

BOOK REVIEW

ALAIN BADIOU'S *BEING AND EVENT*

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Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London, Continuum, 2005. ISBN: 0826458319

1. Much like the parade of claimants for the hand of Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*, the theoretical humanities have been presented with a string of would-be *maîtres à penser*, each bringing with them claims of radical originality, and the promise of hope for the disciplines in question. Not only is the philosophy of Alain Badiou among the very few who have serious justifications to the claim of originality, the rigour, scope and goals of his philosophy reveal him as the first thinker in a long time to have the resources necessary to engage with the ailments of theoretical discourse in the contemporary environment of global capitalism, and the steady dismantling of the traditional infrastructure of the human sciences and philosophy.

Almost twenty years after its publication in French, the keystone to Badiou's philosophical system, *Being and Event*¹, has been published in English. This delay is interesting. It reveals the temporal profile of Anglo-American investments in French theory particularly clearly. Even in an environment where new 'flashy Hegels'² have their work pre-digested and circulated in an economy every bit as elusive and powerful as any other—and regardless of the value of the theoretical perspective in question—Badiou's work has remained relatively obscure beyond Paris until recently. Students will now doubtless go back and find Badiou as a member of a group interviewing Foucault about the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, or as the author of articles in the *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, in whose pages Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Claude Milner amongst others

1. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London, Continuum, 2005 (henceforth BE).

2. The phrase is from Foucault's 'Preface' to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, a text which has been well and truly digested by this circulation of intellectual commodities, and indeed, hardly read or understood.

were published.³ They will rediscover the problems that the post-68 period posed for thought, already unlaced and examined by Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Deleuze, and their treatment in another radical way. But only twenty years later.

The sociology and politics of the scholarly interest and—let's be honest—*fixation* on the figure of the 'French theorist' are thought-provoking topics. And, no doubt, the way in which Badiou's thought is introduced and elaborated in the Anglo-American context will reveal many of the socio-political dynamics of this context. However, the real task before us is to decide, on the basis of careful, thoughtful analysis, an analysis that struggles to remain irreducible to these dynamics, what Badiou's thought can bring to our contemporary situation.

2. *Being and Event* is an extremely remarkable book, presenting in just over 430 pages in the English translation a fundamental ontology, an account of the subject relative to this ontology, and a presentation of the ways in which novelty can come to restructure what is given in the socio-historical formations of being. The ambition of the book is equalled by the range of its references, from set-theoretic mathematics to psychoanalytic theory, and by the strength of its conviction, which is unwavering. The claims of *Being and Event* represent the very heart of Badiou's philosophical endeavour.

3. It has been suggested on a number of occasions that it is comparable only to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. There is some real justification for this. However, I think that there is a book which it resembles more closely. Rather than *Being and Time*, it is Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* which bears much greater fundamental similarities to *Being and Event*. Unlike Heidegger, Badiou does not lead us back down the well-worn paths of existential phenomenology, returning us again to a meditation on lived experience. Like Deleuze's book, *Being and Event* unashamedly engages in a philosophy which is abstract and metaphysical, one that does not presume the starting point of phenomenological experience, and one that gives absolutely no ground to that world view—or to its familiar themes of impoverishment, finitude and death. Again like Deleuze's book, it continually surprises the reader with the breadth of sources from which the argument draws, sources that range across the entire history of philosophy (Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Pascal, Hegel, Heidegger), poets and writers (Holderlin, Mallarmé) and contemporary mathematics. And, above all, *Being and Event* draws on resources which are generally conceived as outside of the philosophical enclosure, particularly within the milieu of 1970s and 80s France: mathematics and mathematical logic. Finally, like *Difference and Repetition* (and beyond this the similarities come to an abrupt end), *Being and Event* is a book whose novelty and scope may well lead to it being poorly read, poorly understood, and as a result, thoughtlessly criticized: only time will tell. Or, as Badiou himself might say, such is a question of fidelity, a question whose answer will only become apparent in the future anterior.

3. The *Cahiers* was a journal published by the *Cercle d'Épistémologie* at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, of which Badiou was a member.

BADIOU'S METHOD

4. Badiou begins the first part of his most recent work *Logiques des mondes* with a statement about the logic of the book: it is written so as to '[make] clear from the beginning what is only fully intelligible at the end'.⁴ *Being and Event* is composed according to a very different schematic—one that Badiou is implying in this claim, I would suggest—according to which its most elaborate conclusions on the nature of the subject can only arrived at according to a double process of *decision* and *deduction*.

5. The first Meditation ('The One and the Multiple: *a priori* conditions of any possible ontology') opens with an explicit statement of decision: in the face of the philosophical tradition, which has gambled on the mutual implication or 'reciprocity' of the one and being,⁵ and likewise the multiplicity of ways in which being is expressed, Badiou writes:

We find ourselves on the brink of the decision, a decision to break with the arcana of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried, phoenix of its own sophistical consumption. This decision can take no other form than the following: the one is not (BE 23).

What is striking here is that Badiou claims no evidential support for this assertion, no external justification of any kind: he *decides* on this *axiom* (and it is an axiom). This point must not be overlooked: there is no question of referentially grounding philosophy for Badiou, whether in consciousness, the objective world, human custom or even unconscious drives. Philosophy begins with an axiomatic break, and proceeds on the basis of a fidelity with this break, patiently unfolding its deductive consequences. It is not surprising, then, that Badiou immediately goes on to account for the fact that while the One is not, beings as they are presented are nonetheless really unified. He thus begins the second movement characteristic of *Being and Event*, a movement that will carry this initial decision into the heart of novel theories of being and truth.

The surprise that emerges as the book progresses is that this decision-deduction movement is precisely the movement of the subjective fidelity as Badiou describes it. The very effort to render consistent his novel ontology with an account of the subject reveals that the emergence of the subject itself takes the *same form*: decision (yes, an event has taken place) and deduction (the constructive unfolding of the consequences of this decision). The subject, for Badiou, *is just decision and faithful deduction*. A further consequence follows, this time relative to mathematics. Set theory—Badiou's choice of mathematics for reasons we will see—is governed by a set of axioms, axioms which regulate the manipulation and creation of sets. The decision-deduction complex at the heart of Badiou's philosophical method, and the heart of the advent of subjectivity, is played out in the field of mathematics. Thus, set-theory is at once the discourse proper to being, and an ideal example of the way that subjective fidelity to axiomatic decisions can unfold deductive consequences that in turn enter into the composition of knowledge.

4. Alain. Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*. Paris: Seuil, 2006, p. 53 (henceforth LOW).

5. Badiou indexes this claim to the name of Parmenides (BE 23). It seems to me, however, that it is much rather the ontology of neo-Platonism which could be said to invest itself in such a claim.

6. While I will return to the category of the subject shortly, we can also say this: that *Being and Event*, like many of the great books of modern philosophy, attempts to say its own sense, to play out the nature of subjective fidelity in its construction. Nowhere is this more clear than the first Meditation, one of the real *tours de force* of philosophical rigour in the book, which presents and answers an increasingly complex and reflexive set of problems, which can be schematized as follows: what is the nature of being? Given this, how is ontology, the discourse about being, possible, without abandoning this fundamental ontological insight? In Lacanese, we can say that it is a matter of Badiou's position of enunciation being taken account of in the field of statements that he is endorsing in *Being and Event*.

MATHEMATICS AND ONTOLOGY

7. What then of mathematics, since I have just mentioned it? Despite the obvious scope of *Being and Event*, and the striking claims it makes about ontological matters, I do not think that we can claim as some have done that it is the first book since *Being and Time* to ask and answer the question 'what is being?' Badiou himself, in his book on Deleuze, indicates that the philosophical epoch that he finds himself a part of has been, precisely, dominated by ontological discourse—whence the significance of Heidegger, but also his relativity.⁶ However, *Being and Event* engages with ontological concerns directly, both presenting them in a striking new way and elaborating the consequences of his founding intuitions with considerable daring and philosophical acumen. While ontology is to some degree an integral part of our contemporary philosophical regime, Badiou's account of it, for these reasons, is nonetheless striking.

8. The book is without a doubt mobilized on the basis of a single proposition: 'The initial thesis of my enterprise [. . .] is the following: the science of being qua being *has existed* since the Greeks—such is the sense and status of mathematics' (BE 3). As it is infamously formulated shortly afterwards, 'mathematics = ontology' (BE 4). This equation, despite its apparent transparency, may well be the source of the greatest number of misunderstandings about *Being and Event*. Not only will it be read poorly if the centrality of mathematics is downplayed, it will be read poorly if the nature of this centrality is misunderstood.

9. Badiou's equation of mathematics and ontology does designate the former as the sole discourse about being. However, mathematics does not *describe* being. His view—an initially surprising one, but the only one befitting a materialist philosophy—is rather that mathematics is the *literal inscription* of being. It refers to nothing other than itself, it embodies nothing, it reveals nothing. The simple marks themselves are the sole reality of mathematical discourse

Thus Badiou abandons the power and the supremacy that ontology as a discourse

6. Badiou, Alain, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000. For example: 'Our epoch can be said to have been stamped and signed, in philosophy, by the return of the question of Being' (BE 18)

has held from Plato to Deleuze and beyond, ontology as the profound *substantial* connection of thought and being. In its place, only marks, letters, scribbles. This is not to say that mathematics *qua* ontology is not the effectuation of the unity of being and thought for Badiou: it certainly is. However, this unity is in fact brought about only under the most restrictive, minimal conditions. It is not the plenitude of being that answers to ontological thought, but the almost-nothing of the letter. In other words, there is no ontology of presence for Badiou, the presencing of presence in thought, but instead an ontology which marks the absence of being *qua* being in through the agency of the letter.

Beyond the famous equation, then, the claim that is really at the root of the book is this:

The thesis that I support does not in any way declare that being is mathematical, which is to say composed of mathematical objectivities. It is not a thesis about the world but about discourse. It affirms that mathematics, throughout the entirety of its historical becoming, *pronounces what is expressible of being qua being*.

Insofar as being is expressible in thought, it happens in the barren and minimal *marks* of mathematics themselves, and nowhere else.

10. To this, a number of things that could be added, and there are two of importance. First of all, a point which Badiou makes continually, is that this claim does not come to bear on philosophy itself other than in a negative fashion. That is, ontology is not a part of philosophy, the two are separate discourses. Rather than dispossessing philosophy of its fundamental claims, for Badiou, this relieves it of a task which was never its own. We can see the logic of this: if ontology has as its task the *inscription* of being, philosophy is poorly equipped, since its manifest strength is *description*. And this is true for Badiou as well, who sees the task of philosophy as the commitment to elaborating an encyclopaedic vision of the existence of truths, and thus the maintenance of the category of Truth (as philosophy has since Plato on Badiou's account).

Second, mathematics being a discipline whose conclusions have been elaborated over time (Badiou refers, as I have cited above, to the 'historical becoming' of the discipline), it is the case that at certain points in history, what we were *capable* of thinking or expressing of being has also changed. Now, while Plato's interruption of Parmenidean poetic ontology was brought about through the insistence on the matheme, the mark of an absence (or mark-and-lack to paraphrase an early Badiou), for Badiou the mathematics employed by Plato himself was not equal to being as Badiou understands it. In fact, the range of mathematics-ontology has consistently grown. For Badiou, it is not until the creation of the branch of mathematics called set theory (Cantor) and its subsequent axiomatization (Zermelo, Fraenkel, Bar Hilel) and certain profound elaborations (Gödel and Cohen), Badiou suggests, that mathematics as ontology finally realizes its potential.

The status of this historical claim is puzzling. The most straightforward way of understanding it is manifestly Hegelian: it is only as the result of the elaboration of the discipline of mathematics itself that being as such has—literally—become thinkable.

Since it is in mathematics that being and thought make contact, then we seem led to think that being itself has unfolded at the same time as mathematics—its sole and literal description—has developed. On the other hand, given that Badiou presents one historically specific application of mathematics as adequate to being, it seems that the well-known aporiae of genesis and structure—whose most pronounced accents, as Derrida has taught us, are to be found in Husserl—must plague Badiou's claims also. If mathematics has always been the expression of being *qua* being, then its historical development, only realized in the advent of set theory, must be merely secondary. But Badiou's claims about set theory seem absolutely primary. In either case, the relationship that exists between being and thought in mathematics seems traversed by a problematic historicity in Badiou's presentation.

BEING QUA BEING

11. It remains to be seen what Badiou means by the claim that mathematics is the discourse of being *qua being*. It is clear that many other forms of discourse can come to bear on being as it appears to us: from sociology and political science to market research. However, what distinguishes mathematics is that it deals with being *as* being, the being *of* beings. Clearly here we are seeing a version of Heidegger's ontological difference. Beings are characterized, for Badiou, by minimal *identity*. Everything which constitutes the world is what he terms *counted-as-one*. However, being itself, prior to the unities that are presented as beings, is essentially *multiple*. This is Badiou's opening decision, and the one from which a remarkable range of consequences are *deduced* as noted above. However, it presents us with the question of what kind of discourse would be capable of dealing with being *qua* being as multiple.

12. We have already seen the answer: the branch of mathematics called set theory. Its suitability for the task is essentially attested to by three characteristics of the theory itself. First of all, set theory is a discipline concerned with multiples. A set is nothing more or less than a multiple. Second, the category 'set' has no explicit definition within set-theory itself. While the common-language presentation of the theory presents sets as collections of things, this begs the question in a way that obscures precisely what Badiou finds so important: that the 'contents' of a set have no set form or status. That is, the implicit definition of a set avoids counting-as-one in any *a priori* fashion the contents of a set. Consequently, we can talk about a set α without stipulating anything about its contents at all. All of the many—indeed infinite—number of manipulations that I can subject this set to, according with the axioms of set theory, can be undertaken without any presumption about what α 'is'. Again, the value of this for Badiou is that it preserves multiplicity as such.

The third crucial characteristic of set theory for Badiou is precisely the fact of the axiomatization that I've just mentioned. The supreme importance of axiomatization for Badiou is that it forecloses any possible paradox entering into the construction or manipulation of sets. In other words, the axioms guarantee that set theory can only be

exercised in such a way that its products will not compromise set theory itself. That consistency is the power of axiomatization is attested to by the causes for the elaboration of the set-theoretic axioms in the first place. A number of people, including Burali-Forti and Russell (and indeed Cantor himself), discovered paradoxes at the very heart of the naïve account of sets and the rules for their construction. It was in order to *a priori* eliminate the possibility of such paradox entering into set theory that the axioms were developed. In the case of the three names mentioned, it was a paradox involving the membership of a set within itself. Within axiomatized set theory (in honour of its principal composers Zermelo and Fraenkel, this axiomatization is simply referred to as ZF set theory), the axiom of foundation or regularity removes the possibility of such paradoxes occurring by precisely forbidding relations of self-membership.⁷

13. The concept that Badiou begins *Being and Event* with, one that facilitates a full-blown use of set theory as ontology, is the *situation*. This category, whose name is borrowed from Sartre, concerns every being or regime of being which has been counted-as-one. As such, it is a consistently one-multiple of multiples. Situations must be understood, I think, in an extremely broad sense: a society, a human being, a natural language or a building would all be situations in this fundamental sense, one-multiples.

Throughout, this concept is progressively refined and complicated. However, even in this basic sense, it allows us to see the basic ontological picture at the heart of Badiou's philosophy. Being itself, being *qua* being, *l'être en tant qu'être*, is purely multiple, multiples of multiples, what Badiou designates as inconsistent multiplicity. Later on he will come to specify that these multiples must finally be *void*, multiples of nothing, otherwise we inevitably are returned to the regime of the one. But on the other hand, being, *l'étant*, existing beings, are the result of counting-as-one some inconsistent multiples, thereby rendering them consistent.

14. We have no direct access as such to being *qua* being, and *Dasein* has no privilege here. Mathematics, as ontology, is the single way in which thought approaches the inconsistent multiplicity of being. This single approach reveals to us not Being itself, in its un-veiling movement. It shows us marks of multiple-being, nothing more. In mathematics, for Badiou, being is not un-veiled but inscribed in flat featureless letters.

THE THEORY OF THE EVENT

15. It is in the context of this mathematics-ontology that Badiou unfolds the possibility and structure of the event. The key question is the following: if everything which is presented is unified (counted-as-one), then how can this unity be (at least partially) undone such that something new can come about within it?

16. Part Three of *Being and Event* consists in the main of a lengthy elaboration of number theory, an elaboration which demonstrates in detail the internal structure of

7. More precisely, what it outlaws are circular relations of belonging ($\alpha \in \beta$ & $\beta \in \delta$ & $\delta \in \alpha$), or infinite chains of belonging generated recursively ($\alpha_1 \in \alpha_2 \in \alpha_3 \dots \alpha_x$). It is also important to note that what is included in ZF proper is an axiom *schema* rather than a single axiom, known as the replacement schema.

situations in terms of the relation of ordinality, which for Badiou is another name for *natural* situations. In such situations, there is no possibility of any change; their internal ordered structure is absolute. Badiou begins Part Four of the book with the contrasting category of the *historical* situation. In such situations, we find that there is at least one multiple within the situation which remains ‘on the edge of the void’, a multiple which is at once a part of the situation, but of which some of its members are not (think of the figure of the refugee, who is at once a member of a national situation, and yet not represented or recognized within it). This singular multiple is what Badiou calls an ‘evental site’—it is the precondition for a change in the situation. Its border status, its exposure to uncounted, inconsistent being, is what opens it up to the aleatory. While a necessary precondition, though, the evental site is no guarantee of an event. For Badiou, the event is what is radically unpredictable, unknown and unknowable—it has the status of an unconscious moment in which the possibility of change is all but invisible.

More precisely, Badiou offers two complementary claims about the event, relative to two different points of view. First of all, in a phenomenal sense, that the event is what appears in disappearing. It has no counted-as-one status, no reality or sense within the situation as it stands, but it also has no temporal reality other than the *moment* of its (dis)-appearance. Relative to ontology, though, the event has an undecidable status. There is no absolute way to resolve its belonging to the situation, and thus, no way for the inhabitant of the situation to *a priori* settle the question of the very happening of the event.

17. These two claims each require a response from within the situation in order for the event to have any consequences. The event, in its elusive (non)-presentation, cannot be the object of factual knowledge, evidence or proof. It is only possible to have a *subjective* orientation towards it. Relative to the undecidable ontological status of the event, there is only one possibility: a decision will be necessary in order to proceed. These two points provide a response to the suspicious reader, who may think at this point in the book that Badiou’s theory of the event seems merely an account of auxiliary randomness, a flicker of nothingness, equivalent to nothing more than a trick of the light. It is, finally and solely, in the figure of the subject that the aleatory and sidereal event has its fate played out—the faithful response to what can only ever be invested in, beyond knowledge, consciousness and hope.

THE SUBJECT

18. In the Introduction, Badiou claims that the development of *Being and Event* occurred in response to a problem that was left aside in his 1982 book, *Théorie du sujet* [Theory of the Subject]. He indicates that this problem concerned the elaboration of an ontology that could support the claim of this earlier book, simply that ‘there “was some” subjectivisation’ (BE 4). He presents *Being and Event*, therefore, as the elaboration of an ontology that was previously non-existent. This is clearly modest. Not only do Badiou’s much earlier treatments of mathematical topics reveal key parts of the approach

that is presented systematically or according to their consequences only in *Being and Event*—I am thinking here of the pieces published in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, ‘La subversion infinitésimale’ and the extremely important ‘Marque et Manque: à propos du zero’—Badiou’s materialist commitments run throughout his writings and set up a number of the presuppositions of the ontology of *Being and Event*. Even a hasty or partial reading of the 1969 *Le Concept du modèle* reveals a concern with theorizing mathematics and logic in a way that disembods mathematics from certain theoretico-political commitments.⁸ Having said this, Badiou’s account of the problem posed for him by the unelaborated version of the subject in the regime of ontology, found *Théorie du sujet*, reveals the centrality of the problem of the subject—its nature broadly understood, its relation the regime of its effectuation, its ‘substance’—in Badiou’s thought.

19. I would in fact contend that, rather than being (ontology, mathematics) or the event (the theory of the site, historical situations, the paradoxical matheme of the event itself) it is the doctrine of the *subject* which is at the heart of *Being and Event*. Yes, the answer to the question ‘pure mathematics being the science of being, how is a subject possible?’ (BE 6) depends on a proper view of being as inconsistent multiplicity, the situation and its state as the formal requirement of real consistency, the event as the appearing-disappearing that can only take place in a situation which has at least one multiple ‘on the edge of the void’—and many other things. But the question ‘how is a subject possible?’ is what the immense effort, the remarkable theoretical innovation of *Being and Event*, strives to answer.

Already in *Théorie du sujet*, Badiou notes in the Introduction, there was no commitment to any idea of a Cartesian or Kantian subject, reflexive, founded and central to experience, but something else more fugitive: subjectivization, the advent of a subjectivity which was grounded in the situation it is a part of. In *Being and Event*, the same claim is at the heart of Badiou’s theory of the subject.

20. The picture that emerges is one of tripartite process. Subjectivization happens first of all by way of proclamation, naming: an event has taken place, I stake myself on it, I name it. The name of the event, its trace in the situation, is the only mark of the immediately eclipsed event, and it only subsists as a mark *for* the subject which emerges in this act of naming: fugitive indeed, the possible effects of any event reside in this one point, the subject. The second moment is, for Badiou, in accordance with the account of the *generic* provided by Paul Cohen, a concept that Badiou indicates is at the very heart of his philosophy (‘If one category had to be designated as an emblem of my thought . . . it would be the *generic*’ [BE 15]). Here, the subject—in fidelity to the event whose name is borne by them—engages in the construction of a generic truth.

Why ought these constructions be called ‘truths’? The third moment of the process of subjectivity provides the answer, and does so with reference to the other of Cohen’s famous concepts, *forcing*. The indiscernible truth, which is constructed by the subject in fidelity to the event whose nomination is also the advent of their subjectivity itself, is

8. On this early book of Badiou’s, see the excellent article by Brassier, Ray, ‘Badiou’s Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics’, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2005, pp. 135-50.

forced into the regime of knowledge. This activity does not take a strong-arm form that the word seems to imply (even if there is a violence to the established order involved). Rather, the truth in question, which is definitively unknowable is made a matter of knowledge by the activity of the subject who acts to integrate it into the discernible and epistemological regime of the situation. The subject treats the constructed truth as what *will have been* a part of knowledge, bringing it a moment at a time into knowledge—and here Badiou takes up the future anterior tense, treated elsewhere at length by some of his co-travellers in twentieth century French thought, including Lacan and Derrida—thereby creating an irruption in the order of knowledge.

Now, Badiou's account of forcing, which virtually closes *Being and Event* bar a frustratingly brief and enigmatic critique of Lacan, is almost completely mathematical. The idea is introduced in Meditation 35 without much by way of elaboration, and is then pursued at length in Meditation 36, the latter being at once the most elevated point of the deployment of mathematics, the incredible accounting for some of Badiou's key ideas about the relationship of the subject and the State, and extremely striking for the absence of anything but the most schematic demonstrations of the argument in question in its philosophical (meta-mathematical) formulation. Even given this, though, the power of the Badiouian formulation or philosophical re-inscription of forcing is hard to overlook.

21. It is worth noting that Badiou's continual and well-known insistence on the Lacanian formulation 'Truth is what punches a hole in knowledge' gains its broadest sense in the context of this account of the subject: truths are first of all irreducible to the field of knowledge (Badiou calls it 'the encyclopedia'), their generic status leaving them ungraspable, literally unknowable from the point of view of the situation and of knowledge. However, they harbour the very real power of interrupting the regime of knowledge from within, through the forcing activity of the subject.

22. It is also worth noting an important feature of this theory of the relationship between the subject, truth and knowledge: there is no *absolute* break with the encyclopedia of knowledge. After a truth has been forced, literally becoming a part of the regime of knowledge, its trajectory is completed. Subjective fidelity does not cease, since the construction of truths is infinite for Badiou. But the elaboration, irruption and forcing of a truth renders what was formerly unknowable, indiscernible, a part of the landscape that it formerly subverted. What we find here, then, is a model of permanent revolution, but a revolution that is only as permanent as the continual movements of subjectivization within but beneath their proper regime of knowledge and power. In short, there where knowledge was, truth will be, but *only as knowledge*. Or, to use a political metaphor, something which Badiou himself does not refrain from:⁹ the revolutionary force of truth only ever expresses itself as the overthrow of one oppressive government in order for another to be established.

23. This theory of the subject has recently been renovated by Badiou himself.

9. Metaphor plays a central, and highly questionable, role in the initial elaboration of the concept of the state in BE Meditation 8 (see p. 85 in particular).

Recalling this tripartite structure of subjectivization (nomination, construction, forcing), Badiou indicates that it unjustifiably splits the subject into a subject-who-names and a subject-who-constructs (constructs a truth).¹⁰ This is an important claim, which comes to bear on the whole network of concepts related to the figure of the name: nomination, the naming-subject, and the unnameable.¹¹ It is perhaps in this regard above all that *Logiques des mondes* has come to modify its predecessor. That being said, it seems to me that the renovated account of the subject is related to a new division which is no less problematic than the old: Badiou argues there that there are two distinct moments of the faithful subject, to which he attaches the terms production (fidelity 1) and resurrection (fidelity 2).¹²

‘AN ABSTRACT VISION OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EPOCH’

24. A few points should be made here about the translation of *Being and Event* by Oliver Feltham. For much of the book, Feltham manages to translate the terse and occasionally gnomic tone of the original text very well into English. Likewise, the translation of mathematical discourse into English maintains a very high level of readability, and a close correspondence to the English technical terms relative to Badiou’s French.

However, there are also many points at the translation tends towards the overly literal, contributing an occasional unintended rigidity to the text. Literality also proves to be a problem occasionally in the translations of some of the—relatively rare—literary flourishes in the book. At times, there is also a lack of familiarity with terminology found in other philosophical contexts. The most striking examples of this occurs in Meditation 15 on Hegel. Feltham renders there the French *limite* and *borne*, translations from the German *Grenze* and *Schranke* (as Badiou notes), as *limit* and *frontier*. Not only does the latter deviate from the established translation of ‘boundary’, it partially obscures what is at issue, in Hegel—but also in Kant (the difference between the two is decisive to the *Critique of Pure Reason* in particular)—between the two concepts. Likewise, the translation in the same chapter of the French *relever*, which since Derrida’s intervention has become a standard rendering of the infamous *Aufheben*, as ‘arise’ is unacceptably narrow. Now, there is no doubt that the translation of this impressive work is the result of Herculean effort, and should be regarded as such. This fact, however, does not justify the lapses mentioned.

25. The ultimate point of reference that Badiou himself proposes for *Being and*

10. See Badiou, Alain, Peter Hallward and Bruno Bosteels, ‘Beyond Formalisation an Interview’, trans. Bruno Bosteels and Alberto Toscano, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2003, pp. 111–36.

11. It is worth noting in passing that the concept of the unnameable, used by Badiou in numerous other contexts (his treatment of Beckett, of course, and his ‘Subtraction: Forcing and the Unnameable’ being the two most prominent) does not play any significant role in the architecture of *Being and Event*, where the categories of the indiscernible and the undecidable take pride of place: ‘This ultimate connection between the indiscernible and the undecidable is literally the trace of the being of the Subject in ontology’. (BE 428)

12. See the diagram at LOW, p. 75. The elaboration of this thesis, and its related claims about obscure and reactive forms of subjectivity, takes place in Book 1 of *Logiques des mondes*.

Event—the ultimate horizon against which we must judge its capacity to illuminate contemporary affairs—is our epoch itself, marked by a constellation of evental-names, unfolding subjectivizations and shifting situations. The apparent heterogeneity of the names he refers himself to (Plato, Lacan, Mallarmé, Mao, Gödel) has often been remarked, but what deserves more attention is the unified nature of the result of his fidelity to the events that bear their names. *Being and Event* is striking in its ability to assemble all of these disparate regimes and bring them together in an attempt to account for our times as they are, and what they might be able to become. It is clear that this epoch is itself characterized by a great dispersive movement, the disjunctive movement of capitalism, and which philosophy, and theoretical discourse more generally, is at pains to come to grips with it, and at pains also to understand the relationship of its discourse to capitalism itself.

26. Where do we find ourselves, then? What characterizes our relationship to our times? In short, we are no longer Leibnizian; we cannot any more believe that the universe is governed by a global network of sufficient reason, in which everything is accounted for and justified, where the event is only a name for the continual unfolding of universal entelechy, and in which freedom is a proper cognisance of our place in the whole. In Leibniz's philosophy, the desire for the New, a liberation or disjunction from the present, is at once unnecessary and incoherent. This philosophy of totalized reason has become impossible to believe. And Badiou is, in this sense, the great contemporary combatant of the philosophy and legacy of Leibniz, the ideal of absolute knowledge, and absolute determination. *Being and Event* is the most distilled, the most rigorous and one of the most profound attempt to untie the universe of Leibniz from within, and show how the absolute unpredictability of the event can be the source of the emergence of the radically new. It remains for us to decide whether Badiou's construction is a 'vision of the epoch' equal to its times, or only an internal product of them—a decision that can only follow from an intimate struggle with this epoch itself.

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