

The Politics of Badiou: From Absolute Singularity to Objet-a

Henry Krips

Department of Cultural Studies

Claremont Graduate University

121 East Tenth Street, Claremont CA 91711

henry.krips@cgu.edu

Abstract

In a series of recent publications, Alain Badiou has suggested an interesting, but formidably complex account of the political. His work has attracted many commentators, including the perverse giant of Ljubljana, Slavoj Žižek, who seeks to push Badiou's politics in a more Lacanian direction. In this paper I will explore the intersection between Badiou's politics and a Lacanian architectonic. I suggest that Badiou's concept of the absolute singularity should be replaced by the Lacanian concept of the objet-petit-a. But I also show the dangers of Lacanianizing Badiou. In particular, I criticize Žižek for assimilating what Badiou calls the supernumerary name of the event to what Lacan calls the master signifier, thereby, I argue, shifting Badiou's politics in an unwelcome totalitarian direction.

I dream of the intellectual destroyer of...universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present. (Michel Foucault)

Let the masses educate themselves in this great revolutionary movement, let them learn to distinguish between the just and the unjust, between correct and incorrect ways of doing things. (Central Committee for the Cultural Revolution, 8 August, 1966)

Badiou

For Badiou, the political is a species of Event. What, then, is an Event, specifically a *political* Event? Badiou offers the example of the French Revolution. He starts by considering how the professional historian would approach this event: “The historian ends up including in the event ‘The French Revolution’ everything delivered by the epoch as traces and facts... the electors of the General Estates, the peasants of the Great Fear, the sans-culottes, the soldiers of the draft, but also, the price of subsistence, the guillotine, the effects of the tribunal” and so on. But this archival approach, Badiou says, “may well lead to the one [the unity] of the event being undone – [swamped by] the forever infinite numbering of the gestures, things and words that coexisted with it.” Badiou then affirms that the French Revolution deserves to be singled out as a proper

“Event” only in so far as there exists a “halting point for this [potentially infinite] dissemination.” Specifically an Event is constituted through what Badiou calls “an interpretative intervention” by which “the conscience of the times – and the retroactive intervention of our own [time] – filters the entire site through the one [unifying principle] of its evental qualification.” (Badiou, 2007: 180-181).

What form does this interpretative intervention take? According to Badiou, it involves discerning a new pattern within the nexus of effects that are “connected” with the Revolution.ⁱ Thus the interpretative intervention operates via a sort of a sort of gestalt switch, whereby an unrecognized collection of effects (what Badiou calls an “excrement”) is transformed into what he calls a “normal” element of the situation, which is *both* presented (as an element in its own right) but also represented (as a part).

This interpretative intervention retrospectively hypostasizes the Event of the Revolution as the source of the new pattern of effects: “An *interpretative intervention* declare[s] that an event *is* presented in a situation; as the arrival in being of non-being, the arrival amidst the visible of the invisible” (181, italics Badiou’s).ⁱⁱ The Event of the Revolution thus emerges as a previously unrecognized element of the situation – an element that is a special sort of *singularity* (what Badiou calls “an absolute singularity”) that is distinct from the endlessly disseminating elements that the historian offers as candidates for inclusion in the Revolution.ⁱⁱⁱ More specifically, the Event is like a secret heart of the Revolution, which lies hidden in the midst of, but separate from the disseminating field of facts and traces that the historian includes in it.

Note, however, that the process of discerning a new pattern that precipitates the emergence of the Event is not merely a matter of an academic historian years later discovering what existed all along but was hidden. Instead the process of discerning is contemporaneous with the Event - an action by the participants themselves, which, rather than cognitive in nature, is a militant commitment to see things differently.

Badiou puts all of this in the following terms: “The identification of multiples connected or unconnected with the supernumerary name [of the Event] is a task which cannot be based on the encyclopedia.” Why not? “Because the encyclopedia does not contain any determinant whose referential part is assignable to something like an event.” So how, then, is the task of discernment to be accomplished? Badiou tells us that it is through an act of fidelity to the Event. Not by an expert on the basis of his superior knowledge, but rather by a militant who commits himself to sustaining the Event: “A fidelity is not a matter of knowledge. It is not the work of an expert: it is the work of a militant...The operator of faithful connection designates *another mode of discernment*: one which, outside knowledge but within the effect of interventional nomination, explores connections to the supernumerary name of the event” (Badiou, 2007: 329).^{iv}

For example, consider the way in which, in the light of the interpretation of the French Revolution *as a revolution*, the mass of peasants who are part of the situation in France 1789-1790 retrospectively become a new entity: “those peasants of the Great Fear who seized the castles,” which, together with other entities and happenings – the storming of

the Bastille, and so on - constitute a diffuse and somewhat indeterminate source for the effects that are connected to the Revolution as its future traces (181). In this case it is clear that the relation between the Event and its effects is not merely a matter of straightforward causation, but instead involves a retroactive dimension. That is, through an interpretative intervention that occurs after the fact as it were, the Event is brought into being as a point of origin for the new pattern of effects.

This interpretative act takes place at the site of the Event itself: for example through the actions of the participants, who, in signing on to the cause under one of the many (literal) names that the Event may take - “Liberty,” “Revolution,” “Down with tyranny,” and so on – bring it into existence. Thus their acts in identifying with the cause take on a performative, not merely interpretative dimension. Furthermore their signing on functions as not merely a cause but also a part of the Event, thus collapsing the distinction between (saying the) name and (conjuring up the) object. To put it in a nutshell, the act of interpretation through which the Event is retrospectively brought into being, itself becomes part of the Event. Thus the Event is doubled: it manifests both as an absolute singularity (what Badiou calls the evental site) as well as the act of interpretation through which the Event is named by those who are faithful to it. As Badiou puts it: “the mark of itself...belongs to the evental multiple (Badiou, 2007: 180).

It is important to recognize that for Badiou acts of interpretation that constitute the Event (both in the sense of causing it but also in the sense of being part of it) must be renewed continually through what he calls “a generic process” (Badiou, 2007: 341-342). This

calls for subjects, who retrospectively come into being as militant agents faithful to the Event (for example the peasants of the Great Fear). Such fidelity to the Event is not a matter of sticking to some formulaic instructions – a little Red Book of rules of how to be a good revolutionary. Instead, it is a matter of sustaining the Event in the face of the unpredictable contingencies and negativities that threaten to derail it from a true course - where being on a “true course” is a matter of *being true* (understood intransitively) rather than of conforming to some pre-determined truth. In particular, it is a matter of resisting any attempt to “absolutize” the Event in the sense of essentializing and inscribing it in the permanent record (Badiou, 2001: 85). In other words, the Event must be sustained as “infinite” in Hegel’s sense. That is, it must incorporate what Hegel calls an “absolute unrest of pure self-movement, in which whatever is determined in one way or another, e.g. as being, is rather the opposite” (Hegel, 2007: 101). In short, a true Event is always and already being undone, and therefore must always and already be reconstituted/renewed through continual acts of interpretation that extend it into the unknown. Peter Hallward puts this well: “one should continue in such a way as to be able to continue to continue” (Hallward, 2003: 269; and see too Badiou 2001, 50). It is only through such open-ended “continuing to continue” that the Event is constituted.^v

Now let me return to the question of the political. What is there about the French revolution that makes it specifically a *political* Event? Badiou’s answer: it operates in “collective situations – in which the collective becomes interested in itself,” and, in particular, leads its participants to an encounter with the “void of the social” as a result of which they “change...political subjectivity” (340). Specifically, a political Event is

committed to a general change in subjectivity, which, by dissolving the old lines of social demarcation, liberates people from the relations of inequality and domination that enslave them (Badiou 2006: 94). Thus Badiou is interested in a “democratic politics” not in the usual sense of a formal democracy that incorporates a universal plebiscite, but rather in the more radical sense of an emancipatory politics that incorporates a principle of justice and equality for all.

But there is a second democratic aspect to Badiou’s politics, which becomes apparent when we ask how it is implemented. Answer: by faithfully (which also means thoughtfully) sticking to the task of blazing a new trail that eliminates inequality and injustice. In Badiou’s terms, this politics works by “a faithfulness to thinking, and in particular to following the truth as well as distinguishing between good and evil” (Badiou 2006, 98). This faithful (and thoughtful) dedication to justice and equality constitutes a key dimension of the change in subjectivity that the political Event seeks to install. Thus the relation of the political Event to the collective is doubled. The political Event not only sets out to break the collective chains that bind us, but also democratically extends an invitation to all to take up a militant subjectivity, which is committed *not* merely to policing social boundaries, but rather to cutting across, and more generally dissolving such boundaries whenever and wherever they enslave: “Let the masses educate themselves in this great revolutionary movement, let them learn to distinguish between the just and the unjust, between correct and incorrect ways of doing things” (Badiou 2006, 98 - cited from the “Sixteen Points” developed by the Central Committee for the Cultural Revolution, 8 August, 1966).

Of course, as the French Revolution and the Cultural Revolution both show, this is a tricky enterprise. Despite (perhaps even because of) its commitment to openness qua dedication to change, the revolution is always and already in danger of degenerating into a new policing operation that, by pitting the “general will” (*volonté générale*) against the interests of particular citizens, terrorizes rather than emancipates, and forces a too narrow compliance rather than inviting open participation (Arendt 1990, 79). (Think too of the paradoxical liberal commitment to “defend freedom (with force if necessary)”: you are free to be anything, it seems, except intolerant.)

It is important to recognize that for Badiou (by contrast with Carl Schmitt) the key political acts of interpretation - are not restricted to *finite moments of decision*. In particular, Badiou distances himself from Schmitt’s fascist ideal of the political act as a single supreme *act of will* – an executive decision (*Entscheidung*) by the sovereign. So, for Schmitt, a paradigmatic political act is Hitler’s decisive mandate through which the German “Master race” is created in the image of the noble, blue-eyed, fair-haired Aryan, and in the same process separated from its ignoble, swarthy semitic “impurities.”^{vi}

Whereas for Badiou, by contrast, an act does not wear its political nature on its sleeve, let alone participate in the logic of the “grand decision” a la Schmitt.

On this last point, however, it must be conceded that Badiou confesses to a change of direction in his work. In an interview in 2002, he admits that in *Being and Event*, he said that “the name of the event is the matter of a pure decision.” But, he adds immediately,

“I have to change that point. Its not very good terminology, the terminology of nomination.” He then tells us that the essential nature of the Event does not lie in a one time only executive decision, but rather in a series of decisions that take place in the aftermath of the Event, namely decisions to be faithful to the Event that are taken and continually updated on the basis of rational discussion of the Event’s unfolding effects. “In the current form of my work I don’t attribute the decision to the name of the event, but to the event directly, and, finally, to the logical consequences of the event....It is not exactly the same as in *L’être et l’événement*. So I am not a decisionist...now” (Badiou 2005, 172-173).

Zizek adds a further point here: an act acquires the lineaments of the political retrospectively, in the course of the unfolding of its effects. In short, Events are constituted *retrospectively* in terms of their effects. Zizek puts it like this: “an event is necessarily missed the first time...true fidelity [to the Event] is only possible in the form of resurrection, as a defense against ‘revisionism’,” where by “resurrection” he means “the subjective reactivation of an event whose traces were obliterated, ‘repressed’ into the historico-ideological unconscious” (Zizek 2007, 7) . Here Zizek has in mind not only the Freudian concept that an event takes on traumatic status only retrospectively, but also the Hegelian point that a true Thing emerges only in the context where it is negated but also superceded through a process of reflection from its negation (Hegel 1977, 71-72). Zizek concedes that Badiou recognizes all of this, and in particular recognizes the importance of “resurrection” as a mode of constitution of the Event. But, Zizek insists, Badiou fails to recognize the key Deleuzian (and one might add Freudian as well as Hegelian) point that

“something truly New can ONLY emerge through repetition” – a repetition that in Hegel’s terms involves an imbricated process of negation and supersession (Zizek 2007, 7).

So for example, at the moment of their maiden performance, there was nothing political to distinguish Hitler’s anti-Semitic polemics from the rantings of a mad man. Later, however, and retrospectively – “with hindsight,” as we say - those early rantings took on a political dimension, through their subsequent unfolding within the anti-Semitic institutions, regulations, practices, and so on of the Third Reich. Furthermore, it is only in the course of the unfolding of these effects – and fidelity to them - that not only Hitler but also the rest of the German citizenry ascended to the status of political agents of anti-Semitism, thus taking on the lineaments of *ein Volk* - a “people” (to use Arendt’s and Gramsci’s term). In the process, political agency shifted not only to Hitler but also to the German people as a whole (which is not, of course, to diminish Hitler’s responsibility in relation to the Event.).

Badiou’s concept of the political, in particular his concept of the political Event, undoubtedly captures a significant part of what we mean by thinking of Revolutions as political Events that constitute *new beginnings*. But Badiou’s analysis has its weaknesses. In the next section, I discuss some of these in the context of a constructive critique of Badiou’s ideas from a Lacanian perspective - a critique not so much of his concept of the political, but rather of his more general concept of the Event. This critique

has consequences for his analysis of the political to which I will gesture, but which I do not have the time to discuss here today.

Badiou and Lacan

Badiou explores the concept of an Event in a variety of contexts, including the one that I focus on here, namely Nietzsche's critique of Saint Paul's account of "the Christ-Event," namely the resurrection. According to Nietzsche, Paul insists that, in order to understand the revolutionary significance of the passion of Christ, there must be "something in addition" to the blunt facts of the death by crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, *even when those facts are thickened with theological meaning, namely Jesus as the son of God, the maker of miracles, and so on* (Badiou 2003, 60-61). That "something in addition," Nietzsche claims, is the resurrection with its universal invitation to have faith and thus find salvation - an invitation that is universal in the sense that it cuts across all social barriers, extending to Greek and Jew alike.^{vii} Nietzsche then dismisses this invitation as the big lie of the resurrection, with its phony promise of salvation. There is, says Nietzsche, nothing more to the resurrection than the crucifixion (if indeed there is even that) – all the rest is a comforting fable (61, 81).

Badiou objects that Nietzsche misunderstands Paul's position. Paul the cynical rabbi (60) recognized well enough that the situation of the crucifixion contained no secret, let alone mystical "something in addition," which transformed the crucifixion of Christ into the resurrection, and correspondingly grounded faith in salvation. On the contrary, the

dimension of faith presupposes precisely the absence of any such grounding element. Instead, Badiou argues, the resurrection presented itself in the situation of the crucifixion as a basic element – an absolute singularity – rather than being a composite of the crucifixion together with some other mystery element X. Badiou makes the point like this: “But Nietzsche is not precise enough. When he writes that Paul needs...Christ’s death and ‘something in addition’ he should emphasize that this ‘something’ is not ‘in addition’ to death...And thus if he [Paul] ‘shifted the center of gravity of that [Christ’s] entire existence beyond this experience [of the crucifixion],’ then it is...in accordance with a principle...on the basis of which life, affirmative life, was restored and refounded for all” (61).

How, then, does the resurrection come to appear as an absolute singularity, independent of but attached to the crucifixion? Where does it come from? From the future, Badiou argues, as a retroactive effect of a process of fidelity by subjects who are defined by their faith in and faithfulness to the resurrection, along with their related hope for salvation (90-91). In short, to put it in quasi-Nietzschean terms that suit Badiou’s atheism, the Event of the resurrection is the result of a sort of wish fulfillment, which fastens on to the crucifixion as a fictional basis for the hope of salvation (88-92).

Thus Badiou distinguishes between three aspects of the Christ-Event:

- 1) The plain, material facts of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth (what Clifford Geertz calls “a thin description,” relatively unmediated by heavy theoretical or theological vocabulary).

2) The death on the Cross of Christ-son-of-God.

3) The process of fidelity to the resurrection, which constitutes it retroactively, via an interpretative intervention.

Badiou designates the second of these aspects, namely the death of Christ, as the absolute singularity that constitutes what he calls the evental site (70), and designates the third aspect, namely the resurrection, as the Event proper (see too Badiou 2007, 175-181).

Badiou has a lot to say about the relation between these last two aspects of the Event. In particular, he emphasizes that the evental site, he points out, does not determine the Event. On the contrary, it is only the intervention of militant subjects, who, acting out of fidelity to the Event, bridge the gap between the evental site and the Event. Or to turn the point around, the gap between event and evental site creates a space for the militant subject and his or her exercises of fidelity. In Althusserian terms, we may say that this gap is the ideological site of interpellation, where individuals – all of them - are called, and some of them (although not as many as “nine out of ten”) manage to prove themselves as true, militant subjects, (179; Badiou 2003, 70).^{viii}

But Badiou has much less to say about the equally important relation between the totally material happening of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and the fictionalized death of the Christ. In particular he offers no way of thinking why, in the biblical context, the glorious fable of the crucifixion of the son of God is attached to the account of a botched execution of a man, Jesus of Nazareth, an account which is so full of strange and gruesome detail: the premature darkness, the strangely restless animals, the stumbles by

the criminal on his way to the execution, the unruly mob, the sympathetic soldiers, the preternaturally delayed death, and so on.^{ix}

I suggest that we think the relation between these two stories in Lacanian terms. To be specific, I suggest that we think of Christ's crucifixion and the botched death of Jesus of Nazareth as two different, and necessarily coexisting manifestations of the same object, namely what Lacan calls the objet-petit-a. What is the objet-petit-a? According to Lacan it is the object which, by blocking access to the object of desire, is the cause of desiring. But it is also the object of the drive, around which the subject circulates pleasurably in its failed attempts to get what it desires (Lacan 1981, 184-186). According to Lacan, the objet-petit-a manifests in three intertwined levels or registers, which always and already coexist: the Real (the level at which the symbolic matrix falls apart), the imaginary (the level of phantasy) and the symbolic (the level of reality as it is mediated symbolically). To be specific, the objet-petit-a manifests at an imaginary level as a phantasy object: the secret kernel or essence of a situation that belongs to the situation more than any of its concrete elements – not as something we want, but rather as an imagined stumbling block that we must, but cannot get around if we are to get what we want. It also manifests at the level of symbolic: as a denizen of reality, and in particular as what Lacan calls the little piece of shit in the corner: the waste or surplus of a situation that retains a fragile purchase on reality by being banished to the recycle bin, where we carefully avoid stepping on it. And finally, at the level of the Real, the objet-petit-a manifests as a messy, shameful, bizarre misfit in relation to the normative categories of the symbolic: a place where reality itself palpably stumbles and fails.

In this light how can we think the relation between the Biblical account of the death of Jesus, and the theologically supercharged account of the death of Christ with its promise of universal access to salvation? I suggest that we think of the death of Christ as an objet-petit-a in its manifestation as an imaginary phantasy object, specifically as that which points the way to what the faithful hope for desire, namely salvation, even as it marks out the way as perilous and difficult, even impossible: more than passing through the eye of a needle, a crossing from one side of the valley of death to the other. This, in turn, suggests that the death of Jesus of Nazareth that the Gospels recount – namely a shameful and messy botched execution - is a manifestation of the same objet-petit-a at the level of the Real; whereas the Nietzschean version of the crucifixion - a carpenter cruelly executed for his outlandish beliefs – is a manifestation of the same objet-petit-a in the symbolic register. We are thus able to explain the co-existence of the three stories of the crucifixion as accounts of one and the same objet-petit-a as it manifests in the three different registers of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic.

This Lacanian suggestion also throws light on the status of the death of Christ as an absolute singularity. According to Lacan, the objet-petit-a is an extimate object, by which he means that although it is “intimate” in the sense that it is more in the situation than the situation itself, it is also externalized, and in particular embodied in a totally banal, unworthy object. (Zizek 1989, 132, 180).^x This, in turn, explains how the imaginary death of Christ comes to have no elements. It is because, as an extimate object, its elements are externalized. In other words, it takes on the topology of the

Klein bottle – its insides turned outside, so that it no longer “contains” them in the sense that they are elements that belong to it. Thus, in Badiou’s terms, the death of Christ becomes an absolute singularity: an element of the situation that is basic in the sense that it has no elements of its own.

In the continuation of this paper, I show how my Lacanian reworking of Badiou’s analysis of the Event brings his concept of politics closer to the Lacanian concept of the cure. But I have neither the time nor the energy to include this here today. Instead, I content myself with examining Zizek’s suggestion for reworking Badiou’s concept of the political along Lacanian lines, a reworking that is of interests because it represents a common misreading of Badiou (Zizek 2007).

A Zizekian Coda: What’s in a Name?

Zizek sticks to Badiou’s early emphasis on a politics of *naming*, but (unlike Badiou, and more like Laclau) he hypothesizes an identity between what Badiou calls “names” and what Lacan calls “Master Signifiers” (*points du caption*). On this basis, Zizek proposes a politics that involves “the intervention of a Master-Signifier that imposes a principle of ‘ordering’ onto the world...The Master...invents a new signifier...which again stabilizes the situation and makes it readable....The Master adds no new positive content – he merely adds a signifier which all of a sudden turns disorder into order.” (Zizek 2007, 1). In short: “the task [for an emancipatory politics] today is to form a new world, to propose new Master-Signifiers that would provide [new] ‘cognitive mapping[s]’ (2007, 3).^{xi}

But there seems to be something perversely, even dangerously wrong with Zizek's politics. Consider, for example, the feminist political gesture that constitutes the social category of woman. Such a gesture definitely does not depend upon the authority of a feminist Master, even one who acquires her authority retrospectively as an external projection of group pressures. On the contrary, as many feminists would be quick to point out, a "feminist Master" is an oxymoron, since it reproduces exactly the patriarchal structure of Mastery to which feminism is opposed. (Unfortunately, current institutional structures of "PC-feminism" flirt dangerously with exactly such an oxymoron. Thus ironically Zizek reproduces exactly the structure of PC-feminist politics to which he is so strongly opposed.)

How, then, is the feminist political gesture to be achieved if not by an act of Mastery undertaken from a (real or imagined) position of authority? Badiou's answer to this question indicates the distance between his position and Zizek's. For Badiou, a political Event must satisfy three conditions. First condition: its agents (what Badiou calls its subjects) must make an ongoing commitment to a new order: in particular, they must discern and remain faithful to a previously indiscernible pattern within the ever-expanding field of effects of the Event: "bringing the invisible into midst of the visible," as Badiou puts it (Badiou, 2007: 181). In retrospect, then, the source of the newly discerned pattern of effects takes on the status of an absolutely singular element within the situation (what Badiou calls the evental site). Second condition: by cutting across the social boundaries that constrain people's activities, the new order operates according

to a principle of eradicating inequality. Third condition: the Event is “democratic” in the sense that, rather than recruiting individuals from special groups whose interests it serves, it is open to all.

For example, consider a case to which Jacques Rancière draws attention: the radical gesture by Jeanne Deroin who stood for legislative election in France at a time (1849) when women were not legally permitted to be candidates. (Rancière, 1999: 41). From Badiou’s perspective, this gesture counts as an Event, in particular a political Event, insofar as subjects in general (men and women, Greek and Jew alike) interpret and remain faithful to it as source for a previously indiscernible pattern of effects which, rather than merely “advancing the cause of women,” breaks down the social boundaries that create inequality. In other words, Deroin’s gesture retrospectively takes on the mantle of a political Event through the actions of militants, who, in the name of equality, remain faithful to it through a series of contingencies, set-backs, diversions, etc which takes it in wholly unexpected, unpredictable, even a priori senseless directions.

The danger, of course, is that such fidelity to the Event runs out of steam, with the result that the spirit of the initial gesture disseminates. Or, worse, the gesture itself becomes “absolutized,” its effects predictable and listed encyclopedically, in which case, to use Rancière’s terms, the political impulse reduces to mere policing (Badiou, 2001: 85). It follows that, in its very conception, the political is irremediably fragile, always and already in need of renewal through the actions of the faithful.

Thus, contrary to Žižek's claim, it is clear that for Badiou political Events do not involve the authoritative introduction of a new Master Signifier let alone an intervention by a Master in the cruder totalitarian sense. On the contrary, such Events are a matter of an always and already open, thoughtful, and in particular self-critical engagement with the present, which seeks to preserve the Event, even as, in response to contingencies, diversions, and set-backs, the future takes it in new directions that defy any attempt to master its unfolding the death of Christ; thereby continually facing militants who sign on to the Event with the challenge of re-newing it. It is clear that these militants, these political agents, are not Masters in Lacan's sense. Instead, they are closer to the "local intellectuals" whom Foucault envisages in the following eloquent terms: "I dream of the intellectual destroyer of...universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present" (Foucault 1996, 225). Where Badiou differs from Foucault, however, is in emphasizing that, as *political* subjects, such local intellectuals destroy universalities only as a prelude to the discernment and renewal of a new ordering of equality and justice.

Bibliography

Agamben, G. (2005) *State of Exception*. Trans. Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Alinsky, S. (1989) *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books.

Althusser, L. (1971) "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: Verso.

Arendt, H. (1990) *On Revolution*. London: Penguin

Badiou, A. (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Trans. Peter Hallward. London: Verso

Badiou, A. (2003) *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*. Trans. Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Badiou, A. (2006) *Metapolitics*. Trans. Jason Barker. New York: Verso.

Badiou, A. (2007) *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham. New York: Continuum.

Badiou, A. and Feltham, O. and Clemens, J. (2005) *Infinite Thought*. New York: Continuum.

Badiou, A. and Critchley, S. "Ours in not a Terrible Situation." Interview at Labyrinth Books, NY, March 6, 2006. slought.org/files/downloads/events/SF_1385.pdf

Benjamin, W. (1996) "Critique of Violence." Trans. Edmund Jephcott. In *Selected Writings* vol. 1, 1913-1926. Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press.

Foucault, M. (1996) *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston. New York: Semiotext(e).

Gramsci, A (1997) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. and Trans. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.

Hallward, P (2003) *Badiou*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lacan, Jacques (1981) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: Norton.

Laclau, E. (2005) *Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Rancière, J. (1999) *Disagreement*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Schmitt, C. (1996). *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schmitt, C. (1985a) *Political Theology*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schmitt, C. (1985b) *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. Trans. Ellen Kennedy. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Wittgenstein, L. (1992) *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, R.Rhees, G.H. von Wright. Oxford: Blackwells.

Zizek, S. (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

Zizek, S. (1998) "A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism'." *Critical Inquiry*. **24** (4) 998-1009.

Zizek, S. (2007) "On Alain Badiou and Logiques des Mondes."

<http://www.lacan.com/zizbadman.htm>

ⁱ Badiou calls such unrecognized patterns of effects “excrescences.” They are *parts* of the situation that do *not belong* to the situation; specifically, they are subsets of effects that are indiscernible in the sense that they do not count as members/elements of the situation. Thus we may say that an Event operates by normalizing an excrescence in the sense of making it discernible (100, 324, 328-343).

ⁱⁱ Here the analogy with a liberal politics of representation is clear. Note again that the “recognition” that is at issue is not merely epistemic or semantic, but also has material effects.

ⁱⁱⁱ In Badiou’s terms it is an “absolute singularity:” an element of the situation that is a pure multiplicity in the sense that its components do not themselves appear as elements (Badiou, 2007: 178, 99, 109, 173-175). In Rancière’s less precise terminology, such absolute singularities are “parts that have no parts.” Since it has no components that count as bona fide elements, the absolute singularity does not itself count as a part or subset. In Badiou’s terms, it belongs to but is not included in/is not a part of the situation. As such it is, as Badiou puts it, “on the edge of the Void” (175): devoid of any elements (as far as the situation is concerned) yet with a structure of multiplicity. Badiou accords special status to the names of such absolute singularities: their names are, as he

puts it, “supernumerary:” pure labels without the semantic complexity that reflects an internal organization of components. In particular, although an absolute singularity may be listed in the encyclopedia that details the elements of the situation, no account is taken of its components.

^{iv} Badiou sees fidelity also as a matter of love, qua dedication (Badiou 2003, 89). Love thus functions in two different ways for Badiou: as one of the four arenas in which an Event may take place, but also as an aspect of the generic process by which any event is sustained (Badiou 2007, 340).

^v In a similar way, Wittgenstein points out, a series, 2, 4, 6...., may be continued in an infinite number of ways, none of which merits being singled out a priori as “correct.” Nevertheless, when it comes time to extend it, the series is continued in one way rather than another, depending upon the training of the person who extends it, but also upon the contingencies that belong to the historical horizon within which the continuation take place. But, and here is the key point, thanks to a supplementary act of interpretation, the way in which the series is extended is subjected to a normative judgment: construed retrospectively either as “correct” or “incorrect”. The important thing, Wittgenstein points out, is not to mystify this act of interpretation as “reaching beyond” for an already existing but hidden truth that predetermines “the correct way” of extending the series. Instead, the act of interpretation is no more than a matter of showing how a series of examples is continued in a way that teaches someone else to pick up the same way of continuing it (Wittgenstein, 1992: 82-85).

^{vi} Benjamin and Agamben reject this fascistic redaction of the political. As Benjamin argues, the sovereign is powerless, haunted by the inability to act because there is no legitimate ground upon which he can act, but even so, *act he must* (Agamben 2005, 56).

^{vii} Here, for Badiou, in its universality, lies the “radical” dimension of the resurrection in almost a political sense of the term: its promise of salvation not to some elect group, but to each and everyone who has faith, is faithful and hopes.

^{viii} A complication: Badiou also says that the concept of an evental site only has application when an Event takes place: “Strictly speaking a site is only ‘evental’ insofar as it is retroactively qualified as such by the occurrence of an event” (Badiou 2007, 179). In particular, the singular evental site of the crucifixion of Christ takes on reality (has material effects) only in so far as it is a site for the real Event of the resurrection – otherwise it remains no more than a comforting story with no real presence in the world. Note that the subjects who Badiou has in mind here are not yet political subjects, in so far as the cause to which they are dedicated, although universal, is concerned with the religious question of salvation rather than the political question of emancipation and eradication of inequality. Note too that Badiou’s concept of “true subjectivity” is a refinement upon Althusser’s concept of the subject – a refinement that opens the possibility of subjects doing what, from an Althusserian perspective, seems impossible, namely stepping outside of ideology, at least to the extent of undertaking a radical politics.

^{ix} In its details, this story is no less gruesome and bizarre than the story of the botched execution of Damiens the regicide that Foucault includes in the opening pages of *Discipline and Punish*. Indeed, in many details echoes the two stories echo one another, The parallel between the stories is, of course, no accident: in its recounting by contemporaries, it is clear that Damiens' execution is framed as an *imitatio Christi*, through which the sinful body is weakened and finally destroyed, thus liberating the soul from the ties of the flesh and preparing it for resurrection and salvation – a traditional purification of the soul by mortification of the flesh.

^x This conception of the extimate object, which dates from before Lacan fully developed his concept of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary registers, shows directly the intertwined relation between the Real and imaginary registers.

^{xi} Žižek's use of the term "Master Signifier" here suggests a totalitarian politics in which a Master – he who must be obeyed - issues mandates. But, it is clear, Žižek does not mean this. On the contrary, he is quick to point out that the Master Signifier may acquire its authority retrospectively, as no more than a projection of internal group pressures onto some convenient authority figure. Even with this qualification, however, there seems to be something perversely, even dangerously wrong with Žižek's politics.