rigorously distinguish the generic universalism of Agamben and Badiou from utopianism. As Michel Foucault has argued, utopias derive their attraction from their discursive structure of a *fabula*, which makes it possible to describe in great detail a better way of life, precisely because it is manifestly impossible: 'Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality, there is nevertheless a fantastic untroubled region, in which they are able to unfold, […] where life is easy even if the road to [it] is chimerical' (Foucault, 1970: xvii). While utopian thought easily provides us with elaborate visions of a better future, it cannot really lead us there, since its site is, by definition, a non-place. In contrast, the works of Agamben and Badiou tell us quite little about life in a generic community that has done away with the state form and can hardly tell us more since any designs for a future order would contradict both authors' affirmation of creation over management, but are remarkably concrete about the practices that are constitutive of this community.

How, then, do we go about forming the world community in practice or, since its advent is already made possible by the nihilistic and self-destructive drive of global capitalism, how do we perform the 'small displacement' within this terrain? In response to this question, it is important to recall Badiou's notion of the subject as a *finite* part of a truth procedure, which is itself *infinite*. Thus, the world community is never complete and, moreover, cannot be envisioned as completed in the context of the generic procedure. Indeed, a total forcing of the truth of the world community as a finite self-identical entity would, in Badiou's terms, be a 'disaster' that would destroy the truth procedure, replacing it with a simulacrum (Badiou, 2001: 80–87). It is therefore impossible to imagine generic universalism ever yielding

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something like a 'system' of its own that would replace the existing world order. Yet, this is hardly a disadvantage of this approach, especially since we have no shortage of designs for alternative world orders that can fully satisfy the demand for utopian fables. Instead, generic universalism is best understood as an infinite confrontation with the identitarian logic of politics, which is nonetheless not reducible to vacuous gestures of permanent criticism, but actually produces finite fragments of the world community of whatever being in concrete local settings.

Thus, the necessarily 'incomplete' being of the generic world community, the being-finite of infinity, does not deprive it of its force as a subject of its own institution. In contrast to the Kantian 'regulative idea' or Derridean 'democracy to come', the generic community actually *exists* in today's world as a finite fragment of its own infinite unfolding. Consigned to indiscernibility in the encyclopedia of contemporary global politics, the existence of the world community may be verified by concrete local practices that are able to force a momentary illumination of the truth of generic equality that the statist logic of the political obscures. As long as we understand the world community not in terms of the political unification of the entire humanity but as a process of the unfolding of the anti-statist and egalitarian being-in-common, we have no problem finding numerous examples of the actual existence of fragments of the generic community in today's global politics. However local in their scope or modest in their effects, all forms of non-hegemonic confrontation with the logic of identity politics in such contexts as ethnic or religious conflict management, migration and integration policies, global anti-capitalist movements, etc., participate in the formation of the generic world community (for other examples see Prozorov, 2008a, b). Indeed, Badiou's own engagement in campaigns against the treatment of undocumented immigrant workers in France and Agamben's refusal to accept a US visiting professorship in protest over the biometric processing of foreign visitors also exemplify finite moments of the unfolding of the infinite truth of generic equality.

Yet, we would like to conclude our discussion of generic universalism with an example that exemplifies its operation at a truly global level. The 2003 global protest against the invasion of Iraq gave birth to a slogan, which since then has been deployed in other contexts: 'Not in our name!'[9] This curious formulation acquires its full force precisely by virtue of its repetition in a variety of disparate contexts by entirely disconnected subjects. Who is this 'we' that demands that its 'name' not be used to justify the current wars around the globe? What is this name whose

[9] For a detailed analysis of this movement from a Badiouan perspective see Wright (2008).

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utterance by the representatives of the state of the global situation is prohibited in the act of a negative reference to it? What is this subject that names itself by subtracting its name from the encyclopedic regime of contemporary global politics? It is arguably nothing other than the world community, which, from the identitarian perspective of the state, remains completely indiscernible, so that its only name, for the time being, is 'not in our name'. Intervening to declare the event of its emergence, which, to recall Badiou, 'has the nameless as its name' (Badiou, 2005a: 205), this community makes do with its pure being beyond the nominative repertoire of contemporary global politics. It is precisely this manifestation of the indiscernible that is so frustrating for the adherents of the logic of the political, since this nameless movement is impossible to locate on either side of the friend–enemy distinction, nor does it easily yield to the promise of recognition by and representation in the world state. Yet, in the subtractive utterance of this nameless name, its numerous subjects arguably undergo the experience of community that is strictly analogous to what Agamben called the *experimentum linguae*. Just as the latter experience testifies to nothing more than the elementary fact that language exists, that humans speak and understand each other, the political experiment at work in the statement 'not in our name' affirms the sheer existence of a human community beyond all identity and beyond any possibility of identification, a community whose unnameable name is nothing but the *thus* of its being said in the utterance 'not in our name!' It is in these singular yet recurrent instances of generic politics that we may catch a glimpse of the transcendence of humanity towards its being-in-common.

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