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Kalmar Växjö

Bachelor thesis

*Fiat iustitia, et pereat
mundus?*

*A comparative study of Karl Marx, Slavoj Žižek
and Alain Badiou's reflections on revolution*



Author: Markus Edmonds
Supervisor: Gunlög Fur
Examinator: Ulla Rosén
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* *Fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus*
means: let justice be done, though
the heavens fall.

Title

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Abstract

This qualitative thesis analyses the development of Marxian thought on riots and revolution in the works of Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. Due to the structural limitations of this essay, the research has been limited to a comparison between Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and a selection of Žižek and Badiou’s works. Furthermore, the scope of the essay focuses on two material events; the coup d’état of Louis Bonaparte and the England riots of 2011. The comparison was concretised through the usage of Ludvig Beckman’s model for idea analysis and the method of *ideal types*. This study demonstrated how the modern theorists remain loyal to Marx’s basic analysis of society and concepts such as alienation and exploitation. However, the deterministic and eschatological aspects of Marx’s philosophy have been abandoned for a less ineluctable history, and resonate more towards the Hegelian notion of an *open* history. This study has also elucidated and cemented the vital importance of the material circumstances in a historical materialist study; moreover, it has revealed the necessity for the modern theorists to reinvent and radicalise a number of Marx’s original concepts for the modern world. Žižek and Badiou also contest Marx’s insistence on the requisite nature of violent revolution, and promote the *politics of subtraction* as an alternative.

Key words

History of ideas, Marxism, England riots, ideal types

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1 Introduction

At the end of 2011's balmy summer, London exploded. The ferocious attack on the streets of London did not echo with the resonance of Irish or Islamic terrorism, but was rather an implosion from within and an attack on the capital from the very Londoners that frequent and inhabit her streets. For four days, people around Britain took to the streets to loot, commit arson and protest in, what has been called, the worst bout of civil unrest in a generation.¹ The rioting spread from the capital to other major cities such as Manchester and Birmingham, where a similar symphony of cacophonous unrest rang out, but where a clear political motive was opaquely indiscernible. Reports indicate that the riots and subsequent looting cost the city of London approximately £300 million and that around 2500 shops² fell victim to the perpetrator's actions. This begs the question: why did the riots happen? What drove thousands of people in one of the world's, traditionally, most culturally advanced societies to act with the vehemence required to set their neighbours' homes and possessions ablaze? Some of the most interesting theories concerning this outbreak of violence stem from the contemporary left; i.e. philosophers whose ideas hold a clear link to Karl Marx and the eponymous field of Marxism. Theorists such as Slavoj Žižek, Zygmunt Bauman and Alain Badiou have all explained the riots in Marxist terms, viz. individualist state-leadership, false consciousness etc. But how close are these explanations to the original thoughts of Marx? What, if any, changes have occurred to the leftist interpretation of civil unrest and revolution?

The 19th century is frequently referred to as the age of revolution. During this period, Karl Marx and his communist vision were in their precocious beginnings when he wrote, in 1851-52, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in which

¹ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/Reading/2011/07/15/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Reading/2011/07/15/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15).p. 27.
² [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15).

he debated Louis Bonaparte's rise to power. Here, Marx discusses the role of the French proletariat, peasants and the bourgeoisie in relation to one another, and the political milieu that enabled Louis Bonaparte to seize his absolutist rule. The political uncertainty that inspired *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* seems to echo in the political framework of today; not only concerning the England riots, but the contemporary milieu as a whole. The fact is that, despite the best efforts of eager politicians and social theorists, the underlying motives behind the English outburst of violence are still unclear. This uncertainty is a compelling aspect of the riots, as are the myriad of different explanations that have been presented in its aftermath. However, there is an evident substratum binding many of the various theories that have been proposed and that is the growing gulf between the rich and poor in society. Recent studies presented by *The Office for National Statistics*, indicate that the richest 1% in Britain have accumulated more wealth than 55% of the British population.³ Moreover, five-billionaire families in Britain possess more capital than 20% of Britain, or 20 million individuals to put that figure in a stupefying concretisation.⁴ These numbers correlate with the preponderance of European and global discontent that is materialising in protests and riots. The Paris banlieue riots of 2005, Occupy Wall Street and the 15-M movement in Spain are all examples of citizens in prosperous nations that have acted out, either against this inequality or as a reaction to the objective structures that they claim have created this gulf. Bertolt Brecht's famous quip "*what is robbing a bank compared to founding one*" seems to succinctly summarise the rhetoric of many of Britain's wanting 55%; particularly in light of major corporations' tax-dodging schemes and the enforced, £37bn bailout of the banks in 2008 following

³ The Guardian, *Britain's richest 1% own as much as poorest 55% of population*, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/15/britains-richest-1-percent-own-same-as-bottom-55-population> (accessed 22/01/2015).

⁴ The Guardian, *Britain's richest 1% own as much as poorest 55% of population*, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/15/britains-richest-1-percent-own-same-as-bottom-55-population> (accessed 22/01/2015).

the economic crash.⁵ The decision to analyse non-conformist thinkers, such as Žižek and Badiou, stems largely from the growing consensus, especially in Britain, that the current political system of democracy is flawed and ineffectual. In light of this, there is clear pertinence in examining Marx's original theories against the modern doctrine, as Marx's political concepts are reemerging from the burden of history.⁶ Therefore, this essay intends to examine the development of Marx's theories on riots and revolutions.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this essay is to examine the evolution and materialisation of Marx's original theories on riots and revolutions in the contemporary theorists. How have the fundamental substrata of Marx's theories on rioting and revolution developed, or remained, in these modern theories? In examining how the selected philosophers have analysed the material circumstances behind the political unrest of their respective era, one will be able to examine how much of the leftist, or Marxist, viewpoint has remained in its theoretical status quo or altered fundamentally. In order to do so, this essay will focus on Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and an omnibus of theories from Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou.

- How has the Marxian interpretation changed in regard to riots and revolutions in the relevant works of Žižek and Badiou?
- In what way have fundamental concepts of Marxian thought developed in the modern theories of Žižek and Badiou?

⁵ BBC News, *UK banks receive £37bn bail-out*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7666570.stm> (accessed 22/01/2015).

⁶ The Guardian, *Why Marxism is on the rise again*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/04/the-return-of-marxism> (accessed 22/01/2015).

1.2 Limitations

The scope of this essay has been limited to a number of variables. Firstly, the number of leftist thinkers has been limited to Marx, Žižek and Badiou. This limitation is necessary for this study to provide concise and elucidating results whilst remaining within the structural compounds of an essay of this size. Furthermore, the research focuses on theories that depict concrete historical events, namely the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte and the England riots. Due to the great manifold of possible works to analyse, it is essential to limit the philosophers to a specific event and theoretical theme. The thought-process behind the selection of works has been twofold. Firstly, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and the modern works depict differing examples of the failure of the working class and failed revolutions, i.e. the proletariat's acquiescence towards the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte and the anarchic England riots. The legitimacy of the comparison is heightened due to the similar motifs and motives of the works. Secondly, the choice of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* over works such as *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* may appear surprising to some. However, it is important to use works that are descriptive of material events in order to make the comparison empirically valid. Moreover, the necessity of limiting Marx's work to specific time period and event quickly became evident. This essay does not claim to summarise the totality of any of the philosophers' weltanschauungs, it is merely an analysis of particular works, describing a particular event in a particular and limited timeframe. This research will not wholly encapsulate any of the philosophers' total opuses, but it will be able to compare and contrast their views on the relevant subjects in the chosen timeframes and works. The works of Marx that will be consulted were written between 1851-1852. The modern theories are focused around 2011 and, primarily, after the England riots. Although, other

works of Marx and the modern philosophers may be referred to in order as to elucidate certain terms or concepts.

1.3 Method

The aim of this essay is to investigate the development of the concept of Marxist riots and revolutions from their genesis to the 21st century. In order to achieve this, I will perform a comparison of the original theories of Marx contra his 21st century counterparts and examine how major concepts such as violence and revolution are represented, thus establishing whether or not Marx's original interpretations remain. Therefore, this essay will utilise a qualitative method that focuses on an *analysis of ideas*, which is the systematic analysis of political ideas, ideologies and arguments.⁷ This essay will focus on an ideological analysis and its methodology is based on Beckman's model for idea analysis.

Table 1.1 Beckman's model for idea analysis⁸

Aim
Descriptive
Research Question
Agency-centered
Analysis apparatus
Ideal types
Analysis technique
Concept analysis

According to Beckman, a *research question* can be defined as focused on agency or on ideas.⁹ The former focuses on agents and

⁷ Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys- det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santérus Förlag, 2005. p. 9.

⁸ Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys- det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santérus Förlag, 2005. p. 98.

the latter around ideas. This essay focuses on an *agency-centered* perspective rather than an *idea-centered*, because the latter neglects the context in which the ideas have arisen. Due to the pertinence of context to this essay, an *agency-centered* perspective has been chosen.

Ideal types will be used as the *analysis apparatus* in this essay. The aim of *ideal types* is to combine different components of an idea or ideology and subsequently combine these components to create a, so-called, *ideal type*. In making *ideal types* of an ideology, you must create a category or class that clearly defines the constitution of the idea, thus clarifying and summarising the essential implications and meanings of said idea. The *ideal types* are tools that provide a clear summary of the political ideas, but they are merely extreme versions of reality. The point of *ideal types* is not to create holistic descriptions of actual, existing ideas, but simply to help in determining essential differences and similarities in political theories. The relevant philosophical ideas are placed in reference to the *ideal type*. Subsequently, we can see how close the theories are to the *ideal types*, thus enabling us to evaluate differences and similarities. This essay will use two *ideal types* named *aggressive communism* and *reform communism*. The *ideal types* will contain various criteria that constitute two different stances on riots and revolution.

⁹Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys- det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santérus Förlag, 2005. p. 17.

Table 1.2 Ideal types

Aggressive Communism	Reform Communism
1. Violent revolution is necessary and determinate.	1. Violent revolution is indeterminate and not necessary.
2. The current system must be overthrown.	2. The current system does not need to be overthrown.
3. The working class is revolutionary and universal.	3. The working class is no longer revolutionary and universal.
4. The current system is exploitative.	4. The current system is not exploitative.

A clarification of the terms and concepts that are used to formulate the relevant political ideas is an unavoidable part of idea analysis and the *history of ideas*. In order as to understand the fundamental message of Marx and Žižek, one must determine what the philosophers mean by certain concepts such as violence and proletariat. The fact that modern, leftist philosophers, ultimately, base many of their own theories on Marx's terminology means that many of the relevant terms, such as revolution, bear roughly the same meaning. In examining Marx's original theories on Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état in comparison to the modern philosophers' theories on the England riots, the essay will, hopefully, be able to distinguish whether the leftist stance on violence, riots, civil unrest etc. has changed or remained in its original form. One distinction that must be made in a *concept analysis* is whether or not it is the idea that is under

scrutiny, or the actual word itself.¹⁰ This essay focuses on the philosophers' concepts and ideas, rather than a quantitative study of how many times certain words have been used. This qualitative focus means that a few obstacles and factors must be addressed. Firstly, ambiguity is a relevant issue due to the often-vague attributes that are ascribed to certain concepts. For example, the term democracy can bear many different meanings depending on whom you ask. However, Beckman states that this concern can be minimised by “*preciseringar*” or clarifications.¹¹ Clarifications entail that, in an attempt to reduce the relative vagueness of terms, one endeavours to state, more-or-less, specific criteria for what defines the terms or concepts. Fortunately, the omnipotence of Marxist ideas in all the selected works means that the majority of the concepts have the same theoretical genesis and meaning. Additionally, any major differences will hopefully hint at changes to Marxist thought itself, rather than mere stylistic differences between Marx and the modern theorists.

1.4 Theory

1.4.1 The history of ideas

The *history of ideas*, or *idéhistoria*,¹² is a field of history that focuses on the ideas, theories and concepts that people have formulated to understand their surroundings and, to a great extent, themselves. It is intriguing to examine how theorists and philosophers have debated the great questions and how their postulations have shaped, not only, the thought-process of their successors, but also the unfolding of history itself. The *history of ideas* was formally instituted in 1932, making it a relative novation in the grand spectrum of historical institutions. Svante Nordin states that one of the most central themes in the *history of ideas* is the study of the meeting between tradition and the

¹⁰ Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys- det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santérus Förlag, 2005. p. 31.

¹¹ Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys- det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santérus Förlag, 2005. p. 34.

¹² Original Swedish term for the *history of ideas*.

moment.¹³ What Nordin is referring to is the development of established *topoi*, which are ubiquitous themes such as freedom and violence, and how their meanings have changed or have been modified in changing political environments; i.e. the meeting between tradition and the moment. The burning question, in the *history of ideas*, is whether there are universal truths and trans-historical ideas or whether ideas are merely products of their immediate milieu. In other words, are philosophical ideas and concepts transcendent or, in Kantian terms, immanent? The theoretical standpoint of this essay stems largely from the work of idea-historian Quentin Skinner. Skinner maintains that ideas should be studied in their historical context rather than as trans-historical *unit-ideas*.¹⁴ Therefore, the theoretical premise of this essay is to study Marx in reference to the historical event of Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état and Žižek and Badiou in relation to the England riots in 2011.

1.4.2 Post-structuralism

Art historian Alois Riegl developed the term *beholder's share* in 1900.¹⁵ *Beholder's share*, or *beholder's involvement*, is the term that labels what occurs when an observer views a painting or a work of art. Regardless of the artist's skill or workmanship, he or she cannot control how the viewer sees and, ultimately, interprets the work of art. The viewer approaches the painting with their subconscious subjectivity and a lifetime of biases, opinions and notions that inevitably affect said viewer's perception of the painting. This is the *beholder's share*, but why is this relevant? One major criticism of the *history of ideas* is that our interpretations of philosophical texts are, as is the case with paintings, affected by our subjectivity or, in other words, our

¹³ Nordin, Svante, *Varför Idéhistoria?*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2011. p. 40.

¹⁴ Nordin, Svante, *Varför Idéhistoria?*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2011. p. 25. *Unit-ideas* are elemental ideals that transcend history and were formulated by Arthur O. Lovejoy.

¹⁵ The New York Times, What the Brain Can Tell Us About Art, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/opinion/sunday/what-the-brain-can-tell-us-about-art.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1& (accessed 22/01/2015).

beholder's share. This goes against the positivistic and Popperian tendency that solely advocates the scientifically verifiable.¹⁶ But this does raise the question: what, in the humanist sciences, is truly objective? Clearly, this is not the forum for such a debate. However, the matter of subjectivity must be clarified.

Poststructuralism was first developed as a criticism of structuralism's theoretical immobility.¹⁷ Thinkers such as Jacques Derrida decried structuralism's belief in objective structures whilst promoting the importance of the subject and their singular subjectivity.¹⁸ Edda Manga writes, in her article *History of ideas at the end of Western dominance*, about a poststructuralist perspective on the *history of ideas*. Here, she quotes historian Sven Liedman's critical take on poststructuralist theory. Liedman refers to the theories of the poststructuralist successors of Foucault and Derrida as "*intellectual laxity*" and "*a relativism of the anything-goes variety*."¹⁹ Manga, however, resists Liedman's criticisms by stating that "*post-structural theory tries to be true to the subject's impossibility to represent itself or the other in a stable manner; to imagine possibilities of inhabiting areas of indeterminacy*."²⁰ Manga's view is that objectivity is essentially an impossibility in human sciences. This conclusion resonates through the research of this essay. The premise of this research, i.e. to compare Marx's and the contemporary philosophers' theories on riots and revolution using Beckman's model, can be repeated by others. However, it is unlikely that a facsimile of results and interpretations will occur due to the inexorability of our differing subjectivities. Beckman refers to *forskarens glasögon*, which literally translates to *the researcher's glasses* and is the phenomenon of how the researcher's interests and

¹⁶ Florén, Anders & Dahlgren, Stellan, *Fråga det förflutna: en introduktion till den moderna historieforskningen*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 1996. p. 94.

¹⁷ Florén, Anders & Dahlgren, Stellan, *Fråga det förflutna: en introduktion till den moderna historieforskningen*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 1996. p.118.

¹⁸ Florén, Anders & Dahlgren, Stellan, *Fråga det förflutna: en introduktion till den moderna historieforskningen*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 1996. p. 118.

¹⁹ Corvellec, Hervé (ed.), *What is Theory*, Liber, Stockholm, 2013. p. 53.

²⁰ Corvellec, Hervé (ed.), *What is Theory*, Liber, Stockholm, 2013. p. 59.

academic whims ultimately orchestrate how an idea analysis is constructed.²¹ Hence, the question that should be asked is not whether an idea analysis is objective, but rather: what is making the analysis subjective? Manga concludes her defence of poststructuralism by stating:

*This anxiety sometimes results in calls to submit the human sciences to the scientific fantasy of “evidence based” knowledge, e.g. calls for the historical research to employ “objective” descriptions of the sources and interpretative restraint. However, such calls rest on a fallacious understanding of historical research. Because all narratives are necessarily told by and address themselves to particular subjects, are enunciated from particular localities, and include certain imagined communities while excluding others, even an appeal to the sources cannot guarantee “objectivity.” Instead, one might object, claims to objective description are a sign of ideology.*²²

In light of this, the following research on Marx and Žižek has been produced in a way that accepts the ineludible nature of my *beholder’s share*. Nevertheless, the essay’s methodology has been constructed in a way that is conducive to repetition and similar research; thus allowing for further interpretations permeated by other subjectivities.

1.5 Materials

Slavoj Žižek is one of the most relevant political philosophers of the last decade. He has been labelled “*the Elvis of cultural theory*” and his vast array of popular books and feature length documentaries, such as “*A Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*”, have cemented his status as a “*celebrity philosopher*.”²³ His sensationalist and often-controversial theories on Western culture

²¹ Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys- det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santérus Förlag, 2005. p. 51.

²² Corvellec, Hervé (ed.), *What is Theory*, Liber, Stockholm, 2013. p. 64.

²³ The Guardian, *Slavoj Žižek: a philosopher to sing about*, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2013/jan/13/observer-profile-slavoj-žiček-opera>, (accessed 10/02/2015).

have propelled the Slovenian into the public consciousness, making him, and his ideas, an interesting commentator on the current political climate. Žižek's major influences are Karl Marx, Friedrich Hegel and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. It is precisely because of Žižek's aforementioned cultural relevance that his theories will be focal to this essay. Alain Badiou is a French philosopher whose theories are also influenced by Marx's theories. His books, *Philosophy for Militants* and *The Rebirth of History*, shall be used in this essay.

The materials that have been used in this essay are primarily: the philosophical works of Karl Marx, Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. The primary aim is to assess whether there has been a shift in the Marxist stance on riots and revolution. As a result, Karl Marx and his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* form the figurative base of the essay. The theories found in this work will be compared to the theories of the modern philosophers: Žižek and Badiou and their theories on the England riots. However, it is important to note that all their presented theories were not made in direct reference to the England riots, and a few of the discussed theories were made in regard to other similar events.

1.6 Previous Research

Eric Hobsbawm's book, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, is a body of work that studies the development and posthumous impact of the thought of Karl Marx. It is mainly concerned with "*the interaction between the historical context and the development and influence of ideas.*"²⁴ Elements of Hobsbawm's work are reminiscent of the *concept analysis* that this essay focuses on, as are the deliberations on the development of Marx's ideas. One interesting feature is Hobsbawm's study of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci and an analysis of the

²⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, Little, Brown, London, 2011. p. viii.

latter's pioneering of a Marxist theory of politics.²⁵ Hobsbawm mainly investigates how Marx influenced institutions such as the Labour Party and unions rather than other philosophers. Regardless, it was helpful to read a body of work with approximately the same premise.

The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, written by Shlomo Avineri, analyses Marx's thought against the background of their intellectual origins.²⁶ Avineri focuses especially on the influence of Hegel and elaborates upon Marx's development and critique of said idealist's theories. This aspect of Avineri's work has been useful to this essay, both as a background to Marx but also as an example of an ideological analysis.

1.6.1 The current state of communism

The first question asked in Bruno Bosteels work *The Actuality of Communism* is "*Have the communist idea and the communist name been historically compromised in the last century by their statist and bureaucratic uses, to the point of becoming unpronounceable?*"²⁷ This is an unavoidable question, particularly in light of the totalitarianism that scarred the 20th century. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed that we had reached the *end of history*, and that mankind had reached its apotheosis in the form of liberal democracy.²⁸ The collapse of communism instigated the "happy nineties", which saw liberal democracy and capitalism soar. However, the optimism of the "happy nineties" and the "end of history" came to a close after 9/11 and the economic crashes.²⁹ Žižek describes how, 12 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall,

²⁵ Hobsbawm, Eric, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, Little, Brown, London, 2011. p. 319.

²⁶ Avineri, Shlomo, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970. p. 3.

²⁷ Bosteels, Bruno, *The Actuality of Communism*, Verso, London, 2014.p. 2.

²⁸ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 86.

²⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 87.

new walls were being erected such as the West Bank Barrier and Fukuyama's dream was over.³⁰

Communism is now witnessing a revival, although the premise of this new communism is ambiguous. Bosteel's book discusses the future of communism and the vital dialectic between philosophy and reality. He debates whether or not communism, aside from being a relic of the past and the object of incriminating or nostalgic reminiscences, can be something more than an idealistic utopia for beautiful souls; this leftist idealism is referred to as *speculative leftism* and contains elements of what Lenin denoted as "the infantile disease of left-wing communism."³¹ *Speculative leftism* is an unwavering purification of the notion of communism. It does not merely advocate the abolishment of the present state of things such as classes, parties and the ideological apparatuses of the state; it insists that society must be subjected to a complete *tabula rasa*, thus creating a prelapsarian and socialist ideal.³² Bosteel dismisses these tendencies as idealistic and laments the fashion in which *speculative leftism* transforms the empirical into the speculative, and overlooks actual political circumstances and historical filiations.³³ In short, Bosteel's major criticism of *speculative leftism* is that, rather than studying an event within the current situation or world, it elevates the event into an abstract and immaterial reality. A key discussion in Bosteel's book regards the actuality of today's communism. Is this actuality limited to simply being a pure movement of critique and destruction along the lines of *speculative leftism*? Or can there be a universal front of affirmation that can translate into a political reality? This is an important aspect of the essay and the analysis of modern Marxists. Since material circumstances are of monumental importance to Marxist theory, it will be interesting to establish whether the modern theorists contemplation of the

³⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 87.

³¹ Bosteels, Bruno, *The Actuality of Communism*, Verso, London, 2014. p. 18.

³² Bosteels, Bruno, *The Actuality of Communism*, Verso, London, 2014. p. 24.

³³ Bosteels, Bruno, *The Actuality of Communism*, Verso, London, 2014. p. 24-25.

immanent factors remain, or whether a step towards *speculative leftism* has been taken.

2 Background

2.1 England Riots

The 2011 England riots began on the sixth of August and lasted for four days, causing considerable damage before its conclusion on the ninth. The riots began as a non-violent protest against the suspicious circumstances surrounding the police shooting and killing of Mark Duggan in Tottenham, North London. Duggan's death occurred when police stopped his vehicle following suspicions that he was in possession of a handgun but an undisputed account of what happened is lacking. Police claim that Duggan was armed and, therefore, an imminent threat; whilst witnesses claim that an escaping Duggan was shot in the back. Regardless, these circumstances caused demonstrations against the shooting outside Tottenham police station, demonstrations that quickly became violent. Bottles were thrown at the police and two police cars were set on fire. The situation escalated when police lost control of the crowd and the angry mob of hundreds began looting, committing arson and fighting the police around that area of North London. The disorder continued the next day, and looting dominated the rioters' agenda, as the raiding spread to other areas of London such as Brixton and Hackney. The third day saw the one of the most intense 24 hours of civil unrest in English history.³⁴ Battles against the police in Hackney, East London soon spread around London, affecting 22 of her 32 boroughs and resulting in a fierce tirade of looting and arson. Unrest was spreading on a national level and the ruly status quo was disturbed in other English cities such as Liverpool and Birmingham.

³⁴ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15). p. 17.

The fourth, and final, night saw 17 000 police descend on the capital, finally ending all but a few skirmishes. Rioting and intense looting did, however, continue in other parts of England such as Liverpool, Nottingham and Greater Manchester. In total, the cost of the riots to the London's economy was around 300 million and about 2500 shops were looted.³⁵ As a result, more than 3000 people were prosecuted in England and Wales, and perpetrators are currently serving approximately 1800 years of collective jail sentences.³⁶ A satisfactory explanation behind the riots is still lacking. It is a strange demonstration of civil unrest due to the fact that there was, seemingly, no political message or incentive behind the riots. Usually, a riot is the violent culmination of a political protest, as was the case with the student riots that took place earlier in the same year. *Reading the riots*, a study of the riots undertaken by *The Guardian*, reported that 86% of the 270 interviewed rioters ascribed poverty as an important cause of the riots.³⁷ Additionally, 79% indicated that unemployment was a pivotal cause. The government and police tactics was also a major factor for the rioters. 80% claimed that government policies were a major factor and 85% accredited the police's actions with the outburst of violence. Many of the political commentators, including PM David Cameron, have labelled the riots as "... *criminality pure and simple*."³⁸ 70% of the interviewed rioters also attribute the riots with greed and the desire for material goods but only 64%

³⁵ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15). p. 27.

³⁶ BBC News, *England riots one year on: Culprits jailed for 1,800 years*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-19111720> (accessed 22/01/2015).

³⁷ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15). p. 11.

³⁸ The Telegraph, *UK riots: text of David Cameron's address to Commons*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8695272/UK-riots-text-of-David-Camerons-address-to-Commons.html> (accessed 22/01/2015).

claim that criminality was behind the looting.³⁹ Instead, many of the looters insist that they were getting their “*just rewards*” from a greedy and excluding society that is focused on big corporations and advertising.⁴⁰ However, *Reading the Riots* states that many of the rioters claimed that: “*what began as a protest against the police shooting of Mark Duggan was stripped of political meaning before it spread across the country, fuelled by ‘mindless’ and ‘copycat’ opportunists.*”⁴¹

2.2 Louis Bonaparte’s coup d’état

The period of 1775 to 1848 is known as the age of revolutions. It is a time period that witnessed the collapse of empires, industrial burgeoning and, most notably, revolutions. The emergence of political ideologies and struggles defines the era and the epicentre of these radical new ideas was France. The French revolution saw the rise of liberalism and emanated an awareness towards concepts such as egalitarianism and the habitual inequality of the French class system. 1815 saw the emergence of socialism and thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon established ideas that contradicted trends such as *laissez-faireism* and private property.⁴² The pivotal driving force of socialism was, however, Karl Marx and his collaborative efforts with Friedrich Engels. One of Marx’s major theories was that the middle-class, or *bourgeoisie*, was exploiting the modern working class or *proletariat*,⁴³ *The Communist Manifesto* states that the “*history of all previously*

³⁹ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15). p. 11.

⁴⁰ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15). p. 28.

⁴¹ The Guardian, *Reading the riots*, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf) (accessed 22/01/15). p. 24.

⁴² McKay, John P., *A History of World Societies*, 9. ed., comb. ed., Bedford / St. Martin’s, Boston, 2012. p. 721.

⁴³ McKay, John P., *A History of World Societies*, 9. ed., comb. ed., Bedford / St. Martin’s, Boston, 2012. p. 721.

existing struggles is the history of class struggles."⁴⁴ Inspired by the experiences of industrial workers in England, Marx anticipated that the exploited and growing working class would eventually unite and revolt against the bourgeoisie plutocracy, as is stated in *The Communist Manifesto*.⁴⁵

Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état in 1851 marked the end of the French revolution and was, in revolutionary terms, a damp squib.⁴⁶ In 1848, the reigning monarch Louis Philippe XVIII abdicated due to mounting dissatisfaction stemming from the continued lack of universal suffrage for all French men. This surging sense of revolutionary spirit burgeoned and promoted a committed republic with progressive tendencies. However, these socialist predilections were not wholly accepted as the upper and middle classes along with the peasants were not prepared to give up their land and property.⁴⁷ As a result, a majority of moderate republicans were elected as delegates into the new Constituent Assembly, delegates that opposed any further radical social measures.⁴⁸ Violent clashes between radical socialists and liberal capitalists broke out, but it was the latter who won the struggle for power. The government could, due to the loyalty of the army and peasants, stand victorious after this political struggle known as *The June Days*.⁴⁹ The French revolution had failed and the Constituent Assembly removed many of its democratic features. This allowed Louis Bonaparte to utilise the reactionary vote and, initially, be elected as president in the 1848 election and subsequently remove the National Assembly and seize power in a

⁴⁴ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 222.

⁴⁵ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 246.

⁴⁶ McKay, John P., *A History of World Societies*, 9. ed., comb. ed., Bedford / St. Martin's, Boston, 2012. p. 724.

⁴⁷ McKay, John P., *A History of World Societies*, 9. ed., comb. ed., Bedford / St. Martin's, Boston, 2012. p. 723.

⁴⁸ McKay, John P., *A History of World Societies*, 9. ed., comb. ed., Bedford / St. Martin's, Boston, 2012. p. 723.

⁴⁹ McKay, John P., *A History of World Societies*, 9. ed., comb. ed., Bedford / St. Martin's, Boston, 2012. p. 724.

coup d'état. Louis Bonaparte would later hold the title of emperor until the end of his reign in 1870.

Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* was written as an analysis of Louis Bonaparte's rise to authoritarian power and is a lucid demonstration of the author's historical materialism. It is important to clarify that the proletariat was still a minority during this time period.⁵⁰

3 Results

3.1 Factors behind the coup d'état

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte analyses Louis Napoleon's coup d'état in 1851 and, in Marx's own words, "demonstrates how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part."⁵¹ This political pamphlet illustrates the failings of the aforementioned coup d'état and the factors behind this *farce*.⁵²

The opening line of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."⁵³ This quote refers to, what Marx claimed, was a major factor behind the failure of the 1848 revolution. The problem being that the French, whilst in the process of revolution, were still transfixed by the idea of Napoleon Bonaparte, resulting in the emergence of his nephew and *caricature*.⁵⁴ Louis Napoleon's ascendancy is referred to as a metaphorical reawakening of the dead, and it was the failure of the revolutionaries that, whilst in

⁵⁰ Hobsbawm, Eric, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, Little, Brown, London, 2011. p. 63.

⁵¹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 300.

⁵² McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 300.

⁵³ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 300.

⁵⁴ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 302.

the process of creating something new, they harked back to the past. Marx describes how these pastiches can “*glorify new struggles*”⁵⁵ as was the case with the French Revolution and Cromwell in Britain. However, in the case of Louis Bonaparte, the traditions of the past weighed “*like a nightmare on the brain of the living.*”⁵⁶

The French predilection for the past led to the rise of Louis Bonaparte and the continued oppression of the working classes. Marx maintains that this nostalgia is the bane of future emancipatory struggles.

*The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. /.../ The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead.*⁵⁷

In light of this, Marx sees the weakness of the emancipatory movement as this fixation with the ghosts of old. Thus, the 1848 revolution appears as a farcical parody of the French revolution. The 1848 revolution is, nevertheless, seen as vastly important to the coup d'état as this quote demonstrates: “*The social republic appeared as a phrase, as a prophecy, on the threshold of the February Revolution. In the June days of 1848, it was drowned in the blood of the Paris proletariat, but it haunts the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost.*”⁵⁸

The circumstances enabling Louis Bonaparte's ascent are not of vital relevance to the questions at hand; however, a brief narrative of the structural circumstances is required. Marx stipulates that a “*minor trade crisis*”⁵⁹ caused by the “*idleness*”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 301.

⁵⁶ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 300.

⁵⁷ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 302.

⁵⁸ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 314.

⁵⁹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 307.

of French factories was an important factor behind the failure of the Republic. This uncertain economic climate paired with an equally capricious political milieu led the bourgeois class to accept the rule of Louis Bonaparte. Marx describes how antagonisms within the French bourgeoisie created different factions in the *Parti de l'ordre* or the party of Order; the two conflicting factions of the parliamentary party were the Legitimists or landlords, supporters of the Bourbon dynasty, and the industrialists, aligned with the Orleans dynasty.⁶¹ Marx stated “each of the two great interests into which the bourgeoisie is split—landed property and capital—sought to restore its own supremacy and the subordination of the other.”⁶² This internal conflict, aligned with the bourgeoisie fear of the proletariat, created the circumstances in which Louis Bonaparte could seize control of the state. Marx’s implacable description of the bourgeoisie seemingly reaches its apogee when he depicts how: “out of enthusiasm for its purse, it rebelled against its own politicians and men of letters; its politicians and men of letters are swept aside, but its purse is being plundered now that its mouth has been gagged and its pen broken.”⁶³ Marx’s conclusion is that the bourgeoisie accepted the authoritarian rule of Louis Bonaparte as to not disturb the conditions required for businesses and financial activity and, in doing so, strengthened the centralisation of the governmental power.⁶⁴ According to Marx, the outcome of the coup d’état was France’s escape from the repression of one single class to the repression of an individual;

⁶⁰ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 308.

⁶¹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 304, 305.

⁶² Marx, Karl (2012), *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (kindle e-book), Public domain book. p. 480.

⁶³ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 314.

⁶⁴ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 316.

an individual that renders *all classes*, “*equally impotent and equally mute, fall on their knees before the rifle butt.*”⁶⁵

3.2 Failures of the revolutionary agents

3.2.1 Peasants

Marx’s description of the role of the French peasants is an excellent example of his historical materialism and is of great pertinence to the question at hand. In examining the failings of the peasants alongside the failure of the British working class, one will be able to establish whether the Marxist and historical materialist perspective has altered. Their description as a “*sack of potatoes*” elucidates Marx’s general odium for, what he perceives as, the myopia of the peasants. The peasants were the most numerous class in France; however, Marx contends whether or not this large demographic constitutes a true class or simply an unrepresented mass. He deliberates that, insofar as their culture and way of life puts them in hostility with the other classes, they do form a class; nevertheless, their lack of organisation, *mutual intercourse*⁶⁶ and subsequent isolation means they do not form a class. Ultimately, this ineptitude for political representation means that an authoritarian master with unlimited governmental power must *ipso facto* represent the peasants.⁶⁷ Marx states: “*The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself.*”⁶⁸

A defining aspect of the peasants is their prescribed

⁶⁵ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 316.

⁶⁶ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 317.

⁶⁷ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 318.

⁶⁸ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 318.

propensity for the aforementioned “*spirits of the past*.”⁶⁹ Marx explains the rise of Louis Bonaparte in the following manner:

*Historical tradition gave rise to the belief of the French peasants in the miracle that a man named Napoleon would bring all the glory back to them. And an individual turned up who gives himself out as the man because he bears the name of Napoleon [...] The fixed idea of the nephew was realized, because it coincided with the fixed idea of the most numerous class of the French people [...] It represents not the enlightenment, but the superstition of the peasant; not his judgement, but his prejudice; not his future, but his past; not his modern Cevennes, but his modern Vendée.*⁷⁰

The peasants, or more specifically, the small-holding peasants, equated the re-emergence of “Napoleon” with the liberty and land they had gained after 1789 and the collapse of feudalism. Marx describes that the Napoleonic form of property, “*which at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the condition for the liberation and enrichment of the French country folk, has developed in the course of this century into the law of their enslavement and pauperization.*”⁷¹ This susceptibility for Louis Bonaparte is referred to as the “*Napoleonic illusion*”⁷² and it is the faith in the latter and the *idées napoléoniennes*, that facilitated the manner in which the peasants’ passive support for Louis Bonaparte inadvertently supported the bourgeoisie and their own “*oppression.*”⁷³ Marx describes that the role of the oppressive, land-owning aristocracy had been replaced by bourgeois capital and urban usurers and that the peasants were now enslaved by mortgages and driven to pauperism by heavy taxation.⁷⁴ The

⁶⁹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 300.

⁷⁰ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 318.

⁷¹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 319.

⁷² McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 318.

⁷³ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 318.

⁷⁴ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 320- 321.

Bonaparte dynasty is described as representative of the conservative, small-holding peasants and their reactionary support for the “old” property system and “*the ghost of the empire*”, rather than the revolutionary peasant that “*strikes out beyond the condition of his social existence.*”⁷⁵ The reactionary French peasants are defined as “*troglydytes.*”⁷⁶

3.2.2 Lumpenproletariat

Lumpenproletariat is a Marxist term that denotes a group of the proletariat that, due to a lack of class-consciousness, has no revolutionary merit.⁷⁷ In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx describes the lumpenproletariat as the base for Bonaparte’s power and the tool enabling him to appear as the “*patriarchal benefactor of all classes.*”⁷⁸ Hence, Bonaparte looked upon himself, contradictorily, as the representative of the lower classes as well as the safeguard of the bourgeoisie, despite the fact that one cannot take from one class without taking from another.⁷⁹ An interesting aspect of the lumpenproletariat is the army and its description as a “*drunken soldiery /.../ bought with liquor and sausages.*”⁸⁰ The perpetual “*Napoleonic illusion*” gave the army the impression that it remained the heroic *point d’honneur* and *flower* of the small-holding peasants, defending their “*new possessions against the outer world, glorifying their recently won nationhood, plundering and revolutionizing the world*”; whilst it was, in actuality, merely the “*swamp-flower of*

⁷⁵ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 318.

⁷⁶ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 320.

⁷⁷ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 229.

⁷⁸ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 323.

⁷⁹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 323.

⁸⁰ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 317.

the peasant lumpenproletariat” defending the *huissiers* and tax collectors.⁸¹

3.3 Future of the revolution

The tone of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* resonates, with utter conviction, that revolution is inevitable. Marx’s belief in this, seemingly inevitable, revolution is expressed in the following extract:

... the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still journeying through purgatory, It does its work methodically. By 2 December 1851, it had completed one half of its preparatory work; it is now completing the other half. First it perfected the parliamentary power in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has done this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exultantly exclaim: Well grubbed, old mole!⁸²

The future of the revolution is described as inevitable. It is also personified with eschatological and conclusive qualities. Marx’s metaphoric revolution is likened to a mole that consciously perfects the circumstances required for the necessary political upheaval.⁸³ These descriptions elucidate the evolutionary aspect of Marx’s theory of history that is developed in *The Communist Manifesto*.⁸⁴ There is palpable certainty in Marx’s descriptions of the future for the “*forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions*.”⁸⁵ Marx describes how the peasants will join their natural ally and leader, the urban proletariat, and how the

⁸¹ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 321.

⁸² McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 316.

⁸³ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 316.

⁸⁴ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 222.

⁸⁵ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 246.

bourgeoisie will fear the “*insight of the [peasant] masses as soon as they become revolutionary.*”⁸⁶ These quotes reverberate with the same revolutionary optimism as the final pages of *The Communist Manifesto*, and highlight the determinate nature of Marx’s revolutionary theory. What becomes clear is Marx’s endorsing of an active, public and non-conformist political engagement, rather than attempts to change the system from within.⁸⁷ Furthermore, he states a proletariat that “*seeks to bring about its emancipation, behind the back of society, in private ways, within the narrow bounds of its own class conditions, ... inevitably fails.*”⁸⁸ This standpoint advocates an aggressive and violent attack on the capitalist system.

3.4 Factors behind the England riots

Akin to Marx, Slavoj Žižek introduces his analysis of the England riots with a reference to the Hegelian theory of repetition. He states that the repeated financial crashes indicate a structural weakness within the capitalist system, and that their repetition indicates the unfolding of a deeper historical process.⁸⁹ Although the killing of Mark Duggan initially triggered the riots, Žižek maintains that the current trend of rioting indicates a deeper unease in capitalist societies.⁹⁰

Žižek labels the riots as “*zero-degree protest, a violent action which demands nothing.*”⁹¹ In an attempt to explain this apolitical element, the rioters are described as being underprivileged and socially excluded; nevertheless, Žižek reveals that people in

⁸⁶ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 319.

⁸⁷ Marx, Karl (2012), *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (kindle e-book), Public domain book. p. 169.

⁸⁸ Marx, Karl (2012), *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (kindle e-book), Public domain book. p. 169.

⁸⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

⁹⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

⁹¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 54.

worse political, ideological and material conditions have managed to organise political forces with pure agendas. Moreover, the rioters are, due to their apolitical state, described as difficult to define in Marxist terms. As a result, Žižek utilises the Hegelian term *rabble* to describe them. *Rabble*, as a term, describes “*people outside organised social space, who can express their discontent only through ‘irrational’ outbursts of destructive violence.*”⁹² This lack of political vision is an intriguing factor and Žižek argues that this zero-degree protest signals the post-ideological nature of today’s post-communism milieu.⁹³ He continues by stating how this signals the “*ideological-political predicament*”⁹⁴ of today, and how this is a society which “*celebrates choice but in which the only available alternative to enforced democratic consensus is a blind acting out /.../ what is the point of our celebrated freedom of choice when the only choice is between playing by the rules and (self-) destructive violence?*”⁹⁵

Alain Badiou associates the outbreaks of *meaningless violence* with an increasingly *worldless* social space.⁹⁶ The global dimension of capitalism or, in other words, the lack of a capitalist worldview’ or ‘capitalist civilisation’ proper represents *truth-without-meaning*.⁹⁷ This refers to the global nature of capitalism and the increasingly hegemonic role of scientific discourse, which create a *worldless* ideological constellation and deprives individuals of a method for locating meaning.⁹⁸ Consequently, the only form protest can take is meaningless violence, as a result of *truth-without-meaning*

⁹² Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

⁹³ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 63.

⁹⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

⁹⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 54.

⁹⁶ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 54.

⁹⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

⁹⁸ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 33.

Žižek describes how the rioting and looting mainly took place in the rioters' own areas and around the poorer areas of London and the other cities. As a result, this conflict should not be analysed in the Marxist terms of the small bourgeoisie protecting their property and shops against a genuine and revolutionary protest against the system; it should be described as a conflict between those who have succeeded in functioning within the system against those who are too frustrated to go on trying.⁹⁹ Žižek writes: "*the conflict is not between different parts of society; it is, at its most radical, the conflict between those with everything, and those with nothing, to lose; between those with no stake in their community and those whose stakes are highest.*"¹⁰⁰ Žižek proceeds to discuss Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the riots and *consumerism*. Bauman describes the England riots as "*not hunger or bread riots. These are riots of defective and disqualified consumers.*"¹⁰¹ The riots are defined as a manifestation of violent, consumerist desire that was enacted in the only way possible for the deprived rioters.¹⁰² Bauman describes how the premise of social inequality derives from the division between the *haves* and the *have-nots*.¹⁰³ The desirable objects, which have historically been utilitarian commodities such as bread and rice, are now of a material nature. Bauman depicts how "*For defective consumers, those contemporary have-nots, non-shopping is the jarring and festering stigma of a life unfulfilled – and of own nonentity and good-for-nothingness. Not just the absence of pleasure: absence of human dignity. Of life*

⁹⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

¹⁰¹ Bauman, Zygmunt, Social Europe, *The London Riots – On Consumerism coming Home to Roost*: by Zygmunt Bauman, <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2011/08/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost/> (accessed 22/01/15).

¹⁰² Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 60.

¹⁰³ Bauman, Zygmunt, Social Europe, *The London Riots – On Consumerism coming Home to Roost*: by Zygmunt Bauman, <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2011/08/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost/> (accessed 22/01/15).

meaning.”¹⁰⁴ Consequently, Bauman dismisses the revolutionary zest of the rioters due to the fact that the riots and looting were a desperate attempt to join the consumerist ideology, rather than destroy it.¹⁰⁵ Žižek seconds this thesis and labels the riots as “*envy masked as triumphant carnival*.”¹⁰⁶ The violence, according to Žižek, is not truly *self-assertive* but rather “*impotent rage and despair masked as a display of force*”¹⁰⁷ and, ergo, not revolutionary.

3.5 Failures of the revolutionary agents

3.5.1 British working-class

Alain Badiou claims that we are witnessing the retrograde consummation of the essence of capitalism and the reawakening of History with the possible re-emergence of communism as an *Idea*. Furthermore, Badiou identifies three types of riots in his work *The Rebirth of History*. There are *immediate*, *latent* and *historical riots*, and the England riots are defined as being an *immediate riot*.¹⁰⁸ *Immediate riots* are described as being “*violent, anarchic and ultimately without enduring truth*” and that “*if riots are to signal a reawakening of History, they must indeed accord with an Idea*.”¹⁰⁹ The rioters’ lack of a political purpose and lack of an *Idea*, renders their protests impotent and merely a nihilistic spurt.¹¹⁰ The weakness of the England riots, and other *immediate riots*, is their “*weak localization*” which entails that they have a

¹⁰⁴ Bauman, Zygmunt, Social Europe, *The London Riots – On Consumerism coming Home to Roost: by Zygmunt Bauman*, <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2011/08/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost/> (accessed 22/01/15).

¹⁰⁵ Bauman, Zygmunt, Social Europe, *The London Riots – On Consumerism coming Home to Roost: by Zygmunt Bauman*, <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2011/08/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost/> (accessed 22/01/15).

¹⁰⁶ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 21.

¹¹⁰ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 92.

limited geographical and demographical range.¹¹¹ As a result, the rioting is limited to certain groups of society, in this case, young, working-class men; consequently, the riots “*stagnate in their own space... it rages on itself; it destroys what it is used to.*”¹¹² The key difference between an *immediate* and *historical* riot is the presence of the *Idea* in the latter.

Žižek labels the violence of the rioters as a blind *passage à l’acte*, which is a Lacanian term for “*an impulsive movement into action which can’t be translated into speech or thought and carries with it an intolerable weight of frustration.*”¹¹³ This acting out is comparable to terrorism and suicide-bombings according to Žižek. “*In both instances, violence and counter-violence are caught up in a vicious circle, each generating the forces it tries to combat. In both cases, we are dealing with blind passages à l’acte, in which violence is an implicit admission of impotence.*”¹¹⁴ The crucial difference between the England riots and terrorism is the latter’s undertaking in the service of an absolute *Meaning*.¹¹⁵

The concept of violence is a ubiquitous theme throughout the works of Žižek and Badiou. Žižek differentiates between two forms of violence that are present in today’s society, namely subjective and objective violence. Subjective violence is the most visible type, it includes murder, assault, rape and other acts of clear violence that stride against legality in most countries. This violence is experienced against the background of a non-violent zero level, making it directly visible and conspicuous.¹¹⁶ However, it is precisely *objective violence* that is this zero level or

¹¹¹ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 24.

¹¹² Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 23.

¹¹³ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

¹¹⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, London review of books, *Shoplifters of the world unite*, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-Žižek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite> (accessed 22/01/15).

¹¹⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 68-69.

¹¹⁶ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 1-2.

the “normal” state of things and the violence inherent to this system.¹¹⁷ Badiou uses a similar view of the *actual* violence in society in describing the England riots.

*To believe that the intolerable crime is to burn a few cars and rob some shops, whereas to kill a young man is trivial, is typically in keeping with what Marx regarded as the principal alienation of capitalism: the primacy of things over existence, of commodities over life and machines over workers /.../ Of this lethal dimension of capitalism the Camerons and Sarkozy are the zealous cops.*¹¹⁸

This *Objective*, or *systemic*, violence is described as integral to the capitalist system and Žižek refers to Marx when describing the “*parasitic*” nature of capitalist circulation and its “*mad metaflexive speculations on futures*.”¹¹⁹ The fundamental and systemic violence of capitalism is faceless and no longer attributable to concrete individuals or their “*evil intentions*”; it has become objective, systemic and anonymous.¹²⁰ Žižek elucidates Marx’s predictions on the abstract nature of capitalism by introducing Lacan’s theory of the difference between *reality* and the *Real*. *Reality* is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, while the *Real* is the inexorable “abstract” spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality.¹²¹ A lucid example of the relationship between *reality* and the *Real* is economic reports of nations such as Brazil. The prevalence of favelas and general poverty indicate a high level of human misery; however, an economic report would indicate that the country’s economic situation is sound and stable. Žižek concludes that, in light of

¹¹⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 10.

¹²⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 11.

¹²¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 11.

similar scenarios, “*reality doesn’t matter, what matters is the situation of capital.*”¹²²

3.6 Violence

Žižek and Badiou also discuss the importance of violence in revolutionary acts. One aspect of this is the *Benjaminian*¹²³ notion of *divine violence*. Walter Benjamin coined the term in *Critique of Violence* and defines it as follows: “*mythic violence is confronted by the divine /.../ If mythic violence is law-making, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries the latter boundlessly destroys them.*”¹²⁴ Žižek provides a more concrete depiction: “*when those outside the structured social field strike ‘blindly,’ demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance, this is ‘divine violence.’*”¹²⁵ For Benjamin and emancipatory leftists, *divine violence* is justice for *the part of no-part*¹²⁶ of society and enacted upon the exploitative and oppressive.¹²⁷ Žižek associates the Latin phrases *vox populi, vox dei* and *fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus*¹²⁸ with *divine violence* when explaining the necessity of Terror in a True revolutionary act.¹²⁹ Žižek also quotes Robespierre and his claims that *divine* revolution cannot strike from within the pre-existing norms or social rules and must denounce humanitarian concerns in demanding justice.¹³⁰ The liberal desire for a “revolution without a revolution”, or “*decaffeinated revolution*” as Žižek puts it,¹³¹ must be disdained and *divine* and emancipatory *violence* should be endorsed.¹³²

¹²² Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 11.

¹²³ Refers to the theories of Walter Benjamin.

¹²⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 167.

¹²⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 162.

¹²⁶ The excluded in society.

¹²⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 162.

¹²⁸ *Vox populi, vox dei* means: the voice of the people is the voice of God. *Fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus* means: Let justice be done, though the heavens fall.

¹²⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 163.

¹³⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 163.

¹³¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 159.

¹³² Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 174.

3.7 The future of the revolution

One vital aspect is to consider what will constitute the revolutionary class. Žižek dismisses the revolutionary value of the “traditional” working-class and equates the absence of emancipatory zest to a lack of *rage capital*.¹³³ Žižek expands on this idea by stating that the defining problem of Western Marxism is the lack of a revolutionary subject or agent, and that the “skill” of Lenin lay in his ability to see the *rage potential* of the Russian peasants.¹³⁴ The England riots are described as merely being “*a purely formal universality /.../ a purely negative gesture of angry rejection and an equally abstract demand for justice, lacking the ability to translate this demand into a concrete political programme.*”¹³⁵ While there is *rage-capital*, the disorganized and individualistic rioters lack the necessary revolutionary universality. Dismissing the revolutionary potential of the English and western working-class, Žižek claims that the left must radicalise the notion of the proletariat, to an existential level far beyond Marx’s imagination.¹³⁶ The major facet of Marx’s theory of the proletariat is the exploited worker who is reduced to a machine without subjectivity or substance, exploited by the bourgeoisie and wage-labour.¹³⁷ This classical Marxist notion of the working class is described as being irrelevant in today’s conditions due to the changed nature of the working-class.¹³⁸ Žižek quotes Gerald A. Cohen’s enumeration of the Marxist notion of the working-class:

(1) It constitutes the majority of society; (2) it produces the wealth of society; (3) it consists of the exploited members of society; (4) its members are the needy people in society. When these four features are combined, they generate two further

¹³³ Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2009. p. 159.

¹³⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 89.

¹³⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 124.

¹³⁶ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 92.

¹³⁷ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 227.

¹³⁸ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 420.

*features: (5) the working class has nothing to lose from revolution; (6) it can and will engage in a revolutionary transformation of society.*¹³⁹

Žižek maintains that, although some of the features continue to apply to parts of today's society, the working classes are no longer united as a single agent with a singular universality.¹⁴⁰ In light of this, Žižek concludes that new emancipatory politics will not stem from a particular social agent, such as the working classes, but from an explosive combination of different agents.¹⁴¹ Žižek identifies four contemporary antagonisms, or *commons*, that cannot be solved within the global capitalist space. These *commons* will also constitute the radicalisation of Marx's theories and the new proletariat. The first antagonism is the threat of an ecological catastrophe; Žižek claims the capitalist system's immense structure will eventually destroy the environment and possibly mankind itself. The second antagonism is the Marxist notion of private property in regards to *Intellectual property*. The third antagonism is the "*socio-ethical implications of new technological developments*" and the ethical concerns of biogenetics.¹⁴² Finally, new forms of apartheid, slums and growing gulfs in society constitute the fourth antagonism. Žižek states the new potential agent of future emancipatory struggles will be "*the inert background of history*,"¹⁴³ and the *part of no-part* of society.¹⁴⁴ These terms refer to people such as slum-dwellers, a "*supernumerary*" part of society.¹⁴⁵ Žižek associates all these factors with proletarianisation. He defines the ecological struggle as proletarianisation since "*we are being deprived of our natural substance of our existence.*"¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the struggle

¹³⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 420.

¹⁴⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 420.

¹⁴¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 92.

¹⁴² Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 91.

¹⁴³ Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 99.

¹⁴⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 425.

¹⁴⁶ Adrian Cousins, Youtube, *Slavoj Žižek - What does it mean to be a revolutionary today? Marxism 2009*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GD69Cc20rw (accessed 03/02/2015).

for *Intellectual property* and the ethical implications of biogenetics are portrayed as attempts to deprive “us” of our symbolic substance and genetic legacy.¹⁴⁷ In reference to the fourth antagonism, Žižek declares the new forms of social awareness will stem from the slum collectives and “*the principal task of the twenty-first century is to politicize- organize and discipline- the ‘de-structured masses’ of slum-dwellers.*”¹⁴⁸ There is an apocalyptic and pessimistic tone to Žižek’s theories. He continues his radicalisation of the proletariat by declaring: “*what unites us is that, in contrast to the classic image of proletariat who have ‘nothing to lose but their chains,’ we are in danger of losing everything.*”¹⁴⁹ Here, Žižek is referring to the ecological implications of, for example, global warming and nuclear weapons, and that if the current trend continues, it will not be enough to simply reduce the totality and omnipotence of capitalism to avert a cataclysmic disaster.

A prominent facet of both Badiou and Žižek’s works is the actuality and future of communism as an *Idea*. Badiou describes, as does Žižek, Communism as an “*ethereal*” and eternal Idea.¹⁵⁰ In his *Communist Hypothesis*, Badiou states, more-or-less, that the left should begin again after the obscure disaster of 1989.¹⁵¹ He does not claim the events of the 20th century should be forgotten, but that everything should be reconsidered and begin from a new zero-point.¹⁵² The root of this new zero-point is that modern leftists must locate actual antagonisms within reality that give the *Idea* a practical urgency, rather than to blindly rely on the determinate nature of said

¹⁴⁷ Adrian Cousins, Youtube, *Slavoj Žižek - What does it mean to be a revolutionary today? Marxism 2009*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GD69Cc20rw (accessed 03/02/2015).

¹⁴⁸ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 426-427.

¹⁴⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 92.

¹⁵⁰ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 87.

¹⁵² Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 87.

Idea.¹⁵³ In addition, both Badiou and Žižek insist upon the required modernity of the communist Idea. “*Fidelity to the communist Idea thus means that... il faut être absolument moderne- we should remain resolutely modern.*”¹⁵⁴ The aforementioned update of Marx’s notion of the working class is an example of this modernisation.

Žižek’s major criticism of Marxian thought is its determinate nature.

*The problem is that the revolution no longer rides on the train of History, following its laws, since there is no History, since history is an open, contingent process /.../ we should ruthlessly abandon the prejudice that the linear time of evolution is ‘on our side,’ That History is ‘working for us’ like the famous old mole digging under the earth, doing the work of the Cunning of Reason.*¹⁵⁵

What Žižek proposes is a return from Marx’s revolutionary eschatology to Hegel’s vision of an indeterminate, *open* history.¹⁵⁶ He states the contemporary left should accept “*there is no higher historical Necessity whose instruments we are and which guarantees the final outcome of our interventions /.../ There will never be a left that magically transforms confused revolts and protests into one big consistent Project of Salvation; all we have is our activity, open to all the risks of contingent history.*”¹⁵⁷

The notion that there is no big *Other* is seconded by Badiou: “*the death of Communism becomes the second death of God but in the territory of history.*”¹⁵⁸ In light of this, Žižek and Badiou do not regard a future revolution and utopian society as an inevitable part of the future. Instead, Badiou and Žižek introduce a modern focus on subjectivity and the parallax nature of riots and

¹⁵³ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 90.

¹⁵⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 97.

¹⁵⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 89, 149.

¹⁵⁶ Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 129.

¹⁵⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 129.

¹⁵⁸ Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, London, 2009. p. 149.

revolutions. The *divine* elements of protests and violence are described as *Badiouian events*.¹⁵⁹ This entails that, rather than coming from a big *Other* or blind faith, the belief in a political movement or act comes from one's own subjectivity. In other words, it is only the subject that believes in the *Idea* that can find the "greater" meaning or *divine* element in an act.

Badiou contends that the future for Communism is to do nothing, as it is "*better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering invisible that which Empire already recognises as existent.*"¹⁶⁰ In other words, it is better to do nothing than to engage in *localized* acts that merely make the capitalist system run more smoothly.¹⁶¹ Žižek theorises along the same lines claiming, "*The threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity.*"¹⁶² This approach is referred to as the *politics of subtraction*, and is described as:

*The acceptance of capitalism as the 'background' of our lives: the lesson of the fall of Communist states is that it is meaningless to 'fight capitalism'... It is from this shared space that one should 'subtract' oneself: 'resistance presents itself as an exodus, as a departure outside the world.'*¹⁶³

This resonates with the theories of Bruno Bosteels, who was introduced in the *Previous Research* section of this essay. The, seemingly, cautious and passive approach of Žižek and Badiou is an attempt to create a *constructive* Communist notion of the *Idea*, rather than the *destructive* tendencies of *speculative Leftism*.

¹⁵⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, *Living in the End Times*, Verso, London, 2010. p. xiv.

¹⁶⁰ Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 175.

¹⁶¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 175.

¹⁶² Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2014. p. 175.

¹⁶³ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 406.

4 Analysis

The concepts presented in the results will now be analysed. When examining Marx's concept of the proletariat contra that of Žižek and Badiou a number of interesting points must be discussed.

Firstly, it is crucial to consider the fundamental nature of historical materialism in the relevant works. Marx's main criticism of Hegel's political philosophy was the latter's extreme disassociation between the *formal* and the *material*. As a result, Hegel's discussion of state is denounced for ignoring the social context of actual humans and creating man as an individualistic abstraction, rather than a concrete individual.¹⁶⁴ Essentially, this critique, the notion that man cannot be conceptually isolated from his social context,¹⁶⁵ elucidates the importance of the concrete and actual circumstances in historical materialism. In light of this, it becomes clear why the modern philosophers have modified the aspects of Marx's original concepts. The historical materialism of today confronts antagonisms that, as Žižek claims, are beyond the level of Marx's imagination. Proletariat is an example of a concept that has evolved since the 1850's. The concatenation of the peasants, petty bourgeoisie, workers and honest intellectuals as the base of the proletariat is no longer considered relevant in today's society. In addition, this modern base of the proletariat is no longer as clearly defined as that of Marx. Žižek and Badiou attribute the lack of *rage capital* and *universality* to the weakness of a unified proletariat and, consequently, state that the future of emancipatory politics lies with agents and antagonisms far different to those of Marx. In my opinion, this progression does not represent an abandonment of Marxian thought; it is simply a necessary modernisation of the objective structures and circumstances that are vital in historical materialism.

We can, however, denote a shift in the belief of the

¹⁶⁴ Avineri, Shlomo, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970. p. 17, 22.

¹⁶⁵ Avineri, Shlomo, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970. p. 17.

philosophers and their faith in a universal and revolutionary working class. Marx's description of the peasants and working class, in relation to the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte, is that they are not yet unified, but an eventual unification is seemingly inevitable. He states the peasants must, and *will*, join the revolutionary urban proletariat, thus realising their emancipatory potential. This stands in stark contrast to Žižek and Badiou who do not even have a clear image of who will constitute the base of the future proletariat. Žižek speculates that slum-dwellers may provide the answer; regardless, this uncertainty glares conspicuously in light of Marx's clear and optimistic concretisations. There is an evident post-structural element to Žižek's discussion about the four new antagonisms, or *commons* in modern society. The modern theorists contend that class cannot function as the single agent of universality. Instead they insist that a multitude of agents and subjectivities must constitute a more temporary notion of the proletariat, due to the protean nature of said categorisations. This is evocative of the Foucauldian notion of social identity, which dismisses the Marxian narrative of power and exploitation, i.e. the middle-classes subjugate the working classes.¹⁶⁶ Instead it suggests a more complex flow of social relations that change between different groups and alter in accordance to circumstance and chronological change. In other words, Foucault denounces the idea of a simple social identity due to the fact that an individual's understanding of their identity is based on a number of different factors and categories, such as gender, ethnicity, age etc.¹⁶⁷ A similar notion is reiterated in Žižek's theories. However, he insists that although it is increasingly difficult to define the working class in today's society, the potentially apocalyptic antagonisms of ecology, *Intellectual property*, biogenetics and increasing economic gaps

¹⁶⁶ Danaher, Geoff, Schirato, Tony & Webb, Jen, *Understanding Foucault*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, St Leonards, 2000. p. 87.

¹⁶⁷ Danaher, Geoff, Schirato, Tony & Webb, Jen, *Understanding Foucault*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, St Leonards, 2000. p. 87.

will transcend the aforementioned difficulties of categorisation and individualisation, thus making a true universality inevitable.

It is interesting to examine how Marx's description of the peasants echoes in the modern portrayals of the English rioters. Does not Marx's "*Napoleonic illusion*" resonate with the modern analysis of discontented shoppers, blinded by the consumerist ideology? The description of potential revolutionaries that are thwarted by their "*ghosts of old*" and desire to remain within the dominating ideology is consistent through all three of the philosophers' relevant works. This theory and principle alludes to the term *false consciousness*, a concept first developed by Engels and denotes the hegemonic effect of ideology, which allows for the exploitation of the lower classes. The peasants' enthrallment with the *smallholdings* and Louis Bonaparte are essentially replaceable with the materialist desires of the present working class. In both cases, the agents are distracted and blinded by a *false consciousness* or ideology. In fact, the fundamental analysis of society is strikingly similar in all the works. If one examines the portrayals of exploitation in the relevant works, it becomes clear that the "fundamental" view on capitalist exploitation is undiminished. Žižek's descriptions of the *objective violence* of capitalist society are reminiscent of Marx's descriptions of the dire circumstances of the peasants who "*hover on the margin of existence.*"¹⁶⁸ Concepts such as *alienation* and *exploitation* are inherently the same; it is merely the material circumstances that have changed. A compelling example of this can be found in the concept of class. Marx's diction makes a distinction between the notions of masses contra that of classes, a distinction which is also made in the modern theorists' works. The *masses* remove the class differentiations prevalent in society and, in Badiouian terms, create a universal mass where

¹⁶⁸ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 320.

identitarian objects are removed.¹⁶⁹ This is reminiscent of Marx's notion of the combined "*multitude of the masses*" that will constitute the revolution against the bourgeoisie. In all the relevant theories, revolutionary change occurs within this active principle of universal *masses*, which makes the concept a prime example of a still relevant Marxian concept. The major difference between the theorists lies in Marx's conviction of an impending awakening and universality, whilst Žižek and Badiou's prospects for the future revolutionary class are perspicuously bleak.

One of the most compelling aspects of this comparison is in regard to the future of communism and, crucially, revolutions. When reading *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, one can clearly distinguish Marx's unrelenting belief in the "*locomotive of history*"¹⁷⁰ and the inevitability of a future revolution. The revolution is given anthropomorphic qualities and is personified as a controlling "hand of history," preparing itself and the parliamentary power for its emergence. It is precisely this faith in a determinate *History* and the big *Other* of Marx's theories that is portrayed as dissonant in the ears of Žižek and Badiou. In a sombre pastiche to Marx, Žižek writes, "*the revolution no longer rides on the train of History.*" In a clear step away from Marx, Žižek maintains the evolutionary historicism of Marx must be put aside in favour of an *open* history, where there is no historical *Necessity* that automatically transforms riots and protests into a *Project of Salvation*. This comparatively pessimistic view is, in all likelihood, largely to be accredited to the communist disasters of the 20th century and what Bosteel calls *the burden of history*. The abandonment of Marx's almost theological *hand of History* is partly due to the modern focus on subjectivity and the underlying parallax nature of riots and revolutions. This focus on subjectivity reflects elements of

¹⁶⁹ Badiou, Alain, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London, 2012. p. 92.

¹⁷⁰ McLellan, David, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. p. 287.

poststructuralist influence on Žižek and Badiou, and signals a step away from Marxian thought.

Marx's revolutionary expectations are also subject to revision in the works of Žižek and Badiou. The immediate requisite of the contemporary left is not, as it was during the 1850's, to prepare for revolution, although untapped revolutionary potential is described as lurking in the world's slums; no, the instant path of the contemporary leftist is described as the *politics of subtraction*. This method entails a passive approach and that it is better to do nothing than to contribute to the circle of capitalist liberalism. Badiou contends that one should literally *subtract* oneself from the current social space, thus removing oneself from the proverbial house of cards and causing the whole system, or house, to collapse.¹⁷¹ However, this is paradoxical, especially in light of Žižek's theories on the necessity to return to a *Robespierrean* notion of *divine violence* and emancipatory terror. Žižek paints an ambiguous picture of the future of Communism by promoting both the *politics of subtraction* and revolutionary terror. However, one could also claim that Žižek is merely promoting the *politics of subtraction* whilst the revolutionary class is still unstructured and not universal.

The concept of democracy is vital in the comparison of Marx's revolutionary zest and the modern *politics of subtraction*. The notion of democracy was exceedingly different in the 19th century compared to its modern conceptualisation. Accordingly, the peasants' lack of a political voice and platform explains their propensity for violent rioting and revolutions. This lack of political power is, in all likelihood, one of the reasons behind Marx's championing of revolutionary violence for the lower, unrepresented classes. Moreover, this stands in stark contrast to the *politics of subtraction*, which is the removal of oneself from the political hegemony by, for example, not voting or using banks. Žižek bemoans the futile *passage á l'acte* of the

¹⁷¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 410.

England riots as indicative of the prevalent *ideological-political predicament*, where the only other option to a democratic consensus is a nihilistic spurt of violence. Consequently, only leftists in this post-Marx era and within a modern, democratic setting would implement the *politics of subtraction*, since rioting and potential violence are no longer the only means of gaining a political voice, as was the case for 19th century peasants. Instead, Žižek and Badiou insist that, in a democratic scenario, this passive approach is more beneficial than violence or even attempting to change the system from within and participating in a vicious circle. Žižek comes across as positively *Ghandhian*, when he claims that doing nothing can be the most violent act of all. It is interesting to discuss how Marx would interpret today's society. Today's society contains many elements that are desired in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, such as universal suffrage and greater democratic rights. Due to the changing notion of concepts such as democracy, the leftist standpoint has altered and the new material circumstances have created other forms of oppression.

4.1 Ideal types

Table 2.1 Ideal types

Aggressive Communism	Reform Communism
1a. Violent revolution is necessary and determinate. Marx	1b. Violent revolution is indeterminate and not necessary. Žižek, Badiou
2a. The current system must be overthrown. Marx, Žižek, Badiou	2b. The current system does not need to be overthrown.
3a. The working class is revolutionary and universal. (Marx)	3b. The working class is no longer revolutionary and universal. Žižek, Badiou
4a. The current system is exploitative. Marx, Žižek and Badiou	4b. The current system is not exploitative.

Table 2.1 represents how the philosophers' theories fit into the ideal types *aggressive communism* and *reform communism*.

1. The *politics of subtraction* and passive approach of Žižek and Badiou mean that they are applicable to 1b and the notion that *violent revolution is indeterminate and not necessary*. When reading Žižek's work, it becomes clear that, despite his advocating of *divine violence* and emancipatory vehemence, he does not explicitly state that violence, or indeed a revolution, is necessary. Marx is placed in 1a, the opposing *ideal type*, due to the evolutionary historicism of his theories and the notion that violence is necessary.

2. In regards to the notion that *the current system must be overthrown*, the theories of all three philosophers are applicable. They all refer to the *alienation* of the vampiric capitalist system and relevant examples of *objective violence*. The proposed course of actions, i.e. Marx's revolution and the modern theorists *politics of subtraction*, all ultimately aim to undermine the capitalist system.

3. Žižek and Badiou are placed in 3b in regard to the universal and revolutionary nature of the working classes. This is due to their theories about the lack of a clear revolutionary agent in today's society. Marx, in the case of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, is more difficult to define. Marx's view in the latter is that the peasants are not part of the revolutionary proletariat, and thus, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the working class is not universal. Marx is, nevertheless, placed in 1a. This choice is supported by the tone of Marx and the conviction that the peasants will become revolutionary and, ultimately, led by the urban proletariat.

4. The final *ideal type* was unanimously 4a. All three philosophers are in unison when denouncing the exploitative elements of capitalism. Ultimately, the material circumstances are different, but the fundamental truth of Marx is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Žižek and Badiou.

In conclusion, the *ideal types* have revealed a number of similarities and differences between Marx, Žižek and Badiou. Firstly, one can determine that a fundamental, historical materialism remains throughout the theories. Core concepts such as *alienation* and *exploitation* still refer to concrete examples of the effects of capitalism. The fact that all three philosophers unanimously maintain that the capitalist system is exploitative and should be removed indicates that the dichotomy between the *Included* and the *Excluded* is still a pertinent aspect of Marxism. Secondly, the *ideal types* reveal that there has been a notable shift

in Marxist theory. This alteration is to the determinate nature of the *Idea* and the conceptualisation of the proletariat. The Marxian notion of a determinate *Other* controlling the fate of revolutions has been discarded in favour of an *open*, indeterminate history and greater impetus on subjectivity. The ubiquity of Marx, Žižek and Badiou's materialist standpoint elucidates the theoretical worth of Quentin Skinner and his theory that ideas should be studied within their context, rather than as transcendental *unit-ideas*. This essay demonstrates an example of, what Svante Nordin denotes as, the study of the meeting between tradition and the moment. The importance of the historical context in the historical materialists' works makes the study of universal truths somewhat irrelevant, making Skinner's standpoint firmly relevant to this essay. Finally, how does one define the importance of Marx in Žižek and Badiou? To answer this question we can reflect upon Theodor Adorno's denouncing of another question: what is dead and alive in Hegel?¹⁷² To Adorno, this question is indicative of arrogance. The relevant question is not what can the philosopher tell us, but how our epoch would appear to the philosopher in question. Žižek formulates this question as: how does our predicament look from the perspective of the Communist *Idea* and through the lenses of what was eternal in the old?¹⁷³ In light of this, the theories of Žižek and Badiou are the dialectic between the old and the new. It is not enough to merely stick to the communist *Idea*; one must locate concrete antagonisms that cannot be resolved within the current capitalist state. The *Idea* is not eternal in the sense that the same values have a transcendental and ubiquitous meaning, but rather in the sense that communism is, what Hegel would call, a *concrete universality*. This means that, to Žižek and Badiou, Communism as an *Idea* can be reinvented in every epoch and historical situation, but only in

¹⁷² Adrian Cousins, Youtube, *Slavoj Žižek - What does it mean to be a revolutionary today? Marxism 2009*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GD69Cc20rw (accessed 03/02/2015).

¹⁷³ Adrian Cousins, Youtube, *Slavoj Žižek - What does it mean to be a revolutionary today? Marxism 2009*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GD69Cc20rw (accessed 03/02/2015).

relation to material actuality. To be true to the notion of Communism, you have to repeatedly reinvent it as Žižek does with his radicalisation of the proletariat. Thus, Žižek and Badiou imply that the *Idea* is eternal in the sense that communism can be applied to every historical era, but that modern theories and representations must be made on concrete, local antagonisms. The theories of old cannot just be clumsily implemented on modern situations, as was, arguably, the case with Lenin and Marx. As Žižek states, one must begin from the beginning and revolutions must be repetitive and utterly self-critical. The 19th and 20th centuries should not be forgotten, but harshly criticised and reinvented for the 21st century. Žižek succinctly formulates the aforementioned by referencing the *Beckettian* notion of “*try again, fail again, fail better,*”¹⁷⁴ which is an appropriate summary of what Marx means to the modern philosophers.

5 Conclusion

This essay has revealed a number of aspects regarding the change of the Marxian thought on riots and revolutions. It has indicated that although many aspects of Marx’s original theories are still pertinent in the theories of Žižek and Badiou, there have been a number of theoretical developments. The *ideal types* have revealed how this change has manifested itself in the relevant works. The names of the *ideal types* are indicative of the varying approaches to riots, the proletariat and future revolutions. *Aggressive communism* is, with its advocating of violent revolution and determinism, closer to the original theories of Marx. On the other hand, *reform communism* focuses to a larger extent on a more peaceable approach and an *open* history. Žižek and Badiou fall into the former *ideal type* on the two factors regarding the exploitative nature of capitalism and the necessity of the economic system’s collapse. However, Žižek and Badiou differ with Marx on two factors, namely the determinism of

¹⁷⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Verso, London, 2008. p. 210.

history and the universal nature of the working class.

The reason behind the theoretical differences is twofold. As Hobsbawm states, it is a prerequisite of historical materialism to base theories on actual circumstances, making the historical contexts of the theorists a clear reason behind the differences. Nevertheless, an important aspect of these differences is the so-called *burden of history*, and the tumultuous events of the 20th century. There is a pertinent urge to, as Bosteel states, rethink the actuality of communism. This is evident in Žižek and Badiou as they distance themselves from the eschatological elements of Marx and attempt to radicalise the former's theories to adapt to our changing society. So, how has the Marxian interpretation changed in regard to riots, the proletariat and revolutions in the works of Žižek and Badiou? This essay has established that the interpretations of Marx have changed in terms of the material circumstances and, subsequently, concepts such as the proletariat have changed their meaning. Furthermore, fundamental concepts of Marxian thought, such as determinate and violent revolution are no longer integral and have been replaced by *the politics of subtraction*.

6 Didactic reflection

The subject of *the history of ideas* is becoming increasingly prominent in Swedish *gymnasieskolor*, the equivalent of upper-secondary school in the UK. *The history of ideas* has become a mandatory subject for students studying *estetiska programmet*, which is a 3-year programme, dedicated to aesthetic studies of, for example, music, art drama etc.¹⁷⁵ Two examples of relevant textbooks are *Kultur- och Idéhistoria* by Eva Nord and *Idéer och skapande* by Lars-Göran Alm. It quickly becomes apparent that the main focus of these textbooks is art history and other aesthetic aspects of history. However, the discussion of philosophical ideas

¹⁷⁵ Skolverket, *Ämne- Konst och Kultur*, <http://www.skolverket.se/laroplaner-amnen-ochkurser/gymnasieutbildning/gymnasieskola/kos?tos=gy&subjectCode=kos&lang=sv> (accessed 22/01/2015).

also constitutes a major part of the textbooks' content, but Marx is given a surprisingly small amount of attention. Eva Nord dedicates a mere paragraph to Marx and his theories, whilst Lars-Göran Alm neglects to mention any reference of him. One might imagine that this omission is due to Marx's prominent role in the standard history courses. Yet, Marx and communism are not prominent aspects of these courses either, as an examination of the relevant curriculums indicate. If we examine the first history course at this level, namely *History 1a1*, a clear focus on liberalism and a "democratic" history is evident. The course focuses on "*industrialisation and democratisation during the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as key global processes of change and events, such as migration, peace-making, resource distribution and increased prosperity, international cooperation, human rights, gender equality, colonialism, dictatorships, genocide and conflicts.*"¹⁷⁶ This clearly indicates a tendency towards an exceedingly liberal history, which is justifiable, but Marx and communism are conspicuous by their absence. In fact, when examining all the curriculums of the history courses undertaken at this level, an explicit mention of Marx is absent. One could argue that the presence of Marx and his theories are tacitly stated; however, the absence of an unambiguous reference does seem peculiar.

An interesting aspect of Swedish schools is their so-called *värdegrunder*. *Värdegrunder* are basically a set of values and principles that are upheld by the school and its pupils. One of these values is the school's aim to produce *democratic citizens* with egalitarian ideals. This may be an underlying factor behind the absence of references to Marx and communism, and also to the overlooking of the fascist states of the 20th century in the curriculums. The prioritising of democratic values and their history is laudable; nevertheless, the unbalanced nature of the curriculum's content does bring the words of George Santayana to

mind: “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The avoidance of explicit reference to Marx and his historical significance, as well as the fascist states, seems a dangerous path to tread. The re-emergence of Swedish right-wing politics is clearly not the result of this neglect, but the apparent avoidance of such subjects and *damnatio memoriae* cannot be a helpful factor. This discussion does make the topic of this essay extremely relevant in today’s schools. In light of the current reawakening of communism, it is very pertinent to return to Marx and introduce these ideas in their “original” form. Similarly, the new emergence of right-wing politics should be confronted directly through the lense of the rhetoric of the 1930-40’s. The democratic ideal of *värdegrunder* is important, but if the prescribed *modus operandi* is to merely discuss liberalism and democracy whilst evading other ideologies it becomes somewhat futile. The British philosopher Isaiah Berlin discusses, in *Two concepts of freedom*, the notions of *positive* and *negative liberty*, and the philosophical rhetoric of freedom.¹⁷⁷ Berlin states that the philosophical rhetoric of freedom is a reaction towards the oppression of the 20th century and stance that we will not accept that sort of oppression again. Nevertheless, the paradox of 20th century freedom is that, in fighting for freedom, you use the weapons of “unfreedom”; thus causing another bout of oppression by limiting the *positive liberty* of citizens. Sweden, in an attempt to avert the aforementioned paradox, seems to have taken the complete opposite approach by seemingly evading Marx and his historical importance. One should not merely discuss the historical agents and processes of change; one should also include the ideas and ideologies behind them. In my opinion, a discussion on the Soviet Union is incomplete without an understanding of the influence of Marx’s ideas, and this seems unachievable when the relevant textbook contains just a single relevant paragraph. To conclude, it would appear that, in light of Santayana’s aphorism,

¹⁷⁷ Berlin, Isaiah, *Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002. p. 210-211.

it would be beneficial for Swedish schools' attempts to create *democratic citizens*, if the politics and rhetoric of “unfreedoms” are emphasised and extensively deliberated upon, rather than shunned in favour of an anodyne history of democratisation.

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