

THE EVENT IN DELEUZE

Alain Badiou

Translated by Jon Roffe¹

Deleuze always paid tribute to Sartre as the figure who, during the thirties and forties, woke French philosophy from its academic slumbers. He considered the 1937 article, ‘The Transcendence of the Ego’, the origin of everything: why? It is because, in this text, Sartre proposes the idea—I am citing Deleuze—of ‘an impersonal transcendental field, having the form neither of a personal synthetic consciousness nor subjective identity—the subject, to the contrary, always being constituted.’² I want to emphasise this remark of Deleuze’s all the more insofar as the motif of an impersonal transcendental field is dominant throughout my Greater Logic, where it is effectuated, in the finest technical detail, as a logic of appearance or worlds.³

Deleuze remarked also that Sartre had been prevented from thinking all of the consequences of his idea because he had attached the impersonal field to a (self)-consciousness. This is absolutely correct. We could also say: Sartre continued to believe in an auto-unification of the transcendental. He did not expose the subject to the *alea* of a pure Outside. Now, one of the names of the Outside is ‘event’. This is why the event, as that to which the power [*puissance*] of a thought is devoted, and/or that from which this power proceeds, has, after Sartre, become a common term for the greater number of contemporary philosophers. Other than through the critique of the phenomenology of consciousness, this term has been transmitted to us, on the side of truth-procedures, by the lasting fragment—in the 20th century—of four entangled motifs: that, in politics, of Revolution; in love, of erotic liberation; in the arts, of performance; and in the sciences, of the epistemological break. In philosophy, it can discerned as well in Wittgenstein (‘The world is everything which happens’⁴) as in Heidegger (being as being-on-the-way⁵, *Ereignis*).

The idea is central in Deleuze, as it is in my own enterprise—but what a contrast! The interest of this contrast is that it exposes the original ambiguity of the idea itself. It effectively contains a dimension of structure (interruption as such, the appearance of a supernumerary term) and a dimension of the history of life (the concentration of becoming, being as coming-to-self, promise). In the first case, the event is disjoined from the One, it is separation, assumption of the void, pure non-sense. In the second case, it is the play of the One, composition, intensity of the plenum, the crystal (or logic) of sense. *The Logic of Sense* is the most considerable effort on the part of Gilles Deleuze to clarify his

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concept of the event. He does so in the company of the Stoics, they for whom the ‘event’ must be integrated into the inflexible discipline of the All, according to which Stoicism orients itself. Between ‘event’ and ‘destiny’, there must be something like a subjective reciprocity.

I will extract from *The Logic of Sense* what I will call the four Deleuzian axioms of the event.

Axiom 1: ‘Unlimited becoming becomes the event itself’⁶

The event is the ontological realisation of the eternal truth of the One, the infinite power [*puissance*] of Life. It is in no way a void, or a stupor, separated from what becomes. To the contrary, it is the concentration of the continuity of life, its intensification. The event is that which donates the One to the concatenation of multiplicities. We could advance the following formula: in becomings, the event is the proof of the One of which these becomings are the expression. This is why there is no contradiction between the limitless of becoming and the singularity of the event. The event reveals in an immanent way the One of becomings, it makes becoming this One. The event is the becoming of becoming: the becoming(-One) of (unlimited) becoming.

Axiom 2: ‘The event is always that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening’⁷

The event is a synthesis of past and future. In reality, the expression of the One in becomings is the eternal identity of the future as a dimension of the past. The ontology of time, for Deleuze as for Bergson, admits no figure of separation. Consequently, the event would not be what takes place ‘between’ a past and a future, between the end of a world and the beginning of another. It is rather encroachment and connection: it realises the indivisible continuity of Virtuality. It exposes the unity of passage which fuses the one-just-after and the one-just-before. It is not ‘that which happens’, but that which, in what happens, has become and will become. The event as event of time, or time as the continued and eternal procedure of being, introduces no division into time, no intervallic void between two times. ‘Event’ repudiates the present understood as either passage or separation; it is the operative paradox of becoming. This thesis can thus be expressed in two ways: there is no present (the event is re-represented, it is active immanence which co-presents the past and the future); or, everything is present (the event is living or chaotic eternity, as the essence of time).

Axiom 3: ‘The event is of a different regime than the actions and passions of the body, even if it results from them.’⁸

Whether thought of as the becoming of becomings, or as disjunctive eternity, the event intensifies bodies, concentrates their constitutive multiplicity. It would therefore be neither of the same nature as the actions and the passions of the body, nor supervene on them. The event is not identical to the bodies which it affects, but neither is it transcendent to what happens to them or what they do, such that it cannot be said any longer that they are (ontologically) different to bodies. It is the differentiator of actions and passions of the body as a result. What then is an immanent One of becomings, if not Becoming? Or difference, or Relation (other Deleuzian terms)? However, Becoming is not an idea, but what becomings become. Thus the event affects bodies, because it is what they do or support as exposed syntheses. It is the coming of the One through them that they are as distinct nature (virtual rather than actual) and homogenous result (without them, it is not). This is the sense that must be given to the formula: ‘The event is coextensive with becoming’.

The event of Life will be thought as the body without organs: of a different regime than living organisms, but uniquely deployed or legible as the result of the actions and passions of these organisms.

Axiom 4: A life is composed of a single and same Event, lacking all the variety of what happens to it.⁹

What is difficult here is not the reiteration of the One as the concentrated expression of vital deployment. The three preceding axioms are clear on this point. The difficulty is in understanding the word ‘composed’. The event is what composes a life somewhat as a musical composition is organised by its theme. ‘Variety’ must here be understood as ‘variation’, as variation on a theme. The event is not what happens to a life, but what is in what happens, or what happens in what happens, such that it can only have a single Event. The Event, in the disparate material of a life, is precisely the Eternal Return of the identical, the undifferentiated power [*puissance*] of the Same: the ‘powerful inorganic life.’¹⁰ With regard to any multiplicity whatsoever, it is of the essence of the Event to compose them into the One that they are, and to exhibit this unique composition in a potentially infinite variety of ways.

With these four axioms, Deleuze reveals his response to evental ambiguity: he chooses for destiny. The event is not the risky [*hasardeux*] passage from one state of things to another. It is the immanent stigmata of a One-result of all becomings. In the multiple-which-becomes, in the between-two of the multiples which are active multiples, the event is the destiny of the One.

It is enough to invert these four axioms—here as in Book II [of *Logiques des mondes*], ‘inversion’ reveals negations—in order to obtain a quite good axiomatic of what I call ‘event’, that which is a site, appearing in maximal intensity, and equally capable of making absolute its own inexistence in apparition [*l’apparaître*].

Axiom 1. An event is never the concentration of a vital continuity, or the immanent intensification of a becoming. It is never coextensive with becoming. It is, on the contrary, on the side of a pure break with the becoming of an object of the world, through the auto-apparition of this object. Correlatively, it is the supplementation of apparition [*l’apparaître*] by the emergence [*surgissement*] of a trace: what formerly inexistence becomes intense existence.

There is, with regard to the continuity in the becomings of the world, at once a lack (the impossibility of auto-apparition with the interruption of the authority of the mathematical laws of being and the logical laws of appearance) and an excess (the impossibility of the emergence of a maximal intensity of existence). ‘Event’ names the conjunction of this lack and this excess.

Axiom 2. The event would not be the inseparable encroachment of the past on the future, or the eternally past being of the future. It is, to the contrary, a vanishing mediator, an intemporal instant which renders disjunct the previous state of an object (the site) and the state that follows. We could equally say that the event extracts from a time the possibility of an other time. This other time, whose materiality envelops the consequences of the event, deserves the name of a new present. The event is neither past nor future. It makes us present to the present.

Axiom 3. The event would not be the result of the actions and passions of a body, nor does it differ in nature from them. To the contrary, an active and adequate body in a new present is an effect of the event, as we have seen in detail in Book IV [of *Logique des mondes*]. We must here reverse Deleuze—in the sense in which, after Nietzsche, he himself wanted to reverse Plato. These are not the actions and passions of the multiples which are, under the title of an immanent result, synthesised in the event. It is the blow of an evental One which animates multiplicities and forms them into a subjectivisable body. And the trace of an event, which is itself incorporated in the new present, is clearly of the same nature as the actions of this body.

We will say in a general sense that Deleuze poses the One as ontological condition (chaos, the One-All, Life) and as evental result. In contrast, I claim that the One ontologically in-exists (the multiple is ‘without-one’) and is only related to truths insofar as it is the evental principle, and not at all a result. We can only accept that events ‘are nothing other than their effects’¹² at the point where Deleuze ends, calling them ‘event-effects’.¹³ They are no longer cause, even less ‘essence’. They are acts, or actants, material principles (the site) of a truth. For Deleuze, the event is the immanent consequence of becoming or Life. For me, the event is the immanent principle of exceptions to becoming, or of Truths.

Axiom 4. An event does not make a composite unity of what is. There is, to the contrary, a decomposition of worlds by multiple evental sites.

Just as it performs a separation of times, the event is separated from other events. Truths are multiple, and multiform. They are exceptions in their worlds, and not the One which makes them converge. Deleuze often adopts the Leibnizian principle of Harmony, even as he defends the idea of divergent series and impossible worlds. The eternal and unique Event is the focal point at which the ingredients of a life converge. Beyond the ‘chaosmos’¹⁴ in which the divergent series and heteroclitic multiplicities are effectuated, ‘nothing but the Event subsists, the Event alone, *Eventum Tantum* for all contraries, which communicates with itself through its own distance, resonating across all its disjunctions.’¹⁵ No, this ‘resonance’ does not attract me. I propose rather a flat sound, without resonance, which in no way modifies the apparition of a site, and nothing is disposed in harmony—or in disharmony—either with itself (considered as subsisting solitude) or with others (considered as the reabsorption of contraries). There is not—there cannot be—a ‘Unique event of which all the others are shreds and fragments.’ The one of a truth is initiated on the basis of the without-One of the event, its contingent dissemination.

This dispute is without a doubt, as Lyotard would say, a differend, since it bears on the fundamental semantic connection of the word ‘event’: with sense for Deleuze, and with truth for me. Deleuze’s formula is without apology: ‘The event, which is to say, sense.’¹⁶ From the beginning of his book, he forges what is for me a chimera, an inconsistent neologism: the ‘sense-event.’¹⁷ Such a claim communicates with the linguistic *turn*¹⁸ of the great contemporary sophists, much more than Deleuze would have wished. In maintaining that the event belongs to the register of sense, the entire project finds its ground on the side of language. Consider: ‘The event is sense itself. The event belongs essentially to language, it is in an essential rapport with language.’ It would be necessary to detail the dramatic reactive consequences of this kind of statement, and of many others: for example, ‘[The event] is the pure expressed in what happens which makes us signify.’ Here is the kernel of the aestheticisation of everything, and the expressive politics of the ‘multitudes’, in which the compact thought of the Master is today dispersed. Insofar as it is the localised disfunction of the transcendental of a world, the event does not have the least sense, nor is it sense itself. If it only

remains as trace, it can in no way be supported on the side of language. It only opens a space of consequences in which the body of a truth is composed. Like every real point, as Lacan saw, it is absolutely on the side of this unsensed which by itself can only maintain a rapport with language by making a hole in it. And nothing sayable, nothing of the order of the transcendental laws of language [*du dire*], can fill this hole.

Like all philosophers of vital continuity, Deleuze cannot abide any division between sense, the transcendental law of appearance, and truths, eternal exceptions. He even seems sometimes to identify the two. He once wrote to me that he ‘felt no need’¹⁹ for the category of truth. He was certainly justified in such a claim: sense is a name sufficient for truth. There are, however, perverse effects of this identification. Vitalist logic, which submits the actualisation of multiplicities to the order of the virtual One-All, overlooks the fact that, in the simultaneous declaration that events are sense, and that they have, as Deleuze proclaims, ‘an eternal truth,’²⁰ we find religion in its pure state. If sense has in effect an eternal truth, then God exists, having never been anything other than the truth of sense. Deleuze’s idea of the event would have had to convince him to follow Spinoza to the end, he who Deleuze elects as ‘the Christ of philosophers,’²¹ and convince him to name ‘God’ the unique Event in which becomings are diffracted. Lacan knew well that to deliver that which happens over to sense is to work towards the subjective consolidation of religion, since, as he wrote, ‘the stability of religion is provided by sense, which is always religious.’

This latent religiosity is all too apparent in the disciples eager to praise the supposed inverse and constituent moment of an unbridled Capital, the ‘creativity’ of the multitudes: those who believe they have seen—or what they call seeing—a planetary *Parousia* of a communism of ‘forms of life’ in the anti-globalisation demonstrations in Seattle or Genoa, in which disaffected [*désœuvrée*] youths participate in their own way in the sinister meetings of the financial establishment. Deleuze, often sceptical towards the formulations of those concerned with political matters, would have, I believe, laughed to himself about such pathos. Having openly conceptualised the place of the event in the multiform procedures of thought, Deleuze had to reduce this place to what he called ‘the ideal singularities which communicate in a single and same Event.’ If ‘singularity’ is inevitable, the other terms are of dubious value. ‘Ideal’ could be taken as ‘eternal’ if Deleuze was not overly obsessed with the real of the event. ‘Communicate’ could be taken as ‘universal’ if Deleuze did not interdict any interruption of communication which would immediately connect any rupture to transcendental continuity. Of the ‘single and same,’ I have already noted its unfortunate nature: the effect of a One, on bodies, of an evental blow [*frappe*] is necessarily transformed by the absorption of the event by the One of life.

Deleuze has very strongly marked the nature of the philosophical combat in which the destiny of the word ‘event’ is played out: ‘A double struggle has as its object the prevention of every dogmatic confusion between event and essence, and also every empiricist confusion between event and accident.’²² There is nothing to add. Except that, when he thinks the event as intensified result and continuity of becoming, Deleuze is an empiricist (which he, in any case, continually proclaimed). And that, when he reincorporates it into the One of ‘the unlimited Aion, the Infinite in which it subsists and insists’, into the always-there of the Virtual, he is tendentially dogmatic.

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To break with empiricism, the event must be thought as the advent of what is subtracted from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and the transcendently discontinuous. To break with dogmatism, the event must be released from every tie to the One. It must be subtracted from Life in order to be released to the stars.

Alain Badiou is Professor of Philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. In addition to several novels, plays, and political essays, he has published a number of major philosophical works, including *Theory of the Subject* (1982) and *Being and Event* (1988). He has recently published the sequel to *Being and Event*, *Logiques des Mondes* (2006).

1 The original French text is ‘L’événement selon Deleuze’ in Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes* (2006: Editions du Seuil, Paris), 403-10. *Parrhesia* would like to thank Professor Badiou for permission to publish this translated extract. All notes provided here are the translator’s.

2 Deleuze, Gilles *The Logic of Sense* trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin Boundas (1990: Athlone Press, London), 98; translation modified. Hereafter to be cited as LS.

3 The central three books of *Logiques des mondes* are collected by Badiou under the title of *Grande Logique*, pertaining respectively to the categories of the transcendental, the object, and the relation.

4 Badiou’s French—‘Le monde est tout ce qui arrive’—only idiomatically renders Wittgenstein’s original phrase ‘Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist,’ or as Ogden has it, ‘The world is all that is the case,’ Wittgenstein, Ludwig *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. CK Ogden (1922: London, Kegan Paul), §1.

5 Cf. Heidegger’s discussion of this phrase, which he attributes to Aristotle, in ‘On the Essence and Concept of Physis in Aristotle’s Physics, B1’ in Heidegger, Martin *Pathmarks*, trans. Thomas Sheehan, ed. William McNeill (1998: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 183-230.

6 Unlimited becoming is the topic of the first series in LS (‘Pure becoming, the unlimited, is the matter of the simulacrum insofar as it eludes the action of the Idea and insofar as it contests both model and copy’) but this phrase cannot be found here. Likewise, elsewhere: ‘But the entire first half of *Alice [in Wonderland]* still seeks the secret of events and of the becoming unlimited which they imply.’ (LS 9)

7 ‘Becoming unlimited comes to be the ideational and incorporeal event, with all of its characteristic reversals between future and past, active and passive, cause and effect, more and less, too much and not enough, already and not yet. The infinitely divisible event is always both at once. It is eternally that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening.’ (LS 8) Cf. ‘Just as the present measures the temporal realisation of the event – that is, its incarnation in the depth of acting bodies and its incorporation in a state of affairs – the event in turn, in its impassibility and impenetrability, has no present. It rather retreats and advances in two directions at once, being the perpetual object of a double question: what is going to happen? What has just happened? The agonising aspect of the pure event is that it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening.’ (LS 63)

8 LS 94, translation modified.

9 LS 170, translation modified. The passage from which this phrase is extracted reads:

What makes an event compatible or incompatible with another? We cannot appeal to causality, since it is a question of a relation of effects among themselves. What brings destiny about at the level of events, what brings an event to repeat another in spite of all its difference, what makes it possible that a life is composed of a single and same Event, despite the variety of what might happen, that it be traversed by a single and same fissure, that it play one and the same air over all possible tunes and all possible worlds – all these are not due to relations between cause and effect; it is rather an aggregate of non-causal correspondences with forma system of echoes, of resumptions and resonances, a system of signs – in short, an expressive quasi-causality, and not at all a necessitating causality.

10 Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 2 – The Time Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson (1989: Athlone Press, London), 109.

11 Book VII of *Logiques des mondes*

12 Cf. LS 70: ‘In short, sense is always an effect.’

13 While to be found throughout, this term is introduced at LS 12.

14 LS 176

15 LS 176, translation modified.

16 LS 95, translation modified.

17 Deleuze introduces this term – and attributes it in fact to the Stoics – in a discussion of what he terms the paradox of sterile division, which leads him to assert the independence of sense from the order of propositions: ‘One of the most remarkable points of Stoic logic is the sterility of the sense-event: only bodies act and suffer, not the incorporeal entities, which are the mere results of actions and passions.’ (LS 31-2) See Badiou’s discussion above of Axiom 3 for his reading of this claim.

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18 English in original

19 Deleuze and Badiou engaged in a written dialogue over a number of years towards the end of the former's life, and it is to this that Badiou refers here. An account of this dialogue is given in the Introduction of *Deleuze – The Clamour of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (2000: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis)

20 LS 149; cf. 100-1.

21 Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (1994: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis), 60.

22 LS 53-4, translation modified.