

For a Materialism of the Exception (On Badiou's *Logiques des mondes*)

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Badiou's philosophy posits an unheard of materialism in which he weaves together mathematical idealities, the Marxist egalitarian prescription of justice "for all" and the consequences of the Lacanian discentering of the subject. His ontology, developed in *L'Être et l'événement*, combines a set of discrete elements: matter, the void, the event and the subject. Badiou's ontology prescribes the existence of matter, indifferent to the question of man; a matter that needs to be posited before the latter comes on the scene. Badiou's materialism is thus the expression of an immanent ontology that, only after deducing the laws governing the legality of the structure of being qua being, is in a position to pinpoint the exact placement of its impossible exception: the event. In Badiou, therefore, one finds a theory of the local event in the ontological fabric whose matter is mathematical and out of which the subject is woven only in view of transforming the structure from which it emerges.

Badiou's materialism is mathematical, made up of an inhuman anonymous and infinite legal structure (made of multiple of multiples): an inconsistent and infinite multiplicity traversed by the void, the name of being. This structure confronts the subject with the excess of presentation (infinite) over representation (finite), which means that the void and the infinite render any structure relative, that is, incommensurable to any absolute determination. This explains why within the structure the subject can be conceived as someone endowed with a capacity to re-

organize the inertia of being in the name of an unheard of advent, by acknowledging the event in a sustained manner through time (fidelity). This temporal trajectory through which signification is produced out of a laborious and patient investigation about the indiscernible, is what Badiou calls truth. The truth of an event is not a new form of knowledge, but rather an interruption in the linkages among the available series of discourses; a hole made in the texture of knowledge. This break, this cut, this non-ontological supplement, is not a vertical transcendence but rather, a local immanence. One has to wait until the publication of *Logiques des mondes*, the sequel to *L'Être et l'événement*, to find a complete account of how a truth can re-organize and re-structure the very logic of a given concrete world by transforming the norms that regulate the manifestation of things.

If, as Fabien Tarby states “une philosophie du multiple est nécessairement matérialiste en ceci qu'elle récuse la primauté des opérations cognitives du sujet, et la prétendue puissance synthétique de la catégorie même du sujet”¹, these are two requirements that Badiou's philosophy certainly complies with. However, it remains to be seen how Badiou resituates the question of matter and materialism in *Logiques des mondes* and shows how and why an ethical vigilance, in the end, sustains its most openly declared political position.

¹ Fabien Tarby, *Matérialismes d'aujourd'hui. De Deleuze à Badiou*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.

In *Logiques des mondes*², part two of *L'Être et l'événement*³, Alain Badiou develops an objective phenomenology of appearing in view of specifying the logical character of real change as it takes place in a real given world. This real change, event, or strong singularity results from a truth process that modifies both by its own power, and by the disconcerting force of its consequences, the appearing of multiplicities in a world. When it happens, real change imposes an effective discontinuity upon the world it comes to affect.

The truth-process is the subjectivized synthesis of the event's consequences, what Badiou calls a *faithful subject* (*sujet fidèle*). By this, one must understand an objective formalism whose operation consists in the production of a present: a political sequence, an artistic configuration, an enchanted new reality for the couple in love, or a new scientific theory.⁴ This production of a present results from a decision,

² Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006. Throughout this essay I will refer to this book as LM.

³ Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988. Throughout this essay I will refer to this book as EE.

⁴ It should be noted that the production of a present rich in consequences is twice localized: on the one hand, it appears in *a* world, on the other hand it can only take place *within* one of the four conditions from which philosophy thinks the epochal disposition of the truth. *L'Être et l'événement* and *Logiques des mondes* both present, in different registers, the compossibility of the four conditions, that is, the unified conceptual space in which to think the *evental* consequences that serve as points of departures for the truth procedures. Badiou has devoted several books to each of the four conditions and to its specific truth-procedures: *Petit Manuel d'inesthétique* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998, for the artistic truths; *Abrégé de Métapolitique*, Paris:

from a set of consequences that the *evental* trace brings into the world. If from *L'Être et l'événement* onwards, the event figures as the subject's effective condition, in *Logiques des mondes* Badiou adds the concept of body. It would be wise to put aside

Éditions du Seuil, 1998, for the political truths; parts of *Conditions*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1998, for the amorous truths; *Court Traité d'ontologie transitoire*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998 and *Le Nombre et les nombres*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990, for the mathematical truths. With the exception of Book I, the schema of the four conditions does not explicitly appear in *Logiques des mondes*. In Book I, which deals with the formal theory of the subject, the diagram of subjective destinations is explicitly plotted in terms of the schema of the four conditions. Nevertheless, the latter is presupposed throughout. While the political and the mathematical conditions remain more or less unchanged, the condition of the poem opens itself to a broad series of artistic productions beyond poetry proper: paintings, plays, opera, novels, music. The love condition continues to slide between the encounter of two single individuals and its discursive representations: if in *L'Être et l'événement* and other texts, love and the psychoanalytic discourse on love were conflated, in *Logiques des mondes* its effects and worldly localization are conducted from the perspective of literary works, Virgil's *Æneid*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Berlioz's opera *Les Troyens*. A delicate point, impossible to address here, is whether, once treated as an *example*, politics, the poem, love and mathematics can continue being a condition for philosophy. In "For an Ethics of 'Mystery': Philosophy and the Poem," I have addressed these questions working around the limits and aporias of the logic of exemplarity in Badiou's treatment of the poetic condition. See Gabriel Riera (Ed.), *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and Its Conditions*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005, 61-86.

any biological or organic pre-interpretations, since a body is a multiple that carries and supports a subjective formalism and allows the subject to appear in a world. In *Logiques des mondes* we are always faced with “bodies with organs” (the linguistic operations of a poem, Spartacus’s army in its search for emancipation, the historical state of an algebraic problem) that affirm a point; that sustain the subject’s appearing and its *durée*, thus rendering legible that an eternal truth can be created in a particular world.

In the end, *Logiques des mondes* stipulates a set of directives for an ethics which one is compelled to call an *ethics of living*, if by such an expression one understands a subjective incorporation to truth as exception, to the consequences of a truth that the event brings about, of finding “point by point” the affects that authorize the continuation of the process thereby instantiated.

Badiou posits an ethics of living *with an Idea*, which he places once again under Beckett’s motto: “I can’t go on, I must go on.”⁵ In this sense, *Logiques des mondes* is a theory of (the) exception, of what subtracts itself from the law, of its localization.⁶ Its matrix derives from Mallarmé’s syntax, the “sinon que” that shapes

⁵ Beckett’s motto comes from *The Unnamable*. Beckett has been a constant presence in Badiou’s thinking throughout the years. See Alain Badiou, *Beckett. L’incroyable désir*, Paris: Hachette, 1995, and “Être, existence, pensée: prose et concept,” in *Petit Manuel d’Inesthétique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998, 137-188.

⁶ For the question of the exception in relation to the law in Badiou, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. However, the exception Badiou has in mind proceeds from the event and not from being, which explains why the decisive question is real change and not an intra-structural disorder that in the end reaffirms the structure or State.

the book's first materialist axiom: "*Il n'y a que des corps et des langages sinon qu'il y a des vérités.*" (LM 12)⁷ This turn of phrase inscribes the exception: the "sinon que" reads as a "to exist as subject"; it is the non-pronominal marker that signals "la fragile scintillation de ce qui n'a pas lieu d'être." (LM 53) The axiom thus points to the production of effects that exceed the inertia of a restricted economy of Being and for which there are only bodies and languages; those effects are what Badiou calls truths. In the end, a new body is the organization in the present of a type of subjectivity without precedent. This subjectivity organizes the truth procedure that has opened up the former to an experience of the inhuman: the possibility of a becoming Immortal.

In order to account for this exception, *Logiques des mondes* resituates the notion of site, prevalent in *L'Être et l'événement*, and it does so in terms of the notion of world and the localization of appearing. This is primarily due to the fact that *Logiques des mondes* no longer operates, as did *L'Être et l'événement*, within the field of being-qua-being, that is, within the framework of an ontology stipulated by the categories of set theory. It should be noted that in so far as ontology deals with pure multiplicities, it is indifferent to the localization of any multiple, to their appearing.⁸ Because *Logiques des mondes* operates within the field of logic, it is thus concerned with multiplicity's modes of appearing and, fundamentally, with its consistencies. Unlike ontology, logic is the science of being-there and, consequently, it is not

⁷ For Mallarmé's constant presence in Badiou's thinking, see Pierre Macherey, "The Mallarmé of Alain Badiou," in *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and Its Conditions*, 109-16, and Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁸ I have dealt with the axiomatic of *L'Être et l'événement* in more detail in the "Introduction" to *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and Its Conditions*, 1-19.

concerned with pure multiples, but rather with the world and with objects or consistent multiples. An object, which here is totally independent of a subject in the Kantian transcendental sense, is what counts-as-one in appearing; it is the unity of appearing-in-a-world.

Because logic aims to localize the appearing of consistent multiplicities, it is only starting from a site that one can account for real change: a site “*se fait apparaître*,” “un événement est un site qui a la capacité de faire exister dans un monde l’inexistant propre de l’objet sous-jacent au site. Cette bascule de l’inapparaissant à l’apparaître singularise, dans la rétroaction de ses implications logiques, le site événementiel.” (LM 474) A site thus marks the irruption of being as such in appearing. From this it follows that *Logiques des mondes* seeks to stipulate a unifying doctrine of being and appearing.

Logiques des mondes presents a more flexible model to account for what in *L’Être et l’événement* was the interplay between the State of a situation and the event’s site. Moreover, the question of the consistency of what appears compels Badiou to rethink the relation between the One (that there-is-not) and the count-as-one, the interaction between representation and presentation. By focusing on the retroaction of appearing over being and on the point of anchoring of any appearing object, *Logiques des mondes* posits the existence of an obligatory articulation between the logics of appearing and the ontology of the multiple: the One. This point of logical articulation is the crux of the analytic section of *Logiques des mondes*, as it rethinks Heidegger’s ontological difference, as well as Deleuze’s fold.

The “Grand Logic” Badiou proposes thus examines under which conditions multiple beings can be thought in a world; it determines the concepts through which the appearing of a multiple being can be apprehended, and thinks the worldly multiple

in terms of its appearing or localization. The purpose of this logic is to provide a rational theory of the being-there, an understanding of real change: “it is a question of forcing thinking to acknowledge that the whole situation of being –any “world”—far from reducing itself to the pure multiple (being as such), possesses a transcendental organization.” (LM 102)

In so far as his philosophy unfolds in a context dominated by phenomenology, the expression “objective phenomenology,” which for Badiou characterizes his project, merits some comments. The axis of the whole Husserlian phenomenological edifice, that which constitutes its foundation and thus renders it problematic, is the dyadic subject (transcendental Ego, situated Cogito, or *Dasein*)/object (thing, essence, reality, or world). The last century marked the end of the transcendental subject; it sanctioned its destitution as the ground of the transcendental field, which in turn precipitated the fall of phenomenology’s axial structure. Moreover, the epistemological and ontological legacy of the twentieth-century consisted in acknowledging that the subject is nothing more than an effect of discourse: its being only supposed by the discourse that comes to represent it. This in turn entailed the invalidation of any teleology of the object as one to which the subject could appeal or privilege as its transcendental correlate. In this context, Badiou’s intervention has been decisive: far from presupposing a unified object obtained at the end of the process of phenomenological reduction, it is rather the multiple that shows itself as originary to any presentation. The object constantly fashions, undoes and refashions itself in the background of the multiple. In order to constitute a world, the modes of regulation of its logic have to be taken into account; one must recognize that it is the Multiple that makes the Ones. The intelligibility of these modes of regulation prescribe that they cannot have any guarantor other than themselves and that,

consequently, they have to be read not in terms of a dyadic correlation, but rather in those of consistency. Finally, phenomenology mistakenly took consciousness for the founding principle of a transcendental organization, when it is now widely accepted that it is merely its operator.

Against phenomenology, Badiou's materialist axiomatic prescribes that the subject cannot serve as the ground for the unity or coherence of a given world's transcendental organization and that, therefore, the latter is logically prior to any subjective constitution. The unifying principle is found in a conception of the object that is totally independent from the subject: "le concept d' object désigne précisément le point où phénomène et noumène sont indistinguables, le point de réciprocité entre le logique et l' onto-logique. Tout object est l'être-là de l'être d'un étant." (LM, 255)

An object is thus what counts-as-one in the appearing of a being-there and, more importantly, appearing and counting-as-one in the appearing of a being-there, or transcendental indexation, are one and the same thing. The degrees of existence of different consistent multiplicities are founded on something absolutely real, what Badiou calls an atom. The object thus bridges the gap between ontology (the multiple pure) and logics (being-there or consistent multiplicities).

This objective phenomenology or logic of appearing posits the articulation of a new transcendental regime whose major coordinates unfold as a true war machine against cultural relativism, or what Badiou calls "democratic materialism" and to which he contraposes a *dialectique matérialiste*. One has to pause here and pass beyond the polemical value that this watchword brings into play. In the introduction to *Logiques des mondes*, when anticipating what he surmises may be the reader's reaction, Badiou affirms that his choice of the expression *dialectique matérialiste* to characterize his project could amount to "faire revenir un syntagme d'entre les

morts.” (LM 11) And Badiou may very well be right about this, although there is no footnote to alert the reader that he himself had posited the need to be done with these terms.

During the 1970s and particularly in “Six propriétés de la vérité”⁹, an essay that marks a bridge between a Maoist and a mathematically oriented thinking, Badiou proposed dispensing with “dialectical materialism” and to talk instead in terms of events or *cuts* that break into a given analytic situation and fracture its language.¹⁰ Why is it that after the harsh discipline of the *matheme* displayed in *L’Être et l’événement*, the logics of appearing need once again to be placed under the banner of a ghost, even if Badiou employs the inverted expression, *dialectique matérialiste*, to signal that he is not interested in restoring an outdated ideology? Since the question of fidelity is central for Badiou’s *Logiques*, it is pertinent to ask why something that was dispensed with at first returns, albeit in an inverted form, to prop up a logical edifice whose purpose is to account for the *evental* consequences and for its operator –a faithful subjectivity. What can be achieved by conceiving the exception, the excess of presentation over representation, and the force of creation in terms of a *dialectical* model? Does the adjective dialectical diminish the force of Badiou’s unsettling *materialism*?

The ghostly return of dialectical materialism under the guise of the *dialectique matérialiste* goes hand in hand with the return of a motif that had also been abandoned in previous texts: destruction. They are systematically implicated: “la

⁹ Alain Badiou, “Six propriétés de la vérité,” *Ornicar?* 32, (1985): 39-67 and 33 (1985): 120-49.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of Badiou’s philosophy prior to the mathematical turn, see Oliver Feltham, *Alain Badiou: Live Theory*, London: Continuum: 2008.

dialectique matérialiste assumera sans joie particulière que jusqu'à présent aucun sujet politique ne soit parvenu à l'éternité de la vérité qu'il déplie sans des moments de terror." (LM 98)

Badiou argues that the concomitant violence of democratic materialism makes itself visible in the underside of its false injunction concerning the "end of ideology" whose most obvious truth is the imperative "Live without Idea," or "Buy your enjoyment."¹¹ Badiou's untimely Platonic doctrine, now placed under the banner of *dialectique matérialiste*, instead proposes that living must be conceived as something more than the mere administration of enjoyment and that, consequently, it can only be envisaged starting from and in view of an Idea, that is, of a subjective incorporation to a process of truth whose consequences are eternal. What is astonishing

pour la dialectique matérialiste [c'est] l'immobilité stagnante du présent, sa stérile agitation, l'atonie violemment imposée du monde. Peu, très peu de changements capitaux dans la nature des problèmes de la pensée, depuis Platon (par exemple). Mais à partir des quelques procédures de vérités que déplie, point par point, des corps subjectivables, on reconstitue un passé différent, une histoire des achèvements, des trouvailles, des percées, qui n'est nullement une monumentalité culturelle, mais une succession lisible des fragments d'éternité. Car un sujet fidèle crée le présent comme être-là de l'éternité. En sorte que s'incorporer à se présent revient à percevoir le passé de l'éternité elle-même. (LM, 532)

¹¹ For a critique of so-called ethical ideology, see Alain Badiou, *L'Éthique*, Paris: Hatier, 1993.

If living means to experiment in the past the eternal breadth of the present, *Logiques des mondes* would have, as part of its program, to articulate a new dialectic of the present able to welcome the trans-logical force of an Idea whose effects are deemed to be eternal. Moreover, this new dialectic of the present thinks, beyond the mere dominant archival and memorializing compulsion of democratic materialism, another way of incorporating the past to the consequences of a present marked by the force of the event. Badiou calls this synthesis of the present resurrection, “cette destination qui réactive un sujet dans une autre logique de son apparaître-en-vérité ... une destination supplémentaire des formes subjectives” (LM 74-75). What characterizes a faithful subject is his ability to “reincorporer au présent événementiel le fragment de vérité dont l’ancien présent était passé sous la barre de l’occultation.”¹² (LM 75) Badiou’s ethics of thinking, this strange wager that is *Logiques des mondes*, consists precisely in enacting the formalization of the faithful subject.

¹² Book I of *Logiques des mondes* proposes a formal theory of the subject understood as the active and identifiable form of truth-productions. For Badiou a subject presents itself as what formalizes the effects of a body (\subset) according to a certain productive, counter-productive or disastrous logic. Badiou’s matheme of the faithful subject, $\varepsilon / \varnothing \Rightarrow \pi$, is a formula in which a split new body (\varnothing) becomes, under the bar of repression ($/$), a sort of active unconscious for the event’s trace (ε). This passing under the bar signals an activity, an exploration of the consequences of what has happened, that produces an expansion of the present and thus exposes a truth. Because this type of subject results from the production of the event’s consequences, it is called a faithful subject. It is a subject faithful to a vanished event of which (ε) is its trace. The work/product of this fidelity is the new present (π) that welcomes a new truth.

Against the metaphysical tradition that defines the human being as a rational animal, as a being of language, or the post-metaphysical tradition in its Heideggerian bent that defines being human in terms of finitude, Badiou instead defines it in terms of its logical ubiquity or logical grace, of its capacity to take part in numerous worlds, to appear in different places under different modalities of appearing. It is no longer a question of waiting for a god that could save us, but only the infinity of worlds that “sauve de toute dis-grâce finie.” (LM 536)

Logiques des mondes consists of an analytic section, the “Grand Logic,” that exposes the most abstract and constitutive laws (pre-linguistic ones) of a world understood as a general form of appearing. This analytic completes the mathematics of multiple being of *L'Être et l'événement* with the logics of appearing. However, neither the mathematics of the multiple, nor the logics of the world can comprehend the exceptions that singularize materialist dialectics: truths understood as exceptions, and the subject understood as the active form of these exceptions.

Logiques du mondes presents itself in the proximity of Hegel's thinking, of its systematicity. However, it is safe to say that Badiou appeals to Hegel more as a way to prop up a *dialectical* thinking than to erect a system of Absolute Knowledge. Since Badiou is dealing with plural logics of multiple and different worlds, this means that there is no possibility of determining the being of a Whole —“il n'y a pas le Tout”—; there is no single or all-encompassing logic of presentation. This explains the heterogeneous nature of the book, in which empirical examples taken from the four conditions (politics, art, mathematics and love) alternate with a demanding formalism grounded in category theory, and with autobiographical passages.

While for Hegel totality, understood as its own realization, is the unity of Truth, in Badiou totality's inexistence fragments the conceptual exposition and

sanctions that there are only local truths. Where in Hegel totality takes the idea of speculation's unconditioned autonomy to its limits, for Badiou philosophy is always under the condition of external truths. Although a world is, like the Hegelian Absolute, the unfolding of its own infinity, unlike Hegel's Absolute, a world cannot construct the concept or measure of its infinity from within, as Cantor's axiomatic, and in particular, the inaccessible nature of an infinite cardinal stipulates.

As I mentioned earlier, the crux of *Logiques des mondes* is to think real change, to provide an explanation of how an eternal truth proper to one of the four conditions that emerges in a given situated world (let's say the pre-historic paintings of horses in Chauvet's cave) can communicate with other worlds across a broad span of time (Picasso's painting of horses during the 1930s). It should be remembered that in so far as there is no whole, the worlds in question are disjointed. Although different and heterogeneous series must enter in some sort of resonance, even when it is a question of a legible series of fragments of eternity, resurrection here cannot, as with Proust's Combray and its surroundings, suddenly "emerge from a cup of tea."¹³ In order to account for the subjective process of incorporation to real change, a

¹³ I am thinking here of Marcel Proust's famous episode of the *madelaine* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, where he presents the *evental* effects of involuntary memory in terms of a logic of a set of parts that are finally integrated into a whole: "comme dans ce jeu où les Japonais s'amuse à tremper dans un bol de porcelaine rempli d'eau, des petits morceaux de papier jusque-là indistincts qui, à peine y sont-ils plongés s'étirent, se contournent, se colorent, se différentient ... de même maintenant ... tout Combray et ses environs, tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, villes et jardins, de ma tasse de thé." Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, I, Paris: Gallimard, 42.

reformulation of the key concepts of event and subject are crucial. I must briefly turn to them before adding some final thoughts on Badiou's ethics of thinking.

1. The Event: From the Ultra-One to the Mix of Pure Being and Appearing

For Badiou, an event arises as the inconsistency of Being that shatters the consistencies of presentation. The event thus releases the virtual potentials of a given situation. (EE 274) Being the expression of the void within the particular situation at hand, the event thus functions as a radical supplement to the indifferent multiplicity of Being. In *L'Être et l'événement* Badiou's typology of being reveals the existence of a type of multiplicity that transgresses the laws of the axiomatic that were set to formalize it and is thus indiscernible from this very axiomatic.

The axiomatic of set theory isolates two types of relations among multiplicities: belonging and inclusion; it is from the latter that the excessive type of multiples originate. Therefore, in Badiou the axiomatic of set theory defines the site of the inexistence that produces truths—the event. The event is an exceptional multiple that is added to a given situation by tracing the passage of an interruption. It produces an interruption since it opens a perspective from which to discern what a situation cannot know or grasp: what is left unaccounted for by the situation's meta-structure. The event, therefore, points to the void or inconsistency out of which a situation holds together. The event is destined to a given situation and it confers a local extension to it. (EE 196)

Badiou calls *evental site* (*site événementielle*) the singular multiple whose elements do not present themselves in a situation. The state of the situation cannot count the terms that make up this singular and abnormal multiple (for example, a family of illegal immigrants whose members are unregistered and thus lack public

status) and therefore it lacks existence. A site is thus always in the position of internal exclusion in regard to the situation within which it is presented, insofar as the site belongs to the situation without being included in it. What is excessive regarding the classes the state counts is neither one (the retroactive result of a structural operation) nor consistent: it is a nothing (*rien*). A site is thus unclassifiable since its excess exceeds what the state designates as being a legitimate part of a situation. Moreover, a site is precarious and ephemeral and although it is a requisite for an event to appear, it is not the event's cause but its idiosyncratic condition.

Because of its intrinsic feature, Badiou defines the event as an “extraordinary multiple” or “ultra-One”; it is, *at the same time*, the situation of the multiples of its own site *and* its own situation, which means that the defining feature of the event is its self-belonging. The event then is an unfounded and autonomous set or situation that subtracts itself from the axiom of foundation.¹⁴ Ultimately, the event is unfounded and autonomous in terms of the situation within which it arrives. What is decisive for the subject is to inscribe the event within a situation to which it does not belong, given that the event only belongs to itself.

The event's modality of manifestation is that of the eclipse: it is a fading and fragile appearing that produces the dispersion of the site's elements. However, given that the event belongs to itself, its dazzling passage leaves a remainder: a name, the only element by means of which it can survive its own disappearance. The name prohibits that the event's disappearance give way to a discourse whose grammar and syntax is grounded in the encyclopedic and classifying language of the state.

¹⁴ This formulation appears in Alain Badiou's *Court traité d'ontologie transitorie*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998, 58. This text predates the formulation of *Logiques des mondes*.

In *L'Être et l'événement* the event as Ultra-One was a problematical construction for the corresponding conception of a subject understood as fragment of the event. The supernumerary character of the event and its subjective naming implied that the subject was something more than the fragmentary aftermath to the event's sudden eruption, that it was its effect and its source. Therefore, there was a need to supplement the ontological description of the event with a logical description able to elucidate the temporality proper to the event.¹⁵

In *Logiques des mondes*, the event is a hybrid; a mix of pure being and appearing and, consequently, the thinking of the event is neither ontological nor transcendental, which explains why the specification of the site, of its singularity, must redouble the ontological delimitation proposed in *L'Être et l'événement* with a logical characterization. Between the site and the event, Badiou unfolds the transformations that real change undergoes. Badiou's logical characterization of the event takes the existential intensity with which real change endows a multiplicity as its point of departure.

If in *L'Être et l'événement* the event's eruption shattered the consistency of a presentation, in *Logiques des mondes* it produces a de-regulation in the logic of the world, a sort of transcendental malfunctioning or disruption. In other words, the event modifies the rules of appearing. This modification can be seen in any genuine event: something or someone, whose value in a given world was null or weak, suddenly acquires a strong or maximum existential intensity. Therefore, the event conserves its ontological character as a surging forth of the site in a moment of self-belonging and, *at the same time*, it produces a brutal transformation of a given regime of intensity, so

¹⁵ On this particular topic, see the "Introduction" to Alain Badiou, *El ser y el acontecimiento*, Buenos Aires: Manantial, 1999.

as to allow what was inexistent to come into existence. This entails that the regime of truth acquire a double status too. Although it maintains its generic characteristic, the regime of truth produces the reconstruction of the whole set of rules by which things appear (by taking into account that something or someone that previously did not appear must appear now).

If in *L'Être et l'événement* supplementation was the only term that accounted for the rearrangement of transcendental correlations, *Logiques des mondes* reintroduces a term that used to play a more decisive role in *Théorie du Sujet*¹⁶—destruction: something must disappear in order for an inexistent element to appear in the world. The site is now conceived as a “reflexive multiple” and thus, in so far as it transgresses the laws of being, it is a multiple that belongs to itself. Further, a site is the fleeting revelation of the void that haunts multiplicities. Finally, the site is the ontological figure of an instant; it appears only to disappear: “Self-belonging annuls itself as soon as it appears. A site is a vanishing term: it appears only as disappearing. The problem consists in registering the consequences of the appearing.” (LM 392)

Due to the site’s fleeting and vanishing nature, its true duration must be placed on the side of its consequences, or on the logical interpretation of the relation among the different degrees of intensity, which means that the logic of the site is the distribution of the degrees of intensity around a vanishing point. An event is a strong singularity that enables its consequences to exist maximally; it is the only type of real change that brings into existence “l’ inexistence propre à le site-objet.” (LM 397)

2. The Subject: From Naming to Incorporation

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

Regarding Badiou's theory of the subject, the major shift that takes place in *Logiques des mondes* consists in that the subject's effective operation no longer concerns naming the event, but rather "ce qui impose la lissibilité d'une orientation" (LM 54), that is, an evaluation of the intensity common to the appearing of two beings. In order to fully grasp the implications of this shift I will first focus briefly on how the subject is conceived in *L'Être et l'événement*.

For Badiou the subject is not a universal or given category, nor is it a transcendental or empirical subject; even less a constructed one. Subjectivization, if it happens and when it happens —let's remember that the subject is as rare as the event—, only takes place in the wake of an event. It is unthinkable apart from it, and it is always the subject of a particular condition since there is no subject in general.

For Badiou, there is no event without an intervention. If something has taken place, we would know nothing about were it not for the wager, the decision to name it, and the consequences that follow from that naming. The event, therefore, is nothing, except the name with which the intervention endows it. But it is this nothing, too; this void that erupts, as if eclipsed, in the situation.

According to the basic axioms of set theory, the void never presents itself. The question is therefore how to give consistency to it, or rather, how to give consistency to that whose supposed "taking-place" bears witness to the situation's void? By naming it. Nomination wagers, or decides after the fact of the event's having taken place and, for this reason, the name is supernumerary. The supernumerary, the void in excess in relation to the structure, presents itself in the form of a name. To decide in favor of the event is to decide that *the event belongs to its site*, that something has taken place here, in this very place. The self-belonging of the multiple to itself results from a supernumerary One, an ultra-One testifying that nothing has taken place in this

place, nothing but this nothing, this void, that comes to present the void that is barred from any situation in an impossible fashion. This explains why it is impossible *to know* whether something has taken place. Nevertheless, there is a risk in naming the event. By declaring it, one risks its negation, its re-integration within the structure, that is, within the State's counting-as-one. This is an insurmountable problem that, in the end, compels Badiou to abandon the theme of nomination.

Badiou calls the recognition by which the event testifies to its unexpected and incalculable arrival an intervention. The intervention unleashes a "discipline of time" that controls the putting into circulation of the paradoxical multiple of the event. (EE 232) In Badiou there is no way of knowing beforehand whether someone is connected to a given event. *Fidelity* thus names a process that separates and discerns "le devenir legal d'un hasard." (EE 257) A truth is thus what results from a subjective process once the subject puts the event's name into circulation. In Badiou subject refers neither to a network of representations grounded in experience nor to the transcendental constitution of any possible object of experience. It instead signals the linkage that brings together the event and fidelity, or the relation between subjectivization and the subjective process. (EE 264) By the latter Badiou understands the subject's seizure by the event's eruption, as well as the act by which the subject gets hold of the event's name in order to make it intervene in a given situation. The subject does not pre-exist the event since she only becomes subject thanks to the interrupting force and the arresting power of the event. (EE 48)

In both *L'Être et l'événement* and *Saint Paul* Badiou posits the subject in a non-ontological way. In fact, no matheme of the subject is offered until *Logiques du mondes*. If for Lacan, the subject is an effect of the structure, for Badiou it is a

punctual and haphazard effect of what comes to disrupt a part of the structure; the part that exceeds the structure because it is infinite.

If in *L'Être et l'événement* the subject is conceived as a finite fragment of a truth-procedure, or as a finite instance of an infinite process, *Logiques des mondes*, as I mentioned in the previous section, instead proposes a different distribution of subject and truth that no longer coincides with a finite/infinite distribution. Moreover, Badiou introduces the fundamental notion of consequence. Badiou shows that the subject is identified by a type of marking, a post-*evental* effect, whose system of operations is infinite, which means that once the subject is constituted under the mark of the event, subjective capacity is infinite. This occurs because subjective capacity amounts to drawing the consequences of a change and, if this change is *evental*, its consequences are infinite.

In *L'Être et l'événement*, subjectivization fades away; its status remains indeterminate outside the problematic of the event's name, which makes it difficult to conceive of subjective capacity in an immanent way. In *Logiques des mondes* the notion of consequence is bound to the subject and, therefore, immanence is possible. The subject is an active and identifiable form of the production of truths. The logic of consequences replaces the logic of naming.

Logiques des mondes determines that a subject is the set of consequences deriving from the relation it establishes between a trace and a body. If the ethics of the subject entails finding an order of affects that authorizes the continuation of a process, this compels us to reassess the "reappearance" of *matérialisme dialectique* beyond its immediate polemical value. The book is not only the presentation of a thesis concerning the appearing of the world and the subjective fidelity to the consequences an event brings to it. It also exposes itself to the event and maps the trajectory of a

subjective incorporation that, by exploring its consequences and broadening the scope of the present, bears witness to a truth. This explains why the opposition between “democratic materialism” and *matérialisme dialectique*, or rather their disjunction, sustains a transcendental trial or test (*une épreuve*) for the appearing of a truth: this is what Badiou calls a point, which always takes the form of an alternative. Insofar as a point is the condensation of infinity, it localizes the action of a truth that the event has allowed to appear in a world. A point is always an instance of the Two, and in order to be effective, it must be localized. If a point splits infinity into the figure of two (yes/no) by condensing the appearing of a truth in a place in the world, it is precisely the opposition democratic materialism/materialist dialectics that displays the topology of the appearing of the truth. The ethics of living with an Idea is therefore inextricably linked to a fidelity to thinking the political event of emancipation.

“Identity politics” is the epitome of the State, or of a State-order that takes advantage of a set of sub-sets that are counted-as-one. But insofar as this State-order is itself a sub-set of an abstract universality (the commodity), there is plenty of room for it to fit perfectly within a global order that grants freedoms for different identitarian claims. Capitalist power organizes the competition among the different identitarian sub-sets, that is, it undermines the freedoms it was supposed to grant them from the start. Because the State re-enforces the difference between Masters and Slaves by exacerbating identitarian politics, Badiou’s ethics of living with an Idea is a legitimate anti-capitalist alternative grounded in the exigency of universalism.

This explains why in Badiou ethics takes precedence over politics. The latter cannot be sustained unless it subtracts itself from any State-order. Any transformation of a generic fidelity into a dogmatic one amounts to an infidelity to the consequences of the event and to its regime of truths. When reading Badiou one must be vigilant

and observe this ethical exigency, and even more so when reading Badiou's commentators. It is no exaggeration to say that Badiou's ethical exigency marks a watershed between what he himself calls a "gauchisme spéculatif" and a *dialectique matérialiste* informed by an ethics of living with an Idea. But this is a delicate point in his writing as this tension is present in Badiou himself. It appears that a decision is necessary: an ethico-political stance or a politico-religious one.