
HISTORY AND EVENT IN ALAIN BADIOU

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I would like to lay out for you the main theoretical decisions in the philosophy of Alain Badiou concerning the themes of today's seminar: history and event.² I do not speak as a disciple of Alain Badiou, because I develop philosophical positions distinct from his; but it seems important to me, that if one seeks to enter into a conceptual contemporaneity with the Marxist and Post-Marxist demands of politics and history, that one do so with the full scope of Badiou's system in view, a system, now built around his two principle books *Being and Event* (*BE*) and *Logics of Worlds* (*LW*). This philosophy is particularly complex, but it seems to me that one can bring it into view through the two notions of history and event. I will thus attempt to explain a nodal and seemingly paradoxical thesis of Badiou's: *that there is only a history of the eternal, because only the eternal proceeds from the event*. In other words: there is *only* a history of truths insofar as all truth is strictly *eternal* and impossible to reduce to any relativism.

Badiou refuses therefore two antithetical positions: on the one hand that there can be eternal truths deprived as such of their historicity—a position proper to classical metaphysics—and on the other hand conversely that there can be no eternal truth, all discursive statements being irremediably inscribed in a historico-cultural context that strictly delimits the scope of truth to the particular instance that it supports. On the contrary, *BE* maintains that there are eternal truths, but that they are not unifiable in a metaphysical system, because they are distributed among four truth procedures: science, art, politics, and love—philosophy itself not having the capacity to produce truths. These truths, moreover, cannot exist in a Heaven of Ideas: they are the result of an undecidable event and of a fidelity of subjects that attempt to investigate their world in light of it. *LW* will conversely add that all processes lacking truth are not historical in the true sense, but have been reduced to a simple temporal modification without the capacity for truth and the subjects who adhere to it.

To elucidate the meaning of these statements, we must first understand the two constitutive theses of Badiouian philosophy: 1. Mathematics is ontology; 2. All truth is post-evental.

We will then be in a position to draw out the precise connection that exists between the three principle terms of our intervention: history, event, eternity.

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1. The inaugural decision of *BE* bears on ontology and conjoins two theses about it: the affirmation, on the one hand, of its rational possibility (against Heidegger), and the denial, on the other hand, that philosophy carries its burden (against dogmatic metaphysics). For it is, and always has been, mathematics, *and only mathematics*, that constitutes according to Badiou, the discourse of being-qua-being. Consequently, ontology is identified as an unachievable science, evolving in rhythm with the most fundamental advances in the science that deploys it,

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and does so even without the knowledge of mathematicians. They are “without knowledge,” because only the philosopher can draw out the ontological meaning of mathematics—mathematicians being ontologists unaware of themselves as such. Philosophy plays a “meta-ontological” role whose task it is to locate the place in which mathematics effectively manages to speak being. For Badiou, the “Platonic gesture” consists in mathematizing and not poetizing being.

2. Ontology, for our time, is thus identified with set theory, in the sense that this theory reveals to us that any mathematical entity can be thought of as a multiple. To be, in the most general and fundamental sense, is to be a set, and therefore a multiplicity. Hence Badiou’s ontological thesis: being is multiplicity—and, we should add: nothing but multiplicity. In other words, being is multiple to the strict exclusion of its opposite—namely, the One. Being is not therefore a multiplicity composed of stable and ultimate unities, but a multiplicity that is in turn composed of multiplicities. Indeed, mathematical sets have for their elements not unities but other sets, and so on indefinitely. When a set is not empty, it is composed of multiple sets.

A multiple of this type, which is not consolidated into any law of the One, Badiou calls an “inconsistent multiple,” as opposed to consistent multiples, i.e. made of unities. Being, far from being a stable foundation for a phenomena that would be perishable in relation to it, is pure dissemination, withdrawn from our immediate experience of reality, where we discover on the contrary, in daily life, consistent multiplicities (men-ones, God-ones, star-ones, etc.). Even though it is a Platonism, Badiou wants, beyond the heritage of his master, a Platonism of the pure multiple: from the apparent consistency of situations, ontology must return to the inconsistency of multiplicities.

3. Having been relieved of the burden of thinking being (which falls to the mathematician), the second task of the philosopher, which is also the most specific, consists in thinking being’s exception, namely the event—that which happens and not that which is. The event is an exception to being not insofar as it would not be a multiple, but insofar as its multiplicity is ontologically forbidden, i.e. mathematically rejected, at least in the standard axiomatics for sets. The event is thus for Badiou *a multiple belonging to itself*: a reflexive multiple counted among the number of its elements. Yet, according to one of its axioms (the axiom of foundation), set theory forbids the existence of these multiples that mathematicians nicely refer to as “extraordinary.”

How is such a reflexive multiple joined to our intuition of an event when we think of the event as a pure emergence, whether it be in art, in politics, in science, or in our love lives? Art, science, politics, and love are what Badiou calls “truth procedures,” i.e. the four fields of thought where genuine events can be produced, and as a result—eternal truths.

The political example is, as it often is with Badiou, the most immediately accessible. What exactly do we mean, when we say that “May 68” was an event? In this expression, we are not merely designating the set of facts that have punctuated this collective sequence (student demonstrations, the occupation of the Sorbonne, massive strikes, etc.). Such facts, even when joined together in an exhaustive way, do not allow us to say that something like an event took place, rather than a mere conjunction of facts without any particular significance. If “May 68” was an event, it is precisely because it earned its name: that is to say that May 68, produced not only a number of facts, *but also produced May 68*. In May 68, a *site*, in addition to its own elements (demonstrations, strikes, etc.), presented itself. What is the meaning of such a tautology that characterizes all political events (in 1789, there was “1789,” etc.)? It means precisely that an event is the taking place of a pure rupture that nothing in the situation allows us to classify under a list of facts (strikes, demonstrations, etc.). Let us wager the following formulation: the event is that multiple which, presenting itself, exhibits the inconsistency underlying all situations, and in a flash throws into a panic, their constituted classifications. The novelty of an event is expressed in the fact that it interrupts the normal regime of the description of knowledge, that always rests on the classification of the well known, and imposes another kind of procedure on whomever admits that, right here in this place, something hitherto unnamed really and truly occurred.

Indeed, an event is not a matter of scholarly discourse, being at once new and aberrant in regard to the law of

being. An event is always undecidable in relation to knowledge, and can therefore always be annulled by one who only believes in brute facts: is there political revolution, or merely an accumulation of disorder and crime? Amorous encounter, or merely sexual desire? Pictorial novelty, or shapeless mass and imposture? Etc. This undecidability of the event is given in the fact that it has always already disappeared the moment it is located, and therefore implies the suspicion that nothing has taken place, except the illusion of novelty. The fragile being of the event therefore held in a trace that only a militant discourse—and not an erudite one—can draw out: the subject is thus the name of the faithful operations of an eventual trace, i.e. having wagered on the existence of the event, and having decided to follow out its consequences. The question for a subject is: “if something has indeed taken place, what is to be done to remain faithful to it?”: “what to paint, if Cubism is a new form, and not an imposture?,” “how to act, if 1789 is a revolution, and not a disorder?,” “how to change our life together, if this process is an amorous encounter, and not a fling?,” etc.

Another example, given in *BE*, is that of the “French Revolution”: if we try to demonstrate the existence of this Revolution in the same way we try to exhibit an empirical fact, we will undoubtedly fail: because the Revolution is none of the facts that compose it—the States-General assembly, the storming of the Bastille, the Reign of Terror, etc.—and neither is it their combination, because nothing in this set by itself lays claim to the name of the Revolution other than chaos, disorder, or divine punishment. When Saint-Just affirms in 1794: “The Revolution is frozen”, what is he talking about, as a consequence? He is not talking about an objectively constituted fact, but an event attested to, not only by its site—France 1789 to 1794—but also and above all by the militant naming of what happened there. To call a Revolution *the* Revolution, is thus to affirm the sense in which one remains faithful to a hypothesis: the hypothesis, the wager, that something fundamental is being produced in the political field that is worth being faithful to, while trying to draw out that which, at the heart of the situation, upholds an emancipatory truth in the process of elaboration, and which opposes all the forces of the old world.

The subject is thus the invention of a fidelity to that which, *might have*, taken place, in such a way as to produce partially, by a sequence of finite operations, a truth whose being is, in relation to the subject, always infinite. A truth—like everything else—is a multiple, but a multiple that Badiou calls “generic.” This property characterizes a set whose mathematical singularity eludes all possibility of classification by linguistic predicates, even those supposed to be infinite. Suppose you have an infinite “encyclopedic” language, capable of naming and differentiating an infinity of properties: then there will exist for this language, claims the ontologist (i.e. the mathematician) a multiple that this language cannot name, because it will be made of “a little bit of everything” says Badiou: of “a,” but also of “not a” (“a” therefore could not characterize it) of “b,” but also of “non b,” etc., and so on to infinity. A truth is such an infinite multiple, always coming and making a hole in knowledge, the result of a fidelity concerned with the unlimited consequences of an event. Emancipated society, mathematized science, love subverting sexual difference by inventing a new bond between men and women, artistic discipline calling for the revolution of a form: such are the four types of truths—produced by the four procedures of politics, science, love, and art—that may create, albeit rarely, a subject capable of making an exception to the ordinary regime of knowledge, opinion, egoism, and boredom.

Now we understand in what way a truth, being the patient result of a series of local inquiries under a wagered hypothesis of an undecidable event, cannot exist outside the concrete history of subjects. But how is it that such truths can be at once eternal, and yet the bearers of history, the only genuine history? It is because a truth is the bearer, by right, of an infinite number of consequences: a set of inquiries therefore, by right, inexhaustible, and capable of being extended to historical moments in profoundly different contexts. In other words, a truth is the bearer of theoretical movements that form among themselves a historicity both profound and discontinuous. This is why an event always produces, in the minds of those who decide to be faithful to it, a retrospective genealogy of precursors. A precursor, as we know, is something of which we know only later that it came before. There is thus no novelty that does not try to forge a previously unknown historical depth, by bringing together a series of ideas previously dispersed in common consciousness, in order to herald a new lineage of the present. There is no truth, as new as it may be, which does not claim to be realizing an idea that was not

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already germinal in a largely unknown, or misinterpreted past. A revolution, as Marx already knew, cannot be produced without cloaking itself in the tatters of the past—politics being one of the major places where the new is revived along with the defeated ancestors of their time, whose torch shines again in the present configuration. But we can say the same for scientific revolutions: Galileo claimed to be following in the footsteps of Plato, the inventor of stereometry, in contrast to Aristotle, who expelled mathematics from *physis*; the inventors of infinitesimal calculus feverishly immersed themselves in Archimedes' rediscovered manuscripts in order to revive its theoretical audacity; the pictorial revolution of the fifteenth century thought of itself as a Renaissance of Greek aesthetics, etc.

This is why truths are eternal and historical, eternal because they are historical: they insist in history, tying together temporal segments across the centuries, always unfolding more profoundly the infinity of their potential consequences, through captivated subjects, separated sometimes by distant epochs, but all equally transfixed by the urgent eventuality that illuminates their present. Because they are eternal, truths can be reborn, but because they are infinite, they are not reborn under the form of a simple and sterile repetition: on the contrary, they deepen the revolutionary path with each of their reactivations. They are not reborn in history by interrupting its becoming with their recommenced identities: on the contrary, they give birth to history itself through their reactivation, making their inexhaustible potential for novelty intervene in the monotonous train of daily work, ordinary oppressions, and current opinions. This fragmented history is opposed to the simple passage of time without meaning, from which we weave empty hours and epochs that for Badiou are clearly not worthy of the name of history in a genuine sense.

But if we want to give a rigorous form to this intuition of historico-eternal truths, we must now turn to the second volume of *BE: LW*. For it is in this second work, published in 2006, that Badiou thinks through in depth the notion of world, i.e. the context of the appearance of truths. *LW* will thus allow us to think the connection between a posed truth as the immutable inconsistency of the multiple, and the extraordinarily various historico-cultural contexts in which that same truth can reveal itself to subjects who would otherwise be completely separated from each other.

LOGICS OF WORLDS

Let us begin by explaining the general meaning of the 2006 work.

To which principle objectives does *Logics of Worlds*, this extension of *Being and Event*, respond? The preface of this work draws out two in particular.

The first objective is to add to the theory of being, a theory of appearance. The purpose of this, for Badiou, is to confront a problem left unaddressed by *BE*: how is it that being—pure inconsistent multiplicity—can come to appear as a consistent world? In themselves, ontological multiples lack the order that the empirical given manifests for us: they are only multiples made of other multiples. A building is a multiple of bricks, that in turn are multiples of molecules, made of a multiplicity of atoms, themselves decomposable into a multiplicity of quarks—and so on to infinity, since Badiou's ontology does not abide by the givens of contemporary physics—making of all entities a pure multiple such that one never encounters any fundamental unity. It is always the count that introduces the One: a house, a brick, a molecule are one because they are counted as one. But this introduction of the One by the count begins with a being that one never thinks of as anything else other than multiplicities without end. The problem then is to understand why being does not present itself as such an inconsistent multiplicity: for there are plenty of things that are given to us as intrinsically bound up in the given, stable unities on which we can build a foundation: objects, collectivities, institutions, material bodies. These unities do not emerge entirely from an arbitrary act of a subject affixing its unity of the count to them from without, they³ actually govern their own sensible donation, if not in being than at least in appearance.

Consequently, this poses a transcendental type of question: how is it possible to have an order of appearance

that does not proceed from being in itself? But if the question posed by Badiou is transcendental, the treatment he proposes is not Kantian. This is because Kant's response to creating a phenomenal order consists in the exhibition of the *a priori* forms of a constitutive subject. Now, according to Badiou, who is in this respect a materialist, the subject is never constitutive, but constituted. As we have seen, the subject is rare, generally non-individual (the political subject can be a party, a revolutionary army, the subject in love is the couple, etc.); it is sequential (temporally finite), and it always depends on the taking place of an event that it itself cannot produce.

If appearance can have a consistency, it can therefore only be the result of an asubjective order, that is on the one hand connected with being—for it is always being that appears—and yet distinct from it—insofar as its order does not itself result from multiple-being. It is thus a matter of thinking the singularity of appearance with respect to being, and of thinking the link, in spite of everything, between the latter and the former. Yet the consistency of appearance is comprised of extremely various logics, as opposed to ontology, which is based on a single classical logic. Set theory is indeed a system of all or nothing. In an ontology of the multiple, there is only one of two things: either a set “a” is an element of a set “b,” or it is not: the thesis is either true or false, and there is no third option—*tertio non datur*. But appearance, according to Badiou, is far from always obedient to the law of the excluded middle: the colorful richness of the given imposes upon us weighted judgements, of “more or less” truth, of complex degrees of probability, and all that faces these realities escapes the strict disjunction between affirmation and negation. In short, the given constrains us to add to the mathematics of being a *logic of appearance* capable of accounting for the diverse consistencies revealed to us in our experience.

It is therefore necessary to mobilize a logic capable of “capturing” the innumerable modes of appearance possible for being and to provide some sort of connection, however slight, to visible things. But since appearance is always an appearance *of* being, this logic will be a mathematized logic, a logic shot through with mathematical procedures: this is precisely the theory of categories introduced in *LW*, it will be a mathematical logic capable of theorizing innumerable classical or non-classical universes. The technical aspect of these logics is far too complex to be elaborated here. But it is important to keep in mind the notion that governs how such formalizations are set up: the immutable being [*l'être*] in itself of a being [*l'étant*] – of inconsistent multiples – appears in numerous distinct worlds that are accordingly governed by very diverse logics. Badiou understands “world” in the most general sense: a world, can be an epoch, a moment of artistic history (dodecaphony), a battle, a culture, etc. Worlds can therefore can just as easily be successive in time as synchronic, and at the same being can appear in a thousands ways, in a thousand different worlds at the same moment. The central question of *LW* will then be to show how a truth appears in a world—and in particular how the same truth—transhistorical, transworldly, and ultimately eternal—can appear in distinct worlds. This appearance of a truth in a world, Badiou calls a *subject-body*: a mode of appearance in a world determined by a subject that has developed its fidelity to the trace of an event.

The second objective of *LW* consists in being opposed to a dominant paradigm of contemporary thought: “democratic materialism.” Democratic materialism can summed up in the following statement: “there are only bodies and languages.” This is a decision that refers just as much to post-Deleuzian vitalist philosophers as it does to post-modernity, understood as historical and linguistic relativism. Badiou, basically, takes issue with all forms of linguistic relativism, cultural or historical: every belief that there is no truth capable of traversing the particularity of an epoch, of a milieu, of a language game. Democratic materialism, claims to be in this sense, the only genuine historical materialism. This is why there is is such an impugment of history in Badiou's work: “History (with a big H) does not exist” he writes twice, the first time in *Theory of the Subject*, in a particular objection to Hegelian, (read: Marxist-Hegelian) totalizing history, and the second time in *LW* as an objection to what is essentially the absorption of eternal truths in contemporary historical relativism.

To this democratic materialism, Badiou opposes a phrase he himself says, is like the “return of the dead”—that is “dialectical materialism” (distinct, though, from the old Marxist “dialectical materialism.” In what sense can his materialism be said to be “dialectical”: in the sense that it overcomes a duality—that of the bodies and languages of democratic materialism—by a third whose exception is: “There are only bodies and languages,

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except that there are truths.” These truths that Badiou always calls “eternal” are admittedly made only of bodies and languages, but regardless of what the relativists say, the infinite being of a truth always exceeds the perishable existence of material by which it is comes to light. The worldly historico-cultural context at the heart of which truths appear, and that is indeed relative to languages and cultures in time, cannot stifle their trans-historical being, something Badiou illustrates in the preface of *LW* by closely analyzing several examples drawn from each of the four truth procedures.

In order to counter the historical relativism introduced by democratic materialism, and its denial of any hierarchies of ideas, we can look to the existence of invariants within disparate worlds.

Take a mathematical example, a seminal procedure of all thought for Badiou. There is an arithmetic theorem that states, in contemporary terms, that there exists an infinity of prime numbers. We know that Euclid has already demonstrated this theorem in his *Elements*, and thus we are able to deduce that in such a case what we are dealing with is an eternal truth, unchanged in history, intangible, just as true for a Greek as for a contemporary, and that possesses the same kernel of meaning for one as for the other. But the proponent of historical relativism, being a “cultural anthropologist”, will underscore our naïveté, arguing that these two statements, present in two different cultural worlds, in reality have nothing in common—which already reveals a difference in their formulation. Indeed, Euclid could not demonstrate that there are an infinity of prime numbers, because arithmetic infinity would have no meaning at all for a Greek. He demonstrated only that prime numbers would always be superior in quantity to a given (finite) quantity of prime numbers. Other such differences of formulation will eventually convince our relativist that the two statements would be truly incommensurable.

Badiou retorts that the naïve illusion here is on the side of the anthropologist, and not the mathematician. For the Greeks already discovered, through this theorem, an essential truth about number. Euclid’s demonstration, indeed, proceeds by way of the demonstration that all integers can be broken down into prime factors. This truth, Badiou insists, governs all contemporary mathematics, and in particular modern abstract algebra. It accounts for, in a given operative domain, operations similar to those of addition or of subtraction, but also for the decomposition of these “objects” into primitive objects, in the same way that number is always decomposable into prime numbers. There are therefore, across the centuries and cultural and anthropological worlds, truths that, although eternal, are not at all frozen but produce the only genuine history: that of fecund theoretical gestures, always recommenced in diverse contexts, with the same fidelity, and yet each time with novel results.

Let’s take another example, which this time will show how the subject-body works, and what Badiou calls the resurrection of a truth. Again, it is a political example: the revolt of a handful of gladiators led by Spartacus, analyzed several times in *LW*. We know that following this revolt, slaves produced a body of great number around the first insurgents, instead of being dispersed according to the will of their owners. Badiou argues that the trace of the revolt-event, that to which the insurgents devote their fidelity, can be grasped in a simple statement: “We, slaves, we want to return home.” The slaves united in an army constituted from then on a new type of *subject-body* tied to the production of a previously inexistent present, characterized by that which the event suddenly foresees as *possible*: this very day, to stop being slaves, and return home. This subject-body is the appearance of a genuine subject in the world of Roman slavery in the 1st century BCE. And this subject is not an individual, but an army: a particular body, collective, devoted to an uncertain event, to the capacity of slaves of the time to stop presently being slaves, to act like free men, and become masters of their fate.

The consequent fidelity of this *subjectivated body* that is the army led by Spartacus then deploys itself in time, according to a series of decisive alternatives that Badiou names *points*. The term “points” should be understood as that which confronts the global situation with a choice in which⁴ a “yes or no” is at stake: “Is it necessary to march to the south, or attack Rome?”, “Is it necessary to confront the legions, or evade them?”, etc. The organization, the deliberation, and the discipline with the help of which the army-body will treat the situation

point by point constitutes the real becoming-subject of this body, whose capacity to produce a new present or not comes from the evental trace. This body, it should be added, is always organized, i.e. articulated in differentiated organs capable of specifically treating such and such a point of the situation: like the military attachments deployed by Spartacus to oppose the Roman cavalry. The fact that the subjectivated body is organized also means that this body is essentially “split,” “crossed out”, i.e. that it is never totally adapted to the actual situation. It is divided into an efficacious region, an organ appropriate to the point being treated, and, “a vast inert component.” Facing the Roman cavalry, this unadapted component will be— as opposed to the body of the disciplined gladiators—constituted by the disorder of the army induced by the cosmopolitanism of the slaves, by the women, the rivalry of the leaders, etc. But this latter component also reveals on the contrary the possibility of a new egalitarian organization, a deliberative camp, against the elitist arrogance of the gladiators.

The form of the faithful subject consists thus in the subordination of the split body to the trace of the event by which it constitutes, point by point, a new present.

The subject is said to be “reactive” once a slave does not dare to revolt and resists the novelty of the event, as a result of the inertia of the old but above all by the creation of “arguments of resistance adjusted to the novelty itself.” There are thus, what Badiou calls “reactionary novelties” that produce new intellectual arrangements [*dispositifs*] whose entire object is to shore up the refusal of a present fidelity. Finally, the obscure subject is one who, like the patricians of ancient Rome, is directed toward the pure and simple abolition of the new present. The obscure subject always has recourse to the invocation of a pure and transcendent Body, a historical (City, God, Race) whose only goal is, through the mobilization of such a phantasm, the destruction of the real body—the split body emerging from the emancipatory event.

Thus, we can see the outline of what Badiou calls the three possible “destinations” of the subject: the faithful subject organizes the *production* of the evental present, the reactive subject, its *denial*, and the obscure subject its *occultation*.

But there is one last destination of the subject, a fourth destination, that consists in organizing the resurrection of the evental present: whether it is Toussaint-Louverture, the leader of the Saint-Domingue slave revolt who was dubbed the “black Spartacus,” or whether it is Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, leaders of the Spartacist revolution, the Spartacus-event never ceases to be reborn, as an eternal truth, in different worlds, according to radically distinct contexts, and yet always as the same statement that affirms a present time of a fidelity in which servitude has ended. In other words, just as the theoretical gestures of Euclid or Archimedes can be reborn in a productive manner in different periods separated by centuries, so too little known men, who fought battles and who were ultimately defeated and even crushed by all-powerful Empires, have their deeds honored by other rebels millennia later, by being given a name, their own—Spartacus—a name that belongs to all slaves.[At the end of the Kubrick film, based on the novel by Howard Fast: each rebel, once the slaves are defeated, responds to the Roman legionnaire’s question, “who is Spartacus?” by saying “I am Spartacus.” Each rebel appropriates in the present—a present that has become eternal—a proper name that becomes the generic name of all slaves in struggle].

Finally, we need to highlight the major characteristic of the emergence of an event in a world: to make appear maximally the inexistence of a situation. There is indeed an entire gradation of eventality in *LW*, an entire hierarchy of the emergence of novelty in a world. The event in its strong sense, is what Badiou calls a singularity: the proper criteria of which is, as I said, to bring about the intense appearance of a being that up until then was invisible in the situation, though its being was already present. Our task then is to clarify this character of the event, and its enigmatic property of dazzling the present with its own inexistence.

To understand this point, we must begin by clearly distinguishing being and existence in Badiou.

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We have to first of all get a firm grasp on the relation between the being of a multiple, and its appearance. The multiple-being of a being is that which is, for it, eternally present, motionless, and invariable. It is important to highlight that, according to Badiou, being is static: it is made up of multiples always dispersed to infinity. Genuine ontology seizes these multiples in their immutable nature according to the science of immobility that is mathematics. It is this eternal inconsistency of being that rises, as it were, to the surface with the event, along with its capacity to overturn the classifications and well ordered consistent distinctions of ordinary knowledge. Appearance, on the other hand, is that which, as diffracted in an infinity of conjoined and fragile aspects, never ceases to multiply in diverse worlds where it is locally identifiable. The same being (identical in its multiple-being) can thus appear in multiple different worlds in very different and equally fragile ways.

For example: ordinals, immutable according to their mathematical being, can appear in different ways in the world of the pagination of a book, in the percentage of a vote, in the meter of a verse, etc. In each case, we are dealing with a being of unchanging number, but this number assumes a greater or lesser importance according to the situation: crucial in a vote, anecdotal in the pagination of a novel. The being of number is immutable, its appearance, like its intensity, however, is variable. Similarly, the same man will appear differently in his professional milieu, in his musical interests, or among his close friends. To the immutable analysis of his ontological being (a multiple is composed of elements that are always the same) is juxtaposed the local analysis of his being-there in distinct worlds.

The intensity of the appearance of a being in a world is what Badiou calls *existence*. Contrary to being, the specificity of existence consists in the fact that it admits of infinite variations between one world and another. The same multiple will be able to exist maximally in one world and very weakly in another, where it will be practically effaced. In this way Badiou captures the fact that the same being exists in a more or less intense way as a function of the contexts where it appears. We can thus say that the syllabic number, very present in an Alexandrine poem, is only slightly present (although still there) in a poem of free verse; or, a person, radiant among their colleagues, is practically “effaced” when seen with their family.

Thus, Badiou aims to show that the novel is not so much the creation of something new out of nothing, but rather the intense manifestation of something that was already there. It emerges as an event that disrupts our ordinary knowledge, but whose existence, whose appearance, had been profoundly denied by the situation. This is the case with the slaves, whose humanity was denied by the society of slave holders, refused to the point of making men into speaking instruments, or into bipedal cattle, and who appeared suddenly with Spartacus in a dazzling intensity, at the heart of the historical situation that up until then included them without noticing them. The slaves were there, or it could almost be said that they were always there—always being part of ancient Mediterranean societies—but their continued presence was only given the place of a minimal appearance: the slaves are but do not exist, until the recommencement of their revolt in the 1st century BCE, and culminating in the years 73 to 71 before falling back into the night. We have here the meaning of the phrase, to make appear maximally the in-existent proper to a situation.

Badiou gives another example: that of the Parisian proletariat during the Commune. To conclude, let's look at this example, that will allow us to explain his typology of different types of events.

In Book V of *LW*, Badiou elaborates the way in which changes inherent to the emergence of truth in a world appear. In *BE*, Badiou was content with an ontological characterization of the event as a reflexive multiple. He is now going to distinguish between three types of eventality to aid in the (phenomeno-)logical description of their appearance: fact, weak singularity, and strong singularity.

It is necessary to first distinguish evental changes from simple temporal modifications that are, for their own part, subject to the laws of appearance. Thus, to describe the different degrees of identity of appearing in a demonstration does not amount to merely restoring it to an image frozen at a given instant, but implies as

well an elaboration of the temporal variations of these degrees in time, from the initial assembling of the demonstrators to their final dispersion. There is no event in this type of change, it does not introduce a reflexive multiple. A world without any event is not a fixed world, but a world that follows the ordinary course of things and their modification.

The first type of evental change, is that of the weakest scope: the fact. This is an event whose appearance in a world is of weak intensity, and whose consequences in this world are trivial and seen as null. Hence, Badiou says, from the declaration of triumph by the central Committee of the Commune to the day it was crushed by the Versaillais. This is a genuine historical event, but without any consequences that follow: an event at the threshold of its abolition affirms its having-taken-place without anything immediately following, except its own repression. As opposed to fact, the strong singularity is an event of maximal intensity, that brings into existence the inexistent proper to the site that supports the event. Lets take again the example of the Commune, as an event brought about in the world: “Paris at the end of the Franco-Prussian war.” On March 18, 1870, once the people of Paris impeach the government by seizing the cannons from the National Guard, and abscond from the City, what comes to light is the political capacity of workers and socialist militants to exercise power by themselves. This was the inexistent proper to the site that supported the event: “the day of March 18”, that is, the workers political capacity existing maximally in the consequences of the founding act of 1870. These are consequences that will nourish revolutionary struggles for a century. Finally, between the two, weak singularities are events whose scope is intermediate: for example, according to Badiou, the foundation of the Third Republic, that was supported by a real popular movement, but that was rapidly arrogated by established politicians of the time in such a way that the inexistent proper to the site-object (the political capacity of the worker) was not brought to light.

In sum, different intensities of the event are distinguished by their capacity, at the heart of different truth procedures, to bring forth a being that up until then was inexistent, and once it maximally appears, forces us to retrospectively reconsider the entire history of its predecessors: the slave, the proletariat, and today, according to Badiou, the workers without-papers (called only the “*sans-papiers*” in the media, in order to conceal their working conditions, and to make them sound like potential delinquents) are those political invisibles who, when they come to be revealed as the vanguard of history, entirely reconfigure its logic in the eyes of their contemporaries, and add a new facet to the present as well as the past, repainting them both with the colors of their struggle. But we can say the same of art, love, or science, whose innovations are often rediscoveries of what, without being entirely absent, existed only minimally until their maximum appearance in the event of an *avant-garde*, a discovery, or an encounter.

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In conclusion, we can interrogate this blurred line between the Badiouian conception of truth and the Christian conception of the Incarnation. In *BE*, mediation 21, devoted to Pascal, opens with the following thought (776, Lafuma): “The history of the Church should, properly speaking, be called the history of truth.” And in fact Badiou credits Pascal, and with him Pauline Christianity, with having grasped something on which Badiou has expressly written a book, mainly, what we could call the “true process of the truth.” Because if Christianity is founded on a fable, according to Badiou, its force stems from having, if not the content, then at least the real form of all truth: it proceeds by way of an event un-demonstrable by a constituted knowledge—the divinity of Christ—of which one knows no more than a trace—the testimony of the apostles, evangelicals, etc., because its being is already abolished, crucified, and its body equally disappeared, while a belief begins to emerge that will have already taken place. And the Christian truth is the set of faithful inquiries, i.e. their intervention in the Palestinian situation, then Middle-Eastern, and Roman, in the light of Christ’s having taken place. Finally, universal history, for Christians, is nothing other than the set of inquiries of the Church-subject over the course of centuries, made of schisms and hierarchies, that is, of quests for ways and means faithful to the absolute event of the divine made man: Jesus. Outside the Church, its history, and its salvation, there is only the monotonous passions of chaos and perdition.

HISTORY AND EVENT IN ALAIN BADIOU

Badiou is here very faithful—to the structure, if not the content—of Christian eschatology. And he would not dream of denying it, he who declared Paul the “founder of universalism”, the one who was the first to understand the militant nature, and not the erudite nature, of truth. In this sense he represents without a doubt one of the possible becomings of Marxism, divided since its beginning between critical thought and revolutionary eschatology. A large portion of ex-Marxists have renounced eschatology because they consider it a religious residue, and among the principle sources of the promethean disaster of real socialism. Badiou’s uniqueness seems on the contrary to consist in the fact that he isolates from Marxism its eschatological part, separates it from its pretensions – which he judges to be illusory, based on economic science – and delivers it, ardently, to subjects distributed among all kinds of struggles, political as well as amorous. For Badiou, instead of critique dissolving the religious illusion of eschatology, the now-irreligious eschatology of the event deploys its critical power on the lifeless present of our everyday renunciations.

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1. TN: The following was given as a lecture for *Marx in the 21st Century: the Spirit and the Letter* in Paris, on February 2nd, 2008.
2. TN: I thank Kieran Aarons, Nicolae Morar, and Ian McDonald for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this translation. Any remaining errors are my own. When applicable, I have followed Alberto Toscano's translations from Alain Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* (2009) and Ray Brassier's translations from Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2008). I would also like to thank Quentin Meillassoux for granting the English translation rights.
3. TN: "elle" in the French is likely a mistake here and should be *elles*.
4. TN: *Ou* in the French is likely a mistake here and should be *où*.