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## BADIOU AND THE FRENCH TRADITION

There was a French philosophical moment of the second half of the 20th century which, *toute proportion gardée*, bears comparison to the examples of classical Greece and enlightenment Germany. Sartre's foundational work, *Being and Nothingness*, appeared in 1943 and the last writings of Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, date from the early 1990s. The moment of French philosophy develops between the two of them, and includes Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan as well as Sartre and Deleuze . . . if there has been such a French philosophical moment, my position would be perhaps as its last representative.<sup>1</sup>

—Alain Badiou

**Z**ARATHUSTRA ONCE RAN into an old hermit so completely isolated from the world that he had not yet heard the news, namely that God was dead. One does not accuse Alain Badiou of such isolation; yet in the analogous situation of the death of philosophy—in that immense dedifferentiation of the fields in post-modernity in which philosophy has sunk to the level of theory, opinion, ideology or Wittgensteinian monitoring—Badiou has always rejected such readings of the historical situation and claimed a central role for his own work in the philosophical tradition. To be sure, he also does all the other things with which former philosophers now amuse themselves—the culture critique or the historical commentary, the blog or op-ed, the interview, the simulated polemic, the artificial revival or pastiche of long-dead philosophical genres such as ethics or aesthetics, and even the swan-song, the elegy for a thought-form that once was—meanwhile outbidding his exhausted rivals with a surplus of plays, poems and pronouncements of all kinds, whose proliferation sets him apart from conventional judgement or even comparison. And at the same time, he laboriously pursues an unexpected philosophical *Hauptwerk*, its prestige scarcely undermined by the mathematical arguments and formulations

with which, as with a little-known foreign language, he generously interlards it.

Whether Badiou's current notoriety is due to his stamina as a survivor, or to the cloud of *obiter dicta*—he admires St Paul!—that swarms throughout his innumerable minor writings, we do not do him justice by avoiding his more ambitious philosophical monuments; nor does conventional patchwork sampling even constitute a sufficient tribute to those rare commentators—Hallward, Bosteels—who have valiantly offered guides to the thicket. Meanwhile, to step into a swiftly moving stream—*Being and Event* dates from 1988, *Logics of Worlds* from 2006—all the while being quite properly assured (by Bruno Bosteels, its translator), that *Theory of the Subject* (1982) is also indispensable—is a rash if not dangerous project. Still, the fateful Badolian word 'event' significantly marks the title of that first post-political philosophical text—the first to emerge from the late capitalist 'end of history', that is, the Reagan–Thatcher inauguration of a financial and neo-liberal globalization beyond Cold War ideological struggle. It does not seem unreasonable, therefore, to start by coming to terms with its first systematic statement and its position in the philosophical tradition. To be sure, in doing so one always risks being swept into the Scylla and Charybdis of the dialectic of Identity and Difference: that is, by translating the unique terminology of works like *Being and Event* back into a more familiar philosophical terminology one may be reducing an incomparable standpoint to the stereotypical positions of stock history of philosophy. In that tradition, however, Badiou's allegiances extend well beyond the immediate national context he quite properly affirms above. They include, besides Sartre, Hegel and Mallarmé; besides Lacan, Mao Zedong and also Cantor, Zermelo and a modern set theory into which I will not follow him.

### *Being and nothingness*

Otherwise, we might as well begin where so many others have, with being and nothingness as such. In the Standard Narrative (if I may put it that way), Being is something, whereas nothingness is nothing at all: this was the doctrine, or the discovery, of Parmenides, greatest of all philosophers, who said the first and last word on this subject, followed, unrefuted, all the way up to Heidegger and Sartre. Badiou seems to have

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou, 'The Adventure of French Philosophy', NLR 35, Sept–Oct 2005, pp. 67–8.

felt it was high time to unsettle this deeply rooted prejudice and to affirm that Being is simply multiplicity, it is the untotalizable variety of existents (or *Seienden*) which we confront in life and which we occasionally attempt to unify (or to 'count-for-one', to use his own formula). But there is no One, and as for infinity, let the mathematicians fight over it, our only conclusion being at this stage that ontology is mathematics and being is number. But such 'numbers' are like atoms in a void, attracting and repelling one another, and so the logical (and profoundly Hegelian) inference is that Being is simply the void, if not nothingness as such (a view interestingly related to the late Althusserian metaphysics of 'the encounter'). Much will be premised, as we shall see shortly, on our anxiety in the face of this void and our attempts to flee it. Meanwhile, it is probably not superfluous, in the current intellectual climate, to observe the extraordinary respect in which Badiou holds Hegel; and, indeed, beyond that to note that *Being and Event* (and even more explicitly, *Logics of Worlds*) is something like an emulation of the *Greater Logic*, if not an attempt to fuse logic and ontology as such, in ways neither Hegel nor Heidegger could have imagined.

But that still leaves the other half, so to speak, of the original married pair of opposites in the philosophical tradition, namely that Nothingness which always trails along after Being like a pale shadow of its former self. There will be more to say about such binary oppositions in a moment; suffice it to note that Badiou's title deviates sufficiently from its Sartrean model to give us the clue: the official, acknowledged opposite of Being will in this work not be *le Néant*, but rather the Event. When one remembers that Sartre's nothingness turned out in fact to be freedom and 'human reality', the expectation is heightened that the burden of something like praxis and history will fall here, along with consciousness, the negative, freedom, and whatever other accolades we are still willing to bestow on what today is contemptuously called the 'Anthropocene' and minimized as thoroughly as possible in Latour's 'democratic' equality between humans and objects. In fact, the author of *Being and Event* will turn out to be relatively reticent about 'events' as such, but we may expect the author of *The Theory of the Subject* to be far more forthcoming about human potentialities. Indeed, he there also proves to have a good deal more to say about Being as such, a mute domain of silence in Sartre where only three meagre sentences characterize it: 'Being is. Being is in itself. Being is what it is.'<sup>2</sup> (And as for Heidegger, the fact, not only that

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes, London 1958, p. 22.

there is not much to say about it, but that we have in general forgotten about it altogether, does not prevent *das Sein* from looming larger than life in his scheme of things.)

In Badiou, however, Being is the realm, not of things as such, but rather of the multiple: and this is why here the absolute inexpressivity of Sartrean matter and the equally inexpressive splendour of the Heideggerian epiphany are both impatiently dismissed by the revelation of a new and different kind of language, if one may still use that word, namely that of mathematics. As the very expression of quantity, only set theory can be considered to be the appropriate conceptual vehicle for things; and here even the word ‘concept’ must be considered doubtful, for Being is the multiple without a concept, as Kant might have put it. But this is the realm of Heideggerian ‘existents’ or *Seienden*; and for Badiou the only singular of which they are susceptible is the One imposed by us, in that inimitable ‘count-for-one’ which is here the equivalent of Sartrean totalization.

### *Situations*

Badiou’s Sartrean reference is confirmed by the designation of the organized representation of being as a ‘situation’, a term Sartre famously found in Jaspers and which allowed him to transform all first-order thoughts and perceptions, desires and observations, into acts and choices, very much in the spirit of Badolian interventions. The general, inspecting the battlefield to come, reorganizes its landscape into a *situation*, each element of which demands a specific kind of deployment or counter-measure. The artist reorganizes the very *telos* of the modern in his head in order to transform the empty canvas before him into the possibility of a decisive intervention in that history, the solution of a form-problem, the invention of the next step, the innovation which changes the very logic of painting itself. The interlocutor, reading my gestures and my remarks in the spirit of his own project, sees the conversation with me as a situation in which to project a move which turns it in his direction or to impose his own characteristic personality on the encounter, to lend it the stamp of his own timidity, aggressivity, acquiescence or latent hostility and refusal. (The notion of the situation is an essentially narrative one.)

*Logics of Worlds*, with its move from ontology to a more Hegelian conception of ‘logic’, will translate the Sartrean term ‘situation’ into that—more

professionally philosophical—of ‘world’ as such. Yet the multiplicity of worlds posited there correlates to the multiplicity of Sartrean situations far more closely than to current problematics of alternative worlds or ‘multiverses’. Indeed, it is striking to find that the analogies between battle and the work of art (already worked out by Proust in *Le Côté de Guermantes*) furnish the basis for one of the most remarkable set-pieces in Badiou’s *Logics*, namely the analysis of Alexander’s strategy in the battle of Gaugamela, which destroyed the Persian army. The example might indeed be compared to Sartre’s monumental demonstration of the unity of the boxing match in the unfinished second volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. And in a sense it is by way of a leap forward to the problematic of the latter work that Badiou now takes on the possibility of the concept of the situation, to offer the occasion not merely for intervention and originality but also for alienation (in Sartre, it became a ‘counterfinality’ which reacts back on the initial agent with disastrous consequences). But in order to grasp the impressive complexity of Badiou’s development we must return for a moment to that initial moment of the ‘presentation’—the chaos of multiplicity, the incorrigible Being of sheer number, in opposition to which the former ‘nothingness’ took on the unified form and order of a ‘situation’ to be somehow imposed—and imposed as much by language and nomination as by anything else, it should be noted in passing: an intervention imposes its novel, historic Oneness by way of a word and even a name.

That the initial chaos of the Void was essentially spatial, we have implied in passing; and indeed the earlier *Theory of the Subject* made the qualification far more directly and inescapably, coining for it the neologism ‘esplace’—the inseparable synthesis of space and place. We must now grasp space as the villain here, observing the way in which it tends to seize on the ‘situation’ and to reify it back into something far more spatial like a ‘state’ or a ‘structure’. The political and historical significance of these terms will escape no one: ‘structure’ designates the great period of structuralism through which the 1950s and 60s passed, and constitutes a rebuke to its transformation of what were to be relationships back into empirical entities and positive terms (much against the spirit of Saussure’s original dialectical formula: ‘oppositions without positive terms’). As for the term ‘state’, whose double meaning is the same in French, Badiou here exploits that ambiguity in order to associate the transformation of the situation back into a static order with that quasi-anarchist loathing of the political state that hardened on both sides of

the Cold War with the development of monopoly capitalism on the one hand and a post-Stalinist party bureaucracy on the other. We will return to this parallelism between political developments and philosophico-ontological ones later on.

But the moment of the struggle between multiplicity and the situation has itself been, as it were, memorialized, even mythologized, in an epic poem, and accounts for the privileged yet otherwise unaccountable position of Mallarmé in Badiou's pantheon, and in his philosophical pantheon at that. For the Mallarmé of the great single-sentence epic *Un coup de dés* (1914) schematizes Badiou's dialectic of space and event most dramatically and memorably in its image of the empty ocean from which every trace of the shipwreck has vanished: the event is always past, it leaves no traces of itself behind in Being as such; and yet, as the very existence of the poem testifies, it would be wrong to believe that space has the last word or that, despite all the evidence to the contrary, Mallarmé is a nihilist.

For 'space' as such is not only the void of being, it is also a 'site' on which 'events' may take place: to explain how this vital ambivalence works—and how, from the meaningless existents of being and number, something can happen—is then the fundamental philosophical and formal problem *Being and Event* sets for itself. We may note an initial, perhaps premature and overhasty, solution in *Theory of the Subject*, in which the void of *esplace* is answered by the intervention of the 'horslieu'—what is not in and of space at all (Bosteels translates 'outplace' as opposed to 'splace'). But this does not yet give us the dynamic whereby, for a brief moment, the agency of event manages to overcome the inertia of being, of space, of structure and the empirical. The dilemma is analogous to that of Lévi-Strauss's analysis of narrative, which, beginning with the givens or data of the tale's initial situation, must somehow show how they can be rearranged, transformed, into that genuinely new emergence which is the 'event' of the story itself. The master of structuralism is of course hampered by his methodological and philosophical perspective, and his 'mytheme' turns out to involve little more than structural inversions and redistributions of the materials of his starting point (crab canons and palindromes rather than the eruption of the new).<sup>3</sup> Ironically, this ideological closure of the method will in much the same way lead Adorno to a critical pronouncement on sonata form, where the triumphant return

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<sup>3</sup> See Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Ouverture', in *Le Cru et le Cuit*, Paris 1944.

to its initial tonic or key is grasped as a ratification of the status quo, making of the symphony, this musical cousin of the novel, the expression *par excellence* of bourgeois aesthetic closure.

### *Inclusion and belonging*

Unlike Lévi-Strauss however, Badiou is not imprisoned in the empirical and is in fact working with two different dimensions of reality, however much their opposition may at first seem to be a purely structural one. His version of the opposition of being and nothing posits a reified world of Multiplicity standing over and against an insurrection of the Event and of freedom, in what had hitherto looked like one of the mere elements of that static world. That he is sorely tempted by the lure of the binary and the contained multiplicities of the permutation scheme will be clear at key moments of his oeuvre, such as the *Logics of Worlds* or the concluding sections of *Theory of the Subject*. Still, there comes the moment of truth of the mediation, where somehow those dimensions must meet in the dialectical struggle either for mastery and submission or for metamorphosis. This is the operation Badiou will navigate by way of a new opposition between *appartenance* and 'inclusion' (the latter passing effortlessly into English, whereas for the former term we only have the awkward equivalent 'belonging' or 'membership'). The two options designate alternative relationships between the elements of a state and its overall form: they determine whether the latter is to solidify into a structure or, as a situation, become available as a site, or in other words a place where, with the uprising of one of its elements—the included but 'unassimilable' one—the event may 'take place'. *Theory of the Subject* again offers helpful clarification here, by designating mere 'inclusion' as a kind of 'voisinage' or neighbourly juxtaposition with the other elements, rather than an all-out participation or 'appartenance', a whole-hearted sacrifice of its autonomy to the all-embracing structure itself. It is a distinction which clarifies the status of the outplace as well: for this vital or dynamic element will not yet have been absorbed, in mere 'inclusion', into the static space of its environment, rather retaining something of the freedom of what is only spatially juxtaposed with its neighbouring elements. (Later on, Badiou will reach back to the genius of Democritus to find yet another term for this wayward atom: it will be the famous *clinamen* or 'swerve', which unexpectedly brings movement to the lawful randomness-in-identity of the atomic multiplicity by way of a violent 'diagonal', to use another of Badiou's favourite terms.)

The political implications of this theoretical operation should then begin to become clear: what is only ‘included’—*horslieu, clinamen*, wayward undomesticatable element—is in fact the proletariat, or, as Badiou pointedly prefers to say, ‘the masses’, acknowledged by conventional social ontology but not assimilated to any fixed place or function, always dangerously prone to break loose like a cannon across the deck, to wreak havoc and bring about revolutionary disorder and change. In order to grasp the militant spirit of this analysis, it will once again be useful to have recourse to *Theory of the Subject* and its opening chapter, which provides a wonderfully inventive and original Maoist reading of Hegelian contradiction. We are, Badiou tells us here, still under the spell of space and structure when we continue to think of class struggle as an opposition between two empirical entities: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Rather, class struggle is in a sense a tension and an antagonism within the proletariat itself: contradiction is thus not an encounter between two existents, but rather that between a pure element and its positioned form, a struggle between two versions of the proletariat itself—the domesticated one, assimilated into its official unions, and the insurgent workers of the wildcat strike. I take the analysis to suggest two premises which are probably far more congenial to our current moment in history than they would have been for nineteenth- or twentieth-century Marxism. The first is that the bourgeoisie was never really a class, which means that its alleged absence from this or that national situation is no longer a real problem either. For it has always been a grey area, this gap between a proud and class-conscious bourgeoisie in its nineteenth-century French homeland and the vaguely ‘middle’ classes of the American continent, where only big businessmen seem somehow to ‘represent’ capital as such, without for all that being any more quintessentially bourgeois than the rest of us. (Indeed, I have elsewhere read Kojève’s infamous doctrine of the end of history and the convergence of the US and the USSR in precisely this spirit, as a sociological rather than an economic development, a kind of universal social plebeianization which has little enough to do with rich and poor, or powerful and powerless.<sup>4</sup>)

What ‘bourgeois’ comes to mean in this waning of a specific social class is bourgeois culture as such: commodification, consumerism, wage-work, Americanization. The contradiction, the class struggle, of some ‘pure’ proletariat then has for its target a situated proletariat, a proletariat

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<sup>4</sup> *The Hegel Variations*, London and New York 2010, pp. 100–2.

already deeply embedded in bourgeois culture, and incorrigibly wedded or indeed addicted to its benefits (even when it scarcely 'enjoys' them). This is the sense in which the Maoists attacked Soviet revisionism, as a sell-out to an essentially bourgeois way of life; and it is the sense in which the political Badiou will hold to what he sees as a core of genuine working-class militancy in its local struggles against a domesticated (or 'revisionist') working class that has fallen prey to the 'lieu', in a Mallarméan sense: to the place itself. It is this struggle that Badiou today calls 'communism'; an engagement whose philosophical preconditions lie in his conception of the event and his four forms of 'authenticity', or the so-called truth procedures.

### *Agency and event*

This will clearly bring us to the question of subjectivity, about which it is appropriate to say, not only that Badiou eschews Sartre's simplified identification of consciousness with nothingness (as well as eschewing the Hegelian language of the negative and negation in general), but that he also passes over in silence the former's pathbreaking distinction between the pure or empty consciousness of intentionality and that personal identity or self which is only one of the objects of consciousness (Sartre's first publication, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, so influential on Lacan<sup>5</sup>). Indeed, the phenomenology of the individual subject, the problem of consciousness as such, is never really the centre of Badiou's philosophical concerns, unless one takes the word, as in the title of *Theory of the Subject*, to be a reference to the subjectivity of the committed or 'engaged' militant.

In *Being and Event*, 'intervention' is not explicitly endowed with any specific agency (or individual subject or actant), but rather detected by way of the 'situation', or the 'site', into which it reorganizes the state or the static givens of space. I have already mentioned its motivation by the horror of the void which lies at the heart of Being's multiplicities; but we must also remind ourselves, on the one hand, of Being's capacity to re-appropriate such 'interventions' and draw back into the reifications of the empirical as such; and on the other, the status of knowledge as the thought-mode specific to the state.

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<sup>5</sup> Sartre, *La transcendance de l'Ego*, Paris 1937.

For it must be concluded, despite Badiou's delight in the mathematical, that he is to be numbered among those 'Western Marxists' whom Perry Anderson has diagnosed as harbouring a Viconian commitment to history as over against Nature, and a resultant option for the 'social' ('historical materialism') rather than science, or the metaphysics of 'dialectical materialism'. Hegel, and his modern equivalent in Lacanian psychoanalysis, might seem to have offered a certain corrective to this anti-scientific bias; yet we have seen how purposefully Badiou continues to range the epistemological, knowledge and its structures and laws, on the side of Being, that of the forms of multiplicity and of mathematics as the language of the reified and what Hegel liked to call the 'fixed' (only set theory, with its decentred infinities, will for him free number from that fixity).

Knowledge is, however, precisely just such fixed data and facts: the state and its power are thereby partly grounded in its condition as an encyclopaedia (Badiou's term), a storehouse of empirical facts. But the fact as such is neither 'word' nor 'deed', and the distinction at stake here is rather that between science and truth (although this will require further qualification when we reach the truth procedures, one of which is paradoxically still identified as science). Hegel had already worked out the basic dialectic of the matter in his own differentiation between 'bad infinity'—the endless accumulation of positivities—and the genuine article. There is a good deal of philosophical speculation about what Hegel took to be true infinity, but much less doubt in Badiou, where Cantor and set theory provide a more reliable reference.

Meanwhile, even in the absence of an account of agency, what can be identified is the effect of the intervention, which is none other than that long-awaited master-term, the Event. 'The state knows no such thing as an event'; the latter is something like an 'ultra-one' imposed on it with all the violence of a nomination (see Mallarmé again). The event makes the situation and its 'state of things' into a site, and turns its facts into singularities. It is dual, partaking of the empirical and yet of something transcendental: the Event 'is composed on the one hand of elements of the site and on the other of itself alone' (the fundamental meaning of 'inclusion'). This is not the routine time of Kuhn's 'normal' science (Badiou uses the word), but rather that of 'paradigm change'. But what is more paradoxical is the well-nigh tragic qualification of this triumphalism in the insistence that the Event, like Hegel's essence, is always

past, always lies in the past, consigned to history, whatever unforeseeable eruptions it may confront us with in the future.

The Event, in other words, has no present: a peculiar idea, which we can perhaps best explain to ourselves by remembering that the present is the realm of Being as such, and that the Event is not an existent in that sense. Oddly enough, Badiou does not raise the issue of narrative in his analysis of the Event: yet his position would seem to be confirmed by the absence of any definitive narrative solutions to the form-problem of collective events such as revolutions, which have no individual agents. Broken and fragmented individual points of view only testify to the certainty that something like an Event was there, had been there, once existed. Not only his empty ocean, Mallarmé's empty rooms also offer this spectacle of a site in which, perhaps, an inhabitant once was, or might yet come to be. It is in appearance a rather desolate political perspective, this one, in which the great revolutionary moments all seem to lie in the past, offering no technologies for the detection of future eruptions or tectonic plate shifts. One of the reasons for this allows us to mark one of those asymptotic approaches of Lacan to Marxism, of which Badiou's work is one fundamental version: in this case the matter of the Real, 'which resists symbolization absolutely' (Lacan), which cannot be experienced directly or even conceptualized beyond this topological inference. The Real of the Event, for Badiou, the reality of the political Event *par excellence* or of revolution, is in that sense identified with 'the masses'; and their unrepresentability is what makes it impossible to designate them as an agency or an actor on the historical scene. Their presence is also detected after the fact, in the ruins of 1848 or 1917: collectivity cannot constitute an actant in this narrative sense. Yet these convulsive events themselves can somehow be reawakened in the present, in what sounds like a fraternal echo of Benjamin's energetic formulation: 'to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now [*Jetztzeit*] which he blasted out of the continuum of history'.<sup>6</sup> This 'tiger's leap into the past' of Benjamin is surely an excellent interpretation of what Badiou means by 'fidelity' to the Event.

### *Truth procedures*

Now we reach the so-called truth procedures, and this perplexing philosophical term 'fidelity', which seems less redolent of this or that

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London 1970, p. 263.

philosophical analysis of temporality than of a kind of *Lebensweisheit* or knowledge of 'human nature'. And this is precisely why it is important to grasp the word for this 'virtue' as a technical term rather than an ethical one, a term intended indeed to mark the very emergence of a kind of human temporality as such. Fidelity is then the commitment (or 'engagement') to the Event itself: it is neither psychological nor moral, but rather a Husserlian retension, which is at one and the same time a protension: not memory or historicity, but very much the conversion—of a kind familiar from Sartre—to the Event as to truth itself, as to a cause.

But we have been evoking the Event as though it were always a specifically political reality. The four truth procedures (or forms of fidelity) make it clear even initially that, although political conversion is a privileged model of the process, it does not constitute its only possible content. The four 'truth procedures' are by now well-known: they are art, science, politics, and what I must continue to call *l'Amour*, in order to avoid prudish Victorian overtones, inasmuch as this word in French means Eros in general, from sexology to sublimation, from Plato to Havelock Ellis and Frank Harris, and very much including the entire psychoanalytic tradition. Perhaps, indeed, *l'Amour* is the place to start here, as its ontological 'investigation'—very far from any humanism or psychology—would seem to designate an extension of the sexual interest into the most obscure forms of human attention and the most outlandish diagnoses of the universal meaning and omnipresence of this drive, both empirical and transcendental all at once. Such investigations are what Joyce or Freud found themselves accused of in olden times, an obsession that tracked down the sexual element in every living moment and in our noblest spiritual ambitions as well.

In this sense, the forms of 'truth' are not for nothing described as procedures: for the word is meant to underscore that dimension of all four which is praxis and activity, and not merely that contemplative and epistemological 'knowledge' traditionally associated with the state and its empirical 'truths'. In order further to underscore this active nature of the procedures, Badiou has here strategically positioned two other terms with even more paradoxical connotations: their French forms are *indiscernable* and *enquête* (investigation rather than the literal 'inquest') respectively. The latter can surely not mean the cataloguing of features we associate with dictionaries and definitions; but rather an active

pursuit of consequences and effects, preconditions and derivatives. It might better be characterized as an exploration which is simultaneously a translation into another master-code (not Badiou's language), the mathematization of older physical concepts, for example; but one which at the same time opens up and 'colonizes' new and hitherto untheorized areas of reality, rather in the spirit of Foucault's micrology of power. At this level of 'truth' it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the diagnostic focus and the ethico-political imperative; or between the presence and the absence of the relevant content or thematics of the four procedures either, as far as that goes. So we are confronted here with an immense, well-nigh global dedifferentiation in Luhmann's sense, which will, as we shall see shortly, go a long way towards justifying the use of the word 'indiscernible'.

The other Badiouian generic which requires a certain vigilance, is as we have already warned, that of science or knowledge. Politics is everywhere, no one can doubt it; and as for art, in our aestheticized commodity culture—and compared to the art-poor societies and cultures of yesteryear—we might also be willing to agree that it too is everywhere and everything. But as we have already shown, science, as a truth procedure, is not in Badiou quite what one might at first think; and we may recall how carefully Heidegger excluded science from his own more numerous 'truth procedures' (they included the founding of a new state, the religious approach to the Absolute, as well as *Opfer*, or the supreme sacrifice on the battlefield). But in fact the inclusion of science among Badiou's truth procedures opens up a significant rift within our conventional notion of 'science' and knowledge. For there are the cut-and-dried formulations of the latter's findings, and then there is the act of finding itself, mathematization, the passionate search, indeed, the very *enquête*/investigation, whereby we seek to extend our conquest of the *terra ignota* of the untheorized by way of the heroic speculations of non-normal science: in this sense, for example, Cantor is by far not the same as the writers of academic textbooks on mathematics, and set theory is an intervention of the most violent kind into the terrain of the One and its domesticated numerologies. Here, indeed, we touch on a well-nigh Deleuzian celebration of novelty and innovation, and the way in which, in Deleuze as well, science in this form becomes nearly indistinguishable from art as such (Badiou's explicit addition of politics to these procedures will sharply mark off his difference from the earlier philosopher of 'difference').

Now perhaps the attachment to Leibniz's term 'indiscernible' will have become clearer. The story is well-known, how the court philosopher led his lady pupils into the garden to search in vain for two leaves that might be considered absolutely identical with one another. 'Discernment' in that sense has become for Badiou (as in a somewhat different way for Luhmann) the mark of the bad old sciences, the epistemological and structural ones, which sought perpetual differentiation as their very reason for being. But as opposed to that self-perpetuating proliferation of difference, both substantive and structural, and to its production of ever more specialized and distinct bodies of knowledge (or faculties, as Kant might have called them), truth sees everywhere the Same. If one is 'faithful' to the political, for example, then there is nothing that is not political; and nothing more hostile to the genuinely or authentically political than the effort to hive off an area such as the bureaucracy or management, which would be free of political struggle in its loftiest generic sense. So with love, so also with art: these life passions de-differentiate our civilized modern differences and return to a passionate identification of their commitments everywhere; and this is the way in which truth procedure also means praxis. The very function of language is thereby modified; and the way in which linguistic differentiation stands in the service of a kind of Foucauldian conquest of ever newer, hitherto unnamed terrains and territories is violently transformed by the return of language to its use as an intervention and as a fundamental form of identification and revelation by the prophets and their modern equivalent, the great revolutionaries. Intervention is that: the dedifferentiation of word and deed, as in Faust's translation of the first line of the Gospel according to John: 'Im Anfang war die Tat!'

But this reenergizing of the deeper identity of knowledge and praxis in the truth procedures does not altogether solve the theoretical problem of their status and origin. Perhaps the mystery can be sharpened by raising anew the question of the place of psychology in these distinctions. We must indeed remember that psychology as such is to be counted among the forms of knowledge in its reified, structural sense: psychological observations, let alone psychological hypotheses and explanations, are to be numbered among the empirical facts, however they may be later on assigned to ideological conceptions of human nature (itself a static concept, which falls on the side of Being in this opposition). It is therefore crucial that the 'generic' areas (to which the so-called truth procedures apply) not be grasped in any psychological way, as fundamental

functions of human nature. It was indeed in order to avoid this very danger that ontology reemerged in modern times (and as a preparation for it, phenomenology with its vocation to reinterpret the data of psychology in a non- and anti-psychological way). We must therefore try to find a way to understand the 'generic' in an ontological rather than a psychological mode.

Sartre was more forthright about the problem, and his conception of the 'originary ontological choice', that fundamental choice of being that each individual is, would seem to address it more directly, although without any of the richness of the Badolian truth procedures. Indeed, what corresponds to these in Sartrean ontology is rather the extraordinary elaboration of our 'concrete relations with the Other' which was one of Sartre's most original and influential developments in *Being and Nothingness*, and which alerts us, like the famous dog which did not bark in the night, to the utter absence of any theorization of the Other in Badiou (unless, to be sure, one assumes that the problematic of the Other has today been wholly absorbed into the enlarged field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, organized as it is, and unlike Freud, around Others big and small).

It will be remembered that the Sartrean table of 'concrete relations' mobilizes our duality as being and freedom, body and the not-being of consciousness, in such a way as to ground its individual forms according to our passive or active stance towards this same duality in other people (I omit those future developments on collective relationships which were the innovation of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* some twenty years later). To be sure, one of the consequences of this Sartrean 'deduction' is the proposition that none of these structurally unequal relationships can 'succeed', in the sense of attaining some harmonious or at least tolerant coexistence. Our relationship with the Other is thus always conflict; and at best something like that 'sexual relation' which Lacan tells us does not exist (in this, following the Sartrean model of incommensurability that clearly inspired this now famous or infamous proposition).

Yet the Sartrean 'concrete relations with the Other' are also passions, whose dominance or obsessive practice can become virtual life choices: such are, for example, the habitual recourse to language as a means of seduction, or the all-encompassing commitment to hatred as a desperate solution to the impossible dilemma of the Other's existence. If the former might at a pinch be assimilated to love or to art, it is hard to see

how the latter—a Spinozan sad passion if there ever was one—could find any place in Badiou's generics, any more than anger as a Dantean life passion could, or habitual pity, or indeed monastic withdrawal. This is to confront both systems—the Sartrean as well as the Badolian—with a properly empirical question: can there be more such choices? Is this number of relations or generics final and all that can theoretically be conceivable? As with the Kantian or Hegelian categories, one wants to wonder whether one might not add some new ones or subtract some, or whether history itself might not at some point do so.

### *Reinventions*

And then there is the question of beginnings, which both systems necessarily face. The Sartrean conception of an originary choice is particularly unsatisfactory, even though it is a godsend for analysis, which can now read my every gesture and predilection in terms of my ontology—my own individual relationship to being—rather than my psychology or nature. But this is very much a situation in which the Kantian antinomy obtains, and we cannot assign any empirical reasons for what is an 'always already' absolute choice that overarches all reasons and gives them their meaning from the very outset. Here Badiou's notion of the event is far more satisfactory, in that, like trauma in the theories that cluster around that term, it is the initial shock of the primordial event that can be seen as determining my fidelity to it (or my infidelity, as the case may be, or my lifelong attempt to forget its primacy and to flee its consequences).

At that point, however, a different kind of problem emerges (which holds equally for Sartre and his incomplete *Ethics*, doomed for the same structural reasons to failure): this is the question of the content of ethics, which remains a necessarily formal and formalist matter if it is not to sink without a trace once and for all into empirical history. Only Kant's categorical imperative was able to make a content out of its very form itself (and the Sartrean attempt, by making freedom itself the object of my freedom, turns out to be little more than a pale modern replay of the latter). Otherwise the question, inevitable for all ethical theory, arises: why cannot fascism be the legitimate content of a life-passion, of a generic or truth procedure? Certainly its commitments are formally indistinguishable from those of any politically

correct 'engagement'. Badiou's thoughts on this in his *Ethics* (fascism is exclusionary rather than universalizing) are not much more satisfactory than Sartre's own.

I should note, however, that this problem—along with many others—is explicitly addressed in *Logics of Worlds*, which is less a second volume of *Being and Event* than an elaborate commentary on many of its more abstract themes and propositions. Badiou there takes up the problem of what he calls fascism by positing, not one, but three, and even four, 'figures' of the contemporary political subject. The figure pledged to fidelity 'blasts open the continuum of History' by keeping faith in the present with the political Event; while its opposite number is reactive to that present and thereby 'reactionary'. But a third figure—the 'obscure subject'—attempts to turn away from the present and to 'occult' its elements and possibilities: this is Badiou's redefinition of fascism, which ranges from Nazi archaism to the fundamentalisms of ISIS and other religious or mythic delusions. A possible fourfold is however opened up by the 'resurrection' of fidelity in a new way which invents a contemporary renewal of the Event.

In fact, all four truth procedures undergo structural differentiation of this kind, which makes *Logics of Worlds* a far more practical and 'phenomenological' guide than the implacably metaphysical and abstract *Being and Event*, which remains its fundamental template. Indeed, the new work, like the concluding section of *Theory of the Subject* so many years earlier, offers a proliferation of oppositions and distinctions of all kinds, which bring the Event down to earth in a multitude of forms, often richly concrete and historical, but which at the same time renew our deeper unspoken questions about it: why only four registers? What differentiates the absolute event from its humdrum quotidian varieties, except our retroactive devotion to it? In the newer work, indeed, Badiou boldly reasserts an ever more open and brazen Platonism, characterizing his four truths as those eternal constellations which coldly shine in the distant sky of Mallarmé's empty poems.

Meanwhile the very title of the *Logics of Worlds* signals a new and different linguistic strategy as well, for it promises to translate Badiou's metaphysics back into some of the more traditional philosophical problems, which can essentially be identified by way of their terminology.

Thus, for example, we have observed how Badiou by skirting the question of narrative is able to avoid traditional questions of temporality, or at an even deeper but far more modern level, those of identity and difference: at what point do the humdrum and repetitive 'events' of everyday life undergo that sea change that marks the emergence of the radically new, of the Event in all its absolute splendour—the Rubicon, Cleopatra's nose, the Resurrection, Spartacus, the dictation of the Quran by the Angel Gabriel, Luther's theses, the writing of the American Constitution, the Paris Commune, or the Chinese Cultural Revolution? My point is not that these are not utterly absolute events, but rather that Badiou has cunningly omitted (he might say, subtracted) a heavy weight of philosophical debate and polemic by excluding terms such as identity, difference and repetition from his discussion of them (the occasional neologism—'count-for-one', for example—will accomplish much the same terminological cleansing).

I will suggest, however, that we do not need to stage our ultimate confrontation with Badiou's presuppositions on the site of the Platonic Ideas. Indeed, the method of abstraction whereby Badiou identifies his four generic domains with each other under the heading of 'procedure' allows for a more generalized conception of what commitment might be across the fields, and also of the place of the philosopher as the guide to praxis: for the key dimension of Badiouian 'science' secures the role of thought and analysis in this situation, while that of 'love' secures passion, that of art innovation, and that of politics the deeper content of all four zones.

Badiou and tradition? This now massive oeuvre leads one to the conclusion that, far from theoretical critique of tradition, as in Heidegger, Althusser, Derrida and Adorno—let alone from its philosophical pastiche in Deleuze—Badiou is out for nothing less than its wholesale reinvention. It is therefore only fair to mark its omissions, which may or may not constitute its limits, if not its evasions. For me, those are: the question of the Other; the economic dimension of Marxism, very much including the structure of the commodity and the dialectic of labour and production; the very rich heritage of ideological analysis whose findings and problems are scarcely touched on here; the contemporary relevance of the dialectic as such; the nature of class struggle under globalization; and finally the implications of Maoism: is it Marxist or post-Marxist, indeed approaching a genuinely anarchist anti-Marxism? But any further

judgement on the system must necessarily choose between two criteria: does this work inspire 'fidelity' to the Badiou-event itself; or can it produce new problems that generate not only a new philosophy, but also new and active forms of a radical political practice for today's worldwide stalemate? Whatever his pessimistic assessments of the contemporary situation (St Paul in the place of Lenin?), Badiou's emphasis on activity and production, his insistence on fidelity as the resurrection of the dormant Events of a seemingly extinct political praxis, can only be energizing for us.