

## Alain Badiou: From Ontology to Politics and Back

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A review essay of Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), and Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

A sense of expectation greets these two new translations of the work of Alain Badiou. For, first of all, it is the magnum opus *Being and Event*,<sup>1</sup> originally published in France in 1988, that provides the theoretical basis for those Badiouian propositions which have already provoked both strong interest and uproar in the English speaking philosophical world. Texts such as, *Manifesto for Philosophy*,<sup>2</sup> *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*,<sup>3</sup> *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*,<sup>4</sup> and *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*,<sup>5</sup> were all originally published in French after 1988 and, despite their clarity, presuppose in many ways an understanding of the singularly novel ontology outlined in *Being and Event*. Its translation is thus not only a major contribution to our contemporary English speaking philosophical scene; it also coincides with an established and indeed growing interest in Badiou's work as a whole.

Secondly, it is Badiou's "politics" which has thus far generated the most attention, due in no small measure to his *Ethics*, which swims against most of the currents in contemporary political thought: liberalism, communitarianism, identity politics and the politics of difference and alterity, to name but a few. *Metapolitics*<sup>6</sup> thus arrives as a welcome follow up to the *Ethics* and a clarification of Badiou's political

commitments. As will be seen, however, *Metapolitics* also presupposes and gains depth from a prior reading of *Being and Event*.

Apart from the sheer ambition of these two works, the novelty and scope of whose claims will cause much ink to be spilt, what will strike the reader (with the appropriate patience) is their systematic coherence. What is revealed in these two texts is a unity of thought that defies any criticism based on a piecemeal approach (such as is often directed at foreign language philosophers, the publication of whose translated texts do not follow the same chronology as their originals). Indeed, the internal consistency of Badiou's philosophy is of such importance as to warrant an examination of it. What is here proposed is thus a schematic overview of *Being and Event*—of its structure, its major arguments and some points of entry into the text—followed by an outline of *Metapolitics*, showing how it is to be understood as, in Badiou's words, the “political condition” of philosophy recorded “in conformity with the parameters of ontology” (M 72). As will be seen from the little that can be discussed here, there is much in these two works to keep us engaged for some time. Time enough, perhaps, for Badiou's second magnum opus—appropriately titled *Être et événement tome II: Logiques des mondes* (*Being and Event II: The Logics of Worlds*) and published in French at the start of 2006—to appear in English translation.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Being and Event***

The aim of *Being and Event* is to establish two major claims. The first is that “ontology = mathematics,” or more precisely, that what can be said of being-*qua*-being can only be said by set theory (BE 13). The second and related claim is that, insofar as it is punctured by an “event” (Cohen's “proof” of the un-measure of multiple being), being-*qua*-being can only be said by set theory “as a truth”: a “truth” which philosophy alone can affirm as such, but for which set theory can nevertheless think the sayable *being* (BE 18). Badiou sets out to demonstrate these two theses through a series of thirty-seven “meditations.” Some of these meditations are “conceptual”: they develop and arrange the concepts and problems which are necessary for the trajectory of thought which Badiou proposes. Other meditations deal with the mathematical discourse appropriate to establishing the above claims. Others, finally, take the form of interpretations of certain

figures in the history of thought who “anticipate” various facets of Badiou’s project. This review will confine itself, for the most part, to the first two types of meditation, for the simple reason that Badiou’s forays into the history of philosophy do not so much advance his argument as contextualize it, allowing us to read retrospectively the historical development of, as he writes, the “mathematical regulation of the ontological question” (BE 435).

The very first meditation sets out a conceptual problem upon which Badiou’s entire project hinges: that of the relationship between the one and the multiple. It can be unpacked as follows. On the one hand, any presented concrete thing must be *one*: *this* thing is always *a* thing. On the other hand, it is generally held that presentation itself is *multiple*: it is only ever a more or less confused manifold that is synthesized (or “counted as one,” as Badiou will say). Given this situation, if we ask whether being is one or multiple, we find ourselves at an impasse. For, if being is one, then the multiple cannot be. But it has just been said that presentation itself is multiple and there cannot be any access to being outside of all presentation. Now, however, if we affirm that being is multiple, we cannot simultaneously affirm that being is equivalent to the one. And yet it is clear that there is a presentation of *this* multiple only if what is presented is one. Badiou then states that such a deadlock can only be broken by a decision which he does not hesitate to make. The one, he says, is *not*. Or rather, the one is a *result*, a presented multiplicity which has been *counted for one*. Such a consistent multiplicity is called a *situation*, and every situation must have a corresponding *structure* which is the operator of the count-as-one (BE 23-24).

The general picture that ensues from this decision is the following: every identifiable “thing” is in situation. Every being is a consistent multiplicity, counted for one. What is not in situation, therefore, can only be qualified as *no-thing*. “There are” only situations or consistent one-multiples, and these must all be downstream from a structuring or counting operation (whatever this may turn out to be). Indeed, for Badiou, even ontology is a structured situation. But now, if it is agreed that the one is only ever a *result*, it follows that *upstream* from any possible count-as-one there must be, and can only be, *inconsistent* multiplicity. At the limit, therefore, if the one is always already a result, inconsistent multiplicity—this *no-thing* which is outside of any situation—must be presupposed as the very “stuff” that is counted

and hence the pure unqualified being of any possible being (BE 24-25).

Now, since being is presented in every presentation, and since everything that “is” must be in situation, this unqualified being could itself only “be” insofar as it is counted for one. So then, what could the structure be—that is to say, what could the science be—of this being *qua* being? In other words, what could *ontology* be? It must be a situation capable of presenting inconsistent multiplicity *as* that from which every “in-situation” thing is composed. It must “present presentation” in general (BE 27-28). The only way that ontology can do this, following Badiou, is by showing in its very structure that inconsistent multiplicity exists and that everything in the ontological situation is composed out of it, without, however, giving this no-thing any other predicate than its pure multiplicity. We are now led to the statement of Badiou’s first thesis: the axioms of set theory fulfill this *a priori* condition of any possible ontology, since they both declare that the no-thing—what Badiou will call the *void*—exists and give only an *implicit* definition of what they operate on: the pure multiple (BE 28-30, 52-59).

So how does the Zermelo-Fraenkel (ZF) axiom system fulfill the above analyzed pre-ontological requirements? First of all, it reduces the “one” to the status of a relationship: that of simple *belonging*, written  $\in$ . In other words, everything will be presented, not according to the one of a concept, but only according to its relation of belonging or counting-for-one. ‘Something =  $\alpha$ ’ will thus only be presented according to a multiple  $\beta$ , written  $\alpha \in \beta$  or ‘ $\alpha$  is an element of  $\beta$ ’. Secondly, ZF has only one type of variable and hence does not distinguish between “objects” and “groups of objects,” or between “elements” and “sets.” “To be an element” is not an intrinsic quality in ZF. It is a simple relation: to-be-an-element-of. Thus, by the uniformity of its variables, the theory can indicate, without definition, that it does not speak of the one, and that all that it presents in the implicitness of its rules are multiples of multiples: multiples belonging to or presented by other multiples. Indeed, and thirdly, via the “axiom of separation,” ZF affirms that a property or formula of language does not directly present an existing multiple. Rather, such a presentation could only ever be a “separation” or sub-set of an already presented multiplicity. A property only determines a multiple under the supposition that there is already a presented multiple (BE 43-48). Everything thus hinges on the determination of an initial multiple. But as seen above, if the one is

only a “result,” then there must be, upstream from any count, inconsistent multiplicity, and it is this which is counted. It appears, then, that this inconsistent multiple—the void—must be the absolutely initial multiple.

But how can the void have its existence assured, and in such a way that ontology can weave all of its compositions from it alone? As Badiou says, it is first of all by making this nothing *be* through the assumption of a pure proper name:  $\emptyset$  (BE 66-67). This is the task of the axiom of the void: it presents or “names” the void *as* the set to which no-thing belongs. This not to say that the void is thereby *one*. What is named is not the one of the void, but rather its *uniqueness*: its “unicity.” In what sense is the void unique? Another axiom of ZF tells us this. This is the “axiom of extensionality” which will fix the rule for the difference or sameness of any two multiples whatsoever; that is, according to the elements which belong to each. The void set, then, having no elements—being the multiple of nothing—can have no conceivable differentiating mark. But then, if no difference can be attested, this means that there is a unicity of the void: there cannot be “several” voids; the void is unique and this is what is signaled by the proper name,  $\emptyset$  (BE 67-69).

So how are beings to be woven from this void? What is crucial to this operation is what is known as the “power-set axiom” or “axiom of subsets.” This axiom guarantees that if a set exists, another set also exists that counts as one all the *subsets* of this first set (BE 62-63). It has been seen what belonging means: an element (a multiple) belongs to a situation (a set) if it is directly presented and counted for one by this situation. What the power set gathers together are rather *inclusions* of a given situation. In other words, elements directly presented by a set can be *re-presented*, that is, grouped into subsets that are said to be included in the initial set. Inclusion is written  $\subset$ :  $\alpha \subset \beta$  or  $\alpha$  is a subset (a part) of  $\beta$ .<sup>8</sup> The power set axiom thus says that if a set  $\alpha$  exists, there also exists the set of all its subsets: its power set,  $p(\alpha)$  (BE 81-84). Now, let it also be said both that the void is a subset of any set—it is universally included—and that the void possesses a subset, which is the void itself (BE 86). Indeed, it is impossible for the empty set not to be universally included. For, following the axiom of extensionality, since the set  $\emptyset$  has no elements, nothing is marked which could deny its inclusion in any multiple. What is more, for this same reason, since the set  $\emptyset$  is itself an existent-multiple (following the axiom of the void),  $\emptyset$  must be a subset of itself (BE 86-87).

This is precisely the point from which the axioms or laws of being will weave their compositions from the void. The argument is as follows: since the void admits at least one subset—itsself—the power-set axiom can be applied. The set of subsets of the void,  $p(\emptyset)$ , is the set to which everything included in the void belongs. Thus, since  $\emptyset$  is included in  $\emptyset$ ,  $\emptyset$  belongs to  $p(\emptyset)$ . This new set,  $p(\emptyset)$ , is thus “our second existent-multiple in the ‘genealogical’ framework of the set-theory axiomatic. It is written  $\{\emptyset\}$  and  $\emptyset$  is its sole element”:  $\emptyset \in \{\emptyset\}$  (BE 89). Now, let us consider the set of subsets of  $\{\emptyset\}$ , that is  $p(\{\emptyset\})$ . This set exists, since  $\{\emptyset\}$  exists. What, then, are the parts of  $\{\emptyset\}$ ? There is  $\{\emptyset\}$  itself, which is the total part, and there is  $\emptyset$ , since the void is universally included. The multiple  $p(\{\emptyset\})$  is thus a multiple with *two* elements,  $\emptyset$  and  $\{\emptyset\}$ . This is, in fact, woven from the void, “the ontological schema of the Two,” which can be written  $\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$  (BE 92, 131-132). Now, since this set,  $\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$ , exists, we can consider its power set  $p(\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\})$ , which must also exist. Along with the void which is universally included, its parts are  $\{\emptyset\}$  and  $\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$ ,... etc. This process can obviously be repeated indefinitely and it is in fact in this way that our counting numbers—our “natural” or “ordinal” numbers—can be generated:

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &= \emptyset \\ 1 &= \{\emptyset\} = \{0\} \\ 2 &= \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\} = \{0, 1\} \\ 3 &= \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}, \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}\} = \{0, 1, 2\} \dots^9 \end{aligned}$$

It can here be seen that at any point in the chain, to be the  $n$ th successor of the name of the void is to have  $n$  elements. This is why Badiou also calls these ordinals “number-name ordinals” (BE 139-140, 153).

What is at stake here, let us recall, is an ontology: the “laws of being.” So it should come as no surprise that, from this generation of “natural” numbers, all woven from the void in accordance with the ZF axioms, Badiou will elaborate his ontological concept of “Nature” as a network of multiples which are interlocking and exhaustive without remainder. In Badiou’s formulation, a multiple  $\alpha$  will be said to be *natural* (also called normal, ordinal and transitive) if every element  $\beta$  of this set is also a subset or part (that is, if  $\beta \in \alpha$  then  $\beta \subset \alpha$ ), and if every element  $\beta$  of  $\alpha$  is itself natural in this way (that is, if  $\gamma \in \beta$  then  $\gamma \subset \beta$ ). This doubling of belonging and inclusion guarantees that there is nothing uncounted or unsecured in natural multiples which might contradict their internal consistency and concatenation. Thus, just as

Nature can never contradict itself, natural multiples remain homogeneous in dissemination. Every natural multiple is here obviously a “piece” of another (BE 123-129). Now, it is evident that the natural numbers generated above follow this formulation. For not only does the element  $\{\emptyset\}$  have  $\emptyset$  as its unique element, since the void is a universal part, this element  $\emptyset$  is also a part. Furthermore, since the element  $\emptyset$  does not present any element, nothing belongs to it that *is not* a part. There is thus no obstacle to declaring it to be natural. As such, the power set of  $\{\emptyset\}$ — $\mathcal{P}(\{\emptyset\})$  or the Two:  $\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$ —is natural, and all of its elements are natural, etc. Thus, ordinal numbers both formalize the concept of natural multiples—of Nature—within set-theory ontology and are themselves existing natural multiples. Furthermore, it can be said that the name of the void is the ultimate natural element or atom which *founds* the entire series, in the sense in which the void is the “smallest” natural multiple. In other words, if every natural multiple is a “piece” of every other, the void is the only natural multiple to which no further element belongs (BE 130-140).

Needless to say, however, in Badiou’s set-theoretical concept of Nature, there can be no possible formulation of Nature *in itself*. Nature in itself would be a multiple which makes a one out of all the ordinals. But since this multiple would itself have to be an ordinal to make a one out of all the ordinals that belong to it, it would also belong to itself. However, since no set can belong to itself, Nature in itself can have no sayable being (BE 140-141). Indeed, that no consistent set can belong to itself is a fundamental presupposition of set theory. ZF can even be said to have arisen in response to the paradoxes induced by self-belonging such as those demonstrated by Russell (BE 40-43). In fact, another of ZF’s axioms, the “axiom of *foundation*,” was formulated in order to exclude self-belonging. This axiom says that a set is founded if it has at least one element whose elements are not themselves elements of the initial set, that is, if it contains an element which has no members in common with the initial set. It is thus obvious that no set founded in this way can belong to itself (BE 185-187).

This last point leads Badiou to examine a further problem, even if he does not set it up in quite this way. It has been seen that there cannot be a set of all sets which would govern the total count. Yet this does not in any way dispense with the task of examining the general operation of the count. For, because the one is not, because the count-as-one is only an operation, something *always escapes* the count-

as-one and thereby threatens to ruin consistency. This “something” is nothing other than the *count itself*, and this is true of natural as much as non-natural situations (BE 93-94). In other words, because the “one” is only an operational result, if the count-as-one or structure is not itself counted for one, it is impossible to verify that ‘there is Oneness’ is also valid for the counting operation. “The consistency of presentation thus requires that all structure be *doubled* by a metastructure which secures the former against any fixation of the void,” that is, against any inconsistency (BE 93-94). This metastructure of a structured set—what Badiou also calls the *state of the situation*—is precisely the power set which counts as one all of the initial set’s parts. The power set counts all of the possible internal compositions of the elements of the initial set up to and including the “total part”: the composition of elements that *is* the initial set (BE 98).

This is all well and good, but what if we were dealing with infinite multiples? What could the count of the internal compositions of an infinite multiple look like? This is a real and general problem, for not only is Nature (since the moderns) said to be infinite, presentation itself, even of finite multiples, is *essentially* infinite. In other words, in set-theory ontology the finite is itself derived from the infinite, for the reason that the indefinite *succession* of finite natural multiples needs the infinite in order to qualify it as the one-multiple that it is; that is, in order to form-one out of *all* of its terms *as finite* (BE, 159-160).<sup>10</sup> This is precisely what the “axiom of infinity” declares: there exists an infinite limit ordinal, written  $\omega_0$ , such that for all  $\alpha$ , if  $\alpha$  belongs to  $\omega_0$  and if  $\alpha$  is not void, then  $\alpha$  is a finite, natural successor ordinal (BE 154-159). And what is more, since the one is not, there cannot be any one-infinite-being named  $\omega_0$ , but only numerous infinite multiples. Indeed, we can (and must) generate, not only infinite successor ordinals such that  $\omega_0 \in \omega_1$ , for example, but also infinite limit ordinals such that  $\omega_0, \omega_1, \dots, \omega_n, \omega_{n+1}, \dots \in \omega_{\omega_0}, \dots \in \omega_{\omega(\omega_0)}$ , etc. (BE 275-277). If the one is not, presentation essentially concerns an infinite number of infinite multiples. The question thus remains: what could the power set of an infinite multiple look like?

The more precise question that Badiou asks is in fact the following: is the power-set  $\mathcal{P}(\omega_0)$ —that is to say, the count-as-one of all possible sub-sets of the series of finite natural numbers, sufficient for a complete numerical description of the void-less geometrical continuum—equivalent to  $\omega_1$ , the smallest infinite natural multiple which

directly succeeds and counts-as-one  $\omega_0$ ? This is Cantor's famous "continuum hypothesis" (BE 295). The importance of this hypothesis is that, if true, we would have a "natural measure" for the geometrical or physical continuum. Or in other words, we would have a quantitative knowledge of being-*qua*-being. For, if the continuum could be numerically measured, every multiple could be quantitatively secured therein. The "great question" of Badiou's set-theory ontology is thus: is there an essential "numerosity" of being (BE 265)? The answer is, as we shall see: we possess a natural measuring scale (the succession of number-name ordinals), but it is impossible to determine where, on this scale, the set of parts of  $\omega_0$  is situated (BE 277-278). Or more precisely, following the work of Cohen and Easton, it appears that it is deductively acceptable to posit that  $p(\omega_i)$  is equal to  $\omega_{347}$ , or  $\omega_{(\omega_i)+18}$ , or whatever other infinite cardinal we should care to choose.<sup>11</sup> In other words, their work "establishes the quasi-total errancy of the excess of the state over the situation. It is as though, between the structure in which the immediacy of belonging is delivered, and the metastructure which counts as one the parts and regulates the inclusions, a chasm opens, whose filling in depends solely upon a conceptless choice" (BE 280).

This "un-measure" of the continuum, insofar as it threatens the count or consistency of the deployment of inconsistent being, is what Badiou calls the "impasse of ontology" (BE 279, 281). However, it is precisely in this "un-measure" or "errancy" that the double task of Badiou's project in *Being and Event* finds its point of intersection. For here, on the side of being, it becomes necessary to think "what-is-not-being-*qua*-being": to think the *event* (along with its conceptual correlates, the *subject* and *truth*). Why is this thought "necessary"? It is necessary insofar as, faced with the impasse of ontology and working within the shadow of the problem of the one and the multiple, these three philosophical concepts will allow us once again to aim at the thought of inconsistent being *qua* "one"-being. Of course, because these concepts are philosophical, the thought of being *qua* "one"-being can no longer unfold in strict immanence to ontology and its axioms. The thought of being-*qua*-being—of ontology—will rather be conceived of as an ongoing practical affair or "truth procedure" (BE 284-285). And indeed, if it is the case that the resolution of the impasse of being requires a "conceptless choice" to be made and then "verified," then the concepts of event, subject and truth seem particularly well adapted

for thinking this task. Nevertheless, following Badiou, the thought of these three philosophical concepts will remain “homogeneous” with the thought of being in general, inasmuch as a particular orientation (the generic orientation) within set-theory ontology can think the sort of being—that is, the sort of multiples—which “correspond” to these notions.

So let us look at these concepts in more detail. First of all, then, what is an *event*? Speaking conceptually, an event is an unpredictable occurrence, something that comes to pass which disrupts the usual way in which things are counted or grouped together, thereby revealing the essential inconsistency of the situation. The work of Easton and Cohen—the abovementioned “proof” of the un-measure of being—can thus be said to constitute such an event in the *historical* development of set theory after Cantor. Speaking ontologically—that is, from *within* the space circumscribed by the axioms of set theory—the event is an unfounded multiple (or rather, self-founded multiple: it belongs to itself) which supplements the situation for which it is an event. It is a self-founding “supernumerary” something whose place cannot be recognized in a situation even though it can come to belong to or be counted within that situation, giving thereby, as will be seen, the “truth” of said situation (BE 342). Being self-founding and violating the axiom of foundation, the event can have no sayable being (BE 189-190). Events in general would thus be completely foreign to ontology if they did not, however, have a “site” within the situations for which they are events: what Badiou calls the “evental site.” This site is the “foundational multiple”: that multiple which is presented in a given situation, but whose own elements are not themselves presented (BE 175). It is easy to see why an event could only take place at such a point. For it is only at such a point that something might appear which, while not previously counted within the situation (remember: the elements of a foundational multiple are not themselves presented), needs to be counted therein, since, as foundational, this “something” “detains in its multiple-being all the common traits of the collective in question” (BE 17). Given these two aspects of the event, Badiou thus terms “*event of the site X a multiple such that it is composed of, on the one hand, elements of the site, and on the other hand, itself.* . . . The event is a one-multiple made up of, on the one hand, all the multiples which belong to its site, and on the other hand, the event itself” (BE 179).

## BADIOU: FROM ONTOLOGY TO POLITICS

Now it is evident that, insofar as an event is composed of all the non-presented multiples which belong to its site as well as the event itself, the situation for which this event is an event can give us no basis for deciding whether the event belongs to it (BE 181). What is required, therefore, following Badiou, is a subjective *intervention*: a procedure through which a multiple is designated as evental in conformity with its two aspects (having a site and self-belonging) and where it is decided that this multiple is a term of the situation, that it belongs (BE 202). What this subjective intervention then requires, can be sketched in the following way:

Firstly, the event is “named.” It is the act of its *nomination* which constitutes the event as susceptible to a *decision* concerning its belonging to the situation (BE 203). “The initial operation of an intervention is to *make a name out of an unrepresented element of the site to qualify the event whose site is the site*” (BE 204). Next, in *fidelity* to this decision, a procedure separates out, within the set of presented multiples (and starting with the multiples of the evental site), those multiples which depend upon or are connected to the event (BE 232). Such a collection of multiples can thus be said to be included in the initial situation as a part (BE 233). An *enquiry* is, correspondingly, “any *finite* series of atoms of connection for a fidelity” (BE 234). However, because every situation is essentially infinite, and insofar as the subjective operator of connection to the event has no in principle tie to the relations of belonging and inclusion governing a given situation, a finite enquiry could only ever be an aleatory collection of positively connected terms, encountered one by one and having, therefore, no *a priori* relationship with the infinite situation for which it is nevertheless a part (BE 235-236).

Now, the regrouping of all of the (infinity of) terms which *will have* been positively investigated by the procedure of fidelity is precisely what Badiou calls a *truth*: a truth of the entire situation (BE 335, 339). Conceptually, it is not difficult to see why: if a situation is only “complete” insofar as an evental supplement belongs to it, a truth of the situation must show how all of the terms of the situation are connected (or not) to this necessary supplement. However, and precisely because an infinite truth begins in a supplementary event, ontology can have nothing to say about truth *per se*: a truth is necessarily “indiscernible” in the situation for which it is a truth. Indeed, for Badiou, what separates his “Platonic” conception of truth from merely “metastable” knowledge (from what Badiou also calls the *encyclopedia*

of the situation) is truth's rigorous *avoidance* of all available means of classification (BE 327-338). Nevertheless, Badiou goes on to argue that ontology is *compatible* with truth insofar as the *being of truth* can be conceived within ontology as a *generic multiplicity* (BE 355). In other words, a generic multiplicity will formalize the being of a truth insofar as it provides us with the ontological concept of an existent, in-situation, indiscernible multiple which exhibits "as one-multiple the very being of what belongs insofar as it belongs" (BE 339).

The key to this concept, such as Badiou sets it out, lies in the way in which the enquiries which make up a truth (or, as they are called in the ontological situation, the *conditions*: the in-situation multiples judged to be positively connected to the name of supplementary event) are handled. The idea is roughly the following (for what follows, see BE 355-371). The evental multiple is inscribed in ontology by the supplementary signifier, *G*. (In *Being and Event*, in order to position his work in relation to that of Lacan, Badiou uses the female symbol for the inscription of the evental multiple. For typographical reasons it is represented here by *G*.)

This multiple is made up of series of conditions (enquiries) which provide cumulative "information" about it and which maintain certain relations amongst themselves. First of all, one condition will be said to *dominate* another if it provides more information than this other (e.g., the condition  $\langle 0,1,0 \rangle$  is dominated by the condition  $\langle 0,1,0,0 \rangle$ ). Secondly, two conditions will be said to be *compatible* if they are dominated by the same third condition ( $\langle 0,1,0 \rangle$  and  $\langle 0,1,0,0 \rangle$  are thus compatible insofar as they are dominated by the condition  $\langle 0,1,0,0,1 \rangle$ ). Finally, every condition will be dominated by two conditions which are *incompatible* between themselves ( $\langle 0,1,0 \rangle$  is dominated by both  $\langle 0,1,0,0 \rangle$  and  $\langle 0,1,0,1 \rangle$ , but these last two are incompatible insofar as they cannot be dominated in turn by  $\langle 0,1,0,0,1 \rangle$ ). Now, a collection of conditions will be said to be *generic* (indiscernible) if it "intersects" with *every* discernible domination. As Badiou writes, a generic set contains "a little bit of everything" (BE 371). In other words, *G* will be generic if it contains, for every property supposed to discern it, one condition or multiple (at least) which does *not* possess this property or which belongs to the contradictory determinant. At the limit then, since they systematically *avoid* classification, the positively investigated, in-situation multiples from which the indiscernible is composed cannot be said to have anything

in common apart from *belonging* to the situation; that is to say, that “property” shared by *all* the terms of the situation. As Badiou writes, at the limit, “the indiscernible set *only* possesses the properties necessary to its pure existence as multiple...It does not possess any particular, discerning, separative property...At base, its sole property is that of consisting as pure multiple, or being” (BE 371).

So we now have our ontological concept of an in-situation indiscernible truth which exhibits “as one-multiple the very being of what belongs insofar as it belongs” (BE 339). The problem, however, is that, from a point of view *within* the situation (and as will be seen, this is the general position of the *subject*), even if one understands its concept, one cannot yet say that the multiple *G* *belongs* to the situation for which it is a generic part. From within the situation, *G* cannot be counted-as-one. Here, one could only *believe* in the existence of an indiscernible. The ontological problem thus becomes: how can an indiscernible be said to belong to the situation for which it is an indiscernible? How can the event-supplemented situation finally be counted as one?

What will be required is a “generic extension” of the pre-evental situation, carried out *in situs*, as it were (for what follows, see BE 372-387). In order to achieve this “extension,” conceptually speaking, what must be modified is the *language* of the original situation, and in such a way that all of the elements of the event-supplemented situation can be named. This will allow one to say ‘if there exists a generic extension, then this re-worked name designates such a thing within it’ (BE 375). To put it very roughly, a “re-worked name” here refers only to another such name that has been “coupled with” a condition (which itself refers to another name, coupled with a condition, etc.). But now, given this definition of name, we can say that *if* such and such a condition belongs to *G*, *then* the name that refers to its coupling with another name “designates” such and such a multiple in the event-supplemented situation. Of course, the fleshing out in this way of the generic extension will depend entirely on the way in which the names are constructed and on the particular multiples investigated by the faithful subject. Indeed, until this or that multiple has been investigated and judged to be positively connected to the name of the event, it will be said that the referential value of this or that name remains “suspended” from the infinite “to-come” of a truth. What will be important to remember, however, is that, proceeding in such a

way, a subject will nevertheless be able to make hypotheses of the 'if...then' type regarding the generic extension.

From the point of view of the ontologist operating from *outside* the situation, however, it is possible to give an "all at once" or "one" account of the generic extension. Without going into the details (suffice it to say that the essence of the demonstration consists in manipulating a denumerably infinite "natural" situation), set theory can show, on the one hand, that, for every element of the pre-evental situation, a name exists such that the referential value of this name in the generic extension is this element itself. In other words, the pre-evental situation belongs entirely to the generic extension (BE 381-383). On the other hand, set theory can show that the indiscernible set  $G$ , insofar as it too can be given a name, belongs to the generic extension. Here,  $G$ 's "name" (a name which does not discern the indiscernible  $G$ ) is nothing other than the (denumerable but infinite) set of conditions which belong to  $G$ , that is,  $G$  itself, for *any* fixed  $G$  (BE 383-384).

So finally we possess a concept of a generic multiple, that is to say, *a concept of an existent in-situation indiscernible multiple*. Ontology has formalized the sort of multiple that "corresponds" to the being of a *truth*, where a truth is understood as being the regrouping of all of the infinity of enquiries (conditions) which, on the one hand, will have been positively investigated by the procedure of fidelity as connected to the name of the self-founding *event* (inscribed in ontology by the supplementary signifier  $G$ ); and which, on the other hand, since it remains "rigorously" indiscernible, avoids classification in the situation to which it belongs. This "truth" is a "one"-truth insofar as, being generic or indiscernible, the only relation its elements can have with the situation is one of belonging, that is, the "predicate" shared by *all* elements of the situation. A "truth" or generic multiple can thus be said to form a "one" under the sole predicate of belonging.

But what now about that other necessary correlate of truth and the event: the *subject*? As seen above, in order to be able say in the first place that the event belongs to the situation, a subjective intervention is required. This intervention comprises two moments: the nomination of the event and an operation, that is, a faithful generic procedure which connects multiples of the situation to the name of the event (in series of finite enquiries or conditions). Badiou defines the subject, then, the necessary requisite for such an intervention, as "any local configuration of a generic procedure," that is, of "the incorporation of the event into the situation in the mode of a generic

procedure” (BE 391, 393). The subject is, as it were, “between’ the terms that the procedure groups together” (BE 396).

Now, since it is separated from the truth by an infinite series of chance encounters, the truth is always indiscernible for the subject (remember: the determination of the being of an infinite truth is possible only from the point of view of the ontologist operating from outside the situation). Nevertheless, nothing prevents a subject from believing that there is a truth, that is, “that the operator of faithful connection does not gather together the chance of the encounters in vain” (BE 397). What is more, “this belief occurs in the form of a knowledge,” since the subject, as has been seen, in faithfully investigating the terms of the situation, generates or reworks *names* in order to gather these terms together (in the form of partial works, statements, sermons, formulas, poems, etc.). However, and precisely because of the gap between any finite enquiry and an infinite truth, it must be said that the *reference* of these names remains “suspended.” In other words, it will only be possible for a subject to make hypotheses about the truth. But precisely because of the way in which they are constructed, the names used in these hypotheses will “*displace* established significations and leave the referent void”; and this void, in turn, “will have been filled if truth comes to pass as a new situation” (BE 399). From the point of view of the subject then, to speak in terms of “knowledge,” one can say—in the future anterior—that this or that statement of the created subject-language *will have been veridical if* the truth turns out to be such and such. But now, following Badiou, this change in knowledge brought about by the work of the subject amounts to an ontological “law” of the subject, a law which Badiou, following Cohen, calls *forcing*. It is such that a “term forces a statement if its positive connection to the event forces the statement to be veridical in the new situation (the situation supplemented by an indiscernible truth)” (BE 403).

This final point is crucial for Badiou, for it indicates a fundamental capacity of the subject: the capacity to force, through its investigations in relation to the indiscernible, a decision on previously *undecidable* statements and thus to transform the old, pre-evental situation.

Following Badiou and speaking ontologically, Cohen’s technique of forcing is the set-theoretical determination of a relation of equivalence between a formula applied to the “names” and the veracity of the same formula in the generic extension when we have a

particular condition which belongs to  $G$  (BE 411–413). More particularly, what forcing is designed to show is whether a given formula *in the language of set theory* is veridical in a generic extension, that is to say, when the ordinary multiples of the ontological situation are supplemented with an indiscernible multiple,  $G$ . What must be examined first of all is whether the axioms of set theory—internally consistent, “verified” or veridical in the ontological situation such as we have seen it—remain veridical in the generic extension. Again, without going into the detail (see BE 467–470), it can be shown that “these axioms are all forced by  $\emptyset$ ; they are therefore veridical in *any* generic extension” (BE 416).

From here it thus follows that, if one supposes that ontology is consistent, no veridical statement in a generic extension can ruin that consistency. In other words, if a statement  $\lambda$  is veridical in a generic extension, set theory ( $ST$ ) supplemented by the formula  $\lambda$  is consistent, once  $ST$  is (BE 418). But what this means in turn is that there are only two possibilities available for a statement  $\lambda$  which forcing reveals to be veridical in a generic extension: either  $\lambda$  is a theorem of ontology; or  $\lambda$  is not a theorem of  $ST$ , but then, being nevertheless compatible with  $ST$ , it is an *undecidable statement* of ontology, since whether we supplement ontology with  $\lambda$ , or with  $\sim\lambda$ , its consistency will remain (BE 419).

The crux of the matter here, for Badiou, is that forcing reveals that the *problem of statist excess is undecidable within ontology*. In other words, Cohen’s technique of forcing reveals that it is veridical in certain generic extensions, thus consistent with the axioms of  $ST$ , that  $p(\omega_0)$  be the value of just about any transfinite cardinal (BE 419). Cohen’s idea was to show that there can exist sets of conditions of a generic subset  $G$  which can force, in a generic extension, the number of parts of  $\omega_0$  to surpass an absolutely indeterminate cardinal  $\delta$  given in advance. An account of the demonstration cannot be given here (see generally BE 420–426). Suffice it to say that it turns on the fact that, as has been seen, the generic set, by definition, sets no limits on what it can (rigorously) count as one.

The conclusion that can then be drawn from Cohen’s technique of forcing is thus that “[s]tatist excess is effectively revealed to be without any fixed measure; the cardinality of the set of parts of  $\omega_0$  can surpass that of  $\omega_0$  in an arbitrary fashion. There is an essential undecidability, within the framework of the Ideas of the multiple, of

the quantity of multiples whose count-as-one is guaranteed by the state (the metastructure)” (BE 426).

Of course, what is important for our purposes is to recognize here that forcing corresponds to the law of the subject. That is to say: just as it can be shown via the construction of certain generic collections of conditions that the statement ‘statist excess is without measure’ is veridical, the subject more generally has the capacity to force, through its investigations in relation to the indiscernible, a decision on *undecidable* statements and thus to transform existing knowledge (even if, of course, the laws of being will be the same in any situation). Or again: precisely because the subject “alone possesses the capacity of indiscernment,” it is that which, in relation to the indiscernible, collects conditions or enquiries in such a way that it can force new knowledges (BE 429).

So finally we see how a particular orientation within set-theory ontology—or more precisely, the “event” of Cohen’s technique of forcing—allows Badiou to think the sort of being that corresponds to the philosophical concepts of the event, truth and the subject; that is to say, the philosophical concepts that were called upon in order to think, in light of ontology’s internal impasse, the “one” of inconsistent being-*qua*-being as an ongoing practical affair or truth procedure.

Our problem was, first and foremost, that of being-*qua*-being, that is to say, of giving a consistent “one” account of what is presupposed and counted in every presentation: inconsistent multiplicity. We saw that, in accordance with the ontological problem of the relationship between one and the multiple, “being is universally deployed as nature” in an infinite number of infinite natural multiples all woven from the void (BE 269). However, when asked about the count as one of this deployment of being—that is to say, about the measurement of the void-less continuum  $p(\omega_0)$  wherein every multiple would be quantitatively “secured”—it had to be admitted that there was no essential “numerosity” of being. We possess a natural measuring scale for every multiple (the succession of number-name ordinals), but it is impossible to determine where, on this scale, the set of parts of  $\omega_0$  is situated. The Cohen-event, as has just been seen, effectively proves this. Nevertheless, Badiou will argue that this very same proof gives a “one” account of inconsistent being-*qua*-being. How? It constructs an infinite generic multiple (by collecting series of “conditions” attached to the supplementary, evental signifier  $G$ ) which exhibits “as one-multiple the very being of what belongs insofar as it

belongs,” and in such a way that every being (or number) in the ontological situation can be rigorously thought as a “slice” of this multiple (BE 339).<sup>12</sup>

However, ontology can only come to present this generic “one-multiple” or truth via a subjective intervention or practical truth procedure. Indeed, since nothing internal to set-theory ontology allows us decide the impasse of being one way or another, it will be necessary for the general ontologist to make and then verify a “conceptless choice” with regard to the set  $p(\omega_0)$ . In this sense then, the “choice” of generic thought, or more precisely, the decision to construct a generic one-multiple, cannot initially be said within ontology. It can only be said via a “truth procedure” which philosophy alone has the conceptual tools to think. The thought of the “one” of inconsistent being, the thought of being-*qua*-being, thus passes from set-theory ontology to philosophy. Nevertheless, since set-theory ontology can think the sort of *being* that corresponds to the concepts of the event, truth and the subject, and in such a way that it can give a “one”-account of inconsistent being, we can say that, *as a truth procedure, set-theory ontology thinks being-qua-being.*

Finally then, it can be said that Badiou’s set-theory ontology is an immanent ontology. If what is named by the interrelationships between the philosophical concepts of the event, truth and the subject is nothing other than a truth procedure, then set-theory ontology must be said to think the being of truth procedures in general, including the truth procedure that it is. We take it that this is what Badiou means when he says that “the *proof* of the undecidability of this measure [for state excess], which is the rationality of errancy, reproduces within mathematical ontology itself the chance of the generic procedure” (BE 429). It can thus be said that set theory provides truth procedures in general with an appropriate ontology, since truth procedures *are always* a question of intervening in and transforming a given situation in order to count something that, while previously indiscernible, “detains in its multiple-being all the common traits of the collective in question.” We shall see this much more clearly after we have examined the “political truth procedure” such as Badiou analyzes it in *Metapolitics*.

### ***Metapolitics***

The text of *Metapolitics* is made up of ten essays of four types: polemical essays; essays of commentary and support; essays devoted to examining

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several major categories of political thought; and one essay outlining the way in which the “political condition” is thought within Badiou’s overall system (M xxxvi). As to the unity the text, it can be said that all but the last of these essays form a selective series of investigations into, on the one hand, contemporary political thought, and, on the other hand, the thought of the relationship between philosophy and politics. The results of these investigations, along with several theses from Badiou’s *Being and Event*, are then synthesized in the final essay in order to provide, as Badiou explains, “philosophical propositions concerning the modes of inscription of the political condition in the general system of truth procedures,” that is, in the system of truth procedures that *is* Badiou’s philosophy (M xxxvi). Another way that Badiou says this is that the final chapter “records the political condition in conformity with the parameters of ontology” (M 72), for Badiou’s ontology, let us remember, is the truth procedure that corresponds to the development of mathematical set theory. Indeed, we can see here a concrete case of what Badiou means when he says elsewhere that the task of philosophy is to “compossibilize” its external truth-procedural conditions (see also: M xxxi-xxxiii).<sup>13</sup> We see, in other words, both that the “political condition” is thought within the parameters laid down by Badiou’s set theory ontology, *and* that set theory ontology is adopted by Badiou insofar as it provides the political condition, thought here through a series of essays, with an appropriate ontology.

As to the aims of *Metapolitics*, we can say that Badiou wants to reformulate, under the name “metapolitics,” what can, on the one hand, philosophically be said of politics, and, on the other hand, what philosophy’s relationship is to this saying. These two aims are set up in the very first chapter by two objections that Badiou puts to “political philosophy,” this latter being understood in a particularly conservative way as the theorization of a State’s just regulation of opinion. Badiou’s first objection is that philosophy is wrong to say that politics is about mere debate, that is, the public exercise of judgment or opinion in Hannah Arendt’s sense (M 10-13). Rather, following Badiou, “debate is political only to the extent that it crystallizes in a decision,” and has a relationship to “a possible political truth...in whose name one or more interventions are possible” (M 15). One immediately grasps the force of this argument, for if debate does not culminate in a decision which has a relationship to some “possible political truth” beyond mere opinion, it could only be some sort of non-political chatter. As for the

thorny question of what a “political truth” might be, however, suffice it to say for the moment that, in Badiou’s metapolitics, a political truth will be a “truth of the collective” as such (M 151).

The second objection that Badiou puts to “political philosophy” is that politics is *not*, in any case, “an objective datum, or even invariant, of universal experience” to which it falls to philosophy to provide the thought (M 10). Indeed, for Badiou, politics is *already* a thought insofar as it has “the subjective reality of organized and militant processes” (M 10). In other words, if this claim that politics is already a thought is defensible, then if philosophy declares politics to be a “brutal and confused objectivity” and sets out to think this “objectivity,” it could only be engaged in *a* politics (M 16).

It follows, therefore, from these two points of discord with “political philosophy” that the aims of philosophy must be to think, first of all, how politics can be conceived of as a subjective process—as itself a thought—which has an intrinsic relationship to “the truth of the collective” that, moreover, politics subjectively “is.”<sup>14</sup> Secondly, philosophy must think this thought that is politics in such a way that philosophy itself does not become *a* politics.

So, what must be clarified first of all—and indeed, this will also be the first step away from “political philosophy”—is how politics can be conceived of *as thought*. This is what Badiou will examine in relation to the work of the political thinker Sylvain Lazarus. The problem, in short, is how to avoid the sort of “objective mediation” that results when we take thought as an object, or when we think thought in the image of the pre-given “object” that the thought in question is supposed to think. Or again, the problem is to think thought “internally,” as “an *internal* relation of its Real” (M 27-28). Lazarus advances a series of theses in response to this problem, all of which, it will be noted, have their correlates in Badiou’s system. The first thesis is that what is thought in thought is not so much an object as a “name? . . . which is not given in itself or directly”: a “name” which is not itself “named” (M 28-29). Indeed, if the name were to be named, thought “would constitute an object for itself;” and this is precisely what we want to avoid (M 30). But now, how can thought think an unnamable name? What is required, first of all, is the recognition that the name is not the name of what is, but “what can be.” The name is *prescriptive* rather than descriptive. It is, in Badiou’s terms, the name of a “supernumerary event” which, abstractly, can be characterized in terms

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very similar to the following: “the unnamable ‘essence’ of the name [of the event] is that which conjoins a possible and a prescription” (M 31-32). In other words, as examined above, the name of the event is that which, while remaining unnamed or indiscernible, will be “affirmed” and “verified” as existing (BE 180).

Now, every such name or prescription “is given in statements,” and these statements “are thinkable through the categories that they convey” (M 32). These “categories” are given in statements about the situation, but they also “vouchsafe the existence of the name” insofar as they have as their “extension... the seizure of the name’s prescriptive nature,” a seizure which does not, however, name or define the name (M 32-33). In Badiou’s terms, then, the categories are the reworked names of the situation which flesh out the referential space for what is prescribed by the name of the event, but whose referent or extension is “suspended” by the “to come” of the infinite procedure of eventual verification. Here, we can think of the way in which names such as ‘discipline’, ‘party’, ‘revolutionary consciousness’ (along with all the names which then articulate, stratify and ramify these names) are reworked by Lenin and remain suspended from a “to come” of a political collective (BE 396-397; M 46).

Finally then, the name possesses “places,” that is to say, material instances where the name is deployed and verified. These places “are themselves prescriptions, which localize the name within a multiplicity, a multiplicity that has the essential property of *remaining homogeneous to the subjectivity that it localizes*” (M 33). In Badiou’s vocabulary, the places are the finite “enquiries” or “matter” of the political subject: they are multiples that have been “investigated” and judged to be positively connected to the name of the event, providing both the material for, and information about, what is thought through the name of the event.

Having thus elaborated what he means by the “thought” that is politics, Badiou now turns to an examination of several concepts of political theory, starting with those of “the masses” and “the party.” His aim here is to extract these concepts, associated with the names of Mao Tse-tung and Marx, from any form of a totalizable One. In other words, “the masses” and “the party” must be understood as essentially “unbound.” Indeed, Badiou notes, it is only when these concepts are understood under the figure of the bond that they come to be thought of as terms essentially standing for, on the one hand, blind “mob rule,” and, on the other, a “representative fiction” authorizing

particularly brutal bureaucratic machines (M 68-69). How can this situation be turned around? Following Badiou, “the masses” will be able to be a metapolitical concept insofar as, “far from gathering homogeneous crowds under some imaginary emblem, [it] designates the infinity of intellectual and practical singularities which every politics of justice requires to be taken into account within its accomplishment” (M 73, translation modified). It will thus be able to be said “that politics is of the masses, not because it takes into account the ‘interests of the greatest number’, but because it is founded on the verifiable supposition that no one is enslaved...by the bond that results from those interests that are a mere function of one’s place” within a totalizable form (M 73). The masses, in other words, will necessarily designate a kind of political unbinding at the heart of every attempt to totalize the collective space. And similarly with the concept of “the party”: it will designate, not a dense, bound fraction of the working class, but “an unfixable omnipresence, whose proper function is less to represent class than to de-limit it” (M 74).

The next concept of political thought that Badiou analyzes is that of “democracy.” His aim here is to separate the concept of “democracy” from the form of the State, that is, insofar as democracy is thought therein merely as an organizer of the “interests of the greatest number.” What he is searching for is a way of understanding democracy in conjunction with the sort of political unbinding associated with “the masses” and “the party.” What will be required, then, following Badiou, is to axiomatically conjoin “democracy” to the political prescription itself, that is, to its “universal capacity” (M 90). The political prescription, as democratic or universal, would thus be open to “the infinity of intellectual and practical singularities” of the un-bound masses; that is to say, to “the particularity of people’s lives, or people as they appear in the public space” (M 92-93). In other words, if it is democratic, the prescription through which the political subject thinks its relation to the possible truth that it is will be “the thought of everyone.” Democracy will be what “*presents equality*” as such, and “what maintains politics in the realm of universality proper to its destination” (M 93-94). We have already indicated what this “destination” is: it is the political collective determining itself as the “truth” that it subjectively is.

What, however, is this “truth”? We must here follow Badiou as he passes through a series of interlocking definitions. First of all,

“justice” shall be called “that through which a philosophy designates the possible truth of a politics...a truth of the collective as such” (M 97). A “truth of the collective,” for its part, will be the generic quality—that is to say, the strict equality—of all of the members of the collective (M 97).<sup>15</sup> “Equality,” in this context, “means that the political actor is represented under the sole sign of the uniquely human capacity,” that is, not self-interest (since this capacity is shared by all animals), but *thought*. The unique general axiom of an egalitarian politics will thus be: “people think, people are capable of the truth” (M 97-98). “Thought,” finally, to complete the circle, “is simply that through which the human animal is seized and traversed by the trajectory of a truth” (M 97-98).

It appears, therefore, given these interlocking definitions, that *we must come to understand politics as a matter of “thought acting through and towards a collective seized by its truth,” that is to say, the strict equality of all of the members of the collective* (M 104—my emphasis). Politics, in other words, will be a matter of how the egalitarian maxim is inscribed (or *prescribed*) and “carried” by the collective political subject. Furthermore, since such a politics can never finally realize its program, can never finally name or totalize the collective as a *particular* this or that without negating its universality or strictly *generic* quality, “justice” will only be able to “name the most extreme moments of inconsistency. For the effect of the axiom of equality is to undo the bonds” (M 104).

In the last and most important essay of the book, the above analyses are synthesized and thought in accordance with the “ontological condition” in Badiou’s philosophy. The first question that is addressed is how the event, and thus the procedure that it engages, can be thought of as exhibiting a *political* truth: what makes an event a political event? What is indispensable, for Badiou, is that the eventual prescription be attributed *to* a collective multiplicity and in such a way this prescription is universal *for* the collective (M 141). A prescription is thus political only if it is addressed to all as the “thought of all”; that is to say, as we did above, only if it is democratic or egalitarian. But now, since “equality” was defined above in terms of the capacity for thought, it must be said that “politics is impossible without the statement that people, taken indistinctly, are capable of the thought that constitutes the post-evental political subject” (M 142).

It is clear that, if politics has such a statement as a prerequisite, it must be “generic,” not only in its “result” or “truth,” but also in the local composition of its subject (M 142). What is more, to say that politics is “generic” is another way of saying that “politics treats the

infinite as such according to the principle of the same, the egalitarian principle. This is its point of departure: the situation is open, never closed” (M 142-143). In other words, because the political situation can never be totalized, it is essentially infinite: there is always and necessarily a “still one more” of the political subject *within* the generic collective.

What now, however, is the relation of this simple infinite with the “State of the situation,” that is, with the “metastructure” which represents the political collective by counting as one its hierarchically arranged parts and subsets? Speaking *non-ontologically*, we can say that the State is a sort of “superpower” with regard to the presented members of the collective. Empirically, there seems to be no limit to the ways in which the members of the political collective can be represented by the State (and hence by the economy which today is the norm of the State). Speaking *ontologically*, since the generic collective is an open and denumerable infinite, Badiou argues that the number of ways in which the State can re-present it is undecidable. As was seen in *Being and Event*, state excess is immeasurable. Or again, more precisely, the “measure” of state excess depends entirely upon a “conceptless choice.” Thus, finally, speaking *philosophically* or *metapolitically*, we can say that, just as for the ontological truth procedure, the political truth procedure will begin by assigning a measure to the superpower of the State. In other words, the political prescription, inscribed and “carried” by the generic or collective political subject, will consist in the “establishment of a fixed measure for the power of the State” (see M 143-145). Indeed, how could it not? For if the power of the State is indeterminate with respect to the way in which it counts the possible divisions of the political community—that is to say, the divisions of the community into hierarchically arranged parts to which *different* formal criteria are applied—then any statement of radical *equality* at any given political site will effectively reveal the sort of inequality that the State normally tolerates at that site. A statement of equality obliges the State to “reveal” how it counts as one (or not) all of the members of the political site in question.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the errant excess of the State will be measured insofar as the political prescription forces the State to account for its count, as it were.

Badiou sums up matters by elaborating the “numericality” of the political procedure, that is to say, ontologically, the traversal of the various “multiples” at stake in the subjective thought that is politics. The first term of the political truth procedure is the simple or

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denumerable infinite: the “for all” of political thought. This is the collective political subject. It is the unbound generic collective effectively implied by the political prescription when it is addressed to all as the thought of all. Badiou writes this infinite multiple as  $\sigma$ .

The second term of the procedure is the State of the situation. It too is ontologically infinite, though its “value” is entirely indeterminate. What is certain, however, is that its power remains superior to the simple infinite. Badiou thus writes this multiple as  $\epsilon > \sigma$ .

The fixing of an eventual political prescription of equality for the measure of this statist excess is then the third term of the procedure. It is written  $\pi(\epsilon)$ . Through this prescription, a certain “distance” from the normal operations of the State is established, allowing political thought to unfold in a more or less autonomous manner. Or again, a difference is established between a regime of strict equality that can be affirmed and “verified as existing” by faithful political subjects, and the sort of inequality (now visible) that is normally tolerated by the State (M 147-148).

Now, it is precisely in the rigor of this “distance” that it becomes possible to think or produce the equality of the infinity of intellectual and practical singularities which effectively composes the political collective. This production is the fourth term of the procedure. The figure for this equality, “the figure for the prescription whereby each and every singularity is to be treated collectively and identically in political thought... is obviously the 1”: the generic “one”-truth of the unbound masses. And this equality is produced—or rather, since it is looked for in the political prescription itself, it should be said that *this equality is “verified”*—by the repeated (re-)application of the political function to the prescription which determines the collective political subject:  $\pi(\pi(\epsilon)) \Rightarrow 1$  (M 150).

We at last see, then, at the level of the “compossibilization” of philosophy’s political and ontological conditions, how the political truth procedure can be understood, in its being, as the political subject acting, within the regime of equality, through and towards the generic collective that it is, in truth. We finally see, in other words, as we had set out to do, not only how Badiou thinks politics in line with his ontology, but also how set theory provides the political truth procedure with an ontology appropriate to its essence as “thought.” For in the political truth procedure, it is a question of intervening in and transforming the sort of inequality normally tolerated by the State in order to count

something that, while previously indiscernible, “detains in its multiple-being all the common traits of the collective in question” (BE 17): the absolute equality of the political subject.

This has been a long journey in thought. In exposing the systematic coherence and interpenetration of the issues raised in *Being and Event* and *Metapolitics*, however, it is hoped that we have been able to contribute something to the reception of Badiou’s philosophy as a whole in the English speaking world. It will be most interesting to see what complications *Being and Event II* brings to this picture.

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## Notes

My thanks to Marc Jones for his useful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> References to *Being and Event* will be marked in the body of the text by “BE,” followed by the page number.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> References to *Metapolitics* will be marked in the body of the text by “M,” followed by the page number.

<sup>7</sup> Alain Badiou, *Être et événement*, tome II: *Logiques des mondes* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted here that inclusion is not really another primitive relation, to be added to that of belonging. Rather, inclusion can be defined on the basis of belonging, for  $\beta \subset \alpha$  is equivalent to saying for all  $\gamma$ , if  $\gamma$  belongs to  $\beta$  then  $\gamma$  belongs to  $\alpha$  (BE 82).

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> See also Alain Badiou, *Le nombre et les nombres* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 100.

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<sup>11</sup> A “cardinal” is nothing other than an ordinal such that “there does not exist a one-to-one correspondence between it and an ordinal smaller than it.” The “cardinality” of a set is thus the number-name ordinal, that is to say, the cardinal, “with which that set is in one-to-one correspondence” (see BE 267-272).

<sup>12</sup> On this last point, see more particularly: Alain Badiou, *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 149-150 ; *Le Nombre et les nombres*, p. 261

<sup>13</sup> See generally: Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*.

<sup>14</sup> At least, this appears to be what Badiou means when he says that, within the political procedure such as it can be formalized by ontology, the collective *subject* of the judgments of political truth “is *constituted* through the political process itself” (M 22).

<sup>15</sup> As Badiou writes in *Being and Event*: “The generic is *egalitarian*, and every subject, ultimately, is ordained to equality” (BE 409).

<sup>16</sup> Following Badiou, since “politics universally concerns the parts of the situation,” the power of the State is often revealed through the “repression” it brings to bear on whatever threatens the indifference in which its count usually operates (M 144-145).