The thought of stupefaction; or, event and decision as non-ontological and pre-political factors in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou

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> *Etourdit* — Jacques Lacan[1]

> *Studium*: "It goes back to a *st-* or *sp-* root indicating a crash, the shock of impact. Studying and stupefying are in this sense akin: those who study are in the situation of people who have received a shock and are stupefied by what has struck them, unable to grasp it and at the same time powerless to leave hold. The scholar, that is, is always 'stupid.'" — Giorgio Agamben[2]

> "HAMM: What's happening?
> CLOV: Something is running its course" — Samuel Beckett[3]

1. Question of method: Stupefaction & Confrontation

The first problem that arises when confronting a genuine philosopher is that he or she must — at least initially — *stupefy* you. You *must* not know how to respond. If the philosopher has truly introduced (you to) something new, then the existing, received distinctions with which you think will be, by definition, incapable of treating the intervention adequately, at best reducing it to the Procrustean bed of *what is*. Yet if you simply respond to the intervention with uncritical assent, then you also fail the argumentative conditions for philosophy, perhaps even succumbing to a kind of religious enthusiasm. Philosophy will be rational, or it will not be; but if it seeks to reimpose (established) rationality at all costs, it also will not be. The problem of this volatile inch or itch of unreason is bound to the stupefaction of thought. Yet if, as Jacques Derrida once phrased it, "a 'madness' must watch over thinking,"[4] this ought to be taken as a salutary admonition rather than as a conclusion, the beginning of a construction and not a sententious dissolution. So, as always, the stupefying problem is: how to say *yes* and *no* to a philosopher, to philosophy, to philosophizing? *Yes* to the deranging force and to the consequences of new ideas, *no* to the temptations to unreason — all without simply remaining mute? This is the problem of the confrontation of thought.

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[1] J. Lacan, "*Etourdit*," in *Autres Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).
[2] G. Agamben, *The Idea of Prose*, trans. M. Sullivan and S. Whitsitt (Albany: SUNY, nd), p. 64.
[3] This extract functions as Badiou's own epigraph to Book V of *Logiques des mondes* (Paris: Seuil, 2006). Henceforth noted LM followed by a page number in the body of the text.
[4] See J. Derrida, "A 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking" in *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. E. Weber, trans. P. Kamuf et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 339-364.

If Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze share anything, it is that they explicitly affirm and try to think through such a confrontation. Indeed, thought for both is entirely bound up in confrontation, is confrontation. Moreover, it is their very placement of the problem of the confrontation of thought at the heart of thought — and of their own thought — that renders Badiou and Deleuze genuine thinkers. This feature should make us especially cautious in responding to them. Even more disturbingly, their thought of confrontation also develops (and perhaps even has its genesis) in a confrontation with each other's thought — resulting in confronting thoughts of the thought of confrontation *in* (and out of) confrontation itself. Badiou tends, for example, to be direct and declarative in his confrontations, Deleuze indirect and evasive.[5] And if Deleuze's mature thought seems to precede Badiou's, this is not only not necessarily the case — perhaps being an image of reception rather than of the conditions of production — but, even if it were, would not necessarily confirm any priority of origin.

So caution should accompany our stupefaction at their confrontation, or at least entail, as Jacques Lacan put it, trying to take the measure of the necessity of the experience of being stunned or dazed, "*étourdit*." To attempt this seriously means asking: from what possible position could one even go about discussing their confrontation? For this is precisely the point at which one should avoid the temptation of enumerating apparent points of similarity and difference. After all, if one were tempted to do such a thing, it would be only too easy. We know that Deleuze draws on the Stoics, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, and Bergson in the early development of his work, as well as on Leibniz and Foucault; we know he assaults Plato, Descartes, Hegel and psychoanalysis. We know, furthermore, that he draws on allegedly extra-philosophical works — such as those by Lewis Carroll, Marcel Proust, Sacher-Masoch, Samuel Beckett, Francis Bacon and cinema — as integral moments in his program. We know that he assaults traditional ontology, the subject, and truth; that he affirms immanence, univocity, problematisation and creativity in a radical vocabulary that often explicitly departs from the received terminology of the philosophical tradition. We know that he experiments with forms (e.g., non-standard "commentaries," collaborations with Felix Guattari and experimental presentations). As for Badiou, he is for Plato, Descartes, Hegel and Lacan; he thinks of Nietzsche as an "anti-philosopher" and of Deleuze's Spinoza as "an unrecognisable creature." He affirms mathematics, axiomatisation, and the sustenance of a very traditional conceptual armature, for which being, truth and the subject provide the key supports. At the same time, he insists that philosophy is also always *conditioned*, by love, art, science and politics.

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[5] For the exoteric confrontations with each other's thought, see: A. Badiou, *Deleuze: 'La Clameur de l'Etre'* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), translated as *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. L. Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); "Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*," in C.V. Boundas and A. Olkowski (eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1994); "L'ontologie vitaliste de Deleuze" in *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 61-72, translated as *Briefings on Existence*, trans. N. Madarasz (Albany: SUNY, 2006); *Logiques des mondes. L'être et l'événement, 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp. 403-10, translated as "The Event in Deleuze," *Parrhesia*, No. 27 (2007), pp. 37-44; also *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 40; G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1991), pp. 144-5, translated as *What is philosophy?* trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

But such an enumeration would be a mistake, for a number of reasons. First of all, both philosophers explicitly repudiate mediation, in both the common and philosophical acceptations of this term. (Hegel is therefore an enemy against whom both struggle, if in entirely different ways.[6]) Philosophy is not debate or discussion; one does not "compare and contrast" philosophers except in utterly dissatisfactory pedagogical exercises; moreover, there is no available third position from which to survey and adjudicate the situation. Nor is critique — at least in the classical form in which it has been bequeathed to philosophy by Kant — adequate to the task. Indeed, both Badiou and Deleuze treat Kantian critique as among the most virulent of enemies. Both find its epistemological strictures, its legalism, its liberal optimism, its ethical pathology, an affront to what is at stake in thought.[7] Against critique, both attempt to be "affirmative," that is, to construct their concepts beyond the vortices of the *via negativa* or negation.[8]

But one cannot even treat shared affirmations (of affirmation) nor shared dislikes as if they provided a basis for proceeding: the concepts, operations and styles that Badiou and Deleuze object to in their enemies, as well as the ways in which they confront these enemies, are themselves so different that they seem to undo in advance any attempt at unification, reconciliation or resolution. In this vein, it would be only too easy to show how commentaries on Deleuze and Badiou, on Deleuze *and* Badiou, have so far failed the test of stupefaction. "The enemy of my enemy" is certainly not my philosophical friend; nor are the friends of my enemies necessarily my enemies; nor are the enemies of my friends necessarily my enemies. Stupefaction strikes not only our standard routines of separation, but stuns any capacity to know how to go about reconstructing ways to go about making such separations. At the very least, this suggests that Carl Schmitt's theses about sovereignty, the exception, the decision, and the friend/enemy dichotomy are philosophically and perhaps also politically insufficient to think the problem of

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[6] For Deleuze, see especially *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), where Hegel is to be combated as a particularly heinous opponent. For Badiou, the situation is entirely different. A partisan Hegelian in France when just about nobody else was able to be so — *Théorie du sujet* goes so far as to affirm Hegel's absolute correctness — Badiou, despite his rigorous criticisms of Hegel since, will continue to affirm, up to the recent *Logiques des mondes*, that, along with Plato and Descartes, the German thinker is one of the three "essential" philosophers.

[7] See G. Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); A. Badiou, "L'ontologie soustractive de Kant," in *Court traité*, pp. 153-164 and "Kant" in *Logiques*, pp. 245-255 for his specifically *philosophical* intervention, as well as his strong remarks against the *political* consequences of Kantianism in *L'éthique: Essai sur la conscience du Mal* (Poitiers: Hatier, 1994) translated as *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. P. Hallward (London: Verso, 2001) and in *Abrégé de Métapolitique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998) translated as *Metapolitics*, trans. J. Barker (London: Verso, 2005). For an absolutely stunning reading of Deleuze's anti-Kantianism, see Q. Meillasoux, 'Subtraction and Contraction: Deleuze, Immanence, and Matter and Memory,' *Collapse*, No. 3, pp. 63-107.

[8] As Deleuze notes of Nietzsche, "A logic of multiple affirmation, therefore a logic of pure affirmation, and an ethics of joy that corresponds to it, such is the anti-dialectical and anti-religious dream that traverses all of Nietzsche's philosophy," *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1999), p. 20, translated as *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson, foreword M. Hardt (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). In early Deleuze at least, affirmation is integrally linked to an experience of the tragic: "the tragic is only in multiplicity, in the diversity of affirmation as such. What defines the tragic is the joy of the multiple, plural joy," p. 19.

confrontation.[9] Neither will a deconstructive *suspension* of the concept of decision be adequate; the aporias and undecidabilities in which deconstruction delights have as yet not escaped the desultory conclusion that the event, for example, is at once "impossible and necessary." If such a conclusion can appear demonstrably inescapable, this is fundamentally a consequence of method: reading philosophers reading philosophers in order to show how modal inconsistency is "irreducible" (itself calibrated to displace the term "absolute") in the *practice* of writing philosophy.

So we cannot proceed simply according to: i) existing categories and philosophical methodologies; ii) immanent exegesis; iii) compare and contrast; iv) the establishment of "a third way"; or v) methodological suspension. Is the only other option then to decide to be partisan, to take sides for one or the other thinker, to deploy the terms of one against the other? This way, at least, would have the benefit of accepting a kind of confrontation as primary and assuming the burden of a decision whose grounding may well be unjustifiable and obscure. On the other hand, it may well thereby miss the aspect of stupefaction: that the master himself has been stupefied in and by the very concepts that he seems to be so magisterially elaborating.

Our method here will be different from the aforementioned, if it necessarily passes through each of them in turn. Our method will involve isolating a key concept, the "event" for both philosophers. This isolation must involve, at the same moment, a situating of the conditions that impel a return to such a concept: of a situation for thought in which the necessity to think what an event might be has to be seized as a task. On the basis of an outline of this "necessity," we will show how the thought of the event at once emerges from a problematic in which "language" proves to be the threshold for such a thought, and yet cannot, *qua* language, provide an adequate ground for such a thought. As we shall see, both Deleuze and Badiou are forced to engage with a problematic of language in order to rethink the event, albeit in radically different ways. In doing so, we examine the problems each has in trying to think the event. Finally, we return to the consequences that their difficulties have for any contemporary thought of the political.

What we will at least minimally demonstrate is that "the event" is not *simply* a *concept* for both philosophers, but a name for that itch of unreason that stupefies thought, that forces thought to a standstill, demanding new forms of thinking which themselves cannot be resolved except at the cost of inconsistency. As we shall see, neither Deleuze nor Badiou avoid the thought of the event — indeed, their strength is substantially due to their willingness to grapple anew with its exigencies — but, in their attempts to think it, it drives them ever further into stupefying difficulties that force, in turn, further essays of thought that further multiply the difficulties. The key terms in this demonstration will be: *event*; *institution*; *decision*; *polemos*; *multiplicity*; and *affirmation*.

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[9] If J.-F. Lyotard was the first to accuse Badiou of "decisionism" in the latter's theory of the event, he has not been the last; we will return to this accusation below. But note Jason Barker's "Translator's introduction" in *Metapolitics*, e.g., "For Schmitt, one might say that politics as subjective practice was quite simply irrelevant to the structure and endurance of political authority. In *Metapolitics*, by complete contrast, Badiou sets out from the premise that the State (generally capitalised here), instead of being all-embracing or totalitarian, is in fact something akin to a representative fiction, albeit a constitutive one," p. vii.

2. The necessity of the contingency of the event

Why "the event" at all? Precisely because of the logical paradox that arises when attempting to thinking what happens in its happening, in the possibility, the necessity and contingency of its happening. Moreover, since ethics has always been considered as a problem of acting in accordance with what happens, the event tends to name that obscure point at which — to speak like David Hume — "what happens" and "right action" can no longer be taken as either self-evident or compatible. If Aristotle encountered and attempted to treat this problem under the heading of "future contingents," the Christian theological tradition found itself in its own peculiar bind given the necessary omnipotence and omniscience of God in regards to the Fall, which functions essentially as "the event of events" for Judeo-Christianity.

We mention this tradition here because the situation of thought with which we begin — 1960's France — is attempting to de-theologize radically, and finds itself forced to do so in a very particular philosophical conjuncture. If the context and development of recent French thought has received enormous attention from a variety of different positions, we emphasize only a few key elements here, and insofar as they bear integrally on the thought of the event.[10] We will characterise the situation as a knot of legacies and opacities: Heidegger's thought of the event as *Ereignis* and language as the house of being; Hegel as delivering the problem of becoming considered in terms of negation; Saussure's conception of language as a diacritical system of differences which provides a scientific model for a systematic thought of systems. We believe that the emergence of the contemporary French thought of the event — exemplified by Michel Foucault, J.-F. Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, and Badiou — is bound up with the struggle to escape the force-field of these legacies. All these thinkers find Heidegger overwhelming, and his elaboration of the destining of Being as rupture-and-continuity a crucial resource for a diagrammatic reconstruction of heterogeneous discourses. But they also cannot be happy with his characterisation of Being, nor with his politics. They all recognise the crucial need to think *becoming*, to conceptualise how change can occur in situations *à la* Hegel, but outside of any dynamic provided by a logic of negation. They also recognise that Saussure has enabled a new and powerful thought of variant institutional structures, but that he also thereby confirms language *as* institution, as the very paradigm of institution and, in doing so, reduces difference to bundles of oppositions.

This means that a rethinking of the event must confront: traditional conceptions of being; the logics of negation; the primacy of language as the model of institution itself. As no existing techniques, methods or concepts will do, these will have to be invented, and the

[10] See, for instance, B. Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003); J. Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); J. Derrida, "Preface," in C. Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, preface by J. Derrida (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. vii-xlvii; V. Descombes, *Recent French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); F. Dosse, *History of Structuralism Volume 2: The Sign Sets, 1967-Present*, trans. D. Glassman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

exposition will have to take on the reconstruction of the concept of the event as an integral part of its presentation.

If one takes as an entrance point for this reconstruction the relationship between the event and the institution, it is possible to discern three different moments in this relationship in contemporary French philosophy.[11]

The first moment is that of the critique of institutions in the name of difference and desire: Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari.[12] In each case an institution is criticized for imposing artificial norms upon existence, for failing to recognize other modes of existence.[13] The corresponding status of the event is best characterized by Aristotle's term *tuche*, employed in the *Physics*, translated as *hasard* in French, and chance in English.[14] The event as *tuche* happens to a pre-existing institution which either refuses to recognize its occurrence as pertinent, or *manages* the event by isolating it, diverting it, adjusting or mis-categorizing it. The institution reduces the event to the status of an accident; assigns its modality as contingency, and its source as external, the environment.[15] The resultant relation to the event on the part of the institution is one of *indifference*.[16] In his essay 'Force of Law*,'* Derrida critiques precisely such an institution by remobilizing the concept of the event.[17] He argues that there is a founding event that lies, repressed, at the heart of an institution. In the institution that concerns him, the law, this event involves a primordial violence, the violence of the original instituting of the law.[18] This can be generalized as a *genetic* argument: there can be no institution without an original founding event. The first moment of event and institution in contemporary French philosophy thus consists of a *passage from the institution as indifferent to events, to instituting as an original inaccessible event*. Note that in the current age of the privatization of public services and networked capitalism, of a flexible labour force, just-

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[11] These moments do not form a chronological order; indeed, sometimes they occur within the very same work.

[12] Michel Foucault's critical genealogies of psychiatry, the clinic, and the penal system, Jean-François Lyotard's critique of theoretical knowledge in the name of a libidinal economy, Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis in the name of desiring machines…etc.

[13] And for subsequently curing or adjusting or minimizing any social and psychical phenomena judged to be 'abnormal.'

[14] See Book II, Sections 4-6. Aristotle, *La Physique*, trans. A. Stevens (Paris: Vrin, 1999); Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Haride & R.K. Gaye in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[15] Note that the distinction between events and accidents is crucial for this inquiry. In the *Physics* in his examination of the causes of change Book II Section 3, Aristotle seems to suggest that an attribute is an accident as a function of its relationship to what is in question. For example, that the sculptor is called *Polyclete* is an accident from the standpoint of the sculptor as cause of the production of the statue.

[16] We think that each of us may, at one point in our lives, have been treated by a bureaucracy as a kind of accident, as inessential, a brief irritation. We certainly have, especially since moving to France. You know in Australia, when we are lying on the beach after work, we read Kafka and laugh – "it's *so* European"; now, living here... For this reason it is always with great pleasure that I recall…

[17] See J. Derrida, 'Force de Loi: Le "Fondement Mystique de L'Autorité,' in *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol. 11 Nos. 5-6, (July/August 1990), pp. 919-1045.

[18] A violence thus prior to the distinction between legal and illegal violence. It is a reworking of social contract theory: violence does not reside in the state of nature but rather in the act of the sovereign, the legislator, who institutes the social contract.

in-time production and instant adaptation to market fluctuations, this rigid institution/event opposition is in need of updating.

The second moment is the emergence of the event as a *central* term of investigation: from Deleuze's *Logique du sens* (1969) to Badiou's *L'être et l'événement* (1988) to Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* (1992).[19] What these texts have in common, at the very least, is an attempt to dissolve or render inoperable any rigid opposition between event and institution: events and institutions are in *some* manner *coterminous* for these thinkers. For Deleuze, the institution itself, rather than being thought as a more or less static set of rules and procedures, can be thought, in its being, as a continual event, a continual coming to pass.[20]

The third moment in French philosophy's interrogation of the event-institution relationship is the moment of construction: it is a question of thinking the kinds of institutions and practices that can sustain events, that can expand and extend events: Badiou's generic truth procedure; Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic war machine, but also experiments in philosophical writing, such as Derrida's *Glas*. In each case what is at stake is thinking two different processes together – a process of dissemination or deterritorialization and a process of writing or reterritorialization – *without* separating them into a negative phase and a positive phase.[21] There are two sides to this concept of an institution as the expansion of an event: the first takes the French Revolution as its model: an event generates new institutions that seek to preserve its élan, its force and its promise.[22] The second side of this concept is the institution being orientated towards the production of events: such is the effect of a nomadic war machine when it enters into new territory, such is the effect of a manifesto or a happening. The third moment in French philosophy is thus as *prescriptive* as it is descriptive: it seeks to render the institution and the event *practically* coterminous, it is looking to think an institution *as* event.

In other words, the event arises as a triple problem for thought: 1) the problem of thinking *multiplicity* against institutions considered in their broadest sense as regional forces of unification; 2) the problem of the *centrality* of the event, as opposed to its consideration as a marginal or supplemental moment in the elaboration of an ontology; 3) the problem of the *constructibility* of the event, of constructing a concept that can at once account for its welcome and its sustenance. As we shall see, the attempt to rethink the event is so difficult that, in doing so, it threatens to render thought inconsistent. The

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[19] Of course one would have to predate this sequence of texts by adding Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (1936-8).

[20] This is *not* the same as saying 'all is flux': one does not have commit to an overall unity of events in a *general* becoming: an institution can be thought as a particular host, a cloud, a swarm, a thickening of multiple and discrete events. Note that Luhmann's social systems theory would have to be placed as a particular variation on this theme. See, inter alia, N. Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, trans. W. Whobrey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[21] In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida says deconstruction is an event. In *La communauté désoeuvrée*, Jean-Luc Nancy says community is not a work, but can only take place as the unworking of a work.

[22] The effects of such institutions necessarily surpass the vulgar utilitarian criteria of success and failure. This is the place of Sartre's enquiry into the problem of the ossification and gradual inertia of revolutionary groups in *Critique de la raison dialectique*.

challenges are so great that one might even suggest that the attempt to construct a concept of the event ends by having to construct a new concept of concept. Precisely for the reasons we have mentioned, "language" has tended to function as one of the guiding threads of this program. It is with this thread in hand that we now turn to Deleuze.

3. Deleuze on the Event

Deleuze's thought constitutes, from beginning to end, a sequence of experiments about the problem of the event, sense, difference, expression and univocity. Even in such early work as the review of Jean Hyppolite's *Logique et existence*, Deleuze emphasizes that, if ontology is possible, it is not as an ontology of essence or of man, but of "sense." It is by way of a radicalisation of this sense of sense — that is, as *extra-ontological becoming* — that Deleuze's works of the 1960s pursue a theory of the event, most explicitly in his magnificent text from 1969, *The Logic of Sense*.[23]

What Deleuze is clearly attempting in his works of this period is nothing less than a resumption of "classical philosophy," as Badiou himself puts it, if in the guise of its opposite.[24] Yet if, as Badiou also claims, one of the crucial aspects of Deleuze's work is the latter's evasion of the linguistic turn, this is not *quite* the case, for reasons we will examine.[25] The case is much rather, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle puts it in an excellent account, "Deleuze is an integral part of the linguistic turn that characterises classical French theory…But the paradox is that he is also the heir of a tradition of, if not downright hostility to language, at least deep distrust."[26] In a similar way to that in which Derrida attempts to think the Other of language by means of a very peculiar form of empiricism, an empiricism of the text, Deleuze attempts to construct a theory of the event by passing *through* language itself.

In this regard, *The Logic of Sense* is a foundational text, interested still in philosophical foundations, in a way that Deleuze will later reject or, at least, deliberately complicate. One should also note that this book, which Deleuze himself called a "psychoanalytical novel," engages in a radicalisation of the famous Lacanian distinction between "statement" (*énoncé*) and "utterance" (*énonciation*), which insists on the irreducibility of a cleavage within any act of discourse itself.[27] Note, too, the *form* of the book, which, if it

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[23] G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester with C. Stivale, ed. C.V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969).

[24] See A. Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. L. Burchill (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[25] As Badiou recognises in *Logiques des Mondes*, however, Deleuze's theory of the event "communicates with the linguistic turn of the great contemporary sophists, much more than Deleuze would have wished. In maintaining that the event belongs to the register of sense, the entire project finds its ground on the side of language," "The Event in Deleuze," p. 40.

[26] J.-J. Lecercle, *Deleuze and language* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 20. Lecercle continues: Deleuze "never actually wrote a philosophy of language, but *Logique du sens* comes close to it; he never constructed a fully-fledged theory of language, but he gives us a multiplicity of partial theories (of sense, of style, etc.) and language is constantly present as a privileged point of application for theories or concepts that at first sight do not seem directly to concern it," pp. 21-2.

[27] Note that the English translation of the *Logic of Sense* commits the unforgivable error of mistranslating 'psychoanalytical' as 'psychological,' p. xiv.

doesn't yet attain the radical dis-organisation of something like *A Thousand Plateaus*, is nonetheless an explicitly non-traditional book of philosophy, in line with Deleuze's own famous strictures from *Difference and Repetition*: "The time is coming when it will hardly be possible to write a book of philosophy as it has been done for so long."[28] To read *The Logic of Sense*, then, it is advisable to take account of its form, the length and distribution of chapters, their titles, not to mention the relations forged within each chapter between traditional philosophical reference, literary developments, and logical argumentation. As we shall see, this deformation of philosophical presentation is itself a work of philosophical ethics *chez* Deleuze.

Take, for instance, the first entry, "First Series of Paradoxes of Pure Becoming." The "First" here designates three things, first, that it is indeed the first entry in the book; second, that there will be more than one "series" in this book, of which this is the inaugural moment; third, that each chapter is itself a "series." Which has already taken us to the second word, "series," which itself will become a concept in the course of the book's elaboration. This inexorable movement from first to second word already leads us towards something at which we have not yet arrived; that is, to the movement of sense itself (of which more in a moment). As for "paradoxes," here notably *plural*, we will soon find that paradox is one (privileged) way in which sense itself can be exposed as the expressed of a proposition. The adjective "pure" is also crucial, as is the gerund "becoming," but these as yet cannot really be meaningful until the book has been read — and then reread.

The text proper proceeds to open with a very suggestive opposition: between the logician Lewis Carroll's purveying of nonsense and the mathematically-obsessed Plato's distinction between measured things and, precisely, unlimited becomings. From there, Deleuze discusses Stoic logic and ontology, contemporary linguistics, absurd and impossible objects, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Aion and Chronos, Mallarmé, nonsense, good sense and commonsense, Artaud, Husserl, Leibniz, among much else. This linking of the disparate is itself a procedure, and tracing its details leads us into the dark arcana of Deleuze's thought.[29]

In the section entitled "Third Series of the Proposition," Deleuze establishes the bases of the theory. For Deleuze, like the Stoics, is interested here in the proposition as the basic element of language, and identifies "three distinct relations within the proposition." These are: i) denotation; ii) manifestation; and iii) signification. Denotation functions with representations (particular images) which are held to represent a state of affairs. Its paradigm case are indexicals, and its ruling criterion the true and false distinction. Manifestation, by contrast, concerns the utterer of the proposition, and "is presented as a statement of desires and beliefs which correspond to the proposition"; its paradigm case

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[28] G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. vii.

[29] Note, too, that Deleuze always transforms — if he doesn't entirely reconstruct — the work of those upon whom he comments. For an example of how he has deformed the Stoic corpus, see the work of John Sellars, e.g., 'Aion and Chronos: Deleuze and the Stoic Theory of Time,' *Collapse*, Vol. III (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007), pp. 177-205.

is the "I," and its criterion "veracity and illusion." Finally, signification concerns universal and general concepts and their proper syntactic articulation; it establishes general truth-conditions, which are differentiated not from falsity or illusion, but from what would be absurd.

One basic aspect of Deleuze's procedure here is that he is concerned with which of these relations is *primary* in any proposition. He is thus pursuing a general and systematic inquiry into the grounds of language considered as sets of propositions (and not, for instance, judgements). His arguments are designed to show that not one of these relations suffices as primary in every case. For example, if in the order of speech (*parole*), the I is foundational, in this order significations are not strictly speaking *significations* at all, for they are thereby ultimately deployed only as fodder for manifestation, for the expression of beliefs and desires; if one takes language (*langue*) as primary, then significations come into their own, but denotation is likewise compromised (representations of states of affairs being reduced to the legitimacy of their implication and not taken in their reference); at the same time, the phantom of denotation splits signification (premises have to be affirmed as true, i.e., as adequately representing states of affairs, which entails that signification cannot entirely be implicative or tautological), etc.

Not only are none of these relations capable of grounding one another, but none of them are capable of functioning without one another (e.g., the manifestation of beliefs and desires would be impossible without concepts): "From denotation to manifestation, then to signification, but also from signification to manifestation and to denotation, we are carried along a circle, which is the circle of the proposition"(16-7). In order to break this closed circle and ground the proposition, Deleuze is compelled to add a fourth to this list of relations, that of *sense*.

Sense for Deleuze is a "nonexistent entity," which can only present itself as paradox and non-sense. It is essential to note that Deleuze never explicitly defines this term as a concept: in French, *sens* can mean at once "senses," "meaning" and "direction," and Deleuze plays here on the polyvalence of the term without, for all that, ever admitting its equivocity. The very nomination is therefore polemical, not only directed against such dualisms as "the intelligible and the sensible," but against the "more profound and secret [Platonic] dualism" of "limited things" and "a pure becoming without measure."[30] Deleuze argues that sense cannot be reduced to any of the other relations but must be "*both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs*….We will not ask therefore what is the sense of the event: the event is sense itself. The event belongs essentially to language; it has an essential relationship to language"(22). Sense thus provides a non-foundational foundation for *all* relations in the proposition.

If the Stoic and literary references are explicit in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze also confesses his enthusiasm for the great Scholastics. We have already noted the sequencing, or serial, nature of discourse, a feature which may seem trivial in itself, but

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[30] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 1.

in fact becomes a key feature of Deleuze's project. As William of Ockham writes in his *Quodlibetal Questions*:

> a mental proposition is a permanent entity and can exist all at once as a whole at the beginning of the utterance. Therefore, it can be true then; likewise, it can be true in the middle and at the end. By contrast, a spoken proposition is a successive entity, and when one part of it exists, another does not. And since i) the truth of any proposition about the world requires either that the proposition now actually exists or that it has actually existed, and since ii) at the beginning of its utterance a spoken proposition neither does exist nor has existed, it follows that it is not true then. Nor, for the same reason, is it true in the middle of the utterance. Instead, it is true at the end. Even though it does not actually exist at the end, nonetheless it did exist previously — not as a whole all at once, but successively, one part after another.[31]

We can discern in Ockham's remarks something that is also integral to Deleuze. While a proposition is in the course of being expressed, it cannot be said, strictly speaking, either to exist (it is not-yet) or be true (it is not-yet complete). Yet its truth is only evident when the proposition is fully expressed — and therefore no longer exists. The truth of a proposition, moreover, must be open to the possibility of further propositions, which, in turn, render the truth of any particular proposition subject to modifications of sense. And given that, in the uttering of a proposition, it is impossible to say at its beginning where it might end, the idea of "sense" is precisely the sense that it can take many determinations, many directions. This is one reason why the event never *is*, but is always *becoming*; a proposition is never the last or final proposition, because its entire sense will be altered by the addition of further propositions. Yet this "sense" can never be *said* as such, only *expressed*. Its incorporeal subsistence can therefore be most fully shown in paradoxes and nonsense, which open up new zones of problems for thought — without necessarily passing through any activity of questioning, which tends to take interrogative forms driving towards denotation, manifestation or signification.

Deleuze's point is this: paradox and nonsense are ineradicable and insistent features of propositions, which, even as they conform to all criteria of denotation, manifestation and grammar, are nonetheless irreducible to such criteria, and cannot be satisfactorily explained (away) or neutralised by any recourse to the true, the veracious or truth-conditions.[32] Paradoxes present serious difficulties to the thought of universals, for

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[31] William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. A.J. Freddoso and F.E. Kelly (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1991), p. 210. As Deleuze notes, "The Stoics discovered it [sense] along with the event: sense, the expressed of the proposition, is an incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure events which inheres or subsists in the proposition. The discovery was made a second time in the fourteenth century, in Ockham's school, by Gregory of Rimini and Nicholas d'Autrecourt. It was made a third time at the end of the nineteenth century, by the great philosopher and logician Meinong. Undoubtedly there are reasons for these moments: we have seen that the Stoic discovery presupposed a reversal of Platonism; similarly Ockham's logic reacted against the problem of Universals, and Meinong against Hegelian logic and its lineage," LS, p. 19.

[32] We can immediately see why, in a much later work, Deleuze becomes interested in the "formula" of Bartleby the Scrivener from Melville's novella of the same name. Bartleby's notorious "I would prefer not

example, with regards to the problem of infinite regress. This can be verified historically in the key role that paradoxes have played in philosophical inspiration from Epimenides and Zeno to Bertrand Russell and Kurt Gödel. Not only can paradoxes not be simply excluded by logicians, but paradoxes *practically* give rise to entirely new enterprises within thought. Indeed, logicians often find themselves obsessed by paradoxes, and become great inventors of paradoxes in their own right. Such paradoxes clearly also thereby serve a crucial *pedagogical* function for philosophy, which, on Deleuze's description, does not transmit itself by way of a promulgation of doctrine, but through unhinging good and common sense (which directs us, again, to the problematic of what we are calling "stupefaction").

Deleuze's own "propositional calculus" thus situates itself fully in the Stoic and Scholastic tradition of logical analysis and teaching. Not simply anti-Platonic in its sidelining of axiomatic mathematics, it is also anti-Aristotelian insofar as it junks the primacy of predicate logic, and anti-Hegelian insofar as the emergence of sense as the expressed of propositions is entirely affirmative. (Certainly, we still have to be attentive to the fact that the problem of affirmation arises in Deleuze's own confrontation with the traditions of logic and negation.) There is always the possibility — or virtuality — that another proposition can add itself, in a kind of disjunctive synthesis (the "and"), to what has already been said, and in a fashion that is irreducible to the logic of the negation of the negation. There is no transcendence to sense for Deleuze, precisely because it is *immanent* in the proposition as such; it only subsists as *expressed*. What began as something that may have looked like a transcendental inquiry — what are the conditions of the relations within language? — turns out to be a philosophy of immanence. Sense conditions truth, which is a feature of denotation and, as such, unable to function as a ground; it must be, moreover, a-conceptual, because it exceeds any possible capture by signification or truth-conditions in advance.

One must therefore emphasize that Deleuze's theory of the event is both *pragmatic* and *affirmative*.[33] It hinges on the fact that no proposition can truly be first or final, that one

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to" is a very simple and straightforward proposition — not on the face of it nonsensical, paradoxical, or otherwise aberrant — and yet it effects an absolute transformation in the situation in which it is uttered. See G. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. D.M. Smith and M.A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[33] It seems to us that Deleuze — who is notoriously fond of American philosophy and literature, perhaps uncharacteristically so for someone thoroughly identified with the so-called "continental" tradition — is in fact very close to classical American pragmatism. Take, for instance, the following famous remark by William James: "if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed. Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest.* We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one at work. Being nothing essentially new, it harmonizes with many ancient philosophic tendencies. It agrees with nominalism for instance, in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasizing practical aspects; with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions, and metaphysical abstractions," William James, "What Pragmatism Means," in *Pragmatism: A Reader*, ed. Louis Menand (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 97-98. Note the emphasis on openness (or Deleuze's

always begins "in the middle," as it were, in an originary milieu. Moreover, this entails that the "event" is singular, neither one nor multiple: *an* event is also always part of a *series* of modifications through further propositions which constitute the continuing "eventing" of the event.[34] This "eventing of the event" therefore has to be considered as an eternal return of sense as continual novelty (at once a quantitative and qualitative extension of sense); the "same" event never stops coming back (although it never really ever exists as such); the "same" event is always divagating and accreting. This accounts at once for the event's univocity and hyper-differentiation. If there is any part of speech that best shows this intricate unwinding of events, it is the verb form: "Equivocity is always the equivocity of nouns. The Verb is the univocity of language, in the form of an undetermined infinitive, without person, without present, without any diversity of voice."[35] The theory is affirmative in a very straightforward way, too: a proposition is itself a positive addition to what has already been expressed, but what has already been said or expressed in no way determines what may be said or expressed next.[36] Its subsistence accounts for change, without reducing change either to mere alterations in "appearance" or in "reality" ("states of affairs").[37]

"and"), on change ("becoming"), and on "instruments" (comparable to the Deleuzean ideal of philosophical books as tool-boxes), etc.

[34] It would be of interest here to compare the famous Lacanian distinction between "existing" and "insisting": the phallus, which is of course nothing but a lack, nowhere *exists* in language and can never be captured in a proposition, but nonetheless *insists* in every utterance. See "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," in *Ecrits*, trans. B. Fink with H. Fink and R. Grigg (New York & London: Norton, 2006), pp. 412-441. Indeed, the following sounds like a pretty good characterisation of what Lacan means by "phallus": "What are the characteristics of this paradoxical entity? It circulates without end in both series and, for this reason, assures their communication. It is a two-sided entity, equally present in the signifying and the signified series. It is the mirror. Thus, it is at once word and thing, name and object, sense and *denotatum*, expression and designation, etc," *The Logic of Sense*, p. 40. And it would also be of interest to compare the Deleuzian pragmatics with those of J.-F. Lyotard's explicitly Wittgensteinian theory of genres and events, especially in such works as *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans.G. Van Den Abeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and *Just Gaming*, trans. W. Godzich with afterword by S. Weber (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1985), with J.-L. Thébaud. One might, by the same token, contrast Deleuze's logic of sense with that of Emile Benveniste, whose own theory of the event hinges on the linguistic shifter (what Deleuze would call "manifestation") but which bears very many similarities to Deleuzes's, e.g., "La phrase est donc chaque fois un événement différent ; elle n'existe que dans l'instant où elle est proférée et s'efface aussitôt; c'est un événement évanouissant," E. Benveniste, "La forme et le sens dans le langage," *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 227.

[35] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 185.

[36] Despite the temptation to hypostatize Deleuze's favoured terms ("the event," "desire," "sense," "the virtual," "Life," etc.) and to give them a kind of overwhelming Romantic metaphysical pathos, we would like to emphasize here just how careful, logical, and even "commonsensical" these terms begin to appear when one approaches Deleuze's work with an eye to the history of philosophy.

[37] Deleuze summarizes thus: "Events make language possible. But making possible does not mean causing to begin. We always begin in the order of speech, but not in the order of language, in which everything must be given simultaneously and in a single blow. There is always someone who begins to speak. The one who begins to speak is the one who manifests; what one talks about is the denotatum; what one says are the significations. The event is not any of these things: it speaks no more than it is spoken of or said. Nevertheless, the event does belong to language, and haunts it so much that it does not exist outside of the propositions that express it. But the event is not the same as the proposition; what is expressed is not the

We are now also in a position to underline why Deleuze considers the event as: extra-ontological, extra-subjective, and extra-political. It is extra-ontological, because it must be incorporeal, that is, sense *cannot be identified with any particular body* (whether of "matter" or "part of speech") because it is available as such only with the completion of the proposition, and no proposition is in itself complete because it is continually being modified by the very possibility of further additions. It is extra-subjective, because it makes the manifestation of subjectivity possibly (in the sense of desires and beliefs tied to a particular utterer), but it exceeds every possible utterer (even God). It is extra-political, because it exceeds any particular institution, whether of law, grammar, tradition, existing repertoires of acts, what have you. In other words, "the political" is unable to think what happens as becoming. All the notorious predicates that Deleuze aligns here with sense — the event, signs, becoming, incorporeal, superficiality, the neutral, the nomadic, immanence, univocity, etc. — are, despite their rhetorical flavour, in fact rigorously logically assigned.

Yet, precisely because of this assignation, it is tempting to discern the residues of logical negation in Deleuze's project: the event has these predicates and associations precisely because it has to be defined on the basis of what it isn't (i.e., denotation, manifestation, and signification, and all that they imply). Indeed, his logic remains foundational: it is *because* the three relations of language cannot be separated nor function as the ground of the others, that it is necessary to posit a fourth entity to serve as language's condition of possibility; this entity must have these predicates if it is not to be confounded with these other relations.[38]

But if the event is extra-ontological, -subjective and -political, it is eminently *ethical*. This is where the Stoic, Spinozean and Nietzschean elements of Deleuze's philosophy are overwhelming: "Stoic ethics is concerned with the event; it consists of willing the event as such, that is, of willing that which occurs insofar as it does occur."[39] Precisely because there is no possible play in regards to denotation, manifestation and signification (only good or common sense), the only possibility of an ethics, that is, of self-transformation, must emerge in regards to sense. This sense, however, cannot be given any clear direction, code or order, precisely because it only emerges as paradox and nonsense. This is why Deleuze can quite reasonably ask: "Is not Humpty Dumpty himself the Stoic

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same as the expression. It does not preexist it, but pre-inheres in it, thus giving it a foundation and a condition," *Logic of Sense*, p. 181.

[38] Indeed, "Good sense and common sense are therefore undermined by the principle of their production [i.e., sense and nonsense], and are overthrown from within by paradox," *Logic of Sense*, p. 117.

[39] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, p. 143. Which is undoubtedly why Peter Hallward can comment that, "Rather than a philosopher of nature, history or the world, rather than any sort of 'fleshy materialist,' Deleuze is most appropriately read as a spiritual, redemptive or subtractive thinker, a thinker preoccupied with the mechanics of *dis*-embodiment and *de*-materialisation," *Out of this world: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London & New York: Verso, 2006), p. 3. However, we cannot agree with Hallward's conclusions regarding the essentially "theophanic" nature of Deleuze's work; on the contrary, the notion of "creativity" is, as we try to show here, a rather more pragmatic, even anti-theophanic, project. Deleuze is, in other words, entirely engaged with a problematic of the mundane, not the "otherworldly," and if his rhetoric may suggest otherwise, this is to misread the status of the genuine *logic* upon which it is based.

master?"[40] In other words, the event — as a sign of unexpected novelty which derails what seems to have established itself as reality — is what must be taken up by any actor as a force of de-subjectification, and affirmed as such. This is the *power* of paradox, nonsense, humour. It might be better denominated a weak or *impotent power*, since it precisely cannot rely on any established criteria for its apparition, continuance or effectiveness. It is in some essential way performative, but without meeting the basic criteria (position, place, persons and propositions) that someone like J.L. Austin requires for the successful fulfilment of a performative utterance.

But if *The Logic of Sense* proves to be a decisive moment for Deleuze's own thought of the event, it is equally the case that he himself is dissatisfied with this construction. Indeed, throughout his subsequent work — alone, as well as with Guattari and Claire Parnet — he constantly returns to this basic account in order to modify it. Hence we see a shift from "sense" (which, as we have seen, emerged in such writings as the review of Hyppolite and from an encounter with Lacanian psychoanalysis) to entirely different vocabularies in which "the virtual," "Life," "rhizome," "body without organs," etc., come to the fore. This bespeaks, as much as anything, an attempt to turn away from an account founded on language to much broader concerns whose emblem is the biological in the broadest sense, "vitalist."[41] If we can only point to this shift here, it is critical to add that it shows that Deleuze was himself unhappy with his early characterisations of the event, and that, *at the very least*, he found it necessary to renominate it ceaselessly, to try to find better names — or even to *proliferate* names — for the concept. Yet it should also remind us that the problematic of language was never for Deleuze simply one problematic among others; indeed, it is the confrontation with language that enables him to crystallise his thought of the event.

But this shift also raises the problem of Deleuze's politics again, a problem upon which there is only dissent among his interpreters.[42] As Due puts it, "Most commentators

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[40] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, p. 142. Note, again, that Deleuze is always trying to practice the very ethics he outlines: if this is unquestionably a *humorous* remark about Humpty, it is for all that deeply serious. After all, for Deleuze, speaking of Diogenes the Cynic and his jokes (man as featherless biped = plucked chicken; philosophy = a cod on a string): "This exercise, which consists in substituting designations, monstrations, consumptions, and pure destructions for significations, requires an odd inspiration – that one know how to 'descend.' What is required is humor, as opposed to the Socratic irony or to the technique of the ascent," p. 135.

[41] Hence Claire Colebrook can claim that, for Deleuze, "Language is just one structure among others and expresses more profound prehuman differences. The differentiated structures through which we live — such as language or culture — are organised or 'coded' forms of imperceptible differences. These differences are 'imperceptible' precisely because they have not been ordered, organised and represented in any systemic form. Think of the differences in sound that we do not hear in all the different articulations of a word, or the genetic differences that we do not perceive when we identify a group as belonging to the same species," *Understanding Deleuze* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p. xli.

[42] Indeed, it can often seem that the strongest accounts of Deleuze's "politics" derive, not from his intra-theoretical exegetes, but from those who have sought to apply his theories to worldly phenomena. See for example M. Hardt and A. Negri. *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); M. de Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Swerve, 1991); B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke UP, 2002).

disagree sharply on the further issue: is Deleuze a political philosopher?"[43] So Todd May will write that: "Life…is the fundamental political category. It provides the underlying grid for Deleuze's multifarious political analyses. It is the value to be realized in and through political action," although Deleuze "shies away from offering a specific political program. To do so would be a betrayal of micropolitics, which finds the intertwining of the productive and the repressive in specific situations rather than in programs that can be realized across situations."[44] For his part, Paul Patton remarks, "Deleuze and Guattari do not offer a concept of the political as such. Rather, they provide a series of concepts in terms of which we can describe significant features of the contemporary social and political landscape."[45] Yet Philippe Mengue will propose that:

> If Deleuze offers us very powerful tools for emancipating us from the weight of the past, and encourages us to commit matricide towards History, matrix of modernity, he only turns us from it to throw us into becomings, certainly ahistorical, but eventually severed from every possible social and political effectuation. Whence the effacement of his political influence, and the disappearance of active struggles in his wake, and that of Foucault. Deleuze did not know how much all that he wrote treated of an *ethics* (non moralist, non-Kantian, actually postmodern) and not of a politics, even "micro." His mistake was to believe that he was still within politics, whereas he had already fled towards the new earths of an autonomous ethics emancipated from juridico-politics and revolution.[46]

Note also that the zones of art, science and philosophy don't come to terms with politics as a thought: while Deleuze from the first wants to place philosophy alongside art and science, he consistently overlooks the "political" as a field in itself.[47] Towards the end of his life, Deleuze is still affirming the same: in *What is philosophy?* he speaks of the three programs of art, science and philosophy — but not of politics or the political. This is probably because philosophy, as commentators like Patton have emphasized, is *itself* a

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[43] Reidar Due, *Deleuze* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 6. Due himself slots Deleuze's work into three basic periods: 1) 1950s-1970, in which Deleuze is a French academic philosopher, first historian then independent, a period which culminates in DR and LS; 2) 1970s-early1980s, where he collaborates extensively with Guattari on social and political theory; 3) 1980s-1994, Deleuze's turn to "aesthetics" (Francis Bacon, literary criticism, etc.). This periodisation, useful as it is however, is too clumsy to account for the subtle mutations in Deleuze's theory of the event.

[44] T. May, "The Politics of Life in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze." *SubStance*. Vol. 20, No. 3 (1991), p. 24/33.

[45] P. Patton, *Deleuze and the Political: Thinking the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 133.

[46] P. Mengue, *Deleuze et la question de la démocratie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p. 17.

[47] See, for example, "Every philosophy must achieve its own manner of speaking about the arts and sciences, as though it established alliances with them. It is very difficult, since philosophy obviously cannot claim the least superiority, but also creates and expounds its own concepts only in relation to what it can grasp of scientific functions and artistic constructions. […]. Philosophy cannot be undertaken independently of science or art. It is in this sense that we tried to constitute a philosophical concept from the mathematical function of differen*t*iation and the biological function of differen*c*iation, in asking whether there was not a statable relation between these two concepts which could not appear at the level of their respective objects. Art, science and philosophy seemed to us to be caught up in mobile relations in which each is obliged to respond to the other, but by its own means," *Difference and Repetition*, p. xvi.

political act.[48] Or, as John Rajchman puts it: "Often it is a matter of making visible problems for which there exists no program, no plan, no 'collective agency,' problems that therefore call for new groups, not yet defined, who must invent themselves in the process in accordance with affects or passions of thinking prior to common cognition and its codes."[49]

What is certain is this: Deleuze's theory of the event is initially derived from his confrontation with a theory of language; this theory is pragmatic, logical, systematic and consistent if one accepts Deleuze's starting point in regards to denotation, manifestation and signification; it must be extra-personal, -ontological and -conceptual in its own terms; it must also be ethical in the peculiar form he assigns. Yet he himself is not altogether satisfied with this attempt, and returns to it throughout his oeuvre under a swarm of different names and, indeed, by attempting to rupture with language by turning to other interlocutors, other fields.

What is also certain is this: Badiou, in his own confrontation with Deleuze, recognises the strength of this account, and also recognises that it permits him, in turn, to construct another concept of event which also integrally involves paradox and nonsense. But rather than passing through logic and language, Badiou will do so by means of a doctrine of mathematics that breaches any compact with language.

4. Badiou on the Event

The comparison of Deleuze and Badiou's philosophy has become a commonplace of commentary since the original French publication of Badiou's *Deleuze* in 1997, and its translation into English in 2000.[50] This commonplace has built up an entire battery of secondary commonplaces: Deleuze is or is not a thinker of the One, Badiou is or is not an analogical thinker, etc. The most frequent of these commonplaces are those that frame the very comparison: "Badiou has not understood Deleuze on univocity or problematics"; "Badiou's paradigm is the stellar matheme, whilst Deleuze's is vitalist." The commonplace of commonplaces is thus quite simply that Badiou and Deleuze have different philosophies; and so the very least one might expect is that Badiou has a *different* concept of the event. But why even start with such a premise? Is it even

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[48] As Patton says, "Gilles Deleuze does not conform to the standard image of a political philosopher. He has not written about Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau and when he has written on philosophers who rate as political thinkers, such as Spinoza or Kant, he has not engaged with their political writings. He does not address issues such as the nature of justice, freedom or democracy, much less the principles of procedural justification. His work shows an almost complete lack of engagement with the central problems and normative commitments of Anglo-American political thought. Explicitly political concerns are not the largest part of his oeuvre and they emerged relatively late in his career," *Deleuze and the Political: Thinking the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

[49] J. Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 8.

[50] See Badiou's own defense of his position on Deleuze in "One, Multiple, Multiplicities" in A. Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, trans R. Brassier & A. Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004). See also Todd May, "Deleuze on the One and the Many" and Daniel W. Smith, "Badiou and Deleuze on the Ontology of Mathematics" in P. Hallward (ed.), *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 67-76, 77-93; Daniel W. Smith "Mathematics and the Theory of Multiplicities: Deleuze and Badiou revisited," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2003).

philosophical? How do we know that there are two concepts of the event at stake here? Because we have two different proper names, 'Deleuze' and 'Badiou'? Because the texts we refer to have different titles, '*Logique du sens'* and '*L'être et l'événement*'?

Let's suspend such a question and begin the conceptual analysis of the status of the event in Badiou's work *without* assuming that it is necessarily different to Deleuze's event. To do so let's pick up the line of investigation announced above — the three articulations of event and institution in contemporary French philosophy — and decide whether they are all reflected within Badiou's philosophy.

In his latest work, *Logiques des mondes*, which is the companion volume to *Being and Event*, Book V is consecrated to a study of forms of change. Badiou begins this study by clarifying the disposition of set theory ontology, category theory phenomenology, and the thinking of events and processes of change. He states that neither ontology, nor his logics of worlds have the resources to think change: "The transcendental analytic of being-there, or the formal theory of worlds, the Greater Logic, leaves untouched the question of change"(LM, 377). In *Being and Event*, he says "ontology has nothing to say about the event" and ontology cannot "formalize the law of the subject" (BE, 190, 410). Again, in *Logiques des mondes,* he states, "Being qua being is pure multiplicity. For this reason it is absolutely immobile in accordance with Parmenides' powerful original intuition…it tolerates neither generation, nor corruption"(LM, 377). Change, on the other hand, is defined as "that which imposes upon the world in which it occurs a real discontinuity," or as a "singularity," which is a being that cannot be thought solely in reference to its worldly context, a being with which a thinking begins (LM, 377). And so here we have a variation on the first moment articulating event and institution in French philosophy: a rigid opposition between immobility and real change. The equivalent of the institution would be the symbolic order of set theory and its writing of pure multiplicity.

However, immediately following this passage, Badiou qualifies his remarks and modifies his position. He states that "the appearing of a being in a world is the same thing as its modifications in this world, without any discontinuity and thus any singularity"(LM, 378). Badiou thus incorporates into his philosophy an understanding of appearance as woven from micro-changes. There is no development of this idea in *Logiques des mondes*. That to appear in a world is to be modified is quite clear; beings, after all, can appear in more than world and thus receive different transcendental indexations of their intensity according to the relations they enter into with other appearing beings in a particular world. What is *not* so clear is how a transcendental indexation can be modified within a world, without what he defines as real change taking place.

In any case, this idea of appearing as being-modified is similar in some respects to the Stoic ontology Deleuze lays out in *Logique du sens*. For the Stoa, any situation whatsoever consists, on the one hand, of bodies and their arrangements or states of affairs, and, on the other hand, of events, of actions, expressed by verbs which describe not so much beings as manners-of-being (LS, 14). Let's focus on this emergence, in the midst of Badiou's philosophy, of a possible conception of institutions as being woven from series of micro-events. It is difficult to avoid employing organic or military-

religious metaphors in characterizing this conception: the *life* of the institution consists of millions of actions, exchanges, encounters; an institution is a *host* of events.

However, there is a problem with this conception. When Badiou says that "all appearing is modification," he does not distinguish those appearing-beings that are institutions. When the Stoics, at least in Deleuze's account, distinguish between bodies, states of affairs and events, they do not distinguish that particular conglomeration of bodies and events that is an institution. What do we call an institution amidst this thick cloud of micro-events, this stream of tiny happenings? Is it the coagulation of repeated series of particular kinds of event? Perhaps it is the occurrence of predictable sequences of events; the emergence of temporal and spatial orders and the sowing together of events into regulated processes or procedures.

But then a further problem arises: what distinguishes an event that reproduces the institution from an event that regularly takes place within its temporal and spatial borders yet is accidental to its reproduction?[51] For instance, we all know that gossip, black humour, infighting and backstabbing and breakdowns in supplies and equipment are repetitive, predictable events that take place within and according to the temporal and spatial orders of an institution – but do they form part of the institution? One must respond in the affirmative. We all know that without such events these institutions — exemplarily, poorly funded public institutions, like hospitals, schools and universities — would fall apart.[52]

Deleuze has a readymade solution for distinguishing an institution: the dualist ontology of the Stoa which admits both events *and* bodies in particular arrangements. If one can *first* determine an institution as a particular arrangement of bodies, and *then* consider the host of events impacting upon it, one has no problem distinguishing one institution from another, not to mention from the accidents of daily life. Badiou, however, cannot have recourse to a dualist ontology. He has a monism of pure multiples. How is he going to resolve this question? One could argue that, in fact, Badiou does end up implicitly adopting a dualist ontology with his division between being-qua-being as pure multiple, and the 'there is' of events.[53] However, Badiou is very explicit when he states that events

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[51] Donald Davidson raises a number of related problems in his work on events within the philosophy of action. If we admit particular events, alongside things, into our ontology, are these events unique for each phrase that refers to them, or can two different phrases refer to the same event? If events are repeated, do we have to admit two types of event, particular events (e.g., *going for a walk on Wednesday the 26th September*) and universal or atemporal events (e.g., *going for a walk*)? Davidson's approach to ontology is to develop coherent theories of the semantics of everyday language, of what ordinary phrases like "Sebastian wandered around Boulogne at 2a.m." require in terms of existing entities to make sense. Note that for Badiou one first needs a theory of pure multiplicity before one can speak of semantics, and the only semantics he recognizes is the definition of a set in the axiom of separation. See D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

[52] If we do not bitch about our colleagues, scorn our students and curse the photocopier, at least once a day, we are either dead, psychotic, or somewhere else earning real money. As Theodor Reik once put it, "A thought-murder a day keeps the psychiatrist away."

[53] The only interaction between these two dimensions involves the "traces" that the eventhood of set theory itself leaves in set theory, in the form of the axiom of choice and the undecidable excess of an infinite set's powerset over itself.

are not a second kind of entities, over and above pure multiplicities: strictly speaking, there are no such entities; they are impossible within the discourse of set theory-ontology. So Badiou cannot have recourse to a dualist ontology.

Of course, both at the level of ontology and at the level of his phenomenology, his logics of appearing, Badiou can give an account of the unity of any being or phenomena whatsoever. This is the entire point of his theory of the object in Book 3 of *Logiques des mondes*. His account of ontological unity is slightly less robust insofar as he can say that any being whatsoever, however one slices up a concrete situation — chairs in this room, chairs and dust in this room, etc. — any being whatsoever is both a pure multiplicity and a unity, a counting-for-one. But if we accept his accounts of ontological and phenomenological unity we still don't have a specific account of the particular unity of institutions, understood as a host of micro-events, of little modifications.

Now the closest thing Badiou has to an account of institutions is the theory of the state in his ontology: the state consists of all of the possible regroupings or re-presentations of the presented elements of its situation. However — and this is where it gets interesting — for set-theory ontology, given an infinite set or situation, it is impossible to know the limits of its state; it is impossible to know by how much the state exceeds the original situation in the number of its elements. In set-theory terms, the state of a situation is schematised by the powerset of an initial set and the quantitative excess of the powerset — the set of all subsets, of all regroupings of elements — is unassignable. Except, that is, in one peculiar situation: it *is* possible to decide on the quantity of a powerset by means of a particular mathematical procedure called "forcing," which is designed to construct, using the language of the set, an indiscernible subset called the "generic set." For Badiou, this generic set writes the multiple-being of genuine change, of real discontinuity in a world. The existence of a possible decision via forcing of the quantity of the powerset translates — in Badiou's theory of change — into the thesis that it is only within a procedure of global structural change that a measure can be found of the state's excess. In other words, the institution of the state can only be distinguished, its measure taken, within a process of sustained dysfunction and construction that produces a new overall situation.

We have gone a little quickly here, presupposing a familiarity with the entirety of *Being and Event*. Let's recapitulate by analyzing the different conceptions of the event Badiou needs to mobilize in this theory of change as measure of the state. The first is the event as *tuche*, as chance encounter. The second is the event as symptom of something larger running its course, in Hamm's words, which also implies the notion of an event-like interpretative cut which names the symptom. Finally, the fourth conception is that of the expansion of the event into a global procedure of change, complete with its own "counter-institutions."

For a global change to occur, it must be initiated by an anomalous, punctual rupture that occurs by chance at a specific point — termed an "evental site" — within a situation. This rupture has no assignable cause, and there are no criteria, at the level of the state, or the level of knowledge — what we are here terming the institution — for deciding

whether or not this occurrence belongs to the situation or not.[54] Here we find again our classic rigid opposition between institution and event, the first romantic moment of contemporary French philosophy. Badiou claims that this punctual event falls into the category of "what-is-not-being-qua-being." It thus cannot be assigned a cause, which would be another pure multiple. This is somewhat difficult to understand. It gives the event the flavour of a miracle or a *Deus ex machina*: indeed a journal issue devoted to Badiou was entitled "Miracles do Happen" by its editor, Dominiek Hoens, and more than one commentator has the term "miracle" (or near-synonyms) in the title of their article on Badiou's philosophy.[55]

Not only that, but in order for the event to gain consistency in a situation it must be named and its undecidable belonging to the situation must be decided. This is called the intervention, and many commentators see this as a second event. In *Logiques des mondes*, Badiou acknowledges the problem with his concept of the event, evental site and intervention in *Being and Event* and proposes the following reworking of his theory. He fuses the concept of event and evental-site by proposing that an event is a particular type of site, where a site is a self-reflexive multiple; that is it refers to itself in its own appearing; that is it objectivizes itself. One no longer needs some miraculous transcendental agency that recognizes and names the events; these site-events name themselves. However, this self-reflexivity, which was solely reserved for the event in the earlier theory, gives these sites a measure of sovereignty; they *separate* themselves from the transcendental regulation of the appearing of their world (LM,380).

The problem with this solution proffered by *Logiques des mondes* is that it results, in Aristotelian terms, in a proliferation of little prime-movers; moreover, these sites still emerge from nowhere, so we still have *deus ex machina*; and, insofar as they are self-movers, they are spontaneous and *automata*. From the event as pure accident, we move to the event as *automaton*, as self-institution. This proliferation of little prime-movers, although polytheistic, is still too religious.[56] Into the bargain, the related thesis of event and the intervention resulting in the momentary exposure of the being of the situation, of its inconsistent multiplicity via the interruption of the count-for-one, is too much like God opening the heavens. To be exact, it resembles Jean-Luc Nancy's pious domestication of Bataille via Heidegger in his conception of the "unworking of communities."[57]

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[54] The event arises most forcefully in *Being and Event*: there it is considered as "extra-being," a two-without-concept whose uptake by a subjective decision founds the work of fidelity. The event is split: between a nomination and a vanishing fragment of being, so an event is never one but always bifurcated in a heterogeneous doublet. The role of language is critical: to get away from it, Badiou does two things: i) he makes mathematics ontology, rigorous, well-founded; ii) he renders language for the event a name, that is, a nomination that precisely ruptures with all sense. The event is bifurcated between a meaningless signifier (therefore stripped from language) and a disappearing void (therefore non-existent). It is by this that Badiou ruptures with the domination of the linguistic turn. On the rigour of Badiou's use of mathemtics, see J. Clemens, "Doubles of Nothing: The problem of binding Truth to Being in the Work of Alain Badiou," *Filozofski vestnik*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2005), pp. 97-112.

[55] See D. Hoens (ed.), "Miracles Do Happen," *Communication and Cognition*, Vol. 37, No. 1-2 (2004); D. Bensaïd, "Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event," in *Think Again*, pp. 94-105.

[56] This polytheism, despite all appearances, could be an answer to Jean-François Lyotard's call for a new paganism in the opening of *Economie Libidinale* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974).

[57] See also Zizek's concept of the vanishing mediator between two regimes of the discourse of the master.

Our target here is a particular modality of Badiou's philosophy, a particular line of thought in his work from 1966 till the present day, that thinks change as an instant transformation of a global regime through the conversion of impossibility into necessity and possibility via a nomination.[58] There is also another solution. In *Being and Event*, the matheme of the event is its name plus elements of the evental site. By definition, these elements of the evental site belong to another situation: the evental site can thus be defined as an underground intersection of situations. In Aristotle, *tuche* is figured precisely as two people meeting in the market, as an intersection between two separate chains of causality: this is an event as encounter. But for Badiou, intersection is not enough because we *also* need a moment of reflexivity to have an event: an event belongs to itself. What we need is a moment of self-naming.

An event names itself through its encounter with a very particular situation, which is another truth procedure, another militant thinking. For example, in *Théorie du sujet*, Badiou grounds Marxist philosophy in the primacy of political practice by arguing that *Das Kapital* is the sedimentation of the experience of militants in the political rebellions of the nineteenth century. He argues, using a psychoanalytic analogy, that Marx interpreted the "social hysteria" of the nineteenth century revolts in France as *symptoms of something lying beneath* — a *hypokeimenon*. In other words, beneath the anarchic surface of political events, Marx read the emergence of a new subject: the proletariat, which carried within itself as part of its very becoming a historical project for the transformation of the political sphere. In the opening arguments of *Being and Event*, justifying his opening thesis that mathematics is ontology, Badiou states that he reads set theory as a symptom in mathematics (BE,21). In each case it is the interpretation — the location and nomination — of the symptom that opens up that which lies beneath, whether it be the historical project of the proletariat or the native ontology of mathematics. The effect of such an interpretation is to unite otherwise disparate phenomena — rebellions, mathematical symptoms — into a consistent procedure and expand the horizon of that procedure beyond the particular finite enquiry which encounters the symptom. In this case, it is the interpretation that institutes the event, that prevents it from vanishing. For Badiou, the event itself is existentially fragile: it appears so as to disappear.

In Badiou's theory of change, what follows the naming of the event is a series of finite investigations of the consequences of the event's belonging to the situation. These investigations, whose trajectory is not predetermined and is thus hazardous, decide whether or not certain multiples encountered in the situation are connected to the name of the event or not. Those multiples that are connected to the event are grouped together and

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[58] Oliver Feltham calls this modality or voice of change in Badiou's work *the eagle*. There are other bestial voices at work in Badiou's work, namely the *old mole*, and the *owl*, but there isn't time to meet them here. The event as miracle, arriving from nowhere, instantly exposing the being of the situation: all of this is the eagle speaking. As Deleuze notes in *Logic of Sense*, "The popular and the technical images of the philosopher seem to have been set by Platonism: the philosopher is a being of ascents; he is the one who leaves the cave and rises up. The more he rises the more he is purified," p. 127. See also Derrida's punning on Hegel and "*aigle*" [eagle] in *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey and R. Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

they gradually form what Badiou calls, after the work of the mathematician Paul Cohen, a "generic multiple." A generic multiple is a sub-multiple (subset) of the situation, which is indiscernible according to the established categories of the state of the situation. Badiou writes:

> What happens in art, in science, in true (rare) politics, and in love (if it exists), is the coming to light of an indiscernible of the times, which, as such, is neither a known or recognized multiple, nor an ineffable singularity, but that which detains in its multiple-being all the common traits of the collective in question: in this sense, it is the truth of the collective's being (BE, 17).

For every property that is named, this indiscernible multiple contains at least one element that negates that property, yet at the same time it also contains at least one element that affirms that property. For this reason it can be said that the generic multiple is not only indiscernible but *generic* in that it contains a little bit of everything. The only common property it possesses is that of existence, and this is why Badiou claims that the generic is the truth of the situation; it is an immanent part of that situation that shares its being, and nothing more.

The infinite multiplication of finite investigations into the consequences of the event results in what Badiou calls a "generic truth procedure." The punctual discontinuity of the event is thus extended into a long division, a division of the situation that creates a new consistency: from the perspective of militants, this consistency, this connection of different political episodes, a *hypokeimenon*. From event to hypokeimenon, from external contingency to internal necessity: this is a movement that fuses the event with a peculiar type of institution, one Badiou names a "counter-state." Badiou thus surpasses the romantic opposition of punctual event and static institution by conceiving of a mobile instituting force that takes place through local enquiries into the texture of a situation from the standpoint of the event. This is not the same operation as the institutionalisation of an event, understood as its integration and domestication within an already existing set of institutions. Rather, the counter-state is always posterior to an event, and its consistency is continually renewed through a series of micro-decisions concerning the belonging of the event to the situation. In other words, the counter-state represents the living dialectic of the event with its consequences, and the maintenance of conflict in the form of the division of the situation in two: this is the work of the old mole. In Badiou's philosophy, division is thus a mode of institutionalisation inasmuch as it is joined to a selective work of synthesis, a knitting together of investigations. This means that the generic multiple is neither pure in its election nor ubiquitous in its embrace: as it institutes it maintains the eventhood of the event precisely through these divisive syntheses. Not every model of classroom interaction, for example, can be embraced as an educational incorporation of the Revolution's values of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The work of the enquiries into the event's consequences is guided by what Badiou calls the "operator of fidelity." In the generic truth procedure of set theory, he identifies this operator as deduction. For example, Barbara Formis, in her work on the generic truth

procedure of Fluxus and Allan Kaprow following the event of the ready-made, argues that the operator of fidelity is the ready-made understood as *gesture* rather than as work of art.[59] The operator of fidelity simply decides whether or not a particular multiple is connected to the event or not. It so happens that the first connection between the name of the event and certain multiples is established by the intervention itself. The matheme for the event is $e_x = \{e_x \, / \, x \in X\}$ where e_x is the name of the event, and the $x \in X$ are the elements of the evental site. As we argued above, the evental site is constituted from an intersection of the initial situation with a heterogeneous situation. Part of the work of the enquiries can thus be understood as an *elaboration* of the initial conjunction — senseless from the point of view of the state — *between* the name of the event and the evental site. Hence, insofar as the enquiries gradually accumulate the number of multiples connected to the event, they can also be understood as an *expansion* and *extension* of the evental site, and thus of the intersection with the heterogeneous situation. Indeed, in *Logiques des mondes* this conception becomes quite explicit. A site only becomes an event if its consequences have a maximal intensity, and if they include the conversion of the site's "inexistent" multiple — the one with minimal intensity of appearance, or self-identity — into a maximal intensity of appearance (LM, 396).

In the end, for Badiou what eventually belongs to the being of the event is thus the entirety of the generic truth procedure that elaborates its consequences. In a certain sense, the event is rendered equivalent to the procedure of change that *institutes* a new supplemented situation: what Badiou calls the "generic extension." But if Badiou's rare and punctual event is rendered equivalent to the coming into being of a new situation, then aren't we uncomfortably close to Deleuze's conception of any state of affairs being also a host of events, or to what we termed above in our exegesis of Deleuze: "the continuing 'eventing' of the event"?

One or two concepts of the event: one or two philosophers?

Would this be the event's final act of stupefaction — confounding our love for proper names?

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[59] See B. Formis, "Event and Ready-made: Delayed Sabotage*," Communication and Cognition: Miracles do Happen: Essays on Alain Badiou*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2004), pp. 247-261.