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For a Rationalist Politics of the Event: Zermelo–Fraenkel Set Theory and Structuring the Multiple

Introduction to Badiou’s Universalist Politics and the Axiomatic Method

The first version of *Migrants and Militants* was presented as a lecture given at the Maison de la Poésie in Paris on December 12, 2018. Nonetheless, the text, given its survey of migrants and neoliberal capitalism, reads as a perfectly situated critique given the contemporary political climate that we are currently imbricated in. Just in the United States, Black Lives Matter protests continue to vehemently challenge unbridled police violence while nascent authoritarian leaders (e.g., Donald Trump, Victor Orbán, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Jair Bolsonaro) attempt to stymie any structural economic agenda, automatic stabilizers, or universal single-payer healthcare program that would counter the effects of COVID-19 while, simultaneously, relieving corporations of any financial pressure. While Badiou’s intervention is at the level of a rather specific issue—migration and ethics—the text is galvanized by a more general critique of globalized neoliberal capitalism. Historically situated, Badiou’s project is unique insofar as he attempts to demonstrate that many of the putative “trends” associated with contemporary neoliberalism (e.g., globalization) have haunted the logic(s) of capital and capitalism since its inception.

This text and its philosophical current follow a general interest that Badiou, since *Being and Event*, has concerned himself with, including problems of representation, the relation between natural language and being, as well as the relation between natural-scientific languages and mathematical formalization. That is, despite neither the problem of “being” nor the traditional parlance that accompanies it directly transpires in the pages of *Migrants and Militants*, Badiou’s historically-moored project and its universalist formula follow from a greater interest in mathematics as coordinated movement “coextensive with being”.¹

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¹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham, Continuum, New York 2006, p. 48.

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For, just as set-theoretical ontology is indifferent to the distinction between thinking and being insofar as everything is in its being is a “pure multiple,” for Badiou the topological ordering of worlds indicates that the coordination between being and appearing no longer depends on epistemological operation(s). In flattening epistemological problems to the coordination between different formal domains, mathematics traces the coordinated “movement of thought, coextensive with being,” such that saying “mathematics thinks means in particular that it regards the distinction between a knowing subject and a known object as devoid of pertinence”.² In turn, Badiou produces an ontological separation of the event from being. Following Plato, for Badiou mathematics demonstrates the distinction between a *knowing Subject* and *known object* as having no permanence; the regulated movement of thought is coextensive with the being that it embodies, such that discovery and invention are indiscernible from the idea and its ideatum.

This means that every thought initiates decisions from the standpoint of the undecidable of non-deducible inference. Badiou’s political writings are no exception, as they are, in similar fashion, mathematically tethered. Badiou’s communist program begins with indecision and prompt us into a philosophy of action. This will not only become particularly pellucid when we consider his critique of Derrida’s *Of Hospitality* but also when we examine how *Migrants and Militants* operates at the level of style: that is, this little book, like so many of Badiou’s politically exigent texts, is programmatic, written as a manifesto. In turn, the text is rather short, accessible, and meant to galvanize what Badiou often terms a “new Communism” of universalist stripe.³

Subjectivity and The Event

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Science can be bifurcated into so-called “natural” science (physics, chemistry, biology, and other such science founded upon experiment) and “mathematical” science (those areas of pure mathematics, formal logic, and computer science that are independent of experiment). For Badiou, mathematics is not merely tethered to mathematics objects—mathematics is equally concerned with (pri-

² *Ibid.*

³ Thus it should serve as no surprise that, contra academic convention, Badiou does not hesitate to liberally quote Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*.

mal) structure. Badiou here recalls Hegel, for whom logic is natural, our spoken languages containing normative force with substantives and predicates expressing the self-reflexive and dialectical nature of thought; more recently, thinkers like Graham Priest have also made the case that we should consider terms like 'being' and 'nothingness' as substantives rather than quantifiers, therein treating. Thus, Badiou espouses the position that mathematics is neither excluded from metaphysics nor from ontology but, instead, is a crucial component of the architecture of the structure of reality.

Badiou's systematically developed meta-ontological narrative identifies ontology with the theory of inconsistent multiplicity, and the latter in turn with Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatized set-theory. In relation to the ontological order of the pure multiple and the objective order of presentation, becoming or subjectivation emerge as interruptions of the stability and stasis of the ontological order. This implies the process which Badiou names an "event," and which initiates a creative process of construction, or "truth-procedure(s)." For Badiou, "Truth Events" manifest in ordinary situations or "worlds" across four domains of thinking and practice, functioning as the "conditions" which philosophy aims to think together, relative to its historical moment: *science, art, politics, and love*. Within each of these four domains, truth is an exception to knowledge or representation, in the sense that truth disrupts the objective distribution of "bodies and languages" through which one discerns coherent parts within a situation or "world." In Badiou's most recent texts, the Truth Event signals the emergence of a "strong singularity," making the "inexistent," or nil-intensity, of a world appear with maximal intensity. According to William Watkin, the program of Badiou's post-Marxist politics is to delineate that which separates us from our age, our present, our real. Badiou, vis-à-vis offers category theory, identifies the greater logic of appearance in worlds, or the "order of representation", with an indication of the failure of images to capture that which they purport to index, our present. The subsequent question then becomes one concerning the intensity of relational identity, as category theory strips power of its univocal prominence by allowing us to stage the evental response.⁴

⁴ Alain Badiou, *The Pornographic Age*, trans. A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens, Bloomsbury Press, London and New York 2019, p. 108.

In his prudent monograph, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, Badiou draws our attention towards the (logical) “form of the act”.⁵ Setting the stage via Wittgenstein’s understanding that neither philosophy nor science can explain the act, Badiou queries if we can even have such a “logic of the act”? Turning to psychoanalysis and mathematics, Badiou identifies the Truth Event with an abrupt interruption that involves an axiomatic declaration of the occurrence of the impossible. The “act” in question, empowered by its endorsement of impossibility, inaugurates an evental break: the becoming of the subject of materializes vis-à-vis historical construction. Thus the Badiouian Event, as a making-archaic, exacts a rupture in the now-bygone mode of looking at all past events and, accordingly, the past writ large—this act is an evental interruption of truth qua truth. Nonetheless, the Event is not true or false as a proposition’s truth-value is true or false. Rather, there *can*, indeed, be a false Event, something that *presents* itself as a truth but, in the end, merely reinstates classical ways of being and power hierarchies (as has been the case with many historical attempts at revolutionary political change, for instance). The false Event is, in the last instance, no Event at all but merely a “reactive formation, a way of betraying the modernist break, of re-integrating its achievement into the dominant field”.⁶ Thus, Slavoj Žižek, recalling Schoenberg’s atonal revolution—after which all tonal music would lose its innocence, relegated to the crevices of nostalgia—underscores how the Event must radically change meaning and, therefore, function as a negation, mediating all that precedes it. After such an Evental breakage, “one simply cannot return to the past, or go on as if nothing happened—even if one does, the same practice will have acquired a radically changed meaning”.⁷

The criterion between a true or false Event is not contingent upon a verification feature but with a breakage in the order of sense. While propositional truth-value deals with empirical observation, “[s]ense, on the other hand, rooted in the substantial eternity of possible-multiples, of combinations of objects, is readable in the very structure of the proposition, in the immediate fact that we understand it independently of all external verification”.⁸ How does this relate to Zer-

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, Verso, New York 2008, p. 79.

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, Verso, New York 2012, p. 190.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁸ Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, p. 106.

melo-Fraenkel systematization? Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory's axioms assert an exclusive foundation, grounding the existence of an empty set where operations (e.g., the subset axiom, the power set axiom, the axiom of infinity) allow for the generation of an entire numerical universe. Critically, Zermelo-Fraenkel's axioms preclude the existence of sets that belong to themselves, thereby avoiding Russell's paradox. As Peter Hallward remarks, "axiomatized, set theory as such refers to nothing outside its own internal and purely abstract consistency; its subsequent, and perfectly legitimate, application to other (physical) domains is not itself considered properly mathematical at all.... One consequence is the suspension of claims to truth and reality in the familiar sense".⁹ As a formalization of possibility, Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory diagrammatizes interruption qua mediation, a tabula rasa upon which Truth Events can be coded and recoded like a palimpsest. Illuminating Badiou's theory of change vis-à-vis politics, there are but incommensurate historical moments that have no directionality. The "illegal" Event—to borrow Badiou's parlance—is, in turn, a self-belonging multiplicity that decries any progressive/teleological character or historicist justification. To do so would be to merely trade in that which Žižek terms "mobility," "the motif of the fluidification or historical relativization of all forms of life".¹⁰ Rather, Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, as a transcendental logical architecture, maps historical thought proper to the constellation of being. These Events do not occur within the causal order of the empirical world but the actual world, which contains infinite sets of every possible combination within it—that is, the real existence of absolute possibility. Nonetheless, much of these possibilities that are contained by absolute necessity remain inaccessible to the world-itself; possibility, for Badiou, requires the process of emergence *vide* dialectics in order to become fully present in actuality. Thus, in Hegelian fashion, Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory avoids the problems of modal indeterminacy by unspooling a one-world modal theory.¹¹ This concept of possibility inherently

⁹ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2003, p. 73.

¹⁰ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 145.

¹¹ According to Hegel and as evidenced by the Actuality chapter of the *Logic*, there is but one world, which contains infinite varieties of other world-like composites which are not exterior worlds transcending the actual world but, instead, layered and immanent part(s) of the constitution of actuality. That which modal theorists may term "alternative possible worlds" are, for Hegel, embedded in the determinate content of this world—the actual world contains infinite sets of every possible combination within it—the real existence of absolute possibility.

contains negativity: what is possible both *can* be and *cannot* be. Contra those who insist upon potentiality as a primary and immanent concept, possibility for Badiou's Truth Event is not freighted by connotation(s) of power, capacity, real determinateness, and teleological design. Rather, possibility refers to formal aspects of modality.

The difference between the being of the pure multiple, the objectivity of consistent multiplicity (i.e., "ordinary situations"), and the subjective disruption of the "Truth Event" ("evental situations," "strong singularities") forms the basic conceptual triad that organizes Badiou's philosophical system. This is initiated in his estimation of a "third phase" in the history of dialectics, following the completion of its first two defining moments with Plato and Hegel. In his 2016 article, "Affirmative Dialectics," Badiou writes that:

The fundamental problem in the philosophical field today is to find something like a new logic. We cannot begin by some considerations about politics, life, creation or action. We must first describe a new logic, or more precisely, a new dialectics. This is the way of Plato, but after all, it is also the way Karl Marx proposed. The work of Marx is not first a new historical vision, a new theory of class struggle, and so on, but from its very beginning a new general logic in the wake of Hegelian dialectics. Marx was perhaps the first, maybe after Plato, to create an explicit relation between revolutionary politics and a new dialectical framework. We have the same problem today. To be sure, we have to rectify something after two centuries of successes and failures in revolutionary politics, and, in particular, after the failure of the State-form of socialism. But we also have to find a new logic, a new philosophical proposition adequate to all forms or creative novelty. Thus the question of dialectical and of non-dialectical relations is a pressing difficulty. If you want, our problem is the problem of negativity.¹²

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This new "logic" ought not to be understood *vide* a deductive order or calculus but as the rational articulation of being and appearing in relation to the constitution of a subject. We cannot begin with considerations about politics, life, creation, or action. Similarly, we cannot search for some beginning of philosophy via history. For Badiou, this "new logic" must accompany "a new way

¹² Alain Badiou, "Affirmative Dialectics: from Logic to Anthropology", *The International Journal of Badiou Studies* 2 (1/2016), p. 1.

of thinking” and, consequently, “a new definition of philosophy itself”—i.e., a “new dialectics” where the affirmation, or the positive proposition, comes *before the negation* instead of after it.¹³ In forging the conditions for this “new way of thinking” which would imply a recommencement of philosophy, and against the idealist dialectic, Badiou rejects the reduction of subjective becoming to the movement of “radical negativity” as in Hegel. Insofar as the Truth Event occurs precisely against the rational regulation of the axiomatic-ontological order, the concrete negation of the ontological and objective orders involves an *affirmative act* that grounds it. For Badiou, philosophical recognition is an “affirmative act” that conditions the constitution of the “subject of truth” and requires an inaugural “meta-ontological decision” by virtue of which philosophy historically intervenes in the arcana of the One and the multiple. This affirmative act, the “decision,” is of *pure multiplicity*. As this relates to the migrants and the variegated ethnic groups that Badiou mentions in *Migrants and Militants*, this means that we ought not eliminate difference and strive for an ideal but, instead, affirm difference by way of a mediating principle that draw as forth the non-being of the One and the being of the pure multiple. For Badiou, this will transpire via a pure politics of universalism, which precedes and conditions difference.

For Badiou, “[s]ubjective induction knows the sources of the compatibility between the elements of a body, and thus of its practical cohesion”.¹⁴ The relationship between an element and the evental trace is directly linked to questions of imputed consistency. Thus, following Mao, Badiou extols a doctrine of “permanent discussion, assemblies, [and] ‘political education,’” with particular interest in future efforts of a conjoined “working class and ... peasantry”.¹⁵ Within any *polis*, cohesion depends of the making of a “new present” that is subjectivated to the point of attaining its immanent eternity; only by breaking forth from the body of cohesion can an entirely new and singular idea of politics and revolution evolve that distributes a transcendental political intensity.

For Badiou, subjectivity *grounds* his Marxist prescription and its universalist aim seeks to move beyond the conception of politics as activism, which is, ac-

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Albert Toscano, Continuum, New York 2008, p. 497.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

According to Badiou, carried by the transitory objectivity of a movement. While the sequences of such a universalist subjectivity may not wield the teleological goal of illuminating pure objective reality, Badiou's politics serve a much milder goal: truth as what occurs in history via subtraction. In *Migrants and Militants*, as with his earlier political texts, Badiou seeks to remedy what he sees as the mistakes of dogmatism (especially the dogmatisms of 1968 and movements such as the Maoists of the Gauche prolétarienne), with Badiou's post-Maoist work instrumentalizing the equipollence between mathematics and the ontological situation. For Badiou, ontology is what is *sayable* of being—i.e., what can be articulated without reference to qualities—and philosophy has meaning for politics because it does not arise from its own capacities but from the capacities of thought in its heterogeneous instances of production and subjectivation.¹⁶

For Badiou, problems of being deals with the inconsistencies underlying all “consistent” situations proper to artistic, political, or amorous worlds. But what criteria establish that a given mathematical, or in this case universalist, theory actually captures the “being of ordinary situations,” other than by analogically mapping formulae, axioms, and theorems into a conceptual program of descriptions and explanations? Since Badiou adamantly rejects the Pythagorean thesis according to which mathematical idealities constitute the world as such, it follows that set-theory is the “presentation of presentation” just to the extent that it is said to re-present something like the general form of all ordinary presentations in the world(s). This is to say that the consistent presentation of the being of beings, ontology, can be nothing other than the re-presentation of the general form proper to all non-ontological situations. For if set-theoretical mathematics is more than just an abstract axiomatized order and inherently ontological in scope, it is because it is the unique situation that—grounding itself in the void—thinks the irreducible, latent “inconsistency” which subtends the structural consistency in all ordinary “presentations.” Conceptually speaking, Badiou's set-theoretical method of universality lays forth the invariant structures of inconsistent multiplicity, and so functions as the general theory of presentation as such, analogizing “the presentation of presentation.” As it relates to *Migrants and Militants* this will specifically mean that Badiou's set-theoretical system demonstrates the inconsistency in the West's treatment of migrants, reducing

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¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Migrants and Militants*, trans. Joseph Litvak, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK 2020, p. 267.

them to the arrival and productive subjugation. Yet this is merely a (false) appearance, a representation which Badiou seeks to negate via underlying affirmation (the pure multiple). For Badiou, just as the “there is” is pure multiplicity, then truth is the “radical interruption” of the ubiquity of the One, such that the only way to think a political revolution, an amorous encounter, an invention of the sciences, or the creation of art is to regard them as distinct infinities brought into common by suggesting something outside of appearance.¹⁷

Badiou Contra Deleuze: on the Nomad

Deleuze and Badiou share a few fundamental philosophical concerns. Chiefly, Badiou’s philosophical project, in continuity with Deleuze’s, aims to forge a materialist ontology of multiplicity in which subjectivity plays a fundamentally creative role, rather than solely an epistemic one. Both thinkers also agree that overturning the priority accorded to representation-as-model-for-thinking means the obverse of overcoming the essentialist metaphysics following from Aristotle, which has been reiterated throughout the epochs of Western philosophical history. That is, by upholding the priority of multiplicity against “Oneness” or substance, both Badiou and Deleuze’s materialisms do not only seek to overcome critique in its Kantian form, but to respond to the Heideggerian injunction against “ontotheology,” and so to the radicalization of critique in the 20th Century against metaphysics, resisting metaphysics’ forecasted historical closure, or death.

¹⁷ It is perhaps quite fair to say that Deleuze’s disjunctive synthesis is often over-designated as the fruit of Badiou’s critique (with Badiou eliding the connective first system and especially ignoring the conjunctive synthesis). This is, in fact, what Badiou’s book on Deleuze, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, makes clear, as for Badiou the disjunctive synthesis lays claim to how relations work. According to Badiou, relations are rooted in a universal and open Whole that reintroduces a universal one. The eternal return is understood as the formal law posed on chaos; the universe thus being an outcome of the struggle between dissolution and return, where Being is prodded forth via conjunction and dissolution: “[t]he reascent of the virtual would be the return, or the engagement of the One in the simulacra or beings, while the beings themselves, in their subjection to the disjunctive synthesis, would signify heterogeneity and dissolution”. Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, p. 68. Badiou reduces Deleuze’s philosophy to essentially contemplative rather than productive, foregoing thought’s conversion from contemplation to production (which is what the third synthesis achieves).

As a Platonist, Badiou commits to an abstract yet prescriptive *polis* of the (Platonic) Idea – transcendent, universal, and eternal. Nonetheless, this is a limit-condition and an asymptote, whereby representative democracy reproduces itself interminably as a relation to *impossibility*. For Badiou, politics must always strive beyond representation and deal with the idea, which is always outside of the image. Deleuze’s earlier transcendental empiricism, expropriating the subject of its synthesizing role and its reworking of Kantian problematic ideas, as well as the aforementioned “machine ontology” which more explicitly colors Deleuze’s later work on systems of influence/becoming, is inextricable from politics, because it invariably invokes circuits of influence and commonality. Badiou’s dialectical construction of an “alternative” systematically develops a meta-ontological narrative which identifies ontology with the theory of inconsistent multiplicity. In relation to the ontological order of the pure multiple and the objective order of presentation, becoming and subjectivation emerge as interruptions of the stability and stasis of ontological order, implying a process which Badiou names an “event.” “Events” as such initiate a creative process of construction or “truth-procedure.” For Badiou, “Truth Events” manifest in ordinary situations or “worlds” across those aforementioned four domains of thinking and practice that function as the “conditions” which philosophy aims to think together, relative to its historical moment. Within each of these domains, truth is an exception to knowledge or representation, disrupting the objective distribution of “bodies and languages” through which one discerns coherent parts within a situation or “world.” Badiou’s Truth Event signals the emergence of a “strong singularity,” making the “inexistent” of a world appear with maximal intensity. This “making” anchors *Of Migrants and Militants* and, more broadly, Badiou’s concept of change.

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Badiou seeks to suspend the inaugural equation of being with the “One”—rejecting Leibniz’s axiom, according to which “to be a being is to be a being”—which leads to the identification of being with “inconsistent multiplicity,” and of set-theoretical mathematics with its inherent expression. According to Leibniz’ monadology, monads are regarded as “neither substance nor accident” and “have no extension, no shape, and cannot be divided”.¹⁸ Leibniz explains di-

¹⁸ Gottfried W. Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology” [1714] in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Hackett, Cambridge, MA, 1989, §7.

versity and change by positing that monads do have relational properties “that express all the others, so that each monad is a perpetual living mirror of the universe”.¹⁹ In turn, Leibniz’ monadology conceives of absolute isolation in combination with total relationism, where each monad’s Being partially comprises an expression of the world’s totality—that is, external difference is premised on internal reality.

Deleuze’s treatment of Spinoza is more variegated: it is from Spinoza that Deleuze inherits Oneness (albeit sans divine connection) and from Leibniz the thesis of the multiple.²⁰ Consequently, it is here that Deleuze is clearly influenced by Leibniz, although the fact that each monad entertains an internal relation with the entirety of the world leads Deleuze to also reject Leibniz elsewhere, as, following the logic of the monadology, reason is equated with representation for Leibniz. For Deleuze, this is a fatal flaw and reifies the seductive pull of Platonism which he so adamantly resists, as “any given machine and every picture, drawing, description, or theorization is an irreducible entity with a private reality [...] uncoupled and deterritorialized [...] ‘extra-relational’”.²¹ Contra Platonist essentialism and Leibniz’ monadology, for Deleuze univocity does not “mean that there is one and the same Being; on the contrary, beings are multiple and different [...] That of which it is said is not at all the same, but Being is the same for everything about which it is said”.²²

While Deleuze may treat Leibniz ambiguously, he outright rejects Platonism. If Platonism is the doctrine that the being of some or all entities is secondary, it is because principles, truths or essences are found in a “something else” which we can engage with through interaction. Deleuze’s machine ontology inverts this idea and seeks to replace the “Idea as the goal of reminiscence” and, therefore, the Platonic “stable Essence” by reorienting Ideas as they are conceived of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §56

²⁰ Note: it is also by way of Husserl that Deleuze is interested in qualitative distinction: re-objects demarcated from their semblance via subjective, relational, or actual encounters, events, or experiences.

²¹ Arjen Kleinherenbrink, *Against Continuity: Gilles Deleuze’s Speculative Realism*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2019, p. 74.

²² Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* [1969], trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, Columbia University Press, New York 1990, p. 179.

by a subject, utilizing “qualitative transition” and “mutual fusion.”²³ To “overturn Platonism” necessitates removing all traces of “full presence,” “reductionism,” and “relationism” by liquidating stable and eternal “general essences,” replacing them with individual and malleable distributions capable of forming singularities.²⁴ For Deleuze, all resemblances that exist are merely productions between machines instead of (Platonic) predetermined identities. Resemblances are simulacra, retaining a difference in kind between “what they are in their virtual becoming” and that which they “manifest to others,” i.e., the machinic becoming of actuality and appearance. This also is precisely why the Deleuzian machine necessarily produces images *without* resemblance, finding itself at odds with Platonism, where the copy is an image *with* resemblance.

Nonetheless, one may read Deleuze’s oft-utilized term “nomadism” in Badiou’s work on migrants and nomadism, but we ought to underscore that, for Badiou, the term “nomad” does not designate (Deleuzian) becoming. In fact, Badiou’s project is in direct contrast to Deleuze, as Badiou aligns his ontology to the rationalist priority accorded to thinking “over the aesthetic under the dialectical method,” as he avows the explanatory priority accorded to being over becoming.²⁵ This arguably “revisionary” rationalist materialism gives way to a conception of what Badiou names “inconsistent multiplicity,” which takes axiomatized set-theoretical mathematics as its formal paradigm, and which contrasts the “problematic” conception of multiplicity derived from the differential calculus advocated by Deleuze. Thus, for Badiou multiple being is not an “intensive spatium” of “virtual Ideas,” but is instead defined within a purely extensional order, riven from dynamicity, and partitioned qualitative and modal specificity. Challenging Deleuze’s identification of multiplicity with intensity, Badiou’s rationalism opposes empiricism’s deliverances of the senses to the present, for empiricism—even in Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism—reduces being to experience. Badiou holds that the invariant forms of the multiple must be conceived of irrespectively from any process supported in aesthetic synthesis or experiential mediation. This bolsters Badiou’s universalism, where the nomad

²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* [1964], trans. Richard Howard, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, p. 109.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], trans. Paul Patton, Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 53, p. 59; Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 253.

²⁵ Daniel Sacilotto, *Saving the Noumenon* (Under Review) 2020, p. 62.

does not signify “a line of flight” or ascent but, instead, deals with the subtraction of being from representation; we are all nomads in the last instance, denizens of a world without borders.

Contrast this to the Deleuzian “problem,” which not only refers to the genetic conditions of any item or body but also all the entangled ecological relations relating to the environment around it—i.e., in considering, say, an acorn’s “becoming” a tree in Deleuzian fashion, we must similarly conceive of an empirically poised “problem” by way of “soil conditions, plant and animal wildlife in the vicinity of the seed, altitude, humidity, the amount of sunlight the seed is exposed to, and so on”. As the acorn seed integrates these singularities and their entangled relations, a unique “solution” is produced as the acorn generates a tree that is distinct from all other trees. Deviation from normalcy is indexed by how modes of existence articulate themselves for Deleuze and, conversely, how externality and the body without organs guarantee that a multiplicity can never be reduced to the circumstances that this system proffers. As an articulation of the machinic nomad, “lines of flight” indicate how the body exacts sufficient reason for the possibility of breaking with current relations. Deleuze’s nomad is wrapped within a double etymology referring to dividing, distributing, and allotting lands but also to roaming, roving, and wandering. For Deleuze, to be a nomad is to never settle within a relation, a “local absolute, an absolute that is manifested locally”.²⁶ The Deleuzian nomad is thus, an experimenter actualizing virtualities by contracting them into incessant becoming—therefore, it follows that, for Deleuze, “what counts the most is a certain idea of the event that in the end makes philosophy ... ‘experimentation’”.²⁷ History is the ingredient of possible material experimentation and the nomad is the essence of practice—thus, what is “radical” for Deleuze is the legislation of the imagination *vide* invention.²⁸ The nomad is where particular points and the relations of forces between these points are tossed about, an informal battle.²⁹

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 382.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Letters and Other Texts*, trans. Anna Hodges, Semiotext(e), South Pasadena 2020, p. 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* [1986], trans. Seán Hand, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1988, p. 121.

How, then, does Deleuze's concept of change transpire if it is always situated within a modality of relation-becoming? In *Anti-Oedipus* we see the disjunctive synthesis coming into its full form, prodding forth material affect(s) and implying a counter-actualisation, a "becoming" of that which it was previously not. In such later work, the logic of Deleuze's disjunctive synthesis is demarcated within the machine ontology as the second synthesis, following the contractive (first) synthesis of connecting relations and followed by the conjunctive (third) synthesis, which creates externality and residual relations of novelty. According to Deleuze's disjunctive synthesis, entities are endowed with a gradient or register of "receptivity" upon which traces of encounters (regarding internal matters of alteration) record themselves, resulting in the "change that is substance itself".³⁰

Deleuze recalls Kant's three syntheses of: i) apprehension (the synthesis or "synopsis" of the present); ii) memory (recollection "of the thought object and its recognition by a thinking subject" in the sense of the capacity to reproduce, i.e., the synthesis of reproduction); iii) final recognition (knowledge, or the capacity to subordinate memory under concepts). For Deleuze to combat Kantian understanding he distinguishes how, after memory, one does not encounter judgment and recognition but, instead, encounters something that breaks from representation, moving towards the production of the future – that is, "the process of prediction".³¹ At the beginning of *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari outline the machine ontology:

It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks. What a mistake to have ever said the id. Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts.³²

Accordingly, machines operate via fluxes (including energy, desiring energy, matter, money, and so on) by stopping, using, transforming, and releasing them. For

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, New York 1991, p. 36.

³¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 226.

³² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 1.

example, Western society responds to the abstract machine of capitalism, which itself organizes the work of all the other machine by transforming the fluxes of Capital. Capital is the Body without Organs upon which the concrete machines are attached/connected in order to transform and to create an economy from the flux of money. So, not only is there a distinction between fluxes and machines in the machine ontology but any machine and every machine is operates specifically with respect to the way in which it uses a particular flux and releases a transformed flux to the (other) connected machines. However, this is not entirely a rejection of Kant as it is a transformation of Kantian thought; Badiou does to Kant what Deleuze does to Plato. Following Hegel on this front, Badiou *opposes* the Kantian representational account of thought, along with the emphasis of finitude which dominates the latter's work, and that of his phenomenological and neo-sophistic successors in the twentieth century. For Badiou, the fact that the Kantian conception of thought had to remain at the analytic level means that it fails to rise to what Plato already identified as dialectical thinking.

As outlined in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*³³ Deleuze's empiricism must think of the subject not only as a "passive self" but as something "larvally" produced within the natural world; as a consequence, "the construction of the given makes room for the constitution of the subject. The given is no longer given to a subject; rather, the subject constitutes itself in the given".³⁴ A problematic "double genesis" of being and thinking, of the virtual and its actualizing agent, seems to be thus at work, by virtue of which intensity shocks the subject which encounters it, but at the same time is unintelligible as being independent of the subject's production of it. Accordingly, Deleuze's constructivism renders the receptivity associated with sensibility inscrutable, as he flattens the spontaneity of thinking into a purely semiotic-structural register or protocol of exchange. This quandary leads to crucial methodological consequences for Deleuze's conception of philosophy as "conceptual creation," and of transcendental empiricism as inculcating a method of division commensurate to lived experience. For Badiou, lived experience and its consequences are deracinated while, for Deleuze, having flattened thinking into a problem-solving protocol occurring at the pre-discursive level, the relation between the conceptual creation that

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* [1997], trans. Constantin V. Boundas, Columbia University Press, New York 1991.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

ordains philosophy and the world becomes notoriously difficult to adjudicate. For Deleuze the question arises about just how, exactly, the transcendental empiricist concepts and the formal paradigms it champions suffice to theoretically track the domain of difference and its subjectivation, without supposing a representational account of thinking which “reflects” upon the real as its domain of investigation. Formulating an implicit response, Deleuze reiterates that ontological univocity implies a strict equivalence between sense of the expression and the expressed.

For Deleuze, nomadic reality transpires as a “schizo-phrenia”—an inverted mereotopology where private reality is prioritized over the relations between them.³⁵ Therefore, Deleuze’s nomad is equipollent to the schizophrenic machine comprised of parts and elements of various pre-existing machines, rather than indicating universality—“the schizophrenic is a functional machine making use of left-over elements that no longer function in any context and that will enter into relation with each other *precisely by having no relation*”.³⁶ For Deleuze, following Husserl, essence refers not to a simple object of experience but to the body’s internal reality, distinct from “sensible things” and, in turn, “morphological,” “nomadic” and “vagabond.” Detachment from the immediate production of actuality gives rise to a new nomadic machine in many instances, as, for example, “whenever someone makes love [...] that person constitutes a body without organs, alone and with the other person or people”.³⁷ Every synthesis necessitates two former syntheses, and every connection invariably involves the “eternal return’s” production of a non-productive, irreducible body without organs undergoing virtual becoming, delegating the *becoming* of a conjunctive machine, wrapped up in autonomy and novelty.

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Historically mediated affirmation trumps epistemic foundationalism for Badiou; as a consequence, the decision exacts a historical cut, and this is what Badiou identifies with all political acts, which function as “events,” proper (cuts in the cloth of history). The “decision” is therefore characterized metaphorically as an “axiomatic” act, which interrupts the monotonous oscillation of metaphysi-

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2005, p. 34.

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness—Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, Semiotext(e), New York 2006, p. 18.

³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 30.

cal history. Badiou's claim that "the One is not" is not the result of a derivation or proof, but enables subtracting ontology from onto-theology, and the dialectic from idealism. Accordingly, from this fundamental statement Badiou draws two immediate theses, in terms of which a dialectical resolution of the contradiction between the One and the Multiple is said to follow:

- (1) to say that the One is not is not to say that there isn't Oneness;
- (2) to separate the non-being of the One and its "being-there" we must understand the One as an operation rather than as a given product, i.e. "there is oneness" since pure multiplicity is presented in a situation as a result of the "count-as-One." As a consequence, Badiou writes that:

...the multiple is the regime of presentation; the one, in respect to presentation, is an operational result; being is what presents (itself). On this basis, being is neither one (because only presentation itself is pertinent to the count-as-one), nor multiple (because the multiple is solely the regime of presentation) I term situation any presented multiplicity. Granted the effectiveness of the presentation, a situation is the place of taking-place, whatever the terms of the multiplicity in question. Every situation admits its own particular operator of the count-as-one. This is the most general definition of a structure; it is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one.³⁸

Badiou completes the basic dialectical maneuver by drawing the necessary link between the non-being of the One and the being of the pure multiple: since the One is not, it is nothing; but to "be nothing" must not be thought negatively, but positively as the being of "inconsistent multiplicity," which remains the latent void of inconsistency in every structured situation, and over which the count-as-One operates. Only at this point does the equation of ontology with axiomatized set-theoretical mathematics become intelligible: set-theory is the singular situation which, affirming the void as its first existential axiom, "grounds" its discursive apparatus on the abyss of presentation, and thus thinks "intrinsically" of inconsistent multiplicity: In affirming that "there exists a set to which nothing and belongs," a pure mark with an empty extension structures and presents nothing becomes the axiomatic ground on whose basis every consistent presentation is successively conceived, in conjunction with the other axioms.

³⁸ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 24.

Set theory thus constitutes the register in which one thinks consistently of inconsistency, presenting the form of inconsistency that underlies all consistent presentation.

Badiou accords priority to affirmation over pure negation. This not only designate the origin of a subjectivation or eventual change across the four conditions, but, crucially, the methodological lever by virtue of which philosophy coordinates the axiomatic formalism of set-theory to meta-ontological concepts, so as to identify the former with ontology i.e., “multiplicity,” “presentation,” “structure,” “situation,” “the count-as-One,” “the event,” “truth,” etc. With this said, in order to secure the ontological role played by mathematics in general and set-theory in particular, and so the correspondence between meta-ontological concepts, ontological formalization and the real of materiality, Badiou avows that mathematics grants a kind of an “intrinsic access” into the being of the multiple, within which the difference between thinking and being becomes in-operative, and the problematic of access is overcome.

Badiou’s identification of mathematics with ontology rests on the agency of a self-determining philosophical subject whose grounding gesture he names the “historical decision.” Badiou’s deferral to this “historical decision” determines both the condition to think of the eventual interruption in the wake of the event as well as the structural basis on which philosophy as meta-ontology identifies mathematics as the discourse that thinks being qua being directly, i.e., without the detours of sensory, genetic, or linguistic experience. Badiou thus seeks to free philosophy from the detours of representation. Rather than instantiating being qua becoming, as with Deleuze, Badiou’s engagement with being qua being underlies a more programmatic understanding and aspiration for a politics of the nomad that defies liberal pragmatism, where nomadism is defined neither through an order of relations or by way of what the nomad *does*. Instead, Badiou affirms the nomad as an extrinsic condition that precedes any signifying order grounding it. Here, Badiou’s “axiomatic method” produces a subtractive ontology where the exceptional agency of a philosophical ur-subject affirms the “historical decision.”

Migrants, Militants, and Universalist Ethics: Badiou's Platonist Politics

Recall how Plato's ontological project reshapes Parmenides by articulating our relation to the "Way of Truth" as a moral one;³⁹ for Plato, the atemporal realm becomes a whole congeries of moral values (of *eidē*) and not a perfect unity but a set of Forms. Our political task is, thus, to rise intellectually from the thing-which-becomes (*ta gignomena*) to the contemplation of unchanging truths. How do the world of unchanging Forms and the one of "things that become" relate to one another? For Plato, this is imbricated with moral value: Forms make up our world but their most important role is to be what we are to seek; we cannot know the Forms in detail until we are dead and their moral function is to call us elsewhere, their ontological function is to *be elsewhere*. They communicate, they engage in exhortation(s). Through axiomatized set theory, this communication is relationally diagrammatized; just as there are no subjects without events, there is no truth without the collective (re)orientation of possibility. This is why for both Plato and Badiou, mathematics is the condition for staging the Idea and, thus, the grounding for philosophy. Ontologically, the subject is a finite enquiry of an infinite truth procedure, which always follows an event. Mathematics assumes an ontological role, subtracting thinking from the qualitative determinations represented by sensible intuition. Badiou's tripartite Platonic gesture, of "orientation, situation and trajectory",⁴⁰ is knotted together via participation, which formalizes the subject's political satisfaction and activates the Idea of thought. The "decision" is, thus, conditioned on a historically mediated affirmation rather than an epistemic foundation, characterized as an axiomatic act which interrupts the monotonous oscillation of metaphysical history (with neoliberalist democracy serving as its most contracted point).

³⁹ For Parmenides the Way of Truth could only be bifurcated into "itself-as-it-was-before-the-change" and "-itself-as-it-is-after-the-change"; this internal opposition is incompatible with true Being, so the "Way of Truth," or the "One" of Parmenides, never changes in-itself (it is atemporal). Unlike the One, we are not unified or atemporal for Parmenides but *dikranoī*, two-minded, wandering along a "way of Seeming". On this "Way of Seeming" everything is in a process of change and, thus, exhibits internal opposition; beyond this path is the "Way of Non-Being," which is without unity and cannot even be spoken of. John McCumber, *Time and Philosophy: A History of Continental Thought*, Acumen Publishing, Durham, UK 2011, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Badiou, *Migrants and Militants*, p. 50.

How, exactly, does this affirmation of truth function within a case study? Let us thus turn to Badiou's most recent work for an answer. Badiou's short and programmatic text, *Migrants and Militants*, is bookended by references to the Yellow Vests Movement in France. According to Badiou, the Yellow Vests are a mass response to the specter of pauperization/proletarianization that now haunts a suburban lower-middle class that was reared on the liberalist dream of commodity fetishism and materialist accrual. Badiou recalls Marx's aphorism that "proletarians have no homeland" which is truer today than it was in Marx's time, for "our homeland is the world, and our compatriots make up working humankind in all its diversity".⁴¹ Despite this vision of compatriotization, the migrant has come to represent the arrival and presence of that which *comes from elsewhere*. "We," being those prodding forth the communist politics of our time, must expatriate ourselves in the direction of the expatriating—"we" have no common land other than the one demanded by our common work. In turn, Badiou motivates us to universalize "we" into a horizontal condition.

Badiou turns our attention to how the term "migrant" has been introduced relatively recently within our common lexicon, particularly to describe Africans coming to Europe. Badiou dons a historical-etymological cap and surveys several moments:

- i) 1950s – 1970s: During this era, France's industries began to burgeon and, thus, with parallel vigor, so too did the import of a foreign labor force. Badiou calls our attention to how over a million Portuguese came to France at this time. Yet, curiously, no one spoke of immigration as a problem at the time. Instead, all those who came to France were spoken of and termed "workers" in univocal fashion, with workers' hostels erected to house this labor force. In turn, an international proletariat of France advanced, with industries such as the Bank of France, and factories such as Renault Billancourt directly owned and managed by the states.
- ii) 1970s – early 1980s: At this time, the pressures of the global market began to increase on a now-diminished imperial France. This resulted in the dismantling of state-monopoly capitalism. Accordingly, France saw its epoch of privatization accompanied by massive deindustrialization. This meant the disappearance of great factories and the eventual outsourcing of jobs. Badiou

⁴¹ Badiou, *Migrants and Militants*, p. 5.

notes that, with this moment, “[p]eople now start talking not about workers any more, but about immigrants”,⁴² with the understanding that “*they*”—the immigrants—are not, and cannot, be “*we*,” the inhabitants of France. This also meant that immigrants were not seen as deserving of the same rights as those French denizens.

- iii) 1990s – today: Now immigrants and immigration are deemed to be a major political problem. It is only in this contemporary moment that the word “migrant” appears after “worker” and then “immigrant”; the term “migrant” is accompanied by quasi-racial threats, with supporters of this “counter-revolution” portraying the situation as that of an *invasion* of civilized countries by hordes. Workers’ hostels are closed and young people in working class suburbs are placed under constant police surveillance. Deportation becomes a norm while obtaining residence permits becomes increasingly difficult. New laws regulating immigration and citizenship are instituted.⁴³

For Badiou, this historical development evidences that the word “migrant” invokes an ambivalence between the stable identity of the worker and the provocation that the arrival of the other represents for it. Citing Patrick Chamoiseau’s poetic call to action, *Migrant Brothers: A Poet’s Declaration of Human Dignity*, Badiou claims that the contemporary historical moment presents us with a “cause” upon which we must act. Specifically, Badiou encourages us to reject both the fundamental conception of the “migrant” as the “other” and the accompanying essential norm of this orientation, an ethics of hospitality. For Badiou, this rejection of hospitality is rooted in a communist vim, as the fundamental concept that belongs to the proletariat and its essential norm is transnational organization.⁴⁴

Following this ethical orientation, Badiou prods us to not simply welcome the foreigner but to regard “welcoming” as a *duty* that transcends all other dispositions. Badiou’s choice of the word “duty” in specific invokes the Kantian categorical imperative, albeit Kant’s name is absent from the text. Nonetheless, Badiou is similarly working towards a kind of unconditional and universalist moral realism. According to Kant’s categorical imperative, morality is univer-

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

salizable because self-legislation has a universal foundation, as it allots us with being a standpoint shared by all human beings cum rational beings. This capability of a universal standpoint in cognition allows us to access the particular reasons we may have to act in one way rather than another, as well as claiming normative validity in *willing* (which, for Badiou, transpires in tandem with “acting”). For Badiou, there is a relation of necessity between the one who arrives and the one already “living here,” such that welcoming the one who arrives is an ethical obligation and is unconditional.

Given Badiou’s marked philosophical differences with Jacques Derrida, it is no surprise that he summons in Derrida’s “law of unlimited hospitality” to spar with Derrida’s ghost. For Badiou, it is absurd to even question the ethical orientation of saying “yes” to the one who arrives and we must affirm the arriver, regardless of whoever that person may be and before any identification; Derrida’s logic of hospitality exists as something akin to the *sin of neoliberalism*, making-diffuse the logic of neoliberalist globalization by reifying borders, separations, and ethnic/racial essentialisms. Nominally, Badiou is in agreement with Derrida on one point, as both see the welcome of the other as an absolute necessity, this absolute necessity juxtaposed with the relative necessity of the laws of state. However, Badiou is arguably much more discerning than Derrida, as he launches a tripartite critique on Derrida’s *Of Hospitality*.⁴⁵

- 1) For Derrida, the other is the one who arrives and this not only imposes a kind of “serious limitation” but also subtly heartens racism, xenophobia, and other types of hostility to the other. For Badiou, to focus on the person’s arrival means that we do not, with equally interest, concern ourselves with the other’s presence over the long term—the coexistence of customs, cultural habits, and children. Thus, Derrida’s focus on the “welcome” and thresholds of passage is not only inadequate and myopic but is politically feeble.
- 2) The identity of the other, as Derrida conceives of it, does not impose a limit on the concept of *nationalism*; Derrida’s “law of unlimited hospitality” and jingoism can mutually coexist, as the former does not negate the latter. For Derrida, “[w]hether the arriving person is a God, a man, a woman, or an animal,

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2000.

otherness imposes a law of welcome.”⁴⁶ For Badiou, this absolute imperative is dangerous as it is undiscerning—how can we accept this absolute imperative if the other is, say, “a supporter of slavery, or a Zionist preying on Palestinian Land?”⁴⁷ However, it is not that Badiou thinks we should be more discerning about who we welcome but that framing hospitality in terms of who is welcome is already poisoning the well from the start. Such an imperative like Derrida's, which makes an event of the welcome also encourages exploitive international tourism, the predatory delight of “rich westerners going to take the sun in the territories where the most extreme poverty is massive”.⁴⁸

- 3) As Derrida notes, the relation between absolute imperative and particular laws remains indeterminate. With such indeterminacy in mind, Badiou considers those laws that deal with poor migrants arriving into rich countries as well as laws which invoke identity, integration, and assimilation. Badiou remarks that these laws function with the goal to accept only those who are already prepared to obey the norms of the dominant country, ready to make themselves as invisible as possible outside the designated work that they are required to provide. For Badiou, this absolute law of hospitality is, in reality, funded by relative laws which enforce submission and maximum invisibility. *Derrida's framework and the logic of the welcome/hospitality reduces the new arrival to their being a migrant-as-nomad without calling into question the dialectical relations between this person's coming and the conditions that motivate them to come.* Derrida's logic of the welcome and hospitality enforces submission and maximum invisibility, reducing the arriver into the laws that determine this person's acceptance or rejection, which supervene on all else.

Derrida's *Of Hospitality* invokes the idea that the poor, mistreated, and humiliated constitute a kind of “gift” for us rather than engaging with what migration “allows us to see”. Citing Laurent Gaudé's poem “Regardez-les” (“Look at Them”), Badiou remarks that Derrida is not alone in this conception of the other-as-gift, for it also characterizes Gaudé's attitude towards the nomad. In response, Badiou notes that we must engage in rational analysis of what the word “migrant” captures at the surface level: “forced travel, wretched families, their arrival, the gift that this arrival constitutes for us. The poem, just like the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17–18.

philosopher of hospitality, does not really name the larger context in which this tragedy of wandering is being enacted”.⁴⁹ Arguably, Derrida and Gaudé’s framework—albeit Badiou does not use this terminology—function as auxiliaries to neoliberal ethics, scoring the circuits of trade and travel rather than dealing with what underpins these structures.

More broadly, and unlike Derrida, Badiou upholds what he sees as the genuine humanism of equality, which erases genealogical, anthropological, or social differences (e.g., Jewish/Greek, nomad/denizen, man/woman, master/slave). As Balibar remarks, Badiou’s “true universalism” is contrasted by “a universalism proceeding from Christianity and later secularized by modern republicanism [...] a ‘simulacrum’ of universalism [...] namely, the universalism of the liberal world market (or perhaps the liberal representation of the world market), which is based not on equality but on equivalence and thus incorporates into its formal homogeneity the permanent reproduction of rival identities”.⁵⁰ Derrida’s logic of hospitality reinforces the universalism of the (neo)liberal world market, constructed around differences such as the “arriver” and the “denizen”—arbitrary differences, as evidenced by the arbitrary border that is crossed by the putative “nomad”. Badiou, as an opponent of postmodern thought and relativism, upholds a totalizing and extensive “universalism of equality” that erases genealogical, anthropological, and social differences which are opposed to the “false universalism” of the world market and its representation.

Despite Badiou’s analysis does not engage with digital modalities of control and platform capitalism, glazing over the politics of data,⁵¹ he does trenchantly underscore how the possibility of production, writ large, occurs on a worldwide and earth-wide scale. Badiou roots his case study in the manufacturing and

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Étienne Balibar, *On Universals: Constructing and Deconstructing Community*, trans. Joshua David Jordan, Fordham University Press, New York, 2020, p. 88.

⁵¹ Or what Colin Koopman calls “infopower,” which deploys techniques of formatting/formats in order to fasten and speed up datafied “informational persons”—while this logic precedes digitality (e.g., birth certificates and auditing), “infopower” has become ubiquitous through digital platforms and, arguably, is due analytic credence given Badiou’s penchant for universalist proletarianization. As unwitting metadata creators, we, as social media surfers, have all become our “data,” which is circulated and sold by advertising companies. Colin Koopman, *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2019.

distribution of cell phones, which “require calculations made in California, financing carried out in US dollars, German technical adjustments, the violent plunder of rare metals in Africa and the South Pacific, painstaking assembly work in vast Chinese factories, and networks of communication established everywhere”.⁵² Rather than reify the platitude that “neoliberalist capitalism a novel global phenomena,” Badiou once again dons himself a historical-materialist cap and directs our attention to how globalization is by no means a contemporary occurrence. In fact, Badiou notes that the capitalist vision and the bourgeois oligarchic order was born from this global vision, as capitalism was established from the outset by international commerce (e.g., in Venice or Holland) where fortunes were made through the mediation of bankers and owners of fleets of ships on the basis of products imported from the Far East, Africa, or the Americas.

This accumulation of primitive capitalization and its mooring to globalization and cosmopolitanism was, as Badiou correctly notes, pointed out by the young Marx.⁵³ The production of capitalism and its instruments of production have, since the very beginning, relied on the subjugation of provinces and countryside to cities and capitals, subordinating all that has anything to do with the rural world and, as technologies allow for it, increasingly moving outwards. This also resulted in those whose raw materials were plundered becoming “other,” such that their provinces, countries, and economies became dependent. Badiou professes that we *must* propose a different organization of the global apparatus of production.

Following his distinguishing “worker” from “migrant,” Badiou here makes a further distinction between “worker” and “proletariat,” wherein the former references someone who works in a factory *organized by capital* which, historically, has accompanied industrialization. The “proletariat,” on the other hand, has a much more vast designation, for it deems the mass of those denizens who, solely to survive, must attempt to *become* workers, or those who *already are* workers; a proletarian has only their labor power to offer by way of work. So

⁵² Badiou, *Migrants and Militants*, p. 20.

⁵³ Badiou points cites passages from *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 that underscore how raw material is drawn from remote zones and variegated quarters of the globe, such that the production of capitalism is always an international initiative.

while the “worker” refers to “work” that is localized and determinate, “proletarian” is the *general condition* of someone who has no other possibility of survival than finding work, hitched to the vicissitudes of competition and the fluctuations of the market.⁵⁴ Despite he does not offer an economic program, it would appear that, for Badiou, the universalization of the proletarian condition will mollify the subservience of the proletarian to the appendages of capitalist circumscription.

Returning specifically to the conditions of the migrant, Badiou underscores that, today, the market is organized by planetary oligarchy with whole regions where there are no jobs to be had, forcing young people to travel.⁵⁵ Insofar as they have not found work, the would-be worker is reduced to a state of nomadic proletarian wandering; Badiou remarks on how the migrant’s historical essence is the result of a capitalist order at the peak of oppressive inegalitarianism. As a consequence, our duty is not to *welcome* this person in the name of an ethics of hospitality but, instead, our duty is to “organize ourselves with him or her and with everyone like him or her, if possible at an international level, to prepare the end of the oligarchic world order whose result is his or her being as nomadic proletarian.”⁵⁶ Contra predetermining and essentializing narratives that deal with systematic issues superficially—with such programs increasingly being prodded forth by the likes of bias training and diversity consultants, implemented by corporate office training workshops (e.g., Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* and its appendages) —Badiou motivates how our duty is to think and prepare with the nomadic proletarian in facilitating a new communist politics.

China and the Worker-Poet

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Badiou turns to the case study of China and, specifically, the poetry of workers/ the genre of the worker-poet, which he sees as best capturing the epic of the nomadic proletariat. Such poets tell the story of their migration from remote rural provinces that have been deserted as they venture towards the “penal colonies”⁵⁷ of Chinese factories where a prodigious quantity of the consumer prod-

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ This is exceedingly true even on a local level, as evinced by oil “boomtowns” in the USA.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Badiou uses the term “penal colony” to historically invoke the English nomadic proletarians who lived and worked a century and a half ago.

ucts found all over the world are now produced. Specifically, Badiou references the poet Yang Lian (who belonged to the Misty Poets collective, a group of poets thematically associated with dialectically traversing objective and subjective realism) and the worker-poet Guo Jinniu, who worked at the Foxconn factory. Badiou culls Jinniu's 2015 anthology, *A Massively Single Number*, referencing the poem "Going Home on Paper," which, given its realist sensibilities, deals with nomadic work in brute fashion:

...On the 13th floor, a suicide net is closing up, this is my
job
in order to make a day's pay.
I tighten a screw step by step, counter-sink it clockwise,
it struggles and fights me in the dark,
the harder I push, the greater the danger.⁵⁸

Another work of Jinniu's, "A Massively Singular Number," engages with the question of "home" and wandering:

...Our Motherland, it organized me a temporary
Residence Permit
Our Motherland, it accepted the Temporary Residence Fee I handed Over
[...] Someone in the south broke into a rented room
Oh god. It's a raid to check Temporary Residence Permits.⁵⁹

Jinniu's poem dissolves any stability of "home," giving recourse to universality and nomadism as the universal condition and deals with the infinite singularity of what holds an essential truth in reserve: the question of movement and travel. Jinniu's poem also recalls the ontic process of identity vis-à-vis signification by way of identification papers, with the poem concluding in Jinniu's rented room's being raided by police demanding to check Temporary Residence Permits. While Badiou explicitly invokes the example of Chinese laborers, one may readily be reminded of refugees from the Middle East seeking work in Europe or undocumented workers from South America working in the United States. Once again, Badiou is quick to remind us that the question of documentation, or "pa-

⁵⁸ Badiou, *Migrants and Militants*, p. 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

pers,” is by no means novel, as the state in nineteenth-century France instated a “worker’s booklet” which made the nomadic proletarian subject to surveillance and deportation (at the time it affected those nomadic workers living and working in Paris). Today, in China, there exists such an analogous “worker’s booklet” with the Temporary Residence Permit. Rather than evince the intractable nature of archival identification as a precondition for industry and labor, Badiou’s historicization seeks to prove that the sole mean of destabilizing the strife of displaced nomadic workers is by way of a normative ethics of universality. Such unconditional universality, contra the hospitality of the arrival, serves as Badiou’s quilting point writ large.

The poet Xin You queries:

... Who, exactly are we?
 We, workers,
 We who work throughout the seasons
 We who are like birds
 Migrators who have lost everything.⁶⁰

Badiou offers the response that “[y]ou are and will be, in your land of origin as in your adopted land, those who embody universality, those who will help us give birth to the unified world of the new communism”.⁶¹ Badiou here bolsters the plenary embodiment of universality vis-a-vis nomadic proletarianism; despite he hesitates from engaging with the parlance of “open borders” and similar adjacent debates, Badiou’s program undoubtedly pushes for a philosophical doctrine of universality first and foremost, for it is only here from which all other practical schemas may bloom.

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In the final pages of *Migrants and Militants*, Badiou concludes by noting that the very reason he has held reservation over the putative “movement” of the Yellow Vests is due to the massive presence and constant reappearance of the French flag, which is compounded by the Yellow Vest protesters’ often reciting the Marseillaise, which “too many fascist-leaning nationalisms have struck up for us to

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

remember its revolutionary origins any more”.⁶² For Badiou, these engagements reduce all the Yellow Vest’s discussion of inadequate pensions, cancelled public services, and reduced buying power to remarks that solely express the bitterness of those who thought that they were superior, and, therefore, “protected from the planetary gangsterism of capital,” i.e. a tattered sense of superiority.⁶³ Thus, Badiou remarks that, “rather than “beware of white men”—which we should be hearing, and by which I mean ‘beware of the system which are invented and spread everywhere by force’”—what we are hearing is ‘beware of blacks, Arabs, Asians, and “migrants” of all kinds’.”⁶⁴ At the conceptual level, Badiou determines the relationship between the necessary and the contingent, revealing the structural isomorphy between axiomatic theories and set-theoretical structures (i.e., “domains of interpretation”) as a process immanent to mathematical-cum-political production, revealing that formal theories are not *given* but *constructed*, thereby demonstrating that the constructive activity of “inscription” is an inherent aspect of conceptual behavior as a whole. At the level of action, Badiou’s message resounds vigorously, layered upon the recent Black Lives Matter protests following the police- and state-sanctioned murder of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. When Badiou denounces the waving of *any* national flag of *any* color or stripe as a requirement for one’s presence, he is seeking to abolish the conception of a foreign land and extolling the universality-ethics of the living world. This is a realist ethics which need not a concept of hospitality, for the arrival into an alien territory is necessarily dissolved, conceptually dismantled.

Here, Badiou’s conceptual envelopment recalls the Hegelian notion of simultaneous immediacy and mediation, where to say that the “universal” is the “truth” of “sensible immediacy” means that the relation between conceptual form and matter, thought and being, is not that which lies between abstract determination and real content. The universal for Badiou, as for Hegel, is illustrated by sensory immediacy that remains “in-itself,” utterly empty of content and conjoined to the evanescence of temporal and perspectival passing. Working in such a Hegelian register, Badiou reaffirms the idealist philosophical project of

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

political exigency par excellence, participating within the inconsistent terms of sensory givenness and guiding it towards the universal.⁶⁵

According to Hegel, we must “reject the opposition between an independent immediacy in the contents or facts of consciousness and an equally independent mediation, supposed incompatible with the former. The incompatibility is a mere assumption, an arbitrary assertion”.⁶⁶ In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we the notion ‘alienation’ is moored to two German terms that Hegel utilizes: ‘*Entfremdung*’ and ‘*Entäusserung*’.⁶⁷ Although both have often been translated as ‘alienation’, in parsing this heteronomy with a sharpened conceptual scalpel at hand we ought to note that ‘*Entfremdung*’ more closely refers to *estrangement* as the process or state whereby consciousness is separated from one or more of the aspects required for consciousness to fully understand itself. ‘*Entäusserung*’, on the other hand, is the process where consciousness externalizes itself in an object-ified form and, by way of the object, develops a more adequate understanding of itself. The former is linked to *alienation* and the latter *externalization*, *proper*, as (self)-*externalization* is the way consciousness learns that it is not purely a subject and has an ontological structure that not only incorporates a relation to objectivity but *depends on this relation*. In turn, consciousness is purposed and re-purposed, deracinated from the subject as it is distributed among a community in the form of concrete content—instrumentalized vide the form of work and the objects of labor. Thinking, the profoundest aspect of Spirit with its highest activity being to comprehend itself, unspools by way of its operations, which direct themselves towards determinate activity, the aims of finitude. Thus, we see how cognitive activity is directed not towards *interiority* but a determinate actuality. For Hegel, the nature of Spirit must particularize itself to become true and this is achieved by way of movement towards externalization: “consciousness is essentially this process—not a remaining static in the imme-

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⁶⁵ It is crucial to disjoin the materialist dialectic, the philosophy of emancipation through truths, from historical materialism, the philosophy of alienation through language-bodies, with the responsibility of creating a properly de-alienated world tethered to those “wild militants”. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. xv.

⁶⁶ Georg W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Science* [1817], ed. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2010, §78.

⁶⁷ Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807], trans. A.W. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977.

diate natural state but a passage through a process in which what is eternal or true, as its essence, becomes its object or purpose”.⁶⁸

For Hegel, the activity of object-ification transfers and converts *empty objectivity* into a manifestation of being in-and-for itself, i.e., self-determination. For “[a]s soon as the universal is externalised, it takes on a particular character. In isolation, the inward dimension of the Idea would remain a lifeless abstraction, and it is only by means of activity that it acquires real existence”.⁶⁹ Spirit abandons its original condition and discovers itself through what it performs, translating inner essence into reality by way of externalizing the universal concept and, thus, attaining a ‘real’ existence. For Hegel customs, laws, institutions, and symbols of ancient nations were vessels of speculative ideas and products of Spirit but the true fruit of Spirit never comes first; the speculative Idea is externalized, it is always the manifestation point of rationality upon worldly existence, where the potentiality in consciousness, volition, and action finds itself inorganically excised through its determinate object. Spirit, for Hegel, is not abstract, because “it is consciousness, but it is also the object of consciousness—for it is in the nature of the spirit to have itself as its object. The spirit, then, is capable of thought, and its thought is that of a being which itself exists, and which thinks that it exists and how it exists”.⁷⁰

Does this heteronomy between ‘*Entfremdung*’ and ‘*Enttäusserung*’ imply synonymy? Spirit’s self-externalization—that is, collective self-consciousness’ self-externalization—is undoubtedly *constitutive*, but there is a marked difference between *how* Spirit realizes its freedom and *those ways by which it becomes bound or subjected to a foreign agency or power*, which is only, itself, an alienated or estranged form. That is, Hegel’s, all estrangement is externalization but not all externalization is estrangement. This account evidences the dialectical interplay between Spirit’s independence and dependence, wherefor Spirit frees itself from its subjection to nature, achieving spiritual independence/autonomy, and in doing so moves towards culture as a kind of “second nature” to which it then becomes subjected. It becomes dependent on societal institutions, customs,

⁶⁸ Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures of the Philosophy of History: The Lectures of 1825-1826, Vol III.*, trans. R.F. Brown, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1990, p. 21.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Lectures of the Philosophy of History*, p. 79.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

and norms in a manner by which Spirit's freedom is significantly diminished. At once, naturalness or instinct is replicated within Spirit, manifesting within it in an estranged form while, institutions, customs, and norms begin to function *as if* they were nature. The anthropologist Arnold Gehlen would later similarly refer to reified second nature but by way of mankind's deficiency, using the term "ersatz organs" when describing technologies and institutions alike, with both of them compensating for the unfinished or lacking human; nonetheless, in both accounts in furnishing institutions qua norms culture becomes man's "second nature".⁷¹

Accordingly, for Hegel every self-consciousness denaturalization engenders an unconscious re-naturalization, repressing Spirit. First there is subjection to necessity and then emancipation by way of generating another form of subjection. As Ludwig Feuerbach, a key disciple of Hegel, remarks: "Man—this is the mystery of religion—projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject; he thinks of himself is an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself".⁷²

Objectification thus yields the object to which the object-ifier is objectified internally. This is the *processual movement* of alienation as double-objectification in Feuerbach and the young Marx.⁷³ A naturalized scenography divulges itself where humans are necessarily self-externalizing, i.e., producers by nature. The termination of subjection is not the reinstatement of interiority—externalization is not the externalization of a pre-existing ordinary substance or the index of a vital source but, rather, a constant process of amendment, with this process generated because of the *constituent non-identity of humans as self-transforming producers*. Given this picture of Spirit, we are encouraged to see self-externalization as resulting in either a state that is alienated or un-alienated depending on the circumstances in question. Mechanical compulsion and globalization,

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⁷¹ Arnold Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, trans. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer (orig. 1940), Columbia University Press, New York 1988.

⁷² Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, Dover Philosophical Classics, New York 2008, p. 181.

⁷³ Marx roots this in human social relations, which become objectified via commodities. Feuerbach sees this as within the ambit of human self-consciousness and Marx sees this as human practice (i.e., social production).

as Badiou shows, collapses all norms and exercises of freedom into alienation such that we cannot measure the discrepancy between realized and unrealized collective human freedom, for our metaphysical collective Spirit is always being outpouched by way of a processual unfolding.

Recall how, in the *Science of Logic*, the universal and singular form totality, the concept passing into concrete existence which is, itself, free and is none other than the 'I' or pure self-consciousness. The 'I' is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into determinate existence and finds itself instantiated into all manmade hardware.⁷⁴ In *Philosophy of Nature*,⁷⁵ Hegel constructs concepts that define Being by way of a tripartite model—the mechanical, the chemical, and the organic—demonstrating that these are instantiated into our productive experience of the world in equal part, with the living body sustaining this “contradiction”.⁷⁶

Following Hegel, Badiou opposes the Kantian representational account of thought, along with the emphasis of finitude. Yet, Badiou also departs from and radicalizes the Hegelian productive experience via mathematical formalization, overcoming Hegel's idealist solution of absolutizing the concept and the residual metaphysical conservatism in the Hegelian account of determinate being as “essence.” While retaining being (contra Deleuzean becoming), Badiou's philosophy begins by delivering thinking to its scientific condition, giving way to a materialist ontology subtracted from the categories of experience; accordingly, Badiou's conceptual ideation also departs from the vagaries of the partition and distribution of the sensible.⁷⁷ Badiou is perhaps one of the few living philosophers who engages with both Plato's philosophical pursuit of dialectical thinking and Quine's challenge to intentional theories of meaning. Distinguishing form from content, mathematics for Badiou becomes apposite for the materi-

⁷⁴ For Hegel, “[t]he concept is free because the identity that exists in and for itself and constitutes the necessity of substance exists at the same time as sublated or as positedness, and this positedness, as self-referring, is that very identity”. Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* [1816], trans. G.D. Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2015, p. 513.

⁷⁵ Georg W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. M.J. Petry (orig. 1842), Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1970.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁷ This is how Badiou distinguishes his non-dogmatic and non-essentialist materialism from those such as Rancière.

alist dialectic and, by extension, the politics of event. Badiou does not merely overcome the residual “essentialism” in empiricist and naturalist theories of meaning, but also goes beyond idealist attempts to identify the determinations of being in analogy with alethic modal conceptual relations of material incompatibility and consequence. Instead of extolling the negative as the engine of trans-historical and ontic individuation, from which all determinations can be subsumed into a deductive order and in which infinity proceeds from the point of Being, alone, Badiou’s materialist dialectic here involves a more primitive act of *affirmation*. Such affirmation underwrites action, preceding the differential oppositions that organize ontological and phenomenological determinations.

Make no mistake, even with his politics Badiou reiterates the Platonic priority accorded to the pure ideality of mathematics in their extensional dimension, which escape the registers of meaning and the qualitative determinations of experience as we move towards apprehending the universal and eternal forms of being. Thus, Badiou provides us with a rationalist concept of radical politics, with every dialectical truth unspooling a cut upon the real, imparting the possibility of a fundamental Truth beyond the empiricist canvas. If the logic of the dialectic necessitates that we be resolutely materialist, in the spirit of Marx’s response to Hegel, then Badiou both avoids dualist solutions—which would necessitate separating the subject from material reality—while simultaneously avoiding the idealist solution of identifying logic and metaphysics, the forms of thought and the forms of being. Rejecting the reification of observational vocabulary (i.e., empiricism) and theoretical vocabulary (i.e., naturalism), Badiou eruditely elides the immanent productivity and historicity of science. Instead, Badiou’s political philosophy continues his rationalist-materialist epistemology of mathematics, which involves defusing the dichotomy between the representing form and represented fact. For Badiou, theorization and experimentation—that is, philosophy and action—are dialectically woven in a vector of formalization in which conceptual interpretation is periodically disturbed. *Migrants and Militants*, as well as Badiou’s political work writ large, could very well be seen as a program to exact such a disturbance.

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