CHAPTER 8

From Mallarmé to the Event
Badiou after Derrida

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I begin with an anecdote from February 1967, Derrida's own *annus mirabilis*, which saw the publication of his first three books: *La Voix et le phénomène*, *L'Écriture et la différence* and *De la grammatologie*. Consulted by Jean Piel on one of the earliest texts sent by Alain Badiou, an article on French Marxist critic Louis Althusser submitted to *Critique*, Derrida replied that he found it "at least irritating in its tone" and pompous, objecting to "the 'marks' [Badiou] hands out to everyone as if it were prize-giving or the Last Judgment." However, Derrida was also prepared to acknowledge its undeniable importance, let alone since he felt "far from . . . 'philosophically' ready to follow [Badiou] in his arguments or his conclusions."[1] Soon before the turbulent May '68 "events," which ushered in so many ideological realignments in the contemporary French intellectual panorama, the stage seemed set for what would crystallize, in the next three decades or so, as an opposition of style and politics, between the "philosophers of difference," to use François Laruelle's label in his 1986 study,[2] and a younger Turk, whose philosophical system was to gather momentum abroad around the turn of the millennium, spawning an alternative to what had been called by then "post-structuralist" thinking.

However suggestive Laruelle's denomination lumping together philosophies of alterity and difference was thirty years ago, it fails to register the work of Alain Badiou within what could be a larger, more flexible and still topical construction of contemporary French thought over the past fifty years. This chapter proposes such a reframing via an encounter between the

[1] Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 171–72.

[2] François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle (London: Continuum, 2010). This unconventional history of the "reality" and "syntax" of Difference as distinguished from dialectic includes the two fathers of post-structuralism, Nietzsche and Heidegger, Derrida, who occupies a special chapter with his notion of *différance*, and Deleuze – with only a passing mention of Jean-François Lyotard's *différend*; see *Philosophies of Difference*, 5.

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most seemingly antithetical protagonists. I see a possible convergence in what I call more inclusively the "philosophies of the event."[3] An essential reference in the emergence of *nouvelle critique* since Maurice Blanchot's seminal postwar essays[4] and a bridge between incompatible intellectual trends, the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé serves as a convenient fulcrum throughout this confrontation.

A Singular Union of Differences

There is not much, at first sight, that could legitimately authorize a dialogue between Derrida and Badiou. Unlike Derrida's constant problematization of language, his deconstructive practice of a "double gesture, a double science, a double writing"[5] and his conception of deconstruction as "*the* question of translation,"[6] Badiou's anti-nominalism and anti-relativism leaves no place in philosophical investigation for linguistic issues: these, for Badiou are "sophistics" and subordinate the question of truth to that of expression in language conceived as resistant and non-transparent. If anything, Badiou's dismissal of previous ontologies rests on their common fixation upon the independent materiality of language, as in the "stitching" (*suture*)[7] of philosophy to poetry already at work in Heidegger's hermeneutic prophesying.[8]

As a result of his conjunction of mathematics and ontology in his systematic "return to Plato," Badiou's philosophy is highly synthetic and organized by a taut chain of generic concepts, categories and oppositions.

[3] For some preliminary comparisons, see Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and Their Time* (London: Continuum, 2007).

[4] See especially Blanchot's "The Myth of Mallarmé," in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 27–42; "Mallarmé's Experience" and "The Igitur Experience," in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 38–48, 108–19; "The Book to Come," in *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 224–44. See also Arleen Ionescu, "Spacing Literature between Mallarmé, Blanchot and Derrida," *parallax* 21, no. 1 (2015): 58–78.

[5] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 329; see also *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41, alluding to the *double séance* reading Mallarmé in *Dissemination*.

[6] Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Psyche. Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, vol. 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1.

[7] The term is used by Lacan to designate a "conjunction of the imaginary and the symbolic." See *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 118. Badiou's use of Lacan's technical concept becomes relevant in my discussion of subtraction.

[8] Despite Badiou's claim that the German philosopher "is the last universally recognizable philosopher." See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 1.

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A closer precursor here would be Gilles Deleuze, for whom the task of philosophy was to "invent concepts." Such a conceptual focus departs from deconstruction's stubborn resistance to univocal concepts, its mistrust toward structures and programs, a suspicion introduced by Derrida as early as the groundbreaking and well-known essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."[9]

Although Derridean deconstruction, *pace* his detractors, is not synonymous with endless procrastination and "sitting on the fence,"[10] one has to concede that the structural undecidability of the critical moment, whose other name is *différance*, this "ordeal of aporia" without which "no decision would ever take place," even "no responsibility . . . no event would take place . . . not even the place,"[11] estranges it from Badiou's ethico-political imperative to act fast, strongly and politically, that is to respond to urgency by "taking the plunge."

Nevertheless, the experience of deconstruction as a faithful relation to figures of singularity[12] or the emphasis on *plus d'une langue* (more than one/no more of one language) in which Derrida proposes to offer for once a "single definition of deconstruction"[13] is not far apart from Badiou's conception of being as the "pure multiple," through which he works out the conditions of a "universal singularity" in a truth procedure.[14] Although Badiou's claim that "[a] truth procedure interrupts repetition"[15] appears at odds with Derrida's original iterability affecting the structure of singularity and of "eventuality" (*événementialité*),[16] the faithful's unconditional conversion to the event producing an "irreducible singularit[y]"[17] for Badiou ends up sharing some analogies with Derrida's machinic conception of

[9] See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 352.

[10] In "Ethics and Politics Today," Derrida emphasizes the necessity of the "interruption" of reflection for responsible action to happen; see Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 296, 302.

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 37.

[12] Jacques Derrida, "Fidélité à plus d'un – mériter d'hériter où la généalogie fait défaut," *Cahiers Intersignes* 13 (Autumn 1998): 221.

[13] Jacques Derrida, *Memoires: For Paul de Man*, ed. and trans. Cecile Lindsay et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 15.

[14] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13–14 and *passim*.

[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," trans. Gila Walker, *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Winter 2007): 441–61.

[17] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. and intr. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 44.

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blind faith.[18] If Badiou's universalist philosophy is a "Platonism of the manifold" waged on the joint resources of ontology (or philosophy) and mathematics (or scientific rationality), Derrida's plural singularity and generalizable inscription of division-as-multiplication also challenges the Oneness, which is the principle of identity in classical thinking.

Even in Badiou's "foundationalism," as opposed to Derrida's ceaseless interrogation of the "mystical" nature of what "*founds in foundering*,"[19] there is a place for what punctures and interrupts the system, as in the devastating flash of lightning of the *coup de foudre* (love at first sight) that founds the couple in love, the Revolution, a groundbreaking scientific invention, an aesthetic masterpiece, or (the conversion to) Christ's Resurrection. Beyond their differences, and Badiou's avoidance of "difference" as a philosophical concept altogether, the revolutionary potential of the event remains. It is an event to which one has a duty to testify, as Derrida asserts, or to whose truth one owes fidelity in order to become a subject, as Badiou states.

Il y a lieu: The "Place of the Event" in Derrida and Badiou

Leaving aside passing considerations on Mallarmé's project of the Book in "Force and Signification,"[20] Derrida's first major encounter with the French poet is in "The Double Session" (1970). This essay is a masterly deconstruction of Jean-Pierre Richard's "thematic criticism" deployed in Richard's subtle book *The Imaginary Universe of Mallarmé.* Derrida counters by giving meticulous readings of how poetic figures and motifs such as the blank (the white, spacing), the fold (the re-mark), the hymen, French homonyms like *or* (meaning both gold and now) and the figure of the Mime all operate differently in Mallarmé's poetry.[21] My first port of call is Derrida's contribution to *Tableau de la littérature française* (1974), an introductory essay in which he revisits some of the textual examples from "The Double Session," and that offers a synoptic view of the poet's centrality in Derridean thought.[22]

[18] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42–101 (especially 82, § 37).

[19] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 57, § 22. See also in *Acts of Religion*, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, 230–98.

[20] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 8–11, 29.

[21] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), 173–286.

[22] Jacques Derrida, "Mallarmé," trans. Christine Roulston, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 111–26. See also Michael Temple, "Mallarmé, par Jacques Derrida," in

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Derrida's introductory question, "Is there *a place* for Mallarmé in a 'history of literature'?,"[23] interrogates the double operation of rupture and repetition performed by Mallarmé's poetry, especially in *Un Coup de dés*, whose undecidable meanings and double syntax open a crisis of criticism and suspend taxonomic, hermeneutic judgment. As Derrida states, "Something takes place, something 'more' or 'less.'"[24] Such an operation disrupts the then fashionable concept of "polysemy" to which Derrida had opposed his "dissemination." Mallarmé's text becomes more and less than a simple *event*: it is an event that affirms the place of eventuality, as we see in the famous formula "*rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu*" (Nothing will have taken place except the place) from *Un Coup de dés*.

For Derrida, Mallarmé's text subverts the logic of metaphor since Aristotle, for whom "not to signify a single thing was to signify nothing."[25] This introduces a new crisis: the event of plural signification is a writing that does not so much multiply the sign (the old "polysemy") as it fractures its integrity by the process of dissemination. Metaphor no longer "makes known the same or the similar." Poetic language deploys the "idealizing power of the word which makes the existence of the thing appear and disappear by the simple declaration of its name." Hence the object disappears at the very moment its name is uttered. Mallarmé formulated this process brilliantly in *Crise de vers*: "I say: a flower! and beyond the oblivion to which my voice relegates any shape, insofar as it is something other than the calyx, there arises musically, as the suave idea itself, the one absent from every bouquet."[26]

This memorable passage had been singled out by Blanchot as containing the "myth of Mallarmé." The passage would condense the poet's conception of an authentic language that distances and silences the object: "In authentic language, a word is not the expression of a thing, but the absence of this thing."[27] Such a poetic program predicated on absence thus became a sort of Ariadne's thread linking together across ideological persuasions and intellectual genealogies thinkers as diverse as Derrida and Badiou.

Badiou mentions the famous passage several times. One occurrence that interests me comes from the chapter "On Subtraction" in *Conditions* (1992)

The French Connections of Jacques Derrida, ed. Julian Wolfreys et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 1–21.

[23] Ibid., 111. [24] Ibid., 115. [25] Ibid., 116. [26] Qtd. in ibid.

[27] Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, 63, recalling p. 30.

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and bears on "[t]he site of the true, subtractively edified."[28] I return to the concept of subtraction, one of Badiou's essential operations in poetic language, but first I would like to show how Badiou derives from Mallarmé's poetry a conception of the event consonant with Derrida's problematics. With politics, science and love, poetry is one of Badiou's four generic conditions for truth.

Already present throughout *Theory of the Subject* from 1982,[29] Mallarmé takes full center stage in an 1986 essay with an unmistakable Mallarméan ring, "Is it exact that all thought emits a throw of dice?"[30] The essay provides a matrix for a meditation on the poet in *Being and Event* (1988), before being developed in *Conditions*. I survey the key points in the initial essay alongside *Being and Event*.

In the essay, Badiou calls *Un Coup de dés* "the greatest theoretical text that exists on the conditions for thinking the event."[31] The question *par excellence* in Mallarmé's poetry, in which "[a]ny poem . . . describes the place of an aleatory event," is not "what is being?" but "what is it 'to take place'?"[32] As in Derrida, for reasons pertaining to his understanding of truth as invariant but constructed through determinable procedures, Badiou's reading of the French symbolist poet allows him to distrust the doctrine of polysemy.[33] Purely aleatory yet "no less a fixed multiple," the throw of the dice "symbolizes the event in general" and "make[s] an event of the thought of the event."[34] Through a special procedure or "intervention," one must decide that the event belongs to a situation. However

> the event is *undecidable*. It belongs to the place, or it does not: this undecidability being a matter of principle.
>
> What results from this is that an event whose content is the eventuality of the event . . . can only take the *form* of indecision.[35]

One cannot miss the strikingly Derridean overtones of the formulation. For Badiou, then, "Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure

[28] Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 128.
[29] Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009). See also Robert Boncardo, "Mallarmé in Alain Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*," *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics* 9, no. 3 (Winter 2015): 0–43.
[30] Alain Badiou, *Les conférences du Perroquet* 5 (January 1986): 3–20.
[31] Alain Badiou, "Is It Exact That All Thought Emits a Throw of Dice?," trans. Robert Boncardo and Christian R. Gelder, *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics* 9, no. 3 (Winter 2015): 74.
[32] Ibid., 69, and compare with *Being and Event*, 191.
[33] Badiou, "Is It Exact That All Thought Emits a Throw of Dice?," 70.
[34] Ibid., 79. On this aspect, see Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially 140.
[35] Ibid., 80. Also in *Being and Event*, 192, 193.

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undecidable"[36] whereby the "auto-foundational interruption"[37] of an absolute aleatory event (the throw of dice) inaugurates, in Mallarmé's words, a "memorable crisis."[38] But whereas Derrida's eventuality dwells on the conditions of decidability "in the first place," Badiou produces a forceful interruption that precipitates truth. The "crisis" is precisely what must precipitate decision rather than paralyze it. Both the initial essay and the chapter in *Being and Event* conclude on a maxim used to define ethics in *Theory of the Subject*, here reiterated to translate Mallarmé's "All thought emits a throw of dice." One must "(d)ecide from the point of the undecidable."[39]

For Badiou, the lesson of *Un Coup de dés* is as "a decision in thought, that is, . . . a decision of the poem, which is an encounter or trial with chance."[40] Where Derrida "retreats" before the instituted place to an indeterminate, ante-primal (*avant-premier*) site called *khora*,[41] Badiou's event is grounded in the situation: the event has a site in the situation even though it is supernumerary or supplementary to it. It is in this intervention, this "taking place," that Badiou's event is foundational. The fact that the event exceeds being and what Badiou calls the "subject" (a term always problematic for Derrida) is inaugurated by the i(nte)rruption of the event. The subject is subtracted from being. It is what one becomes by being faithful to the truth of the event. The supernumerary event is therefore nothing but a "completely precarious having-taken-place."[42] Thus both Badiou and Derrida recognize the necessity of surprise, "grace" or even a miracle in the structure of eventuality. In order to take place, Badiou's event must be "*surprised* by the paradox of the multiple."[43]For Derrida, an event likewise "implies surprise, exposure, the unanticipatable";[44] indeed, it must arrive as "untimeliness of the infinite surprise."[45]

[36] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 192. [37] Ibid., 196.
[38] Badiou, "Is It Exact That All Thought Emits a Throw of Dice?," 83. Also in *Being and Event*, 196–97.
[39] Ibid., 85; *Theory of the Subject*, 287. [40] Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 122.
[41] See Jacques Derrida, "*Khōra*," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87–127; and "Faith and Knowledge," 57–59, §§ 23–25.
[42] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 54. See also *Being and Event*, 193, 196 for the Mallarméan formula. For the event as hazardous supplement, see Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 67.
[43] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 216, about the event-Christ.
[44] Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," 441.
[45] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37. This "absolute surprise" also characterizes Derrida's conception of the *arrivant* in *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 33–35, or "unconditional hospitality" in "Hospitality," trans. Gil Anidjar, in *Acts of Religion*, 362, and is what the "messianic" exposes itself to in "Faith and Knowledge," 56, § 21.

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In Derrida's post-Heideggerian deconstruction of ontology, the emphasis shifts from the *il y a* (there is) to *il y a lieu*, a simple phrase that in French both points to place (lit.: there is "place") and signifies eventuality (*avoir lieu*) as well as ethical necessity (*il y a lieu de*). Derrida's fascination with the inaugural event of the non-place of place, the "evental supplement" (in Badiou's terms) of/to place that founds place itself, can be read in his frequent returns to *khora*, Plato's *atopos* that marks the anteriority of a place divested from the reassuring trappings of a definite essence,[46] but also, in a more insistent inflection, in his recurrent musings on the philosophical force of Mallarmé's poetry, as in the following passage from *Cinders* in which he again cites the celebrated line from *Un Coup de dés*:

> Cinders there are [*Il y a là cendre*], this is what takes place in letting a place occur, so that it will be understood: Nothing will have taken place but the place [*rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu*]. Cinders there are: Places there is *(il y a lieu)*.[47]

Where Derrida's eventuality of place emphasizes *restance* (the erasure of the trace as remainder) against essence, Badiou's event "supplements" being.[48] Badiou's event emerges from the void in the midst of being,[49] and thus forces us to invent a new way of being subject to its truth. If for Badiou the event is the "generic" designation of a rupture within a known, given structure, for Derrida it is exemplified in the singular form of a gift (*don*), forgiveness (*pardon*), debt and duty, promise, hospitality, responsibility, secrecy, decision (and, thereby, critique), invention, but also the miracle of translation.

With "the interruptive vitality of the event"[50] is opened up what Derrida frequently called, from the late 1980s onward, "an experience of the impossible."[51] This summary of the ethico-political stakes of

[46] Derrida, *On the Name*, 96ff.

[47] Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, trans. and ed. Ned Lukacher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 37 (also 21, 71). Hence, also, the other formula without definite article, f *il y a khôra* (*On the Name*, 96). See Laurent Milesi, "Thinking (Through) the Desert (la pensée du désert) with(in) Jacques Derrida," in *The Politics of Deconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Other of Philosophy*, ed. Martin McQuillan (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 173–91.

[48] See, for instance, *Ethics*, 41.

[49] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 204–06. On this point, see Slavoj Žižek's "The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of St Paul," in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), especially 128.

[50] *Being and Event*, 196.

[51] Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Acts of Religion*, 243, 244. Or else "a universal structure of experience" ("Faith and Knowledge," 56, § 21: "*general structure of experience*") and "universal structure of relation to the event"; Jacques Derrida, "Marx & Sons," trans. G. M. Goshgarian, in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 248, 249.

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deconstruction can be attuned to Badiou's thoughts on emancipatory politics.[52] For Derrida, "[t]he event's eventfulness depends on this experience of the impossible."[53] In particular, the impossible possibility of the gift (*don, présent*) makes us aware of the precarious link between the present and the event: the event can only take place if it does not appear as such, an onto-phenomenological play of appearance-disappearance that sounds like the drama of the event's aphanisis (the disappearance of the subject) staged by Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* for Badiou.[54]

On the temporal level, Badiou's pure event has no duration for it has only the retroactive temporality of the Freudian *après-coup*, the deferred action. The pure event is as instantaneous as an aleatory flash of lightning that one must interpret from the traces it leaves behind, and also through its opening of an historical epoch.[55] Similarly for Derrida, alluding to the dislocation of the contemporaneous and the impossibility of presentation, the formulation of the impossible "resembles a structure of temporality, an instantaneous dissociation from the present, a *différance* in being-with-itself of the present."[56]

Where Badiou and Derrida clearly part company is in their divergent conceptions of the *trace*. The trace is the remains left by an anterior event to be "forced" into knowledge through the truth procedure that the event initiates for Badiou, but it is always already inhabited by *différance* for Derrida. Such a retreat into a "*desert in the desert*" in Derrida complicates Badiou's evocation of "the desert of the site" or "deserted horizon" of "unpresentation" in *Un Coup de dés*.[57] It would be misleading to draw too tight an analogy between the supplementary movement of localization in Badiou and Derrida's concept of the "desert within the desert" developed in "Faith and Knowledge," or the idea of a hollowing out of place without place for Derrida.[58]

Subtractions

Being and Event is Badiou's first attempt to resort to mathematical ontology to think the pure multiple and apprehend "the radically subtractive dimension of being." For Badiou, "being qua being does not in any manner let itself be approached, but solely allows itself to be *sutured* in its

[52] See Badiou, *Ethics*, 121.
[53] Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," 451.
[54] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 195. [55] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 45. [56] Derrida, *Aporias*, 17.
[57] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 1962. [58] Derrida, "Marx & Sons," 249.

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void."[59] Hence we find a chapter on "The void, subtractive suture to being." Thus, although the phrase barely occurs verbatim and is hardly given definitional contours, a subtractive ontology is adumbrated whose major operation, together with dissemination, will inform Badiou's unbinding of being-as-radical-multiplicity from the One, including in later essays such as "The Question of Being Today" and "Kant's Subtractive Ontology."[60]

Badiou returns to subtraction in *Conditions* at the intersection between philosophy and first poetry, then mathematics. The chapter "On Subtraction" confirms it as the key operation in his system. As Badiou repeats, the poem, as an exercise of thought, subtracts; it is even the very act of this subtraction.[61] Subtraction is the generic operation affecting names and traces in three different types of negation: vanishing, cancellation and foreclosure, corresponding to three objects of thought: the event, the undecidable and the unnameable.

About the same time, in "Language, Thought, Poetry" (1993),[62] a title deliberately evocative of Heidegger's most sustained reflections on poetry (*Poetry, Language, Thought*), Badiou redefines the two poetic methods outlined in *Conditions.* Moving from Mallarmé to Rimbaud, he renames Rimbaud's "interruption" as "dissemination," thus adding to the essence of poetry the two joint procedures of his mathematical ontology in *Being and Event.* Doing this, Badiou further reroutes Derrida's strategic deconstructive operation. After reiterating that "[t]he poem presents itself as a thing of language, encountered – each and every time – as an event,"[63] and calling the poem, in Mallarméan terms, "a purity folded in upon itself," "[f]olded and reserved," "a reserved and refolded word,"[64] the essay then articulates its central tenet: that of the "unstitching" of an imaginary object relation from the poem's symbolic language. Thus, for Badiou, the poem is a thought without knowledge because, in being subtracted from reality, it does not relate to an object and even denies it by means of two contrary operations: subtraction and dissemination. They are defined as follows:

[59] Badiou, *Being and Event*, 19.
[60] Badiou, *Conditions*, 58; also 55, 57. Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2005), 39–48 (41: "a genuinely subtractive science of being qua being") and 135–42. In *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Badiou speaks of "Mallarmé's subtractive ontology" (71).
[61] Badiou, *Conditions*, 49.
[62] Badiou, "Language, Thought, Poetry," in *Theoretical Writings*, 233–41.
[63] Ibid., 233.
[64] Ibid., 234.

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> Subtraction organizes the poem around a direct concern with the retreat of the object: the poem is a negative machinery, which utters being, or the idea, at the very point where the object has vanished. . . . Dissemination, for its part, aims to dissolve the object through an infinite metaphorical distribution.[65]

In the subtractive operation of the poem, the object is forced "to undergo the ordeal of its lack" (Mallarmé), whereas in dissemination "the poem loses the object in the pure multiple" (Rimbaud), "not through the effect of a lack, but through that of an excess."[66]

By a curiously parallel movement, if Badiou seemed to appropriate Derrida's dissemination for his own mathematical ontology applied to poetry, conversely, soon after, Derrida began evoking subtraction in relation with the "desert in the desert." For Derrida, this "*abstraction of the desert*" or "*deserted re-treat*" would be a "place that could well have been more than archi-originary, the most anarchic and anarchivable place possible."[67] As we can glimpse from these scant phrases and echoes, the difference is that Badiou's subtraction performs a more classically negative, or mathematical operation, whereas Derrida's formalization of abstraction as subtraction, his retreat to an ante-primal secret non-place, is paradoxically affirmative. This relates both to his work on Blanchot's figure of "X without X," the affirmation of passion and passivity, "a double *pas* without negation of negation and without denegation," and to his related attempt to demarcate deconstruction from *negative* theology.[68] And although Derrida's blind faith without/before credit or knowledge is comparable with Badiou's fidelity and truth beyond knowledge, it is mostly in the motif of *déliaison* or unbinding that the former's abstracted religion without religion, or the extirpation of a primordial, desert-like messianicity without messianism,[69] revealability without revelation,[70] "*between event and possibility or virtuality of the event*,"[71] as well as his unbinding of the social *nexus* or bond, will meet Badiou's own insistence on political unbinding.

[65] Ibid., 236–37. [66] Ibid., 237. [67] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 55, § 20.
[68] See Jacques Derrida, "*Pace* Not(s)" (orig. "Pas," 1986), in *Parages*, ed. John P. Leavey, trans. Tim Conley et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 40, and "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," trans. Ken Frieden, in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 73–143.
[69] See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 28.
[70] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 80.
[71] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 59, § 25.

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Politics of Unbinding: Badiou after Derrida

In Badiou's philosophy, the strangely absent category of religion subsumes the four *génériques* in which the event can take place insofar as the truth procedure initiated by the event presupposes in all a quasi-theological stance, involving such manifestations as conversion, fidelity (or, conversely, betrayal), belief and faith, grace, love and hope, etc. Similarly, alongside the foregrounding of questions of ethics and politics, Derrida's thinking underwent an idiosyncratic turn to religion, from "How to Avoid Speaking" and "Circumfession" onward, which culminated with the theme of religion without religion in "Faith and Knowledge."

Derrida's religion without religion also operates as the etymological matrix for the "bond without bond,"[72] as does social unbinding (*déliaison*),[73] a dissociation or absolute *interruption*[74] that would make possible a gathering together without/before the formation of a *socius* (link), the sociality or community that erases subjectivities in the name of a promised collectivity and revealed universality.

In the chapter on "Politics Unbound" in *Metapolitics*, Badiou puts analogous questions to the thought of the political, which needs "unstitching" from political philosophy since the latter is on the side of "inactive judgment" and reflection (whereas metapolitics allows retention of the pure political act), on the side of doctrine and institutionalization versus fidelity and belief. Badiou inquires why the subsumption of politics under the totalizable figure of the bond – immediate (the masses) or mediate (the party) – induces state cult and bureaucratic submission, and claims that, even at the heart of mass movements, political activity should fundamentally be an unbinding for the truth procedure initiated by the event to be meaningful and durable.[75]

Badiou's position, which is perfectly congruent with Derrida's, is that politics must always endeavor "to deconstruct the bond, including the one within the mass movement," since unbinding allows for the affirmative multiplicity of versatile abilities and receptivity to the event.[76] Both Badiou

[72] The double Latin filiation of "religion": *religare* (to tie, bind) and *relegere* (to harvest, gather), is recalled in "Faith and Knowledge," 71, § 34.

[73] About this *déliaison*, see, for instance, Derrida's "Fidélité à plus d'un," 221–65. See also Peter Hallward, "Badiou et la déliaison absolue," in *Alain Badiou: Penser le multiple. Actes du Colloque de Bordeaux, 21-23 octobre 1999*, ed. Charles Ramond (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), 295–311.

[74] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 99, § 49.

[75] Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2006), 72 ("Politics Unbound").

[76] Ibid., 73. A similar point obtains for another "condition": love; see Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 83.

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and Derrida, each in his own way, strive for the universal or generalizable that would inscribe singularities, allowing the free inhabiting of a place in "non-belonging,"[77] rather than for the communitarian consensus that ultimately negates them.

Whereas Badiou's imperative cutting of the ethical knot stands as a guarantee for immediate political action, Derrida's insistence on an aprioric plurality of choices aims to conjure up the aporetic experience of the ethical decision within the quasi-originary *yes* to the other. As Žižek succinctly remarks, "Badiou is clearly opposed to the Derridean ethics of openness to the Event in its unpredictable alterity."[78] What is needed for Badiou – indeed what the event "eventuates" – is the leap *out of* the void of the situation. If *différance* as justice enjoins the ethico-political duty to preserve the gap between the redemptive promise of an impossible possibility always to come (*avenir*) and the "positive" event,[79] for Badiou, "[t]he Truth-Event is, at its most radical, a purely formal act of decision."[80]

The shared program of *déliaison* is but one sign of the increasing rapprochement between Derrida and Badiou as the general philosophical and critical configuration changed throughout the 1990s. With the years 2000–02 came, in Peeters's apt phrase, "The Time of Dialogue," the time of a renewed exchange when, as Derrida put it to Badiou himself, "we have the same enemies."[81]

The reconciliation and postmortem promise to pay tribute were acted on in a 2005 anniversary conference in Paris and subsequent commemorative writings. Originally titled "Derrida, ou l'inscription de l'inexistant," Badiou's sober but poetic evocation ranged from a retrospective glance at Derrida's aloofness from "the truth of the red years between 1968 and 1976," which pitted Badiou's "metaphysics of radical conflict" against Derrida's peaceful "patient deconstruction of oppositions," to a belated realization of the singular place of Derrida's thought.[82] In particular, Badiou singled out Derrida's "passion of Inexistance,"[83] a restyling of his own concept (see the section "The inexistent" in *Theory of the Subject*) to

[77] Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans Giacomo Donis, ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).
[78] Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 138.
[79] Cf. "Faith and Knowledge," 59, § 25 *supra*; see also Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 134.
[80] Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 144.
[81] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 546.
[82] Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Postwar Philosophy*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 2009), 138–39.
[83] The phrase appears in his *Logics of Worlds*, 546.

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acknowledge the unique contribution and event of Derridean *différance*.[84] For Badiou, at stake in Derrida's writing as a thought-act "is *the inscription of the impossibility of the non-existence as the form of its inscription*."[85] Derrida's desire in writing is to "localize" an impossible vanishing point that is outside-place (*hors-lieu*) in place, to locate the inexistent of a place.[86]

In proposing the centrality of the "event" in my articulation of the French philosophical moment of the 1960s and beyond, I do not wish to simply pay lip service to the political debates that raged during and after May 1968's so-called events. France has known a short-lived socio-political fulguration whose revolutionary promise marked this generation of differently active, militant philosophers to which Derrida and Badiou, but also Deleuze, Lyotard et al., belonged. I hope to have given evidence of the urgency of opposing to the configuration of French philosophers grouped under the banner of difference a more historically turbulent yet also more topical "pass-word" of "event." Its greater flexibility, the new possibilities of confrontation it still offers, would allow Badiou's heterogeneity within the former framework to find the place it deserves, while opening up Derrida's difference to other philosophical motifs.

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[84] Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 143; "Homage to Jacques Derrida," 46.
[85] Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 132; "Homage to Jacques Derrida," 40.
[86] Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, 140; "Homage to Jacques Derrida," 44.

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