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FROM DEVOTION TO COMMITMENT: TOWARDS A CRITICAL ONTOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT¹

ABSTRACT

This article approaches the notion of engagement from the perspective of critical ontology. With language as the starting point of its hermeneutic task, it commences with an etymological analyses of diverse Indo-European words gravitating around the semantic field of the notion of engagement. From these introductory insights obtained by an exercise in comparative linguistics, *devotion* and *commitment* are mapped as two opposite, yet inseparable, *modes of being* of engagement. Both of these modes seem to condition engagement in an ontologically disparate manner. While examining their fundamental structures, some of the canonical concepts of history of philosophy such as being, existence, subjectivity, or world – and also some of its constitutive binary oppositions such as body/mind, individual/collective, transcendence/immanence, light/darkness and sacred/secular – will be reconsidered through the prism of different ontological dispositions that devotion and commitment impose respectively on engagement. The overall aim of this investigation is to bring forth the main existential characteristics of *being-engaged*, by interpreting the roles of *who*, *where*, and *what* of engagement, and in order to provide a fundamental conceptual apparatus for a *critical ontology of engagement*.

KEYWORDS

engagement,
commitment, devotion,
being, subject,
collectivity, world,
ontology

Introduction

What do we mean when we speak of *engagement*? Certainly, this peculiar notion contains meanings that are multiple and layered. In the everyday life, in our *everydayness* Heidegger would say, the first thing that might come to our minds when we think of engagement is a *pledge*, a solemn *promise*. More formally, we understand engagement as an *act* that ties its *subject* to a certain future. Furthermore, engagement is a *commitment* of oneself that is to be

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faithfully and responsibly respected before the others, a *devotion* or *dedication* that comprises an inherent debt, but also guarantees future gain if fulfilled. Arguably, those are some of the ways through which the semantics of the common sense, formed mostly by western philosophical tradition, makes us think of engagement. These formulations describing engagement could multiply themselves here, but that wouldn't be of great use for our examination, as we have already started to grasp the shell of opinion that envelopes the notion of engagement. Albeit, what we can already see as more useful is that, following this semantics, engagement seems to be a highly complex *fiduciary* mechanism – a mechanism depending on *trust* – that involves connection and attachment of the 'individual' to its presupposed 'social realm', a specific relation of 'subjects' to 'things' and 'others', in the 'world'. In order to shake and revive what seems to be taken for granted in the presupposed definitions of engagement mentioned above, one can think of it further as of a *multiple, singular plural* phenomenon in constant *becoming*, that has a number of different *modes of being*; modes that are always already preceded by their correlation, their *being-together*. In other words, we will propose a *critical ontology of engagement* that would subsequently lead us to rethink the well-worn ways of considering some of the canonical concepts of philosophy.

Our first methodological question appears to be: are there to be found multiple and diverse sorts of engagement, or is all engagement basically one and the same thing? Is there 'engagement', or are there 'engagements'? If we decide to examine the phenomenon of engagement empirically, from the standpoint of *existence*, a number of different *types* of engagement will be immediately given at hand – social, political, civic, activist, artistic, religious, academic, and many other forms of engagement promptly appear to us as suitable for many kinds of categorizations. As to put things simply: empirically seen, there are many different *types* of engagement. But the ambiguity of this kind of approach lies in the presupposition of oneness and homogeneity of the engagement itself – when it is taken 'independently' from the adjectives that characterize it. For empiricists, there are many types of engagement, but the underlying concept is always the same, unquestioned, even repressed. On the other hand, if one decides to examine the engagement speculatively, from the standpoint of the *notional being*, it can no longer be the question of *types* of clearly distinct engagements. Rather, there is a *multiplicity of modes* that the notional unity of the engagement encloses *in* its polymorphic, porous and protean membrane. Somewhat unfaithfully departing from different perspectives as Badiou's hypothesis of the *being as a multiplicity*, and/or from the Nancy's understanding of being as *singular plural*, but also echoing Deleuze by positioning *becoming* before *being* – we will strive to analyze and disclose different modes of being of engagement. On the level of its *notional being*, as we will argue later on, engagement is one and multiple, singular and plural – its notional totality is built on an oppositional, fundamentally bipolar tension, that encapsulates a multiplicity of ontological modes. That totality never obtains a determinate, petrified being-in-itself, but is rather constantly in an intense becoming of

what it is. So instead of categorizing all different *types* of engagement that can be perceived empirically, we will prefer to disclose the ‘inner’ tension of engagement, a silent multiplicity that this notion possesses. If *types* are different engagements that empiricists perceive as existing on an *ontic* level, than the *modes* express something more basic, something that is to be found on an *ontological* level of the notion of engagement.

Finding the Way around the Notion of Engagement

How can one *access* then to the ontological level of the notion of engagement? Does one have to break the mentioned shell of opinion, to pierce the membrane lining the notion in order to access its ontological disposition? Let’s stop here for a moment. Isn’t this a false question in the first place, a mirage that the common opinion creates? The very first thing to ask would rather be: why have we chosen the term ‘notion’, in order to speak of engagement? The explanation of this choice is an important step that calls for a brief digression. The term ‘notion’ is similar to the term ‘concept’. But a notion, unlike the concept, seems to take into account its own context, historicity, and non-linear, disruptive timeliness – what Foucault would call, its *discursive formation*. Also, the term notion stands for a changing opinion, a widespread understanding, as well as it stands for a rigorous theoretical articulation of sense. The ‘notion’ blurs somehow the limits between critique and what is being critiqued, between the ontic and the ontological level of a phenomenon. By observing a phenomenon through the kaleidoscopic lens of *notionality*, all of its aspects become not only *present-at-hand*, but also, they become perfectly *handy* (or ready-to-hand, if we are to express this claim rigorously in Heideggerian terms).

We propose that the ‘notion’ has a higher potential for exposing the plasticity of the phenomenon, than does the term ‘concept’. When considering something as a notion, there is suddenly no more the gap that separates the immediate knowledge, and the ‘hidden’, deeper sense, the ‘essence’ that is somehow laying in the depths that are to be revealed. Instead, there are no longer any depths, and a surface is the only thing that’s left – a surface made of *traces*. All meanings are always already there, and by ‘there’ we mean *in the language*. On that linguistic surface of a notion, where the depths of the concept are being reflected onto the superficiality of the opinion – in form of traces of intensive passages, thus making the conceptual bottom inessential – the ontological level of any phenomenon is fairly easily accessible. On the notional surface, everything is always already there. Although, what announces itself then is a work of discernment, a proper hermeneutic enterprise. To articulate different senses of a notion, is to transform it from its everyday determination to a philosophical one, and vice versa. To grasp a notion (the word in German is *Begriff*) is, as Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, not only to go from word to concept, but also from concept to word, as well as to keep that path open in both directions (Gadamer 2004: 565). It is precisely in that round-trip (*aller-retour*), in this back and forth (*va-et-vient*), that the notion (of engagement)

discloses itself, neither merely as a thing, nor as an abstract idea, but as an unstable and misty bunch of traces.

Let's start then from the *'aller'* – from the word. What we have already presupposed as definitions of engagement in the first lines, converges with Adriana Zaharijević's findings, discussed in the article entitled *Engagement: thinking and acting together*. In particular, this occurs when she writes that engagement is implying inherently the ideas of 'publicity and commitment': "Contracts, companies, endeavors and wedding engagements are such recognized forms of engagement, that in some European languages they function as synonyms for the later term. Each of these initiatives demands mutuality and formal promise, whose formality is assured by the public domain. In a similar vein, *commitment* [*posvećenost*'] is woven in the very tissue of this word" [My translation from Serbian] (Zaharijević 2017: 20). In this definition, we see engagement as an important *subjects/object/others* mechanism, that organizes the social existence of *homo fidei*; and the notion that is of central importance for our investigation on *modes of engagement*, is the one of *commitment*, because commitment appears here to be an inherent *condition* of engagement. Or shall we say rather the one of *devotion*? Or, even of *dedication*, *allegiance*, or *loyalty*? How do we translate the serbo-croatian word '*posvećenost*'? The starting point of our ontology of engagement will be, as it occurs, language. Language as the skin of a notional surface that hides no depths, comparable to the libidinal skin that Lyotard famously describes in his *Libidinal economy*. By resisting to the general linguistic domination of English – the *lingua franca* of our days, and also by avoiding falling into the trap of what Derrida calls *mondialatinization* (Derrida 2000: 23), we will now shift our attention to Slavic languages, in order to reveal the intense relation between *commitment* and *devotion*, and designate them as diverse ontological modes of *engagement*.

Examining the Serbo-Croatian Word '*posvećenost*'

The words *commitment* and *devotion* are commonly translated to serbo-croatian as '*posvećenost*'. To understand the polysemy of this word, heavily charged by its semantic and/or cultural heritage, we must stress in the first place, that we are dealing here with an *untranslatable* term (Cassin 2004: XVII-XXIV). Having therefore dismissed the possibility of a direct, unanimous and unique translation of the word '*posvećenost*', we are brought to perform its morphological and etymological linguistic analyses. The term '*posvećenost*' builds from the prefix *po-* (similar to english prefix *co-*, french *con-* and german *ver-*), which means both 'on top of' and 'together', thus showing the auto-reflexive character of the term in which it takes part; it has for its etymological root the Slavic noun '*svet*' (practically translated in English as 'world', but hiding a much more complex semantic structure, as we will show), and the suffix *-ost* (comparable the french *-ance*, german *-keit*, english *-ity* and *-ness*) meaning 'having the quality of'. The etymological root of '*posvećenost*', the substantive '*svet*', is of major interest for our archeological investigation – given the ambiguity that it

engenders in all of its variations across Slavic languages (while the prefix *po-* and the suffix *-ost* provide us with more peripheral, more subtle conceptual tools).

The first, and the oldest division in the heterogeneous semantic field of the word '*svet*', distinguish '*svet*' as 'light' and '*svet*' as 'world'. As it is noted in the entry defining the term '*svet*' in the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, this ambiguity is a common phenomenon to all Slavic languages. The idea of 'light' is, without dispute, considered by linguists as primary meaning of '*svet*', which determines all of its other meanings. The secondary meaning of '*svet*' is 'world'. Thus, in Slavic languages the concept of 'world' contains, and even presupposes, a visual intuition, by which *to be* (someone or something), is *to be at the light*. Following this etymology we could say that through the lens of Slavic languages, the world is defined as 'a space on an open light'. Theoretical implications that this conception of the world engenders will be taken into account later on, but for the moment we must stress that '*svet*' differs importantly from the Anglo-Saxon '*world*' and German '*Welt*', which both share etymological meanings such as 'human existence' and 'age of men', and the french '*monde*' deriving from Latin '*mundus*' and meaning 'something arranged, distinct and pure'. Yet another meanings derive from the word '*svet*', offering an entirely different pathway for pursuing our investigation. Namely, the slavic 'light' has also parented the serbo-croatian adjective '*sveti*', meaning 'saint, sacred'. This semantic affinity is also without doubt relevant for the majority of other Slavic languages, but there are more theological explanations to this philological phenomenon, then there are linguistic ones. The 'saint' and the 'sacred' are 'luminous' and 'bright', because the "element of *light* is itself the divinity that tolerates no obscurity, impurity or (according to later meaning) sin" (Cassin 2004: 1260). Those metaphysical approximations, perpetuated mostly by the orthodox Christian theology, can be dismantled linguistically by showing, as A. Brückner does in his *Etymologic dictionary of polish language*, that the root '*svet*' as 'light' derives from the avestan *spaēta* – 'white'; and that '*svet*' as 'sacred' derives from the avestan *spenta* – 'sacred' (which is the equivalent of greek *hagios* and Latin *sanctus*). But still, the approximate meanings that theology has imposed, are deeply inhabiting the modern slavic languages, and as such must be seriously considered. Even more so, having in mind that this ambiguity is to be developed and used in a great number of literary texts, from Russian folk tales (as shown by V. Propp) to Dostoevsky, confirming always anew its symbolic power and its decisive role in the construction of a specific *Weltanschauung*. We shall not neglect that this *Weltanschauung* will, in extension, give linguistic birth to many other complex words that range from '*posveta*' meaning 'dedication' (equivalent to Latin '*sacrare*' or '*sanctificare*') to '*osveta*' meaning 'revenge' (equivalent to Latin '*vindicare*'), but also '*svetac*' which stands for 'saint', '*svěštenik*' meaning 'priest' or '*Prosvetiteljstvo*' designating the 'Enlightenment' (Skok 1971: 370, 371) and many others. All those meanings and derivatives of the substantive '*svet*', and especially the ones introduced by theology, haunt the untranslatable word '*posvećenost*' – itself corresponding only imperfectly to the English words *commitment* or *devotion* – that stay hidden

for the *immediate* consciousness of the contemporary speakers, and attain, as such, the perfidious aims of, not only modeling the dominant discursive formations, but also determining engaged political and social practices.

Articulating the Modes of Engagement

What we retain from this short linguistic inquiry is decisive for our further ontological examination of engagement. The etymology of the word '*posvećenost*' offers us powerful tools for articulating what we have already designated as modes of engagement. The linguistic fact that the notion '*posvećenost*' can be understood both as *commitment* and *devotion*, is providing us with the very archeological structure of the ontology of engagement. In other words, the contradictory unity that commitment and devotion find in the notion of '*posvećenost*', is to be taken as the very condition of engagement. All engagement requires devotion/commitment, which is not the case in the opposite sense. Without this correlative semantic field, there is no ground on which engagement can build its multiple senses, thus sliding into nothingness. The paradoxes of that field become thus the paradoxes of engagement, and it's different, often opposed senses, can be taken as modes of being of engagement. Furthermore, it is through this archeological structure that an important phenomenological difference between *commitment* and *devotion* is disclosed. Seen in the *light* of the serbo-croatian untranslatable word '*posvećenost*', the presupposed synonymy of commitment and devotion is put into question. A confirmation of that doubt comes swiftly from an examination of the very Indo-European heritage of those two words.

So, how does all that looks in the linguistic praxis? The infinitive of the reflexive verb '*posvetiti se*', deriving from the noun '*posvećenost*' and meaning formally 'to dedicate' and/or 'to commit oneself', can be understood literally in two ways: on the one hand, it means to become 'sacred' and/or 'saint' by enacting personal *devotion*; on the other hand, it means to 'become the world', 'to *worldize* oneself', to show personal *commitment* in the *worldly* affairs. If we consider now the etymology of the words 'devotion' and 'commitment', we will see that they are somewhat converging with those two literal meanings. Let's observe the word 'devotion' in the first place. This term derives from the Latin *devotionem* (nominative *devotio*), composed from the prefix *de-* 'down, away' and the substantive verb *vovere* 'to promise solemnly, pledge, dedicate, vow;'. In its later significations devotion will also stand for 'piety', 'profound religious emotion, awe, reverence' and 'an act of religious worship, a religious exercise'. Finally, the Latin verb that corresponds to the action of devotion is *devovere*, and it means to "dedicate by a vow, sacrifice oneself, promise solemnly". This seems to correspond closely, but not without subtle differences, to the meaning of '*posvećenost*' as 'becoming sacred'. On the other hand, the word 'commitment', a presupposed synonym of 'devotion', shows utterly different etymological and semantic features. Built from the substantive verb *to commit*, itself deriving from the Latin *committere* 'to unite, connect, combine;

to bring together' (from prefix *com-* 'with, together' and substantive verb *mittere* 'to release, let go; send, throw'), the word commitment will later render meanings such as 'an action of officially consigning to the custody of the state', 'the pledging or engaging of oneself, a pledge, a promise' or later 'an obligation, an engagement'. Commitment thus seems to correspond to the literal meaning of '*posvećenost*' which is 'to become the world'. On the one hand thus, we have *devotion* as a mode of engagement that is characterized by a religious worldview, presupposing the ontological centrality of the religious faith, the sacred and the divine; when on the other hand we have *commitment*, which reflects a rather secular image of the world – a fiduciary world to which the engaged subject must nonetheless be loyal.

Before going further into details, we should briefly pay attention to the way that those two modes of engagement are articulated. What seems to 'lack' in the convergence between the two ways of understanding '*posvećenost*' on the one hand, and devotion and commitment on the other, seems to be the original meaning of the substantive '*svet*' which is '*svetlost*' – *light*. Rather unexpectedly and nonetheless quite adequately, the idea of light seems to serve well as an explanation of the original articulation of different modes of engagement which are devotion and commitment. In devotion and commitment, the light is a hidden element which is to be deduced from a hermeneutic enterprise of those two notions. The different roles which the idea of light plays in the semantic and cultural context of those two modes of engagement, determine firstly their ontological characteristics (as far as they are considered strictly on a notional level), but also subsequently determines the being of the engaged subject, the subject structured through its own engagement. We shall thus observe that *subjectivation through engagement* is not quite the same process when it comes to devotion or when it comes to commitment. The idea of light in devotion and commitment has different natures, sources, directions and consequences, thus articulating the differences between those two modes of engagement. Let's take now a closer look at this problematics of engagement and shed some light on each of its modes separately.

The Transcendent Lights of Devotion

As it was pointed out already, the term devotion derives from the religious discourse. But how does that shape the phenomenon of engagement? How this indication helps us to understand its notional being? We propose take one notorious example from the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to discern the proceedings of the devotional engagement. Our example is situated in the very first lines of the Gospel of John, and it reads: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. If we remember that we have shown that 'to devote' (*devovere*) means to 'dedicate by a vow', we see clearly the correspondence between this definition and the cited passage. When dedicating the absolute primality to the Word, God is commanding it through an imperative clause (*genetho*) – the perfect ontogenetic grammatical

form, as Agamben points out (Agamben 2013: 18). God proclaims the *logos* not only by promising it, but also by being himself *Logos*. God is his own *speech act*, God is a *performative being*, and his devotion to the commandment of *logos* is so intense, that they are to be taken as identical and one. God is devotion without subjectivity, he *is* the Word, a being generated on its own command. In consequence, the divine entity commands the devotion of humans to *logos*, as devotion to himself. But how the ‘ignorant human flock’, the imperfect yet constitutive *others of God*, could perceive and understand the Word? To what and how should they vow? The idea of light will be coupled to these proclamations very quickly, through the figure of Jesus, to resolve this problem. Few lines further in the prologue of the Gospel of John, the vow (Word and/or God), will be translated in the idea of light: “In him [Jesus] was life; and the life was the light of men. / And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”. Yet, Jesus is not a figure of the devotional subject, but the *light*, the devotion (Vow-Word-God) itself – as it will be repeated multiple times through the text. Therefore, another character must be introduced to fulfill that function: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. / The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. / He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. / That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”. That man named John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, is the prototypical witness of the divine Light, a paradigmatic figure of the subject of devotional engagement, a prototype of a devoted subject. His devotion is a matter of passive receiving of the divine light and active bearing witness to it, the act of an absolute voluntary servitude that will enable the light to reach “every man that cometh into the world”.

Human coming into the world is in this context always already an exposure to the divine light. But devotion is the presupposed ‘second birth’, in the sense that the subject accepts this light and the devotion to it. Ritually, the moment from which the subject becomes devoted corresponds to baptism. John was baptizing first Christians in the lake just so they could see the light when pulling their heads out of water. More concretely, in an ontotheologic sense, this devotional engagement will structure the human subject as *sacred*, thus enabling it to transmit the light further – of course, firstly on the unfaithful ones. The structuring of a solid, total, and unquestionable subject is the main point for grasping devotion as a mode of engagement. Its unavoidable correlate is of course the radical annihilation of the world, because still – “the darkness comprehended it not”. Finally, the devoted transmission of the *light*, the ‘*re-ligare*’ of the religion, is only the means in service of an end that consists in building the specifically engaged subjectivity. Therefore, the devoted subject is to be considered as a disciple, and the good disciple becomes a saint – simply by being a *good witness*.

As we have clearly stipulated already, our aim is not here to examine the *types*, but rather the *modes* of engagement. Therefore, our inquiry on devotion is not an inquiry on the religious type of engagement, but rather on what

modality of being the religious field gives to the engagement through devotion. Our next step will be thus to discern the philosophical implications of devotion. And this is not a purely methodological or formal decision to make, but a decision that has historical and epistemological arguments to rely on. Nietzsche (all too) famously wrote in fragment 125 of *The Gay Science*: “God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him. How can we *console* [my italics] ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?” (Nietzsche 2001: 120) From these lines we can imagine how devotion has detached itself from the religious field, how it has repressed its own religious origin, but stayed nonetheless amongst humans as a principal way of building subjectivities and societies on trust, rather than on belief – just as Nietzsche, the thinker of the eternal return of the same, could propose. That repeated appearance of devotion reflects itself clearly in the philosophical tradition. The proof that devotion has survived the murder of God is exactly to be found in the idea of light, which seems to repeat itself after the ‘death of God’, notably in the Age of *Enlightenment*. So, firstly there was a divine light, and the repetition of that light is situated in the Enlightenment. Solely, this light is no longer divine, but it is the light of *reason*, a *rational light*. The human subject which was previously constituted through the devotion to God, is then constituted through devotion to Reason. Just as in the religious field where the divine light was structurally divided from the world of darkness, in the foundational doctrines of the Enlightenment such as the cartesian one, the reason is divided from matter. The paradigm of this idea is to be found notably in Descartes who, in the *Principles of Philosophy*, makes a famous distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. This substance dualism, highly compatible with the Christian tradition, introduces a substantial hierarchy in which mind prevails over body, reason over matter, and subject over object. It is clear therefore on which side is the light, and on which side is the darkness, and thus, what is worthy of subject’s devotion, and what is not. The light of reason is the cause to which a good cartesian subject should be devoted and the world is thus reduced to a pure extension, deprived of all possibility to be taken otherwise than as an indifferent physical space. The enactment of doubt is the baptism of the devoted subject in the context of the Enlightenment. The ‘only’ flaw of that doubt is that its cartesian paradigm represents a mere methodological *detour*, leading to an inevitable fall into certitude... Certitude of the existence of *reason*, of *subject* and finally, all over again, of *God*. The substantial counterparts of those three categories – *matter*, *object* and *world*, aren’t even considered as worthy of attentive philosophical reflection, or at least, it goes so for Descartes who will not consider much the term ‘world’, except in his book very interestingly entitled *The World, or Treatise on Light*. In this early text which was published only posthumously,

Descartes will dismiss the subject, the *Man*, from the material *World*, in order to consider physics of matter, space, light, cosmos, etc. He will justify that move by showing in particular the “difference between our sensations and the things that produce them”. From this ‘hidden’ starting point, the philosopher will later deepen this separation and affirm the primordial position of the subject in his later works, such as the *Principles of Philosophy* and the *Passions of the Soul*, thus building his metaphysics and theory of mind separately from the material human condition. The consequences of his theory will be considerable, as practically all modern philosophies will somehow rely on it. If we fast-forward through the history of philosophy, we will see that, having a solid foundation in the cartesian doctrine, the centrality of the subject and its *sacred* status will endure all through the Enlightenment. In consequence, devotion will prevail as the predominant mode of engagement that we can deduce from a whole set of theories conceived by a number of (irrefutably important) thinkers, from Locke to Kant, with a noteworthy exception of Spinoza who was clearly refusing the anthropocentric standpoint. This disposition will remain relevant at least until Hegel, whose theory of subjectivity could be considered as an announcement of a turning point, an announcement of the shift that is to come. Still, one will have to wait for the upcoming of Marx and his dialectical materialism on the one hand, and the philosophy of Nietzsche on the other, to see this reductionist approach to the *world* generally changed.

Instead of going further into an overview of this era of centrality of the subject, we should rather ask now: how this helps us to understand the contemporary meanings of the notion of engagement? The devotional subject, as we have seen it until now, is a subject ‘blinded by the lights’ – whether this light is divine or rational. The devotional engagement (from the point of view of Christianity and Enlightenment) is an engagement with a blind spot. And it seems that it is a considerably tremendous spot that remains blind in devotion. Whole *worlds* are out of its sight. Subjectivity and subject’s transformation to the status of *sacred*, are the only instance and process that count in devotional engagement. All *worldly* reality and its proceedings remain out of site and hidden paradoxically behind the light. They are *there*, they *exist*, but they remain *unseen*. We have given some examples of what that meant in the two above mentioned different discursive formations, but what does it mean today?

In the late capitalism, the divine and the rational seem to be sublated (*aufheben*) in the idea of capital. How could that be explained through the notional apparatus of devotion that we have introduced until now? Where are to be mapped the notions of *light*, *sacred* and *world* in the capitalist discourse? Let’s take them into consideration one by one. The only, however, hidden symbolic light in capitalism, is to be found in the phenomenon of *fiduciary money*. How come, one could ask? Fiduciary money is the money based uniquely on *social, interpersonal trust*, a general belief that is without God; or rather, the trust that is between humans as they were gods – *weak gods*. Our hypothesis that the symbolic source of light in capitalism is money, can be explained only *objectively* and *materially* (very unlike in divine or rational light), and not

abstractly as one could expect. Gold, shiny as it is and light-reflecting, comes to mind immediately. In different historical epochs, gold has served to measure monetary value. From the end of the 19th century, the values of currencies were internationally and formally based on the value of gold, accordingly to the famous ‘gold standard’. In brief, what shined with this specific light in the developing stages of capitalism was gold. Nowadays this light is hidden much better. It is practically imperceptible, because the contemporary capitalist light is nothing else but the light of the electronic blip on the bank server. This minimal materiality of physical light is however the measurement unit of a general *interpersonal trust*, which translates itself into the symbolic register of trust as money. And as one could suspect, this ontological circle is hermetically closed, as the users of money, its subjects, are also a sort of a kind of monetary entity, as it is proposed by Pierre Klossowski in his genuinely provocative little book, *The Living Currency*.

We already see thus that there is no place for a *world*, neither for a transcendent figure of God, in the auto-reflexive relation between the light of capital and the capitalist subject. The contemporary devotional subject is a good witness of that light and could become *sacred*. He never sees the light, but unconditionally believes in it and attributes infinite credit to it. He doubts many things, but never puts into question the monetary system. His devotion is limited to an unquestionable servitude. In the hidden shine of the almost immaterial object (in a *trace*, perhaps?) that constitutes the fiduciary money², lies a whole symbolic order of the capitalist project of annihilation of the world. This absence of world to be attained is the very condition of devotional (inter)subjectivity in capitalism. The ‘light of the capital’ is reflecting strictly human desires, judgments and values, and not the world or some material reality, which it destroys without even taking into the account. In that manner, the world is easily repressed in capitalism, but yet another important devotional entity disappears, or rather, becomes incorporated in the subject. Unlike in the previous appearances of devotion, in capitalism, God is neither ‘transcendent’ nor ‘death’, he is “drawn into the fate of man”, as Walter Benjamin famously proposes in his short essay named *Capitalism as Religion*. How could Benjamin help us to understand devotion and its specific subjectivity in the capitalist context? Firstly, he sees the capitalism as a permanent religious cult that “knows no specific dogma, no theology”. Also, he sees that capitalism is a blaming cult, unlike any other that has preceded it. Benjamin writes, and we cite lengthy:

2 Banknotes and coins have obviously become secondary monetary objects a while ago. But even those pieces of metal and paper, as Benjamin considers, had a religious aspect : “Compare the holy iconography [*Heiligenbildern*] of various religions on the one hand with the banknotes of various countries on the other: The spirit that speaks from the ornamentation of banknotes” (Benjamin 1996 : 289). How could he describe the presence of spirit in the light of the electronic blip – we will never know, but somehow we could imagine he would provide us with ingenious insights.

In the essence of this religious movement that is capitalism lies – bearing until the end, until the finally complete infusion of blame into God – the attainment of a *world of despair still only hoped for* [my italics]. Therein lies the historical enormity of capitalism: religion is no longer the reform of being, but rather its obliteration. From this expansion of despair in the religious state of the world, healing is expected. God's transcendence has fallen, but he is not dead. He is drawn into the fate of man. This passage of 'plantetary man' [*Planeten Mensch*] through the house of despair is, in the absolute loneliness of his path, the ethos that Nietzsche describes. This man is the *Übermensch*, the first who knowingly begins to realize the capitalist religion. The fourth characteristic [of the religious structure of capitalism] is that its God must become concealed and may only be spoken of in the zenith of his culpability. The cult becomes celebrated before an immature deity, [while] every image, every idea of it injures the secret of its maturity. (Benjamin 1996: 289)

What does this tell us about the capitalist devotional subject? This tells us that the human subjects are living on the planet 'Human', a *worldless* planet, hoping for a world of despair to come. The *Stimmung* of that being consists paradoxically in guilt and absolute loneliness. The non-dogmatic and strictly cultic capitalist religion doesn't promise an atonement, but promotes the perpetuity of moral guilt and economic debt. Likewise, this subjectivity is woven uniquely out of intensities of despair. The despair comes from the fact that this subjectivity is itself an 'unmatured deity', a weak deity with no world, a child without a playground. Instead of a playground, there is rather a theater scene, which is set in front of a big mirror, standing on the place where the spectators should. Humans are the artists and the consumers of their own art, godly only inasmuch as they are tragic.

How does that look concretely? One of the paradigms of the contemporary devotional subjectivity is the figure of the so called *populist leader*. In our capitalist reality, populist leaders are the perfect witnesses of the capital, devoted to reflect the logic of capitalism by being its blind counterparts. From their state institutional positions, they 'realize the capitalist religion' by embodying the paradoxical figure of a deeply failed and weak *Übermensch*. Their devotion can be completely resumed in the enhancing of social trust (or mistrust, if needed) in the ideas which are presumably blind for the light of the capital, while being nothing else but its mere reflections. These discriminatory ideas are often nationalistic, racist and conservative, but their content is not their end – they are forged with one only aim, which is to preserve the domination of the capital. Populists are likewise witnessing the light of the capital, and they do comprehend it, they are even the saints of the capital, but they share that light only as transformed to the level when it becomes unrecognizable, shaped by a perfectly desperate cynicism of a devotee, as the capitalist religion commands. We could say much more here about the phenomenon of populist leaders, but that would lead us to consider the type of engagement that this devotional figure represents, and not the mode of being of engagement that it reflects. Let's take then one seemingly very different example: the

ordinary, middle class, non-activist subject, devoted to ecology. Generally, its devotion to ecology as a mode of engagement which structures it as an ‘ecologist’, is nothing else but a set of rituals that correspond to the cultic religion of capitalism. What is commonly perceived as eco-responsible behavior nowadays is, for example, having a compost bin on the balcony or in the garden, buying eco-responsible goods, having an electric car, etc. All those consumerist behaviors never put into question the main enemy of ecology, which is the capital and its monetary system. So, as Benjamin could propose, we can say that this is a tragically desperate behavior. This behavior, which can be nonetheless considered as engaged, builds in one devotional movement the subjectivity of a devotee and annihilates the world, both symbolically and materially. The devotionally engaged subject in capitalism paradoxically finds comfort in the trust on which the ‘house of despair’ is built. Capitalist religion offers no redemption, just on the contrary, its founding principle is that the change is impossible. This still unshaken trust in the eternity of the capitalist system is possible, in return, thanks to the devotion as a predominantly present mode of engagement. But are those claims sufficient to refuse the notion of engagement altogether, to deny its radical subversive potential? Certainly not so. The pharmacological semantics of the word ‘*posvećenost*’ impose that on us. How is then commitment different from devotion?

Committed Engagement: The Collectivity as a *Clearing*

The notion of commitment presupposes an entirely different ontological structure of engagement – of the ‘engaged’ and the ‘*gage*’³ itself – than the one presupposed by devotion. In commitment, the engaged is no longer a separate subject, an ‘I, myself’, but rather, a *collectivity*, a ‘we’ or a ‘with’. The ‘*gage*’ in commitment is also no longer a subjective destiny, but rather a destiny of a world. This structure is traced on the very semantic surface of the word ‘commitment’, that is, as we have already shown, deriving from the latin *committere*, meaning ‘to unite, connect, combine; to bring together’ from *com* ‘with, together’ + *mittere* ‘to release, let go; send, throw’. If we turn back anew also to the the serbo-croatian word ‘*posvećenost*’, we will remember that its literal meanings — ‘to become a world’, ‘to *worldize* oneself’ — somewhat correspond to those of ‘commitment’. What all these insights bring to the table when it comes to our *critical ontology of engagement*? Or else, what do they remove from that ‘table’ in order to set a different ontological disposition? In the following lines we will try to respond to those two resolutely interconnected questions. The response to the second question (which is fairly easy compared to the first one) seems to be obvious already. For the ontology of engagement conditioned by commitment, the whole traditional vocabulary of metaphysics that was fueling devotion becomes obsolete, unusable, it becomes an obstacle on the pathway of interpreting engagement as commitment. Traditional concepts such as subject,

3 The french word ‘*gage*’ can be translated for the purposes of this text as ‘guarantee’.

object, nature, spirit, reason, matter, others, world, and maybe even more so *being* or *existence*, need to be radically reconsidered in order to perform the hermeneutics of commitment – the very semantics of the word imposes this.

We will start to sketch our ontology of commitment by firstly analyzing its prefix *co-*. In complete contrast to the ontological structure of devotion, where there is firstly a ‘subject’ which by the means of devotion obtains the ‘with’ and joins the ‘others’ (thus paradoxically obtaining an even more stable subjectivity), in commitment, the *with*, the *co-*, precedes the subjective being and puts it radically into question. This turning point in the history of first philosophy is undoubtedly introduced by Martin Heidegger, who characterizes the *Being-with* (*Mitsein*) as one of the constitutive modes of human existence, or of the *Dasein* to be more precise. But furthermore, it is Jean-Luc Nancy, initially inspired by Heidegger, who will resolutely posit the *with* as a minimal ontological premise. In *Being Singular Plural* he writes: “Heidegger clearly states that being-with (*Mitsein*, *Miteinandersein*, and *Mitdasein*) is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself. Given this, it needs to be made absolutely clear that *Dasein*, far from being either ‘man’ or ‘subject’, is not even an isolated and unique ‘one’, but is instead always the one, each one, with one another [*l’un-avec-l’autre*]. If this determination is essential, then it needs to attain to the co-originary dimension and expose it without reservation” (Nancy 2000: 26). Nancy explains this co-originary of Being by introducing a concept articulated in three apposite words, pronounced in one single stroke – *Being Singular Plural*. We cannot help but cite him again: “*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence. In turn, coessence, or *being-with* (being-with-many), designates the essence of the *co-*, or even more so, the *co-* (the *cum*) itself in the position or guise of an essence. In fact, coessentiality cannot consist in an assemblage of essences, where the essence of this assemblage as such remains to be determined. In relation to such an assemblage, the assembled essences would become [mere] accidents. Coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality, sharing in the guise of assembling, as it were. This could also be put in the following way: if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the “with” that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition” (Nancy 2000: 30).

This ontological reversal that transforms the *ego sum* into *ego cum*, gives to commitment, as far as it is a mode of being of engagement, a peculiar political dimension. From this dimension emerges what Nancy calls collective [*collégial*] power, a power which is “neither exterior to the members of the collective [*collège*] nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity [*collégialité*] as such” (Nancy 2000: 30). In commitment, the subject is dispersed, shattered, dis-posed, which doesn’t mean it is simply dismissed as impotent. It is rather translated and transformed, replaced by the term *singular*, that keep its significant place in the co-ontology of Nancy. But, not without another twist: the force of the singular resides only in its *plurality*. The subjective can therefore be seen only through the prism of collectivity, fundamentally as a *being-with*, as a knot in the web of coexistence. The *ego sum* thus

finds its truth in *nos sumus*, the ‘we’ takes the primordial ontogenetic position that was once held by the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. But then, *who* is engaged in commitment? The fact that Nancy redefines what is used to be called ‘subject’ as a *singularity* that appears always already as exposed to *sharing*, as a *being-shared* that is foremost *between us*, doesn’t mean that he is entirely rejecting the figure of *Dasein*, for example. At least, not necessarily. Refusing the possibility of a (real) philosophical solipsism, doesn’t mean refusing altogether the idea of *Dasein*; quite on the contrary – *Dasein* is the *with* of multiple, equiprimordial modes that compose its ontological structure – *Dasein is co-determined*.

We can ask now our question anew: *who* is engaged in commitment? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger consecrates an entire chapter to the analyses of the ‘who’ of an average *Dasein*, providing us with some precious insights for our own analyses of the ‘subject’ of commitment, or rather of a *committed plural singularity*. In the paragraph 25, he starts his analysis by seemingly accepting the traditional conception of the subjectivity, with one only aim in view though – its complete *destruction*: “*Dasein* is an entity which is in each case I myself; its Being is in each case mine” (Heidegger 1962: 150). Anyway, he draws the reader’s attention to the fact that this definition only “*indicates an ontologically constitutive state*”, being in fact nothing else but a rough *ontical* observation. And still, he continues: “The question of the ‘who’ answers itself in terms of the ‘I’ itself, the ‘subject’, the ‘Self’. The ‘who’ is what maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its Experiences and ways of behavior, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in doing so” (Heidegger, *ibid*). This substantiality of the ‘subject’ is indeed an ontological clue for determining the entity of the *Dasein*’s ‘who’ in Heidegger’s view, yet what prevents him to draw an ontological conclusion from that clue, is the very givenness of the ‘I’ (the givenness of the ‘thinking thing’, concept that he reproaches to the cartesian theory of subjectivity as misleading), its ‘presence-at-hand’ which belongs to “entities whose character is not that of *Dasein*”. Having dismissed this stance as incompatible with *Dasein*’s character, finally, Heidegger writes: “It could be that the ‘who’ of everyday *Dasein* just is *not* the ‘I myself’” (Heidegger 1962: 150). And effectively, the *Dasein*, the ‘who’ of commitment that we are searching for here, is co-determined by its various co-originary, equiprimordial modes of being, amongst which the most important for us are named Being-in-the-world and Being-with Others. While we have already exposed some insights on the meanings of *Being-with* and its significance for understanding commitment, and having in mind that we will later on focus on some characteristics of *Being-in-the-world*, we shall now analyze the meaning of *Being-in* as such – in order to answer the question of ‘who’ is committed in engagement. What already announces itself as a pathway to follow in our upcoming analyses, is that we will rather speak about the ‘there’ than about ‘someone’, because, as Heidegger writes: “[...] man’s ‘*substance*’ is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather *existence*” (Heidegger 1962: 153).

So, how does the always already *committed Dasein* of engagement factually *exist*? The very root verb of the latin word *comittere*, which is *mittere*, meaning

“to release, let go; send, throw” drives us directly to Heidegger’s definition of Dasein as *thrown projection*, which in return provides a theoretical explanation of the given philological fact. Let’s dive briefly into chapter 5, division 1 of *Being and Time* to try to expose the ontological concept of *thrownness*. The Dasein is “unveiled in Being-delivered-over to the ‘there’ [to the *Da* of Dasein]. In the evasion itself the there *is* something disclosed. This characteristic of Dasein’s Being – this ‘that it is’ – is veiled in its ‘whence’ and ‘whither’, yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the ‘*thrownness*’ of this entity into its ‘there’; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the ‘there’. The expression ‘thrownness’ is meant to suggest the *facticity of its being delivered over*” (Heidegger 1962: 174). Simon Critchley explains what Heidegger means when writing with complexity about the phenomenon of *thrownness* in clear and simple terms: “Thrownness (Geworfenheit) is the simple awareness that we always find ourselves somewhere, namely delivered over to a world with which we are fascinated, a world we share with others” (Critchley, internet). But furthermore, this thrownness is, as Heidegger explains, ‘disclosed’: in the Dasein’s state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) and through its mood (*Stimmung*). We find ourselves always already in a state-of-mind that discloses our Dasein in its thrownness, and simultaneously, we are always already ‘assailed’ by a certain mood, an attunement that comes “neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside’, but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being” (Heidegger 1962: 176). What could that teach us about the committed entity and about the *being-committed* in general? Firstly, this shows that in committed engagement, we are not away from the risk of an ‘unreflecting devotion to the ‘world’ because the states-of-mind discloses Dasein in an evasive turning-away which is also called the *falling* of Dasein; and *falling* is characterized by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. In this case, the thrownness is disclosed in its very veiling. Heidegger gives us also the example of *bad moods* such as fear, boredom and more fundamentally *anxiety*, to depict how Dasein can become blind to itself, to the others and to the environment with which it is concerned. Effectively, one can be committed in an ‘inauthentic’ way. But also, if commitment presupposes the thrownness of Dasein into a state-of-mind, it also “*implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matter to us*” (Heidegger 1962: 177) – and we commit ourselves by definition to something that *matter* to us.

By pursuing this rhythm of veiling and unveiling, we can see that the Dasein, as it were to resist to the overall domination of its primordial thrownness, has another equiprimordial mode of being. Heidegger calls it *understanding*. But, what that has to do with *commitment*? Being-there *is* understanding, and understanding ‘has in itself the existential structure which we call ‘*projection*’. The word ‘*Entwurf*’ that Heidegger uses is translated in English as ‘projection’. Translators of *Being and Time*, Macquarrie and Robinson, explain that this noun and cognate verb ‘*entwerfen*’ mean basically to ‘throw’ something ‘off’ or ‘away’ from one, which once more coincides with the meaning of the Latin root verb ‘*mittere*’ (‘to release, let go; send, throw’) on which the term

commitment is built. Also, like ‘projection,’ *Entwurf* stands for ‘designing’ or ‘sketching’ some ‘project’ which is to be carried through, but this sense rests secondary for Heidegger. So how all of that helps us to grasp the specificity of a committed entity of Dasein and the commitment as engagement in general? In projection, Dasein throws forth its own thrownness, which could be considered as an initial and fundamental *act* of commitment. This operation resumes itself in the idea of understanding, in which Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, projects itself essentially upon *possibilities*. Let’s see this step by step. Firstly, as Heidegger writes, Dasein is disclosed as *Being-possible* in *anxiety*. “Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being — that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself” (Heidegger 1962: 232). So the anxiety, as a fundamental mood through which the Dasein is attuned to the world, opens the possibility of *individuation*. It discloses Dasein as a *solus ipse*, although not in a traditional way which we have seen in the case of devotion: in commitment, the existential ‘solipsism’ is the bringing of Dasein “face to face with the world as world”, and face to face with Others (a point that Emmanuel Levinas conceptualizes so powerfully), rather than a “displacement of putting an isolated subject-Thing into the innocuous emptiness of a wordless occurring” (Heidegger 1962: 233). Only ‘after’, or only *with*, this particular individuation, understanding as projection becomes possible and opens up to *possibilities*. Thus, in commitment, we recognize the world and the others in it, just as we recognize ourselves — through understanding. Furthermore, in projective understanding, Dasein is a *Being-ahead-of-itself*, it is always *ahead* of itself, *ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*, where the *others* are always already encountered *in the world*. At this point of Heidegger’s ontology, the anxiety is ‘overthrown’ by *care* (*Sorge*). In the world in front of which we are fundamentally anxious, there are *others* for which we *care*, and thus for-the-sake-of-which *we are*. In this sense, commitment is radically different from devotion, which is condemned to anxiety, solitude, and finally, as we have seen before with Benjamin, despair. And this isn’t only a formal difference, it is an ontological difference, because *care* as Dasein’s mode of Being belongs to *projection*, a “disclosive Being towards its potentiality-for-Being. As something that understands, Dasein *can* understand *itself* in the terms of the ‘world’ and Others or in terms of its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 1962: 264). On the contrary to this committed projection and care, in devotion, we see rather retrieval and despair. With those remarks being exposed, commitment can now be seen as *caring*, in which *care* is a fundamental mode of the Being of Dasein. Furthermore, we should stress that the two essential modes of care are: *concern* (*Besorgen*) and *solicitude* (*Fürsorge*). The first one corresponds to our dealings with the equipment which are ready-to-hand, the ‘stuff’ the we encounter in the world and find potentially useful, while the second represents our care for Others, as other Daseins that we encounter equally within-the-world. Likewise, *care doesn’t* stands for a special attitude towards the Self and *isn’t* simply care-for-oneself. This characteristic represents a fundamental feature of commitment

that differentiates it from devotion, which entirely depends on a desperately egoistic care-for-oneself. Care for Self is for Heidegger a mere tautology, because “the Self has already been characterized ontologically by ‘Being-ahead-of-itself’, a characteristic in which the other two items in the structure of care —Being already-in... and Being-alongside...— have been *jointly posited* [*mit-gesetz*]” (Heidegger 1962: 237). Finally, we can say that Dasein is the *who* of commitment that we were searching for. Dasein is the *thrown projection*, it is thrownness *with* projection; and the core of Dasein is this very articulation, the *with*, which represents the condition and the structure of *care* thus making commitment *possible*.

In spite of these clear convergences between the etymology of the word commitment and Heidegger’s ontology, something seems to lack in our analyses of committed engagement. This lack is firstly methodological, but it is also substantive. We haven’t yet mapped the ideas of light and world in the phenomenon of commitment. In order to repair this analytic insufficiency, we shall turn once more briefly to the semantic field of the word ‘*posvećnost*’. One of its literal meanings which is ‘to become a world’ or ‘to *worldize* oneself’ interestingly find once more its echo in Heidegger’s ontology. As we have already mentioned, one of Dasein’s primordial modes is *Being-in-the-world*. Dasein is not ‘in the world’ as the water is in a glass, or the chair is in a room, etc. Also, the world isn’t a mere container collecting the entities that are to be found in it: “As Being-in-the-world, Dasein has already discovered a ‘world’ at any time. This discovery, which is founded upon the worldhood of the world, is one which we have characterized as freeing entities for a totality of involvements” (Heidegger 1962: 145). Therefore, on the contrary to the proceedings which construct subjectivity in devotion through an annihilation of the world, in commitment, the Dasein frees the entities in the world and *discovers* a world simply in order to *be*. The appearance of Dasein is simultaneous to the appearance of the world. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger pushes this position even further: “World-understanding as Dasein-understanding is self-understanding. Self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein” (Heidegger 1982: 297). This feature of Dasein imposes to commitment an inevitable responsibility for the world, as if it was a responsibility for the self, because Dasein and world are equiprimordial. How come one could ask? Once again, the idea of light is there to save the day. In *Being and Time*, we encounter the concept of *Lichtung*, translated as ‘clearing’ or even ‘lighting’, explaining this equiprimordiality quite well: “When we talk in an ontically figurative way of the *lumen naturale* in man, we have in mind nothing other than the existential ontological structure of this entity, that it *is* in such a way as to be its ‘there’. To say that it is ‘illuminated’ [‘erleuchtet’] means that *as* Being-in-the-world it is cleared [‘gelichtet’] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing” (Heidegger 1962: 171). Here we can clearly distinguish the main difference between commitment and devotion: the lights of devotion are always exterior to the subject, they are by definition transcendent, subjectifying lights – whether they are divine, rational

or capitalist; inversely, the light in commitment is a light that cannot be assigned to any entity, it isn't a light with a single localized source, but rather the light of an assemblage, of an encounter, of a short circuit maybe. The figure of light in commitment stands for the primordial *disclosedness* of Dasein which is nothing else but an articulation of selfhood and worldhood through *othering*. Therefore, the only possible answer to the question 'Who is committed in engagement?' is simple: 'We'. Only a 'we' is capable of committed engagement, a mode of being which is unreachable for the *solus ipse* of the 'I'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we shall somehow refine what has been proposed through the text and point out how our analyses further helps us to critically understand what is engagement. It seems that we have made a rough division between the two modes of being of engagement, a rupture between devotion and commitment. Although this methodological maneuver was beneficial for developing a clearer argumentation, it doesn't reflect faithfully the reality of *being-engaged*. In engagement, generally speaking, both of these modes are necessarily present and cannot simply exclude one another. There is no such thing as a purely committed or purely devotional engagement. The question is rather, to what level will one of them prevail? The very engaging aspect of engagement lies exactly in this resonance between the two modes. There are two ways to consider engagement: 1) simply as a being engaged, and 2) as one's acting in an engaged manner. In an ontological sense, we are always already being engaged – from our birth, we are engaged with the world that surrounds us and that we discovered, and furthermore, all of our relations with others presuppose engagement. In that sense, we are always already *committed*. On the other hand, when we act in an engaged fashion, we make reference to certain values and ideals, exposing our positions publicly and thus putting at stake our subjectivity while simultaneously petrifying it. So, we can say that, in order to act – one must be *devoted*. The paradox arises when we understand that, as living beings, we are fundamentally *active beings*. On the one hand, we observe that in commitment, as an ontological mode of engagement, we seem to lack the necessary tools for acting; while on the other, in devotion, taken as a predominantly ontic modality of engagement, our Being is obscured, or rather dazzled by an exterior light. However, in order to exist fully, we must engender both of these modes of engagement at any time. The only way to critically apprehend this is to embrace the paradox. To recognize the existential necessity of correlation between devotion and commitment is the first step towards a critical engagement. The second one is to engage in an (auto)reflective endeavor in such a way, that it will necessarily and always augment the intensity of commitment and reduce the one of devotion. In the historical era that we are living in, this can become should be considered even as a moral maxim. Because in his time, Descartes could let devotion take an advantage over commitment, and keep its engagements intellectually brilliant. In our historical context of late

capitalism, commitment is almost a moral imperative and engagement's mode of being that must prevail in order to preserve nothing less than our coexistence. Heidegger writes that we are beings for whom the very Being is an issue. We can say now that we are *engaged beings* for whom the very *being-engaged* is an issue. Thus, it is only through committed reflection on the phenomenon of engagement, that we can achieve to render possible our very existential paradox, which is to say, to become able to *act critically*.

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Andrea Perunović

Od predanosti do posvećenosti: ka kritičkoj ontologiji angažmana

Apstrakt:

Ovaj članak prilazi pojmu angažmana iz perspektive kritičke ontologije. Sa jezikom kao polazišnom tačkom svog hermeneutičkog zadatka, on započinje etimološkom analizom različitih indoevropskih reči koje gravitiraju oko semantičkog polja pojma angažmana. Iz ovih uvodnih nalaza stečenih kroz jednu vežbu u komparativnoj lingvistici, *predanost* [devotion] i *posvećenost* [commitment] su mapirani kao dva suprotstavljena, ali pak nerazdvojiva, *modusa bivstvovanja* angažmana. Ispostaviće se da ova dva modusa uslovljavaju angažman na ontološki različite načine. Tokom ispitivanja njihovih fundamentalnih struktura, neki od kanonskih koncepata istorije filozofije, kao što su biće, egzistencija, subjektivnost ili svet – ali takođe i neke od njenih konstitutivnih binarnih opozicija kao što se telo/duh, individua/kolektiv,

transcendencija/imanencija, svetlo/tama i duhovno/svetovno – biće preispitane kroz prizmu različitih ontoloških dispozicija koje predanost i posvećenost, svaka na svoj način, nameću angažmanu. Opšti cilj ovog istraživanja je isticanje glavnih egzistencijalnih karakteristika *bi-vanja-angažovanim*, interpretirajući tako uloge *koga*, *čega* i *gde* angažmana, s idejom predstavljanja jednog bazičnog konceptualnog aparata *kritičke ontologije angažmana*.

Ključne reči: angažman, posvećenost, predanost, biće, subjekat, kolektivitet, svet, ontologija