WHAT IS TO BE DONE? ALAIN BADIOU AND THE PRE-EVENTAL[1]

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While Alain Badiou's resuscitation of the subject has provided continental philosophy with new possibilities for political activism, its reliance on rare events has also paved the way for a potentially paralysing pre-eventual situation. The aim of this paper is to examine Badiou's own writings for hints of a theoretically justified pre-eventual politics—one that not only works within the ambit of his philosophical project but is also capable of explaining Badiou's practical engagements in the politics of France. Two solutions are offered through an examination of the implications of heterogeneous situations: a repetition of events and a pre-eventual mobilisation of the uncounted.

There can be no doubt that the works of Alain Badiou constitute a breath of fresh air in philosophy, an event in thought. Against the increasingly repetitive platitudes of phenomenology and hermeneutics, Badiou marshals an impressive synthesis of mathematics, poetry, art, politics and psychoanalysis to unfold a novel conception of philosophy and ontology.[2] One of the most important areas in which Badiou has effected a significant reconfiguration of the debate is in regard to the subject. After the death knell of the Cartesian and transcendental subject, Badiou has resuscitated a novel type of subjectivity that avoids both the preoccupation with finitude that characterised much of post-Kantian philosophy as well as the dissolution of the subject into linguistic and cultural structures that appears in much of continental philosophy. Instead of finitude,

[1] My thanks goes out to Nandita Biswas Mellamphy and Antonio Calcagno for generously providing feedback and critical comments that greatly helped in sharpening the arguments of this essay.

[2] The most obvious distancing Badiou takes from phenomenology and hermeneutics is with his notion of the subject. Contra the self-deferring or irreducibly mediated subjects (which tend to lead to an infinite respect for undecidability, rather than an injunction towards action), Badiou's subject is rigorously active, emerging to force a truth and change a situation.

the subject is taken up into the infinite procedure of fidelity to an event. More generally, the infinite is secularised and made banal by Cantor's mathematical treatment of the concept, thereby revealing that *every* situation of being is infinite. On the other hand, rather than a focus on how linguistic and semiotic structures de-centre the subject, Badiou (like Jacques Lacan) argues that subjectivity punctures a hole in the system of constituted knowledge. The subject, rather than existing solely by virtue of its linguistic position, instead "in-exists," thereby opening the space for it to construct a truth that necessarily evades knowledge.

This new conception of the subject is, in turn, marshalled towards an explicitly militant politics of truths. Again turning against contemporary leftist *doxa*, Badiou criticises the trepidation and contradictions of liberal tolerance, and the pre-eminence of respect for the Other.[3] Both stances, he argues, consist of a fearful resignation to the status quo, and, as such, perceive as Evil any positive attempt to construct a novel emancipatory project. By contrast, Badiou situates his ethical imperatives in terms of truth procedures. Once an event exempted from the Law has been declared, Evil emerges as a possibility through three variations: in the simulacra of real events, in the betrayal of an evental encounter, and in the attempt to re-name the *total* situation in terms of the truth. Each of these distorts what Badiou calls the Good, which is a faithful inquiry of a particular event's occurrence and the discerning of its consequences within a situation (while recognizing its unnameable[4] limits). The militant subject that emerges in the truth-procedure has, therefore, an ethical injunction to continue.

The benefits of such a concept of the subject and politics are readily apparent: in an era where Slavoj Žižek can credibly declare that "it's much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth [e.g. through climate change, nuclear war or wayward asteroids] than a much more modest, radical change in capitalism,"[5] the theorisation of how radical change occurs is extremely pertinent. The injunction to *change* the situation, as a

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[3] For more on this critique see Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil,* tr. P. Hallward (New York: Verso, 2001), 18–29. This text was written for high school students (as Badiou outlines in the Preface), and so some of the subtleties have been left aside. Nevertheless, it offers an excellent introduction to Badiou's writings.

[4] Alain Badiou, "Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable" in *Theoretical Writings*, eds. R. Brassier and A. Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2006), 121–36.

[5] *Žižek,* video recording, directed by A. Taylor (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2005).

part of a truth-procedure, also contrastively reveals the complicity that much liberal thought has with the status quo, whether it be through a tolerance that merely restricts options or a discourse of human rights that reduces humanity to its minimal animalistic basis (e.g., the right to life and freedom from suffering). Moreover, in an era dominated—on both the left and the right—by a fear of fundamentalism, the grand emancipatory projects of radical change have been deemed to be either hopeless, naïve or, even worse, self-destructive.[6] The conclusion that is drawn from these assumptions is that politics has become a matter of efficient management, with the basic social structure being deemed unassailable. While continental political theory has been exemplary in revealing how these social structures have been contingently constructed (often as the result of power imbalances), their inability to develop a rigorous model of active agency has theoretically left them largely at the mercy of historical forces. In this situation, Badiou's work is in many ways a call to arms, a manifesto for generic universality (subtracted from all known predicates), and a philosophical foundation for those who believe that parliamentary democracy and global capitalism are not the end of history. In all these respects, Badiou must be commended for changing the terms of discourse, for altering the encyclopaedia of our situation according to his own truth-procedures.

Yet, for all the militancy of a post-evental fidelity, Badiou has avoided any systematic discussion of the question of what is to be done beforehand, instead offering only fragmentary insights. Even more worrying is the fact that Badiou's own conception of the event (as a radically unpredictable supplement) appears at first to suggest that there is *nothing* (beyond management) one can do while waiting for an event. Put simply, if an event is unpredictable from within the situation, is it still possible for political participants to try and generate an event? If the answer is that it is not possible, then despite all the formative power accorded to his conception of the subject, Badiou's project would still have to be deemed as acceding to the status quo (with the obvious exception of rare events). Alternatively, if the answer is affirmative, then it is the task of

[6] Badiou is well aware that despite the current absence of these grand projects for a "new man," our age is no less violent for that fact. As he says, "today's well-tempered moralism … is nothing but the endorsement of aseptic crimes—backing virtuous wars or decorous profits." Alain Badiou, *The Century*, tr. A. Toscano (Malden: Polity Press, 2007), 33.

activists to undertake an analysis of how precisely it is possible. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to undertake a detailed examination of Badiou's concepts of subject, event, and situation in order to discern the outline of a pre-evental political project.

The first step to undertaking this task is to tackle the criticisms whereby Badiou's concept of the event is deemed miraculous or pseudo-religious,[7] or where its experience is regarded as a mystical, ineffable encounter. If such criticisms were true, then an event would in fact be an absolute and *transcendent* break with all that had occurred before. Structurally, there would be no difference between the rupture of an event and the ineffable encounter with a supreme being since both would rely upon essentially uncontrollable encounters with something absolutely other than our immanent lived space. It would, ultimately, foreclose any possibility of working *toward* an event, and as such, demand a political pacifism in the absence of an event. Undeniably, some of Badiou's own formulations suggest precisely this radical disjunction between being and event, particularly in his emphasis on the absolutely unpredictable nature of the evental occurrence. At the same time, however, Badiou is keenly aware of the necessity of integrating the two into a dialectical relationship.[8] The question to be asked, then, is how is the event something other than a rupture of a transcendent outside? It must retain some relations with the particular situation *in which* it is an event.

There are two primary responses to this line of thought: one involves the conception of the evental site, with the second involving the necessarily immanent process of constructing a truth. The initial description of the event does indeed suggest that the event involves a complete disjunction with a situation. It is described as being entirely unpredictable from within the situation, as being an aleatory encounter of some-

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[7] For perhaps the most explicit outlining of this criticism in English see D. Bensaid, "Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event" in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. P. Hallward (New York: Continuum, 2004), 94–105.

[8] As a side note, this dialectical reading of Badiou is most clearly expressed and developed in Bruno Bosteels' excellent commentaries. For a sustained look into the ways in which Badiou both critiques and surpasses any radical divide between being and event, by developing a unique theory of dialectics, see Bruno Bosteels, "Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics" in *Positions*, 13:3, 2005, 575–634; and Bruno Bosteels, "On the Subject of the Dialectic" in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. P. Hallward. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 150–64.

thing that exceeds the situation. There is, in other words, no way to account for, predict, or understand an event from within its situation. However, what, in part, distinguishes this from pure transcendence is the fact that an event *must* be localisable within a particular situation. An event must have some minimum of ontological consistency in order for it to appear, and as such, it must employ the local beings in a situation to give it its minimal embodiment. The place of this localisation is termed the "evental site" by Badiou, characterised as "a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation."[9] Politically, this resonates with the common descriptions of mass movements, whereby the mass itself is presented *as* a mass, but none of its elements appear in their particularity. It is no surprise, then, that Badiou commonly attributes evental occurrences to various mass movements (the French Revolution, May '68, the workers' movements, etc.). The important point in all of this is simply that the event is localised and singularised by the evental site.[10]

Here a question arises, one which we will also have to return to later: While the idea of an evental site is clear in the case of a mass movement, is it not also the case that the elements of the presented "mass" are themselves presented precisely *as* specific family members, specific workers, and/or specific community individuals? In other words, while the elements of an evental site are not presented from the perspective of the state of the *political* situation, can it not be said that the elements *are* presented in an alternative situation, such as the community situation, or the familial situation? If this is the case, then the unpresented elements of one situation may simultaneously be the fully counted elements of another situation. As such, what constitutes an event and evental site for one situation may be a mere continuation of the *status quo* for an alternative situation. Or, to put it in other words, what constitutes an unpredictable rupture from one perspective is simply a culmination of various, determined causal paths at another level. For example,

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[9] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, tr. O. Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 175. Badiou will later (185) admit that a site, qua presented multiple whose elements are not presented, is an aspect of *every* situation insofar as they must be regulated by the Axiom of Foundation. What distinguishes a site from an *evental* site is therefore nothing more than the retroactive qualification that an event occurred with that site.

[10] This, moreover, can be seen clearly in the definition of the event as "a multiple such that it is composed of, on the one hand, elements of the site, and on the other, itself." *Ibid.* 179.

the mass movement of the proletariat could simply be the result of a multitude of individual conflicts and demands, and the gradual, patient and strategic construction of a group identity. It is obvious that such a conclusion is contrary to Badiou's own intentions, reducing, as it does, the event to knowledge. A full response to this point will hinge on the question of what constitutes *a* situation, since, with the absence of any overarching One, "thinking about any being is always a local question."[11]

For the moment, we will return to the second aspect that ties an event to a specific situation: the extension of a situation through the construction of a generic set, and its subsequent forcing. Against the reading of Badiou, which would place the concept of an irruptive event at the centre of his project, Badiou himself declares that it is the concept of the generic that is essential.[12] The reason for this centrality of the generic is that it involves the *immanent* working through of what the event exposed. Unlike Lacan and Žižek, Badiou is not content with the transient experience of an irruptive moment (this is what severely hampers Žižek's reading of Badiou, and what allows him to conflate truth and event, into a so-called "Truth-Event.") To be content with the mere transitory appearance of the Real is to remain bound to a mysticism which privileges the unsayability of the event, marking the experience as sufficient in itself. Badiou, to the contrary, argues that the event is strictly *nothing* without its subsequent consequences. In *Being and Event* these are carried out by a truth-procedure and the subjective intervention that retroactively (and publicly) declares the event's occurrence, while in his latest works, the event itself is considered to have "objective and logical consequences,"[13] thereby avoiding any simple reliance upon a subject to decide absolutely that the event has occurred. Employing Paul Cohen's concept of the generic set for his ontological purposes, Badiou then goes on to show that a truth is constructed as a generic set that, while working with the elements *in* the situation, approaches them through their connec-

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[11] Alain Badiou, "The Transcendental" in *Theoretical Writings*, tr. R. Brassier and A. Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2006), 197.

[12] "If one category had to be designated as an emblem of my thought, it would be neither Cantor's pure multiple, nor Gödel's constructible, nor the void, by which being is named, nor even the event, in which the supplement of what-is-not-being-qua-being originates. It would be the *generic*." Badiou, *Being and Event*, 15.

[13] Alain Badiou, "Ontology and Politics" in *Infinite Thought*, eds. J. Clemens and O. Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2004), 172.

tion or disconnection to the name of the event. The generic set can also be constructed from *within* the situation because it is simply another "excrescent" multiple among an infinite of others; there is nothing abnormal about its status as excrescent.[14] During the process of construction, the generic set can then be forced into the situation by the use of names that anticipate elements that will have been presented. The important thing to note is that it is *not* the event that does the ontological work here; rather, it is the statement or naming of the event and the subsequent generic set built on their basis that does all the work of ontological change. In this way, an event is entirely specific to its situation and is not simply a transcendent intervention. Rather than a rupture of an event, it would perhaps be better to speak of a *torsion* produced by a truth procedure on the situation, in the same sense in which topological transformations can immanently shift one given object into a radically new object.

An event, therefore, is not transcendent to its situation, but is instead localisable within the immanence of the situation. There is no radical disjunction between truth and knowledge, but instead a subtle, dialectical interplay carried out by the aleatory path of a truth procedure. As Badiou will repeatedly say, an event is an event *for* a situation.[15] In this regard, Badiou has rightfully highlighted the continuance of the old

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[14] An "excrescent" multiple is one which is represented, but not presented. Whereas presentation concerns itself solely with the individual elements comprising a situation, in Badiou's work representation is the grouping together of a portion of these elements according to a particular characteristic counted by the state of the situation. The particular excrescent multiple in question here—the generic subset—,consists of elements that are positively connected with the name of the event. However, it is not yet presented because the elements it collects are not currently counted by any legitimate measure within the situation—in fact, one of the defining features of a generic set is that from the perspective of the State, its elements come from multiple and often contradictory subsets of the State; the generic subset includes without discriminating (which is another way of saying it is universal in principle). As Hallward notes, the axiom of extensionality allows for subsets to be constructed with no overarching, defining unity; so it is formally possible for a collection of elements to be grouped together, while only later uncovering the discerning measure which allows them to be presented *as* elements of that set. Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 132.

[15] It should also be mentioned that Badiou himself, in *Being and Event*, goes to great lengths to distance himself from what he calls "speculative leftism" which "bases itself upon the theme of an absolute commencement." Badiou, *Being and Event*, 210.

within the new, and has developed an ontological theory capable of transversally crossing the division between the leftist wish for a pure flux of revolutionary change and the rightist affirmation of universal stasis and continuity. But while we have managed to integrate being and event together, we still have our primary question of what can be done politically during pre-evental intervals.[16] To put it schematically, while the old has been shown to continue within the new, the new has not yet been shown to have an obscure precursor within the old. The risk here is to fall into precisely the speculative leftism and glorifying of an absolute beginning that Badiou wants to resist. The problems involved in escaping it are numerous, though. For one, the novelty of the event, its rupture of the void and inconsistent excess, does not exist in any sense, since the event is constituted by its indiscernibility from the perspective of the situation's particular count. For another, from within a situation, the event is entirely unpredictable. There can be no causal sequence that ultimately determines the sufficient reason of an event, and as such, there can be no programmatic series of actions that can definitively produce an event. Lastly, any complete theory of the pre-evental must undertake an

[16] It would be remiss of us to neglect to mention the great work that has already been done on this issue of the pre-evental. The path taken so far appears to be to grant the unpredictable rupture of the event and to focus on the individual's ability to recognise and declare an event. Levi Bryant and Sam Gillespie have both contributed excellent work on this, with Bryant taking a largely Žižekian approach and arguing for the necessity of first dislodging the individual from their Symbolic interpellation and imaginary misrecognition. Without this pre-evental work, the individual is more likely to remain bound to their Symbolic identity, since it is constitutive of their very being. Gillespie focuses on how the experience of anxiety can provoke—in analysis or politically—the individual to seek to reconfigure their fundamental fantasy, thereby shifting the Symbolic coordinates towards something definitively new. In both Bryant's and Gillespie's works, Badiou's system is seen to require supplementation by a more developed theory of the individual. Our task here, on the contrary, is to give a more developed account of situations, in order to detect alternative ways in which the monotonous stasis of the pre-evental can be loosened. See Levi Bryant, "Symptomal Knots and Evental Ruptures: Žižek, Badiou and Discerning the Indiscernible" in *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 1:2, 2007, 1–28: http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/30/89 (accessed March 30, 2008); and Sam Gillespie, "Giving Form to its Own Existence: Anxiety and the Subject of Truth" in *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, eds. P. Ashton and A.J. Bartlett and J. Clemens (Melbourne: RE:press, 2006), 180–209.

analysis of *concrete* situations, and not merely ontological situations. The reason for this necessity is simple: in order to work with the tendencies in the situation, we must have a sufficient grasp of what the concrete situation entails, and this involves "an interplay of different situations in the ontological sense of the term."[17] What must be observed in concrete situations, therefore, are both its interactions with other situations and its appearing in a world. This problem of interaction raises a number of issues pertaining to the idea of a situation.[18]

Initially, the question is what constitutes *a* situation. In *Being & Event*, Badiou makes it clear that oneness only arises from the operation of a count. At the presentational level of elements that belong to a situation, there is no overall unity—it is simply "a" consistent multiple.[19] When the unity of the presentational level *does* arise it is in the state of the situation, through which all the parts of the situation are themselves counted-as-one, including the "total part"[20] of the situation that guarantees the foreclosure of the void. The presentational unity of a situation is, therefore, the result of the secondary count-as-one of the state, which is itself the result of that operation (and not its agent).[21] What this entails is

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[17] Badiou, "Ontology and Politics", 174.

[18] A parallel idea—one which will not be followed in depth here—is that of interacting truth procedures. Badiou himself has acknowledged this possibility, referring to "culture [as] the network of various forcings, that is, at a given moment in time, the manner in which the encyclopaedic knowledge of the situation is modified under the constraints of various operations of forcing which depend on procedures that are different from one another." Cited in Bosteels, "Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics", 591.

[19] Importantly, Tzuchien Tho points out the different implications of the word "consistency": "The term 'consistent' in English has a sense of something free of contradiction. … In French, the sense of the term "*consistence*" does not have a strong sense of contradiction, but rather something which is not 'formed' or not 'collected.'" (Tzuchien Tho, "New Horizons in Mathematics as a Philosophical Condition: An Interview with Alain Badiou" in *Parrhesia* 3, 2007, 5.
http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia03/parrhesia03_badiou.pdf (accessed March 30, 2008).

[20] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 98.

[21] "The operation is the situation itself." Badiou, "Ontology and Politics", 170. It should also be made clear here that the situation does not *present* itself as an element of the situation (a set cannot belong to itself); what is counted is the total part of the situation, as

that the interaction of situations must mean an interaction of *states* of situations or rather (given their indiscernibility), the *counts* which comprise states of situations. In the end, a concrete natural[22] situation entails multiple, heterogeneous counts interacting in various, contingently determined ways.[23] This should be uncontroversial—in everyday situations we are accustomed to having people counted by a variety of simultaneous criteria (in a socio-political situation, for example, the categories of class, gender, education, beauty, etc. count the subsets of individuals).

But this raises a further question, because Badiou often appears to equate the state (of the situation) with the (political) state[24] and, as we have just seen, it is clear that this cannot be the sole embodiment of the state of the situation. To begin with, there is the simple recognition that the political state is a relatively recent construction, whereas the ontology conditioned by set theory should hold retroactively for these pre-state situations too. This tautology of the state=state is also denied by present conditions in which the decline of the nation-state is causing widespread concern amongst political scientists (not to mention the people of failed or economically liberalised states!). So it is clear that the state of the situation is not reducible solely to the political state. The question then arises, what other forms of social organisation can function as a state of the socio-historical situation? Religion is certainly a major alternative, since it effectively counts, organises, and deals with subsets of individuals (e.g., sinners, the chosen, the pious, etc.). There is also the possibility

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a represented element. This is another way of saying that at the level of pure presentation, there can be no totality or unity.

[22] We are here using "natural" in Badiou's sense, in which a multiple is natural "if [1] every *element β* of this set is also a *subset*," and if [2] this property holds for the constituent elements of the set too, making this 'naturalness' transitive all the way to the void as null set. *Being and Event*, 130. It is precisely the event which will upset this natural equilibrium by virtue of introducing a presented multiple whose own elements go unpresented (i.e., the evental site).

[23] In *Logiques des mondes*, Badiou explicitly admits this multiplicity: "To put it simply: there are many transcendentals; the intra-worldly regulation of difference is itself differentiated. This is one of the main reasons why it is impossible here to argue for a unified 'centre' of transcendental organisation such as the Kantian Subject." Alain Badiou, "The Transcendental" in *Theoretical Writings*, 205.

[24] Badiou goes so far as to relegate any "non-state structure" to the "immediacy of society." *Being and Event*, 105.

that multiple political states can interact in a single localised space, with one state representing its citizens in a particular way, while the other state represents the public in alternative ways. The occupation of Iraq by the U.S. is one notable recent example, revealing again that the state of the situation is irreducible to a single political state. However, perhaps the most significant contemporary state of the situation is capitalism as a global economic system. This is an important point (and one that space constraints will limit us from developing), but it is clear that modern capitalism does not concern itself with individuals in their presentational specificity (as family or community members, for instance), but rather with their placement as consumers, managers and producers—pure numbers to be put on the company's bottom line.[25] We could go so far as to say that states themselves are not considered as individuals in capitalism, but as "competitive" or "non-competitive" spaces within which largely deterritorialised flows of capital can be invested.

Given the multiple ways in which beings are counted, the question now concerns whether this interaction contributes any sort of emergent effects. In the context of this paper, the most important consequence is the acknowledgement that pre-eventally, there can be presentations and representations that escape any single dominant structure such as the political state. The state of the situation encompassed by the political state has its own singular void and evental site that must be excluded, but it is also necessary that this void and evental site not hold transitively for every other situation. While *unique*, the void is not a *one* which would underlie every situation as its substantial foundation. Instead, the void is indexed to each situation by its proper name.[26] Or in other words, the void is always the void of *a* situation, which can easily be perceived in the fact that the inconsistent multiple the void names is a retroactive construction of the count constitutive of the situation. What this all entails is that while certain elements may go unpresented from the perspective of

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[25] We must be careful here, as it is precisely the category of the "worker" that Badiou argues is a singularity within the contemporary situation. What is presented is the factory, as an evental site, but its own elements (the workers) are necessarily unpresented from the perspective of the economy. See Alain Badiou, "The Factory as Event Site" in *Prelom*, 8, 2006, 171–6: http://www.prelomkolektiv.org/pdf/prelom08.pdf (accessed March 30, 2008).

[26] For Badiou's discussion of the unicity and oneness of the void see Badiou, *Being and Event*, 68–9.

the political state, they can nevertheless be localised within alternative worlds (since they are not the void of *every* situation). The mass movements that typically announce political events may be entirely unpredictable at the level of the political situation, but from the perspective of the coexisting community situation, their power may be only *relatively* unpredictable. The emergence of an uncounted element (from the perspective of the political state) may have any number of obscure precursors within the community situation. This, again, points to the way in which being and event are related rather than absolutely disjunctive. Moreover, it gives support to the idea that political mobilisation *prior* to an event is a useful venture. As Badiou himself points out, he has "never argued that the event, when we examine it in its facticity, presents irrational characteristics."[27] There is indeed a causal sequence prior to the event which can prepare the space for an event to occur without, for all that, making it reducible to a deterministic sequence.[28]

Does this idea, however, entail that there are ultimately *no* unpredictable events, and that what appears as a rupture of inconsistency at one level can simply be patched over with the consistency of an alternative situation? To refute this, it simply needs to be recalled that there is no Whole, no Universe within which the heterogeneous situations could be composed together into a continuous and all-encompassing consistency. Every thinking of being is local and situated, and as such, requires its own void, its own constitutive inconsistency. What has been accomplished here is rather the attenuation of any idea of an absolute beginning which would have no precursors. The localisation of being and the heterogeneity of situations instead offers the possibility that situations outside of the political state can be employed as a space to pre-eventally construct and mobilise potentially irruptive movements (without any guarantee of their ability to do so, of course). The key here would be to discern or construct a situation that escapes the logic of structuring through which the political state operates. To "[find] a point that would

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[27] *Ethics*, 125.

[28] As an aside, we would note that, in their studies of social movements and contentious politics, sociology has made a number of useful contributions to the understanding of these pre-eventual political sequences. These works have provided a great deal of insight into the conditions which make revolutionary moments possible. For one notable example see S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics,* 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

stand outside the temporality of the dominant order,"[29] and use it as a pivot from which to illuminate the dominant situation's constitutive void. This explains Badiou's own practical engagements in France's situation, involved as he is with the *sans papiers* and factory workers. At the level of the dominant situation (what is counted by the French state), these elements are unpresented; yet since "the human animal is the being of a thousand logics,"[30] it is capable of entering into alternative situations and mobilizing them in such a way that they might burst into the political situation and provide a contemporary event around which a community of subjects could be constructed.

The interaction of multiple situations and counts is not the only way to be politically active prior to an event. Some of Badiou's own writings (albeit not in the formalised, mathematical writings) suggest another alternative, one which would incorporate aspects of the past in order to make use of them in the present. The ontological basis for this action appears to lie in the statement that truths are infinite, which entails that any particular truth procedure is only a finite section of an infinitely extendable process. Typically, the problem Badiou notes with regards to truth's infinite, is that of when to declare a truth's "saturation." That is to say, the problem is of discerning when a truth procedure has plausibly accomplished its goal of drawing out interesting and remarkable consequences in relation to the declared event. A sort of law of decreasing returns appears to hold true for truth procedures, where interesting connections with the name of the event become increasingly difficult to discover. Our concern here, however, is not with the declared end of a truth procedure, but with the closely related ideas of the *extension* of a truth procedure and the *repetition* of an evental naming into new situations. We have already looked at how concrete situations are themselves composed of multiple ontological situations and constituted by multiple counts. The task now is to understand how the heterogeneity of situations permits the extension of truth procedures and the repetition of events.

From the beginning, it is obvious that the repetition of an event cannot involve repeating some substantial aspect of it, defined as it is by its subtraction from the count. Instead, what must be repeated is the *name*

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[29] Alain Badiou, "Spectres of 68" in *New Left Review* 49 (Jan/Feb 2008): http://www.newleftreview.org/?page =article*and*view=2705 (accessed March 30, 2008).

[30] Badiou, "The Transcendental", 199.

of the event. It is the substantial trace of the event, whether the name or the extracted statement concerning the evanescent event, that can be retained.[31] As Badiou has made clear in a recent article,[32] the repetition of the name "communism" entails a commitment to a mode of social organisation foreclosed by the capitalist situation. Hence, his own predilection for citing Lenin as a repetition of the Paris Commune, and Mao as a repetition of Lenin. The name itself is transitive to multiple situations, while at the same time naming that unique unpresentable aspect of the capitalist count. It functions as an anchor throughout these situations (Paris in the 1870s, Russia in the 1920s, China in the 1950s–70s) from which to draw new consequences once the truth procedure has been rejuvenated. Undoubtedly, the truth procedure constructed from this name can reach a saturation point within a specific situation, yet once the situation has been altered (even according to what Badiou calls a "modification" in *Logiques des mondes*)[33], there are new elements and relations to inquire into. This is what has occurred with the name of communism. In each situation in which it has gained widespread adherence and sparked extensive investigations, the name of communism has been used to inquire into the elements belonging immanently to that specific situation, leaping from previous periods to provide insight on the contemporary world. As a result, the problems faced by each epoch have been drastically different: for the original communists, the problem was formulating the initial program; for the Bolsheviks and into the Maoist period, the problem was developing a form of organisation that would be capable of

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[31] Undoubtedly, this is in part where the importance of Sylvain Lazarus' work on an "anthropology of names" stems from for Badiou. As Badiou will remark, the name is necessarily prescriptive (not being objective or descriptive), it organises its own internal history, and "every name is deployed in places, or through the materiality of the prescription." Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, tr. J. Barker (New York: Verso, 2005), 33.

[32] See, "Spectres of 68" in *New Left Review* 49 (Jan/Feb 2008): http://www.newleftreview.org/?page =article*and*view=2705 (accessed March 30, 2008).

[33] In *Logiques des Mondes*, Badiou puts forth 4 distinct "figures of transformation: modification (which is the mode of being of the objects of the world), a fact (which is a transcendental novelty, but one endowed with a low degree of intensity), a singularity (a transcendental novelty whose intensity is strong, but which has few consequences), and an event (a singularity with consequences of maximal intensity)." Alain Badiou, "Afterword" in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. P. Hallward. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 236.

maintaining the communist project in the face of adversity; for our own times, the problem is again organisation, but this time under the rejection of the party-form. For each case, though, it is a matter of constructing and extending the previously saturated truth procedures into the present situation. The repetition of a name, therefore, involves the extension of a truth procedure into heterogeneous, discontinuous situations.[34]

The article by Badiou cited earlier ("Spectres of 68") provides one example of how this repetition of names can be carried out. As he explicitly proclaims within that work,

> [O]ur task is to bring the communist hypothesis into existence in another mode, to help it emerge within new forms of political experience. This is why our work is so complicated, so experimental.... What might this involve? Experimentally, we might conceive of finding a point that would stand outside the temporality of the dominant order and what Lacan once called 'the service of wealth.' Any point, so long as it is in formal opposition to such service, and offers the discipline of a universal truth.[35]

There are a few things to note in this selection, along with the larger essay itself. First is the claim that our work must be "experimental"; it is a tentative and necessarily uncertain path that must be followed by locating a point outside of the dominant order. In many ways, this agrees with the typical idea of activism found within Badiou—the event itself is undecidable as to its belonging, and the militant path that follows its consequences is aleatory and uncertain. The second point to be highlighted, though, is that unlike the normal Badiouan approach, there is no event declared or even mentioned within the article. The declaration and the rejuvenation of the communist hypothesis is fully experimental in that there is not even a recent evental supplement to which it can attach itself. Instead, all that is left is the name of communism, which has been repeated in a variety of different situations and which must again be resuscitated for our own globalised times. This leads us to our final point,

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[34] The discontinuity of the situations mandates that there be no "super-subject" which could be said to underlie all the different manifestations of the name. Rather, "a subject is a subject of a definite situation." Badiou, A., "Ontology and Politics", 175.

[35] "Spectres of 68" in *New Left Review* 49 (Jan/Feb 2008): http://www.newleftreview.org/?page =article*and*view=2705 (accessed March 30, 2008).

namely, the necessarily performative nature of the repeated name or statement: "The simple phrase, 'there is only one world,' is not an objective conclusion. It is performative: we are deciding that this is how it is for us. Faithful to this point, it is then a question of elucidating the consequences that follow from this simple declaration."[36]

Declaring something outside of the dominant order, the statement proclaimed must not be found within any objective circumstances, but is instead a performative statement that enacts its own declaration. Hence, another pre-evental possibility (besides the interaction of situations) is the repetition of evental names through their performative declaration within heterogeneous situations. Despite the absence of an event, these declarations can serve all the essential functions of militant fidelity, providing an anchor from which the situation can be investigated, and a public name from which a generic community can be organised.

Lastly, we have already pointed out that normal non-evental modifications of situations can lead to altered situations wherein past event names can be used to rejuvenate a truth procedure. Some of the particular characteristics of a situation, regardless of the truth procedures in progress, can facilitate a repetition of names and the emergence of a political event.[37] At the same time, however, one of the most substantial conclusions to be drawn from Badiou's idea of "culture" (as the network of coexisting forcings at a given moment) is precisely that culture provides truth procedures with a constant source of potential rejuvenation. Against the saturation and fatigue that eventually accompany any truth procedure, the shifts in the situation effected by culture introduce new elements which other procedures can draw upon. A primary effect of culture, therefore, is a sort of ratcheting effect whereby, through successive forcings by disparate truth procedures, situations are extended and formerly saturated truth procedures are rejuvenated. In other words, culture

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[36] "Spectres of 68" in *New Left Review* 49 (Jan/Feb 2008): http://www.newleftreview.org/?page =article*and*view=2705 (accessed March 30, 2008).

[37] Antonio Calcagno illuminates some of these properties in his work. See Antonio Calcagno, "Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou: Is there a Relation between Politics and Time?" in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30:7, 2004, 811–13. As well, following upon our earlier note (n. 28), social movements studies has also examined some of these situational properties in depth. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*.

is a vital resource for those seeking pre-evental political activism, since it generates potential material upon which names are able to be repeated.

Our task here has been fairly modest—we have aimed to supplement Badiou's rigorous ontological system with the intention of alleviating some of the more politically paralyzing features. Through the interaction of heterogeneous situations, we have seen the possibility of constructing political movements outside the logic and space of the political state. Simultaneously, we noted that the saturation of a truth procedure need not be the definitive end point for an event, since its name can be repeated within other situations to generate a new truth procedure. With these aspects of situations in mind, it should be clear why Badiou can, without contradiction, be engaged in trying to shape France's political situation regardless of a lack of events.

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