



HATE
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“Hate”, Melanie Klein writes, “always entails self-hate.” This may seem like common sense. If hate, like love, renders porous the boundaries between self and other, should we not expect that this peculiar emotional investment called hate would affect the reflective perception of the self, its relation to itself? There are, of course, good reasons to interrogate the symmetry that locates love and hate on the same spectrum. Is it not the case, after all, that affects have enough integrity to be considered in their specificity? Is it not true that an understanding of hate would gain from not being reduced to a polar opposite of love? A sign of its absence or of its perverse transformation? But what about the subject of love and hate? Whether or not there is a continuous line between passions or affects, is it possible to dissociate between agent and patient, to rigorously distinguish hate from self-hate? And who is the “subject” of affect? Affects and passions, as Susan James compellingly reminded us this year, are highly political. Their exclusion from political analysis (or from political life altogether) is not only shortsighted, it is also dangerous – as dangerous perhaps as their inclusion or recuperation. But hate has hardly suffered such a fate, and no one would seri-

ously complain that a lack of attention to hate has plagued social and political reflections. Perhaps what is nonetheless peculiar to the study of hate is that, insofar as it partakes of social and political life, it appears at the margins of this life, on the outside of its limits. Hate is either at the origin, preceding, as it were, the constituted group (the famous “pessimistic” conception of humankind praised by Carl Schmitt and made famous by Hobbes), or at its perverse culmination, when the group reaches its worst manifestation, gathering and coalescing against an outside deemed hostile. Like its object, then, hate remains a figure of exteriority, even if this exteriority is “only” desired. In this frame of understanding, hate cannot be construed as a bond. Having transcended the sphere of personal hate (“man is a wolf to man”) or sharing hate for the other, members of a group may move closer to each other, but the nature of the ties that bind them cannot be hate.

What are we to make, then, of a social “application” of Melanie Klein’s assertion? Clearly, Klein suggests that hate (which is always to say, self-hate) is a rapport to self. Hate, in other words, is precisely a relation, a bond. That too may be commonsensical. What remains unclear, however, is how to think of hate, and particularly of self-hate, as constitutive of the social bond, prior or, in a way, aside from a relation to the outside (which hate will participate in constructing – later, as it were). We all know of collectives who share this attribute, this self-hate. Oppressed groups are, indeed, well-known as suffering from one form of self-hate or another. They have internalized, so goes the description, the negative perception that others have of them. They have made this perception theirs. They hate themselves and the hate they feel is constitutive of the collective they constitute.

Is it possible to determine whether such collectives hate themselves or whether they (“they” being one thing, a subject) hate something in themselves, which they perceive as external, foreign or at any rate dispensable (and that would be another thing, an object)? Is it not the case, in other words, that such self-hate is simply a kind of hate? And vice-versa? Much as one can accuse the hater of hating not just the other, but the other in himself, one can identify in the self-hater, a hate of the other, which would exempt him from this peculiar, reflexive pathology, if not of much else. The near-collapse of hate into self-hate (and vice-versa), such as suggested by Klein, would thus be shown to be quite accurate in the very difficulty of distinguishing hate from self-hate, subject and object, in the case of social entities. But the meaning of this conclusion on the level of the social or of the political remains troubling. For what group, what community would not be suffering from a form of self-hate? What group could fail to qualify as suffering from an acute form of self-hatred? What becomes necessary is therefore an understanding of social and political for-

mations such that the nature of the bond that links them (to themselves, first of all, but also to others) is or could be constituted by hate. Even if not exclusively or entirely so. What becomes necessary is an account of the measure and the operations of hate at work within specific collectives, groups, communities, cultures, and civilizations.

As I write this, I remain a bit uncertain about this and other things. Was I, for example, fortunate or unfortunate during my stay in Berlin, at the Wissenschaftskolleg? I wrote and published a bit (on the Semites and their invention, on hate speech and the Marranos, on Carl Schmitt, and on the purity of blood). I read more than I anticipated (the phrase “borrowing privileges” will never mean the same in any other library), and I learned enormously from what I could gather during my stay, from friends and acquaintances, from newspapers and museums, and, mostly, from a number of incredible scholars. It was truly a privilege. For all this, for the long-awaited time with Nono, and for the sheer delight of my stay at the Institute, I am more than fortunate. I am also grateful, of course. And yet. The title of my project was, in fact, “Hate”, and my intent with it was located within the framework I sketched above. The group of Fellows with whom I found myself was, however, stubbornly uncooperative in showing any signs of self-hate. Demonstratively so until the last moment. The result will speak for itself. I was completely unable to pursue my project as I had formulated it.

I hate myself for it.