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# POLITICS OF THE ONE

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Concepts of the  
One and the Many  
in Contemporary  
Thought

EDITED BY

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**Artemy Magun**

POLITICAL THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY  
series editor Michael Marder

B L O O M S B U R Y

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Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy

Michael Marder, Series Editor

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## About the authors

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**Jussi Backmann**, University Lecturer in philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

**Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback**, Professor of Philosophy at Södertorn University, Stockholm, Sweden.

**Alexey Chernyakov (1955–2010)**, Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Smolny College) at Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia.

**Keti Chukhrov**, Associate Professor at the Russian State University for Humanities, member of the Moscow Art Magazine Editorial Board, Russia.

**Oleg Kharkhordin**, Professor and Rector, European University at Saint-Petersburg, Russia.

**Vitaly Kosykhin**, Professor of Philosophy at Saratov State University, Russia.

**Susanna Lindberg**, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tampere, Finland.

**Artemy Magun**, Professor of Democratic Theory, Chair of the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the European University at Saint-Petersburg; Associate Professor in the Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Smolny College) at Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia. Member of the group “Chto Delat.”

**Boyan Manchev**, Associate Professor at the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria.

**Michael Marder**, Ikerbasque Research Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country, Vitoria-Gasteiz; Editor of the Continuum series “Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy.”

**Jean-Luc Nancy**, Professor Emeritus, University of Strasbourg, France.

**Gerald Raunig**, Professor of Aesthetics and Political Philosophy at Zürich University of the Arts, Switzerland; founding member of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (EIPCP); founding member of the e-journal *Transversal* and of the review “Kulturrisse.”

**Yves Sintomer**, Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Department, at the University Paris 13, France. Invited researcher at Neuchâtel University, Switzerland.



# Introduction

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“*Unum est necessarium.*” This advice of Christ to Martha became the very formula of Western theology and metaphysics (as a result of what was in fact a pun, because Christ certainly did not speak of “the One” as a principle, but used the word to point at a distinct thing among many others). The mood of heroic allegiance succeeded the more ancient analogy between being and monarchy: “The rule of many is not good; one ruler let there be.”<sup>1</sup> In both cases, their difference notwithstanding, the One is an imperative. Which also means that it is recognition of a lack.

The divergence between the Neoplatonic transcendent One and the Aristotelian worldly One as an organizing principle, significant as it is, has not prevented theory and practice from a consensus on the preference for the One over the many. The few heretics, such as Étienne de la Boétie, author of the political pamphlet “Against the One”, attest to the general rule.

It is not surprising that, in the twentieth century, the “One” became a target for philosophical attack, on different levels of sophistication, which include liberal apologies of pluralism in politics and epistemology (Isaiah Berlin etc.) and the more metaphysical political ontology of “multitudes.” “A multitude,” say Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, “is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference.”<sup>2</sup> They follow an earlier apology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in *Thousand Plateaus*, of a pure “multiplicity” that would not even be correlated with the One, would allow escaping “the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one.”<sup>3</sup> “*Multitudo sunt necessaria, Martha,*” one could perhaps translate, more in the spirit of contemporary busy life.

The problem with this position of Deleuze and Guattari, which, by the way, is borrowed from Plato's Parmenides (hypothesis #8, based on the premise of the non-being of One) is the assurance that this inversion of the traditional approach would in fact not be an inversion, but a complete severance of relationship with the one. But why is it then rhetorically contrasted with the One? Indeed, in the same book, Deleuze and Guattari say that rhizome, as an instance of a pure multiplicity, is not derived from the one, the one is not added to it, but it is something “from which the One is always subtracted”.<sup>4</sup> The Lacanian “minus One” is not that far away. Indeed, maybe the multiplicity is more lively than the One, but it cannot be represented without first considering one as a “negative magnitude” or a fulcrum. “Follow the plants,” say Deleuze and Guattari (see on this the chapter by Michael Marder in this volume), but it is implied that a plant is not just a pure multiplicity (which would go in all directions at once, would not it?) but has rather to do with an excess, overplenitude of the One.

Absolute first principles, such as Being, Unity, Truth, and Good are, if not quite inverted, the attacked, as transcendent abstractions which are usually usurped by hypocritical ideologists. In the twentieth century they are often replaced by structural/procedural or anthropological concepts. But, the ruling ideologies, the absolutes remain, albeit in an inverted form: democracy, individuality, freedom of conscience and of ethical choice partly inherited, in the discourse of human rights, the absolute authority of monarchy, totality, orthodoxy, and supreme good which they oppose.

Absolute monarchies, religions preaching obedience to authority, social codes dictating uniform morality (at least to the lower classes), and even nationalist, fascist, or “totalitarian” democracies that tried constituting a unitary “people,” now appear as constraining human freedom, offending human dignity, and closing a horizon of possibilities. Of course, police order, the rule of law, and social conformity largely remain in place, but they lose their transcendent legitimacy and have to play

double role of authority and rational technological utility. This does not necessarily make them less oppressive: sometimes, the opposite is the case. But they cannot speak the language of the One.

What have been the possible modes of being-one? In philosophy, there are two major models: the many, gathered, like a choir around a conductor, around the One that is radically separated from them (thus Plotinus,<sup>5</sup> but even Aristotle thinks similarly), or the many actually forming unity-totality as its parts or members (Spinoza, and almost the entire Modern democratic/materialist thought).

The former mode very much depends on divine transcendence, although Oleg Kharkhordin shows in this book how the model of a choir constitutes an actual form of a collective unity around a leader which is alternative to our representational models.

The latter, immanent mode of unity poses a further philosophical and practical problem of integration. Without appeals to the transcendent one as a principle of hierarchy, the whole hierarchy becomes illegitimate. A well-ordered harmonious unity may, from a different angle, seem like a system of borders that separate social groups from one another and antagonize them: this is, for instance, the famous critique by Marx of bourgeois civil society with its “division of labor.”<sup>6</sup> Hence in contemporary philosophy, a search for the modes of unifying society that would go beyond the system of parliamentary representation (which in fact stabilizes socio-political asymmetries and hierarchies through a procedure of idealization). Badiou's concept of the “generic”—a set that systematically avoids any substantive criterion of inclusion (technically speaking, a subset that is indescribable in the categories of the original set)—is the most influential attempt to formulate the idea of a true immanent unity. But there are other less metaphysical inquiries into the same subject, such as the chapter by Yves Sintomer on non-representative, or at least non-electoral, politics based on drawing lots, and Gerald Raunig's reflection (in his second chapter) on non-representative “concatenations.” Badiou's “communism” sets forward, in fact, the task that is analogous to, even more radical than, the task of rethinking democracy and republic in the face of the crisis of representation: an aleatoric logic is proposed, instead of the electoral aristocracy now in place.

One can say that the late medieval and Catholic “representative” logic of presenting social groups as ideal essences (the Peasant, the Blacksmith, the Knight) and/or persons, as well as the Modern institutions of the regular mass army, Fordist factory, and mass political party—extreme instances of the “One”—gradually recede, and give place to a fragmented society where units are relatively small, isolated from one another, and constantly run away from each other like galaxies in the Universe. No more estates, no more classes (say some), no more charismatic national heroes. The unifying institutions such as elections, newspapers, or national TV channels arguably lose their significance because of the dissolution of stable public opinion and of mobilized civic culture. Elections are seen rather as a way to switch among several “elites” than to represent a “people.” (This is the reason why the more archaic ways of social integration such as the aleatoric “lots” may be a preferable option.) A *network* that is interconnected but not total (like family resemblance, or threads in a rope), unlike unitary organization, has become a privileged model of social integration due to its technological installation through the Internet and cell phones.

But it would be wrong to think that, because of the crisis of traditional modes of unifying, unity itself such would be disappearing, that Modernity would in some sense be abandoning unity. While this is partly true in what concerns unity as a reflexive idea, in another more direct sense Modern technology and Modern capitalist political economy succeeded in an *unprecedented unification* of the globe. The One, as a hidden spring of numbering, unites the world through monetary exchange and through the binary language of electronics. This is possible via the *negative force of the one* that

makes “everything solid melt into the air” and unites humans and countries “by default.” My chapter on “imperialization” emphasizes a negative and passive character of this process. Such unity, obvious as it is, cannot satisfy us because it lacks a *form* of unity and remains purely nihilistic (see my first chapter, on the proximity between one and the nothing): in the words of Boyan Manchev (in this volume), this unity lacks a *world* in the proper sense of this word. A. Negri and M. Hardt tend to oppose the organic multitudes to the unifying logic of empire, but it is clear that the “multitudes” can emerge only as a result of a violent dissolution of borders operated by capital and technology, and by liberal-democratic propaganda.

But this Modern unifying process has at the same time led to the atomization of society and the dissolution of traditional social links. A subject loses the intermediary levels of reference, finding itself one to one with the totality of the world. Unity of a state, and then, of the planet, implied the unitary atoms as its elements. But today it appears at once as a limitless totality and as an excluded and excepted one-as-singularity. Therefore, throughout the last two centuries, social thought has been lamenting the loss of social solidarity, and social practice was searching for artificial ways to reestablish it. This is particularly a French tradition going from Rousseau to de Tocqueville and then to Durkheim; de Tocqueville prescribing the spontaneous civic organizations that we today classify as “civil society.” In post-revolutionary Russia, after a decade of experimenting with actual communes, the party experimented with the creation of “collectives” based on intense practices of cooperation and public denunciation. As Oleg Kharkhordin argues in his book<sup>7</sup> and recalls in the present volume, this “collective” structure had its precedents in some Orthodox monastic practices. In the West, psychological training secularizes some of the similar Protestant practices. Contemporary white-collar corporations borrow many of these community-building technologies.

Strictly speaking, nothing prevents a fragmented body or network from being somehow unified. There is no contradiction here. In the simplest case, this unity comes from outside: the fragmented and disintegrated multitude is in danger of being ruled by an authoritarian leader (who would profit from the disconnectedness of interests). This is why Negri and Hardt emphasize that this multitude has a mode of *acting together*. To Aristotle, a joint action was also a way to unite the multiple. But Negri and Hardt—probably following Jean-Luc Nancy—speak of the “*common*” instead of the “one”. “The multitude, although it remains multiple and internally different, is able to act in common and thus reunite itself.”<sup>8</sup> By this, they apparently mean being-together without a unitary form, united by a set of relationships rather than a single essence or attribute. But is not commonality (with its “com”, “with”) also a (divided) unity, even though of a special kind? “Which With for the Many?” asks Gerald Raunig, in the first of his two chapters in our volume. And he comes up with the answer of “*common division*”: a mode of collectivity which is no longer composed of units but only exists in a centrifugal process of differentiation and singularization. My own chapter on solitude in this volume moves (*mutatis mutandis*) in a similar direction and conceives a unity of the common as a *shared solitude*.

Another non-formal condition of unity is an empty space or a stage where multitudes and singularities could actually *meet*. In our volume, this question is addressed by Susanna Lindberg and Boyan Manchev, who discuss unity in relation to the concept of the *world*. In their view, what is the crisis today is not a unitary form of collectivity but rather the open *space* of occurring events, something which plays a role of non-thematic horizon and not of form, and which is itself formless. The crisis of extreme unification and extreme dissolution pushes us to constantly go back and down to turn to the foundations of foundations. Both Lindberg and Manchev defend the immanent character of the world thus understood. The former suggests returning to the ancient natural-philosophical language of “elements”; the latter opposes the immanent ubiquitous alteration and transformation

things viewed by a fresh eye to the sublime unity of the event which is privileged by Badiou and, Ketī Chukhrov argues in her chapter, is even present in Deleuze.

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In philosophy, interest in the problem of One and many as such goes beyond the obvious need to undo (or even invert) the monotheist ideologies of the Old Regime. In the twentieth century, some thinkers (such as Heidegger) had little interest in this concept, and some, as mentioned, were mainly interested in subverting and abandoning it. But there have also been schools that tried to productively renew the very concept of the One. Philosophy of mathematics was one major school of thought where the One was a central question (Frege, Cantor, etc.). A redefinition of the One as based in zero was advanced by Frege, while Russell, Gödel, and some others demonstrated the logical impossibility of an absolute supreme totality. The One is not one: the existing one is not unitary, and the unitary one does not exist either existentially or logically. This is a powerful critique of the metaphysical and theological conception of being, which makes the one into an aporetic principle of an infinite procedure. However, as we know, the danger of this approach is to make a skeptical or a Neokantian decision and to treat a unity as subjective or formal.

The other line of the twentieth century's "henology" was the French metaphysical tradition stemming from Jacques Lacan. It is Lacan, this philosopher-psychoanalyst who is, strangely, the most eloquent theoretician and apologist of the One in the "continental" philosophy of the twentieth century. Instead of escaping into "multiplicity," Lacan dialectically reverses the very concept of the One, stating, for instance, that "The One is a pure difference" or even that "The One as such is the Other."<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, Lacan emphasizes the negative aspect of the One as a result of subtraction, separation, and exception. He notices that, in the midst of dogmatic metaphysics, the One constitutes a virus of negativity, and is itself inherently negated. Even our negative terms, such as the Latin "non" or German "nein," contain a reference to the one: the one functions here under subtraction, as "minus one."<sup>10</sup>

Lacan uses the concept of One in connection to his structuralist philosophy of language, and for him the One, and numbers in general, are instances of signs without a semantic meaning, pure signifiers that lie at the ground of language. The One, expressed by the minimal, simplest line, "*trait unaire*," is a pure, minimal *signifier*, a borderline not just of quantity but of meaning and sense, which precede and exceed the question of existence. Moreover, for Lacan, the negative designation of the "one" precedes its positive definition: the one emerges in response to a lack.

It is in Lacan's footsteps that his two great heirs, Deleuze and Derrida, developed, at the end of the 1960s, the theories of *difference* as preceding and forming identity. The double, the mimesis, the resemblance, the repetition, are what constituted our notions of truth and sameness. Unlike Lacan, neither Deleuze nor Derrida tried to use the concept of One on its own—both preferred to invent new concepts, and held an acutely polemical relation to traditional metaphysics. Deleuze polemically opposed the philosophy of the One as a kind of policing gesture, while Derrida emphasized "dissemination" and (as we are reminded by Nancy's chapter in the present volume) the "*plus d'un*" (more than one) of any phenomenon that he analyzed. The situation changed with Jean-Luc Nancy, who, following some ideas of Derrida, nevertheless insisted on a more hermeneutical approach to "deconstructing" the classical concepts and the trivial words of language by giving them a new (primordial) meaning.

Nancy's classical work from the 1980s<sup>11</sup> was dedicated to the notion of the *common* which, he showed, was not an indication to a totalitarian unity, but to an inherently plural structure of being, of any being thing. This was in fact already an attempt to "save" political unity from the neoliberal

individualism, by reinterpreting it as open and shared. But at that time, the accent was on plurality rather than unity, on the inherent split and distribution of being. But *Being Singular Plural*, which developed the same set of ideas, invoked unity in the aspect of singularity, *uniqueness*.

In Nancy's recent works, in which he "deconstructs Christianity," he has no reservations to speak of the One as such, although of course this is not a return to any religious orthodoxy. The continued relevance of monotheism, says Nancy, is its proximity to atheism: the negative character of the One God that withdraws from the empirical realm.

[W]hat is lost of the very essence of monotheism in all its [present] forms is precisely that the "one" of the "god" is not at all Unicity qua substantial present and united with itself: on the contrary, the unicity and the unity of this "god" (or the divinity of this "one") consists precisely in that the One cannot be posited there, neither presented nor figured as united in itself. Whether it be in exile or in diaspora, whether it be in the becoming-man or in a threefold-being-in-itself or whether it be in the infinite recoil of the one who has neither equal nor like (thus not even unity in any of its forms), this "god" (and in what sense is it divine? how is it divine? this is what we have to think through) absolutely excludes its own presentation.<sup>12</sup>

When God becomes one, Nancy develops, he is displaced by becoming a "principle" ["the first captured": the One appears again] rather than a person, but this "principle or principate [principat] (an appeal to this old word here) can only exempt or make exception of itself in regard to itself."<sup>13</sup> This is a thought that is familiar to us from Giorgio Agamben (who quotes Nancy in his turn), but unlike Agamben, Nancy does not make this observation into an ironic denunciation of sovereignty but uses it to emphasize the potential of self-criticism and access to the abyssal ground that lies in a serious fidelity to the one. In his chapter of our volume, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, Nancy conceives the one as an overflowing excess, not as a stabilizing and "molar" form imposed on a chaos.

Here we come to Alain Badiou who is in a way the central author for many chapters of this book because he (well, like Nancy) calls for a creative renewal of traditional metaphysical and scientific concepts, and because he sees in mathematics a chance to reunite science with philosophy, and thus the concept of one plays for him a particular role.

Building on Frege and Lacan, Badiou admits that the "One" is naturally not there, and that it only emerges as an operation. "Il y a de l'Un." ["There is something of One."] Hence the role of mathematics, which is sufficient to form and structure being, forms the multiple matter from outside. Badiou is a good Kantian here. Further, like Frege, he deduces the One from the notion of zero, the "empty set," which is named by "the name of the void." Vitaly Kosykhin rightly notes in his chapter the Neoplatonic overtones of this position. The new unity of "sets" and "numbers" is an imperfect unity, since it cannot unite, represent *itself*. Hence, a new dialectical step is needed, which, according to Badiou, consists in an emergence of the "Ultra-One"<sup>14</sup> (a concept to which Nancy's concept of "More than one," developed in this volume, is probably a rejoinder). The "ultra-one" is the event—reflexive, impossible set that counts itself: includes its own name. "The 'ultra-one' [...] counts the same thing as one: once as a presented multiple, and one as a multiple included in its own presentation."<sup>15</sup> The "Ultra" means both that we transcend the one and that we find a new larger unit like in Cantor's theory where there is a hierarchy of inconceivably large "cardinal" numbers.

But one cannot say that unity, in Badiou, takes over the multiple. He insists that the sets that his studies are "multiples," even though on the other hand it is clear that they are just multiples counted

for-one by “ontological” rationality. Moreover, the ultra-one of the event, a non-set which exceeds set, is not, in Badiou, the end of the story: it further leads to the creation of a new peculiar set: the “generic” one. A generic set is a subset that is not discernible from within the original set, but that “runs through” all its possible classes and categories. In *Being and Event*, Badiou emphasizes that the construction of the generic is an attempt to introduce truth within ontology. But ontology is a regime of counting something as one! In the first *Manifesto*, Badiou emphatically states that the generic is the multiple as such, and that his theory is a sort of “Platonism of the multiple” which allows for *passing between* the principles of the “without-being of the One” and “the limitless authority of the multiple.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the generic goes beyond the opposition between the one and the multiple and reconstitutes a multiple in the terrain and in the language of the One itself. Once again, we have something like a dialectical synthesis of the one and the many.

Badiou as a thinker of the One is preoccupied with the part, not with the whole: an event, and its generic consequence, are ways to separate and describe the phenomena that stand apart from the common situation. “One divides into two,” he repeats Mao, not “two unite into one”: both in philosophy and politics, truth is derived by distinction and discovery within the existing situation. However, Badiou would agree that “unum est necessarium”, in the direct sense of the Christian ethic of fidelity which he secularizes in his *Saint-Paul*: there is just one thing necessary, and it suspends all other existing values and rules.

Attractive as are Badiou's apology of the splinter-like Ultra-One and his dialectical construction of it, they pose several problems. One of them is the complicated character of Badiou's theory that basically posits *two* images of unity: the event and the generic set, and the relationship between the two does not have a clear mathematical or logical form (Alexey Chernyakov suggests in this volume that the event is a risky bet on the possibility of a generic set). The second problem of Badiou's ultra-unity is his *affirmative* understanding of event as an *advent* which makes it ontologically secondary to the original set (situation), from which the new set is separated but which it does not annul or destroy. Without the internal negativity of event it is hard to conceive either historicity (nothing actual disappears here), or the need to keep a *fidelity* to the event instead of simply carrying through its agenda (“fidelity” implies that the cause has somehow been lost, event interrupted, etc.).

If we now try formulating the reason why the One is interesting at all, we can say, in a short cut, that the One, in the all-familiar language of both words and numbers, is the most basic term. An indefinite article and a unit of counting. To achieve this “atomic” quality, One had to become a pure name or a pure number: it is the very operator that allows the subject to pass from an egocentric obsession to the happy play of reversible signifiers. But, at the point of this suspension of meaning, it turns out that the One is a highly polysemic *name*, and that its polysemy reflects the semantic intricacy of the concept. Like so many ancient names, the “one” means contrary things at once: uniqueness and equivalence, inclusion and separation, orgiastic collective and egotistic monad, siege and exile, in the terms of Marcia Cavalcante, who formulates sharply: “The one names both the most singular and individual—*each one* as opposed to another one—and the most universal and general—each one as *each one of* a conceptual whole or kind.” This singular is not an element of a totality or an exemplar of a genus; it has a meaning of the One that resists counting, only to be reaffirmed in a new turn in an infinite multiplicity of shared solitude.

Being a dialectical, rhythmic (Jean-Luc Nancy), or “heterogeneous” (Jussi Backman) concept, the One unites and dis-unites the mutually contradicting concepts of totality, singularity, and identity in an inevitable temporal deployment which requires a philosophical analysis to discern. A rhythm of

affirmation, passage, self-annulment, and re-settlement at a new terrain: it is hidden in all everyday occurrences where we start—and immediately stop—counting, stumbling at the edge of something for which we try to prepare. But this rhythm is infinitely variable, subject to recombinations and reverberations of the meanings of the One. The chapters collected in this book are so many variations in the same scale that stretches from singularity through identity to totality, and then, symmetrically, from the multiplicity as the distinction of singularities through the multiplicity as the anonymous equivalence of *hoi polloi*, to the power and awe of enormous multiplicity that animates any totality and exceeds it. The inventive paths between the one and the many are compressed, in the chapters of this book, in a series of new (or renewed) promising philosophical concepts: Fragility, Dividuality, Element, Solitude, Icon, Plant. At the same time, the concept of the One helps to throw light on more familiar concepts, such as World, Event, and Representation.

The structure of the book groups its chapters in accordance with the specific angles taken by them in rethinking the concept of One.

The first, introductory part, entitled “The other One,” contains attempts to conceive unity, or something like unity that could not any longer be called by this name, beyond our general stereotypes of totality, numerical unity, or singular uniqueness. This other angle invariably includes *negativity*, which makes the one into a moment of rupture, crisis, split, but also reflexive self-reference. The chapter by Jean-Luc Nancy deploys the dialectic of One through the seemingly banal logic of quantity and count, and through exploring the intricacies of the one as signifier. Marcia Cavalcante, inspired by the theme of Saint Petersburg (the venue of the 2010 *Unum* conference), describes the traditional notion of the one as a “besieged” identity and suggests looking for a new intermediary concept between the one and the other: what Cusanus called the “non-other.” My own chapter in this part develops an existential approach to the metaphysics of One and suggests that this abstract and subliminal notion can be deduced from the experience of solitude. But then this experience is such that the roof of unity looks very much unlike the closed, oppressive, prison-like totality.

The second part, “Event of the One”, unites the chapters that take the One, temporally and existentially, as an eventful encounter rather than a form or substance. The One is singular in the sense of unexpected, it is a product of intense condensed experience and a ground of subsequent time space. Such is, as we have seen, the position of Alain Badiou, and three of the four chapters in this part are dedicated to this great French thinker. Keti Chukhrov contests, with polemical vigor, the ironical reading by Badiou of Deleuze and of his philosophy of event. She insists, in fact, on the proximity of both theories of event, giving a rather unexpected interpretation of Deleuze. Alexey Chernyakov compares Badiou's eventful temporality with the structure of time explicated by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*. Vitaly Kosykhin argues, on the contrary, for a more objectivist reading of Badiou, emphasizing that the being, for him, is subjectless. Thus seen, Badiou loses some of his glamor as a militant philosopher and appears as a contemplative metaphysician, somewhat in the spirit of “speculative realism.” Jussi Backman, in a detailed reading, explains Heidegger's reading of Parmenides as a “onset,” presenting the “one” (and “first”) as a name of a permanent crisis.

The third part, “The Singular Plural,” brings together two chapters that problematize multiplicity and explore alternative ways to conceive it. Both Michael Marder and Gerald Raunig are less “henophilic” than other authors of the book: both try developing, with the “help” of Deleuze, new ways of conceiving and thinking multiplicity, being not content with its supposed obscurity. While abandoning the metaphysical One, Raunig and Marder do not abandon its more immanent version, such as singularity and “being-with.” Marder explores the transcendental repercussions of the conce

of “plant,” while Raunig uncovers, in the work of Gilbertus Porretanus, a theory of “*unum dividuum*” as a mode of conceiving of a human being without making it into a self-sufficient unit. Creative combining Deleuze and Nancy, Raunig describes a mode of joint being that would consist in “co-division” and not in the “common.” In spite of their seemingly abstract concerns, both authors are overtly political, in that they look for a “true” democracy, republic, or community, behind these very concepts/values that may look trivial or even problematic.

The fourth part is titled “Unity of the World”. Boyan Manchev and Susanna Lindberg try to find and re-found unity as non-thematic conditions of gathering and communicating: unity is thus neither a thing nor a transcendent idea, but rather a ubiquitous environment. Manchev emphasizes constant alteration and transformation as a condition for a worldly encounter of things, while Lindberg, with environmental problems in mind, suggests a return to the ancient “elements” as a concept to which we do not have today an exact analogon.

The final part of the book, which is homonymous with the whole, is more empirically oriented. It deals with political theory, but its chapters pose the very same problems of the one, the many, and their transformations. In my chapter on “negative imperialization” I apply my concept of negative unity as solitude to the contemporary political order, showing the force of dissolution hiding behind its apparent imperial integration. This crisis of the Modern state and the void that it opens, obviously set the stage for the invention of alternative forms of political unity.

Oleg Kharkhordin takes a step back from today’s instinct to think of a popular unity as formed by representation. Attempting to think differently, he shows an example of a non-representative unity that would not necessarily be authoritarian or anarchic. “Who”, he writes, in restating the perennial political problem of the One’s non-existence, “can claim that s/he has seen or touched a group *in toto* or a group as such, an entity separate from its members?” And, continues Kharkhordin, “[a]n iconoclast citizen is characterized by understanding this absence and by a determined pointedness to this ever retreating group existence.” Unity is not incarnated in a center, there is no idea of resemblance, typifying, or copying: instead, something like a correlation is established among the group and its leader(s). One is reminded again of Lacan’s “Il y a de l’un.”

Yves Sintomer speaks of the actual forms in which political unity may exist beyond the standard representation. Democracy, being an organon of social integration, has a potential of transformation in the situation where the standard parliamentary system starts aging, both historically and conceptually. The participatory forms of government that draw on lot rather than “aristocratic” election help make society into a more perfect larger unity—or a more perfect multiple, if one prefers.

Finally, in a coda, Gerald Raunig returns to the opening chapter by Nancy and formulates once more the main problem of the book: to find a way to concentrate, single out, or intensify the multiple that would not at the same time impose the identitarian One upon it. Raunig points at the political answers to this question, in the practices of contemporary art and of militant non-conformist activism.

It must be added that the book may provide an additional interest for the fact that most of its authors represent the Eastern/Central and Nordic corners of Europe: Russia, Bulgaria, Finland, and Sweden (plus a Canadian of Russian origin, an Austrian who is very involved in the intellectual life of Central Europe, and, finally, one (the one?) from France). This is a region of intellectual semi-periphery whose intellectual life is relatively separate from the global discussion, not just because of linguistic and cultural barriers, but also because of the logic of the postcolonial world where those without access to rich libraries and living outside of the networks of Anglo-American universities are at comparative disadvantage. While in Finland and Sweden the state stimulates academics to publish



English, this has only very recently become the case in Russia, for instance. Thus, my effort as an editor and conference organizer was, apart from matters of substance, also to build up and to present a community of thought from the scholars of the North-East corner, scattered around its intense island-like intellectual centers, such as Södertorn in Sweden, European University and Smolny College in Saint Petersburg, New Bulgarian University in Sofia, and others. The task was thus to build in this region something like a new philosophical archipelago (that would not at the same time resemble the *Gulag* or the besieged Leningrad). Certainly, the presence of the great European centers of gravitation, such as Strasbourg, Paris, and Zürich, remain crucial for not closing this contour of generic energy into an identitarian “one.”

The origin of this book is a joint interest in the notion of One and in the philosophy of Badiou that in 2006 made me start a joint seminar with Alexey Chernyakov. Not just age but also the styles of our thinking and the character of our questioning separated us, but nevertheless there emerged a sort of intellectual resonance, as a result of which we ran, from 2006 to 2008, a seminar on the One (“Unum Seminar”), first in the Saint Petersburg Higher Religious and Philosophical School, later in the Smolny College of Saint Petersburg State University. From 2008 to 2010, Chernyakov ran his own seminar, where he provided a detailed exegesis of Badiou's works. A mathematician and a philosopher of phenomenological orientation, author of a book on temporality in Heidegger,<sup>17</sup> and a long-time professor of the Saint Petersburg Higher Religious and Philosophical School, Chernyakov quite unexpectedly became interested in the French Maoist Badiou: apparently he saw in him the continuation of the early Heidegger's ethical pathos, but without his stoic and atheist principles of finitude and death, and without his prejudice towards science and particularly mathematics which, for Chernyakov as for Badiou, was an obscure, almost illegible, language of infinity. In this, he followed not just Cantor but the great Russian mathematicians of the twentieth century who interpreted their own mathematical discoveries in the sense of “*imyaslavie*,” a tendency in Orthodox Christianity that emphasized the power of the name of God and made its pronouncement into a special cult.<sup>18</sup> Hence the strange alliance of an apolitical and theologically oriented phenomenologist with a leftist political philosopher, out of which this book, in the final analysis, was born.

In April 2010, thanks to a generous grant from the Center of Franco-Russian Friendship in Moscow, to the French Institute at Saint Petersburg, to the Andrew Gagarin foundation, to the Smolny College (now the Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Saint Petersburg State University), and to the Center “Res Publica” of the European University at Saint Petersburg, I organized a large international conference, “Politics of the One,” which was centered around the issues previously discussed in our seminars but which involved a broad circle of thinkers from Europe and North America. The next step was a publication developing the same questions in depth, and this is now achieved thanks to the energy and intelligence of Michael Marder, the editor of the series, to the publishers, Continuum and, in particular to its editor, Marie-Claire Antoine, and to the serious effort and sharp minds of all the authors of the book. Special thanks go to the European University at Saint Petersburg for supporting the translation of Gerald Raunig's chapters, to Aileen Derieg and Brian Currid, and to Jonathan Chalier for translating Raunig and Nancy, respectively. Tragically (in the literal sense of the word), Alexey Chernyakov, who stood at the origin of this project, did not live to see this book: he died from a stroke during a period of intense heat in July 2010. We dedicate this book to the memory of the one who was thus singled out for interruption.

# Notes

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- 1 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (12), 1076a5.
- 2 M. Hardt and Antonio Negri, *The Multitude* (Penguin Press, 2004), 105.
- 3 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 32.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 5 Plotinus, *Ennead*, 6, 9.
- 6 See “On the Jewish Question,” in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Lawrence & Wishart, 1975–2005), 146–74.
- 7 Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 8 *The Multitude*, 100
- 9 Jacques Lacan, *L’identification, Séminaire IX* (unpublished), 1961–2, 15.11.1961, 35. There are two seminars of Lacan devoted in a large part to the concept of One. They are separated by an interval of 10 years, the first is #9, 1961–2, the second is #19, 1971–2. The second one returns to the same problem that Lacan posed in 1961–2, but with new philosophical references such as Frege and Plato.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 21.02.62, 109.
- 11 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. P. Connor *et al.* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
- 12 Nancy, *Dis-enclosure* (Fordham University Press, 2008).
- 13 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 14 A. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 181–2.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 A. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 1999), 103.
- 17 Alexey Chernyakov, *The Ontology of Time: Being and Time in the Philosophies of Aristotle, Husserl and Heidegger* (Kluwer, 2002).
- 18 Lauren Graham and Jean-Michel Kantor, *Naming infinity: a true story of religious mysticism and mathematical creativity* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

# The Other One

# More than One

Jean-Luc Nancy

*[W]e shall at one time be descending, tearing apart, like Osiris, the one into many by a titanic force; and we shall at another time be ascending and gathering into one the many, like the members of Osiris, by an Apollonian force.*

Pico della Mirandola<sup>1</sup>

[T]he double did not only add itself to the simple. It divided it and supplemented it. There was immediately a double origin plus its repetition. Three is the first figure of repetition. The last too, for the abyss of representation always remains dominated by its rhythm, infinitely. The infinite is doubtless neither one, nor empty, nor innumerable. It is of ternary essence.<sup>2</sup>

One, two, and the resumption of this division and this addition. Resumption that counts for one more and makes three. Two divides one and supplements it: one has not taken place; it has only taken place by redoubling [*dédoublant*] and repeating itself.

The “abyss of representation” is the non-presence that is replayed at each new proposal of meaning: a sign, as soon as it makes a sign, refers to another sign and their reference refers to nothing (to nothing as a “thing,” a “presence,” a “given”). Sign, and sign, and nothing, such is the rhythm.

But *nothing*—no thing, not *any* thing, not “one”—we begin to know that it is “something,” as in French (*res, rem, un rien*). In order to understand what “thing” nothing is, if it can be understood, one might consider how reference is there made: through rhythm. In other words, nihilism consists in contending that no sign refers to any thing and that signs only carry this nullity on. It therefore contends that “one” corresponds to “one,” to a “one.” But if the repetition of signs—language, and even more than language, the significance [*signifiante*] of all things—is valid as rhythm, isn’t there a scene change? Rhythm throws in more than one. More than one, more of one, “neither one, nor nil, nor innumerable” and *nothing*, the thing, in the form of infinity. Exit from nihilism. This is what we are here taking care of.

The un- of the unfolding [*dédoublement*] and the re- of the repetition make “one” more—one that is not another one added in the indefinite series of units, but one, the addition of which is also the distance between one and two, the gap that divides one at the same time as it supplements it, that is to say the gap sustains its place and role and, in doing this, it adjoins the one to itself, the simple “one” to the split, double “one.” This adjoining through division, this inflection, this articulation transforms the monotonous addition of one to one into rhythm. The return of the same substitutes for linearity a succession—the return with which Nietzsche has opened what one could call the epoch of “more than one.” The “same” indeed is not the “one”—at least as identical. It is what, in order to be the same

similar (*das Gleiche*), must precisely not be “one.” Or must sweep the one—with its own unity and unicity—in a displacement the movement of which we begin to feel, while feeling that in reality, since the very beginning of our history, the “one” displaces itself, in itself or out of itself. We will have reasons and occasions to go back to this, without claiming to reconstitute—that would be the task of a vast treatise—the history of the one, this history that, all in all, is *one* from Heraclitus to Derrida and to ourselves, but that is one by way of having from the outset displaced [*déplacé*], carried off course [*déporté*], and extended beyond limits [*débordé*] its own unity as well as the “one” of which it seemed to be in charge.

(To say no more about this now, it may suffice to take a moment and recall some flashes of the one in Heraclitus, in Plato, in Aristotle or Plotinus, the unity of Augustinian Trinity and that of the God of Averroes, of the God of Thomas Aquinas, without mentioning Ibn Arabi or Eckhart, Leibniz's monad, the one-for-itself by Hegel or Stirner's unique. A few references are not much, of course, within the vast and proliferating course of the history that could one day be characterized as the history of the One, the unique history of the One, of its advent and its avatars<sup>3</sup>—“one day” when the One is disunited from itself. As a matter of fact, we are already there. This is precisely what we are talking about.)

“More than one,” this was, later than the text I've quoted, one of Derrida's favorite phrases. I might say: a fetish phrase. More than one language, more than one session, more than one law, etc.—and maybe more than one “one”: whether he has taken the risk of such a turn of phrase or not, it is not legitimately prescribed. Prescribed by the logic of the supplement of origin, to take over his own words, but prescribed to this logic itself since the most ancient departure (was there one departure only one?) of philosophy.

More than one philosophy? More than one, philosophy, itself? The unity of philosophy has not ceased to be for itself an object of litigation. Now there have to be essentially several philosophies that diverge or confront themselves, now there has to be one philosophy that continues and reasserts itself unless it comes to pronounce its own “end” and its opening to an other “thinking.” But philosophy itself presupposes the putting at a distance of a unique principle of the *sophia* it talks about. The *philein* is a principle of non-unity: it implies the possibility of variations, distances, and approaches, and on principle then it holds at a distance the unity and unicity that we would always obstinately tend to assign to a *sophia*.

It also means that always and constantly, in one way or another, philosophy is more *than* philosophy. More than one and more of one. More than itself: this too is indicated by *philein*. Hence necessarily and originally, philosophy would throw in an excess over unity: its own unity as well as that of its theme (whether it is called “being” or as one wishes; here precisely only counts the excess of any meaning [*signification*] or significance [*signifiance*] over *one* sense [*sens*] whatever it may be. “One way only”—that is also one of the main names of our history as a process and as a calling the process in question.

“More than one”: it obviously means more than one thing (and what is “a thing” in this remarkable undetermined sense? A signified, a reference, an object, a concept? In truth, it simply means “one” in any given unit, the fact that we can fulfill the intention of “meaning” [*vouloir dire*] through something else than “nothing”—therefore simply that “one” is not nothing, and that for this reason the minimum question of the “one” is the question of nihilism: nothing, or something of the one).

“More than one” means first and foremost “more than only one,” more numerous; it means in this sense the number itself, or numeration. More than one: one, two, three, four ... (non-rhythmical)

succession). It immediately entails a plurality of “ones”: the one-one is followed by a second one, then by another. But the plurality of “ones” opens straightway the question of its nature: is it addition or multiplication or else distinction, dissimilarity?

If plurality results from addition or multiplication, “more than one” may extend indefinitely like the series of numbers, of all possible numerations (“natural,” “real,” “imaginary,” “irrational” numbers, ...). The principle is that of numeration or numerality: more than one, which is to say not only some ones but also many. More precisely, there are never “some ones” without there being “many” at the horizon. Many, the multitude, i.e. the multiplication of the ones that are not brought back to the jurisdiction of a One, simply because there is neither a jurisdiction nor a “One” with capital, but only the enumeration of “ones.” Enumeration is the principle of the crowd, of the numerous of which the number continually increases. Addition brings always further the indefinite sum that will never make up a unity.

When humanity counts seven billion individuals—nine billion in 40 years, according to forecasts—the large number seems to disseminate in itself any alleged unity of “man,” of “human kind” which, in fact, turns out much more similar to the kind of an indefinite multiplication than to the kind of growth of a generic unity. And that could therefore turn out [*s’avérer*] to be the kind of no kind, a blurring of genre or more precisely of species, since *homo sapiens* is a species of the genre *homo*. A species that does not let itself be grasped as such, that is to say *specified* or grasped under an *aspect* that would be distinctive of it: the *aspect* that, all in all, is a term akin to “species.” The species without aspect, or the species characterized by what defines as a rule the zoological “species,” name its inner fertility. The human species could not develop any other aspect than its own exponential reproduction accompanied by a reduction and a destruction of many other living species and by the genetic transformation of many others, and even of itself thanks to technologies such as cloning. More than one, yes, up to nine billion, and not *one* man? Can we imagine that: that a specific identity deploys itself as pure multiplication of units that tend to be only of worth as units of account within the interminable counting? The seme or semen of “man” disseminated in its pure dispersion?

Multiplication also makes the other value of “more than one” appear. Dissemination—this other word by Derrida—steals the sense [*dérobe le sens*] (and the seme, and the semen) from unity and unicity. “More than one” is thus multitude, less as proliferation than as efflorescence, an overabundance and in the end as excess of sense [*sens*].

No doubt the growth of the human population proceeds from the activity of man who never stops pursuing anything else than the reproduction of its conditions of life and of its species, always paving the way for unpredicted lives, lives that do not appear on the table of species, and transcends any novelty that mutations could introduce among the living. As more than one and more than one species, man is itself a mutation of the living: it transforms life, which is maintenance, into enterprise—if one may retain the original meaning of the word, i.e. nothing else than “realization, fulfillment.”

As long as life maintains itself, it responds to rhythms, to the alternation of sleep and wake, action and passion, words exchanged, languages and peoples. When it turns maintenance into enterprise, life breaks the rhythms, creates new ones though, invents complex cadences, but also carries any cadence along an indefinite speeding-up. Here is another aspect of the passage to large numbers: population speed, dimensions of economic bubbles or measures of the universe, everything receives the sign of large numbers. Large numbers are both received and produced by this movement called “globalization” that increases the presumption of unity. But “global” unity cannot be anything else than a unity itself numerical, numerous, cumulative and dissociative at the same time, the “more than one” unfolded [*déplié*] into “one plus one plus one ...”. The “plus,” hence as a sign of addition and not

as an indication of overcoming.

In addition, the unity of the whole is not distinct from the uniformity of additive operation. And yet the value of “plus” changes completely between “one plus one” and “more than one.” The form is reduced to arithmetic writing (+) and our linguistic use distinguishes it from the latter.<sup>4</sup>

1 In the latter use, “more than one,” the issue is to overcome the unity of one. It is not only a question of being able to count many “ones” or several times the same “one”. What is thrown in is neither several, nor a lot, but the status of the “one” itself. But this throw-in is not opposed to addition and multiplication: Derrida's text reads precisely “the double did not *only* add itself to the simple”. Addition is not denied; it is animated by another movement: by going from one to two, therefore from one “one” to two “ones,” I do not place only units side by side—which are furthermore necessarily supposed to be identical in so far as one can be added to the other—but I also affect the nature or the state of the “one” (and as a consequence not only of the first one, but of the second one and any other “one” to come).

This affection is a division and a supplementation or a substitution: of course there is a given one followed by a second one, but as a consequence of this fact the first “one” cannot remain immobile itself. On the one hand, it becomes [*passe dans*] the second—as a “one,” precisely—and it is thus divided from itself. On the other hand, since this division withdraws from the one its propriety of initial unicity, and since in this way one has not started to count—one has not really counted “one plus one”—therefore the beginning or origin establishes [*avère*] its propriety *instead* of what should have begun, what we tend to represent as making the “one” of the first step [*pas*], even though “step,” by itself, divides itself.

One could say that there are two logics of the “one”: one that posits the one as immobile, but raises the difficulty to know how to *step towards* [*passer à*] more than one, and the other that receives the one as the *step* itself, that divides itself by itself and replaces its own initiality [*initialité*].

“One” divided is not “one 1 one” but two “ones” resulting from the division of the first one that has not taken place. Two times, then, and the division itself as initiality of what has not “begun” and therefore a third time. A ternary rhythm, the metric figure of which could be the so-called “amphibrachic” meter - - -, and it does not exclude other possible beats, or the possibility to move [*passer*] to four by splitting and thus doubling up [*dédoublement*] the second time. As we know, this is what happens in Hegelian dialectics, as well as in the Christian Trinity, which could be considered as the unity of the three with this unity itself called “God” (or, in the human analogy employed by Augustine, the unity of memory, intelligence, and love with the person who is only herself in these properties taken together)—without the fourth time indicating any further “unit” but rather the extension or the inner tension of the ternary. Hence the *Geviert* by Heidegger is the figure [*figure*] of the extension or the opening of the world, an extension in which existence is possible according to the *Ereignis* understood as the event of the one (of each one and/or of the one of “Being”) and therefore also as its division or partition.<sup>5</sup>

I do not undertake, obviously, to go through the figures and concepts of the three and the four in philosophy, theology, mysticism, alchemy: I only want to mention how this numeration has been significant throughout our history. A numerology and an arithmosophy has, from time immemorial and well before philosophy, covered and doubled enumeration. The “one, one ...” has always given rise to speculation about the “one” itself, the “one” that is not enumerated. Beyond any numerology

however, it matters to *hear*: because there is a beat [*battue*], a beating [*battement*], a pulsation. May “one” is only possible without this pulsation, which is not numeration and yet already plays numeration, already percussive in the simple “one 1 one 1 one ...”. There is no addition without repetition, and no succession without scansion. No chant of the recitation of tables—“one plus one two, two plus one, three ...”—without suggesting a song, an incantation. It is no longer the count that is important, but the resonance: it is the language of calculus referring back to itself, that which exceeds both calculus and language.

“One,” perhaps, is a matter of rhythm and not of counting, and not of the number of the rhythm—3, 4, etc.—but of movement, of gait [*allure*], of drive [*allant*], and of pulsation. For a long time, the question of the primacy of the one or being was disputed—in particular between the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic traditions. Pico della Mirandola tried to end this debate by writing his *De Ente et Uno*. His solution consists in overcoming the rivalry of the two pretenders by ascribing them both (along with the good and the true) to God, who cannot be grasped by thinking<sup>6</sup> because his unity comes “prior” to that of the one itself. Its unity is actual infinity and at the same time intimate with itself such that “true knowledge” of God's unity is a “total ignorance.”<sup>7</sup>

In other words, there is one and one. There is more of one buried at the heart of the one—and being. If it is impossible, indeed, that a being be without being one, it is yet possible, and maybe even necessary, that the one and being come under a different logic of the One. Distancing oneself from substantive “being”—which indeed readily submits to numeration—so as to approach “Being,” the verb “to be,” this verb that “is not” as Heidegger says and that for this reason calls for its crossing over—not a deletion, but a spacing [*écartement*] (a quartering [*écartèlement*] if I may, or a star-shaped crack [*étoilement*])—one comes to think of this verb as a transitive verb (Heidegger requires sometimes). This non-grammatical transitivity could be rendered thus: Being spaces being out [*écarte l'être*].

Being is thus not “one” being, nor the production of beings one by one. But “Being” forms the act of spacing [*écartement*], distinguishing and dividing beings. This act is one—without being “one being.” It is the unity of the act, the transitive unity that does not precede the “ones” of beings and that does not take place [*survient*] but that is acted or rather acts, that enacts their event [*événement*] advent [*avènement*].

This “one” does not let itself count. It is the one of the upsurge [*poussée*], of the pulsation or the drive [*pulsion*] that makes what is be. A rhythmic one, that is to say both composed, plural in itself and one that eludes counting. We are not talking about counting the times of the rhythm here: we are talking about clapping one's hands or beating the drums, and that is something completely different. We talk about dance and cadence. The apprentice counts his steps, but the dancer does not; the dancer takes steps or is carried and pushed by them.

“Being” is being pushed outside, that is to say ex-isting. Each existent being is one existent being—which does not mean that it is *one* in itself and for itself [*en soi et pour soi*], unique and united—but by the pulsation that projects all and each falls within a very different unity. In this sense, the world is indeed “one” but this unity is taken away [*dérobée*] from us by number—not the magnitude of the number, even though this magnitude itself seems to indulge in adding itself for the sake of adding itself—but because of our struggle to understand what unity could be revealed beneath numeration and multitude.

Of course, the world's unity is not revealed, in the sense we give to this word. It does not come to light, it does neither let itself be known, nor counted. But it testifies of itself always and everywhere. Always and everywhere indeed, in the exorbitant profusion of nature as in the proliferation, or even



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