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Change between Scylla and Charybdis ¹

Reflections on the paradoxes of change via the work of Alain Badiou

Introduction

“What is change”? In its driest formulation, this question seems to be one of those games in which, since centuries, philosophers brilliantly waste their time. Nevertheless, if one decides to take it in a very literal sense, it appears in all its explosiveness: the relation between the three terms of the sentence (what – is – change), taken in their philosophical transcription (thing – being – becoming) produces a series of other questions in which a qualitative leap is produced, via the destruction of some philosophical evidences. We would like here to show how the work of Alain Badiou can be seen as a productive – albeit problematic – unfolding of the explosiveness of this question, i.e. of the question of the essentiality of change.

The formula “ ‘what is’ ‘change’?” in fact puts together on one side the idea that, at least in philosophy, it makes sense to ask what a given thing² *essentially is*, and on the other hand that, if we want to answer this question, we cannot exclude the changing set of the accidental variations from the questioning around what classical philosophy called “the essence”. The question “what is change?” thus removes the evidence of the separation between the unity of the essence and the multiplicity of the material accidents. And in fact, at the very hardcore of Badiou's philosophical system lies the idea that Being is not a unity that is affected by a multiplicity of accidental, changing, variations, but on the contrary is a pure multiplicity that appears as one, according to an internal principle of unification. The question of change is thus an *essential* question in Badiou's perspective on philosophy. To this extent, it might be interesting to observe that, already in 1967, Gilles Deleuze linked essence and change as follows: apparently philosophy is traversed by the question “what is it?” This noble question is supposed to concern the essence, and is thus opposed to vulgar questions, which point merely to the example or to the accident”... “It might be that questions such as who? how much? how? when? are better – as much for discovering the essence as for discovering something more important”³: something more important, i.e. a changing multiplicity of accidents, of things which “accidunt”, which happen and change, and which compose the apparently indissoluble unity of the object. If no split is thus possible between essence and

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² A given “thing” can of course also and mainly be understood as something inside philosophy, i.e. a concept.

³ Gilles Deleuze, “The method of dramatisation”, in Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Island*, New York, Semiotexte, 2004, pp. 95 and 94.

accidents, then, as Badiou says, being has to be thought as “strictly univocal”, through “a theory of multiplicities and an embrace of singularities”: to this extent, he declares, Deleuze’s “bold program is the one which I also espouse”⁴

First of all – as known this is one of the essential thesis of *Being and Event* – Badiou considers that only mathematics, through set theory, can express being as pure multiple: set theory expresses that a unity is never a primal or original data, but it is the mode of presentation of a set of elements sharing a given common propriety, elements which are not “unities in themselves”, but multiplicities structured *as* unities according to the criteria of the set⁵.

Secondly, it is via the concept of excess that Badiou links the idea of Being as pure multiple, and the idea of change: if “what is” changes, it is because each thing, conceived on an ontological level as a pure multiple, animated by the fact of not having a ground, a point of stop of its internal division into smaller elements, has as « essence to multiply itself in an immanent manner »⁶. Thus « the profound ontological thesis here is that ...one can think multiple as in excess of itself »⁷. The pure multiple is both what is phenomenally presented, and the principle of its explosive variation. The tiny, infamous, changing, sensible accidents that have often been considered as a irrelevant disturbance that philosophy cannot account for, are thus reinjected into the very core of ontological thought.

More precisely, one of the largest efforts of the work of Alain Badiou has been to conceive a theory of change that is neither bounded to a dialectical structure, nor to continuity. A theory of change, on the one hand, not bounded to a dialectical structure, in which the two terms of the change (the substituent and the substituted) are subsumed under a larger identity. To this extent, even his early works on contradiction, namely in *Theorie de la contradiction*, he states that “the primacy of contradiction over identity” is a “dialectic principle” based on the idea that “the essence of things is nothing else than the internal law of their transformation”⁸. But also, on the other hand, a theory of change which is not bounded to continuity – as it would be for instance in the case of the Leibnizian

⁴ Alain Badiou, *One multiple, multiplicity*, in Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, London/New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 68

⁵ If we consider a situation as a set, we will thus name “minimal elements” the elements to which I can apply the distinctive characters of the situation, but to the parts and elements of which such character cannot be applied. For instance a party-structured political reality is made of political parties, which are made of federations, which are made of local cells, which are made of *political* individuals: all this levels, are political elements. All these elements, except for the militants, are also subsets, made of political elements. But the organs, the physical needs, the symptoms, drives and desires of the militants, although presents in the political scene, cannot be represented at a political level. The minimal elements of political reality (the militants) are made of an infinite multiplicity of parts and subparts (and so on) that, in their infinity, cannot be represented into the logic of organisation of the situation. Being is thus a pure multiplicity that appears as structured in unities unified by the logic of the set, of the situation they belong to.

⁶ Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, London – New York, Continuum, 2006, p. 33

⁷ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 78

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction*, Paris, Maspero, 1975, p. 51

heritage of Deleuze's work –. In other words, Badiou has tried to think, in strict relation to ontology, a theory of *radical* change, a theory of change in excess both over continuity and over the internality of change to a structure that commands its articulation.

In this sense he carefully depicts, in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, how change necessarily takes place as something radically new, irreducible to *what is*. This means, first and foremost, that change *is*, but is not *univocally* assignable to ontology: on one hand, Being is in excess over itself, and thus changes (and therefore one can say that “*change is*”), but on the other hand change is in radical excess over that which is.

From this problematic standpoint, two questions can be raised through Badiou's work: first, in order to produce a change, change cannot be simply irreducible to what is here and now, but has to be *something* structured following a given logic. Secondly, change, although irreducible to the existent, nevertheless exists only as embodied in the situation where it appears: but by doing so, it seems to lose its proper excessiveness. It is only by distinguishing radical change on one side from the inconsistency of a pure subtracted moment and on the other from the consistency of a state of fact, that it becomes possible to pinpoint where radical change can happen. These two problems tell us that, on one side, change, *in order to be what it is, in order to be a change, has to be in excess over that which is*, and on the other that, in order to produce a change, change *has to be something*.

Thus change has to be something, and in order to be a change it has to be in excess over that which is. But this latter statement can be radicalised: only what changes is.

We would then write that only what is changes (although change is in excess over being), and only what changes is (although in order to be a change it has to be something). In fact, on the one hand, a thing *is* only when it changes: only what exceeds itself by changing, can be *identified*. It is because what I see is changing, and it is insofar as the conditions of its manifestation escape my expectations at least partially that I can localize it. Without this resistance to localization, a thing would become imperceptible, it would be impossible to localize it in its singularity: this is namely the case of something very still, equal to itself, that disappears in its environment, mimetically camouflaging in it. But on the other, change is such only when it is something: a change, as Badiou notices in *Saint Paul*, becomes true only retroactively, in the consistency of the consequences that embodies it in the situation in which it appears. In other terms, there is no such thing as change in general, but change is always something specific.

We face now two problems: in order to be, change has to change, and in order to change, change has to be something. The relation to fidelity and the relation to the State offer us a good perspective on these problems.

Change and fidelity

The idea that, in order to be, change has to change, enters into contradiction with the problem of the status of the *consequences of change*. For Badiou – as he articulates in *Saint Paul* – a radical change, an event, exists only retroactively, starting from the set of its consequences, and more precisely it exists retroactively starting from these points that declare that their own existence is bounded to such event. Fidelity is thus the minimal requirement for the occurrence of a change: there is thus no change, if it is not incorporated in the situation by a set of faithful acts that, despite the impossibility to prove its truth according to the criteria of the situation, decide retrospectively that “yes, a radical novelty has effectively taken place”.

But the criteria of fidelity is not sufficient: a change has also to be *singular*. A radical change is something radically *true*, in the sense that it is at the same time undeniable, and non-reducible to the *knowledge* of the situation⁹. And to this extent it is radically singular: in fact a “singularity means a being that cannot be thought via its sole contextualization”¹⁰. Thus, “since truth is evental ... it is singular”, in the sense that it is “subtracted to the structures of the situation”¹¹. Because of this, « it does not offer any objective warranty »¹², and therefore it demands an “ab-solute choice”, a choice with no bounds that can identify it as right or wrong according to a criteria, a choice that is therefore singular.

But the two conditions of change, fidelity and singularity, enter in conflict: in fact, for Badiou the sign of an event is that the faithful choice to say « yes, it happened », instead of « no, it was just a fact amongst others, but not a radical change » is an absolutely singular choice, which cannot rely on the usual criteria that the situation offers to judge facts. But what happens after the first moment of choice, in the continuation of the faithful procedure, i.e. in the unfolding of the consequences of the having-taken-place of the event? If, passing through all the singular embodiment of the consequences of the event, one keeps on simply affirming the truth of the event, then one starts to act *as if* he or she had a criteria of choice. Reproducing the choice, the choice is no more singular, because a previous criteria on which one can rely becomes available, a previous criteria which becomes progressively consolidated, and to which therefore one can rely with an increasing automatism. What is thus progressively installed via repetition is the *factual* unfolding of the consequences of a previous choice. It is exactly this repetition, which is inscribed inside the faithful

⁹ To this regards, Badiou follows the lacanian distinction truth/knowledge. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar XVII*, New York, Norton, 2006, chapters 2 and 3 and Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar XX*, New York, Norton, 1998, chapter 8.

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 377.

¹¹ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, cit., pp. 14 et 13. The truth of a radical change which appears in a situation is thus strictly linked to its singularity. Singularity, by the way, as paradoxical as it might seem, is what universalises the change, because, being singular in regard to the laws of the situation in which it appears, it addresses all elements despite their role in the situation, it addresses the potential singularity of each element.

¹² Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, cit., p. 452

procedure, that, foreclosing the singularity of the choice, provokes the conversion of the radical change into a state of fact, rendering it *ineffective*. Badiou has a name for the figure which chooses for the event, but treating it *as if* it was a fact amongst others: the « reactive figure ». This figure is the principle of the State itself, it is the figure of the normalisation, of the conversion, for instance, of the Revolution into a set of decidable bureaucratic decisions. But, as we have seen, it is the product itself of the simple and straight *repetition* of choice, repetition in which the excessiveness proper of change – and of being – gets lost.

Thus what necessarily appears via the *simple* application of a faithful procedure to an event is a new structure of consolidation of change; a structure of consolidation in which the excess of change, the vital forcing of the structure of the present, gets progressively lost (because the being of change relies exactly in its *excessiveness* over being – which is of course also a character of being itself); a structure of consolidation which thus takes progressively the place of the state of fact that it was supposed to cut in a radical fashion. To this extent, it might be interesting to see how, in its book on Saint Paul, Badiou analyzes an unrealized scenario by Pasolini on Saint Paul's life. The plot, remarks Badiou, spins around the fact that Paul “turns against his own inner saintliness”, because “the strict requirements of militant activity progressively invert saintliness into priesthood”. This happens because the faithful militant cannot bear “the ordeal of a History, which is at once *fleeting* and *monumental*”: history is thus *monumental*, is a solid situation “in which the truth (to which the militant holds) is conceived as an exception”; but it is also *ungraspable* for the event: it is an infinite set of singularities, the singularity of which the faithful procedure is incapable to deal with. Having to face the resistance of the singularities which do not join the faithful procedure, the faithful procedure « protects itself creating, with all the necessary strength, a Church », a state. And this provokes « the almost necessary movement of an internal betrayal »¹³. There is thus a sort of fatal necessity of the conversion of the radical change into state. Fidelity is then the exact point in which the excess of the revolution is embodied into the situation, and in which the excess of the revolution is converted into a state: and in fact, as Badiou states, « fidelity is the *law* of a *truth* »¹⁴. The state as exhaustion of change is thus the result of the incapability to integrate the excessive nature of the singular points of the situation in the universalising address of the event – which aim is to change radically *all* the situation –, it is the result of an excessive straightness of the faithful procedure that was set to unfold the consequences of the event.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, cit., pp. 38-39. The consequence of it is that « Paul dies also to the extent that saintliness has darkened within him », that its own revolutionary strength has darkened.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90

In *Logiques des Mondes* Badiou tries to face this predicament. Through what he calls the theory of points, he seeks to root change into the very details of the situation: a point is a minimal element of the situation, but a specific point, a point which is characterised by the fact that it imposes a binary choice, which options are to declare the truth of change, or to deny it. And, he states, a subject is such only if he composes a body, i.e. a coherent set of *points* that he finds in the situation¹⁵. The truth of change, as well as the subject who declares it, are thus possible only in the specificity of a true *embodiment*, an *embodiment* which is each time unique and singular, specifically belonging to a given situation, although in excess over it. Truth thus is embodied as political equality between those who are presented in the situation and those who are invisible in it, as artistic sensible tension between the formal codes of the present and the idea of the form which cannot be contained in them, as the scientific expression of a non yet expressible intuition of the infinite, as a love statement that joins the lovers in the precise point of their disjunction. But in these procedures of embodiment “one draws the consequences” of an event and, for Badiou, “the appearing content of the alternative does not really matter”¹⁶: the truth of the event remains strictly the same, and it is just *reactivated* in each singular case, so that each point “is the testing surface of the appearance of a truth”¹⁷: it is a test surface, but not a moment of modification. In its perfect an-historical eternity, the truth of the pure multiple is embodied in specific points, via which it appears as an explosive moment of reconfiguration of the situation: but this same multiple, for Badiou, is not affected, in its intimate in-consistency, by this passage into the world. “Change” – which is that expression of the excessiveness of Being which excessiveness is in excess over Being – is thus paradoxically “irrealized” by its mundane realisation, a mundane realisation which appears to be unable to change the truth of change – and of Being –, and which thus stabilizes itself necessarily into a state of fact. And in fact Badiou in *Logiques des Mondes* affirms that Being as pure multiple « as affected that it might be by the paradoxes of its infinity (and of its presentation), is absolutely immutable »¹⁸. The excess of the pure multiple over its presentation is reduced to a principle of difference indifferent to the difference that it produces. And to this extend we can use an observation that Jacques Rancière made about Deleuze's ontology : «the question remains : how can one make a difference with this

¹⁵ Both a subject and a living being have a body: but while the body of the latter is composed by a series of atomical points identifiable according to the laws of the situation (the laws that define what an animal is allow me also to identify the minimal elements of this same animal), the body of a subject is a series, a sequence of points that belong to the situation, but cannot be clearly assigned to it, because their existence implies a choice about the totality of the situation of which they are part. The body of a subject is limited (although the consequences of the event to which the subject is connected are not limited), but its limits cannot be set in advance. It is an expanding body.

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes, cit.*, p. 455

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 421

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 377

indifference ? »¹⁹.

A state of change

This question can be solved only if we continue our path through the problems raised by the specific modes of appearance of change.

The tension between the double condition of change has also shown how change exists only via its solidification in a present state of reality, it has shown that there is nothing like a “pure presentation of change as such”: change is always somehow existing via a form of structuring, via a “state of fact” in which of course its singularity is highly at risk. *The state is not the pure opposite of change, because change, in order to exist, has to be something of which I can affirm the factuality of, a factuality to which it nevertheless resists.* The second paradox concerns thus the structures of change: change implies a removal of the logic of representation in a given situation, but at the same time change can only become present in the situation if it appears through a structure that *represents* its evanescent emergence. We thus need a more precise concept than the simple opposition change/state, if we want to seize the “evental factuality” of change. We need a concept of a relation state/event which affirms the “dialectic” (which of course is not one) between their radical separation and their genetic relation.

Although such relation is not explicit in Badiou – and it is even often denied, as we will see later – its existence is nevertheless grounded in an ontological explanation provided by Badiou himself. In fact, in Badiou’s texts, the singularity of a moment of radical, singular change, and the specific power of state structure are both related to the concept of excess, and namely to the excessive irruption in the situation of something which presents the excessive inconsistency of the pure multiple of the situation, something that presents *a void*. On one side, in each given situation, there are always some specific parts which are present in it, but that have no representation: the immigrants with no papers exist generally as « a problem » in the State, but they are not represented, in all the senses of the word: they have no representatives, and their individualities are not taken in account by the state: the subset « illegal immigrants » is present in the situation (as a problem), but their elements are strictly inexistent for the State, and they form therefore a sort of abnormal, *empty* set. Badiou extends his argument via the mathematical demonstration of the fact that each situation has a subset which is empty, a subset with no elements that can be represented in the situation (as for instance as in the case of the illegal immigrants). The fact is that, in a given set, elements or subsets cannot be included that have proprieties conflicting with those that define the

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The flesh of the words*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 163.

given set, but at the same time in a set are logically included all elements or subsets that cannot be excluded. An empty set is therefore necessarily a subset of any given set: due to the fact that the empty subset has no elements, it has also no elements which have conflicting proprieties with the set of which the empty set is a subset, and thus it is necessarily included in it²⁰. Peter Hallward resumes very well this argument as follows: « to be a part or a subset of a set means not to have elements that are not themselves included in the initial set... Given that the empty subset has no elements, it cannot not be a part of a given set »²¹. This means that we can finally affirm that the void is « a subset universally included in each set »²².

In the case of the illegal immigrants, we have considered a peculiar element that, in the situation, exposes the void that inhabits the latter. But even more, we can affirm that each singularity of a situation is somehow – although in a less evident manner – a-normal, close to the void. Let's bring back an example that we have previously seen, i.e. the situation « political groups »: a militant is an element, but its elements are not elements of the original set: flesh and bones, thoughts and desires are not political elements. From the point of view of the logic of the party, militants are empty elements, and in fact we know that it is through local groups made up of militants that a shifting in the logic of organisation of the party can occur. In order to prevent that, a party is often structured by a multiplicity of levels that renders impossible for the local militant (who exposes such radical multiplicity, who exposes the void) to communicate with the chiefs of the party. The structure of the situation tends to keep at distance a void which inhabits, at a certain level, each element of the situation.

From this, we can say, very broadly, that when the state organizes a series of actions which tend to attack the emergence of the void, its primary goal is to limit the *spreading* of this excessive void, to encircle the change that the uprising of this void can introduce. The state builds walls, organizes ships, puts on police actions in order to confine into a set of laws, actions and prescription the existence of such void. The inexistence of immigrants, or rather the existence of their inexistence, has to be confined. The action of the state puts this empty set at a distance, preventing its spreading (for instance, by punishing those who perform political or solidarity actions with the immigrants). Thus, *given the necessary presence of an excessive void, and given the universal value of this void* (that is mathematically explained by the fact that the original set not only has the void as subset, but also all elements of the set which is also a subset has necessarily the void as a subset), *the state characterises itself first and foremost by the fact that it performs some excessive, ab-normal actions*

²⁰ See Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, cit., pp. 86-88.

²¹ Peter Hallward, *Badiou – a subject to truth*, Minneapolis – London, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 102.

²² *Ibid.*, *ibid.*.

of the state that tend to confine the action of the void. And Badiou in several texts tends to explain that the state has a natural tendency to express an excess of representation that keeps the disruptive power of the void at a distance.

So a state, a state of the situation²³, operates by keeping at a maximal distance all the empty subsets that, being composed by materials that cannot be represented by the actual configuration of the situation, can claim a reconfiguration of the state of the situation in order to represent their own vital material. It operates thus by keeping at a maximal distance in the first place all the subsets that the logic of the situation considers as mere void²⁴. In order to keep such void(s) at a distance, the state has a way to represent it, separating thus it via a further layer of subsets: the immigrants can be inscribed in the subset « security problems », or in the subset « unemployment problems » (arguing that immigrant steal the work from citizens): this affirms the existence of the subset as empty, but declares at the same time the inexistence of its elements. But in more general (and hidden terms) it operates also by keeping at a distance all the elements which are closer to the void, and namely all the elements which are not also subsets: this is the case of the militants of a party, who are kept at a maximal distance from its ruling hierarchy via a multiplicity of intermediate levels, of intermediate subsets (the section, the local federation, etc...).

Such a power of representation (of mediate presentation), of the empty subsets and of the primary elements, that forecloses the possibility of the spreading of the emptiness of the former towards the emptiness of the latter, is explained as follows: « the ghost of the void can be exorcised only via the operation of a second structuring principle, a sort of re-presentation, or metastructure, a structuring of the structure... »²⁵. And the state – the ruling logic of organization of the situation – has a very large power to do so, because, mathematically speaking, the subsets in which one can organize the elements of a set, the parts in which one can represent them, are always in excess over the elements²⁶. We have here what Badiou calls « an ontological excess of representation over presentation »²⁷. This is the excess that characterizes the “state of the situation”, the capability to represent the situation in closed parts.

²³ « Due to a metaphorical affinity with politics ... I will hereinafter term state of the situation that by means of which the structure of a situation – of any structured presentation whatsoever – is counted as one » (Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, cit., p.95)

²⁴ See Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, cit., p. 108-109

²⁵ “Via counting as one not the elements of the situation, but the way in which the subsets organize the elements of the situation” Peter Hallward, *Badiou – a subject to truth*, cit., pp. 95-96

²⁶ Given three elements A B C, I can put ABC in one set, or AB on one side and C on the other, AC on one side and B on the other, BC and A, or keep the tree of them separate. So, with 3 elements I have 5 ways to organize subsets, and the gap between elements and subsets increases exponentially when the number of elements increases. And, if we think that the number of elements of a given concrete situation is infinite, it follows that this state excess is unmesurable

²⁷ Alain Badiou, *One multiple, multiplicity*, in Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, Londo/New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 76.

Thus the excess is necessarily present in each situation at two levels: at the level of the structure of the situation, and at the level of the singularities that compose it: on one hand we have the excess of the state over the empty subsets and over the elements that display a certain proximity to the void, and on the other we have the excess of singular elements (or sometimes singular events) that work in order to *reduce* the excess of the state. But what then is the deep link between these two senses of the excess, between the excess of the non-representable change and the excess of the structures of representation?

In a lot of texts, and particularly in *D'un désastre obscure*, Badiou affirms that there is no direct link between the excess of the revolutionary process and the state: specifically, he states that it is not possible to deduce the power of the Stalinist state over the population from the excess of the singular revolutionary procedure of the soviets. To this extent, Badiou observes correctly that « no state rule concerns directly a subject or an individual: the state relates only to the parts, to the subsets»²⁸, Thus « when it seems to act upon an individual, it is not the concrete infinity of the individual that is concerned, but this same infinity reduced to ... a subset which has for sole element this same individual. The one who votes, who is in prison, who pays the taxes, etc”.

Starting from this observation, he posits a binary division between radical change and state representation. Let's take an example: the communist commitment is for Badiou reducible to the faithfulness to a universal axiom, which is, in its simplest form ““we’ has a universal meaning”. And even if he declares that there is an immanent darkening of this idea, nevertheless “the political history of communists is essentially disjointed from their state-structured story. The criminal *objectivity* of the Stalinist state is one thing, the militant *subjectivity* of the communists is another thing”²⁹. Historical thickness and eventual interruption are here presented by Badiou as if they had no relation (a consequence of which is also that it becomes difficult to know how an eventual change can change something in a situation, if there is no relation between the thickness of the state and the sequence that unfolds the consequences of an event)³⁰. The state appears all of a sudden as a purely external cancer that emerges and eats the tired body of communist universalism, but *nothing is explained neither about the causes of such tiredness nor about the origins of such cancer*.

²⁸ Alain Badiou, *D'un désastre obscur*, Paris, Editions de l'Aube, 1991, p. 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁰ It is true that in the first pages of the book Badiou seems to unfold a possible relation between these two poles: in the first page one can read that “the “we” is entered in a twilight zone far before the “death of communism” Or rather the uprising of the Sovietic State-Party is nothing but the objective cristallisation of the fact that a certain thought of the “we” has been inactive for twenty years”, Alain Badiou, *D'un désastre obscur, cit.*, p. 7.

Notwithstanding this problematic claim of a radical separation, if one looks carefully, it appears that a relation between the excess of the event and the excessive power of the state is built inside the logic of Badiou's texts. On one side, we have the singularity of an event which, as such, is « a *power of being excess over the law* » which « makes collapse the given differences »³¹ that organise the situation. Although in excess over being, the event of an excess is nothing but the convocation of the excessive propriety of being, and in fact, Badiou stresses the fact that an event “governs a multiplicity in excess of itself”³². Even more, it is exactly for this reason than an event receives a universal address: excessive over being, an event exposes that all the elements of the situation are pure multiples, excessive and non-representable for the situation: the excess of an event, appearing as a void into the consistency of the situation, expresses that all the element – because they are pure excessive multiplicities, are “void”, and therefore they are in excess over the way in which they are represented in the situation. On the other side, Badiou affirms that the pure multiple that composes a situation is, as seen, “haunted by the internal excess of its parts (subsets)”³³ over its elements. For each situation, there are always some “void” parts, some specific parts present but which receive no representation, as well as an infinity of minimal elements which, being composed by an infinity of parts which are not parts or elements of the situation, are literally at the edges of the void. And the state uses the excessive power of representation which characterizes it in order to limit the spreading of the void from the empty set to the minimal elements. Even if Badiou does not develop the common origin of the state excess and of the singular excess of change, we can argue that on one side the excess of the state might have an origin which is not necessarily disconnected from the rising of a singular excess, or of an evental excess. And on the other side that the excess of a singularity is maybe possible only by passing through some form of representation. We can thus ask if the excess of a change is such only if it passes through some structures of fixation, and if the excess of the state is the perverted form of a necessary fixation of the exceptional nature of radical change.

In fact, what the uprising of the excessive nature of an event installs into the situation, is a new way to count, and to organise, the elements of the situation: this, as Badiou says, is an *act of law*, that *proceeds from the illegality of an event*. Badiou connects thus *state law* and *evental truth*, saying that “the trajectory of a truth, which institutes its subject as detached from the statist law of the situation, is nonetheless consistent according to another law: the one that addresses the truth to

³¹ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, cit., p. 78

³² *Ibid.*, *ibid.*.

³³ Alain Badiou, *One multiple, multiplicity*, in Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, London/New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 79

everyone”³⁴: a law is produced directly in the faithful procedure that poses a new truth into the situation. The law has thus a double effect: it is the principle that stops the proliferation of truth, the principle that stops the vital proliferation of the excess of the event (this is why « death is on the side of the law »³⁵), and at the same time it is the logic of fixation of the consequences of the excessive nature of an event. We can now understand why the transformation of the evental excess in state excess is presented as a sort of necessary paradoxical fatality: *it is a constitutive characteristic of Being qua Being to appear in an evental manner; it is in the nature of the event to consolidate itself into law, and it is in the nature of law to produce the excess of the state over the event and over the singularities*. It is necessary to consolidate an event via a new structure of organization if we want to embody an event in the situation, in order to stop the excessive power of the state, but this law creates inevitably another form of state.

The solution then cannot be, as Badiou claims, in a complete separation of the two excesses, which inevitably leads to an obscure uprising of a new state excess that mysteriously appears as a fatal issue of the revolutionary process. In other words, there is no such thing as a pure political excess, as a pure singular excess opposed to a fatal uprising of a mysterious state. An excess, in order to be present, is always immediately mediated by a form of re-presentation. *But those forms of state excess, of representation of the revolutionary excess, that simply solidifies the revolutionary impulse into a given form, end by transforming it into a state excess that represses all the possible form of singular divergence, of new singular excess*.

Conclusions

As the second paradox has shown, change exists only via a present state of fact. But on the other hand, as it is posited by the first paradox, change is such only if it changes constantly, not only in relation to the state of fact of the situation, but also in relation to itself. Probably in this sense, it is necessary to think universalism as the equal capacity of each point of a situation, in which a radical change is rooted and re-presented, to declare that the mundane relations which take place in this situation are able to affect essentially the nature of change: only under this condition can change be, can exist in the situation, and not simply in-sist in it. As we know, change is the excess of the pure excessive multiple over its presentation; but it is also the addition of a new present identity, that, adding itself to being, modifies its multiplicity, multiplies its multiplicity, and thus renders it what it

³⁴ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, cit., p. 87. Even more “the One is for all, for everyone, and it comes from the event”. And “There is no evental One that can be the One of a particularity. The only possible correlative element of the One is the universal”. Such an universality cannot thus be deduced from the present order of the situation, because the law of a situation “is always predicative, particular and partial”. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, cit..

³⁵ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, the foundation of universalism*, cit., 1997, p. 68

is: an excessive multiple. “Change” is the multiple that “this present thing” is, and that, exceeding its presentation, forces it to change; but at the same time it is this present thing that, while changing, exceeds the coordinates of the pure multiple that changes it, and therefore realizes this multiple as an excessive multiple that produces a change. Only in this shifting identification does the “what is” change, and “change” is.

Change is thus possible only by finding those structures that render it possible to *create* new identities which produce the emergence of radically new singular senses of the being of the situation: change changes the situation because it exists in a new identity, irreducible both to the situation, and to change, i.e. to the being of the situation. It becomes thus insufficient to proclaim, with Badiou, that “the destatalisation of truth is a program for thought”³⁶. This can be a program only if it is accompanied by specific means of structuring which operate directly into the contingencies of the present, if it is accompanied by means of structuring which are powerful enough to change the very sense of change itself. If we simply stick to the pure point of change, inexistent for the situation, subtracted to the state, we face a double fatal issue: either it remains a pure inexistent, or, worse, it transforms itself into a state created by the very procedures of defence of its own inexistence. On the contrary, the form that a change requires is the addition of a minimal, always local form that can allow it to increase the excess over itself, which means to *realize its change*.

What the problem of change thus shows, is that change is a point that indefinitely demands philosophy to reconfigure some of its major concepts and structures, namely to rethink the relation between being and becoming as a shifting identity, which always happens in singular modes. By doing so, the questioning around the ontological nature of change exposes philosophy to an « effectual », praxical gesture: it pushes theory to *do* in the exact point where it has no longer the authority to *know*. It is in this point, that philosophy, as Badiou remarks, « becomes an act of thought ».³⁷ The specific question of philosophy thus becomes to know that « how? » is in fact an ontological question; the question of philosophy is to know how what “*is*”, being excessive, “*does*”, and how this action always produces a radical reconfiguration of being. This of course also exposes philosophy to its limits, the limits in which a decision has to be taken concerning what to do with such singular points. But this is also the point where the philosopher needs to shut up, in favour of other forms of practice and thought.

³⁶ Alain Badiou, *D'un désastre obscur*, Paris, Editions de l'Aube, 1991, p. 57

³⁷ Alain Badiou, *Petit Panthéon portatif*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2008, p.66.