

# THE SCINTILLATION OF THE EVENT: ON BADIOU'S PHENOMENOLOGY

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*In Le Sens du monde, Nancy argues that “some value of scintillating phenomenality remains invincibly attached” to Badiou’s notion of the event. This paper examines to what extent Nancy’s comments still apply to Badiou’s phenomenology of the event developed in Logiques des mondes. In particular, although Badiou provides a thorough account of the event from the perspective of the consequences it enables, I show on the basis of Nancy’s suggestion that he tends to neglect an account of the event from the perspective of its occurrence and its passage.*

In *Le Sens du monde*, Jean-Luc Nancy notes that the question of the event is a crucial one in contemporary French thought. Although Nancy discerns a definite similarity between his own account of the event and the way other (French) philosophers, such as Jean-Luc Marion, address the event, he is at the same time concerned about the particular phenomenality they use to describe this notion. As Nancy writes, “some value of scintillating phenomenality remains invincibly attached” to these conceptions of the event. (SdM 35/18)<sup>1</sup> He explains in an accompanying footnote that he reckons Alain Badiou among those philosophers that relate the notion of the event to its scintillation (*éclat*). To demonstrate this he quotes a passage from the latter’s reading of Beckett’s *III Seen, III Said*, where Badiou writes, “The break in being that the suddenness of the event crystallises, the brilliance of that which is held in poor esteem.” (C 351)<sup>2</sup> For Badiouan standards, the phrase “the brilliance of that which is held in poor esteem” is rather informal, and it is not until

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Sens du monde* (hereafter referred to as SdM) (Paris: Galilée, 1993). Translations are taken from Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, tr. J.S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). All parenthetical references refer to the original (French) editions followed by a reference to the English translation in case a quotation from these translations is included in the main text.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, *Conditions* (Paris: Seuil, 1992). (Hereafter referred to as C.) The translation is taken from Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 176; the original French text reads as: “*la brèche dans l’être que cristallise la soudaineté de l’événement, la brilliance du mal vu.*”

*Logiques des mondes* that Badiou provides us with a thorough, formal description of the phenomenology of the event. In the conclusion to this monumental book, one can find at least one indication that Nancy's remarks from 1993 concerning the brilliance of the event are still relevant for a reading of this work: Badiou uses the same term as Nancy—*éclat* or scintillation—to describe what happens in the event he calls the in-existent. (LM 529)<sup>3</sup>

This paper examines the implications of Nancy's brief remarks from 1993 for Badiou's phenomenology developed in *Logiques des mondes*. In particular, it shows that Badiou's phenomenology of the event provides us with an analysis of the event from the perspective of its consequences while neglecting an analysis of the event from the perspective of the event's occurrence.

### 1. Poetics *versus* Mathematics

With his comments, Nancy proposes to read Badiou's account of the event from the perspective of the problem of presence and appearance. To give an adequate account of the role played by presence and appearance in Badiou's thought, it is crucial to understand how he deals with appearance and presence in his account of subtraction in *L'être et l'événement*.<sup>4</sup> In particular, I want to turn briefly to Badiou's reading of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger is important here not only because he is one of the main targets in Badiou's account of subtraction, which can therefore be called anti-Heideggerian, but also because Nancy's account of presence, appearance, and scintillation is highly indebted to Heidegger.

Badiou approaches the difference between his and Heidegger's thought as the difference between a mathematical and a poetic treatment of the question of being. Throughout his work, Badiou criticises Heidegger's poetic treatment, and he does so from a number of different per-

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<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'être et l'événement 2* (LM) (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988). (Hereafter referred to as EE.) Translations taken from Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, tr. O. Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005).

spectives.<sup>5</sup> These different perspectives are all carried by one fundamental question: How to conceive of ontology?

This ontological difference between Heidegger and Badiou can clearly be discerned in their understanding of the real contribution of the Greek beginning of philosophy to the question of being. For Heidegger, the reinterpretation of the Greek notion of truth—*aletheia*—as unconcealment guides his approach to the question of being and constitutes the Greek experience of thought. For Badiou, however, the event of Greek thought cannot consist in the invention of a poetic “coming-forth of being” or unconcealment since the conception of such a non-latency was already part of other and older cultures. (EE 143–4) As an alternative to Heidegger’s account of the Greek beginning of philosophy, Badiou insists that “[t]he particular invention of the Greeks is that being is expressible once a decision of thought *subtracts it from any instance of presence*.” (EE 144/126; my emphasis) Badiou continues, “The Greeks did not invent the poem. Rather they *interrupted* the poem with the *matheme*.” These comments paint a clear picture of the difference between poetry and mathematics as models for ontology: this difference concerns the relation between ontology and phenomenology. In Heidegger’s poetic approach, being coincides with the occurrence of coming-forth and coming into presence. (EE 141/123) In Badiou’s mathematical approach, being is *subtracted* from presence and appearing. This approach “disjoins being from appearing, essence from existence.” (EE 143/125) Already in Greek thought, this subtraction opened up the possibility to approach being from the perspective of (mathematical) evidence rather than (poetic) presencing. (EE 143)

At this point, where evidence is promoted over presence, it is not difficult to reconstruct a possible Heideggerian response. As opposed to Badiou’s claim that evidence is subtracted from presence, one could argue in a more Heideggerian fashion that mathematical *evidence* invokes an *evidentia*, that is, a particular phenomenality and a particular presentation. On the basis of Heidegger’s comments in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, one may conclude that for him, the real difference is not a difference between evidence and presence, but between, on the one hand, the light of *energeia* and *evidentia* (which Heidegger uses in a rhetorical context

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<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifeste pour la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 41–58; and Alain Badiou, “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics” in *Phi*, 10, 2000, 181.

rather than a mathematical one) and, on the other hand, *Lichtung* as the realm of openness that precedes the light of *evidentia*.<sup>6</sup> As a condition of possibility of this light, *Lichtung* is not presentation itself, let alone the scintillation that marks evidence.

This Heideggerian difference returns in Nancy's work. To introduce his comments on the relation between event and scintillation in *Le Sens du monde*, Nancy inquires into a realm that opens up the possibility of presentation and phenomenality and that is itself not of the order of presentation. This inquiry is clearly indebted to Heidegger's concern regarding any form of evidence. In fact, Nancy plays with the difference between "*obvie*" and "*ob-vie*," but, as he notes, "*obvie*" is a synonym of "*évident*" in the French. Hence, not only on the level of his explanation but also on the level of the examples he chooses, Nancy emphasises the similarity between the difference he broaches and Heidegger's difference between *evidentia* and *Lichtung*. (SdM 32)

This Heideggerian difference also shows the complexity and ambiguity of Heidegger's account of truth; it shows that his interpretation of truth is not only a matter of presentation but also an inquiry into that which is earlier than and presupposed by every presentation and, for that matter, not of the order of presentation. In this latter sense, Heidegger criticises the notion of presence and presentation. If we follow this latter trace in Heidegger's account of truth, one could argue that Badiou's notion of subtraction is not simply a break with Heidegger's account of truth as presentation, but is at the same time a furthering of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. This is also argued by Calcagno when he notes that Badiou's critique of presence remains "faithful to Heidegger's insights about the tradition of Western philosophy as a metaphysics of presence."<sup>7</sup> Hence, Badiou's critique of Heidegger's account of truth as presentation could be described as a critique of presence that is more radical than the one Heidegger undertakes. Moreover, read in this way, Badiou's concerns regarding Heidegger are similar to the concerns that speak from Nancy's critical comments on Heidegger's conception of truth as presentation. (SdM 31–4) (Obviously, this critique is to be dis-

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2007), 80–3.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and their Time* (London: Continuum, 2007), 94.

tinguished from Nancy's affinity with Heidegger's inquiry into a realm that precedes presentation and that is not of the order of presentation.)

However, at the same time—and this really complicates matters—Nancy's critique of the primacy of presentation in Heidegger's notion of truth is a *prelude* to his critique of Badiou's phenomenology of the event in *Le Sens du monde*. Apparently, Nancy considers the problem of the interpretation of *aletheia* as presentation to be akin with the important motive of scintillation in contemporary accounts of the event. (SdM 31–6)

Let me deduce one, clear description of the question that Nancy poses to Badiou's work from this complicated mix of mutual criticisms. Badiou's *ontology* of subtraction is a criticism of presence, much like and more radical than Heidegger's critique of Western thought as a metaphysics of presence, but is this still true for his *phenomenology* of the event? Does he reintroduce a primacy of presence and presentation in his account of the event as Nancy fears? And what does this mean? To approach these questions, I first turn to a reading of *L'être et l'événement*, where I concentrate on the relation between Badiou's account of subtraction and his account of the *existence* (and appearance) of the event. This important analysis also allows me to discuss the context of the passage of *Conditions* that Nancy relates to in *Le Sens du monde*.

## 2. Subtraction and Existence of the Event

One of the fundamental notions that Badiou develops in *L'être et l'événement* is the notion of the subject. In fact, one could argue that Badiou's "powerful dualism"<sup>8</sup> between being and event is developed first and foremost to be able to describe the duality (or the Two) that constitutes the subject. (EE 431) As is well-known, the notion of the event transgresses the realm of ontology in Badiou's thought since it does not respect the ontological law that states that a set cannot be an element of itself. The subject is a Two since, on the one hand, it arises in the wake of an event, and, on the other hand, its fidelity to an event consists in a specific operation that relates elements from the situation to the event.

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<sup>8</sup> Étienne Balibar, "'The History of Truth': Alain Badiou in French Philosophy" in *Radical Philosophy*, 115, 2002, 26.

Let me briefly describe both the ontological and the evental dimension of the subject.

The subjective procedure of fidelity consists in altering the situation. As such, it can be studied ontologically: there is a *being* of truth. To account for this being of truth and this alteration of the situation, Badiou introduces the mathematical notion of a generic set. Loosely speaking, a generic set is a subset of a situation that cannot be described in the language of the situation. From this mathematical-ontological point of view, the procedure of truth can be described globally as the construction of an extension of the situation such that the generic set, which need not be an element of the original situation, is indeed an element of this extension. Consequently, the generic set of truth *exists* in the (extended) situation, although it cannot be *described* in the language of the (original) situation. The notion “the language of the situation” is broached here because it is a crucial ingredient in Badiou’s definition of subtraction: each of the four forms of subtraction that Badiou distinguishes is defined in relation to the language of the situation: subtraction concerns something that cannot be decided, discerned, constructed, or named in terms of the language of the situation. (C 179–95)

From this ontological perspective, the difference between the perspective of the subject and of the ontologist is the difference between a local, finite procedure in which the extension of the situation is realised step by step, and the global, infinite result of this procedure in which the set of truth eventually exists. (EE 430–1) Being local means here that the subject cannot overlook this infinite result.

However, this ontological point of view is not the only perspective. In particular, the subject is not only the local procedure of truth, but is also faithful *to the event*. To this evental dimension of the subject corresponds a properly subjective dimension of language, namely, *nomination*. Badiou uses this term to describe both the nomination of the event and the subjective operation of connection. In both cases, the crucial dimension of nomination is the invention of names such that these names do not refer to elements in the situation as the meaningful language of the situation does. Rather, in the case of the operation of connection, the invented names anticipate referents of the *extended* situation (EE 416–8), and in the case of the nomination of the event, the invented name determines both the *appearance* and the *existence* of the event. Hence although the generic set of truth as well as the event are subtracted from

the language of the situation, they appear and are brought to existence in nomination.

This double role of language, i.e., as language of the situation and as nomination, provides us with the background for Badiou's critique of hermeneutics in "*L'écriture du générique: Samuel Beckett*" (C 329–66), which is also the passage discussed by Nancy. In this essay, Badiou makes distinction between interpretation and nomination. The goal of (hermeneutic) interpretation is not to name an event in order to mark its transgression of the situation, but to reattach and to reincorporate the event into the "established universe of significations." (C 349) In this sense, interpretation as the basic category of hermeneutics neglects and denies the event as a separation from the (language of the) situation. Inspired by Beckett's *III Seen, III Said*, Badiou argues that the occurrence of the event as such does not mean that "we are under the imperative of the discovery of its [the event's] sense" (C 349), as hermeneutics claims, but that this occurrence requires that we *name* the event. Unlike interpretation, nomination is not a quest for meaning, which reduces the event to the situation; rather, nomination seeks to "fix the incident, to preserve in language a trace of its separation." (C 350) As opposed to an interpretation, a nomination shows the singularity of the event with respect to the situation because it *lacks* signification. (EE 431) A nomination arises from the void of the language of the situation. It provides us with a name without meaning, and this name "is subtracted from the grey darkness of being, 'while it shines with formal clarity.'" (C 351)<sup>9</sup>

This latter quote brings up the theme of scintillation and brilliance in relation to the event, as discussed by Nancy. It provides us with an account of how the problem of nomination is related to the problem of the existence and the scintillation of the event: *that which does not exist in the situation and cannot be described by the language of the situation, is brought to existence by nomination*. Nomination lets the invisible event shine with brilliance. As such, it is nomination that brings the question of phenomenology into play in Badiou's work of the 1980s as can also be seen in *L'être et l'événement*. Here, Badiou writes, "only an *interpretative intervention* can declare that an event *is* presented in a situa-

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<sup>9</sup> My translation: "un supplément séparable qui [...] soustrait au noir gris de l'être, 'brillant de clarté formelle.'"

tion; as ... the arrival amidst the visible of the invisible.” (EE 202/181)<sup>10</sup> Thus, the appearance of the event depends upon its nomination. Nomination, however, is subjective. This leads to a typical problem in Badiou’s conception of the relation between event, its existence and appearance, and the subject in *L’être et l’événement*: if the event requires this subjective intervention for its existence, how can we combine this with the fact that the subject *presupposes* the event? Badiou responds as follows to this question. On the one hand, the event is prior to the intervention: “It is certain that the event alone, aleatory figure of non-being, founds the possibility of intervention.” On the other hand, “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 ... the event does not exist.” (EE 231/209) This latter comment explicitly states that the *existence* of the event depends upon the subject. This leads to a serious circularity in Badiou’s conception of the event: how can the subject at once presuppose the event and be constitutive of the existence of the event in its nomination?

Badiou is aware of this problem, and he tries to solve it by arguing that “*the possibility of the intervention must be assigned to the consequences of another event.*” (EE 232/209) Hence, the intervention of an event is made possible by the consequences of an other, previous event. Thus, Badiou tries to secure the primacy of the event over any subjective procedure, so that subjectivity can aptly be characterised as drawing the event’s consequences. However, this solution is disappointing since it leads to an infinite regress: the prior event presupposes an intervention of its own, which refers back to another event, and so on. This does not really solve the problem of the relation between event and nomination. In fact, this problem guided Badiou to the project of *Logiques des mondes*. Already in 2003, Hallward noted that around that time Badiou aimed to develop a conception of the existence of the event such that it is not “marked by any ontological trace of the subject position of whoever first declared it.”<sup>11</sup> This is the task of *Logiques des mondes*: to think the exis-

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<sup>10</sup> In this quote, one should emphasise “intervention” rather than “interpretative”: interpretative is here *not* meant as reattaching the event to the “established universe of significations.”

<sup>11</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 145.



tence and the appearance of the event beyond its dependence on the subject.

These latter remarks give us an outline of the development in Badiou's work, but they do not really help to understand Nancy's comments on the relation between event and scintillation since these are not primarily concerned with the subjective trace at work in the event's appearance. To capture the core of Nancy's comments, we need to return to the first sentence of the previous paragraph, which approaches the relation between event and subject in Badiou's work from the perspective of the consequences of an event as the condition of possibility for subjectivity and consequently also for nomination. This sentence will guide us in the next section.

### 3. The Occurrence and the Consequences of the Event

At the end of his discussion of the problematic relation between the event and the subject in *L'être et l'événement*, Badiou emphasises that his work is not so much concerned with the *occurrence* of an event as with its *consequences*. He writes, "the entire effort lies in following the event's consequences, not in glorifying its occurrence." (EE 233/211) This difference between occurrence and consequences indicates that the genuine theme of his book is an account of subjectivity and truth; these two notions both depend on the *having already happened* of the event. At the same time, beyond Badiou's concerns, this difference between occurrence and consequences corresponds to two different perspectives on the event. This section is devoted to a brief account of the difference between these two perspectives.

On the one hand, one can inquire into the *occurrence* of an event. In this way, one approaches an event as an opening and as a coming to presence of something that is completely incongruent to a given situation. In this mode of questioning, one inquires into the very passage of the transition that an event is. On the other hand, one can also inquire into the realm of the *consequences* that is opened up thanks to the occurrence of an event. This means that once this event has happened, it has opened up the possibility of subjectivity (in Badiou's sense of the term). For Badiou, the passage enacted in the occurrence of the event is important, but only insofar as it allows us to think the consequences of the event. However, one may wonder whether such an account that insists on

the primacy of consequences is capable of doing justice to the event *as occurrence*. This is the question, as I propose to show, that Nancy poses to Badiou's work.

To approach the event in its occurrence amounts to an inquiry into the *coming* into presence and into the transition from absence to presence that characterises the event. Such a transition from a lack of manifestation to manifestation is itself neither of the order of presence nor of the order of absence. It is this typical intermediate status of the event's occurrence as passage and transition that Nancy brings to the fore in *Le Sens du monde* as an alternative to a conception of the event from the perspective of its scintillation. Nancy determines this alternative conception of the event as "sense."<sup>12</sup> Sense, of course, is here not meant in a Badiouan sense as reattaching the event to the "established universe of significations," that is, to that which is already present in the situation. It is rather meant as the occurrence of the event itself. As Nancy writes, "Sense, for its part, is the movement of being-toward, or being as coming into presence or again as transitivity, as passage to presence—and therewith as passage of presence. Coming does not arise out of presentation any more, indeed, than it arises out of non-presentation." (SdM 25/12) In this quotation, Nancy proposes a crucial difference between, on the one hand, presentation and manifestation as the crucial ingredients of every phenomenality and, on the other hand, a coming into presence that is presupposed by phenomenology. ("This *coming* [venue] is infinitely presupposed." (SdM 34/17)) In this way, every phenomenon presupposes in itself something that transgresses its own phenomenality, namely, the very passage that allows a phenomenon to come to presence. As a consequence, Nancy's comments imply that a conception of the event to which "some value of scintillating phenomenality remains invincibly attached" (SdM 35/18) forgets to think the event's occurrence as passage and as coming since these dimensions of the event transgress the phenomenality of the phenomenon.

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<sup>12</sup> This points to another typical difference between Nancy and Badiou. While they are both critical of the hermeneutical paradigm, Badiou dismisses this paradigm as we saw above in his reading of Beckett. Nancy, however, does not only try to rethink crucial hermeneutical notions such as "world" and "sense," as he does in *Le Sens du monde*, but he also tries to rethink the meaning of hermeneutics itself, as can be seen from his work on the Greek notion of "*hermēneuein*" in *Le Partage des voix* (Paris: Galilée, 1982).

Of course, in a general sense, although Badiou emphasises that he is interested first and foremost in the consequences of the event, the event as transition is important for him too. For instance, our brief discussion of his reading of Beckett has demonstrated that the event and its nomination allows the ill seen to shine brilliantly. Hence, the event involves a transition from invisible to brilliance—and as we shall see this motive of transition returns in *Logiques des mondes* with respect to the inexistant. However, this does not yet mean that Badiou discusses the event *as* and *in its occurrence*. In fact, in other contexts he has clearly expressed his doubts concerning the category of the to-come to which not only Nancy but also Derrida and Heidegger often refer.<sup>13</sup> According to Badiou, this category does not amount to a genuinely philosophical alternative for classical metaphysics. In relation to Heidegger's work, Badiou even qualifies this insistence on the to-come as being poetic and prophetic rather than philosophical; as he writes, “the established power of an unknown master [i.e., the highest being in classical metaphysics; my note] is opposed by the poetics or prophetics of the to-come.”<sup>14</sup>

The difference between these two approaches of the event also corresponds to a difference between two temporalities. An account from the perspective of temporality shows the difference between Nancy and Badiou even more clearly. In an interview on Badiou's reassessment of the figure of Saint Paul, Slavoj Žižek touches upon these two different temporalities in relation to the Messiah-event in Christianity and Judaism, respectively. According to him, the occurrence of the Messiah in Christianity implies that “it's done, the Messiah is here.... [This] means that the space is now open for struggle. It's this nice paradox that the fact that the big thing happened does not mean it's over.... [This is] to the horror of some of my Jewish friends, who don't like this idea that in Christianity everything happened whereas in Judaism the Messiah is always postponed, always to-come, and so on.”<sup>15</sup> The two temporalities of

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<sup>13</sup> In a passage on this Heideggerian “*a-venir interminable*” in the work of Nancy, Badiou “malignantly” remarks “*on a envie de dire: ‘Écoutez, si cette pensée est encore tout entière à venir, revenez nous voir quand au moins un morceau en sera venu!’*” Alain Badiou, “*L’offrande réservée*” in *Sens en tous sens: Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy*, eds. F. Guibal and J.-C. Martin (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 16.

<sup>14</sup> Badiou, “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics”, 181.

<sup>15</sup> J. Delpèch-Ramey, “An Interview with Slavoj Žižek: ‘On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love’” in *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 1, 2004, 35.

the Messiah-event that Žižek invokes here are the temporalities of an event's occurrence and of an event's consequences, respectively.

Under the name of Judaism, Žižek introduces the time of the occurrence of the event. This time is the time of the to-come. In its German form *Zukunft*, this temporal dimension of the event as to-come plays a crucial role in the thought of Heidegger. For the early Heidegger, this to-come character of an event plays a crucial role in his interpretation of Saint Paul's account of the experience of Christian life.<sup>16</sup> For Heidegger, Christianity is not marked by the fact that everything has already happened, but by the expectation of the *parousia*.<sup>17</sup> This expectation is an expectation of "the reappearance of the once appeared Messiah."<sup>18</sup> Thus, this experience is focused on the coming and the coming into presence.

Beyond the scope of Heidegger's understanding of Christian life, this early analysis of the Christian hope is similar to the temporal dimension of Heidegger's extremely difficult notion of *Ereignis*. This appropriating event—whether it concerns the appropriation of the Greek origin of philosophy or the name of being—is marked by a temporal primacy of the future that holds something unforeseeable in store for us and that has not yet arrived but is still to come and is still drawing near. Even the Greek origin of philosophy that Heidegger seeks to bring to language is not something that has already happened, but something that still awaits us.<sup>19</sup> This primacy of the to-come plays a crucial role in Nancy's account of the temporality of the event and the instant as well. He does not interpret the time of the event as a form of temporizing, that is, as an endless delay of the arrival of presence. Such an endless delay would presuppose the primacy or the teleology of the arrival of presence. Inspired by Derrida, he rather interprets the time of the event as *différance*. As such, this time is, as Nancy writes, the "interior spacing of the very line of time: that which distances from one another the two edges of this line, which, however, has no thickness whatsoever, in accordance with the coming of being, the coming of a singularity, of an 'instant.'" (SdM 59/35) This

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<sup>16</sup> Hence, it remains to be seen whether or not Žižek is accurate in ascribing this time of the to-come solely to Judaism.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, GA 60 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995), 98–110.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l'art et la politique* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1987), 90–1.

distancing within time itself implies, as Nancy continues, that the “coming into presence of being takes place precisely as non-arrival of presence.” Thus, the event occurs only as non-arrival of presence. Hence, also from the perspective of its temporality, it follows that the event can only be described before or beyond the scintillation that marks every arrival of presence.

Under the name of Christianity, Žižek discusses the other approach of the event: the event’s having already happened opens up “the space for struggle.” In this brief but very clear characterisation, Žižek has beautifully captured Badiou’s point of view. The emphasis on the having already occurred of the event should not be read as prioritizing the past. Its having happened does not imply that we can record the event into the book of history and carry on with our daily affairs *as if nothing happened*, but it opens up the realm of the event’s consequences and as such, approached from the perspective of its consequences, the event opens up the temporal dimension of the *present* of the subject. This present is marked by the urgency to draw the consequences of the event.

It is this sense of the present that gains all weight in Badiou’s account of the Two of the subject and of the consequences of the event. Note that, since the subject cannot overlook (as the ontologist can) the infinite extension of the situation, there is a version of the unforeseeable in Badiou’s thought. However, this version of the unforeseeable concerns the extension of the situation in the wake of the event rather than the event itself. Moreover, it concerns the way this extension is (not) given *to the subject*. For the ontologist, the infinity of the procedure of truth is, with respect to the finite subject as its local support, merely a form of temporizing. Yet, the subject’s time is not a temporizing; it is not an endless deferral. The time of the subject is the present in which consequences are drawn. In this sense, Badiou is not so much interested in the time of the occurrence of the event, but in a “*discipline* of time” (EE 233/211), which is a time of the disciples of the event that faithfully follow its consequences.

#### 4. Badiou’s Phenomenology of the Event

What are the implications of the difference between a description of the event from the perspective of its occurrence and from the perspective of its consequences for Badiou’s phenomenology? This question guides us

in this final section where we turn to Badiou's phenomenology of the event developed in *Logiques des mondes*. As I noted above, *Logiques des mondes* solves the problems of *L'être et l'événement* concerning the relation between the event and the subject. In particular, it provides an account of the existence and the appearance of the event that does not invoke the subjective intervention of nomination. To follow Badiou in his formal account of the existence and the appearance of the event, let me briefly recall some crucial ingredients.

Book II of *Logiques des mondes* is devoted to a technical study of the *transcendental*  $T$  of a *world*  $m$ . A transcendental is a partially ordered set with a minimum element  $\mu$  and a maximum element  $M$ . (LM 171–84) In the rest of this book, this transcendental plays the formal role of degrees of appearance. The notion of the world replaces the notion of the situation. Another crucial notion is the object, which Badiou defines as a pair  $(A, Id)$ , where  $A$  is an element of the world  $m$ , and  $Id$  is an *appearance function*  $Id: A \times A \rightarrow T$ , which determines the degrees of identity and difference between elements of  $A$ . The formal notion of existence is defined in terms of appearance. Existence is a function  $E: A \rightarrow T$ , given by  $E(a) := Id(a, a)$  for every element  $a$  in  $A$ . (LM 260–1)

With this basic terminology, Badiou introduces a thorough account of that which he in *Conditions* described as “the brilliance of that which is held in poor esteem.” To see how he does this, we need to recall one basic result concerning every object from Book IV. Here, Badiou shows that every object has a special element  $\emptyset_A$  in  $A$  such that its existence is minimal, i.e.,  $E(\emptyset_A) = \mu$ . This element is called an *inexistent* because it lacks existence. (LM 360–2)<sup>20</sup> With this fact in mind, Badiou gives a very clear and univocal conception of the transition brought about by an event. Note that this transition is not the transition of the event itself, but the transition of the *inexistent*. An event implies that the *exis-*

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<sup>20</sup> The notation Badiou uses for the *inexistent* ( $\emptyset_A$ ) suggests a similarity with the notion of the void ( $\emptyset$ ), which he developed in *L'être et l'événement*, nevertheless they are different. As Badiou remarks, the void is a *global, ontological* notion: the existence of the void is the only existential axiom in set theory. The *inexistent*, however, is only a *local, logical* notion: it is relative with respect to the object  $(A, Id)$ . To spell it out: the *inexistent* is an element of the set  $A$  (hence it is relative to  $A$ ) having minimal existence (hence it is relative to the identity function). To borrow Heidegger's distinction between being and beings, as Badiou does, the void “is being as non-being” (LM 361–2), whereas the *inexistent* is *a* being, although a non-existing one.

tence of the inexistant changes from minimal to maximal existence, from  $\mu$  to  $M$ . Thus, an event allows “that which is held in poor esteem” to scintillate maximally.

To account for this transition, Badiou formalises the notion of the event in Book V as follows. First, he defines a *site*. This is an element  $A$  such that  $A$  is an element of itself. (LM 413)<sup>21</sup> An event is defined to be a site that satisfies two additional conditions that *both* involve a maximal existence (LM 413–7): (1) since  $A$  is a site,  $A$  itself appears and exists. An event should satisfy the condition that  $A$  exists maximally, i.e.,  $E(A) = M$ . Hence, an event involves a scintillating site; (2) the radical change implied by the event concerning the existence of the inexistant is simply included in the second condition of the definition of an event, which reads formally as:  $E(A) = M \rightarrow E(\emptyset_A) = M$ . This means that the maximal existence of  $A$  implies the maximal existence of the inexistant. In turn, this transition marks the event. This is why Badiou calls the scintillating inexistant the *trace* of the event.

This latter scintillation is a necessary condition for the possibility of subjectivity. Decisions, points, bodies, and drawing consequences can only be thought in light of the mark of the transition implied by the event. The expression “in light of” is not metaphorical. The sudden splendour of the inexistant that used to be without any glory is the first guideline for those who ask for the true life of subjectivity, as Badiou writes in his beautiful conclusion: “For those who ask for the true life, the first philosophical directive is the following: ‘Take care of what is being born. Interrogate the scintillations [*éclats*], probe their past without glory.’” (LM 529)<sup>22</sup>

It is clear that this phenomenology of the event is very well suited to account formally for the possibility of a subjectivised body. In this sense, Badiou’s account of the consequences of the event in *Logiques des mondes* is highly impressive. Moreover, Badiou also incorporates a conception of the transition brought about by the event in his account of the scintillation of the inexistant. Yet, *this does not enable us*

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<sup>21</sup> Note the typical difference with *L’être et l’événement*; in this book, it is only the event that transgresses the ontological law that a set cannot belong to itself. In *Logiques des mondes*, already a site transgresses this law.

<sup>22</sup> My translation: “*La première directive philosophique à qui demande où est la vraie vie est donc la suivante: ‘Prends soin de ce qui naît. Interroge les éclats, sonde leur passé sans gloire.’*”

to approach the very passage that occurs in the occurrence of an event itself. The change concerning the inexistant marks the event. However, the event itself is already determined by maximal existence, as we can read from the first condition:  $E(A) = M$ . Rather than accounting for the coming into presence that precedes the appearance and the existence of both the event and its results, Badiou's definition of the event *departs* from the scintillation of the event and approaches the event *from the outset* as a site that appears maximally. With respect to the inquiry to which Nancy invites us, namely, an inquiry into the temporality and the (beyond-)phenomenality of the coming into presence of the event's occurrence, one would have to conclude—to put it as clearly as possible—that such an inquiry is *formally obstructed* by the equation  $E(A) = M$ . This equation situates us always already after the arrival of the event rather than placing us in the midst of its evental passage. Moreover, it equates the event with its scintillation, and *as such* it deprives us of the possibility to question into the evental passage, which *as passage* is not of the order of a scintillating presence.

Along these lines of thought, Nancy's brief comments from 1993 are still relevant with respect to the phenomenology of *Logiques des mondes*. Badiou's formal account of the event “misses the excess or the initial spacing” (SdM 35/18) of this occurrence. Without a doubt, Badiou's ontology of subtraction in *L'être et l'événement* is an impressive break with any metaphysics of presence. But what about his phenomenology of the event? The critique of metaphysics as it has been developed by Derrida and adopted and furthered by Nancy is in the first place a critique of the notion of presence *in phenomenology* in order to account for that which is presupposed in every phenomenon and which transcends the phenomenality of the phenomenon. Of course, Badiou's questions with regard to Heidegger's account of the to-come need to be addressed, namely, what does it mean that Heidegger's interpretation of the to-come remains to some extent indebted to a poetic and a prophetic discourse?—and need to be extended to, for instance, Derrida's and Nancy's discussion of the to-come. At the same time, the phenomenon of the event cannot be discussed without taking its occurrence and its passage into account. At this point, Nancy's work on the time of the instant as well as his efforts to think the occurrence of the event as a non-scintillation and a non-arrival of presence provide us with important



critical questions concerning maximal appearance and existence in Badiou's definition of the event.

By posing these *mutual* questions, the phenomenon of the event "comes to meet us" in its different dimensions, its occurrence *as well as* its consequences. Thus, these mutual questions "open the path" (SdM 32/17) to the phenomenon of the event; that is to say, these dimensions become "*obvie*," obvious, evident, and visible as the dimensions that any account of the event needs to address.

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