

## Poeticizing Revolution: Žižek's Misreading of Mao and China

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The March 2009 Conference on the Idea of Communism organized by Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou at Birkbeck College, University of London, was planned as an academic event but turned out to be an immense media hype. As one *Guardian* reporter put it, “The hottest ticket in London this weekend is not for a pop singer or a football match but for a conference on communism which brings together some of the world’s leading Marxist academics.”<sup>1</sup> One year later, the Chinese newspaper *Zhongguo shehui kexue bao* (*Chinese Social Sciences News*) reported that Žižek delivered another speech at Birkbeck College, titled “On the Idea of Communism: A Year After.” The newspaper, with only several thousand subscribers among Chinese academics, labeled the event “The Return of Communism,” highlighting the conference’s dramatic end, “when Žižek led the choir singing ‘The Internationale.’”<sup>2</sup> Back to March 2009. The *Financial Times* carried a weekend

column by its news editor, “Lunch with the FT: Slavoj Žižek,” with the following concluding remarks: “The role of philosophers, as [Žižek] sees it, is to help clarify the questions that societies should ask and force us to think, rather than conjuring up ready-made solutions to all our problems. ‘I feel like a magician who is only producing hats and never rabbits,’ he says.”<sup>3</sup> The more scholarly review from *Criticism* echoed the *Financial Times* in assessing the performance of the “magician”: “Part of the appeal of events such as this conference is simply that they give us an opportunity to see academic superstars in action. From this perspective, ‘On the Idea of Communism’ did not disappoint. Slavoj Žižek was in fine form, manic and excited, and so full of a kind of outward-directed energy that I didn’t really mind his overbearingness.”<sup>4</sup> The reviewer reiterated that Žižek’s purpose was “not to engage in discussion of actual political programs, or to intervene in the harsh realities of day-by-day social and political struggles, but to consider how the philosophical idea, or ideal, of communism might be revitalized and made useful in the twenty-first century.”<sup>5</sup>

While mainstream media and academics worldwide have acknowledged the conference’s success as performance art with Žižek as its brilliant star, one Chinese commentator offered a different opinion on Žižek, and Western Left intellectuals in general: “The greatest problem faced by [Western] radical leftist thinkers is how to unite their theories with reality. . . . Marxism in essence is to transform communism from non-reality to reality, but the contemporary Western radical leftists are taking the opposite direction. Their communist hypothesis is essentially a return of the form of communist specters.”<sup>6</sup> The endeavor to revitalize communism qua Marxism by Žižek and the Western Left cannot solve its fundamental dilemma, inscribed on Marx’s tombstone: that of changing the world by revolutionary practice rather than philosophizing. The Chinese commentator may not have had a ready-made solution, but his point is relevant: inasmuch as Žižek aims to revive revolutionary ideas that include, among others, Chinese experiences and Maoism in particular, and inasmuch as China’s revolutionary legacy resonates theoretically and practically with the Western Left (Alain Badiou, spiritual leader of the conference, is a self-proclaimed Maoist), the question of revolutionary Marxism has brought the Western Left and China together, converging (or colliding) on a range of issues.

As the Western Left seeks alternatives to global capitalism, its members view China as an authoritarian and therefore deviant capitalist state, rejecting Western-style democracy and rule of law, as well as socialist egalitarianism and justice. However, the specters of China's recent past haunt the political unconscious of Žižekians. Žižek refers to the unconscious in his psychoanalytical readings of China—the country's past and present, and Mao in particular—which are uncanny, perplexing, and contradictory, even as they reveal a symptom shared with the Western Left. Žižek remains oblivious to his own political unconscious, despite his masterful symptomatic or parallax readings of so many complex ideas, images, and words.

Žižek's rereading of Mao (and Lenin) emphasizes the passion and energy of revolution; less obvious is the purpose of such revitalization. Is Žižek's analysis of China today a critique of twentieth-century communist legacies that draws on real experiences—a political clarification of history's conjuncture with the contemporary world? Or is it a passionate reenactment of historical drama as a poetic displacement of the past? Given the overwhelming attention on the performative, affective aspects of Žižek's "theoretical variety show" (Fredric Jameson), and on Žižek himself as a self-conscious "intellectual rock star" (Terry Eagleton), I understand Žižek's readings of Mao and China as Austinian performative texts out of real historical context, as speech acts set in an "imaginary" context.<sup>7</sup> If Žižek's (mis)reading is poetic displacement, then perhaps it is best called "theory" or "philosophy," in which the former seeks to unite with practice and the latter remains an immanent, abstract system of truth.<sup>8</sup> In the end, as Chinese critic Zhang Yiwu puts it, it may be that Žižek's reading of Mao and China is an imaginary other, with "Made in China" as its real. In Žižekian parallax fashion, Zhang Yiwu concludes, "Žižek is the China of theory for the age of global capitalism, while China is the real 'Žižek'" (Zhang Yiwu, this issue, 737). A theoretical and poetic Žižek must confront his real subject, be it China or the world at large. This is, again, the predicament of the Western Left: an unwillingness or inability to break away from intellectual foreclosure, which in Žižek's case is camouflaged as Lacanian post-Marxism or parallax theory.

Žižek's poetic misreadings of Mao and China are symptomatic of the pessimism and cynicism of the Western Left concerning real alternatives to

global capitalism and the historical legacy of Marxist-inspired revolution. How, I ask, can we come to terms with the legacy of revolution in *theory* and *practice*, when Žižek and other Western Left intellectuals avoid or displace the question, and when, in China, the largest existing socialist state (at least in name), revolution is being demonized and rapidly erased from collective memory?

### **The Western Left, Mao, and China: Rethinking Historical Contexts**

The Western Left's engagement with Mao and China peaked in the late 1960s. At the height of worldwide cultural revolution, French and German thinkers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, and Herbert Marcuse, enthusiastically embraced Maoism and the Chinese Cultural Revolution as a critique of and alternative to capitalist modernity. The late 1960s constituted an extraordinary episode of the twentieth century and a major conjuncture of modernity, marked by the events of May 1968 in Western Europe, the Vietnam War, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. During that tempestuous decade, the internal tensions and contradictions of modernity erupted, fundamentally altering the world order — although of course they never fully destroyed capitalism, only shook it. Indeed, transnational capitalism emerged around this time, as new communications technologies rapidly changed modes of production and distribution. Capitalism entered a new phase of postindustrialism or postmodernism. To a large extent, this transformation was a response to the social and cultural changes of the 1960s.

Philosophically, as Fredric Jameson notes, the Althusserianism of the mid- to late 1960s “is the most revealing and suggestive of the various ‘structuralisms,’” which hailed language or the symbolic as the new paradigm of the “politics of otherness.”<sup>9</sup> This politics was closely related to the decolonization that marked the beginning of the third world. Decolonization forced first world intellectuals to reexamine assumptions about Western civilization and modernity, predicated on a system of binary oppositions. The Althusserian politics of otherness illuminated both the possibilities and limitations of cultural and aesthetic solutions to the problems of capitalist modernity, especially when these solutions were translated into concrete practice. Dur-

ing this period, Althusser painstakingly searched for conceptual alternatives by critiquing Hegelianism, Stalinism, and bourgeois humanism. It was, as Jameson points out, the moment that made Chinese Marxism a universal Marxism. “What is less often remembered,” Jameson continues, “but what should be perfectly obvious from any reading of *For Marx*, is the origin of this new problematic in Maoism itself, and particularly in Mao Zedong’s essay ‘On Contradiction,’ in which the notion of the complex, already-given *overdetermined* conjuncture of various kinds of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions is mapped out.”<sup>10</sup>

Jameson acknowledges Mao’s notion of contradiction as one of the most significant theoretical formulations for the Western Left in the 1960s. Seeking alternatives to capitalist modernity, Althusser used Mao’s notion of contradiction to formulate several important concepts, including overdetermination, structural causality, and structural totality. Althusser characterized his project as theoretical critique. Throughout his life, he insisted on “theoretical practice” as distinct from political and material practices: “My aim was equally clear: to make a start on the first *left-wing* critique of Stalinism, a critique that would make it possible to reflect not only on Khrushchev and Stalin but also on Prague and Lin Piao; that would above all help put some substance back into the revolutionary project in the West. . . . [F]or me philosophy is something of a battlefield.”<sup>11</sup> Ironically, Althusser’s cultural and theoretical critique involved an unanticipated political twist. In China, where Lin Piao served as Mao’s chieftain, the Cultural Revolution became an episode of bloodshed and violence between radical groups and ordinary citizens. What started out in the cultural sphere—on “symbolic battlefields,” as Althusser perceived it—became nationwide chaos, eventually suppressed by the People’s Liberation Army, Mao’s “army of guns.” At the time, Althusser and his French colleagues could hardly comprehend the consequences. Nor could they have imagined that China would exist under virtual martial law for the rest of the revolution, from 1969 to 1976, until Mao’s death.

Alain Badiou, on the other hand, seems to have thought through not only Mao’s theory and its practical consequences but his own French Maoism, taking Althusser as a point of departure. Rather than abandoning altogether the radical legacy of Mao, as did many on the radical Western Left, Badiou

retained its “rational kernel,” taking Mao’s theory as a philosophy serving truths that “will largely have consisted in introducing an interior divide into the legacy of Marxism-Leninism,” as Bruno Bosteels puts it.<sup>12</sup> Or, in Badiou’s words, “Rebel thinking if there ever was one, revolted thinking of the revolt: dialectical thinking.”<sup>13</sup> When most of the Western Left turned their backs on the radical legacy of the 1960s, remorseful of their admiration for Mao, Badiou insisted on being a Maoist, or post-Maoist, in principle. This can only be explained by Badiou’s internalization of Mao’s theory of revolution; he saw it as a universal principle rather than an Orientalist overture of third world radicalism.

In contrast, Alain Badiou’s comrade, Slovenian Slavoj Žižek, harkens back to an Orientalist attitude vis-à-vis Mao and China that some Western Left intellectuals, such as Sartre, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault, once harbored, taking Mao as an embodiment of oriental despotism disguised as revolutionary rebel. There is, of course, something more than romantic fantasy gone awry in Žižek’s reading of Mao and China; they are part and parcel of his ambitious efforts “in defense of lost causes,” resuscitating a revolutionary past to reignite the lost zeal of collective movement against the current conditions of globalization. Following Althusser and Badiou, Žižek continues to probe Mao’s ideas concerning contradiction, as he endeavors to internalize Maoism in radical thinking and to refute Althusser’s and Badiou’s attempts to make Maoism a radical universalism. This may be nothing more than postmodern philosophical jostling. Or it may involve a genuine belief in revolutionary theory and practice as alternatives to current impasses, no matter how improbable such propositions may seem at present.

### **Overdeterminism, Antideterminism, or the “Lord of Misrule”?**

*On Practice* and *On Contradiction* are Mao Zedong’s two most philosophical texts, both written in 1937 when Mao embarked on the task of “sinifying Marxism”: transforming Marxism into a Chinese theory of revolution with an “indigenous form.” A year later, in the throes of the Sino-Japanese War (1938–45), Mao formally announced the program of making Marxism Chinese. In “The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War” (1938), Mao told Communist Party leaders, “Being Marxists, communists

are internationalists, but Marxism can only be realized through a national form. There is no abstract Marxism, there is only concrete Marxism. By concrete Marxism we mean the Marxism with national form, and to apply Marxism to the concrete struggles in the concrete circumstances of China, rather than applying it in the abstract.”<sup>14</sup> Mao spelled out a program of peasant guerrilla warfare for making Marxism concrete through revolution; he also tackled *epistemological* issues of universality (the abstract) and particularity (the concrete), by way of contradiction.

When Louis Althusser “rediscovered” Mao’s idea of contradiction some thirty years later in postindustrial, advanced capitalist France, as he reflected on the possibility of revolution against capitalist modernity, he took theoretical and philosophical works as his battleground. His “epistemological revolution” is widely acknowledged as a significant achievement of the Western Left, and it was certainly connected to real, violent, radical movements from Paris to San Francisco (though Althusser refused to participate in demonstrations and riots on the Parisian streets and university campuses). Both Mao and Althusser were motivated by revolutionary objectives in theorizing contradiction, by the communist-led war of national liberation in China and battles against both Stalinism and advanced capitalist modernity, respectively. Their thinking on contradiction is decidedly epistemological, grappling with issues of identification and the logic of worldwide revolution in their search for alternatives.<sup>15</sup>

In two key texts, “On Contradiction and Overdetermination” and “On the Materialist Dialectic,” Althusser elaborated his theory of overdetermination as the essential part of “structural causality” vis-à-vis Hegelian “expressive causality.” Mao’s work on contradiction figures prominently in Althusser’s thinking here, as a way to understand history not as a linear, teleological totality but as an overdetermined, structural totality. He characterized his work as “interventions in a definite conjuncture,” taking Marxism as a “theory of epistemological history.”<sup>16</sup> For Althusser, the historical conjunctures were, first, the crisis of international communism in the aftermath of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which triggered the collapse of Stalinism as a socialist alternative to capitalist modernity; and second, the 1960s “era of cultural revolutions,” in which Mao’s revolutionary theory and practice emerged as a new alterna-

tive. Althusser's concept of overdetermination involves the particularity and specificity of Marxist materialist dialectic and is indispensable to his critique of the teleological and determinist logic underlying classical Marxism and Stalinism.

Mao's insistence on the primacy of particularity and the unevenness of contradiction provided the philosophical and theoretical ground for his program to sinify Marxism. Marxism provided Mao with a universalist theory, but his transformation of Marxist universalism by emphasizing particularity justified his endeavor to construct an alternative modernity. Mao conceived socialism in rural, third world China, with its underdeveloped, unindustrialized economy, as a necessary alternative to Western capitalist modernity. His emphasis on cultural and ideological revolution as the condition of socialism offered an alternative not only to Western capitalism but to the Stalinist model of "economism." That Mao's theory and practice revolved around contradiction amounts to a logic of antideterminism; Althusser's antideterminist concept of overdetermination and Mao's notion of contradiction are mutually illuminating. By drawing on Lenin's Russian Revolution as the "weakest link" and Mao's particularity of contradiction, Althusser constructed a specific, overdetermined, contradictory "universality," conceived first by Mao.

Universality for Mao was both absolute and relative (relational). The "absoluteness of contradiction" or particularity was never an ontological or metaphysical concept but an epistemology or hermeneutic to interpret temporal and spatial particularities. In short, Mao's concept is an antideterminist notion that favors particularity. However, his insistence on universal truths smacks of essentialism and determinism as a structural limit of modernity. Mao's elaboration of the mutability of contradiction, coupled with particularity as the absolute condition of universality, contains the basic proposition of cultural revolution as a path to alternative modernity. Mao elaborated on the mutability of contradiction to invert the economic determinism inherent in classical Marxism:

In the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base is the principal aspect [of contradiction]; . . . but . . . in certain conditions, such aspects as . . . superstructure in turn manifest



themselves in the principal and decisive role. . . . The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” . . . When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive.<sup>17</sup>

It was clear to Mao that the mutability of contradiction was as important as its particularity and unevenness. Moreover, he considered mutability to be an absolute and therefore universal conditionality, without which the Cultural Revolution would have been impossible. In Mao’s view, contradiction could only be mutable in revolutionary practice, guided by theory that would compel revolutionary subjects to bring about structural change in their own conditions of existence. Not unlike many Western Marxists, Mao considered the realm of consciousness as the foremost arena for practice. In “On New Democracy,” a programmatic text for alternative modernity, he elaborates disproportionately on the role of cultural revolution, leaving little room for economic issues: “Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential fighting front in the general revolutionary front.”<sup>18</sup>

Cultural revolution constitutes the particularity of the Chinese Revolution, a conditionality of the mutability of contradiction. But Mao’s alternative modernity required that cultural revolution be ceaselessly reenacted, renewed, and reinforced, often at the expense of economic and social development. Mao predicted that struggle “between the proletariat and bourgeoisie in the ideological sphere will still be protracted, tortuous, and even violent at times. . . . Whether among the entire population or among the intellectuals, Marxists remain a minority. Therefore Marxism still has to develop through struggle. That Marxism can only develop through struggle holds true not only for the past and present but will also inevitably hold true in the future.”<sup>19</sup> Mao’s somber, even pessimistic vision for the future of Marxism is a parallax reflection of his insistence on endless cultural revolution.

As an antideterminist and antiessentialist strategy, cultural revolution

lapsed into a paradoxical affirmation of cultural determinism and fetishized class struggle. Similarly, when compelled to seek alternatives to Stalinist economism and capitalist modernity, Althusser elevated Marxism to the status of true science, fetishizing the difference between “science” and “ideology.” When made absolute as the “general objective law” (Mao) or “science” (Althusser), cultural revolution lapsed into an essentialist determinism that merely replaced economic determinism. Post-Mao China witnessed the reversal of historical determinism from Mao to Deng, whose economic developmentalism was a response to the Cultural Revolution. Ultimately, Mao and Althusser were unable to transcend the determinist and essentialist epistemology of modernity. As Alain Lipietz observes, Althusser’s fetishization of objective conditions “unfortunately slipped from methodology to ontology. It has thus remained capable of analyzing past conditions but finds itself powerless to apprehend the new humanity in the process of making the world.”<sup>20</sup>

If Althusser’s engagement with Mao’s contradiction sought epistemological alternatives to the Hegelian conceptual impasse, as well as Stalinist and Western modernities, then Žižek’s postmodern reading of Mao is clearly a rebuttal of alternatives, conceptual or real. Žižek’s invocation of Mao is *not* a viable political strategy for revolution (in fact, Žižek emphatically denies any alternative modernity in Mao’s vision); rather, it is a rhetorical trope for Mao’s Oriental despotism as “lord of misrule.” While Althusser integrated Mao’s theoretical and practical endeavors on contradiction into a revolutionary epistemology of overdetermination and structural causality, in Žižek’s reading, Mao’s ideas are but historical vagaries of “vulgar evolutionism.” In his introduction to a 2007 edition of Mao’s *On Practice and Contradiction*, Žižek questions Hegelian propositions on Western thought vis-à-vis a prephilosophical, mythical Asiatic universe, claiming that “it is this Asiatic ‘radical strangeness’ which is mobilized, politicized, by Mao Tse-tung’s communist movement.”<sup>21</sup> Through parallax juggling, Žižek’s repudiation of the Hegelian prejudice against Oriental otherness affirms that which it is prejudiced against, while denouncing “prejudice” as a gesture.

One cannot miss the dazzling brilliance of Žižek’s reading of Mao, with his signature style of rhapsody or fantasia, this time on “radical Oriental strangeness.” His purported aim is to “reinvent emancipatory terror” (6).

But by his account, the Jacobians, Soviet, and Chinese revolutionaries failed to accomplish such terror, owing to an “excess of egalitarian democracy over the democratic procedure” (7). Despite its seemingly illogical logic, a major motif of Žižek’s assessment of Mao and the Chinese Revolution is that Mao’s failure lay in a regression to “primitive pagan ‘wisdom’” or a “non-dialectical notion of the ‘bad infinity’ of struggle” (10). He portrays Mao as a crazy pagan lord whose apocalyptic view of the “proto-Nietzschean ‘overcoming’ of man is nothing less than a terrorist vision of doomsday, which closely echoes the so-called ‘bio-cosmism,’ the strange combination of vulgar materialism and Gnostic spirituality which formed occult shadow ideology, the obscene secret teaching, of the Soviet Marxism” (11).

Žižek ignores or dismisses the centrality of particularity and the mutability of contradiction as the conditions for revolution in Mao’s thinking. Instead, he focuses on Mao’s insistence on continuing class struggle as a rejection of the dialectical principle of “negation of negation.” He notes that “the conceptual consequence of this ‘bad infinity’ [continuing class struggle] that pertains to vulgar evolutionism is Mao’s consistent rejection of the ‘negation of negation’ as universal dialectical law in his explicit polemics against Engels” (12). Mao did remain skeptical of the “negation of negation,” or dialectical synthesis of abstract opposites. Žižek recounts the debate over the One and the Two of the 1950s, in which Chinese Marxist philosopher Yang Xianzhen proposed the thesis “Two unite into One.”

Mao rejected this thesis and insisted that, as quoted by Žižek, “in any given thing, the unity of the opposites is conditional, temporary, and transitory, and hence relative, whereas the struggle of opposites is absolute” (ibid.). Mao rejected Yang’s thesis in the aftermath of the disastrous Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s, largely to defend his utopian vision of surpassing Western capitalism. Indeed, the debate was a precursor to the Cultural Revolution, in which Mao’s antideterminist vision culminated in tragic events with deadly consequences. Though he must be aware of this history, Žižek ignores the specific context in which Mao formed his ideas and concepts, and launches a grandiose, rather abstract denouncement first of Mao’s “cosmic perspective” and then of “Marx’s fundamental mistake” on the possibility of communism. He thus views Mao’s insistence on continuing class struggle as a dismissive “attitude towards the human costs of economic

and political endeavors” (11). Without any critical reflection on the West’s demonization of Mao, Žižek writes, “If one is to believe Mao’s latest biography, he caused the greatest famine in history by exporting food to Russia to buy nuclear and arms industries; 38 million people were starved and slave-driven to death in 1958–61” (ibid.).<sup>22</sup> Tabloid histories of Mao’s alleged atrocities abound in Western popular media; grounding serious theoretical inquiry on such unreliable accounts is frivolous.

But my concern here is not with Žižek’s uncritical acceptance of the popular demonization of Mao in the West, or even among Chinese intellectuals. Rather, I draw attention to his refusal to acknowledge the logic of Mao’s (and Althusser’s and Badiou’s) search for alternatives in cultural revolution, however ill-fated they may have been in practice. Marx is said to have committed the same “fundamental mistake” by envisioning a communist future of higher social order. In Žižek’s parallax view, communism is impossible because the negation of negation—or synthesis, or overcoming of capitalism as obstacle—ultimately is not a victory, but “victory in defeat” (13). His logic is confusing: on one hand, Žižek argues that a victory of synthesis “occurs when one’s specific message is accepted as a universal ground, even by the enemy.” On the other hand, he suggests that the abolition of capitalist antagonism will result in a loss of momentum: “If we take away the obstacle [of capitalism], the very potential thwarted by this obstacle dissipates” (ibid.). By stretching this confusing logic, Žižek concludes that “ironically this is the ‘synthesis’ of capitalism and communism in Mao’s sense. In a unique poetic justice of history, it was capitalism which ‘synthesized’ Maoist communism” (14). His conclusion does more *in*justice than it does poetic justice, dismissing Mao’s search for alternative modernity as the whim of a crazy mind, and naming it as a direct cause of the brutal, primitive capitalism that China now embraces. Žižek elaborates on what he calls the “profound structural homology between the Maoist permanent self-revolutionizing, the permanent struggle against the ossification of state structures, and the inherent dynamics of capitalism. It is the reign of today’s global capitalism which is the true Lord of Misrule” (17). Would he also deduce that Marx, by envisioning a communist future for humanity, anticipated the “victory in defeat” of global capitalism? If so, what is the point of “reinventing an emancipatory terror” and “defending a lost cause”?

Perhaps Žižek's real interest lies elsewhere: in an imaginary realm of poetic justice, in all the confusing, illogical hodge-podge of Orientalist, exotic deeds and thoughts of the lords of misrule, or proto-terrorists. In his portrayal of Mao, Žižek swings between negative and positive: he often depicts Mao as a primitive pagan lord, transgressing law and order and lacking a true notion of politics. Yet he sometimes paints Mao as a poetic and passionate Robespierrean hero: "This brings us back to Robespierre who expressed in a touching way the simple faith in the eternal Idea of freedom which persists through all defeats" (20). Žižek is at his best when citing Robespierre's last speech, where he claims that "it exists, that tender, imperious and irresistible passion, the torment and delight of magnanimous hearts; that deep horror of tyranny, that compassionate zeal for the oppressed, that sacred love for the homeland," and he links this to Mao's China: "Does the same not hold even more true for the last big installment in the life of this Idea, the Maoist Cultural Revolution? Without this Idea, the Cultural Revolution was to an even greater degree 'just a noisy crime that destroys another crime'" (21). This is Žižek as a postmodern, postrevolutionary romantic poet, performing a poeticizing act with "compassionate zeal." However, his poeticizing remains far from the concrete historical contexts in which Mao and Althusser groped for theoretical and practical alternatives that would change the real conditions of existence. Žižek's allegation that Mao's revolution led to today's global capitalism in China borders on irresponsible absurdity.

### **Post-Maoism as Universalism: How to Think about China Today**

Žižek's indebtedness to Badiou is evident in much of his writing on China. "Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao," a chapter in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, begins with a discussion of Badiou's elaboration on revolutionary politics and ends with Mao. However, for Žižek, Badiou's Maoism (or post-Maoism) affirms the Cultural Revolution, which he claims must be rejected, because nothing about it was positive: "What if the Cultural Revolution was 'negative' not only in the sense of clearing up the space and opening up the way for a new beginning, but *negative in itself*, negative as an index of the *impotence* to generate the New? This brings us back to the cen-

tral weakness of Mao's politics" (15). Žižek never renounces Badiou directly. However, it is clear that he parts with Badiou over the issue of Mao and China when discussing the logic (and values) of revolution and alternatives to capitalism.

Following Althusser's rediscovery of Mao, Badiou considers Mao's notion of contradiction as a political tool for revolution, and reflects on the ramifications of the Cultural Revolution not only for China but for revolution as a social practice or event—seeing it as a genuine alternative within the context of capitalist modernity. Badiou's soul searching, as it were, is no intellectual acrobatics or nostalgia for the radical 1960s but an attempt to bring revolutionary theory and practice, Mao and China, to bear on contemporary reality. Badiou insists that he is a Maoist in the present tense, as noted by Bosteels: "Pour le maoïste que je suis" (For the Maoist that I am).<sup>23</sup> In his reflection on the Cultural Revolution, Badiou claims that "we carry their questions rather than their outcomes."<sup>24</sup> These questions remain relevant today, because China's revolution represents a real alternative for Badiou and his cohort of French Maoists: "For us, the Cultural Revolution remains the obligatory historical reference for whoever holds fast to the communist project, in the conditions offered by our time: conditions that are fixed by the necessary Marxist assessment of this monster that the October revolution—through an inversion whose political laws need to be investigated—ended up engendering."<sup>25</sup> In short, it is "*the* question: must we, and can we, march toward communism?"<sup>26</sup>

Western intellectuals acknowledge Badiou as a major contemporary thinker who "forces us to interrogate most if not all of our postmodern beliefs: from the death of Marxism and the deconstruction of the subject to the revival of neo-Kantianism and scientific pragmatism," by "pierc[ing] the common sense of each and every one in order to reveal, against a backdrop of conventional wisdom, philosophy as a militant discourse on truth."<sup>27</sup> Badiou follows Althusser's footsteps quite faithfully, holding fast to radical political engagement. In his early years, he embraced Sartrean Marxism; in the upheavals of the 1960s, he dedicated himself to Maoism as a radical alternative to capitalism. When the Chinese Cultural Revolution was denounced throughout the world, and after the collapse of Soviet-style socialism and the

retreat of the communist movement, Badiou engaged in a difficult reflection on a post-Maoist “politics without party.” As a philosopher, Badiou stands out as a steadfast “militant,” dedicated to subversive and rebellious politics against capitalist modernity, and he remains an idealist for a communist future. Theory for Badiou does not involve interpretations of empty, floating signifiers; in old-fashioned Marxist fashion, he believes in the power of revolution to change the world. He therefore adamantly opposes the contemporary reduction of philosophy to language and premature announcements of its demise.

Badiou insists on viewing Maoism as an incomplete revolutionary task, rather than as an impractical theory or a past accomplishment to be remembered nostalgically. In *Théorie du sujet*, he proposes, “To defend Marxism today means to defend a weakness. We have to do Marxism. . . . That which we name ‘Maoism’ is less a final result than a task, a historical guideline. It is a question of thinking and practicing post-Leninism.”<sup>28</sup> He thus favors a Maoist cultural politics, closely related to the critique of everyday life formulated around the same time by Henri Lefebvre and the Situationist International. According to Badiou, philosophy takes place under four conditions: art, love, politics, and science — “procedures” that can, under the right conditions, produce truths. He looks for points of suture or places of exceptional connection between the truths produced by these discourses.<sup>29</sup> Thus we should learn from truths that are produced outside philosophy, through art, love, politics, and science.

Mao’s proposition that “revolution is an everyday task” and the practices of the Cultural Revolution are such points of suture, and thus they constitute ideal objects for Badiou to investigate. He lists three reasons for discussing the Cultural Revolution:

One, the Cultural Revolution has been a constant and lively reference of militant activity throughout the world, and particularly in France, at least between 1967 and 1976. It is part of our political history and the basis for the existence of the Maoist current, the only true political creation of the sixties and seventies. Two, the Cultural Revolution is the typical example of a political experience that saturates the form of the party-state. Three,

the Cultural Revolution is a great lesson in history and politics, in history as thought from within politics.<sup>30</sup>

In the same article, through a detailed description of Cultural Revolution processes, Badiou shows his admiration for Maoism. He respects the Cultural Revolution as the historical development of contradiction. The goal was to launch revolutionary movements in the margins of the state, even as the subversion of bureaucracy by mass revolts created chaos all over China. The historical lessons suggest that the Cultural Revolution could not resolve the tensions between the bureaucracy of the single-party state and the masses Mao mobilized to curb and revamp the power structure from within. However, Badiou insists on discussing the positive side of the event. For him, Mao's thought was formulated against all odds, and the Cultural Revolution created new theoretical and practical spaces for continuous revolution. If Maoism was a heroic but failed effort to constitute a new mode of politics, then the task after the Cultural Revolution is to prepare for a new Maoism.

Badiou's faith in communism and his insistence on Maoism as a revolutionary alternative seem quixotic but never cynical. His attempt to elevate Maoism to a universal ideal of revolution is certainly challenged by history, and Mao's notion of contradiction (or Althusser's concept of overdetermination) must not be taken as the only premise with which history can be understood. For those who remain faithful to Marxist principles of liberation, the very real human sufferings, political disruptions, economic stalemates, and horrific socioeconomic inequalities during Mao's reign must be scrutinized. While remaining faithful to Marxist principles, Badiou has neither confronted the real consequences of the Cultural Revolution nor offered a Marxist critique and clarification of Mao, or of the revolution's implications for general revolutionary causes. Badiou's post-Maoism is thus ambiguous and abstract and offers few clues regarding a post-Mao existence. He only implores Maoists to "keep going even when you have lost the thread, when you no longer feel 'caught up' in the process, when the event itself has become obscure, when its name is lost, or when it seems that it may have named a mistake, if not a simulacrum."<sup>31</sup> In his elaboration on event-being and truth, Badiou claims that truth does not exist in the relationship between subject and object, but in the process. Likewise, the subject does



not exist before the event, but in the process of the event. For him, Maoism is a truth-in-process, endlessly unfolding.

Like most Western Left intellectuals, Badiou is critical of the post-Mao *gaige kaifang*, or “opening up” launched by Deng Xiaoping. Accusations against Deng’s capitalist view of contemporary Chinese politics under leadership of the Communist Party reveal the Western Left’s deep-seated pessimism over the purported failure of worldwide revolution, and a dilemma in universalizing Maoism as a revolutionary theory under global capitalism. Badiou’s categorical dismissal of the Deng and post-Deng eras as periods of capitalist restoration reveals a conceptual cleavage between a prospective and retrospective vision of revolution and alternatives to capitalism. The principles of Badiou’s post-Maoism are irreconcilable with the specific conditions of China today. Rethinking China’s position under global capitalism and searching for a discourse of modernity in which China’s experience can play a significant part remain high on the intellectual agenda in China, endorsed by the more assertive Chinese leaders. However, it is difficult to find compatibility between the universalizing endeavors of Badiou’s post-Maoism and those of Chinese intellectuals (and some Western critics, such as Joshua Ramos, who invented the so-called “Beijing Consensus”). The incommensurability between the Western Left’s agenda and “mainstream” official, intellectual, and popular discourses in China, often highly contentious and fragmented, is a dilemma for the reconstruction of a postmodern universalism, a set of universal principles for humanity.

For Žižek, any universalism that derives from the Chinese experience takes a different spin. In contrast to Badiou, Žižek’s interpretation of contemporary China and its Maoist history is pessimistic, cynical, and nihilistic, denying any redemptive possibility in the “Fall” of revolutionary movements. The biblical references that run through Žižek’s misreadings of Mao and China betray a cultural bias, under the guise of Euro-continental philosophy and psychoanalysis—though he renounces the biblical anxieties of (Western) Marxists over the Fall by calling forth the “displacement” of Mao in his introduction to Mao’s *On Practice and Contradiction*.<sup>32</sup> In Žižek’s account, the two great displacements—from Marx to Lenin and from Lenin to Mao—have changed Marxism “in the same way as Christ needed

Paul's 'betrayal' in order for Christianity to emerge as a universal church."<sup>33</sup> Mao's universalism must undergo a similar process: "This is the movement of 'concrete universality,' this radical 'transubstantiation' through which the original theory has to reinvent itself in a new context: only by way of surviving this transplant can it emerge as effectively universal."<sup>34</sup>

It would be a gross miscalculation to expect Žižek to recover a universalism for radical change from Mao. What emerges in Žižek's "recovery" is a bizarre homology between Mao's theory and practice, and global capitalism. This "homology" is a central motif in Žižek's writings on Mao (in this special issue and in his introduction to Mao's works) and runs through his analysis of China today. If his reading of Mao is (like that of so many Western Left intellectuals) mostly ambivalent and often contradictory, Žižek's critique of contemporary China and its leadership is relentless. In the essay "Three Notes on China: Past and Present" (this issue), Žižek discusses the Chinese "Valley of Tears" and picks up his thesis regarding the universal (and inexorable) triumph of capitalism, claiming that "there is thus nothing exotic about today's China; what happens there merely repeats a forgotten European past." Paraphrasing German liberal thinker Ralf Dahrendorf, he writes that "after every revolutionary change, the road to prosperity leads through a 'valley of tears.' After the breakdown of socialism, a state cannot directly shift to the abundance of a successful market economy." Žižek uses the German philosopher's theory to diagnose China's ills, concluding that "the combination of capitalism and communist rule, far from an anomaly, proved a blessing not even in disguise; China developed quickly, not despite authoritarian communist rule but because of it" (Slavoj Žižek, "Three Notes," this issue, 718).

For Žižek, the uncanny (but inevitable) realization of capitalism (the Chinese "valley of tears") smacks of a universal agony of the dispossessed that accompanied the primitive accumulation of capital, diagnosed by Marx more than a century ago; it also carries specific Chinese characteristics — a concrete universality, so to speak. He invokes Mao's homology to global capitalism verbatim from other works (it has become quite tedious to read Žižek quoting himself profusely and repeatedly). With his instincts for theatricality, Žižek tells us that "today, the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward is repeating as the comedy of the rapid capitalist Great Leap Forward

into modernization, with the old slogan ‘an iron foundry in every village’ reemerging as ‘a skyscraper on every street.’ The supreme irony of history is that it was Mao who created the ideological conditions for rapid capitalist development, by tearing apart the fabric of traditional society” (Žižek, “Three Notes,” this issue, 719).

As shown in the brilliant analysis of Žižek’s 2008 China tour by Kwai-Cheung Lo and the parallax reading of a sinified Žižek by Zhang Yiwu (this issue), Žižek’s obscene jokes during his talks in China, his cinematic flashes of memory and stream-of-conscious style, much amplified by popular media, have endeared him to a sizeable Chinese audience, mostly young fans of Western celebrities. His witty, tongue-in-cheek remarks on today’s China have placed him among the new popular icons of political jokesters and bloggers. One such celebrity is comedian Zhou Libo, whose Shanghai-dialect diatribes against petty bureaucrats and the vanity of non-Shanghai Chinese have drawn applause from locals and fury from audiences outside Shanghai, boosting ratings for the television station. There is also the audacious writer-turned-cyber-political-commentator Han Han, who was listed among *Time* magazine’s one hundred most influential people of 2010 for his “mega-popular blog that pokes fun at prominent cultural figures and incompetent officials.”<sup>35</sup> Žižek’s scandalous style is in perfect sync with such current chic in China, especially on the Internet, where discontent over political repression, rampant corruption, and sexual promiscuity is expressed through *e-gao* (malicious parody-travesty) jokes in *weibo* (microblogs) as well as tweets and SMS (cell phone text messaging).

When Žižek’s Bakhtinian carnivalesque imagination is cast on the harsh reality of China, his jokes seem less funny and more ominous, especially his indictment of China’s passage to modernity from Mao to Deng. If Mao’s revolutionary theory and practice all but paved the way for China’s current exploitative capitalism, then the official efforts of the Communist Party to resuscitate Marxism as state ideology are a paradoxical “sign of the ultimate *triumph* of capitalism” (Žižek, “Three Notes,” this issue, 719; emphasis Žižek’s) or, inversely, the irrevocable failure of socialism and communism. Žižek’s scathing condemnation of the Chinese regime is no seasoned, well-grounded exploration of China’s complex reality; rather, it is a passionate, overblown accusation of communist tyranny, made in the past by East-

ern European political dissidents such as Vaclav Havel during the events of 1989. The problem is not so much that Žižek's political unconscious, derived from his upbringing in the former communist regime, prejudices him against China today. Beneath his boisterous rhetoric of radicalism there lurks a pessimistic, nihilistic, and, indeed, fatalistic vision against communist and socialist ideas and the revolutions they inspired. To be fair, Žižek is not without practical recipes for fighting against an omnipotent, oppressive global capitalism: "In today's postpolitical times, social movements that keep the state under constant pressure are often more important than what party is democratically elected to power" (Žižek, "Three Notes," this issue, 721). Nonetheless, he returns to his apocalyptic view of the future:

This, perhaps, is what is ultimately so unsettling about today's China: the suspicion that its authoritarian capitalism is not merely a remainder of a Western past, the repetition of the process of capitalist accumulation . . . but a sign of the future. What if "the vicious combination of the Asian knout and the European stock market" proves to be economically more efficient than liberal capitalism? What if it signals that democracy is no longer a condition of economic development but its obstacle? (Žižek, "Three Notes," this issue, 721)

If capitalism, whether Western liberal or Chinese authoritarian, ultimately prevails in the absence of true alternatives, then what should be our vision of future equality and justice? Žižek has no answer. His postcommunist political practice in Slovenia and theoretical ruminations suggest that he envisions discrete, fragmented movements in this time of so-called interregnum, including antiglobalization, environmental, indigenous rights, and gay rights activism. Žižek's politics is clearly aligned with the anarchist social movement advocated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, a "radical democracy and agnostic pluralism in advanced Western capitalism."<sup>36</sup> He surely espouses a Gramscian antihegemony politics, particularly the "war of position" as "the only viable possibility in the West," with culture, rather than physical might, as its foundation.<sup>37</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, Gramsci's theory of hegemony parallels Mao's efforts to build alternatives through cultural revolution.<sup>38</sup> However, as the Western Left's contemporary

appropriation of Gramsci has already displaced the Italian communist leader's anti-Fascist strategies and transmuted his concept of the interregnum to a permanent condition of capitalism, Gramscian revolutionary theory and practice have become vacuous, postmodern symbols of socialism's defeat.

Žižek's description of and prescription for China's problems today are based less on historical understanding and serious inquiry than on abstract, out-of-context generalization and speculation, which reveals his ignorance of China's complexity. He does not offer us insights from a Marxist or post-Marxist perspective that combines Western critical theory with Chinese theory and practice. As the Western Left by and large remains silent on China's rapid transformation over the last three decades, Žižek's invocation of Mao, coupled with his sweeping condemnation of China's current development, has at least instilled a modicum of renewed interest among the Western Left in Mao's revolutionary legacy. Granted, the Western Left faces a crisis of identity, future orientation, and vision, as the last glimmer of hope for alternatives to global capitalism seems to vanish from sight, even as the capitalist world system plummets into its deepest economic crisis since World War II. The Western Left must take into account China's revolutionary legacy from the early twentieth century through the late 1970s, and its reform during the last three decades; without doing so, any effort at change would be seriously flawed. Presumably Žižek, an icon of the Western Left, takes on Mao and China as a part of his inquiry into a new universalism, a grandiose and visionary intellectual agenda. But his mistake is to take for granted *Western* interpretations of Mao and China—the high theories of Hegel, Sartre, Badiou, and Lacan, as well as the popular media and tabloid biographies—which he relies on without critical reflection.

There are different ways to reflect on the future by taking into account China's history and passage to modernity. Perry Anderson, for instance, has engaged in a serious inquiry into China's complex historical socialist trajectory. In "Two Revolutions," a 2010 essay, Anderson compares the Russian and Chinese revolutions to excavate historical causes that may explain the present moment.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to Žižek's sweeping generalization of Mao, Anderson carefully traces Mao's revolutionary theory and practice and its impact on China today. His description of the Cultural Revolution is more

historical than theoretical. For Anderson, Mao instilled “moral confidence” in millions of Chinese people, which remains unbroken through today. The energy and enthusiasm of Chinese people for modernization derives from that self-confidence, and “Mao’s dynamism, for better or worse, had been one expression of the recovery of that confidence. The Reform Era propelled by Deng would be another. In this historical self-assurance lay a fundamental difference between Russia and China.”<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, Anderson’s reading of the impact of the Chinese Revolution on current reforms gives the revolution its due credit. He favors the view that Mao “laid the deep foundation for the feats of the Reform Era.” He claims that with “the creation of a strong sovereign state, the formation of an educated and disciplined labor-force, and the establishment of powerful mechanisms of economic control, the Reform Era can rapidly move ahead.”<sup>41</sup>

Anderson seeks alternatives to past revolutionary practices and explains the various historical passages to modernity. This type of historical account is absent in Žižek’s readings of Mao and China. With a focus on theory and ideology, Žižek misses real issues in China today. Faced with a crisis of legitimacy, the Chinese state grapples with both ideological reinvention, as it addresses questions of social justice and equality, and a socialist revolutionary legacy as the foundation of China’s reform.

Today’s China, saturated in modern communications technologies, embodies the tensions and contradictions inherent in globalized media culture. Beyond the new social formations that techno-media culture has produced globally, Chinese culture is further complicated by political and economic developments, and new social values and identities that have emerged since the Reform and Opening Up. Questions that must be addressed include the discrepancy between state ideology and China’s socioeconomic reality; the fragmentation of state, intellectual elite, and grassroots populations in their cultural expressions and values; and the post-1980s urban youth culture, which will become a dominant formation in years to come.

China is complex, not only because of its internal diversity, but because it is integrating now into global capitalism, with all its inherent inequalities. Reducing it to an imagined, abstract “structural homology” hardly does China justice, not even poetic justice. Politics is no poetics. Žižek’s misreading of Mao and China is largely an abstract theorization, divorced from

specificity and historicity. His pessimism, camouflaged by radical hubris and theatricality, can neither further our understanding of China's struggles with modernity, particularly Mao's endeavors for alternatives, nor inspire a renewed search for social change. Žižek's poeticized version of the Chinese Revolution is thus a theatrical parody-travesty of the true revolution, an imaginary rhapsody of "revolution without a revolution."

## Notes

1. Duncan Campbell, "Move Over Jacko, Idea of Communism Is Hottest Ticket in Town This Weekend," *Guardian*, March 12, 2009, [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/mar/12/philosophy](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/mar/12/philosophy).
2. Wang Xingfu, "Gongchanzhuyi de huigui: Lundun gongchanzhuyi guannian dahui de toushi yu fansi" ("The Return of Communism: Perspectives and Reflections on the London Conference on the Idea of Communism"), *Zhongguo shehui kexue bao (Chinese Social Sciences News)*, March 11, 2010.
3. John Thornhill, "Lunch with the FT: Slavoj Žižek," *Financial Times*, March 6, 2009.
4. Steven Shapiro, "Communism at Birkbeck—Conference Review: On the Idea of Communism," *Criticism* 51 (Winter 2009): 147–48.
5. *Ibid.*, 147.
6. Wang, "Return of Communism."
7. Fredric Jameson, "First Impressions," review of *The Parallax View*, by Slavoj Žižek, *London Review of Books*, September 7, 2006, [www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n17/fredric-jameson/first-impressions](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n17/fredric-jameson/first-impressions). Terry Eagleton, "The phenomenal Slavoj Žižek: Is There Any Subject on Earth that Isn't Grist to Žižek's Intellectual Mill?" *Times Literary Supplement* (London), April 23, 2008.
8. Fredric Jameson, "First Impressions."
9. Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the '60s," in *The Ideologies of Theory*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 191.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Louis Althusser, "News," *Radical Philosophy* 12 (1975): 44, quoted in *Ibid.*
12. Bruno Bosteels, "Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13 (2005): 576.
13. Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction (Theory of Contradiction)* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 50–51. Quoted in *Ibid.*
14. Mao Zedong, "Lun xin jieduan," in *Mao Zedong ji (Collected Works of Mao Zedong)*, ed. Takeuchi Minoru, vol. 6 (Hong Kong: PoWen Book Co., 1976), 260–61. Mao's writings underwent extensive revision and editing in the definitive *Mao Zedong xuanji*, appearing in English translation as the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. For the corresponding text of

- the quotation, see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 209–10.
15. For a detailed analysis of the theoretical linkages between Althusser and Mao, see Liu Kang, “The Problematics of Mao and Althusser: Alternative Modernity and Cultural Revolution,” *Rethinking Marxism* 8 (1995): 1–25.
  16. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. B. Brewster (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 38–39.
  17. Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 336.
  18. Mao Tse-tung, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 382.
  19. Mao Zedong, “On Correctly Handling Contradictions among the People,” in *The Writings of Mao Zedong (1949–1976)*, ed. J. Leung and M. Kau, vol. 2 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 331.
  20. Alain Lipietz, “From Althusserianism to ‘Regulatory Theory,’” in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. A. Kaplan and M. Sprinker (London: Verso, 1992), 125.
  21. Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: Mao Tse-tung, the Marxist Lord of Misrule,” in *Mao on Practice and Contradiction* (London: Verso, 2007), 2.
  22. The biography Žižek cites is Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Knopf, 2005).
  23. Bosteels, “Post-Maoism,” 576.
  24. Quoted from Tani Barlow, editor’s introduction to the special issue on Badiou and China, *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13 (2005): 475.
  25. Alain Badiou, “The Triumphant Restoration,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13 (2005): 661.
  26. *Ibid.*, 659.
  27. Jason Barker, *Alain Badiou: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 1.
  28. Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 198.
  29. Barker, *Alain Badiou*, 106.
  30. Alain Badiou, “The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13 (2005): 481–83.
  31. Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2002), 79.
  32. Žižek, “Introduction,” 1–3.
  33. *Ibid.*, 2.
  34. *Ibid.*, 4.
  35. “The 2010 TIME 100 Poll: Han Han,” *Time*, April 1, 2010, [www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1972075\\_1972078\\_1972568,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1972075_1972078_1972568,00.html).
  36. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York: Verso, 1985). Žižek cited this book as having had a significant impact on his ideas, particularly in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.



37. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, trans. J. A. Buttigieg, vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 168.
38. Liu Kang, "Hegemony and Cultural Revolution," *New Literary History* 27 (1996): 34–51.
39. Perry Anderson, "Two Revolutions," *New Left Review*, January–February 2010.
40. *Ibid.*, 79.
41. *Ibid.*, 95.