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The Militant Historian: The concept of history in the  
work of Alain Badiou

A dissertation presented by

Kerry William Purcell

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

Birkbeck College, University of London  
September 2021

*Declaration*

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

.....

Kerry William Purcell

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*The Militant Historian: The concept of history in the work of Alain Badiou*

*Abstract*

This thesis pivots on two suppositions: firstly, that historicism as an approach to the past remains dominant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and secondly, the work of the philosopher Alain Badiou offers an original and altogether radical riposte to this form of historiography. The work as whole is principally focused on the second of these assumptions and seeks to offer the first wide ranging analysis of Badiou's use, development, and transformation of the concept of history. Broken into six chapters, the first five sections center on key texts in Badiou's still developing oeuvre and examine how the growth of his philosophical ideas serve to challenge dominant conceptions of history and the role of the historian. In a hypothetical turn, the final section addresses how these ideas could transform the practices of teaching history and what it means to 'do history' as a meaningful endeavour. The thesis concludes by exploring what forms the 'militant historian' could take outside the narrow strictures of academic life.

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'The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.  
At the foundation/ground [*Grunde*] of well-grounded belief lies belief that is not grounded'  
- Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'On Certainty', (1969: 166)

'Nothing ever comes to an end'  
Maria Stepanova, *The Memory of Memory* (2021: 497)

## Introduction

'Men's curiosity searches past and future

And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend

The point of intersection of the timeless

With time, is an occupation for the saint'

T.S Eliot, 'Dry Salvages', *Four Quartets* (1944/1995: 30)

As a method of engaging with the past, historicism remains hegemonic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The desire to 'learn from past mistakes', to 'contextualise past events', to 'not be on the wrong side of history', etc., continue to hold a strong influence on the popular imagination.

Documentaries, podcast series, best-selling books, family history shows, 'box-set' historical dramas on streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon, all feed a yearning that is part of

what Maria Stepanova called in her recent *In Memory of Memory* (2021), a 'global obsession' with the past, one which often weds the personal evocations of memory with the

longing for historical fact. The wish to 'explain where things come from', where *we* come

from, becomes 'the key to everything that occurs daily in the present' (102). For Stepanova,

this has given rise to what she terms a 'religion of the past' (105). It is a state in which the

'subjectivity and selectiveness of memory means we fix on a historical 'excerpt'', which, '[i]n

comparison with a future we don't want to inhabit...feels domesticated – practically

bearable' (Ibid.).

While it is one of the major contentions of this work that this landscape necessitates the

work of the militant historian (see below), inside history departments and the narrow

confines of writing about the history of History, publications that purportedly seek to



challenge dominant modes of historiography often only reveal how entrenched historicism remains. From a cover design that situates the work within the tradition of artistic and political manifestos of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, via an allusion to *The Communist Manifesto* in its opening lines, Jo Guldi and David Armitage's 2014 publication *The History Manifesto* is a work which, on the surface, appears as a radical confrontation with our ways of 'doing history'. Yet, when reading the book's introduction, we encounter the following:

'History's power to liberate...ultimately lies in *explaining where things come from*, tacking between big processes and small events to see *the whole picture*, and reducing a lot of information to a small and shareable version. We recommend these methods to a society plagued by false ideas about the past and how it limits our collective hopes for the future' (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 13. Emphasis added).

As Simon (2015) has recognised, Guldi and Armitage's approach is one of viewing the past in instrumentalist terms, looking to the past as offering a 'useful enterprise' in 'how it might shape the future and guide action' (823). While driven by a desire to address the perceived 'false ideas' about the past, the problem actually lies with the methodological approach. Echoing Stepanova's point, Simon continues, '[i]f there is a problem, it is that history and historians seem to want to recover something that they lost a long time ago...[but] the problem is not the desire for something lost, but that historians seem to want to recover it in *the very conceptual shape they lost it*' (Ibid.: 820). In brief, Guldi's and Armitage's project is aligned with a remodelled *longue durée* tradition of historical research and writing, an approach that, in its original form, looked to the past as offering 'a necessary precondition of making ethical decisions about how to conduct a society' (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 23).

It is a form commonly associated with the Annales School of historians (and the journal *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* (founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929, and most prominently developed in the post WWII period by Fernand Braudel)). As Braudel himself noted in his 1958 essay 'History and the Social Sciences: *The Longue Durée*', the project was originally a response to 'short-term' episodic forms of historical analysis driven by the social sciences witnessed in the post-WWII years. As he remarked

They...deal excessively with "events," or if you will, they "presentize" social research, thanks to an empirical sociology that disdains any kind of history and limits itself to short-term data, to on-the-spot surveys. Or they dispense with time altogether by inventing, via a "science of communications," a mathematical formula for virtually timeless structures' (1958/2009: 183)

One of the goals of the Annales School was to 'open up history' to the conjunction of other disciplines (psychology, sociological, geography, tec.), but with a focus on various events, alongside the *longue durée*, which 'provided the matrix in which all objects of historical analysis met' (Tendler, 2013: 86). While Guldi and Armitage sought to distance themselves from what they termed the 'dirty *longue duree*' tradition which, they argue, saw historical research as 'a tool for persuading bureaucrats and making policy', as Simon has rightly noted, they still seek to advocate what Maurice Mandelbaum entitled a 'developmental view' of the history (1971). This is a view of history as eminently accessible, and offering 'critical potential, for historians, for other social scientists, for policy-makers, and for the public' (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 9). In other words, a form of Annales style instructional historicism they otherwise critique, which Mandelbaum defined as the contextual 'belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of any phenomenon and an adequate

assessment of its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place which it occupied and the role which it played within a process of development' (1971: 42). Shared between Braudel and Guldi and Armitage is the critique of the narrowing focus of historical research. With Braudel, it was a disciplinary foreshortening of historical time (i.e. driven by the narrow demands of scientific data); while with Guldi and Armitage, it was primarily a response to the contraction of time, or fragmentation of history, into smaller and smaller periods and subjects. As Guldi and Armitage summarised:

'The anthropological turn, with its emphasis on 'thick description'; the export of micro-history from Italy via France; the destabilisation of the liberal subject by identity politics and postcolonial theory; the emergent scepticism with regard to grand narratives diagnosed by Jean-François Lyotard: these were all the centrifugal forces tearing the fabric of history apart...[and] the disintegration of the profession was parasymptomatic of a larger trend, a triumph of the *short durée*.' (2014: 53-54)

While overlooking the hyperbolic notion of *short durée* writing 'tearing the fabric of history apart', what is so striking about Guldi and Armitage's text (and the many forms of popular history noted above) is that while they acknowledge the critical frameworks that challenge the grand substantive narratives of historical change, and there is some awareness of the way identity politics has given rise to 'micro-histor[ies] of exceptional individuals' (Ibid.: 11), there is a singular lack of a theory of the subject, either in terms of the events of historical study or, most evidently, the historians themselves. Ultimately, akin to the Annales school, underlying this approach is a theory of change that is based on 'a single ontological subject – humankind, reason or freedom – within a flow of time' (Simon, 2016: 263). Such a methodological lacunae is not, however, unique to Guldi and Armitage. In fact, while the

‘anthropological turn’ (i.e. the shift to structural levels of meaning seen in the work of such figures as Claude Levi-Strauss, see Chapter One) ‘addressed questions *to* history even as it tended to repress the question *of* history’ (Bennington and Young, 1987: 3), and post-structuralism ‘contrived to reintroduce it’ (Ibid.: 1), (albeit at times being accused of being a-historical (Ibid.: 2)), the examples of its impact on history as a practice – and specifically in terms of the theorization of the subject – have been limited (Cousins, 1987; Jenkins, 1991; Munslow, 1997). It is in response to this gap, that one of the key figures in the theoretical journey from structuralism to post-structuralism proves so productive, but who has been largely ignored in most studies of historiography when it comes to the issue of history, the historical event, and the historian’s engagement with the past in the present. It is to this absence that this current work primarily responds.

It is possibly an inauspicious start to a study of the concept of history in the work of French philosopher, playwright and activist, Alain Badiou, to note that in his 1982 study *Theory of the Subject* he alleged: ‘history does not exist’ (1982/2013: 92). One could interpret such a statement as superficially echoing Francis Fukuyama’s notorious essay published seven years later in 1989 that reasoned we had reached the ‘end of history’. Yet, when we explore his philosophical oeuvre in closer detail, we see that, rather than some end point or eschatology, for Badiou, to encounter the historical moment is a rarity, one that only manifests itself in moments of unparalleled *singularity*. These distinct ‘Events’, as Badiou labels them (Badiou 1988/2006), are only experienced through the aleatory historical experience itself; that is, a retrospective realisation that the subject has passed through an unanticipated process of radical subjectivation within and through the Event, i.e., an experiential encounter that has profoundly transformed them. For Badiou, history as

singularity manifests through such moments of individuation, where we see the emergence of a subject (not always aligned with a biophilic entity) that does not (cannot) exist in the pre-existent spaces of representation. More accurately, the Event gives rise to a historic being that is 'subtracted from representation, or from the state' (Ibid.: 177). When a historic subject is summoned into existence by the Event, then, in such moments, the mythic continuum of history, 'the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary' as Walter Benjamin famously said, is revealed as nothing other than the precondition of the existing status quo. History in this interpretation moves from epistemological questions of what and how we can know, to history as a form of ontology: to being *as* historical event and vice versa.

To work through an analysis of how conceptions of the 'historical event', 'history', and finally, the symbolic status and role of the 'historian' (an area that Badiou has not directly addressed), are impacted by his philosophical approach, demands an exploration of the emergence of Badiou's philosophical system. Yet, in any discussion of what constitutes 'history' in Badiou's work, it is necessary to address the central issue that his formal and axiomatic approach to change (i.e. Evental change) is fundamentally anti-historicist (Meillassoux, 2011). In fact, it is one of the markers of Badiou's evental historiography that, while one is called upon to challenge dominant modes of historiography, it offers no fixed guide to future action, no firm position from which to see this 'whole picture' in Guldi and Armitage's phrase. Karl Marx himself partly recognised this in his well-known letter to the German philosopher Arnold Ruge in 1844 when he noted that 'it is precisely the advantage of the new trend that we do not dogmatically anticipate the world... We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles... We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it *has to* acquire, even if it does

not want to' ('Marx to Ruge', 1843). If we were to substitute 'world' for 'event', Marx takes us close to a useful definition of Badiou's evental historiography, one that side steps the contradiction of an approach which undermines its call for the new by returning to a 19<sup>th</sup> century historicist ambition that seeks a 'connection between the past and future and uses the past to think critically about what is to come...' (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 13). As such, if approaching Badiou's work through a Badiouan framework, it is certainly problematic to think that we can simply begin to engage in a study of the idea of 'history' in his writings by attempting to construct a series of epistemic links between the intellectual milieu in which his thought was cultivated and the theoretical constitution of those very ideas. This is a very genuine dialectical problem faced by this thesis, in that historicism is the antithesis of a philosophical methodology that is hostile to all forms of constructivist and epistemological relativism and, as such, problematises a reading of his thought as contained within the evolution of specific idioms of French philosophy. Fundamentally, while the historical is the local site of the realisation of these truths, the truths that emerges from these sites are not limited and contingent to the site (it must be made clear here that 'truth' in this context is not epistemological, but, as will be discussed in Chapters Two and Five, subtractive, i.e. that which cannot be represented by language of the site). Nevertheless, while this thesis will engage in a structural periodization of Badiou's thought, focus will be brought to bear on the epistemic events in his thinking that mark the entrance of the Universal, the Evental ruptures in his encounters with key figures and through key works that reveal the generic "form" of infinity that fractures the finite historical moments or situations. The axiomatic formalization of this will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five, but there is a productive tension or gap here that I contend will possibly enable us to explore the development of Badiou's own thought through the methodological framework it seeks to promote.

However, before introducing the main sections of this thesis, it is necessary to provide a brief understanding of key ideas and debates that prefaced what has been termed ‘the crisis of history’ in the post WWII period (see Chapter One). The aim here is to explore, via a concise discussion of the general development of history as a distinct field, some of the key themes that foreshadowed ‘the centrifugal forces’ that challenged classical ideas of historiography. It is hoped this will then offer a valuable entrée to the work of Badiou and the transformation of historiography his writing potentially offers.

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History is, of course, a complex and slippery concept, and debates about the history of History (and historicism) often function as a ‘lexical crossroads’ (Hartog and Werner, 2014: 440). Looking for a definition, the most obvious place would be the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where, in a markedly historicist turn of phrase, history is defined as follows:

‘A written narrative constituting a continuous chronological record of important or public events (esp. in a particular place) or of a particular trend, institution, or person's life. Common in the titles of books.

and

‘Strictly speaking, a history is a work in which each movement, action, or chain of events is dealt with as a whole and pursued to its natural termination or to a convenient stopping place...’ “history, n.” (*OED Online*. Oxford University Press.)

The OED's definition is, as Paul Hamilton recognised in *Historicism* (1996), an idea of 'historical explanation' that can be traced back to such classical figures as Herodotus and Thucydides; while the rise of historicism can be dated to the critique of Enlightenment thought in the work Giambattista Vico and J.G. Herder and 'the convergence of literary interpretation and historical explanation demanded by the particular modes of expression of different nations at different times' (Ibid.: 31). Equally, Reinhart Koselleck recognised in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (2004) how '[o]ur modern concept of history is the outcome of Enlightenment reflection on the growing complexity of "history in general," in which the determinations of experience are increasingly removed from experience itself' (4). The roots of this shift from *res gestae* (human life itself) to *historia rerum gestarum* (the account of human life), could be traced back to the differentiation made by Aristotle in his *Poetics* between the universal aspirations of poetry and the historical focus on particulars. As Hamilton continues, 'For Aristotle, history was distinguished from poetry not by greater seriousness of purpose but by the different balance of probability and possibility proper to each discourse...[i]n poetry, probability was all; history on the other hand, had to attend much more to what was possible' (1996:7). For Aristotle, as David Gallop adds, a 'historian might assert, for example, that Alcibiades urged the Athenians to invade Sicily, or that he was later exiled, and finally murdered; whereas a poet would use Alcibiades's story to show the *kind of person* to whom *things of that kind* are likely or bound to happen' (2018: 420). Yet, in its later historicist guise, these are possibilities or particularities that are only conceivable according to a general theory of historical understanding which, as Simon noted, privileges a continuity between the past and the present. And it is here that we find the always present tension within historicism



that makes the 'point from which the critic speaks...as unsettled...as the object he or she interprets' (Hamilton, 1996: 17). This is the relativist conundrum of the 'historicist dialectic', which Hamilton summarises as follows:

'Historicism is the name given to this apparent relativizing of the past by getting to know the different interpretations to which it is open and deciding between them on the grounds expressing our own contemporary preoccupations. Fears then grow that this amounts to uncontrolled relativism on the part of the historian or critic. All one can say so far in mitigation is that changeability in our view of the past is a condition of getting our present into proper perspective.' (Ibid. 16)

As we will see, the critical distinction between past and present that the historicist dialectic points up becomes problematic when we try, as Badiou's work does in opposition to history as continuum, to attend to history as *dis-continuity*; when the historical event which serves as a break from any possibility of contextual comprehension, in the past or present, gives rise to 'new ontological subjects – new human communities – in terms of identity shifts' (Simon, 2016: 263). Here we are faced with events which are literally incomprehensible from the standpoint of the context in which they emerge. In such situations, history as conceived by Hamilton, Guldi and Armitage, etc. becomes impossible.

But Hamilton's characterisation is only one element of the debate concerning the possibility of knowledge of the past. With echoes of Aristotle's division of poetry and history, Hartog and Werner in Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2014) observed, along with the aforementioned 'historicization of the field of knowledge', one of the other areas of debate within the history of History is the associated theme of the 'relation between

relativism and universalism' (439). As Koselleck identified, in German '[t]he naturalized foreign word *Historie* – which primarily meant a report, an account of what had occurred, and in a specialized sense identified the “historical sciences” – was rapidly displaced in the course of the eighteenth century by the word *Geschichte*.' He continues

'*Geschichte* principally signified an event, that is, the outcome of actions either undertaken or suffered; the expression referred more to an incident than to an account of it...*Geschichte* assumed the sense of history and drove *Historie* out of general linguistic usage. As history (*Geschichte*) converged as event and representation, the linguistic basis was laid for the turning point leading to the historical philosophy of idealism. (Koselleck, 2004: 32)

As Koselleck rightly notes, the major episode which transfigured history from chronicle to 'event' was the French Revolution of 1789. This is when 'History [was] experienced as a new temporality, [and] specific dispositions and ways of assimilating experience emerg[ed]' (Ibid. 4). For Hartog and Werner, 'the violent and massive intrusion of manifestations of the revolutionary break produced chain reactions that modified the self-perception of contemporary European cultures' (2014: 446). From this point, continues Koselleck, history as a subject became 'furnished with divine epithets of omnipotence, universal [secular] justice, and sanctity, and the “work of history”, to employ the words of Hegel, [became] a driving force dominating men and shattering identity' (2004:33). Hegel himself noted in *The Philosophy of History* that 'In our language, the term *History* [*Geschichte*] unites the objective with the subjective side, and denotes quite as much the *historia rerum gestarum*, as the *res gestae* themselves...This union of the two meanings we must regard as of a higher order than mere outward accident' (Hegel, 2004: 60). As Hamilton continues, following the

revolution, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) accounted 'for knowledge as the progressive self-recognition of 'mind''. It was a 'mind which rationalizes nature in the course of scientific improvement [and] comes to see in nature only its self-image reflected back'. As for Hamilton, this teleological union 'strives for a fuller rendering of nature's otherness which will, in turn, be defeated by its own success' i.e. thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The outcome according to Hamilton's reading is 'a dynamic chronicle revised at each stage by the transformation of what it is about' (1996: 41). While Hamilton argues that Hegel's approach is 'as much a history of discontinuity...as it is one of continuity' (ibid.), one could question how discontinuous it is. As Simon recognises, it is a 'substantive philosoph[y] of history that postulat[es] an *ultimate meaning* of an entire historical process in the future, which retrospectively explains past events as directed towards future fulfillment' (2016: 263. Emphasis added). Clearly, this then leads to a situation where discontinuity itself is *anticipated*, which negates any genuine sense of a break in the very discontinuity of the conditions. This is the 'event horizon' of historicism, the deadlock of formalization that falls into the tautological position of historicizing the process of historicizing History and to which Alain Badiou's work offers one of the most substantial critical responses.

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Hayden White noted in his 1973 book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, that questions such as 'what does it mean to think historically, and what are the unique characteristics of a specifically historical method of inquiry?' were 'debated throughout the nineteenth century by historians, philosophers, and social theorists' (1) However, as White summarises, they were questions that were discussed

‘within the context of the assumption that unambiguous answers could be provided from them’ (Ibid.). While there were key texts in the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century addressing the split between science and history (Dilthey, 1910), history and its relation to philosophy (Croce, 1917), and the idea of history (Collingwood, 1946), many historians held firmly onto the objectivist ideal of historical research. It was not until the Post-war period that a critique of the ‘supposition that history can give us an account of the past that is not entangled with our ethical and political thought in the present’ (Ahlskog, 2018: 99) began to emerge. Certainly, this was not the first-time historicism had been in crisis. As Hartog and Werner correctly note ‘Nietzsche led the first attack against the all-encompassing ambitions by contrasting the imperatives of life (leben) with a relativist logic of historical method, which pushes the knowledge of detail so far as to lose sight of the whole...’ (2014: 448). And while Hamilton argues that historicism still ‘creeps in’ with the post-war attack on historicist approach, within primarily French (or more accurately, Parisian) intellectual culture, the historicist dialectic was displaced for a ‘synchronic tropology of the present – a treatise on figures of speech – displaces a diachronic map of the past’ (Hamilton, 1996: 24). It was a shift which saw the ‘theoretical implications’ of historiography shaping the act of historical research itself, when previously ‘the problem of the form in which the results of research were to be presented was always considered to be a domain separate from that of historiographical activity proper’ (Hartog and Werner, 2014: 449). Yet, following the work of Saussure and Levi-Strauss (see Chapter One), and the emphasis on the synchronic structures of language and society, writers such as Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey and Roland Barthes, among others, sought to critique what could be termed Bourgeois historicism or the Bourgeois historian (see Chapters One, Two and Six). Certainly, in the figure of Barthes

and his 1967 essay 'The Discourse of History', we see the argument that the referential realm of history is treated as somehow separate from its discursive capture. As he stated,

'Like any discourse with "realistic" claims, the discourse of history thus believes it knows only a two-term semantic schema, referent and signifier; the (illusory) merging of referent and signified defines, as we know, sui-referential discourses (such as performative discourse); we can say that historical discourse is a fake performative discourse in which the apparent constative (descriptive) is in fact only the signifier of the speech-act as an act of authority' (Barthes, 1984: 139).

This is what Bennington and Young term as history's 'sleight of hand' (1987: 3), that is where the 'referent...is projected into a realm supposedly beyond signification, from which position it can be thought to precede and determine the discourse which posits it as a referent (Ibid.) i.e., as if the historian has access to some substantial historical kernel that is beyond the discursive tools necessary to grasp it. As to whether we add the prefix 'post' to the works that followed Barthes hypothesis is questionable (see Angermuller, 2015), but in such works as Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973) and Jacques Derrida's *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1979), we find theorists 'redescribing the content or depth of reference of a piece of [historical] writing as an effect of the play of rhetorical figures across its surface' (Hamilton, 1996: 18). Fundamentally, for a figure such as White, examinations of the historical object, reveal nothing more than the historian's 'philosophy of history' (1973, xxxi). Ultimately, 'historical explanations are...based on different metahistorical presuppositions about the nature of the historical field, presuppositions that generate different conceptions of the kind of explanations that can be used in historiographical analysis' (Ibid. 13). For White, it was these philosophical assumptions that served as the 'glue' that bound historical events

together in their retelling by the historian. He disagreed with Collingwood's a priori assumption that, in White's words, 'historians come to their evidence endowed with a sense of the *possible* forms that different kinds of recognizably human actions *can* take' (1978: 84). Rather, the historian is faced with nothing but value-free 'elements', which 'are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others...' (Ibid.). White is key in understanding what Ahlskog encapsulated as the rejection of 'the absolute separation between substantive and critical philosoph[ies] of history' (2018: 97). However, Ahlskog's argument that what we should take from White is that 'every historian, consciously or not, must rely on their preunderstanding about the nature of historical reality, human behaviour, causality and so forth' (Ibid.) returns us to a form of historicist relativism. More significantly, returning to one of the overarching themes of this thesis, there is, once again, no room here for history as discontinuity. If one is reliant upon 'preunderstanding', then how do we encounter historical events (in the past or present) that break with this very 'preunderstanding'? In fact, White's formalist approach permits no such "space". Rather, for White, any formal "space" is already preordained by his call to know the metahistorical structured coordinates before one embarks on a historical study. While also serving to problematize the structuralism/post-structuralism chronology (Bennington and Young, 1987: 8), this ability to speak of an undecided gap was something Derrida highlighted in his 1959 essay 'Genesis and Structure', when he noted

'the Idea or the project which animates and unifies every *determined* historical structure, every *Weltanschauung* [a particular view of life], is *finite*: on the basis of the structural description of a *vision of the world* one can account for everything except the infinite opening to truth, that is, philosophy. Moreover, it is always something like an *opening*

which will frustrate the structuralist project. What I can never understand, in a structure, is that by means of which it is not closed.' (cited in Ibid.: 8; Derrida, 1959/1978: 160)

While Alain Badiou would come to disagree with Derrida's equation of philosophy qua truth, the identification of this *opening*, what he would term as Derrida's '*inscription of the non-existent*', was a recognition shared by Badiou, with the addendum that this inscription is 'strictly speaking, impossible' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 132). That is 'Derrida's thesis, Derrida's conclusion, the source of Derrida's desire is that, whatever form [a] discursive [structural] imposition may take, there is a point that escapes that imposition' (Ibid.: 133), with '*the inscription of the impossibility of the non-existence as the form of its inscription*' (Ibid.: 132). This marked in his words the beginning of a post-structuralist 'anti-humanist programme', which 'prevailed because it [was] the bearer of coupled ideas of the void and the beginning' (Badiou, 2005/2007: 173); that is, a '*formalized in-humanism*' (Ibid.: 178). It was from this period that 'the interminable work of thought, or of writing, is to locate that point'. Not 'grasping' the vanishing point, but 'grasping fleeing *qua* vanishing point' (Ibid.). Transferred to the realm of historiography, Badiou's oeuvre, his 'interminable work', potentially offers a way of 'grasping' this *becoming* of history as singularity. In the historicist guise, the space of the events fleeing becomes all, and as a result you are 'not able to locate anything that is non-existent', that is '[y]ou simply have the space of generality' (2008/2009: 135).

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This thesis begins in the post-war period of 1950/60s France and Badiou's entry into the changing landscape of the French higher education system. In **Chapter One: Structuralism**

**and the Crisis of History** I will seek to examine how, freed from the memories of war and deprivation, he was part of a generational challenge to the systems of authority embodied in the traditions of the 'grandes écoles'. Central to this will be an analysis of the critical confrontation between Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, pinpointing some of the key ideas that played a pivotal role in shaping Badiou's subsequent explorations of the 'subject' and 'history', a philosophical encounter that more generally formed part of what has been termed the 'crisis of history' (Dews, 1994: 105). As will be examined, the philosophical and political positions advocated by Sartre and Althusser marked a highly contested space within French intellectual culture of the early 1960s. Specifically focused upon questions of agency, structure and the role of history in philosophical investigation, Badiou's encounter with such texts as Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960/1976), developed his awareness of the historical event as something we could either betray or maintain a lasting faithfulness towards. This was clear in the first of the three phrases<sup>1</sup> which Badiou himself identified as key to understanding Sartre's political engagement. In the 1950s and his work with the PCF, Badiou recognised that Sartre had 'realized at that time that the choices facing intellectuals were historically situated. Anyone who claimed to be able to remain neutral had simply chosen to side with the forces of social conservatism' (2008/2009:15-16). It was the period in which 'Sartre became the man of specific commitments, the man of concrete historical conflicts' (Ibid.: 17). In this, we can see the principle of an allegiance towards the 'Idea' that would become, in a different form, so central to Badiou's later work; that is, a desire to remain true to the

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<sup>1</sup> While the first was Sartre's work with the Parti Communiste Français, the other two phases were his struggles in the 1960s against the French colonial war in Algeria; and his movement away from the PCF in the 1970s, working with immigrants and factory workers in anti-capitalist struggles (Badiou, 2008/2009: 14).



Idea of Communism that was 'radicalized' with his engagement in the events of 68 (Badiou, 2010; see Chapter Three).

As noted, Chapter One will also examine Badiou's engagement with the work of Lévi-Strauss, the 'father of modern anthropology' (Wilcken, 2012) and central to the emergence of Structuralism. With respect to Badiou's nascent formalisation of history, we will briefly identify Lévi-Strauss' connections to mathematics, before turning to the structural anthropologists' attack on Sartre's conceptualization of 'man' and its consequences for the idea of history. Key to this dispute is the problematic of connecting history with the contingent sites of its production and what this means for the conceptualization of the historical. We will examine how Badiou would come to adopt elements of both Sartre's and Lévi-Strauss' ideas, including from the latter the concept of 'anti-history', and the former the idea of the historical as a political process and the importance of subjective agency.

Beyond Sartre and Levi Strauss, if there was one figure who lay at the centre of the storm that swept across French intellectual culture in the second half of the 1960s, it was Louis Althusser. With the growth of structuralism and the associated turn away from phenomenological idealism, Sartre's reputation had waned amongst the first wave of *normaliens* that emerged from the Ecole Normale Supérieure at the beginning of the sixties. It was argued at the time that underlying Sartre's approach was a set of assumptions about the possibility of mass political action and the transparency of the subject (partly influenced by his reading of Hegel), and Althusser's theories sought to challenge these realms. In this early period, it will become clear that Badiou shared many of Althusser's arguments that

both history and science were 'subjectless' fields, along with his critiques of the teleological presumptions that underwrote Sartre's work.

Contra to his later work, Badiou concurred with Althusser's contention that discussions of the subject only functioned at the level of ideology and not within the realm of scientific/mathematical formalization. This chapter will seek to outline how Althusser's critical engagement with the work of Sartre served to establish, via his 'return to Marx', the idea of historical change as emerging through ruptures within the mode of production and associated super structural forms. One of the central developments of Althusser's work in relation to Badiou's own theoretical maturation was the way he would seek to develop a theory of historical change that was effectively 'subjectless'. As will be examined, this was not a simple mirroring of Lévi-Strauss' submission to synchronic absolutism. Rather it was an approach rooted in material actualities of modes of production. This was not, however, another form of historicism, but, via Althusser's re-reading of Marx, a way in which a scientific methodology could be utilised in the analysis of eventual change. Central to this was his concept of the 'epistemological break' that would serve as one of the more lasting influences on the young Badiou. While Sartre advanced a phenomenological theory of subjective transformation via historic events, Althusser sought to provide a structural language that accounted for these transformations (minus the subject) and in the process, sought to distinguish between the ideological and the scientific' or, more accurately, 'the ideological immanent to science itself' (Fraser, 2007: xvii). Ultimately, as will be examined in Chapter Two of this thesis, it was in relation to this key distinction that Badiou's subsequent critique of Althusser marked the first steps towards his mathematization of the subject and his radical rethinking of what constituted the historical event.

In the four years that preceded the events of May 1968, Alain Badiou was engaged in an intense period of philosophical investigation. It was a time when he attended and spoke on Althusser's *théorie* classes, joined the audiences of *normaliens* at Jacques Lacan's talks, and researched a mixture of mathematical, psychoanalytical, and political texts. The outcome, as explored in **Chapter Two: History as internal exclusion: From 'The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism' to 'Mark and Lack'**, were three essays, the aforesaid 'The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism' (RM) (1965) and 'Mark and Lack' (ML) (1969), along with 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (IS) (1968), all of which, without fear of overestimation, served to guide Badiou's subsequent approach to the concepts of history, historicity, and the historical event.

Opening with an examination of how the tensions between the Parti Communiste Français and Althusser in the 1960s shaped Althusser's re-reading of Marx, and how this subtly influenced the evolution of Badiou's philosophical ideas, one of the key realms of analysis in the first part of this chapter will be the differentiation between science and ideology first encountered in Chapter One. In Badiou's RM, this manifested itself in an analysis of the 'site' of historical change, the theorisation of change, and the ideological-science dynamic in the representation of change. RM finds Badiou as the committed Althusserian, where, against the backdrop of an ideological battle over future direction of Communism, he works through the impact different approaches to Marx's work have had on the post-war conceptualisations of historical transformation. It is from his frustrations with the formal representation of Marxism, that is, the modelling of the scientific formalisation of Marxism, that we will explore how Badiou turned towards mathematics, specifically set theory. From

this, the crucial question, already alluded to in the summary of Chapter One, was how to represent change *from within* the space of change, or, more accurately, identifying the 'blind spot' of the structure that could 'mark' the site of change. This focus constituted the intervention that was to become Badiou's second essay, 'Infinitesimal Subversion'.

As will be explored, IS maps out two key areas of Badiou's early approach to the theorisation and the identification of historical transformation. These are primarily the realms of the indeterminate variable that is unnameable within the structure in which it is "found" and the development (via the analysis of the mid twentieth century mathematician Abraham Robinson) of a language via which one can theoretically 'occupy the inoccupiable'. In many ways, this chapter begins the investigation as to whether this process of 'naming' what Badiou terms an 'infinity point', could, in philosophical terms, support a nascent form of militant historiography. Alongside the mathematical formulation of this, Chapter Two will briefly touch on Badiou's early encounter with Lacan and how his concept of the Real supplemented Badiou's algebraic formalisation of the infinity-point via a material mark. The concise study of IS will argue how this pivotal, but often ignored, essay, serves as one of the key theoretical pillars in his challenge to dominant forms of historicism.

While May 1968 would serve as Badiou's Damascene conversion to the role of political activist, the essay he wrote on the eve of this tumultuous event served, in its elementary propositions, to build upon the previous works exploration of the real qua void set/infinity point as 'marking' the site of a structure's transformation. Partly written as a response to Jacques Alain Miller's essay 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)' (1966/1977), 'Mark and Lack: On Zero' (1969/2012) could be said to be an important tool in challenges to

post-structuralist arguments that historical change is located at the level of the signifier, that is, as discussed above, transformations are limited to the sphere of representation (White, 1978 et al., see above). As will be examined, ML seeks to challenge Miller's argument that the logic of the signifier masks the lack of a structure, that which is *beyond* the ideological forms of that structure's forms of representation. Miller's transcendental idea is that this 'impossible object', this lack from without, is masked by the signifier, which then serves to suture the subject within the structure. As will be examined, for Badiou, in the formal logic of mathematics, there is no gap in meaning, no 'outside' of that language. Rather, the self-identical, grapheme like quality of logico-mathematical forms, being free of ideology, produces no blind spot. This has significant implications for forms of historical analysis, not least how Badiou's 'mathematicisation of change' offers a radical methodological instrument for the 'identification' of impossibilities *within* historical structures.

For Badiou, from the 1960s to the 1970s, China 'was a space of [the] singular and irreducible existence of the communist hypothesis...' (Badiou, 1978/2011: 92). Badiou was frustrated with the static models of state communism represented by the Soviet Union (and the moribund PCF), and it was the authenticity of Mao's struggle for new ways of thinking about communism (and specifically the dialectic), that held such a fascination for himself and many French intellectuals during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). For Badiou, this decade became his *années rouges*, or Red Years. It was a spell in which his efforts were largely directed towards political action with the L'Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste (UCFML). In **Chapter Three: The 'paradoxical history of eternity': Badiou, Mao, and the 'historico-truth'**, we will explore how Badiou's turn towards political

action shaped his conceptions of the historical and how this period of intense activity contributed to his subsequent theorization of the subject as key to historical change (the consequences of which will be explored more fully in Chapter 4). More specifically, as will be investigated, it was in Badiou's own exploration of Mao's theorization of contradiction (Badiou, 1975/2005), that we start to see the emergence of a 'materiality' of the Real, that is, a structural impasse that offers the possibility of (or call for) a new formalization as a way of a 'resolving' this impasse. It is worth noting here that this also has a connection to the concept of 'force' discussed in Chapter Four.

The chapter will begin with a succinct précis of the political developments preceding the events of May '68. Central to this was how Khrushchev's de-Stalinization of the CCCP led to the deterioration of the relationship with Mao's CPC, and how this was mirrored in the *normaliens* attacks on the PCF. Badiou had been apart from many of the political machinations of this period, but via an analysis of Althusser's own engagements with the PCF, Mao, and his critiques of the reduction of communism to either the economy or superstructure, we will examine how his thought would mature as a counterpoint to that of his masters.

Therefore, Chapter Three will find Badiou moving away from the Idealism of Althusser's 'structural materialism', a decision which was only fortified by his master's response (or lack of) to the activities of May '68 and Badiou's transformation by this event. As will be discussed, like many of the micro groups that emerged from this time, (Gauche prolétarienne, Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes, etc.), Badiou's reading of Mao translated itself into the practical activity of exploring the points of contradiction in

political situations. Agreeing with 'The Great Helmsman', that this impasse or contradiction is 'the fundamental cause of...development, while its interrelations and interactions with other things are secondary causes' (Tse-Tung, 1937/1965: 313), Badiou's political activity during this period sought a radical scission or reinsertion of a contradiction into the relationship between two objects/subjects or object-subject. The outcome of such operations for Badiou was the 'revelation' of the infinite. While this chapter will explore May '68 and the consequent political struggles shaped by these philosophical developments, the focus will be on how this connects to the continued formalisation of potential new historiographic models. To that end, beyond the discussion of Althusser and his response to the Cultural Revolution, Chapter Three will also be marked by the analysis of what Badiou would term the 'communist invariant', along with his own response to Mao's theory of contradiction. Both sub-sections will serve to offer an understanding of the embryonic emergence of a conception of history as both site-specific and universal, a union I encapsulate in the term 'historico-truth'.

As will be revealed, while Badiou's break from Althusser in the 1970s served to clarify the emergent ideas of his philosophical oeuvre, his approach to history was still coloured by a traditional Marxist teleology. It was one in which the proletariat as 'insurgent producers' were equated with the empirical category of the working class 'as the class of all workers' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 334). Yet, via his study of Mao, his approach slowly transmuted into a more nuanced dialogue between Marxist theory and the practical realisation of the timeless invariants of the communist idea, which manifested itself in the recognition that the subject serves as the bearer of this conjunction of the eternal and the political engagement with its consequences. It will be argued that the emergence of this theory of subjectivation marks

the point in which history as Idea becomes allied with the subject as faithful conduit of this Idea.

In his 1997 publication *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Badiou noted that Paul offered a model to 'sharply separate each truth procedure from the cultural "historicity" wherein opinion presumes to dissolve it' (6). "Historicity" in this passage was a condensed synonym for what Badiou saw as 'the progressive reduction of the question of truth (and hence, of thought) to a linguistic form, [where] judgment...ends up in a cultural and historical relativism that today constitutes at once a topic of public opinion, a "political" motivation, and a framework for research in the human sciences' (ibid). Clearly, Badiou's problematizing of historicity is shaped by his critique of one of the persistent targets of his philosophical project, namely what is commonly identified as the 'linguistic turn' in critical thought. This shift, if not playing a defining role in methodological approaches to popular forms of historical research, has, as we have touched on, been highly influential in academic discussions and debates around the 'possibilities of history'. Conflated (if not by the authors associated with these terms, then often through those secondary texts in which their ideas were circulated) under the various titles of 'Post-Structuralism', 'Postmodernism' and 'Deconstructionism', while initially targeting forms of positivistic (read Marxist) history and historical research, which were frequently classified as 'reductionist', 'teleological', 'imperialistic' etc., the shadow of suspicion slowly fell across history as a viable subject *tout court*. **Chapter Four: Between the eagle and the old mole: History, Historicity, and the Theory of the Subject**, will commence with an analysis of how the postmortem of '68 metamorphosed into these much broader critiques of the political narratives of change. From this, we will explore how, via such figures as Andre Glucksmann, the aforementioned



linguistic turn became the means via which the language of Marxism and militantism was condemned as the work of 'master thinkers' who subjugated people via their textual discourses. In this critique, history became a synonym for these oppressive narratives, while the 'Pleb' became its antagonist. It was a theoretical approach, as Badiou would recognise, that set up a contradiction between the empiricism of these supposed powers and the transcendental forms of textual idealism ascribed to them.

In many ways, Glucksmann's ideas were a bastardized appropriation of Michel Foucault's groundbreaking work, and it is essential to our understanding of how Badiou's oeuvre serves as a challenge to all forms of historicism, that we consider his encounter with this key figure. As will be examined, Badiou's own critique of the post-68 period homed in on all totalities, or more accurately, as is explored throughout this thesis, the 'identification' of the gap or fissure that is not speakable within any critical approach that generates a totality. This, as will be identified, forms one of the key elements of his critique of Foucault's synthesis of discourse and power.

As we identified in the summary of Chapter Two, the work of Lacan became increasingly important to the development of Badiou's thought throughout the 1960s. And this became key when addressing the idea of the impasse as the marker of history, or, in the language of his later work, history qua manifestation of the eternal. Central to this was the subject, a figure his master Althusser had refused to examine beyond forms of ideological capture/reproduction. Thus, while charting his ongoing retreat from Althusserian thought, Chapter Four will offer a detailed consideration of the text that lay at the heart of this formalization: *Theory of the Subject (TS)* (1982/2013). In the analysis of this text, four key

spheres will be examined. Firstly, in 'The Critique of Structural Dialectics', we see Badiou challenging the reading of Hegel in which linear conceptions of historical time emerge, arguing that the unsuturable space of the impasse, the scission, means that the thesis-antithesis dialectic is never synthesised. He builds his critique via the use of algebraic formulation and through the portmanteau concept of the *Splace* and its obverse, the *Outplace*. In *TS*, the former refers to the preexisting symbolic co-ordinates of a place, the dominant ordering of a place that denies the possibility of the new. While the latter term indicates this very idea of the new 'within' the old, as being that which resists inclusion into the *splace*. As we will explore, when Badiou denies the existence of History with a capital 'H' in *TS*, it is this language/analysis of the *Splace* to which he is referring.

The second component of my analysis of *TS* is the important concept of *periodisation*. The periodisation of history into distinct and measurable units of time is a common element of historicism. Yet, in Badiou's theorisation, following our evaluation of his critique of structural dialectics, periodisation becomes a vital tool in considering the break in the *splace* effected by the rupture by the *outplace*. While not unproblematic, we will examine how this concept fosters a radical historiography that challenges traditional notions of historical continuity, while still allowing us to identify the 'rebirth' of new historical sequences.

As to what it means, phenomenological speaking, to encounter the rupture of the *splace* by the *outplace*, Badiou develops the concepts of 'anxiety', 'courage', 'superego' and 'justice'. All four terms allow Badiou to map the trajectory of an event, marking its emergence, realisation, oppression and fidelious continuity. What will be noted, is that the first of these concepts plays a noteworthy role in our tentative formalisation of the figure of the militant

historian. That is, the sense of anxiety that is manifested via the force of the outplace in the splace, serves as a missive from the real qua void. For the individual attuned to this nameless communiqué (as will be examined, a message that finds its recipient in the figure of the lampbearer, *guetteur* (lookout) and, finally, in this thesis, the militant historian), one is required to scrutinize the potential break, to be, what is termed, the 'old mole', then, have the courage to defend it against the statist superego, to maintain a lasting fidelity to its fulfilment that Badiou identifies as a form of justice.

Finally, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of Badiou's reading of Stéphane Mallarmé's Sonnet 'Stilled beneath the oppressive cloud' (1895). While the poem offers Badiou the opportunity to synthesise many of the critical ideas introduced in *TS*, it also offers us a deeper understanding of the concept of the 'vanishing term' and its role in Badiou's conceptualization of change. What will become clear, is that one of the key elements of Mallarmé's work for Badiou is how radical change is 'marked' within the preexistent splace or structure. This highly complex process of marking the infinite *within* and *via* a finite structure, will serve to strengthen our nascent comprehension of the radical histography achieved in the work of the militant historian.

*'Concept of Model and Theory of the Subject* are texts that stand on a threshold in Badiou's work', Oliver Feltnam noted in *Alain Badiou: Live Theory* (2008): 'they close one period and open the next' (84). The subsequent stage was marked by the publication of two books which, while continuing to develop many of the themes first introduced in the former titles, enact a radical break from those publications. In terms of the focus of this thesis, Badiou's *Being & Event (BE)* (1988/2006) and *Logic of Worlds (LW)* (2006/2009) clearly have

significant implications for our theories of historical change as explored in the previous chapters. In the first instance, as Feltnam continues, what is negated in *BE & LW* is 'the entire Marxist framework for the analysis of politics and history: he no longer speaks of a dialectical process of history, of the party, of proletarian ideology or contradiction' (Feltnam, 2008: 84). In **Chapter Five: The Historian as 'retroactive agent of interventional practice': *Being and Event* and *Logic of Worlds***, there will be an examination of how these two seminal texts attempted to construct a new 'consistency' (ibid.) that sought to theorize historical-subjective transformation via a mathematical modelling of change.

Though he does not seek to dismantle the Marxist project, in the post-1968 period Badiou grapples with the diminishing returns Marxism offered as judge and instigator of historical change. One of the problematic issues for Badiou was his dissatisfaction with the traditional amalgamation of 'workers' with the sociological category of the 'working class', and by association how this limited ideas of historical transformation. Following his own transformative experiences of May 68, Badiou sought to explore how the process of subjectivation, which, he argued, was simply presumed in *TS*, was not, as with 'old Marxism', the outcome of fixed dialectic laws. While *BE* would sustain a comprehensive challenge to these ideas, the bridge between *TS* and *BE* were two papers Badiou delivered at the the École Normale Supérieure in January and June 1984 that became the concise publication *Can Politics be Thought? (CPT?)* (1985/2018). Chapter Five will commence with an analysis of how *CPT?* challenged Marxism's long-standing claim as History's guardian and explore how Badiou argued for the uncoupling of Marxism from its traditional referents. As will be emphasised, this paved the way for the idea of history as counterweight or

counterforce to the certitudes of facticity and inevitability, towards history as impasse qua event and the subject's response to the aleatory nature of its manifestation.

Yet, theorising the consistency of inconsistency constituted one of the significant objectives of *BE*. To this end, Badiou turned to the work of German Mathematician Georg Cantor (1845-1918). While Badiou does not directly address the philosophy of history in *BE*, Cantor's work (along with Zermeloan set theory), allows him to model structural change in such a way that one is able to symbolically 'represent' the infinite and, as such, begin to develop the idea of history as the 'manifestation' of this infinite. The important distinction here, however, is between the forms of *presentation* and *representation*. For Badiou, presentation constitutes the idea of the 'there is'. What he means by this is, as he highlights in the 'dictionary' towards the end of *BE*, 'the multiple-being such as it is effectively deployed' (Badiou, 1988/1995: 519. It is only in the realm of representation, that one can count the re-presentation of multiples according to the logic of the situation in which they appear (here we also see Badiou's divergence from the emphasis on representation within post-structuralist circles). Beyond the site itself, the key terms here as regards the presentation and representation of multiples are those of *inclusion* and *belonging*. The former constitutes the presentation of multiples, while the latter their presence within the realm of representation. Since this thesis engages with a uniquely Badiouan approach to history, it will confine its analysis to that which is included but does not belong, presented but not represented. It is the gap between these two realms and those figures who, in institutional terms (i.e., the Bourgeois historian) stand sentry over whether something belongs or not, that will serve as one of the points of analysis in Chapter Five and Six. From this, via the process of subjectivization, it will be argued via Badiou that the 'appearance' of

an absence within the sphere of belonging calls forth a militant figure, one who, via their intervention, could sustain a form of justice to this absence. The enquiry into *BE* will then conclude with a careful dissection of this militant figure/operator of connection, seeking to grasp how, as presentation is prior to representation, the subject must always wager as to whether the event has in fact taken place. It will be argued that, as regards historical research, this act of radical subjective intervention becomes an essential precept in definitions of the militant historian.

If we equate history with the emergence of an event, then, without allowing it to collapse into the contextual, one must still pay attention to the ontic dimension of its manifestation. This was a sphere in which, as Badiou himself acknowledged, *BE* lacked a detailed understanding. It was one of the objectives of *LW* to develop a clearer conception of how the ontical connects to the transcendental structure of the infinite. As regards the appearance of historical change, the second half of Chapter Five will begin with an exploration of how the inconsistent multiplicity, manifests *in* the world. This analysis will pinpoint a slight shift in Badiou's mature thought, from the evental moment as the 'appearance' of the void, to the historical event as the entrance of the 'singular inexistent' within the site of the event, that is the multiple manifesting itself within a particular world. Moreover, what becomes important here for radical forms of historiography, is how this 'function of appearing' of the singularity focuses our attention on the relationship between the multiplicity of objects in *a* world, and the transcendental identity of these multiplicities. However, the identification of this identity within a world creates significant problems as to how it can appear without being corrupted by the world in which it emerges. This is the problematic of engaging with the concepts of historicity and eternity within the same

temporal site. The subject's response to the event lies at a crossing point of retrospection and futurity and calls for a militant figure that enacts an either/or response to the axioms the event compels.

When it comes to contemporary debates on historiography, Badiou's work has been largely ignored. Yet, when one challenges historicism and the institutional role of the historian (the supposed 'guardians of deep knowledge', in Guldi and Armitage's revealing phrase (2014: 5)), he offers a clear and precise response. While the preceding chapters will examine the development of his philosophical challenge to these dominant discourses, **Chapter Six: The Vibrating Mind**, looks more closely at the application of his work to ways of 'doing history' and the role of the historian.

Divided into four sections, this chapter will return to the idea of history as immanent exception, but with a focus on how, when viewed from within the historicist paradigm, Badiou's formalizations are regarded as illogical. We will also see how, when faced with building a methodological approach to history, where one is limited to pre-existing ways of speaking about change, the ideas of *hope* and the prior discussed concept of *courage* can serve to sustain a militant historian's identity qua event. This discussion will conclude by examining how, if a historian practices a narrow form of ontological self-assurance concerning both the subject of their studies and their (not unconnected) institutional role as a historian, what does it mean when a militant historian stands as an exception to this ontology?

Continuing this critique of a single ontological subject underpinning the historicist approach, the second segment of Chapter Six will return to the idea of the historico-truth as the point of genericity extracted (opened) from within the contingent moment (that is, the manifestation within a world of a truth). Building on our previous discussions of his work, it will be examined how we can engage in historical analysis without, in Badiou's words, 'anthropologizing' the truths revealed by those rare moments of rupture (Badiou, 2005/2007: 178). A crucial element of this section will be of particular importance, that is to determine how the multiplicity of truths calls upon a potentially infinite array of ontological positions from which history is explored, which, beyond questions of difference and identity, could serve as one of the key challenges to the institutionalisation of history as a practice. The other more uncompromising and possibly unsettling challenge is that history, as the commonly assumed collections of dates, people, and events, becomes unimportant, if not meaningless, in the light of Badiou's work. As Meillassoux summarised in his short essay on 'History and Event in Alain Badiou' (2011) in Badiou's view, this is history as nothing more than 'temporal modification' (1).

While much ink has been spilt on the 'philosophical predisposition[s]' (Scott, 2007: 22) of history and forms of historiography, one could argue that the same level of attention has not been paid to the historian themselves. Traditionally, the historian has always resided 'outside' the events they are observing. As White has recognised, 'unlike the novelist, the historian confronts a veritable chaos of events already constituted, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell' (1973, FN.5: 6). But in the handful of works that have attempted to engage with the role of history in Badiou's work (Meillassoux, 2011; Simon, 2016; Peden, 2018), none have seriously considered how his philosophical ideas



have impacted on the historian themselves. Thus, in the third section of Chapter Six, we finally turn our energy to the ontology of the historian and how he or she engages with history as discontinuity. More precisely, this will entail asking the question: can a new subject emerge through a present-day encounter with a past event? And if this becomes the form in which we grasp historical transformation, is it possible to speak of history as one of a continuity of truths qua subjects? And if the symbolic identity of the professional historian is challenged by this encounter, what does the process of transformation look like? As will become clear throughout this section, I will argue that the application of Badiou's work to definitions of the historian is most keenly felt in the institutional realm in which the professional historian is most found: Higher Education.

Lastly, continuing these questions of institutional authority and the persistence of the event, the closing section of this chapter will conclude with an examination of the tropes and patterns of the historian as statist character. We will consider what, if any, forms of organisation can serve to sustain historical change contra such a figure. We will ask if, beyond the symbolic co-ordinates of traditional forms of historiography, new subjects can emerge which offer a uniquely Badiouian approach to historical education. Returning to some of the key concepts from *TS*, this chapter will close by looking at how the 'splaced ground' of historical knowledge can be split from within the 'finitude of its means' (Badiou, 2005/2007: 154), resulting in an institution that, via a form of evental historiography, can allow a form of infinite thought to appear.

## Chapter One: *Structuralism & the Crisis of History.*

"One must get down from the horse

in order to pluck the flower"

Mao Tse Tung

In part 1, scene three, of Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles stands before the eponymous character in his study and says: "I am the spirit that negates all..." Marshall Berman pertinently used this scene in the second chapter of his landmark examination of the experience of modernity, *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1983). In previous sections, Berman had explored how Goethe's tragic play offers a metaphor for the totality of modern material life and how this epoch gave rise to a form of subjectivation in which 'self-development' became synonymous with the fulfilment of modernity's potential. In the aforementioned chapter, Berman then astutely combined his distinctive reading of Goethe with an equally judicious one of Marx. While acknowledging his voluminous studies of the economic extraction of surplus value, and his political evangelizing for a socialist society, Berman recognises Marx as offering a way of understanding the unique qualitative experience of modernism.

When Berman uses Goethe's Mephistopheles to speak of negation, or when Marx speaks of 'all that is holy is profaned', they delineate a central feature of 19<sup>th</sup> century Capitalism; that is, everything that is built 'is built to be torn down' (Berman, 1983: 99). As is amply revealed by Berman, the economic expansion of the post-war period only served to extend what could be called the 'intensification of uncertainty'. This was an escalation that, through the global search for profitable margins, gave rise to a society in which it 'annihilat[ed] everything that it creates – physical environments, social institutions, metaphysical ideas,

artistic visions, moral values' (Berman, 1983: 288). The acculturation of individuals as 'flexible' economic agents, but whose 'freedoms' were inherently wedded to the symbolic obliteration of the stable signifiers of tradition and place that were needed to offset them, led to what one author termed the 'fear of freedom' (Fromm, 1961). However, as in many other instances, as Berman recognised, Marx and Engels had long accepted this contradiction at the heart of capitalist dynamics. That is, while in the political realm the bourgeoisie sought to represent order and tradition, in the economic realm a voracious appetite for perpetual motion was its *raison d'être*. The resulting contradiction was 'a society that has conjured up such mighty means of production and exchange, [but] is like the sorcerer who can no longer control the powers of the underworld that he has called up by his spells' (Marx & Engels, 1951: 15-16). In the decade immediately following the Second World War, these contingent contradictions had yet to surface, partly because of the drive to rebuild and the resulting period of unprecedented growth. In fact, throughout the 1950s, across most of the developed economies, there was no room for the traditional leftist critiques that had marked the 1920s and 30s, with most nations such as the US and UK 'presided over, almost everywhere, by governments of moderate conservatives' (Hobsbawm, 1994: 283). However, partly due to the strong presence of the *Parti Communiste français* (PCF) and the national soul-searching prompted by the Algerian War (1954-61), the economic euphoria experienced by many nations during the mid-to-late 1950s was not one shared by France (albeit the period did retrospectively come to be known as 'les trente glorieuses').

It was towards the end of this decade that a young Alain Badiou arrived at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS). As he notes, he 'met Althusser, read Derrida's first books, and

encountered Lacan's teaching, [and]...became involved in what was called structuralism at the time...' (Badiou & Engelmann, 2015: 2). His entry into the École was part of a general expansion of the student population (specifically in terms of social class), which would have a profound impact on French society over the coming decades. At the close of the WWII, the student population of France was well below 100,000. However, by the time Badiou was three years into his studies at the École, this had doubled to 200,000. It was an acceleration that showed no sign of abating (by the end of the following decade it was well over half a million) (Flora, 1983: 582, as cited in Hobsbawm, 1994: 300). What transpired was an illustration of the capitalist drive (in this instance, for an increasingly technically adroit workforce), which would inadvertently lead to a challenge to the traditional sites of bourgeois power and cultural reproduction. Yet, as Stefan Collini has recognised in his concise chapter on French intellectuals in *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006), one should not overstate the magnitude of this social shift. Many of the incoming students during this period came from the very same socio-economic and cultural milieu as their professors. 'In 1961', Collini notes, '50 percent of the Normaliens were sons of scholars or teachers...the overwhelming majority of those who were to be successful in gaining entry into the grandes écoles undertook their 'classes préparatoires' at four or five crack Paris lycées; a ludicrously disproportionate number did their 'classes prépas' at just two of these schools, Henri IV and Louis-le-Grand [which Badiou himself attended], symbolically located in Paris's 'Latin Quarter' adjacent to the other select institutions they served' (267-268).

Still, as Collini continues, 'the emphasis on the separateness or self-containedness of the intellectual elite can be exaggerated...[and] from the end of the 1950s onwards, French society underwent a period of enforced modernisation [in which]...the narrow educational

world...expanded and changed its character' (268-269). As such, it would certainly be remiss to say there was no increase in social mobility amongst the escalating student numbers of the 1960s, and that there was no conflict between this slowly diversifying cohort of future 'Normaliens' and the established elite. As Hobsbawm identified, the 'most immediate and direct consequence was an inevitable tension between these masses of [...] first-generation students and institutions which were neither physically nor organizationally and intellectually prepared for such an influx' (1994: 300). For these students, many of whom had no living memory of the deprivations of the 1930s or the traumas of war, they were 'not blanketed by the consciousness of living through times of staggering improvement, far better times than their parents had ever expected to see' (Hobsbawm, 1994: 301). It is not difficult to see how the irritation felt by some students towards the traditional authority of the École Normale, would soon spill over into a much broader resentment towards all authority figures. By the beginning of the 1960s, as Peter Wolin notes in *The Wind From the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution and the Legacy of the 1960s* (2010), for many students' the 'political system was an atavism: it had been conceived at the time of the Third republic, whereas by the 1960s France was well into its Fifth' (Wolin, 2010: 45). However, one could argue that for the young Badiou, as for many others, the seeds of this frustration were sown much earlier, when they were *lycéens*. When Badiou was a pupil at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, which, as Collini noted, was just a short walk south along the Rue Saint-Jacques and Rue d'Ulm to the Ecole Normale, he was engaged in the widespread protests against the prolonged Algerian War. For Wolin, the generational gulf between the growing student body and the French intellectual and political elite was only exacerbated by these protests. 'The [Algerian] conflict reinforced French youth's sense of political alienation, its antiauthoritarianism, and bred a pervasive cynicism concerning the Fifth

Republic's political institutions', Wolin observes. 'Its disaffection from mainstream politics set the stage for the emergence of "gauchisme" the proliferation of micropolitical groups that would stake out a terrain to the left of the Communists and their allies' (Wolin, 2010: 43). In the years to come, these *lycéens* would play a decisive (if much ignored) role in the 'events of May' 1968; for Badiou, however, the defining event of his intellectual development would come seven years after he had left the ENS. Prior to that, from 1957 to 1961, he had undergone what Peter Hallward referred to as his 'theoretical training' (Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 1). Under the tutelage of Louis Althusser, Georges Canguilhem, and Jean Hyppolite (amongst others), and alongside a collection of like-minded young theorists and writers, Badiou engaged in an atmosphere of incredible theoretical and political investigation. In what can only be referred to as the beginning of a revolution in French philosophical thought, Badiou, alongside his fellow students, sought to question the post-war explorations of public intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, along with other humanist philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although, as will be explored in further detail, as one of the older students associated with the groups that went on to form *Cahiers Marxiste-Léniniste* (1964-1968) and *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* (1966-1969), Badiou was always slightly to one side of his younger associates and would, in time, seek to integrate elements of the influence of Sartre into his work with Althusser. Nevertheless, on the whole, the fault line that marked the rupture or scission between, for example, the Existentialist Marxism of Sartre and that of the ENS students largely predisposed to the 'scientific turn' extended by Althusser's re-reading of Marx, was primarily centered on the key interrelated areas of the 'subject', 'history', and 'structure'. Although, as Hallward recognised, Badiou's attraction to the work of Althusser, and later on Mao (see Chapter Three), did not stem exclusively from his frustrations with the older generation of French

intellectuals, but was also connected to the already acknowledged crisis in the post-war generation's relationship to the established order. For Badiou, the self-conceit of the French political elite, a social body that often denied any need for change, was one of the driving forces behind his attraction to the highly theoretical seminars of Althusser and then the work of the 'Great Helmsman' of the Cultural Revolution. '[Y]ou have to remember', Badiou notes, 'just what the established Gaullist regime was like, in the early 1960s. You need to remember its oppressiveness, and the extraordinarily marginal or minoritarian character – in a way we can scarcely imagine today – of the protest movements, of radical or critical currents, confronted with the triumphalism of Pompidolian propertied capitalism. And you need to have lived through that society, a society which saw itself as having no more problems...' (Badiou, cited in Hallward & Peden, 2012a: 124).

The sphere in which this struggle took place, the epistemological battleground in which the theories of structuralism emerged, has been broadly characterized as marking a 'crisis of history' (Dews, 1994: 105); or, to follow Althusser's logic, a crisis in which the theories of structuralism were *both* a manifestation *of* and 'solution' *to* this crisis: history as both lacunae and revelation. To grasp how this "crisis" impacted on Badiou's early conceptions of the historical, it is necessary for this thesis to take what Althusser once termed 'a big detour' (Althusser, 2017: 47). As will become clear, Badiou was late to engage in many of the philosophical considerations explored below, for the simple fact that upon leaving the ENS in 1960 he entered his statutory year of military service (where he played flute in the army band) and then took up a teaching post in Reims. Therefore, while a degree of historical latitude is called for when isolating of these theoretical disputes, and while Badiou's own development does not run parallel to their emergence, they are key to

understanding the manifestation of his later thought, specifically with reference to questions of history.

### **Subject to structure: Sartre to Lévi-Strauss**

As Badiou himself has noted, if we were to look for the arrival of Hegel onto the stage of modern French thought, it would be with the celebrated seminars of the Russian born philosopher Alexandre Kojève. Held from 1933 until 1939 at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Section des Sciences Religieuses, it is not clear if Sartre attended the colloquia. Yet, as with many other many intellectuals of the post-war period (Simone de Beauvoir, etc. (Fallaize, E, 1998: 93)), Sartre would have read the publication of Kojève's lectures *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1947/1980), as well as Jean Hyppolite's *Genesis and structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of spirit* (1946/1979), published one year earlier. As Badiou intimates, the influence of these texts manifested itself in the increasing politicization of Sartre's thought during the 1945 – 1950 period and would eventually contribute to the publication of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in 1960 (1976). Following the metaphysical explorations of the subject and freedom in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943/1956), Sartre's political conversion was, as Badiou continues, one that sought a practical answer to the philosophical question: 'how can activity, the only model for which is the free individual consciousness, be a collective given?' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 19). It was in the *Critique* that he sought to explore the sites or differing definitions of the collective and its relation as an object to the individual. The three categories he developed to explore this were the 'Series', the 'Gathering', and the 'Organisation'. In brief, a 'Series' comprised a group of people orientated to an object, where they share a relationship to an object, but one which maintains a passive rapport



between each individual. Famously, Sartre's favoured example was the bus stop or queue. As he noted, if a group of people 'are waiting for a bus at a bus stop in front of the church...These people...realise, within the ordinariness of everyday life, the relation of isolation, of reciprocity and of unification (and massification) from outside...' (Sartre, 1960/1976: 256) As Badiou himself continued, 'In a series men are...brought together by the object. The unity of the gatherings exists because everyone's relationship with the object is the same. But that external identity becomes an internal alterity: if the object makes me the same as everyone else, then I am other than myself.' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 21). Alternatively, the 'Gathering', or 'Fused Group', manifests itself in those moments when the Other ceases to reinforce a passive isolation, and becomes the 'third party who totalizes the interiority of the fused group in action' (24). It is important to note, that it is here that Sartre associates such gatherings with historical riots or revolutions (1789, etc.), something Badiou would explore much later in connection with the 'rebirth of history' (Badiou, 2011/2012). Such moments emerge when no party or political institution co-ordinates action, but are rather an 'amorphous' association, which are 'the direct opposite of alterity' (Sartre, 1960/1976: 357). Finally, in Sartre's thinking, to move from the fused group to the Organisation is to make an oath. 'The oath', Badiou summarised, 'appears at the point where the possibility that the group might disperse has been internalized' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 25). The fundamental quality regarding the continuation of such an organisation is fear. This is primarily because, as Badiou continues, 'everyone is the third party for everyone else, [so] he fears the dispersed solitude that is both the others' doing and his own doing...It is the oath [and fear] that allows everyone to commit themselves to remaining the same. The oath gives me a guarantee that the third party will not become the Other; at the same time, I guarantee that I will not become the Other for my third parties' (Ibid). Clearly, this later

conceptualisation of the 'collective given' is deeply pessimistic and one could argue serves as a subtle critique of the PCF (which had mounted a sustained attack on Sartre in the years preceding the publication of *Critique*) alongside the Soviet Communist Party itself. As Sartre himself said in a 1975 *New York Review of Books* article 'writing *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* represented for me a way of settling my accounts with my own thought outside of the Communist Party's sphere of influence over thought. I felt that true Marxism had been completely twisted and falsified by the Communists' (Sartre, 1975).

It is evident from this highly schematic outline of Sartre's theorisation of the relationship between the individual and collective, that the 'gathering' or 'fused group' served as the site of radical social and political change. As Badiou has recognised, when thinking about the historical, Sartre's categories offer a useful way of exploring those moments of transformation before they became ossified into institutional structures and/or states (see Chapter 6). Set against a characterisation of Marxism as a form of economic determinism which 'limited the role of human beings in history to one of passivity, and with an economism that restricted the understanding of human affairs to the sphere of work relations' (Poster, 1974: 393), Sartre's theorisation of human freedom as fulfilled in a non-antagonistic other of the gathering also implied the 'end of historicity as we understand it' according to Dews (1994: 106). As he continues, in Sartre's schema, 'History thus recounts the consequences of a fall from the state of original innocence – free individual praxis – which can only be recovered on a collective level at the 'end of time'' (Ibid). But this 'freedom' to which the individual was always seeking a return was purely mythical, in that it was a collective freedom, both rooted in a contingent historical moment, while also being supposedly universal and timeless. It was a vision that was to be critiqued by both the

anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Althusser, who saw it alternatively as trying to position history as a manifestation of a teleological convergence towards a 'single universal idea' or Hegelian 'Spirit', which reduced 'past cultures and societies to a series of hierarchically ordered stepping stones on the path to a true humanity' (ibid), while also being a fundamental betrayal of the scientific enterprise of Marx's mature thought. For Lévi-Strauss, Sartre's teleological approach betrayed a lack of understanding of 'primitive' societies; but, as noted, he also contended that it transmutes history into a mythic category, that is characterised by both free will *and* intrinsic inevitability. Ultimately, as will now be explored, in his critique of Sartre's work, history for Lévi-Strauss simply served as 'raw data', from which contingent 'empirical realizations must be abandoned' (ibid.: 109) to better reveal the 'structure which underlies many manifestations and remains permanent throughout a succession of events' (Lévi-Strauss, 1962/1966: 21).

In his second year at the École normale supérieure, Badiou was an avid reader of Lévi-Strauss' work, and it was also a time when he was taking mathematics classes at the Sorbonne. These two worlds came together with Badiou's perceived correlation between the emergence of structuralist modes of thinking in Lévi-Strauss' texts and the field of mathematics. As he recalled in his *In Praise of Mathematics* (2015/2016)

'It was then probably also because of the atmosphere of structuralism...when there was a lot of buzz about formal disciplines, that I became really convinced that mathematics was in a very close dialectical relationship with philosophy – at least my conception of it, because mathematics was at the heart of my concerns. Structures are first and foremost the business of mathematicians. At the very end of his seminal book, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* [1949], the great anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, whom I was reading with passionate interest at

the time, referred to the mathematician [André] Weil to show that the exchange of women could be understood by using the algebraic theory of groups.' (5)

The earliest synthesis of mathematics and philosophy in Badiou's thought will be examined in more detail in Chapter Two, specifically in relation to his essays 'The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism' (1967/2012), 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (1968/2012) and 'Mark and Lack' (1969/2012). However, it is worth noting here that an understanding of the structural organisation of meaning that Lévi-Strauss' work inaugurated, would eventually give rise to its negative other of post-structuralism and its emphasis on the instability of meaning, or alternative sites in the production of meaning. For Badiou, this particular development – although as Angermuller has shown in *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France* (2015), the radical French thinkers that emerged from the upheavals of the 1960s have never presented themselves as a coherent group – would be circumvented by his mathematical turn. That is, if that body of thought gathered under the rubric of "post-structuralism" would later critique the epistemological rigidity of early structuralist thinking, the mathematical thinking Badiou witnessed towards the end of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, would provide an alternative model, one without the 'experience of an object, [which could serve as] an asubjective, regulated access to the intelligible" (cited in Hallward, 2003: 22), a shift which, as we will see, would come to have a profound impact on his conceptualization of history. As with his encounter with Lévi –Strauss, it would often be the mathematical components of a thinker's thought that most attracted the young student. Nonetheless, Badiou's first engagement with Lévi-Strauss' came at a time when the anthropologist had firmly established himself as the father of modern structural anthropology (Wilcken, 2010). With the publication of *The Savage Mind* (1962/1966), Lévi-

Strauss' analysis of kinships via his works *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1948/1955), *Tristes Tropiques* (1955/1975), *Structural Anthropology* (1958/1967) and *Totemism* (1962/2016), had continued his systematic explorations of myths, totems and symbolic classifications in primitive societies. Yet, it is the final chapter of *The Savage Mind* that concerns us here. Entitled 'History and Dialectic', it is a condensed attack on Sartre and Sartrean philosophy and seeks to draw a clear line between the evolving field of structuralist thought and the development of Sartre's philosophy in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*.<sup>2</sup> Although there are numerous areas of *Critique* that receive Lévi-Strauss' critical opprobrium (as we will see, Sartre's use of the term 'dialectical' is one of them (Lévi-Strauss, 1962/1966: 246)), the two concepts that lay firmly in his sights are the associated fields of 'Man' and 'History'. From the very beginning, Lévi-Strauss makes his position clear: in terms of a structural understanding of 'man', Sartre is unable to escape from the cogito, even when this cogito exists via the aforementioned categories of Gathering or Organisation. As Lévi-Strauss states:

'He who begins by steeping himself in the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection never emerges from them. Knowledge of men sometimes seems easier to those who allow themselves to be caught up in the snare of personal identity. But they thus shut the door on knowledge of man: written or unavowed 'confessions' form the basis of all ethnographic research. Sartre in fact becomes the prisoner of his Cogito: Descartes made it possible to attain universality, but conditionally on remaining psychological and individual; by sociologizing the Cogito, Sartre merely exchanges one prison

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<sup>2</sup> According to Étienne Balibar, Lévi-Strauss' presented this chapter in a lecture at the ENS in 1962. It is unknown if Badiou attended the talk. (Balibar, 2016: 21)

for another. Each subject's group and period now take the place of timeless consciousness.' (Ibid., 249)

Sartre's totalizing metaphysics were unpalatable for an anthropologist whose scientific methodology held that all human action is determined at a structural level. He advances this argument when he condemns Sartre's use of 'secondary incidents of life' such as boxing matches, strikes and bus stop queues, rather than searching out the foundations of such phenomena (Ibid., 250). Following on from his critique of Sartre's theorising of the subject – or possible lack of it – came an exploration of the conception of history as expressed in Sartre's *Critique*. As Dews highlights above, Sartre's hypothesis of the movement of history was one based on the loss of an authentic ahistorical individual praxis<sup>3</sup>, which would only be recovered at some unspecified point in the future at the collective level. For Lévi-Strauss, contained within such a schema is the contradictory assumption that one can view the totality of this journey from a contingent moment (as will be examined throughout this thesis, this serves as a key problematic with regard to Badiou's later conceptualization of history). In this sense, Sartre's model of history is, in Lévi-Strauss's assessment, nothing more than a form of false consciousness (a view that Althusser would later concur with). Sartre holds to the idea of an original primitive moment of freedom, Lévi-Strauss argues, but this reference to a historical teleology in which this freedom is lost then found again, hides a conception of the history which is actually ahistorical (Ibid., 254). 'It [Sartre] offers not a concrete image of history', Lévi-Strauss continues, 'but an abstract schema of men making history of such a kind that it can manifest itself in the trend of their lives as a synchronic totality. Its position in relation to history is therefore the same as that of

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<sup>3</sup> 'Sartre uses the term *praxis* (Greek for 'action') to refer to any purposeful human activity' (Cox, 2008: 10). Also, see Sartre, J.P. (1960/1976).

primitives to the eternal past: in Sartre's system, history plays the part of myth' (Ibid) (one could possibly argue that this is very similar to Badiou's later understanding of history as 'eternal' (see Chapters 5 & 6)).

For Badiou however, Sartre's approach to the historical is more nuanced than Lévi-Strauss permits. As Badiou was to recognise, Sartre's conception of history (characterised by the gathering in which the Other stops reinforcing the alterity of the individual, but rather becomes a point of collective identification, the totalising identification (or myth) to which Lévi-Strauss refers), never aspired towards the realm of scientific exploration. Rather, it was a political act, a process, which, by its very nature, is ephemeral and fleeting. As Badiou continues, history for Sartre is

'oriented towards a greater liquidation of passivity...[where] the human is nothing more than the dissolution of the inhuman...One has in fact the feeling that man exists only in flashes, in a savage discontinuity that is, ultimately, always absorbed into inertia and the law of separation. Collective action is the pure moment of revolt. Everything else is an expression of man's inevitable inhumanity, which is passivity' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 30-31).

It is worth noting that there is a connection here between Badiou's later theorisation of the historical riot and Sartre's authentic ahistorical individual praxis, as manifested in the collective event. And, as Dews recognised, and as will be explored in greater length in subsequent chapters, this has consequences for the way we think of the historian. That is, 'if the capacity of the historian to interpret the traces of the past is directly attributable to his or her own breadth of experience and receptivity...the participatory aspect of

undertaking is pushed to an extreme in which it is the individual who 'makes' history who is also the ideal interpreter of history' (Dews, 1994: 107; also see Chapters Five and Six).

However, for Lévi-Strauss, the recognition of this dissolution, the realm in which the Other serves as the historic point of collective identification, is located in the superstructure (for Lévi-Strauss, the realm of ideology). The collective identification is 'never the right one', Lévi-Strauss argues, 'superstructures are faulty acts which have 'made it' socially. Hence it is vain to go to historical consciousness for the truest meaning' (Lévi-Strauss, 1962/1966: 254). Once again, history as played out in the break with the series in group praxis is perceived by Lévi-Strauss as operating within a purely mythic realm, in this case, the realm of ideology. 'For Lévi-Strauss,' as Dews recognised, 'human action is uniquely determined by social structure, it cannot be the source of the transition from one structure to another. Time ceases to be the privileged dimension of human self-realization, and Sartre's Hegelian-Marxist myth of history is exposed as 'the last refuge of a transcendental humanism'' (Dews, 1994: 107). In short, Lévi-Strauss accuses Sartre of allowing contingency to masquerade as atemporal structural laws, the interiority of the individual (even if shared with the Other) as universal. If, for Lévi-Strauss, it somehow transpires that certain contingent developments allow us to detect synchronic meaning(s), then such an approach is 'not alarming'; or more accurately, if an understanding of contingency is able to throw into relief the ideological, then 'man will have gained all he can reasonably hope for if, on the sole condition of bowing to this contingent law, he succeeds in determining his form of conduct and in placing all else in the realm of the intelligible' (Lévi-Strauss, 1962/1966: 256). From the denial of a generic interiority that emerges from, and is constitutive of, historical events, Lévi-Strauss moves towards a generic exteriority, 'which he equates with the



domain of a structuralist science' (Dews, 1994: 108). Yet, as he argues in the final chapter of *The Savage Mind*, he is not anti-historical; rather, he argues one can effectively grade history in terms of its value as a form of rigorous knowledge. Obviously for Lévi-Strauss, the closer one moves from diachronic to synchronic forms of knowledge, the more analytical these forms of knowledge will become. However, it is certainly not, as Dews argues, that Lévi-Strauss 'disqualifies history' completely (Dews, 1994: 108). As Lévi-Strauss himself outlines in a footnote towards the end of 'History & Dialectic', as new forms of knowledge emerge, they replace previous histories, becoming in effect their 'anti-history'. 'The progress of knowledge,' he remarks, 'and the creation of new sciences take place through the generation of anti-histories which show that a certain order which is possible on one plane ceases to be so on another. The anti-history of the French Revolution [as a favoured historical example of Sartre's, this is no accidental choice on Lévi-Strauss' part] envisaged by Gobineau is contradictory on the plane on which the revolution had been thought of before him' (Lévi-Strauss, 1962/1966: FN., 261). What Lévi-Strauss is actually highlighting here is the differing forms of history, from biographical to anecdotal, through to structural forms of understanding, each bringing with them qualitatively different forms of knowledge:

'with...each domain of history... [either]...teach[ing] us more and explain[ing] less [i.e. biographical], [or]...explain[ing] more and teach[ing] less [i.e. structural]' (Ibid.: 262).

However, it is also an approach, minus the subject, that bears a striking similarity to the theory 'periodisation' Badiou would develop in *Theory of the Subject* (see Chapters 4 & 5).

Fundamentally, by marking out such areas as anecdotal and structural historiographies, Lévi-Strauss is critiquing Sartre's strictly teleological conception of history as one which progresses from a History-for-I to a History-of-we, from the isolated individual, to the individual as collective will. As Dews recognised, 'for Lévi-Strauss this 'subjective' factor in

the codification of events renders historiography unfit for the inclusion amongst what he calls the 'hard' sciences' (Dews, 1994: 109).

Towards the conclusion of *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss summarises his critique of history (and Sartre) in a passage that squarely reveals the true object of his ire - the exploration of history as a path to political freedom. As he notes:

'We need only recognize that history is a method with no distinct object corresponding to it to reject the equivalence between the notion of history and the notion of humanity which some [read Sartre] have tried to foist on us with the unavowed aim of making historicity the last refuge of a transcendental humanism: as if men could regain the illusion of liberty on the plane of the 'we' merely by giving up the 'I's' that are too obviously wanting in consistency.' (1962/1966: 262)

Lévi-Strauss' words serve to mark out the realm of structuralist thought which Althusser critiqued as one that was fundamentally ignorant of the relationship between forms of ideology and modes of production. For Althusser, Lévi-Strauss' conception of the diachronic was nothing but a succession of events that rise or fall 'in the empty continuum of time for purely contingent reasons' (Althusser, 1965: 118). As Althusser rightly recognised, the significance of a synchronic totality, in which all historical material was simply the datum of the totalizing structure, was nothing but a variant on the Hegelian totality, a teleological conception of history that Lévi-Strauss was so critical of in Sartre .<sup>4</sup> In his 1966 article 'On Lévi-Strauss', Althusser accused Lévi-Strauss of a 'profound "blunder"' (Althusser,

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<sup>4</sup> However, as Dews notes, '...if modes of production are the fundamental forms of historicity there can be no 'historical time' in which the transition from one mode of production to another takes place...Thus one of the ironies of Althusser's theory of history is that it ends by reproducing the division between synchronic necessity and an untheorizable contingency which he had originally criticized in Lévi-Strauss.' (1994: 116)

1966/2003: 29) in this ignorance of the particular correlations between ideology and what he termed 'practices'. That is, as Althusser noted, when Lévi-Strauss talks about 'kinship structures' he is actually talking about relations of production, or when he examines myths, he is actually 'talking about an *instance* (the result of complex and paradoxical combination) that takes its place in a social formation structured by a combination of modes of production'. Ultimately, for Althusser, the father of structural anthropology shifts between an analysis of formal structures and a form of biological materialism ('a binary linguistic approach with a cybernetic conception of the human brain' (Ibid)),<sup>5</sup> with the outcome that the complex '*relations of production...that are intelligible only as a function of the modes of production whose relations of production they are...*' are reduced to '*l'esprit humain*' (Ibid. 31n).

Badiou would in time see this general valorization of structural totalities or spheres of knowledge by such figures as Lévi-Strauss as a formal retreat from the political. After the revolutionary ambitions of the Soviet Union had weakened (prompted by such events as the quashing of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising and Khrushchev's secret speech against Stalin), certain intellectuals were 'clearly committed to bourgeois and chauvinistic revisionism', as the 'playground' invented to 'organize different ideals for themselves' (Badiou, 2012a: 22). In time, it would give rise to a form of theorisation that Badiou considered nothing more than sophistry. Admittedly, this accusation was levelled at Althusser as much as Lévi-

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<sup>5</sup> It is worthwhile noting that even the possibility of using mathematics within other registers, were themselves reduced to biological foundations. '...mathematical thought', Lévi-Strauss remarked in a footnote in *The Savage Mind*, 'reflects the free functioning of the mind, that is, the activity of the cells of the cerebral cortex, relatively emancipated from an external constraint and obeying only its own laws. As the mind too is a thing, the functioning of this thing reaches us something about the nature of things: even pure reflection is in the last analysis an internalization of the cosmos.' (1962/1966: FN.248)

Strauss, yet, Althusser offered Badiou a middle ground between the rarefied structuralist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss and Sartre's Humanist Marxism.

Although Althusser certainly shared many of Lévi-Strauss' critiques of Sartre, the publication of *Reading Capital* (1965/1970) revealed an author who was unsympathetic to the positivistic strain that was characteristic of his anthropological work. A concise study of this seminal text will offer an understanding of Badiou's later development, as well as laying the groundwork for my study of his eventual break from Althusser (see Chapter Two), and the subsequent development of his thought in relation to the question of history.

### **'There is Philosophy': Louis Althusser<sup>6</sup>**

In 1961, a few months prior to Alain Badiou's *agrégation* at the École Normale Supérieure, Louis Althusser published 'On the Young Marx: Theoretical Questions' in the March-April edition of *La Pensée*. According to Pierre Macherey, in this early article one "discern[s] the broad lines of an orientation of thought, forming a starting-point for all of Althusser's future approaches" (Macherey, 2016). Essentially, this orientation was one which saw Althusser challenge both the humanist Marxism of Sartre and the rigid reductionism of Marx's thought in the Soviet influenced policies of the PCF. Central to the essay was a critique of the Hegelian teleological presuppositions that underwrote much of Sartre's later philosophical project, and specifically the argument 'that history cannot be seen as neatly divided between the transparency of wills and the opacity of things' (Dews, 1994: 104).

Fundamental to this assault on Sartre's work, was Althusser's contention that the subject of

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<sup>6</sup> 'It must be emphasized that, in the 1960s, which were so marked by anti-philosophy and so open to the conjoined themes of global nihilism and the reign of the human sciences, Althusser was almost the only one to maintain what is for me still a crucial and disputed statement. I refer to the statement: There is philosophy'. And indeed: there is philosophy in a rational form.' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 88-89)

historical knowledge could only be determined by Marxism as a form of scientific theory, and not, as Badiou recognised retrospectively, Sartre's desire to 'force Marxism into subjective idealism'. As Badiou continues, '...Sartre hailed Marxism as the unsurpassable horizon of our culture and, in a single movement, undertook to dismantle this Marxism by forcing it to realign itself with the original idea that is most foreign to it: the transparency of the cogito' (Badiou: 2012a: 21). In 'On the Young Marx', Althusser challenged the notion of history as one of (proletarian) progression corresponding to a transparent (collective) will; instead, he would position both the subject as an effect of, to use his own phrase, the 'ideological field', and more significantly argued that "'fully developed Marxism," ...[was] not [a]...truth of its own genesis, [but] rather, [was] *the theory which makes possible an understanding of its own genesis as of any other historical process*' (Althusser, 1965/1969: 63). In later publications, this 'theory which makes possible an understanding of its own genesis' would – with reference to the work of Gaston Bachelard – come to be known as an 'epistemological break', and as will be discussed in the second half of this thesis, this 'break' can be seen as a precursor to Badiou's theory of history qua *Event*.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Althusser was highly critical of Sartre's contention that history was enacted in the movement from a series towards the fused group.<sup>7</sup> Sharing Lévi-Strauss' critique in *The Savage Mind*, he argued that such an approach was founded on a set of assumptions that were, at root, purely ideological. In his later 1967 essay 'The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy' (1967/2003), Althusser argued that

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<sup>7</sup> In his later work, Badiou appears to actually move closer to Sartre's theorisation of the subject and collective action. As Hallward (2003) recognised 'What has happened in Badiou's subsequent work is that he has slowly adopted, while struggling to maintain his strictly political principles, a perspective similar to Sartre's historical-ephemeral pessimism. The further from the party Badiou has moved, the more his conception of politics has come to resemble a politics of the "flash", a politics grounded in the revolutionary but ephemeral moment in which a serial inertia can be suspended with only minimal recourse to an institutional stability of any kind. But whereas Sartre was able to move beyond the ephemeral only by equating an ultimate historical coherence with a global political coordination...Badiou's determination to avoid this has driven him ever further toward the radical subtraction of politics from history altogether' (43-44)

'In Marxist philosophy, the basic theoretical concepts are the concepts of materialism and the dialectic, the distinction between being and thought, between the real object and the object of thought, the primacy of practice, and so forth. Theoretical humanism substitutes for these concepts the ideological notions of subject and object, consciousness, activity, act, creation, and so on.' (1967/2003: 186)

However, this was not to say that the subject was unimportant as a theoretical issue for Althusser (Ibid). Rather, there needed to be a greater clarity regarding the theorisation of the subject, and not just its treatment as an *a priori* (a scenario Badiou himself would come to tackle. See Chapter Five). The danger was that the critique of capitalism by humanistic strains of Marxism was emerging from within an ideological field that treated the subject as an uncomplicated and transparent source of historical change; that is, a theoretical object of the subject was mistaken for an actual object. For Althusser, Sartre (along with Henri Lefebvre, Roger Garaudy, and Maximilien Rubel), negated the central feature of Marx's work (after the *German Ideology* of 1845) that the ways of thinking about the subject emerged from the 'close relation between conceptions of the social formation and conceptions of historical time' (Dews, 1994: 113). Underlying this, as with Lévi-Strauss's critical remarks, was Althusser's critique of the Hegelian influence on philosophical thought during the post-war period and the conviction, discussed above, that history was analogous to the liberation of the individual and/or proletariat. As Jason Read has acknowledged, Althusser perceived this historicism as resting 'on a "Hegelian" conception of time, which has two mutually reinforcing defining characteristics: "the homogenous continuity of time" and "the contemporaneity of time"'; two ideas, as Read continues, that 'find their

philosophical expression in Hegel's understanding of history as the self-development of the Idea or Spirit' (Read, 2005).

For Jason Barker, Althusser sought 'to reclaim the proper identity of Marx, the one so often suppressed by Marxist intellectuals (especially the French existentialists led by Sartre after the war)' (2002: 14). It was in the *Theses on Feuerbach* that Marx argued how Feuerbach mistook the secular projection of God as 'conceived only in the form of the *object of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively' (Marx, 1973: 13). Marx's analysis of Feuerbach was echoed in Althusser's critique of Sartre; the problem with Sartre's theorisation of history, was that *there was no* theorisation of history. Sartre's interpretation of Marx treats history as 'undefined, or, and this amounts to the same thing, is understood to be completely obvious and self-evident' (Read, 2005). The objects of history that formed the examples of Sartre's philosophical analysis (French Revolution, etc.) ran through his 'fingers like the beads of a rosary' to quote Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1968/1992: 255). Correlation does not imply causality; or more accurately in Sartre's case, temporal association does not entail actual correlation. For Althusser, as Read notes, 'History [in Sartre] is not conceptualised, it is assumed as a fact, a fact that connects events – political, philosophical, or economic – by the simple coincidence of their date' (Read, 2005). This Hegelian structuring of historical time in Sartre negated how the specific mode of production, and the shifts and ruptures within those modes, give rise to specific experiences of historical time. As Marx himself asserted with regard to the fetishization of the secular in Feuerbach 'the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is really only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness of this secular basis (Marx, 1845/1973: 366); equally so

with Althusser, in that history can only be understood via the relations and ruptures in the 'mode of production, infrastructure (productive forces and relations of (production)), super structure (juridico-political and ideological), social class, class struggle' (Althusser, 1967/2003: 186). As Dews notes, for Althusser, these elements serve as 'the fundamental forms of historical being' (Dews, 1994: 115); and moreover, if there is no Hegelian spirit which drives history towards its ultimate denouement, Althusser's theorisation reveals just one conclusion: there are only 'specific structures of historicity' which emerge from different modes of production (Ibid, 116).

One of the other targets of Althusser's work during this period was a form of empiricism that lay at the heart of much Marxist practice, that is the previously discussed practice of *historicism* (see Introduction). As he noted in 'The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy', '*one of the most dangerous forms of empiricism is historicism – in other words, the idea that it is possible to know the nature of history directly, immediately, without first producing the theoretical concepts indispensable to acquiring knowledge of it*' (1967/2003: 204, original emphasis). Many of these critiques were first set forth two years before this essay in *For Marx* (1965/1969) and more in the two volume co-authored *Reading Capital* (1965/1970). The collection of texts which composed the latter work emerged from ten seminars on *Marx's Capital* that Althusser held at the Salle des Actes of the ENS from January to April 1965 (Balibar, 2016: 21) and were part of the 'Cours de Philosophie Pour Scientifiques'. These seminars – the beginning of which predated Badiou's return to Paris by a few months – were one of a series of sessions that had been held at the École Normale Supérieure since 1961 (although Althusser had been conducting various seminars at the ENS since 1958), and in time, would be the cradle of Badiou's first philosophical book of philosophy *The Concept*



*of Model* (1969/2007). In terms of the *Capital* seminars, as one of the contributors, Étienne Balibar, recalled, 'After Althusser's opening, the first presentation was given by Maurice Godelier, who took up the themes of three articles he had published a few years earlier in the periodical *Économie et Politique*. He was followed, in this order, by Rancière, Macherey, then Rancière again with the latter part of his presentation, then Althusser himself, and finally Balibar, the presentations being on each occasion followed by discussions involving the whole audience' (Balibar, 2016: 22). The students who contributed papers went on to be co-authors in the published volumes of *Reading Capital*. While sharing many of Lévi-Strauss' criticisms of Sartre's Hegelian infused reading of history, the book sought 'to avoid the structuralist relegation of the historical to the status of a contingent and untheorizable residue, and its concomitant, a naively positivist view of social science' (Dews, 1994: 111). While not overstating the theoretical unity of the authors of *Reading Capital* – Rancière would spend many decades distancing himself from the general substance of the original seminars and ensuing publication (see Rancière, 2011a) - most would have certainly concurred with Althusser's belief that the practice of historicism disavowed a central theoretical development in Marx's thought; that is, his 'discovery of absolutely new theoretical concepts with which to think the reality of what we call, and experience as, 'history'' (Althusser, 1967/2003: 186).

As has already been alluded to, Althusser considered the understanding of history amongst humanist Marxists as symptomatic of the work that predated Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (which served as notes towards the first chapter of *The German Ideology*), a text that broke with the humanism of his earlier texts and was repudiated some two decades later with the 'scientific' theories of *Capital*. As he noted in *For Marx*:

‘There is an unequivocal ‘*epistemological break*’ in Marx’s work which does in fact occur at the point where Marx himself locates it, in the book, unpublished in his lifetime, which is a critique of his erstwhile philosophical (ideological) conscience: *The German Ideology*. The Theses of Feuerbach, which are only a few sentences long, mark out the earlier limit of this break, the point at which the new theoretical consciousness is already beginning to show through in the erstwhile consciousness and the erstwhile language, that is, as *necessarily ambiguous and unbalanced concepts*.’ (Althusser, 1965/1969: 33)<sup>8</sup>

In *Reading Capital* Althusser tackled two realms of thought with regards to the conceptions of the historical. The first was the already explored idea, associated with the work of Sartre, of ‘the phenomenological assumption that history possess a distinctive dialectical form of intelligibility’ (Dews, 1994: 111). Second, was to challenge the ‘Lévi-Straussian assumption that structural intelligibility is not characteristic of history’ (Ibid). What was so radical about the second line of attack, was that Althusser was seeking to establish a theoretical methodology of the historical, but one that was not dependent on historical referent for its validity. It was a theory that aspired towards a Marxist science of history that was founded on the matrix of Marxist concepts, and not a correlation to a historical object/subject, or aspiration to the language of the natural sciences (Ibid).<sup>9</sup> Althusser’s task was ‘to elaborate a theory of history which [would] avoid the spurious homogeneity of the Hegelian conception, without allowing the historical past to become fragmented into a plurality of

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<sup>8</sup> In Gaston Bachelard’s *The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind* (1940/1968), the text from which Althusser took the idea of the ‘epistemological break’, Bachelard makes the point that it is actually only by challenging the “epistemological obstacles” that a moment becomes about the “break” (i.e. the process). These obstacles only emerge when a scientist is faced with the possibility of a radical transformation of their field.

<sup>9</sup> As Balibar remarked in Chapter Two of *Reading Capital*, ‘The Elements of the Structure and their History’: ‘Marx’s method thus completely *abolishes* the problem of ‘reference’, of the empirical designation of the object of a theoretical knowledge, or of the ideological designation of the object of a scientific knowledge. In fact, this determination now depends entirely on the theoretical concepts which make it possible to analyse in a differential way the successive forms of a connexion belongs. ‘Labour’ is presented as a connexion between the elements of the mode of production, and therefore its constitution, as an object of history, depends entirely on a recognition of the structure of the mode of production’ (Balibar in Althusser, 1965/1970: 249-250)

unrelated diachronies' (Dews, 1994: 112) (i.e. something akin to a medieval chronicle (see Chapter 6)). It was to be an approach that saw him 'eliminat[e] all reference to a historical subject', in favour of 'the structural character of Marxist analyses' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 19). The disappearance of the subject from the structural was not, like Lévi-Strauss, accompanied by the associated perception of objects outside of the synchronic as inherently unsound, and the contention that collective historical action was nothing more than myth. As Badiou himself recognised, the categories of philosophy in Althusser were 'empty because their sole function consist[ed] in operating on the basis of and in the direction of practices [modes of production, ideology, etc.] that are already given and which deal with a raw material that is real and that can be situated in historical terms' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 65). As Hallward has recognised, in time, Badiou himself would come to encounter the historical 'raw material that is real' not in some synchronic structural totality, but via the subject (and mathematics as *being qua being*). It would be the synthesis of Althusser's application of a scientific methodology to historical events, with Sartre's belief that the subject must throw off the external object and must 'proceed very literally "ex nihilo"'. As Hallward continues, what Badiou would manage 'to privilege in both thinkers is a refusal of the merely objective in favor of an essentially principled, essentially militant intervention' (Hallward, 2003: 11). However, such developments will be explored in more detail in the second half of this thesis.

The epistemological 'break-point', primarily centered on how Marx created two synchronous theoretical models: 'a theory of history (historical materialism)...[which] broke with his erstwhile ideological philosophy *and* established a new philosophy (dialectical materialism)' (Althusser, 1965/1970: 33. Emphasis added). For Althusser, a before and after

was created with *The German Ideology* and the *Theses of Feuerbach*, which retrospectively designated such works as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The Holy Family* (1844; co-authored with Engels) as 'ideological' (ibid.); while the works beyond the break (which Althusser grouped into two broad categories, the 'transitional works' (1845-57) and the 'mature works' (1857-1883)), marked the emergence of Marx's scientific theory of history (Ibid: 35). In the chapter of *Reading Capital* entitled 'Marxism is not Historicism', Althusser argued that 'by virtue of [this] unique epistemological rupture' Marxism was established as a 'anti-humanis[t] and an anti-historicis[t]' discourse (Althusser, 1965/1967: 119). Fundamentally, in Althusser's assessment, *Capital* and the *1857 Introduction* provided a scientific framework for the understanding of history, which, broadly speaking, contended that 'every science of a historical object (and political economy in particular) applies to a given present, historical object, an object that has evolved as a result of past history. Hence every operation of knowledge, starting from the present and applied to an evolved object, is merely the projection of the present onto the past of that object...The inevitable retrospection is only scientific if the present is an 'essential section' which makes the essence visible' (Althusser, 1965/1967: 122). Even though its target was the political economy, for Althusser, *Capital* offered one such 'essential section' or model, as a template for a science of history which escapes the present through its ability to 'attain [a] science of itself' (ibid). Althusser draws out the parallels between the science of capital and the science of history in the following passage:

'The object of history as a science has the same kind of theoretical existence and occupies the same theoretical level as the object of political economy of which *Capital* is an example, and the theory of history as a science lies in the fact that the theory of the political economy considers

one relatively autonomous component of the social totality whereas the theory of history in principle takes the complex totality as such for its object. Other than this difference there can be no distinction between the science of political economy and the science of history, from a theoretical view-point' (Ibid: 109).

Althusser argues that in traditional (bourgeois) histories of the political economy, we have found 'thinkers who have merely thought within the limits of their present, unable to run ahead of their times...The Mercantilists merely reflected their own present, making their monetary theory out of the monetary policy of their own time. The Physiocrats merely reflected their own present' (Ibid.: 123). Such historicism is simply a manifestation of 'self-conscious critique...as part of the self-consciousness itself' (Ibid.:123). In such moments, a 'limit form' (Ibid.: 126) is reached in the search for an 'absolute knowledge, in which consciousness and science are one and the same, in which science exists in the immediate form of consciousness, and truth can be *read* openly in phenomena, if not directly, at least with little difficulty, since the abstractions on which the whole historico-social science under consideration depends are really present in the real empirical existence of the phenomena' (Ibid.: 124). These were the specific arguments laid at the feet of Lévi-Strauss and his empiricist methodology; that is, the 'limit-form' of empiricism is unable to account for both the objects of analysis *and* itself; namely, 'there is no longer any privileged present in which the totality becomes visible and legible on an 'essential section', in which consciousness and science coincide' (Ibid.: 132). If there is no privileged position, if all points support the same perspective, this totalizing form is in all but name an ideology. As has been indicated at various points above, Althusser also aimed this argument at Sartre. If the idea of 'totality' is one in which every historical practice 'directly express one another', we have a 'logically

necessary chain reaction which tends to reduce and flatten out the Marxist totality into a variation of the Hegelian totality, and which, even allowing for more or less rhetorical distinctions, ultimately tones down, reduces, or omits the real differences separating the levels' (Ibid). Althusser's reference to 'the levels', was the organisation into a structure of individual (but related) practices that he argued Marx had proffered in *Capital*. As Axel Honneth noted in his essay 'History and interaction: On structuralist interpretation of historical materialism', 'the category of practice is the key term [for Althusser] with...[e]ach social sub-system...thought as a socially stabilized form of practice, such that under the general rubric of 'social practice', Althusser distinguishes between [four forms of practice] economic, political, ideological and theoretical...' (Honneth, 1994: 87). Alongside these practices, Althusser also 'distinguishes four social instances: the economic system, the state as hegemonic apparatus, ideology-forming institutions, and the instance of theoretical practice' (Ibid.: 88). These practices serve as the structured 'totality', but most significantly, a decentred one, where the economic is only determinate 'in the last instance'; although, wary of unintentionally preserving the legacy of the Second International and the economistic conviction that the means of production act as the driving force of historical progression, Althusser contended that 'the lonely hour of [this] last instance...never comes' (Althusser, 1965/1967: 180). History in this model is a form of multiple practices, practices which do not have a singular determinant 'base', as in the traditional Marxist approach, but rather where 'each instance or practice...is [and Althusser reaches for the Freudian term here] 'overdetermined' by the totality of other practices, which...also in part [they] reciprocally determine...' (Dews, 1994: 113).<sup>10</sup> The vacillation between the discontinuity of

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<sup>10</sup> It was this fracturing of determinant forms that caused the PCF to accuse Althusser of weakening 'the explanatory basis of Marxism by lapsing into an incoherent pluralism' (Dews, 1994: 114).

these practices and the way in which they determine each other, *constitutes the historical model* Althusser and his students proposed in *Reading Capital*. It is to see a single historical period as a multiplicity, where ‘the unity of history splits into different histories [synchronic ‘totalities’], composed of their own respective modes of production and sub-systems’ (Honneth, 1994: 83) which Althusser would align with the theory of conjunctures.<sup>11</sup> And in his 2009 retrospective essay on Althusser, Badiou saw these ‘different modes of production’ in Althusser as ‘fundamental forms of historical being’, forms that offered a conception of the historical as founded on the multiple.<sup>12</sup> ‘This multiple,’ Badiou notes, ‘which is irreducible, is that of practices.’ He continues

‘Let us say that ‘multiple’ is the name of practices. Or the name of what I call a situation, once we begin to think it in order of its multiple deployment. To recognize the primacy of practice is, precisely, to accept that ‘all levels of social existence are the site of distinct practices’. There can be no apprehension of social existence under the sign of essence, or the sign of the One.’ (Badiou, 2008/2009: 59-60)

Clearly, Badiou is playing with Sartre’s famous dictum that ‘*existence comes before essence*’ (Sartre, 1947/1973: 26), while also implicitly criticizing the biologism that sustains many of Lévi-Strauss’s statements (see above), but utilizes it to extend Althusser’s recognition of the role of structural practices, and, furthermore, argues that there is actually a multiplicity of such factors in the shaping of historical experience. One should not underestimate the radicalness of Badiou’s later interpretation of Althusser here, especially concerning the aims

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<sup>11</sup> It is one of the contentions of this thesis that we see the re-emergence of ‘different histories’ in the historical trajectories of truth qua history (see Chapter 5)

<sup>12</sup> Admittedly, much of Badiou’s recent writing has seen him retrospectively recasting the work of such figures as Plato (Badiou, 2012b) and Althusser (Badiou, 2008/2009), as evincing the ideas of the multiple and multiplicity.

of this thesis. Although Althusser does not use the idea of ‘practices’ in the generic sense that Badiou would come to – what he would later classify as their inability to specifically ‘validat[e] any description’<sup>13</sup> – nonetheless, as a philosophical development, it is the first step towards an infinity of practices that could give rise to new understandings of the historical that coagulate around an engagement with a specific impasse (in the language of the later Badiou, between presentation and representation). It also allows us to see the point made earlier with reference to Sartre, that is how Badiou accepted both the centrality of the subjective decision as key to the historical Event, while equally taking from Althusser the contention that philosophical thought has no object in and of itself, but was rather an “activity of thought *sui generis* that finds itself under condition of the events of real politics” (Badiou, cited in Hallward, 2003: 11). Yet, in terms of the narrative of this thesis, this synthesis of Althusser and Sartre in Badiou’s later work is already short-circuiting the later criticism of *Reading Capital* by Badiou (see Chapter Two).

Through *Reading Capital*, Althusser and his students sought to extricate from Marx’s *Capital*, a scientific reading of history that both critiqued the perceived bourgeois inflection of ‘humanist Marxism’ and challenged the sterile historiographies of the Second International.<sup>14</sup> In a 1972 critical response to an article on his work by the Welsh Marxist philosopher and Unitarian Minister, John Lewis (‘The Althusser Case’ *Marxism Today*, Jan/Feb 1972), Althusser reaffirmed that Marxist Humanism wore the cloak of bourgeois historiography. To situate the transformation of history at the untheorized level of the subject, was to mimic the revolutionary bourgeoisie who were actually ‘struggling against

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<sup>13</sup> Badiou makes the point in his essay ‘One, Multiples, Multiplicities’ that he originally held to the idea of practices/multiplicities being inexorably tied to contingent actualities, even if this link was weak (Badiou, 2004c: 78).

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed overview of the reception of Althusser’s work across the European Communist movement, see Grahame Lock’s ‘Introduction’ to *Althusser’s Essays in Self-Criticism* (1976).



the feudal regime which was then dominant. To proclaim *at that time*, as the great Bourgeois Humanists did, that it is man who makes history, was to struggle, from a bourgeois point of view (which was then revolutionary), against the religious Thesis of feudal ideology: it is God who makes history' (Althusser, 1973: 46). As Honneth (1994) continues, Althusser argued that

'the historical-materialist versions of the modern concept of history, which presuppose the macro-subject either qua class-consciousness (in the philosophy of consciousness), or substantially qua the forces of production, can only be regarded as bourgeois relics in the tradition of Marxism. In fact these versions of Marxism share with bourgeois philosophies of history not only the same conception of history, but also the same interest in legitimation' (Honneth, 1994: 80).

For Althusser, if the structure of *Capital* offered a political theory that was not delineated by contingent practices, was not simply a perspicacious reading of the historic condition of capitalism, but rather a dissection that *in itself* offered a scientific model, then, from this, is it possible to think of a 'non-historicist theory of history' (Ibid: 86); a philosophy of history that is ahistorical? As Badiou recognized, Althusser's

'programme... [was to] extirpate philosophy from the parenthesis of the theoretical, which also means this: ceasing for ever to conceive of it as a history of knowledge. Neither a theory nor a history of the sciences, philosophy is, all things considered, a practice, and yet it is a-historical. This strange alloy of a practical vocation and a tendential eternity will probably never stabilize, but it does at least tell us this: on this point, the entire development of Althusser's thought is a de-epistemologization of philosophy. And to that extent...he sets

about destroying the epistemological and historicizing tradition in which French academicism is grounded' (2008/2009: 64).

As Badiou highlights, it was a project directed just as much at Lévi-Strauss and Sartre, as it was the Annales school of history, which, throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, had favoured a *longue durée* historiographic approach largely rooted in the empirical methods of the social sciences.<sup>15</sup> Still, looking to his future developments, the question remains: while Althusser looked to the 'universality' of philosophy as offering a formal check on the scientific models of Marx's *Capital*, is it possible to develop out of this a form of historical *practice* that equally allows for universalism? Can we come close, in terms of a historiography, to what Badiou, in relation to the de-epistemologization of philosophy in Althusser's work, refers to as 'the name of Truth or some equivalent name, [an] empty space within which a few truths can be grasped in the declarative form of their being, and not in the real form of their process' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 80)? The distinction between 'being' and 'process' is a key one, as in Badiou's later work, being is the witness of truth, and process is but the continuation of the pre-existing. Is it the case, as Honneth noted, that 'the continuity of the process of history becoming world-history is, strictly speaking, only conceivable in theory if it can find support in a comprehensive historical experience which underlies all particular interpretations of history' (1994: 85). In Althusser's schema, as Honneth rightly notes, this is an impossibility, as 'owing to the theoretical presuppositions of his own critique of historicism...the idea of a world history continuity can only be understood as a metaphysical fiction of history' (Ibid). Yet, what is missing here is a more

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<sup>15</sup> Also see introduction and also Wallerstein, I. 'Fernand Braudel, Historian, "*homme de la conjuncture*"' in Clark, S. (ed.) (1999) *The Annales School: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge), where Wallerstein notes that after the events of May '68, the Annales school was seen as part of the establishment (102).

detailed understanding of the subject and social change; or more precisely, a theorisation of the subject as a manifestation of and witness to the *universal* or 'world history'. Also, could not 'a comprehensive historical experience which underlies all particular interpretations of history' be a nascent definition of Badiou's Event? We will return to this issue throughout this thesis, briefly in Chapter Two, when I examine Badiou's encounter with Lacan, and more extensively in the examination of *Theory of the Subject* (1982/2013) and *Being & Event* (1988/2006) in Chapters Four and Five.

It needs to be reiterated, that while many of the critical debates briefly outlined above profoundly influenced Badiou's early thought, they originally took place in his absence. In 1961, he had passed the *agrégation* at the École Normale Supérieure (his thesis was supervised by Georges Canguilhem and was titled *Demonstrative Structures in the First Two Books of Spinoza's Ethics*, but he immediately had to undertake his military service (1961-62). Following this, he retreated to Reims, 90 miles to the East of Paris (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 273), where took up the post of philosophy tutor at a local *lycée*.<sup>16</sup> In his own words, during this period Badiou was 'pretty far from the intellectual scene of the ENS' (Ibid.), and it was during the years 1962-63 that he continued to focus on literature, a concern that had actually begun much earlier.<sup>17</sup> This was a period of literary engagement – primarily aligned with the *Nouveau Roman* – that would give rise to two books: *Almagestes* (Paris: Seuil, 1964) and *Portulans* (Paris: Seuil, 1967). It would be a mistake, however, to see this engagement with literature as signaling Badiou's retreat from philosophy (clearly implausible considering his teaching post). As Collini (2006) has recognised, Sartre, (who,

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<sup>16</sup> 'Badiou taught at the *lycée* in Reims from 1963 to 1965, then as *Assistant* and then *Maître-assistant* at the University of Reims from 1965 to 1969.' Schrift (2005: 91-92)

<sup>17</sup> Badiou had begun his book *Almagestes* in 1956 and completed it 1960. (Badiou, A. 'Biography' <https://alain-badiou.jimdo.com>)

criticisms aside, continued to be a key influence on Badiou during these early years) saw the ‘imaginative writer, unlike the philosopher or scholar or scientist, [as] ‘necessarily’ an intellectual’ (Ibid., 265). As has already been noted, when he entered the ENS in 1956, Badiou was very much a ‘confirmed Sartrean’, strongly influenced by his philosophical novels and plays. For Sartre, the work of a writer was the ideal entry point for philosophical exploration. In a series of lectures he gave in Tokyo and Kyoto in September–October 1965, which were to become the essay ‘A Plea for Intellectuals’, Sartre elaborated on this idea:

*“In his professional capacity itself, the writer is necessarily always at grips with the contradiction between the particular and the universal. Whereas other intellectuals see their function arise from a contradiction between the universalist demands of their profession and the particularist demands of the dominant class, the inner task of the writer is to remain on the plane of lived experience while suggesting *universalization* as the affirmation of life on its *horizon*. In this sense, the writer is not an intellectual accidentally, like others, but *essentially*.”*  
(Sartre, 1974a: 284, author’s emphasis)

Approaching this definition retrospectively, one could detect in Sartre’s characterization of the writer Badiou’s later argument of the contingent subject as bearer of the vessel containing the universal or multiple (via the Event). Yet, such a precipitate judgement would only negate the host of competing influences that, as will be explored, contributed to the development of such ideas. At this point, away from Paris, Badiou most certainly remained engaged with philosophical questions, even if the form in which those questions were explored were the ‘lived experience’ of literature, music, and cinema.<sup>18</sup> Some years later in

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<sup>18</sup> From 1957, Badiou had joined the board of the *Vin Nouveau*, a literary bi-monthly magazine. For this magazine Badiou wrote on cinema, poetry, and opera (it was at this time that he first discovered Wagner, which was to become a lifelong passion, see. Badiou, A. (2010) *Five lessons on Wagner* (London: Verso)), (Badiou, C. A. ‘Biography’ <https://alain-badiou.jimdo.com>).

the preface to his *The Adventures of French Philosophy*, Badiou spoke of this as one of the unique qualities of the period of modern French philosophy, that it sought to 'play upon different registers in language, displacing the borders between philosophy and literature, between philosophy and drama' (Badiou, 2012a: lvii). For Badiou, it was a bearing that constituted something greater than a nomadic drifting across disciplines, it was a way of being, a relationship to the world. One can detect hints of Freud here. Alongside its scientific ambitions, psychoanalysis also functions as a conduit for the articulation of the 'wild things' (Phillips, 1993: 18) of the unconscious, the outcome being a highly conflictual discourse. For Freud, literature has the potential, if not to unify, then to offer a paraspace for the exploration of new forms of knowledge across these two realms. As he famously noted in his 1907 essay 'Delusion and Dream in Jensen's *Gradiva*', 'Creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which have not yet opened up for science' (Freud, 1997: 4). Badiou himself experienced literature as an 'overdetermined' space, one in which philosophical arguments could be teased out via fictional forms:

'one could even say that one of the goals of French philosophy has been to construct a new space from which to write, one where literature and philosophy would be indistinguishable; a domain which would be neither specialized philosophy, nor literature as such, but rather the home of a sort of writing in which it was no longer possible to disentangle philosophy from literature. A space, in other words, where there is no longer a formal differentiation between concept

and life, for the invention of this writing ultimately consists in giving a new life to the concept: a literary life.' (Ibid.: lix)

A 'literary life', but also a politically engaged one. For Badiou during this period was also thinking philosophically in terms of political events. From the late 1950s he had started writing as a journalist and in 1960 visited the Belgium General Strike to interview miners for the official organ of the Parti Socialiste Unifié *Tribune Socialiste* (during his tenure in Reims, Badiou was the General Secretary for the Marne region of the PSU (Tho and Bianco, 2013: xxiv))<sup>19</sup>. In 2007, Badiou recalled that "I assisted at their [miners] assemblies, I spoke with them. And I was from then on convinced, up till this day I am speaking to you, that philosophy is on that side. "On that side" is not a social determination. It means: on the side of what is spoken or pronounced there, on the side of this obscure part of common humanity. On the side of equality" (Badiou, 2007a). Aside from the fact that Badiou is, with hindsight, situating this encounter within the purview of his mature work (one that speaks of generic truths of equality), it reveals once again how Sartre the public intellectual loomed large in Badiou's intellectual life of the early 1960s. In the same 2007 lecture from which this anecdote is drawn, Badiou reaffirmed that Sartre had taught him the "conviction that the philosophic concept is not worth an hour of toil if, be it by mediations of a great complexity, [if] it does not reverberate, clarify and ordain the agency of choice, of the vital decision" (Ibid).

Yet, in intellectual terms, Badiou's Sartrean outlook only exacerbated his distance from the intellectual debates in the École during the first half of the 1960s. While the mixture of

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<sup>19</sup> Badiou's father, Raymond Badiou (1905 -1996), was a founder member of the PSU.

seminars and ensuing journals and books gave rise to one of the most productive and critically influential periods in modern philosophical history, if there was one common enemy all parties could agree upon, it was the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. As this chapter has attempted to show, the structuralist explosion had 'implied that both the Sartrean figure of the "total intellectual" and the "phenomenological" model of subjectivity were slowly disappearing' (Tho & Bianco, 2013: xxiv). Lévi-Strauss 'opposed... Sartre's instrumentalization of his own work and criticized Sartre's privilege of history over other human sciences and...on an epistemological level, he counterposed the structuralist paradigm of meaning to that of phenomenology' (ibid). Some, as Tho & Bianco (2013) outline, attempted to synthesise Sartre's work with the developments in structuralist thought. During the cycle of Seminars on structuralism that Althusser ran during the 1962-63 academic year, he invited Lévi-Strauss to discuss possible bridges between the different spheres, but it was 'concluded that structuralism implied a Kantianism without subjectivity and was incompatible with phenomenology and humanist Marxism' (ibid). In Lacanian circles, Sartre's conception of the unconscious was considered "incompatible" with Lacan's idea of the unconscious as structured like a language. 'It was at this moment around 1963,' as Tho & Bianco (2013) conclude,'...that the existential and phenomenological paradigm, and the figure of Sartre with it, faded into the shadow of structuralism's brilliant glow.' (xxv)

Yet, being older than many of his fellow students, Badiou felt that he had the opportunity to explore Sartre's conception of the subject *before* it was deemed passé by the younger generation of *normaliens*. 'They had not really been Sartreans' he later observed, 'and they also had not known any political situation in which they would have had to think in categories proper to Sartre' (cited in Bosteels, 2005a: 242). Badiou continues:

'I found in Sartre's theory of practical freedom, and particularly in the subjectivized Marxism that he was already trying to produce, something with which to engage myself politically...This did not keep me from taking my distance from Sartre, nor from participating in that generation of mine which...started to take a major interest in the question of the structure. But in the end, I entered in this debate from the point of view of Sartre, whereas for most others in my generation this question of the structure has been their immediate philosophical education, so that they really entered the debate *against* Sartre and not *from* Sartre. And in general, one should say, against phenomenology' (Ibid).

For Badiou, the Sartre-Althusser (and one could add Lévi-Strauss) debate opposed "the defenders of liberty, as founding reflective transparency, to the defenders of the structure, as prescription of a regime of causality. Sartre against Althusser: this meant, at bottom, the Cause against the cause" (Bosteels, 2005b: 609). However, as will be explored in Chapter Two and the theorisation of the 'gap' that marks the conjuncture of structure and structuring, a primitive form of set theory offered a way to map this lack; while in Chapter Three, with the Sino-Soviet split and the Cultural Revolution, we will see that Maoism offered Badiou a means by which the insertion of a dialectic or a diagonal scission could cut across the Cause-cause, or structure-subject relationship. Reflecting on the latter some years later, Badiou saw how 'Maoism...has been proof for me that in the actual space of effective politics, and not just in political philosophy, a close knot could be tied between the most uncompromising formalism and the most radical subjectivism' (Bosteel, 2005a: 243).<sup>20</sup> Throughout this work, it will be necessary to ask: How does this 'uncompromising

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<sup>20</sup> Clearly Lacan also plays a role here. But, as Bosteels has asked: 'The question of being, of course: on which side? Or perhaps we should ask ourselves whether a Lacanian logic of the Cause (as Chose) does not interrupt the possibility of being loyal to a political Cause, just as Althusser's structural causality may have kept him from joining Sartre's Cause on the side of the Maoists.' (2005: 632)



formalism' connect to the idea of historical agency that manifests itself in 'the most radical subjectivism'? Does the idea of a scission, cutting diagonally across these two areas, which Badiou locates in the work of Mao, Maoism, and the Cultural Revolution, give rise to a new way of thinking about forms of historiography? Can the practice of history as a revolutionary political act only come about through such a 'cutting' or militant intervention, which is centred on both a fidelity to an historical Event and the (re)emergence of the subject in the very act of this intervention? Does the diagonal scission across the continual displacement from historical subject to historical object, so central to Bourgeois forms of historiography, effectively serve to challenge a system of exchange between these two areas that is often left untouched? And lastly, if the epistemological break marks the absence in the previous 'state of affairs', how do we actually begin to theorise this absence without lapsing into the ideological once more? Like a recurring melody, these questions and more will re-emerge throughout this thesis. However, to begin the investigation, it is necessary to examine how Badiou's early published works of philosophy (specifically 'The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism' (1967/2012), 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (1968/2012) and 'Mark and Lack' (1969/2012)) laid the groundwork for the consideration of these larger theoretical difficulties.

## Chapter Two: History as internal exclusion: From ‘The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism’ to ‘Mark and Lack’.

‘No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive

forces for which it is sufficient have been developed...’

Marx, K. (1971) ‘Preface’, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

(London: Lawrence and Wishart)

In 1969, Alain Badiou paraphrased Marx’s famous words when he said ‘we pose only those questions whose answers are the pre-given conditions of the questions themselves’ (1969/2008: 8). Speaking of theoretical, rather than political change, it also featured in his first published book of philosophy *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics* (1969/2007). This was a text which was initially prompted by Althusser’s invitation for Badiou to present on his *Cours de Philosophie pour scientifiques* at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1968, but would also see him step out of the shadow of his master. It marked the end of a four-year period of intense philosophical explication, which was only broken by the ‘happy interruption’ of May 68’, and the successive turn towards political action this event engendered (see Chapter Three). Much of what was written in *The Concept of Model* was actually a summation of ‘The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism’ (1967/2012), ‘Infinitesimal Subversion’ (1968/2012) and ‘Mark and Lack’ (1969/2012) which, one could argue, formed the foundations of his later thought. Bisected by the ‘events of May’ ‘68, these three key texts were equally a validation of Althusser’s thought, a critique, and an outright rejection. Because of Althusser’s ongoing relationship with the PCF, they were also an indirect commentary on accusations of ossification and

revisionism laid at the door of Khrushchev, to which the PCF was undyingly loyal<sup>21</sup>, and which, by the mid 1960s, 'seemed mired in anachronistic debates from the 1930s' whose 'intellectual stagnation...[was] palpable and undeniable' (Wolin, 2010: 14-15). One of the key accusations levelled at the PCF was its lack of theoretical development and critical self-reflection, and, as a prominent member, Althusser still sought to influence the party (albeit from a distance). While Badiou was never a member of the PCF, many of his early ideas were formed in Althusser's *Théorie* classes, and it is possible to trace the intersection of Althusser's subtle critiques of the PCF and Badiou's thought in the aforementioned texts. If we could group these themes, they would be the following: the role of the masses and the party in historical change; the distinction between science and ideology in theorizing these relationships; the exploration of dialectical and historical materialism as the locus of structural change in Marxist thought; and most importantly for this work, how these debates impacted on the conceptualization of the 'historical'. This final question haunted many of Althusser's theoretical promulgations, and shaped Badiou's early development. Whether positioning a split between the 'humanism' of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical manuscripts of 1844* and the 'science' of *Capital* (1867) (and the implicit critique of Sartre this distinction masked), to the de-epistemologicalization of philosophy that sprang from a critique of the 'Hegel-Marxist mythology of *Aufhebung*' (Beradi, 2011:18)<sup>22</sup>, historical change and questions of historicity run throughout Althusser's work during this period, and as a consequence became a fundamental (if equally unspoken) theme within Badiou's early texts too.

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<sup>21</sup> '...in the eyes of many on the Left, the Communists had become excessively complacent. Conventional electoral success seemed to trump its commitment to radical political change. Moreover, the PCF enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the most resolutely Stalinist among the European Communist parties. Its servility to Moscow was notorious' (Wolin, 2010: 14).

<sup>22</sup> 'The key to Hegelian dialectics, the nature of which remains a contentious subject among Hegel scholars, is the notion of mediation. The dialectic mediates the abstract and the concrete, synthesizing knowledge in the *Aufhebung* (sublimation) of effective thought.' 'Dialectic La dialectique' <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/dialectic.html> (Date Accessed: 1/4/16)

In the mid-1960s, Althusser was, according to Jacques Derrida, 'conducting a struggle against a certain hegemony which was at the same time a terrifying dogmatism or philosophical stereotypism within the Party – a struggle that seemed to me (within the limits of that context) quite necessary' (Derrida as cited in Kaplan and Springer (eds.) 1993: 189). This struggle primarily concerned itself with 'the PCF's Stalinist view of the split between proletarian and bourgeois science and the later battle over the theoretical foundations of the party (and its outcomes) during the period of de-Stalinization...' (Pfeifer, 2015: 10). The origins of this position within the PCF can be dated to the 1930s and the Soviet Union's 'Great Retreat' from the radical Bolshevik experiments of the 1920s<sup>23</sup>, while its European-wide dissemination proceeded from the Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) founded two years after the war in September 1947. This was an organisation headed by Andrei Zhdanov, a leading member of the Soviet Politburo and key representative of Stalinist cultural policy. As Cyrille Guiat has outlined '[i]n their early days, the French and Italian Communist parties, faithfully following the directives of the Comintern in applying the hard, conflictual 'class against class' line (1928-34), were advocates of the theory of the two cultures imposed by Stalin. They claimed that there existed a bourgeois, decadent culture whose aim was to maintain and justify the existing socio-economic order' (Guat, 2004: 58) and a revolutionary Proletarian culture that sought to further the historic cause of the working class. While initially questioning this austere definition of cultural activity, by the late 1950s and early 1960s the PCF would champion a French version of the 'Russian model of *rabcors*, that is to say, workers writing about

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the origins of the cultural policies of Stalin during this period, see Volkov, V. 'The Concept of Kul'turnosy': Notes on the Stalinist civilizing process' in Fitzpatrick, S. (ed.) (2000) *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge). 210-230.

workers, and for workers about life in the factories...’ (Pfeifer, 2015: 12). The two cultures approach – which originally emerged from the Ukraine agronomist Trofim Lysenko’s critiques of Mendelian genetics as inherently reactionary and conservative but was then expanded to all forms of scientific activity (Ibid.) – was the shift in PCF policy that, in Derrida’s words, Althusser ‘struggled against’. However, it is worth noting that Althusser did not fully oppose the Zhdanovists view ‘that Marxist science is that through which one can come to separate that which is scientific and true from that which is ideological’ (Ibid.). Rather, the problem, he observed, lay in the division established between Proletarian and Bourgeois science, a division which was itself, he argued, a symptom of ideology. For Althusser, ‘Marxist philosophers [have] forgotten what Marx said about dialectics, that it could become one thing or the other, could either become ‘critical and revolutionary’, or play the role of ‘glorifying the existing affairs’’ (as cited in Pfeifer, 2015: 20). That said, by the mid-1960s, the ideological line emanating from the PCF on such issues as cultural production had softened (i.e. the ‘Party would not interfere in matters of artistic/literary creation’ (Guiat, 2003: 62)); but it was not a two-way street. That is, writers and intellectuals could go about their business, as long as they did ‘not contest the design or discussion of the strategy and policies of the Party...’ (Ibid.).

While certainly not determined by the developments within the PCF, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* was undoubtedly, in part, Althusser’s attempt to redress the ideological manipulation of Marx by his fellow party members. It was certainly no coincidence that the political juncture which saw the obfuscation of the science-ideology dialectic within the PCF, was mirrored in Althusser’s exploration of (or his perception of) Marx’s own comprehension of this distinction. Just as with the PCF, Badiou argued in his essay long review of these two

texts, 'The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism' (1967/2012), published in *Critique* 240 (May 1967), that Althusser contended that this science-ideology distinction in Marx's work was a 'buried difference' that required unpicking. What is more, the distinction was unresolvable, one which had no future synthesis. In Badiou's judgement, for Althusser to

'restore the difference [between the scientific and ideological Marx] mean[t] to demonstrate that the problem of the 'relations' between Marx's theoretical enterprise and Hegelian or post-Hegelian ideology is properly speaking irresolvable, that is, un-formulatable... *precisely because its formulation is the gesture that covers up the difference*, which is neither a reversal, not a conflict, nor a borrowing of method, and so on, but an *epistemological break* – that is, the rule-bound construction of a new scientific object whose problematic connotations have nothing to do with Hegelian Ideology.' (1967/2012: 138-139. Emphasis added.)

One can detect in this passage the early influence of Jacques Lacan's thought on Badiou, and specifically the idea of *Lack* as the Real<sup>24</sup> which is the 'irresolvable' or 'un-formulatable' 'space' 'upon' which the science-ideology problematic is 'situated'.<sup>25</sup> As Feltnam has noted, for the later Badiou the 'impossibility of certain statements...singularizes the latter by differentiating it from the new structure that renders those statements possible' (Feltnam, 2008: 27). At this point, it is important to note that the Lacanian formulation of Freud's theory of the Unconscious, in which the excluded returns to generate a new structure in

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<sup>24</sup> Lacan introduced the concept of the Real in his 1953 lecture 'The symbolic, the imaginary, and the real'. As the title implies, the real was part of a triptych of interrelated concepts that included the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'. The 'Real' is 'defined as what escapes the symbolic, the real can be neither spoken nor written. Thus, it is related to the impossible, defined as "that which never ceases to write itself." And because it cannot be reduced to meaning, the real does not lend itself any more readily to univocal imaginary representation than it does to symbolization. The real situates the symbolic and the imaginary in their respective positions' (International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, <http://www.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/real-lacan>, last accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Badiou makes this point on the same page as this quote when he notes that 'the space of science constitutes itself on the basis of their radical lack.' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 138-139))

which hitherto proscribed statements become possible, could serve as a way of theorising historical change; that is, the very ability to speak an erstwhile impossibility marks the site of a new historical position and by distinguishing this new position brings into sharp relief the former site of impossibility, i.e. a break occurs. Yet, as will we return to throughout this work, the problem is, what steps lead us to the point of 'naming' this impossibility, especially if we are drawing from the preceding paradigm to enact the actual naming. Before addressing such themes, we need to continue to work through Badiou's early thought (via the influence of Althusser) and how it afforded the very possibility of theorising the production of historical change.

### **Theorising change: 'The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism' (1967/2012)**

A contestation of the site of 'historical' change informs much of Badiou's RM and his analysis of Althusser's exploration of Historical Materialism and Dialectical Materialism in the work of Marx (simply put, between actual historical change and the philosophy of change). His overall aim with this paper was not a question 'of retelling it's [the work of Althusser] story, nor of confronting it either with existing theories or with an undifferentiated concept of the real, but rather of folding it back upon itself, introducing some play into it, qua theory, according to the meta-theoretical concepts that it produces – to investigate if this work obeys the rules whose operations it isolates as the law of construction of its objects' (Badiou, 1967/2012:143). He begins his review by echoing Althusser's own condemnation of the theoretical silence in discussions of Soviet and Chinese Communism, by noting that this theoretical 'lacunae must be covered over and the whole chain of arguments must be deformed so that the signifiers of the cover-up may come to find their place' (Ibid.: 133). Using Althusser's own terminology, Badiou argues that

‘Althusser’s work is attuned to our political conjuncture, for which it provides a grid of intelligibility by indicating its own urgency therein’ (Ibid.). By ‘find their place’, Badiou clearly means they are revealed as pure ideology; a revelation that is only exposed through the ‘deformation’ or differentiation that is brought about by the ‘break’.<sup>26</sup>

As Althusser notes, the movement from the humanistic form of history (i.e., the mythic narratives of the ‘Great men’), to the scientific theory of historical change (historical materialism), was that the danger persists that this rupture would inexorably slide towards a pragmatic and positivist theory of history (ibid.: 33-34). However, for Althusser (and Badiou), there is a short-circuiting of this probability, in which the rupture between the ‘early’ and ‘late’ Marx created a historical and dialectical materialism that was not a binary but occupied the same space. The former (historical materialism), as Badiou’s fellow student at the ENS (and subsequent critic of Althusser) Jacques Rancière has outlined, emerged in Marx’s analysis in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, which essentially focused on

‘the fact that Feuerbach defines the essence of man by means of an atemporal relation – whether man/object, self/other, man/woman – and on the fact that, for Feuerbach, sensible experience is not historical. Marx doesn’t object to the fact that Feuerbach’s history has a subject; he objects to the fact that his subject has no history. If history reaches this subject, closed in as he is in the *contemplation* and *interpretation* of the world, it is purely by accident.

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<sup>26</sup> Althusser always contended that his idea of an ‘epistemological break’ came from Gaston Bachelard (see: Bachelard, G. (1938, ed.1986) *The Formation of the Scientific Mind: A Contribution to a Psychoanalysis of Objective Knowledge*, (Boston: Beacon Press). However, as Feltnam (2008) notes ‘For Bachelard an epistemological break designates the slow gradual process through which a science disengages itself and its results from the common knowledge of its time, which is a tissue of error and illusion. For Althusser...science disengages itself from ideology, but the latter is not simply the epistemological negative of science. Ideology possesses a social function: that of determining how individuals experience their economic and political conditions’ (13). As Feltnam goes on to say ‘For Althusser, an epistemological break is both an event...and an infinite process’ (ibid).



History in Feuerbach, and in the young Hegelians in general, is the history of *representations* [ideology]....' (Rancière, 2011a: 6)<sup>27</sup>

The philosophical tool that enables Marx to enact this critique is that of dialectical materialism. In the 1873 German edition of *Capital*, Marx famously stated that

'My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite...the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. [...] The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel in the mystical shell' (Marx, 1873. From Tucker, 1978: 301-2).

Once again, for Althusser, this secondary element marked the doubling of Marx's thought in the singularity of the epistemological break. As Feltnam summarised, it was a 'cut', in which Marx's *Feuerbach* contained 'first, the new science itself, historical materialism, whose object is the history of societies; second, dialectical materialism a new type of philosophy whose object is the history of theoretical production' (Feltnam, 2008:12). As Badiou notes in RM, this rupture led Althusser to the contention that ideology, as symbolized by the 'contemplative and interpretative subjects', was 'the specific *other* of science – that from which epistemology can teach us how science separates itself.' And, as he continues, 'In the *discovery* of science, we may try to map the 'edge' of the break, that is, the ideological place

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<sup>27</sup> This is Marx's criticism of the fundamentally idealist nature of Hegel's thesis in *The Philosophy of History* (2004), where Hegel states: Such men 'may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from a concealed fount – one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence – from that inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer world as on a shell, bursts it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question.' (30)

that indicates, in the form of an answer without a question, the necessary change of terrain' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 139). This is the symptom leading to the cause, a tracking back from the scientific revelation that serves to reveal the ideological obfuscation. Although, as Badiou intimates, what needs to be made clear here, is that Althusser did not specify a clean break between the scientific methods and the recognition of the ideological, as ideology always plays a part in the *representation* of scientific ideas (hence Badiou's tentative spatial metaphor of mapping the 'edge' of the break).<sup>28</sup> Ideology always mediates the 'lived' relationship to objects, while science 'produces forms of knowledge, whose means of production are concepts' (Ibid.: 147). As such, it is 'the ideological immanent to science itself' (Fraser, 2007: xvii) that the break reveals. As Fraser notes, throughout much of Badiou's early work, he holds to this view of the science-ideology relationship, and two years later in 'Mark and Lack' (1969/2012; see below for further analysis of this key work) he once again 'define[s] an "a priori" science as one which has business with ideology only insofar as it is represented by the latter: science breaks incessantly with its own representation in the re-presentational space' (Ibid.: xxii). Although, once again, 'break' is too distinct a word, as with Althusser's master Gaston Bachelard, it 'is not an instant in time but an ongoing process, an interminable struggle between the scientific and the ideological at the heart of scientific practice' (as cited in Fraser, 2007: xvii). In such moments, there is a gradual shift to the plane of knowledge as the site of contesting and mapping the ideology-science schism, and as Badiou correctly identified some years later, it was for Althusser one of substituting 'the question of the mechanism of the cognitive appropriation of the real object by means of the object of knowledge' (i.e. positivism) for 'the ideological question of

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<sup>28</sup> Badiou notes further on that we are not able 'immediately to classify the different practices and discourses, even less 'valorize' them abstractly as science 'against' ideology. (1967/2012: 147). Also, what Badiou is clearly doing here is noting that the 'real' or 'impossibility' that the science-ideology split covers, cannot be approached directly by the very situation of it being unspeakable.

guarantees of the possibility of knowledge' (Althusser, as cited in Badiou, 2009: 58). One of the key elements that must be understood here, is that through a desire to challenge the Hegelian-Marxist conception of history - that is the traditional view held by such parties as the PCF that Marxism contained an inherent telos that led towards revolutionary synthesis - Althusser saw structural change as emerging from multiple contradictory determinants (practices). He grouped these contradictory elements as primary (i.e., dominant) contradictions and secondary contradictions. As Feltnam (2008) summarised,

'The first invariant is that any society is structured both by a dominant contradiction and by secondary contradictions. The second invariant is that the dominant contradiction is determined and conditioned by each of the secondary contradictions: this conditioning is what Althusser, after Freud, calls 'overdetermination'. These secondary contradictions may exist within the domains of religion, ideology, the judiciary, international relations and the political system. The third invariant is that the dominant contradiction is always economic and so in capitalist societies it is the contradiction between capital and labour.' (7)

As he explored in *For Marx* (1965/1969, 87-116), it is only when these contradictions coagulate, that we see an epistemological break. Although, one should not confuse this coalescence as a movement towards a Hegelian model of final synthesis and associated teleology. Rather, the process takes place within the structured whole of the contradictory invariants. However, for Althusser, the conclusion of such breaks is never preordained. These contradictory forces 'may either be *overdetermined* in the direction of a *historical inhibition*, a real 'block' for the contradiction (for example, Wilhelmine Germany), or in the direction of *revolutionary rupture* (Russia in 1917), but in neither condition *is it ever found in the 'pure' state* (Ibid.: 106). For Althusser, there was no pure distinction between Dialectical

Materialism (the scientific theorisation of dominant and secondary contradictions), and Historical Materialism (the *actual* structural contradictions of specific modes of production). Rather, the resolution of this condensed overdetermined dialectic was not simply a synthesis of binary forms, it was the production of new forms of knowledge that are themselves an expression of the very rupture caused by the clash of secondary and dominant contradictions. This is why Badiou notes in RM that ‘the difference of DM and HM is *not distributive*. We have here a *non-differentiating difference*, which in principle is mixed: impure (Badiou, 1967/2012: 146. Emphasis added). Conversely, Badiou outlined in RM what he considered the three dominant forms of ‘Vulgar Marxism’ that sought to ‘efface [the] difference’ between dialectical and historical materialism (Ibid.: 140). Not in the way already discussed, i.e., when the relationship of HM and DM is ruptured by a fracture that collapses historical development and theoretical exploration of that development into a ‘singular space’ of epistemological break; but, when either DM is collapsed into HM, or when there is an ‘equal balance’ between to the two. He grouped these into the three categories: ‘Fundamental Marxism’, ‘Totalitarian Marxism’, and ‘Analogical Marxism’.

One could read the first form as partly targeted at the stance of the PCF and its continuing support of the CCCP. As Badiou explains, this form ‘takes Marx’s work to be a dialectical anthropology in which historicity becomes a founding category...By thus *undoing* the concept of history, it enlarges it to include the notional dimension of a totalizing milieu in which the *reflection* of the structures, their ‘interiorization’, is a mediating function of the structures themselves.’ (Ibid.: 141). What is pinpointed here is the belief in a historical teleology that moves from Capitalism to Socialism; the sublimation of the theories of change, to an inherent process of change itself. That is, this dominance of a particular

science of history overrides the multiplicity of invariants that Althusser spoke of as secondary contradictions in favour of the single dominant contradiction of the economy qua traditional Marxist analysis. This was one of the criticisms levelled at Althusser himself, that the plurality of invariants destroyed the fundamental contradiction in capitalist society that Marx outlined in *Capital* as regards the economic contradictions of capitalism. For example, as Roger Garaudy, one time editor of the PCF publication *Cahiers du Communisme*, noted:

'Whatever the complexity of the mediations, *human practice is one, and it is the dialectic of human practice that constitutes the motor of history*. To blur this with the (real) multiplicity of "overdeterminations" is to obscure the essence of Marx's *Capital* which is above all a study of this major contradiction, this basic law of the development of bourgeois society. Once this is obscured, how is it possible to conceive the objective existence of a basic law of development of our own epoch, the epoch of the transition to socialism?' (As cited in Althusser, 1965/1969: 193. Emphasis added).

The conservative elements of the PCF, of which Garaudy had joined in 1933, 'accused him [Althusser] of having weakened the explanatory basis of Marxism by lapsing into an incoherent pluralism' (Dews, 1994: 114). In fact, as Feltnam notes, 'long after he and Badiou parted ways, Althusser confirmed the anti-teleological import of his theory of change by explicitly embracing *contingency*, re-baptizing his philosophy an aleatory materialism' or a 'philosophy of the encounter' (Feltnam, 2008:7).

The second form of eroding difference between HM and DM, 'Totalitarian Marxism', sees HM consumed by DM, where contradiction is treated 'as an abstract law' and is applied 'to any object whatsoever' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 141). As Badiou explains 'Under these

conditions, the procedures for the constitution of the specific object of historical materialism end up being suppressed, and Marx's 'results' incorporated into a global synthesis that could never transgress the rule that attributes to the imaginary any assumption of the Totality' (ibid). In the phrase 'the imaginary...assumption of the Totality', the target appears to be the humanist Marxism which transmutes Marx's theory of history into a theory of the subject's encounter, an encounter that overrides the structural invariants outlined by Althusser and gives rise to a form of idealism. As Peter Dews noted,

'If historical events are only truly 'explained' by being deduced from the structure of a social formation, if there is 'no history in general, but specific structures of historicity, based in the last resort on specific structures of the different modes of production' [*Reading Capital*, 1970: 109], then the totalizing ambitions of a Sartre are vain' (Dews, 1994: 116).

As Althusser himself remarked, such approaches simply served to reinforce the Bourgeois myth of the *homo economicus*, which Marx did so much to undermine (Althusser, 1965/1970: 125). In *For Marx*, Althusser sees Engels as the source of this position, but in *Reading Capital* he cites Sartre as its contemporary manifestation, who in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960/1976) 'tries to find a *philosophical basis* for the epistemological concepts of historical materialism...' (Althusser, 1965/1970: 127). As Badiou chides, in such forms of idealism there occurs a 'strange metempsychosis,'<sup>29</sup> from which Marx emerges saddled with the 'cosmic' robe of Father Teilhard de Chardin'<sup>30</sup> (ibid).

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<sup>29</sup> 'Transmigration of the soul, passage of the soul from one body to another; *esp.* (chiefly in Pythagoreanism and certain Eastern religions) the transmigration of the soul of a human being or animal at or after death into a new body of the same or a different species.' (OED)

<sup>30</sup> Father Teilhard de Chardin (1881 -1955) was a French Jesuit priest and idealist philosopher.

The final category of what Badiou terms the 'purification of difference' is Analogical Marxism, of which he says very little. According to Badiou, what occurs in such instances, is HM and DM as 'a relation of correspondence juxtaposing two terms, with Marxist philosophy at every moment being the structural *double* of a given state of social formation, and particularly of the objective form of class relations', which result in 'pure redundancy' of the two spheres (Badiou, 1967/2012: 142). Of the three examples (DM collapsed into HM or HM consumed by DM being the other two), this is the furthest from Badiou's theorisation of Althusser's 'epistemological break'. In Analogical Marxism, Badiou sees a clear separation of the philosophical analysis of science and the science of history, in which there is no 'excluded middle', no productive gap or fissure that signifies a possible rupture.

What Badiou attempts to set out in this brief classification is a map of the post-war intellectual currents of Marxist thought. It would not be an overstatement to say that Althusser lay at the centre of the storm that swept across French intellectual culture in the second half of the 1960s. In many ways, Sartre had occupied a similar position as a recognizable public intellectual with the Algerian war, but as noted in the previous chapter, with the growth of structuralism and the associated turn away from phenomenological idealism, his reputation had waned amongst the first wave of *normaliens* that emerged from the ENS at the beginning of the Sixties. They argued that underlying Sartre's approach was a set of assumptions about the possibility of mass political action and the role of subject, and Althusser's theories sought to challenge these ideas. Yet, Badiou's RM revealed that Althusser's work contained a blind spot. Simply put: if there are multiple conditions, and the economic remains both dominant *and* immanent to each of the conditions, what is the 'space' in which these conditions encounter one another? How does Althusser theorise

this 'space' of overdetermination? How can the determining practice of the economic ('in the last instance') work both *within* the totality connecting the secondary contradictions, while at the same time operate as the final determining practice of the totality *outside* of these specific practices?<sup>31</sup>

As Peter Hallward recognised, 'Badiou's main reservation regarding Althusser's effort to re-launch dialectical materialism as a general 'science of the scientificity of the sciences...is simply a concern that the project does not go far *enough* in establishing its central concepts ('structure', 'determination', 'the dominant instance of a structure', etc.) on the basis of a purely 'formal' and thus self-sufficient discipline' (Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 131).<sup>32</sup> It was such frustrations that played a role in Badiou's 'mathematical turn' (specifically model theory), a language that is able to explore its own materiality or representational space. This was a model of mathematics personified in the work of the German mathematician David Hilbert. 'For Hilbert', Hallward notes, 'elementary geometric objects like points and lines are not ideal approximations to objects in physical space but undefined terms that conform to axiomatically asserted procedures governing their manipulation' (Ibid.132). As Fraser (2007) has recognised, in 'general, model theory constructs...a logical analysis of mathematics' own 'representational space', weaving together meticulously ruled systems of interpretation between formal systems and the various mathematical structures that those systems can be said to be 'describing'' (xxiv). Such mathematical formalizations would emerge in greater detail in 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (1968/2012), Mark and Lack (1968/2012), and *Concept of Model* (1969/2007), but we do see the beginning of this move in RM, primarily around the

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<sup>31</sup> This point was originally raised by Feltnam (2008:10).

<sup>32</sup> As will be explored below, this becomes clear with the scientism of Badiou's final essay for *Cahiers* essay 'Mark and Lack (1969/2012).



areas of *conjecture*, the *conjecture effect*, and most significantly for this study, his tentative movement towards a *theory of historical sets*. Although, at this point, a focus on the themes of ideological representation do remain part of Badiou's work, he is turning towards a system that treats the materiality of DM as a history of the theory of science with no need for ideological forms of representation. 'For in truth', Badiou states, 'there is no other theory of science than the theoretical history of the sciences.' Furthermore, clarifying a common theme throughout RM, he continues, 'Epistemology is the theory of the history of the theoretical; philosophy is the "theory of the history of the production of knowledge"'. And this is why the revolutionary foundation of the science of history, insofar as it renders possible a scientific history of the production of scientific knowledge, *also* produces a philosophical revolution, designated by DM' (1967/2012: 145).

The first point Badiou raises regarding the issue of 'totality', which, Feltnam notes, has its origins in Aristotle (2008: 10), is to explore the constituent elements of HM via DM. Unlike traditional ideas of HM, in which there exists a determinate practice, Badiou argues that DM allows us to see that HM is composed of multiple forms of practice. So far as economic practice is concerned, you always have the 'labour force', 'the means of labour' and 'the forms of application of force to the means' (2012a: 154). You have the book ends of this condition (i.e., 'raw materials at the point of entry, product at the end'), but it is the relations between these elements that 'defines a practice' (Ibid). In line with Althusser, Badiou recognises that there are other forms of practice, such as 'political practice', 'ideological practice', etc. (Ibid.). Yet, importantly, in this multiplicity of practices there is no single practice; or more specifically '*The practice does not exist*' (Ibid.). Althusser himself makes this point in *Reading Capital* 'there is no practice in general, but only *distinct*

*practices*' (1965/1970: 58), and Badiou also recalls Althusser's statement in *For Marx* that to speak of a 'totality' of practices is to speak of a 'complex unity of practices in a determinate society' (Althusser, 1965/1969: 167; as cited in Badiou, 2012a: 154). Many decades later, Badiou remarked that this was one of Althusser's key innovations; that is, to speak of a multiplicity of practices was to argue that 'historical existence in general is based upon the multiple' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 59-60). Once again, as will be explored below, we see here the inception of Badiou's movement towards a mathematical formalism that would serve as a model for his ideas of the multiple in *CM* (1969/2007) and then more fully in *Being and Event* (1988/2005). Yet, at this point, Badiou continues to interrogate the philosophical space of overdetermination in Althusser's work, by questioning how the social whole (the totality, 'the sign of the one' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 60)) is articulated by the dominant economic practice? As Badiou asks: 'What *type of unity* articulates the different practices among one another?' (Ibid.). Unlike Althusser, whom Badiou argues maintained the term 'contradiction' out of allegiance to both Marxist tradition and a desire to associate his work with Mao's celebrated 1937 essay<sup>33</sup>, Badiou uses the word *instance* to refer to those moments when a *practice* is 'articulated onto all the others' (154), i.e. it becomes dominant. And it is this process of articulation, or more accurately the result of the articulation, that, following Althusser, Badiou refers to the aforementioned term *conjuncture*. This 'determining practice' becomes 'the practice responsible for historical change', Feltnam argues (2008: 10). DM for Badiou offered a way into theorising Althusser's 'dominant instance' which 'fixes the point of departure of the rational analysis of the whole [that is, of all other practices 'under' the dominant condition]' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 155). From this, DM serves as an 'epistemology of HM' – although, as we will see, there is always the danger

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<sup>33</sup> See fn.40 (Badiou, 2012a: 54). Tse-Tung, M. 'On Contradiction' (1937/1965)

that this epistemology is a form of ideology – and this epistemology is composed of a ‘set of instances’ that ‘defines a conjunctural kind of existence’ (Ibid.). In terms of the exploration of the historical, it has been argued that a danger exists in such a prioritising of DM. As Peter Dews argues, ‘Althusser’s attempt in *Reading Capital* to force all scientific knowledge of history into a preconceived mould leads to a number of...perverse conclusions. He suggests, for example, that the apparently ‘historical’ pages of *Capital* dealing with ‘primitive accumulation’, the struggle for the reduction of the working day, the transition from manufacture to industry, are merely raw materials for a history, since these are not subsumed under formal laws of structure. On the other hand, the theoretical sections of *Capital* are more truly ‘historical’ since they construct the theory of one region of the science of history’ (Dews, 1994: 114). As will be seen in Chapter 6, such a judgement certainly locates the source of a key component of Badiou’s later conceptualisation of history, while partly presaging the formalisation of the historian as argued for in this work.

Clearly, from this it is not too much of a leap to contend that the economic is not always the final determining practice. For Badiou, ‘if a *conjunctural type* is defined by the instance that occupies “the principal role” – which is dominant – *all types are thinkable*: the conjuncture with a dominant that is political (crisis of the State), ideological (anti-religious combat, as in the eighteenth century), economic (general strike), scientific (decisive break, as in the creation of Galilean physics)...’ (1967/2012: 155. Emphasis added). As Feltnam summarises ‘the dominant practice is given the role of both unifying and dictating the identity of its particular structure: for instance, the dominant practice in a given social structure might be juridical, ideological, or religious, and so this practice will give that society its particular

historical identity' (Felman, 2008: 8).<sup>34</sup> However, as Althusser himself argued, it is only with the 'economic in the last instance', which the phrase 'principal roles' seems to signify, that it 'is possible to escape the arbitrary relativism of observable displacements by giving these displacements the necessity of a function' (Althusser, 1965/1969: 58). Nonetheless, there is still a confusion here between conjuncture as the engine of historic change *and* forming the defining element in the continuing organisation and stability of the structural totality?<sup>35</sup> DM as epistemology, Badiou notes, frequently 'poses more problems than it solves' (Badiou, 1965/2012: 163).

Badiou's response to this was to develop the above-mentioned 'theory of historical sets' which sought to explore the dominant-secondary relationship (Ibid.). As he explained, his aim was to construct a 'formal discipline...which contains *at least* the protocols of 'donation' of the pure multiples onto which the structure-in-dominance are progressively constructed' (Ibid) ('donation' here signifies a metastructure). As highlighted earlier in relation to the ideological-science rupture, Badiou reached for spatial metaphors when attempting to map the articulation of the dominant on to a secondary instance. 'Indeed,' he says, 'we have seen that the conjuncture had to be thought as a definite system of 'places' in which the instances come to articulate themselves onto one another. From this point of view, the dominant...is essentially a *distributor of places and a definer of functions*' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 163-164. Emphasis added). This, it could be argued, is the first step towards a form of historiography which functions by *naming* instances of domination, a naming that

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<sup>34</sup> As Felman notes, by the time of *Logic of Worlds* published forty years later, Badiou has changed tact, arguing that 'to construct an order one must first demonstrate the existence of an *orientated* relation between any two given elements and the existence of a minimum element' (Felman, 2008: 8; Emphasis added). i.e. the relational nature of practices becomes central, rather than a single practice being dominant.

<sup>35</sup> Although not addressed in RM, the source of this contradiction is the absence of the category of the *subject* in Althusser's work. As will be discussed, this omission would serve to mark Badiou's break from Althusser.

emerges from the lack within science, identifying the break within the ideology-science relationship.<sup>36</sup> This is why Badiou argues in RM that DM as a theory must be able to ‘think’ its own break (Ibid.: 162). This returns us to the quote by Marx referred to at the very beginning of this chapter, in which the manifestation of a new theory, political formation, etc. is itself the ‘site of nomination [that is] prescribed by the very thing it is meant to be naming’ (Badiou: 2008/2009, 57) and the dialectic between these two areas – that of the rupture and the naming of the rupture – serves as the dual engine of historical movement. However, if, as Badiou argues, DM is ‘*the formal theory of breaks*’, the problem persists in distinguishing the structure from the causality of the structure; i.e. how do we separate out ‘an interconnected system of concepts that obey certain [structural] laws of combination’ from ‘forms in the order of discourse that organize the evidentiary unfolding of the system’ (Badiou, 1967/2012: 151)? An associated point was made some years later by Honneth (1994), who argued: ‘If sections of historical reality – in Althusser’s terms, ‘concrete situations’ – can only be grasped in the structuralist theory of history when integrated into the logical context of a social-structural totality, then only the already systemically organized parts of these concrete situations’ can be grasped by thought at all’ (94). As Badiou continues, ‘the whole problem lies in the fact that the second order by no means represents the trajectory of the first, nor its redoubling, but its existence, determined by the very absence of the system, and the immanence of this absence: its non-presence within its own existence’ (1967/2012: 151-152). The danger is that if DM is the theory of HM, if, as Althusser notes, it is ‘*capable of accounting for itself*, by taking itself as its own object’ (Althusser, 1967/1969: 39), then, as Badiou recognises, ‘DM is strongly at risk of being...the

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<sup>36</sup> Although speaking of Althusser, Dews rightly notes that such an approach sees ‘causal and narrative sequences of traditional historiography’ as having ‘no scientific validity’. He continues: ‘a historical event has not been truly ‘explained’ until it has been identified as an overdetermined effect of the complex structure of a social formation.’ (Dews, 1994: 114)

impossible enclosure of the scientific opening in the illusion of closure of typical ideology. Simply put, DM risks being the *ideology of which HM is in 'need'* (Badiou, 1967/2012: 162). The 'distinction of levels of a social formation (politics, aesthetics, economics, etc.) is presupposed in the very construction of the concept of determination [structure in dominance], since determination is *nothing else* than the structure-in-dominance defined on the set of instances.' It was faced with this tautology, that Badiou turned to the notion of '*historical sets*' as offering a workable 'collectivizing concept' (Ibid: 163).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, if the dominant is, as noted above, a 'distributor of places', then, Badiou argues, set theory offers the possibility of establishing a formal distinction between the structure (the (empty) space of the set) and the practices or functions '*which distribute certain places to the functions themselves*' in the set (Ibid: 164)). That is, a language of mathematical axioms has 'no material place other than where the difference between marks is manifested' (Badiou 1969/2012: 30). It is now necessary to briefly explore this initial move towards set theoretical thought in Badiou's work.

In truth, the actual space given over to the discussion of set theories relevance to the DM/HM relationship in RM is relatively small. In all, Badiou offers just two pages of algebraic proposals in the last quarter of the essay. As highlighted, he begins by marking out two formal operators:

'a) Set P. set of places, or (empty) space of combined efficacies

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<sup>37</sup> Although, in the original RM essay Badiou uses the word 'ensembles' rather than 'sets'. As Bruno Bosteels notes in his footnote to this choice of word in his translation of RM: ensembles 'can be translated both as 'ensemble' (as in Marx's 'ensemble of human relations', mentioned in his 'Theses on Feuerbach') and as 'set' (in the mathematical sense associated with Cantorian set theory). (Bosteels fn.52, in Badiou, 2012a: 159)

'b) Set F of functions, or practices, which distribute certain places to the functions themselves. These functions are thus defined on a part of F and they take their values from P: they distribute-occupy certain places. We define 'practices' as assignments of places to other practices.' (Badiou. 1967/2012: 164)

Following this 'splitting', Badiou then goes on to clarify the relationship between the two operators. Firstly, he argues that within a set of places (P) we may have a function ( $f$ ) which is delimited by another function ( $f'$ ). This would be called the 'instance of  $f$  according to  $f'$ ', or 'the distance of efficacy'  $f - f'$  (Ibid.). He then asserts that, when faced with the efficacy of  $f$  according to  $f'$ , or, in his words, 'the part of F on which  $f$  is defined contains  $f'$ ', displayed as ( $f(f')$ ), one can argue that in such instances 'this is the *representative* instance of  $f$ : the place that  $f$  assigns to itself' (Ibid.). Badiou then moves on to specify that, if we were to distinguish a 'set of practices' within F, that is a clear allocation of sites/places that constitute a subset H within F, then we could call this H a '*historically representable*' set. Badiou then stipulates two conditions which must be met if we are to identify such a set. Firstly, there must be a '*condition of determination*' (Ibid.). 'For example', he notes, '[t]here is in H a function  $det ( )$ <sup>38</sup> which is a bi-univocal application of H on P:  $det ( )$  distributes therefore the practices of H on all the places of P, and in particular it distributes itself – it is represented in P by the instance  $det(det)$ ' (Ibid). The one-to-one coupling of  $det( )$  within H on P is, Badiou argues in the second condition, always 'extremely regional' (Ibid.: 165). That is 'in the sense that the concept of structural causality that we obtained depends essentially on the type of dominance adopted' (Ibid). Yet, as Badiou argues, this second condition needs to stress 'the conceptual difference between determination and domination' and that

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<sup>38</sup> In set theory, *det* is an abbreviation of determinacy.

‘the representative existence of the *determining* instance cannot occupy therein the *dominant* place’ (Ibid). In Badiou’s proposition, the bi-univocity of  $det(det)$  ‘allows us to consider that in each place of P stands a practice (completeness of a social formation)’ (Ibid.: 165) one which also introduces the determinant itself. To briefly return to Althusser’s conception of ‘practices’, we must recall that, as Althusser noted in his essay ‘What is Practice’, when we look at any social formation we can detect a range of practices ‘the practice of production, the practice of technical and, later, scientific knowledge, political practice, ideological practice, aesthetic practice and so on’ (Althusser: 2017: 82). However, as Althusser continues, the important question is ‘less to identify and classify all the existing practices than to establish *the determinant practice in the totality of practices*’ (Ibid). While Althusser does stress that ‘...Marxist theory does not...claim to provide an exhaustive account of all the practices as a function of its topography’ (Ibid.: 84) and that ‘the way we visualize the determination of the practices, which can originate in either an ideology or a science, is itself part of the practices’ itself (Ibid.: 82), for Badiou, once again, there is a lack of clarity regarding Althusser’s theorisation of the bi-univocity of DM-HM, or ‘practices as a function of its topography’ (i.e. the space in which these practices interact). As he notes, ‘...the problem remains as to the ‘deduction’ of the modes – that is, the determination of ‘that which’ is structured by the structure from that *on the basis of which* the structure is defined’ (Badiou, 1967/2012: 163). In RM, Badiou continues to develop a response to this. From the bi-univocity of  $det(det)$  – as outlined above, that is the distribution of practices H on the sites of P, *and* the distribution of  $det( )$  itself – Badiou explains that ‘[g]iven a function of  $h$  of H, everywhere defined in H, and a place  $p$  of P, we will define  $h(p)$  as being  $h(h')$ , with  $det(h') = p$ . In other words,  $h(p) = h(det^{-1}(p))$ : the function takes as its argument the function that occupies the place  $p'$ ’ (Ibid.: 165). This is what in set theory is called



‘endomorphism’<sup>39</sup> and which Badiou refers to as an ‘endomorphism of places’ (Ibid); that is, the functions of *det* ( ) that are a part of the set itself. Badiou is here having his logical cake and eating it! That is, his set theorisation seeks to account for bi-univocity of place as both structure *and* structured. After this brief consideration of the operators of *determination*, Badiou then examines the formal properties of *domination*. If we recall, one of the distinctions between determination and domination is that the *determining* instance is unable to occupy the *dominant* place. So, taking the set of *dom* ( ) ‘as a function of H defined on H’, Badiou argues ‘[w]e will define the place n-dom by recurrence’. Badiou sets this out as follows:

$$1\text{-dom} = \text{det} (\text{dom}) \quad (\text{instance of } \text{dom} \text{ by the determinant})$$

.....

$$n\text{-dom} = ((n-1)\text{-dom}) \quad (\text{defined as } h (p) \text{ above) (Ibid.)}$$

What Badiou argues here is that in the first element, *dom* acts on itself ( $1\text{-dom} = \text{det} (\text{dom})$ ), and, as Badiou remarks, this is so because to have ‘ $2\text{-dom} = \text{dom} (\text{dom})$  would be to see the domination of domination. In the second operation, this becomes clearer, as ‘on the function that is sent by *det* to the place, here *dom* sends itself...’(Ibid.) Finally, Badiou

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<sup>39</sup> ‘An endomorphism is a function from a set into itself that preserves the natural structure. Thus, an endomorphism of a group into itself is an automorphism. An endomorphism of a vector space into itself is a linear transformation. If the set has no structure, then the endomorphism is merely a function from the set into itself’ (Lo Bello, 2013: 122).

concludes this section by saying that '[w]e will say that *dom* is in a position of *dominant* instance if, for any place *p* there exist a number *n* such that:  $n\text{-dom} = p$  (Ibid.: 166).

What Badiou is effectively developing here is a series of formal operations that, as Barker notes, enables him to build 'the conjuncture theoretically, axiom by axiom' (Barker, 2002: 17). As we explored, the conjuncture is defined as the dominance of one practice over others, 'a practice placing another practice' (Feltnam, 2008: 9). For Badiou, such a moment marks the aforementioned subset of H within F, that is, when '*a single* determining instance and *a single* dominant instance will be said to be *historically represented*' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 166). For this study, I would argue, what we see here is Badiou's early theorisation (through his use of *model*) of a conception of 'history' as an objectless subject. This was an approach that, although not in the language used above, would be further developed in his first book *Concept of Model* (1969/2007), where he noted that 'the problem is not, and cannot be, that of the representational relations between the model and the concrete, or between the formal and the models. The problem is that of *the history of formalization*. 'Model' designates *the network traversed by the retroactions and anticipations* that weave this history [of science]' (Ibid.: 55. Emphasis added).

However, at this stage of Badiou's work, his specific use of set theory creates two problems. Firstly, 'the weak point of this construction is that the initiation and intensity of change, and any possible variation in its form, cannot be theorized.' While this system accounts for historic change on a macro level, Feltnam continues, it does not 'at the level at which a militant philosophy is supposed to intervene; the level of a particular political practice' (Feltnam, 2008: 9), a lack famously thrown into relief by the 'events of May' '68. The second

issue for Feltnam is that ‘Badiou argues that economism...consists in the identification of the dominant practice with the determining practice, the practice that changes a conjuncture...Yet it is not clear how Badiou’s position...avoids economism in turn.’ As Feltnam concludes, ultimately, ‘in this mathematical structure the order of practices is quite unified, but at the price of eradicating any possibility of the emergence of a new practice: change is theorized as the reshuffling of the same practices into a different order’ (Ibid.). A reshuffling that materialises from a seemingly unspoken totality, that, for Feltnam, is Aristotelian, rather the Hegelian, in origin (Ibid.: 10-12) (i.e., ‘something has to *remain the same* during a change, otherwise one cannot speak of a change occurring to something’ (Ibid.).<sup>40</sup> As he rightly notes, in RM Badiou himself critiques Sartre for a form of ‘Fundamental Marxism’ in which ‘the concept of history..[is] enlarge[d]...to include the notional dimensions of a totalizing milieu in which the reflection of the structures, their ‘interiorization’, is a mediating function of the structures themselves’ (Badiou, 1967/2012: 141). While in this early work Badiou avoids the reduction of the ‘historically represented’ to the figure of *homo economicus*, the mathematical approach does still suffer from a final totalisation that presents an ‘over-complete theory of change’, where there is little room for ‘contingency or variations in the process of change’ and finally, that ‘change itself is limited to modification rather than full-scale transformation’ (Feltnam, 2008: 12).

Admittedly, Badiou was still an Althusserian with the publication of ‘The (Re)commencement of Dialectic Materialism’.<sup>41</sup> As with Althusser himself, Badiou’s focus was primarily on science and ideology, that is ideology as a form of representation and how

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<sup>40</sup> Badiou does make this observation of Althusser’s work himself (see Badiou, 1969/2012: 166, FN. 62)

<sup>41</sup> Although, as will be explored in Chapter Three, and as Barker (2012) notes, ‘What the conjuncture urgently required in the meantime was a theory of politics to accompany Althusser’s theory of science, a theory capable of ‘reflecting the political conjuncture *in our theoretical conjuncture*, and vice versa’ (18)

science could circumvent it (if only temporarily) through the act of pure presentation. Yet, unlike Althusser (and with hindsight as to how Badiou's oeuvre would develop) what RM offers is the first step towards a more coherent and transparent *theorisation* of conjuncture as the absent cause (i.e. 'absent' because it seeks to make sense of the already existing, but as yet untheorized, transformations of HM. That is, as Althusser himself made clear, there is always a lag between HM and DM; a lag, which Badiou felt, mathematics could address by mapping 'the abstract interval that separates, within DM, the concept of practice from the concept of articulation-unity, and to indicate the allure of its problematic filling' (Badiou, 2012: 166)).<sup>42</sup> What is of vital importance for this thesis, is that Althusser argued that this space of theorisation, the space of eventual philosophical explication of the transformation in HM, is the true site of historical change (also see Chapter One). Later chapters will show the centrality of this to Badiou's theorisation of the Event, which would develop the idea that truth is essentially its 'non-presence within its own existence'; that is, it is the 'space' in which a pre-existing discourse is revealed as fundamentally deficient: 'a null-trace whose effects are real' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 69). This is partly because the Event itself is generative of a new critical language which 'speaks' the rupture. This is the materialism of DM. Still, at this point, for Althusser (and Badiou) it was the critical language itself (rather than the space that *allows for the formation* of a critical language) that was the site of historical change.<sup>43</sup> And the problem recognised by Althusser, was that when seeking out a theoretical language to chart this new continent, we cannot draw from pre-existing ideological forms of

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<sup>42</sup> By 'allure of its problematic filling' Badiou simply means ideology. As Barker has noted, '[L]ike every great event of historical importance, the conjuncture always runs ahead of itself in the sense that its practices (scientific, political, ideological, etc.) always fall short of their combined efficacy. This shortfall might equal the 'overdetermination' of a political situation (e.g. the Weimar Republic) where the conditions for its transformation (e.g. Nazism) remain unseen and can only be re-presented once the transformation has actually occurred. The determinant practice of every conjuncture is therefore the absent cause of an "already structured whole."' (Barker, 2002: 16).

<sup>43</sup> Still, Althusser was one of the few structuralists to consider history as a necessary discipline within theoretical discourse. As Poster (1974) acknowledged (and was explored in Chapter One): 'For Lévi-Strauss, history was a form of mythic thinking by which the historian converted the past into a line of succession that made for a false continuity [see *History & Dialectics* in *The Savage Mind* (1962/1966)]. In Foucault, we find a succession of epistemes but not explanation for the change from one to the next. As a Marxist, Althusser was in no position to suppress or minimize the question. Diachronics would have to be given as much attention as synchronics' (402).

representation. As Althusser notes, DM 'cannot borrow its theoretical concepts from the ideologies occupying this 'continent', because they are profoundly distorted representations of reality. Nor can it simply 'apply' to this new 'continent' theoretical concepts that hold for other 'continents', since this 'continent' is completely new. Finally, it cannot directly [and] immediately extract its theoretical concepts and their system from the empirical reality of its new object: that is an empiricist, ideological, and hence distorted conception of the practice and history of the sciences' (Althusser, 1967/2003: 176). Althusser's response to this was to look to other scientific discourses as offering a language to 'question the specific object of a specific discourse, and the specific relationship between this discourse and its object' which it names (Althusser, 1965/1979: 14). Yet, there is always the danger that this imported language could clash with the new 'continent'. There is, he continues, 'an inevitable discordance [*écart*] between the imported concepts and their object in the field of the new science. [Still] [t]his discordance is corrected and reduced in the practice of the science as it develops: the imported concepts and their system are rectified one step at a time' (Althusser, 1967/2003: 177). Clearly, the danger is that these scientific discourses bring with them their own ideological obfuscations, and, as Althusser himself noted, present 'a very great risk' where the revolutionary shift is '*smothered by the old world and, directly or indirectly, fall[s] back under its sway*' (Ibid: 192. Emphasis added).

Certainly, there is a methodological vagueness to Althusser's solution of adopting a language which can facilitate the scientific transformation of HM in DM; which could, simply put, 'extrapolate a general theory of history from the conceptual framework and the

methodological articulation of capital' (Honneth, 1994: 87).<sup>44</sup> As Barker has noted, unless he 'claim[ed] to be able to produce a conjuncture practically out of thin air...it would appear that (the absent cause of) the conjuncture depends for its existence on some kind of 'preliminary formal discipline' where the concept of determination could be worked out' (2002: 17). With his 'mathematical turn', this is what Badiou set out to do in RM.<sup>45</sup> Towards the end of this key essay, Badiou further argued that the conceptual understanding of HM in Althusser's work means that '[w]ithin DM, the moment of 'pure' theory of historically representable sets seems to me to have to take precedence over the theory of historical structures' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 167). The 'hyper-structuralism' of Althusser and his circle of students, Badiou argues, is in danger of losing sight of the historical structures that DM attempts to explore. Clearly for Badiou, set theory, as utilised in the discussion explored above, offers a redress to this lack of lucidity regarding an understanding of the 'fundamental concepts' of HM ('structure in dominance, structure of structure, determination' (ibid.)). To demonstrate his point, Badiou turns the spotlight on the political conjuncture of the period in which he was writing. His conclusion of RM begins with the reflection that 'there currently exists no other resource, at least if one wants to be able to *speak* about that of which the silent reality (silent in *theory*) interpellates us and makes us the 'bearers' of determinate historical functions. There exists no other resource if one wants to think what constitutes *our* political conjuncture: de-Stalinization and 'pacific coexistence',

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<sup>44</sup> As Badiou would note some four decades later: 'Scientific (or theoretical): this innocent parenthesis which aligns 'theoretical' with 'scientific', this minor, transitory punctuation that divides only to unite, is the source of all the subsequent difficulties' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 60)

<sup>45</sup> 'Althusser thinks he can do without it' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 166). 'It' being mathematics. Much later, Badiou would say that: 'He [Althusser] often criticized me for what he called my 'Pythagorism', or what he saw as my excessive interpolation of mathematicity into my philosophical arguments' (Badiou, 2008/2009: 62). Interestingly, Althusser's own 'master' Gaston Bachelard, foresaw the need for the increasing mathematization of theory. As Dews noted: 'There can be no contesting that Bachelard's philosophy stresses the primacy of theory over experience: he often refers to his position as a 'rationalism' – although open rationalism – in which the increasing conceptual coherence and mathematization of theory, rather than an accumulation of empirical detail, is seen as the true mark of scientific advance...' (Dews, 1994: 123). The work of Bachelard's that Dew is referring to here is *The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind (1940/1968)*

tioned to that form of regressive transition defined by the Soviet regime; American imperialism; the Chinese revolution, which is another *species of transition*' (Ibid). Clearly aimed at the theoretical vacuity of the PCF and the lack of clarity in Althusser's own promulgations (although, as noted above, Althusser's work during this period was partly undertaken to address the political impasse within of the PCF)<sup>46</sup>, Badiou argues 'we owe it ['it' being a clarification of DM] to the epistemological lucidity of Marxists working around Althusser if we are capable of reflecting upon this political conjuncture in our theoretical conjuncture' (Ibid.: 168). And if there should be any doubt as to the said target, Badiou continues that without this consideration of the theoretical perspicacity of DM, 'we would be reduced to regurgitating the descriptions of vulgar Marxism and abandoning the vitality of the science, in all its aspects, to the formalist right and to the theologians of Literature' (Ibid). Badiou argues that the theoretical 'working out' of this political conjuncture was already underway in the work of Althusser's students. Furthermore, once again reaching for a topographic metaphor, Badiou contended that the '*place* for such a theory is clearly designated' (Ibid.).<sup>47</sup> In one sense, this latter statement appears to contradict his accusations of 'vulgar Marxism' by presenting this space of theorisation as a 'place-holder' that is kept open by a teleological imperative of working class revolution.<sup>48</sup> Then again, immediately following this, such transcendental schemas are, according to Badiou, evidenced in Althusser's approach and are roundly criticized by him (a schema he attributes to the continued 'tyranny of Hegel'; although, as seen above, Feltnam actually aligns this with Aristotle). 'When even to escape the empiricist 'circle', Badiou argues, 'that endlessly

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<sup>46</sup> See Althusser, 2006: 253.

<sup>47</sup> As we will see, Badiou extends this topographic metaphor in 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (1968/2012)

<sup>48</sup> 'In a time when the conjuncture forces us beyond the common critique of phenomenological idealism, to preserve – through novel and scientific configurations – the *rationalist and revolutionary rigor of class organizations*, to think that political practice will be assigned its status gives shape to our exigency' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 168. Emphasis added).

confronts the subject to the object, Althusser talks about the '*mechanism* of the cognitive appropriation of the real object by means of the object of knowledge', he is not so far from schematism, which also sidesteps the problems of the guaranteeing, of the 'policing' of the true, in the direction of the positive question of the structures of the concept's functioning.' The outcome is a 'multi-transcendental field without a subject' (Ibid.: 169). A similar point was made by Dews (1994), when he recognised that in Althusser's framework, 'if modes of production [HM] are the fundamental forms of historicity *there can be no 'historical time'* in which the transition from one mode of production to another takes place...Thus one of the ironies of Althusser's theory of history is that it ends by reproducing that division between synchronic necessity and an untheorizable contingency which he had originally criticized in Lévi-Strauss' (116). Badiou concludes RM that if the DM/HM relationship is to continue as a productive theoretical tool, then the juncture 'of a regional, historical and regressive epistemology with a global theory of the effect of the structure' needs to be critiqued more fully,<sup>49</sup> otherwise, one will do nothing but 'sing the song of departure while staying in the same spot' (Ibid.). Or, as Rancière would come to remark more acerbically, Althusser's discourse simply 'cloaks its consecration of the existing order in the language of revolution' (Rancière, 2011a: 124).

### **Indefectibly blank: 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (1968/2012)<sup>50</sup>**

If, as Badiou argued in *Concept of Model*, following the work of Bachelard (and Althusser's adoption of it), the resolution to a (scientific) problem 'reveals' itself within the space that

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<sup>49</sup> Badiou frames this as an issue between 'the Kantianism of the multiple that we perceive in Althusser's 'regional' epistemology, and the Spinozism of causality that rules over the presuppositions of his 'general' epistemology' (Badiou, 1967/2012: 170). That is the conjuncture of practices and science. However, it is not within the focus of this thesis to offer a greater discussion of these philosophical influences and/or the possible contradictions.

<sup>50</sup> '[A]nd when in the lines chance appeared conquered word by word in a scattered minimum rupture, indefectibly the white [blank] returns, gratuitous before, now certain' (Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Le Mystère dans les lettres', in Mallarmé (1965) (London: Penguin), 204).



allows the very problem to be posed, then one could argue that Althusser's work was itself a manifestation of the political tensions emerging from the interpretations and applications of Marx's work during the 1966-69 period (Badiou, 1967/2012: 138). As Feltnam recognised, Althusser saw 'his own theoretical innovations as interventions designed to clarify the confused situation of Marxism', and 'ever since Khrushchev's speech at the twentieth Congress denouncing Stalin, the gulags and the cult of personality, there had been, in his eyes, a poisonous flowering of liberal-humanist interpretations of Marx [meaning the work of Sartre, Roger Garaudy, and the idea of 'Marxism with a human face']' (2008: 4).<sup>51</sup>

Althusser's aim in such texts as *For Marx* (1965/1969), and his collaborative *Reading Capital* (1965/1970), was to pinpoint the rupture or break between Marx's scientific theorisation of capitalism in *Capital* and his earlier 'humanist' works. As we have seen from RM, one could argue that Badiou took this impetus towards a *scientific* theorisation of ideology within capitalism more seriously than Althusser himself. Utilizing mathematical axioms (and his theory of historical sets) as a response to the problematics thrown up by 'conjuncture' as the engine of historic change *and* as a lynch pin of structural totality, it was Badiou's first entrée into the formalisation of philosophical issues arising from Althusser's work. In his next essay, he sought to extend this 'scientism', seeking to trace the unoccupied sites or 'blind spots' that lay within the ideological categories emergent from the economic and historical form of capitalism. IS was the first of two essays for the radical journal *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, the second being ML, a critical response to Jacques-Alain Miller's 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)' (1966/1977; see below). The editorial collective of *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* came from those student's attending Althusser's classes at the ENS.

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<sup>51</sup> As Althusser himself said in his introduction to the English translation of *For Marx*: '...these philosophical essays do not derive from a merely erudite or speculative investigation. They are...interventions in a definite conjuncture...this conjuncture is...the theoretical and ideological conjuncture in France, more particularly the present conjuncture in the French Communist Party.' (Althusser, 1967/1969: 9)

Shaped by disciplines of Althusserian historical materialism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the aim of the journal was to generate a wholesale theory of structural change that could also account for the place/role of the subject (a goal that would have clearly appealed to an individual schooled in both Sartrean and Althusserian philosophy).

While Badiou would come to have significant reservations about Miller's work in 'Suture' (see below), IS shared its focus on the point of exclusion within the chain of representation as sustaining the very forms of representation. That is, it was focused on the idea of a 'blind spot' or 'empty place' within the structure. As with Badiou's use of mathematical axioms in RM, to grasp the relationship between the structure and the empty space of the set, and the way certain practices are assigned (and impact) within the structure, IS confronts the proposition of the 'unoccupiable place' via the language of formal axiomatics. The essay itself is divided in to two parts. The first part seeks to argue for the site of an unquantifiable variable, which always remains impossible within the system it 'appears' in, but still offers a path to naming a 'fissure' in the structure (in many ways, this space could be argued to occupy the same realm of Lévi-Strauss' 'limit-form' witnessed in Chapter One). The second part of IS takes as its focus the work of mathematician Abraham Robinson and his system of *non-standard analysis*. This later development provides Badiou with a language to '[occupy] the inoccupiable', and to enact 'an intrusion of formalisation into..[the impasse of the] real (Fraser, in Corcoran, 2015: 138). The outcome is, once again, Badiou's development of the "subversive' i.e. revolutionary power of scientific formalisation, [specifically] its capacity to interrupt the ideological categories of continuity, quality and temporality' (Hallward, NDb). This is where we see the adoption of the concept of *forcing* (*forçage*; also see Chapter Five), and, as I will argue later in this thesis, offers a key tool in the retroactive recognition, that

connects with an anticipated futurity, of the truth in past historical situations (events). That is, history as the 'naming' of the point of exclusion, not as a variant of what Tho (2013) has named as the 'Atomistic strategy'<sup>52</sup>, but rather the 'placing' of a generically formal point of infinity that is not 'coextensive with that for which it is "other"' (Ibid: 31).

Badiou's IS follows a similar theoretical path to Miller's 'Suture' (see below) by stating that 'what is constitutive for it [the finite] is the empty place where that inscription which lacks is possible' (1968/2012; Emphasis added). Clearly, what Badiou is saying here is something any young child who is trying to think of the biggest number can understand. Take any finite number, is that the largest number you can think of? Of course not, you can simply expand it by adding another number ( $n+1$ ). However, Badiou asks, what is the *place* in which this endless inscription is inscribed? Badiou formalises this as follows: 'A number  $x^n$  is that which determines 'to its right' the place of its successor:  $(x^n S) \rightarrow (x^n S x^{n+1})$ . To be inscribed at one of the places distributed by  $S$  is to assign to the other place [*l'autre place*] the constraining exclusivity of the blank space. The numerical effect exhausts itself in the incessant shunting along of the empty place: number is the displacement of the place where it is lacking [*où il manque*]' (Ibid.). The question that then arises is, as Hallward posed, if 'through each operation of succession number shows itself to be "the displacement of the place where it is lacking"...is inscription in the place of such lack a sort of 'representation' or reflection of something external to the inscription, a sort of indication whereby the lack itself might somehow be rendered 'visible'?' (Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 134). Badiou's answer to this would be an irrevocable no (he does provide a greater sense of how this can be formalised

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<sup>52</sup> 'In philosophical terms, this way of thinking the "indeterminate" qua void is such that it renders it dependent on its relation with the determinate. As a figure of "abyss", "lack", or "hole", the signification of the void is coextensive with that for which it is "other"; dependent on the determinate, the total, the whole' (Tho, 2013: 31).

as a 'stratified space', rather than a lack. in ML; see below). As Hallward continues, the 'endless generation of finite numbers through succession simply presupposes the blank or missing place required for its operation...' (Ibid.). In IS, Badiou illustrates this using the example of the Turing machine (briefly, this is 'a notional computing machine for performing simple reading, writing, and shifting operations in accordance with a prescribed set of rules, invoked in theories of computability and automata', OED). He argues that the infinite space or, that is, the continual blank space of the inscribed (in Badiou's example the blank and infinite ticker tape), *is* what supports the universal applicability of Turing's postulation. This 'ticker tape' is the 'infinity support', the 'non-markable unity of its space of inscription' (Badiou, 1968/2012: 188).<sup>53</sup> Badiou names the *infinity point* as that within a situation which marks the point of contradiction – or the real – which subsequently gives rise to a new situation. He outlines this as such: 'Let us suppose that these procedures allow us to designate a place such that none of the objects that are constructible within this domain can, on pain of contradiction, be marked within it. We will call 'infinity-point of the domain' the *supplementary* mark that conforms to the following conditions: a) It occupies the unoccupiable place. b) Apart from this occupation, it is governed by all the initial procedures' (Ibid). What is important for this study, is that the *recognition* of this infinity point is always a retrospective action; or as Badiou notes, 'the 'potential' infinite, the indefiniteness of progression, *testifies retroactively* to the 'actual' infinity of its *support*' (Ibid.: 187; Emphasis added). Infinity-points are of a binary nature, i.e. they can only be gestured to after the event. As such, there is something inherently 'historical' about the assessment of this action. Or rather, a historical reflexivity is central to the

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<sup>53</sup> One could argue that this 'ticker tape' metaphor shares something with the way Miller speaks of the + symbol in mathematics. (see Miller, 1966/1977: 98)

emergence/recognition of the new. As I will argue in the second part of this thesis, this unoccupiable binary space could be framed as the engine of the historical, or the 'pulsation' between the future anterior a new infinity point opens up and its possible retrospective recognition, a bivalent process that proffers a radical new form of historiography. For Badiou, these issues manifest themselves in terms of his exploration of infinity as both immanent and external. As he explains:

'This infinite [*cet infini*] has a twofold relation to the procedures of construction, since only the latter allow us to determine the unoccupiable place which the former will come to occupy, while the former enables the efficacy of the latter to recommence. But the infinite is also exterior to the domain in which those procedures are exercised – this is its supplementary – since it marks within this domain that which is averred in it only as void. We see then that the infinite closes off a domain by occluding the voids determined within it; but also that it opens up a higher domain as the first point of a second space in which the initial procedures can be exercised. This pulsation of closure and opening defines the infinity-point: it is the zero of a higher stratum' (Ibid: 188).

As was to become customary, Badiou offers a mathematical formulation of this process. He simply states that for all  $x, x < y$ . In this statement 'the *variable* 'y' marks the place in question [the infinity point]...no proper name of a number, can occupy this place – can be substituted for the variable 'y' - without a contradiction ensuing.'  $x$  can by all means signify a number, but, Badiou notes, 'Every number is lacking in [the] place' of  $y$  (Ibid). Simply put, 'y' is a variable but not a number or integer; it names but does not count. Therefore, the space of the void is 'identified' but not given a value. Through the act of forcing, Badiou

argues, the variable as infinity point is 'positioned', but it is a point that is 'disconnected' from the system that precedes it. With his penchant for naming these processes and actions, Badiou states that 'We will call these effects of the marking of constructible empty places a recasting [*refonte*]...The infinity-point of a domain is a recasting-inscription' (Ibid.: 189). In a footnote, Badiou says that he 'has taken the concept of recasting...from Francois Regnault (Regnault was a fellow member of the *Théorie* group, good friend of Badiou's and fellow member of the UCFML). He uses it to designate those great modifications whereby a science, returning to what was un-thought in its preceding epoch, carries out a global transformation of its systems of concepts – e.g. relativistic mechanics after classical mechanics (Ibid.). Once more, we see here the future anterior-retrospective dynamic noted above. That is where the infinite calls for a finite mark that denotes an opening; a Janus-faced variable that demarcates an unoccupiable place retrospectively (one detects in such a theorisation echoes of Marx's theory of the commodity, that curious object that is both quantitative and qualitative, materialist and transcendental). Within the realm of the already known, the recasting of a 'space' as an infinity-point 'ensures that impossible equations are sufficiently legible to read their impossibility' (Ibid.: 191). This is the materialistic nature of Badiou's thesis. The infinity point is 'located' within the structure but reshapes that structure as a result. To place it 'outside' of the structure would be to slip into a form of the metaphysical. Ultimately, naming the impossible within the possible becomes viable with the variable.

It is implicit from the above how much Lacan and his concept of the 'Real' was influential on Badiou at this point. There is some confusion over when Badiou first encountered Lacan, but Badiou himself has said it was via the pages of the journal *La Psychanalyse*, specifically Vol

1. (1956) and Lacan's celebrated 'Actes du congrès de Rome' in 1953, which was the lecture 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis'. Badiou has said he was 'literally dazzled' by this work. 'I experienced a veritable textual fascination', Badiou continues, 'so much so that my theoretical relation to Lacan has also been mediated by his writing' (Badiou & Roudinesco, 2014: 4). Badiou notes that as he became more familiar with Lacan's work, he would 'slip references to Lacan into my own essays' and that his master Althusser noticed this and then took him to one of Lacan's seminars at the Sainte-Anne Hospital (Ibid.). Badiou further notes that in the 1960-61 academic year, he was the first student to propose a presentation on Lacanian thought at the ENS (Ibid.). Like his colleagues at the *Cahiers*, Badiou came to see Lacan's thought as offering a formal bridge between the conceptualization of the subject and structure, or more accurately, the conceptualization of the subject *within* structure. Yet, one should not naïvely conflate Badiou's philosophical alliance with the other authors of *Cahiers* retrospectively, as it actually took the events of 68 to transform his approach to this component (the subject-structure relationship) and the role of Lacan's work in formalising it. As IS (and ML) demonstrates, the mathematical was more central to his work than the formalisation of the subject in this process. As Badiou himself reflected many years later, in the 65-67 period 'I was [still] freeing myself from Sartre, existentialism and phenomenology. I would say that what first seduced me in my mathematical education was the non-subjective, the making of a capacity to think of all intentionality and subjectivity' (Cited in Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 138). At this point, Badiou judged 'that if mathematics were to achieve the secrets of thought, it was because of its a-subjectivity. It seemed like a psychosis; that is to say, it was the automatism, a characteristic of the automatism of thought, a mechanical conception of mathematics, that I was concerned with in those days' (Ibid). As such, IS sees Badiou applying Lacan's thought in

such a way that the concept of the real is subsumed to that of the mathematical variable. While for Badiou, Lacan's real is 'for a domain of fixed proofs...defined as [that which] is impossible', in his schema 'an axiomatic system can operate as *this* system, and can allow itself to be thought differently as the discourse of the real' (Badiou, 1968/2012: 192). However, one should not, Badiou argues, conflate the mark of the variable *as* the mark of infinity itself. Rather, the variable prepares a 'space' for multiple forms of the infinite. 'It is in this place of the impossible,' Badiou continues, 'which the variable occupies *in order to designate its impossibility*, that the infinity-point will come to inscribe itself as a constant' (ibid.). The variable is the 'empty-mark', or more accurately, the indicator of 'the prescribed lack of every constant' (ibid.). Succinctly put, Badiou states that 'the infinity-point is the becoming-constant of a variable in the impossible place whose impossibility it indexes' (ibid.). The variable does not 'fold' impossibility back into the system it marks (i.e. it does not serve as the 'Other' of the infinite array of constants that may come to occupy its place); it is not a reading of the Derridean *différance* where meaning is 'perpetually delayed' (also see Introduction); as Badiou argues 'the continuum can't collapse into divisibility and the divisibility can't collapse into the continuum' (ibid.: 194). As he noted, 'if every constructible place is occupiable, the system marking neither differences nor regions, becomes an opaque body, a deregulated grammar, a discourse dense with nothingness.' (ibid.: 192). Rather it distributes 'as many impossibilities as there are constants capable of entering or not into any given relation...' (ibid.: 193). There is a clear tension here between the mark of the variable and the 'infinite divisibility of the continuum' (i.e. the infinite constants that can come to occupy the 'site' of the variable). Badiou argues that this tension is maintained 'in the unitary space of this exclusion' (ibid.) (exclusion from the system in which it is 'located'). This is why, to its surrounding system, the infinity point seems irrational. As Badiou argues,



‘...since it is linked to the forcing of the empty spaces proper to a domain, the introduction of an infinity-point is a modification which must of necessity seem irrational, since in any given theoretical conjuncture rationality is defined precisely by the respect accorded these blank spaces, as the sole guarantors, variably indexed, of *real* difference for the domain’ (Ibid.: 198). Yet, when an infinity point is forced, a ‘macro-field’ can ideologically close the singular point. As Hallward rightly observes in his synopsis of IS,

‘Along with revolution comes, unsurprisingly, reaction or counter-revolution. The recasting [*refonte*] of a domain which follows the inscription of an infinity-point can have literally anarchic consequences. By forcing the infinity-point of the real number system, for instance, we generate an extension or ‘macro-field [*surcorps*]’ of ‘complex numbers’ in which some basic arithmetic relations no longer apply. The structure of order itself is not valid for the remoulded domain, which thus presents a literally ‘disordered’ field of number’ (Hallward, NDb).

It is here that Badiou highlights how this process can be witnessed in history (in his chosen example, the history of mathematics), where for the sake of “epistemological prudence’ (on the part of mathematicians) conspire[d] with ideological ‘repression’ (on the part of philosophers), to ensure that the infinitely small or ‘almost nothing’ remained without a numerical mark of its own (Ibid).’ By forcing an infinity point through the ‘inclusion’ of a variable mark, one can establish ‘oneself in the constitutive silence, in the unsaid of a domainial conjuncture, one maintains the chance of producing a decisive reconfiguration’ (Badiou, 1968/2012: 198). At this point in IS, he quotes the preternaturally gifted French mathematician Évariste Galois, who noted in his posthumously published ‘minor mathematical manuscripts’:

“It often seems that the same ideas appear at once to many people as a revelation: if one looks for the cause, it is easy to find it in the works of those which preceded, where *these ideas were prescribed unknowingly by their authors*’ (Ibid.: 198, Original emphasis; Galois, 2011: 271).<sup>54</sup>

Returning to Lacan’s ‘Real’, Badiou reaffirms his mathematicising of the formulation whereby what is barred from the symbolic ( $\mathcal{A}$ ) appears in the real, as ‘the excluded proper to an *already produced* mathematical structure reappears as the instigating mark of a real (historical) process of *production* of a different structure’ (Ibid.: 199). It needs to be acknowledged at this point that it is one of the contentions of this thesis that when historians ‘...[establish themselves] in the constitutive silence, in the unsaid of a domainial conjuncture, [they maintain] the chance of producing a decisive reconfiguration’ (Ibid.: 198) of both history and traditional forms of historiography (see Chapter Six). However, such a statement negates the role of the subject in such a theorisation, and this will be explored more fully in Chapters Four and Five.

Badiou spends the last quarter of IS validating (in algebraic form) the theorisation of the issues outlined above. In these closing statements we can often detect some of the issues that would be further addressed in ML. For example, as he has shown, the variable that ‘marks’ the infinity point is not the ‘hidden’ point from which the structure is constituted (i.e. ‘lack’). Rather, ‘the new system obtained by the above procedure is *the formal theory of infinity-points for the transgressive-within-the-finite relations of a given system*’ (Ibid.: 202). The extension, while perceived by the system as irrational, is coherent if the system which is transgressed is also coherent. ‘We are thereby authorized’ Badiou concludes, ‘in marking an

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<sup>54</sup> ‘...the infinity-point declared by a mathematician often provokes accusations of obscurity at best and of madness at worst – and this primarily, as in the case of Galois, from established colleagues, such as Siméon Poisson.’ (Badiou, 1968/2012: 199)

infinity-point for every relation that is transgressive-within-the-finite: this marking conserves the formal coherence and defines a 'non-standard' extension of the structure which is the 'standard' (ordinary) model of the system' (Ibid.: 203). Badiou argues that there has often been a 'guardianship of the real...by a secret and permanent supremacy of the continuous over the discrete [the mark of the variable]' (Badiou, 1968/2012: 206). As already highlighted, it is a '*retroactive effect*' that has existed 'throughout the history of philosophy', whereby '[q]uality and continuity are mutually implicating...and which has in part governed the *censuring of infinitesimals*' (Ibid.: 206; Emphasis added). As such, we have two approaches: one which foregrounds 'quality, continuity, temporality and negation: the oppressive categories of ideological objectives'; the other 'number, discreteness, space and affirmation: or better, Mark, Punctuation, Blank Space [*blanc*] and cause: the categories of scientific processes' (Ibid.: 206-7). These are two approaches which, Badiou notes, 'have been in struggle, according to Lenin, since the beginnings of philosophy' (206). As Badiou argues 'ramified history' has long supported this 'ideality of the Whole' and negated the 'linking [*enchaîner*] [of] the infinite through them' (Ibid.).

### **'Lacking a mark, never a mark of lack': 'Mark and Lack: On Zero' (1969/2012)**

Badiou once reflected that 'in 1967, just before the political storm, my mediations were on the side of formal structures', while after 1968 his focus was 'on the side of political subjectivity' (cited in Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 127, fn. 8). While ML was published in the penultimate issue of *Cahiers* in 1969, it was actually written in January 1967, before this ontological 'breach' (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 141). The essay, Hallward argues, 'deserves to be recognized as one of the pivotal moments in the history of French structuralism' (Ibid.: 138). Like IS, ML finds Badiou attempting to clarify the boundaries

between the ideological and the scientific, once again in relation to questions of the void and the subject (which, as he was still in full Althusserian mode, he remained hostile towards). The central target of ML was the work of Jacques-Alain Miller and specifically his (subsequently) celebrated essay 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)' (1966/1977), which was the third work in the opening issue of the *Cahiers* (partnering Yves Duroux's paper 'Psychology and Logic'). Against Miller, the aim for Badiou in ML was to 'delineat[e] the impossibility of a logic of the Signifier that would envelop the scientific order and in which the erasure of the epistemological break would be articulated' (Badiou, 1969/2012: 160). The argument levelled at Miller was that fundamentally 'the logic of the Signifier is a metaphysics: a representation of representation, an intra-ideological process and progression' (Ibid.). While it is not within the scope of this work to offer a full and comprehensive analysis of Miller's text, it is worthwhile noting some of its key elements alongside Badiou's theoretically detailed riposte.

Lacan himself never developed a theory of 'suture' (and some years later Badiou himself would eventually come to see Miller's paper as 'the first great Lacanian text not to be written by Lacan himself' (Badiou, 1990/2008: 25)), although Miller starts 'Suture' by saying he has no experience to speak about psychoanalysis. There are three sections in 'Suture', the first being 'Concept of the Logic of the Signifier'. In this segment, Miller asks the question '*what is it* that functions in the series of the whole natural numbers to which we can assign their progression?' (Miller, 1966/2012: 94). His immediate answer is that 'In the process of the series, in the genesis of progression, the function of the subject, unrecognized, is operative' (ibid.). It is in the exploration of the theorisation of this 'space' that constitutes the subject and thus the structure itself, that Miller turns to the work of

mathematician Gottlob Frege (1848-1925). As Tho (2013) has argued, ‘Frege, by reasoning that there is nothing [0] that is not identical with itself, “ $x \neq x$ ”, identities a concept with no extension at all, since it does not refer to anything’ outside of its own non-self-referentiality (36) (This point was famously examined by Russell in his *Principia Mathematica* (1903)). Just to clarify, in Frege’s thesis the extension of the concept ‘not identical with itself’ is  $\emptyset$  or “zero”. As Tho notes, we are able to continue to extend this, in which “One” would be the counting of this empty extension  $[\{\emptyset\}]$ , “two” would be the counting of this counted empty extension  $[\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}]$ , and “three” would be the counting of the counting of this empty set  $[\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}\}]$ , and so on. This iterative procedure indeed returns to satisfy the iterative or successive structure of arithmetic progression. Once in place, the expansion of this basic procedure would allow us to map the successive, or iterative structure, generating the variety of other numbers’ (Ibid.) In ‘Suture’, following Lacan, Miller argues that the subject is this initial barred object ( $\emptyset$ ). As he notes, this ‘impossible object, which the discourse of logic summons as the not-identical with itself and then rejects as the pure negative, which it summons and rejects in order to constitute itself as that which it is, which it summons and rejects wanting to know nothing of it, we name this object, in so far as it functions as the excess which operates in the series of numbers, the subject’ (1966/2012: 99). What Miller is arguing here is that any structure which presents itself as consistent, does so by excluding that which is inconsistent or not equivalent ( $x \neq x$ ). As such, it is those elements that are excluded that are constitutive of the structure, that are non-identical, and which can be represented by the mathematical figure of the void ( $\emptyset$ ). In Miller’s analysis qua Lacan, this marks the site of the subject; that is, ‘the excess of the structure, whose very content, “not identical with itself”, calls upon *suture* that extra-structurally correlates subject and structure (through the impossible object)’ (Ibid.: 38). Yet, for Badiou, Miller’s thesis is not

really a *logic* of the signifier at all; rather, its movement towards the representation of lack is pure ‘metaphysics’. It is simply, for Badiou, ‘a representation of representation, an intra-ideological process’ (Badiou, 1969/2012: 160). There is no epistemological break here between science and non-science. As Tho remarked, ‘Badiou contests that [Miller’s adaption of] Frege’s use of the non-identical ( $x \neq x$ ) does not in any sense produce a “lack” and, in turn, there is nothing to suture. Ultimately, Badiou argues, the marks that enter into scientific practice such as formal logic or mathematics are generated without any repression of a fundamental lack’ (2013: 39). His response is to set out the proposition of four levels which, he argues, are central to the logical process. These four “mechanisms” are abbreviated as follows:  $M_1$ ,  $M_2$ ,  $M_3$ , and  $M_4$ .  $M_1$  is *Concatenation*, and it simply classifies the ‘graphic marks’ or ‘alphabet’ which constitutes the tools of logic. This is what Hallward called the ‘(neo-Hilbertian) inaugural confidence in the permanence’ and ‘self-identity or self-substitutability of logico-mathematical marks or graphemes’ (Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 139).  $M_2$  is *Formation* and it operates on  $M_1$ . As Badiou himself outlined, for a logical expression to be classified as “well-formed and the others as ‘ill-formed” in  $M_2$ , then ‘the division [should] be without remainder’, meaning for any ‘given inscription [in  $M_1$ ] whatsoever (i.e. finite sequence of signs of the alphabet), there exists an actual procedure that permits one to determine unambiguously whether the expression does or does not conform to the rules of the syntax’ (Badiou, 1969/2012: 161; FN). The third mechanism ( $M_3$ ) that operates upon *Formation* is *Derivation*. Badiou notes that Derivation ‘is set up to produce

1. A perfect dichotomy between Theses (or derivable statements) and non-Theses (non-derivable statements).
2. A certain type of functional relation between these two divided halves.’ (Ibid: 162)

There is no 'excluded middle' in this analysis: 'a functional relation...sends each statement to its negation ( $t \dots \sim t$ ). There is no effective dichotomy [i.e. third position that 'overseas' these positions] that cuts through *all* of those relations' (Ibid.: 163). Ultimately, it is not a lack that breaks the dichotomy. Rather, it is a rupture or epistemological break. 'The undecidable is not the saturation of lack', as he argues, 'but the *foreclosure of what is lacking* through the failure to produce, within what is derivable, the whole of the non-derivable negated' (Ibid.: 164). As Hallward rightly notes, in Miller's thesis, as paradoxically as it may sound, "x is unequal to x' [only] if x necessarily remains the 'same' x in both instances' (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 140). That is 'we can formulate logically coherent statements of non-self-equality (on the model  $x \neq x$ ) *only if we first exclude all that is 'scripturally non-self-identical'* (Ibid; Emphasis added). For Badiou, the scriptural nature of mathematical language 'allows of no exceptions and tolerates no evocation of what evades it, not even in the form of rejection. What is not suitable-for-itself is something radically unthought, of which the logical mechanism *bears no trace*. It is impossible to turn it into an evanescence, a shimmering oscillation...What is not substitutable-for-itself is foreclosed without appeal or mark' (Badiou, 1969/2012:166). In response to the issue of how to respond to the situating of a zero, Badiou introduces the fourth mechanism ( $M_4$ ). If, at  $M_3$ , we have  $I(x,x)$  and  $\sim I(x,x)$ , 'the latter "negation' marks nothing but the rejection of (or presence in) the other division (that of non-theses)...No absence [i.e. Lack] is convoked here that would be anything but the allocation to one class rather than to its complement – according to the positive rules of a mechanism – of what this mechanism receives from the productions of another' (Ibid.: 168).  $M_4$  for Badiou is 'the logical system that adds to  $M_3$  the predicative constant (the proper name) 0, as it has been defined [via  $M_1, M_2, M_3$ ,]...' (Ibid.:

170). The zero of  $M_4$  is effectively identifying the zero of  $M_2$ , which becomes discernible in  $M_3$  (Ibid.: 171). Ultimately, Badiou notes, 'The scientific signifier is neither sutured nor split, but stratified' (Ibid).

What Badiou is building here, is a critique of Miller's concept of Suture as one that emerges from a totalising hypothesis of structure in which the void is "outside". As Tho highlights, for Miller 'the reason why the indeterminate [i.e. the void] is understood as inconsistency results *only* from the prior assumption that the determinate organization of structure is founded on a closed circulation of terms. This quasi-totalizing representation of structure naturally leads to the privileging of the void as its supposed "indeterminate"' (Tho, 2013: 46-47). In Badiou's schema, the layering of the mechanisms of logic means that the 'system of differences between systems, [is] ruled by substitutions, equivalences, and withdrawals' where the site of a zero may be lacking a mark but is never the mark of lack (Badiou, 1969/2012: 171). '[S]cience is pure space [*l'espace pure*]' it has no blind-spot, there is no barred subject, Badiou argues (Ibid.:171-172).

In ML, Badiou is chiefly critiquing the project of the *Cahiers* (that is the weaving of structure and subject, Althusser and Lacan, into one). As he says, 'when Historical Materialism claims to be able to elucidate subjective enslavement to ideologies on its own, or when psychoanalysis effaces the specificity of the place where it must uncover the mark of lack in the generality of a logic of the signifier, then these disciplines are collapsed and reduced to one another. They become un-stratified: un-scientific' (Ibid.: 172). The importance of ML for this thesis is that although Badiou would come to revise some of the more austere elements of this essay, its basic premise, that of the void as *within* rather than other or *without*, has



remained constant in his work, and presents a vital tool in exploring the relationship 'between' historical structures and the emergence of new forms within these structures (often seen as indeterminate, irrational, or inconsistent). As Tho summarised, Badiou's 'formalist path, in eschewing such systematic totalization, is nothing less than the rejection of such prior assumptions of "completeness... As such, *the singular is always the inscription of a new and positive formalization* that, though indeterminate insofar as it has no determinate status within the strata of determinations that constitute a structure, is not the failure of the structure but only the *failure of the representation of the structure as total or complete.*' (Tho, 2013: 46-47; Emphasis added). In some readings of Badiou's work (see Ruti, 2012), this distinction between lack as the 'Other' of the structure, that which sustains the structure through its omission, and lack as the *positive inscription* within the structure via a stratified order of logic, is confused. Via his critique of Miller's essay, ML reveals Badiou's unique reading of Lacan, where the 'hypostatization of the void as the repository of the contingent and singular' (Tho, 2013: 47-48), is challenged via a mathematical encounter that seeks out radical omissions within the representations of the structure. Badiou grounds the void firmly within the inchoate being of the structure itself. In Tho's conclusion, he argues that this formalist "subtraction" from the closed circuit of the everything-something-nothing allows us to think the indeterminate singular as a self-grounding multiplicity, a radical cut from the co-extensiveness of structure and its (supposed) gaps' (Ibid).

Once again, while in his ontological treatises of the 1980s (see Chapter 5) Badiou would significantly revise many of the ideas expressed in ML, the critique of the 'occultation of the void' (Ibid.), or the perception of the void as the external repository for a structure's contingency, would continue to remain a critical target of his writings (and consequently set

him apart from such contemporaries as Žižek and Rancière). ML offers us the beginnings of a reading of the void as a mathematical limit-form, as a point upon which the sets are founded. Badiou himself returned to ML four decades later in an interview with Tho, in which he affirmed how many of the proposals in this important essay have continued to direct his work. He reiterated that '[i]n Miller's text, suture designates the point of absolute lack which accommodates the heterogeneity of the subject. For me suture designates a juncture between ontology and its 'object'. To hold mathematics as ontology, the very limits of being as such will be touched by the void. But, as such, the void is not the point where we discern subjective heterogeneity. The void is the point on which we found the constructible sets which allow us to unfold the characteristics of pure being' (Badiou, 2007b: 99).

As Tho argues, and as ML reveals, mathematics for Badiou 'lacks nothing that it does not produce, that it organizes these lacks according to a process of stratification, and therefore never encounters the sort of uncontrolled lack such as Miller posits in 'Suture' (Tho in Ibid.: 98). What is more, as Hallward has recognised, the logic of stratification, of the void as within, the interruption of the structure via the positioning of the  $\emptyset$ , all lay the groundwork for Badiou's subsequent introduction of the subject. If examined in detail, ML reveals the mature Badiou, the 'perspective that understands reality or 'what there is' in such a way that for something new or true to happen it must happen *to it*' (Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 125). Hallward continues

'It is in this sense that, contrary to what readers of his most purely political 1970s writings might suspect, Badiou's later philosophy might be described as faithful both to the ultra-theoreticist work he wrote in the mid 60s *and* to the way he broke with such work in and after

68. Alone of all his contemporaries, Badiou has remained faithful to the theoretical project of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, precisely in the way that he helped to interrupt it.' (Ibid)

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, theorising change via critiques of historicity were a key element of Louis Althusser's work during the 1960s, and ineludibly became an important (if frequently unspoken) element within Badiou's first critical essays. Badiou's movement from a Sartrean conception of individual historical agency, to a structural (Althusserian) understanding of historical change, and finally to a uniquely axiomatic formalisation of the Althusserian-Lacanian theorisation in the *Cahiers* project, instituted many of the key themes that he would develop in later philosophical works. Crucial to this thesis is how Badiou's 'mathematicisation of change' supported a material naming of historicities impossibilities, how this opened a site *within* a structure that reveals the limitations of that structure, and subsequently transforms it from the interior. As we have seen, these theorisations emerged from the domain of science, rather than, as Badiou outlined in *Concept of Model*, 'the representational relations between the model and the concrete, or between the formal and the models' (Badiou, 1969/2007: 54-5). Echoing the point made by Dews above, regarding Althusser's 'perverse' location of history *in* ideas over the specific historicity of those 'ideas', it is at this point in Badiou's oeuvre that history is the 'history of formalization' (Ibid.). As highlighted in the Introduction, we see here the source of what philosopher Quentin Meillassoux termed Badiou's 'history of the eternal' (Meillassoux, 2011: 1); the contention that 'there is *only* a history of truths insofar as all truth is strictly *eternal* and impossible to reduce to any relativism' (Ibid.). As RM, IS, and ML reveal, Badiou's early work already offers the opportunity to rethink what we mean by history and historiographic methodologies, albeit with one major omission: the subject. As

Chapter's Three, Four and Five will reveal, 'the time that passes between 'Mark and Lack' and *Being and Event* [see Chapter 5] finds Badiou rejecting the machinic universalism espoused in the former and struggling to articulate a universalism founded in disciplined subject fidelity.' (Fraser, 2007: xiix). In the spring of 1968, it was the very absence of this latter category, that, as Hallward has acknowledged, made it all the 'more remarkable, that even before [ML] was published...[it] had already been interrupted...by nothing other than an intrusion of the subject, sparked by a revolutionary though evanescent upsurge of the masses' (2012a: 141). In his own words, Badiou was 'at the extreme point of a strict formalism' (cited in Ibid.: 126) on the eve of the 'events of May' and 'the gap between objective science and subjective commitment (the gap between Althusser and Sartre)' (Ibid.: 145) was about to be overcome with a 'reorientation from scientific closure to a *philosophy of perseverance*', which 'involve[d] an affirmation of the subject in precisely the place where science had excluded it' (Ibid.: 141). It was a time when, to paraphrase Mao, revolt itself became reason.

### Chapter Three: The 'paradoxical history of eternity': Badiou, Mao, and the 'historico-truth'.

"Our heritage consists of the universal  
that was borne by the Cultural Revolution"  
Badiou, A. 'The Triumphant Restoration',  
*Le Monde*, Dec. 9<sup>th</sup>. 1980. (Badiou, 2005j)

As Peter Wolin has argued, the revolutionary events of China during the post-war period often 'became a projection screen, a Rorschach test, for the innermost radical political hopes and fantasies, which in de Gaulle's France had been deprived of a real-world outlet' (2010: 3). One could argue that this form of Orientalist fantasy was certainly the case for many of the students' swept up in the protests of the mid-sixties. Famously, such attitudes were caricatured in Godard's 1967 *La Chinoise*, with the soundtrack 'Mao-Mao', the excessive use of copies of Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*, or the numerous images of Jean-Pierre Léaud and Anne Wiazemsky pictured nonchalantly in front of Maoist revolutionary posters; all scenes which served to represent the imaginary investment in the events of the Cultural Revolution that would be played out in the coming years. As will be explored further in this chapter, Wolin designated such students as 'libidinal'. Referring to the founding of the group *Tout!* in the autumn of 1970 (a group that split off from the *Gauche Prolétarienne*), what we saw was the emergence of a 'politics [that] had become avowedly anti-intellectual. A "politics of feeling" – "thinking with one's gut" – triumphed over a "politics of the intellect," now denigrated as "masculinist" and "phallogocentric"' (Ibid. 146). While this was certainly the case, and there was an obvious naiveté when it came to the dire impact of such campaigns as the 'Great Leap Forward' (1958 – 1961) and the eventual

widespread failings of the Cultural Revolution, there were very real investments in the forms of communism being challenged and endorsed by Mao during the opening years of the 1960s. At an institutional level – and Godard characters do pinpoint the *communiste français* as the problem – as touched on in Chapter Two, the PCF (and associated *Union des étudiants communistes* (UEC)), were intrinsically wedded to the Soviet model of state communism, along with those older intellectuals who, if only out of an undying loyalty to their fellow communists who had fought in the resistance during WWII, continued to embrace the party. However, by the early 1960s, descriptions of Stalin’s Gulags in such books as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago (1918 - 1956)* – of which Badiou would later state that it shook ‘the regime of blind certitudes’ (Badiou, 1985/2018: 44) - the aforementioned renunciations of Stalin’s ‘reign of terror’ by his successor Khrushchev, and what many then perceived as Khrushchev’s subsequent revisionism, critical attitudes towards the Soviet Union hardened amongst the politically conscious students of the ENS. With Mao’s open letter of 25 points “on questions of principle” entitled “Proposal Concerning the General Line of the Communist Movement”, those critical of the Soviet orthodoxy, and by extension the PCF/UEC - the ‘unregenerate Stalinists’ as Wolin labelled them (2010: 117) – felt they had some political momentum. The points made by Mao were broadly that the CCP rejected Khrushchev’s acceptance of peaceful coexistence between communist and capitalist nation-states, that he was “catering to the need of imperialists”, and that, most galling for Khrushchev, the latter’s critique of Stalin’s “Cult of the Personality” was nothing other than a shifting of blame for his own “errors” and a “defamation” of the “proletarian party” (Radchenko, 2009: 59-60).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The letter was initially private, but, according to Radchenko, it was made public with its publication in June 17<sup>th</sup> edition of the CCP mouthpiece the *People’s Daily* (Radchenko, 2009: 58).

At the ENS, Mao's attacks on Khrushchev bolstered the *normaliens* critiques of the PCF. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to say a break with Moscow and the French wing of the CCCP among the students corresponded immediately with Mao's letter. For example, in Althusser's seminars on Marx, while he was both theoretically engaging in the continuing process (albeit at a certain distance) of the de-Stalinization of the PCF, he publicly maintained a loyalty to the party (which he had joined in 1948). In fact, this diversion into theory (what Althusser himself termed 'Class struggle in theory'<sup>56</sup>), could in itself be perceived as a strategic response to his fraught position within the PCF. Although, as Elliott (2006) has noted, Althusser never sought to divide theory from political engagement, rather the 'Marxist workers' movement needed scientific theory in order to 'change the world.' Protected from the ravages of official pragmatism and opportunism, a detour via theory – at this time and in this place – was no division from the struggle, but the long-term, practically motivated continuation of politics by other means' (52). In the *Théorie* collective (see Chapter Two), many of the students followed Althusser's lead, and the challenges to the PCF first came in the form of recommendations for changes (which were made via the UEC's connections to the party) to PCF policy. But, by December 1964, these proposals took on a more considered form, which would, in time, come to mark a clear break with the PCF-supported UEC. That was the founding of *Cahiers Marxiste-Léniniste* (*Marxist-Leninist Journal*, hereafter CML), which came from 'The Circle of ENS Communist Students' and was principally coordinated by Robert Linhart, who had arrived at the ENS in 1963 (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 259). In Frédéric Chateigner's recent study of the

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<sup>56</sup> See Althusser, L. 'Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon' *New Left Review* 1/64, November-December 1970

publication, he sees the *CML* as mirroring the movement from the initial influence of Althusser's structuralism on the communist students at the ENS, through to the growing 'advocacy' of the thought of Mao, and finally the 'events of May' '68, when the publication ceased (Chateigner, 2010: 1-2). Like Badiou, Rancière was very much on the periphery of the editorial collective of the *CML*. He does, however, offer a summation of this intense period of transformation of which the *CML* was symptomatic. As he notes, initially, it was 'simply about reviving the propagandist activity of the *Cercle des Étudiants Communistes de L'École Normale Supérieure* (the Cercle d'Ulm)'. 'But' he continues

'...the Communist *normaliens*...who participated in this revival alongside me had become Communists under Althusser's influence. And what was supposed to have been a simple informational bulletin of the cercle communiste d'Ulm...became in fact an instrument for propagating Althusserianism amongst Communist students' (cited in Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 259)

As Rancière notes, at the time of *CML*'s launch, there were 'two tendencies in the Union des Étudiants Communistes (UEC): those we called "the Italians", people influenced by the Italian Marxists (or by dissident French Marxists like Henri Lefebvre), who emphasized recent changes in capitalism...basically...they approved of the policy of peaceful coexistence [with capitalism] proclaimed by Khrushchev...[and] [t]hen there were, to the left, the Trotskyists, and these we called pro-Chinese' (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 260). As noted, Rancière's perspective was that the UEC (and by extension the PCF), were more than happy for the *CML* to engage in theoretical explorations of Marxism, but they called on them to eschew actual political engagement (Ibid). In fact, this position was officially stated at the 1965 UEC congress, and it was an opinion quietly supported by Althusser who continued to



look to the students and the UEC as his opportunity to influence PCF policy. As Chateigner recounts, the ‘first five issues [of the *CML*] responded foremost to an explicit ambition from issue 1: reform the UEC from within of all revisionist deviations by giving a lesson in Marxism – an authentically scientific Marxism, according to the Althusserian framework’ (Chateigner, 2010: 4). It was into this shifting landscape of practical political allegiances to the PCF/UEC and the associated theoretical explorations of the *CML*, that Badiou returned to Paris. The occasion coincided with what Chateigner terms the second phase of *CML*’s existence, the publication of Issue No.8 and the ensuing split of the editorial collective. This issue was edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and entitled “The powers of literature” – the general direction of which was one of self-contained analysis of literature, with little reference to Marx or Lenin. As Chateigner notes, for Linhart and others, the break from the Marxist-Leninist project that Miller’s edition seemed to represent, ultimately ‘led to a crisis within the Cercle, ending with the suppression of the issue and the resignation of Miller, [Jean-Claude] Milner, and [Alan] Grosrichard.’ Following their resignation, ‘[t]ogether with [Francois] Régault, the departed would go on to form the editorial committee of the first two issues of the *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, the publication of the Cercle d’épistemologie (Epistemology Circle) at the ENS’ (Chateigner, 2010: 7). As Badiou recalls, it was at this time that Régault visited him in Reims and told him ‘of the *Cahiers pour l’analyse* [henceforth referred to as *CpA*], Althusser’s seminars and the tension between the two’ (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 277). The split within the *CML*, and the subsequent founding of the *CpA*, was also indicative of a wider rift within the group of students who attended Althusser’s *Reading Capital* project (see Chapter One). As Badiou recalled, Miller, Milner, Grosrichard, and Régault ‘assigned more importance to Lacan than to Marxism...[and]...furthermore, there was already a germ of the tension that would soon turn into the tension between the

Maoists (including Miller and Milner) and Althusser and the Althusserians.’ (Ibid).<sup>57</sup> These tensions between theoretical exploration and political action would resurface with a renewed vigour with the ‘events of May’ ’68 and would directly lead to the cessation of both the *CML* and the *CpA*.

What is clear from the theoretical fallout from this fracturing of the *CML* and the founding of the Cercle d’Épistémologie and associated publication, was that Badiou was never entirely located in one camp or another. As we have seen from Chapters One and Two, the time he spent in Reims away from the internal wrangling of the Union des Étudiants Communistes, *CML*, and Althusser’s group, only served to permit the emergence of a unique philosophical approach that was shaped by the combined legacy of Sartre, explorations of Althusser, and the formalizations of Lacan, combined with his early training and continued interest in mathematics. In fact, indicative of his status as an intellectual outlier – ‘[I] was always a bit marginal’ (Badiou cited in Bosteels, 2005a: 242) – in 1965 Badiou accepted Régnauld’s invitation to join the editorial group of *CpA*, while at the same time taking up an offer from Althusser who invited him to hold a seminar on literature at the ENS, a seminar that was eventually published in No.12/13 of *CML* as ‘The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process’ (Badiou, 1966/2013: 77-89). However, one should not draw too firm a line between the Cercle d’Épistémologie, Lacan, and those who continued to attend Althusser’s reading group. The fact is, following his seminar series on Marx (1961 – 62) and Structuralism (1962 – 63), he had programmed a series on Lacan and Psychoanalysis (1963 – 64). Althusser also attended Lacan’s seminars at Hôpital Sainte-Anne (as noted in Chapter Two, including one

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<sup>57</sup> With the departure of what the CML group termed the “Bourgeois Intellectuals”, they published *Documents des cahiers marxistes-léninistes* (1965), a compendium of articles by Lenin, Stalin, etc., that aimed to critically explore these texts – an exploration considered heretical by the PCF – and, as such, sought to reaffirm the intellectual freedom of the Cercle. (Chateigner, 2010: 8)

trip with Badiou in 1960), and when Lacan was barred from that institution, he was welcomed to the ENS by Althusser. In addition, the very first issue of *CpA*, in the journal's opening declaration written by Miller, he states that one of the key areas of the publication is dialectical materialism, and 'Who could doubt...Louis Althusser's recognition of its import?' (Cited in Hallward and Peden, 2012a: 58). Then again, further along one can detect a departing rebuke at both the PCF and the Althusserian circle, when Miller clarifies that 'there is nothing about our project that clings to the particularity of a doctrine' (Ibid). As Badiou later acknowledged, '...watch out! The Lacanians and the Althusserians were not entirely the same people. There were overlaps and exchanges, but these were nevertheless two distinct groups' (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 277)

As highlighted in Chapter One, the late 1950s and early 1960s were witness to the increasing confluence of global and local economies; what we now recognise as the beginning of the globalization of free-market politics. Yet, often ignored is how the increasing global reach of capitalism was mirrored in turn by a growing network of radical politics challenging these developments. From Prague to Cuba, from the USA and West Germany, the expansionist policies from both the East and West and the pre-war models of state rule, had become symbolic targets for a post-war generation. By the time of the 'events of May', this radical culture of protest and resistance had manifested itself around the world. While each particular demonstration was contingent upon the site of its emergence and sought to pinpoint an exception or gap in the dominant ideology, one common theme important for this study (and a central motif in many of the protests in Europe), was the perceived failure of the Soviet Marxist-Leninist model of state Communism (and its associated models of historical change). A critical evaluation of what had become

the 'embodiment of ideological rigidity' (Wolin, 2010: 117) became a key element of Badiou's initial engagement with Althusser and then his subsequent break and critique of his master's relationship with the PCF. Fundamental to this narrative was the growing importance of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution (C.R.), specifically within the period from 1965 to 1977. It is not the aim or purpose of this chapter to offer a detailed historical recounting of the events of the C.R., such accounts can be found elsewhere (Dikotter, 2010; Gao, 2015). Rather, it is to examine the impact and perceived relevance of the C.R. for French intellectuals (specifically Althusser and Badiou) and its contribution to changing conceptions of the historical. As we will see, during these years, Badiou's engagement with Mao and the C.R. complemented this exploration of the theoretical topics of subject and structure, and the associated issues of historical agency and historicity. However, before exploring the specific expressions and transformations of the historical in the work of Badiou during the late 60s and 1970s, it is necessary to step one pace back and examine Althusser's engagement with Mao and the PCF, and how his specific response to the tumultuous events of that Paris spring would serve as a foil for Badiou's own critical developments.

### **Althusser's Cultural Revolution: Between the Idea and the Site.**

In December 1966, an unsigned essay was published in the Nov-Dec issue (number 14) of the *CML* entitled 'On the Cultural Revolution'. The anonymous author of this short article was subsequently believed to have been Louis Althusser himself (Anonymous [Attributed to Althusser], 1966; trans. Smith, 2010). The article came at an important point in Althusser's relationship to the PCF. As noted, in 1966, some of Althusser's students were ejected from the UEC for their explicit Maoist sympathies. In the same month that Althusser's article

appeared, these students (Robert Linhart, Benny Lévy, Tiennot Grumbach, amongst others) went on to form the Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (UCJ (ml)). It is clear that the unidentified author of the essay was communicating to such students, but more importantly he was also addressing the upper echelons of the PCF in his exploration of the C.R. and how it related to international Marxist politics. These shots across the bow of the PCF were, by 1966, a common theme of Althusser's relationship with the party. He would offer critiques, then be reprimanded, but would never officially be ousted. One could argue, as some have, that it would be his lasting affiliation to the PCF (and its clear parliamentary ambitions) that would prove to be his ultimate downfall post '68 (Greene, 2015). As Elliott has noted, the PCF's 'adjustment to the Krushchevite line arose not simply from fidelity to the bastion of world socialism, but because there was an underlying compatibility between the imperatives of 'internationalism' and domestic horizons. Regardless of its official doctrine, the PCF had, in a sense, been pursuing an analogous line, in impeccably French colours, ever since the Popular Front' (Elliott, 2006: 10-11). Or, as one time party member Sartre reportedly said more pithily after '68, 'when a so-called revolutionary party with five million armed members or followers refuses to seize power, it can no longer claim to be revolutionary' (cited in Gerassi, 1993: 84). Still, while never destroying his party card, Althusser covertly critiqued the PCF's continued affiliation with the C.C.C.P. and specifically its focus on the economic (and the resultant horror of mass industrialization that was the consequence of this position) at the expense of the superstructure. He shared with Mao the criticism of how Soviet state communism, which he termed 'mechanical communism', had seriously neglected the ideological realm as part of the class struggle. As he noted in the *CML* essay, 'Marx, Engels and Lenin always proclaimed it was absolutely necessary to give the socialist infrastructure, established by *political*

revolution, a corresponding – that is socialist – *ideological* superstructure. For this to occur, an ideological revolution is necessary, a revolution *in the ideology of the masses*. This thesis expresses a fundamental principle of Marxist theory...it is, in fact, unthinkable that a socialist country could remain socialist for long if it is indeed based on this contradiction: a socialist infrastructure and a bourgeois ideological superstructure' (Anonymous, Attributed to Althusser, 1966; trans. Smith, 2010: 2-13). It was in the C.R. that Althusser saw a solution to this contradiction. That is, 'we must undertake a revolution in the ideological in order to give a socialist country furnished with a socialist infrastructure a socialist superstructure' (13). As Mao himself explained in his 1961 'Critique of Stalin's Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR': 'They [the C.C.C.P.] walk on one leg, we walk on two. They believe that technology decides everything, that cadres decide everything, speaking only of "expert," never of "red," only of the cadres, never of the masses. This is walking on one leg" (Tse-Tung, 1961). Nevertheless, one should not confuse this focus on the ideological as a veiled support for the significance of individual action, something that was possibly the case amongst many of Althusser's students before '68. So far as the idea of a 'historical totality' was concerned, for Althusser the Soviet model and socialist humanism were two sides of the same coin. As Paul Blackledge highlighted in his book *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (2006) both approaches were symptoms of historicism:

'Althusser argued that both Stalin *and* his humanist critics shared a similarly weak model of the historical totality: Stalin, economically, reduced the totality to the economy, while the humanists reduced it to human practice....Althusser claimed both failings to be variants of one more generally inadequate approach to the study of history – historicism – ...Stalin and the humanists were historicists because

they reduced the complexity of the social whole to one historical process; either economic progress or human practice.’ (164-165)

Althusser’s conjecture, as explored earlier in this thesis, was that rather than a reduction of history to the individual actor or economic structure, the totality is composed by a series of interdependent levels that become apparent in moments of ‘ruptural unity’ or contradiction (clear echoes can be detected here with Badiou’s stratified levels as explored in ML – see Chapter Two). In such moments, the contradictions ‘become “active” in the strongest sense’ such that the various levels ‘fuse’ into a single national crisis’ (Ibid.) like a revolution. It is here that the voice of Mao in Althusser, with reference to principal and secondary contradictions, becomes most pronounced. Following the logic of Mao’s *On Contradiction* (1937/1967), Althusser argued in ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’ that there are a plurality of contradictions ‘each of which exhibits a relative autonomy from others’ (Ibid.: 165). Moving away from a totality reduced to either individual agency or economic determination, Althusser contended that within an organic society it is rather the process of overdetermination of secondary contradictions by a principal contradiction (‘the last instance’). It is worth noting here how both Mao’s origination and Althusser’s further development of the theory of contradiction foregrounds history as the key realm in which we see a manifestation of an overdetermined contradiction. While both Mao’s and Althusser’s utilization of a historical methodology is maybe nothing more than an empiricist perspective on such moments of overdetermination within an organic totality (this being in fact one of the blind spots of Althusser’s own critiques of empiricism in the work of the French Annales school of history (see Vilar, 1973)), and while both would argue that the contradictions are entirely dependent on a ‘site’ for their encounter and appearance

(something Badiou would concur with, and which will also be discussed below), one senses that these contradictions lay dormant and reappear across time, and in such moments when the conditions are right we see what Badiou would later term as the 'rebirth of history' (Badiou, 2011/2012).

However, for Althusser, rather than the reopening of an old wound, or a return of a repressed 'historical precedent' via a fidelity to that event, the C.R. simply 'present[ed] an [object of] intense theoretical interest' (Anonymous [Attributed to Althusser], 1966/2010; trans. Smith, 2010). As Elliott noted above, one could see this theoretical detour as nothing more than a response to the restrictions placed on his practical-political activity that his membership of the PCF entailed. However, in this anonymous essay, Althusser does move beyond the 'class-war in theory' to an acknowledgement of the C.R. as something other than a direct response to the revisionism of the CCCP. What we see in this passage of his *CML* essay is Althusser's effort to rethink history from within a specific political conjuncture. That is, accepting the historicity of the C.R., while at the same time establishing its relationship to the broader Communist movement. As such, Althusser notes that 'The C.R. is not, first of all, an argument: it is first and foremost an historical fact. It is not one fact among others. It is an *unprecedented fact*' (Ibid.: 2). Although he does not follow this idea to its conclusion, Althusser goes on to make a statement in which one can see him struggling with the historical as both an ephemeral power, symbolizing a set of (communist) ideas beyond the site of their manifestation, and as an empirical event located within an (over)determined time and space. Yet, the C.R., Althusser argues, 'is not an historical fact reducible to its circumstances, it is not a decision taken "in light of" the Chinese Communists Party's struggle against "modern revisionism" or in response to the political and military encirclement of



China. It is an historical fact of great importance and long duration. It is part of the development of the Chinese Revolution. It represents one of its phases, one of its mutations. It plunges roots into its past, and readies its future.' But,

*it belongs to the International Communist Movement in the same way the Chinese Revolution does. It is therefore an historical fact that must be examined for itself, in its independence and depth, without pragmatically reducing it to this or that aspect of its current conjuncture.'*  
(Ibid. Emphasis added).

Althusser is endeavouring to grasp a historical revolution as both site and Idea, as both historicity and history (if, as will be argued later in this thesis qua Badiou, we equate history with the Idea as generic multiple). Although it appears he wishes to curtail the distance the Idea could actually travel from its site of (re)activation. The origin of this was most probably a symptom of his dual identity as PCF party member and symbolic figurehead for students of the École Normale Supérieure. From which there came a reluctance to completely align himself with the criticisms of the CCCP by Mao (and therefore by association criticism of the PCF) or a complete rejection of the C.R. and hence a rejection of many of his students who had been ejected from the PCF for their Maoist sympathies. But, in simple terms, Althusser held that it was not possible to naïvely transpose the developments of China straight to France. Firstly, he aimed a criticism at those in the PCF for simply dismissing the C.R. when he argued that without a 'twofold analysis, at once political and theoretical...it is simply not possible for a French communist to judge the C.R.' (Ibid.). Then he followed this with a sideways shot at the *normaliens*, when he also noted that 'It is not a matter of exporting the C.R. It belongs to the Chinese Revolution.' But then saying that the C.R.'s 'theoretical and philosophical lessons belongs to all communists. Communists should borrow these *lessons*

from the C.R., and benefit from them.’ (Ibid.). As Rancière subsequently noted, ‘the authority of [Althusser’s] theory seemed to denounce the ‘spontaneous’ ideology of students, but it also discredited, in the same stroke, the [PCF’s] authority’ (Rancière, 2011: 44). Althusser was being pulled in multiple directions here. In fact, one could use his own critical language and say that his relationship to the C.R. was itself overdetermined. On the one hand he foregrounds the global importance of the C.R.’s ideas, but then argues that those ideas are site specific and should not be simply imported into the corridors of the ENS.

The PCF’s deep suspicion of Althusser and his work (which they simply labelled ‘gobbledygook’ (cited by Goshgarian, 2003: xxvi)) only led to a greater admiration amongst some of those students who set themselves against the established party elite of the PCF. One year prior to the ‘events of May’, many of these students (including Badiou) had formed a clandestine PCF-Althusserian organization known as the ‘Spinoza Group’, created after the PCF had displayed a clear preference for the humanistic writings of Roger Garaudy. As Althusser himself noted in his posthumously published *The Future Lasts a Long Time* (1992/1993), ‘most of my friends belonged, whether they were Party members or not [Badiou was not]. The experience was interesting, because it was prophetic. We were convinced that things were about to happen in the universities, and it gave rise to a book, published under the names Baudelot and Establet...on *L’École capitaliste en France...*’ (Althusser, 1992/1993: 356). Published by Maspero in 1972, it is not known by this author if Badiou contributed to this book, but its aim was to both propose and challenge the idea that the French education system was the vanguard of class inequality (see Chapter One for a brief discussion of this issue). Foreshadowing his essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)’ published in *La Pensée* (151) in 1970, for

Althusser the book argued that in both schools and Universities, the ossified pedagogic structures of Bourgeois and Petty-Bourgeois culture simply served as dominions of ideological reproduction (Althusser, 1992/1993). As Althusser noted, the book was prophetic; but what he did not see was that he himself would simply serve to replace one master with another. As Rancière subsequently argued,

‘It may seem amusing today, but the fact is that young communist intellectuals at that time were really looking for an *authority* other than the one represented by the stereotyped discourse of the Party, or by the eclectic blabber that, outside the Party, was regarded as the height of ‘Marxist’ culture. Eager to have theoretical mastery over the effects of their political and syndicalist fights, these young communist intellectuals needed another authority in order to rethink their relationship to the Party, an authority that would free them from the ‘petit-bourgeois’ guilt that had always trapped communist intellectuals in the dilemma of submission or betrayal. Althusser played the part of this liberating authority’ (Rancière 2011: 48).

According to Althusser’s autobiography, the ‘Spinoza Group’ eventually broke up in 1969 ‘due to lack of time and funds’ (Althusser, 1992/1993: 357). Although, as he himself intimates, this was not the sole reason. The departure of Badiou from the group seems to have been a key moment too. As Althusser says ‘Alain Badiou, one of our most brilliant members...decided he had to reunite the Maoist groups in France in order to renew the Party’ (Ibid.). What Althusser then said points towards the sphere of disagreement many students would have with their former master. Highlighting Badiou’s subsequent publications (this portion of the autobiography was written in 1976, so these were yet to emerge in 1969), Althusser commented that ‘Badiou is currently bringing out some interesting volumes with Maspero, in which, curiously, one finds the Sartrian philosophy of

revolt, which he has never disowned, used as the basis for his analysis of certain texts of Mao, against a background of voluntarism, or pragmatism, and of idealism which is typical of the great Chinese communist leader's thought' (Ibid.). This concise summary broadly (and one could argue in a somewhat critical tone) pinpoints the area of Badiou's work that would constitute his break with Althusser: the role of agency in structural change. Ironically, it was a break that originated during one of the talks Badiou was giving at the ENS at the bequest of Althusser himself. As highlighted in Chapter One, the lectures were part of the *Cours de Philosophie pour scientifiques* organized by Althusser. Badiou gave his first lecture on 29<sup>th</sup> April. The second was due to start on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May. However, this second meeting was, as Badiou later reflected, 'Happily interrupted'. As the Foreword to the publication of the planned lectures *Concept of Model* stated, 'That day, as is well known, the popular masses, mobilizing against the bourgeois, Gaullist dictatorship, affirmed their determination across the entire country, and began the process that would lead to a far-reaching confrontation between the classes, turning the political conjuncture on its head and provoking effects whose aftermath was not long in coming' (Badiou, 1969/2007: 3). This became for Badiou 'a veritable road to Damascus' moment and served as the final curtain on his Althusserian period. Yet, more importantly, it also marked the beginning of a period when Badiou would begin to build a philosophical system which would establish the act of subjectivation as the link 'between the local belonging to a political procedure [i.e. the site] and the huge symbolic domain of Humanity's forward march towards its collective emancipation [i.e. the Idea] (Badiou, 2010: 4)'. That is, in his subsequent terminology, the creation of a subject who by maintaining a fidelity to an event, becomes beholden to a truth; a subject (which, as Badiou will emphasise throughout this writing, is not biophilic) that experiences a 'revelation' that is not simply the Hegelian synthesis of the contradiction between the

subject and the structure, but something radically new; a process that established a historical moment (site), but also served as a nodal point connecting to earlier historical moments (via an Idea). Or more poetically, as Badiou would also remark, when 'to give out a flyer in a marketplace was also to mount the stage of History' (Ibid.).

Yet, one could argue that during what Badiou would later come to classify as his 'Les Annees Rouges', or Red Years, broadly from 1968 until 1976, we see the concept of history moving slowly from the traditional Marxist idea of a telos to something that simply marks out the arena in which political challenges to inequality and oppression take place. In fact, it could be maintained, until the publication of *Theory of the Subject* in 1982, 'history' was very much a floating signifier in Badiou's thought. In one sense, we can see how Badiou was still attempting to find a way of interlacing the subjective will emboldened by the rupture of 1968 with the idea of history as objective political progress, a connection from which he would reiterate in his later works. As Hallward notes 'Badiou's early effort was precisely to equate the subjective process of becoming confident in oneself with the process of historical struggle itself, as aspects of a single logic' (2003: 39). But, attempting to pinpoint some internal coherence to Badiou's conceptualisation of the historical in his early work is a 'fairly complicated' experience (Ibid.: 29). Although, if one looks closely, there are two areas that emerge during this period that have a 'global continuity' (Ibid.: 30) in his writings, and which are highly relevant to this thesis. The first is the concept of the 'communist invariant'. What we see in this concept is an embryonic manifestation of the generic Idea. As will be explored in later chapters, this leads to an understanding of how Badiou would ally challenges to historicity through the process of subjectivation via the truth procedure qua history. As we shall see in later chapters, it also leads to a classification of history as

fundamentally both situated (i.e. emerging within a definite 'historico-cultural' site (Meillassoux, 2011: 1)) and atemporal (i.e. speaking universal truths); what could be summarised by the term: historico-truth. The second element is Badiou's development of Mao's theories of contradiction. As will be seen, this area of Badiou's work connects with the troika of history, subjectivation and truth procedure, in that it serves to situate a scission in a pre-existent situation (be that contemporary or historical) to reveal (in the language of the previously explored 'Infinitesimal Subversion' (see Chapter Two)) an 'infinity point', that 'gives the impetus for the supersession of the old society by the new' (Mao, 1937/1961) and the emergence of a subject faithful to this radical newness (see Chapter Four).

#### **The communist invariant and the *subject* of contradiction.**

'In every mass revolt there exists the germ of emancipation struggling for ideological expression', Badiou and François Balmès (BB) noted in *Of Ideology* (1976; Cited in Barker, 2002: 29). The 'expression' they are seeking is one of 'egalitarian classes, anti-property and anti-statist'. Although such claims are not made in the language of communism, for BB they 'establish the lineaments of a communist programme' (Ibid). Interestingly, the example they employ to explore this argument is a historical one: the German preacher and leader of the *Deutscher Bauernkrieg*, or German Peasants' War in the 16th Century, Thomas Müntzer. As Barker has outlined, 'Although he was a Christian reformist, BB argue that Müntzer's programme held together all the demands of a communism of the masses in *embryonic* form' (Ibid.: 54). BB argued that the rational kernel of these spontaneous rebellions were aligned with communist principles in all but name. As they themselves state:

'The elements of this general positioning of the insurgent producers are what we call the communist invariants: ideological invariants of communist type that are constantly regenerated in the process of unification of the great popular revolts of all times' (1976, 67; cited in Bosteels, 2011: 277)

Locating historical change in the activities of 'insurgent producers' signposts one of the constitute features of Badiou's shift away from Althusser, and his specific conceptualisation of invariant elements in the theorisation of historical change. As will be recalled from Chapter Two, in *Reading Capital* the invariant was constituted by how the means of production, workers, and non-workers, 'could be combined and recombined in various ways through two relations: the *production* process and the *exploitation* process' (Blackledge, 2006: 164). It was the relationship between the subjects and the means of production, in correspondence to the differing production processes, that Althusser and Balibar believed historical change occurred. But the problem for Badiou (and many other students who engaged with the activities of 1968) was that Althusser's emphasis on structural causality of the differing elements left very little room for the consciousness or agency of the aforementioned 'insurgent producers'. Although, one could counter that accusation by saying such criticisms misinterpret the broader intentions of Althusser's work at that time. While one can point to his theoretical declarations as a turn away from engaging in actual practice, such statements ignored the fact, as discussed in Chapter Two, that his broader aim was to challenge the theory-practice relationship that emerged from the legacy of Stalin, and by association to disentangle theory from the pronouncements of the PCF, freeing it up, so to speak, from the perfunctory diktats of the party elite. Althusser's aspiration - via theory - was one of anticipated transformation of this relationship. However, one cannot escape the

fact that while Althusser's theorisation of historical change was driven by immediate political goals for future political gain, it led to a set of ideas that were in many ways just as reductive. As Blackledge has remarked, 'despite his stated aim of improving on Stalin's fatalist interpretation of Marx's theory of history, Althusser tends to a similar error' of reductionism, albeit to structural conjunctures rather than economic forms (Ibid.: 166).<sup>58</sup>

If one is to be clear sighted, at this point one could argue that Badiou himself did not fully escape the Marxist-Leninist telos of history that emerges from the kind of orthodox reading of Marx that Althusser was critiquing. While we see at this juncture the development of one of Badiou's key ideas in the communist invariant, the connection between the subject and the object (of history) is still present in references to 'the practical certainty of the final victory' (Badiou, 1975/2005), 'class struggle (Ibid.) (which is always and everywhere the motor of history)', or 'the endpoint' (Ibid.). While endeavouring to move away from Althusser's structural determinism, the 1970s found Badiou still unable to disconnect from the long-standing idea of the inherent rightness of the "objective" telos, or a separation of a 'final victory' from the subject's engagement with/realisation of this movement. As Hallward notes, 'the proletariat was to be the vanishing yet consistent vehicle of this logic' and, at this time, Badiou 'was insufficiently detached from its object. His confidence remained, despite everything, contaminated by belief in a minimally "objective" telos, mediated by an irreducibly dialectical process' (2003: 39). In time, Badiou would come to renounce this kind of 'vulgar Marxism' (see Chapters 4 & 5), recognising the error of seeing 'the working class as the class of all workers' as one of blending a 'political truth' (i.e. the proletariat as subject

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<sup>58</sup> This point was also made by Pierre Vilar in Vilar, P. 'Marxist History, a History in the Making: Towards a Dialogue with Althusser' in *New Left Review* 1/80, July-August 1973



('insurgent producers')), with a fixed sociological category (the working class as static economic classification) (Badiou, 1988/2005: 334; also see Hallward; 2003: 39). Although, as we will see in the exploration of his *Theory of the Subject*, Marxism remained key as the '*discourse which the proletariat sustains itself as a subject*' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 44). While this was still to come, the revelation of the 'political truth' that flowed from the events of 1968 could not wait for Althusser's theoretical explorations to run their course. The party, in the form of the PCF, was a redundant institution, no longer representing the principled invariant, no longer addressing the oppression found on the Rue Cujas or at the Boulevard Saint Michel Crossroad.<sup>59</sup> Such issues demanded attention in the here and now. As one of the slogans from May 1968 acerbically exclaimed: 'The prospect of finding pleasure tomorrow will never compensate for today's boredom.' Or as Rancière stated in more violent imagery, Althusser was the head of a 'theoretical police whose headquarters May has sent up in flames' (Rancière, 1974: 131).

Badiou's argument that the 'workers rebellion' was '*the very reason of history*' (Badiou, 1975/2005: 674) was most probably one of the statements that compelled Althusser to see in Badiou's work a 'Sartrean philosophy of revolt'. As we know, Althusser's belief that the driver of change was to be found in the party made him deeply suspicious of the Sartrean "man makes history" approach to historical change. For Badiou, rebellion, as Bosteels (2005c) recognised, was an 'invariant process whereby the people constitute themselves as people or, conversely, people constitute themselves as the people in a movement of immanent self-legitimation' (752). This clearly has echoes of Sartre's 'Gathering', or 'Fused Group' as discussed in Chapter One. Although, in the early historical examples that Badiou

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<sup>59</sup> Both key locations in the riots of the 10th May 1968

examines in *Of Ideology*, such as Thomas Müntzer, etc., the argument is that the communist invariant manifests itself as a response to oppression by the state, but often lacks a language that channels this response into a consistent political position. For Badiou, it is only with the introduction of the concept of *proletariat* from the mid 19th Century onwards that 'the ideological resistance becomes not only the repetition of the invariant but also the mastery of its *realization*' (cited in Bosteels, 2005c: 756-57). In other words, the working class moved from object to subject.

It was during the period 1968 - 1976 that Badiou saw Marxism as drawing together knowledge of past historical revolts to produce 'accumulated wisdom' (1975/2005). This was also to make an important distinction between Marxism as a language that made sense of the historicity of revolt, and communism as the persistence of the idea of this eternal struggle. In short, Marxism as a systematised and recurring fidelity to the communist invariant qua history as generic Idea. As he noted towards the end of his 'red years' in an edition of the journal produced by the UCFML, *Le Marxiste-Leniniste*, which was published on the death of Mao in 1976, the 'great stages of Marxism are punctuated by the proletarian revolutions and, precisely, the great Marxists are those who have directed and synthesized the findings of the theory, ideology, and politics of the proletariat in the light of these same revolutions: Marx and Engels for the Paris Commune, Lenin and Stalin for the October Revolution, Mao Zedong for the Cultural Revolution' (Badiou 1976; trans, Bosteels, 2005c: 759). As Bosteels summarised, in this theorisation 'Marxism and communism thus rely on each other in a paradoxical history of eternity - that is, the historical unfolding of an eternal revolt.' As explored in the introduction, this is a reading of Badiou (albeit of his later work) shared by Meillassoux (2011), of history qua idea as a *situated* container, an 'earthen vessel'

(as Badiou, quoting from 2 Corinthians 4:7, would say in *St. Paul* (1997/2003: 53))

symbolising the *timeless* infinite power of the invariant (Idea). This again is the idea of the historico-truth. It also points to one of Badiou's sites of divergence from Althusser, and his focus on the realm of theory. In that Marxist theory without the eternal struggles of communism is an arid dry exercise, while communism without Marxism is nothing other than an insurgent spasm. Alternatively, as Bosteels concludes: 'Marxism without communism is empty, but communism without Marxism is blind' (2005c: 757).

For Badiou, the productive link between theory (Marxism) and practice (communism) grew out of his reading of Mao. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there was certainly an orientalist fantasy at play in the attraction to the C.R. amongst many of Badiou's fellow students. But, as Badiou has argued 'we cannot simply understand those years as revolutionary exoticism...I think Maoism brought about a real transformation of the questions' (Cited in Tho, 2011: 97). In fact, Mao served as a pivotal moment in the development of Badiou's thought. As Hallward has stressed, it was 'only with his discoveries of Maoism in the wake of May 1968 [that] Badiou begin to develop a systematic philosophy' (2003: 31). For Badiou and others, Mao and the C.R. offered an alternative path to that proffered by Soviet Union, where 'in the 70s, there was no longer a communist hypothesis at all' (Cited in Tho, 2011: 97). While alternatively, China during this period 'was a space of a singular and irreducible existence of the communist hypothesis...' (Ibid). Central to this attraction was Mao's theory of Contradiction. As Mao summarised in *On Contradiction* (1937):

'Changes in society are due chiefly to the development of the internal contradictions in society, that is, the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction between classes and the contradiction between the old and the new; it is the development of these contradictions that pushes society forward and gives the impetus for the supersession of the old society by the new.' (Mao, 1937/1967)

If Mao's theory of contradiction was highly influential on Althusser, it also shaped, via his criticisms of Althusser's theories, Badiou's development of Althusser's theory of the conjuncture, the conjuncture effect, and his theory of historical sets (see Chapter Two). Many of these ideas were explored in *Concept of Model* (1969/2007), but with the rupture of 1968, such theorisations (and texts) became somewhat ossified, like communiqués from another time; as the *Théorie* collective who, when the book was published, noted in the foreword to the slim publication, 'the somewhat 'theoreticist' accents of this text hearken back to a bygone conjuncture. The struggle, even when it is ideological, demands an altogether different style of working and a combativeness both lucid and correct [*juste*]' (Badiou 1969/2007: 3). It is not the focus of this work to explore Badiou's political campaigns (with the UCFML) on the other side of that break, but 'Les Années Rouges' were vitally important in the development of his later theorisation of Mao's theory of contradiction (Badiou & Balmès, 1975). In Maoist terminology, this period offered fertile conditions for the practical engagement with a specific set of contradictions between theory and practice, or more accurately, the tensions, as set out above, between the practice of Marxism and the invariant truths of communism. More significantly, it was also a revolutionary conjunction, when the subject became both 'actor' and 'target' of the political events.

In an interview with Hallward in 1998, Badiou reflected on these events and noted that 'yes we were the genuine actors, but actors absolutely seized by what was happening to them, as by something extraordinary, something properly incalculable (cited in Hallward, 2003: 123). What Badiou is describing here is a form of 'historical consciousness', but not in the sense that Marx contended (i.e. something inevitable because of the inherent progressive trajectory of history, i.e. an inherent link of the subjective will with the telos of history, which Badiou later said only leads to terror (Badiou: 2005/2007)). Although, as we saw above from the contradictory way in which Badiou spoke of history, there certainly was some persistence of this idea throughout the 1970s, and during this period Badiou had yet to fully break the connection between the communist invariant and the *stages* of Marxism; that is, the separation of history from politics (see below). But what is important here is how Badiou does begin to make the connection between the site of the conjuncture and the subject as *bearer* of the conjuncture. While possibly aimed at Althusser's absence from direct political engagement, Badiou and Balmès stated in *Theory of Contradiction* (1975), there that is a 'reactionary illusion entertained by those who imagine they can circumvent the strategic thesis of the primacy of practice. It is clear that whoever is not within the real revolutionary movement, whoever is not practically internal to the rebellion against the reactionaries, knows nothing, even if he theorizes' (2005: 671-672). This is the Maoist attainment of 'correct knowledge' discussed earlier. It is in this process of attaining 'correct knowledge' that the subject makes a decision to ally him/herself with, in Badiou's later language, a 'truth procedure' "revealed" by the contradiction. Forty years on, Badiou outlined this subject-object-subject relationship that the C.R. and Mao initiated:

In the untiring inventiveness of the Chinese revolutionaries, all sorts of subjective and practical trajectories have found their *name*. Already, to change subjectivity, to live otherwise, to think otherwise: the Chinese - and then we - called that "revolutionarization." They said "To change the human being in what is most profound." They taught that in political practice, we must be both at once "the arrow and the bull's eye," because the old worldview is still present within us.'

(Badiou, 2005d: 481-482)

Although Badiou was an active agent of revolution, he was also 'targeted by, carried away by, and struck by [*atteint par*] the event' (cited in Hallward, 2003: 123); or more accurately, he was an agent *because* he was carried away. Considering Mao's well-known statement that 'Marxism comprises many principles, but in the final analysis they can all be brought back to a single sentence: it is right to rebel', Badiou asked in 1975 'Is Marxist truth the following: one rebels, one is right? Or is it rather: one must rebel? The two, perhaps, and even more the spiralling movement from the one to the other, real rebellion (objective force) being enriched and returning on itself in the consciousness of its rightness or reason (subjective force)' (Badiou, 1975/2005: 669-670). It was a process that could not be understood from a purely theoretical standpoint, one had to encounter it. Confronting the communist invariant via the site of Marxist theorisation is bivalent with the process of subjectivation where such reason *is* rebellion and vice versa. As noted earlier, to lack one of these elements is to either fall into a form of anarchic dissent ('...a site without an Idea is merely an immediate riot, a nihilistic spurt', as Badiou would say later (Badiou 2011/2012: 92)), or retreat to the icy realm of abstraction ("Professors you are as old as your culture, your modernism is only the modernisation of the police" as one piece of '68 graffiti decried). One could argue, as Badiou's fellow UCFML member, Sylvain Lazarus, has, that this realm of

the theory-practice relationship is simply a synonymic couplet for politics-history, and that the engagement with the forms of subjectivation resultant of the practice and theory dialectic marked 'the ground of caesura of '68' (Lazarus, 1996/2015: 13). What he meant by this is that before this rupture 'politics, history, along with economics, [had] long been the paradigm of science.' He continues:

'The theory-practice twosome opens onto the scientific-theory-and-political-practice-of-history couple. We then find ourselves in the configuration of history as science and politics as action. If we posit a radical separation of history and politics, that is, of science and politics, the break-up of the theory-practice couple and the abandonment of the concept of theory on the one hand and that of practice on the other confirms the break-up of the space that conjoins politics and history. This space...was referential [for '68], as much for subjectivations - with consciousness chief among them - as for forms of organizations in terms of Party' (Ibid.).

While the rupture between the traditional party structure and a historical telos occasioned a break between history and politics in the form Lazarus characterises, for Badiou the 'Cultural Revolution is a great lesson in...history as thought from *within* politics (and not the other way around)' (Badiou, 2005d: 483, my italics). As noted above, the link between the Marxist historical telos and party politics was often maintained by Badiou throughout the 1970s, but 1968 did mark the beginning of a new shift in the perception of the historical rupture as emerging from forms of practical engagement, engagements that demanded new configurations of subjectivity distinct from those positions proposed by the party apparatus. In this formulation, the perception of history as the prerogative of the party was challenged, along with its associated means of subjectivation. Out of this emerged the argument that

depending on the political axiom(s) that determined the process of subjectivation, one could read the historical via a new subject position; or possibly more accurately, *become* the historical. This should not be confused with a form of solipsism. Rather, to embrace the language of Badiou's mature work, it is the continuance of a subject that maintains a faithfulness to the event that engendered their being. This will be explored more fully in Chapter's Four and Five, and, as we will see, has implications for questions of historiography (see Chapter Six). But it is worth mentioning here that if one holds to a set of axioms (truths) born of a political revelation, then to view history via these axioms is to view it from inside the political, and not to view the political as residing in history as an external field (which would be akin to historicism; see Introduction). As Lazarus remarked, for 'such groups as the Trotskyites and the Parti communiste marxiste-leniniste de France...history is referential [external] and has already taken place' (Lazarus, 1996/2015: 17). Intrinsic to this form of history is the notion of progression, which Badiou would argue gave rise to "movement communism" and in its parliamentary ambitions remains indifferent to what he would later characterise as the 'retroaction of the event' in which 'the universality of a truth is constituted' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 81). Or to continue Badiou's retrospective reading of the C.R., he stated that if one encountered the Chinese government via axioms of 'civil stability, production, a certain unity in the administrative top, cohesion in the army, etc.' then one's reading would tend towards a particular outcome. 'This is not my axiom', argues Badiou, 'and these are not my criteria'. He continues:

'If one examines the question of dates from the point of view of politics, of political invention, the principal criteria become the following: when can we say that there is a situation of collective creations of thought of the political type? When does practice with its directives stand in a veritable excess over the tradition and function



of the Chinese party-state? When do statements of universal value emerge? Then, we proceed in a completely different way to determine the boundaries of the process named the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” which we among ourselves called “the GPCR.”(2006e: 292)

It is not the aim of this work to explore the theories and histories of the GPCR, but to examine how, via '68, it led towards to a form of historiography that allied the subject to clearly defined axioms, or statements of 'universal value'. And in addition, how Maoism offered Badiou a way of developing a formal logic that necessitated a process of subjectivation. As Bosteels has argued, in relation to Badiou's own evolution, Maoism offered a 'primary resource to trace a diagonal across the Sartre/Althusser debate' (Bosteels, 2005b: 611).

While they may not have been incompatible for Badiou, the 'caesura of '68' was marked by a split in the 'formalism-radical subjectivism' relationship among many of the other groups that came out of the uprising. As Belden Fields outlined in his 1986 *Trotskyism and Maoism. Theory and Practice in France and the United States*, the '1968 revolt proved to be a watershed. After it, French Maoist groups proliferated. But they went in one of the two directions...Those whom I call hierarchical Maoists accepted the Leninist concept of a centralized and highly disciplined party and attempted to build organizations along those lines. While...the anti-hierarchical Maoists went in a different direction...The French signify the distinction between the two currents by referring to the first as *Marxiste-Leniniste* and the second as *les Maoistes* or simply *les Maos'* (93-94). The direction of the anti-hierarchical groups was typified in the Yanan collective introduction to the 1977 *La Situation actuelle sur*

*le front de la philosophie* (edited by Badiou and Lazarus) as seeking to associate Marxism with the 'entire history of the twentieth century'. Fundamentally, in such groups, the idea of pure revolt meant that 'In order for the revolt of the masses against the State to be good, it is necessary to reject the class direction of the proletariat, to stamp out Marxism, to hate the very idea of a class party' (Badiou cited in Bosteels, 2011: 138). Such groups as the Gauche Prolétarienne and the UJCML were perceived as having a 'dream of a formal antagonism, of a world broken in two, with no sword other than ideology' (Ibid.). As Belden Fields summarised, such organisations (which Badiou and his colleagues later entitled the 'anarcho-desirers'), were 'not about to submit themselves to the discipline of an "adult" party.' Rather they would 'through a method referred to as the *enquête* – going out to people and learning from them – come to know and understand not only the workers but also such "secondary categories" as students, the bourgeoisie, and small and tenant farmers' (Belden Field, 1986: 90). It was statements such as 'Structures do not take to the streets' by Lucien Goldman that represented the position of such groups, a position that Badiou insisted disregarded 'the structural element' and confused ideological identities as 'an accomplished state of affairs' (cited in Bosteels, 2005b: 599) For Badiou the Maoist, everything must be riven, split from itself in the formation of two, not one of identity. 'We are in favour of the increase by scission of the new', the Yen-an Collective continue in *La Situation*: 'We want neither the sanctified and obscure, inoperative and repetitive, ultraleftist masses nor revisionist union, which is but the façade of a sinister dictatorship. What is proletarian, especially today, divides and combats the smallest fractures that are internal to the "movement" and makes them grow to the point where they become what is principal' (cited in Ibid.: 602). Badiou's Sartrean-Althusserianism inflected Maoism necessitated subjective transformation via the exploitation of structural contradictions

inherent in areas such as class and the state. Everything must be split, 'split between itself and something else, namely, the system in which something stands as *this* something rather than as an other' (Bosteels, 2005b: 604). Crucially, this splitting, this politics of antagonism, takes place within '*its actuality*' (Badiou, cited in Bosteels, 2011: 138). One could read this 'actuality' as the site which enables an axiomatic truth to obtain some leverage on the *situation*, where historicity is riven by the communist invariant qua generic truth. In the former, as Hallward notes, the 'object stays in its place', while in the later, the 'subject violates its place' (Hallward 2003: 35), i.e., a subject overwhelms and abolishes its objective foundation (Ibid.). When such moments occur, history becomes both situated and atemporal, i.e., a historico-truth. But, importantly, it is only realised via the process of subjectivation that, at this point in Badiou's writing, only the working class-proletariat could undergo.

If the activities of the Gauche Prolétarienne were at one end of the spectrum, in which there is an overemphasis on the processes of subjectivation and the multiplicity of identities such processes can engender, at the other was, as Bosteels termed, 'the case of "rightism"' (Bosteels, 2005b: 599). Considering the inclinations of the GP, Badiou did not fully discount their emphasis on the processes of subjectivation. It was simply that they lacked an understanding of how this both related to, and could impact upon, broader structural change. Equally, the "rightist" approach, was, at worst, to deny the enacting of structural change from "within", or (clearly pointing towards Althusser) 'becomes installed in an opportunistic attitude of waiting' (Badiou, cited in Bosteels, 2005b: 599). The clear danger between the two approaches regarding the actuality of historicity, is, as Hallward pinpointed, that the former clearly disregards the place it seeks to violate, while the latter

holds off violating the place in favour of some awaited transformation. Moreover, as BB noted in *Theory of Contradiction* (1975/2005), there is a further problem in that 'how can the logic of places and the logic of forces be articulated-without fusion?' (cited in Bosteels, 2011: 135). As we will recall, the issue of the fusion of one with the other, was partly addressed in mathematical terms in IS (1968/2012; see Chapter Two). That is, the displacement of a number by a consecutive number presupposed a blank space for that new number, a blank space that could never be 'rendered visible' (Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 134). As will also be recalled, Badiou labelled this unrepresentable space the 'infinity point', which serves to "mark" in his later texts (*Being and Event*), the vanishing point of contradiction and which compels, in Mao's words, 'a form of motion' towards a new situation. This theorisation (which in its earliest incarnation came before the events of '68), enabled Badiou to hold off a form of gravitational collapse of places into forces and vice versa. It also echoed, if in a more theoretically explicit manner, Mao's conception in *On Contradiction* that 'that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes' (Mao, n.p).

But the issue remains of what Lazarus would later term the 'historicist problematic'. That is, within the dialectic of force and place (I explore the concept of 'force' in more detail in Chapter Four), how does the latter connect to the former? As we saw above, Lazarus's argument was that 1968 marked the subtracting of politics from the historical and enabled 'a situation of great subjective rupture...in which recourse to history is no longer possible' or, one could argue, necessary (Lazarus, 1996/2015: 36-37). To restate, this was the argument against the notion of history as conceived as a synonym for historical scientism of

'Marxism and Marxism-Leninism' (Ibid.: xvi), and an attempt to move away from the idea of history as object, that is history as conceived within the frameworks of 'classism or statism or science' (Ibid.: 3), and the associated idea of history as *chronos*. What 1968 enacted for Lazarus, was politics as a form of 'thought, and not as an object' and he calls this 'an approach "in subjectivity"' (Ibid). Admittedly, Lazarus is speaking retrospectively of the period that marked Badiou's 'Les Annees Rouges'. As a fellow member (along with Badiou and Natacha Michel) of the UCFML, his theorisation was borne of the political struggles of the 1970s, struggles that were still very much tied to the traditional party as the vehicle to sustain the 'subjective rupture'. At this point it was still 'through the party,' as Hallward again observes, that the 'all-powerful but ephemeral power of the masses becomes conscious of itself, becomes the actual rather than simply the effective subject of history.' Ultimately, during the 68-76 period, while the vanishing point of the masses effected a political transformation, 'the party makes this vanishing *consist* and endure' (Hallward 2003: 36). This is what we referred to earlier when Hallward talked of the 'minimal consistency' the party lends to the ephemeral power of the rupture. In this sense, Marxism (in the manner Lazarus frames) in terms of the theorising the place or site of the rupture, the conditions of a break, is still woven into the party as representatives of the working class. Yet, as noted during this period there was certainly a weakening of the role of the Marxist-Leninist party intellectual in the manner originally spelled out in Lenin's *What is to be done?* (1902/1961) (although Badiou does challenge this reading of Lenin's key text in *Theory of the subject*). Mao's contention that 'correct leaders' develop a 'Mass Line' where ideas go "from the masses, to the masses", played a key role for Badiou (and fellow members of the UCFML) in the slow unravelling (if not severing) of the thread that ties the party to the working class. Yet, one should not forget, in its original conception, the axiomatic

communist invariants lacked a class dimension. As BB stated in *Of Ideology* 'they [the communist invariants] synthesize the universal aspiration of the exploited to topple *every principle of exploitation and oppression*. They emerge on the terrain of the contradiction between the *masses* and the state (Badiou & Balmès, 1976: 67; cited in Bosteels, 2005: 755; Emphasis added). But because of the class focus of the realisation and consciousness of this 'exploitation and oppression' born of Marxism, the masses remained a key element throughout Badiou's UCFml activities in the 1970s which were still orientated towards traditional forms of Marxist-Leninism (Lazarus, 1996/2015: xviii).<sup>60</sup>

All the same, how the traditional party structure related to the political subject born of May 1968 remained a real challenge. In the early 1970s, Badiou perceived history with a capital 'H' as inherently progressive, remaining the central 'driving force' of change; but this force could 'slacken and tire', and Badiou remained faithful to the party as the only viable institution to 'achieve the full transition from History to class struggle to the Politics of a communism beyond class' (Hallward, 2003: 13). The party represented here the structural edifice that would support the transition to communism, without, as Althusser himself once said, 'the conquest of state power by the exploited masses under the leadership of the proletariat is impossible' (Althusser, 1972a: 29). On this issue, Badiou held a firm (if often at times contradictory) line within the UCFML. It was a position that emerged through the influence of the 'events of May' with the subject emerging as the site of revolutionary action, where a decidedly Sartrean "'humanity" emerges in the ephemeral, occasional dissolution of passive anonymity' (Hallward, 2003:15), and politics started to be aligned with the momentary "flash" 'grounded in the revolutionary but ephemeral moment...' (Ibid.: 43).

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<sup>60</sup> As Belden Fields recognised, the UCFML 'made no claims to be a party', rather a "'group" for the formation of a "union"' (Fields, 1986: 98). Yet, throughout Badiou's 'Red Years', his belief in the symbolic role of the party remained strong.

As Badiou himself recollected forty years later, 'In 1967, just before the political storm, my meditations were on the side of formal structures. For the ten years following it, I was rather on the side of political subjectivity' (Badiou, 2007c: 7). As we have seen, this offers a rather too clear-cut reading, for there was an extended interval where the difficulty persisted of reconciling these two spheres.

1968 marked an impasse, in which the subject who speaks, who was the centre of political change, still remained subsumed by the Marxist-Leninist fulfilment of historical destiny. A decade after these revolutionary events, the task became one of freeing this subject-truth 'from the communitarian grasp, be that of the people...or a social class.' Where 'what is true...cannot be reduced to any objective aggregate, either by its cause or by its destination' (Badiou, 2003: 5). As already discussed in this Chapter, this was seen in the tension of history as objectal set against history as a rendition of axiomatic invariants. However, even by the mid-1970s, although Badiou still held to the party form as the inherent bearer of change, he had begun to question this formal impasse in a series of seminars that would go on to form the basis of his *Theory of the Subject (TS)* (1982/2007: 13). Still, in *TS*, he would still perceive the party as essential, albeit one adhering to a different structure. Although, *TS* was a project in which he would seek to recognise that while the world 'pertains to scientific objectivity', where 'it is indifferent to humanity, etc...it is in the regime of the exception to this objectivity, precisely, that something can be grasped which maintains the figure of the subject...' (Badiou, 2007c: 9). As is no doubt clear from this passage, the work of Jacques Lacan was to be key to resolving this 'deadlock of formalization'. In the next chapter, I will contend that this development in Badiou's thought offered a way of conceiving of the aforementioned 'historico-truth'; that is, how the universal truth of the invariants emerges

via the subject within a definite historical site. More importantly, I will also argue that to bear witness to such moments is to occupy a place that challenges traditional forms of historiography that conceive of events as past, present, or part of a continual progression. Rather, it is to inhabit a 'subjective disposition' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 45), which seeks to identify and forge affinities between the 'exceptions to objectivity' and to challenge what Badiou termed 'the guardian[s] of slumbering History' (2011/2012: 70). It is, as this thesis contends, to occupy the position of the militant historian.



## Chapter Four: Between the eagle and the old mole: History, Historicity, and the *Theory of the Subject*

'A people without history

Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern

Of timeless moments.'

(Eliot, 1944/1995: 42)

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1917, the front page of Russian broadsheet *Pravda* appeared with what the writer and historian China Miéville has referred to as a 'white, textless hole' (Miéville, 2017a: 236). The cause of this editorial lacunae was the speed with which the political ground was shifting. In the period between the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the Bolshevik's seizure of Petrograd eight months later, calls for violent revolutionary change by the Bolshevik Party were quickly countered with appeals for gradual reform by the Mensheviks, and the party-lines promoted in the newspaper were often obsolete before they rolled off the press. Yet, what this 'textless hole' also symbolised was the possibility of change; a faith in the new that had yet to be named. It was a blank space as radical possibility, the latent opportunity to name a political truth that was once considered impossible. Like Kazimir Malevich's painting 'White on White' that was created one year later, it was a void thrown into relief by the surrounding space; a perceptible shift in the coordinates of the space that revealed the edge of something new.

Fifty-one years later, we saw the obverse of such an event. Towards the end of May 1968, Herbert Beuven-Bery's *Le Monde* ran a headline in response to the student riots and demonstrations that had erupted across the Boulevard St. Germain, Gay-Lussac, and the

Square Paul Painlevé, this headline simply stated “Enough”. Unlike the space of possibility that *Pravda* presented, *Le Monde*’s title terminates its once sympathetic attitude towards the students of the Sorbonne and École Normale Supérieure. Now, it aligned itself with both de Gaulle, and the forces of workerism represented by Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) and the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). It served to mark a ‘halting point’ to the historical events of the preceding weeks and shut down the prospect of continued political revolt. As Badiou would later insist, ‘it argued from the point of chaos and transmitted anxiety as the violent appeal to the Gaullist superego’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 292)

For Badiou, to paraphrase Eliot, this end marked a beginning, one which saw him engage in a six-year period of direct political action, in which he was ‘caught up in political decisions in the most activist sense of the term’ (Badiou, cited in Hallward, 2012: 288). It is beyond the focus of this study to explore this period in any depth, but it is important to note that one should not confuse Badiou’s *Red Years* as marking an extended sabbatical from philosophical questions. Rather, as his *Theory of Contradiction* (1975/2005) and *Of Ideology* with François Balmès (1976) were to reveal, it was, as Feltnam noted, only after the period from 1968 to the mid 1970s, that it was possible to theorise once more. ‘That is to say’, as Feltnam continues, ‘Badiou places all his Marxist knowledge under the sign of Hegel’s Owl of Minerva: the theoretical knowledge of historical change comes after practice...’ (Feltnam, 2008: 53). As we saw in sections of the previous chapter, this practice came via the L’Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste (UCFml). Founded one year after the student riots, it continued to seek to establish a mass revolutionary movement, a new communist party which would deliver power to the proletariat, albeit

while still maintaining a nucleus of communist direction. This relatively small group engaged in a variety of activities which included its weekly (then monthly) magazine *Le Marxiste-Léniniste*, the founding of factions that addressed specific areas of art and culture (the Foudre Group) and the organisation of political meetings with workers. Through such activities, Badiou was seeking to 'sustain and expand the Maoist political thinking of May 1968' (Feltnam, 2008: 83) beyond the ideological full stop represented by the *Le Monde* headline and what he perceived as the desire of the CGT and CFDT to become political organizations fully integrated into the bourgeois state.<sup>61</sup> For Badiou, '68 continued to represent a touchstone of political practice, one that, in the words of his fellow UCFml member Lazarus, presented 'a concrete situation (a given struggle) [that] is explained by the notion of revolt.' As he continues: 'The struggle and the revolt are both the situation and the circulating category. The struggle is at once the parameter of political practice and the signifier of a general intellectuality. As a result, the relationship between a particular struggle and the general intellectuality comes to be a complex question, connecting a particular situation to a general situation and a general situation to a general intellectuality' (Lazarus, 1996/2015: 19).

Yet, to return to Feltnam's point, practice (or a 'particular struggle') is not always guaranteed to give rise to a subsequent philosophical breakthrough (or 'general intellectuality'), one that comes with the realisation that some logical endpoint has been reached, and which consequently needs to be disentangled. Traditionally, such moments

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<sup>61</sup> One could argue that Badiou was always in a minority regarding this objective. As João Moreira Salles noted in his marvelous 2017 documentary *The Intense Now*, if the students of '68 really wanted to seize control of the state for the workers, they had ample to do so when in their thousands they marched past a relatively empty and unsecured Assemblée nationale on the Rue de l'Université).

have been deemed to follow on the heel of scientific revolutions (i.e. as Bosteels notes, when a 'major scientific breakthrough...produces new forms of rationality, there occurs a revolutionary transformation in philosophy' (Bosteels, 2011: 52)). Rather, Badiou's return to philosophy in 1974 emerged from an impasse, a moment of political stasis, rather than one of revolutionary upheaval followed by a philosophical enlightenment. Furthermore, beyond the aforementioned sublimation of the spirit of '68 into the party apparatus of the CGT and CFDT and its call for improvements in salaries and better conditions for the workers (the narrow limitations of which galvanised the work of the UCFml), it was via a series of formal issues arising from 'the fading political fortunes of the Maoist movement...the dilution or abandonment of the Marxist, structuralist and post-structuralist thought of the late-1960s and their replacement by a tepid liberalism' (Boncardo, 2015: 1) that Badiou was to confront head-on in his series of seminars at the University of Vincennes in Saint-Denis from 1974 – 1981. Before addressing the key work that emerged from those seminars, *Theory of the Subject* (1982/2013), and its significance for questions of the historical, it is important to make a small deviation by way of the emergence of new forms of historicism that partnered the aforementioned 'tepid liberalism'.

### **The Limit Point of Historicism**

In the post-'68 period, the perceived "failure" of the student riots transmogrified into a more widespread 'critique of militantism', 'refutations of Marxism', and a much broader attack on so-called 'master discourses' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 321) or 'the master thinkers as the makers of history' (Badiou, 1978/2011: 69), which, for Badiou, became more general 'passageways...for re-establishing [the bourgeois language] of morals and rights' (Ibid.). While these forms of critique came to be linked with the agenda of the 'New Philosophy'

(*nouvelle philosophie*) more generally, the two individuals commonly associated with this development are Andre Glucksmann and Bernard Henri-Levy. It was to be the former who served as a passing foil for Badiou in terms of the future development of his work. Glucksmann was in many ways seeking to re-connect philosophy (although it is questionable whether he was ever a philosopher) to the traditions that existed before the break of '68 (specifically some of the early Sartrean conceptions of the subject); while in his turn Badiou was attempting to maintain a fidelity to the practical-political events that constituted the break. Additionally, although it would be simplistic in the extreme to collapse them into a single critical realm, the work of Michel Foucault was highly influential on Glucksmann, and Badiou would also turn his critical focus upon the man he once termed our 'Curvier of the archives who with some bookish bones examined with genius gives you the entire brontosaurus of the century.' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 188) and critique what he considered the historicist nature of his work.

It was specifically Glucksmann's reading, in his notorious 1977 *The Master Thinkers*, of history as nothing more than the interpretation of textual signifiers, that came under intense criticism from Badiou. For example, in the aforementioned book, Glucksmann noted that the "Germany' where Fascisms are born is not a territory or population but a text and an attitude to texts which became established long before Hitler' (Glucksmann, 1977/1980: 37). It is worth continuing in full Glucksmann's extension of this methodological line:

'Texts do not simply serve the exercise of power, they are that very exercise of power, they subject people. Even more than the chains of slavery, they are part of that slavery. Policemen inside the heads of those who subjected

them, the great texts of power in Europe are not in the service of the strategies of domination, they are the strategies themselves.' (Ibid.: 47)

Glucksmann argued for the concept of the 'pleb' as the counterpoint to the 'textual power' of the 'policemen inside the head' (i.e. the state). As Copjec (1994) once summarized, Glucksmann promoted the 'pleb' as a 'pure instance of particularity that had the potential to undermine all the universalizing structures of power' (1); or, in more blunt terms, for Glucksmann the 'pleb' positions itself against the inevitable endpoint of communism 'which [put] together the mental apparatus indispensable to the launching of the great final solutions of the twentieth century...the 60 million deaths of the gulag (Glucksmann, 1977/1980: 286). To be a 'pleb', was to *embody* the experience of oppression; migrants, students, workers, 'all those made poor, sorry, worthless, or marginal by the society in place' (Copjec, 1994: 2). As Copjec continues, any discontent expressed by the 'pleb' was seen by Glucksmann as having inherent 'political value'; while the source of that discontent was frequently to be found in discourses "'originating" with those in positions of power' (Ibid.). Badiou's own response to Glucksmann's came in his book *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic* (1978/2011). In this text he contended that in Glucksmann's 'history of fascisms and gulags, there is an adequation of text and territory, of thought and reality. But for Glucksmann, the force of this adequation is to be found in the active side of text and thought: *history does nothing but to realize the text of the master thinkers'* (70. Emphasis added). From the inherent validity of the 'plebs experience' to the determination of social relations via networks of power, Badiou recognised contradictions in Glucksmann's thought. Ultimately, we have the reduction of the state to a form of textual idealism, although one with an empirical 'indwelling [in the] networks of power and knowledge' (Copjec, 1994: 5-

6); but we also have the singularity of the pleb, that is objectively oppressed ('inside the heads') by these transcendental forms of textual idealism. There is a reversal with which we are now familiar with in critiques of certain strains of post-structuralist thought; that is, the 'simple inversion of the materialist thesis of the primacy of reality over thought' (Badiou, 1978/2011: 69). As Badiou continues:

'Here, thought is not conceived as that which first and principally reflects reality. Real history is not what is reflected in a text nor is it, at its limits, a relation to text...[b]etween text and reality, it is the text that is principal for Glucksmann...[t]here would then be no other history than the strategy of the text...' (Ibid. 69-70)

The 'pleb' is seemingly given a 'free pass' (Ibid.) within this textual policing, and throughout *The Master Thinkers* it remains problematic as to how it is wrenched away from the 'strategies of domination'. The site of the subject as bearer of change *and* as the target of the state's totalitarian ambitions 'has the effect of re-inscribing the entire book into contradiction,' Badiou notes, 'that insofar as we have liquefied them [i.e. reduced the subject to nothing more than a gossamer like symptom of textual discourses], we can [also] take them into account...' [i.e. treat them as empirical objects] (Ibid. 71); or, maybe more accurately, as Copjec continues, if we look at Glucksmann's treatment of the textual forces *and* subjects as both emerging from the aforementioned 'networks of power and knowledge', what we actually have is nothing more than a form of historicism which locates the 'texts' and their 'effects' upon the same empirical plane. It is here, as noted above, that we can see Glucksmann's dependence on the work of Michel Foucault for his formulations. For Badiou, it was Foucault's work, specifically in *The Order of Things* (1966/1970), that

formulated (in a far more nuanced way than Glucksmann) a form of historicism which conflated narratives of the historical with the operations of the state. It is worth briefly examining Badiou's critique of this before turning to *Theory of the Subject*.

On 25<sup>th</sup> February 1976, Foucault was giving the eighth in a series of lectures at the Collège de France. He had been elected to the chair of History of Systems of Thought in 1971 (see Ewald and Fontana, in Foucault, 1997/2003: ix) (when he was 43), and each year from January to March would give his yearly quota of talks. This eighth session in 1976 was part of a lecture programme entitled 'Society Must be Defended'. As part of this lecture on the writer and historian Henri de Boulainvilliers and 'the constitution of a historico-political continuum', amongst other themes, Foucault made the argument that what Boulainvilliers introduced was history as constituted by the study of the 'relational character of power' (1997/2003: 168). That is, from history as the story of wars, to history as 'deciphering the war and the struggle [sic] that are going on within all the institutions of right and peace' (Ibid.: 171). In brief, for Foucault, the 'relations of force and the play of power are the very stuff of history' (Ibid. 169). It was through these relations that politics and history construct narratives and determine outcomes. Politics and history 'may not have the same goal, but there is a definite continuity in what they are talking about, and in what is at stake...In Boulainvilliers, we therefore find – for the first time, I think – a historico-political continuum' (Ibid.).

As Badiou reflected some years later in his essay 'Foucault: Continuity and Discontinuity' (2004/2012), in this analysis 'the consideration of this continuum (characteristic of the 'modern' episteme?) imposes first of all the equation 'politics = State = power', and second,



the equation 'history = war' (Ibid.: 95-96). In other words, if 'war is politics by other means', then the politics of history is an extension of this. It is worth quoting at length how Foucault himself endorses this connection,

'History thus becomes a knowledge of struggles that is deployed and that functions within a field of struggles; there is now a link between the political fight and historical knowledge. And while it is no doubt true that confrontations have always been accompanied by recollections, memories, and various rituals of memorialization, I think that from the eighteenth century onward and it is at this point that political life and political knowledge begin to be inscribed in society's real struggles-strategy, or the element of calculation inherent in such struggles, will be articulated with a historical knowledge that takes the form of the interpretation and analysis of forces. We cannot understand the emergence of this specifically modern dimension of politics unless we understand how, from the eighteenth century onward, historical knowledge becomes an element of the struggle: it is both a description of struggles and a weapon in the struggle. History gave us the idea that we are at war; and we wage war through history.' (Foucault, 1997/2003: 171-172)

If one detects aspects of historicism in this passage, especially in the phrases 'history...[is] a knowledge of struggles' and 'historical knowledge ...[is] the interpretation and analysis of forces', then it is not surprising to note that when Badiou interviewed Foucault for a French TV series on Philosophy in 1965, the interviewee stated that 'I am a fierce partisan of factual history' ('Badiou interviews Michel Foucault (1965)'). Badiou's critique of this approach focused on the issue he had with the way Foucault compacted the society-state relationship via a form of 'linguistic or discursive anthropology' (2004/2012: 87). 'The formal object that is central to history is the pair society/State', Badiou later argued, 'whereas Foucault wants

to subvert this duality with the use of transversal categories that socialize the State all the way to the top and that 'stratify' society all the way down to the microscopic level' (ibid.: 86-87). The conceptual tools with which he performs this operation are 'those of 'knowledges' and 'powers'' (Ibid.: 87). Yet, the problem with this form of "linguistic anthropology' is that it is unable to 'realize that the whole of society will never reveal itself in an analytical moment', as Copjec recognised, because 'no diagram will ever display it fully, once and for all' (Copjec, 1994: 8-9). In such moments, we are back with IS, in that for Badiou, Foucault's 'operative dimension does not bear witness to any underlying element of the real beneath the operation itself' (Badiou, 2004/2012: 87). Like the contradiction in Glucksmann's pleb, there is no gap, no space for change or agency. 'Nothing is intelligible', Badiou continues, 'except the words by which one enters discourse as the interface between the statements and practices and the operations or treatments of bodies prescribed by the discourse' (Ibid.: 88). But what is one left with if one rejects the framework of Foucault's argument that it is the relationship between 'thought' and 'power' that is significant? This was increasingly Badiou's position throughout the first half of the 1970s. His 'militant' experience with the UCFml was, according to Alberto Toscano, fuelling his 'attack on historicism and on theories of expressive totality altogether' (Toscano, 2008: 25). The desire to challenge the tightly knotted conception of history & politics in much of Western Marxism (and specifically such organisations as the PCF) was leading Badiou towards a conception of politics that one could argue was clinically excised from history (this is Hallward's accusation, that Badiou's later writing enacted a 'radical subtraction of politics from history altogether' (Hallward, 2003: 43). Although, as this thesis argues, it could instead be characterised as the beginning of a radical reframing of what we actually consider as history). Nevertheless, at this point, it was a challenge, as Toscano correctly

notes, that was in many ways a radicalisation of Althusser's original attack on historicism in *Reading Capital* (Ibid.). Althusser had recognised the point that historicism 'may be regarded as a limit-form, insofar as it culminates and destroys itself in the negation of absolute knowledge' (Althusser, 1965/1970: 126); namely, historicism faces a 'limit-situation' from which it is unable to account for itself. For Badiou, Foucault folds such an unspeakable point back into the 'indwelling networks of power and knowledge', which in the words of Althusser, merely bends history 'to the interests of the times, but without any apparent movement, being content to *reflect* the historical changes which it is its mission to assimilate and master by some imperceptible modification of its peculiar internal relations' (Ibid. 142).

Bruno Bosteels has argued that it was Althusser himself who, in 1966, saw the potential to develop this Lacanian influenced line of attack into a possible project with Badiou and his fellow students. While the project never materialised (and 'never [went] beyond the exchange of personal research notes, published... posthumously in Althusser's *Writings on Psychoanalysis* (Bosteels, 2006: 122)), Bosteels has argued that it could be considered one of the 'three major sources for Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*' (the other two being the continuing political fallout from May '68 and the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé (Ibid.) (see below)). Whether one can draw a line of theoretical causation between this abandoned project and Badiou's *TS* remains an open discussion. What we do know from the discussion in Chapter Two, is that Badiou's singular treatment of Althusser's theory of *conjuncture* (in his essay 'The (Re)Commencement of Dialectical Materialism) served as an early attempt to frame the aforementioned limit-form of history as an 'objectless subject', where, to restate

from the earlier chapter, the ‘true does not speak the object, it speaks of nothing but itself’ (Badiou, as cited in Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 133; FN 23).

It was his shift to Lacan during the first half of the 1970s which enabled Badiou to formalize the impasse of the situation beyond the language of models; an impasse which, in this early instance, was the dialectic between history and politics as represented by the ‘limit form’ of the party structure. As Feltnam summarised ‘to sustain and expand the Maoist political thinking of May 1968 Badiou sought to critique the bureaucratization of the party; the argument being politics endures not as structure, but as historical periodization of structure, as subject process, as the interweaving and historical maintenance of *all* the subjects: the superego *and* courage *and* justice’ (2008: 263).<sup>62</sup> The point being that a party’s alignment with the historical realisation of its revolutionary project served, in fact, as a ‘halting point’ (Boncardo, 2015:20) to the radical aims of Maoist politics that emerged during Badiou’s political activities with the UCFml and the role of the subject in those activities.

As we know, Althusser was unwilling to accept the subject as a site or force of change. In what was to be the denouement of his theoretical oeuvre (*‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’* (1970/1971)), Althusser argued that the subject was nothing more than an ideological effect. The deeply transformative impact of the work of Lacan (alongside the ‘events of May’) contributed to Badiou’s break from his former master and as he would outline much later in *Metapolitics*: ‘In Lacan there is a theoretical concept of the subject, which even has an ontological status. For the being of the subject in Lacan is the coupling of

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<sup>62</sup> The concept of ‘periodization’, alongside those of ‘superego’, ‘courage’ and ‘justice’, and their relation to questions of history and the historical all emerged from *TS* and will be addressed in more detail below.

the void and the 'objet petit a'. There is no such thing in Althusser, for whom the object exists even less than the subject' (1998/2005: 59). This was supplemented by the abovementioned activities he engaged in from 1968 onwards in which he and his colleagues were driven by the practical demands of political action. And from this came 'a more Lacanian than Sartrean version of the correlation between the theory of the subject and the formal theory of structures...' (Badiou, cited in Hallward and Peden, 2012b: 288).

Amidst the movement towards parliamentary politics of the main communist parties and the rapid dissolution of the 'anarcho-desirers' (see Chapter Three) of the Gauche Prolétarienne in the post '68 period, Badiou recognised that the conceptualisation of the subject and its relationship to political action had reached an impasse. But, as A.J. Bartlett has correctly argued, 'an impasse is not an end; it is the articulated point, immanent to a process (a thought process) at which one must recommence intellectual struggle' (2014: 291). In this sense, it was propitious that Badiou could pursue this struggle in one of the institutions that was born of the upheavals: The University of Vincennes (Paris 8). In 1969 he began as an Associate Professor organising a series of seminars as part of a philosophy course that was 'so radical, that the government decided that the philosophy degrees granted...would have no national accreditation!' (Badiou, 2013/2018: xiii). Yet, the unofficial nature of the seminars contributed to an atmosphere free from educational strictures and, as such, was at liberty to explore many of the issues addressed above. Badiou would continue these seminars at numerous venues 'virtually free from any institutional authority' (Ibid. xii) for decades to come, but it was on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1975, that the first seminar of what would eventually become *TS* was held (we will return to the institution and the teaching of history in Chapter Six) .

When finally published by Seuil in 1982, *TS* was divided into six chapters. But for the purposes of my analysis, I have divided the book into four conceptual sub-sections. I have adopted this approach because, in terms of the impact this work would have on the development of Badiou's engagement with history and historicity, many of the conceptual innovations bisect the books published structure. Beginning with the concept of an impasse, the first section will address 'The Critique of Structural Dialectics'; following this will be the exploration of 'Periodization' (and within this the concepts of 'Splace' and 'Outplace'); the key concepts of 'Anxiety', 'Courage', 'Superego' and 'Justice'; and finally, Badiou's study of Mallarmé and its relevance to the historical.

### **The Critique of Structural Dialectics**

If Badiou's attempt to contest the teleological focus of traditional Western Marxism could be summarised in one phrase, it would be the 'detotalisation of history'. At the centre of this process was the question of the dialectic, about which there continues to remain some debate as to whether Badiou's *TS* offers a refutation or remodelling (see Bosteels, 2004; Bartlett, 2014). As we have seen from the previous chapters, Badiou was very much a proponent of the practice of dialectical thought. However, as Bosteels has recognised, by the 1970s the 'dialectical mode ha[d] reached its moment of closure', a moment that 'could be attributed to those practices and experiments from the past century, be they political or artistic, that failed to realize this tradition of thought...' (2004: 158). Clearly, at the centre of this critique of the dialectic lay the assessment of Hegel, or more accurately, a particular interpretation of Hegel. In the early sections of *TS*, Badiou recognises that 'Hegel does not position the 'something' all on its own, but the difference between something and

something other (*Etwas und Anderes*).’ As such, Badiou continues, ‘[w]hat is thus recognized is that no dialectic is conceivable if it does not presuppose division. It is the Two that gives its concept to the One, and not the other way around’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 5). From this, Badiou argued, the scission is never closed; or, in other words, the middle and not the end is always the “beginning” (also see Chapter Five).

This critique of a teleology, of a process with final synthesis, had radical implications for Badiou’s conception of the historical. The “movement” of events is not linear. The impasse is actually the inauguration; or, like the axis of a hinge (a metaphor that we will return to in Chapters Five and Six), the source of change is actually the middle of two points. In such a reading, we return to ‘IS’ (1968/2012) and the recognition that this mid-point denotes an opening. The two is ‘incurable’, and as Graham Harman has argued, the ‘scission rather than completion should be viewed as the true pillar of Hegelian philosophy’ for Badiou (Harman, 2012: 227). As with ‘IS’, Badiou reverts to the language of algebra to present a formal rendering of this argument, with the subject (as will be explored in more detail below) coming to mark the point of the incurable scission of the dialectic. In *TS*, Badiou proposes  $A$  and  $A\rho$  as signifying *pure being* and *being-placed* respectively (in such moments we are back with the inscription and the place of inscription that we saw with the example of the ticker tape in Chapter Two). In the Hegel of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, the scission that leads to synthesis is represented as ‘ $A = (A A\rho)$ ’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 8). ‘Now’, Badiou continues, ‘Hegel says that what *determines* the split term, what gives it the singularity of its existence, is not of course  $A$  [the One], the generic term closed in on itself, indifferent to any dialectic. It is rather  $A\rho$ ,  $A$  according to the effect of the whole into which it is inscribed [the Two]’ (ibid.). It is necessary at this stage to introduce two concepts which, while they have shaped

our examination of Badiou's critique of traditional structural dialectics, have not been explicitly named. These are those of the portmanteau *Splace* and its counterpart the *Outplace*.<sup>63</sup> As with the mathematical symbolization, these two terms are not symmetrical, rather 'one of the terms sustains a relation of inclusion to the other'. As Badiou continues, the 'including term, which is to say the place, the space of placement, is named (particularly by Mao) the dominant term, or the principal aspect of the contradiction' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 13). So, in this sense,  $A\rho$  is the splace of A. From this emerges a 'logic of places and a logic of forces' (Ibid.: 53). As noted earlier, 'Force' is the key term here, as the outplace functions as a force within the splace. But it is a force that only manifests itself when there is an attempt to incorporate it into the splace. The outcome is that 'every force stands in a relation of internal exclusion to its determining place' (Bosteels, 2006: 175). Badiou then clarifies this, in a philosophical move which would be extended in *Being and Event*, between the areas of "inclusion" and "belonging" and uses as an example the political (and historical) subject of the working class. The 'working class is always the contradictory unity of itself as proletariat [pure being] and of its specific bourgeois inversion [being placed]' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 9), with the latter, for Badiou, associated with the parliamentary shift of the PCF. 'The unity of opposites', Badiou continues, 'is determined (in the sense of the Hegelian *Bestimmung*) by the general bourgeois space, which bears the possible unity of the politically active (Marxist) proletariat and of the working class as Place of the new state bureaucratic bourgeoisie (revisionism)' (Ibid.). Therefore, in algebraic terms: 'A = working class, P = contemporary imperialist society. This gives us  $A\rho$  = modern revisionism, and the algorithm:  $A \rightarrow A\rho$  ( $A A\rho$ ), in which is indicated that what determines the dialectical actuality of the proletariat today is its internal purification from modern

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<sup>63</sup> The 'outplace' (*horlieu*) has also been translated as the *offsite*. See Feltham (2008: 43)



revisionism' (ibid.). The determination is distributive, that is, place or force can establish their prominence within the dialectic, with one element determining the other (there is never any excluded middle). In this, the rightist and leftist drifts of the post '68 period can be formulated as the predominance of place over force, or force over place. As Badiou argues, a 'deviation "to the right" ...leads back to the objective brutality of the place P in order to deny the possibility of the new inherent in the old' (Ibid.:12). While counter to this, 'the ineluctable deviation 'to the left' ...vindicates the original and intact purity of force while denying...the old inherent in the new, that is, determination' (Ibid.). A 'rightist relapse' or 'suicidal leftism', that are formalized as either  $A\rho (A\rho) = P$  or  $A (A) = A$  (Ibid.). In other words, with Foucault, Glucksmann, the PCF and associated Bourgeois parties placed squarely in his critical cross hairs, he is speaking of 'The State and the plebs' (Ibid.). Badiou concludes that 'the true terms of all historical life are rather  $A\rho (A)$ , determination, and  $A (A\rho)$ , the limit terms by which the Whole affirms itself without closure, and the element includes itself therein without abolishing itself' (Ibid.).

Emerging from his ongoing political action of the 1970s, Badiou's criticism of the 'rightist relapse', the collapse in to the state of the PCF, CGT and CFTD, mirrored his critique of historicism, an approach to the dialectic which 'falls apart because it cannot think qualitative global change: it cannot think revolution' (Feltnam, 2008: 40). What Badiou proffered with his formalisation of place and force, was instead a truly '*historical* dialectic, capable of thinking qualitative change by means of a concept of the subject as the torsion of structure' (Ibid.).

One of the problems here, however, is how this conception of a 'historical dialectic', of 'thinking revolution', is mediated beyond the singularity of the event itself (it is in *TS* that we first encounter this term (Badiou, 1982/2013: 60))? When we attempt to move beyond this, towards either place or force, there is the real danger of any historical analysis slipping into a naïve empiricism (an overdetermination of place (party, group, state) or idealism (an excessive emphasis on force (agency))). 'The suspicion', as Bosteels recognised, 'is that an attempt such as the dialectical one to name the entity in relation to which the possibility of a political sequence emerges, whether this is done in terms of history or society, in terms of time or totality, runs the risk of dispersing the singularity of such a sequence on to two or more heterogenous fields' (2004: 155). In the political sphere, which, we should remind ourselves, is the only condition recognised in *TS*, the mediation of place and force, of objective and subjective, was seen in such examples as 'Lenin's vanguard party', with its assumed realisation of equality, with force absorbed into the structure of the state and its concomitant declaration of the end of history. For Badiou, it took Mao's theory of communism, together with Lacan's conception of the real, to argue for the 'inexistence of history-qua-totality' (Toscano, 2008: 26). In this regard, the focus of Badiou's critique was the 'spatializing ambition' of the structural dialectic, 'which works to the detriment of qualitative heterogeneity', by 'privileg[ing] weak difference' in terms of positionality, 'over strong difference', and as such 'reduce[s] any difference to a pure distance of position' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 54). For Badiou, in such schemas, place and force become relational, part of a chain. Originally, 'the structural dialectic immobilizes the position of the terms into a symmetry, or into an invariant asymmetry', he notes, 'rather than seizing...the explosion of its rule and the loss of principle of the initial position' (Ibid.: 54). Weak difference, Badiou argues, is 'wherein the quality of the real qua force makes itself felt, to a homogenous

combinatory space, wherein a process becomes composed with terms of *the same kind*' (ibid.: 57). This is a critical scenario in which force is distributed (not dissipated) in place. While Badiou's *TS* rejects a science of history, or history qua totality, which offers no sense of how radical change transpires, it can be argued that he does not reject the concept of history *tout court*. Rather, he attempts to realign it with the concept of force within place; that is, a model of history aligned with concept of force that is *immanent* to place; the place of weak difference. In such moments, it is vitally important to make the distinction between historicity as place, that is the datum of historicity (i.e. the events, people, places and dates), and history as the invariant truth. Again, in relation to the political subject, with which Badiou aligns the subject as force in *TS*, he makes the distinction that:

'At bottom, it is always in the interests of the powerful that *history is mistaken for politics*, that is, *the objective is taken for the subjective*. This is the natural element for the maintenance of their own subjective activity, which is applied so that no unaligned quality may come to concentrate itself to confront them.' (ibid.: 44. Emphasis added)

It is this conception of history that partly informs Badiou's provocative statement in *TS* that 'history does not exist'; for if it did, it 'would be the figure of the whole' (ibid.: 92). In terms of the political, such an approach transmutes the heterogenous quality of politics into the objective and fixed coordinates of the place, which in Badiou's reading constitutes historicism (and which was affirmed towards the beginning of *TS*, when Badiou stated that 'Everything that belongs to a whole is an obstacle to this whole insofar as it is included in it' (ibid.: 12. Emphasis removed)). Rather, what Badiou is arguing for is history as the immanent force within the totality. This connection between history and force is made more explicit when Badiou states in *TS* that the structural dialectic 'does encounter

[force]...as obstacle, *which is the effective thought of the historical*' (Ibid.: 54). However, as noted, the 'spatializing ambition' of the structural dialectic always seeks to subordinate force as the 'thought of the historical' into a 'combinatory' element within the whole (Ibid.) (the university being central to this process as regards professional history/historians, I will return to this in Chapter Six)).

One question that emerges here, is how the above-mentioned immanence of force 'makes itself felt [within the] homogenous combinatory space', how the impasse of the real/void qua force becomes *recognisable* when distributed within place? In other words, how do we name the manifestation of force qua real within the structural dialectic? Badiou argues in *TS*, that traditionally the structural dialectic 'prefers the correlation of pure exclusion, of split positionality, and of interchangeability, to that correlation which, under the name "struggle of opposite", attempts to grasp the destruction that issues from a certain quality of force' (Ibid.). But if force qua real is *within* the "place" from which true change (historico-truth) emerges, (i.e. it is immanent to place), from where do we grasp this destruction? In traditional Marxist writing, it was a transcendental place of nature or spirit from which the dialectical process was considered. But Badiou's argument, as we have seen with the concept of force, is that the structural dialectic has no external site, that the force is immanent to place. Therefore the question remains as to how Badiou separates force from place? In this respect Badiou reaches for the classical atomist idea of the *Clinamen*.<sup>64</sup>

Following Epicurus, Badiou characterizes the term as when an 'atom is deviated, the world can come into being.' He continues

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<sup>64</sup> Badiou had no doubt read Gilles's Deleuze's 1969 book *The Logic of Sense*, in which he explores the ideas of Lucretius (or more accurately, those of Epicurus, whom Lucretius addressed in his six books *The Nature of Things* (2007)) and specifically that of the *Clinamen*.

‘The sudden obliqueness of a trajectory interrupts the identical movement of the atoms and produces a collision of particles from which is finally born a combined multiplicity, a thing, sufficient to make up a world... Let us closely follow the thread of the operation. If an atom relates to the void in a manner that is not the general rule for all atoms, it may function as *atomistic designation of the void itself*. It is here that strong difference begins its involution into weak difference, since the opposition between the deviating atom (or rather of the clinamen as the act of this atom) and the atom as pure principle reinscribes from one atom to another, and thus within the same kind of principle, the absolute heterogeneity of the void and the atom’ (Ibid.: 58)

The clinamen, the swerve which re-orientates the atoms around it, leaves no trace beyond the new formulation of those atoms. The clinamen is ‘the passer of force onto places’ (Ibid.: 62). In terms of the structural dialectic, Badiou uses this idea to explore how ‘any term is split into its place, on the one hand, and its vanishing capacity for linkage on the other...the absent cause is always reintroduced into the whole of its effect. This is a major theorem of the structural dialectic: in order for the causality of lack to exert itself all terms must be split’ (Ibid.: 71). Therefore, in formal terms, what Badiou is arguing here is that force gives rise to the coordinates of place, and, importantly, each place contains the remnants of previous splits driven by force; or, insofar as this pertains to this thesis: historicity (the where, what, and who) contains the trace of previous historical ruptures. Again, in Badiou’s argument it is not possible to account for change as coming from outside, it comes from within, a scission from one to two that is the result of the clinamen.

The consequences of this for the conception of history is clearly spelled out by Badiou when he noted in the January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1976 seminar that:

‘the trace left behind in the social world by the great mass movements about which we have shown that they were the vanishing terms of all things historical, resides in the fact that any form of consciousness, any point of view, any reality, in the final instance is split into the old and the new by means of which *history produces movement* in the entities that make up its combination’ (Ibid.: 71. Emphasis amended)

This serves as a partial response to the question above as to how we are able to distinguish the impasse in the situation. Ultimately, through the concept of ‘trace’, Badiou is arguing that a recognition of the excess of a situation is always bivalent, a future anterior judged from a retrospective position. He extends this point in his next seminar (26/1/76), when he notes that ‘if everything exists thanks to what is lacking from it, then the same applies to the cause. It is only by abolishing a first causality that you give consistency to the concept of itself’ (Ibid.: 82). Thus, causality only manifests itself *ex post facto*. As Badiou notes, ‘this is the reason why Minerva’s bird, the owl of patient knowledge, only takes flight at dusk, with its silent wing saluting the contrary light of truth’ (Ibid.: 19). Yet, one should not see in this retroactive naming of the excess a collapse of force into place (although this is an ever-present danger), of the infinite into the finite. Such a reading would take us back to the ‘end of history’ or the idea of contained historical periods. Yet, in terms of the relationship between history as force within historicity, the answer Badiou offered is, as noted, only partial. The question remains as to how can we grasp infinity within the new formalisation or configurations of historicity? As Frederic Jameson has noted, how do we move on from a situation where ‘an absolute historiographic beginning...cannot be justified by the nature of

the historical material or evidence, since it organizes all such material or evidence in the first place' (Jameson, 2002:23). To answer this, we must look at Badiou's concept of 'Periodisation'.

### **Splace is the place: Periodisation**

Within traditional forms of historiography, 'periodisation' is often, as Hayot has argued, a 'largely untheorized...[unit] of historical significance' (2011: 745). It is a term, he continues, that places faith in 'a narrative of origins' one in which a 'mode or tone of the period is grasped'. There is sense of 'development' that is 'it is carried forward; a spirit emerges', which subsequently reaches a 'peak' achieving 'one or more high points' then declines. There are moments of supersession, where 'it struggles to maintain energy' and often 'achieves a decadent version of itself'. And finally, there is often a 'ghostly return', where 'its spirit emerges, a generation or two later, in an ironic, revolutionary, or nostalgic mode' (Ibid.). As we have seen with Badiou's critique of Historical Materialism (see Chapter Two), this was a conceptualization that held little value for him. Like Balibar and Althusser in the section of *Reading Capital* entitled 'Marxism is not Historicism', this approach to the historical was conceived as nothing more than ideology, where the 'largely untheorized' empiricist models of history were 'collapsed' into the object of history (see Chapter One). Within the post-68 era, Glucksmann and Henri-Levy certainly sought to identify Marxist thought as operating within the sphere 'supersession', maintaining that this particular tradition had run its course. But, as we have already established, their focus upon Marxism as a network of textual forms of power and knowledge was itself nothing but a form of idealism. As with all forms of idealism, if Glucksmann et al. had taken flight at dusk, believing themselves fully cognisant of Marxism's failures, they had forgotten that their own

positions necessitated an absolute that had given 'its blessing' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 19). Moreover, the question remained, as Badiou continued, that if the owl 'does take flight...it is so as to go eat some mice. But where then is the mouse in the absolving benediction of the absolute?' (Ibid.). It was in searching for the mouse that Badiou engaged in the 'painstaking endeavour [of] disarticulate[ing] the circularities and redundancies of the Hegelian dialectic' (Toscano, 2008: 20). The way Badiou attempted to do this in *TS* was by seeing history as either circular or periodised, two elements which could broadly be characterised as 'history as perpetual return' and 'history as rebirth'. For this thesis, it is an approach that offers a circumvention of the subsumption of a historiographic approach into its object, or the equally redundant amalgamation of a textual methodology within the networks of power and knowledge it seeks to investigate (as with Foucault).

A partial solution to the limitations of these two categories has already been expounded. This is the assimilation of the outplace by the splace. During such an instance, the outplace could either be incorporated into the symbolic realm of the splace,  $A\rho(A)$ , or, we could reach a critical cul-de-sac with the simple repetition of the splace  $A\rho(A\rho)$ . With the former, as Feltham has recognised, Badiou considered such moments as 'when social democracy, trade unionism or even right-wing politics captures the energy of the working class and its knowledge of its own exploitation' (Feltham, 2008: 41). It is a process of assimilation whereby the splace continually incorporates the outplace into itself. Badiou himself illustrated it in theological terms as a

'circularity which, presupposing the absolute in the seeds of the beginning, leads back to this very beginning once all the stages of its effectuation, its alienation, its going outside-itself, and



so on, are unfolded. Thus, the dead son reintegrated into the divisible immanence of the father *completes* the world-concept of the Christian God, which is the holiness of the Spirit.' (Badiou, 1982/2009: 19)

This is 'history as perpetual return'. As Feltham notes: 'If the dialectic comes full circle and its result is the split between the *offsite* [outplace] and its placement, then for Badiou the *offsite* – proletariat or revisionism - ends up as being the mere product of the *splace* – the bourgeoisie or revision' (Feltham, 2008: 43). But the question that suggests itself here is: what if there were no God to which the dead son could return, where would the 'halting point' be? (Bell, 2011: 107-108). The only answer for Badiou is the mathematical void, or Lacan's real. And it is from this line of reasoning that we move from an idealist or 'theological circularity' towards a scenario in which periodisation marks a break or rupture rather than a perpetual looping back. This is Badiou's conceptualization of periodisation, which he defined as

'the sense of the pure passage from one sequence to the other, in an irreconcilable, unsuturable lag, where the truth of the first stages gives itself to begin with only as the condition of the second as fact, without leading back to anything other than the unfolding of this fact' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 19)

Ultimately, as Feltham highlights, this is a theory of periodisation in which 'the process produces something different from what it starts with, and consequently...one dialectical process distinguishes itself from another' (Feltham, 2008: 43). The implicit critique of the Hegelian version of the dialectic being that it denies the point from which one can view the dialectic, an unspeakable synthetic point which, via Badiou's concept of periodisation, one

only becomes cognisant of in the next dialectical sequence. That is, the ‘truth of the first sequence is given merely as the factual condition of the second’ (Ibid.). Upon which ‘[a] new sequence opens when the previous sequence becomes theoretically intelligible, when its history can be summed up...’ (Ibid.).<sup>65</sup> This retrospective intellectual understanding is in many ways a process of negation and the historical example that Badiou uses to illustrate this is that of Lenin, and how his Bolshevik party served as ‘the active bearer of an assessment of the failures of the Paris Commune’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 20). As is widely known, Leon Trotsky famously witnessed Lenin dancing in the snow when, in 1917, the Bolshevik party had held on to power for one day longer than the Commune’s National Guard. As such, for Badiou it was ‘the rupture of October that periodize[d] the Paris Commune, turning a page in the history of the world’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 20). But as is no doubt clear, if the Bolshevik Party became the (s)place from which the Commune was viewed, in time, the Party would itself be viewed from the vantage point of its own destruction (as it would be in the 1960s, when the Soviet Communist Party under Khrushchev was viewed by Mao as revisionist – see Chapter Two). As Badiou notes much later in *TS*, ‘any splace is thus the after-effect or *après-coup* of the destruction of another’ (Ibid. 264). If we re-examine history and historicity in this light, then historicity is very much the remnants of previous periodisations, the vestiges of a rupture which become the new coordinates and conventions of a splace. Yet, one could possibly detect in this an idea of history as a sequence in the traditional sense already critiqued in this thesis (see Introduction, Chapters One and Two). Yet, to do so would be to negate the scission that is central to the theorisation of periodisation. ‘This discontinuity’, as Toscano has recognised,

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<sup>65</sup> As the German philosopher F.W. J. Schelling famously stated, ‘The beginning is the negation of that which begins with it’ (Cited Rancière, 2004: 65).

‘marks the fact that we are not dealing with a seamless and cumulative tradition, where later sequences would simply learn from the lessons of old, but with the notion that it is in the impasses and impossibilities of a previous sequence, a first moment, that a second sequence intervenes, generating the kind of novelty which does not simply solve the problems of the first, but generates an entirely new evaluation of the requirements of novelty and emancipation...The dialectic of cumulative completion and resolution is thus replaced by a dialectic of failure and innovation, where what stood as an impasse and remained unthinkable in a previous sequence is not the germ, but merely the site for the inventions of a later one’ (Toscano, 2008: 28-29).

An argument could be raised here that the recognition of the impasse that gives rise to a rupture, and subsequent periodisation, requires a degree of empiricism. That is, if we only understand change from the perceived difference between distinct spaces that are themselves symptoms of prior periodisations, then are we not always locating change *within* that existent period? As Feltham notes, in *TS* ‘nomination alone is enough to initiate the unravelling of the political order’ (2008: 57) and this gives rise to accusations of voluntarism and empiricism. While many of these issues would be addressed in Badiou’s next critical text, *Being & Event*, he does seek to tackle them in *TS* via the important concept of ‘force’, which, as already discussed above, we can position as the disappearing power of historicity.

However, first we need to understand where force fractures the formal elements of historicity to engender the process of periodisation anew. This requires us to grasp that at the core of Badiou’s concept of force is always the subject. In *TS*, once again, we must

remind ourselves, politics is the only condition, and politics exists only insofar as there is an event in which 'every subject surpasses its place by force, inasmuch its essential virtue lies in being disorientated' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 32; see also Chapter Six for a discussion of this in relation to the historian). On the one hand, Badiou aligns history with the moment that the coordinates of splace splinter and break; but on the other, he aligns historicity with the conditions of that fracturing. The subject is caught between these two realms. As he states, the subject is 'the excrescence of the revolt of anxiety...born in the violent internal distance of the law to itself, and it names the process through which the order that the subject sustains in its truth comes into being as other than itself' (Ibid.: 156). The subject *is* 'the periodisation of the dialectic' (Feltham, 2008: 52), and Badiou details four processes that must occur for this periodisation to take place: Anxiety, Superego, Courage, and Justice.

### **Anxiety to Justice**

In brief, anxiety 'is the submersion by the real, the radical excess of the real over the lack [within the splace], the active failure of the whole apparatus of symbolic support provoked by what reveals itself therein, in a cut, as unnameable encounter' (Badiou, 1989/2013: 146). As Bosteels recognised, anxiety 'signals a radical breakdown, due to the irruption of an overwhelming part of the real [outplace], in the whole symbolic apparatus' (Bosteels, 2006: 183). But anxiety is more than simply the post-evental symptom of the real, it also serves as an apostle of what may come to pass. Turning to the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Badiou sees anxiety in the figure of the lampbearer<sup>66</sup>, that 'inspect[s] the political place [splace] in order

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<sup>66</sup> The lampbearer, Anxiety, at midnight sustains  
Those vesperal dreams that are burnt by the Phoenix  
And which no funeral amphora contains,  
On the credenzas in the empty room . . .  
(Cited by Badiou, 1982/2013: 73)

to discern therein the staking out of antagonism that will relay the promise and organize the future' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 108). Clearly, the real cannot be named, but 'the poet's dead eye' can allow itself to be exposed to the real, which then 'spins the subtle threads that link one object to another so that, in a tricked perspective, the illusion of a surprise may come about' (ibid.). A barometer of the excess-of-the-real, or the force of the outplace within the splace, anxiety registers that which the symbolic splace lacks, what it is deficient in, what sustains the whole by its exclusion. Unlike courage (see below), which marks its opposite, anxiety as subjectivization is unable to move beyond this position, often regressing 'through the terror of restoration' or 'its opposite, the mystical stupor' (Ibid.: 168).

However, while anxiety, if not transcended, can regress back into the splace, the lampbearer (or as Boncardo identified, the *gnetteur* (lookout) (Boncardo, 2015: 12)) reveals its radical potential. In Badiou this manifests itself when she engages in 'a kind of detailed investigation of the varied development of political knowledge and the pragmatic inventions that crystallize and sustain it' (Feltnam, 2008: 58). In such moment 'another voice emerges in his texts: the voice of the old mole.' Feltnam continues

'It is the old mole at work when Badiou speaks of the Marxist's slow realization in the 1960s that Leninist parties themselves could become a bastion of bourgeois and revisionist bureaucracy 'which oppress[es] the working class and the people in a quasi-fascist manner' (TS, 221). It is the old mole at work when Badiou analyses the 'impasse of the political subject' in the Soviet Union as due to the emergence of new bourgeoisie rather than as the result of some inevitable totalitarianism. Indeed, at a global level, the work of the old mole in *Théorie du sujet* has as its object *the critique of the party*. That is to say, the critique of the structural dialectic in the name of history is none other than

Badiou's coming to terms with the limit, and failures of the very organization that allowed the worker to enter upon the world stage. *Théorie du sujet* is his elegy for the party; in the following period he will declare its time over and a new epoch begun, its contours still unclear' (Ibid., Original emphasis).

Feltnam has clearly taken the figure of the 'old mole' from Marx, who referred to this figure in both *The Philosophy of History* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. It is the latter text that possibly has the most relevance to the manner in which Feltnam develops it. As Marx notes in Chapter Seven:

'But the revolution is thorough-going. It is still in the process of passing through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed one half of its preparatory work; it is now completing the other half. First it perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the *executive* power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has done this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from her seat and exultantly exclaim: Well grubbed, old mole!" (Marx, 1852/1978: 606)<sup>67</sup>

The old mole is the warden of the new within the old, the first step towards a naming of the nameless. Qua historian, they are keeper of a future presaged by an event in the past, what we explore later as the 'future anterior' of Badiou's 'event'. As Boncardo identified with reference to Gardner Davies' study of Mallarmé (1959), Badiou equally recognised in the poet the genius of 'perpetuat[ing] the light of the vanished sun' (Cited in Boncardo,

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<sup>67</sup> 'Shakespeare uses the "Old Mole" to represent the ghost of Hamlet's father who keeps speaking from under the stage, despite Hamlet and Horatio shifting their ground seeking a secret place to swear their oath. <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/o/l.htm> (Date Accessed: 19/5/21)

2015:28), sketching the 'contours' of the momentary vision. Badiou originally made the point identified by Feltnam in his February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1976, Seminar, when he argued that the militant figure seeks to separate out the amphora from the vesperal dreams, 'to divide what is obscure, to hold fast to the worker's promise even at the heart of its deepest denial' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 108). In such moments, the lampbearer, *guetteur*, or militant figure, 'inspect[s] the political place in order to discern therein the staking out of antagonism that will relay the promise and organize the future' (Ibid.) or maintain a fidelity to the future once offered in the past.

In the 1970s, Badiou equates this antagonism with the masses (see below), an entity that is only really encountered in the momentary rupture. The masses engender a *historical cut*, a key concept for Badiou which finds its origin in Lacan's idea of 'the pass'. Lacan's celebrated idea was first conceived in 1967 in his 'Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School'. In this document, delivered to the Ecole freudienne de Paris, Lacan set out what he considered the guarantee of the school, that is the specific point when a trainee moved from an analysand to analyst. As Lacan stated, 'It is to them that, a psychoanalysand, in order to have himself authorised as an analyst of the School, will speak about his analysis, and the testimony that they will be able to receive from the very heart of their own pass will be of a kind that no jury of agreement will ever collect' (Lacan, 1967: 9). Inspired by the series of seminars on Heraclitus by Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, it refers to that moment when the analysand can reflect on what has transpired in their analysis, and as such marks the end point of their training whereby they can now adopt the appellation of analyst. Beyond its institutional role, the pass was recently characterised by one-time analysand and friend of Lacan, Catherine Millot, as 'the moment of...the Heraclitean flash of

lighting which reveals everything all around, as the crest of a mountainous massif suddenly stands out against the storm' (2018: 69). As Badiou summarised in *TS*, 'the real as cut, [is that moment when] ...a retroactive dispersion reveals the key of the order where it holds sway' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 61), or in other words: the outplace is revealed in the splace. In this moment strong difference becomes weak difference, and the force that distorts the splace vanishes into the splace, transforming it as a result. The cut as vanishing term, as Badiou states 'is the passer of force onto the places' (Ibid.: 62).

If anxiety is the effect of the real within the symbolic (splace), then the second of the concepts, *superego*, is its destruction, but from the opposite end of the spectrum. It is through Badiou's interpretation of Lacan, that the superego is categorized as the forceful encircling of the outplace-real within the coordinates of the splace as such. As Lacan himself outlined, the 'superego is at one and the same time the law and its destruction. As such, it is speech itself, the commandment of law, in so far as nothing more than its root remains. The law is entirely reduced to something, which cannot even be expressed, like the *You must*, which is speech deprived of all its meaning' (Lacan as quoted in Badiou, 1982/2013: 145). As Lacan recognised, there is always a fine balance between anxiety and the superego, which is the difference between the destruction of structure, and a too-muchness of structure. Anxiety and the superego are the twin poles that manifest themselves when the real-outplace splits the subjects place within the symbolic-splace. This is designated by Badiou as the process of subjectivization that is characterized by the moment of rupture. Yet, while anxiety is the disposition that lends itself to a receptivity of force and the transformation of the splace, it takes boldness of the subject to exceed its site, to begin to solidify its new discoveries.



As we noted, for Feltnam, a state of anxiety that is keenly attuned to the distortion of the splace by the real or its negation is encapsulated in the figure of the old mole. But it takes a different creature to name this distortion, to entitle the once impossible. Feltnam calls ‘this voluntarist and idealist tendency in Badiou's thinking of change the *voice of the eagle*’ (Feltnam, 2008: 57). It is the eagle who responds quickest when faced with the excess of the superego and/or destruction of social structure (ibid.). The eagle ‘opens up a new realm of possibility’, giving symbolic form to the once inconceivable. While never using the term himself, Badiou saw this process in Marx, specifically when he was speaking of the Communist revolution as ‘the most radical rupture with traditional ideas’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 156) and how the rupture ‘allows for the advent of the new’ (Ibid. 163). While the old mole may burrow down into the splace, seeking possibilities afforded by the failures of previous acts of history, it is the eagle that appears to “name” these possibilities, the possibilities that the mole has unearthed and gestured towards, but not inscribed within the splace.

However, as may be pointed out, in terms of a radical form of historiography, we are faced with a familiar issue here. As was clear from the example of Lenin celebrating the Bolshevik’s surpassing of the Commune’s time in power, periodisation via the work of the old mole and the eagle gives rise to history as a series of successive sequences. That is, the closure of one period is only perceived from the virgin soil of a new period. The outcome is a steppingstone ‘image of history as a sequence’ (Feltnam, 2008: 70). Furthermore, Feltnam argues that in such a reading of Badiou’s Periodisation, we have neither the Mole nor the

Eagle, but the 'distant and age soaked voice of the owl'. As Feltnam continues, with the owl, there is

'a long distance view of history that discerns patterns and regularities in the occurrence of political change, much like the cyclical theories of history, of the rise and fall of civilizations, or even predictions of the eventual heat death of the universe. The correlate of this vision of history is a pragmatic and politically neutral judgement of change: little matter whether it is for better or worse, according to any scale of values, sooner or later change will happen, and a structure will be destroyed. The owl objectifies change.' (Ibid.: 70)

For many today, Badiou is solely aligned with the aforementioned 'Heraclitean flash', but what is missed in such moments is the belief Badiou holds that change will come, whether one wishes it or not; Badiou the Eagle is also Badiou the pragmatist (as was clear with his political engagements of the 1970s). However, one should not confuse this reading of history as sequential in the historicist sense as critiqued in earlier chapters; rather it is a conceptualisation of periodisation, of change, that is formed of deferred retroactions that are radically distinct from each other. In fact, for Badiou, they are so distinct that the conceptualisation of periodisation itself is challenged with each new transformation. There is no 'transperiodisation', a history of histories: rather a split from within the concept of periodization itself. However, as we will see in *BE*, transperiodisation could be argued to become a metaontology of presentation, which in *LW* is robbed of all materialization to become the idea of the eternal. Yet, at this point, the idea of transperiodisation only leads (especially when placed within the institution) to a circularity of placing such "outsider" concepts within the space, which soon become nothing but a form of idealism, change as nothing more than a form of syntagmatic moving of chairs. Badiou's materialist

periodization forces a rupture in the prior ideas of periodization, it comes from the very point of excess of that concept of periodization and gives rise to something genuinely new. Quoting Badiou, Harman notes in his essay on Badiou's relationship to Heidegger, that in *TS* 'Badiou proposes dividing Hegel yet again, offering a materialist periodisation in place of idealist circularity. In circularity "the outplace finds a space in the place", without excess or remainder. What is called for instead is a principle of the "irreducibility of action", and of "discontinuity, even [of] failure" ...To escape circularity, one of the terms of the new contradiction needs "to become the bearer of the intelligibility of the preceding sequence", and this is how "it comes about as subject". Here the decisive break with Hegel is announced: "Now that Hegel has been given the proper salute...we must think periodization through to the end"' (Harman, 2012: 230). What Harman (and Badiou) is saying here is that the process of periodisation itself is never closed, the scission of the transforming sequence gives rise to new forms of periodisation, new subjects. Yet, the obvious question is can we even talk about "periodisation" if the concept is utterly transformed in its sequential revolution? Harman's response, once again citing Badiou, is that the 'key to periodicity lies in distinguishing between the One and the Whole: "in this gap lies the whole question of the Subject". This occurs by breaking free from the structure towards something outside the splace that is admittedly difficult to express, given that "every discourse fixes the splace of the very thing that it passes over in silence"' (ibid.). There is a leap of faith here or reaching for the ineffable (a theme we will return to in Chapter Five). This is why Badiou, like Heidegger in a different context, turns to poetry and the figure of the poet (that eagle of meter and form) as a vehicle through which to render visible the contours of the 'vesperal dreams'. 'As it is only by breaking up all ordinary prose', Badiou notes in *TS*, 'that it extends the limit of the communicable and pushes back the inaccessible frontiers of *lalangue*

[structure/symbolic]' (1982/2013: 159). How poetry and the poet suggest a possible ontological foundation relevant to the idea of the militant historian will be explored shortly. Before that, however, it is necessary to address the third concept of periodisation which, for Badiou, is a prerequisite to any such poetic "identification" of force: *courage*.

Courage is, in many ways, a form of radical hope. Unlike a diffident form of optimism (see Eagleton, 2015), courage for Badiou persists beyond the law of the superego (the state and the onset of anxiety). Courage is a subjective state that arises from the movement from a strong difference that marks the splace from the outplace, to the outplace *in* the space as a form of weak difference. In his February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975, seminar (entitled in *TS* 'The real is the impasse of formalization; formalization is the place of the forced pass of the real') Badiou aligns the realms of strong and weak difference with the distinction between 'structural contradiction' and 'historical contradiction'. The former is the classic Hegelian locus of dialectical, 'the pure and simple position of the Two as a processual unity' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 24). 'Place' in this scenario serves as shorthand for the invariant asymmetry between the two. For example, the Bourgeoise and Proletariat are both placed within the splace, they are structurally positioned by the splace, although a structural contradiction is never a total difference, because one '...affirms itself only by destroying the other...the way the proletariat destroys the bourgeoisie, all the while destroying itself...' (Ibid.). In this scenario, as Badiou states,

contradiction is a permanent structural fact, which can be mapped economically (weak correlation); the class struggle is a process under particular conditions, entirely political in essence, which is not deducible from the simple weak correlation. To confuse the

class contradiction with the class struggle, to practise the correlative indistinction of the contradiction, is the philosophical tendency of economism, of workerism, of somniferous Marxism for the lecture hall.' (ibid)

Conversely, Badiou aligns class struggle with 'historical contradiction', as opposed to the 'correlative indistinction' of the structural contradiction of class position. In *TS* class struggle is 'the real as the impasse of formalization', it is 'violently heterogenous' (Ibid.: 23).

However, we should not forget that this violent heterogeneity has to pass into the *splace*, has to be 'formalized as the forced pass of the real', to effect change within the *splace*. As will be recollected from the previous chapter, existing outside of the *splace* is what many '68 student groups (such as *Tout!*) aspired towards, with a "politics of feeling" or "thinking with one's gut". But, for Badiou, such positions effect no change, and, as Peter Wolin stated, are in the case of groups such as *Gauche Prolétarienne* nothing but a form of 'libidinal' politics. In many ways, they were deeply conservative, because, if we continue to split history into the concepts of history as force and historicity as the remnants of force, history's residue, one could argue that being considered part of the *splace* (i.e. maintaining a strong difference), is to *be* historicity; while the passing of strong difference into the *splace* is to (potentially) *make* history, one that requires courage. This is a crucial distinction in *TS*, one which Badiou links to the role of the masses as subject of political change. As he remarks

'The masses themselves, in their static being, their structural positioning, their statist placement, constitute the historical world. It is from their basis that any figure of the State draws its sustenance, and it is from the consensus that holds them together that

any given social being receives its definition. These splaced masses do not *make* history so much as they *are* history.' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 63)

Badiou is ascribing a negative and positive sense to the noun 'history', one that follows the previous discussion of history as either a synonym for 'historicity', that is, the remnants of earlier forms of radical courage that have since become ossified, become splaced, or opposed to this, radical courage *as* history. In many ways, anxiety and courage come from the same root, it is just that 'anxiety means deficiency of the place, while courage is the assumption of the real by which the place is split' (Ibid.: 160). Taking up for a moment Badiou's use of the term 'history', one could speak of historical courage and historical anxiety. The former seeks to challenge the symbolic order 'urging of the dissolutive injunction of the real... positively carr[ying] out the disorder of the symbolic, the breakdown of communication, whereas the latter [historical] anxiety calls for its death' (Ibid.).

Historical courage is needed because there are 'no co-ordinates with which [the masses can] orient themselves and so conceive of what they were while they *deviated*' (Boncardo, 2015: 3). For Badiou, the 'masses' were the 'being of history' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 63) or the 'historical interruption' (Ibid: 173) (although Badiou accepted during the 1970s that a militant intellectual cadre (i.e. Maoist) were also required to maintain and, if necessary, revive the masses revolutionary substance (Ibid.)); in short, to revive history. Yet again, as Badiou noted, if one attempts to institutionalize courage, then it simply returns to a form of statist superego (also see Chapter Six). As he outlined

'The fact that one can describe the mass movement, its memorable lucidity, its invincible courage, its particular division, its suspicious-looking assemblies, its fraternal terrorism, does

not authorize us to believe that therein lies a stable term of socio-political being. Any attempt to institute in a lasting way the forms of its creative impatience, or to define its state of affairs, changes the mass movement into its opposite' (Ibid.: 63-64).

This is the danger hiding within the Bolshevik response to the Paris Commune, and the Maoist conclusion of the Bolshevik revolution. The masses as splaced and the masses as destructive. 'The masses can irrupt onto the stage of history only in a destructive excess over and above the State', Badiou summarised, '[t]his is their communist invariance. They may also, in their identity as substance, dictate the thickest, and even the most abject, statist consensus. But this is their placed being, their forced being. Their being-in-force falls under the law of nonlaw' (ibid.: 173). As Badiou would develop in *BE* and *LW*, it is also why history is always remarkably brief in its manifestation and that true subjects are so rare.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, it is when such instants are extended beyond their momentary flash, that we come to the final concept of Badiou's quartet of terms which assists our understanding of periodisation.

*Justice* for Badiou is when courage extends its brief manifestation. It is the novelty of the unfamiliar extended into a radically new status quo, which, as should be clear, is what Badiou in *TS* considers the authentic journey from history to a new historicity. For Badiou, what often passes for 'history' is frequently nothing more than the opposite of justice, the superegoic reiteration of the same (although he admits it is impossible to live without repetition). As we have seen, it is the subject that travels the high road from anxiety to courage, but it is justice where the subject moves beyond the 'excess over the place' (Ibid.

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<sup>68</sup> Badiou is actually quite precise in his classification of the 'historical' periods of the Paris Commune, Bolshevik Revolution, and the Mao's Cultural Revolution.

157) to 'nam[ing] the possibility that what is nonlaw may function as law' (Ibid.: 159), i.e., the passing from strong to weak difference. It is the moment when the superego's injunction is relativized. 'This time',

'the effect of recomposition obeys the maxim: "Always more of the real, less of the law." If in nonlaw is only the universal barbarism of the law, then in justice it is the corrosion of the law itself. It is the subjective principle of the withering away of right.' (Ibid.: 296)

The emplacement of place by the splace is challenged by justice. In fact, justice enacts a retroactive 'blurring of places...by way of the approximative legitimization of courage' (Ibid.). To illustrate this, Badiou turns once again to the historical example of Thomas Müntzer (see Chapter Two). Specifically, Badiou pinpoints how Müntzer's 'communist egalitarian' proselytising across central Germany enabled a process of subjectivization that established subjects that 'appeal[ed] to justice' (Ibid.: 298). That is, Müntzer 'name[d] his courage based on the absolute conviction that Christ seeks the fulfilment of this design, he proposes the imaginary articulation of the bravery of revolt based on the superego whose allegory is 'the Kingdom of God' (Ibid.). When faced with the Müntzer example one could ask how do we move from the real as the scission of splace, to the formalization of that real in the institution of a new splace that accords with the forced pass of the real? In such a question we are directed to the centrality of the two concepts of *topology* and the *algebraic* that are key to Badiou's theorisation of justice.

To restate the question, one is asking how, from the initial anxiety, to the naming of courage, to the establishment of justice, do the multiplicity of points coalesce into a



meaningful order (one different from the prior configuration)? Such a question is really another way of asking how does history (as invariant) become a new form of historicity? Bosteels poses this question (albeit in different terms) when he asks how the real is not just the scission of the splace, but also the “site” of a new truth:

'For a materialist understanding of the dialectic, however, the decisive question is rather whether the real cannot also on rare occasions become the site for a newly consistent truth. In addition to the real as an evanescent cause, we ought therefore to conceive of the real as a novel consistency. Badiou calls the first conception algebraic, insofar as the real is considered in terms of its relations of belonging and foreclosure, while the second is topological, in terms of adherence and proximity. “We thus have to advance that there are two concepts of the real in Lacan, as is adequate to the division of the One: the real of evanescence, which is in a position of cause for the algebra of the subject, and the real of the nodal point, which is in a position of consistency for its topology,” with both being required for a materialist theory of the subject: “From the real as cause to the real as consistency we can read an integral trajectory of materialism.”' (Bosteels, 2006: 181).

Justice is, in many ways, the *modus operandi* of this movement from the algebraic splintering of the splace to the topological ordering of its newly cast elements. As Badiou stated, ‘we thus pass from the algebraic punctuality, by which a materialist domain opens itself up to knowledge, to the topological adherence, which saturates the recurrence of conflict with memory and neighbourhoods' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 231). In relation to the concept of periodisation, the topological is key, in that it serves to establish fused units of meaningful change which coalesce into what Badiou refers to here as *neighbourhoods*. What is important to understand about this concept, is that a neighbourhood is not a synthesis of the algebraic variables that emerge from the too-muchness of the real within

the space, rather, it is their *proximity* to each other. As Badiou outlines ‘the mathematical notion of neighbourhood establishes a link between the elements of a set, which is the basis of belonging for algebraic materialism, and the surrounding adherence by which the elements are locatable, basis for topological materialism’ (Ibid.: 220-221). Feltham further clarifies that ‘[t]opology concentrates on what is ‘close to’ or ‘distant from’ an element rather than on the latter’s combination with other elements: the central concept is thus not composition but proximity or the neighbourhood’ (Feltham, 2008: 59. Emphasis omitted). In such a move, Badiou bypasses the Hegelian final synthesis, for one of a momentary alignment. In practical terms, a political topology (and one that is specifically ‘anchored in the consistency of the Marxist algebra, which arranges into a structure the elements of class, the people, imperialism, the strong moments of ideological history, and so on’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 222)) can give rise to neighbourhoods which are capable of intersecting with other neighbourhoods. One of the examples Badiou uses is that of a factory revolt. In such moments, the working class within the factory are the initial neighbourhood (Ibid.), but such neighbourhoods can connect to other neighbourhoods not directly engaged in the revolt, with the outcome of ‘nothing less than the form of internationalism immanent to the term ‘revolt’ (Ibid.). A series of questions emerge following such associations, Badiou argues, which test whether justice is being sustained. Clearly emerging from his political activities with the UCFml of the 1970s, he asks: ‘Does it [a neighbourhood] unify the French and the immigrants? Or is it chauvinistic? Does it affirm, with the PCF: ‘Made in France only’? It is a new neighbourhood, at the intersection of the national and the worker’s, which demands a special topological taking of sides’ (Ibid.). Recalling the figure of the old mole, it is through ‘the concrete analysis of the situation’ (Ibid.) that Badiou asks if a ‘political subject is found’? (Ibid. Emphasis omitted), i.e., does this intersection of two

neighbourhoods form a coherent topology that gives rise to a subject, or do the algebraic properties fall back into the space? Yet, one should not see in this process an identitarian quality. If anything, Badiou argues, 'topology is *disidentifying* in nature' (Ibid.: 223). Because within the topological, that which 'applies to a term, a point, an individual, by way of the determination of its site, its local adherence, must also hold true for others, for a collective, to which this individual belongs' (Ibid.). Fundamentally, 'any topological predicate is plural' (Ibid.), it is both particular to a specific site, but it is also universal in its collectivity.

Importantly, for our discussion of history/historicity (or the historico-truth) in Badiou, justice does not simply reside within the immediate present of a topological formation. In a small passage in the February 1976 seminar 'Neighbourhoods' (from which much of the discussion above comes), Badiou makes a brief, but significant point that the universality of the topological cuts not just across space, but also time. Towards the end of the seminar, he poses the question that the topological adherence can also be receptive to previous historical orders of the algebraic, asking 'which dominant historical memory saturates [the topological site]?' (Ibid.: 222). He calls this the 'temporal expansion-constriction'. This particular phase is only mentioned twice throughout the whole of *TS* but it does echo the history-historicity division introduced earlier. This becomes clearer when Badiou maintains that the expansion-constriction relationship 'gives its active meaning to the classical pair of the universal and the particular' (Ibid.: 221). The universal in this sense is tied to a form of topological loyalty (i.e. justice, or what would become 'fidelity' in *BE*) to earlier manifestations and relations of the (Marxist) algebraic. So, Badiou asks, does a contemporary topology 'act according to the dream of June 1936? The echo of May 1968? The sense of isolation, or a beginning' (Ibid.: 222). In other words, invariants manifest

themselves through topological configurations of particular algebraic elements, that reach back to previous expressions of such invariants by means of the particular. This is history qua universal real, a series 'of timeless moments' that become discernible within particular neighbourhoods.

Yet, while the struggle over history is fought on the line between anxiety and courage, either withering back into the splace via the superego, or carried forward by justice into a radically distinct neighbourhood, once again, we should not confuse these 'timeless moments' as signifying history as a teleological sequence. As Badiou has argued, his 'antihistoricism pertains uniquely to the impossibility of integrating things into an overall history [one that could be named], declaring that sequences of worlds, the disparate of worlds, can be reconciled with or organised in a general dynamic' (Badiou and Sedofsky, 2006f: 250). Rather, as Toscano has recognised, 'history and historicity are...withdrawn from the domain of meaning and totality, and rendered over to an interventionist notion of singularity...' (Toscano, 2008: 31). While in my particular reading, historicity is the final manifestation of the "translation" of history into the moment (or splace), the bearer of this translation is, of course, the subject. As Toscano continues

'subjectivity is what forces the unrepresented, that which is foreclosed from the situation, into appearance, in other words, what gives body and voice to what was, viewed from the standpoint of the state of the situation, a nullity. This also means that the Hegelian notion of the absolute in history, of an absolute history—already attacked by the earlier theory of periodisation—is further distanced' (Ibid.).

The obverse of the detotalization of history, is that history as manifestation of the invariant becomes ‘the arena for the revelation of being (inasmuch as what is not being qua being, the illegality of the event, is the only thing that allows the thinking of being qua being, i.e., inconsistency)’ (Ibid.: 33). This thesis begs the question that, if the subject is the manifestation of the ‘discontinuous grasp of the periodisation of political “sequences”’, then how are such sequences encountered in the figure of the historian? Or, more radically, could we argue for a generic subject qua historian that is resultant of the process of subjectivization that emerges with a topology, that engenders an ability to connect a contemporaneous ‘inconsistency’ with the aforementioned ‘dreams’ and ‘echoes’ of earlier topologies? As we will see, the answer must be no. With this in mind, the final section of this chapter will consider Badiou’s engagement with the French poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé’s work (and the figure of the poet) could be said to offer a form of being qua being that gestures towards the historian as *guetteur* or lampbearer. The poet-historian, if we may, who, in their journey from anxiety to courage to justice ‘maintains the memory of the vanished light and of all that it had inspired...’ (Boncardo, 2015: 27).

### **‘From the Bourgeois ship to Sirens with a moustache’**

So far, we have only touched on the concept of the ‘vanishing term’ obliquely. It will be recalled that when it comes to the scission of the place by the outplace, force manifests itself as a vanishing term. That is, the topological consistency of the outplace “appears” only to necessarily disappear, transforming the splace in the process; or conversely, in more reactionary circumstances, the vanishing term is annulled by the splace. As discussed, in the former, Badiou saw the masses as the historical manifestation of the vanishing cause (‘the disappearing fury of the *deviating* masses...the unpredictable storm of their confident revolt

[standing]...up against the figure of the state' (Badiou, 1982/2009: 63)). While in the latter, the masses as placed are aligned with the pre-existing historicity. While clearly assuming the term for his own ends, the idea of the vanishing term was partly informed by Badiou's reading of Mallarmé, and specifically his sonnet 'Stilled beneath the oppressive cloud'.<sup>69</sup> Accompanied by a painting by the Belgium symbolist artist Fernand Khnopff, 'Stilled beneath the Oppressive Cloud' was first published in the April-May edition (1895) of the short-lived German Art Nouveau magazine *Pan*. The poem depicts a tempestuous seascape *sub specie aeternitatis* (Cohn, 1965: 229), centred upon the twin imagery of a sunken ship and drowned siren (although, as Rancière rightly questioned, can a siren ever drown? (Rancière, 2011b: 6)). The imagery of the poem is not stable, but rather for Badiou it is sustained by the vanishing force (which emanates from, but is not immanent to, the drowned siren and the 'sepulcral shipwreck') that gives rise to the disappearing 'foam' or 'spray' and subsequently the 'white trailing tress' or 'thread' left by the siren. In his analysis of this poem, Badiou highlights these two elements, split by the 'or else' of 'or else concealed', as key, and, as will be discussed shortly, symbolise the functions of the splace

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'Stilled beneath the oppressive cloud  
that basalt and lava base  
likewise the echoes that have bowed  
before a trumpet lacking grace

O what sepulcral wreck (the spray).  
knows, but it simply drivels there)  
ultimate jetsam cast away  
abolishes the mast stripped bare

or else concealed that, furious  
failing some great catastrophe  
all the vain chasm gaping wide

in the so white and trailing tress  
would have drowned avariciously  
a siren's childlike side'

(Mallarmé, 2006: 78)

and the outplace, and the return of the real. As he describes, these two elements of Mallarmé's work, the ship and the siren 'are the two vanishing terms that support the fact that there is something (the foam) rather than nothing (the oppressive cloud)' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 78). But, as he questions, 'why two vanishing terms'? Why is it necessary for the real to 'manifest' twice?

To answer this (and relate its importance for questions of history and historicity), we need to understand that for Badiou, the cloud and the sea signify the abyss, but the abyss as placed within the splace ('the legal place presupposed by any event' (Ibid.: 76)), what he terms 'the low-ceilinged oppressiveness of the nothing' (Ibid) and would later be termed the 'state of the situation'. The first splace is the 'virgin page' upon which Mallarmé writes. This is the 'original metaphor for the splace-in-itself' (ibid.: 77). It is into this splace, which seeks to maintain the coordinates of strong difference, that Mallarmé introduces the 'network of weak differences, organized in metonymies (ship mast, horn; siren, hair)'. It is the 'transition from one to the other by way of causality of lack supported by the vanishing terms: the ship's wreck and the siren's drowning, of which what is – the foam – is the mark out-of-place on the splace's desolation' (Ibid.: 78-79). Yet, Badiou highlights how the 'avaricious' sea (splaced abyss) forever seeks to subsume this heterogeneity into the homogenous, with the outcome being, as Badiou notes with reference to Mallarmé's 1897 poem 'A Dice Throw At Any Time Never will Abolish Chance': 'Nothing will have taken place other than the place' (Ibid.: 79) (in algebraic terms  $A\rho (A\rho)$ ). While the foam is a marker of the vanishing cause – i.e. "the ship" – there is always the danger that in the poem it becomes ensnared in what Badiou terms the 'mundane differences' of the splace. It 'exists out-of-place' but 'finds itself placed...under the law of the place' (Ibid.: 79-80). Badiou acknowledges that if we were

presented with just this scenario, then that would be ‘the end of our troubles’ in the interpretation of the poem. It would simply be a case of ‘the ship and the siren, [returning] to the nullity of the abyss, [where we would] divide the foam according to the cause (the vanishing side) and according to consistency (the effective but really mute trace, which ‘slobbers on’)’ (Ibid.: 80). However, there are two vanishing terms, split by ‘or else’. The obliterated ship, traced by the dissolving foam, and the siren, ‘drowned stingily’, marked by a ‘white and trailing tress’. As such, we are asked to make a distinction:

‘These two negations do not belong to the same species. The first offers a figure for the vanishing of the causal term; the second annuls the vanishing itself. And, against the backdrop of this revocation, the second and final vanishing term (the ~~siren~~) takes flight.’ (Ibid.)

Immediately following this, Badiou returns to the historical example of Maoism, seeing in the two negations of ‘Still Beneath the Oppressive Cloud’ the pattern of periodization discussed earlier. ‘You see’, Badiou contends, ‘in Maoism, we must produce the destruction of the bourgeoisie twice’:

‘First of the old bourgeoisie, the classical one, for which Leninism provides the means to destroy its apparatus. And then of the new one, the state bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which as Maoism teaches us sprouts up even among the instruments of the first destruction, the Leninist party and the socialist State.’ (ibid.)

As we ‘pass poetically from ship to siren’, we do so from the Soviet state to Maoism. It is ‘by way of the vanishing of the first figure, whence the necessity of the second is engendered’



(Ibid.: 81). Once the 'bourgeois ship' has sunk, Badiou argues, 'we have to consider the communist plunge of the sirens of the State...[even] sirens with a moustache' (Ibid.). In short, there is a 'causality of lack'; as Badiou notes with regard to Mallarmé's 'or else', [t]hat which was lacking, the ship, or the ~~ship~~, must come to lack in its lack so that the ~~siren~~, *qua* ideal, may come into being' (ibid.) In such moments, we find ourselves back on the terrain of Badiou's 1969 essay 'Mark and Lack' (see Chapter Two). That is, to "count" the lack, we must do so from another place, which itself would have to be reckoned from another site, etc. To repeat a point made by Bosteels earlier, this process of the lack of lack is the *force* that when "incorporated" into the splace as the naming point of annulment (i.e., the "naming" of the void) 'stands in a relation of internal exclusion to its determining place' (Bosteels, 2006: 175). This 'special operation', Badiou argues towards end of his analysis, is 'typical of Mallarmé's dialectical machines, by which they undertake from within the suppression of their first negative metaphor'. On a larger scale, and admittedly returning to the danger of transperiodization, what we are identifying in this process of the vanishing term and its annulment is the locus of the rupture which engenders (or necessitates) a new period. 'Periodize and pass beyond' Badiou argues with reference the Maoist approach to political history. There is '[n]o halting point', he continues. Alluding to the refrain in 'The Internationale' he states: "Success, failure, new success, new failure, and thus all the way to the final victory" (Ibid.: 91). Yet, 'the 'final victory' in question is only the one prescribed by the periodization.' Ultimately, for Badiou, '[t]here is no final victory that is not relative. Every victory is the beginning of a failure of a new type' (ibid.). We have reached the point where Badiou distinguishes between Mallarmé's structural dialectic (where the vanishing point is annulled, 'or else') and the historical dialectic (which splits that structure via the permanent effects of the lack of lack). With the former, the 'poem, which is supposed to be

finite, does not end in a loop, nor does it suggest the principle of an iterative descending infinity' (Ibid.: 91); while the latter leaves a 'trace...behind in the social world' (Ibid.: 71), one that 'the Maoist *guetteur* is meant to preserve as well as deploy in order to orient their political praxis' (Boncardo, 2015: 18), which recalls the notions of courage and justice discussed earlier. In the 'temporal expansion-constriction' that the Maoist *guetteur* or lampbearer enacts in outlining the trace 'left behind' in the present, the essential concept for Badiou in *TS* is once again that of the 'masses'. For Badiou, 'Mallarmé stops', while 'Mao does not' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 91). For Mao (as discussed earlier) the masses are the manifestation of the invariant, while for Mallarmé, as Badiou discussed in the seminar that immediately followed his analysis of 'Still Beneath the Oppressive Cloud', the masses occupy a more ambiguous position. In conclusion of this Chapter, I will now explore this distinction and question what it offers for my characterisation of the militant historian.

### **The *guetteurs* of the Future Cause**

In Badiou's seminar 'Jewellery for the sacred of any subtraction of existence', he explores an anecdote by Mallarmé published in 1895. The anecdote explores one of Mallarmé's common themes, his relationship to the masses (or crowd) via his poet-persona. It is based on an encounter he had with a group of railway labourers, who, building a canteen for the workers near his property in rural Valvins, Northern France, disturb his pastoral contemplation when one of the men kicks his gate:

'Filthy scum!' is hurled violently, accompanied by a few kicks at the gate: I understand at whom the compliment is aimed...' (Mallarmé, 2006: 131)

As Boncardo has recognised, the encounter between the aesthete in his rural retreat and the workers would no doubt have struck a chord with Badiou's own encounter with the workers of the Chausson car factory in Reims in '68 (Boncardo, 2015: 10). Badiou himself has recently reflected on that moment as his 'main experience of May 68' (Badiou, 2019a). He realised 'from that moment on' that 'two worlds – which I had imagined as separate – could go beyond this paradigm':

'While being a Marxist and recognizing the importance of the working-class world, it was very far in terms of existence from the philosophy teacher that I was then in Reims. In 1968, I realized that teachers could, as we did, march to the Chausson factory. Little by little, we were accepted...The class barrier did not prevent us from building a political and fraternal project. It was a defining moment in my life, and I remained true to what happened during that sequence.' (Ibid. 2019a)

While the poet-persona's rendezvous with the 'other class' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 98) in *Conflict* did not result in the formation of Mallarmé the poet-worker, the labourers actions compel Mallarmé to reflect on the bourgeois site of his contemplation. At one point, faced with the drunken workers resting outside his retreat, Mallarmé asks himself: 'So I am going to marvel and muse freely' (Mallarmé, 2006: 133). Then again,

'No, my gaze cannot escape toward the horizon from the window where I am leaning, without some part of me inappropriately over-stepping those scattered plague victims, which would show a lack of courtesy and propriety in my turn; from my own standpoint, I must appreciate their mysteriousness and assess their task: for bread was not enough for them (unlike the majority and more fortunate ones)—first they worked for a substantial part of the week to gain it; and now here they are, with no knowledge of tomorrow, crawling through the haze

and digging motionlessly—making as big a hole in their destiny as the one they have dug daily till now in the reality of the ground (a foundation for a temple, assuredly). *By stopping, waiting, and momentarily committing suicide, they honourably retain the sacred part of existence, without witnessing what it is or what lightning-bolts this festal occasion is shedding* (Ibid.: 133-134. Emphasis added)

The last part of this extract points towards the masses as real, as the manifestation of the ‘sacred part of existence’ that is the vanishing point of the lack of lack in the splace (i.e. the lack that gave rise to the proletariat encounters a second lack in their committing symbolic suicide). Yet, this revelation of the eternal for Mallarmé is ‘reduced to social proportions’, downgraded to the ‘invok[ing] [of] one and another according to their mothers or their provinces’. While the alcoholic stupor facilitates a momentary symbolic death for Mallarmé, he would turn away from advocating a more enduring form of ‘violent political praxis’ (Boncardo, 2015: 12). Yet, for Badiou, ‘contrary to what Mallarme says, [the riot] is indeed the exact form of the crowd as vanishing term, which is ‘sufficiently tumultuous’ to cause the spectacular restructuring of time itself’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 67). It is possible to argue that this is the ‘distinction between Mallarmé and Badiou’, a division ‘between a thought that grasps [via fiction] the insubstantiality of the social bond but goes no further than articulating a *modus vivendi* with it, and a thought that posits the necessity of using this insubstantiality as a spur to a transformative praxis...’ (Boncardo, 2015: 15). As Badiou rightly recognised, Mallarmé ‘wanted nothing less than to empower the City with a book and a theatre in which the infinite and mute capacity of the masses which he names the crowd - would finally find what it takes to produce, by withdrawing from it, its complete

emblem' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 66).<sup>70</sup> Such moments of insubstantiality open the masses up to history, the masses as an 'arena for the revelation of being' (Toscano, 2008: 33). There is something inherently theatrical about this moment for Badiou, the moment of 'evental concatenation that is called history' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 63). Certainly, in the realm of politics 'only one link is required: trust, which must be granted, as in the theatre, in order for the fiction to work' (Ibid.: 86). When faced with the unknown of the radically new, 'their remains only the internal confidence of the masses, which is the reciprocal support of their truth *qua* fiction' (Ibid.).

But what of the figure of the poet and/or intellectual in this 'revelation of being', this 'evental concatenation'? Boncardo argues that for Badiou, Mallarmé occupies a 'liminal position between the positive and negative poles of the forms of praxis in which such a figure can engage' (2015: 12). What Badiou does point towards in *Conflict* is how Mallarmé's prose is 'consubstantial with its consistency' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 69). That is, speaking of the masses in their post-evental historical existence (historicity) is to speak in the register of the masses who *were* once history (however corrupted (co-opted) that language may have become by the established order). In the preface to *TS*, Badiou argues that 'the potential forces at the heart of the people are kept at a distance from their proper concept' (Ibid.: 14) via the obfuscations of ideology. Yet, equally for Badiou, it is impossible to *identify* these potential forces directly, as 'any attempt to institute in a lasting way the forms of its creative impatience, or to define its state of affairs, changes the mass movement into its opposite...the statist disappearance of their historical apparition' (Ibid.: 64). While a mass

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<sup>70</sup> This, it could be argued, is one of the sources of the widely perceived 'difficulty' of Mallarmé's writing. In that, as Rancière has argued, his writing 'obeys a demanding poetics...which responds to an acute awareness of the complexity of a historical moment and the way in which, in this moment, the 'crisis of verse' was linked to a crisis of the ideal and of the social.' (Rancière, 2011b: xvi).

movement appears '*without a trace* on the vast stages of the historical splace' and one can only speak of its appearance from the position, *post -facto*, of a consistency that the movement itself has facilitated, 'no political project has any future' if it does not remain alert to 'the direction indicated by the founding disappearance of the mass movement' (Ibid.: 64). What this means, is that one must 'search the contemporary political landscape for the subject' (Feltnam, 2008: 75) and identify what elements have yet to be subsumed into the symbolic order. It is this process of examining the traces of the vanishing term from within the splace that can sustain the subject's potential to transform. Badiou makes this point himself:

'No matter how stable, or even ossified, it may appear to be, a historical thing presents the border of the disappeared movement from which results its presence in the whole, that is, the actuality of its future destruction, just as on those stumps washed up on the shore the dried foam marks a border of the dead sea, which is also the tide's reversible imminence' (Badiou, 1982/2015: 71)

The point I am making is that these traces of a vanishing term are manifested in sites of historicity, and the *guetteur* or lookout plays a central role in their identification. Mao, for Badiou, was one of the figures 'to have insisted that the revolutionary Marxist is the lookout for the vanishing term, emblem of the new within the old.' Such a figure, the above mentioned lampbearer and *guetteur*, is the 'guardian of the future of the cause' (Ibid.). Here we touch on the *raison d'être* of the militant historian. To use the concepts of *TS*, the militant historian seeks to reconnect the masses to the unspoken/repressed vanishing terms; they anxiously survey the landscape of historicity, seeking the remnants of subject/events etc. that may have given form to the vanishing cause but have since been

nullified; and with a renewed desire (courage), they assess what has been betrayed and seek to reconnect the masses to the universal invariant manifested in a past event, in short, they pursue justice. As Bosteels recognised, this is the key importance of Marx and Freud for Badiou. The former 'listened to the popular uprisings of 1848 and responded in the *future anterior* with the hypothesis of a proletarian political capacity', while the latter 'listened to the hysterical interruptions of the familiar discourse on sexuality and love in order to respond with the intervening doctrine of psychoanalysis' (Bosteels, 2004: 164. Emphasis added). In 2019, when asked of his opinions on the current political situation Badiou reaffirmed the need for this kind of detective work. Nearly four decades after the publication of *TS*, one could argue it serves as a call for the work of the militant historian:

[We are] almost at the stage at which the unlucky Karl Marx was when he wrote the *Communist Manifesto* so forcefully, on 21 February 1848. At the time, the communist party he wrote about was represented almost exclusively by him and Friedrich Engels. Today, the priority is ideological and experimental: are there political issues where we can try new models that are in open conflict with the dominant order... Experiments must be linked to a *careful, prolonged and systematic examination of Marxism, but also to the revolutionary attempts of the twentieth century as a whole. What really happened in Petrograd and Shanghai? What is the balance sheet? What formulation allows us to avoid the failures of these undertakings?* It's a huge work! *We have to combine experimentation rooted in concrete situations with this vast collective examination of the general balance-sheet of socialism during the century and a half of its existence.* We need to get down to this.' (Badiou, 2019a. Emphasis added)

To identify the distortions of the space by the real, one requires a finite mark to facilitate the "reading" of the unoccupiable "space" of infinity (see Chapter Two). It is akin to listening

to soundwaves from a black hole, where the quantifiable pressure waves disclose the immeasurable compression of the dying star. However, as Badiou observes with reference to Mallarmé, while the 'vanishing term is the centre of gravity of the whole mechanism of the poems', the effects of the vanishing terms are themselves annulled through the poetic arrangements of this lack (Badiou, 1982/2013: 109). What Badiou means here is that, as noted earlier, 'there is an unprecedented use of metonymical sequence[s]' in Mallarmé's poetry (the ship and the siren for example), where one metaphor is negated by another and the 'causality of lack is reduplicated' (Ibid.). Towards the end of the seminar 'Jewellery for the sacred of any subtraction of existence' Badiou argues in a passage that could be directed at historicism, that he is 'not swayed by an order of things in which all thought is devoted to the inspection of that which subordinates it [the lack] to the placement of an absence [i.e. the quantifiable marking of the absence] and which brings salvation for the subject only in the already-thereness of a star' (Ibid.: 110). Essentially for Badiou, the translation of a rupture into an established language annuls the 'exception in the signifier' (Ibid.: 11). What this means in terms of the 'collective examination of the general balance-sheet', is that the translation of history into historicity always has an element that eludes transcription (neatly summed up in the title of the opening seminar in *TS* as 'Everything that belongs to a whole constitutes an obstacle to this whole insofar as it is included in it' which is an impossibility (Ibid.: 3)). It is the job of the militant historian to search for these unnamed vanishing points, just as Marx and Freud did, indicating a potentiality, a capacity, which is as yet unspoken. Or more accurately, it is to experience the '[a]nxiety [that] maintains the memory of the vanished light' (Davis, 1959: 108; quoted (and translated) in Boncardo, 2015: 27) . 'That is why' Badiou has argued, 'anxiety is said to be a 'lamp bearer', carrier of light', which



'is not so much its reality as much as its *duty*. Its dialectical duty, which requires that at the point of anxiety the other subjectivizing figure comes in, the one which breaks up the order of things and tolerates its scission: courage.' (Badiou, 1982/2012: 108)

While *Being and Event* and *Logic of Worlds* enrich and modify the discoveries of *Theory of the Subject*, *TS* remains a foundational work in Badiou's oeuvre. Nevertheless, accusations that the process of subjectivization is *de facto* assumed in *TS* pressed Badiou to offer greater detail, which in *BE* took the form of a more concerted engagement with the mathematics of set theory. While admittedly important for the conceptualisation of history, historicity, and the historian, Chapter 5 will place greater emphasis on how *BE* and *LW* elaborated the conceptualisation of history as the manifestation of the 'Event'; truth as a correlate of history; the subject as embodied by a fidelity to this truth; and finally, the further development of the concept of periodisation in light of these elaborations. It is to this that we must now turn.

## Chapter Five: The Historian as ‘retroactive agent of interventional practice’: *Being and Event and Logic of Worlds*

‘There are high-school teachers in France who try to educate students in line with the maxim inscribed over the front door of every public school: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. These teachers are still trying to work out just what the French revolution is, and what it entails, in the field of education. The French revolution is not yet closed. *Aux armes citoyens!* The revolution is not yet over’ (Felman, 2008: 102-103).

In *A Man in Love*, the third volume of his epic six book series *My Struggle*, the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard wrote, ‘The past is only one of many possible futures, as Thure Erik was wont to say. It wasn’t the past you had to avoid and ignore, it was its ossification. The same applied to the present’ (Knausgaard, 2013: 344). With obvious allusions to Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, this offers a useful entrée into Badiou’s permanently shifting relationship to Marxism throughout the 1970s; an ever-fluctuating liaison frequently fought on the terrain of history and historicity. Like the eponymous figure of *My Struggle*, Badiou was acutely attuned to the ossification of previous political configurations, groupings, and practices, that were no longer suited to the contemporary site of political struggle. The shifting political landscape of post-68 France and specifically ‘the explosion and subsequent collapse of France’s Marxist consensus, which had its roots in a deep crisis of the political left’ (Chabal, 2016: 247), rendered redundant the previous affiliations and common projects. In the context of that era, the Marxist analysis of the economy could be said to have still held true, but Marxism as a militant strategy of political engagement was desperately out of sync with the changing referents of French society. As Badiou himself summarised, ‘[to] be the subject of the crisis of Marxism is the opposite of being its object. What does it mean to be its object? It means to defend Marxism, to defend the doctrinal corpus against destruction.

It means to keep artificially alive all the dead referents at the level of discourse. It means to keep laying claims on history, whereas the credit line has long run out' (1985/2018: 62).

While mindful of how this thesis has sought to reveal Badiou's long retreat from the orthodox ideas of historical materialism (see Chapters Two and Four), and to take account of what is left along his philosophical shoreline, it was not until the second half of the 1970s that we saw what Feltnam has identified as 'the almost complete disappearance of Marxist vocabulary – party, dialectic, revolution, proletariat – from Badiou's work...' (2008: 85).

Published two years after the transformation of his Maoist group the UCFml into the L'Organisation Politique, *Can Politics be thought? (CPT)* (1985/2018) marked Badiou's recognition of the ossification, or, in the language of *Theory of the Subject*, the periodisation of a particular form of Marxist thought and language. Yet, it is important to note that one should not confuse the death of one particular form of Marxism for Badiou's renunciation of Marxism *tout court*. Rather, it was a case of 'dividing, multiplying and transforming it' (Feltnam, 2008: 87).

We now know that Badiou is a philosopher of discontinuity, of the break, the rupture. Yet, the language in which these disruptions manifest themselves has at times reached 'chilling heights' (Bosteels, 2006: 190). As we saw in the analysis of *TS* in Chapter Four, Badiou saw change in terms of annihilation, specifically of the old by the new. For example, as one may recall, Badiou argued in *TS* that 'any splace is thus the after-effect or *après-coup* of the destruction of another' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 264). Referring to passages in the 1975 publication *Theory of Contradiction* (see Chapter Four), Bosteels recalls how Badiou during this period saw '[e]very truth' as 'essentially destruction' and most ominously declared that '[h]istory has worked all the better when its dustbins were better filled' (cited in Bosteels,

2006: 190). In time, Badiou confessed that ‘I was, I must admit, a little misguided in *Théorie du sujet* concerning the theme of destruction. I still maintained, back then, the idea of an essential link between destruction and novelty’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 407). The stridency of such earlier statements – that destruction was a prerequisite for regeneration - makes the mid-1970s about turn of Badiou’s relationship to Marxism even more striking.

Retrospectively, one could possibly argue that the events of ’68 had, until 1975, been transformed, *initium novum*, into an ‘origin that from times immemorial precedes and overwhelms the search for a specific truth in the present’ (Bosteels, 2006: 203). As Bosteels further argues, in such moments ‘[k]nowledge of this transcendent origin is then simply imposed and transmitted, instead of being actually detached, which means forever to obscure the possibility that an unprecedented regime of consequences can be initiated in the here and now by a rare temporal act of subjectivation.’ ‘In this denigration’, Bosteels continues, ‘of all present temporality, the obscure figure is fundamentally a figure of death’ (Ibid.). What became clear to Badiou between *TS* and *CPT?* was that truth was ‘an impure and ongoing process that actively destroys the premise of a simple face-off, no matter how heroic or melancholy, between an established order of being and the untainted novelty of an event’ (Ibid.: 204). This post-Maoist shift was identified by Toscano, who noted that

‘[w]ith the publication of *Can Politics be Thought?* (1985), Badiou signals a break, at once philosophical and political, with the very idea of a dialectical transitivity between the politics of non-domination and the system of representation. At the heart of this rupture is a thorough rethinking of the very place of the Two in political subjectivity, no longer to be configured as a destructive antagonism but rather as a discontinuous and event-bound subtraction’ (Toscano, 2004: 142).

As Badiou himself would later reflect, what an event like May '68 'teaches us is rather that the entire effort lies in following the event's consequences, not in glorifying its occurrence. There is no more an angelic herald of the event than there is a hero. Being does not commence' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 210-211). Once again, this transformation came against the backdrop of the diminishing returns of Marxism's traditional referents. For Hallward, 'Badiou's early work was conceived as a contribution to the ongoing *victory* of the proletariat: the subjective power of Marxism springs precisely from actually "victorious Leninism" (*TS*, 144), not from abstract theoretical prescriptions. (This is why, in his early work, there is properly "only one subject" [*TS*, 160, 148].)' He continues,

'His later work, by contrast, begins with an acknowledgment that Marxism and historical victory present, at least in the current state of things, a contradiction in terms (*PP*, 27). The error of classical Marxism as a whole, the later Badiou concludes, was to have mistaken object for subject: "It thought the working class as the class of *workers*," that is, as a sociological category ...' (Hallward, 2003: 39)

While mindful of reducing philosophical transformations to bean counting, it is still noteworthy to remark that while *TS* includes over fifty references to the category of 'workers', *Being and Event (BE)* includes only five. The transition between these two titles - via *CPT?* - recognised that 'because it declared itself to be simultaneously political truth, combative and faithful, *and* knowledge of History...Marxism ended up dying, because it followed the fluctuations of the encyclopaedia under the trial of the relation between language and the State' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 334). Emphasis added). Or, as Hallward remarked more succinctly, '[i]t died because it was un-able to free itself from the "fluctuations" of social categories and objects' (Hallward, 2003: 39). Fundamentally, like the

teacher of the French Revolution in the opening quote, Badiou would come to recognise '68 not as a sociological given, but, in Bosteels words, as 'an ongoing process of fits and starts, of destructions and recompositions, of backlashes and resurrections, of fidelity and the extreme fallout of reaction and obscurantism' (2006: 206). More importantly, central to this sporadic course of amendments, counteractions and re-emergences of '68 as event, was the process of subjectivation; that is, the process that enables the rebirth of the generic truth born of the event via the subject. As Badiou himself contended at the start of *BE*, as with the presumptions around the classification of the worker, this was a process that was 'still-born' in *TS* (1988/2005: 4). Ultimately, with the break from the traditional referents of Marxism the need to theorise being qua being was made more urgent. To this end, Badiou (re)turned to mathematics, summarising this moment as follows:

'The (philosophical) statement that mathematics is ontology – the science of being qua being – is the trace of light which illuminates the speculative scene, the scene which I had restricted, in my *Théorie du sujet*, by presupposing purely and simply that there 'was some' subjectivization. The compatibility of this thesis with ontology preoccupied me, because the force – and absolute weakness – of the 'old Marxism', of dialectical materialism, had lain in its postulation of just such a compatibility in the shape of the generality of the laws of the dialectic, which is to say the isomorphy between the dialectic of nature [i.e. that nature evolved according to some teleological design] and the dialectic of history. This (Hegelian) isomorphy was, of course, still-born.' (Ibid.)

Already, we are in danger of jumping into the fast-running waters of philosophical exegesis without fully understanding the direction in which the river is flowing. It is clearly impossible within the limitations of this work to explore all facets of *Being and Event* and its successor

*Logic of Worlds*. Rather, converging on the still not insubstantial idea of the 'Event', and the associated concepts of 'presentation', 'representation', 'intervention', 'naming', and 'fidelity', and in *LW* the extension of the idea of 'periodisation', this chapter will seek to explore those critical ideas that had and continue to have a direct influence on the conception of history, historicity, and the subject in Badiou's work. Yet, we must first start by exploring in greater detail the text which did so much to force a break between *TS* and *BE* and foregrounded many of the developments found in that latter text.

### **'Marxism is not dead, it is historically destroyed': *Can Politics be Thought?***

As stated, in the second half of the 1970s Badiou began to challenge the traditional left's association of the proletariat as inherently one 'with the necessity of the event itself' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 179). Fundamentally, as Bosteels recognised, the late seventies saw the end of 'any structural or historical guarantees for politics' (Bosteels, 2011: 232). The process of questioning this association (between the proletariat and the event) entailed, in broad terms, the need for a distinction between *politics* and the *political*. One of the individuals who played a significant role in shifting the focus from the datum of class dynamics (*la politique*) to the category of the political (*le politique*) as a realm of engagement distinct from empirical questions, was Jacques Derrida. Aiming squarely at the idea of a transcendental signified, Derrida challenged a totalitarian hold on *la politique*, which in turn served as the ground of being. As he famously argued: 'to affirm that within the decisive concept of ontico-ontological difference, *all is not to be thought at one go*; entity and being, ontic and ontological, "ontico-ontological," are, in an original style, derivative with regard to difference; and with respect to what I...call *différance*, an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring' (my italics, Derrida, 1967/1997: 23). In other words, we

cannot think of politics and the political in the same moment. Derrida's work loomed large in the late 1970s and was one of the key influences on the 'Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political'. Founded at the École Normale Supérieure in November 1980 by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, it was here in January and June 1984, as part of a general seminar series entitled *The Withdrawal of Politics*, Badiou delivered two papers which, when taken together, would form the publication *Can Politics be thought?* (1985/2018).

These papers (and ensuing publication) served, as suggested above, to periodize Badiou's 'Les Années Rouges', and, as a consequence, signpost the future developments of *BE*. Nevertheless, unlike many of his contemporaries, Badiou did not fully turn away from politics (or Marxism), but rather sought to uncouple *la politique* from the 'prescription of the social bond' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 36). Unlike his old master Althusser, he turned away from the party in favour of a politics that was an 'actively intervening-interpreting thought, and not assumption of a power' (Ibid.). His own activity with UCFml and then L'Organisation Politique revealed to Badiou that politics only emerged when 'it touch[ed] upon the real by way of an interruption, and not by way of a gathering' (Ibid; also see Chapter One). To facilitate this, Badiou argued, one must turn away from the 'tyranny of history', so as to facilitate the possibility of chance. Echoing his statements in *TS* (see Chapter Four), Badiou argued in *CPT?* that to enable the event 'history as meaning does not exist', what only exists was 'the periodized occurrence of the a priori of chance' (Ibid.: 37). In this scenario, it was not the death of Marxism per se, but as noted earlier, the shift from being the object of Marxism to the ever-alert subject of its possible application. For Badiou, the subject was no longer the object of Marxism's historical inevitability, but rather, its agent of transformation.



Much of this was discussed in Chapter Three, specifically around the ‘caesura of ’68’ and the later work of Badiou’s UCFml comrade Sylvain Lazarus. But in *CPT?* Badiou goes to great lengths to detail the referents that, in the phraseology used above, comprised the ‘historical credit’ (Badiou, *Ibid.*: 42) of classical Marxism, the credits which had traditionally ‘designated the singularity of Marxism’ and its ‘historically attested right to lay claims on History’ (*Ibid.*: 41). In brief, for Badiou these now periodised credits were Marxism’s more general ‘historical punctuation organized by the political subject, around the theme of victory’ (*Ibid.*: 42), ‘[t]he wars of national liberation’, and ‘the workers’ movement...[specifically] in the metropolis of the West and especially in Western Europe’ (*Ibid.*: 43). It was these three referents that ‘conveyed the conviction that History worked in the direction of the credibility of Marxism’ and which found their realisation in the ‘Marxist political party’ (*Ibid.*: 43). But, with the ossification and negation of Marxist revolutionary praxis in socialist states, the transition from victorious wars of national liberation to the pragmatic mechanisms of state power, and finally, the diminishing returns of proletarian identity in ‘the transition from activism to identity politics throughout the 1960s and 70s (Chabal, 2015: 10), Marxism was cut loose from its moorings, and, in the process, transformed into nothing more than ‘just a discourse’ (Badiou, 1985/2018: 57; See Chapter Four). Moreover, it is no coincidence that, just at the moment when Marxism was being deprived of its referents, anti-Marxist critics sought to preserve the links *between* them. As explored in Chapter Four around the work of Glucksmann and Henri-Levy, there was an ideological attempt to sustain the link between Marxist *politics* (as a form of totalitarianism) and Marxism’s *political* ‘essence’ as a way to discredit it as a whole, replacing it with a ‘conservative democratic spirituality’ (Badiou, 1985/2018: 59).

Alluding to such texts as Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago (1918 - 1956)*, the historian Eric Hobsbawm noted in one of his final publications that it was during this period that Marx and Marxism were 'typecast as the inspirer of terror and gulag, and communists as essentially defenders of, if not participants in, terror and the KGB' (Hobsbawm, 2011: 398). Yet, in the form of periodisation, for Badiou, this ideological sleight of hand served to mark the site of a new form of Marxism. '[B]ecause all anti-Marxist thought about the historical destruction of Marxism turns out to be reactive', Badiou notes in *CPT?*, 'the contemporary being of that which will mark the new figure of politics, and which we might still call "Marxism" insofar as it must continue along the lines of the emancipatory hypothesis, is nothing else than the complete thought of its destruction' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 60). The quotation marks signify that Marxism functions as a generic placeholder for the yet-to-come 'new figure of politics' (which Badiou would continue to label communist); or more precisely, its destruction is only founded *by* the future anterior of this new figure. 'There is a being to this destruction' Badiou argued, a being that is 'immanent to the destruction' (Ibid.) of Marxism's historical referents. To adopt the position of the 'nouveaux philosophes', that is, viewing the death of Marxism's traditional referents from a site external to its transformation, would *only* lead to 'an external concept of the crisis' (Ibid.: 61). Ultimately, for the Badiou of *CPT?*, one must forgo an all-embracing set, some conceptual schema that speaks from an *a priori*. Rather, '[i]t is on the basis of the destroyed Marxism that one experiences the breakthrough of the real which illuminates the historical process of this destruction' (Ibid). Here we begin to detect once again the shift away from the nonexistence of "History" argued for in *TS* (see Chapter Four), to the non-existence of Marxist history in *CPT?*, to "history" itself 'stand[ing] [in] for the untotalisable and the singular' qua Event (Toscano, 2008: 30); history as the 'breakthrough of the real', or as the previously identified

as the latter half of the historico-truth couplet. Certainly, it is clear *CPT?* marks an important crossing point for definitions of history/historicity in Badiou's oeuvre. It continues the movement towards history as the nucleus of inconsistent sets, 'history' as the point of rupture that denies the possibility of any overarching continuity. As we will see in our analysis of *BE*, this conceptualisation of history becomes one of that text's key developments.

Undoubtedly, there is an inevitable tension when one is the subject of the death of Marxism; a subject is born of an unnamed and unknown place, a place that is destroyed and uninhabitable (Badiou, 1985/2018: 63) (also see Chapter Six and the transformation of the historian). This is a place that is neither interior 'to the [traditional] Marxist-Leninist heritage nor the reactive exteriority of anti-Marxism' (ibid.); rather, as Badiou argued in *CPT?*, it is Marxism as a site of torsion. That is, a singular proletarian identity can no longer confront a 'heterogeneity with regard to the figures (including Marxist ones) of domination' which necessitates, in its 'emancipatory dimension', that the historico-political 'must be thought anew' (ibid.: 67). Badiou refers to such a dimension as the 'there is'. He continues:

'The deconstruction of Marxism-Leninism establishes the destruction of Marxism in the guise of the (re)commencement. This scission is the gesture by which we become once again capable of hosting in our midst, albeit at the cost of great anxiety and peril, the "there is" of the real on which an entirely new practice of politics can be founded' (ibid.: 69)

Part One of *CPT?* is entitled 'Destruction', and like the subject that periodizes Marxist-Leninism, to identify destruction one must occupy the 'there is' that marks the inception of 'thought anew', which Part Two names 'Recomposition'. And, while the 'Event' was first

named three years earlier in *TS*, it is in his second chapter that we find its first significant introduction. Badiou begins the codification of the Event by substantializing the 'there is', making clear that the event itself is not a place of datum and certainty, it is rather 'that which comes to be lacking in the facts, and from the point of which the truth of these facts can be assigned' (Ibid.:72). Occupying one of the sites of the historical destruction of Marxism (post '68 France), Badiou begins to see the event as both periodising and opening up the possibility of rebirth; or more accurately, it makes rebirth conceivable *via* periodisation (see Chapter Four).

'The event is not *given*', Badiou continues, 'because the law of all donation is the regime of the One' (Ibid.:78). Rather, whether it is the Marxist-Leninist claim on a given historico-political occurrence, or Bourgeois conceptions of history as homogenous empty time, it is that 'which the qualification of the regime of the One *leaves as a remainder*' which constitutes the realm of the event (Ibid. 78. Emphasis added). As such, faced with the fundamental unknowingness generated by the real as scission of the One, the revelation of the inconsistent set, an events identity 'must gain some consistency' through a groundless 'decision [that] must be taken as to its belonging' (Feltnam, 2008: 103). As Bosteels recognised, for Badiou 'the traditional guarantees of Marxist-Leninism 'are not *given* but must be *produced*' (Bosteels, 2011: 232. Original emphasis). What is required is an *intervention*. Moreover, Badiou argues, the 'event *is...the product of an interpretation*' qua intervention (Badiou, 1985/2018: 78. Emphasis added). We must 'set aside all the facts so that the event may take place' (Ibid. 79), and therefore if one is unable to read *from* the event, if there is an absolute non-relationship between the impasse of the event and some a priori, then one is required to make a wager that 'politicizes a prepolitical situation by the

interpretation it proposes of this situation in which the event is constructed' (Ibid. 101). As Feltnam has commented, it is at this point that 'Badiou's philosophy places a Sartrean pressure upon its interlocutors' (Feltnam, 2008: 133) to actively proceed towards an interpretation of the event, but without the existence of any 'guideposts for the determination of...the event' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 70). As Badiou noted earlier in *TS*, 'haste, not inferable from the symbolic, is the mode in which the subject exceeds [the symbolic] by exposing himself to the real' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 272). It is a 'subjective rapport' that has the 'aleatory nature of a wager' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 85). It is worth noting that one of the later criticisms of this 'subjective rapport' in *LW* was that Badiou relied on 'a rather unclear transcendental structure' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 361) in the theorisation of this 'anonymous subject' (Ibid.). Yet, as Feltnam notes, such a criticism negates the fact that there are 'structural constraints' on the subject's interpretation/intervention. 'It is quite possible' Feltnam argues, 'for the procedure of forcing to come across multiples that are not connected to the event, and thus do not form one of its consequences' (Feltnam, 2008: 106).

As Badiou himself notes

'Nonetheless it would be unreasonable to imagine that the intervention is subtracted from every conjunctural constraint and singularly from any constraint of duration. Whoever has done a bit of politics knows to what extent it is, with regard to the situation, under pressure of some urgency. It depends on our keeping up with this urgency whether the true will come to be' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 97))

The second rebuttal to the notion of some transcendent being is that 'subjects...that are posterior to event [sic.] are not heroic individuals, but enquiries and practices that take place

*between and through* individuals - a political subject is a meeting, a tract or a protest rally, not an individual...' (Feltnam, 2008: 106. Original emphasis). When faced with the 'there is' of an event, rather than a symptom of some boundless generic procedure, the subject is situated between 'an event to be elucidated and an event that elucidates' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 97). In such moments we are back to Meillassoux's view of Badiou's conception of history as 'fragmented' or discontinuous (2011: 4). But, more importantly here, echoing the temporal contraction-expansion explored in *TS*, what we see emerging in *CPT?* is nothing less than *historical investigation as a theory of time*, where intervention or elucidation, as Bartlett has recognised, becomes 'time itself' (Bartlett, 2011: 117). As Badiou concludes towards the end of *CPT?*, to ignore the true, the remainder, or the forbidden is to ignore the 'voice of time' (Ibid.: 93), that is, the continued exploration of the eternal via contemporary struggles.

Mired in discussions of Marxism's legacy, for Badiou, the Nouveaux Philosophes of the late 1970s and early 1980s were doing just that. And faced with the reactionary approach to the crisis of traditional Marxist referents noted earlier, *CPT?* closes with what one could be regarded as indirect critiques of those unwilling to see the crisis as an opportunity to transmute a newly emergent invariant truth into a transfigured historicity. To enact this, what is required, Badiou argues, is an 'intervention by wager, which refers to the event in the hypothesis that some Other is hiding beneath the Same, that some Two has been counted by the structure of the One' (Badiou, 1985/2018: 101). In their elision with the 'conservative democratic spirituality', figures such as Glucksmann, Pascal Bruckner, and Alain Finkielkraut, were engaging in an intervention that was, in Badiou's words, 'null'. If politics 'often boils down to having to ask the right question' as Bosteels cites Badiou as

saying (Bosteels, 2011: 237), they ‘ask[ed] a question about the situation that produce[d] no effect whatsoever [that could have been] of any service to qualify the situation’ (Badiou, 1985/2018: 105). Rather, theirs was a ‘dogmatic intervention’ that was ‘itself [a] correlate of the structure’ (ibid). Faced with the crisis of the political, they sided with politics as the ‘assumption of power’ and not politics as ‘an actively intervening-interpreting thought’ (Bosteels, 2018: 36).

Once again, in the logic of periodisation, Badiou detected in the closing notes of Marxism-Leninism, the opening harmonies of this new ‘intervening-interpreting thought’. What was required now was to develop a formal system that could develop a rigorous understanding of the event’s necessary interlocutor. Amongst the conceptual instruments that emerged from this exploration, and which will serve as the parameters of my encounter with *BE*, are those of ‘intervention’, ‘forcing’, ‘naming’, and sustaining a ‘fidelity’ to the event. All these terms, as we will see, are crucial to the ideas of history and historicity as elucidated in the previous chapter and associated conceptualisation of the militant historian that is proposed in this thesis.

### ***Being & Event: The one is not: History as singularity***

In studies that set out to examine an influential text in a philosopher’s oeuvre, a commonly asserted truism is that it is impossible to do it justice. Yet, such a platitude is particularly apt when examining Badiou’s *Being and Event*. While *TS* was certainly a major step in the codification of Badiou’s philosophy, *BE* could still be considered the first of his books to synthesise the diverse strands that comprise his entire intellectual output, engaging, but not limited to, politics, psychoanalysis, epistemology, language, mathematics, ethics, logic,

aesthetics and history. Moreover, unlike many of his fellow French philosophers who have been characterised (mainly by US and UK academics – see Angermuller, 2015) in contradistinction to the analytical tradition as ‘continental’, Badiou’s work, as should now be clear, ‘overleaps the great rift that is supposed to have opened up between these two intellectual cultures...’ (Norris, 2009: 1). As we know from such early essays as ‘IS’ (1968/2012) and ‘ML’ (1969/2012) (see Chapter Two), it is specifically in the register of mathematics that Badiou straddles these two modes of philosophical enquiry. And what mathematics offered Badiou, beyond its ability to explore its own materiality (see Chapter Two), was its capacity to examine how truth surpassed the ‘finite support’ of those ‘subjectivizations’ that ‘manifested’ it (Badiou, 1988/2005: 395). As Watkins (2017) has noted of Badiou’s work:

‘What it shows is that the field where there is nothing truly transmissible, the field of history or discourse, this lack of transmissibility can be compensated for by the discipline, mathematics, where there is transmissibility. In transmitting a law of consistent inconsistency to the discursive realm, Badiou shows how set theory is not an analogy with how things are in the history of the world. Rather, it expresses formally what we have already realized discursively. What is included in a set is decided by what the set decides to include, not what the things included are, a formalized way of stating our basic axiom of communicability: not what a statement says but that it can be said...*This is what Badiou has to mean by history, the local contingency of every single term as regards its belonging, inclusion, non-belonging or non-inclusion.*’ (139. Emphasis added)

I would question this concluding sentence, pointing to the division made in the previous chapter between history and historicity, with the latter being the fragments and/or residue



of previous events that distorted the space and have possibly themselves been periodised by succeeding events (i.e., history). Although, what Watkins is proposing serves a useful way of understanding the process of inclusion and belonging that Georg Cantor's work, in Badiou's hands, allows us to explore.

One of Badiou's earliest engagements with 'the Paradise...Cantor created' (Hilbert, 1926) was in *TS*. In the chapter entitled 'Neighbourhoods' and a subsection labelled 'Cantor's theorem and the inexhaustion of history', Badiou argued that 'in one fell swoop by Cantor...[he] provide[d] a unifying language of such powers of generality that in comparison the ancient objects of mathematical denotation must appear as contrived artefacts' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 216). At the heart of this language, Badiou would later specify in *BE*, is the exploration of 'the abyss which separates numerical discretion from the geometrical continuum' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 281). As Badiou maintains, '[t]his abyss is none other than that which separates  $\omega_0$ , infinite denumerable domain of finite numbers, from the set of its parts  $p(\omega_0)$ , the sole set able to fix the quantity of points in space' (Ibid.: 281).<sup>71</sup> Cantor himself spent many a 'hard night of thought and calculation' (Ibid.: 295) seeking a resolution to this problem, which, in layman's terms, was one of seeking a 'one-to-one correspondence between the natural numbers [1,2,3 etc.] and the real numbers [a real number denotes the value of a distance along a line, such a measurement could be one of mass, time, speed, etc.]' (Koeller, 2013.). For the 19<sup>th</sup> century mathematician, '[t]aking the existence of a one-to-one correspondence as a criterion for when two sets have the same size...this result show[ed] that there is more than one level of infinity' (Ibid). Why? Because, as Richard

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<sup>71</sup>  $\omega_0$  is shorthand for that which is on the threshold of infinity.

Dedekind noted in 1872 'The straight line  $L$  is infinitely richer in point-individuals than the domain  $R$  of rational numbers in number-individuals' (cited in Hallett, 1984: 25). For Koellner, 'Cantor immediately tried to determine whether there were any infinite sets of real numbers that were of *intermediate* size, that is, whether there was an infinite set of real numbers that could not be put into one-to-one correspondence with the natural numbers and could not be put into one-to-one correspondence with the real numbers' (Koeller, 2013). The outcome was the *continuum hypothesis* which revealed 'that there is no such set of real numbers' (Ibid.); or that there are more real numbers than there are natural numbers, and we cannot simply draw a line from the latter to the former, the gap is unbridgeable. As Badiou remarked, this was a situation that 'tormented Cantor[']s...desire for foundation' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 295), but equally gave rise to the set theory universe that became central to Badiou's mature work.<sup>72</sup>

Written in natural (i.e., non-mathematical) language, Badiou's early considerations of Cantor in *TS* were an effective entrée to the algorithmic examples he would later serve up in *BE*. For example, he outlines that '[f]or the mathematics of set theory as much for the true materialist, all totality is particular', from which it is only a short step to the recurring theme in *TS* 'that universal history, conceived as the actual totality of political events, for example, is an inconsistent notion' (See Chapter Four; Badiou, 1982/2013: 217). Cantor showed Badiou that there was no 'formal apparatus...[that] lend[s] itself to being unified into the global perception of a course of history...' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 217). That was because, as explored above, 'one cannot bi-univocally correlate the set of the *parts* of a set and the set

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<sup>72</sup> As Aczel noted, for Cantor the foundation of the infinite was the realm of God. He believed this to the point of believing that the Continuum Hypothesis was itself the word of God. Something Badiou clearly rejected (Aczel, 2000: 132).

of its *elements*. The first multiplicity necessarily exceeds the second' (Ibid. Original Emphasis). The point of impossibility, the subject of unattainable univocality which is positioned on the edge of the void, is the illogical figure that would be necessary for the recognition of the whole. As Badiou specified in *TS*:

'Either the universe is closed, total, and then there is something strictly indistinguishable, since you do not have enough proper names at your disposal in the universe to distinguish its parts, or else one can always distinguish, but then the universe does not form a whole, there is some excess, by which you give rise to a proper name beyond the supposed totality' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 219).

Ultimately, 'the universe always contains more things than those it can name according to these things. Whence its inexistence' (Ibid.). By the time of *BE*, this is summarised in one line from Plato's *Parmenides*: 'If the one is not, nothing is' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 31). Serving as an epithet to Meditation Two of that volume, Badiou declares that this in many ways symbolises his 'entire discourse' (Ibid.). He reaches this decision following an analysis of the one and the multiple in the preceding Meditation (Ibid.: 23-30). In this he questions that 'if being is one, then one must posit that what is not one, the multiple, is not' (Ibid.: 23). However, following Cantor, Badiou continues, 'this is unacceptable for thought, because what is presented *is* multiple and one cannot see how there could be an access to being outside all presentation' (Ibid. Emphasis added). In the earlier *CPT?*, Badiou made this point in relation to the aforementioned crisis of Marxism, when he asserted that '[w]hat the crisis of the political unveils is that all sets are inconsistent, that there is neither Frenchmen nor proletariat [to speak of the latter is to speak of the working class as object, see above], and that, for this very reason, the figure of representation just as much as its obverse, the figure

of spontaneity, are themselves inconsistent...’ (Badiou, 1985/2018: 32-22). Moreover, it was this line of reasoning that also led to the attack, explored, on the lineages that constituted Marxism’s historical credit (victory, national liberation, and workers’ movement).

The inconsistency of ‘Frenchmen’ or ‘proletariat’ occurs because there is a gap between what Badiou terms in *BE* ‘presentation’ and ‘representation’. That is, the ‘gap between  $a$  (which counts-as-one the belongings, or elements) and  $p(a)$  (which counts-as-one the inclusions, or subsets)...’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 83). In this sense, presentation for Badiou is, as noted earlier, the fundamental expression ‘of metaontology...’ (Ibid.: 519). It is multiplicity *as* multiplicity. As Olivia Lucca Fraser has correctly identified, ‘[p]resentation is reciprocal with ‘inconsistent multiplicity’’ (cited in Corcoran, 2015: 266); that is, as noted above in relation to Cantor, the set of parts which are never countable by the set of elements.

Therefore, there is no concluding presentation, no definitive One of multiples, the presentation of multiples is presentation itself; that is, the general form of presentation *is* the generic multiple, which is, in Badiou’s definition, truth. Representation is for Badiou a ‘[m]ode of counting, or of structuration, proper to the state of a situation’ (Ibid.: 521). When something is represented in a ‘situation’ (see below), it is ‘included...in the situation; that is, it is a part of the situation’ (Ibid.). The fundamental ontological relations of presentation and representation are ones of belonging and inclusion, which are represented by the mathematical symbols of  $\in$  (belonging) and  $\subset$  (inclusion). For Badiou, existence, being itself, *is* presentation, it *is* the multiplicity of presentation itself. A multiplicity belongs to presentation, it receives its first count, is ‘*presented*’ (Ibid. 99). While in representation the multiple is ‘counted as one by the metastructure, or state of the situation...This means that

it belongs [ $\in$ ] to the situation (presentation), and that it is equally included [ $\subset$ ] in the situation (representation). It is a term-part' (Ibid.: 99).

The above suggests that the concept crucial to understanding the operation of presentation and representation is that of 'situation'. For Badiou, the situation is '[a]ny consistent presented multiplicity', or 'a multiple...and a regime of the count-as-one... or structure' (Ibid.: 522). In this there are both the situation qua presentation, and situation qua representation. The latter is the site of consistent multiplicity, the multiplicity resultant of the count of one. The former is common to inconsistent multiplicity, where the state of the situation presents but does not include multiplicities or subsets of multiples. There is always an excess of subsets of presentation over the consistent multiple of representation Badiou argues, which means 'that however exact the quantitative knowledge of a situation maybe, one cannot, other than by an arbitrary decision, estimate by 'how much' its state exceeds it' (Ibid.: 278). However, in terms of the relationship between presentation and representation, between inclusion and belonging in the situation, Badiou sees three conditions: *Normal*, *Excrescence*, *Singular* (Badiou, 1988/2005: 99). 'Normal' is when a multiple is 'both presented and represented' (Ibid.). For example, such a situation would be when a citizen is presented, i.e., counted as part of a nation's population, but is also recognised by the state as a legal resident of said nation. Excrescence is a 'term which is represented but not presented...' (Ibid.). As Hallward (2003) notes, an illustration of such a situation would be 'if our normal army platoon was given fully covert or "special operations" status, it would continue to be included in the state but would become effectively invisible to the ordinary members of the situation' (99), it would be represented but not presented. Conversely, the final term in this triplet is that of singular, 'which is presented but not represented' (Badiou,

1988/2005: 99). Badiou uses the example of the family to illustrate this concluding concept.

As he explains, if

‘a family of people is a presented multiple of the social situation (in the sense that they live together in the same apartment, or go on holiday together, etc.) and it is also a represented multiple, a part, in the sense that each of its members is registered by the registry office, possesses French nationality, and so on [it is normal]. If, however, one of the members of the family, physically tied to it, is not registered and remains clandestine, and due to this fact never goes out alone, or only in disguise, and so on, it can be said that this family, despite being presented, is not represented. It is thus singular. In fact, one of the members of the presented multiple that this family is, remains, himself, un-presented within the situation.’ (Ibid.: 174)

Within the province of this thesis, it is this last term, the singular, and the gap between presentation and representation that it points towards, that concerns us in terms of rethinking definitions of history considering Badiou’s oeuvre. Or more precisely, how the act of intervention in naming the ‘unrepresented within the situation is not just central to the designation of the historical but becomes, via the operation of subjectivization (see below), synonymous with the manifestation of history qua generic truth itself. In what we have previously referred to as ‘Bourgeois historicism’ (see Introduction and Chapter One), the gap of decision is expunged. As Badiou argues, in such approaches ‘[k]nowledge, in its encyclopaedic disposition, never encounters anything. It presupposes presentation, and represents it in language via discernment and judgement’ (ibid.: 395). There is no real choice to be made, apart from one of distinction. In such moments what emerges is a form of professional conceit. As Badiou summarises in Meditation Twenty-Nine, one recognises how in such forms the ‘expert’ is the gatekeeper between presentation and representation, a

warden of the ‘construction of legitimate groupings’, smoothing the path of “knowledge” to ‘state jurisdiction’. He continues:

‘The universal valorization of ‘competence’... is its basest product: all it comes down to is guaranteeing the competence of he who is capable of naming realities such as they are. But what is at stake here is a lazy nominalism, for our times do not even have the time for authentic knowledge. The exaltation of competence is rather the desire – in order to do without truth – to glorify knowledge without knowing.’ (Ibid.: 310)

What such a historian fails to see is that ‘however exact the quantitative knowledge of a situation may be, one cannot, other than by an arbitrary decision, estimate by “how much” its state exceeds it’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 278). As Christopher Norris (2009) has rightly noted,

‘no instance of the count as one, whatever its claim to universal inclusivity, could ever contain (or purport to represent) those endlessly proliferating subsets of multiples revealed by a grasp of that axiom. Once this is admitted, one is *required to think the gap* between simple presentation and this species of re-presentation which is the count-as-one of subsets’ (85; Emphasis added)

One of the key historical examples that Badiou frequently utilizes to explore this gap between the presentation and representation of multiples is that of the ‘French Revolution’. Treated in the manner of the Bourgeois historian, the name of the revolution amounts to a collection of signifiers evincing a time, place, and collection of names. Such names would be Robespierre, peasants, the massacres, the guillotine, etc. However, as Bartlett has noted, ‘if the multiplication of such a historical inventory was all there was to it, then its status, as an

event, as the foundation point for a new orientation to the world, is consumed under a larger logic of history or politics' (2011: 100). This is what Badiou refers to as 'traces and facts' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 180). Split into its constituent elements, such a methodology leads to 'the event being undone to the point of being no more than the forever infinite numbering of the gestures, things and words that co-existed with it' (Ibid.). What acts to disrupt such a reading is '*the mode in which the Revolution is a central term of the Revolution itself*' (Ibid. Original emphasis). Such a mode is when 'the manner in which the conscience of the times - and [importantly for this thesis] the retroactive intervention of our own - filters the entire site through the one of its eventual qualification' (Ibid). Set against this is a possible historiography in which 'the subject [including the historian themselves] is constituted by encountering its matter (the terms of the enquiry) without anything of its form...prescribing such matter' (Ibid. 395; also see Chapter Six). The subject has no prior relationship to the multiples it encounters. Rather, the subject's 'essence, since it has to include the chance of these encounters, is rather the trajectory which links them' (Ibid.). Once again, this rendezvous is 'incalculable' and 'does not fall under any determinant of the encyclopaedia' (Ibid. 396). In the singular moment is the gap, the space of a wager. 'It is as though', as Badiou argues, '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' (Ibid.: 280).

It is in this gap, and the intervention it calls forth, that we find the militant figure. With this figure we have reached the point where Badiou's development of the process of subjectivization (that was presupposed in *TS*) becomes central to further understanding the operation of presentation, representation, situation, and singularity. It is not the intention



here of engaging in a wide-ranging discussion of the mathematical underpinning of Badiou's theorisation of the operations of subjectivisation resulting from an event. However, while the role and experiences of the subject in relation to what Badiou terms the 'rebirth of history' will be explored in the final chapter, it is a precondition of such analysis that we grasp how Badiou positions the 'complex of the subject' (Bartlett, 2011: 108) in response to the 'chasm' between presentation and representation that manifests in the singular situation of the event.

### **Intervention and the diagonal of the historical situation**

In Meditation Seventeen of *BE*, 'The Matheme of the Event', Badiou provides a concise inscription of the singularity that is the event, in which the key term is the aforementioned *situation*. Badiou identifies the evental site, what he classifies as 'a historical situation', as  $X$  (Badiou, 1988/2005: 179). He continues that '*I term 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*' (Ibid. Original emphasis). He then notes 'that  $S$  is the situation, and  $X \in S$  ( $X$  belongs to  $S$ ,  $X$  is presented by  $S$ ) the evental site. The event will be written  $e_x$  (to be read 'event of the site  $X$ ')' (Ibid.). This is summarised in what is possibly the most important matheme of the whole book:

$e_x = \{x \in X, e_x\}$  (Ibid)

Condensed into a modest summary, the matheme is summarised by Badiou as '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' (Ibid.). The site itself, the excess of presentation over the

represented one-multiple, is said, as already noted above, to be ‘on the edge of the void’ (Ibid.: 181), with the void set being  $\{\emptyset\}$ . This excess is *included* ( $\subset$ ) in the situation but does not *belong* ( $\in$ ) to it (i.e. it is *of* the situation, not *in* it). As Badiou outlines, the event has ‘the essential characteristic of belonging to itself,  $ex \in ex$ , it presents, as multiple, at least one multiple which is presented, namely itself’ (Ibid.: 182). That is, ‘the event blocks its *total* singularization by the belonging of its signifier to the multiple that it is’ (Ibid.). Badiou *does not* equate the event with the evental-site. Rather, an event “mobilizes’ elements of its site, but it adds its own presentation to the mix’ (Ibid.) But the event itself does not ‘dictate its own consequences’ (Hallward, 2003: 123). As we will see, a subject is essential for the recognition that something has taken place. The subject must make ‘an *interpretative intervention*’ (Badiou 1988/2005: 181. Original emphasis), a ‘cut’ that declares *something* has transpired. The subject is both a captive witness *and* an active agent of the event, arrow and target, be that in the present or one lived from a distance of time or place.

One cannot look to pre-established forms of historical relationships, knowledge of the situation, or established subjectivities, to make sense of this conjunction; there is no real choice when the choice is finite. It is with this that Badiou short-circuits Žižek’s critique of the event as nothing other than a reworked version of Louis Althusser’s theory of ideological interpellation (1997a: 128, 141). As Hallward noted, Žižek ‘disregards the decisive consequence of that axiom of infinity presumed by every component of Badiou’s system: the ruin of any elementary conception of the One...’ (Hallward, 2003: 149). Also, Žižek negates the ‘essentially interventionist or activist approach’ (Ibid.: 150) required by the ‘subject when “encountering” the ‘gap between  $\alpha$  (a set that counts as one its members or elements)

and the set of its subsets  $p(\alpha)$  (a set that counts as one its included parts or subsets)...’ (Ibid.: 89).

As is no doubt clear, while the Event implies futurity, there is also something inherently ‘historical’ – in the conventional sense of the word (i.e. ‘concerned with past events’ (Oed.com, 2020)) – in Badiou’s conceptualisation. That is, ‘[i]f there exists an event, *its belonging to the situation of its site is undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself*. That is, the signifier of the event (our *ex*) is necessarily supernumerary to the site’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 181. Original emphasis). Therefore, the militant ‘activist’ or ‘interventionist’ can only judge as to whether an event has occurred *retrospectively*. In fact, in accordance with the future anterior of the event, all knowledge for Badiou is an *(un)anticipated future ‘retrospective totalization’* (Ibid. 396. Emphasis added), something that only occurs with hindsight. As such, one could argue that the most radical thing to say when faced with an event is “I know something important has taken place, but not what”. It is from this position of unknowingness, that ‘[t]he 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*’ (Ibid. 204; Original emphasis). However, with no contingent co-ordinates, what is the methodological frame that enables the historian to *recognise* the aberration, the unrepresented multiplicity, especially when the range of unrepresented multiples is infinite. Why does one choice (intervention) carry more meaning than any other? How do we answer this? Badiou encapsulated this problem as follows:

‘Because the referent of the intervention is the void, such as attested by the fracture of its border – the site – and because its choice is illegal – representative without representation – it

cannot be grasped as a one-effect, or structure. Yet given that what is a-non-one is precisely the event itself, there appears to be a circle.’ (Ibid.: 209)

When faced with such logical circularity, there is only one option for Badiou, to split the circle at ‘the point at which it rejoins itself’ (Ibid.). Yet, the question remains: what then serves as the guarantee for such splitting? As Hallward recognised, the intervention itself does not constitute the event, rather it ‘is purely a matter of yes or no, it did happen or it did not happen, and this yes or no applies only to the existence of the event rather than to its alleged (and always debatable) “meaning” or manner’ (2003: 125). For Badiou, in seeking to formalize this yes/no decision (and avoid what he termed a form of ‘speculative leftism’, which he defined as ‘any thought of being which bases itself upon the theme of an absolute commencement’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 210); one senses that here he is clearly referring to such ‘libidinal’ post-68 groups as *Tout*, see Chapter Three), he turned to Ernst Zermelo’s mathematical ‘axiom of choice’ (Ibid.: 227). While mindful of gross simplification, Zermelo’s axiom was a response to Cantor’s ‘well ordering principle’, which sought to find a way of establishing a representative point in any non-empty set.<sup>73</sup> Clearly, if, as Cantor proved, there are always more real numbers (recall, real numbers represent a value measured along a continuous line) than there are natural numbers (1,2,3, etc.), and we are unable to correlate the former to the latter (see above), then it is impossible to build a single representative set from a selection of all unconnected nonempty sets. This is the encounter with the Real, the limit form in which there is ‘an unavoidable obstacle, a point of impossibility which forces the discourse of set-theory ontology to change and develop a new

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<sup>73</sup> ‘The well-ordering principle says that every set can be well-ordered. And a set is called well-ordered if every one of its non-empty subsets has a smallest element...If our set is {1,2,3}, then we know that the set of all subsets has eight elements ( $2^3 = 8$ ...). One of these subsets is the empty set, and the other seven are: {1}, {2}, {3}, {1,2}, {1,3}, {2,3}, {1,2,3}. The original set, {1,2,3} is well ordered because each of its non-empty subsets has a smallest element. These smallest elements are (in order)” 1, 2, 3, 1, 1, 2, 1. Cantor needed to prove the well-ordering principle, namely to prove that every set (in particular, infinite sets) could be well-ordered....’ (Aczel, 2000: 172)

structure in order to remain consistent' (Feltnam, 2008: 92). It was via a potted history of how this problem had been addressed in mathematics (see, Badiou, 1988/2005: 225-226), that Badiou reached the conclusion that '*the axiom of choice* formalizes the predicates of intervention' (Ibid.: 227). As historian of mathematics Amir Aczel (2000) has summarised, Zermelo's response to the challenge faced by Cantor was to associate a '*representative point* with every non-empty subset of a given set' (173), known as the '*axiom of union*' (Badiou notes in *BE* that '*every radical transformational action originates in a point*, which, inside a situation, is an evental site' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 176); an area he would develop in *LW*, see below). Zermelo called these points "*distinguished elements*' of the subset' (Ibid.) which, when a coherent set is constructed from all the subsets of all the elements, forms a powerset. This could be shown as follows. If there is a set  $\alpha = \{a, b, c, d\}$ , that set's elements are obviously  $a, b, c, d$ . Now clearly, there could be coexisting sets that share some of these elements. For example,  $\beta = \{c, d\}$ . However, this set is contained within  $\alpha$  (otherwise known as a subset of  $\alpha$ , written  $\beta \subset \alpha$ ). As Smith highlights, '[t]he Power Set Axiom then states that if a set  $\alpha$  exists then so does the set of all  $\alpha$ 's subsets' (2006: 81). For example, if we then have an additional set of  $\gamma$ , which contains within it  $\{a, b, c\}$ , then, as Smith identifies, its powerset would be: ' $\wp(\gamma) = \{\{a\}, \{b\}, \{c\}, \{a, b\}, \{a, c\}, \{b, c\}, \{a, b, c\}, \emptyset\}$ '. The new set,  $\wp(\gamma)$ , has eight, or  $2^3$ , elements' (Ibid). As Feltnam notes, '[t]his powerset is larger than the initial set and so one can use the axiom of the powerset repeatedly to create larger and larger sets on the basis of an initial set' (92). The powerset is the complete representation of its subsets. Badiou utilised Zermelo's axioms to frame an '*ontological schema of intervention*', in which '*the function of choice* is shown (or constructed) ... [but there] is no explicit rule for the choice...' (Ibid.: 499-500. Emphasis added). As Brian Anthony Smith (2006) acknowledged,

'The Axiom of Choice provides such an approach, by developing a concept of free choice that is independent of any criteria of choice. The axiom affirms freedom and chance, it does not necessarily posit non-constructible sets, but it allows for our manipulation and use of them should they exist.' (86)

The axiom of choice offers the possibility of identifying within the non-empty set an element that has 'nothing in common with the multiple itself' (Ibid.: 88). Badiou identifies 'the abnormal multiple...[as] a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 175), but which can be named in the *choice set* that identifies the event. As already touched on, it is important to note that in *BE* Badiou equates the abnormal multiple (the singular) with the *historical* (see Ibid.: 174), while its opposite, *nature*, is composed of multiplicities that are both presented and represented (i.e. normal). The historical is presented but not represented, it is composed of elements that are present in the situation but are not represented by the situation. Initially, to identify this abnormality requires the 'yes/no' decision, noted by Hallward, but one must then go beyond this and name it. As Bartlett has recognised, when faced with an event:

'No criteria exist by which to discern its place within the structure or to calculate the range or detail of its effects; ergo, a *decision* must be made. To mark the insistence of this exceptionality, its 'trace', and to provide a point of orientation, the intervention produces a name. Given that the situation has rejected the event's novelty, this name must also be 'new'. To put it a little enigmatically, the newness that the event signifies will register through the name. In this context, the name, while being a matter of language, will be 'unheard of.'" (2011: 97-98)

Yet, there is a genuine issue with the naming of events. That is, by naming them, one could argue they become subsumed into the already existent symbolic of the site and the rupture identified by the event is negated. As Badiou notes, ‘...by the very same gesture which designates it, [the event is] reduced to the common lot and submitted to the effect of the structure’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 202). There certainly is the danger of an ‘auto-annulment of its own meaning’ (ibid.) when we name an event.<sup>74</sup> Yet, as Badiou accepted, it is more complex. In many forms, it is not the name itself, but rather what it accrues. For example, via his favourite illustration, the French Revolution of 1789, Badiou notes that we can all agree that it was ‘French’, but France was not the origin and name of this event. ‘It is much rather the case’, Badiou continues, ‘that it is the revolution which has since been retroactively given meaning-by being inscribed, via decision, therein-to that historical situation that we call France’ (Ibid.: 203). Essentially, according to the evental site, any intervention/choice is illegal, because it does not accord with the pre-existent situation which the event ruptures (i.e. they are non-constructible sets, that is sets that are unrecognisable by the constructible (representative) state). However, what it does accord to are *previous ruptures* in the constructible situation, previous ‘name[s] of the event’ which were ‘drawn from the void at the edge of which stands the intrasituational presentation of its site’ (Ibid.: 204). As such, we are left with the conclusion signposted above that, as Badiou argued, ‘*the possibility of the intervention must be assigned to the consequences of another event*’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 209. Original emphasis). Ultimately, as we saw with Hallward, the intervention is not the essence of an event. Rather, ‘[a]n intervention is what presents an event for the occurrence of another. It is an evental between-two’ (ibid.). As Badiou himself argues, and what Bartlett

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<sup>74</sup> As an aside, this is an issue that has been addressed in music, specifically the area of improvisation and genre. As musicologist Ingrid Monson once noted ‘The music that is labelled is somehow the one that carries less prestige, the one that is considered less universal’ (Monson, 1997: 101).

identified in relation to *CPT?*, what we have here again is historical investigation as a model of time (Ibid.: 210). While Badiou showed there was no such thing as History (See Chapter Four) he does proffer in *BE* a model of historical work as a series of associated interventions. As he summarises, the contextualisation of an intervention is an impossibility if that intervention breaks with the pre-existing situation. One simply cannot look to some 'measurable milieu' of the intervention to make sense of it. Rather, it

'is established upon interventional capacity inasmuch as the latter only separates itself from the situation by grounding itself on the circulation – which has already been decided – of an eventual multiple.... Time is here, again, the requirement of the Two: for there to be an event, *one must be able to situate oneself within the consequences of another. The intervention is a line drawn from one paradoxical multiple, which is already circulating, to the circulation of another, a line which scratches out. It is a diagonal of the situation.*' (Ibid.: 210. Emphasis added)

The problematic split in the circle is actually 'the presupposition, implicit or not, that there has already been an intervention' (ibid.) which permits subsequent interventions. 'What the doctrine of the event teaches us', Badiou argues towards the end of Meditation 20, 'is rather that the entire effort lies in *following the event's consequences*, not in glorifying its occurrence' (210-211, my italics). This, as Badiou has recognised, is the space of historical investigation, otherwise known as 'thought as the gap between two events' (Ibid). It is the combined actions of the old mole (labouring to close the gap, to (re)connect with the consequences of an event), and the eagle (seizing upon the consequences of the event when (re)presented). These interpretative interventions are embodied in the 'patient watchman of the void (Ibid.: 111), Mallarmé's 'lambearer', the *guetteur* (see Chapter Four), and the militant historian. Such a figure 'constructs the means to sound, if only for an



instant, the site of the unrepresentable and the means to be thenceforth faithful to the proper name that afterwards, he or she will have been able to give to-or hear one cannot decide – this non-place of place, the void' (Ibid). It is, Badiou argued, an approach of a 'precisely calibrated subjective operation' (ibid.: 218). Or, as Smith (2006) again recognised 'It is the work of the subject to play out the consequences of their intervention through a constant *fidelity* to their conviction that an event has occurred. *The post-evental state is never fully completed, as the infinite task of the finite subject to extend the state of the situation can never be completed*' (89. Emphasis added). What is clear is that an event is not simply an 'imaginary wager upon absolute novelty' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 210) or, as Watkins sardonically noted, it is certainly 'not just unpredictable historical moments after which nothing is the same again' (Watkins, 2017: 135). Toil and effort are required. Certainly, the 'Red Years' was the self-appointed name that Badiou gave to his own process of engaged fidelity to the 'events of May' '68. In the dance of recommencement that is the post-evental labours of commitment, one must always be ready to begin, and then begin again. To do so, is to

'to keep drawing consequences of events that take place in emancipatory politics, artistic experiments, scientific discoveries, and loving encounters to force these events in return to come to bear generically on the current situation and thus to bring a precarious regime of truth, as a small fragment of immortality, out of our finite encyclopedias of available knowledge.' (Bosteels, 2006: 173)

The path of post-evental endeavours (known in *TS* as 'Justice') is always treacherous, because the state is always seeking to incorporate any 'abnormal multiple' into its own representational metastructure. What is required, as alluded to above, is a figure that is

permanently alert to the possible historical configuration's (historicity) ensuing from histories 'timeless moments' (see Chapter Four). Such an intervenor 'will only found his second fidelity [i.e. the first fidelity is the founding of his subject, while this second is its rebirth or recommencement] by trusting himself to the present of the storm, by abolishing himself in the void in which he will summon the name of what has occurred.' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 26)). While the exploration of possible forms of history as interventional practice will be the province of the final chapter, to better understand how the militant subject assumes the dual role of both conduit and subsequent deliverer of the historical event reborn, we must now turn to what Badiou terms the 'operator of connection' (ibid. 239).

### **The 'operator of connection': Implication, prescription, and subtraction**

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Badiou accepted that his theorization of the process of subjectivization in *TS* was lacking (1988/2005: 4) and that *BE* provided an opportunity to redress this lacuna in his thought. Moreover, while Badiou broached the idea of the event in *TS*, following its philosophical elaboration in *BE*, the need for a greater understanding of how an 'event, which brings out the void that is proper to being by revealing the undecidable excess of representation over simple presentation, can only be decided retroactively by way of a subjective intervention' (Bosteels, 2011: 162). In this respect it was around the figure of the 'operator of connection' or, as Peter Osborne designated in a more compelling turn of phrase, the 'retroactive agents of interventional practice' (Osbourne, 2007: 26), that he sought redress this. In seeking to orientate ourselves to this state of being, Bartlett (2011) offers a useful taxonomy of the functions of the Operator (represented in Badiou's work by the mathematical symbol of the Halmos

tombstone  $\square$ <sup>75</sup>). These are that ‘the operator of faithful connection is *implicative* in terms of the event, *prescriptive* in terms of orientation and *subtractive* in terms of operation’ (145. Emphasis added); or, as condensed by Badiou, this is subjectivization as ‘the emergence of an operator, consecutive to an interventional nomination’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 393). To better understand this and its relevance for this thesis, we shall now unpack the functions of Badiou’s agent of faithful connection as initially characterised by Bartlett.

In Meditation Twenty-Three of *BE*, Badiou clarifies the scenario that when faced with an event the ‘operator of connection,  $\square$ , has no *a priori* tie to belonging or inclusion. It is, itself, *sui generis*’ (Ibid.: 236). As such, to speak of “facing” an event makes no sense, as to do so would be to consider the operator as pre-existing the event and as such part of the supposed situation the event has split asunder (moreover, as stressed previously, one must remember this is not a biophilic subject, but a ‘local situated configuration’ (Ibid.: 393)). If ‘fidelity takes the form of being true to the implications of the event,’ Osborne notes, ‘as worked out by the ‘operator of connection’, by organizing fidelity to its meaning’ (Osborne, 2007: 26) (although as Badiou noted above, this is always a debatable issue), then one must always be mindful of the operator’s ‘proximity to the principal ontological connections of belonging and inclusion... presentation and representation,  $\in$  and  $\subset$ ’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 236-237). If the operator  $\square$  maintains a fideliuous adherence to the dominant relations of belonging and inclusion etc. then ‘the more statist it is’ (Ibid.: 237); that is, returning to the state sanctioned synchronicity of presentation/representation is to (re)turn from the multiple to the normal (as defined above) of the ‘one’. If subjectivization has a ‘singular

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<sup>75</sup>  $\square$  (the Halmos tombstone) means “QED”, which is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *quod erat demonstrandum* (“which was to be proven”). “QED” has been the most common way to symbolize the end of a logical argument for many centuries, but the modern convention in mathematics is to use the “tombstone” in place of “QED”.’ Lankham, Nachtergaele, and Schilling (2007: 2)

rule', it is that there is an 'inherent isomorphism' in that the subjectivization of the subject 'takes place in the form of a two' (Ibid.: 393). As Bartlett notes, 'there is the event *and* the procedure of relating it to its 'situation' (see above); namely, 'the intervention having taken place must necessarily *imply* the existence of the 'operator of faithful connection' as within this complex', likewise 'the *decision* and this *work of the subject*, which includes its operational prescriptions, are formally 'identical' (Bartlett, 2011: 141 -143). When you become a subject, you are *implied* to speak from the position of this subject, there is no 'outside' to this, it is an implied consequence of the process of subjectivization, you either wager on the event or return to the existing situation. As Watkins notes, 'It is not a matter of saying 'yes' or 'no' to the event, but of saying 'yes' to the event because you cannot say 'yes' or 'no' to the event as belonging [to the state of the situation]. If you say 'yes' to the event, you say 'no' to the [existing] ontological laws of being, a decision which describes the specific process that Badiou calls intervention' (2017: 165).<sup>76</sup> As such, '[w]henever [Saint] Paul addresses his writings', Badiou continues, 'he always draws attention to the fact that he has been entitled to speak as a subject. And he *became* this subject...on the road to Damascus...' (1997/2003: 17). This point was also made in Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (1993/2001), when he reasoned for the non-existence of ethics 'in-general', because there is no subject 'in general'. Rather, '[t]here is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject – or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject' (40). Therefore, while the subject of subjectivization is implied in the operation of connection that results from the 'composing of a subject' (i.e. intervention), one is still called to make a decision. Here we have what Hallward entitled the

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<sup>76</sup> Badiou also said that 'two values alone are discerned via the operator of fidelity; connection and non-connection. This abstraction is legitimate since *ultimately*...a multiple either is or is not within the field of effects entailed by the introduction into circulation of a supernumerary name' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 330).

‘post-Sartrean theory of militant subjectivity’ (Hallward, 2008: 102) that Badiou’s *BE* developed. It also leads us to the second element of Badiou’s agent of interventional practice, that of *prescription*.

The aleatory wager of the intervention sets ‘out from the void which prior to the event remains indiscernible in the language of established knowledge’ (Bosteels, 2011: 165). But the ‘operator of faithful connection designates *another mode of discernment*: one which, outside knowledge but within the effect of an interventional nomination, explores connections to the supernumerary name of the event’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 329).<sup>77</sup> The latter is a prescriptive procedure that ‘faithfully connects as many elements of the situation as possible to this name which is the only trace of the vanished event, and subsequently forces the extended situation from the bias of the new truth as if the latter were indeed already generally applicable’ (Bosteels, 2011: 165). This process of prescription is the ‘militant mode’ necessitated by an event (or its rebirth), in which one must proceed via ‘decision and conviction’ (Bartlett, 2011: 135). Following the work of mathematician Paul Cohen, Badiou termed this process ‘forcing’. We first came across this term in Chapter Two in Badiou’s 1968 text *IS*, and as Steve Corcoran has described, in both *IS* and *BE* “[f]orcing’ is a procedure of radically transforming the structure by *occupying one or more of its real unoccupiable places*, without for all that collapsing the structure into sheer inconsistency’ (2015: 138). It is beyond the scope of this work to offer a full and detailed discussion of how Badiou utilises Cohen’s ideas, but it is important to note that, for Badiou, forcing is the

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<sup>77</sup> Burhanuddin Baki offers a very useful overview of Badiou’s use of this term: ‘Exceeding the count of the site, the event is said to be ‘supernumerary’ with respect to the elements of the site. The event, in its presentation as a multiple, erupts when the multiple of the site becomes ‘self-aware’ and incorporates its own count into itself. In the supernumerary gesture, the event, collecting itself into itself, self-presents itself. This immanent self-presentation of the evental multiple severs any necessary originary relation to the count-as-one corresponding to the structures within the historical situation [read historicity].’ (2015: 232)

name given to an eventual situation that 'is equivalent to the belonging of this term to the indiscernible part which results from the generic procedure' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 403). The result is that 'this term, bound to the statement by the relation of forcing, belongs to the truth'. Moreover, 'this term, encountered by the subject's aleatory trajectory, has been positively investigated with respect to its connection to the name of the event' (Ibid.). But, at the start of such a process, the militant investigator must be willing to recognise their own ignorance of the event, or more precisely, the event itself *prescribes* ignorance as the conditionality of the subject's encounter with a radical break. Although, as Bartlett rightly notes, 'it is certainly ridiculous to claim that the enquirer knows *absolutely* nothing – is simply *tabula rasa*' (Bartlett, 2011: 135; also see Chapter Six on the issue of ignorance). Rather, 'it is beneficial to be knowledgeable, [but] to *know* one's ignorance' (Ibid.: 135). For the process of intervention and the operator of fidelity that follows the wager of a supernumerary name, uncertainty remains a constant. As Badiou declares

'no other form of vigilance is possible than confronting the event with the anxiety of hesitation and the courage of the outplace. One who wanders on the edge of eventual sites, faithful to the vocation of intervening there in order to draw from the void a supernumerary name...Mallarmé says to them that they are at once the feather, which "flutters about the abyss," and the star, "on high, perhaps"' (Badiou, 2015: 86).

In such moments we are back with the character and proclivities of the old mole (see Chapter Four). Or, more accurately, like some form of revolutionary hybrid, part eagle and part mole. While the eagle plunges down to assign the supernumerary name, the confident mole '[b]y means of finite enquiries...locally discerns the connections and disconnections between multiples of the situation and the name of the event' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 132).

What becomes important about this process is that the operator of connector's work, the old mole, is never complete. As Feltnam argued, 'each time that someone explores the consequences of the intervention they will have to decide again that it, and the event, took place within the situation, and that their efficacy requires further evaluation...the intervention does not secure once and for all the belonging of the event to the situation and hence the transformation of the latter' (Feltnam, 2008: 103-104). This takes us back to this chapter's opening quote, where 'teachers are still trying to work out just what the French revolution is, and what it entails, in the field of education' (Ibid.: 102-103). The intervention is not the event itself, but merely the avant-garde for the operator of faithful connection. And here we return to the third animal of the radical chimera:

'The owl enjoys a long-distance vision of change and searches for patterns or constants in the emergence and forms of change...seen from afar, the processes of transformation initiated by interventions lead to the production of a new situation, and the features of that new situation are in some way a result of that process' (Ibid.: 105).

We have come, it could be argued, as close as possible to a definition of the militant historian's modus operandi. Faced with an encyclopaedic order of things, such a subject progresses 'enquiry by enquiry, dialogue by dialogue... [to discover] retroactively, that an event is the mere evanescence of a truth and not its instantiation (Bartlett, 2011: 136). This is because the 'one of the event...[is] a-non-one, given that its nomination – chosen, illegal, supernumerary, drawn from the void – only obeys the principle 'there is oneness' in absentia...the event remains anonymous and uncertain' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 206). The interventional decision simply names the event but does not *constitute* it. If, as noted earlier, the earthen vessel serves as a metaphor for the timeless invariant (Idea), then, if the militant

historian is a synonym for the 'operator of faithful connection', it is surely that receptacle's bearer. To adapt Feltnam's words, the militant historian is not one who upholds some final meaning of the event, once again, there is no hero. As Feltnam maintains, 'the intervention does not secure once and for all the belonging of the event to the situation and hence the transformation of the latter' (Feltnam, 2008: 104). Rather, while the original subject of an event simply pins 'a signifier on it' (Ibid.: 103) it is then the role of the radical historian to revisit this signifier, question its continual negotiation and its relationship to the event it names. As Badiou notes of the Christian church's relationship to the Christ event, there is a 'perpetual debate and (just like the debate on the link between the Party and the Revolution) ... [that] has given rise to all the splits and heresies.' And, as with all militant figures, 'there is always a suspicion that the operator of faithful connection is itself unfaithful to the event out of which it has made so much' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 392).

If one is to speak of the operator of connection's relationship to the evental name, then, one has to acknowledge it is always one of *subtraction*. Why? Because, as argued, the operator must not be *of* the situation in its relationship *to* the situation of the event, or more accurately the name of the event. As Bartlett notes, the operator:

'subtracts from the existing situation elements connected to the event. It is subtractive precisely because this new set of elements, elements connected for a fidelity, is recollected from the 'fullness of presentation' itself – albeit on the basis of its void. We could say that the operator of faithful connection is born in a decision for that which is undecidable and borne by the faithful subjective (post-evental) insistence as to the existence of the indiscernible.' (Bartlett, 2011: 155)



As we know, the wager on the 'insistence on the indiscernible' is a purely random gesture, it is a leap of pure faith (see Chapter Six). The 'multiples encountered by the procedure do not depend upon any knowledge', Badiou notes, '[t]hey result from the randomness of the 'militant' trajectory starting out from the event-site [or, as we have argued in relation to the militant historian, from a point of temporal distance to the eventual situation]' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 337). Moreover, because truth is generic (i.e. the multiplicity of presentation) it 'entails the noncoincidence of this part with anything classified by an encyclopaedic determinant' (Ibid.: 338). If we turn to dominant forms of historiography (see Chapters One, Two, and Six), the 'enquiring of enquiry' (Ibid.: 395), knowledge never encounters the 'phantom of inconsistency, the 'nothing' (Bartlett, 2011: 155). Rather, as noted earlier, it simply assumes presentation, symbolizing, re-presents it, it via the language of discernment (Badiou, 1988/2005: 395). Contrariwise, the name is 'subtracted from any knowledge' and it has not been...counted by any of the domains of knowledge, nor will be, if the language remains in the same state' (ibid.). The generic condition (the multiple) is, via the eventual declaration (name), the subtracted '*indiscernible of the situation*' (ibid.) and the militant subject 'is constituted by encountering its matter (the terms of the enquiry) without anything of its form...prescribing such matter' (ibid.: 395). Thus, against bourgeois historiography, a militant historian certainly encounters truth in historicity, but it is 'truth as a subtraction from history [historicity]' (Hallward, 2003: 50). That is truth as a subtraction from what is known, truth beyond the usual bearers of historical knowledge (journals, publishers, conferences, etc.) that serve to authorize and evaluate (See Chapter Six). Yet, one could argue that the militant figure as the operator of connection can easily transfigure into a 'gatekeeper' (see above) and become the leading edge of the redirection of these

once unthinkable multiplicities into the statist language of classification and representation.

As Badiou notes:

'The ultimate effect of an evental caesura, and of an intervention from which the introduction into circulation of a supernumerary name proceeds, would thus be that the truth of a situation, with this caesura as its principle, *forces the situation to accommodate it*: to extend itself to the point at which this truth – primitively no more than a part, a representation – attains belonging, thereby becoming a presentation' (Ibid.: 342).

One could conceivably maintain that this is the "end point" of the abovementioned historical enquiry as a 'model of time'. It is the culmination of what Badiou designates the 'event-intervention-operator-of-fidelity complex' (ibid.: 338) when the once illegal multiple is 'finally recognized as a term, and as internal' and 'a faithful generic procedure [has] render[ed] the indiscernible immanent' (ibid.: 342). However, such a consummation is always temporary, more an interval than an ending, as there is always a further 'undecidable supplementation' (ibid.: 355) to the site that is the future anterior of another event. In other words, any knowledge of the event is eternally 'suspended by a truth whose finite moment it is' (ibid.: 406; i.e. the representational space of knowledge is always one step behind truth which is unspoken by that space). Or, in Kierkegaard's famous dictum, 'Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards' (cited in Pérez-Álvarez, 2009: 56)

Badiou's *BE* offered the theorisation of subjectivization that, in his own acknowledgement, was missing from *TS*. However, it came at a price. While the equation of ontology, being qua being, with mathematics enabled Badiou to avoid any Hegelian *das absolute*, and connected

the ontological with infinite multiplicities, it did so at the expense of the ontic. As Hallward argues, '[c]onceiving the being or presenting of a person (or a particle, a planet, an organism) as a mathematical set can tell us nothing about the empirical or material – let alone historical or social – existence of such beings' (Hallward, 2008: 103). Furthermore, this lack of an experiential comprehension of an event and a subject's faithful commitment to its consequences, a situation, as we have seen, in which an inconsistent sub-set ruptures the dominant co-ordinates of the situation, 'appeared to privilege an abrupt if not quasi-*'miraculous'* approach to the mechanics of historical change' (Ibid.). The purity of what Badiou titled in a 1988 essay as the 'objectless subject' (Badiou, 1988), 'seemed to involve a sort of subtraction from the domains of history and society as well' (Hallward, 2008: 103). Clearly, how the event impacts upon the conception of historicity and how this feeds into the actuality of writing about historical relations and events, are significant omissions. While an examination of the potential of Badiou's thought for historical practice will be the focus of the final chapter, we first need to explore how he countered the criticisms outlined by Hallward. That is, in what way does Badiou account for being's appearance 'in a particular world as more or less discernible or 'at home' in that world' (Ibid.: 104)?

### ***Logics of Worlds***

As already suggested, one of *BE's* limitations was that it failed to engage with the ideological and hegemonic battles that shape the social and historical space within which an event appears. Yet, as has been clear since Chapter Two, Badiou has long been skeptical of such endeavours. Rather, his theory of truths presents itself as a subtraction from supposed struggles over the signifiers of "reality". For Badiou, 'every reference to semantic depth, social complexity, or material substance, amounts only to an invitation to participate in the

interpretation and negotiation of meanings, opinions, and impressions', Žižek has argued. Simply put, 'Badiou equates reality in this sense with ideology pure and simple...[and] the first task of any generic practice of thought is the "subtraction" of whatever passes for reality so as to clear the way for a formalization of the real' (Žižek, 2003: xxx -xxxi). It is this sense that, from the outset, Badiou positioned *LW* as attack on what he labelled the ideology of 'Democratic Materialism'. That is, the dominant relativist position that '*There are only bodies and languages*' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 1), with associated questions of difference frequently aligned with such categories. Badiou's riposte to what he considers this 'enveloping ideology' of the twenty-first century, is his 'materialist dialectic'<sup>78</sup> (Ibid.: 3), which contends that '*There are only bodies and languages, except there are truths*' (Ibid.: 4). Yes, 'bodies and languages' are 'what there is', Badiou argues, but the 'except there' of truth is 'what interpolates itself into the continuity of the 'there is'' (Ibid.: 4-5). Thus, rather than a traditional triad of 'there is' (thesis), 'except that' (antithesis), and the event (synthesis), Badiou argues that contra democratic materialism, 'we are to understand that the essence of all difference *is* the third term that marks the gap between the two others' (Ibid.: 4. Emphasis added) rather than fusing them. In other words, the essence of all difference is the infinite multiplicity revealed by the 'except that' that marks the difference; or that 'every relation between objects links together the inexistence of the one to the inexistence of the other'. Essentially, '[r]elations, which conserve existence, also conserve inexistence' (Ibid.: 302). As we know, a set cannot be identical with itself, or a set of all sets cannot contain itself on pain of contradiction. 'The notation  $A \in A$  is that of an ontological (mathematical) impossibility', argues Badiou. He continues:

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<sup>78</sup> Although it is questionable how 'materialist' it is, when the source of change is ultimately to be found in the transcendental infinite.

‘A site is therefore the sudden lifting of an axiomatic prohibition, through which the possibility of the impossible comes to be. The effectuation of the impossible can be put in the following way: a being appears under the rule of the object whose being it is. In effect, the ‘it happens’ makes *A* appear in the referential field of the object (*A Id*)’ (Ibid.: 391)

For Badiou, this inconsistency is exactly one of the properties of the (rare) manifestation of an uncounted multiplicity that marks the site of difference.<sup>79</sup> Or more directly, truth *is* the inconsistency of the situation for Badiou. In this way *LW* attempts to argue that ‘[w]ithin a situation, a truth is the immanent production of a generic and egalitarian indifference to the differences that (previously) structured the situation’ (Hallward, 2008: 98).

While *BE* did seek to offer a ‘structure of the event’ (Badiou, 2006/2009: 361), as Badiou himself acknowledged, there was a ‘rather unclear transcendental structure (the name, attributed by an anonymous subject)’ (Ibid.). As such, in response to criticisms of *BE* by what he termed ‘[p]erspicacious readers’ (Gilles Deleuze and Jean Luc-Nancy amongst the named) (Ibid.: 361), *LW* sees Badiou pursuing the manifestation of a truth within a topological space and all this entails in terms of the conceptualisation of change, the subject, and definitions of the historical. In terms of the need for an ontical dimension that connects to the ‘transcendental structure’, Badiou sought to broaden *BE*’s ‘situation’ into a more nuanced ‘world’. As will be recalled, in *BE* it was the “manifestation” of the void within the situation that gave rise to the evental moment and “revealed” the transcendental of the multiplicities

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<sup>79</sup> As he argues in a three point breakdown of the ontology of the site: 1) a world is a ‘reflexive multiplicity, which belongs to itself and thereby transgresses the laws of being’; 2) the inconsistent multiplicity that is the being qua being of the world is exposed in an ‘instantaneous revelation of the void that haunts multiplicities’; 3) and finally, because of the illegal nature of the self-reflexive set (i.e. Russell’s Paradox) a ‘site is an ontological figure of the instant: it appears only to disappear’ (Badiou, 2009: 369)

of multiplicities (i.e., ontology of the site). Nevertheless, questions remained as to the particulars of this process. As will be considered shortly, one of *LW*'s aims was to explore how the uncoun­ted, the unpre­sent­ed, appear, and how they form a radical break via the subject. Also, because a revelation of the multiple serves to render apparent the multiplicities that have previously been left uncoun­ted – what Badiou calls in *LW* the “phantom’ of the count’ (Ibid.: 28) or ‘[e]very objects...proper inexistent’ (Ibid.: 379) – we will explore how *LW* reveals a history of events as a “history” of the infinite, or, as he declares early on in *LW*, an ‘atemporal meta-history’ (Ibid.: 9). This is a move which classifies and supports the idea explored throughout this thesis of history as an external Idea and historicity as the manifestation of that force’s effects.

As with *BE*, space forbids an exhaustive analysis of *LW*, instead the main focus of my analysis will be thinking how this theory of the recurring event as an eternal meta-history helps us to rethink actual change, how it connects to such clearly historico-religious ideas as resurrection and rebirth, and then, how this shapes our understanding of history, historicity and the militant historian. However, before we can address these distinct areas, we first need to consider how the phantom of the inconsistent manifests itself within a world? For this, we need to turn to what Hallward termed ‘[o]ne of the most compelling sections...’ of *LW* (Hallward, 2008: 106): ‘Book VI: Theory of Points’.

**Either/or: From historical sleep, via the infinite trembling, to a tensed world.**

As mentioned, for Badiou the transcendental structure of the multiple is “revealed” in an event, and this revelation offers a brief intense chance to ‘live...as an Immortal’ (Badiou, 2006/2009: 40). But the question remains as to what are these moments? In the

aforementioned Book of *LW*, Badiou titles such instants 'points'. But, to understand this, we need to return to an earlier section of *LW* when he explores an imagined protest on the Parisian square of Place de la République (Ibid.: 199). In this analysis, his aim is to examine, via a phenomenological turn, the world of a 'demonstration in the making' (Ibid.). He begins by describing the scene of opposing groups joining together in the march:

'the innumerable joy of their strong identities (loudspeakers, steps, clapping, ranks. . .) and of their equally pronounced differences (the red or black flags, the snaking cops, the cadence of the African djembe drums over against the miserabilist slogans of threadbare unions, and so on) is that which constitutes the world as the being-there of the people and things which are incessantly intermingled within it.' (Ibid.: 200)

Badiou argues that within these groups one can speak of a '*function of appearing*' (Ibid.) This function is based on what Badiou terms 'transcendental indexing'. In a highly abridged summary of this concept, it could be explained as denoting the passage from the being-there of an object in a world, to its being-qua-being. 'Technically speaking', Badiou summarises, 'this means that on the basis of the transcendental appearance of objects in a world, we can think singular features of the beings 'themselves', to the extent that these beings underlie objects' (Ibid.: 196). In this moment, we can see how an event in *LW* is the manifestation of the singular in-existent of the object and not just the void, as was the case in *BE*. So, in this Parisian demonstration, Badiou argues, we can 'assume that a transcendental exists in this demonstration's situation of being' (Ibid.: 200) ; that is, there is something distinctive in terms of its singularity, i.e. because of the unique historicity of the site, the transcendental that emerges is both local to the site and generic in its multiplicity. Additionally, 'this transcendental...fixes the values of identity between any two beings of the world' (ibid.)

Why two? If we return to the opening discussion above on Badiou's 'materialist dialectic' we will recall that there is always a gap between the two, a gap which is the kernel of all difference (that is the gap as the in-existent that connects all difference, the generic infinity). Through the example of the protest, Badiou examines a range of identities within the topology of the Place de la République, classifying them according to their 'transcendental degree', that is how their singular in-existent has (via generic infinity) the potential to link them all, although some are more aligned to the 'there is' (being there) than the 'except that' (being). The 'function of appearing' assesses this network of relations between an infinite range of objects within this world and the intensity of their transcendental degree. For instance, in one passage, he compares a 'shuttered window on the fourth floor of an affluent apartment building' overlooking the Place de la République, with the red flags fluttering in the square. The shuttered window 'seems to be saying that it is the bearer of a hostile absence, of non-appearing in this variegated world, that it is irreducibly refractory to the flags of disorder, so that in all likelihood we have a nil transcendental value [of a shared in-existence] for the identity between the window and any of the red flags' (Ibid.: 201). Let us be clear, they *are* both multiples, it is just that within the world of the square they share no singular transcendental identity. Badiou gives the term 'phenomenon' to this '*complete system of the transcendental evaluation of its identity to all beings that co-appear in this world*' (Ibid. Original emphasis). And it is within this system that, as he explains in his *Second Manifesto of Philosophy* (2009/2011):

'a principle of comparison between certain degrees...exist[s] for us to be able to say that two multiplicities that appear in a world, and whose identity is measured by a degree, are 'very identical' or 'very different'...if two multiples appear to be completely



identical even though ontologically different, then their degree of identity is maximal, or larger than all the others. This requires such a degree to exist. In short, *the order structure of degrees admits a maximum and a minimum*' (37-38. Original emphasis).

Nonetheless, beyond the singular identities of the Place de la République, identities that have appeared and could or could not co-belong within the topology of this square, we still need to evaluate each 'otherwise infinitely ramified complexity' (Hallward, 2008: 106). For example, with the demonstration, one could ask: Is it a progressive force? Is it an occasion that seeks to challenge the 'there is' of a government or other such object? Does such an instance open a 'test of the transcendental world for a subject of truth' (Badiou 2009: 401). Or does it, to return to once more to Mallarméan condition of  $A_p$  ( $A_p$ ) (see Chapter Four)? Therefore, returning to the two, Badiou argues that when faced with an event in retrospective, we need 'to 'filter' the complex transcendental through a binary device and reduce the nuances of evaluation to the simplicity that characterizes every ultimate choice: either 1 (for yes) or 0 (for no)' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 403). These 'points' are a 'local test of the transcendental of a world for the subject of a truth' (Ibid.: 401). What's more, this 'test indiscerns the subjective metaphor ('one must decide, one must go through with it') and the objective metaphor ('there are only two possibilities and only one of them is "the right one"'). 'That is why', Badiou continues, 'we can also say that a point, as the reduction of infinite multiplicity to the Two, localizes the action of that truth to which an event has given the chance to appear in a world' (ibid.). To return to the Place de la République, to ask 'Does it play for or against the government?' (Ibid.:404) would be to present a point, one that serves as a 'crystallization of the infinite in the figure...of the 'either/or', what can also be

called a choice or decision' (Ibid.: 400).<sup>80</sup> As such, it is important to stress here that, the either/or decision calls forth truths that are 'creat[ed] in the present of worlds...[and] not because they have been there forever' (Ibid.: 512). This is history as eternally singular.

Still, this process in which a point becomes aligned with a particular 'either/or' question – what Badiou in *LW* terms 'positivization' – is clearly open to corruption. As James Williams has argued in his essay critiquing Badiou's 'denial of time', '[o]ne of the key problems of Badiou's philosophy lies in the compromises and assaults implied by the mismatch between the logic of a world and the activity of faithful subjects' (2012: 117). That is, if the process of positivization is not realised within a socio-cultural vacuum, how is it possible for the movement from 'being-there' to 'being', from finitude to the eternal singularity, not corrupted or shaped by the world in which it appears? From the 'blank space' of Badiou's IS, to Lacan's Real and the Cantorian infinite, Badiou has always maintained a remarkable formal commitment to the idea that there is a "space" beyond the symbolic that opens the possibility for radical change. However, this realm only offers the potential for change 'once it's disappeared' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 368). As first explored in Chapter Four and *TS*, it is a retrospective force, with an inherently 'historical' dimension. There is always a struggle for the subject to remain faithful to the revelation; but this does not inherently mean that the revelation is itself stained by the world within which it emerges. Rather, 'a point in a world is that which allows an exposition [of the eternal] to be distilled in to a choice' (Ibid.: 400). Because the point presents a logical inconsistency – i.e. a self-reflexive multiplicity – under pressure of its own illogicality, its appearance is always momentary and short lived. 'This

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<sup>80</sup> David Harvey has explored this 'either/or' approach to historical moments in his book *Spaces of Hope* (2000). In one passage looking at Marx's hesitation, then firm decision to support the Paris Commune. See p.174-5. Also see Ross, K. (2015) *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso), p.77-78

form of the one', Badiou summarises, 'is but a passage, a visitation: the laws of being close up on that which will have violated them for a flash of time' (Ibid.: 368-369). The difficulty then lay with registering this ephemeral moment, of "recognising" history (as the eternal singularity), and maintaining commitment to its consequences, that is to extend the rebirth of history. As Badiou stresses in *LW* '[c]ommencements are made to be measured by the re-commencements they enable' (Ibid.: 375), and if we hold to the idea noted above in our discussion of *BE* and history as singular and untotalisable, it is in fact *only* via its immediate disappearance that we have the possibility of its continued significance. If the event was immediately understandable from the position of the dominant order it would no longer be an event. Rather, it is the 'infinite trembling' of the evental site that 'makes the radiance of appearing coincide with its immediate revocation' (Ibid.: 368). To return to Lenin still dancing in the snow (see Chapter Four), the Bolshevik revolution was only able to resurrect the Paris Commune once it had surpassed the communards two months in power. Although, as Badiou recognised, amongst the barricades of the Rue de Rivoli and the Place Blanche, the Commune itself passed through its own re-commencement when 'the disorganized enthusiasm of 18<sup>th</sup> March 1871 only founds the Commune to the extent that, from March 19<sup>th</sup> on, what is at stake are its extremely thorny consequences and the missing discipline they require' (Ibid.). Clearly, what Badiou presents here is a more nuanced version of 'Periodisation' (see Chapter Four). And for the purposes of this thesis, helps shape a further understanding of the role of the militant historian. That is, if the 'either/or' of a point 'summon[s] [one] to a radical decision' (Ibid.: 426), and if that decision is always retrospective, the historian could play a key role in the re-commencement of history qua truth. In many ways, in this situation, we return to the twin influences on Badiou of Althusser and Sartre (see Chapter One and Two). That is, a point is not chosen by the

subject, rather it is that 'which the transcendental of the world imposes on a subject-body, as the test on which depends the continuation in the world of the truth-process that transits through the body' (Ibid.: 400). Yet, the 'either/or' of the choice clearly presents an existential element, that when faced with the facts of the situation, a decision has to be made.<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately, what we have in such moments is what Badiou entitles an 'existential densification' (Ibid.: 404). That is, in the language of this thesis, history "calls" on the historian to remain faithful to the potential for historicity to be transformed through the event. We will return to this below, and more specifically the problems and possibilities it suggests with respect to the figure of the militant historian.

But what happens when there are no points, no situations which offer an 'either/or' decision as to whether history has taken place, when a world's 'transcendental is devoid of points' (Ibid. 420)? Badiou labels such pointless places *Atonic*. Unsurprisingly, the above-mentioned territory of 'democratic materialism' is one such world, being a realm where:

'there's no truth, nothing but objects, nothing but bodies and languages. That's the kind of happiness that the advocates democratic materialism dream of: nothing happens, but for the death that we do our best to put out of sight. Everything is organized and everything is guaranteed. One's life is managed like a business that would rationally distribute the meagre enjoyments that it's capable of.' (Ibid)

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<sup>81</sup> 'In Sartre's plays, the pure decision adequate to the affirmation of freedom takes on a positive value, while opportunistic calculations, or the submission to supposed determinisms, pass on the side of the negative. We could say for Sartre the positivation of an intensity is the set of the points of the world that assign it to the appearance of phenomena of self-engendering or of subjective transparency' (Badiou, 2009: 417)

In such a world, pragmatism, 'being realistic', 'returning back to normal', 'the new normal', are all declarations of atony. Such worlds 'have no use for points and all tend towards indifference or non-choice' (Ibid.: 431).<sup>82</sup> In terms of the manifestation of history, a world destitute of points is 'tormented in its historical sleep', it 'no longer experience[s] any kind of expectation, only melancholic inactivity of the spirit, a kind of subtle and voluptuous renunciation' (Ibid.: 408). Antithetical to the historical inertia of such realms, a world that is replete with points is, for Badiou, a *Tensed* world. In the days before an uprising, for example, such a world contains '[s]o many degrees of intensity of appearance, so many possible points; decision, which is nowhere in an atonic world, is everywhere in a tensed world' (Ibid.: 422) Faced with a plethora of points one is called upon to make a choice. '[L]ife', in a revolution, is experienced 'point by point' and 'leaves you no respite, attuned as it is to the tension of everything that appears' (Ibid.: 423).

Yet are we ever faced with such a stark choice, that is, either a world abundant with points, or a dead world empty of them? Using the example of architect Oscar Niemeyer and urban planner Lúcio Costa's celebrated designs for the city of Brasilia, Badiou contends that a site can be both atonic and tensed. That is, Brasilia could be considered 'tensed' if one 'follow[s] its east-west axis, between mass destitution and the sumptuousness of the lake; but atonic, if [one] follow[s] its north-south axis, in terms of the two wings of habitations' (Ibid.: 423-424). In this example, Badiou positions the Presidential Palácio da Alvorada towards the north end of the 'bird', as atonic; while at the eastern end 'the egalitarian span of the dwellings, dreamed up by two communist architects, Costa and Niemeyer' as marking a

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<sup>82</sup>One could also contend, as will be touched on in the following chapter, that the institutional laws, prescriptions, and regulations of the realm in which historical writing and research are traditionally directed, i.e. the university, is a perfect example of such an atonic world. The academe's 'development of a specialist-knowledge, vocational competence, or the vague promotion of currently venerated 'values'' (Cooke, 2013: 3) mark the lingua franca of the practiced academic and their world.

space of tensed points. All worlds, for Badiou, have a place on this spectrum between atony and tension. Of course, a world may be tensed, or have numerous tensed points, but ideology plays a key role in attempting to reframe these either/or moments as nothing but irrational and illogical, objectionable threats to the atonic world. As Badiou remarks '[u]nder the cover of a programme of familial happiness *devoid of history*, of unreserved consumption and easy listening euthanasia, it may mask – or even fight against – those tensions that reveal, within appearing, innumerable points worthy of being held to' (Ibid.: 422; Emphasis added). It is the contention of this study that the figure of the militant historian offers a challenge to the 'violent promise of atony'. Against the enforced banality of democratic materialism, the militant historian can explore the 'nooks and crannies of the world, for some isolate [a term Badiou's uses to speak of a point] on the basis of which it is possible to maintain that a 'yes' authorizes us to become the anonymous heroes of at least one point' (Ibid.: 422). Furthermore, as should be clear, while militant researchers are clearly located in an immediate world, prior worlds, like Lenin and the Paris Commune, can be made manifest through the actions of actors in the present. That is, as Badiou noted in his essay 'The Idea of Communism', 'the historical inscription [of truth] encompasses an interplay between types of truth that are different from one another and are therefore situated in different points in human time in general. In particular', Badiou continues, 'there are retroactive effects of one truth on other truths that were created before it. All this requires a transtemporal availability of truths', that is history as eternal (2010: 2). Therefore, for Badiou, 'there is...a historical dimension of a truth, although the latter is in the final analysis universal' (Ibid.). While there are a multiplicity of truths, with each singularity a new manifestation of truths arise, all drawn from the void that is meta-history qua eternity. As Feltnam notes, what Badiou is attempting in *LW* is to 'theorize the process of change as

infinite, and as the elaborate and continuous material inscription of a new situation or world' (2008: 80).

Yet, to return in part to the issue raised by Williams (2012: 117), Badiou faces an undisputable question when attempting to form a connection between the eternal and historicity. As he himself asks: 'In what way can rational thought take on the historicity of the Absolute?' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 426). As with *BE* and the aforesaid operator, his solution is to locate the realisation of the eternal not in the present, but in the futurity of the subject's faithfulness to the event (the future anterior of the event). Turning to Soren Kierkegaard, he argues that '[w]here eternity is related as futurity to the individual in the process of becoming, there the absolute disjunction belongs' (Ibid.: 425). That is, the disjunction between the world before and the world after the event lay with the future manifestation of change in the either/or decision of the subject. Therefore, in this sense, if evental historicity is, in the form of a continuation of event, 'nothing but the temporal figure of the universality of its exposition', that is historicity as the worldly "expression" of history qua universal, then, he contends, it is possible to argue that '[t]he infinite inaccessibility of the ontological support of a world gives rise to the universal exposition of relations and therefore to the logical completeness of that world' (Ibid.: 331). Not forgetting that the continued resurrection of this ontological support only emerges via a subject's continued fidelity to the event as discussed above, it is within this theoretical framework that Badiou then makes the point that nothing true ever vanishes. In such moments are we not back with the finite mark of 'IS' (see Chapter Two)? That is, in this instance, the subject as Janus-faced figure, looking both forwards and backwards. For example, Badiou makes the connection, in terms of the idea of communism, between the Thracian slave and gladiator Spartacus and his revolt

against Rome in 73BCE, to the Haitian Revolution of 1796 ('Laveaux [called]...Toussaint-Louverture...‘the black Spartacus’ Ibid. 64), and then to the Communist insurgents of 1919 Berlin (who ‘brandished the name of ‘Spartakus’ and called themselves ‘Spartakists’ Ibid.).<sup>83</sup> From the Spartans battles with Crassus, to the revolt of Saint-Domingue, to the protests of Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht, traversing almost two millennia, Badiou argues that ‘every truth is eternal’ (Ibid.: 66). He continues that

‘of no truth can it be said, under the pretext that its historical world [read historicity] has disintegrated, that it is lost forever. That which suspends the consequences of a truth cannot simply amount to a change in the rules of appearing. An act is needed, of a denial or occultation. And this act is always captive to a subjective figure. But what an act has done in the world, what a subjective figure has engineered, can be undone in another world by another act, which articulates another figure.’ (Ibid.)

If we think of History in the traditional form of bourgeois historicism (see Introduction), what Badiou is offering here is nothing other than history without History. Although, the problem with this, as noted by Watkins, is always one of reconciling ‘duration and eternity in an account of time which includes both’ (2017: 127-128). Admittedly, this is not a new challenge or preoccupation. As Badiou notes in *LW*, in one form it is the time-honoured ‘Christian paradox’ where ‘eternity must be encountered *in time*’ (Ibid.: 428). While on the other, it is a shared heritage of philosophical speculation in which appearance gives way to a

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<sup>83</sup> While Badiou does not make the point, Colin Wilson (2008) has argued that in the famous scene in Stanley Kubrick’s 1960 film *The Gladiators*, we see operation of a collective truth that is made manifest via a faithful subject. In this scene, the Roman general Crass (played by Lawrence Olivier) grants freedom from crucifixion if, amongst the rebels, the real Spartacus identifies himself. At this point man after man stands up and declares “I am Spartacus”. As Wilson recognises, this act is an exemplary demonstration of the de-individualised and yet militantly unified character of faithful subject-bodies...‘in which] [t]he sacrifice of their individual bodies to the crucifixes of Roman discipline means nothing since they have already surrendered themselves to the truth they collectively embody.’ (Wilson, 2008: 85).



greater truth (i.e. 'Plato: philosophy is an awakening, ordinary life is nothing but a dream. Aristotle: we must live as immortals. Hegel: the absolute works through us. Nietzsche: we must free the overman within man' (Badiou, 2004b: 237)). Once more, Badiou's resolution is to situate history as that which bursts forth along a past-future axis. In this regard, while prior manifestations of singular truths could aid an existential re-commencement of truths *tout court*, making events that revealed singular truths stages of some preordained historical becoming would only serve to return them to a form of Marxist-Hegelian teleology. As such, for Badiou, while truth *is* unique to the self-referential site that marks its emergence, only the timeless Idea (such as the 'communist invariant' (see Chapter Three) that, for example, connects Spartacus to Rosa Luxembourge) persists. Clearly, there is always a tension. As with the spectrum that is the atonic and tensed worlds, the focus once again shifts to a subject's existential *relationship* to the site and the Idea that was formerly presented but not represented. It is an encounter that marks the paradox of history as both eternal (history) and timebound (historicity) and pushes one towards an either/or decision; or more accurately, to respond to the criticism of Watkins above, the paradox is *embodied* by the subject in how they choose to live out the singular truth of an event. Either one treats the event as some external object, in such a way that it serves to deny the continuation of the Idea, by, for example fetishizing that knowledge, reducing it to a form that serves to maintain the metastructure or state of the situation, what Badiou terms in *LW* 'reactionary novelties' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 54) and which Quentin Meillassoux characterised as serving to 'produce new intellectual arrangements [*dispositifs*] whose entire object is to shore up the refusal of a present fidelity' (2011: 7); or one seeks to live the consequences of the event that serves to *produce* new truths. While hopefully we have gone some way to providing the philosophical scaffolding for what this means in terms of the realm of historiography (of

which more will be explored in the next chapter), the question still remains as to how does one recognise the (re)commencement of truth that is the rebirth of history? How does change (re)appear? It is in the conclusion of this chapter, and preparation for the following, that we will now consider these questions.

### **Change, Resurrection, and the Faithful Subject**

In Book V of *LW*, Badiou maps out what he considers are the 'Four Forms of Change' (357-396). From the very beginning, he argues that there is no locus from which one can 'identify change' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 357). 'To put it bluntly' he argues, 'the thinking of change or of singularity is neither ontological nor transcendental' (Badiou, 2009: 357). Rather, Badiou argues, we can only address the *Becoming* of change. It is under this designation that he broadly traces, in a series of steps, the pathways along which change can emerge, be modified, or have minimal/maximal consequences beyond its initial manifestation. These, with various levels of significance and interrelation, are entitled: modification, fact, and singularity (see *Ibid.*: 372) and have significant import for our conceptualization of history, historicity, and the historian.

*Modification* could be said to constitute what often passes for history in the conventional sense of the term. As Badiou notes, 'Modification is not change...it is only the transcendental absorption of change, that part of becoming which is constitutive of every being-there' (*ibid.*: 359). For example, to return to the hypothetical gathering in the Place de la République, the datum of the day as a form of historical narration, the arrival of the demonstrators, the chants, speeches, and then the crowd's final dispersal, would be nothing more than 'the simple becoming of a world, seen from the standpoint of an object of that

world' (Ibid.: 372). This is not to say that such moments are 'an image frozen at a given moment' as Meillassoux remarks. There are 'temporal variations' in terms of the demonstration and its activities, but '[t]here is no event in this type of change, it does not introduce a reflexive multiple'. As he concludes, for Badiou, a 'world without any event is not a fixed world, but a world that follows the ordinary course of things and their modification' (Meillassoux, 2011: 9). Paraphrasing Mallarmé, what endures in such sites is nothing more than the persistence of the site itself.

For Badiou, a *Fact* is akin to modification, with the key difference being that change *has* taken place. Yet, it marks a site in which the intensity of this change is not maximal (Badiou, 2006/2009: 372). One could add that, when considered from the perspective of atony and tensed, a site as fact offers very few either/or points. Rather, while 'ontologically supernumerary' it is 'existentially...weak' (Ibid.). Clearly, both in the immediate reporting of an event (often in the form of journalism), and in the longer evaluation of scholarly discourse, transforming the singular into a fact is one of the key battlegrounds of establishing control of subsequent 'historical narratives'. 'Note that the repressive force of the Versailles troops is accompanied by a propaganda that systemically de-singularizes the Commune', Badiou recounts, 'which must (forcibly) be brought back into the normal order of modification' (Ibid.: 372-373). As Meillassoux concludes 'an event at the threshold of its abolition affirms its having-taken-place without anything immediately following, except its own repression' (Meillassoux, 2011: 9).

If a fact signifies change that has been counted as one by the meta-structure, and broadly denuded of essential power, then *Singularity* for Badiou marks the site of 'maximal

existence' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 374). Yet, within singularity, there is a marked divergence, Badiou argues, between sites that subsequently have 'non-maximal consequences' (weak singularity) and those that have 'maximal consequences' (strong singularity, i.e., Event) (ibid.). Weak singularity does, like facts, enact change. Yet, unlike facts, this is a change that amends, if only marginally, the fundamental meta-structure. Strong singularity, however, brings into existence the immanent inexistent of the situation, that is, the excluded exception. For example, the Commune served, in the famous closing words of Marx's pamphlet *The Civil War in France*, 'as the glorious harbinger of a new society' (Marx, 1871: np.). This was because the commune advocated 'a rule for emancipation', a rule that was 'relayed by October 1917 and also by the summer of 1967 in China or the French May '68' (Badiou 2006/2009: 375). In these examples, the workers served as the immanent exception, whose self-reflexive becoming cast into relief their prior exclusion from, or at least minimal recognition by, the established social order. Key here is singularity as *duration*. For example, as Badiou notes, while the recommencement of the Commune can be seen throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there may be insurrections 'that institute no duration'. For example, the birth of the Third Republic on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1870, initiated by a group of workers surging into the Palais Bourbon and resulting in the end of the Bonaparte empire, was then 'hijacked by bourgeois politicians, especially anxious to re-establish the order of property owners...[and] with [the] general development of European states...[make] them converge on the parliamentary form' (ibid.: 375). It was the metamorphoses of the anomalous multiple into the mundanities of political administration.

In Badiou's mature work, moderation, fact, and singularity, all serve as tools via which to interrogate the nature of historical change. And, as Meillassoux has summarised, it is a

triumvirate that enables Badiou to distinguish continuity disguised as transformation from the inexistent that suddenly ‘appears...[and] forces us to retrospectively reconsider the entire history of its predecessors’ (2011: 9). Be that the Spartans, the Berlin working class, or the factory workers of a Parisian suburb, Badiou allows us to recognise ‘those political invisibles who when they come to be revealed as the vanguard of history, entirely reconfigure its logic in the eyes of their contemporaries, and add a new facet to the present as well as the past, repainting them both with the colours of their struggle’ (ibid.)

With singularity comes ‘the emergence of a capacity, at once destructive and creative, whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established order’ (Badiou, 2011/2012: 15). The process that serves to ‘reactivate a subject in another logic of its appearing-in-truth’ Badiou labels ‘resurrection’ (Badiou, 2006/2009: 64-65). With this phrase (and others such as the ‘transtemporal availability of truths’ or history as eternal) one would not be mistaken in detecting a religious turn in the shift from *BE* to *LW* (also see Chapter Six). Yet, in Meditation Twenty-One of *BE*, which sought to explore the work of 17<sup>th</sup> century author and philosopher Blaise Pascal, Badiou had, according to Meillassoux, previously acknowledged how Pauline Christianity had ‘...grasped something on which Badiou has expressly written a book, mainly what we could call the “true process of the truth”’ (Meillassoux, 2011: 9). Christianity’s origins in fable are certainly analogous to the quality of the event. Why? Because like the event, Christianity

‘proceeds by way of an event un-demonstrable by a constituted knowledge – the divinity of Christ – or which one knows no more than a trace – the testimony of the apostles, evangelicals, etc., because its being is already abolished, crucified, and its body equally disappeared, while a

belief begins to emerge that will have already taken place. And Christian truth is the set of faithful inquiries, i.e. their intervention in the Palestinian situation, then Middle-Eastern, and Roman, in light of Christ's having taken place. Finally, *universal history*, for Christians, is nothing other than the set of inquiries of the Church-subject over the course of centuries, made of schisms and hierarchies, that is, of quests for ways and means faithful to the absolute event of the divine made man: Jesus.' (Ibid. Emphasis added)

Let us not assume that Badiou believes in the One of a Christian God. Rather, in a speculative vein, he merely sees in the Church an institution that 'supports the 'religious' generic procedure' as an operator of faithful connection (Badiou, 1988/2005: 392).

Admittedly, while the Badiou of *LW* does develop a more explicitly 'theological account of human time...' (Williams 2012: 127), he goes beyond a monotheistic deity. As Hallward recognised, '[n]o one, perhaps, has taken the death of god as seriously as Badiou' (2003: 7).

In fact, Hollis Phelps in *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Antitheology* (2013) has gone as far to suggest that all Badiou's mature works represent 'a consistent and concerted effort to think through God's death' (4). Such a discussion is beyond the parameters of this work. Yet, Badiou's 'evental resurrection' and its relation to the subject, is crucial for understanding how a subject becomes a kind of militant apostle. For Badiou, resurrection speaks of a 'new world, which generates the context for a new event, a new trace, a new body – in short, a truth procedure under whose rule the occulted fragment places itself after having been extracted from its occultation' (Badiou 2006/2009: 65).<sup>84</sup> Such a figure becomes the resurrection of an idea incarnate, the outcome of a melding of past events and new futures, while all appearing 'at the salvific surface of a body' (Ibid.: 66).

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<sup>84</sup> Occultation in this passage refers to a form of denial of the event.

We know from Chapter Four and *TS* that, via the concept of ‘periodisation’, Badiou renounced the idea of History in totality. In various ways, *LW* returns to this task, by examining how distinct periods subsequently re-emerge, and how the ‘historical erosion is not final because the subject can resurrect the earlier truth’ (Williams, 2012: 127). ‘History does not exist’, Badiou reiterates twenty years later in *LW*, ‘[t]here are only disparate presents whose radiance is measured by their power to unfold a past worthy of them’ (Badiou, 2006/2009: 509). As *TS* argued, the subject *is*, for Badiou, the periodisation that results from the event. It was in this sense that periodisation was materialist.<sup>85</sup> So, while there are historical modes that, connected by a meta-historical eternal, are rooted in empirical subjects (i.e. in politics ‘73-71 BC for Spartacus, 1905-17 for Bolshevism, 1792 for the Jacobins, 1965-68 for the Cultural Revolution in China’ etc. (ibid.: 72)), it is the faithful subject/operator that bears the ‘earthen vessel’ as the invariants manifested in such connected instants. What Badiou offers in *LW*, is a greater understanding of the process of subjectivization that was ostensibly lacking from *TS*, specifically the forms of subjectivization that serve to deny, obscure, or remain truthful to those preceding but eternal invariants. So far as the militant historian is concerned, these categories are significant, as they effectively speak of a subject’s *orientation* and reception of the future anterior of the event *via* a contemporary manifestation of an eternal truth.

Badiou uses the term *destination* to refer to the ‘synthetic operation in which the subject reveals itself as the contemporary of the evental present...’ (ibid.: 62). And he identifies

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<sup>85</sup> Although, as noted earlier, one could argue, as Pluth (2012) has, as to how ‘materialist’ the subject is in *LW*? As he notes: ‘While *Theory of Subject* gave the impression that the subject might somehow serve as the basis of materialism, Badiou’s position in *Logics of Worlds* seems to be that this is no longer the case. He can in fact remain agnostic about the basis of materialism – saying nothing other than it is the multiple and develop a theory of being and a theory of appearing in such a manner that the subject takes place within this theory as, precisely, an exception to what is’. (110)

three subjective forms in terms of potential responses to the singularity that is an event. Firstly, we have 'the faithful subject [who] organizes [the events] *production*'. Then we have the 'reactive subject' whose response to the event is 'its *denial* (in the guise of its deletion)'. Finally, we have 'the obscure subject', who engages in a process of *occultation*, that is, its concealment (Ibid.). What must be reiterated, is that none of these 'subjects' are what Badiou terms 'bio-subjective' (Ibid.: 68). In fact, when one considers a 'subjectivizable body', for Badiou, it is 'only in exceptional cases to the form of an animal body, to an organism endowed with biological identity' (Ibid.). While historical modes such as the periods highlighted above can be subjectivizable, Badiou also argues that 'the semantics of a poem' or 'the historical state of an algebraic problem' can also be subjectivizable bodies. Ultimately, the 'attributes of a body-of-truth must be capable of serving as the basis for thinking the visibility of the True in the manifestness of a world, point-by-point' (Ibid.: 67).

As for the historical manifestation of a subjectivizable body and an ensuing relationship to such bodies (such as the working class of Paris in March 1871, or the African American civil rights groups of the South-eastern United States in the early 1960s), the faithful, obscure, and reactionary subject offer valuable conceptual tools when considering if a present event serves as a resurrection, annulment, or concealment of the invariant idea(s) of an earlier event. Is this a situation that once more calls for the radical hybrid of the owl and the mole? Or, is it again, a chimera? Part mole, part owl, and part eagle? When the investigation (mole) from a position of historical awareness (owl) is revealed in the reaction to the spontaneous moment (eagle), one could argue that only is it possible for history to be reborn. Certainly, Badiou contends, 'the spontaneous conception of democratic materialism (a body is the living institution of a marketable enjoyment and/or of a spectacular suffering)



is of no help whatsoever'. This formation, like Bourgeois forms of history, 'immediately flattens the appearing of the body onto empirical and individual forms' (Ibid.: 67-68).

It is important to note that our understanding of the faithful, obscure, and reactive figure is always on the plain of one's reaction to the event. Although Badiou is presenting these responses to change in a formal manner, the actual encounter and subsequent response to the event is not something one simply contemplates. When it comes to discussions around the eternal as meta-history, the singular as event, and the resulting transformations of historicity, a faithful, reactive, or obscure subject is located in the either/or decision they have to make. Returning to Kierkegaard and the Christian Paradox, this choice encapsulates the realm where the eternal is enacted within time. As Badiou outlines:

'It is a challenge addressed to the existence of each and every one, and not a reflective theme that a deft use of dialectical mediations would externally enlist in the spectacular fusion of time and eternity. The time that is at stake in Christianity is my time, and Christian truth is of the order of what happens to me, and not what I contemplate' (Ibid.: 426)

Receptivity and investigation, followed by fidelity towards the truth of the event, are key elements for the militant figure; they are what *constitute* the militant figure. But within this, or more specifically between faithfulness and intolerance towards the event, we find different approaches to history. As Williams notes,

'Fidelity to the event and its repression, as the attempt to deny the event, are embodied in different definitions of history and in relation to different views of time. They are not

distinguished within a single account of history and of historical time. Instead, the struggle between fidelity and repression is more elemental, more essential. It is a struggle about time before it is a struggle about history. It is a struggle about history before it is a struggle between different politics. As intervention between two events, though, it is a political act before anything else.' (Williams, 2012: 122)

As discussed, Williams goes on to assert that Badiou's mature work effectively denies time (he contends that '[o]ntology becomes essentially political here, a matter of intervention, choice, action and struggle' with the struggle being 'the source of political violence' (Ibid.: 121)). What we can take from this is how subjectification locates subjects within *alternative historical trajectories*. As highlighted, for the faithful subject, (for example the German Communists of the Spartacist uprising of 1919), in their fidelity towards an earlier event (in this instance, Spartacus and the Third Servile War of 73-71 BCE) the experience is of history as both transcendental *and* particular. While there may be, as Williams argues, a tension in the fideliou (re)enacting of an eternal truth, to negate this is to assist, in Badiou's eyes, in the repression or occultation of a truth. As Alexander Garcia Düttmann has acknowledged, Badiou's 'fidelity...depends on the capacity of resisting its own regulation and institutionalization. Without such resistance ['violence' in Williams view], which finds its resources in singularity itself, fidelity would amount to a merely functional verification, to sterile confirmation, to dogmatic repetition, and would cease to be a commitment' (2004: 203; see Chapter Six). As for approaches to history qua event, 'reactive subjects' and 'obscure subjects' play key roles in the denial and occultation of radical materialisations of an eternal truth. 'The reactive subject', as Badiou argues, 'carries the reactionary inventions of the sequence (the new form of the resistance to the new) into the heart of the people [*le peuple*]...[and] [t]he names of reaction are sometimes typical of the sequence, for instance

Thermidorian' for the French Revolution, or 'modern revisionists' for the Chinese Cultural Revolution' (Badiou, 2006/2009: 72). And, of course, we have historians who seek, contra the militant historian, to obscure or disavow history qua event. Badiou himself identifies in *LW* François Furet as one such reactionary figure whose work on the French Revolution aimed 'to show that since in the long run the results of the French Revolution were identical or even inferior to...those of the European countries which avoided such trauma, this revolution is fundamentally contingent and pointless' (Ibid. 57). In Badiou's schema, Furet is nothing less than an unfaithful and traditionalist historian, a neo-Thermidorian. Yet, while a truth may be repressed or its consequences occulted, it 'may always be revived by a subject who commits to its 'resurrection' or renewal' (Hallward, 2008: 107). This becomes key when the central tenets of democratic materialism serve as nothing less than the battleground for history's rebirth: As Badiou argues in *The Rebirth of History*:

'Under the interchangeable rubrics of "modernization", "reform", "democracy", "the West", "the international community", "human rights", "secularism", "globalization" and various others, we find nothing but an historical attempt at an unprecedented regression, intent upon creating a situation in which the development of globalised capitalism, and the action of its political servants, conform to the norms of their birth: a dyed in-the-wool liberalism of mid-nineteenth century vintage, the unlimited power of a financial and imperial oligarchy, and a window-dressing of parliamentary government composed (as Marx put it) of 'Capital's executives'' (Badiou, 2011/2012: 5)

If truth never dies, but is simply repressed or concealed, then when it is reborn anew, it is resurrected via a rechristening. Why? Because, while 'it reincorporates what the old obscure subject had occulted', it can only do so 'under the condition of a new egalitarian maxim'

(Badiou, 2006/2009: 70). For example, as with the term communism, reactionary historians have served to occult or negate the proper name of communism as a way of negating the Ideas it symbolises. For Badiou the Platonist, such Ideas are eternal, 'no Idea is definable by its name' (Badiou, 2010: 11). Although, in abstraction, every idea contains three key features: 'a truth procedure, a belonging to history, and an individual subjectivation...[where] an Idea is the subjectivation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History.' (Ibid.: 3). Throughout Chapters four and five we have explored this process in terms of the act of subjectivization and history as the singularity of truth. The time has now come to examine how Badiou's work proposes a new way of thinking about the 'representation of history' and the figure of the historian.

## Chapter 6: The Vibrating Mind

'For even when the events which the historian studies are events that happened in the distant past, the condition of their being historically known is that they should vibrate in the historian's mind' (Hollingwood, 1946/2018: 243-244)

If, as Eric Hobsbawm once noted, what we consider "the past" is nothing but 'a particular selection from the infinity of what is remembered or capable of being remembered' (3), the argument of this thesis has been, via Badiou, to adjust this idea. That is, to see those events that come close to the infinite as marking the past in its most significant moments; or, as Badiou noted in *The Century* (2005/2007): 'Eternity against history (164)'. As should now be clear, for Badiou, 'history' in this split equates with 'developmental' historiography (see Introduction). This final chapter explores how, in challenging both the hegemonic position of such historicist knowledge and the privileged position of the historian (and the dominant institutions in which such figures reside), Badiou's thought points towards a new form of historiography. We should by now have a clearer understanding of how the concept of 'history' has evolved and operated in Badiou's oeuvre, but further clarification is required about the philosophical conceptualisation of 'history' considering his *Being and Event* and *Logic of Worlds*. Additionally, *The Rebirth of History* (2011/2012) and his 1997 *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, have also provided an important elaboration of Badiou's conceptualisation of the subject as the medium of evental history. Taken together, these texts (alongside recent essays and interviews) serve to offer the most far-reaching understanding of how Badiou's philosophical work calls for a radical historiographic approach which paves the way for the conceptualisation of the historian as a militant

conduit for such events. As we will see, for all the works that have reflected on the role and meaning of history, very few have questioned the role of the historian as the carrier of the 'earthen vessel' (see Chapter Three), the target of the future anterior that is the event's hope.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Each sub-section will address those key ideas and developments within Badiou's mature work that could be said to contribute to the realisation of such a historiographic methodology. The first task will be to return to history as immanent exception (see Chapter Four), examining how this serves as a challenge to traditional forms of historical 'contextualisation', then finally how the 'Idea' plays a key role in sustaining evental truths. Secondly, we will revisit to the idea of the historico-truth and its relation to the Idea. Thirdly, we will then explore how Badiou's evental historiography and theory of the subject confront those subjects who often profess to serve as the 'guardians of deep knowledge' (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 5). Finally, we will consider the institutional role of teaching 'history' as defined in this thesis and the possible spaces for historical grace beyond the academy.

### **From Something to Nothing**

When searching for clues about his forgotten childhood, the central protagonist of W. G. Sebald's 2011 fictional masterpiece *Austerlitz* recalls an anecdote about his old history master André Hilary. In a lesson on the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805, the main character recollected Hilary's observations on history as multitudinous 'facts':

‘Hilary could talk for hours about the second of December 1805, but none the less he had to cut his accounts too short, because as he several times told us, it would take an endless length of time to describe the events of such a day properly, in some inconceivably complex form recording who had perished, and exactly where and how, or simply saying what the battlefield was like at nightfall, with the screams and groans of the wounded and dying. In the end all anyone could ever do was sum up the unknown factors in the ridiculous phrase, ‘The fortunes of battle swayed this way and that’...’ (Sebald, 2011: 100-101)

As Knox Peden has recognised, history in such a manner would result in a form not too dissimilar from a medieval chronicle. ‘The Chronicle is pure sequence’, Peden notes, ‘devoid of narrative links and figurative intelligibility’ (2018: 49). For example, referring to Hayden White’s comments on the 8<sup>th</sup> century *Annales Alamannici*, the earliest written records of medieval Europe, such a history would appear as a catalogue of the random and purely incidental: ‘709: Hard winter, Duke Gottfried died. 710: Hard year, and deficient in crops, 711: [no entry]. 712: Flood everywhere. 713: [no entry]. 714: Pippin, Mayor of the Palace, died...’ (White, 1980: 11, as cited by Peden, 2018: 49). As Peden rightly notes, such a history is ‘unintelligible *as history*’ and in Badiouian terms it is only ‘the infusion of subjectivity into the inchoate material of the past’ that gives the past its meaning (Ibid.). To return to Austerlitz’s master, facing such ‘inchoate material’ as a historian *without* a theory of the subject qua historian, without an understanding of the subjective intervention of the historian, the outcome is history as ‘pre-formed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered’ (Sebald, 2011: 101).

Clearly, in this instance if by ‘undiscovered’ we mean the immanent exception (see Chapter Four) it is never fully “discoverable’. As in arithmetic (see Chapter Two) where ‘the hidden infinity is a condition of finite calculation...this hidden infinity cannot be calculated, and so it cannot figure as itself in the formalization in which the calculation operates’ (Badiou, 2018: 12). In a statement that recalls Dews argument against Althusser in Chapter Two that history as a history of theory was perverse (see Chapter Two), Roland Barthes reasoned that to align historical discourse with such a calculation could possibly be perceived as “eccentric” (Barthes, 1984: 135). That is, for Barthes, history traditionally ‘recounts what has been, not what has not been’ (Ibid.). But, as Badiou would argue, it is precisely in the argument of ‘the impossible’ that we find the ‘new principle’ that marks history as rupture (Badiou, 2018: 15). As Alenka Zupančič has recognised, this is a conviction in Badiou’s work that is also a component of Nietzsche’s philosophy. ‘[T]hat an event be immanent to what it revolutionizes or subverts’ (Zupančič, 2003: 7), a nod towards ‘Nietzsche’s “archi-politics” (the conviction that, in philosophy, the event is intrinsic, not external, to the thought itself...)’ (Ibid.). So, for example, to consider evental historiography as that which is the exception to the historicist formalization, would simply be impossible within the historicist formalization of history. As Badiou notes (admittedly in relation to politics), ‘we accept that from your point of view it’s impossible, *because* you are in your formalization.’ As he continues, ‘we must be, not in your formalization, but in the Real of your formalization. So, the real of that formalization is your point of impossibility...’ (Badiou, 2018: 13-14). This is not to deny finitude, the historical actuality of something happening in a place or time. But that the formalization of an evental happening can only be ‘calculated and so on...under the condition of the existence of something infinite, that is, something that from the point of view of the formalization is impossible’ (Ibid.: 12). In short, if our understanding of the finite



shares *with* the finite the law of what is possible, then we are back with *TS* and *Ap*, *Ap*. To see a totality, one must speak from a space that is resultant of the ‘count-as-one’ (see Chapter Five), but a count which is distinct from the one. There is never any final historical totality, no ‘whole picture’ in Guldi and Armitage’s phrase (see Introduction).

Clearly, to solicit the impossible requires a combination of radical self-sacrifice and optimism, where one is left hoping for the possibility of the impossible. In this sense, it is worth recounting Terry Eagleton’s comments on the idea of ‘hope’ itself:

‘In what conceivable metalanguage could a civilization take the full measure of its own nonexistence, a situation which it could properly grasp only by leaping outside of its own skin...Like Abraham with his knife to Isaacs’s throat...[he] was committed to a view of the good that transcended his own ability to grasp it. He was thrown back on what we have previously called fundamental or unconditional hope’  
(Eagleton, 2015: 113).

Such a hope (or courage in the language of *TS* – see Chapter Four) offers a ‘capacity, at once destructive and creative, whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established order’ (Badiou, 2011/2012: 15). Yet, as in poetry, so too in history, it is always a ‘tune without the words’ (Dickinson, 1951). As Badiou has stressed, responding to an event is always an ‘activity carried out with the materials available within the world, within the situation – How else could it be done? – and yet this availability must touch upon something which, being post-evental, absolute in a certain sense, transcending the situation itself, is nonetheless created entirely within the situation. Which is the exception’ (Badiou, 2019b). Crucially for this work, this search for ‘an acceptable meaning in unappropriated words’ (Badiou, 2014a:

10) continues well beyond the event. And one of the vitally important roles of the militant historian is to grapple with the possible consequences of events that have yet to be subsumed within the established order, events whose truth has not been codified or made benign. The militant historian struggles with this 'almost-nothing of the world', embracing this nothing 'by lending it the possibility of being more than nothing' (Badiou, 2019b: 42).

While figures like Guldi and Armitage may 'use the past' to form some all-embracing sense of an event's importance, the militant historian turns towards (is captured by) past events as moments of disruption, a nothing that had the possibility of becoming something. As has been argued, such an approach to history is impossible within the formal boundaries of historicism which is always only concerned with the something. As Catherine Malabou has noted in *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity* (2012), to ask of this nothing is a 'prohibited question...that shelters in the heart of any story, any translation, any genesis. Not what is going to be, but what could have been' (86). The alterity of this immanent Other 'is a question that insists, digs, overflows the effective possible that is usually too readily dismissed: "don't think what could have been," "look at the situation," "you can't remake history"' (Ibid.). As Badiou outlined in a recent interview '[w]hat interests me in life is the moment when life can touch, not upon what there is, but precisely upon what is not there in this 'there is'' (Badiou, 2019b: 63).

This is not history as counterfactual, but the possibility of the nothing, an immanent Other as exception to the something. It is an approach that is markedly different from the Other in the Levinasian sense. As Christopher Watkin has recognised, ever since Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 'the notion of absolute alterity has cast a long shadow over

ethical thought in French philosophy' (Watkin, 2007: 50). It is an emphasis on alterity that has made it a 'cardinal sin to 'totalize' the other, to speak of the other in a reductive, essentializing way that made it the other of the same' (Ibid.). As Watkin's rightly notes, Badiou (alongside Žižek) has been central to challenging the dominance of Levinasian thought in shaping the ethical call to recognise the Other. Central to this has been the question as to what 'testifies to the originality of my de-votion [*dé-vouement*] to the Other?' (Badiou, 1993/2001: 21). Ultimately, in a reference to Lacan's famous 'Mirror Stage' theory<sup>86</sup>, Badiou concludes that what is more often the case is a

"mimetic' conception that locates original access to the other in my own redoubled image [which] also sheds light on that element of self-forgetting that characterizes the grasping of this other: what I cherish is that me-myself-at-a-distance which, precisely because it is 'objectified' for my consciousness, founds me as a stable construction, as an interiority accessible *in its exteriority*' (Ibid.)

Two connected points arising from Badiou's critique is this issue of the Other being recognised only if it is a self-other and that this 'experience of alterity [needs] to be ontologically 'guaranteed'' (Ibid.: 22). As Badiou summarises, 'nothing in the simple phenomenon of the other [appearance, faces, etc.] contains such a guarantee...' (Ibid.). It is nothing other than the same something. So, looking for a 'principle of alterity' that serves to transcend the something, rising above the finite moments of recognition of the Other, led Levinas to the assumption of an 'Altogether-Other', which Badiou recognised as nothing but the 'ethical name for God' (Ibid.).

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<sup>86</sup> Lacan, Jacques (1949/2002). 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I'. In *Écrits: A selection* (Bruce Fink, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton)

What implications does this have for evental historiography? Well, ‘the notion of history harbored by classical philosophies of history’, as Zoltán Boldizsár Simon has recently argued, ‘accounted for change as the development of a single ontological subject – humankind, reason or freedom – within a flow of time’ (2016: 263). While not religious, as identified by Badiou in the ethical sense within Levinas, these normative ontologies are still nothing but ‘categories of construction’ (Badiou, 2019b: 63), which are drawn from the ‘me-myself-at-a-distance’. Contra, the Other in Badiou’s schema is the formalism of a generic multiplicity that stands as the *always* immanent exception, the two of the one of any single ontological subject. In Badiou’s schema, history always resides in the evental ‘return to the same’ (Badiou, 1993/2001: 25). In this instance, the ‘same’ is not that of a shared ontology as identified by Simon, but ‘what *comes to be*’ (Ibid.: 27), via a form of fideliolous labour, in the movement from ‘the infinite multiplicity of differences’ (Ibid.) to those truths which are ‘*indifferent to differences*’ (Ibid.); truths that are the same *for* all, but not *of* all. While Badiou connects the universality of truths with the formal nature of the generic multiplicity, the eternal return of ‘what comes to be’ is the perpetual reoccurrence of these truths, albeit in new locations, times, and with different players. As he summarised in his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* (2009/2011)

‘What interests me is that a truth is produced with particular materials in a specific world, yet, at the same time, since it is understood and usable in an entirely different world and across potentially vast spans of time – we understand the artistic power of cave paintings executed 40,000 years ago – it has...to be trans-temporal. I call truths ‘eternity’ this inviolate availability making it possible for them to be resuscitated and reactivated in worlds heterogenous to those in which they were created, and crossing over...unknown oceans and obscure millennia.’ (129)

It is a process of 'resurrection' (see below) that marks, in the words of Heidegger, how history 'begin[s] again and again' (Heidegger, 1982: 1). Or, to paraphrase Althusser's master Gaston Bachelard in his celebrated *The Poetics of Space*: all history has to be reimagined, for past evental moments are like a micro-film that can only be read if they are lighted by the bright light of a contemporary resurrection.<sup>87</sup>

### **The historico-truth redux**

It is a truism of the humanities or social sciences that when the topic of a student's essay is historical, at some point the tutor calls on the undergraduate to "provide some context" for their critical explorations; "you need to read around" is the oft heard phrase. Yet, as should now be clear, for Badiou there is no supplementary position from which to assess the value of the historical qua event. A similar point, which, I am aware, could be targeted at this thesis, was made by Hayden White in his 1973 book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, in which he argued that '...there are no extra-ideological grounds on which to arbitrate among the conflicting conceptions of the historical process and of historical knowledge appealed to by different ideologies' (White, 1973: 26). In reference to the work of American philosopher Stephen C. Pepper, to adopt such a position was, for White, to play the role of the 'contextualist'. It is worth including in full White's definition of such a subject-position:

'The Contextualist proceeds...by isolating some (indeed, *any*) element of the historical field as the subject of study, whether the element be as large as the "French Revolution"

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<sup>87</sup> The original quote is as follows: 'All memory has to be reimagined. For we have in our memories micro-films that can only be read if they are lighted by the bright light of the imagination' (Bachelard, G. (1957/1994): 175)

or as small as one day in the life of a specific person. He then proceeds to pick out the “threads” that link the event to be explained to different areas of context. The threads are identified and traced outward, into the circumambient natural and social space within which the event occurred, and both backward in time, in order to determine the “origins” of the event, and forward in time, in order to determine its “impact” and “influence” on subsequent events. This tracing operation ends at the point at which the “threads” either disappear into the “context” or some other “event” or “converge” to cause the occurrence of some new “event”. The impulse is not to integrate all the events and trends that might be identified in the whole historical field, but rather to link them together in a chain of provisional and restricted characterizations of infinite provinces of manifestly “significant” occurrences.’ (Ibid.: 19)

This is history as a constructivist game. It is a ‘totally ordered universe’ of rules, as Badiou recognised in *BE*, ‘in which excess is minimal’ and the world we are left with ‘appears to be one of an astonishing poverty’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 313-314). As we know, and as Wright (2008) has recognised, in such publications as *Theory of Contradiction* (1975/2005) and *Theory of the Subject* (See Chapters Three and Four) Badiou was ‘critical of the mode of bourgeois historiography that presents proletarian revolt as resulting merely from accumulated contingencies’ (74). Yet, it was not until his 2005 *The Century* that he sought to confront the ‘century’s productions’ as indicative of how the ‘century thought itself’. Or to be more specific, ‘how the century thought its own thought, [and] how it identified the thinking singularity of the relation it entertained with the historicity of its own thought’ (3). That is, he would ‘*theoretically determine* the primary innovation of the historical period but [this] would also amount to a *practical* (if hitherto under-explored) *expression* of such a creative moment’ (Berstein, 2009: 1145). This is a two-fold approach that reduces the gap ‘between the philosophical knowledge created through subtraction and the concrete ‘truths’

expressed in politics, science, art and love of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' (Ibid.). Again, this was the point made in *TS* (see Chapter Four) in relation to the dual nature of the masses. That is, on the one hand, in their contingent 'structural positioning' or 'statist placement' they 'constitute the historical world' (Badiou, 1982/2013: 63); but this empirical actuality was also the result of the 'disappearing fury of the *deviating* masses, that is to say, the masses who, in the unpredictable storm of their confident revolt, stood up against the figure of the State that first served as their founding principle' (Ibid.). The importance of this distinction for historiography cannot be overstressed. The eternal truths that arise within the evental moment are always 'produced with particular materials in a specific world'. As such, if the historian collapses the eternal truths *into* this 'piteous and contingent history' (Badiou, 2005/2007: 162), then the generic procedures at work *through* those moments are lost (or betrayed if the historians of change are the ones who renege on those truths – see below). Badiou outlined this when contrasting his work with the figure of Foucault. 'I am not against the presence of the past...' Badiou stressed in an interview with Bruno Bosteels. 'But I am against this figure [i.e. Foucault] that apprehends situations in their time by first subtracting any hypothesis concerning the way in which this time has been treated by something other than itself, that is, ultimately, by subtracting the procedures of truth of which this time occasionally has been the site' (cited in Bosteels, 2011: 311-312) (also see Chapter Four). In distinction, Badiou, as Peden has accepted, 'valorizes history to the extent that one can subtract the facts so as to isolate the generic, the hypothesis. One subtracts history so as to attend to the historical [that is the event]' (Peden, 2018: 52). Or as Badiou himself summarised: 'I would pick up a given time from the point of its genericity' (Badiou, 2011: 312).

Therefore, history, as Badiou outlines in the 'The idea of Communism', is not characterized by 'the realization of a possibility that resides within the situation' (Badiou, 2010, 6) or, as Simon argued above, is reliant on a 'single ontological subject' (2016: 263). Rather, history is the 'creation of new possibilities' (Ibid.) that transcend the identifiably finite. Much of Badiou's *The Century* was spent attempting to grapple with this relationship between the infinite and the finite. It was a Platonic investigation seeking, in the words of Bernstein, to explore the 20<sup>th</sup> century's 'events and happenings rather than [its] static objects' (2009: 1148). These were events as a form of anti-contingency or, as Badiou described in *St. Paul*, an 'illegal contingency, which causes a multiplicity in excess of itself to come forth and thus allows for the possibility of overstepping finitude' (1997/2003: 81). As an approach to history, it 'reconstitutes a different past' Badiou summarised in his conclusion to *Logic of Worlds*, 'a history of achievements, discoveries, breakthroughs, which is by no means a cultural monumentality but a legible succession of fragments of eternity' (2006/2009: 510). The historian of these eternal fragments must reject the atonicity (see Chapter Five) (of institutional discourses that seek to appropriate such engagements as part of the workings of state evaluation and assessment (one thinks of the Research Excellence Framework, etc.)). Rather, to be a militant historian is to be 'a faithful subject [who] creates the present as the being-there of eternity' (Ibid.) A subject that 'incorporates[s] oneself into this present' in such a way that it '*amounts to perceiving the past of eternity itself*' (Ibid. Emphasis added). We will return to this evolving definition of the historian shortly, but in terms of historiography, we now have a clear sense that 'being 'historical' is *not necessarily and unavoidably* chained to the assumption of the continuity of human experience' (Simon, 2015: 831). That is, and seemingly counter to what has been discussed above, there is an essential requirement, via Badiou, to see the historical in all its illegality (illegal according to



the dominant historical narratives of bourgeois historiography), via the portal of contemporary issues and events. As Simon continues:

*'if the discipline of history wishes to regain its public relevance, the way to do so lies in articulating a specifically historical way to make sense of present-day concerns and prospects of unprecedented change that disrupt this continuity.'* (Ibid. original authors italics; Additional emphasis added)

Clearly, as has been argued, the phrase 'historical way' could be said to be the 'earthen vessel' rather than some form of historicist methodology, a 'genericity' or truth procedure that is extracted from a specific historical referent in the form of an Idea or statement. Finally, and possibly most importantly, this idea is then used to interrogate and assess present-day events. As Wright has recognised, '[i]t is the primacy of this last step that distances evental historiography from the hermeneutic and casual reductions of historicism' (2008: 87). If one seeks to situate the event purely within its contingent moment, it no longer remains an event, but is simply transformed into an empirical actuality.<sup>88</sup>

But what of this 'idea'? Badiou argued in *TC* that it serves as an operator (an opening) much in the way that *praxis* does for Sartre and *discourse* for Foucault (2005/2007: 177). Yet, one of Badiou's criticisms is that, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we 'live without ideas' (ibid.). Like the 'immediate riot', such a condition is for Badiou nothing but a form of 'animal humanism' (Ibid.). It is a condition that has arisen from the argument that 'the political will

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<sup>88</sup> This was the argument Badiou recently made as regards the waves of protests that have swept the world during the past decade. From Black Lives Matter to the anti-Bolsonaro protests in Brazil, the danger is that without an idea as to what comes next, we end-up with nothing more than a form of 'planetary movementism [that] only achieves the reinforced reproduction of the powers that be or largely cosmetic changes that can turn out to be worse than what one revolted against in the first place.' (Badiou, (2020) 'On the Current Conjecture')

of the overhuman (or of the new type of man, or of radical emancipation) has engendered nothing but inhumanity' (Ibid.). This is the realm of Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers* (1977) as discussed in Chapter Four. But, as Quentin Meillassoux recognised in Badiou's work, it is precisely the inhuman of the eternal truths that emerge from the event, that constitute the historical in Badiou's mature oeuvre (2011). And these ideas are 'inhuman truths...that...oblige us to 'formalize without anthropologizing'' (Badiou, 2005/2007: 178). Truths which are both *apart*, and manifested *through*, the contingent. Or, more accurately, as Michael Kelly has recognised, in Badiou '[t]ruths elicit history, they are history... [truths] and so history...[is] eternal and infinite and capable of being reborn perpetually' (2018: 4). As we know from Chapter Three, the 'communist invariant' was the forerunner to the Idea. Like the Idea, it was an operator for concepts which pre-dated the coherent political ideology known as communism, such as the end of private property, economic equality, and the withering of the state (Wright, 2008: 86). As Kelly argues, for Badiou, the communist idea is an example of history as 'a temporal-atemporal, double-sided line of truths, a meta-history that weaves its way alongside the human existence' (2018: 3). If we reject the historicist idea of a single ontological subject underpinning our conception of the historical, then this opens up the possibility of an infinite array of historico-truth subjects (and, as noted in Chapter Five, and the idea of multiple trajectories of historico-truths). Not just subjects of past exploration, but subjects as contemporary manifestations of the eternal idea; or more accurately, subjects as faithful to, and incarnation of a *pre-existing* expression of eternal truths. These are moments when history becomes historicity and historicity history.

Historico-truth in this guise is nothing but the temporal “appearance” of the void. And the Idea is the “void’s” ‘*evident* aspect of what is offered – it is the surface ‘*façade*’, the offering to the regard of what opens up as nature’ (Badiou, 1988/2005: 124). As noted at different points throughout this thesis, and as Badiou highlights in *BE*, it is at the very moment that the eternal becomes tethered to the idea, is named, that the force of the eternal weakens (Ibid.). However, while the undying eternity of the void is limited by the name, the name is required if the historico-truth event is to manifest in actual acts of transformation. As Wright (2008) has acknowledged with regard to the Spartacist uprising, ‘[p]roperly speaking, the resurrection of the Spartacus referent, its transformation into an event, is only activated if connection is forced between its infinite truth and *contemporary modalities* of unfreedom and resistant political organisation’ (91; Emphasis added). As Wright continues, this has significant consequences for the idea of the event qua history as permanently unfinished. Why unfinished? Because the event offers no understanding from the position of the known and is a continual process. That is, ‘[s]ince no event can be said simply to have ‘happened’ (since events’ undecidability prevents their description as facts), it follows that *historical* events have not yet happened either – until, that is, they are incorporated into a present’ (Ibid.). One of the arguments of this thesis has been that evental historiography offers a sphere in which this incorporation can take place. As will be explored below in relation to institutions that practice and instruct forms of historiography, the problem is always one of circumventing the reduction of events to pre-existing and pre-evental institutional configurations (i.e. specific learning outcomes, etc.), as this would, in Badiou’s words, simply ‘amount to subjecting the truth procedure to the laws of the state’ (Badiou, 2010: 8). Evental historiography must grasp the idea as representing ‘everything elusive slippery and evanescent in the becoming of a truth’ (Ibid.), while also seeking to avoid the transcription of

the aleatory nature of this evental moment into an ossified institutional structure. As Reinhart Koselleck once remarked ““Chance” can be adequately clarified only if the entire conceptual structure of a historian making use of a “chance encounter” is taken into account’ (1979/2004: 115).

Yet are we not back with the question we thought had been addressed in Chapter Five, namely the problematic of identifying the radically new, but *without* recourse to an already existing symbolic? In the previous chapter we saw that Badiou responded to this issue with an original use of Zermelo’s ‘axiom of choice’. However, the question resurfaces when Badiou equates the ‘rebirth of history’ with the ‘rebirth of the idea’. That is, the Idea in its previous incarnations, cannot, as Simon has recognised, ‘retain the function of a substance in a historical process’ (2016: 264). Locating an event such as Spartacus within ‘narrative representations [that] impose a truth onto or into a historical sequence’ (Kelly 2018: 5) is a fundamentally ‘irreconcilable’ synthesis (Simon, 2016: 264). That is because by its very nature the Idea is singular and ‘rules out the construction of a continuity with ...conventional historical discourse’ (Wright, 2008: 78). In response, Badiou turns once more to the in-existent as ‘marking’ the edge of the void (see Chapter Five). He re-affirms that ‘the in-existent is that which, in the world, is closest to something like pure existence, that is to say an existence reduced to existence alone, or the existence of existing’ (Badiou and Tusa, 2019: 59). It is this ‘existence of existing’ that characterises the ‘nodal point’, the point at which the *in-existent* of the *existing situation* is made manifest (by the subject). In this, Badiou emphasises the formal properties of the impasse, rather, as he did in his earlier work (see Chapter Three), the subsequent historical representation of the in-existent per se. So, the interest in a particular historical event (and truth manifested through that event) is ‘not

because of the transtemporal plenitude of some particular constituency' – i.e., as Wright notes, the subject traditionally aligned with the rebirth of a truth '(slaves, the proletariat, the subaltern, the wretched of the earth)' – 'but because they pertain to the fundamental structure of all worlds' (Wright, 2008: 86). That is, formally speaking, the generic truth, the process of subjectivization, and the historical representation of events (see Chapters Four and Five), all serve to formulate this nodal point and its immanent presence across traditional historical time. In fact, this is very much what Badiou means by the Idea itself. As he summarized: 'I call 'Idea' an abstract totalization of the three basic elements: a truth procedure, a belonging to history, and an individual subjectivation', which gives rise to a formal definition of the Idea as 'the subjectivation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History' (Badiou, 2010: 3). To equate the 'rebirth of history' with the 'rebirth of the idea', is, therefore, to speak about the persistence and/or reoccurrence of change *tout court*, rather than the specificities of that change, which, for Badiou, is secondary to the formal processes. 'That the content of the fable', Badiou noted in *St. Paul*, 'must be abandoned leaves as its remainder the form of these conditions and, in particular, the ruin of every attempt to assign the discourse of truth to preconstituted historical aggregates' (1997/2003: 6). As Wright concludes, Badiou avoids 'the Hegelian account of philosophy as the concrete historical unfolding of the Concept...by separating truth from the 'objective' historical realm altogether, turning it into the relation of a subjective decision to an event that miraculously cuts through objective determination' (2008: 80).

From this, one can argue that the historicist's concern for the minutiae of an event is of little concern to Badiou. Although, as explored in Chapter Four, the 'old mole' (historian) is a kind

of transporter of the 'earthen vessel' qua idea. Rather, as a philosopher-historian, he is opening the way for a philosophically informed historiography that sees a connection between the formalization of a past impasse, and the possible correspondences to a present-day revelation of an immanent inexistent. Consequently, from this, a form of historiography emerges that necessitates a process of decontextualisation or, as Badiou himself calls it in *The Century*, 'subtraction' (see Chapter Five). Admittedly, the historian is often assisted by the original subject of the event, who often labours to disseminate the event's formal idea as an exception to the 'statist narrative'. Although, certainly, such accounts often lack the measured critical tones that a study removed from the site of struggle can offer.

As Badiou noted in *The Rebirth of History* 'The subject of immediate riots is always impure' (2011/2012: 26). Even if one encounters an idea whose origin is chronologically or geographically distant, one could argue that its radical alterity is only made "safe" if it has been subsumed with then discourses of the state. Equally so, it is rare to find works that are completely free of the contingent details of an event when they are so intimately entwined with that event in time or place. But, as Badiou argues in *St. Paul*, '[t]he universal is not the negation of the particularity. It is the measured advance across a distance relative to perpetually subsisting particularity' (1997/2003: 110). It is the minimal difference between any 'perpetually subsisting particularity' and what Badiou terms 'the inexistent' of that particularity, (i.e. what cannot be represented by that particularity), that is characterised as the site of the event and the idea which becomes its universal statement. When it comes to the reach of this idea, the only decision that establishes it is the 'subjective intervention that cleaves into the text of official history by means of a choice that is 'illegal' from the point of

view of that history' (Wright, 2008:89). In a summary that appears, in part, remarkably Badiouian (and we must conjecture was marked by the social and political upheavals of its time) Hayden White outlines what such a history could be:

'Since the second half of the nineteenth century, history has become increasingly the refuge of all those "sane" men who excel at finding the simple in the complex and the familiar in the strange. This was all very well for an earlier age, but if the present generation needs anything at all it is a willingness to confront heroically the dynamic and disruptive forces in contemporary life...The historian serves no one well by constructing a specious continuity between the present world and that which preceded it. On the contrary, *we require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot.*' (1966: 134; Emphasis added)

As this thesis has argued, this is not enough, one needs to go a step further. While White calls for a history of discontinuity, such a history could conceivably leave untouched the subject employed in such a study. If the event gives rise to truths that are 'transtemporal' (Badiou, 2010: 2) and these truths are only 'knowable' via the process of subjectivisation, then we also require a formal historiography that extends the elements of 'discontinuity and disruption' to the figure of the historian themselves. Now is the time to examine this speculative figure in more detail.

### **The hopeful apostle in the clearing house of truths**

In her 2007 essay 'History-writing as critique' the American historian Joan W. Scott said of the subject of contemporary forms of historiography that while 'it is acknowledged that true

objectivity is impossible', the aim 'is to get as close to it as possible' (2007: 22). This is an approach that is sustained

'by abjuring any hint of philosophical predisposition, any avowed theory of human behaviour...an appearance achieved by insisting that human subjects act in full command of their intentions, that words literally mean what they say, and that 'nature' or 'experience' are transparent categories outside the reach of politics, philosophy or 'theory'' (Ibid.)

While Scott is ostensibly talking about the subject *of* history, one could argue that she is equally speaking about the historian. Yet, this is a subject that is rarely discussed. As Roland Barthes originally argued in 'The Discourse of History' (1967/1984), the historian frequently "absent[s] himself" from his discourse and where there is, consequently, a systematic absence of any sign referring to the sender of the historical message: history seems to tell itself' (132). As Barthes goes on to argue,

'This accident has had a considerable career, since it corresponds in fact to so-called objective historical discourse (in which the historian never intervenes). As a matter of fact, in this case, the speaker annuls his emotive person, but substitutes for it another person, the "objective" person: the subject subsists in his plenitude, but as an objective subject.' (Ibid.)

Barthes sees this subject as an outcome of what he terms the '*referential illusion*'. That is, when 'the historian claims to let the referent speak for itself' (Ibid.). And, as he rightly notes, this is not a form unique to history. As White himself recognised, it is a practice we see in



such 'exponents of realistic historicism' as 'Hegel, Balzac, and Tocqueville, to take representatives from philosophy, the novel, and historiography...' (White, 1966: 133). Traditionally within such approaches there has always been a moral dimension, that is history as instruction, or *Historia est Magistra Vitae*. For the figures above, history was perceived 'as educating men to the fact that their own present world...had once existed in the minds of men as an unknown and frightening future, but how, as a consequence of specific human decisions, this future had been transformed into a present...' (White, 1966: 133). However, implicit within such a sense of continuity is, once again, a 'self-identical ontological subject' that 'provides a deep temporal continuity' across 'successive stages' of time (Simon, 2015: 825). If the past's future has become the present, then one could argue that the present ontological subject, for example the historian as surveyor of that historical past, shares, in ontological terms, a subjecthood. This is as much the case in "progressive" terms as it is in more conservative readings shaped, as they often are, by a desire to sustain a historicity continuity with the past. For example, take Terry Eagleton's reflection on Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', when he argues that

'In one of his shrewdest sayings, Benjamin remarked that what drives men and women to revolt against injustice is not dreams of liberated grandchildren, but memories of enslaved ancestors. It is by turning our gaze to the horrors of the past, in the hope that we will not thereby be turned to stone, that we are impelled to move forward.' (Eagleton, 2009)

There is no desire here to negate the uncovering of forgotten or suppressed events, to forget historically important struggles. Nevertheless, a contemporary engagement with a historical Event, as explored in Chapter Five, in such a manner implies a continuity of both being and

time. In light of Badiou's thought, the question is how does a subject qua historian *engage with the discontinuity of events*? How does the historian function as both a point of engagement with a previous event, while also becoming a fundamentally new subject? Or more accurately, how does a new subject emerge *via* their contemporary engagement with an earlier event (a rendezvous which is always contemporary)? An engagement that opens up history 'toward the future, rather than [a] longing for closure and death', in the words of historian and theorist Paolo Palladino (2011: 21). Such an engagement precludes an imaginary *identification*, which would only lead, as Peden has recognised, to a form of 'dialectical recapture', that is 'a thinking of the subject that could be recuperated in or rendered commensurate with, an objective schema that then serves as a higher order ground of intelligibility' (Peden, 2018: 50). For Badiou, this is seen most clearly in the figure of St. Paul. 'For me', Badiou explains, 'Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure. He brings forth the entirely human connection...between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is this rupture's subjective materiality' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 2). Badiou's encounter with Paul points towards two key elements of what I have called the militant historian. The first is that of 'invariant traits' (discussed in their earlier form in Chapter Three) and the second that of subjective transformation.

'What is important', in Badiou's words, 'is the subjective gesture grasped in its founding power with respect to the generic conditions of universality' (Ibid.: 6). That is, in relation to 'invariant traits', it is the present transformation of the historian by a generic truth, truths that have manifested themselves in earlier events. Simply stated, the historian's relationship to this event leads to a reawakening of the truth of this event in their

contemporary situation. As initially explored above, what is possibly most problematic to the 'traditional historian' is that in such moments the facticity of history as Event is weakened in terms of critical attention. What is then left is 'the form of these conditions and, in particular, the ruin of every attempt to assign the discourse of truth to preconstituted historical aggregates' (Ibid.). In this sense, if there is a continuity, *it is a continuity of formal truths*: truths that are manifested via the purely subjective choice to either accept or reject them. In this moment, we have history as a dis-continuous and non-linear, and if a pattern could be drawn it is event-subject-event-subject etc. As Simon notes, 'in such momentous changes a new subject is being born, from whose viewpoint the destroyed stories must have belonged to a 'them' which, as a 'them,' was also born in the midst of a momentous change and as a previous 'we' it also had to have its 'them' to dissociate from, a 'them' that was once also a 'we', and so on – all this making up a movement or mechanism based on discontinuous change.' (2016: 266). Although, while the fables are destroyed, the formal truths are not. It is not the case of a historian calmly assessing in a dispassionate manner the contingent reasons for this change. Certainly, while a decision is made to accept or reject the truths of an event, 'the subject that 'makes' this decision is...unleashed by the radical contingency of the event itself...This event is, in turn, the pre-condition for the subsequently conditioning decision which is the subject' (Wright, 2008: 81). As Badiou argues in relation to Paul, 'the enunciative position is obviously part of the statement's protocol. No discourse can lay claim to truth if it does not contain an explicit answer to the question: who speaks?' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 17). There is no end point here. 'If one can talk about an "end"', the Slovenian philosopher Alenka Zupančič said in another context 'it is an end that takes place in *the middle*. The "end" is not conclusive but inaugural; it inaugurates the very split that leads to it. "The end" is nothing other than

the joint or hinge of the two ends that seem to point in opposite directions.' (2003: 3). In relation to Paul, Badiou terms this 'the necessity of constantly linking Christ's resurrection to our resurrection, of proceeding from singularity to universality and vice and versa' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 45). As he summarises, '[i]n contrast to the fact, the event is measurable only in accordance with the universal multiplicity whose possibility it [the rebirth or resurrection] prescribes.' This was literally the case with Paul, as Adam Phillips has recently noted, the word 'conversion' did not even exist in Paul's day (2021: 47). As such, this is 'grace and not history' (Ibid. See below), if history is equated with historicism. In radical historiography, the militant historian is this fulcrum, this 'middle'. We are once more back with Eliot where the end is the beginning.

'My true life starts with an end' said a character in Antoni Casas Ros's novel *Le Théorème d'Almodovar* (2008, translation Malabou, 2012:13). An end which calls for a dissolution of any former identity. For the militant historian this may manifest itself in more than a rupture with prior historical methodologies. Yes, a break with previous ways of 'doing history', but also the end of a previous identity, as a particular type of subject qua historian. In many ways, the main character in André Gide's short novel *The Immoralist* (1902/2002) apprehends this disorientating moment of transformation. In this novella, the central character Michel, an archaeologist, recounts his life to three friends. In one scene, where he describes his recovery from tuberculosis, he speaks of how he tried to continue with his historical research. 'When, in Syracuse and later, I tried to take up my studies again', he says, 'to immerse myself as before in the minutiae of historical research', but he 'found that something had, if not extinguished, then in some way tempered my enthusiasm. It was my

feeling for the present' (Gide, 1902/2000: 42). It is worth quoting in full Michel's subsequent realisation:

'For me history now had that same static quality that had terrified me in the night-time shadows of the little courtyard in Biskra: the immobility of death. Before, it had been this very fixity that I liked; it allowed my mind to work with precision. The facts of history now seemed to me like museum pieces, or rather like plants in a herbarium, so completely dried out that I could forget that they had ever grown in the sun, plump with sap. *Now I could only derive pleasure from history by imagining it in the present.* I was much less inspired by great political events than by the new emotions stirred by the poets or certain men of action. In Syracuse I reread Theocritus and imagined that his goatherds with their beautiful names were the same as those I had loved in Biskra' (Ibid.: 42-43. Emphasis added)

'Your infinite passion is your capacity to be wholeheartedly devoted to your life as a finite being', the writer Martin Hägglund recently remarked (Hägglund, 2019: 130). But, as Michel discovers, this passion can throw into relief the 'immobility of death' of previous symbolic identities and associated approaches to the past. The birth of the militant historian, the historian as radical subject, who serves as the conduit for prior truths reimagined or reactivated (what Badiou terms 'oriented labour' (Badiou, 2019b: 22)), is often accompanied by a biographical crisis as one is alienated from former modes of 'doing history' (and the associated professional significance that comes with publications, positions, etc. (I will return to this below)). Such moments maybe give rise to fear, as Badiou noted in *The Century* (2005/2007), 'the fear of no longer being the little something that one is, of no longer having the little one has' (Badiou, 2005/2007: 124). It is a moment of weakness in the face of the

established forms of historicism (and institutions that service it), but, as Paul states in his letter to the Corinthians 'If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities' (Cor. II. ii. 30). As Badiou argues, there is a process of submission to the event (loosening one's ties to the symbolic) to enable the transgression of established symbolic patterns, one that he himself underwent with the 'events of May' 1968 (see Badiou, 2005/2007: 125-126). For the historian, such existential struggles can be the "working out" of the generic truths revealed by the event (see Chapter Five) (maybe what is most distressing for Michel is that his realisation comes without an idea).<sup>89</sup> This is an engagement with a historical subject, who, in the subject-event-subject configuration above, also engaged with such truths in their turn. As Hayden White once noted

'Historical knowledge, in short, is human self-knowledge and especially knowledge of how human beings make themselves through knowing themselves and come to know themselves in the process of making themselves' (White, 2010: 266).

As Malabou has argued, '[a] new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens a biography' (Malabou, 2012: 2); or returning to a point made earlier, as Badiou notes of Paul 'he always draws attention to the fact that he has been entitled to speak as a subject...he *became* this subject...suddenly, on the road to Damascus' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 17). For the militant historian, this is to be subjectivated in the exploration of past generic truths and not purely contingent knowledge. Once again, this is not to deny the value of the 'Old mole', in fact, as explored in Chapter Four, it is key. But, as detailed, the emergent way of practicing history post event is one that seeks to explore eventual truths

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<sup>89</sup> This was point Badiou made in relation to the fundamentally biographical character of the 'anti-philosopher'. As he notes in *Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophy* (2011): 'For the antiphilosopher, the pains and ecstasies of personal life bear witness to the fact that the concept haunts the temporal present all the way to include the throes of the body.' (69)

(emerging from previous revolutions, riots, uprisings, if one were to focus on the political condition), but in a *contemporary conjuncture that calls for new ways of engaging with these truths*. This was point also made by Peden in relation to Sylvain Lazarus (but one that also resonates with Badiou):

‘the conceptual work that forms reflection on historical sequences can in no way be confused with or assimilated to the thinking that takes place *in those historical sequences themselves*. And yet...the only genuine thinking of...so many historical sequences, the one that grasps thought as a *rapport du réel* is one that seeks to identify the wholly subjective aspect of such thought *from an equally subjective perspective in the present.*’ (Peden, 2018: 47. Emphasis added)

It is here that the traditional role of the ‘professional historian’ is challenged most fully. And, as Peden continues, a ‘vision of history’ emerges that is ‘virtually incommensurable to any recognizable notion of historical knowledge or historical understanding prevalent in the discipline’ (Ibid.: 48). Certainly, it is a definition of history in which both past and present events, ‘rites and external markings’, ‘provide neither a foundation, nor even a qualification for it [i.e., the event]’ (Badiou, 1997/2003: 21-22). Cut adrift from existing modes of historiography, the militant historian must seek to struggle with past-present truths ‘*within the world itself*’ (Badiou, 2011/2012: 67; see Chapter Five). For Peden, it is a vision that challenges dominant modes of historical remembrance, by necessitating a transformation in *how* previous events *are* engaged with *in the present moment*. This is what Wright terms the event as a ‘space of an opening onto radical contingency’ (2008: 76). A space where the militant historian becomes an ‘active body’ in which the ‘evental resurrection brings to this body...a historical resonance that gives it form and gravitas in its world’ (ibid.). In such a

moment history ceases to be that with which the 'event irrevocably breaks, becoming instead a kind of clearing-house of truths' (Ibid.: 85-86). As highlighted above, when speaking of this historian subject in the singular, it is often accompanied by an existential crisis. As Michel says, 'I was scarcely born, how could I know already what I was born *as*?' While his response is that it had to be learned, there is no space of prevarication here. The 'subjective perspective in the present' demands acceptance or rejection. Ultimately, in the rebirth of history qua militant historian, the idea of starting from a place of not knowing is one that necessitates an act of *faith*, as the event itself marks the 'disappearance of the virtues of knowledge' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 45).

As he recounts in *Paul*, for Badiou '[t]he word *pistis* (faith, or conviction) designates precisely this point: the absence of any gap between subject and subjectivation. In this absence of a gap, which constantly activates the subject in the service of truth, forbidding him rest, the One-truth proceeds in the direction of all' (1997/2003: 81). Yet, there is a clear tension in the relationship of faith as starting from a position of 'not knowing' and the militant historian being faithful to past truths. For example, on page 17 of *Paul*, Badiou notes that 'Paul's faith is that from which he begins as a subject, *and nothing leads up to it*' (Ibid. Emphasis added). Then, on the very last page of the text he states 'But if everything depends on an event, must we wait? Certainly not. Many events, *even very distant ones*, still require us to be faithful to them' (Ibid. 111. Emphasis added). Bridging these two statements is to view, as Badiou does, faith in the sense of conviction (ibid. 15). Conviction, in the role of an 'apostle'. 'What exactly does "apostle" (Apostolos) mean?', Badiou asks, 'Nothing empirical or historical in any case' is his reply (Ibid.: 44). 'An Apostle', Badiou concludes, 'is neither a material witness, nor a memory' (Ibid.). Such a figure considers truths of past events as



above and beyond the contingent details of their factual manifestation (their contingent appearance). Rather, the apostle 'claims...legitimacy only from himself' (ibid.). This move 'explicitly challenges the pretension of those who, in the name of what they were and saw [even in the archive!], believe themselves to be guarantors of truth' (ibid.). And Paul's critique of such self-appointed arbiters of the past event is witnessed in his letter to the early Christians in Galatians 2.6: 'But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed *to be somewhat* in conference added nothing to me' (Galatians, 2.6). In the realm of historiography, one could suggest that the 'somewhat' are those who align themselves with the pre-existing structures of knowledge and associated positions of symbolic authority which dictate what is valuable as history. Once more, Paul offers a useful guide for Badiou here. As for Paul, there is no authority to which the truth of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity (see point above) could be adjudicated. 'A truth never appertains to Critique' Badiou remarks. 'It is supported only by itself and is the correlate of a new type of subject, neither transcendental nor substantial, entirely defined as militant of the truth in question.' (1997/2003: 109)

Admittedly, as both Daniel Bensaïd (2004) and Jeffrey Berstein (2009) have observed, there is a highly mystical quality to Badiou's thought here. That is, if 'thought [is] cut off from any historical context by which it can be causally explained or accounted...it more closely resembles religious mystery' (Berstein, 2009: 1149). As is hopefully clear, while there is truth in Berstein's point (see below), it is an argument that misapprehends the principle of Badiou's mature thought. That is, if an event serves as a break from the pre-existing modes of being, then it is, by its very nature, meaningless if viewed, not from the site of its

immanent exception (the subject), but from *within* its 'historical context'. As Eagleton has noted, faith is hope's companion (which Badiou also interprets as both 'certainty' (Badiou, 2003: 15) and 'the subjectivity proper to the continuation of the subjective process' (Eagleton, 2015: 63)). 'If we knew exactly what we were hoping for when we speak of a different future [by its very being faith is forward looking]', Eagleton continues, 'it would not be sufficiently remote from what we see around us, and thus not different enough' (Ibid.: 66). And yet, as conceded, it is correct to sense the numinous in this approach. The desire to follow a path that, to continue with Eagleton, folds 'the future into the present rather than (as with historicism) folding the past into the present and future' (Ibid.: 133) requires that one believes without evidence. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Five, truths are a process that emerge from a future anterior and not a revelation, and the subject requires faith in the step-by-step exploration that is the post-evental comprehension of the past-future universal. As the philosopher, mystic and political activist Simone Weil clarified in more explicitly spiritual terms,

'Certainties of this kind are experimental...if at least we do not behave as though we believed in them, we shall never have the experience that leads to such certainties. There is a kind of contradiction here. Above a given level this is the case with all useful knowledge concerning spiritual progress. If we do not conduct it before having proved it, if we do not hold on to it for a long time by faith alone, a faith at first stormy and without light, we shall never transform it into certainty. Faith is the indispensable condition' (Weil, 1951: 107).

Faith sustains the militant historian in their post evental labours. In the search for an enduring fidelity to the event, it is a 'matter of investigating which law is capable of

structuring a subject devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only “proof” lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject’ (Badiou, 1997/2003: 5). It is this ‘paradoxical connection’ of ‘a subject without identity and a law without support [that] provides the foundation for the possibility of a universal teaching within history itself’ (Ibid.). Still, as Badiou indicates, there comes a time when the apostle needs to *mediate* this ‘universal teaching’ (see Chapter Five). The Idea serves as the bridge between the real and the symbolic, between an eternal evental truth and its potential realisation, but this Idea always demands some form of interventional praxis, which itself requires a framework. Paul’s texts ‘are *interventions*’, Badiou remarked, and ‘[f]rom this point of view, they are more akin to the texts of Lenin than to Marx’s *Capital*, or to the majority of texts by Lacan than to Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, or to Wittgenstein’s lectures than to Russell’s *Principia Mathematica*’ (Ibid.: 31). Common to all these examples is a ‘reawakening... [of a] popular initiative in which the power of an Idea will take root’ (Badiou, 2011/2012: 15). Such a reawakening necessitates the ‘construction of an *empirical duration* of the Idea’ in the post evental period (Ibid.: 90. Emphasis added), what we highlighted above as orientated labour and what Badiou terms in *Rebirth* ‘organization’ (Ibid.: 63). Moreover, befitting the rebirth of history as a contemporary engagement with the eternal Idea, the militant historian must not slip into an exclusively retrospective stance, but must develop a disruptive historiographic approach that remains faithful to the Idea in its contemporary manifestation, *while still allowing the possibility of new events*. As Badiou remarks:

‘The problem can thus be formulated in the following way: how can we prepare ourselves for such surprises? And this time the problem really exists, even if we are already currently militants of a previous event’s consequences, even if we are

included in a body-of-truth. Granted, we are proposing the deployment of new possibilities. However, the event to come will turn what is still impossible, even for us, into a possibility.’ (2010: 12)

To conclude this chapter, we must now explore the ‘empirical durations’ or ‘organizations’ that a militant historiography potentially offers in a post-evental world, organizations that are both born of the event, but still allow for the infinite array of ‘event[s] to come’.

### **A space for grace**

Practicing a form of militant historiography can offer a ‘point of conjunction between the act in the present...the future that programme develops’ and, as this thesis has argued, the past event from which an idea emerged (Badiou, 2005/2007: 146). Still, as emphasised above, while naming an event enables it to transcend its site of emergence, it also potentially weakens its universal reach. That is, while a subject may call for an organization to protect them from possible evental betrayals, this organization can lead to the ossification of the once radical nature of the event. Yet, as Badiou argues in *Rebirth*, while ‘formalizing the constitutive features of the event’ may lead to its incorporation into the state, both literally and symbolically, an ‘organization makes it possible for its *authority* to be preserved.’ He concludes that such a transition makes it possible to enable the progression of an event ‘from the real to the symbolic, or from desire to law’ (2011/2012: 66). As with the subject, positioned as it is ‘between the universality of the idea and the singular detail of the site and circumstances’ (Ibid.: 91), the organization ‘lies at the intersection between an Idea and event’ (ibid.: 63). The organization as a ‘finite mark’ (see Chapter’s Two and Four) is for Badiou a truth process in material form, ‘an ongoing organization’ (Badiou, 2010: 7) that is

always lead by the 'subjective question: 'How are we to be faithful to changing the world within the world itself?' (Badiou, 2011/2012: 67). While the historical event may manifest itself in a riot, work of art, or scientific discovery, the organization serves to embody the Idea, to stay faithful to the Idea. Still, the question returns, 'will the organization, whatever it may be, prove capable of resisting any partial fusion with power, with the state, will it resist being reabsorbed, one way or another, into the always precarious historicity of movements?' (Badiou/Tusa, 2019: 52). So far as historiography is concerned, such questions lay at the heart of the sphere in which its methods, practices, and outcomes are commonly played out: education.

'History', as Hayden White famously noted, 'is perhaps the conservative discipline par excellence' (1966: 112). In truth,

'since the middle of the nineteenth century, most historians have affected a kind of willful methodological naivete. Originally this naivete served a good purpose; it protected the historian from the tendency to embrace the monistic explanatory systems of a militant idealism in philosophy and an equally militant positivism in science. But this suspicion of system has become a sort of conditioned response among historians which has led to a resistance throughout the entire profession to almost any kind of critical self-analysis' (Ibid.).

While it is a naivete that has traditionally conditioned the subject of the historian, it also includes the institutions within which they work. Admittedly, much has changed since White made this point, and within the sphere of education an engagement with the methodological dilemmas history faces as a discipline is now very much present. But if, as

Berkhoffer (1995) has argued, history's 'denaturalization, demystification, and dehierarchization...suggest[ed] new subject matter, additional actors, and in general a history more inclusive of multicultural viewpoints', it has also questioned 'the politics of historical methodology, the politics of the traditional viewpoint from which history is seen and told, and the politics of the discipline as a professional community' (8). And, if we continue this last point via Badiou's line that any post-evental organization must be a formalization of truths, one must reflect on what type of organization allows for the 'arrang[ing] [of] the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them' (Badiou, 1998/2005: 9). As de Heyer (2014) has recognised, this is certainly to move away from the estimation of knowledge as that which is 'of most worth? (that everyone in a political jurisdiction supposedly needs to know)', or what Badiou termed in *The Century* 'the pragmatic calculus of results' (2007: 144)). Certainly, the material form in which 'the only education [as] an education *by* truths' (Ibid.: 14) can manifest itself can never be fully known in advance. As Jenkins (2004) correctly notes 'No one...has the power to name all the "elements of the situation". At least one element – one variable – must remain that is inaccessible to "truthful nomination," and that element...must remain speakable by someone else...in opposition to the potential totality of a truth' (52). And this remains the case for the event as much as for the organization that sustains a fidelity to the event. Still, the eternal Idea could, in some form, serve to shape an educational site which is faithful to an event. It is simply that, to take a phrase from Badiou's *Saint Paul*, any form of 'communitarian marking' must be negated, or, more accurately, 'the postevental truth imperative renders...[one] *indifferent*' towards any 'positive or negative' symbolic

framework for inclusion in this site (1997/2003: 23).<sup>90</sup> The law separates. It creates difference. And within the educational landscape, to continue with the Pauline line, ‘that which enumerates, names, and controls the parts of the situation’ are often of a “statist” character’ (2003: 77). If, as noted above, we seek to create a space that is fidelious to an event, but still remains open to future events, then it must be ‘nondenumerable, impredicable, uncontrollable’ (ibid.). As Hallward has remarked, ‘an event always resembles an instance of grace, a kind of “laicized grace.”’ (2003: 115). A space

‘which occurs without being couched in any predicate, that which is translegal, that which happens to everyone without an assignable reason. Grace is the opposite of law insofar as it is what comes without being due.’ (ibid.)

It is fair to say that to build an educational organization that offers a space for grace would take us as far as possible from the contemporary sites of most historical teaching, research and publication. And this is a key point. As Heyer has noted, Badiou’s work (in this instance Heyer is referring to his 1993/2001 *Ethics An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, but it can be said of all his mature work) ‘fundamentally challenges a dominant contemporary vision of education as a sophist’s affair’ (2014: np). As Bartlett has recognised a ‘sophistic education provides the youth with the necessary knowledge for making one’s way in the state. It has a repetitious function and a reproductive intent’ (Bartlett, 2011: 37). But it also determines the practice of teaching as that of working for financial return, where the sophist transmission of knowledge ‘is reduced to the exchange of goods’, which entails ‘the a priori assumption...[that] a subject [is] already [a] properly constituted (citizen) and thus capable

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<sup>90</sup> As captured in the saying oft heard in connection with Badiou’s work with the L’Organisation Politique and the Sans Papiers: ‘If you are here, you are from here’.

of discerning what is true or not concerning knowledge' (Ibid.). Fundamentally, it is an approach that is 'predicated on an un-thought conceit – that it knows what is and what is not – it authorised the free reign of interest at the expense of truth' (Ibid.). It is a scenario in which '[t]eaching and learning that avoid the “void” at the heart of each situation' leads to a condition in which the historian must 'leave [his]...subjective upsurge outside every official seal' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 18). In a more prosaic manner, Edward Said recognised this in the persona of the academic or intellectual who simply toes the institutional line:

'Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep your reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship.' (Said, 1994: 74)

Contra such a figure and the organizational values they represent, what would an institution that placed at its heart a formalization of truths look like? Is it even possible to create a space which maintains an ethical place for the militant historian who is never, to adopt Adorno's phrase, 'at home in one's home' (Adorno, 1951/2005: 39)? If, as Badiou argues, '[a]s soon as it is a question of contingency and grace, all fixing of divisions or distributions is forbidden' (1997/2003: 96), then the danger always looms that a form of reconciliation to the status quo is one step nearer when an organization serves as the medium of perpetuating truths. Is it that one must, in the current educational landscape, adopt the oft



quoted line from Herman Melville's 'Bartleby The Scrivener', (Melville, 1853/2016), and say 'I would prefer not to'? Or in Badiou's words 'close our eyes tightly, and ears too, in our complete indifference to everything content to preserve in its being, everything exhibited and declared by the state and its servants' (Badiou, 2012: 99)? Rather, what we are seeking is an educational space suitable for the blossoming of truths, a space that, in the words of Hannah Arendt, 'continuously renews itself through birth, through the arrival of new human beings... [who] are not finished but in a state of becoming' (Arendt, 2006: 173). In the ongoing marketisation of education, such a space 'should not be a place for preparing people for work' contends Anna Strhan, but rather a place 'that might enable the beginning of the process of subjectivity, *introducing students to past events* and enabling them, potentially, to begin *to work out what fidelity to past events might mean*, just as teachers are also struggling to work out the conditions of fidelity' (2010: 245; Emphasis added). There is no "expert" here. If the teacher-historian serves as the 'gatekeeper' to generic truths as manifested in past events, then for the student encountering such truths in the present, the historian becomes 'a master for the perplexed subject' (1997/2003: 59). As Badiou continues, 'he who declares without prophetic or miraculous guarantees, without arguments or proofs, does not enter into the logic of the master' (Ibid). Such a figure also throws into relief the contemporary configuration in which history is comprehended and communicated, a critique which inversely reveals a path towards a shared encounter of the event. As Kristen Ross summarised in her introduction to Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987/1991), if, in such moments, equality is taken as 'a presupposition rather than a goal, a practice rather than a reward situated firmly in some distant future' then we would be better placed to 'explain its present infeasibility' (xix). As for historiography and the student-teacher relationship, to encounter evental grace is to be

near a 'worldly multiplicity in excess of itself, one that is indescribable, superabundant relative to itself' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 78). Rancière himself offers a useful characterization of what such an encounter could look like. Principally, it would be one that would enable the student *and* teacher to

'...learn near those who have worked in the gap between feeling and expression, between the silent language of emotion and the arbitrariness of the spoken tongue, near those who tried to give voice to the silent dialogue the soul has with itself, who gambled all their credibility on the bet of the similarity of minds.' (1987/1991: 68)

In this sense, the symbolic identities that are often fostered and enabled via the structures of the contemporary university need to be set aside if a historical education is to 'arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them' (Badiou 1998/2005: 9). In addition, the 'subject's subsequent re-appropriation of those structures of knowledge in the light of the event' (Strhan, 2010: 236) requires that these 'forms of knowledge be arranged for the possibility for [future] event[s] to occur and the educational in the form of a truth procedure inaugurated' (Heyer, 2014). Although, once again, the danger persists that just as institutions engage in a constant shoring up of their future, indemnifying themselves against potential shocks to the system, any post-evental knowledge will be objectified (Badiou, 1997/2003: 75) and institutional authority restored (Badiou, 1988/2005: 296). From this, the question naturally arises that, in terms of militant historiography, should we actually be looking outside the academy for a 'subjective truth [that] is indifferent to customs' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 29)?

In conclusion, it is necessary to return to *Theory of the Subject* for guidance here, and specifically the concepts of *Splace* and *Outplace* (see Chapter Four). As will be recalled, the outplace only manifests itself *within* the splace. There can never be a pure undiluted outplace, only a displacement within the splace resultant of an event (the idea of a separate post-evental realm is the stuff of leftist fantasy according to Badiou). In terms of pedagogic spaces, Badiou encourages a subjective challenge to the traditional symbolic co-ordinates of the splace of education. While primarily speaking about mathematics, this passage from *TS* clarifies his position:

‘[p]edagogy delimits it’s a splace, it is up to you be out of place with respect to it, that is, to produce were it only one decisive theorem, one that provokes a thorough reshuffling – which is the only title that can be claimed for the mathematician, who is not to be confused, as Lacan would say, with the university professor of mathematics.’  
(1982/2013: 39)

Once again, as discussed in Chapter Four around the concepts of Topology and the Algebraic, even though such a ‘decisive theorem’ could effectively ‘untie the knot of knowledge’ (Harman, 2012: 236), there exists ‘no neighbourhood in exteriority’ (Badiou, 1982/2013: 221). Rather, all individuals exist within ‘varied subsets of which each individual makes its site within the whole’ (Ibid.: 215). It is only subjects within these subsets that offer the potential for a form of truth that ruptures the splaced ground, that challenges what is deemed impossible by the co-ordinates of the situation. The question again arises as to how historiography can ‘assume the compulsory finitude of its means while incorporating the infinity of Being into its thinking?’ (Badiou, 2005/2007: 154). While there is no single ‘decisive theorem’ in historiography, a militant history must start by denying any form of

'legalizing subjectivation' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 87), which, in the academic realm, as Said intimated, would include, but not be limited to, the trinkets of professorships, articles in esteemed journals, PhDs, and work that is valued according to the criteria of its 'REFability', etc. Rather, we need to look to a historical practice that is 'raised up by faith, which belongs to the spirit and to life' (Ibid.). A start, as Ann Rigney has noted in her short essay 'Being an Improper Historian', is to acknowledge 'outside the realm of academic history per se there are varieties of historical practice that are not merely failed versions of 'disciplined history' (they may also be this, of course), but something of a different order' (2007: 156). As she continues '[t]hese differences relate both to the topics treated and to the type of relation established to the past, and the specific combinations of pleasure, cognition, empathy, reflection that the particular medium or genre brings into play' (Ibid.). Rigney rightly recognises that 'novelists, film-makers and visual artists' all offer different symbolic registers within which subjects can be placed 'on the historical agenda' and which 'are socially relevant but about which not much is yet known or for which little archival evidence is yet available' (Ibid.: 155). Moreover, such 'artists help keep historical horizons open and, by experimenting with new discursive models, provide alternative models for making the past intelligible and observable [and one could add, making its truths liveable in a contemporary form]' (155). It is by a recognition of these "'undisciplined' variants' that we can identify how 'performance, re-enactment, identification, pleasure and interactivity provide alternative models for thinking about how people relate to the past' (Ibid.: 156). Returning to Said, historians in this form are often inherently 'marginal' and 'undomesticated' (according to the dominant modes of academic historiography). They are 'exilic' figures who do 'not respond to the logic of the conventional but the audacity of daring' (1994: 47). As with Badiou's Paul, they are '*ex-centred*', a quality that forms the 'practical sub-structure of his thought, which

posits that all true universality is devoid of a center' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 19). There are no universities for this universality, although such an institution can, like any place, become the site of its manifestation. And, in the sphere of the rebirth of truths, the militant historian is just one amongst many who can facilitate a faithfulness to these truths. Likewise, comparable to the Nicholas Bourbaki group in mathematics, the militant historian is not constrained to a singular practitioner. As has been made clear throughout this work, the subject in Badiouan thought is not biophilic, but could be a collective, an uprising, a book, or media performance. It is clear to see that everything from radical film co-operatives to journals such as Rancière's *Les Révoltes Logiques* could justifiably be called a militant historian. In whatever form, when faced with a historic truth, what is required is a provisional structure (Badiou, 2005/2007: 139) that orientates the historians being qua event towards some future ends. For example, Badiou observes this in the sphere of art history, where 'the avant-gardes activated formal ruptures in the present and at the same time produced – in the form of manifestos and declarations – the rhetorical envelope for that activation'. The outcome was that they 'produced the envelopment of a real present in a fictive future...[a]nd they called this double production 'new artistic experience' (Ibid.).

Ultimately, the 'rhetorical envelope' for evental historiography is not limited to the representations within and by the academy but are manifested in new and multifarious subjects conveying the 'earthen vessel'. Subjects beholden to truths reborn, that convey a 'projective rhetoric' (Ibid.) into the future.

In the introduction to *Being and Event*, Badiou declared that '[t]he categories that this book deploys, from the pure multiple to the subject, constitute the general order of thought

which is such that it can be *practised* across the entirety of the contemporary system of references' (Badiou, 1988/2005: 4). While 'these categories are available for the service of scientific procedures just as they are for those of politics and art' (Ibid.) it has been the aim of this chapter to tentatively sketch out what history, the historian, and the institutional sites in which history is practiced, could possibly look like in light of this 'abstract vision' (Ibid.). This has been, as Bosteels notes in his own reflection on Badiou's thought, a 'question of taking up a transformative and critical sort of reading by way of a separate and localized...intervention in the present that attempts to think of our actuality in the terms provided by Badiou' (2011/2012: 251). While one accepts that we are still mapping the primary methods of a Badiouan historiography, this chapter, along with the previous sections, has hopefully opened a new path for further explorations into how the understanding of past events can, in the words of Hollingwood, continue to 'vibrate in the historian's mind' (1946/2018: 243-244).

## Conclusion

'This  
narrow sign between walls  
the impossible-true  
Upward and Back  
to the heart-bright future.'

Celan, P. 'Anabasis' (1952/1998: 203)

Described by Franz Kafka to Elias Canetti as 'the most wonderful story in the world' (cited by Hibberd in Heber, 1994: ix), Johann Peter Hebel's 1811 short tale 'The Unexpected Reunion' tells the tale of youthful miner and his bride-to-be. Set in Falun, central Sweden, we first encounter the man 'in his black miner's suit (a miner is always dressed ready for his own funeral)' (Ibid.: 25) as he kisses 'his pretty young bride-to-be' before wishing her goodbye on his way to work. He 'wished her good morning', the story continues, 'but he did not wish her good evening' (Ibid.). While resigning herself to his death, the bride 'never forgot him'. Then, in a passage that is remarkable for its ellipsis of the ensuing 50 years, Heber condenses the passing of time in a manner akin to a medieval chronicle. It is worth quoting in length:

'In the meantime the city of Lisbon in Portugal was destroyed by an earthquake, the Seven Years War came and went, the Emperor Francis I died, the Jesuits were dissolved, Poland was portioned, the Empress Maria Theresa died, and Struensee was executed, America became independent, and the combined French and Spanish force failed to take Gibraltar. The Turks cooped up General Stein in the Veterane Cave in Hungary, and the Emperor Joseph died too. King Gustavus of Sweden

conquered Russian Finland, the French Revolution came and the long war began, and the Emperor Leopold II too was buried. Napoleon defeated Prussia, the English bombarded Copenhagen, and the farmers sowed and reaped. The millers ground the corn, the blacksmiths wielded their hammers, and the miners dug for seams of metal in their workplace under the ground' (Ibid.: 26).

At the end of this period, the said miners discovered a body suspended in 'ferrous vitriol'. 'Untouched by decay and unchanged' they carried the body to the surface but with no living relatives, the identity of the young man was a mystery. That was 'until the woman came who had once been promised to the miner who one day had gone below and had not returned' (ibid.). Now an old lady, '[g]rey and bent, she hobbled up on a crutch to where he lay and recognized her bridegroom'. The surrounding miners

'were moved to sadness and tears when they saw the former bride-to-be as an old woman whose beauty and strength had left her and the groom still in the flower of his youth; and how the flame of young love was rekindled in her breast after fifty years, yet he did not open his mouth to smile, nor his eyes to recognize her; and how finally she, as the sole relative and the only person who had claim to him, had the miners carry him into her house until his grave was made ready for him in the churchyard' (Ibid.: 27).



As the architectural historian Mari Lending has acknowledged ‘Heber’s exposition of warped temporalities – the synchronizing of something personal, subjective, and out of sync within a factual, chronological framework...[results in] a kind of elliptical anti-ellipsis, so to speak – the bracketing of the epic sweep of history between cruelly sundered personal histories’ (2018: 11-45). Lending goes on to argue that the kiss functions as the story’s fulcrum, ‘encapsulat[ing] its own actual contemporaneity as well as constituting a new potential future contemporaneity occurring half a century later: two contemporary moments that are not governed by linear time’. She concludes, ‘the kiss has a time of its own, preserving the singular moment and pointing towards experiences unfolding in alternative and competing temporalities, beyond chronology’ (Ibid.: 45-46). Looking beyond the historicist idea of the ‘sweep of history’ - we also need to avoid what Rigney characterised as the ‘abstract notion of ‘history’ as a sleeping-beauty object waiting for the professional kiss to arouse it’ (2007: 152) - the notion of an event inhabiting its own temporal space chimes perfectly with the idea discussed in Chapter Five of evental subjects occupying their own trajectories of time. In Heber’s story, it is the resurrection *via the subject’s encounter* with the eternal love substantiated in the figure of the miner, that marks the site of history’s rebirth. As Badiou noted recently, ‘[r]esurrection is the possibility for a truth to be active in *another world*’ (2019c: 112. Emphasis added), but it is not identical, it is not the pure repetition of the event (the woman is now an old lady in a different time). Examining the *situation* in which the truth has emerged, like the old mole (see Chapter Four), surely constitutes one of the key elements of the militant historian’s *raison d’être*. That is, they must labour (like metaphorical miners) ‘near the evental site to organize the best possible response to an event’ (Ibid.: 124). But they must also grasp (have faith), as to how this truth serves ‘another world’ in the future.

To emphasize, one can work 'near' an evental site even when it is temporally distant. As noted in Chapter Five, many are still exploring the consequences of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, even though we are separated from its genesis by nearly 250 years. This is to turn away from any (Marxist) notion of historical inevitability, towards the historian as active agent in 'the organization of the evental site in terms of the subjective possibility of immediately transforming even a small event into something positive' (Badiou, 2019c: 124). Admittedly, as we identified in Chapter Six, such an encounter requires one to often exist in a space of not knowing. This is not 'ignorance' in the psychoanalytical sense, that is, as Heyer (2014) explained, where we actively 'avoid that which challenges our cherished visions or ideals and or implicates us as benefiting from, albeit in unequal ways, the many horrors of the present'. Rather, it is a form of 'faith and hope...where knowledge is hard to come by' (Eagleton, 2015: 112). Once more, this is not hope that gives itself over to a practice of historical certainty. As Eagleton argues, '[t]here may indeed be progress in history from time to time, but it is not to be confused with redemption' (Ibid.: 27). Ultimately, for the militant historian, the question is one of 'knowing what relation hope has to power' (Badiou, 1997/2003: 94). 'Does it,' Badiou continues, 'reinforce power *from outside*, according to what one hopes for? Is there an event to come that will reward us for our painstaking declaration of the event that constitutes us?' In this instance hope 'becomes an evental connection; it deploys the subject in the interval between two events, and the subject relies on his hope in the second in order to sustain his faith in the first' (Ibid.). We are back to the historian as fulcrum identified in Chapter Five.

The symbolic remunerations of academia reward ignorance in the psychoanalytic sense. They diminish one's ability or desire to respond to truths in the Badiouian sense or inhabit an ability to remain in the tensed space of not knowing. Therefore, as examined in Chapter Six, the militant historian compels a radical break with the identities of the expert, the self-proclaimed custodians of history. It is a case of avoiding the language of a professional historian, the tone and style of a historian, where you become the undead in your relationship to the Idea: a zombie historian that peddles the hegemonic language of "university discourse" to such an extent that the singularity of the self is absent. In reference to the work of Eric Santner (see Santner 2001), Mari Ruti recognised that too often "disciplinary requirements can...divest us of intellectual capaciousness, open-mindedness, and generosity to the extent that we find it difficult to appreciate anything that falls outside of our own tightly defended way of doing things" (Ruti 2012: 31). As Badiou speaks of the anti-philosopher, I have attempted to speak of the militant historian. "Instead of pretending that the voice of being or some other objective order directly speaks through him", Badiou reminds us, "the antiphilosopher speaks only in the name of his own tormented subjectivity, as torn between salvation and sin, or between saintliness and suicide...." (2009/2011b: 53). Although tinged with a certain strain of nihilistic masculinity, Slavoj Žižek's much promoted form of subjective destitution is productive here in its call for a need to kill our attachments to hegemonic discourses, we must "sacrifice that innermost part of yourself, your mode of enjoyment by means of which you were attached to power" (Žižek 1999). As explored in the final chapter via the work of Edward Said, in this instance, the historian needs to sever their "excessive allegiance to symbolic investitures that seek (sometimes quite brutally) to bind [their] energies" (Ruti 2012: 32). It is about refusing to invest ourselves in a form of historical practice that can be enervating, that can drain us of our capacity for, to use the British

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's phrase, "creative living". As Ruti notes, the withdrawal from the edicts of the symbolic order is to reject what is expected of us, to reject what it is legitimate to engage with (and how we can engage with history), it is to encourage transcendent experiences that "summon us to what is immortal within our being" (Ruti 2012: 29).

As has been examined throughout this work, the problem persists in translating these "transcendent experiences" into the discourse of historiography, which is one with the perennial challenge of investing 'time's truth within the impassability of the inherited language' (Badiou, 2005/2007: 89). Badiou's resolution is the idea of *forcing* explored in Chapters Two and Five, and the militant historian can assist in the rebirth of the eternal by linking a name with the eventual truth. An encounter with a historical truth may originate in our reflection on the way we repeatedly encircle historical objects, time periods, or significant places, becoming slowly conscious of as to why these entities have returned in a singularly unique present moment. Walter Benjamin captured this when he said "Materialistic historiography... involves not only flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. *Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad*" (Benjamin 1868/1992: 254, Emphasis added). The uncanny encounter with a past "configuration pregnant with tensions" that connects to universal truth, is an apt way of describing the militant historian qua event. And, as is well known, Benjamin is here advancing a form of historical thought that fractures the abstract and homogenous temporality that permeates much historicist writing. What emerges from this is a vision of the historical encounter as a "monad", a radically consistent but (maintaining the Badiouan critique of the one) heterogeneous

event, that sets itself against a form of singular abstraction known as History (but equally so, other abstractions such as Capital, Nation, etc.). It has been the contention of this thesis that the historian can serve as the lampbearer of such fleeting monads, wedding a past truth to the present via a nexus point of contemporary being, which then offers a way of exploring that truth via new relations and creative explorations (see below). The radical awareness of such moments is that a new potentiality can be inserted into the historical record. Obviously, this does not mean that we can change past events. As Henri Bergson recognized, one can never “insert reality into the past and thus work backwards in time.” However,

‘one can lodge possibility there, or rather that possibility is at every moment lodging itself there, that is indubitable. As reality creates itself, unforeseeable and new, its image reflects behind it into the indefinite past; it finds itself having been, for all time, possible; but it is at this precise moment that it begins to always have been possible, and that’s why I said that its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once its reality has appeared (Bergson, 1930).

Benjamin himself was aware of this, when, paraphrasing a comment by the historian Andre Monglond in his Arcades Project, he recognized that “the past has left images of itself in literary texts, images comparable to those which are imprinted by light on a photosensitive plate. The future alone possesses developers active enough to scan such surfaces perfectly” (Benjamin 1999: 482). The work that remains is to ask why some truths and not others envelope the historian at a specific moment in time. The logical culmination of such a

question is both a subjective and an ethical one. An eternal truth may be connected across time by enduring socio-political lineages (i.e., Spartacus), but there is a significant degree of agency in how, once (re)awakened, we live these truths. Following this, it becomes productive to speak about competing historical narratives. As with the analysand in the therapeutic setting, who seeks to explore how their identity has been shaped within stories that are not fully their own, it is the ability to say yes or no to those ingredients of the story one emphasizes and or ignores, which offers the real freedom. The “truly new emerges through narrative”, Žižek has said, “the apparently purely reproductive retelling of what happened – it is this retelling that opens up the space (the possibility) of acting in a new way” (Žižek 2014: 150-151). We are exposed to Ideas in our exploration of the past, Ideas that connect with contemporary conditions, and through this very identification, the significance of those Ideas in history change along with our stories of the future.

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What of the formal nature of these explorations of the idea? Admittedly, throughout this work I have resisted a strict methodological criterion as regards a militant historiography. To have done so would have merely curtailed the singularity of history’s rebirth, leading to the kind of totalising approach to the past critiqued in this work. However, one of the recurring motifs has without doubt been the proximity of the ungrounded decision that is the naming of the nameless to practices of faith. Certainly, broad connecting themes have developed such as naming the ineffable as an exploratory form of historiography (Chapter Two and Four), the militant historian as the operator of this faithful connection to the nameless (Chapter Five), and the relationship between secular faith and knowledge (Chapter Six). If we

are going to utilise some form of faith, we must remind ourselves that it is determinedly godless. But I would argue that recourse to a religious language, due to the impossibility of secular names within the existing sphere of representation, is undoubtedly part of the lexicon of hope. It is a language Badiou has persistently returned to, most recently speaking of the subject as the 'Son', the 'father' as the state, and the 'spirit' as the mediation between the two (Badiou/Tusa: 1997/2019: 54). Moreover, it is the Christian subject 'who does not preexist the event he declares' (Badiou, 2003: 14), who is the most prescient figure when speaking of the militant historian qua event. But contra to the certainties of historicism as a 'religion of the past', to return to Stepanova's comments in the introduction, the militant historian remains homeless, with their fidelity to the truth that has borne them their only guide. It is a question of believing in the truth, 'mak[ing] it ours' Badiou has said (2005/2007: 95), then toiling to see that truth represented. It is an arduous and wandering journey most effectively captured in the Greek word 'Anabasis'.

The original Anabasis is, as John Dillery has summarised, 'Xenophon's account of the march of ten thousand Greek soldiers through much of the western portion of the Persian empire' (2001: 1). Seeking to seize the throne from his brother Artaxerxes II, Cyrus the younger had journeyed with his Greek army along the Tigris-Euphrates River valley to Cunaxa.

Subsequently defeated and Cyrus slain, the troops had to return to the Greek world without a leader. 'Xenophon emerged as the ideal replacement' Dillery continues, 'and guided the men through difficult terrain, food shortages, and sometimes hostile peoples to reach the relative safety of the northwest coasts of Asia Minor' (Ibid.). In this sense, the word Anabasis literally means 'a journey up country or inland' (Ibid.: 8). For Badiou it also conveys the associated ideas of 'a re-ascent towards the source, an arduous construction of novelty,

[and] an exiled experience of beginning' (2005/2007: 81). For the purposes of this thesis, anabasis captures in Badiou's words 'the free invention of a wandering that *will have been* a return, a return that did not exist as a return-route prior to the wandering' (Ibid.) It resonates with the figures of the lampbearer and guetteur discussed in Chapter Four. It names the militant historian's voyage to the past, a passage which offers no clear return route. Yet, this return is merely an indication of how the eventual truths of past events continue to remain presented but not represented, and how, in the anxiety of their being (see Chapter Four), the militant historian testifies to these truths. As Badiou summarised, 'the century's militants, whether in politics, science, the arts or any other passion, think that man is realized not as a fulfilment, or as an outcome, but as absent to himself, torn away from what he is and that it is this tearing away which is the basis of every adventurous greatness' (Ibid.). Seized by the historical event, 'nothing pre-exists this attempt...nothing has prepared the ground' (95) for the return journey of the historian. On their journey, the historian finds herself in a land of impossibility concerning the recognition of that truth. 'In the trajectory it names', Badiou adds, 'anabasis leaves undecided the parts respectively allotted to disciplined invention and uncertain wandering' (Ibid.). Unsure whether we are at 'an end or a beginning' of a journey (Ibid.: 83 – See Chapter Six), this author is certain that the increasingly inflexible structures of academia offer no ground for the 'vacance of wandering' (ibid.: 92).

However, one cannot, as noted in Chapter Six, remain in this land of flight forever. The militant historian must facilitate the representation of this past truth, move towards a future destination which requires them to supplant research with direct intervention and activism. Maybe as Joan W Scott argues, '[t]he point of critique is to make visible those blind spots in



order to open a system of change. Not to replace what is with a fully formulated, ideal plan, but to open the possibility for thinking (and so acting) differently' (2007: 23). Yet, when those 'blind spots' are literally unspeakable in current 'possibilities for thinking', it is always more than about simply bringing new differences to light. History must become more than a purely restorative act, i.e., making history more equitable and inclusive *within* dominant modes of historiography. Instead, the historian qua event must connect these truths to broader movements of social change. As noted in Chapter five, there is no locus from which you can identify change, you can only become change. As China Miéville noted of the October Revolution:

'Unsayables are by no means all there is to this strange story, but they are central to it.

They are key to why it matters. Because that which we can't speak we might experience, instead. Which is why with the hesitations to answer comes a yearning. Not to say but to do and be. Not to struggle and fail to explain or to speak an October, but to be part of one' (Miéville, 2017b)

Alongside the activist-historian, the personae most suited to this becoming of universal truths is perhaps that of the hybrid figure of the poet-historian (see Chapter Four). It has been one of the suggestions of this thesis that poetry offers the militant historian the potential to traverse the gap between presentation and representation. Maybe it offers a language that mirrors at the material level of the text, the tide of meanings that twist, swirl and encircle history qua event. That is, offering a form of historical writing that is close to the

way Wittgenstein spoke about poetry and, as Badiou recognized, its ability to say materially what can't be said linguistically, the "unsaid of the saying" or the act "summoned at the edges of linguistic evocation" (Badiou 2009/2011: 177–178). If, as Hartog and Weiner argued, history describes something 'that has been', while poetry describes something 'that might be', naming the unnameable qua the singularity of the event appears to call for both mediums (2004/2014: 443). 'It is sometimes fiction. It is sometimes theory', Macaulay famously said of history in 1828, and if poetry's 'statements are of the nature...of universals', while history is those of 'singularity' (Ibid.), then the poetic turn is seemingly well placed to represent the manifestation of generic truths *in* a situation. One could argue that poetry is the appropriate dialect of the concept of 'forcing' (Chapter Five). As recalled, 'forcing corners the point at which, although incomplete, a truth authorizes anticipations of knowledge, not statements about what is, but about *what will have been if the truth reaches completion*' (Badiou, 1992/2008: 138). If the role of the 'future anterior' (Chapter Five) is the space of such anticipations, then poetry could serve as its voice. '[W]hen it comes to what happens *on condition that that truth will have been*' Badiou continues, 'there is a forcing that enables almost everything to be stated' (Ibid.). In this way, poetry can work like truth, in that 'truth works in the retroaction of an almost nothing and the anticipation of an almost everything' (Ibid.)

Although, as stressed in the closing chapter, if we are to challenge the dominance of historicism, other forms of creative expression offer potential too. Over the past 30 years there has been a seemingly unstoppable growth of new kinds of writing around place and identity. Those working in this area have employed a productive range of literary and cultural forms, including memoir, anecdote, folklore, fiction, conversation, and biography.

Outside of the academic strictures of peer reviewed journals (although rigour and exactitude are essential) such work often emerges from a state of free association or daydreaming. The French word *dérive*, or drift, is the most apt way of describing this act. When applied to our sojourns in the city or country, to drift is to bypass the sanctioned pathways that delineate a terrain. Following your own inclinations or thoughts that arise through unexpected and suggestive encounters can connect with forgotten ways of thinking about the past. To *dérive*, is to remain alert to the unconscious forces at work in the common place. The phrase most often associated with this approach is the admittedly overused one of 'psychogeography'. Coined in 1957, it was used by the Situationist International, a small group of avant-garde artists and intellectuals influenced by Dada, Surrealism and Lettrism who sought out the repressed desires of the urban environment. The group's central proponent, Guy Debord, defined psychogeography as the 'study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (1955). It is a methodology that makes use of poetry, music, history, rumour, economics, or philosophy to detect the reverberations, the long-forgotten undertones, or actively suppressed associations of a street, building or district. By acts of *détournement* or turning the sanctioned use of a space on its head, like the demonstrations May '68, Situationist's sought to reveal the hollow spectacle of the commodified consumer society and its barren existence that masquerades as an abundance of choice.

While conceding the obvious political anomaly that distinguishes the revolutionary aims and ambitions of the Situationist International from the predilections of most academic history, psychogeography and its ability to synthesize numerous fields of inquiry offers another

possible form for the analysis of unspoken or negated truths of history qua event. To seriously engage with history as explored in this work, an interpretative dexterity is required, one that can imaginatively respond to the currents of time, place and memory that are pertinent in our encounters with past events. In this area we could take a lead from the 'Memory Map' project established by the writer Marina Warner. Working with Essex University and the Victoria and Albert Museum, Warner sought to create an engagement with sites that draw on writing inspired by paintings, ancient artifacts, local stories, and folklore that involves 'listening in to other people's ghosts as well as your own'. As she continues, it is an approach that:

'grows out of daydreaming, reverie, and the unbidden images that come up in the mind. This is writing as fugue, as enigma variations, as rapporteur of what Antonio Damasio has called 'the-movie-in-the-brain', that is, the phantasmic flow of consciousness...[It] could also have been called after Proust's madeleine, the subtly flavoured biscuit he dipped in tea which, as if softened, set off a train of memories and meditations. Proust was revisiting a world he knew in the recent past, whereas Memory Maps spreads out in rings beyond the familiar and personal past into more distant time too, and charts, like an old portolan, unexamined coastlines, land masses, and possible harbours' (2006)

When faced with the official histories of a place or region, memory mapping offers the possibility of discovering truths that have been subjugated or simply forgotten. 'The work of mapping', Warner continues, 'involves above all remapping; it beckons us to entertain

different, new concepts of the past and work out how they refashion the present' (Ibid.)

Such pioneers of this form include the writers Iain Sinclair, W. G. Sebald (see Chapter Six) and Lisa Appignanesi. Delicately unfolding the forgotten stories of time in the vicissitudes of place, their narratives are not nostalgic; rather, they ingeniously reveal a relationship to the past which in the words of T. S. Eliot, allows in 'the conscious present...an awareness of the past...which the past's awareness of itself cannot show' (Eliot).

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This thesis began by questioning how Badiou's work could offer a formal challenge to the continued dominance of historicist modes of thought in contemporary society. It has hopefully revealed that if we are to contest such ideas, it requires more than a historian dispassionately choosing topics that have been ignored within dominant historical frameworks, although this is important. It calls for the historian themselves to undergo a transformation that makes their continued existence within the prevailing institutional structures that practice historicism impossible. Echoing Miéville's comments on the October Revolution, Badiou argues that if you can claim faithfulness to the truths of the revolution, but only if 'you're able to show how a given aspect of your action is consistent with the principles in whose name you regard the Russian Revolution as having an absolute value' (2015/2016: 77). 'In this sense', Badiou continues, 'you exist "timelessly," so to speak, with the Russian Revolution as a co-consequence of these principles' (Ibid.). Remaining alert to the singularities born of an event, history is wrenched from the security of the past to become our present and future selves. It is to '[r]eactivate your dormant childhood', to 'be the prince of your own unsuspected beauty' (Badiou,1998/2014: xiv). If '[t]here are only

singularities awaiting reactivation, creative virtualities lodged in [the] folds of time, which the body can discover and accept', then now is the time to '[a]ctivate your virtuality' (Ibid.).  
History is yet to come.

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