

Christine Evans

editor's introduction:

theology & the political

Only the political is intrinsically required to declare that the thought that it is, is the thought of the all. It has an organic need for this declaration... The political is impossible without the statement that people, taken indistinctly, are capable of the thought which constitutes the political subject of the post-event. This statement reveals that a political thought is topologically collective, which means that it can only exist as a thought of the all (Badiou par. 5).

In his essay, "Odradek as a Political Category", Lacanian-Marxist theorist Slavoj Žižek reiterates an assertion that has surfaced several times throughout his work: in today's postmodern, postsecular society, our closest approximation to the divine (in all its senseless absurdity) is an encounter with the insanity of state bureaucracy. As evinced by the recent predicament of a Princeton, British Columbia pensioner who – although very much alive – was declared legally dead by the Canada Revenue Agency (which subsequently demanded a tax credit on his estate), the Kafkian dimension of 'insane' divinity which permits a Canada Revenue B.C. spokesman to look us in the face and tell us that we are dead, that we don't exist, offers us a glimpse of "another order beyond mere terrestrial everyday reality" (Žižek 140). Indeed, who is more qualified to confirm our existence than the agencies which uphold the Law and ensure the smooth, regulated functioning of the mysterious but structurally essential symbolic order? We may not be as metaphysically equipped to confirm our existence as we assume! It is clear that the message to the Princeton pensioner is also the standard punchline of innocuous and unfunny comic strips: namely, the horrible irony of the Big Other is not, "You aren't paying your taxes because you aren't alive", but rather, "You aren't alive unless you're paying your taxes."

This collusion of self and symbol, belief and Law, and faith and fact, is precisely the obscene dimension which marks the intersection of theology and the political. Although the two concepts have always shared an abstract heritage (suffice it to recall our mother's warnings to avoid all discussions of religion or politics while in polite company), it is only at the level of the properly symbolic – or, in Badiou's terminology, the "topologically collective" – that 'religion' and 'politics' can effectively transform into their philosophical counterparts of 'theology' and 'the political.' It is therefore the aim of this issue of UBCinephile to accept both theology and the political as coercive and reciprocal objects rooted and comprehended in the realm of the symbolic: if all theology is inherently political and all politics essentially theological, how does the idea of theology manifest in the current cultural sphere? Suffice it

to say that the nature of the theme values meta-commentary over religious practice, and theoretical investigations over practical applications; it seems unnecessary to state that the aim of the issue is not to damn or defend religious or political agendas, argue their empirical or metaphysical validity, or document the appearance of religious iconography in a film. Rather, the contributors to this issue endeavor to investigate the philosophical underpinnings of theology itself, its expression in film, and its political ramifications. The feature articles in this issue explore a variety of manifestations of theology. R. Colin Tait offers an analysis of mass culture and 'Walmartification' in post-9/11 America as exemplified by David O. Russell's *I ♥ Huckabees* (2004), while Jennie Carlsen analyzes Neil Jordan's *The End of the Affair* (1999) within the context of adaptation. I contribute a piece on psychoanalytic structures of belief in Jonathan Glazer's *Birth* (2004), Katherine Pettit offers an illuminating account of the historical and theoretical conditions of post-mortem and 'spirit' photography, and David Hauka submits Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) to a generic reframing as both an action film and a 'Jesus narrative.' Interspersed throughout the issue are thematically-attuned reviews of recent films/books and an interview with filmmaker Su Rynard. Be sure to peruse our website (www.film.ubc.ca/ubcinephile/) for additional feature articles, reviews, and interviews. UBC's Film Studies program is committed to the academic investigation of critical theory in visual culture, and aims to place its student body and faculty at the forefront of advancing cinema and visual studies as a rigorous academic discipline – particularly as an interdisciplinary phenomenon which explores cinema from varied perspectives. I am confident that this issue of UBCinephile reflects the aims of the program, and I hope that you enjoy reading the offerings of the contributors.

Finally, I'd like to publicly express regret over not heeding my temptation to surtitle this issue "The Passion of the Christ(ine)" at the last minute.

Many thanks to everyone who had a hand in this publication, especially Dr. Brian McIlroy, the UBCinephile editorial team (both local and abroad), Kate Castello, Dr. Lisa Coulthard, and Zanna Downes. ☺

WORKS CITED:

- Badiou, Alain. "The Political as a Truth Procedure." [Lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com/badtruth.htm) (<http://www.lacan.com/badtruth.htm>).
- Žižek, Slavoj. "Odradek as a Political Category." [Lacanian Ink](http://www.lacan.com/badtruth.htm) 24/25 (Winter/Spring 2005): 136-155.