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Event and Decision: Ontology and Politics in Badiou, Deleuze and Whitehead

11/11/07

Absolute Beginnings...Almost: Badiou and Deleuze on the Event

Kenneth Surin has recently suggested that, if we take stock of the theoretical-philosophical options currently available for a politics of liberation, we are basically left with two—or variations on these two—that are viable. On the one hand, we have “the politics of the Event” associated with Badiou and, to some extent, Žižek. On the other hand, we have “the politics of the multitude” associated with Deleuze and Guattari, Hardt and Negri, and perhaps Whitehead, although Surin does not mention him.¹ I bring up Surin’s observation because it seems to fit rather well with the theme of this conference, since these options are inscribed in the title: “Event and Decision: Ontology and Politics in Badiou, Deleuze, and Whitehead.” But how should we read this title? For reasons that I hope will become clear momentarily, I suspect that many would place a correlative conjunction in the title: “...*either* Badiou *or* Deleuze and Whitehead.” Indeed, it would seem that the title contains “the two extreme, and absolutely hostile, poles which nevertheless constitute the contemporary philosophical field in its materialist necessity.”²

When we read the title this way, we are forced to make a decision—a decision between different ontologies and different conceptions of events. Practically speaking, such a decision is thoroughly political. A choice for one side or the other opens up certain paths, options, and

¹ Kenneth Surin, “The Ontological Script of Liberation” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, edited by Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 254-257.

² Eric Alliez, “Badiou: The Grace of the Universal,” in *Polygraph*, Number 17 (2005): 268. The quotation in its original form applies only to Badiou and Deleuze. I am, of course, adding Whitehead to Deleuze, which does not seem contrary to the spirit of Alliez’s claim, not to mention this conference.

strategies, while inevitably foreclosing others. I want to suggest, however, that we should not make such a decision too quickly. That is to say, perhaps we should read the title as indicating a possibility, a possibility to look for some point that connects the names Badiou, Deleuze, and Whitehead, despite obvious and irreducible differences.

This paper is a step in that direction, although I will largely focus on the idea of the event in Badiou and Deleuze—or more specifically, Badiou and his reading of Deleuze. Although both Badiou and Deleuze work with a conception of the event, their thinking on the latter and the role that it plays in their respective philosophies are often considered diametrically opposed. To be sure, there are important differences, most notably in the way in which the event in Deleuze is related to becoming while in Badiou it is related to a break with becoming, with a radical or absolute beginning. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that there may be a way to bring their differing conceptions of the event closer together. More to the point, I argue in this paper that, despite claims to the contrary, Badiou’s notion of the event does not imply a complete break with the past; if we take the ideas of intervention and eventual recurrence as expressed in *Being and Event* seriously, then the event always retains a connection to the past. Such a connection to the past allows for a reconsideration of the relationship between Badiou and Deleuze.

Badiou, Deleuze, and the Event: Becoming vs. Absolute Beginnings

We should note that, although both Badiou and Deleuze use the term “event,” the meaning of the term is, at first glance, quite different in their respective philosophies. As Badiou notes, the dispute between him and Deleuze on the question of the event is “a differend, since it bears on the fundamental semantic connection of the word ‘event’: with sense for Deleuze, and with truth

[for Badiou].”³ It would seem that the similarities that we can point out regarding the notion of the event do not extend much beyond linguistic usage, since the meaning of the term, its connotations and various associations, does not appear to circulate between Badiou and Deleuze. For Badiou, the difference lies precisely in the relationship among the event, becoming, and the One.

To shore up this difference, Badiou in *Logiques des Mondes* draws out “four Deleuzian axioms of the event” from *The Logic of Sense* and contrasts these with his own understanding of the event. First, according to Badiou, the Deleuzian event “is the ontological realization of the eternal truth of the One, the infinite power [*puissance*] of Life.”⁴ The event is a virtual donation of the One to the multiplicity of actual beings in their variegated becomings, the latter being the expression of the former. Ultimately, the event in Deleuze links becoming to the One and the One to becoming. Badiou states, “The event reveals in an immanent way the One of becomings, it makes becoming this One. The event is the becoming of becoming: the becoming(-One) of (unlimited) becoming.”⁵ In contrast to Deleuze, Badiou separates the event from becoming or, more properly, the event is this separation in becoming, a break with or interruption of becoming itself. The event for Badiou “is never coextensive with becoming. It is, on the contrary, on the side of a pure break with the becoming of an object of the world, through the auto-appearance of this object.”⁶

Second, the Deleuzian event qua becoming synthesizes the past and the future in “the indivisible continuity of Virtuality” at the expense of the present, which occludes any separation

³ Alain Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” translated by Jon Roffe in *Parrhesia*, Number 2 (2007): 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

of and in time. Badiou writes, “The event as event of time, or time as the continued and eternal procedure of being, introduces no division into time, no intervallic void between two times. ‘Event’ repudiates the present understood as either passage or separation; it is the operative paradox of becoming.”⁷ Against this understanding, Badiou holds that the event is a disjunction of the past and the future, a separation of the former from the latter which occludes any continuity between the two. The event irrupts in time as “the possibility of another time. This other time, whose materiality envelops the consequences of the event, deserves the name of a new present. The event is neither past nor future. It makes us present to the present.”⁸

The third axiom that Badiou attributes to Deleuze reads: “The event is of a different regime than the actions and passions of the body, even if it results from them.”⁹ What concerns him here is the way in which the Deleuzian event as differentiator affects “the actions and passions of the body *as a result*.”¹⁰ According to Badiou, the event in this understanding is, once again, a figure of the One, as both the ontological condition of bodies and as their result: “[The event] is the coming of the One through [the bodies] that they are as distinct nature (virtual rather than actual) and homogenous result (without them, it is not).”¹¹ Badiou insists, however, that the event is not a result; it is not a synthesis of the actions and passions of the body in the becoming of the One or the One of becoming. The event “is the blow of the evental One which animates multiplicities and forms them into a subjectivisable body.”¹²

Fourth and finally, Badiou notes that the Deleuzian event is somewhat analogous to a musical composition. The different notes, tones, tempos, and so on that we experience and sense

⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹ Ibid., 38. The quotation is from *Logic of Sense*, 94.

¹⁰ Ibid., 38; emphasis mine.

¹¹ Ibid., 38.

¹² Ibid., 40.

in a musical score are all variations on one common theme, the former resonating together to produce the latter as harmonious result. Thus Badiou states in regards to Deleuze, “With regard to any multiplicity whatsoever, it is of the essence of the Event to compose them into the One that they and to exhibit this unique composition in a potentially infinite variety of ways.”¹³ In this way, all events are only aspects of a single Event, “the Eternal return of the identical, the undifferentiated power of the Same: the ‘powerful inorganic life.’”¹⁴ Badiou instead proposes “a flat sound, without resonance.”¹⁵ Rather than an expression of harmony the event is “contingent dissemination” in the absence of the One.¹⁶ Badiou states, “Just as it performs a separation of times, the event is separated from other events. Truths are multiple, and multiform. They are exceptions in their worlds, and not the One which makes them converge.”¹⁷

According to Badiou, these four Deleuzian axioms on the event signify one thing: a choice for destiny. Badiou states, “The event [for Deleuze] is not the risky passage from one state of things to another. It is the immanent stigmata of a One-result of all becomings. In the multiple which becomes, in the between-two of the multiples which are active multiples, the event is the destiny of the One.”¹⁸ Such a focus on destiny, on the eternal truth of the evental One within multiplicities, is nothing but “religion in its pure state,” a “latent religiosity” that subsists at the heart of Deleuze’s philosophy.¹⁹

We should ask at this point: what precisely is Badiou’s problem, here? That is to say, in contrasting his conception of the event with Deleuze’s, what is Badiou’s main concern? It would

¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

seem to be the One, since Badiou's project rests on expelling the One from thought. As is well known, Badiou's ontology begins with a decision against the One. The One only "is" as a result, as the outcome of the operation of the count-as-One.²⁰ Cutting through the "latent religiosity" that he claims to find in Deleuze, Badiou's formal and austere mathematical ontology begins and ends "in the clearing of God's death."²¹ In other words, "There is no God. Which also means: the One is not."²² Moreover, Badiou's more extended discussion of Deleuze in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* focuses primarily on the issue of the One, a renewed conception of the latter being the thread that runs throughout Deleuze's philosophy, according to Badiou.²³ However, I want to suggest that, in reference to the event, the One is not the main issue. Badiou's main concern is with becoming, the way in which becoming tends to deny the possibility of a radical break with or reorientation of being.

To be sure, becoming, the event, and the One coincide in Deleuze's thought. We cannot separate one concept from the others, since they are all mutually implicated. Whitehead's reminder that the "fundamental ideas" of any philosophical system "presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless" should thus be taken seriously.²⁴ So by saying that Badiou's main concern is with becoming, I am not arguing that we can separate becoming from the event and the One in Deleuze's thought. The issue is, rather, a question of emphasis. If we look back at Badiou's responses to the four Deleuzian axioms of the event that he extracts from

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, translated by Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 23-24.

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, translated by Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 32.

²² Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, translated by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 25.

²³ Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, translated by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 10: "Deleuze's fundamental problem is most certainly not to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed conception of the One."

²⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 3.

the *The Logic of Sense*, in which he sets out his own conception of the event against Deleuze's, we see that the discussion always comes back to becoming, to the eventual interruption of becoming itself. In one way or another, Badiou stresses that his conception of the event rests on the possibility of a rupture in the order of being: the event is a "pure break" with becoming rather than being coextensive with becoming; the event creates "the possibility of another time" as a "vanishing mediator" rather than being tied to the continuity of time; every event is separated from other events rather than being the expression of a single eternal event; and so on.²⁵ In Badiou's words, "For Deleuze, the event is the immanent consequence of becoming or Life. For me, the event is the immanent principle of exceptions to becoming, or of Truths."²⁶ Thus as he states in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Badiou prefers to think of events as "absolute beginnings."²⁷

I would suggest that it is this focus on the event as the interruption of becoming that allows Badiou to find political allies in some seemingly unlikely places, even in places that still harbor the One. Take Badiou's reading of Paul in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, for example.²⁸ From the start of his engagement with the apostle's writings, Badiou is, of course, quick to dissociate himself from the more explicit religious dimensions of Paul's thought. Badiou states, "For me, truth be told, Paul is not an apostle or a saint. I care nothing for the Good News he declares, or the cult dedicated to him...No transcendence, nothing sacred, perfect equality of this work with every other, the moment it touches me personally."²⁹ He goes on, "If it is possible for us to speak of belief from the outset...let us say that it is rigorously impossible

²⁵ Cf. Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze," 39-40.

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷ Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, 90.

²⁸ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

²⁹ Ibid., 1.

to believe in the resurrection of the crucified.”³⁰ Although Badiou credits Paul with establishing “the laws of universality in general,” the mythological status of the resurrection separates the latter from the “effective truth procedures” of art, science, love, and politics.³¹ Paul’s intervention is only a “theoretical break,” since it does not touch upon any of the material truth processes.³² In the end, Paul remains for Badiou an anti-philosophical thinker. Paul’s suturing of a truth-process to a religious event, to a mythical statement on the One, limits the application of his discourse for the creation of actual truths.

However, despite these reservations, Badiou finds in Paul an important political ally or comrade. According to Badiou, Paul is our contemporary and his task is our own; in short, he is the “new militant figure” we have been searching for, “a Lenin for whom Christ would have been the equivocal Marx.”³³ Badiou states, “[Paul] brings forth the entirely human connection, whose destiny fascinates me, between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is this rupture’s subjective materiality.”³⁴ Indeed, on Badiou’s reading the operations of Paul’s militant Christianity largely coincides with the conditions for a political truth-process in at least three ways.

First, politics for Badiou has as its subject the collective as such; that is, politics is always “immediately universalizing,” prescribing a subjective disposition for all irrespective of the established differences and particularities that mark individuals.³⁵ Badiou finds a prototype of this egalitarian maxim in Paul’s famous statement in Galatians 3.28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Ibid., 108.

³² Ibid., 108.

³³ Ibid., 2.

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, translated by Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 142.

Christ Jesus.” Like a political truth-procedure, the resurrection-event cuts through all established differences, providing a new subjective disposition—the Christian subject—which is immediately available to all.³⁶ To put it in the terms invoked by Badiou against Deleuze on the question of the event, the resurrection for Paul is precisely “the blow of the evental One which animates multiplicities and forms them into a subjectivisable body.”³⁷ Second, politics based on the collective “presents the infinite character of situations.”³⁸ Politics does not base itself on the finite or what seems possible, but on the impossible and the infinite character of situations, from which the affirmative power of the event irrupts. Again, Badiou finds this process at work in Paul’s claim that the resurrection of Christ converts death, whose subjective disposition goes under the name of sin, into life, allowing the Christian subject to affirm openness over closure, immortality over the merely mortal, infinity over finitude, and the impossible over the possible.³⁹ Finally, a political truth-process always subtracts itself from the state of the situation, the organizing principles and rules that codify and govern the sets and subsets of that situation and determine the subject accordingly.⁴⁰ Paul accomplishes this task by subtracting from the two “regimes of discourse” that comprise the state of the situation in which he finds himself: the Jewish law and the Greek cosmos.⁴¹ Against these governing principles, the resurrection-event announces the advent of a singular universality that operates in utter indifference to and refuses integration in any established “regime of discourse.” In Badiou’s words, Paul’s event is “a-

³⁶ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 76-77.

³⁷ Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” 40.

³⁸ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 142.

³⁹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41-42.

⁴⁰ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 143-145.

⁴¹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41-42.

cosmic and illegal,” limiting the range of the Jewish and Greek discourses and opening up a third, new space that is completely disjoined from the state of the situation.⁴²

This last point gets to the heart of the matter. What Badiou finds most important in Paul, it seems, is the apostle’s conviction and ability to think through the idea that the resurrection-event and its consequences represent something “absolutely new” in the order of being.⁴³ Paul’s intervention, then, is against becoming, taking the form of a break, a rupture, an irruption, an illegality, and so on. For this reason, Paul is a companion on the way to thinking the introduction of something absolutely new in any situation, even if his discourse remains tied to a bit of religious obscurantism. Politically speaking, he is a friend of the revolution.

To sum things up. So far I have been arguing that Badiou’s main concern in contrasting his conception of the event with Deleuze’s is the issue of becoming. Whereas in one way or another Deleuze sees the event as tied to becoming, Badiou sees the event as a break with becoming, as the introduction of something absolutely new in a situation. It would seem, then, that we are faced with a decision, a decision between the event of becoming and the event of the absolute interruption of becoming, a decision between Deleuze and Badiou. However, I want to suggest that the decision is not so clear-cut. Everything rests on how we understand Badiou’s conception of the event as a beginning.

Absolute Beginnings...Almost

Break, rupture, irruption, illegality, pure break, the absolutely new—these are all terms associated with Badiou’s event. In one way or another, they all seem to signify a radical cut in the order of being, an irremediable and immediate disjunction between the old order and the (coming) new order. As Badiou states in reference to Deleuze, “As for myself, however, I

⁴² Ibid., 42.

⁴³ Ibid., 43.

cannot bring myself to think the new as a fold of the past... This is why I conceptualize absolute beginnings....”⁴⁴ How are we to understand this notion of event as absolute beginning? What actually is an absolute beginning? What would that even look like? Is an absolute beginning even possible?

If we take this notion of the event as an absolute beginning literally, then from an ontological, historical, and political perspective the idea seems hopelessly naïve and utterly impossible, perhaps even a bit irresponsible. As an absolute beginning, the event would appear to have an almost religious status, a power usually reserved for the divine *creatio ex nihilo*—and we have all been taught that God is dead, no less from Badiou himself. It is not surprising, then, that Badiou has been criticized on this point, especially from those who either adopt or have sympathies with a Deleuzian perspective.

Although Kenneth Surin considers Badiou’s evental politics as one of the live options currently operative for a discourse of political liberation, he ultimately sides with a Deleuzian perspective, where “nomadology” replaces the “politics of the exceptional event.”⁴⁵ Noting that “Badiou’s truth-events tend to be august and rather splendid (St. Paul’s conversion, 1789, 1917, May 1968), as well as being associated with charismatically distinct personages (Lenin, Mao, St. Paul),” Surin suggests that Badiou displays a certain “political romanticism,” an unnecessary longing for the extraordinary that does not touch upon the way in which “the multitude directs itself according to its own powers and its own history.”⁴⁶ Surin’s suspicion, here, is that the idea of the event as a radical break in being reintroduces an element of transcendence, a concern which is also echoed by Daniel W. Smith. Smith notes, “Though Badiou is determined to expel

⁴⁴ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 90.

⁴⁵ Surin, 256.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 255, 257.

God and the One from his philosophy, he winds up reassigning to the event, as if through a back door, the very characteristics of transcendence that were formerly assigned to the divine (as Badiou declares triumphantly, ‘I conceptualize absolute beginnings’).⁴⁷

Likewise, those who adopt other philosophical perspectives also repeat such criticisms of Badiou. Echoing the concerns of Surin and Smith, Daniel Bensaïd suggests that a “new danger” emerges in Badiou’s thought: “that of a philosophy haunted by the sacralization of the evental miracle.”⁴⁸ The rarity of the event, its exceptional and indeterminate character, the voluntarism of decision, and apparent dogmatism which Badiou seems to associate with the resulting process of truth all coincide to produce “a philosophy of majestic sovereignty, whose decision seems to be founded upon a nothing that commands the whole.”⁴⁹ Bensaïd continues:

The absolute incompatibility between truth and opinion, between philosopher and sophist, between event and history, leads to a practical impasse. The refusal to work within the equivocal contradiction and tension which bind them together ultimately leads to a pure voluntarism, which oscillates between a broadly leftist form of politics and its philosophical circumvention. In either case, the combination of theoretical elitism and practical moralism can indicate a haughty withdrawal from the public domain, sandwiched between the philosopher’s evental truth and the masses’ subaltern resistance to the world’s misery.⁵⁰

Simon Critchley worries that the exceptional character of Badiou’s event turns “politics into this heroic act, which we await...It worries [him] because of its Heideggerian and national aesthetic connotations in the German tradition.”⁵¹ To be sure, there are serious philosophical issues

⁴⁷ Daniel W. Smith, “Badiou and Deleuze on the Ontology of Mathematics,” in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, edited by Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), 93.

⁴⁸ Daniel Bensaïd, “Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event,” in *Think Again*, 97.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵¹ Simon Critchley, “‘Fault Lines’: Simon Critchley in Discussion on Alain Badiou,” in *Polygraph 17* (2005): 297. Surin expresses a similar concern: “The other problem with a politics of the exceptional event is that it is the right that is now using the category of the exceptional event to mobilize the very considerable resources of power and coercion that are at its disposal after September 11. September 11 is clearly the right-wing obverse of Badiou’s 1968 truth-event, as evidenced by such claims as ‘things can never be the same again in America’ or from

involved in such concerns. But all of these concerns seem to come back to Oliver Marchart's claim that "a rigorous and uncompromising ethics of the unconditional [event] is entirely at odds with our political reality."⁵² In other words, absolute beginnings are simply not possible or desirable—ontologically, historically, and politically.

However, there is much to suggest that Badiou does not think that absolute beginnings are possible either, despite his claims, some of which I have already mentioned, that would appear to suggest the contrary. It seems that these criticisms of Badiou ascribe to him a position he does not hold. Moreover, Badiou is critical of the very position that such critics often associate with him. This much becomes quite evident if we look at Badiou's discussion of Marcionism in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* and at Meditation 20 in *Being and Event*.

According to Badiou, Marcion, the heterodox theologian of the 2nd century CE, took things a bit to far. Taking Paul—indeed, almost exclusively Paul—as his guide for all matters Christian, Marcion posits the eventual break between Judaism and Christianity "as absolute in the precise sense: *it is not the same God who is in question in these two religions.*"⁵³ For Marcion, there is an absolute disjunction between the old and the new, between the malevolent creator God of the Old Testament and the benevolent, fatherly God of Christianity, who is known through the coming of the son: two gods, two religions, with no mediation between them.

now on everything is different,' used by George Bush and his handlers to mobilize American public opinion not just as a response to Al-Qaeda, but also to promote the Republican Party's overall right-wing agenda" (255-256).

⁵² Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 129.

⁵³ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 34; emphasis in original.

Although Marcion bases his understanding of things on Paul, Badiou notes that he pushes Paul too far, conceiving “the new gospel as an absolute beginning.”⁵⁴ Badiou goes on:

There is no text of Paul’s from which one could draw anything resembling Marcion’s doctrine. That the God whose son is Jesus Christ is the God spoken of in the Old Testament, the God of the Jews, is, for Paul, a ceaselessly reiterated and obvious fact. If there is a figure with whom Paul feels an affinity, and one whom he subtly uses to his own ends, it is that of Abraham. That Paul emphasizes rupture rather than continuity is not in doubt. *But this is a militant, and not an ontological thesis.* Divine unicity bridges the two situations separated by the Christ event, and at no moment is it cast into doubt.⁵⁵

Marcion’s problem, it seems, is to mistake the militant features of Paul’s discourse for an ontological claim. Although Paul certainly posits the event of the resurrection as a break, as the initiation of something new, the rupture with the past is not absolute—the resurrection-event still assumes a divine unicity that bridges the old situation and the new situation.

A certain Marcionism continues today in what Badiou refers to as “speculative leftism,” the critique of which remains constant throughout his writings, as Bruno Bosteels observes.⁵⁶ In Meditation 20 of *Being and Event*, Badiou notes that speculative leftism holds “to the idea of a primal event, or a radical beginning”; speculative leftism signifies “any thought of being which bases itself upon the theme of an absolute commencement.”⁵⁷ However, such an operation is prohibited in Badiou’s thought at the level of intervention, that is, the “procedure by which a multiple is recognized as an event.”⁵⁸ Although intervention is not to be identified with an event, intervention and event are inseparable, insofar as the effectiveness of the latter for a situation depends upon the former. That is to say, given that the status of an event is properly undecidable is a situation, an interventional decision for an event, which is always preceded by

⁵⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 35; emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ Bruno Bosteels, “The Speculative Left,” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 104:4 (Fall 2005): 754.

⁵⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 210.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 202.

an act of nomination that designates an event as capable of belonging to a situation, is necessary to determine that an event does indeed belong to a situation. In this sense, an intervention is the means through which an event is submitted to thought, to a “discipline of time, which controls from beginning to end the consequences of the introduction into circulation of the paradoxical multiple, and at any moment knows how to discern its connection to chance.”⁵⁹

However, it is important to point out that the link between intervention and event is not immediate or direct. If it were, then Badiou would run the risk of sacralizing the event in an heroic gesture, as some of his critics charge. But Badiou points out that intervention depends upon what he calls “evental recurrence.”⁶⁰ Intervention is always suspended between events, so to speak; in Badiou’s words, intervention is “an evental between-two.”⁶¹ Badiou writes:

In order to avoid this curious mirroring of the event and the intervention—of the fact and the interpretation—*the possibility of the intervention must be assigned to the consequences of another event*. It is evental recurrence which founds intervention. In other words, there is no interventional capacity, constitutive for the belonging of an evental multiple to a situation, save within the network of consequences of a previously decided belonging. An intervention is what presents an event for the occurrence of another.⁶²

Far from being an absolute beginning, the interventional presentation of a new event always depends upon its connection to another, previous event. According to Badiou, “[F]or there to be an event, one must be able to situate oneself within the consequences of another. The intervention is a line drawn from one paradoxical multiple, which is already circulating, to the circulation of another, a line which scratches out. It is a *diagonal* of the situation.”⁶³ Such a process is, however, not a matter of mere repetition. Although a new event depends upon its

⁵⁹ Ibid., 211.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 209.

⁶¹ Ibid., 209.

⁶² Ibid., 209; emphasis in original.

⁶³ Ibid., 210.

connection to a prior event, the latter is not simply repeated; rather, a new event “evokes the previous situations and uses them precisely to create its own rationality.”⁶⁴

Take Paul’s intervention, for example. Certainly, for Paul the resurrection posits a break, the introduction of something new. However, it is not the case, as with Marcion, that Paul completely disjoins the Christian event from the past in an absolute beginning. Rather, Paul always understands the resurrection-event by reiterating its connection to past events, to the way in which the resurrection-event draws out the truth of these past events and deploys them in a new context.⁶⁵ So too with politics. Although 1789, 1917, and 1968, for example, name distinct evental sequences, they are not absolute starting points. As Badiou points out, “In particular, in politics, it is absolutely clear that any new sequence is also, in the creation of its rationality, giving a new meaning to previous sequences...All political sequences simultaneously give a new meaning to previous ones. The most typical example is of course Lenin who, during the Bolshevik revolution, gives an entirely new meaning to the Paris Commune.”⁶⁶

Evental recurrence means that there are no absolute beginnings. The introduction of novelty in any situation, the interruption of becoming for the sake of the new, is always relative, relative to the situation in which the new occurs and to past evental sequences that reverberate in

⁶⁴ Alain Badiou, “After the Event: Rationality and the Politics of Intervention. An Interview with Alain Badiou,” in *Prelom* 8 (2007): 185.

⁶⁵ See also Badiou’s discussion of Pascal in Meditation 21 of *Being and Event*: “The intervention [of Christianity] is based upon the circulation, within the Jewish milieu, of another event, Adam’s original sin, of which the death of Christ is the relay. The connection between original sin and redemption definitively founds the time of Christianity as a time of exile and salvation. There is an essential historicity to Christianity which is tied to the intervention of the apostles as the placement-into-circulation of the event of the death of God; itself reinforced by the promise of the Messiah which organized the fidelity to the initial exile. Christianity is structured from beginning to end by evental recurrence; moreover, it prepares itself for the divine hazard of the third event, the Last Judgement, in which the ruin of the terrestrial situation will be accomplished, and a new regime of existence will be established” (213).

⁶⁶ Badiou, “After the Event: Rationality and the Politics of Intervention,” 185.

the present. Far from sacralizing the event or assuming that the event requires some sort of romantic hero, the doctrine of evental recurrence requires the careful and disciplined submission of the event to thought. In Badiou's words, "What the doctrine of the event teaches us is rather that the entire effort lies in following the event's consequences, not in glorifying its occurrence. There is no more an angelic herald of the event than there is a hero."⁶⁷ Based on this conception of the event, how are we to read Badiou's disagreement with Deleuze on the issue of becoming and beginnings? And how what does this conception of the event imply for a connection between Badiou and Deleuze? I conclude with some brief remarks concerning these issues, remarks that at this point should be taken as suggestions for further inquiry.

Conclusion

In a review of *Logiques des Mondes*, Žižek suggests that "a revolutionary orientation to the future" implies a certain stance towards the past, in seeing the future in the past and the past in the future. Žižek asks rhetorically, "What if, however, the future one should be faithful to is the future of the past itself, i.e., the emancipatory potential that was not realized due to the failure of the past emancipatory attempts and for this reason continues to haunt us?"⁶⁸ Žižek goes on to suggest that it is here that we should turn to Deleuze against Badiou, since for Deleuze repetition provides the form for the emergence of something new. Žižek writes, "The proper Deleuzian paradox is that something truly New can ONLY emerge through repetition. What repetition repeats is not the way the past 'effectively was,' but the virtuality inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualization. In this precise sense, the emergence of the New changes the

⁶⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 211.

⁶⁸ Slavoj Žižek, "On Alain Badiou and *Logiques des Mondes*," available at <http://www.lacan.com/zizbadman.htm>; accessed 10/20/2007.

past itself, that is, it retroactively changes (not the actual past—we are not in science fiction—but) the balance between actuality and virtuality in the past.”⁶⁹

If we take notions such as rupture, irruption, illegality, pure break, and absolute beginning at face value in relation to the event, then it would seem that Badiou’s event cannot assume such a relation to the past. The issue, here, concerns becoming. As I have argued in this paper, Badiou’s main disagreement with Deleuze hinges on the notion of becoming, on the way in which the latter tends towards destiny. Badiou states in reference to Deleuze, “The event is not the risky passage from one state of affairs to another. It is the immanent stigmata of a One—result of all becomings. In the multiple—which-becomes, in the between two of the multiples which are active multiples, the event is the destiny of the One.”⁷⁰ At every step of the way in his confrontation with Deleuze on the question of the event, Badiou opts for an opposition: discontinuity rather than continuity, disharmony rather than harmony, pure break rather than becoming, and so on. To quote Badiou again, “As for myself, however, I cannot bring myself to think that the new is a fold in the past...This is why I conceptualize absolute beginnings...”⁷¹ This notion of absolute beginnings, as I also argued, is part of the problem that critics find in Badiou, especially those with sympathies for a Deleuzian perspective. In one way or another, these critics stress that Badiou’s notion of the event as an absolute beginning is hopelessly naïve and utterly impossible, perhaps even a bit irresponsible—historically, ontologically, and politically. Given these problems, it is better to side with Deleuze—even Žižek suggests so much in his claim that we should turn to Deleuze against Badiou.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” 39.

⁷¹ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 90.

However, there is really no need to do this. Instead, we should turn to Badiou against Badiou or read Badiou in light of Badiou. That is to say, an absolute beginning is already repudiated as a mere species of “speculative leftism” or Marcionism through the notions of intervention and evental recurrence. As I discussed above, these two ideas assume that a new event always arises in relation to a past event; a new event evokes a previous evental situation and rationality, using the past in a new way in the present so as to force an interruption in the present. The introduction of novelty in any situation, the interruption of becoming for the sake of the new, is always relative in this sense, relative to the situation in which the new occurs and to past evental sequences that reverberate in the present. Indeed, such a relation to the past seems evident in Badiou’s philosophy itself—how else are we to understand Badiou’s “reactivation” of Saint Paul or his more recent emphasis on the subjective figure of resurrection?⁷² No heroism, no sacralization, no absolute beginning—only the hard work of following the consequences of an event.

But if Badiou’s event does maintain a certain connection to the past, to past events and their consequences, then what are we to do with his claims to the contrary, claims which seem to hold on to dreams of absolute beginnings and complete breaks? Although I have suggested that Badiou’s critics are wrong in ascribing to him a speculative leftist view, they undoubtedly pick up on something in the corpus of Badiou’s writings—Badiou does speak of “absolute beginnings,” after all. It would appear that, despite his intentions to the contrary, Badiou does

⁷² Alain Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes* (Paris: Sueil, 2006), 53-87. Badiou develops four subjective figures in relation to the event: fidelity, obscure, occultation, and resurrection. In his review of *Logiques des Mondes*, Justin Clemens suggests that the latter is “the key, the crucial, figure that governs the entirety” of *Logiques des Mondes*. See Justin Clemens, “Had We But Worlds Enough, and Time, This Absolute, Philosopher...,” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1-2 (2006): 277-310.

often border on a view that could be associated with the speculative leftism he denounces.⁷³ Indeed, such is especially the case in his argument with Deleuze, in which he sharply distinguishes his conception of the event from Deleuze's. I want to suggest that, in order to understand this seeming contradiction, we posit two types of discourse in Badiou's philosophy that should not be confused: militant claims and ontological claims. Like Paul, Badiou has constant recourse to militant claims in order to separate his conception of things from that of others, in order to try to evoke something new in a situation. However, at the level ontology such claims are tempered, for lack of a better word, showing their connection to the claims of others, despite notable differences. Badiou has stated that it is only natural for every philosopher to think that "his or her work is completely new. That's only human." However, philosophical novelty always relies on a repetition of the past to ascertain the new, what Badiou calls a "creative repetition":

That's why we can speak finally of a creative repetition. There is something unchanging in the form of a gesture, a gesture of division. And there is, with the pressure of some events and their consequences, the necessity for transforming some aspects of the philosophical gesture. So we have a form, and we have the variable form of the unique form. That's why we clearly recognize philosophy and philosophers, despite their enormous differences and despite their violent conflicts. Kant said that the history of philosophy was a battlefield. Yes, it is so! But it is also the repetition of the same battle, on the same field. Perhaps a musical image may help. The development of philosophy is in the classical form of theme and variations. Repetition, the theme, and constant novelty, the variations.⁷⁴

We could say the same thing of events. The doctrines of eventual recurrence and intervention imply, it seems, a certain creative repetition of past events. And it is at this point that we begin to glimpse a point at which Deleuze and Badiou begin to come closer together, since creative repetition is the way in which Badiou seems to define the Deleuzian event.

I want to be clear—I am not trying to conflate Badiou and Deleuze. There are, inevitably, important differences to keep in mind, most notably the issue of the One. But if the

⁷⁴ Alain Badiou, "Philosophy as Creative Repetition," in *The Symptom*, Issue 8 (Winter 2007); available at http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/badiou18.html.

distinction between the two is not so sharp, as I have suggested, then perhaps we can begin to look for a way to think Badiou and Deleuze together, rather than as “two extreme, and absolutely hostile, poles.” Perhaps in the end the differences are a matter of taste, as Badiou suggests.⁷⁵ Eventually we must move beyond taste to politics, which would seem to require looking for points of contact between these two thinkers, if they truly represent the options we are left with today for a politics of liberation.

⁷⁵ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 91.

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