

## **Memorial Culture and the Univocity of Being**

Adrian Parr

On Monday October 2, 2006 Charles Carl Roberts IV, a thirty-two year old truck driver and father of three, took his children to school as usual then drove to the nearby West Nickel Mines Amish School in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In a suicide note left at his residence he expressed a continued anger at God for the death of his daughter, Elise, who had died twenty minutes after being prematurely born nine years earlier. In the note, he also admitted to assaulting family members twenty years ago, saying he had more recently experienced recurring feelings of pedophilia. In what seems like a planned attack (Roberts used several items for the shooting that appeared crossed-off on a list of supplies he had compiled) he entered the school with an automatic handgun and shotgun along with six hundred rounds of ammunition. He ordered the fifteen boys, three women (including the teacher) and infants to leave the school. Ten schoolgirls remained in the building. He then barricaded himself in the one room school building, nailing the doors shut, tying the girls up and binding their feet. He then made them face the blackboard, at which point he shot them close range – execution style – and then shot himself. Five girls died.

Given the insularity of the Amish way of life, the shock of having someone enter their community, hijack their school unprovoked, traumatize their children and other adults in the school, then cold heartedly murder half of their schoolgirl population and seriously injure the others meant that day in October was a day like none other. It was a day when the men stopped work in the fields; the women left their home duties and all rushed to the

side of the families in their community who were suddenly and unexpectedly hit with grief. This was a day when the tourism objectifying the perceived eccentricity of Amish life exploded as the mass media noisily consumed their silence and sorrow across television screens, the Internet, and newspapers worldwide attracting another kind of tourist culture: memorial culture.

Exactly one week after the shooting the surrounding community tolled its church bells at 10:45am, the same time the school had been taken siege. Choosing to ignore the ‘no parking’ and ‘no standing signs’ at the site of the shootings, the surrounding community left flowers and messages along with a makeshift memorial that read ‘Gods little Angels ... In our hearts forever’. Spontaneous memorials are a common public response to death. Examples are numerous but some of the more well known ones would have to include the flowers, notes and teddy bears flooding the gates of Buckingham Palace in London upon the sudden death of Princess Diana; likewise there was an influx of soft toys, letters and drawings to the New York Fire Department in the aftermath of 9/11. How did the Amish respond to a similarly unexpected and violent act against some of the youngest members of their community?

Funerals for the murdered girls occurred on family land; they were laid to rest in simple pine caskets and buried in hand dug graves. The Amish community rallied around in support some raking the leaves in the front of the homes of the grieving families, whilst others cooked meals. Within a week the schoolhouse was demolished and the debris taken to a nearby landfill. Grass and clover was planted at the site without plans for a

commemorative structure to be placed there. Following in accordance with Amish tradition they did not commemorate the dead, the lives of the girls were not eulogized at their funeral, nor will their graves be visited in the future.<sup>1</sup> The Amish did not build anything, they did not leave memorabilia at the site, they did not publicly express their grief, in fact they did the very opposite of this. They were obviously deeply upset and yet they maintained their composure without traces of anger. All in all, there was a quiet feeling of strength the Amish expressed through their grief.

Instead of building a permanent structure to memorialize the five dead girls the focus was on forgetting through forgiveness. Interestingly, the community made a concerted effort to reach out to the Roberts family, going so far as to mourn his death and establish a fund in the local bank for the family. October 2, 2006 was obviously an anomaly in the life of the Lancaster Amish community and they articulated this difference through their own communal specificity producing an individuating difference that was implicitly transformative.

Death was not embraced as a finite moment it became a practical undertaking to participate in divine power and an exercise aimed at a producing change for both their own community and the surrounding Lancaster County community. The Roberts family spokesman, Dwight Lefever told CBS News correspondent Byron Pitts how an ‘Amish neighbor came that very night, around 9 o'clock in the evening, and offered forgiveness to the family.’<sup>2</sup> The trauma experienced became another modality of being, being not as a finite individual but a being that transforms the moral view of the world into an ethical

encounter. The Roberts family did not stand accused in the eyes of the Amish and in many senses nor did the murderer, because to the surprise of the general public the Amish grieved at Roberts' funeral. This paper will use Deleuze's concept of the univocity of Being and Badiou's critique of Deleuze, to extract the ethical challenge such a traumatic event poses. What is especially intriguing about the Amish is that grief did not give way to invariable moral commands to 'never to forget', neither was it defined by the cultural convention of commemoration and memorialization common today (the construction of monuments or memorials).

Surpassing the dualistic structure that separates the victim from the victimizer, the past from the future, death from the present and forgetting from memory, the Amish response produced a different experience of trauma, one that brought into being what Deleuze might describe as the univocity of Being; a concept that Badiou was to identify as the foundation of Deleuze's thinking in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. Badiou sums Deleuze's project up in the following manner:

This brings us to the very core of Deleuze's thought. It is, in fact, entirely reasonable to maintain that the sole function of the immense pedagogy of cases (cinema, the schizo, Foucault, Riemann, *Capital*, Spinoza, the nomad, and so on) is to verify tirelessly – with the inexhaustible genius of variation – this unique sentence: “There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal.”<sup>3</sup>

The ontological proposition Deleuze puts forward is that difference is the condition of Being. Setting out to clarify what constitutes the individuality of an existent, he begins by explaining the univocity of Being in contradistinction to the idea that Being is oppositional and limited. An example of this would be when we posit inside against outside or black against white (A does not equal B). In reference to this idea Badiou succinctly explains this means that the univocity of being is not tantamount to claiming that being is One in the numerical sense of the term. Rather, for Deleuze, all Being is implicitly difference in and of itself regardless of whether it is of one genera or another, as Badiou puts it the Deleuzian concept of the One-All indicates that it is ‘fully compatible with the existence of multiple *forms* of Being.’<sup>4</sup> Or as Deleuze puts it: ‘Univocal Being is at one and the same time nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy.’<sup>5</sup> Continuing on from here he clearly states that ‘being cannot be supposed a common genus without destroying the reason for which it was supposed thus; that is, the possibility of *being* for specific differences.’<sup>6</sup>

Univocal Being is therefore not a genus it is individuating difference. What is univocal is that this is the primary condition shared equally amongst all existents: becoming. This is why Deleuze insists: ‘Univocity of being thus also signifies equality of being.’<sup>7</sup> In order to show this he uses the following distinctions originally put forward by Duns Scotus in *Opus Oxoniense: formal* and *modal*. When taken together, formal and modal distinctions demonstrate that univocal being is a condition of variation.

First, a formal distinction Deleuze says:

... is a real distinction, since it is grounded in being or in the object; but it is not necessarily a numerical distinction because it is established between essences or senses, between “formal reasons” which may allow the persistence of the unity of the subject to which they are attributed. In this manner, not only is the univocity of being (in relation to God and to creatures) extended in the univocity of its “attributes”, but, given his infinity, God can possess his formally distinct univocal attributes without losing anything of his unity.<sup>8</sup>

What this means is that we avoid the trap of presupposing that what we discriminate between is necessarily a fixed identity, furthermore the essence at the heart of each distinction cannot be incorporated into one Being. This formal distinction allows us to distinguish between essences, all the while continuing to maintain that such differences persist in a univocal Being.

On the other hand, a modal distinction is,

... established between being or the attributes on the one hand, and the intensive variations of which these are capable on the other. These variations, like degrees of whiteness, are individuating modalities of which the finite and the infinite constitute precisely singular intensities.<sup>9</sup>

Deleuze posits that although beings have attributes that vary in intensity, the variation in question here is not a distinction between fixed self-enclosed individuals. Yet, the problem of the a priori nature of inherent variation persists. To solve this, Deleuze turns to Spinoza.

Spinoza's definition of the single substance of Being depends upon an ontological distinction formed between attributes and modes. The single substance of God or nature, for instance, has the attribute of infinity that is independent of the modes expressing the changes taking place in an attribute. However, the limitation of Spinoza is that identity is given primacy over and above difference and variation. He concludes *Difference and Repetition* noting that all Spinoza had to do was 'realise univocity in the form of repetition in the eternal return.'<sup>10</sup> Deleuze understands the univocity of Being by the infinite differences of intensity a mode expresses. He amends Spinoza, proposing what makes Being univocal is that attributes and modes persist together. Attributes are virtually undergoing variation and a Being expresses this as an actual intensity.

Using Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, Deleuze extends the two distinctions laid out by Duns Scotus and also turns the univocity of Spinozism into an object of affirmation.<sup>11</sup> 'The form of repetition in the eternal return is the brutal form of the immediate, that of the universal and the singular reunited, which dethrones every general law, dissolves the mediations and annihilates the particulars subjected to the law.'<sup>12</sup> What keeps Nietzsche's wheel of the eternal return in motion is the creation of difference and the production of repetition through the affirmation of difference. The univocity of being here is said in the single sense of difference in and of itself, and the same sense that repetition returns. In this way, the eternal return doesn't just affirm univocal being it realizes it.

With the example of the throw of a dice, Deleuze explains that each throw is formally distinct and still ontologically unique. The outcomes of the throw of dice ‘implicate, displace and recover their combinations in one another throughout the unique and open space of the univocal.’<sup>13</sup> The differences issued forth through the repetition of eternal return reject outright the dualisms of copy/original and model/reproduction that representation depends upon. Through the affirmation of chance and the invocation of the positive power of simulacrum the representative grounding of difference in the identical or subsuming it into a model of the Same (or One) and the oppositional framework whereby difference is understood as the antithesis of the Same, is rejected. Instead what Deleuze finds in Nietzsche is the possibility to articulate the positive power of simulacrum (as opposed to the Platonic dialectic formed between the Ideal forms and corrupt copies) whereby everything ‘animal or being assumes the status of simulacrum’.<sup>14</sup> Simulacrum engages the difference at the heart of being whilst also summoning forth the repetition conditioning difference.

In Deleuze’s formulation, difference has classically been understood negatively. Put differently, to state that black is black because it is not white is to understand the difference between the two purely in terms of how one term negates the other. Implicit within this schema of recognition and identity formation is that difference is subsumed by the Same. Difference of this kind, is anything but difference in and of itself simply because it lends support to an organic representational model, connecting ‘individuation to the form of the I and the matter of the self.’<sup>15</sup>

Deleuze's concept of univocity is an attempt to free himself from metaphysics, a position that is organized around a transcendent One from which the world can be judged. The argument Badiou constructs in response to Deleuze starts out by asking how it is that Being can be at once a multiplicity (actual) and Univocal (virtual)? Yet, the supposedly dialectical structure of Being that Deleuze produces is not oppositional. It is however, nominal because both univocity and difference are considered by Deleuze to be expressions of Being. In addition, even though these are not ontologically in opposition to each other, they are nevertheless real. It is here where Badiou confronts the supposedly Anti-Platonist stance Deleuze identifies himself with. He asks:

Strangely, this consequence has a Platonic, or even Neoplatonic, air to it. It is as though the paradoxical or supereminent One immanently engenders a procession of beings whose univocal sense it distributes, while they refer to its power and have only a semblance of being. But, in this case, what meaning is to be given of the Nietzschean program that Deleuze constantly validates: the over-turning of Platonism?<sup>16</sup>

Badiou wonders, if Deleuze makes an appeal to the univocal in order to overcome the transcendence of the metaphysical project, how might we come to grips with, or understand both expressions of Being without re-invoking transcendence? Badiou's response is that we can't and from here he declares that 'Deleuzism is fundamentally a Platonism with a different accentuation.'<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately for Badiou what this means is that Deleuze is not a thinker of multiplicity and instead of thinking the One-All he in fact embraces only the One. The claim is a daring one to make and it has certainly left many Deleuze scholars, such as Todd May, up in arms, who declares Badiou has basically conflated the univocity of being with identity.<sup>18</sup> So how can we resuscitate Deleuze from the backwaters of metaphysics? Or do we need to? The key lies in the Deleuzian method, one that is by and large committed to folding thought in such a way that the concept of the One with multiplicity to produce what he calls the 'One-All.' The method of folding is what enables him to 'renew' the One as the One-All. The One-all is the power, or *puissance*, that an individual summons forth in order to become – other, different, or even the same. If what is folded is both the virtual real (the One-All as immanent and real) with the actual, which is a version of the virtual, then the immanent position of Deleuze can be maintained. There is no Outside (in the absolute sense) because all actuality is a creative adaptation of the immanent multiplicity of the One-All. The outside subsists in the actual through the intensive process of folding.

For Badiou, Deleuze invokes a metaphysical question, the reason being, the moment Badiou asks how both expressions of Being can be surveyed together without taking the vantage point of the Outside he is in fact forcing Deleuze to take a different methodological approach. Methodologically speaking, to demand that a vantage point of this kind be adopted is in itself to insist Deleuze renounce immanence in favor of a transcendent realm from which such a vantage point could be maintained. The question requires Deleuze's method of folding be sacrificed in order to produce a firm and fixed point outside of his system from which he can adopt a unified viewpoint.

The whole point of Deleuze's study of difference and repetition, in his 1968 book bearing the same title, is to develop a concept of difference that is intensive. This is a system of differences all communicating with one another, one in which 'different relates to different through difference itself'.<sup>19</sup> The process is conceived later in Deleuze's work as one of enfolding, a methodological way of creating Being, and herein lies his fascination and rather idiosyncratic understanding of Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return. Imagine a repetition of differences that don't set out to produce a copy of a supposed original; a difference that emerges through the *process of* repetition itself. This is an system of creation and variation that results in a method of intensive folding.

The consequence of this position is that for Deleuze, simulation does not reference a moral order that uses the value of truth to judge one reality as more real than image in the way that Platonism does, and one that Badiou's antihumanist ethics would agree with. Yet once again Badiou's position on Deleuze here is somewhat polemical as he insists when Deleuze denies Platonism his affirmation of 'simulacra that joyously attest to the univocal power of Being' he is decidedly Platonist.<sup>20</sup> The criticism is one that seems to share sympathies with that of Slavoj Zizek who in the *Ticklish Subject* exclaimed that 'The fundamental lesson of postmodernist politics is that *there is no Event*, that "nothing really happens" ... is not the ultimate deconstructive lesson that every enthusiastic encounter with the Real Thing ... is a delusive semblance.'<sup>21</sup> As Badiou says, the real, which for Deleuze is virtual is chaotic; the reason is that the condition of flux, occurring on a virtual plane, is the essence of the real. What is more, as the actual world is a version

of the flux of the virtual real, which is immanent to actuality, then actuality is only ever a version of the virtual. Hereby, for Badiou, Deleuze's concept of the virtual is fundamentally Platonist in outlook because actuality continues to reference the One and the Same virtual realm of univocity, albeit in different versions. The shortfall is a problem of representation and this is not simply theoretical; it is methodological. In effect Badiou wants Deleuze to give up on his practice of intensive folding and adopt the method of a mathematician interested in set theory. The former is a dynamic movement, the latter is movement based on membership. This is why for Deleuze the fundamental ethical goal is becoming-imperceptible; whereas for Badiou it is one that demands otherness be abandoned entirely.

Becoming is not the end result of a change, such as when we posit in the past we had X but this then evolved, or changed, into Y in the present. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari outline their concept of becoming. They announce that a 'becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification.'<sup>22</sup> Becoming is a dynamic movement of difference that can best be described as a non-goal orientated movement and this is why Deleuze and Guattari explain becoming 'produces nothing other than itself.'<sup>23</sup> Set theory on the other hand is a science of the infinite and it relies upon a system of membership whereby A is taken to be a member of B ( $A \in B$ ), whereby it is the elements that determine a set. This is why Badiou maintains that the 'forms of the multiple, just like the Ideas, are always actual.'<sup>24</sup>

At this point we return to our opening example of the Amish. There is a different kind of self-referentiality at work in the Amish response to not memorialize the dead and to visit the family of the perpetrator with a spirit of forgiveness. Amish remembrance brought ‘into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation.’<sup>25</sup> Or perhaps, to borrow from Badiou, it was one way in which the ontology of trauma could ‘effectuate itself without needing to identify itself.’<sup>26</sup> The supposed void left behind by the crisis and the subsequent void – no memorialization – mapped the immanent organization of trauma specific to the Amish way of life. This was how the Amish created their own order out of the multiplicity of differences defining the immanent realm and life of trauma. This idea seems to apparently resonate with both Deleuze and Badiou. Deleuze enables us to consider traumatic memory as an affective organization immanent to reality. Meanwhile Badiou, in his use of set theory to describe mathematical universes, allows us to consider the multiplicities effected from this movement of becoming as sets.<sup>27</sup> The point of sympathy arises in Deleuze’s invocation to ‘dis-shelter’ the closed sets, a move that Badiou admits he finds exciting. In short: ‘Thinking a situation always involves *going* toward that, in it, which is the least covered by the shelter that the general regime of things offers it, just as in order to think the situation’ of traumatic memory today ‘one must start from the “dis-sheltering” by the memorialization of the traumatic force of memory what Badiou otherwise describes as an event site.’<sup>28</sup>

The singularity of trauma was put to work by the Amish to produce difference; a difference that opened itself up to individuation: the power of bodies to be affected and together undergo change. In this regard, trauma did not take on a metaphysical dimension

in so far as the events of October 6, 2006 were not allocated an authoritarian position from which Amish identity could be signified.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, an order was extracted out of the chaos that the shootings prompted. At the same time the very notion of order, as an expressive power, was a priori (Amish as an Order) and one that had infinite potential. The Amish did not build a structure to remember the dead by, but what they did do was articulate the infinite dimension of the future as a way of remembering. Trauma was consequently defined as an opportunity for forgiveness, an opportunity that was formally derived from the internal structure of the crisis itself.

The life of trauma ‘does not speak; it listens and waits’ and as it does so it becomes a site for an event in so far as it is ‘part of a situation all of whose elements are on the edge of the void.’<sup>30</sup> Badiou responds to this in the following manner: ‘To think that the event is a point of rupture with respect to being does not exonerate us from thinking the being of the event itself, of what I precisely call “trans-being”.’<sup>31</sup> Where the event for Deleuze is premised upon a separation between two heterogeneous multiplicities (extensive and numerical on the side and intensive and qualitative on the other), Badiou sets out to develop a concept of multiplicity that is ‘axiomatically homogenous’ in order to account for the being of the event both as a irreducible rupture of the law and as homogenous to it.

Grief can mobilize a statement such as ‘We will not forget’, or the expression ‘We forgive you’. It is the latter that expresses an incorporeal attribute of bodies that consists of both the victim and the perpetrator. The order-word ‘designates this instantaneous

relation between statements and the incorporeal transformations or non-corporeal attributes they express.<sup>32</sup> It also shares sympathies with the concept of the event that Badiou explicates, especially when he writes: ‘an event is nothing but a part of a given situation, nothing but a *fragment of being*.’<sup>33</sup> For Badiou the fragment he speaks of is a site of fragility that predisposes it to being extracted out of the crisis. As Deleuze and Guattari rightly say there are ‘many passions in a passion, all manner of voices in a voice, murmurings, speaking in tongues’ and what the Amish response to the shooting of five of their children evokes is a case of, what Manuel de Landa has described elsewhere in the context of his discussion of open-ended becoming as ‘nonessentialist realism’, or what Deleuze might otherwise call an orgiastic representation; one that produces an inclusive and nonrestrictive use of memory that ‘opens up an infinite space’ to borrow from Lucretius.<sup>34</sup> It is in this way that the traumatic event, as a site of fragility as Badiou describes it, determines the trans-beingness of forgiveness.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The Amish do not have a memorial day and graves are often anonymous, reiterating the Amish belief and practice that each and every person is equal to the other in death as in life.

<sup>2</sup> Pitts, Byron. “Amish Forgive, Prey and Mourn”, *CBS News*, October 4, 2006. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/10/04/national/main2059816.shtml>. Accessed on November 7, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Badiou, *Deleuze*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, ), 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze writes: ‘it is not the Whole, the Same or the prior identity in general which returns. Nor is it the small or the large, either as parts of the whole or as elements of the

---

same. Only the extreme forms return – those which, large or small, are deployed within the limit and extend to the limit of their power, transforming themselves and changing one into another. Only the extreme transforming themselves and changing one into another. Only the extreme, the excessive, returns; that which passes into something else and becomes identical. That is why the eternal return is said only of the theatrical world of the metamorphoses and masks of the Will to power of the pure intensities of that Will which are like mobile individuating factors...’, *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>16</sup> Badiou, *Deleuze*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Namely Todd May and Nathan Widder. See May, Todd. ‘The Ontology and Politics of Gilles Deleuze’, *Theory and Event*, Vol. 5; Widder, Nathan. ‘The rights of Simulacra: Deleuze and the univocity of being’, *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 34, No. 4, December 2001, 437-453.

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 277.

<sup>20</sup> Badiou, *Deleuze*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 135.

<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 237.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou, *Deleuze*, 46.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

<sup>26</sup> Badiou, Alain. ‘The Event as Trans-Being’, *Theoretical Writings*, trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004), 97.

<sup>27</sup> Badiou, Alain. *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, trans. Norman Madarasz (SUNY, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Badiou, *Deleuze*, 85.

<sup>29</sup> Arguing that the Amish identity was not signified against the trauma of the shootings is not to suggest that the community may not have used this as an example of why they remain separate to the modern world, nor is it to overlook the very non-Deleuzian emphasis that the Amish place on the world yet to come. There isn’t the space here to critically evaluate the religious customs of the Amish and I don’t pretend to be an Amish scholar. All we are trying to do here is consider and learn from a different way of responding to trauma, one that avoids turning traumatic memory into spectacle, reducing the lived reality of that day to a transcendent signifier. For anyone interested in researching the specificities of Amish life in more detail I would highly recommend Hostetler, *Amish Society*, and Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*.

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 76; Badiou, ‘The Event as Trans-being’, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Badiou, ‘The Event as Trans-being’, 99.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Badiou, ‘The Event as Trans-being’, 98.

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 77; See De Landa, Manuel. “Deleuze, Diagrams, and the Open-Ended Becoming”, in Grosz, Elizabeth (ed.). *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 33; Badiou, ‘The Event as Trans-being’, 98.