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THE ETHOS OF INSECURE LIFE: SCHMITT, FOUCAULT, KUNDERA AND THE POINT OF THE POLITICAL

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Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the ethical implications of Carl Schmitt's decisionism in a post-structuralist reading of Schmitt's conception of the political as a constitutive exception. The Schmittian problematic of the exception as the constitutive principle of the political has recently made a comeback in the critical discourse¹, though, as we shall suggest below, the full significance of Schmitt's political philosophy for contemporary critical thought still remains underestimated. The contention of this paper is that rather than serving as an easy *target* of poststructuralist (deconstructionist or genealogical) criticism, the Schmittian political ontology functions as an irreducible *limit* of this criticism, serving as the 'undeconstructible' excess of political realism, that which *remains* after the deconstructive labour.

More specifically, the paper seeks to explore the affinities between the work of Schmitt and Foucault. Mika Ojakangas has recently argued that the approach of the two thinkers is marked by the same conceptual logic² that locates the foundation of order in the founding rupture of the exception, a logic that we have elsewhere termed 'ontological extremism'. Nonetheless, there are also crucial divergences between Schmitt and Foucault, most notably regarding the relation to the principle of sovereignty. In contrast to Schmitt's valorisation of sovereignty, Foucault has of course famously dismissed the very problematic of sovereignty in contemporary political theory with his call to 'cut off the head of the king' and his argument for the decentred and immanent character of power. However, as we shall argue, it is both possible and fruitful to reintroduce the question of sovereignty, in its Schmittian 'quasi-transcendental' sense of the constitutive decision on exception, into the Foucauldian genealogical problematic. Moreover, a Schmittian exceptionalism, in its focus on the exterior limit of the political order, is more in accordance with the critical thrust of Foucault's philosophy than the more immanent critique practiced e.g. in the studies of

¹ The renewed interest in Schmitt in political and IR theory is particularly evident in the aftermath of the influential readings by Derrida (1996) and Agamben (1998). See also Mouffe 2000, Hirst 1999, Zizek 1999, Norris 2000, Ojakangas 2000, 2001, Huysmans 1998, 2002, 2003, Rasch 2000, Williams 2003, Turner 2002.

² See Ojakangas 2001. While a number of works in political and IR theory have relied on a certain combination of *insights* from Schmitt and Foucault and post-structuralism more generally (See e.g. Mouffe 1999, 2000, Zizek 1999, Rasch 2000, Huysmans 1998, 2002, 2003, Williams 2003, Edkins and Pin-Fat 2003), Ojakangas advances a more controversial argument that the approach of both authors is marked by the same *conceptual logic*. It is this line of reasoning that we seek to continue in this paper.

³ See Prozorov 2004b.

⁴ See Foucault 1977b, 1990a. Unfortunately, this criticism of sovereignty has, in the Foucauldian studies of governmentality as well as in 'critical' IR theory inspired by Foucault, overshadowed Foucault's own analyses of sovereignty and its relation to other forms of power, which has never been presented in terms of a simple linear succession.

⁵ See Prozorov 2004a, 2004b for the attempt to reintroduce Schmitt's notion of sovereignty into the Foucauldian problematic of governmentality. See also Dillon 1995, Dean 2002a, 2002b for the critique of the lack of attention to sovereignty in governmentality studies.

governmentality. As we shall argue below, Schmitt's political ontology strongly resonates with the work of Foucault, particularly his writings on aesthetics, transgression and freedom that are unfortunately rarely addressed in the studies of governmentality and the applications of Foucault in political and IR theory.⁶

Thus, rather than engage in the 'Foucauldian critique of Schmitt', we may suggest that the valorised concepts in the work of one of the two thinkers figure as disavowed *blind spots* in the work of the other: *sovereignty*, famously dismissed by Foucault in his analytics of power; and *government(ality)*, sidelined in Schmitt's emphasis on extreme situations of the emergence and demise of the political order. The two theoretical projects (Schmitt's political ontology and Foucault's genealogy) are thus permanently at work in *mutual* deconstruction. It is from this perspective on a 'Foucault-Schmitt' synthesis that this paper attempts a reading of Schmitt's concept of the political as an *ethics* in the Foucauldian sense, i.e. as a modality of decisionist self-constitution as a subject in the absence or in the face of a substantive moral code. Proceeding from the reading of the concept of the political as independent of and ontologically prior to moral or any other positive criteria, we shall first relocate the Schmittian problematic to the level of the individual subject and, secondly, approach Schmitt's existential decisionism as a mode of Foucauldian transgression which constitutes the subject through a dissociative gesture of 'making enemies'. The remainder of the paper will further illustrate this ethics in an account of the relationship of the characters of Milan Kundera's novel 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being'.

The Force of the Political: Ontological Extremism and Concrete Life

A distinctive feature of Schmitt's political philosophy that may account for its continuing appeal is its abandonment of any identification of the political with the state or any other organisational form of community. Schmitt's dissatisfaction with the juristic definitions of the political leads him to the search for the ultimate criterion, which both defines the political as anterior to the state and autonomous from other spheres of the social order. In contrast to conventional definitions of the political as something derived from the notion of the state and defined negatively against the presumed non-political background of 'economy' or 'society', Schmitt famously argues that it is the "concept of the state [that] presupposes the concept of the political", not the other way round. The level, on which Schmitt's political philosophy operates, precedes the very distinction of state and society and rather encompasses the conditions of existence of the very political community within which the latter is delineated. In his famous argument, these conditions consist in the friend-enemy distinction.9 Yet, the status of the friend-enemy distinction in relation to other 'constitutive distinctions' within the social remains ambivalent. On the one hand, Schmitt contrasts the distinction of friend and enemy with the distinctions of good-bad, profitable-unprofitable and beautiful-ugly that define respectively the domains of morality, economy and aesthetics. The political is thus cast into a relationship of functional differentiation with these other sectors and is at first glance of equal ontological status with them. On the other hand, he argues not merely for the autonomy of the political as a subsystem of the social but also for its antecedence to the other sectors. In Schmitt's claim, the political concerns itself with relations of an "utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic or other distinctions." This statement carries two important consequences.

Firstly, the political is argued to precede the other constitutive distinctions and serve as the

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⁶ See e.g. Foucault 1977b, 1984a, 1987, 1996c. For the most authoritative commentaries on this aspect of Foucault's work see Deleuze 1988, Bernauer 1990, 1994, Rajchman 1985, 1994a, 1994b, Simons 1995.

⁷ See Prozorov 2004b for the more detailed elaboration of this argument.

⁸ Schmitt 1976, p. 19.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 26-28.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

condition of their possibility by establishing the overall order, which is subsequently functionally differentiated. In this sense, the Schmittian 'political' corresponds to Claude Lefort's notion of *le politique*. Lefort's distinction between *la politique* (politics) and *le politique* (the political) is a distinction between a preconstituted domain of politics, delimited within the social order against the non-political background of society or economy, and the conditions of possibility of institution of the overall order that are placed in relation of *constitutive exteriority* with it. The friend-enemy distinction is the instance of the foundation of the political community that subsequently recedes to its borderline as both exterior to the existence of the community and indispensable for its formation: a *constitutive outside*. This conceptual logic is a distinctive characteristic of Schmitt's *philosophy of concrete life*, which operates with 'borderline concepts' to restore transcendence and exteriority into the legal-political sphere, dominated by the immanentism of legal positivism. The political', 'sovereignty', 'exception' are all 'borderline concepts' or instances of the *concrete* since they pertain to "the outermost sphere" the extremity of any order, and form the irreducible *excess* of order that is nonetheless indispensable for its emergence as its unfounded foundation: "The concrete is that kind of instance or act which belongs to order, but can't be included in it."

In Derridean terms, *the political* is thus a 'supplement' of the order of *politics*. The Derridean notion of the supplement combines the two meanings of the term: the addition of a *surplus*, "a plenitude enriching another plenitude" and the compensation for a certain internal *lack*, which "insinuates itself in-the-place-of, [...] fills the void". The supplement is therefore an external surplus that makes *whole* something that "ought to lack nothing at all in itself", the condition of *possibility* of something and simultaneously the condition of the *impossibility* of its completeness or closure. The consequence of this understanding is the rejection of any claim to the 'self-immanence' of the social order, of any possibility of a system without an outside or of an order wholly sufficient unto itself, a 'self-propelling machine'. Any order is contaminated *at its foundation* by something heterogeneous to it yet essential to its emergence and continuing existence. Rather than having its positivity or identity threatened by a variously construed exterior 'other' (a permanent theme of political realism and its poststructuralist criticism in IR), all positivity is always plagued by the *other within*.

For [Schmitt], the political refers exclusively to the foundations, to the basic and tragic foundation of any human order whatsoever [...] – to the state of exception, to the ever-present possibility of war, to the land appropriation. Any foundation is, necessarily, according to the logic of Schmitt's thought, an instance of resistance to the absolute immanence, insofar as the absolute immanence implies either a pure non-order (anarchism) or an order without meaning (nihilism), and every real and meaningful order, consequently, implies a founding or a constituting instance which does not normally belong to that order. The absolute immanence is a system without an outside, without the other. But every foundation refers explicitly to the outside and the other which resists the absolutisation of immanence. However [...] the question is neither of an absolute exteriority nor of the absolute other – transcendence – but of an instance which opens up the absolute immanence, of a passage which is inside and outside at the same time, transcendent and immanent at the same time. ¹⁷

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¹¹ See Lefort 1988, pp. 11-12.

¹² Schmitt 1985a, p. 5, 20. For the importance of borderline concepts in Schmitt's thought see Muller 1999 and Ojakangas 2000. Borderline concepts are cast by Schmitt both as *Ur-Worte*, 'basic words' that refer exclusively to the founding instances of every order (hence the importance of esoteric etymology for Schmitt's method) and as *Gegenbegriffe*, 'counter-concepts' that possess a performative aspect that lets them function in *resistance* to the doctrines of immanence that Schmitt opposed. For Schmitt's critique of legal positivism, see Schmitt 1985a, McCormick 1997, chapter 5.

¹³ Schmitt 1985a, p. 5.

Ojakangas 2000, p. 67. See ibid. for the explication of Schmittian philosophy of concrete life, which, as Ojakangas argues, is distinct from the 19th century 'philosophy of life' (*Lebensphilosophie*) that Schmitt's thought is often associated with (See e.g. Wolin 1992a, 1992b).

¹⁵ Derrida 1998, p. 144.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ojakangas 2000, p. 68.

Secondly, the political is argued to be *independent* of ethical, economic and aesthetic *content*. If the enemy is ultimately not the bad, the ugly or the economic competitor, if the friend does not stand for the good, the beautiful and the economically useful, one may observe that the distinction lacks any substance at all. The political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavours, from the religious, economic, moral and other antitheses. *It does not describe its own substance*, but only the *intensity* of an association or dissociation of human beings [...]" Once a certain level of intensity is reached, the moral, the economic or the religious acquire a political dimension: "the point of the political may be reached from the economic as well as from any other domain."

Schmitt takes care to note that no such level of intensity can be theoretically prescribed and may only be decided by actual participants in a concrete situation: the enemy is "the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a *specially intense* way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party." Contrary to many interpretations, Schmitt not merely refuses to 'legitimise' war as a 'social ideal' but in fact denies the very possibility of normatively justifying *any* recourse to 'physical killing of human beings', including the 'wars to end all wars' and 'wars for peace' practiced by the pacifist militants of liberalism. In contrast to the enormous hypocrisy that we observe in the attempts to legitimise liberal aggression, the Schmittian position manifests an admirable sincerity:

It is a *manifest fraud* to condemn war as homicide and then demand of men that they wage war, kill and be killed, so that there will never again be war. War, the readiness of combatants to die, the physical killing of human beings who belong on the side of the enemy – *all this has no normative meaning, but an existential meaning only*, particularly in a real combat situation with a real enemy. There exists no *rational purpose*, no *norm*, no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no *social ideal* no matter how beautiful, no *legitimacy* nor *legality* which could justify men in killing each other. If such physical destruction of human life is not motivated by an *existential threat to one's own way of life*, then it cannot be justified. *Just as little can war be justified by ethical and juristic norms*.²⁴

Deprived of normative substance, the political becomes elusive by definition, *its entire definition contained in its undefinability*. The political act can not be defined, simply because it is itself *that which defines*, defines the positivity of order while eluding subsumption under its definition. The friend-enemy distinction is an act of existential decision, a constitutive practice that is not grounded in truth or morality and is rather *made possible by this very ungroundedness*: "The decision frees itself from all normative ties and becomes in the true sense absolute". The political decision does

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¹⁸ See Zizek 1999, in whose argument the political moment of foundation is marked by the 'purely formal' decisionism that is an antithesis of the equally formal character of legal positivism.

¹⁹ Schmitt 1976, p. 38. Emphasis added. For a most explicit denial of substance to the political see Schmitt 1999, pp. 202-203.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 78. Emphasis added.

²¹ Schmitt 1976, p. 27. Emphasis added.

²² See Ulmen and et al 1996 for the critique for ostracising and demonising readings of Carl Schmitt.

²³ See Schmitt 1976, pp. 33-34: "The definition of the political suggested here neither favours war nor militarism, neither imperialism, nor pacifism. Nor is it an attempt to idealise the victorious war or the successful revolution as a 'social ideal', since neither war nor revolution is something social or something ideal. [...] War is neither the aim nor the purpose nor even the very content of politics. But as an ever present possibility it is the leading presupposition that determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a particular political behaviour." This quotation leaves one bemused at the insistence of many commentators to find in Schmitt something remotely resembling glorification of war. See e.g. Wolin 1992. For a contrasting reading see Schwab 1976 Dyzenhaus 1999 Kervegan 1999 Freund 1995

see Schwab 1976, Dyzenhaus 1999, Kervegan 1999, Freund 1995.

24 Schmitt 1976, pp. 48-49. Emphasis added. Schmitt's use of 'ethical' conflates the notions of ethics and morals. (See e.g. ibid, p. 70, when he speaks interchangeably of the "ethical or moral pathos" of liberalism.) The discussion of Schmittian ethics offered later in the paper is, in contrast, based on a sharp distinction of morals and ethics, developed by Foucault. In its terms, the 'ethical' corresponds in many ways to Schmitt's notion of the 'existential'.

²⁵ Schmitt 1985a, p. 12.

not draw on the categories of the moral or the economic to justify itself, it does not make a reference to the pre-existing, but rather brings into existence in what may be read as a "free act of artistic genius"²⁶. The Schmittian enemy, 'existentially different and alien', is neither different from or alien to a pre-existing self, nor antecedent to that self in its existential strangeness. Both the friend and the enemy, the self and the other, owe their existence to the decisionist act of distinction that brings them into being simultaneously. The concept of the political therefore consists entirely in a *constitutive decision*, or, more precisely, in the decision that is *always* constitutive: "There can never be absolutely declaratory decisions." Divorced from substantive content, the political is to be isolated in the acts that possess an *intense force* of constitution, acts that are *ontogenetic*²⁸ in relation to the social order, acts that give it form by escaping from it: "The constitutive, specific element of the decision is from the perspective of the content of the norm new and alien."²⁹ In Derrida's terms, "this founding [...] moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law [...] It is the moment in which the foundation of law becomes suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure performative act that would not have to answer to or before anyone."³⁰ Thus, the political is also an *undeconstructible* element within order, since it is rather the function of the concept to deconstruct its assertion of self-immanence. The ontological status of the supplement is not substantive (or identitarian) but existential: the political isn't anything in a strict sense, it simply

This reading of Schmitt's concept of the political is the target of Leo Strauss's critical commentary, which arguably launched the tradition of conceiving of Schmitt's political ontology in terms of tension and ambivalence in its central concepts. Strauss's criticism of Schmitt's 'residual liberalism' concerns precisely the autonomy of the political from the moral, its ungroundedness in any substantive notion of the good.³¹ In Strauss's view, Schmitt's affirmation of the political as such, with neutrality to the empirical friend-enemy groupings, and the valorisation of "decision of whatsoever character"³² is marked by the same spirit of neutrality and tolerance that Schmitt derides in liberalism. Strauss considers this 'abstract' affirmation of the political to be a mere preliminary step towards a "decisive battle between 'the spirit of technology' [...] and the opposite spirit and faith which, it seems, does not yet have a name", a battle that is fought on unequivocally moral grounds.³³ This attempt to re-couple the political and the moral in the name of the 'conservative revolutionary' struggle against liberalism as an *inimicus* rather than a *hostis*³⁴ arguably serves to diminish the significance of Schmitt's conceptualisation of the political by the reduction of the latter to one side of the liberal/conservative friend-enemy grouping. It also seems to run contrary to Schmitt's explicit insistence on the separation of politics and morality, an insistence that, as Strauss concedes, "pervades" the whole essay on the concept of the political.³⁵ Yet, one is also left unsatisfied with the interpretation that emphasises the merely functional character of the differentiation of the moral and the political along the lines of Luhmannian systems theory.³⁶ Since for Schmitt "the political is the total", it clearly cannot be reduced to a sector within the social

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²⁶ Burger quoted in Wolin 1992, p. 8.

²⁷ Schmitt 1985a, p. 31.

²⁸ See Megill 1985, pp. 20-25, 35-36.

²⁹ Schmitt 1985a, p. 31.

³⁰ Derrida 1992, p. 36.

³¹ See Rasch 1997, p. 3.

³² Strauss 1976, p. 103.

³³ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁴ Schmitt 1976, p. 36. Schmitt makes a distinction between *hostis* and *inimicus* to stress the specificity of the relationship of political enmity. The concept of *inimicus* belongs to the realm of the private and concerns various forms of moral, aesthetic or economic resentment, revulsion or hate that are connoted by the archaic English word 'foe', whose return into everyday circulation was conceived by Schmitt as an example of the collapse of the political into the moral. The concept of *hostis* is limited to the public realm and concerns the existential threat posed to the *form of life* either from the inside or from the outside. See Schmitt 1976, pp. 27-29, Kervegan 1999, pp. 62-63, Derrida 1996, pp. 245-248.

³⁵ Strauss 1976, p. 101. See e.g. Schmitt 1976, pp. 48-49, 70-71.

³⁶ See Rasch 1997.

³⁷ Schmitt 1985a, p. 2. Emphasis added.

system. Schmitt clearly affirms the ontological priority of the political and the constitutive character of the exceptional decision for the general and the normal, the political being concerned with the social order *in its entirety*: "The exception thinks the general with intense passion." Both restoring the moral dimension to the concept of the political and recasting its a-moralism in terms of functional differentiation serve to negate the originality of Schmitt's political thought, particularly the potential it offers for contemporary critiques of depoliticisation. ³⁹

It is the contention of this paper that the *a-moralism* of Schmitt's concept of the political is an indispensable component of its *ethical* dimension. This paper attempts to recast Schmitt's concept of the political as an ethical relationship to the self by applying Michel Foucault's concept of ethics, developed in his later writings by distinction from the notion of morality. It should be noted that what is at stake in this recasting is *not at all* an attempt to recover, in a hermeneutic reading, something that may be termed 'Schmitt's ethics', but rather the *possibilities opened* by the reconstruction of the *logic* of the concept of the political in terms of its functioning as an ethical practice. Rather than try to *restore* an ethical dimension to Schmitt's political theory, the attempt is to *develop* one on its basis, proceeding ironically from Schmitt's own belief in the uncontrollable demonic force that concepts may exercise against their creator. In Foucault's terms, the purpose of this reading is not to try to retain fidelity to the author's thought in the course of interpretation but to "to deform it, make it groan and protest". The following chapter proceeds in this deformation by two steps: firstly, relocating the concept of the political to the level of the individual as a deciding subject, and, secondly, juxtaposing Schmitt's decisionism with Foucault's thought on transgressive practices of the self.

Decision as a Transgressive Practice: Lightness and Weight in Schmitt and Foucault

The ethical reading of Schmitt's concept of the political entails an important shift of focus away from the political community towards the individual as an ethical subject. At first glance, Schmitt's theory does not appear to warrant this move, since in his conceptualisation, the political enemy is exemplified by a collectivity, whose hostility concerns another collectivity: "The enemy is solely the public enemy". The decision on the friend-enemy distinction is, in contemporary politics, deemed to be taken by the state and concern another state. The reduction of the concept of the political to the collectivity that in European modernity takes the form of the state would appear to confirm a 'political realist' reading of Schmitt in the context of International Relations. It would nonetheless not do justice to Schmitt's insight that it is the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political and not the other way round, and thus mistake Schmitt's affirmation of the political for the valorisation of statism. It would also ignore what is arguably most original, disturbing and haunting about the Schmittian concept of the political: its actively nihilistic existential decisionism, which, in the affirmation of the constitutive decision that inaugurates the state, simultaneously subverts all claims to self-immanence that the state may have.

³⁸ Kierkegaard quoted in Schmitt 1985a, p. 15.

³⁹ See Mouffe 1998, 2000 for the engagement of Schmitt's thought in a critique of contemporary discourses of liberal democracy.

⁴⁰ See Muller 1999 for the importance of the belief in the 'demonic' for Schmitt's thought.

⁴¹ Foucault 1980b, p. 64. For practical purposes this means that the question of what ethical practice Schmitt may have favoured is of no major interest to the author, and the incompatibilities that may be found between the interpretation advanced here and Schmitt's occasional remarks on ethics are of no consequence to the thesis of this paper. What is important are rather the new possibilities, emerging as effects of the force of the violence of the author's discourse to the discourses of the two authors who both emphasised the violence inherent in every discourse.

⁴² Schmitt 1976, p. 28.

⁴³ See Wolin 1992a for examples of this tendency. See Freund 1995, Cristi 1998 for the argument that Schmitt's affirmation of the political is in many ways advanced in opposition to statism, particularly to the interventionist 'quantitative total state' that accompanied mass democracy and which exemplified the tendency towards totalitarianism. The Schmittian 'qualitative total state' is, in contrast, total by virtue of its self-limitation rather than the extension of its domain of rule. See Prozorov 2004b for the detailed discussion of the opposition between quantitative and qualitative totality in the context of the critique of neoliberal governmentality.

⁴⁴ See Wolin 1994, Hirst 1999, p. 8, Zizek 1999, pp. 18-20.

To fully appreciate this subversive force, it is necessary to recognise in the 'solely public' enemy the effect of subjective will, an ontogenetic act of 'principally unlimited authority' that is not derived from anything but rather constitutes the basis of all derivation, a decision ex nihilo. 45 The friend-enemy distinction is a sovereign decision par excellence - an act that "emanates from nothingness, 46 and, as something "that can not be subsumed, 47 under the universal and the general, can only come as an exception to any pre-existing norm. Even if Schmitt's insistence that it is the state alone that decides on the friend-enemy distinction is taken into consideration, one ought not to forget that Schmitt explicitly rejected legalist, abstract and impersonal conceptions of the state, claiming that "the sovereignty of law means only the sovereignty of the men who draw up and administer this law."48 Schmitt's reconstruction of the concept of sovereignty seeks precisely to restore to the sovereign decision its intensely personal(ist) character, recognised in Hobbes's political theory but systematically erased subsequently in the doctrines of rule of law and legal positivism. On a more general level, Schmitt's discussion of the historical shifts in the 'central spheres' of human existence emphasises the role of what he calls the 'clerics', deciding and decisive subjects who are both called forth by and subsequently sustain the centrality of each successive sphere. 49 It is thus neither coincidental nor bizarre that, particularly in his early work, Schmitt chose as "the model of political activity" none other than Don Quixote, an individual, the content of whose quest may well have been delirious, but who was nonetheless "capable of making a decision in favour of what seemed right to him". 50

Our next step is to begin to problematise the figure of the *deciding subject* by juxtaposing Schmitt's existential decisionism to Michel Foucault's thought on transgression and aesthetics of existence and bringing up the relationship the two thinkers establish towards individual and collective dimensions of existence. It is not difficult to discern a general affinity between Schmitt's and Foucault's political philosophies. Despite obvious differences in political positions the two authors share a number of philosophical traits: an 'ontological extremism' that grants a foundational status to excess and the experience of the limit; a common attention to the 'foundational' moments of decisive rupture and discontinuity; a shared distaste for neutralisation and technologisation of modern life, etc.⁵¹ Using Alan Megill's term, both Schmitt and Foucault may be referred to as 'prophets of extremity', characterised by an aestheticist relationship to reality, which is admittedly less obvious in the style and subject matter of the former thinker.⁵²

For our present purposes, an important affinity of the two thinkers concerns the curious ambivalence that their philosophical strategies establish in relation to subjectivity. In the case of Foucault, this ambivalence was summarised by Jon Simons in Kundera-esque terminology as an oscillation between unbearable heaviness and lightness, the weight of discourses and strategies of power and the force of anti-gravitation offered by transgressive experiences.⁵³ On the one hand, Foucault's idea of autonomy of discourse in his 'archaeological' writings and the conception of

⁴⁵ Schmitt 1985a, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 32. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 13. Cf. Derrida 1992, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Schmitt 1976, p. 67.

⁴⁹ See Schmitt 1993, pp. 4-5. See also McCormick 1997, p. 99 for the discussion of the notion of clerics in terms of Schmitt's 'elitism'.

⁵⁰ McCormick 1997, p. 53.

⁵¹ See Prozorov 2004a, 2004b.

⁵² See Megill 1985 for the discussion of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida as 'aestheticist' thinkers, who expand the notion of the aesthetic to embrace the whole of reality and emphasise the ontogenetic force of aesthetic practice. In opposition to Romantic aestheticism, the thought of 'extremity' rejects the humanistic pathos of Romanticism, its nostalgia for 'return to nature' and its endowment of art with truth value. See particularly chapters 5, 6 for Foucault's aestheticism. See Wolin 1992, Huysmans 1998, McCormick 1997 (Chapters 1, 2) for the discussion of Schmitt's aestheticism, which, though indebted to Romanticism, is closer to the Nietzschean aestheticism of the 'prophets of extremity'. Regarding Schmitt's style, see Muller 1999 for the argument for Schmitt's oscillation between the 'objective' or scientific and 'aestheticist' or literary styles in his work. Cf. Heiner Muller cited in Muller 1999, note 91, p. 25: "Carl Schmitt is theatre. His texts are theatrical performances. His good texts are simply great performances."

⁵³ See Simons 1995.

productive power in his 'genealogical' phase point to a conception of subjectivity as an effect of discursive or political practices, whose rationality is irreducible to subjective intention and is rather constitutive of a dispositional diagram, in which man emerges as a subject and object of knowledge and action.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the emphasis on contingency in the constitution of subjectivity and the affirmation of the unfounded character of discourses of truth and strategies of power provides a possibility for a transgression of the limits, within which our subjectivity is inscribed, and thus opens a space of what Foucault referred to as 'concrete freedom', a practice of liberty⁵⁵ that, rather than being positively *identified* within the diagram, consists in crossing its constitutive boundary and dispensing with the very notion of identity rather than merely resisting a particular mode of subjectification: "Transgression has its entire space in the line that it crosses." While this oscillation between lightness and gravity may be interpreted as ambivalence or a paradox, we would argue that it finds its resolution in the distinction of two aspects of Foucauldian critique, the collective and the individual.

On the level of human collectivities, Foucault's conception of decentred and constitutive power serves to destabilise all positive projects of liberation and demonstrates the full array of the practices of exclusion, confinement, normalisation and subjection that pervade the discourses of humanism, operative either in the liberal notions of 'rule of law' or the movements of 'sexual emancipation'. ⁵⁷ Foucault's analytics of power is clearly marked by a persistent refusal to take the side of 'society' against the state, to "recognise in civil society a principle of good opposable to the evil of the state"58. Instead, the underlying concern of Foucault's work with multiple and heterogeneous relations of subjection demonstrates his distrust and distaste for the 'social bond', of any project that prescribes a form of collective identity and of any 'progressive politics' in the name of that identity; in short it "places little faith in the goodness of society"59 that could serve as a normative foundation for political action. It is on this level that Foucault's work exhibits a sense of unbearable gravity, arising from a suspicion of any 'positive' political action. It is here that, in the words of Charles Taylor, "Foucault disconcerts."60

Yet, rather than withdraw into passive resignation in the face of the unbearable gravity of social life, Foucault's thought and practice proceeded from "pessimistic activism",61 that questions and ridicules the discourses of aggressive normativity: "There is always something ludicrous in the philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it." This stance is what Foucault, echoing Schmitt's insistence on the existential rather than normative character of the friend-enemy distinction, refers to as the 'indignity of speaking for others'. 63 Instead, Foucault explicitly suggests that political activity be a matter of personal decision.

> It is absolutely true that when I write a book I refuse to take a prophetic stance; that is, the one of saying to people: here is what you must do, and also: this is good and this is not. I say to them, roughly speaking, it seems to me that things have gone this way; but I describe those things in such a way that the possible paths of attack are delineated. Yet, even with this approach I do not force or compel anyone to attack. So then, it becomes a completely personal question, if I choose, if I want, to

⁵⁴ See Foucault 1989, 1996a, 1977a, 1990a, Deleuze 1988, 1992. The notion of the diagram is central to Deleuze's reconstruction of Foucault's thought (1988). See Prozorov 2004a, chapter 1, 2004b for the elaboration and the methodical application of this notion.

See Prozorov 2004a, chapter 5 for the detailed reconstitution of the Foucauldian notion of concrete freedom. See also Rajchman 1985, 1994a, 1994b, Deleuze 1988, Bernauer 1990, Dumm 1996, Pizzorno 1992, Robinson 2003, Heiner 2003.

⁵⁶ Foucault 1977b, p. 34.

⁵⁷ See Foucault 1977a. 1990a.

⁵⁸ Gordon 1996, p. 263.

⁵⁹ Gordon 1996, p. 264.

⁶⁰ Taylor 1986, p. 69. For a critique of Foucault's 'nihilism', understood as an absence of regulative principles of political action see also Walzer 1986, Rorty 1992, Habermas 1995, Fraser 1994, 1995. For a more sympathetic discussion of the issue and a different conception of nihilism see Veyne 1992.

Foucault 1984b, p. 343.

Foucault 1990b, p. 9.

Foucault 1996d, p. 76. Emphasis added.

take certain courses of action with reference to prisons, psychiatric asylums, this or that issue. But I say that political action belongs to a category of participation completely different from these written or bookish acts of participation. It is a problem [...] of *personal and physical commitment*. [...] The *essence of being radical is physical*: the essence of being radical is the *radicalness of existence itself*.⁶⁴

This lengthy quotation provides a good illustration of the dimension of lightness in ethicopolitical practice, when the latter is conceived on the level of the individual. In the absence of secure foundations of truth and morality, the sole remaining 'guideline' for political action is *subjective will*. Similarly to Schmitt, Foucault's political ethics is marked by an *existential decisionism*, ⁶⁵ an affirmation of one's stance combined with the recognition of inability of the secure grounding of the decision. Secondly, it is important to note that Foucault's affirmation of subjective will is by no means a return to an essentialist conception of the subject, whether rationalist or phenomenological. "Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not liberate the man in his own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself." We may therefore conclude that while the social aspect of existence is in Foucault's work endowed with a dimension of gravity, the transgressive element of lightness is contained within those personal *practices of the self*, by which a subject *stylises* her existence.

The next chapter will attempt to demonstrate that a similar distinction between lightness and weight is at work in Schmitt's concept of the political. On the level of collectivity (specified in terms of the state), Schmitt's concept of the political presents us with a gloomy (and arguably irrefutable) vision of an "ever present possibility" of war, delivered in a concise and solemn style that parodies the force of theological revelation that in Schmitt's political theology is a metaphysical counterpart to his decisionism. ⁶⁷ Yet, the images of recurrent doom that this reading conjures are dissolved in Schmitt's ontological extremism, his insistence on the ungrounded and ontogenetic character of the decision, the intensely personal nature of the political act of the 'friend-enemy distinction'. The restoration in the 'philosophy of concrete life' of the exception as the immanent-transcendental condition of possibility of order has a transgressive effect similar to Foucault's historical ontology that makes the "the intelligible appear against the background of emptiness and den[ies] its necessity". ⁶⁸ In the following chapter we shall discuss the Schmittian ethics of decisionism in terms of the four-fold scheme offered by Foucault.

The Art of Making Enemies: Towards a Nonpositive Affirmation of Life

We have argued above that the work of both Schmitt and Foucault is marked by a consistent amoralism and anti-normativism, which, however, is indispensable to the constitution of a distinct *ethos* of political practice. The distinction of morality and ethics, relied on in this paper, originates in Foucault's late work on the 'ethical' axis of 'historical ontology'. Foucault introduces a distinction between three aspects of morality: moral behaviour, the moral code (with which behaviour may be consonant or dissonant) and, most originally, the "kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rapport a soi*, which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions". In his studies of Greco-Roman culture Foucault brings up a particular form of the latter aspect of morality, a type of *ethics*

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⁶⁴ Foucault 1996b, p. 261. Emphasis added.

⁶⁵ See Wolin 1994.

⁶⁶ Foucault 1984d, p. 42.

⁶⁷ See Schmitt 1976, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁸ Foucault 1996c, p. 312.

⁶⁹ See Foucault 1982, 1990b, 1988e. Though less prominent than the theme of power/knowledge, the ethical problematic of Foucault's work has been the object of increasing commentary. See e.g. Connolly 1998, Bernauer 1990, 1994, Smart 1998, Rajchman 1992, 1994a, 1994b, Dumm 1994, 1996, Robinson 2003, Simons 1995 (chapters 6, 7, 8).

Foucault 1984b, p. 352. For a more detailed discussion of this threefold distinction see Foucault 1990b, pp. 25-32.

which is simultaneously an *aesthetic* relationship, an "art of existence", which does not emphasise the recovery of the underlying deep truth of one's subjectivity in the practice of 'hermeneutics of the self', but rather focuses on active self-fashioning, "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men [...] seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria."⁷¹

Aesthetics of existence thus forms an autonomous domain of the constitution of the self, related to but not reducible to the moral code, the latter having its locus in the domain of the social. Furthermore, the relation of ethics to morals is that of opposition and antagonism: as Foucault remarks in his discussion of Baudelaire, the techniques of the self do not "have any place in society itself, or in the body politic. They can only be produced in another, a different place which Baudelaire calls art."72 It must be noted that in the 'aestheticist' worldview that, according to Megill, characterises Foucault's work, art does not denote a functional sector contrasted with other domains of experience; in a curious parallel to Schmitt's concept of the political it is rather a source of all experience.⁷³ Just like any practice acquires a political character, when it carries an intense ontogenetic force, any material, including one's everyday existence, can become enveloped in an aesthetic project of creating oneself as a 'work of art'. It is important to stress that, contrary to the facile criticism of Foucault's 'aestheticism' as elitist and narcissistic⁷⁴, self-creation as a work of art "is to be taken in the sense of the Greeks, for whom an artist was first of all an artisan and a work of art was first of all a work."⁷⁵ Far from being a vacuous valorisation of 'creativity' and 'selfexpression', characteristic of contemporary neoliberal individualism, Foucault's ethics thoroughly de-glamorises self-fashioning as a dangerous and open-ended encounter with the multiple diagrams of subjectification, that make practices of freedom dependent on epistemico-moral authorisation, thereby dispensing with freedom itself.⁷⁶

What is problematised in ethics is not following a certain code of behaviour with an epistemicomoral certitude, but rather the style of relationship to oneself that one establishes in the absence, or at least in oblivion of any substantive conception of the good and the true. Foucault's ethics is "the philosophy for a practice, in which what one is capable of being is *not rooted in a prior knowledge of who one is*. Its principle is freedom, but a freedom which does not follow from any postulation of our nature or essence." In the absence of any *knowledge* about who one *is*, freedom takes concrete shape in the cultivation of a style of existence, a sensibility that is aesthetic rather than epistemic: "What is required is an aesthetic attitude in which the *cultivation of a style takes precedence over any curiosity about the true nature of the experience* being stylised." Posing the question of Schmittian ethics in these terms requires a reconstruction, in the existential decisionism of Schmittian political theory, of the four aspects of ethics that Foucault distinguishes: *ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work* and the *telos* of the ethical subject.

Ethical Substance: Proximity to the Void

Trying to identify an ethical *substance* in Schmitt's political theory may appear paradoxical in the light of the preceding discussion of the thoroughgoing negativity that characterises the concepts of

⁷¹ Foucault 1990b, p. 10.

⁷² Foucault 1984d, p. 42. See also Foucault 1988a.

⁷³ Megill 1985, pp. 2-5.

⁷⁴ See Wolin 1994 for the most extreme version of such criticism that claims that Foucault's position is indistinguishable from that of a "narcissistic child" (p. 257.) and that the 'realisation' of his ethical project would bring about "a Hobbesian state of nature with a flair for style". (p. 262.) See Bennett 1996 for the response to this and other criticisms of a Foucauldian ethics.

⁷⁵ Veyne 1993, p. 7. Emphasis original.

⁷⁶ See Prozorov 2004a, pp. 443-453 for the more detailed elaboration of this argument.

⁷⁷ Rajchman 1994a, p. 192. Emphasis added.

⁷⁸ White 1994, p. 75. Emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Foucault 1990b, p. 26-28.

the political, sovereignty and the exception. Yet, the notion of ethical substance in Foucault's usage refers to the aspect of existence that is problematised, the *object* of ethical practice rather than its content. 80 We may thus venture that the ethical substance of a Schmittian political realism is contained in the notion of (real) life, the access to which is provided by the exception. "The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: it confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition."81 The antagonistic situation brought about by the decision on exception affirms the creative, ontogenetic aspect of existence by displacing the neutralising torpid 'mechanism'. This attention to the practice of fostering 'real', unmediated life arises from Schmitt's ontological extremism that derives a political theory of normal order from a moment of exceptional decision, an act of unlimited authority that emanates from nothingness and has no content other than the intensity of its ontogenetic force.⁸²

Thus, in the absence of a positive ethical substance Schmittian political realism offers a notion of life, which is as holistic and all-encompassing, as it is restricted to the absolute minimum, its entire 'reality' contained in the exceptional, critical, boundary or limit experiences, 83 that both serve as conditions of possibility of 'ordered life' and affirm its ultimate impossibility, relegating it to the order of 'mechanism', done away with by taking exception to it. The limitation of life to the situation of the limit is not reducible to the conservative-revolutionary aesthetics of horror, frequently deemed synonymous with the exaltation of the virtues of war, 84 but rather concerns any experience that is transgressive in the Foucauldian sense: an awareness of the limits of our constitution that is simultaneously a step beyond them, a step that, it should be reminded, has its entire space in the line of the limit. The ethical substance of Schmittian ethics is thus that narrow segment at the extremity of one's existence, the traversing of which via the decision returns the subject to the void, to which he owes his subjectivity. What is problematised in decisionist ethics is not the certainty of presence of the grounds of the good, it is rather the proximity to the void, that space of nothingness from which the decision emanates and which provides access to 'real life'.85 This vitalist understanding of ethics carries an affinity with Deleuze's reading of Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and resistance:

> Life becomes resistance to power when power takes life as its object. [...] When power becomes biopower, resistance becomes the power of life, a vital power that cannot be contained within [...] the paths of a particular diagram. Is not the force that comes from outside a certain idea of Life, a certain vitalism, in which Foucault's thought culminates? Is not life the capacity to resist force? [...] There is no telling what man might achieve 'as a living being', as a set of forces that resist.86

Although this notion of life as an ontological precondition of subjectivity appears to betray a residual naturalism in Schmitt's otherwise anti-essentialist ontology, it is necessary to note the nuances in this conception of ethical substance. The 'ethical subject' for both Schmitt and Foucault is not an anterior vital force that resists but that which emerges in the act of resistance to diagrammatic enfolding. Freedom therefore does not consist in letting the primal forces of life be

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 26. See also Foucault 1984b, pp. 352-353.

⁸¹ Schmitt 1985a, p. 15.

⁸² See Huysmans 1998, pp. 582-583, Wolin 1992a, Muller 1999.

⁸³ See Foucault 1977b. For the importance of the notion of 'life' as a resisting force and a general vitalism in Foucault's philosophy see Deleuze 1988, particularly pp. 91-93, 124-133. The notion of 'bare life' that we espouse in this paper goes against the influential depiction of bare life by Giorgio Agamben (1998), for whom it is exemplified by the figure of homo sacer, a being entirely constituted by being caught up in the sovereign exception and exposed to death at the will of the sovereign. See Prozorov 2004a, chapter 5 for a different reading of the concept of 'bare life', inspired by J.M. Coetzee's novel 'The Life and Times of Michael K'. ⁸⁴ See Wolin 1992a.

⁸⁵ See Simons 1995, pp. 69-70, White 1994, Dumm 1994, Chapter 3, Caputo 1993, Chambers 2001, Robinson 2003, Prozorov 2004a, chapter 5 for the importance of the figure of the void, abyss or absence for Foucault's understanding of transgression. ⁸⁶ Deleuze 1988, p. 92-93. Emphasis added.

but in their confrontation with that which threatens to enclose them within a diagrammatic domain of positivity. Transgressive resistance is not *protective* but *constitutive* of free subjectivity as "something one has and does *not* have, something one wants, something one conquers." ⁸⁷

Mode of Subjection: Existential Decisionism

The second component of the Foucauldian reconstruction of Schmittian ethics concerns the mode of subjection, "the way in which people are invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations". 88 While a subject may be (self-) subjected to a certain practice via its claim to rationality, a divine or natural law, an epistemic-political construction of 'normality', the nihilism of Schmitt's political theory leaves no possibility of linking ethical practice to truth, either of divine or human origin. A Schmittian decisionism uncouples the link between truth and power that Foucault referred to as the power/knowledge nexus. Since the decision 'emanates from nothingness', it is by definition deprived of a ground such as the truth of divine law, rationality, even pragmatic utility. The only mode of subjection that Schmitt's nihilism permits is what we have referred to above as existential decisionism, a commitment to a position in spite of the impossibility of its grounding. This stance can be described in Paul Veyne's terms as a fulfilment of nihilism. Veyne approaches nihilism as "a name we give to periods of history when thinkers feel that truths are without foundation." 89 In this understanding nihilism is constituted by, firstly, a recognition of the absence of foundations of truth, morality and politics and, secondly, the desire to have such foundations. The properly nihilistic response to this existential condition may consist either in the hypocritical attempts to invent new foundations for judgment ('incomplete nihilism' in Nietzsche's terms) or in the passive*nihilist* abandonment of all judgment due to its necessary contingency. Veyne interprets Foucault's work as the 'fulfilment of nihilism' that accepts the first assumption of nihilism but rejects the second, claiming instead that it is the impossibility of founding norms that makes possible ethical action. Similarly, Vevne suggests that the absence of secure foundations does not disable judgment, but merely disables giving one's judgment the force of truth or moral law. "What remains is to live and to want what one wants without justifying oneself and saying that one is right."90 It is this formulation that sums up existential decisionism as a mode of subjection.

It is important to distinguish this understanding of decisionism from the deconstructionist understanding of the 'impossibility' of decision, highlighted in the 'ethical' writings of the later Derrida. Similarly to Schmitt's insistence on the decision emanating from nothingness, deconstructionist ethics affirms undecidability as the condition of possibility of the decision, without taking the second step of disavowing this undecidability in the very act of making the decision. Moreover, it is precisely this second step that deconstruction targets as an object of criticism, seeking to restore the undecidability at the heart of order to its present existence. In Derrida's supplementary deconstruction of Schmitt's approach, any decisionism necessarily contains the 'aporia of decision', the passage through the undecidable, the experience of the 'perhaps' that is both traversed and effaced (but not annulled) in the act of decision. It is this effacement that deconstruction seeks to bring up and highlight in the decisions already taken. Yet, the very passage from undecidability to decision remains immune to deconstructive criticism and weakens the ethical thrust of deconstruction. As Dominic Moran ironically remarks, Derrida's fixation on undecidability and hence the 'impossibility' of decision entails that "he must be constantly amazed that anything at all happens". Indeed, a deconstructive approach to the decision

⁸⁷ Nietzsche 1977, p. 271. Emphasis original.

⁸⁸ Foucault 1984b, p. 353.

⁸⁹ See Veyne 1992, p. 342.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 343. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ See Derrida 1992, 1996.

⁹² See Derrida 1996, p. 67.

⁹³ Moran 2002, p. 127.

appears to inaugurate an *ethics of indecision*, a self-imposed suspension over the abyss of undecidability in the desire to refrain from the closure that every decision inaugurates (and which makes it, in Derridean ethics, *always* inadequate and irresponsible).

Paradoxically, having demonstrated that *every* decision is *ipso facto* contingent and arbitrary, enabled by the abeyance of certainty and normativity, the 'experience of the perhaps', deconstruction is unwilling to actually *decide* in this manner, *as if there was* any other way of proceeding about the decision. Moran's stinging critique therefore has a degree of validity:

In emphasising the profound effect of impossibilities and unrealisable virtualities on all political thought that is always deemed too crude, deconstruction runs the risk of appearing either as a *critical Puritanism* or as a *series of empty, if largely unobjectionable platitudes.*⁹⁴

The deconstructionist ethics of (in)decision therefore remains suspended in irresolution and impotence, a deadlock which can only be broken via its supplementation with a Schmittian decisionism, a supplement of which it allegedly is. Pace the more comforting thought of Derrida successfully deconstructing Schmitt, Derrida's and Schmitt's accounts of the decision actually supplement (and deconstruct) each other, decisionism being necessary for deconstruction not to appear "either as substanceless cant or a new moral absolutism". Simply put, radical undecidability must be suspended for anything to happen at all, for the event to take place. This imperative problematises the very attempt at a deconstructive ethics: since any decision passes through the ordeal of undecidability and "there can be no responsibility without [...] this passage by way of the undecidable", 96 all decisions are responsible and hence 'ethical' in Derridean terms. Yet, since all decisions effect a closure of the radical openness of the perhaps, they are all equally irresponsible and hence unethical. This appears to make the notion of an ethically responsible decision meaningless in principle, forever gravitating between demanding the impossible (the maintenance of undecidability) and lamenting the obvious (the ungrounded grounding at work in every decision). In contrast to the impasse of deconstructionist ethics, a Schmittian approach focuses not on the impossible attempt to establish the *fact* of ethicality of decision, but on affirming the decision itself as an ethical act, whose authenticity is conditioned by 'going through' both the traversal of undecidability and its closure. The ethical injunction of existential decisionism thus concerns not the *substance* of decision, but the *responsibility* for the decision as an act. ⁹⁷

Ethical Work: Making Enemies

The third step in the elaboration of a Schmittian ethics concerns the *ethical work*, those practices that the subject engages in to constitute herself, the actions exercised on the ethical substance that Foucault unites under the name 'askesis'. 98 This aspect comprises such techniques of the self as renunciation or mastery of pleasures, decipherment of one's desire or the Baudelairian 'doctrine of elegance'. 99 For our purposes, the ethical work prescribed by Schmitt's existential decisionism consists in the friend-enemy distinction as a *practice*, the *art of making enemies* as a means to actively fashion the self. The antagonistic relationship with the Other, and, more specifically, the social, is contained in the very definition of ethics as a technique of the self. To recall the distinction between lightness and weight, the work on the self always proceeds in the environment of unbearable heaviness, imposed by the mutually reinforcing relationship of discourses of truth and strategies of power. The significance of ethics as a transgressive individual practice therefore lies in

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

⁹⁶ Derrida cited in Critchley 1992, p. 198.

⁹⁷ Cf. Zizek 2002a, 2004b, pp. 139-170 for a similar perspective on decisionism, articulated in opposition to Levinasian-Derridean ethics.

⁹⁸ Foucault 1984b, p. 355.

⁹⁹ See Foucault 1990b, 1988e, 1984d, pp. 41-42.

the possibility of "self-formation in the face of all the other forces that fashion us" A Schmittian ethics makes this 'initial' condition of the work of the self its entire substance: one fashions herself by taking exception, thereby constituting both the self and the other, the friend and the enemy. The art of making enemies thus consists in actively pluralizing differences, nurturing an antagonistic field which alone proves the reality of one's life: "To abandon self-fashioning is to abandon the craving for freedom, and to let go of one's stubborn hold upon selfhood, even selfhood conceived as a fiction, is to die." 101 Difference, and more precisely, making differences rather than resolving them, becomes both the *condition* and the *content* of existence of the Schmittian subject. One is reminded at this stage of the very specific function that Schmitt's political theory assigns to the enemy: in the absence of secure foundations of the good the political relationship of enmity proceeds from the strictly equal (in)validity of opponents' claims, while the moralist discourse of global liberalism devalues the adversary to the status of a despicable monster to be humiliated and annihilated, not merely defeated. 102 In the situation of antagonistic equality, a Schmittian enemy is spared the two variants of the unfortunate destiny of the *enemy of liberalism*, which one recognises all too well in the age of liberal interventionism: the subjection to the missionary activity of conversion or, should conversion prove insufficient, a crusade. 103

Nonetheless, one should not exaggerate the 'friendliness' of the relationship with the enemy. While resting, by necessity, on the ultimate equality of unfoundedness, the friend-enemy distinction devalues and does way with the principle central to the liberal ethos in Schmitt's interpretation: the principle of discussion. 104 To fully appreciate the irrelevance of discussion to the decisionist ethics one needs to specify its relationship with *alterity*. As opposed to the well-known critiques of realist practices of security as stabilising the identity of the self via its authoritative demarcation from the other, the friend-enemy distinction in our reading operates in two steps and with two notions of alterity. Simultaneously with any exclusion or authoritative nomination of a positive other (the enemy as something existentially strange to the self), the ungrounded decision on the friend-enemy distinction marks the space of *negative alterity*, the *void*, where neither the self nor the other vet exist. 105 What is at stake is thus not a facile gesture of demonstrating the dependence of one's identity on the exclusion of the other and then proceeding to advocate 'responsibility to Otherness' (a fixture of poststructuralist ethics 106), which empirically comes down to the valorisation of marginal, repressed and otherwise disadvantaged groups, a valorisation, which is in fact constitutive of one's very *self* (as a social activist, humanitarian, critical intellectual, etc.). The inconsistency is immediately apparent: there is little that is so very 'other' about the usual figures of otherness deployed in critical thought, both empirically (insofar as the very sympathy for the cause of the other renders his otherness questionable) and conceptually (the notion of alterity is hardly apt for an ethics which ultimately professes *empathy* with the other's cause and hence at least a minimal degree of identification). In contrast, the notion of negative alterity does not endow difference with any form of positivity and identity: self-constitution in decisionist ethics involves otherness as, in the pure and simple sense, the void, a blank and indifferent space that is traversed in the simultaneous constitution of both the 'self' and the 'positive other'. We may begin to appreciate the austerity and scarcity of the 'ontological extremist' disposition of both Schmitt and Foucault¹⁰⁷: that

¹⁰⁰ Simons 1995, p. 76.

¹⁰¹ Greenblatt cited in Simons 1995, p. 76. Emphasis added.

Schmitt 1976, p. 27-29. For Schmitt's critique of the hypocrisy constitutive of liberal humanitarianism see also ibid., pp. 53-54, 69-79.

¹⁰³ See Schmitt 1976, p. 79.

¹⁰⁴ See Schmitt 1985b.

¹⁰⁵ See Zizek 1999, pp. 19-20 for the discussion of the 'abyssal founding act' that precedes the 'birth' of *both* the friend and the enemy and the argument for its dual nature that, echoing Derrida's discussion of decision, consists simultaneously in a passage through radical openness and the decisionist act of its closure.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Campbell 1998, Edkins et al 1999, Connolly 1995.

¹⁰⁷See May 2000, Hallward 2000 for the discussion of the 'austerity' of Foucault's ontology. For a more detailed discussion of austere ontology see Prozorov 2004a, chapter 5.

which precedes and exceeds any positive identity is quite literally *the void*, the 'background of emptiness', whose only characteristic is its radical *difference* from *any* positivity.

Yet, to posit *transcendence as absence* is obviously the opposite of postulating, in a positivist manner, the *absence of transcendence*, which is equivalent to the effacement of the radical openness of the political and the subscription to the depoliticised assertion of self-immanence. In contrast, the nihilism of Schmitt's political ontology affirms the impossibility of immanentism by asserting "the experience of a difference which is not at the disposal of human beings, *whose advent does not take place within human history*, and which can not be abolished therein." This willingly maintained 'proximity to the void' that is a defining feature of a Schmittian ethos makes it impossible to invoke any claims of normative foundationalism and spares the enemy from conversions and crusades. At the same time, it reconfigures the relationship with the positive other into that of *existential equality*. The existence of the self is no longer *owing to* the existence of the positive other, since both emerge simultaneously as the twin offspring of the friend-enemy distinction.

Discussion that is the central principle of the liberal political ethos therefore appears irrelevant since it replaces the *ontogenetic situation* of *self-creation* with an *ontological reflection* on the questions of truth or morality, presupposing either a teleology of rational consensus or a neutralised conception of truth as an emergent equilibrium. Schmitt's criticism of the Enlightenment ideal of the 'discussing public', coupled with a Foucauldian re-introduction of the political into the domain of the epistemic, entails an obvious consequence: *nothing is to be gained in discussion*. If truth is a thing of this world, then any consensus that emerges in discussion will be always already permeated by power relations, i.e. it will always emerge as a result of an unfounded decision, however much the event of the latter is disavowed: "Every consensus, even a 'free' one, is somehow motivated and brought into existence. Power produces consensus and often, to be sure, a rational and ethically justified consensus. Conversely, consensus produces power, and then often an irrational and – despite the consensus – an ethically repugnant one."

A decisionist ethics values difference without a liberal 'safety mechanism' of postulating the underlying identity of 'humanity', which in Schmitt's astute observation serves to deny the enemy the existential status of being human, reduce him to a "total non-value" and has "incalculable effects [since] a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity". Just as Schmitt's political realism on the level of interstate relations affirms pluralism in the domain of the international while privileging a minimal degree of domestic homogeneity, a decisionist ethics, (un)grounded in an antagonistic ontology, emphasises the maintenance of difference and agonistic respect for it, while simultaneously privileging a resolution of interdependence with the positive other via a clear act of self-distinction and self-delimitation. In this manner, a decisionist ethics posits a *telos of sovereign subjectivity*.

Telos: Sovereign to Oneself

The telos of sovereignty is the final component of Schmittian ethics. The ultimate goal of the *art of making enemies* that nurtures the substance of *real life*, permanently re-invoking the state of *proximity to the void*, is ultimately to emerge from a state of unbearable gravity into the condition of lightness via transgressive practices of decision. The 'art of making enemies' is thus a *practice of liberty* (as opposed to a struggle for liberation) that furnishes lightness by permanently *replaying*, as it were, the foundational moment of decision. In this moment of radical openness, one finds herself

109 Lefort 1988, p. 222. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Foucault 1977b, p. 32.

¹¹⁰ See Schmitt 1985b, pp. 35-51 the detailed critique of the notion of discussion.

¹¹¹ Schmitt 1999, p. 202.

¹¹² Freund 1995, p. 19.

¹¹³ Schmitt 1976, p. 54. See also Freund 1995, Kervegan 1999.

in a condition of *mastery* of the ethical substance of *real life*, a mastery that is equivalent both to Schmitt's famous notion of sovereignty as contained in the decision on exception and to Foucault's notion of transgression. Indeed, the logical consequence of Schmitt's argument for the constitutive nature of the exception is the uncanny *identity of the foundational and the transgressive*, which carries important consequences for rethinking the Schmittian concept of sovereignty, which is usually read as a mere affirmation of unlimited authority. In his study of the similarities between Schmitt and Foucault, Ojakangas differentiates between the directions of the constitutive founding rupture that the two authors opt for, Schmitt valorising the top-down decision on the exception and Foucault developing a bottom-up conception of the primacy of the resisting 'plebs'. Yet, is the difference all that clear? In Schmitt's approach, sovereignty is understood, in a way similar to Foucault¹¹⁵, not as the *positivity* of the exercise of power, its scope or intensity, but as a negative operation of *transgression*, the capacity to *suspend* the normal functioning of order. 116

Sovereignty operates at the outermost sphere; it is here, at the borderline, that it establishes and violates limits. [...] The question of the sovereign is the question of the limit. If sovereignty decides upon its own limits, its decision cannot be bound by those limits. [...] The sovereign is the unlimited power that makes limits, or in other words, the ungrounded ground of the law. 117

Thus, sovereign is s/he who is simultaneously *inside* the space of order as the source of its foundational principles and *outside* it as something that "that can not be subsumed" under these principles, a surplus that *in relation to the order in question* is always unfathomable, monstrous and obscene. We may then redefine the sovereign as the *transgressor in relation to the order of his own creation*. The logic of the concept is thus *anarchic* rather than 'authoritarian' and the *sovereign* ought to be distinguished from the figure of the *hegemon*, located wholly *within* the diagram of order as the embodiment of its foundational principles. The Schmittian sovereign and the Foucauldian transgressor occupy the same relation to the positivity of order: the self-immanence of order is destabilised and disrupted by the figures located on its exterior limit, be it the sovereign subject of its institution or the resisting subject instituted by it. Rather than posit a Foucauldian transgression as a practice of resistance *to* sovereign power, valorised by Schmitt, we rather suggest that both authors may be read to deploy an *ethics of sovereign transgression* that seeks mastery of one's own existence in the face of the self-immanentist diagrams of objectification and subjectification.

The affirmation of the self that this telos of sovereignty points to is thus markedly 'non-positive' in the Foucauldian sense: a Schmittian subject affirms the self by the art of making enemies, yet simultaneously negates the self by retaining proximity to the void that conditions his being. It affirms life in the absence of grounds, i.e. it involves the void in its ethical practice rather than orient ethical practice to the erasure of the void in the authoritative postulation of the locus of truth at its bottom. It is this 'nonpositive affirmation' that constitutes what we propose to call the ethos of insecure life. This ethos is indeed marked by lightness, a lightness emerging out of the dissolution of the epistemic and moral certitude of the collective regimes of truth, which constitute us in our positive identity. Yet, the cost of this ethical practice of liberty is an ineradicable sense of insecurity that arises, by definition, from an antagonistic relationship to the world that forms the very substance of the decisionist ethics. While various strands of what David Campbell refers to as 'politics of principle' proceed from the problematisation of this insecurity and attempt its

¹¹⁴ See Ojakangas 2001.

¹¹⁵ See Foucault 1977b.

¹¹⁶ See Norris 2000.

¹¹⁷ Norris 2000, p. 8. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 13. Cf. Derrida 1992, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ For a more detailed argument for the 'obscenity' of the sovereign act in relation to the positivity of order see Prozorov 2004b.

¹²⁰ Foucault 1977b, p. 36.

¹²¹ See Campbell 1993, p. 4.

effacement via postulating abstract universal ideals of humanism and (as Schmitt wryly observed¹²²) enacting them in the peculiarly intense practices of violence, the ethos of insecure life precludes the possibility of the familiar postures of missionaries and crusaders in its affirmation of 'unprincipled' existence. Paradoxically at first glance, this antagonistic ethos that is 'nihilistic', 'decisionist' and 'irrational' and emphasises the *intensity of constitutive force* rather than a *substantive conception of the good*, appears to prescribe practices, marked by a stronger sense of humility and responsibility than the moralist ethos of *politics of principle*, of whose many guises the current drive of global 'anti-terrorism' is the most recent manifestation. Self-deprived of epistemic and moral certitude, a Schmittian subject reserves the capacity of judgment and decision, but, placing herself in these very acts in proximity to the void, forfeits the capacity to ground and thereby universalise her judgment. Both *speaking for* others and *telling others* where truth or morality resides becomes for a Schmittian subject a manifest *indignity*. In the terms discussed in the chapter below, she amputates her *index finger*.

A World Saved and A World Betrayed: Franz, Sabina and the Index Finger

The discussion above proceeded by the implicit contrast between the Schmittian ethos of insecure life and the *ethos of epistemic and moral certitude* that characterises both the liberalism of Schmitt's time and, arguably, various contemporary strands of global liberal governance. This contrast may now be explicated and elaborated further with reference to the failed relationship of Franz and Sabina, the two characters of Milan Kundera's novel 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being'. The discussion below attempts to demonstrate the operation of the ethos of insecure life in *everyday situations* and thereby challenge the assumption that a Schmittian existential decisionism is marked by the dislike and devaluation of 'everydayness' and an affirmation of heroic practice, restricted to the elite. ¹²³ Instead, it may be argued that the relocation of the Schmittian problematic of the political to the ethical domain of the relationship to the self helps do away with the quasi-heroic elitism, which adds nothing of interest or value to Schmitt's political philosophy. As the discussion below hopes to make clear, it also does away with the heroic posture of the adversaries of Schmittian ethics, the missionaries and the crusaders of global liberalism.

In Kundera's novel Franz, a university professor, and Sabina, an émigré painter, enjoy a brief affair, on whose completion their relationship to each other develops in a markedly different way. While Sabina "left the man because she felt like leaving him" departing without a warning and never recalling him subsequently, Franz's existence in the absence of Sabina was marked by a continuing obsession with the self-inflicted ghostly presence of her in all his endeavours. Yet, to infer from this contrast of lightness and weight a tragically unrequited love of Franz contrasting favourably with Sabina's cold-hearted indifference and to confer upon the former the compassion of the reader is to engage in a game of misunderstandings that, as Kundera writes, characterised the entire relationship of the two characters. Let us begin to describe this game by drawing from Kundera's "short dictionary of misunderstood words" and discussing the relationship Franz and Sabina had to *parades*. 125

Having grown up in the communist Czechoslovakia, Sabina has a marked distaste for parades, partly due to the compulsory nature of participation in parades that was imposed by the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Franz, on the other hand, lived in Paris and took part in all sorts of

¹²² Schmitt 1976, p. 21.

See Huysmans 1998, p. 581. Huysmans's alternative to the 'aesthetics of horror' involved in the Schmittian passage to the limit is presented as a 'political aesthetic of everydayness' (p. 588.), where aesthetic creativity finds its locus in daily encounters with others. While fully in consent with the need to emphasise local practices in everyday surroundings, the argument of this paper is that 'everydayness' does not form an *alternative* to Schmitt's 'passage to the limit', but rather presents itself as a *site*, at which the implications of existential decisionism can be elaborated more fruitfully.

124 Kundera 1999, p. 121.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

demonstrations: "how nice it was to celebrate something, demand something, protest against something; to be out in the open, to be with others." For Franz, parades represented 'real life', marked by the excitement not to be found in his academic existence. One may of course read this contrast unproblematically as a contrast of oppression and freedom, forced and authentic participation. However, the object of Sabina's disgust was not the forced nature of communist parades (it was precisely that which made then tolerable), but the possibility (actualised in Western European anti-communist marches) of that very feeling of 'niceness' that Franz experienced. In other words, what was unbearable to her was not the ugliness of communism but its 'mask of beauty', not because it was a mask but because, and that's the scary part, it may well in fact be genuine. It is important to note that the Czechoslovak parades that Sabina despised most were those in the early period of communism, "when people were *still enthusiastic*, or still did their best to feign enthusiasm. [...] even the most blasé faces would *beam with dazzling smiles*, as if trying to prove that they were properly joyful, or to be more precise, in proper *agreement*." 127

The object of resentment becomes even clearer if we address Sabina's interpretation of the Soviet films, which she had the misfortune of seeing in her youth, the saccharine melodramas whose incredible innocence and joyfulness strikes one as peculiarly macabre considering that they were produced amid the bloodbath of the 1930s. Yet, Sabina rebels against the bland observation that these "films showed the Communist ideal whereas the Communist reality was worse." "She would unhesitantly prefer life in a real Communist regime with all its persecution and meat queues. *Life in the real Communist world was still livable.* In the world of the Communist ideal made real, in that *world of grinning idiots*, she would have nothing to say, she would die of horror within a week." One must note therefore that Sabina detested not the repression, poverty or ugliness of communism but the possibility of the actualisation of the *ideal of social harmony* only hinted at in the Soviet films, where the only conflict that could occur was a lovers' misunderstanding to be conveniently resolved in the final scene. What Sabina finds revolting is the *possibility of the world saved*, the horrendous possibility prophesied by Nietzsche's Zarathustra:

The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. *His race is as ineradicable as the flea; the last man lives longest.* [...] They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbour and rubs against him, for one needs warmth [...] No shepherd and one herd! *Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.* One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health. 'We have invented happiness', say the last men, and they blink". ¹³⁰

This possibility, based on the belief in "the natural goodness of man" forms the essence of what Kundera refers to as "categorical agreement with being", the ethos that he labels 'kitsch'. Categorical agreement with being, a stance that affirms the essential goodness of human existence as a possibility to be actualised, logically finds evil to be unacceptable and external to existence. In this manner, categorical agreement with being produces what William Connolly calls the 'second problem of evil', which in our terms can be understood as the erasure of negative alterity in the designation of the positive other as a locus of responsibility for evil that allows one to retain a sense of stability or fullness of one's own identity as 'good'. The possibility of the world saved that

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 98. Emphasis added.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 246. Emphasis added.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 250. Emphasis added.

¹³⁰ Nietzsche 1961, p. 9.

¹³¹ Schmitt 1976, p. 60.

¹³² Kundera 1999, p. 245.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 250.

¹³⁴ See Connolly 1991, p. 8. The 'first' problem of evil is of course the very fact of its ineradicable existence in the world. Connolly's distinction is fruitful for understanding Schmitt's tragic existentialism that recognises the impossibility of extermination of evil and

frightens Sabina thus presupposes that, firstly, evil is external to the world, and, secondly, that there is an identifiable locus of evil, which, taking various historical shapes, is to be fought and eradicated. In Connolly's terms, this possibility of redemption relies on finding "external justification for existential suffering". ¹³⁵ In Sabina's terms, this possibility relies on the possession by the subject who entertains it of an exceptionally long index finger, whose growth is most probably due to its frequent use to pointedly assess others. Once the index finger has penetrated the domain of the 'evil other', the ethos of categorical agreement with being deploys its primary askesis, the technique that Kundera has referred to as the Grand March.

It is the function of the parade as an instance of the Grand March that so appeals to Franz: "He saw the marching, shouting crowd as the image of Europe and its history. Europe was the Grand March. The march from revolution to revolution, from struggle to struggle, ever onward." For Kundera, the kitsch of the Grand March, operating with such markers as 'brotherhood', 'equality', 'justice' is the defining characteristic of the Left of all times and guises, contrasted with the 'American' kitsch that operates with notions of 'human right to security', 'the inalienable freedom of the human individual', 'our traditional values'. 138 The end of the Cold War has certainly made the distinction obsolete, permitting indiscriminate juggling with these labels under the aegis of the Third Way. Kundera's own depiction of the Grand March already hints at the interpenetration of the two kitsches in the pathos of global humanism. The Grand March of Western intellectuals to Cambodia is a melting pot of the pilgrims of all types: French professors of linguistics arguing incessantly over the correct translation of the American participants' platitudes, an American actress, appalled by the "barbarity of Communism", joined by a German protest singer, "who had already written nine hundred and thirty songs for peace and against war". 139

For Kundera the political-theoretical content of the March is entirely "beside the point", 140 the whole significance of the Grand March rather contained in its functioning as an ethos, capable of deployment in a variety of forms for a variety of purposes. Irrespectively of its substance, the Grand March is about the enactment of categorical agreement with being, the affirmation of the possibility of the world saved, the stabilisation of one's epistemic and moral certitude via the practices of security, whose variations in content are ethically as indistinguishable from one another as the 'nine hundred and thirty songs for peace and against war'. In contrast to what we designated as the ethos of insecure life, let us label this mode of relationship to the self, marked by the ethical substance of categorical agreement with being, the telos of 'the world saved' and the askesis of the Grand March an ethos of (epistemico-moral) security.

The mode of subjection that this ethos relies on is that of 'ontological' or 'transcendental' narcissism, 141 whose main feature for our purposes is the externalisation of evil that permits to give one's own stance a transcendental epistemico-moral ground. The Grand March may never be propelled by the agonistic notion of Schmittian enmity: its enemy is not constituted as an equal to the simultaneously created self, but rather as an obstacle to be overcome, a monster to be exterminated, evil to be fought so that a feeling of categorical agreement with being may come over that indispensable category of humanity. One also fails to find in the ethos of security the

his consequent sharp criticism of the belief that human beings can eradicate evil through greater mastery of the world or moral selfperfection. See Ojakangas 2000, p. 69. Ironically, it is the understanding of man as evil, which characterises Schmitt's thought (and in his argument all political thought), that disables the self-righteous pathos of missionary and crusading activities, claiming to eradicate evil in the 'last war of humanity'. See Schmitt 1976, pp. 61-67. The attunement to the first problem of evil therefore precludes the formation of the second one and the consequent compounding of evil in the world. ¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

¹³⁶ Kundera 1999, p. 95.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 257-259.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 259-260.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

See Connolly 1998, p 126, note 18. "The transcendental narcissist loves the image of itself that it projects into a transcendental command or direction". The term 'transcendental narcissism' was originally deployed by Foucault (1989, p. 203).

Foucauldian concern with the self as the *object* of ethical practice. The transcendental narcissist problematises not his self but rather the *world*, in which every minute occurrence is to be integrated into the eschatology of the Grand March. We find this integration clearly in Franz's love for Sabina, which is given content via his reference to 'her country' being the victim of Russian aggression, his envious admiration of 'dramatic' existence in the occupied Czechoslovakia, his nostalgic excitement on hearing words like 'banned books', 'enemy tanks', 'persecution'. ¹⁴² In short, Sabina is integrated into the fantasy of the Grand March as a representative of the country where this March is occurring *for real*.

For Sabina, of course, drama and tragedy "didn't mean a thing, there was nothing inherently valuable within them, nothing deserving of respect and admiration." Sabina flees with disgust the meeting of émigré Czechoslovak dissidents, where the man with artificially waved grey hair and a long *index finger* interrogates the audience, including herself, as to how actively and sincerely they opposed the Communist regime. Franz, on the other hand, derives from the same speeches the pleasure, comparable to that of his erotic encounters with Sabina.

On the anniversary of the invasion, they attended a memorial meeting organised by a Czech group in Geneva. [...] The speaker had artificially waved grey hair. He read out a long speech that bored even the few enthusiasts who had come to hear it. [...] From time to time, to stress a point, he would raise his index finger, as if threatening the audience. The girl with the glasses could barely suppress her yawns, while Franz smiled *blissfully* at her side. The longer he looked at the *pleasing* grey-haired man with the *admirable index finger*, the more he saw him as a secret messenger, an *angelic intermediary* between him and his goddess. He closed his eyes and dreamed. He *closed his eyes as he had closed them on Sabina's body* in fifteen European hotels and one in America. ¹⁴⁴

Another misunderstanding between the two lovers therefore occurs on the aesthetic level. Sabina finds the words "prison, persecution, banned books, occupation" *ugly*, "without the slightest trace of romance", while Franz sees in them, and for that matter in Sabina herself, the presence of the Grand March: "She came from a land [...] where the thing he admired most in revolution remained: *life on a large scale*; a life of risk, daring and the danger of death. Sabina had renewed his *faith in the grandeur of human endeavour. Superimposing* the painful drama of *her country* on *her person*, he found her even more beautiful." It is clear from the preceding discussion of the Grand March why Franz would confer *aesthetic value* on struggle, risk and the ever-present possibility of persecution – for the pilgrim of the Grand March, enjoying the boredom and safety of its actual absence, it is absolutely necessary to believe that (in the slogan of the Czech communist revolution of 1948 that is the title of Kundera's early novel) *life is elsewhere*.

Why did Sabina detest this romantisation of struggle and resistance? We have already noted that her dislike of Communism did not prevent her from treating with similar distaste the militancy, in the safety of emigration, of Czech anticommunist dissidents. Rejecting the incorporation of her paintings into the kitsch of anticommunist resistance, she remarked: "My enemy is kitsch not Communism!" Sabina is thus not averse to making enemies, yet, very importantly, neither seeks the recasting of the enemy in terms of evil to be eradicated nor gives herself a stable epistemic or moral ground from which to point her index finger at the other. What clearly distinguishes her aesthetic judgment from the discourse of the Grand March is the absence of any need for the validation of its universal or transcendental status, the absence that, according to Kundera, turns kitsch into non-kitsch:

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 126. Emphasis added.

¹⁴² Kundera 1999, p. 101.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 102. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 252.

running on the grass! The second tear says: how nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass. It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. The brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on the basis of kitsch. 147

Sabina's aesthetic disgust for any manifestation of categorical agreement with being is equivalent to what we have designated as 'proximity to the void', the affirmation of negative alterity in the constitution of positive otherness via the friend-enemy distinction. This affirmation attunes her to that which the transcendental narcissist systematically erases, "that behind Communism, Fascism, behind all occupations and invasions lurks a more basic, pervasive evil and that the image of that evil was a parade of people marching by with raised fists and shouting identical syllables in unison". 148

Sabina's attunement to the second problem of evil that is inherent in every 'social' project echoes both Foucault's sense of the unbearable gravity of the social, constituted at the point of interpenetration of discourses of truth and strategies of power, and Schmitt's wariness of the displacement of the political into the moral and the humanitarian that leads to the crusade against the demonised adversary. This attunement also brings to mind Foucault's insistence on political action being a personal, existential question that belongs to the domain of one's relationship to oneself. Finally, this opposition to the Grand March is clearly aesthetic: what repels Sabina is not exactly the content of the protest or affirmation (she notably refers to it in terms of syllabic and not lexical units, emphasising thereby their unintelligibility), but rather the ugliness of the unison of shouting. Sabina's ethical problem is thus clearly a Foucauldian one: casting her 'social' surroundings in terms of ugliness, she seeks to make her own life a work of art, grant a dimension of beauty to her own existence, endow the self with "originality, which she consciously cultivated". 149 Her ethical solution to this problem is consonant with the 'art of making enemies' that we designated as the primary askesis of a Schmittian ethos of insecure life and may be concretised as the art of betraval.

Betrayal is one more in the series of 'words misunderstood' in the relationship of Franz and Sabina and is crucial to the understanding of Sabina's flight from Franz, since it illuminates the relationship that the two characters establish to truth and freedom. In accordance with the solemn morality of the Grand March, Franz values fidelity and 'living in truth', which he deems possible only in terms of *publicity*. Overcome by the desire to 'live in a glass house', Franz perceives the distinction of the public and the private as the source of dishonesty and is intent on breaking this boundary. The participant of the Grand March is indeed in permanent need of publicity both in the sense of exhibiting the truth and morality of his self and interrogating the other as to her truth and morality. A transcendental narcissist lacks any sort of satisfaction with himself, his empirical individuality being radically insufficient, since the object of narcissism is always perceived as in need of validation of its transcendental status, a validation that gives the narcissist self his security. Hence, Franz's anxiety about keeping his amorous relationship with Sabina secret – it seemed to him to place in question the truth of his love, the truth, which to a transcendental narcissist surely exceeds in importance the love itself. 150 The personal and the intimate are thus subordinated to the ethical work of the Grand March and become governed by its principles of publicity and fidelity.

Sabina, on the other hand, conceives of 'living in truth' as a solitary activity, which is impossible in the presence of others. Truth is corrupted by the very fact of 'keeping the public in mind." ¹⁵¹ Sabina's notion of living in truth is equivalent to Foucault's notion of 'concrete freedom' from any 'regime of truth'. To her, truth is to be furnished aesthetically in one's relationship to the self, always created in an affirmative act of decision, never discovered in a hermeneutic practice,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 248. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 99. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵⁰ Foucault 1990b, p. 239.

¹⁵¹ Kundera 1999, p. 112.

whether public or solitary. This 'living in truth' requires a furnishing of the space of privacy, impenetrable to the index finger, as a necessary condition for self-fashioning: "A man who loses his privacy loses everything. And a man who gives it up of his own free will is a monster." This valorisation of privacy, belonging squarely to the liberal tradition, is in Sabina's case nonetheless supplemented with an active practice of self-fashioning that rejects the essentialisation and naturalisation of one's identity. For Sabina this means an establishment of an antagonistic relationship with the world that goes far beyond the passive unwillingness to 'be with others'.

The beauty of betrayal generally tends to elude one since "from tender youth we are told by father and teacher that betrayal is the most heinous offence imaginable". 153 Yet, in the condition of nihilism betrayal constitutes the very practice of liberty, a practice of becoming other than one is by transgressing the limits of one's constitution, the alleviation of the unbearable gravity of the positive disposition of identity. In a crucial sense, therefore, the object of betrayal is ultimately one's own self, or rather the *identity* of oneself, which is always the effect of the external violence of subjectification. As Kundera remarks in his most recent novel Ignorance, the infamous injunction to 'be true to oneself' is nothing other than the demand to abide by the way one is authoritatively pigeonholed and labelled, the demand to cease to resist. Sabina's betrayals are thus marked by a certain "irrepressibility, a refusal to contract into an identity, a continual twisting loose from the historical forms of life, by which it is always already shaped."155 Betrayal seeks to expand a (non)space "of what the individual is not, of what we can not say about the individual, to preserve a space of a certain negativity that refuses all positivity, all identification that is always in the end a historical trap". ¹⁵⁶ In Foucault's expression, the subject of betrayal enters a "happy limbo of non-identity" that renders her immune to the seduction of transcendental narcissism and the eschatology of the Grand March. For Sabina "betrayal means the breaking of ranks, [...] going off into the unknown". 158 With betraval as her main ethical work, Sabina seeks to furnish the ethical substance of 'proximity to the void'. While Franz betrayed his spouse Marie-Claude in order to demonstrate his fidelity to Sabina, Sabina betraved Franz for the sake of her fidelity to the void. If Franz's betrayals are of a *functional* nature (marking the passage to another object of fidelity), Sabina's betrayals are clearly ethical. Her entire life is in fact a sequence of betrayals, which have no other purpose than the aesthetic experience of *freedom* or 'sovereignty over oneself' that they provide: "She heard the golden horn of betrayal beckoning her in the distance, and she knew that she would not hold out. She sensed an expanse of freedom before her and the boundlessness of it excited her."159 The excitement of Sabina in turn excited Franz, who mistook what was a betrayal of him for the statement of her love for him. 160 For Franz, the void opened up by his own betrayal is to be immediately filled by his love for Sabina. For Sabina, the void opened up by her betrayal of Franz was the only purpose of her betrayal:

> He felt like a rider galloping off into the magnificent void, a void of no wife, no daughter, no household, the magnificent void swept clean by Hercules's broom, a magnificent void he would fill with his love. Each was riding the other like a horse, and both were galloping off into the distance of

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁵⁴ Kundera 2003, p. 24.

 ¹⁵⁵ Caputo 1993, p. 255. Emphasis added.
 156 Caputo 1993, p. 251. Emphasis added.

Foucault cited in Dews 1995, p. 168. See also Robinson 2003, Prozorov 2004, chapter 5 on the discussion of Foucault's passion for non-identity which renders his thought entirely antagonistic to any form of 'identity politics'.

Kundera 1999, p. 89.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 116. Emphasis added.

On second thought, this may not have been a misunderstanding. In a way, Sabina's betrayal of Franz was indeed a statement of her love for him, insofar as it is the (possibility of) betrayal that ultimately proves the existence of the bond of love, asserting it in the very act of its dissolution. Understood in this manner, the concept of betrayal clearly belongs to Schmittian 'borderline concepts' that designate various forms of 'constitutive outside' or 'immanent transcendence'. Betrayal is simultaneously that which is external, alien, monstrous to the bond of love and that whose possibility forms the very substance of this bond. The proper definition of love would be that it is "something that can(not) be betrayed".

their desires, drunk on the betrayals that freed them. Franz was riding Sabina and had betrayed his wife; Sabina was riding Franz and had betrayed Franz. 161

The ultimately irreconcilable difference between the characters is finally clear and concerns the relationship to the void: Franz's practice is oriented towards *filling* that very void which Sabina's practice seeks to *open up* and *leave open*. In other words, Franz experiences the beauty of the world in the categorical agreement with being that pronounces the possibility of the *world saved*. Sabina gives beauty to her own existence via her gestures of categorical disagreement with being that state that "beauty is a *world betrayed*. The only way we can encounter it is if its persecutors have overlooked it somewhere. [...] If we want to find it, we must *demolish* the scenery." Beauty does not await the spectator *in the world*, but rather opens itself at the limit, to which the ethical subject passes via the practices of betrayal *of the world*.

Although this ethical disposition is easy to dismiss as empirically impossible, romantically naïve or politically dangerous, we shall rather suggest, along with Slavoj Zizek, that it is precisely the dimension of *impossibility*, of the danger of assuming a position in proximity to the void, that is the condition of the authentic political act as, in Zizek's terms, an encounter with the Real: "The point is not that the Real is impossible but rather that the *impossible is Real*. A trauma, or an act, is simply the point when the Real happens, and this is difficult to accept." The ethos of insecure life that we have elaborated connects with Zizek's notion of the ethics of the Real, which is squarely Schmittian in its decisionist emphasis on the act as the rupture in the existing space of possibilities. "An ethics of the Real is not one of accepting impossibility in the sense of an indefinite ideal, but is rather one that entreats us to risk the impossible: to break out of the bonds of existing possibility. [...] This is the mark of the act: a basic rupture in the weave of reality that opens up new possibilities and creates the space for a reconfiguration of reality itself." Sabina's endless flightsin-betrayal are 'Real' acts in this sense of the traversal of pure negativity in the attempt at a 'lighter being', 'a happy limbo of non-identity' – an attempt whose success is only thinkable in terms of a miracle, which of course is the theological correlate of a Schmittian decision 165: "The truly traumatic thing is that *miracles* – not in the religious sense but in the sense of *free acts* – *do happen*. but it's very difficult to come to terms with them. [The] Real is not this kind of thing-in-itself that we cannot approach; the Real is, rather, freedom as a radical cut in the texture of reality." ¹⁶⁶

The disposition of openness to the Real is clearly marked by *insecurity*, since the achievement of entirely light being is impossible in a world of others. Sabina's search for beauty leads her from betrayal to betrayal, forces her into permanent antagonism with the world of others and thereby into permanent encounter with ugliness. Yet, this insecurity is precisely the 'real life' she seeks, since "in the mind of a woman for whom no place is home, *the thought of an end to all flight is unbearable*". What Sabina cherishes is the ever-open possibility of flight, a continuous non-eschatological betrayal, which presupposes the impossibility of the world saved, the impossibility that, in the brilliant phrase of Simon Critchley, grants us "redemption from redemption" As "one is never installed within transgression, *one never lives elsewhere*" any ethical practice must permanently unfold *within* the positivity of the social order, yet in proximity to the void of the *outside*. One thereby makes of one's own existence a *blind-spot* within the diagram of order,

¹⁶¹ Kundera 1999, p. 116. Emphasis added.

¹⁶³ Zizek 2004b, p. 70. Emphasis added.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 109.

Daly 2004, p. 11. See Zizek 1999 for an insightful reading of Schmitt's work along these lines. Zizek's own valorisation of decisionism is of course more explicitly related to the figure of Lenin. See Zizek 2002a.
 See Schmitt 1976, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶⁶ Zizek 2004b, p. 166. See Zizek 2004b, chapter 5 for the detailed discussion on reaffirming the miracle as an essential element of a properly political act.

¹⁶⁷ Kundera 1999, p. 124. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁸ Critchley 1997, p. 27.

¹⁶⁹ Derrida 1981, p. 12. Emphasis added.

asserting the undecidability at the heart of it as not merely as a logical paradox but rather as an actuality of the force of one's sovereign transgression. From this topos at the limit of order, order is revealed to the subject in its *holistic exteriority*, as a whole, but paradoxically a 'whole apart', an *immanence transcended*, which appears as no longer ours, or, more precisely and more importantly, as no longer 'us' in our very identity.

The example of Sabina's practice of the ethos of insecure life suggests that the existentialist aesthetics of rupture that governs Schmitt's political philosophy need not be equated with the aesthetics of horror that in the thought of 'conservative revolution' was concretised as valorisation of war. It also serves to demonstrate the possibility of reading Schmitt as an ethical thinker who sought to affirm life in the disenchanting condition of nihilism, rather than a war-mongering 'conservative revolutionary', relying on the combination of violence and traditionalist mythology to challenge the bourgeois routinisation of life. None of these qualifications are intended to 'rehabilitate' Schmitt's thought, since the very presupposition of its need for rehabilitation brings to mind the erect index finger of the Czech dissident and elicits a similar sense of nauseating boredom. It is rather that the ethos of insecure life arguably presents a more serious challenge to the complacent post-Cold War liberalism and its ethos of security than the anachronistic politics practiced by Schmitt in his lifetime. In our reading, a Schmittian ontological extremism both deconstructs the discourses of epistemico-moral certitude that erase negative alterity and demonise positive otherness and opens, in a gesture of nonpositive affirmation, a possibility of life in proximity to the void that fashions the concrete freedom of the subject as a sovereign to oneself. Such a deconstructed Schmittian approach is arguably a productive intervention into the poststructuralist discourse that offers an alternative to the influential Derridean resolution of the question of a 'postmodern ethics', which also operates with the central concepts of decision and alterity. In contrast to the deconstructionist affirmation of undecidability and hence the impossibility of every decision, which leads it into an ethical impasse, our approach connects with Zizek's recent reaffirmation of decisionism in conceiving of undecidability as "both an inherent limit and an inherent opening/beginning: the radically negative dimension that is the condition of creation ex nihilo and the political itself."170

The reading of Schmitt, espoused in this paper, has admittedly privileged the disturbing and destabilising force of Schmitt's existential decisionism rather than his well-known personal preference for the stability of any order, once it is formed in an act of exception. The possibly un-Schmittian effects that Schmitt's conception of the political may induce in its ethical reconstruction testify to the persistence of the demonic force of the borderline concepts that their creator endowed them with and which they exercise in turning against him. In this manner, Schmitt's personal orientation towards order remains forever haunted by the ghosts of undecidability that *take exception* from their austere master's bad taste. Gilles Deleuze once wrote that his practice of philosophical reading consisted in "taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous". In the case of Schmitt, for all the 'groans and protests', it is arguably his *own* mischievous offspring of ontological extremism that takes incestuous frivolities with the father of political realism.

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¹⁷⁰ Daly 2004, p. 11.

¹⁷¹ Deleuze quoted in Zizek 2004a, p. 46.

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