

# Politics Beyond Ontology

## Hypothesis in Process Philosophy

### Abstract

It seems that we experience the world: but beyond this, what more can be said? Can we hypothesize the abyssal and incorporeal depths of the origin of social desire, and could description perhaps reach even *farther*? In this paper, my goal is to provide a reading of the work of Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze in light of present sociopolitical conditions. I stress that we should see conventional ontology as a social machine which functions by division, and in this it operates in a precisely opposite way from a political logic of (just) distribution. If universalism would actually imply a transcendent origin of social order, we must learn to do without the hypothesis. I argue that the future must be sought immanently, as a *process* of utopian restoration. Tomorrow's truth is to be constructed by our hands or not at all.

Ontology has a new goal and new project in the twenty-first century. How do we think the relation of subjects to events without transcendence? How do we organize the field of social intensities without division and repressing desire? How can we accelerate distribution, and intensify healthy and potent forces of social change? This paper aims to provide a new kind of mapping of the social field, pointing towards a space for thought where ontology can be seen as secondary to metaphysics. Deleuze writes that "politics precedes being," so metaphysics must clarify what to ontology is indiscernible -- the lack produced by social and conceptual division -- and recognize this divisive operation not as productive of an immanent equality, but in fact a transcendent subjugation.

## Introduction

This is truly the epoch of absolute relativity. Morality and reason no longer appear sufficient for justice; truth and faith no longer appear sufficient for belief; and courage no longer seems necessary for action! Plato is dead: only a fool today would admit he considers truth to found knowledge.

But his ghost haunts us yet. Have we almost lapsed into a too-precisely opposing view, such that only doubt and paranoia could found 'true' knowledge (like Descartes, or his postmodern revenant, Jacques Lacan)? And should we accept *this*, then we certainly must consider the further hypothesis of Alain Badiou's that knowledge is always subtracted from the indiscernible truth of an event<sup>1</sup>, accomplished by an engaged generic process of becoming-subject through which the unrecognized truth is supported<sup>2</sup>. According to Badiou, truths invest subjects (ontologically speaking) by a rigorous subtraction or subdivision, an act not of will, but of *faith*. Underlying the relation between subject and event is the connection of confidence or fidelity which constitutes *us*, as subjects to a truth we carry.

It must already be recognized that this ontologically 'alternate' hypothesis is not altogether different in spirit to that of Alfred North Whitehead's<sup>3</sup> (with his theory of event-particles, his assertion of transcendence, and his advocacy for a universal algebra -- of sets, no less,) and even perhaps that of Gilles Deleuze's (who is also a rigorous thinker of multiplicity, has a con-

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *Being and Event*, especially Meditation 35 ('Theory of the Subject') in which we see that "the subject is literally separated from knowledge by chance. The subject is chance, vanquished term by term, but this victory, subtracted from language, is accomplished solely as truth." (*Being and Event* 397)

<sup>2</sup> "The singular relation of a subject to the truth whose procedure it supports is the following: the subject believes there is a truth, and this belief occurs in the form of a knowledge." (*ibid*)

<sup>3</sup> "In an intellectual feeling the datum is the generic contrast between a nexus of actual entities and a proposition with its logical subjects' members of the nexus." (*Process and Reality* 407, Whitehead 1929)

ception of a ‘plane of immanence,’ and even deals extensively with “pure events” in the series of the same name in his *Logic of Sense*.) All these voices are congruent, even polyphonous, and not antagonistically opposed -- a reading which Badiou would sometimes seem to encourage.

We should read these each of these singular threads of thought as mysteriously but fundamentally univocal<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, it is one of the goals of this paper to assert that all of us are flag-bearers of the same singular epistemological involution, one which is lucidly in *process* for each of these thinkers. What is *not* my goal is to explain the unique historical forces which have so radically compromised our faith in the power of reason to discern. Of much more urgency is a therapeutic critique of the contemporary theoretical and sociopolitical terrain.

For epistemology, insofar as it remains apolitical, degenerates into an apologetics for the horror of the real. It seems much more relevant and important to me to rather develop a map of potential fields of social intensity -- zones where it becomes possible to create open spaces beyond institutionalized forms of justice, thought and conviviality. I am not here concerned with advocating some new and exotic theory of knowledge, but rather with identifying and intensifying unrecognized zones of micro-revolutionary resistance.

For as reality becomes obscure, so does revolutionary potential: it is certainly not clear that we can collectively will the struggle against authoritarian systems of power without reinvigorating precisely those very ‘fascisizing’ elements of political thought and behavior we would seek to eradicate. “Philosophy has to expose the possibility of a true life.”<sup>5</sup> The path I shall take I

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<sup>4</sup> In Deleuze’s sense, “there has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal... A single voice raises the clamour of being... What is important is that we can conceive of several formally distinct senses which none the less refer to being as if to a single designated entity, ontologically one.” (*Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze 35)

<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, *Bodies, Language, Truths* (article, 2006)

hope will be an original and not merely a reactionary one. Today we must venture to describe the conditions within which a liberating, utopian hope would become a resonant impulse to overcome, a fresh will towards becoming conscious. For a veritable becoming is beginning to make itself appear possible historically once more, and we would be well-advised to listen closely to the voice of history-- to ensure we have not misheard the call of the future.

### **Experience and Identity**

We experience the world: but beyond this, what more can be said? What indeed would suffice to describe the encounter with what is 'beyond' any experience? Can language indicate the abyssal and incorporeal depths of its own origin, and could it perhaps reach even *farther*? And finally: must we silence our questioning out of ignorance, even as our investigation has just begun upon its journey to peer through the shattered lattices of universal order -- or is this already where our knowledge meets its limits of certainty?

But before we engage these questions further, let us introduce some of our terms. As I will use it (in a somewhat Deleuzoguattarian sense) the word *description* names the process whereby enunciations delimit observational spaces, by deploying pre-signifying elements onto a mapping of functions in a particular social field. Descriptions stratify *intensities*: they invest regiments of distinctions which encapsulate and coordinate observed singularities. *Observation* will be seen to function as the production of distinctions or divisions between contrasting zones of value and intensity. Finally, *thinking* begins with an unrecognized distinction.

Now we are in a position to provide a certain narrow kind of answer to the questions we opened with. We shall begin with an exposition of the nature of the relationship between identity and. First, let's consider why a purely logical account of identity could not fully describe our experience of self-identity.

Descriptions logically subdivide spaces into zones or territories of equivalence. The ontological question regards the division of the zones, but not the separation of spaces, for this is *its* operation of division. But even the panoramic ontological view would grasp only the most formal aspects of identity. For in an ontological account of identity, *identity thinks itself* as collections of distinct experiences. Even if we suppose identity to be some species of 'pure' cognitive event, this would again demonstrate only the indirect-tautological function of identity<sup>6</sup> ("agent A is that entity which experiences 'being-agent-A'.") Like the tangled hierarchies implicit in the *cogito*, the ontological perspective aims to resolve at a higher position than it began: it seeks passionately to explain based on a total comprehension, which is to be accomplished by a rigorous division. I say that logic studies this same schism, but algebraically rather than differentially. Yet the profound question has remained silent: why is the subject missing from our experiential space? Where has identity gone?

## **Event and Becoming**

It is partly to Alain Badiou's credit that we now think the relation of being to events as

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<sup>6</sup> "Thus ultimately all science depends upon direct observation of homology of status within a system. Also the observed system is the complex of geometrical relations within some presented locus... a loci of entities in 'unison of becoming' obviously depends on the actual entities... The factor of temporal endurance selected for any one actuality will depend upon its initial 'subjective aim.'" Alfred North Whitehead (*Process and Reality*, 195)

*essentially* multiple<sup>7</sup>. But this same principle undermines the very mathematical principle of continuity upon which he seeks to found this relation. Mathematics is presupposed in his ontological analysis of being as constituting a complex and heterogeneous assemblage of events (collections) and spaces (voids) not ultimately founded *upon* the void.

The paradox glimpsed here can be seen most clearly if we approach identity naively, as meaning a “belonging in a certain way to a certain state of affairs.” This doesn’t explain what we’re interested in, which is its actual continuity, the unique and surprising symmetry of identity. A subject maintains its identity despite, and sometimes even *because* of the discontinuity it has experienced. So belonging already entails a multiply-complex balance of coordinating transformations. Thus, without actually discerning or explaining any particular identity, we can generically suppose it is made up of disjoint, discontinuous zones of varying degrees of belonging (to some situation of events.) There is no participation between non-equivalent classes, the ontological break is ‘clean’: “There are only bodies and language.”<sup>8</sup>

We find that we have need for a more complicated algebraic structure, one which at least allows for division of bodies and words into partial membership classes. The very nature of equivalence depends fundamentally on this division into ‘similar’ sets. Not to mention the fact that inclusion itself is already an ontological division demands further explanation. After all, an identity cannot be ‘induced’ from the situation by the simple observation (or negotiation) which decides that such-and-such belongs to the event (considering the state of affairs,) or does not. In

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<sup>7</sup> “For if being is one, then one must posit that what is not one, the multiple, *is not*. But this is unacceptable for thought, because what is presented is multiple and one cannot see how there be an access to being outside all phenomena.” (*Being and Event* 23, Badiou 2006)

<sup>8</sup> Alain Badiou. *Bodies, Language, Truth* (2006)

reality, we cannot rigorously establish the existence of the void or the multiple from a pure induction.

Rather, even induction depends on a rigorous subdivision of the One until this operation approaches its ‘vulgar’ limit (of non-accuracy, of meaning ‘nothing’.) So when we say this ‘limit’ (zero) belongs to every set, even to itself, we mean that induction (the operation-as-limit) has meaning only when the situation it observes is already understood as meaning ‘nothing.’ Hence the infallibility of the inductive process: it is already a “transductive” tautology! The void undermines identity insofar as the void is divided; whereas a truly pure induction on the basis of the multiplicity of events would affirm that multiplicity doesn’t end in the void.

Multiplicity goes all the way down: as soon as we make a single distinction, an *infinite* number of tautologically equivalent distinctions follow. Faith denotes reality. Identity, then, cannot refer only to the void’s self-belonging (even as we have shown by infinite subdivision of the void into  $n$  classes of varying degrees of belonging.) Rather, after Deleuze, a becoming, a process of actualizing a virtual multiplicity, occurs as an unfolding series of never-endingly complex and self-referential patterns, flows emanating from power sources. Thought occurs on the void, not outside distinctions but requiring them to be made without statist negativity<sup>9</sup>.

The void is *never* self-identical, never unicity but always the purest, or ‘least’ unit of division. For if it is split, it is then split eternally, split infinitely, and so it never belongs to or contains itself or anything else. In fact, the power of the void is not activated simply by its pure, abstract emptiness but rather the mathematical intuition of the operator, the one who utilizes the

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<sup>9</sup> As Ellrich observes regarding *Difference and Repetition*, “Deleuze argues that the construction of distinctions without negation is not just possible, but absolutely necessary, if we wish to break the spell of representational thought and dialectics” (Lutz Ellrich 2003, “Negativity and Difference: On Gilles Deleuze’s Criticism of Dialectics”)

void in order to reconstruct a fractured ontology. The ‘smoothness’ of a new cognitive space is no index for its fertility. Even Badiou recognizes that thought finds its full expression beyond a statist or constructed conception of reality<sup>10</sup>.

Mathematics is a thought sublimely broken, purified of violence, cured of resistance, ‘bent to heel,’ stripped of its subjectivity and made absolutely disinterested. Yet its accomplishments, however breathtakingly elegant and beautiful, always and only reconstitute a shrinking remainder of experience. The technological evolution of human society originates not only on our learning to calculate, but our being *made calculable*<sup>11</sup>. Nietzsche has identified this process with the very origin of morality, but it is enough to say here that a mathematical philosophy founded on the void accomplishes its aims by a sort of violent self-discipline which thus locks itself into only one situation: provocation.

Even more importantly, such a conception of ontology appears to focus its attention upon an *inconsistent* layer of being. This logical inversion just traps being in a paradox, and isn’t ‘capturing’ it in its multiplicity but rather surgically inscribing transcendent and radical *distinctions* upon it as pure events<sup>12</sup>-- much less accomplishing some sort of transcendental ‘logic’ of events!

To perceive in reality only the paradox of becoming is to introduce transcendence by the back door, as a desperate escape from an immanent reality (which is therefore all we can ‘speak’ about -- without lapsing into hypocrisy.) It is to understand being as a cage, only as a *challenge*,

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<sup>10</sup> “It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent.” (*Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art*, Badiou 2003)

<sup>11</sup> *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche 58, tr. Kauffman 1969)

<sup>12</sup> “The one-truth, which assembles to infinity the terms positively investigated by the faithful procedure, is indiscernible in the language of the situation... It is a generic part of the situation insofar as it is an immutable excrecence [something not represented in the situation, but present as operation] whose entire being resides in regrouping presented terms.” (396 *Being and Event*, Badiou 2006)

consigning to the undiscerned and the invisible anything marginal, transparent, or secret. We finally capture only a shrinking portion of living experience which crumbles, continually self-dividing into an abyss of silence.

Hence, we claim that ontology, understood as this operation of a primary *division* (instead of, say, a *distribution*) thus cannot in fact account for the reciprocal yet asymmetrical relation between reality and time -- that is, it can pose precisely but never resolve the question of experience and identity. Instead, we need political logic to follow logically from a truly immanent ontology, which is psychologically astute enough to recognize its prejudices (of identity, experience, etc) and reorganize itself, even diagnose and heal itself. For the ontological principle (that being becomes) has no goal written upon its surface, and even ontology must take care of what it becomes.

## **Immanence**

Immanence is, upon its surface, just a word which indicates that amongst the present relationships we observe, we perceive them as interlocking. It means reality is 'inner' space. Another way of saying this would be to say that we do not believe there to exist a *deepest* space. Thus when we make a claim of 'pure' immanence, we assert that there are no extra layers of being above or beyond the situation, and that nothing spontaneously intervenes from another order of time. Immanence implies something special about the initial conditions of any space it is applied to: namely, that they open onto multiplicity, and fold in upon themselves without reference to an

exterior. That there is no ‘outside’ of Being: this is pure immanence.

Nothing encapsulates an anti-immanent perspective more closely than the delicate epistemological framework inaugurated by Plato (but exemplified best, perhaps, by the *cogito*) which asserts that knowing and experiencing are but modalities of a fundamental distinction. Life is essentially separate: both within and without, split between thinking and acting.

But is it really so clear and distinct that such separated spaces would not communicate? Whatever the case may be, in every theory advancing a transcendent distinction as primary, there emerges the necessity for an enduring *interface* produced by a geometric projection between the distinguished spaces. In the ontology of Alain Badiou, ‘fidelity’ names the connective operation between elements of an enumerated network of forces. In the clarity of this fidelity, the distinctions between subject and event, process and underlying ‘reality’ become critically blurred and radically ambiguous. The void can no longer be absolutely distinguished from the situation. The originary reflection which discerns the indiscernible becomes autonomous -- a *faithful* machine - - by this same maneuver.

## Love

In Badiou’s somewhat classical conception, the subject-space is divided between art, science, politics and love (not so curiously, he deliberately excludes psychoanalysis<sup>13</sup>.) Each of these has its subjects in terms of goals, identities, procedures and structures. They are implicit

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<sup>13</sup> “With respect to the doctrine of the subject, the individual examination of each of the generic truth procedures will open up to an aesthetics, to a theory of science, to a philosophy of politics, and, finally, to the arcana of love; to an intersection without fusion with psychoanalysis. All modern art, all the incertitudes of science, everything ruined Marxism prescribes as a militant task, everything, finally, which the name for Lacan designates will be met with, reworked, and traversed by a philosophy restored to its time by clarified categories.” (*Being and Event* 435, Badiou 2006)

division algorithms which ensure success to the faithful. But we should not judge from this that these spaces are indeed so absolutely separate (in reality or in Badiou's ontology,) nor should we conclude from his idiosyncratic treatment of the ontological question that his project is without certain precedents.

For example, when Deleuze and Guattari say that “love is not reactionary or revolutionary, but love is an index of the reactionary or revolutionary investments of the libido in the socius,”<sup>14</sup> they are indicating a requirement not only for political thought, but for creative activity in general: when we participate in sociality, if we do not do ‘it’ with love, the engagement becomes reactive, psychoanalytic, capitalistic, even neurotic or self-destructive<sup>15</sup>. Badiou's sort of fidelity<sup>16</sup> has a similar requirement: you belong to the event only when *you* have made it what it is--and by this process of subtraction, we by chance and faith become whatever we are. Either notion supposes only a single portal to the event: you either enter with love in your heart and hands open in passivity and generosity -- or you do not really enter at all, or only to critically misjudge the nature of your relationship to the event. For without love there is no distinguishing revolutionary necessity.

Love is most enlightening, most important when it is *immediately* political, when it is immediately *ethical*. When it is so intense that it resonates, when it is totally without jealousy,

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<sup>14</sup> *Anti-Oedipus* 374. Also cf. John Protevi from *Between Derrida and Deleuze* (London 2002): “Love is the call to enter that virtual and open up the actual, to install inclusive disjunction so that roads not taken are still accessible, so that we might experiment and produce new bodies.”

<sup>15</sup> cf. Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (380-381): “...desiring-production produces the real, and... desire has little to do with fantasy and dream... Schizoanalysis merely asks what are the machinic, social and technical indices on a socius that open to desiring-machines, that enter into the parts, wheels and motors of these machines, as much as they cause them to enter into their own parts, wheels, and motors.”

<sup>16</sup> “...[Fidelity is] the procedure by means of which one discerns, in a situation, the multiples whose existence is linked to the name of the event that been put into circulation by an intervention.” (Badiou 2006, *Being and Event* 507)

this is when love unfolds its mysterious potential: its capacity to inspire, to dominate, to intensify a flow of desire. Love is reality: it's affect is most closely claimed by the word 'infusion.' An unasked-for or obscure love<sup>17</sup> is indiscernible but essential, if only for its unanticipated transversality, its radical inclusivity -- which is why love is an ethical intercourse, or else a tragic ignorance: faith without love is dogmatic, impotent, incomplete and unsatisfied.

We say love is perhaps *the* revolutionary impulse, for it is that emotion which first reminds us, with piercing clarity, of our real condition. Though we are driven to self-affliction, suffering is not guilt, nor a guilty desire. Pain relates to situations which are not eternal, to arrangements which evolve and change by their nature. To love just means we could not stand the shame of another's degradation. To love is to precisely understand the shame of the situation -- and not to accept it.

Hope can only be inspired for a universal social truth which is *actually* wagered upon, where love engages and focuses our intensity. Love provokes us to create new kinds of spaces for living-together. To wager on an event is to become infected with patience, belief and confidence, and it is (for better or worse) to become an intense potential for social difference. We wager our singularities, and we have faith; only then can we create a new kind of situation. Faith has to be propelled; it doesn't exist in rest. Transitory ontology is the science of trajectories: it perhaps provokes the deepest revelations, but never the deepest joys. That there is still a non-ontological space for thought today we perhaps owe to the stout-hearted endurance of joy.

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<sup>17</sup> cf. *Anti-Oedipus* 367, where Deleuze writes: "Nonfigurative loves, indices of a revolutionary investment of the social field, and which are neither Oedipal nor pre-Oedipal since it all amounts to the same thing, but innocently anoedipal, and which give the revolutionary the right to say: 'Oedipus? Never heard of it.'"

## Politics through the Abyss

We no longer need to be reminded that politics, and more generally ontology, are no longer concerned solely with concepts. We can even now question whether they have ever been. Ontology serenely and passionately desires to explain the primordial origin of all conceptual and actual order; whereas politics, slightly more modest, seeks to divine, explain and control the source of value, or ‘final’ motive towards *social* order. Political ontology is therefore not primarily concerned with concepts, but rather with social functions whose specific operation is division, or ideological concept whose essential modality is exclusion, separation. We should be alert for when a thinker is actually deploying ontological or political concepts, rather than simply dividing in an ontological or political way. For the consistency of a political axiom rests fundamentally on the actual effectiveness of the virtual distinctions it draws.

Our experience of political reality is intimately shaped by an careful community ‘surgery’ which conditions potential expressions of value. In practice, only a delicate subdivision accomplishes the total vision of faith, or ontology. A numerical theory of the event aims at continuity through becoming, where a genetic theory of society aims at becoming through intensity. The essence of the political is the abstract; the question of politics is first that of *clarity*. Accordingly, the truly political desire is a progression: from the will to transparency, to the will to distinction, and finally, the will to loyalty -- or the will to power.

Both ontology and politics are in effect a careful study of the potential varieties (and strata within varieties) of groups, masses, and milieus. More precisely, ontology presents the geometry of plausible inter-relations: mapping logical trajectories between evolving surfaces. Then ‘division’ is *the* ontological term, because whereas masses are indiscernible depths of correlation, surfaces present explicitly calculable interfaces. Surfaces are transversal for this reason, too:

they skillfully restrain their powerful depths, maintain smooth boundaries even as they transcend, divide and encompass the inner abyss with a sublime act of distinction. For even (social and scientific) classes have to do, morphologically and genealogically, with an inclusion/exclusion apparatus, an integral divisibility of property and reality.

Ontological inferences are not simply mathematical distinctions; and political thought precisely remembers the reasons not to give into comfortable abstraction, or to yield to transcendence-claims distinguishing degrees of belonging. For if masses of any kind can be said have an interest in this sense, then the idea of justice even as disinterestedness should invite us to inquire whether and how they are cared for. Thus we can say that materialism (and even, in an ironic sense, its modern subversion) contains an important kernel of ethical truth, namely, that counting is not comprehending. Consider the different investments of intensity from a cursory scientific experiment which merely takes account of a sequence of events, to a mature scientific project which investigates interconnections between and within a variety of processes.

Similarly, framing social justice as an ontological distinction already begs the question of participation: for masses always have interests, even when ignored by those who 'count.' Counting can be seen as 'disinterested' only through a sublimation of inherited violence, a violence which imitates thought in its procedure of desire: to become invisible, to become shadow, to become ingrained even into the very geometry of the universe, finally even into the clarity of light itself.

### **Beyond the Count, Outside the Distinction**

The territory of the count is not absolute: there are wanderers roaming about the edges, brave adventurers tracing paths into the void beyond the state. Of course, many break down-- but

some inevitably break through. Those who escape the territory of the count are those in whom real thinking can occur. For Alain Badiou, political thought must take place at a distance from the state in a militant subject. Justice is pure disinterestedness, and the revolutionary's ethic would have no substance if it were not for his unselfish confidence in the face of the event, his potential to become *equal* to the events of life.

For Gilles Deleuze, the question of political thought is enacted by mapping fields of differential intensity, offering the possibility of a *process* of healing social desire<sup>18</sup>. Deleuze believes we need a radical kind of post-institutional analysis which is forward-thinking and energetic, both critical and clinical, in order to produce results. This analysis is distinguished not by its specialized knowledge, but its ability to rearrange the blockage, misdirection and appropriation of desire by the machine. It is not a political project, but a new discipline whereby we can learn to create more healthy ecosystems -- mental, physical and social.

But what ties them together is not faith in the future, but rather a faith in an originary vision of society which has become possible from our modern perspective. We could not have gotten this far without bringing a past along with us; history has indispensable lessons for those even with the most humble or sweeping of goals. Above all, history teaches us that this moment *is* the event, a rare break in the linear flow of time where we still have the opportunity to intervene: but the mysteries held by the future are as dangerous as they are likely to be curative. Becomings of *any* sort should not be taken lightly.

The question is not: how are we to judge ontologies? For they already contain eschatolo-

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<sup>18</sup> "The task of schizoanalysis is ultimately that of discovering for every case the nature of the libidinal investments of the social field, their possible internal conflicts, their relationships with the preconscious investments of the same field, their possible conflicts with these--in short, the entire interplay of the desiring-machines and the repression of desire." (Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 382)

gies, and dictate potential utopias. Ontology is mathematics only in that its goal is to become wholly symbolic. Logic lives in ontology's dreamworld of an unbroken text. But utopia is not just a self-contained truth lodged within its own marking. Any *particular* ontology already has its entire future sewn within itself – and even its prehistory. Yet it is in the form of the intuition that prehistory shapes the present that we find a curious and golden thread running through Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Their modern counterparts – Deleuze, Badiou and Whitehead – have taken a similar inspiration towards a new kind of metaphysics.

### **The Power of Fidelity**

What does it mean to say we are faithful to a process? Do we affect the series of experiences in the same way the event affects us? Even if we are faithful observers, we are mirrors for the world, but we are still not *in* the picture. Authentic belief is a becoming-void and a becoming-full at once, a dangerous becoming-neither, indeed by an act of pure symmetry: turning something into nothing, turning nothing into something. Topologically, such a faithful subject could only be considered as the miraculous *origin of the situation*, the distinguishing void-point around which the entire symbolic coordination is achieved. Yet what is most interesting about this kind of conceptual apparatus is not its transitory stability but the implicit potential for evolution, counter-coordination, for provocation and mediation, in fact for the whole complex balance of authentic conviviality. Public space is ontology's Being: the subject as void-origin just the inauguration of a new kind of public space, which is able to dispense with the hypocritical historical divisions between private 'self' and public 'person.' This division is the radical core of ontology, its danger and saving power – it is the dream of an ontology.

We should now consider what the power of fidelity means in terms of its construction of

social divisions. Fidelity empowers a transitory subject as an event occupying a place *between* spaces, accomplishing their inter-involution. The topology glimpsed here is characteristic of the field of intensities which invest social drives. Fidelity invests prearranged divisions of space with asymmetrical value; it is the counter-part to a distinction. Badiou even claims fidelity is the operation *of* distinction<sup>19</sup>.

Thus ontology, understood as a primary separation, would divide its own operation by faith *alone*. What indeed is theory, and what practice to such a subtractive, non-distributive ontology? For it is certainly not merely counting! If the object of ontology is Being, then practically our consideration is not political (at least primarily) -- but ethical and aesthetic. Transitory ontology proceeds from a passion to make being good, to make it beautiful, to make it make *sense...* and only secondarily recounts to make the first count just, to actually make the game fair.

But for the moment accepting the hypothesis, let's suppose the question of the political is governed by a logic of interests. We would only be able to ask the historical, or genealogical question: how does the apparent order of political categories arise in the first place? Thus we have abandoned a total vision to attain the power of multiple distinctions; but these sublime clarities become blurred when re-recognized as heterogeneous but communicating spaces. Univocity becomes the mysteriously infinite power of division, singularization, disjunction. Jurisprudence is then stillborn as merely the power of distinction, the transient bifurcation of a wandering void.

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<sup>19</sup> "I call *fidelity* the set of procedures which discern, within a situation, those multiples whose existence depends upon the introduction into circulation... of an eventual multiple." (Badiou 2006, *Being and Event* 233)

In other words, if disinterestedness remains our criteria for justice, then the logic of politics collapses into a pseudo-logic of public and private spaces. The field of the political is *introduced* by a divisional logic. And if politics is the logic of interest, then thinking politically is only about fidelity, or loyalty – distinctly discerning within from without. My point is that finally this amounts to a violent surgical incision, an uncertain split which is claimed to found knowledge. Ontology understood thus deliberately provokes a suffering which reharmonizes our body into new rhythms, making of our bodies, our faces, and our minds a single goal: an object-lesson.

### **Transversality is something we *do***

A distinction serves a new axis of freedom for it allows access to new spaces of the machine, implies new trajectories of social movement. But insofar as distinction is a compressed sort of division, distinction also *wounds* us even as we ultimately escape its grasp. Though we remain but ghostly traces, the passion for division (almost!) fulfills our desire to be whole. In order to explain this, we must borrow the use of the term *transversality* from Felix Guattari.

Transversality is a group phenomena. It is the unconscious dynamic which propels the crowd forward. This aspect of transversal mappings is already the snare which prevents them as such from being politicized: that those who 'transversalize' their group become subject-groups, with definite desires, aims, goals, in short, identities. Then they have already created virtual *subjugated* groups, and in fact risk decaying themselves into dependency upon a reified transversality, which is already an outdated and neurotic fetish.

Guattari writes that transversality means the unconscious source of action in the group. There are no objective limits it cannot exceed, no ontological ruptures which a transversal map-

ping cannot reconstitute. *Transversality carries the groups' desire.* We cannot separate this from a political or ethical sense to transversality as well:

*"It is my hypothesis that there is nothing inevitable about the bureaucratic self-mutilation of a subject group, or its unconscious report to mechanisms that militate against its potential transversality. They depend, from the first moment, on an acceptance of the risk -- which accompanies the emergence of any phenomena of real meaning -- of having to confront irrationality, death, and the otherness of the other."* (Guattari, *Molecular Revolution* 23)

Transversality, as I see it, is an involution of social desire which transfigures reality by scrambling and reordering all of the infinite segments of experience – maximizing their potential. To speak of the pure transversal is in a sense dishonest, because it isn't, it *becomes*, it's already speaking. It is the flowing of speech and even of comprehension itself. Transversality should be thought immanently, not transcendently. For the pure transversal would be the very source of order, in fact the *opposite* of its aim which is to draw lines of flight towards potential sites of resistance or escape. Thus thought becomes poetry if we describe it figuratively; after all, the transversal is not a point, but the flowing and endless remapping and self-organizing of singularities. Just as with distinction, the transversal ought to be thought of as more a function than a concept, a process than a singularized event. Transversality is not something you think; it's something we do!

The transversal aspect of distinction allows us to describe what underlies the investments of social intensity in the political field. Deleuze is undoubtedly correct on this point: desiring-

machines invest unconscious and even preconscious interests. These are either repressed or transversalized, in any case, no matter how deep the division, we are always reterritorialized into subject groups with identities and desires. Our desires, political or otherwise, seem to express themselves as though formed and even enunciated by complex machine of coordinating energy, force and power. Ontology is a symptom of the social deflection of transversality -- in this case inevitably into transcendence, beyond the social. Thus the will to power is identical to the will to truth only if society is to be abandoned.

But, above all, society must be defended. Love names the most disinterested emotion and thus also the most dangerous, the most radical of passions, whose evocation already demands a new becoming, a transversalization of hope into eternity. Certainly faith is never far from love, nor hope from good works: this simple paradox by which abundant organic health invests the whole field of social desire with its intensity is the essential mystery and goodness of love. Faith is involution itself, a counter-revolution which is yet ever *more* radical, demanding ever different intensities to be deployed: successively, in parallel, and finally even in transversal couplings, fractally self-dividing until it finally submerges itself purely in itself, whole, immanent and sublime. But to demand even *more* of love, to demand that it explicitly accomplish a transcendent self-reunification of being is too much. Being is a fractal machine, not a perfect circle: to replace ontology by mathematics is to abandon the field of social intensities at the very moment when it is the most ripe for revolution -- that is, when it is in the most danger of annihilation.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last century, an epistemological inversion engulfed and splintered our experience of the world like a tidal wave. We have been shaken by a tremendous earthquake of uncertainty -- until we have reached the point scholars and scientists alike have actually become afraid of hard judgments and decisive evaluations. Psychologically speaking, this is a symptom of a withering envy, amidst weakening decadence; and at the very least, many thinkers have betrayed their social function by losing the confidence they once possessed of the power of the concept to approach, and to change, the real.

After phenomenology, ontology is the only science which *really* asks: does it make *sense* any longer to follow rules, to make copies of models, to mold ourselves in the images of icons, to become obedient before a sovereign truth? Ontology is the dream of inventing, invigorating and commanding an army of truths, and in turn to humbly 'obey' them; and thus to exhaust the potential geometries of sense: this is a more apt description of the goal of the conventional ontological process than as a second-order phenomenology. For there is no outside of being studied by ontology, the other is subsumed completely within the same. That I am another is already a poet's fancy; indeed it would be much more incisive to say: there is an other *within* me, between myself and myself. Thus the fractured tautology could at least postpone its inevitable collapse.

My aim here has been to suggest that ontology be reformulated as an immanent science of harmonics, a materialist dynamics of social intensities in time and space. Division is not sufficient, and already betrays the nature of the metaphysical relation to the other. We have to be extremely careful here: the other is a purely immanent transcendence -- as the extreme cusp at the apex of a range of mountains. The other is a primary investment of the world prior to my own separate journey. The leap between us is infinite; any path across would also fly between the irreducibly separated spaces. No distance could traverse it; our separation is absolute. This divi-

sion is atheism, and it is already the ontological situation, that is: an irreducible separation is the foundation of faith. For events are communities, even entire ecosystems: an ontology without ethics would become an ontology without reason. Thought becomes real when it involves itself in the situation, through complex assemblages of spaces delicately cloven by rigorous distinctions-- but seems to shutter and shake when confronted with the void of non-reason, the abyss of nonsense or the primary experience of *multiple* disjunctions.

The present, this convergence of heterogeneous series, is a primary experience which is ontologically non-describable. The truth of reality is an indiscernible which is quickly becoming-imperceptible. A transcendent relation to the infinite is implicit in any divisional algorithm which would claim to predict the future, even if it claimed to found order upon the void by infinitely subjecting yet another new assemblage of forces to its sovereign ownership and control. The grasp of ontology seems boundless, but it is not infinite, and despite Cantor not yet having been made *capable* of approaching the infinite. For ontology itself has not yet been made calculable, it is still its own indiscernible, and is incapable of recognizing itself as being an artifact of the arrangement of power sources in the social field, from whom its light and energy and sense emanate. Even transitory ontology only provokes the projective geometry of situations towards revolution, unable to conceive of a purely immanent involution other than as a pure act of faith.

Faith in separation alone is nothing but a desperate escape from a dangerous or inconsistent situation, precisely when we should be on the lookout for novelty (or at least a weapon!) Furthermore, by evoking a *primary* interface to a 'transcendent' plane of immanence, we imprudently (and quite impotently) presume a relation with the absolutely Other. Politically speaking, we need to forget the subject *and* transcendence. We should focus on redistributing intensities across the immanent social field of desires. "In a word, the social as well as biological surround-

ings are the object of unconscious investments that are necessarily desiring or libidinal, in contrast with the preconscious investments of need or of interest. The libido as sexual energy is the direct investment of the masses, of large aggregates, and of social and organic fields.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Deleuze 1977, *Anti-Oedipus* 292

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