

Summary

The book *The Times of Interregnum. Transitory Ontology and Alain Badiou's Work* aims at interpreting the period after 1989 in terms of Gramsci's concept of interregnum and creating its overall theory. According to Gramsci's famous dictum, "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear". Gramsci coined this notion in the 1930s; this was the period of the upswing of fascist and ultra-nationalist movements in Europe. From Badiou's point of view, the period Gramsci conceived as the interregnum was still an element of the historical era during which a practise of collective emancipation was active, operating with the principal of equality, which Badiou presents as the communist idea. Badiou calls this historical era a sequence of the communist idea that lasted from 1917 to the late 1970s. The interregnum Gramsci addressed was a specific stage within this era. Our situation is different from Gramsci's due to the end of the sequence of the communist idea. We live in an interregnum in a strong sense, while the period of the 1930s was rather an interregnum in a weak sense. Badiou depicts our situation as an interval during which this idea is declared untenable, absurd, and even criminal. In Badiou's view, this idea represents a political truth that has closed. The aim of the book is to elaborate the overall theory of interregnum as a period characterized by the closure of truths in three dimensions (politics, art, love) with the exception of the dimension of science (mathematics). I prefer the notion of "interregnum" to "interval" because Badiou defined an interval as the closure of the truth in one domain (politics). Another reason for this terminological choice was that the notion of interregnum captures a variety of social, economic, and culture phenomena as expressed by Gramsci and recently by Bauman. In the book, I address not only the closure of these truths in their specific Badiou sense but also through the following changes in the field of economy and of culture. I deployed the theoretical models of economy and of culture in the interregnum, which are the parts of transitory ontology.

The book consists of an introduction entitled "An Emancipative Meaning of Generalization and the Prehistory of the Interregnum", of the first part entitled "Eccentric Interregnum", and of the second part "Badiou's Transitory Ontology". In the introduction, I expose Badiou's concept of the communist idea as the universal principal of equality and give reasons for its use in terms of the proposed historical periodisation. Its final disappearance

as symbolized by the demise of state socialism in 1989 is the point that is generally accepted as the end of the “great narratives” of the twentieth century. I describe the processes that resulted in the extinction of the communist idea, beginning with its transformation into Stalinist Platonism. Badiou considered Paris of May 1968 and the Cultural Revolution in China to be the last experiments with the communist idea within its historical sequence in the twentieth century. I highlighted the meaning of the Prague Spring of 1968 along these lines. The failure of all these experiments signaled that the communist idea, in its historical form, had exhausted its possibilities. For my concept of interregnum, the process of its extinction in the 1970s and 80s is crucial. Neoliberalism and postmodernism, which became the dominants in the first period of the interregnum, emerged in the socio-political space that had been marked by the extinguishing communist elements. Neoliberalism and postmodernism absorbed these elements in a transmuted form. This is why I interpret certain neoliberal patterns as having a connection to these elements as much as some postmodern patterns.

The first part “Eccentric Interregnum” depicts neoliberalism and postmodernism as the dominants of the first period of the interregnum (1989 to 2000/2008) and shows their transformation from the outset of the new millennium, which is the second period thereof (2000/2008-present). In the first period of the interregnum, neoliberalism involved the idea of equality of the human capital and his or her citizenship, a non-authoritarian strategy of corporate management, and the market as providing a correlation between personal merit and reward. Drawing on authors like Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiappello, and Jessica Whyte, I conceive these neoliberal patterns as the transformed fragments of the egalitarian communist idea. I argue that the early neoliberalism evinced some communist traces, which made it acceptable in the socio-political space with echoes of Paris May 1968 and generally, of the emancipatory movements of the twentieth century. I called these patterns peripheral and related them to the battery of the neoliberal core patterns such as “free market”, “privatization”, “competitiveness”, “human capital”, etc.

In the same period, postmodernism became the cultural dominant. Fredric Jameson, Andreas Huyssen, Josh Toth, etc. show that postmodernism contained some residual modernist elements such as a vanguard criticism of institutions, a radical emancipatory aspiration, a subversive impetus, and techno-optimism. As Toth put it in his “spectroanalysis,” Derrida’s deconstruction and dissemination generate a residual form of a modernist semantic concentration as their own condition of possibility. Toth also revealed a “spectral” presence of modernism in Lyotard’s concept of paralogy that

evoked a modernist element of novelty and of experiment. These residual modernist elements act as the peripheric patterns that are related to the core postmodern patterns, which are multiplicity, radical plurality, heterogeneity, deconstruction, dissemination, difference, etc. We can see that neoliberalism transformed and absorbed some fragments of the political truth and analogically, postmodernism absorbed some fragments of the modernist artistic truth. These fragments created the peripheric patterns in both dominants. I propose to depict the relation between the peripheric patterns and the core ones by using the geometric figure of an epicycloid.

Some authors have already pointed out the disintegration of these dominants in the new millennium, which I conceive as the second period of the interregnum (2000/2008-present). Because of the financial crisis (2008), neoliberalism changed into an antinomic formation. Following Wendy Brown, I argue that neoliberalism replaced its “egalitarian” elements by the ethics of self-sacrifice. Antinomically, neoliberalism is split between the ethics of self-sacrifice and of self-interest. Cultural theoreticians declared “the end of postmodernism”, meaning that postmodern patterns ceased to express the prevailing frame of mind. I see three types of explanation of this end. The first, offered by Jeffrey Nealon, shows that neoliberal capitalism intensified its practices and acts as “just-in-time capitalism” that totally absorbed the postmodern patterns (decentralization, singularity). Consequently, the cultural specificity of postmodernism disappeared. The second type of explanation concerns the institutionalization of postmodernism. Linda Hutcheon, Raoul Eshelman and other scholars argue that postmodernist notions such as the decentred subjectivity, irony, play, the criticism of dualities, etc. were institutionalized and are used as repetitive schematizations which prevent us from understanding new phenomena. The third type of explanation addresses the uncertainties of the human condition in the twenty-first century. As Nicholas Stavris states, postmodern “Anything Goes” is not a commonly felt sentiment. With an unstable economy, financial meltdown, global warming, terrorism, and pandemics, contemporary culture is driven by anxiety. The result is the reappearance of identity and the rejection of the postmodern idea of the “Death of the Subject”.

I suggest an overall explanation of how neoliberalism and postmodernism started to disintegrate. This explanation creates the main conceptual innovation offered in the book and consists of two consecutive theses. The first is the thesis on the prosthetic character of these dominants of the interregnum. Neoliberalism and postmodernism thrive on the condition that their core patterns were related to the peripheric patterns, which were the

transformed fragments of the mentioned truths. For instance, neoliberalism was on the upswing when making the egalitarian promise that each citizen would be a shareholder, etc. Postmodernism was an impressive culture when it refurbished the vanguard criticism of the schematization of art and the institutionalization thereof, etc. In this sense, the peripheric patterns, i.e. the transformed fragments of the truth procedures, acted as prostheses of the core patterns. The following thesis is that due to the disappearance of the peripheric patterns, which were the transformed fragments of the truths, the core patterns of neoliberalism and of postmodernism lost their central position and related themselves to a mixture of various patterns. Neoliberalism and postmodernism thereby evinced their promiscuous character. This process results in a split of neoliberalism and in mutated forms of postmodernism. The neoliberal ethics of self-interest mixed with the ethics of self-sacrifice and the postmodern idea of a heterogenous culture, for instance, was absorbed by radical conservatism (alt-right). There appear the economic, culture, and political formations that are hybrid: no patterns occupy a central position in their structure. A given formation is the outcome of a circulation around the various types of patterns. The epicyclic move, which took place in the first period of the interregnum, reshapes itself into an elliptic circulation. An ellipse, as a geometric figure without a central point, is the proposed model of the formations in the second period of the interregnum. I substantiated this thesis by using a variety of examples in economy, politics, and culture of the present time. I show the circulation around the postmodern concept of a cultural difference and the conservative notion of ethnicity in the Identitarian movement (“ethno-differentialism” coined by Alain de Benoist). Another example is the strategy of the Islamic State that combines a virtual digital space and the premodern militant concept of religion. Conservative populism (Trump, Putin, Orbán) proves to circulate around the postmodern patterns (non-linearity, the floating signifier, etc.) and a national identity. These phenomena resemble “a great variety of morbid symptoms” that, according to Gramsci, appear in the interregnum.

The second part of the book is entitled “Badiou’s Transitory Ontology”. The meaning of this term differs from “transitory ontology” in Badiou’s book *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* that expresses his philosophy in between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. Here, I suggest a new way of understanding Badiou’s philosophy. It is seen as transitory ontology in the sense that it represents a monumental philosophical response to the interregnum (the intervallic period). Badiou situated his philosophy in this period that he defined as the transition between the finished sequence

of the communist idea and its hypothetical new appearance. I address the paradoxical position of Badiou's philosophy in the interregnum. On the one hand, Badiou argues that philosophy is conditioned by the existence of all four types of truths, but simultaneously he indicates that truth procedures in politics, art, and love have finished their existence, and that there are only experiments with their possible rebirth. The scientific truth (mathematics) is the only truth that remains. How can Badiou's philosophy exist in the interregnum? This is one of the hardest riddles of Badiou's thought, which as a rule was overlooked by Badiouian interpreters. I argue that Badiou did not sufficiently solve this riddle until he elaborated the concept of absoluteness in *The Immanence of Truths*, which is the last part of his ontological *opus magnum* entitled *Being and Event* (the first is *Being and Event*, the second is *Logics of Worlds*). He elaborated this concept in relation to the mathematical theory of large cardinals, which enabled him to refine the notion of eternity and of ideas.

I propose to solve the riddle by differentiating truths and ideas, something that the concept of absoluteness has made possible. My argument is that in an interregnum, philosophy is not conditioned by truths, which have ceased to act, but that it is conditioned by ideas. I interpret Badiou's concept of idea in *The Immanence of Truths* in a way that idea expresses a potential infinity of the plunging ("plongement") of absoluteness into truths in the singular worlds in the past, in the present, and in the future. From this it follows that no plunging of absoluteness into a truth is necessarily the last one. Therefore, an interregnum is not the age of the mourning of the "passed" truths in the previous historical sequence, but rather it is the time of a recomposing of their historical meaning in the light of absoluteness. An interregnum enables us to open a space for absoluteness and eternity, which conditions the appearance of a new truth. In Badiou's words, "eternity is always the moment where history, in some sense, is without interest". This moment comes in an intervallic period, i.e. an interregnum. We can therefore conceive an interregnum as an age of absoluteness.