

DECISION AND UNDECIDABILITY OF THE EVENT IN *BEING AND EVENT I AND II*¹

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I would like to take up here the question of the unity of *Being and Event (BE)* and *Logics of Worlds (LW)*. Given the breadth of Badiou's system, this question is very complex, and I can only confront it here from one particular angle, which I will present as follows: I believe that one cannot read *LW* as a simple extension of the system from ontology to logic, or from being to appearing, with some localized corrections, as regards in particular the theory of the event. Badiou himself says in passing, in *LW*, that there remains "problems of connection and continuity" between the two works, which he "leaves for another time, or for others".² I believe that this task of connection and continuity involves more than mere re-elaborations of details, for Badiou in *LW* made advances and imposed inflections on his thought that act retrospectively on the appearance of the system in its totality.

To put it differently, in Book III of *LW*, the moment of the constitution of the object, Badiou expounds one of the striking theses of his book: the retroaction of appearing on Being, the fact that appearing, governed by the order-structure of the transcendental "infects", he writes, the being-multiple with its own ordering. In an analogous way, my remarks will consist in investigating the *philosophical*—and no longer ontological—retroaction of *LW* on *BE*, the way in which *LW* "infects"—but no doubt positively—the decisions of *BE*.

I will henceforth distinguish three works: *BE*, *LW*, and their totality, which is also called *BE*, since the subtitle of *LW* is: *Being and Event*, II. I will agree to call this total book (*BE I and II*) the Badiouian "System" proper. My aim is therefore to reflect on this third book, which is neither *BE* nor *LW*, but their structured summation. Doubtless, *BE I and II* constitutes a system: a unified regime of the concept, through which the notions of being, appearing, event, subject and truth are articulated in a rigorous fashion. But as with every genuine philosopher, Badiou made progress in his thought as he elaborated it. The thought of an authentic philosopher does not confine itself to submitting new domains to ready-made concepts, but simultaneously submits its own concepts to such domains, transforms them upon contact. There is always a "camber" in the great philosophical systems: something that moves on the stern of the ship, and on its whole length, as the bow sinks in new waters. A

subtle “wave”, then, traverses these systems up to their foundations, through the retroactive effect of the newly explored domain.

I believe that Badiou’s System contains such a retrospective wave that the interpreter is obliged to follow in order to reestablish its dynamic structure. And it seems to me that this wave introduces a certain play into the System, which will prove to contain—at any rate, this is what I will seek to show—a tension between its two volumes, according to two theoretical lines that I will call (we will understand why): “arch-anonymous” or “arch-engaged”. A tension that could be resolved in two different manners, depending on whether one privileges the theoretical line of *BE* that I call arch-anonymous, or the line of *LW* that I call arch-engaged. These two lines will prove to be in certain respects complementary for the System, the one not going without the other, but will allow us nonetheless to extract two possible reorientations of Badiou’s philosophy, depending on whether one decides to insist on one or the other possibility. Badiou, I believe, privileges henceforth the arch-engaged line of *LW*; but I will plead for my part in favor of the arch-anonymous line that seems to me to still be that of *BE*. The meaning of all this will become clear in the rest of my remarks.

The pivot on which I will support my inquiry will be the introduction of the notion of “object” into a philosophy that, up till now, refused to add it to its constitutive categories: the event, the subject, and truth.

That the rehabilitation of the notion of object is a veritable rupture in Badiou’s thought, that nothing foreshadowed it, can be seen first of all in Badiou’s insistence on the fact that the principal—anti-Kantian—novelty he brings to this notion stems from the rejection of every *immediate* correlation between subject and object.³ For Badiou, subject and object are two notions that can be thought without each other. And in fact, the subject was thought by Badiou for more than ten years without any correlation to an object—and it is still thought in this way in Book I of *LW*—while the object is conversely thought in an autonomous fashion in Book III, without any relation to a constitutive transcendental subject. The very fact that the theory of the subject could have been elaborated a long time before that of objectivity, and that Badiou could have thought for so long that he can do without a theory of the object, shows the originality of their adjoinment: neither needs the other. The very sign that there was, in this regard, pure novelty.

This rehabilitation of the notion of object is no doubt one of Badiou’s most spectacular evolutions, since the rejection of the object was a characteristic element of his philosophical position. In 1989, in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou makes the age of poets, the epoch of poetry, responsible for “the destitution of the category of object as an organic form of presentation”.⁴ Uncoupling access to Being and to the truth from every objectivation was, according to him, the task that poets bequeathed to contemporary philosophy. Badiou proposed then a combinatory typology of the main contemporary positions of thought around the categories of subject and object: Althusserian Marxism impoverishes the subject for the benefit of the objectivity of science; the philosophies sutured to art dispense with both subject and object; Lacanians make the best of the two categories. A vacant locus was thus highlighted: that of a philosophy positing the subject while rejecting the object. Badiou noted then, perhaps with a certain embarrassment, that this locus had a poor reputation, since it had only been occupied up to then by the Bishop Berkeley. Surmounting any repugnance to cohabitating with this apologetic idealism—the last straw for a materialist—Badiou resolutely claimed that this philosophy of the subject without object corresponded to his own position.⁵

There was thus, for the one who must henceforth be called the “first Badiou”, a rejection of the object so firm that it can be regarded as definitional of his philosophy in the same way as his reactivation of the category of the subject. For Badiou, the rejection of the object signified above all that the event—whence originates a subjective process of fidelity through which a generic truth is hatched—must depend on the choice, the wager, the militant gesture of the subject. The event pertains to the militant decision that pronounces its “there is”, and names it through this decision. This meant that, for Badiou at that time, the event was not an object, a fact whose being can be established via procedures of knowledge: the judgment that indicates the properties of the multiple, and the classification of these multiples in terms of their common properties.⁶

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For, as Badiou wrote: “knowledge does not know of the event”.⁷ In *BE*, it seems clear in effect that Badiou considers the object as that to which positivism—especially—reduces presentation. The object is thus at that moment the site of a veritable foreclosure of the event. And we can say that Badiou’s struggle against every objectivation of the event is one of the major stakes of the 1988 book, which opposes to the grammarian and constructivist thought of knowledge—the paradigm that succeeds logical positivism—the thought of the generic.

Badiou unflinchingly held this line long after *BE*, and always in rigorous terms. Thus, in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* published ten years after *BE*, Badiou proposes a follow-up commentary on “The Afternoon of a Faun”. Following Mallarmé’s text, he rediscovers therein the requirements of an authentic thought of the event, whose peculiarity is to be undecidable, impossible to prove in its taking-place through an operation of knowledge: “The event is subtracted from proof, otherwise, it would lose its dimension of undecidable vanishing”.⁸ The Faun, in Mallarmé’s poem, wonders about the reality of an encounter that it had with two nymphs, and asks itself whether this encounter was oneiric or real. One of the temptations of the Faun, its erotic temptation, consists in considering these nymphs as an object of desire—therefore, as an object—when it is only ever the subject of desire who is convoked by an eventual encounter. Badiou’s words are the following: “The crime is to make an object of what arises wholly otherwise than an object. The subjectivizing force of the event is not the desire for an object, but the desire of a desire”.⁹ And further on, Badiou notes, as if to hammer the point home: “When the event comes to be, objectivation (‘the crime’) summons loss. This is the great problem of the fidelity to an event, of the ethics of fidelity: How not to restore the object and objectivity?”¹⁰

We can, therefore, say that Badiou had crossed swords for a long time with every temptation to objectivate the event—and truth as well—by maintaining the irreducible dimension of the event—and thereby of truth, since every truth is contingent on the event.

I will not attempt to trace the history of Badiou’s evolution which led him to the positions of *LW*. The fact remains that the turnaround is, on this point, spectacular, since Badiou, apart from proposing a very novel conception of the object (in Book III), does not hesitate to posit that the event can itself be given in the form of an object (what he calls an “object-site”) and that it is even this objective form that allows us to distinguish different *types* of events, from “fact” to “strong singularity”—a typology absent from *BE*. There is indeed, in *LW*, an objectivation of the event; and far from being still assigned to the register of “crime”, Badiou renders it now the express condition for a recognition of the event’s type—and thus in particular, a recognition of the event in its radical sense as strong singularity.

So, must we say that what was crime yesterday in Badiou’s philosophy has become lawful, and even recommended today? Or more precisely: must we say that in Badiou’s thought objective knowledge has henceforth taken hold of the event (in which case we must speak of a “positivist” or “scientific” turn in *LW* in relation to the militant line of *BE*)? Has the event become the object of knowledge, and no longer of militant wager, at the same time that it has become an object? In other words, does the objectivation of the event engender what I will call a *positivation* of the event, i.e., its submission to a positive knowledge?

I do not think so. But in order to understand precisely why that is not the case, we must begin by setting forth the reasons that could, on the initial reading of *LW*, make us believe that it is so.

I will therefore set out an interpretation of *LW* which, arguing from the undeniable objectivation of the event in this book, will conclude in the reduction of the event to an object of knowledge. After that, I will sketch out the refutation of this thesis as a positivist deviation from Badiouianism, in the name of a decisional interpretation of the second Badiou, which should nevertheless take into account his undeniable evolution. I will seek, in sum, to emphasize the vested rights of the theoretical line of *BE* within the System, even once this System is equipped with the concept of object.

The partisan of the objectivist line will thus present himself as a parricidal disciple: he does not attempt to assert that Badiou explicitly affirms the thesis he defends, and does not even seek to deny that Badiou could perhaps challenge it explicitly. But he contends that the whole inventive logic of *LW* pushes us to espouse the theses he himself upholds: the dynamic of the System is a dynamic of positivation of the event.

Let's allow him to express himself directly: "Badiou has manifestly abandoned the idea that the event is undecidable. For the event, henceforth, forms a part of knowledge in the same way that facts could do so in *BE*. That the event in its lowest degree in *LW* is named a 'fact' is indicative of its evolution, since the fact in *BE* designated precisely the possible object of knowledge. What must then convince us that the event can henceforth be known in the manner of any situation whatsoever, and despite its remarkable specificity as a self-belonging multiple? Let's recall that the event is henceforth termed a 'site' by Badiou, since the notion of evental site as *BE* understood it, through which one attempted to think the milieu of appearance of events—the milieu of history, in opposition to that of nature—has disappeared from the System. A site is a multiple that appears in a world, as an object, insofar as it is referred to its own transcendental indexing. It is thus a multiple whose auto-belonging appears directly on the worldly object of which it is the ontological ground. From there, Badiou brings into play a typology of the event absent from *BE*, since it rests on the apparent and not ontological characteristics of the event.

The first type of evental change is, as we have seen, the fact, whose consequences in the world in which it appears are nearly nil, like the pathetically triumphant declaration of the Comité central de la Commune the very day it was crushed. At the other extremity of the evental spectrum, the strong singularity brings into existence what Badiou calls the proper inexistent of the object that supports the event, i.e., of the site. The Commune is such a singularity in that it unveiled the political capacity of workers and socialist militants who, up to then, had remained invisible to the historical actors of the epoch, including the primary stakeholders. This was the proper inexistent of the object that supported the event; the 'day of March 18', namely the political capacity of workers, thus exists maximally in the consequences of the founding act of 1870. Consequences that will inspire revolutionary struggles for a whole century. Finally, between the two, the weak singularities are events whose scope is intermediary: such is, according to Badiou, the founding of the Third Republic, which relies on a real popular movement, but is rapidly confiscated by politicians already evidenced by the epoch, and does not thus reveal the proper inexistent (the political capacity of workers) of the object-site.

This typology denotes a new theory of the event whose most remarkable point is the abandonment of the category of *nomination* at work in *BE*. In fact, in *BE*, the event required, in order to be effective, what we could call a "co-participation" of the multiple and the subject. It required, on one hand, determined multiples: the multiples composing the evental site, and the self-belonging multiple, that is, the event proper. But it also required an intervention of the subject capable of recognizing this multiple *as* an event, and of naming this novel multiple, irreducible to facts, so as to anchor in this nomination the labor of inquiries, thus the process of fidelity of the subject to the event. Put differently, the subject intervened not only in the labor of fidelity to the past event, but in its very constitution, since without nomination, the event itself could not occur. It is this co-participation of the being-multiple and intervention that Badiou clearly affirms in Meditation 20 of *BE*: "It is certain that the event alone, aleatory figure of non-being, founds the possibility of intervention. It is just as certain that if no intervention puts it into circulation within the situation on the basis of an extraction of elements from the site, then, lacking any being, radically subtracted from the count-as-one, the event does not exist".¹¹

It is such a notion of nomination that Badiou abandons in *LW*, saying that this notion suggested a 'rather unclear transcendental structure'.¹² Yet, what is the transcendental (taken here in its idealist sense) if not an *immediate* correlation between subject and object? To say that *BE* contained such a structure is to say that such a correlation acted at the time at the very heart of the theory of the event, if not by making the event an object, at least by correlating its "objective" (in the sense of "real") multiplicity with the intervention of a subject. But in *LW*, the division event-subject is different: the event has become an object, but an object *independent*

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of the subject; and it occurs according to a power, an intensity of existence about which the subject can do nothing. This is what we see in the case of the “fact”—the derisory declaration of the Commune the same day it was crushed—wherein is deployed an event whose intrinsic weakness stems from the fact that it is *uniquely* supported by the voluntarism of the subject—and which, therefore, in no way has the power to introduce into the world the least consequence of its being. The subject cannot therefore act on the event’s type: a fact will remain a fact, whatever the subject’s ulterior intervention.

The event is, thus, wrested from every decision process of the subject at the same time that it is objectivated. The subject no longer co-participates in the paradoxical being of the event; only, at most, in the duration of its consequences. The evental object is—like every object—dependent of every activity of the subject: *there are subjectless events*—and, therefore, events whose power the fidelity of the subject cannot modify. The subject intervenes as subject-body in the treatment of the consequences of the event; but it only intervenes once the event is constituted as a strong singularity capable of producing these consequences in a world. The subject no longer intervenes in the very constitution of the event, in its taking-place as in its type.

The (idealist) de-transcendentalization of the event is thus accompanied by its capture in the net of knowledge in the strict sense: the event is an object, and it is therefore knowable like any object whatever. This is indeed why we must affirm that the event ceases to be undecidable. For the undecidability of the event, maintained in *BE*, stemmed precisely from the fact that the subject’s share therein was essentially ambiguous: an event could always be suspected of existing solely as an arbitrary decision of nomination, when nothing in the facts—in the sense of *BE*—allowed us to observe its reality. But from now on, everything changes; there is a possible knowledge of the event as an object entering into a determined typology, and this is indeed why we can henceforth affirm its guaranteed existence.

That the event ceases, in *LW*, to be undecidable can be equally seen in this way: since for Badiou truth is conditioned by the taking-place of an event, the assertion of the undecidability of the event implies that truth in its turn inherits such an undecidability. By right, never, in *BE*, can we be assured—in the manner of a knowledge—that there has ever existed a *single* truth in the whole history of humanity. This is indeed why positivism, whose mathematical source is what Badiou calls constructivism, is an orientation of thought capable of perturbing the history of knowledge by never discovering therein anything other than a certain and methodical progression of knowledge, to the exclusion of every evental irruption and every inquiry that aims for a generic truth.

By consequence, if the event is undecidable, truth is equally so; but, conversely, if Badiou supposed truth to be as guaranteed in its existence as an empirical fact, then we should conclude that the event, which is its conditioning source, has in its turn also become an equally decidable object. This is what Badiou affirms in a categorical fashion in the preface to *LW*, when he states the maxim of the materialist dialectic under the aegis of which he places the whole of his enterprise—I cite: ‘There are only bodies and language, except that there are truths’. ‘One will recognize here the style of my teacher Mallarmé: nothing has taken place but the place, except, on high, perhaps, a Constellation. I cross out, nevertheless, ‘on high’ and ‘perhaps’. The ‘there are truths’ [...] is for me the initial empirical evidence. There is no doubt whatsoever concerning the existence of truths, which are not bodies, languages, or combinations of the two. And this evidence is materialist, since it does not require any splitting of worlds, any intelligible place, any ‘height’.¹³ Further on, Badiou writes again: ‘I have said that for me the existence of...truths...takes the form of a primary evidence’.¹⁴

I will pass over the crossing-out of ‘on high’, which refers back to Badiou’s critical analyses of *Coup de dés* in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. What interests me here is the crossing-out of ‘perhaps’: this is all the more remarkable since *Coup de dés*—and the essential ‘perhaps’ that accompanies the final advent of a constellation—illustrates in *BE* the very theory of the event as undecidable. This critical distancing of *Coup de dés*—preceded by *Handbook of Inaesthetics*—symbolizes the whole distance between the theory of the event in *BE* and *LW*. Whereas the undecidability of the event in *BE* implied a profound adherence to the Mallarméan

‘perhaps’, the ‘empirical’ evidence of truth implies the equally categorical evidence of its condition—that is, of the event, henceforth the object of a certain science of change, a science as certain as the constituted science of modifications that is physics.

We can thus affirm that Badiou has abandoned the romantic and voluntarist sphere of *BE*, in which eventual undecidability proceeded from the creeping subjectivation of the taking-place, that is to say, from the coparticipation (fraught with transcendentalism) of the subject in the event; and that Badiouianism follows henceforth the certain path of a science of the event. The objectivation of the event requires from now on the constitution of experts of the event, whose rigorous knowledge of the types of change must precede every struggle, and therefore every attempt at fidelity to what takes place. Alone strong singularities, possibly weak singularities, must give place to fidelity—never facts, essentially sterile. It will thus be necessary, in the midst of the subject-body in struggle, to distinguish the scientific organ of the objective recognition of eventual types from militant organs proper, charged with extending point by point the singularities detected with certainty by competent authorities.”

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How can we counter this positivist argumentation? Its intrinsic weakness lies, of course, in abolishing the undecidability of the event, thus the very heart of Badiou’s System in its proper originality. Badiouianism would become, in this perspective, an “engaged” variant of positivism: an objective knowledge of the event would be deployed in the midst of each truth procedure onto which would be grafted an ethics of the subject who decided its fidelity to such an event, which is guaranteed beforehand by knowledge. The fact remains that, if we maintain Badiou’s anti-positivism, we must still explain how the objectivation of the event does not imperil its undecidability.

The thesis to be defended would thus be the following: if every reduction of the event to a positive knowledge, if every positivation of the event implies an objectivation of the event, every objectivation of the event does not in turn imply a positivation of the event. In my view, a major originality of the theory of the subject in *LW* resides in the elaboration of a possible non-positivating objectivation, which I formulate with the statement: *there are unknown objects*. We must thus conceive of the event as an unknown object, and *LW* as an enterprise of non-scientific objectivation.

Let’s explain this formula in detail.

That the object-site, i.e., the objective event, cannot give place to a positive knowledge does not evidently mean that it cannot be thought. We know this from *BE*: the non-knowledge of the event in no way precludes its thinkability. It remains that something novel is proposed in *LW* concerning this thinkability: namely, that the event can be subject to a typology, to a classification that dissociates fact, weak singularity, and strong singularity. If we examine how this typology is constructed, we see that it is rendered possible not by the being (or “non-being”) of the event—its nature as a self-belonging multiple—but by its appearing: a fact is an event whose existence has a weak, at least non-maximal intensity; a weak singularity is an event of maximal intensity; and a strong singularity is an event of maximal intensity that brings into existence the proper inexistent of the object that supports the event—i.e., of the site.

It is at this point that the thesis of the objectivist is strongest: it is patent that Badiou takes care to exclude from this typology every co-participation of the subject. The subject in no way co-participates in the event’s type: whether the event has a maximal intensity or not, whether it brings or not into existence the proper inexistent of the site, this is entirely comprised within the sphere of appearing alone, insofar as this sphere in no way depends on a subject in order to deploy the gradation of its intensities in a world which is indexed to a (materialist) transcendental. In this sense, I believe we can say that there is an objective, phenomenological in some sense, knowledge of the event’s type, and that this point is a major novelty of *LW* in relation to *BE*. But I diverge from

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the objectivist when he concludes that the subject can thus solely intervene *downstream* from the event, once the event is fully constituted, in order to faithfully, or in an unfaithful manner, deploy its consequences. For this would imply that there are purely objective events, and therefore that these events could intervene indifferently in a nature devoid of thinking beings or in the history made by humans (or by any being capable of truth procedures). Yet, if I am not mistaken, there is in *LW* no example of purely “natural” events, radically foreign to every human intervention, to every subjective intervention in general. For example, there is in Badiou no description of the evolutionary emergence of species in terms of events —no evental Darwinism. Rather, it seems to me that things are deployed as follows:

1. In the first instance, the event must be thought in its paradoxical being, that is, as a reflexive multiple. The essential undecidability of the event lies in this initial step: its paradoxical being implies that the event remains a scintillation that vanishes as soon as it appears, an ontological impossibility that can only exist as always-already abolished, about which the subject is radically uncertain, and that it must in consequence decide. The event is thus decided with respect to its being, and not positivized by any science whatever.

2. But in the second instance, and *subject* to the decision of its having-taken-place, the event opens up to an objective knowledge not of its *being*—undecidable, paradoxical being, “non-being” in truth—but of its *existence*, i.e., of its *type*. If the subject decided the being of the event, *then* an objective knowledge of the event’s type would open up for it; and, according to this objective knowledge, it can determine whether the decided event possesses the necessary intensity in order to allow one to found upon it a possibly durable fidelity. Therefore, I maintain that the subject in *LW* co-participates, beyond the abandonment of the authority of nomination, in the undecidable having-taken-place of the event. For there to be an event, there must not only be a reflexive multiplicity, but also a decision of the subject; but once the event is decided, the subject no longer co-participates in its intensity of appearing; an intensity of appearing that objectively exists for the subjects who decided the having-taken-place of the considered event.

In sum, and more clearly, I would say that Badiou proposes a form of objective knowledge subject to a militant decision. He unfolds an objective knowledge that is like the proper, yet fundamentally fragile knowledge of humans who decided to militate for a truth. Whereas positivist science relies on attested (non-evental), and in some sense undeniable, multiples, whereas the knowledge of the positivist has the solidity and sureness of a science founded on factual multiples, Badiou sets out a type of knowledge that appears for its part irremediably uncertain of its foundations, and that belongs to the militants of truth alone. This form of knowledge is evidently treated as a false science by positivists, and sometimes rightly so—think of Stalin’s dialectical materialism. But a false science is a militant representation that claims to be a positive science, whereas Badiou attempts to formalize what we could call a “militant objectivity”, which knows that it is different from a factual knowledge because it knows that it is founded on a wager of the undecidable event. It is thus an objective knowledge, which is not a pseudo-science, since it does not pretend to be a positive science, but knows how to takes its origin in the risk of a decision.

If dialectical materialism were a pseudo-science, Badiou’s materialist dialectic proposes a legitimate manner of thinking militant objects, of thinking unknown objects. But it is a conditional objectivity, always capable of disappearing as a pure illusion, as a knowledge of nothing, of derisory events, essentially tenuous. It is an objective thought in permanent danger of dissolution, always capable of abolishing itself with the event that supports it, since we could always say, or discover, that this event never took place.

So, I believe that Badiouian truths can and must be maintained in what I will call an “unwavering fragility” that exempts them from every positivist reduction. But there is still one objection to this anti-positivist understanding of the Badiouian event: if our interpretation is correct, why does Badiou say, in the passages from *LW* I mentioned, that truths—and thus indirectly the events that condition them—represent an incontestable evidence? I will respond thus: in fact, this declaration has nothing to do with the objectivation of the true effected by *LW*. A proof of this is that since *Ethics*—thus well before the rehabilitation of the object—Badiou

affirmed in an equally categorical fashion that there existed “well and truly attested events”, giving his habitual list, going from the French Revolution to the cultural Revolution, via dodecaphonism and the theory of Topos.¹⁵ How can we explain this conjunction of the discourse on the irrefutable *having-taken-place* of the event with the discourse on the undecidable *taking-place* of this same event?

I believe that what is at stake here are two discourses tied to the essential equivocality of the event; an equivocality that appears quite clearly through the very ambiguity of the term “undecidable” in Badiou.

For the undecidable, in Badiou, is not what *cannot* be decided; but quite the contrary, what *must* be decided. In effect, the term undecidable refers, in the first place, to mathematical statements that are indemonstrable with regard to a determined axiomatic. “Undecidable” means first of all: cannot be determined for certain as true or false via a body of knowledge. But this undecidability of the event requires the subject to decide *by itself* the existence of the event, and if it engages in it, to *resolutely* decide its existence. In reality, once the choice is made in favor of the taking-place, hesitation is not appropriate as soon as the being of the event is too weak to suffice for its own perdurance in time. The event is *uniquely* sustained by the resolution of the subject. The effect of the undecidability of the event is thus the opposite of indecision *in* the subject. It is commonly noted that the more a truth is less assured of its recognition, the more its partisans are intransigent. Cinephiles are often more peremptory about the films they *think* are of the highest importance than mathematicians concerning theorems that they *know* have been demonstrated.

Maxim of the event: the undecidable, yes—but not indecision. The subject must decide, and *be* decided—and it is the perspective of this resolution that Badiou adopts when he affirms the evident being of truths, or the attested being of events. This is why Badiou specifies, in *LW*, that truths are “*for him*” irrefutable evidences: he speaks in his proper name, the only one that the subject can enlist, even insofar as his name supports the universal scope of a decision offered to everyone.

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Beyond the question of the object that afforded me an angle of attack on the problem of the work’s unity, we see that a polarity now takes shape in *BE I and II*, one that explains the change in tone from one book to the other, and the apparently contradictory declarations about the undecidable or attested character of the event and of truth.

In effect, the Badiouian system seems to me to oscillate between two possible polarities, which occupy each of the two volumes of *BE*—and in terms of the choice of a privileged adversary. When the privileged adversary is the positivist, or the dogmatic metaphysician, Badiou insists (as he does in *BE*) on knowledge’s inability to reduce the undecidability of the event. I would say that what is at stake in this case is adopting vis-à-vis the event the attitude of the *philosopher* as Badiou defines him: thinking the event *as such*, in its undecidable essence, before thinking it as such or such an event, effectively engaged in a determined truth procedure. We must, then, think the general and meta-ontological categories of eventality—pure multiple, subject, fidelity, truth—as properly philosophical categories. Certainly, the philosopher also determines his present by thinking the unity of the various truths of his time. But here, as in Hegel, the philosopher is the one who comes after the advent of determined truths, in order to attest to their “there is” and to lay out for thought the epoch that constitutes their space of compossibility. Thus, this attestation is carried out, I daresay, in a “disengaged” fashion: the epoch-making of truths is not, strictly speaking, a fidelity to the event, for this unwavering fidelity is peculiar only to a subject, which the philosopher *qua* philosopher is not, since he is deprived of his own truth. The philosopher is thus a “quasi-subject” who stands on the extreme edge of engagement, on one hand in order to establish the militant and non-scientific outline of truth procedures (“epoch-making”), on the other in order to think the very essence of eventality—and its undecidability, which is reflected in the truths that lay claim to it.

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We can thus say that there is an anonymity peculiar to the philosopher, insofar as he is the non-subject who establishes the ephemeral taking-place of the event as such, in order to preserve it from positivist inspection or dogmatic absolutization. We could even say that the philosopher is an “arch-anonymous” quasi-subject; for he speaks of the already-anonymous event, the event that did not receive a name and is not destined to receive one, the event as such, through a figure of non-engagement, a retreat outside of truth, which alone enables him to speak of truth in general, without producing it himself. He is nothing more than the *logos* of epochal and non-veritative connection of events among themselves, whose fragility he obstinately protects. He is the nameless quasi-subject capable of grounding the eternally anonymous status of the event. Maxim of the philosophical pole: do not give way on the evental undecidable, hold fast to your necessary hesitation to pronounce the event.

On the other hand, the privileged adversary of *LW* no longer appears to be positivism, but *relativism*—post-modern, democratic materialism that opposes to the tyranny of the true the indefinite and ludic plurality of historical and linguistic contexts. By consequence, it is the second pole of the system that is privileged; and this second pole is that of subjects themselves, insofar as they have, for their part, effectively decided the having-taken-place of events, and above all did so *as* subjects, engaged in active fidelities, in truths in the present, in the making. Thus, the discourse of *LW* is produced from the viewpoint of the unwavering subject and no longer the philosopher quasi-subject; or rather, from the viewpoint of different subjects, internal to different procedures, and from which Badiou adopts (thanks especially to a style very different from *BE*) the tone and the *Stimmung*: that of unwavering resolution, whose maxim would this time be: do not give way on your decision about the undecidable. The logic is not so much the Mallarméan logic of the anonymous philosopher, as the Pessoaan logic of the subjective heteronym. What is at stake is speaking in one’s proper name about a plurality of names that are not your own—those whose decision you assume as yours, as soon as you make their fidelity your own.

You will recall that, at the end of Kubrick’s *Spartacus*, the vanquished slaves respond, each in his turn, to the Romans who ask them whom among them is Spartacus: “*I am Spartacus*”. Well, by the same token, Badiou produces in *LW* a voice that endeavors to incorporate itself into the present of the innumerable decisions it lists: the challenge for this voice is to constitute at present the becoming-subject of Spartacus, Galois, Picasso, and countless others. Not, of course—this would be megalomania—to take oneself for these individualities, but to test that there have indeed been, through certain demonstrative, artistic or political operations, a universally offered atemporal becoming.

I would then say that this second pole seems to me to support a second type of quasi-subject: no longer the arch-anonymous quasi-subject of the philosopher, but the *arch-engaged* quasi-subject, that is, the quasi-subject that thinks itself as the unity not of a single truth, but of a multiplicity of truths belonging to a multiplicity of truth procedures. What is thus at stake is a unity that, once again, is not a subject—since the subject only ever obtains its unity from *a* truth or *a* truth procedure. This unity of subjects of different truth procedures, for which the quasi-subject becomes the universal ventriloquist, is thus identified with the arch-engaged voice that “speaks” in *LW*. And it turns out that this unity of subjective procedures, which is not itself a subject, is identified in *LW* with what must be called an *I*, and even: an *autobiographical I*.

In effect, what is immediately striking when one reads *LW*, and more particularly its “Notes, Commentaries and Digressions” that gather at the end of the volume Badiou’s remarks on the body of the text, is the emergence of texts in which Badiou, quite simply, speaks about himself, about himself in the first person, takes center stage, even appears in a canvas in parallel with Kant, etc. Some have not failed to be annoyed, but I believe it is more interesting here to tackle this point as a paradox. The paradox is the following: Badiou, particularly in his 1993-1996 seminar, did not cease to oppose the philosopher and his impersonal prose to the antiphilosopher whose peculiarity—think of Rousseau, Kierkegaard or Nietzsche—is to always take center stage in his own singularity, so as to parry the illusory and oppressive generality of the concept. Whereas *BE* respects, I daresay, the specifications of philosophical impersonality, *LW* seems not to hesitate in borrowing from the antiphilosopher, on several occasions, his autobiographical regime. How to explain, then, that Badiou embedded in his system itself, constructed largely against the figure of the antiphilosopher—and in particular against the antiphilosophy

of his own teacher Lacan—a procedure profoundly associated with the antiphilosopher, according to Badiou’s own analyses? How to understand that the biographical I, dismissed as much from philosophical discourse as from the subjective fidelity to the event, is renewed at the level of the completion of the system?

I believe that the meaning of this paradox can be understood in the following fashion. Let’s return to the arch-anonymous pole of the system: the philosopher is the one who thinks the undecidable taking-place of the event, but he is also the one who thinks the irreducible plurality of truth procedures. And he does so by giving them refuge in a space of compossibility that Badiou calls an “epoch”. Well, it seems to me that the biographical individual is the twin, in the arch-engaged pole, of the epochal unity of truths established by the arch-anonymous quasi-subject: no longer the disengaged connection of the plurality of truths in an epoch, but the arch-engaged connection of an I whose autobiography is the sole operator capable of unifying—in the course of a singular life—the adopted and passionately defended truths of different subjects assumed during a real and concrete life. Truths whose autobiographical and no longer epochal unity is marked by the proper name: Alain Badiou.

I must say, in this regard, that I have been fascinated for a long time by the question of the bond between the proper name of Alain Badiou and his own philosophy, for a reason that stems perhaps from objective chance, but that makes me wonder. What is, in effect, the central thesis of Badiouian philosophy? To have done with the One, in any case the capital One of dogmatic metaphysics, the other name for God in the philosophical discourse of presence. But what is a truly contemporary philosopher for Badiou? Someone, he says in *Conditions*, “who has the unfaltering courage to work through Lacan’s anti-philosophy”.¹⁶ Badiou is precisely the philosopher, the only one to my knowledge, who respects a fundamental principle of Lacan: the signifier precedes the signified. The central thesis of Badiou’s philosophy—to have done with the One—derives in effect from a wholly oneiric modification of the syllables of his own name, of his signifier: Alain Badiou. Invert “lain” and “Ba”, hardly modify Diou into Dieu¹⁷ [*God*], and you obtain: “Alain Badiou”—“A Ba lain Di(e)u”. That is, rewritten in the form of a slogan: à bas l’Un-Dieu! [*down with the One-God!*]—or, in a verbal form: “Alain Badiou abat l’Un-Dieu” [*Alain Badiou brings down the One-God*]. This irony would no doubt have delighted his teacher Lacan, who, returned from the dead like the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus*, might have recited to his rebellious disciple his four truths, or in this instance his two anti-truths: 1. Being a subject, my dear, always boils down, at bottom, to making a name for yourself, and 2. The proper name of Being is not the void, it’s your own.

But let’s leave here the eccentricities of the Name, and return to Badiou’s system.

There is, thus, a double polarity in the System, and I believe it is important to maintain its tension, because it accounts for the evolution of Badiou’s very style, but also for what he began to insist upon in his later writings. *BE* is deployed on the side of the arch-anonymous pole: against the dogmatic metaphysician, against the positivist, Badiou insists on the plurality, the heterogeneity of truths, and the uncertainty of events from which they proceed. Whence the insistence, in the writings that immediately follow *BE*, on the rejection of terror, at least that which Badiou writes in lowercase—which I will thus term lowercase-terror—namely the barbarity that does not proceed from the rejection of philosophy, but rather from philosophy itself, as a disaster inherent in its propensity to confound the multiple and subtractive being of truths with the plenitude of a True of which it would be the unique custodian. Whence this text from *Conditions*, which I cite at length because I will return to it:

In Plato’s work, I have for a long time been struck by the dreadful reversal that occurs between *Socrates’ Apology* and, let’s say, Book X of the *Laws*. After all, Platonic meditation was rooted in the question of why Socrates was killed? But what it ends with is a sort of nocturnal terrorism, a repressive apparatus that clamps down on impiety and the corruption of youth—that is, on the two charges that led to Socrates’ execution. It seems in the end as if Socrates was legitimately put to death.¹⁸

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But on the other hand, according the other pole of the System, it is arch-engagement that dominates, the Pessoa heteronymy more than Mallarméan anonymity, and the engaged voices, fully engaged in their multiple procedures, become then the unfailing support of truths. To the point that Badiou no longer insists, in *LW*, on the rejection of lowercase-terror, but on the legitimacy of Terror—this time in uppercase. I speak of insistence because the theses on the two terrors are evidently found in both periods, but with a different reorientation in each case. Thus, insistence in *LW* on uppercase-Terror, in Robespierre's legacy, through which Badiou does not hesitate to convoke the necessity of an eventually extreme violence, including and above all in politics, in order to defend a truth. Perhaps the most shocking text of this legitimization of uppercase-Terror can be found in *The Century*:

The theme of total emancipation, practised in the present, in the enthusiasm of the absolute present, is always situated beyond Good and Evil. This is because in the circumstances of action, the only known Good is the one that the status quo turns into the precious name for its own subsistence. Extreme violence is therefore the correlate of extreme enthusiasm, because it is in effect a question of the transvaluation of all values. The passion for the real is devoid of morality. Morality's status, as Nietzsche observed, is merely genealogical. Morality is a residue of the old world. As a result, the century's threshold of tolerance for that which, from the vantage point of our weary, pacified present, constitutes the worst, was incredibly high—regardless of which camp one pledged allegiance to. This is obviously what leads some today to speak of the century's 'barbarity'. Nevertheless, it is entirely unjust to isolate this dimension of the passion for the real. Even when what is at stake is the persecution of intellectuals, disastrous as its spectacle and effects may be, it is important to recall that what makes it possible is the conviction that what permits political access to the real is not knowledge and its privileges. As Fouquier-Tinville had already declared during the French Revolution, when he judged and condemned Lavoisier, the creator of modern chemistry, to death: 'The Republic does not need scientists'. Barbarous words if there ever were, totally extremist and unreasonable—but they must be understood, beyond themselves, in their abridged, axiomatic form: 'The Republic does not need'. It is not from need or interest—or from the correlate of interest, privileged knowledge—that originates the political capture of a fragment of the real, but from the occurrence of a collectivizable thought, and from it alone.¹⁹

I cited two texts—from *Conditions* and from *Century*—in order to better show the striking contrast between the two polarities of the System: in one instance, against lowercase-terror, Badiou calls us to assume the place of the condemned Socrates and to question ourselves about the becoming-terror of a philosophy that is nevertheless born from the rejection of a murderous trial, so as to stave off every form of oppression in the name of the Good and the True; in the second, he urges us to understand the coherent logic of uppercase-Terror and, while admitting the barbarity of Fouquier-Tinville's statement, suggests that we should not immediately and unconditionally take the side of Lavoisier. As if Badiou, after Plato, took in his turn the risk of going from Socrates' defense to the "nocturnal terror" of the revolutionary Trial against science.

We see thus that the two poles of the system can lead to quasi-opposite positions: for the condemned Socrates against the terrorist becoming of Plato, for the becoming-Terror of the Revolution despite the trial of the condemned Lavoisier. Lavoisier who, let's point out, is a veritable genius of chemistry, and thus a faithful subject in his party. How can we explain the possibility of such a chiasmus? In fact, in *The Century*, Badiou decides to make the twentieth century speak from its own point of view, to understand it from the inside according to its own coherence, which was a violent coherence, thirsty for the Real rather than enlightened by the eschatological illusion. I believe this point of view is generally the same as that of *LW*: the perspective of subjects effectively engaged in a truth, and thus ultimately capable of unwavering violence.

We must nonetheless say that, even considering that Badiou could by right discard the violence that was peculiar to the twentieth century in the name of the current epoch, such a viewpoint leaves intact the problem of the bond between truth and barbarity. For if Fouquier-Tinville's positions, although dubbed "barbaric" by

Badiou, are not entirely foreign to the legitimate logic of uppercase-Terror, and if this Terror is intrinsically tied to the fidelity to a truth, as *LW* underscores, we risk seeing a now-essential bond gradually develop between truth and barbarity. This thesis is exactly that of Badiou's privileged adversaries in *LW*: namely, democratic materialism, whose typical representatives are the post-moderns and the new philosophers like Glucksmann. The paradox is that we risk discovering here a substantial agreement between the materialist dialectic and the new philosophers with regard to their cardinal thesis: truth implies Terror, even barbarity—a central line of argument through which these philosophers disqualified the very category of truth. This paradox, in fact, refers to the whole of the twentieth century, for which such an implicative statement—truth implies Terror—is one of the constants, as much for the revolutionaries as for the post-moderns. The former simply made the implication function according to *modus ponens*: truth implies Terror, yet truth is necessary, therefore Terror is necessary; the latter would insert the implication in a *modus tollens*: truth implies Terror, yet Terror must not exist, therefore truth must not exist. But what neither party contests is the truth-terror implication.

My conviction is that one of the breaks to be made with the twentieth century—revolution and post-modern restoration included—must indeed be made with this very implication, by maintaining that truth does not implicate lowercase- or uppercase-terror. This is precisely why one of the maxims of the twenty-first century may be: do not give way *on* truth, do not give in *to* T/terror. But I add that I have always read Badiou as an essential viaticum for thinking this decoupling of truth and T/terror—for I believe there is in his System something to counter every barbaric drift of the true. This is why I have endeavored, in the first place, to invoke the arch-anonymous pole, by insisting on the fragility of events, and on the rejection of an engagement that would tend to confound truth and the dogmatic Absolute—a rejection, therefore, of lowercase-terror. But I would add that, in a more paradoxical fashion perhaps, *LW* confirms this intuition, by providing us—beyond the positions of the arch-subject Badiou—the means to radicalize the positions of the arch-anonymous Badiouian philosopher, and by effectively warding off the becoming-barbaric of Terror, this time in uppercase, while not giving way on the radicality of truths. For by rigorously thematizing in *LW* the different figures of the subject—faithful, reactive, obscure—Badiou elaborates the concepts that allow us to think the exact nature of Fouquier-Tinville's "barbarity".

I will explain this and end here.

The parallel between the two texts I cited preoccupies me for a simple reason: it is that Badiou has taught us so well to love science as a truth procedure for it not to be clear that what is at stake, in Lavoisier's trial, is resolutely and unconditionally taking his side—a subject faithful to the revolution of chemistry—against that of Fouquier-Tinville, obscure and obscurantist subject since he calls in a barbaric fashion for the physical death of a faithful subject. But then, how to understand the properly theoretical difficulty in which Lavoisier's case places us? It is precisely that we are faced with a political truth—Robespierriest Terror—whose operator of fidelity ends up negating *another* truth procedure—that of science, of chemistry for which Lavoisier is an authentically revolutionary subject. Put differently, we discover that a same subject, supposedly faithful for one given truth procedure, *can be an obscure subject for another truth procedure*. In effect, we discover that, reduced to a truth procedure, the subject possesses an intrinsic propensity for terror—because it only sees a single truth, or at least a single truth procedure. But this being the case, just like the philosopher who believes himself the ultimate custodian of truth, such a univocal subject heads for disaster—destroying if necessary every other regime of the true in order to propagate the only one that matters to it. By consequence, every faithful subject is in danger of becoming what I will call "a faithful-obscure subject": obscure for the other truths *because* faithful to its own.

For there indeed exists aesthetically iconoclastic revolutionaries, politically reactionary brilliant authors, audacious scientists incapable of love, and timid lovers who detest the asceticism of science. A whole world of subjects who are simultaneously faithful and close-minded, or worse, towards the fidelity of others. And so, in Badiou's System, the philosopher would be assigned an eminent and precise task: namely, rendering compossible the truths of an epoch not only by thinking, in a theoretical fashion, their ontological concordance

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in a determined epoch, but also and above all by fending off in a practical fashion their terrorist interdestruction. Since there is no pre-established harmony between these compossible truths, the faithful-obscure subjects are always possible, even probable therein—and the philosopher must in consequence shelter truths not only from opinion, but also from other truths. This task would make the philosopher the one who provides for the failing providence, the lacking harmony between truth procedures; thus, the man of prudence, since the Latin *prudencia*, according to a remark by Cicero, is to be understood as the compression of *providentia*, providence. Providence through which the philosopher not only gives refuge to truths in the face of the violence of *doxa*, but also gives refuge to the procedural plurality of truths in the face of their possible inter-contempt.

Such a task has far-reaching consequences, for it refers to an egalitarianism that, in Badiou's work, is at least as fundamental as political egalitarianism, albeit less identifiable: *the philosophical egalitarianism of truth procedures*. This egalitarianism derives from the fact that Badiou never puts forward an operator of hierarchization among the four truth procedures, which if we think about it implies a thesis of singular radicality, truly uncommon. In the strict sense, for Badiou, a simple love story between two individuals is a truth *in the same way* as the French Revolution in its totality, or the theory of General Relativity. Nothing allows us to impart a superior dignity to events that involve a whole nation or a whole science, in relation to the event of an amorous encounter that merely involves two beings. This unwavering “disproportion” between love (which is exclusively a power of the Two) and other procedures (whose universality generally involves a much more considerable number of individuals) is masked by the fact that the examples of love that Badiou provides, if they sometimes correspond to true love stories (correspondence between Abelard and Heloise), often borrow from *another* truth procedure: art, and more specifically literature—*Nouvelle Heloise*, *Vita Nova*, *Aeneid*, etc. Love is a truth procedure so singular, so autobiographical in truth, that its power of universality must often be manifested not through real examples, but through their sublimation in art.

But such is precisely the stunning power of love, which the philosopher must also preserve: for Badiou, a singular story seems to have as much right to be defended as a political, scientific, or artistic revolution. Although the reality of a single couple, love has nothing intimate about it; it supports the same power of eternity as the most authentically universal politics. This is why the ethics of truths never allows us to decide for certain what must be selected in a situation; each is here sent back to his responsibility as a plural subject, capable of multiple and ultimately conflictual truths. How to decide between the exigency of political violence, which is ultimately legitimate in certain circumstances, and the incalculable destruction of amorous relations, scientific inventions and artistic creations that this violence risks occasioning? Badiou, faithful here to his first teacher, Sartre, invites us to understand that the choice of a subject cannot be guaranteed by any law, any algorithm of the decision: love or revolution, austere theory or furious avant-garde, the individual is often convoked by divergent truths, and no one can replace its choices here and now between heterogeneous subjectivations.

I will therefore say, to conclude, that I understand Badiouianism as a philosophy which genuinely calls us to a pluralism, but not the post-modern pluralism of dialogic opinions opposed to terrorist truth. Rather, Badiou's pluralism is an anti-relativist pluralism peculiar to truths themselves. Or again, a definition that suits me best as to the direction that this decisive thought reveals to us: I would say that Badiouianism is a *pluralism of eternal truths*, in which the philosopher can be identified with any man whatever, so long as he was traversed by a truth, and dominated by the exigency of the preservative prudence of the plurality of truths. Man of the ardor of a truth opposed to the atonal worlds of opinion; but also man of the equality of truths, opposed to the illegitimate domination, instigated by univocal subjects, of one procedure over others. Badiouian philosopher who emerges as the figure deprived of his own truth, but obstinately providential, through whom truths not only insist at the expense of opinions, but coexist at the expense of their reciprocal violence.

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NOTES

1. *Translator's note*—We would like to thank Quentin Meillassoux for granting his permission for this translation. The text originally appeared in the collection *Autour de Logiques des mondes d'Alain Badiou*, Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2011.
2. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2. Trans. Alberto Toscano. London: Continuum, 2009, 39.
3. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 193.
4. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Trans. Norman Madarasz. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 91.
5. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 93.
6. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham. London: Continuum, 2005, 328.
7. Badiou, *Being and Event* 329.
8. Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, 130.
9. Badiou, *Handbook* 136.
10. Badiou, *Handbook* 136.
11. Badiou, *Being and Event* 209.
12. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 361.
13. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 4.
14. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 9.
15. Alain Badiou, *Ethics*. Trans. Peter Hallward. London: Verso, 2002, 41.
16. Alain Badiou, *Conditions*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2008, 129.
17. A transformation all the more legitimate since Badiou himself recalled after the conference that in Occitan language (from which his name stems and with which his origins make him familiar), “Dieu” is in fact pronounced “Diou”.
18. Badiou, *Conditions* 10.
19. Alain Badiou, *The Century*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Cambridge: Polity, 2007, 63.