Badiou and the State
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Throughout the course of history, our understanding of the state has fundamentally changed time and again. It appears as though we are witnessing a development which will culminate in the dissolution of the territorially defined nation state as we know it, for globalisation is not only leading to changes in the economy and technology, but also, and above all, affects statehood. It is doubtful, however, whether the erosion of borders worldwide will lead to a global state, but what is perhaps of greater interest are the ideas of state theorists, whose models, theories, and utopias offer us an insight into how different understandings of the state have emerged and changed, processes which neither began with globalisation, nor will end with it.

When researchers concentrate on reappropriating classical ideas about the state, it is inevitable that they will continuously return to those of Plato and Aristotle, upon which all reflections on the state are based. However, the works published in this series focus on more contemporary ideas about the state, whose spectrum ranges from those of the doyen Niccolò Machiavelli, who embodies the close connection between theory and practice of the state more than any other thinker, to those of Thomas Hobbes, the creator of Leviathan, to those of Karl Marx, who is without doubt the most influential modern state theorist, to those of the Weimar state theorists Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen and Hermann Heller, and finally to those of contemporary theorists.

Not only does the corruption of Marx’s ideas into a Marxist ideology intended to justify a repressive state underline that state theory and practice cannot be permanently regarded as two separate entities, but so does Carl Schmitt’s involvement in the manipulation conducted by the National Socialists, which today tarnishes his image as the leading state theorist of his era. Therefore, we cannot forego analysing modern state practice.
How does all this enable modern political science to develop a contemporary understanding of the state? This series of publications does not only address this question to (political) philosophers, but also, and above all, to students of humanities and social sciences. The contributions therefore acquaint the reader with the general debate, on the one hand, and present their research findings clearly and informatively, not to mention incisively and bluntly, on the other. In this way, the reader is ushered directly into the problem of understanding the state.

Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Voigt
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The state as a form of political representation can be defined as a structured organism, which by the definition of its sovereignty does not account for voids and gaps in the constitutional form of its territory. This hierarchical and well organized body of the state is already present in the famous frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* from 1651. It furnishes the state’s being with a fictional unity of one corpus and one people. However even such a rigid structure, as that depicted in the frontispiece in the form of an armored carapace, cannot prevent the coming of political potentials of universal scale that exist in in-existence below the armor. These potentials, “eventual sites,”¹ or as Alain Badiou calls them as well: “singular terms,”² are of special value in the French philosopher’s texts. They are subject to the order, but cannot be grasped as part of the order itself since their elements are not represented. The consequence is that these singular terms might bear universal ethical value but in their claim they can only appeal as being justified by themselves. Why? Because what “counts” for them as being of normative importance below the state’s radar of representation does not “count” normatively for the state as well. Now, wherever a counter-counting act of agency, against an established form of political representation of political counting, establishes itself, an “event” in the Badiouian sense of this term occurs. A normative claim strives from its lack of political existence to establish its universality, accepting, even in the generic process of itself, a radical and uncompromising confrontation with the field of political representation.

Nowadays Badiou’s philosophy of the event receives much acclaim. It does so especially for the rigorous and systematic unfolding of this theory, presented by him in his mayor publications *Being and Event* from 1988 and *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2* from 2009. However, it is true as well that the French philosopher has almost received more critique than praise due to the implications of his thought outlined above. Is Badiou’s philosophy not undermining the value of political representation? How can his theory be harmonized with practical philosophy? Or with ethics? Can it be compared to classical theories of the state? And what implications do Badiou’s continued references to political violence, Marxist thought, and the Communist idea have? The failure of the Soviet Empire has proven these ‘ideologies’ to be fundamentally defective – hasn’t it?

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¹ Badiou 2005, p. 173.
² Ibid., p. 189.
The articles collected in this volume, written by outstanding experts of Badiou’s philosophy, refer time and time again to these questions, which lead directly into the central themes of Badiou’s philosophical theory. The texts go back to the conference Badiou and the State at the Munich School of Philosophy in Germany on January 18-19, 2016. The texts underline how Badiou’s theory has gained shape in the last four decades of his exceptional career, which started (at the latest) with Badiou being a radical French Maoist in the student revolution of May 1968 in Paris and attained its academic peak with the directorship of one of the most prestigious departments of philosophy in the world, at the École normale supérieure in Paris.

The topics and themes of the papers presented in this book reflect in particular on Badiou’s political philosophy and its relation to the question of the state. They show how his work is grounded in a broad tradition of continental and analytic philosophy alike, from antiquity to our present era. Since many of the authors of the following articles presuppose basic knowledge of Badiou’s thought, the following paragraphs of this introduction will serve to present his philosophy along the general lines of some of his mayor works dedicated to the question of the state. They might be especially helpful for readers not yet familiar with the French philosopher’s oeuvre. Experts in the field are very welcome to skip them. They present briefly his career (1), introduce the reader into mayor works of his ontology (2-4), and finish with some comments on his political philosophy in general (5), and his reception in contemporary philosophy (6).

1. Life and career

Alain Badiou was born on January 17, 1937 in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, as the son of Raymond Badiou, who became later the mayor of Toulouse (1944-1958). After his studies in Paris at the École normale supérieure from 1955-1960 he taught at the lycée in Reims and joined in 1967 a study group organized by Louis Althusser in Paris. Here he became both increasingly influenced by Jacques Lacan and, during the student uprising of May 1968, a member of rebellious groups within the political and social movement of French Marxism and Maoism. In the late 1960s he joined the faculty of the University of Paris VIII (Vincennes-Saint Denis) which grew out of the student movement and become a center of critical theory and counter-cultural philosophy. He taught there from 1969 until his appointment as director of the Institute of Philosophy at the École normale supérieure in 1999. In 1982 Badiou published a collection of essays under the title: Theory of the Subject (Engl. 2009) in which he combines different areas of philosophical investigation such as ontology, mathematics, set theory, and ethics. They gain shape, with new systematic distinctness in his opus magnum from 1988: Being and Event (Engl. 2005). In this book,
which is accompanied by a second volume published in 2006 under the title *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2* (Engl. 2009), Badiou presents a theory of political agency, which he unfolds in reference to Cantorian set-theoretical formalizations and the works of such diverging philosophers as Plato, Hegel, Kant, and Heidegger. In addition, Badiou has also become known to an international audience through a variety of books on ethics, aesthetics, the theory of communism, and with a study on Christian universalism (*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 1997; Engl. 2003). A variety of his publications also refer to concrete debates in French politics (*The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 2007; Engl. 2010) and to international politics. His essay “The Uses of the Word Jew” (2005, Engl. 2006) has triggered especially many polemical debates, as Badiou criticizes, among other things, the misuses of the memory of the Holocaust for political purposes of Israel, especially its politics of apartheid towards the Palestinians. Despite this broad scope of topics, his oeuvre is nevertheless devoted primarily to political ontology and, especially, to theories of the state, where the latter term is interpreted simply as a common form of political representation. Badiou analyzes the state systemically through his examination of political representation which is exemplified both structurally and set-theoretically. In this respect, the state is for him not so much an invention of the early modern period but rather it is always already rudimentary at work in almost all of the political structures, which order communities into hierarchical layers of sets and their counted (and uncounted) subsets. For Badiou the nature of political representation via the state relies on monopolizing what is represented. Consequently any radical opposition to the form of representation cannot be represented itself. This thesis is developed particularly in *Being and Event*, where he advances his understanding of political representation and his theory of the event, where the latter is understood as an entity that disrupts the form of representation itself.

2. Universality and the event

According to Badiou’s philosophy events carry a universal truth-value, which emerges from within the field of political representation but, and this is important, from the place of their constitutive lack of representation. Out of their place-without-representation they compete for their future normative recognition. What makes them and their generic “truth procedures” unique is that they can be based on illegal norms and values. This is what makes their status politically precarious. They are by definition hostile to a structure of legal representation, which is hierarchized and equipped with political institutions within its body politic. Badiou’s philosophy of

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4 Ibid., pp. 93-103.
the event consequently focuses on deeds which question the given normative orders within a community. This does not mean that these events have self-serving egoistical ends or are simply arbitrary violations of the prevailing doxa (= the political common-sense within a community). Events in the form of political deeds are for Badiou “supernumerary,” since their truth-values are lacking representable signifiers but are, because of their universality, not lacking in moral appeal. Within the so-called political “space of reasons” (a concept going back to Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom) with its procedures of “giving and asking for reasons,” they cannot be discussed easily, because their values are generally defined by a lack of justification. They don’t fit within the confines of what is justifiable in the first place. This aspect in Badiou’s philosophy as well as his defense of the “idea of communism” (understood as an idea of the “bien commun”) brings forth, to this day, many critics who see in his theory a democracy-hostile political philosophy, because it questions reason on a fundamental level from an anti-discourse-ethical stance.

Badiou interprets the state as a political structure of order, whose political sovereignty is based on the elimination of gaps and voids within its constitutionally delineated sovereign power. He speaks in this context about the result of a “count-as-one”: an operation through which subsets of the state are represented in the act of counting (or better: administering). The state assumes the procedure of counting with the effect that the total amount of all representable elements of its subsets is the perfect expression of sovereignty. This illustrates the aforementioned frontispiece of Hobbes’ Leviathan fittingly. What is politically represented is counted, and what is counted is, within an operational order-system, an identifiable part of the state within its inner and outer limits. However, this does not imply that there are no other political potentials beyond the forms of counting included within state-accounts. They are present but not represented. These “singular terms are subject to the one-effect, but they cannot be grasped as parts [of the State, D.F.] because they are composed, […] of elements which are not accepted by the count.” Unrepresented political potentials/virtualities are included but do not belong within the limits of the situation they are in. “All multiple-presentation is exposed to the danger of the void: the void is its being.” Each political situation needs to “ward[…] off the void” and it is the task of the state, as the breeding ground of ethical claims with universal validity, to have these claims eliminated. Their elimination is a premise of the established form of state-sovereignty, since representation-deficiency is the state’s condition. This nevertheless does not prevent the fact that people living under the count of the state

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5  Ibid., p. 178.
6  Brandom 2000, p. 11.
7  Badiou 2005, pp. 23-34.
8  Ibid., p. 99.
9  Ibid., p. 93.
10 Ibid.
might perceive in an illegal Badiouian event a convincing normative appeal, which confronts the state with a void/gap within its structural blindness. The state has to prohibit the “catastrophe of presentation which would be its encounter with its own void, the presentational occurrence of inconsistency as such, or the ruin of the One.” Badiou talks about a potential disaster for the state in the encounter with such a void, as the exclusion of this void is for the prevailing doxa its systemic presupposition. Since political coherence is dependent on exclusion of otherness, this otherness becomes a hazard when it gives birth to itself as an advocate of a universal truth contra the state. Consequently, that space within the state-system, as an excluded site of otherness, is always also the potentially dialectical turning point from which the status quo can, at some later point, itself plunge into illegality. In this case, as it is exemplified by every political revolution, an old form of government dissolves into a new one.

3. Illegal self-designation in the “count-as-one”

According to Badiou, every political revolution stands for the disruptive visibility of the aforementioned void. It embodies a dialectical re-mark(ation) where the lack of representation itself becomes an Archimedean point of a new certainty: a site of political excess. Badiou refers in this line of thought repeatedly to the French Revolution as a movement, which succeeded in generating its own generic “count-as-one” in opposition to the operating order of the Ancien Régime. Another example of how a “generic term” wrestles his way up from the underground is to some extent the revolution of 1989 in the last months of the German Democratic Republic. Badiou does not mention it, but the analogy to the French Revolution is easy to see. The participants of the famous Monday-demonstrations in Leipzig designated their lack of representation as the speaking void that counts itself as “one,” i.e. as “the people” in the slogan “We are the people.” As such this self-designation had the potential of universality, since through it all political organs of representation became the void of what the term “people” now in the final weeks of 1989 stands for. The assertive speech act “We are the people” is subversive because it denotes citizens striving for political change as being included in the state, but as not being represented. A gap shows up that the state cannot bear to tolerate. A “generic truth-procedure” starts. In the case of its success it gives the self-proclaimed void in the process of its performative, illegal self-designation retroactively a sufficient reason for being truly one with “the people.” But this act of retroactively becoming “the peo-

11 Ibid.
ple” is only possible after a shift within the political doxa. With respect to the revolution of 1989, the “generic fidelity,”\textsuperscript{14} another of Badiou’s key-terms, consisted of the continuation of the Monday-demonstrations, in which the participants continued to self-designate themselves as the emptiness within the old structure of counting. This definition of themselves became an excess and, as consequence, a starting point of a counter-count.

The event and the state-order (whether in totalitarian or democratic societies) stand in opposition of mutual exclusion. “The state of a situation is the riposte to the void obtained by the count-as-one of its parts.”\textsuperscript{15} While the state may award its subsets legality, so can an event award morality to those who believe in its future. For Badiou, it embodies a surplus of universality and in combination with it an anti-legal moral impact. But as a consequence, the event also incorporates the risk of putting one’s name in for the wager about a future that still awaits the victory of the conquest enabling it. And this victory is far from guaranteed. Badiou considers the militant political groups involved in the procedures of “true events” as being morally legitimized to proceed against the state even violently, because political innovation is not conceivable without events like these. Badiou, like his colleague, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek,\textsuperscript{16} accuses representatives of poststructuralist philosophy, especially in the tradition of deconstruction, of lacking insight into universal truths within politics. As such he sees in their support and glorification of cultural differences a philosophical mentality at work that passively supports a society of global capitalism, in which the focus on irreducible differences and the rejection of metaphysical truths within politics are two sides of the same coin: global capitalism, as the alternative-lacking ideology of our era.

4. Sets, multiplicities, and multiplicities of multiplicities

Georg Cantor’s set theory provides Badiou with the medium of analysis he uses in his philosophical-political ontology. “Mathematics is ontology,” he writes. It is “the science of being qua being.”\textsuperscript{17} The conceptual benefit of set-theory is grounded in its capacity to account ontologically for a world of “inconsistent multiplicity”\textsuperscript{18} whereas the ontology of classical metaphysics finds itself time and time again bound to a limited and potentially coherent understanding of the ultimate reality as “being.” Worlds of multiplicity is what Cantor discovered when he differentiated between in-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 237.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Žižek 2003, pp. 140-1.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Badiou 2005, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 25.
\end{itemize}
finities of different “cardinalities,”19 where some are countable and others not. Can-
tor showed in his uncountability proof that the so-called real numbers, which incor-
porate both rational numbers (fractions) and irrational numbers, cannot be taken as
countable, compared, for example, to the infinite but nevertheless countable sets of
natural, and rational numbers. While the latter two sets are in their infinity biojective-
ly countable, the real numbers are uncountable. This discovery proves a difference
of “cardinalities” (= the number of elements of a set) within the space of mathemati-
cal infinities.

A set is commonsensically understood as a kind of bag where a function or an
axiom defines its elements: for example the set of natural numbers \{0, 1, 2, 3, …, n
+1\}. This set is infinite yet nevertheless potentially countable. Cantor proved against
this common understanding of countability that it is possible for sets to have no limit
whatsoever – for example the set of real numbers – with the effect that infinities of
different cardinalities emerge in the realm of abstract numerical entities. Badiou’s
political philosophy is strongly influenced by this dichotomy between countable inf-
inities and un-countable or supernumerary infinities, since it enables him to explic-
cate the supernumerary dimension of an event with the supernumerary dimension of
countless subsets.

We can apply this insight to the “manifest image” of our every-day world, a term
coined by Wilfrid Sellars in opposition to the concept of a “scientific image” of the
world as established by modern science.20 If we think of the “manifest image” in
terms of Cantor’s universe of multiplicities then our commonsensical reality is noth-
ing but a limited extraction of uncounted infinities as depicted in Cantor’s set-theo-
retical “scientific image.” From within this perspective, or more precisely: from
within this Cantorian “scientific image,” reality (“the manifest image”) itself be-
comes a small sector of worlds of ungraspable infinities and as such is always
vague, constructed, and incomplete. The reason is that the human mind cannot pro-
cess its justified beliefs without putting on it the bounds of clear-defined extensions
against uncounted sets and their subsets or power-sets. Consequently, reality is nev-
er all, or rather “non-all.” It is by definition impoverished, compared to what is po-
tentially hidden in its “layers,” so to speak. Events can reveal potentials as they try
to force their way through into another logic of a world.

The aforementioned reference to vagueness has less to do with a principle of se-
matic ambiguity in the human language (de dicto), but with reality itself (de re).
There is an ontological incompleteness for Badiou in reality at its most basic level,
which underscores how every political “state of a situation” has to abide by proce-
dures of order to diminish the stress generated by normative leftovers in the space of
reasons.

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19 Cantor 1890/1891, p. 75-8.
Badiou is aware that the question of understanding these multiplicities, in a Cantorian sense, can take place only within a horizon of the one, i.e. in reference to a transcendental illusion of a totality, a pseudo-coherent “world picture.” Kant speaks, in a similar context, prominently of the regulative idea of “the world” that reason has to evoke unthematized in order to be able to locate experiences in a pseudo-defined space of objective facts, which are thought of as the “sum total of all appearances.” The “world” as a unity allows for the experience of multiplicity. Un-countable multiplicities are repelled to diminish the stress involved in the process of cognition needed for the organism to survive. And under functionalist conditions, this repellence is justified. Nevertheless, it proves that reality can even be more than real and events bear witness to this.22

5. “The one is not.”

The assertive proposition “the one is not” is crucial for Badiou’s philosophy.23 It breaks a stalemate in which the mind is generally trapped, between its inevitable alteration of “the one” (the World, Being, Reality) as the constitutional background of experience itself and the many contingent facts and states of affairs that necessarily fall within the one. Declaring “the one is not” is not a proof, that the one does not exist, but rather, for Badiou, it is a decisive axiom to plead for a world of unending multiplicities with its hidden universals. The performative act of a decision (as scission), like in the case of Badiou’s own speech act “the one is not,” is for Badiou the source of political subjectivity. Since this is what a subject can effectively do: subjectivize axioms, so that – within a stalemate of certain facts – new facts can performatively be installed. In certain situations this kind of enactment may be useful for a future to come, even if there are no negotiable reasons at the moment of its execution.

Take Saint Paul as an example. The so-called apostle of the gentiles, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, transforms the term “Christ” into a principle of universality against Hellenistic-Jewish policy of the first century. He didn’t accomplish this necessarily, according to Badiou, in the name of a “better argument” within the prevailing space of reasons. He did it in the name of his faith in a new paradigm where “universalism in Christ” is the medium for others to follow his axi-

22 Badiou nevertheless writes against the transcendental concept of the one or “the world”: “We find ourselves on the brink of a decision, a decision to break with the arcana of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried, phoenix of its own sophistic consumption. This decision can take no other form than the following: the one is not.” Badiou 2005, p. 23. See also my study on Excessive Subjectivity in: Finkelde 2017.
23 Badiou 2005, p. 23.
“Christ is not a mediation,” writes Badiou in his book on Saint Paul. “[H]e is not that through which we know God. Jesus Christ is the pure event; and as such it is not a function, even were it to be a function of knowledge, or revelation.”

In other words: Paul refers, strictly speaking, not to Jesus of Nazareth who with his social messages paves the way towards faith in him as being the “Christ” argumentatively. It is the other way around: Christ, the risen Messiah, transforms the life of a young Zealot in Galilee and Judea into a readable event with cosmic repercussions in the aftermaths of his crucifixion. It is only when an axiom reveals its effect that it can be read as the cause, as an apparent moment preceding the effect.

Badiou’s philosophy is therefore, as this example shows, fundamentally guided by the axiomatization of thought. And mathematics gives him the conceptual tools to prove analytically what axioms, like the axioms of set-theory, can generate. He thus contradicts a broad tradition of practical philosophy. The latter often sees conflicts, within the justification procedures of norms and values, as a discursive or communitarian process where the ‘unforced force of the better argument’ (Habermas) wins. Badiou, on the other hand, develops a theory where through the axiom of its constitution a community creates its space of justifications. Just as a mathematician willing to acknowledge Cantor’s axioms of set-theory can actually perform set-theoretical calculations, the same holds for the believer in “Christ.” Only from within the axiom is the universality proclaimed by Paul meaningful. This affects all the contexts within politics where events struggle for their universality in a bet about the future and hope for retrospective justification.

6. Reception

Badiou has become, especially after the translation of Being and Event into English, a philosopher of international reputation. His work has been particularly well received in left-Hegelian circles of contemporary political philosophy. To name just a few members of which one can refer to Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Claude Lefort, Quentin Meillassoux, and his colleague and interlocutor Slavoj Žižek. The term “left-Hegelianism” refers to the fact that the authors mentioned above refer, like Badiou, repeatedly to Hegel’s theory of dialectics as the generic background-structure of normativity via experiences of negativity. Badiou distances himself from “poststructuralist” or “postmodern” philosophy, where the latter questions truth claims and so paves the way – at least according to Badiou – towards a global market economy that cannot be confronted and interrupted with radical interventions of universal truths. Cultural differences and the call for plurality for plurality’s sake be-

come, so Badiou’s critique, glorified at the cost of universal struggles for the impover-ished and marginalized. On the other hand, Badiou understands himself as being a philosopher in the tradition of Plato. The reference to the founder of the doctrine of ideas underlines his dedication to universal claims of truths, values and norms.

Bibliography

Part I:
Ideology and Ontology
Frank Ruda

On Meta-Stasis

1. Staatssprache / official language:

The English term ‘state’ appears verbatim for the first time, depending on the source, somewhere early in the 14th or 15th century, even though it only starts to gain its political significance in the 17th century (and much the same goes for the French ‘état’ and the German ‘Staat’).1 État, Staat and state are all derived from the Latin ‘status’ which itself is derived from the Latin verb ‘stare,’ which designates a static and a stable kind of entity. The Latin ‘status’ has several meanings and they all seem to confirm that the entity one is dealing with, the state, is all about stability and statics. Status means ‘standing’ (as in the German Stand), which necessarily implies something that is put up, that is erected (Lacan will have to say some interesting things about this2); something that, because it is standing, can also not stand, can for example sit, fall down or crumble. Yet, the term state also has the meaning of an ontological, natural, or historical condition (Zustand) or even of a circumstance (Umstand) and it therefore likewise entails the meaning of position (including social, economic or political ones) and location. Through these different significations, the term ‘status’ combines social or political, but also topological and natural determinations. The state I am in can be a natural condition, a specific and individual – say mental – condition of this specific day or hour; as it also can be a socially or politically produced situation. The state I am in can also very well be Germany. The state I am in can be some of, all, or many of these things at the same time. Therefore, although the state itself and the state I am in seem constitutively stable and static, it is not immediately clear, at least if one starts purely from the literal meaning of the term ‘state,’ in which state I am. It might seem very clear to me right now that I am in Germany and hence there does not seem to be a problem at all. Yet, if Germany is a state, which kind of state is it? Is it a geographical location, a historical or natural, or even an ontological condition? Clearly it is something that has been erected. But maybe it is not as clearly something that may fall down. Yet, if it is something standing, might it not also be standing in the way, or in our way? I do not wish to overemphasize these literalities, yet I do want to point out that there is an internal

1 Cf. Loraux 2006.
2 See: Lacan 2006, pp. 75-82. This is part of what Lacan there calls the ‘"orthopedic’ form of […] totality” (ibid., p. 78).
ambiguity within the literal meaning of the ‘state’ that springs from the concatenation of status, stability, static, and statics, whereby something like an excrescence of a multiplicity of possible and not immediately clearly distinguishable states (in which one is) is derived. Yet this excrescence is not grounded on a multiplicity of contradictory meanings inscribed into the term state or status – as one might want to emphasize with Hegel: ‘state’ is not a speculative word –, but this excrescence springs from a fundamental uncertainty of reference (concerning the kind of state I am in). Speaking of the state, language, official language, die Staatssprache, already indicates that the term – and we might here move from term to concept – that the term state, état, Staat suggests stability, but at the same time implies a problem of reference: a problem, so to speak, of measure and measurement. This issue brings with it a question, namely: how to measure which referential framework is adequate? There is something that is stable and static, yet it seems literally not clear what it is.

2. Stasis

The conceptual marriage of a problem of reference or measure and the idea of stability that is literally inscribed into the term ‘state’ entails a further ambiguity that has been pointed out many times before and that can be related to the one I mentioned. If the state is (or is taken to be) a stable and static entity, what does the term ‘static’ mean? It is derived from the art of ‘statika,’ the art and doctrine of weighing things and creating a stable balance, an art that was performed by the statikos whose aim was to install and erect something, say a statue that was then supposed to stand in a stable manner. Yet, to do so the artist needed to create the statue such that it embodied the absolute equilibrium of weight. The stability as well as the static qualities of what the statikos puts upright implies that the erected stature will not and cannot move and, as is well known, such an absence of movement in Greek is called stasis.

Now, things get more intricate. The term stasis does not only contain many different meanings, but does have many contradictory significations: it means immobility but also upheaval and thus the term entails a static but also a dynamic usage. It oscillates, as Rebecca Comay convincingly remarked, “between the condition of standing and the act of standing up, between situation and event, steadfastness and constancy, and stability on the one hand; interruption, instigation, initiation on the other.” There is an oscillation, that is: a movement in the meaning of the term stasis, which moves between different meanings of movement and of rest. Stasis entails the movement between movement and rest, between change and the absence of

3 Comay 2015, p. 239.
change. In the term ‘stasis,’ one seems to be stuck with and within a certain movement between movement and rest. There is literally an internal stasis in the term stasis, as Comay argues. This complicates matters further – still in a literal sense. For this means firstly that the creation of stability that the statikos performs is part of the very movement between movement and rest that is stasis (and its stasis). It is part of a movement that leads or may lead to stuckness, a stuckness that leads or may lead to movement. To put this in an abbreviated manner: the stasis created by the installation and installment of a static stability leads to and thus retroactively shows to always have been a part of the movement of stasis. It therefore seems there is nothing but stasis. And if there is stasis in stasis (which is another way of saying: there is nothing but stasis), one can spell out its effects. One is the peculiar effect that too much stability “can be destabilizing, while excessive mobility produces deadlock.”

A too much of stability ends up producing movement, a too much of movement ends up being stuck (in always the same move). The stasis that is literally inscribed into the installment of a statist order and which, because of its static and allegedly unchanging nature, etymologically makes the state into a state is linked to another peculiar and maybe even more fundamental problem of measure or measurement.

This problem is how to determine the right measure of movement for it to remain movement, which means for it to avoid creating a stuckness of its own, an immobilization. How to determine the right measure of stability of an order to avoid the production of causes for transformative movement(s)? How to determine the right measure of stuckness that is needed to create but also to uphold a movement, for example the right measure of stubbornness needed in defending an impossible position without falling back into a mortified and ossified dogmatism. How to determine the right measure of activity necessary to keep a movement going, and when does this activity turn into an unmoving habit? Because of this problem of measurement, which is linked to the stasis of stasis, which is once again literally linked to the ‘state,’ Nicole Loraux assigned stasis (and its inherent antimony) the status of a counter-sense, of a Gegensinn that Freud in turn assigned to the infamous ‘primal words’ that suspend the law of non-contradiction yet stick to the law of the excluded middle (and therefore follow what logicians call a paraconsistent logic). State is not a primal word, but since ‘stasis’ is what it seeks to attain, states are, literally and conceptually, linked to a movement of stasis of stasis. Here not only do we touch upon a problem of frame-of-reference or measuring that seems to be inherent to the literal term of the state – as a static and unchanging, stable entity – but also upon the dialectic of finitude and infinity.

4 Cf. Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 240.
8 A longer elaboration of this can be found in: Ruda 2015.
What does all of this have to do with Badiou’s concept of the state? One answer is that these etymological reflections depict what Badiou calls the “subjective errancy of the power of the State.” In his *Meta-Politics*, he claims that “the resignation that characterizes a time without politics feeds on the fact that the State is not at a distance, because the measure of its power is errant. People are held hostage by its unassignable errancy.” The state conceptually entails a problem. This problem is a problem of power, which ultimately boils down to be a problem of measure, and the only way of measuring the power of the state is by distancing oneself from it. Why? One way of answering this question is the following: from within the immanence of a power one cannot measure the potency of a power, simply because the only scale for measuring that seems available is the scale provided by that very power which necessarily is unable to include itself into this scale itself. Pure and simple immanence of and within the state creates a problem with measurement, as there is no real measure. That is also to say, if there is no measure, then there is again a problem of reference: where and in what condition, circumstance, etc… are we? This is why in pure immanence the problems that are linked to the stasis of the stasis recur, to the very movement between movement and rest. For it is not clear from an immanent perspective if movement is transformative or reactionary, transformatively reactionary or transformatively emancipatory, etc… There is nothing, per se, emancipatory in movement as such, *an sich* (one may just think of the recent German movement of Pegida). States allow movement (of citizens) and movements and they may do so precisely to prohibit movement. As the French quite adequately once said: *Tout ce bouge, n’est pas rouge*, not everything that moves is red. Yet, stability as such is not a category of the state either. The most stable assumptions may be those that irritate and go against the statist grain of most. Even worse, without a proper measure it is not even clear if the diminution or even decline of the state (this is what the stasis of stasis movement also depicts) has any emancipatory value whatsoever. The absence of the state in its traditional form as well as the decline and abolishment of the state is not as such, *an sich* emancipatory, ever. All these points are good instances to elicit what it means that one always must have a measure. For if, as Badiou states, the state is an “excess […] without measure,” one needs something else, something different from the state, from the immanence.

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9 Badiou 2005a, p. 145.
10 Ibid.
11 “Pegida” is a nationalist political movement founded in Dresden, Germany, in 2014. “Pegida” stands for *Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident.*
13 Badiou 2005b, p. 419.
of movement and rest, for there to be a measure, a measurement. To measure and thus to know what the state is, one needs a position that is different from that of the state, i.e. in distance from it. Badiou claims that gaining a measure equals freedom. So, freedom can only be gained if there is a distance to the immanence of the movement of stasis. Distance means then to establish a subjective stance, a subjective position, that falls out of the topology, the “splace,” as early Badiou said, offered by the state. Any real stance with regard to the state is a dis-stance, a stance in distance, a stance establishing a distance, creating via distance the very possibility of a non-statist stance (for the state organizes and coordinates subsets of the situation and hence creates a transcendental of possible subjective stances). A dis-stance implies that one breaks with this transcendental, one breaks up the errancy of state power by taking a stance, by making oneself into one’s own clear and distinct reference, to use Descartes here. Only thereby is one able to measure the state. For states establish distanceless relations. States always are already too close. Yet, where do they come from? Even in the index of concepts in Being and Event Badiou clearly indicates that the state is necessary – despite all the criticisms that Badiou is a closet romantic or closet hippie who seeks to defend the idea that one can create something like a commune outside of the state. If one wants to account for Badiou’s concept of the state, one always already needs a distance from the state, otherwise one is without measure, that is, without concept. But how does he derive the conceptual necessity of the state from a distance?

4. Accounting

To answer this question is important, since it helps to clarify that the only discipline of thought that can offer a proper account of the necessity of the state is the practice that itself does not entail any kind of state (of the situation), namely mathematics. For mathematics does not need a count of the way it counts. This is the case because it counts in an indeterminate way and hence counts as one without counting as one. This is the actual suspension of the necessity of the state (and thus a paradigm for, say, politics, because anyone counts but not as someone who needs to be part of a larger entity whatsoever). In mathematics, presentation and representation become indistinguishable, but it is important that this does not abolish representation. Mathematics thereby presents presentability. The discourse that actually demonstrates – in the sense of a scientific demonstration – its necessity is therefore a discourse in

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14 One might need what Brecht once referred to as “Maßnahme”.
16 There one can read that “the necessity of the state results from the need to exclude any presentation of the void.” (Badiou 2005b, p. 522) I will return to this point below.
17 For a longer reconstruction of this point, see: Ruda 2015, pp. 83-111.
which there is a suspension of this very necessity. But what does the discourse that suspends its very own state – and that is thus at a distance from the state – have to say about the necessity of the state, from a philosophical perspective? The well-known argument developed by Badiou is that every situation presents something, and for presenting something it needs a structure. This structure is not a given, but needs to be produced, and the very way of producing it is via a count, namely a count-as-one. But the only thing that therefore cannot be counted by the count is the act of counting (i.e. the count) itself. There is a peculiar gap between the operation of counting and the result of the count – a structural gap – a difference between one as operation and one as a result. The state now seeks to eliminate this very gap by counting the act of counting, i.e. by generating a meta-structure. If the count cannot count itself, it necessitates a second count to ensure the consistency of the first count. Where does the logical necessity come from that one needs to count all the unaccounted? Answer: From the demand that there is a consistency of structure. But to understand this answer more adequately, one also needs to answer a more fundamental question, namely: where does the count come from? This is a real question because Adrian Johnston has criticized Badiou for falling back into a myth-of the-given, which manifests in the assumption that there is always a count-as-one. There does not seem to be any logical deduction of the count-as-one whatsoever in Badiou’s work that provides the very ground for the necessity of the state and the problems that follow from it. Even if Badiou does not explicitly treat this question (where does the count come from?), there is a systematic answer implied that will provide a consistent groundwork for his theory of the state (so I disagree with Johnston on this point). This theory must then also include an account of how to measure the state as such, for as previously pointed out: without a measure, there is no concept of the state. Subsequently I will show that Badiou provides the account of the emergence of the count in his reading of Plato’s *Parmenides* dialogue, as this is famously and obviously where the question whether the one is or is not is dealt with extensively (and hence it also deals with the very thinkability, so to speak, of a count of that which is not one). Therefore, I will read this as an account of where the count comes from, which then will also provide the ground for demonstrating the necessity of a second count.

5. Counting

The rarely commented upon reading of Plato’s *Parmenides* is presented in Meditation 2 of Badiou’s *Being and Event*. In Meditation 1 Badiou demonstrates that any

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ontology, since its “Parmenidean organization,”\(^\text{19}\) constitutively has to rely on a decision. For ontology is a truth procedure, that is to say: it is a kind of practice that relies on and springs from something undecidable (an event), which necessitates a decision that subsequently produces consequences that are practically brought about by a faithful subject. The present created in this ontological procedure is what he calls a theory.\(^\text{20}\) The Parmenides offers an account of how to conceive of theory (i.e. the present in ontology), since “the revolving doors of Plato’s Parmenides introduce us to the singular joy of never seeing the moment of conclusion arrive.”\(^\text{21}\) There is no objective logical manner in which one may be able to infer if being is one or multiple. It remains undecidable and thereby necessitates a decision constitutive of any ontology. Parmenides is thus a meta-ontological treatise, that is: a philosophical treatise on ontology.

Clearly, one can conceive of being by means of the multiple. But if what is conceived of (i.e. presented) is also inherently one, the multiple (presentation) is not. This obviously generates a contradiction, since then what is presented cannot be presented. But if the multiple (presentation) is, being is not one. This also generates a contradiction, since any presentation of being can only be \textit{this} presentation of being if it is \textit{one} presentation. The two options (the one or the multiple is) cannot be logically reconciled. This impossibility necessitates a decision. This “exercise in undecidability”\(^\text{22}\) proves that ontology cannot but be dependent on an event, or in other words: ontology is a subjective truth procedure grounded on undecidable events. There is no, nor will there ever be any objective ontology. The decision is thus as much logically impossible as it is necessary. It indicates the real of (any) ontology. It decides that the \textit{presentation of being is multiple}. This is to say that being as such is not identical to its presentation. Hence it is subtracted from the one and from the multiple. But it also decides that the one is not. How can this be made consistent? Being is presented as multiple, but being is not multiple. The very consistency of any presentation relies on counting being as \textit{this} multiple, yet it is not one, for the one is not. This is to say: being as such escapes the dialectic of one/multiple, for “there is no structure of being… we declare it heterogeneous to the opposition of the one and the multiple.”\(^\text{23}\) Being stands as that which is unpresentable on the one hand, i.e. the one and the multiple, yet \textit{what} is presented is nonetheless being on the other. This is where the proponent of the “\textit{Platonism of the multiple}”\(^\text{24}\) turns to Plato’s Parmenides.

\(^{19}\) Badiou 2005b, p. 23.


\(^{21}\) Badiou 2005b, p. 23. For an instructive discussion of this also see: Dolar 2004, pp. 63-98.

\(^{22}\) Badiou 1985/6.


\(^{24}\) Badiou 1999, p. 103.
In this dialogue, Plato elaborates several hypotheses concerning the relation between the one, the multiple, being, non/t-being. Although this logical exercise has been read as “mythical sacred text,” as founding a negative theology, as “humorous polemic, designed to reduce the Eleatic doctrine of a One Being to absurdity” or as mere logical sophism, Badiou takes it seriously and follows the contention that it “is an extremely subtle and masterly analysis, dealing with the problems of the sort we call logical,” even onto-logical. What the dialogue investigates is what follows from the assumptions that “the One is” or that “the One is not.” In Meditation 2 of *Being and Event*, Badiou investigates only what follows from the assumption that the one is not. The decision has already been taken. One can only start with the second part of the dialogue, since it is precisely the relation between the first assumption (the one is) and the second (the one is not) where the decision is located. We witness a decisive reading. Initially Badiou diagnosis that “there is fundamental asymmetry between the analytic of the multiple and the analytic of the one itself” concerning the consequences of the assumption that the one is not. This is because “the non-being of the one is solely analyzed as non-being” and nothing is conceptually derivable about the one itself, “whilst for the other-than one… it is a matter of being….” If the one is not, one at the same time cannot but ascribe a being to it, the being-not-to-be. “If we assert that something is not, we yet name it in the same breath….” But there is thus no positive conceptualization of one-ness in itself.

On the other hand, there are logically derivable consequences for that which is not the (not-being-) one: First one can claim that the others are not simply others-to-the-one because the one is not. One may say that “the others are Others.” If the others are others (to) themselves because the one is not, the others are but pure and inconsistent multiplicity. This is to say that one assumes the purest form of presentation of being (a presentation without one), i.e. presentability as such, which logically precedes any-one. But if any presentation implies (a count as) one and thought itself needs a presentation, for without a “mediation of the one,” it would not be consistent. What Badiou finds in *Parmenides* is the idea that thought is logically grounded on something that is “actually unthinkable as such.” Thinking being is grounded in the non-being of the one; the presentation of being qua being is pure multiplicity – pure multiplicity which as such, at least for Plato, cannot be thought, as any thought would transpose inconsistent multiplicities into consistent multiplicities. Pure presentation is indistinguishable from un-presentation.

25 *Cornford* 1939, p. vii.
26 Ibid., ix.
27 *Badiou* 2005b, p. 32.
28 *Dolar* 2004, p. 87.
29 *Badiou* 2005b, p. 33.
30 Ibid., p. 34. This is for Badiou the reason why Plato uses the “image of a dream.” On this also: *Bartlett* 2011, p. 150.
What can ultimately be said about the others? This is precisely where the end of Plato’s dialogue is significant. Plato there states “[W]ithout the one, it is impossible to conceive of many.” Plato there states “[I]f none of them is one thing [if multiplicity is inherently multiple, F.R.], all of them are no thing…” For Badiou the whole question amounts to the status of this no-thing. He states that “if the one is not, what occurs in the place of the ‘many’ is the pure name of the void, insofar as it alone subsists as being.” This is to say, that being is neither multiple (pure multiplicity is only the mode of presentation of being), nor one (as the one is a necessary operator of any consistent presentation). Being can only be named as that which is unpresentable and can only be thought by thinking what cannot be thought – the name emerges as an index of the paradox. This name presents being as being-unpresentable. The void – “no thing” – as that which indexes this singular place is the name of being. Only by thinking what one cannot think, can one arrive at naming being. Thinking being therefore relies on the unthinkable becoming thinkable (as unthinkable), and this is precisely why Parmenides is a treatise on eventality – for only events generate a new thinkability of the unthinkable. Only against this background is one also able to turn to the first part of the dialogue (investigating the assumption that the one is), for the one is that which emerges as an effect of a paradoxical (self-belonging) multiplicity (event), and cannot sustain itself other than by being formed into one (name). The negative consequence that there is no-thing if there is no-one, leaves for Badiou only one possible solution: to contend that the one in ontology is an operation that generates structure(d presentation), which itself emerges due to an event, i.e. due to the appearance of a rupture in ontology. One has to be absolutely clear here: an event is never an event of being. The being of an event is multiple (it is a paradoxical multiplicity), but being is itself not evental. Also, there is not a first or (ur-)event. Being can be (re-)named if there are historically specific events in ontology (i.e. in the discourse on being), because an event “opens a new access to the Real as such.” This is why the latter part of Parmenides for Badiou precedes the first; for it is that which cannot come first, the thought of an event that then retroactively generates the nameability of the real of ontology. Only from the assumption that the one is not, can one derive that there is being, event, and then an operation of the count (since there is no action of being, being is unpresentable). Badiou’s twist is to

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31 Plato 1997, 166b, p. 64. [transl. modified, F.R.].
32 Ibid., 165c, p. 64.
33 Badiou 2005b, p. 35.
34 This can be read in at least three ways: 1. The very emergence of ontology is the very emergence of the account of the count. 2. The emergence of the count is something that happens to being, although it is not an event of being. 3. There is an evental occurrence of an account of the count in ontology which enables to account for the count being something that happens to being (and is not an event of being). I will specify what this means for the very status of Plato’s dialogue below.
35 Badiou 2014.
argue that conceiving of the one as counting and structuring operation makes it possible to state (1.) that thought needs presentation, that (2.) any presentation relies on the one, and that (3.) thereby one can think what is counted retroactively as that which will have been logically prior to the count. This means that if pure multiplicity is pure presentation and being is un-presentable, being is that which can only be thought as subtracted from multiplicity, as multiple of no-thing that can only be named and thereby decided to be. It is necessary to think being, yet impossible. In the *Parmenides* we witness the emergence of a count. What does this mean?: 1. It means that the theory of the state is already articulated and formulated in a *distance from the state*, because it occurs within a meta-ontological discourse (as there is no state of meta-ontology). 2. This position springs from the emergence of a count, from the emergence of ontology itself (with Plato). This implies a *meta-ontological account of the emergence of meta-ontology because of the emergence of ontology*, i.e. that the emergence of the count is contingent. 3. This also means that meta-ontology which names philosophy in relation to ontology, i.e. to what it means to count and to what it means to account for the accounting of the count, meta-ontology cannot but be in a meta-position to precisely that which it articulates. There is strictly speaking no state of philosophy, and thus no philosophy of the state. Philosophy, as much as it is meta-politics, meta-ontology, inaesthetics and psychoanalysis, is meta-stasis, the metastasis of any state. Why? Because it cannot only show that there is a necessity of the state, even more so, it can only do this by also showing that the state is not at all necessary for thought as such (as mathematics shows). It proves the necessity of the state within a discourse that can only prove it because there is no necessity of the state within it. There is only a theory of the state from a distance toward the state (this is a profoundly Hegelian idea, even though Hegel articulates this in terms of history). If there is a theory of the state, there is always already a measurement of the state. If there is a theory of the state there is always a distance towards the state, yet for it to be that kind of distance, there always already needs to be a truth procedure, or in short: a condition. One breaks the immanence of the power of the state, if there is an immanence of truth that enables us to elaborate a theory of the state. The immanence of truths is already the standpoint of *Being and Event*. As this is neither stasis nor stasis of stasis, philosophy is meta-stasis, philosophy as meta-stasis means: dis-stance from the state as demonstration of the form (and not a concrete material way) of measuring it.

36 Which is, as is well-known, the title of the third and final part of *Being and Event*, to appear 2017.
Bibliography


The Power of the State. On Alain Badiou’s Notion of the “State of the Situation”

“[T]he State, in essence, does not entertain any relationship with individuals [...].” (Badiou 2005a, p. 104)

For Alain Badiou, there is no proper state of the state. ‘Politics,’ as one of four “truth procedures” in Badiou’s philosophical system of onto-phenomenology described in Being and Event, among ‘science,’ ‘art,’ and ‘love,’ can only develop a fidelity to truth if it is directed against the state. Politics begins where the state ends, where a political subject caught in the clutches of state-power manages to win space for itself. This fundamental disparity between politics and state, which according to Badiou characterizes the revolutionary thinking of modernity, is based on the Marxian conception of the state as the guarantor or “authorized representative” (fondé de pouvoir) of capitalism, whose primacy in the political economy is even more evident in the globalized 21st century than it was in the industrialized 19th century.

Despite the pervasiveness of globalization, the reality of capitalist states differentiating themselves in the wake of growing fundamentalism also entails that political thinking must recognize classical structures of state authority as “objective factors” in the scope of actions: “Though politics cannot [...] be defined as originating from the state, politics under the current conditions are not capable either of eliminating the exercise of state power.” This contradictory – and thus philosophically inviting – political reality is the subject under review in the following reflection on the relationship between Badiou’s concept of the “state” (État) and the “state of the situation” (état de la situation).

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3 “What we are witnessing for thirty years now is the triumph of global capitalism. [...] Today we have a capitalism explicitly installed at a global scale. [...] We are witnessing a phenomenon that is truly pathological, i.e. a capitalist process of the withering away of states.” Badiou 2016, p. 17-8.
4 Badiou / Kamecke 2015, p. 117.
1. Polyphony of meaning. The notion of ‘state’ between politics and mathematics

For Badiou, a Platonist and communist alike, the term “state” (Lat.: status meaning ‘status’ or ‘condition’ of polity) generally refers either to a fictional ideal or a real enemy. In the French philosopher’s eyes, Plato’s Republic is the only legitimate founding text of state-philosophy, a discipline questioned today, since representative political communities necessarily infringe upon the universality-principle of truth. Badiou’s reinterpretation of Plato’s seminal work with the French title La République de Platon (Engl.: ‘Plato’s Republic’) shows the significance of the Republic as the foundation of Badiou’s four philosophical conditions described in Being and Event. The problem of the political order in terms of the “truthful organization of a universal political subject” arises in accordance with Plato’s questions – applicable to every historical situation – about the purpose of society, the essence of justice, and the virtue of mental balance, in short: it arises in reference to the idea of a truthful human life.

Through the transposing of Socrates’s conversations into the context of the 21th century, the challenges that Plato addresses in the Republic – e.g. regulations for exceptions to the right of residence, the training of guards and policemen – lead to transcendental, meta-ontological questions about the relationship of philosophical reflection and historically possible political truths: What is a philosopher? And how does philosophy relate to politics as a truth procedure?

The essential characteristic of Badiou’s reading of Plato lies in the fact that the state, in the ancient sense as the organizer of the ‘public affaire’ (politeia, res publica), will only lead to an ideal coexistence of righteous and well-adjusted subjects when it is no longer necessary for the extrapolation of the sovereign’s power. From an ideal point of view, the state is a negative concept that cancels itself out, since in Badiou’s understanding, the political order must be a generic one that sets limits on its own terms, and as such is unenforced, self-evident, and thus universally valid. The external power of political truth is based on the wisdom of a philosophy whose effectiveness can, however, only be grasped analytically, not prescriptively – as is done by Plato where “philosophers become kings” (Politea 473d). Philosophy analyzes the condition of humans fighting for or against the idea of a just society, which they can to a greater or lesser extent conceptualize and establish. Technically speaking, philosophy realizes “any truth procedure considered subjectively.” Thus, thinking of the political essentially means collecting the historically possible “basic

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5 Badiou 2012b.
7 Badiou 2012b, p. 223-4.
8 Ibid., p. 162-82.
9 Ibid., p. 183-96.
10 Badiou 2005b, p. 141 (emphasis in original).
features of a public community dedicated to justice.” In ethical terms, the principle of political thinking – the possibility of conceiving of a society according to justice – is objectively met when the subject is capable of approaching “the real dimension of the power of the people above all aspects of the organization of communal life.” In order for the organization of society – in accordance with the idea of its collective model – to have as its starting point that which the men and woman who form the society have in common, it is necessary that “all things must belong to all the people.”

The historical references present in this interpretation of Plato’s political theory are clearly visible: Rousseau’s social contract-theory, primarily the idea of the common good as the telos of the volonté générale, and the general Marxian understanding of the republic. Marx, economist and analyst of capital, never composed his own theory of the state; and so there is no need for complementation, as in the case of Plato’s theory. Badiou agrees even more with the Marxian viewpoint that power relations within the state cannot be overcome without a “revocation of the state” in terms of an abolition of exploitation and its discriminatorily distributed relations of production. The state itself is for Badiou an institutionalization of the capitalist rule, in which a particular and only pseudo-communal political interest has become prevalent over other private interests, and which ultimately confines itself to the technical premise to protect and legally secure private property. In compliance with the existing models the state, according to the words of Marx, is “a bourgeois, bureaucratically cultured and police-like military despotism, embellished with parliamentary procedures and mixed with feudal supplements.”

Solutions for the abolition of inequality found in this kind of political structure would only be admissible while approving the prevailing political doxa, which is basically impossible once the collective will has been corrupted. Thus, only the demise of the state can lead to overcoming the power structures already in place, via a “dispossession of the proprietors,” or a revolution, whose victory must not result in any state, not even a ‘workers-state.’ In this respect, it is no surprise that Badiou transfers Plato’s distinction of the different forms of government – timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny (Politeia 543a-569c) (in Schleiermacher’s translation referred to as “Verfassungen” (Engl. “constitutions”)) – into a “critique of pre-com-

11 Badiou 2012b, p. 245.
12 Badiou / Kamecke 2015, p. 32.
13 Badiou 2012b, p. 245.
munist systems of government” with the fifth and proper political system being ‘communism’.

Truth procedures in political situations are always subject-constituted actions against the state and its representative structure. Political subjects can only stay faithful to the truth of their endeavor if they resist the temptation to organize themselves into state-like structures. Here lies the “catastrophic” misapprehension of communist parties that created ‘communist states’ under the slogan of a people’s democracy during the 20th century, some of which run their gulags even today, e.g. the “Democratic People’s Republic” of Korea. This understanding of communism is in Badiou’s eyes a tautology on its way to absurdity. Despite the polemic surrounding the term communism, which is today so badly discredited that it seems difficult to pin a future political truth procedure onto the term, it remains nevertheless a conceptual constant in Badiou’s own “very critical account of communism in the period of its state-run organization.” This constant implies that the very difficulty with this most intricate and historically pressing truth procedure of politics rests on finding a suitable and sufficient ‘body’ for the organization of political subjects.

Politics is, technically speaking, “the sole truth procedure that is not only generic in its result, but also in the local composition of its subject.” ‘Genericity,’ in a political truth procedure, signifies that political decisions or subjective interventions in the ontology of politics are imaginable only if they carry universal validity. A look back into history shows, however, that such a generic organization of a political subject has never before been successfully implemented without forcing millions of individuals to adhere to supposed collective interests, which are most certainly not their ‘own’. As a result, the current global situation where capital-concentration in rich countries widens the gap between themselves and poor countries, resembles the pre-political (i.e. pre-communist) conditions of the 19th century more then the cold war setting of the 20th century. With regard to mathematics however, the precept of universality can be derived from the precept of proportionality and phrased in a

17 Badiou 2012b, p. 245.
19 Badiou / Kamecke 2015, p. 34.
20 Badiou 2005b, p. 142. The term “generic” initially applies to the concept of ‘species’ borrowed from the term ‘species-being,’ which Marx uses to describe “the character of humanity, whose medium was the proletariat.” Badiou 2005a, p. 435. Additionally the term has a mathematical meaning – generic set – that is based on Paul Cohen’s set theory. The generic set, that is also referred to as generic extension, is a primary component for the validity of quality statements within the axiomatic set theory. Technically phrased, the term defines a specifically constructed set whose properties allow to ‘enforce’ the proof of independence for certain mathematical problems. The “enforcement” method based on the generic set, also called forcing, became known in 1963, when Paul Cohen succeeded in proving the independence of Georg Cantor’s continuum hypothesis from 1878 and thereby solved one of Hilbert’s 23 problems.
21 “I do not know if Marx ever imagined that he was right exactly the way that, in the last thirty years, reality proves us to be.” Badiou 2016, p. 24.
straightforward manner. The set of the conditions of possibility for a just society must be comprehensive and accordingly exhausted by political legislation. Therefore, it seems theoretically possible for the multiplicity of the polymorph confluence of political interests to assume a discernible form of unity – even outside the uniformity of that monetary value exchange which generates exploitation.

Faced with this disconnect between theory and practice – as a dilemma of ontological truth that does not seem relevant to political reality – it is helpful to consider the set-theoretical meaning of the term ‘state of the situation’ in order to outline the meaning of ‘state’ in Badiou’s onto-phenomenological perspective.

2. The ‘state of the situation’. Mathematics and ontology

The French language allows for an ambiguity of the word ‘state,’ since the term denotes both nation-‘state’ (État) and the ‘state of a/the situation’ (état de la situation). The latter signification is used within Badiou’s system of concepts to refer to the power set axiom of set theory.22 Although the spelling of both terms clearly differs – É versus é – their identical pronunciation has been frequently interpreted as synonymy. This arises from Badiou’s own way of using ‘state’ in an abstract sense as the organization-principle of a political situation, in order to elucidate the phenomenological meaning of the power set axiom for the meta-ontological approach of his philosophy.23

From a mathematical perspective, the power set axiom asserts nothing more than the very simple and universally applicable fact that for any set whose elements can be listed – no matter what those elements might be – the set of all subsets can be generated.24 The power set P(x), which contains all subsets of an input set x, differs from the latter and its elements. Most important: it has a ‘higher cardinality’ than the original set, which cannot represent the subsets as part of its elements. Thus the power set accomplishes a structured aspect of the input set called ‘count’ or “count-as-one”25 whose elements are not registered as such, but in accordance to the parameters of the power set. At the same time, the relation between a set and its power set is not restricted by a certain measure, which in Badiou’s eyes poses a philosophical problem with wide-ranging consequences. It is “a permanent question for thought, an intellectual provocation of being,” that “the gap between structure and metastruc-

23 “The state is simply the necessary metastructure of every historical-social situation.” Badiou 2005, p. 105.
25 Ibid., p. 504.
ture” is “literally impossible to assign to a ‘measure’” as “the ‘passage’ to the set of subsets is an operation in absolute excess of the situation itself.”

Without going into the mathematics of cardinality-assumptions of power sets, which leaves (essential) room for subjective assessments, the ‘power’ of the power set is thus based solely on the fact that it adds a meta-structure to the structure of a set, which in a way makes it, the set, more ‘manageable’ albeit at the cost of not considering the actual elements and their potential. This set-theoretical axiom, which through the ontological equivalence of being and multiplicity can be applied to all kinds of entities, is the conceptual framework for the analogy between state and the state of the situation. This is expressed by Badiou as wordplay within the difference between the French word “État” and the expression “état (de la situation). Here, the state (as nation-state) serves as an example and as a typical negative model for the meta-structure of a “historical social situation”: it marks the space and time where human beings coexist. The modern democratic state founded on a constitution – e.g. France in 1988 – represents the counting principle of a power set with regard to the people living in it. E.g. it registers individuals for voting, quantifies their trade-relevant purchasing power, or collects identity markers for statistical or actuarial purposes instead of understanding humans as individual potentials within a generic multiplicity.

Thus, from an ontological perspective, it is evident for Badiou that a state cannot have access to the essence of a political situation, because the state squeezes the genuine variety of characteristics of political subjects into the corset of a heteronomous, solely administrative identity. Subjects of a political situation can only cultivate a ‘generic fidelity procedure,’ if the latter consists of elements from the input set in which every individual is entitled to his or her own infinite diversity, a diversity that is beyond the power sets’ representational form of government. Therefore, Badiou sees in his diagnosis of our era an analogy to the political evaluation of Marx and Engels, whose ‘pre-communist’ situation dates back 150 years: “One of the great advances of Marxism was no doubt it having understood that the State, in essence, does not entertain any relationship with individuals, that the dialectic of its existence is not that of the one of authority to the multiple of subjects.”

The difficulties in understanding Badiou’s political philosophy posed by the remarks made on the state as historical social situation described in meditations 8 and 9 of Being and Event are linked to the stylistic ornament of his wordplay between État and état de la situation. The ambiguousness of the word “state” found in the French language can lead to the impression that the state is generally tantamount to

26 Ibid., p. 84 (emphasis in original).
27 “[F]orming-into-one is a law applicable to any existing multiple.” Badiou 2005a, p. 92.
28 The state (the ruling class) “re-presents what has already been presented.” Badiou 2005a, p. 106.
29 Badiou 2005a, p. 104.
the state of the situation in a mathematical sense. This is not the case: “If the state (as nation-state) treats each individual as a singleton, and not as an infinite multiplicity, which it is in reality, one will have to say that it, the state, does so in its own way.”

Moreover, the state is not the only possible form of political constitution, but just a certain historical version for the organization of political truth procedures, whose subjects incidentally should have faith in other, non-governmental institutions.

The German edition of Being and Event, which shifts the wordplay to the juridical level by using the term ‘Verfassung’ (Engl. constitution), while eradicating the homophony with the nation-state, has been criticized for laying bare a categorical problem of political science within the ontologically explained analogy of État and état de la situation. This critique is not justified. Badiou is not undertaking a constriction of the concepts “state” and “state of the situation” in a state-theoretical or constitutional sense, because these concepts cannot find use either from a philosophical or an epistemological perspective without the eventful power of subjective innovation in the space of political reality. The truth of politics rests on this side of the state’s constitutional treaties and their symbolic anchors. The prerequisites of both validity and legitimacy of a political order are – as a consequence of Rousseau’s social contract – invalidated precisely through the principle of political representation. According to Badiou, the theory of the state can only be a constitutional theory if the term constitution (Verfassung) is perceived with recourse to the mathematical meaning of the power set axiom as the structured representation of a situation’s being.

Ontology, in turn, is just a chapter in the philosophical triad of Badiou’s main work on ontology, phenomenology, and ethics, although one that is fundamental, crucially shaping the philosophical method itself which is repeatedly drawn on by his phenomenological considerations. Without taking into account the phenomenology described in Logics of Worlds, one runs the risk of misunderstanding Badiou’s unique mode of ontology as rooted in mathematics – due to the methodical lemma “mathematics is ontology” as a mathematical problem of categories. Indeed criticism has been voiced from a mathematical perspective especially in regard to the problem of the perceived equation of the state and the power set axiom. Badiou, so the critics say, tries to “extract arguments for the discussion of the Marxist theory of the state from the relation of set and power-set.” There is “a specific overdetermination of the mathematical concepts practiced, which are defined within a formal language and thus have a precise meaning exclusively within a closed system.” From such a point of view – the defending of mathematical terms for mathematics – the

30 Badiou / Kamecke 2015, p. 154, passim.
possibility of a conceptual analogy between the state as a structured arrangement of a political situation and the power set axiom is questioned altogether. Some kind of "unsecured walk at the borderline" between philosophical and mathematical terms subsists in Badiou’s work with the result that the "connection of philosophy to mathematics" in particular needs a "theory of heuristic transference." 34

Philosophy is a discursive practice, which in a sense has to restrict itself to certain objects being brought to it from eventful areas of thought (i.e. situations of human life). Both science, with mathematics right at its forefront, and politics, are generic procedures. Analyzing and describing their truths is the genuine purpose of a systematic philosophy. The political as well as mathematical reception of the relation that Badiou undertakes in Being and Event between mathematical theory and political facticity in the analogy of the state as a "state of the situation" indicates the fundamental need for a clarification – beyond the resolution of metaphors – of the linguistic constitution of the conceptual relationship between philosophy and its conditions.

Studying this relationship, however, cannot be about scrutinizing political reason on the basis of its supposed lack of mathematical rigor, nor about evaluating the ontological foundation of philosophy of action based on the consistency of constitutionally justified discourses. On the other hand, the systematization found in Badiou’s edifice of thought cannot be reduced to the rhetorically stylistic principle of a "language-game" 35 either, since analytical philosophy following Wittgenstein – criticized as "anti-philosophy" 36 – depicts the exact opposite of Badiou’s philosophical approach. Even if Badiou’s events always refer to specific proper names, which the subjects “draw from the void” 37 in their fidelity procedure, philosophical reasoning itself must be consistent with the requirements set for the conditions of philosophy before being transported through a certain, either tendentially mathematical or tendentially poetical language.

3. The two worlds of philosophical language. Between matheme and poem

It is a genuine characteristic of Badiou’s philosophy, not just in respect to style, that the fundamental notions in his conceptual edifice also have a technical meaning generated from the axioms of set theory. 38 This applies first and foremost to the philosophical equation of ontology and mathematics. What presents itself in its status of pure being must be universal, i.e. without presuppositions and axiomatically describ-

34 Ibid., p. 178.
35 Wittgenstein 2009, p. 34.
37 Badiou 2005a, p. 166, p. 204.
able. Thus, the scientific discipline of axiomatic set theory developed in the early 20th century, whose theory is based on the claim that universally definable variables exist, is a sufficiently precise language to make a coherent statement on being as such.

On this basis, the fundamental ontological notions can be split into their intuitive (ordinary language) meaning and their technical (mathematical) meaning: e.g. being (presentation), void (emptiness), multiple (set), size (cardinality), coming-to-be (foundation). This bipolarity of meaning also applies for phenomenological notions (object, world, belonging, operation, intensity, validity, etc.) – as well as for auto-constitutive descriptions of situational philosophical and extra-philosophical processes of thought: condition, nomination, decision, fidelity and so forth. Ultimately, this applies for Badiou’s “genuinely philosophical” concepts: event, subject, and truth, which evolve along the inconsistent borderlines of thinking where mathematics encounters logical impossibilities. The very simple symbolic language based on predicate logic is grounded on the ten set-theoretical axioms provided by Zermelo-Fraenkel in 1930 – “the greatest effort of thought ever accomplished to this day by humanity” according to Badiou. Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory proves itself suitable for the groundwork of philosophical reasoning, as it provides the ontological foundation with a theory of the void (the empty set) to describe the inconsistency between nothingness and subtraction – and facilitates a logically constructible differentiation between set relations and relations of infinity within the phenomenology of appearances, which Badiou explicates in Logics of Worlds.

The bipolarity of Badiou’s systematic terms is related to the condition of the possibility for “transcendentals” (a central term from Logics of Worlds) – linking ontology and phenomenology – to respectively determine the being of existing facts. In this context, the intuitive and the technical meaning of each notion enter into a dialectical relationship, which reveals each and every time that “a being is thinkable only insofar as it belongs to a world.”: “It must be possible to think, in a world, what

39 Badiou 2005a, p. 499.
40 The technical meaning of the set-theoretical axioms can be summarized as follows: Based on the irreducible fundamental concept of the ‘set,’ which can consist of or ‘represent’ absolutely anything, two propositions that refer to the existence of the emptiness and the existence of distinguishable infinite sets (“axiom of empty set” and “axiom of infinity”) are linked to an ontological theorem that assigns being the primacy over language (“axiom of separation”). Building upon that, the axioms of “replacement,” “extensionality,” “union,” “pair,” and “power set” can be used to identify (inter-)relations between arbitrary situations, branching among elements, the spread between equal and unequal parts, internal relations of size as well as the structure of “representation” by sets with higher cardinality. After that the “axiom of foundation” sets an immemorial boundary for the definition of a situation by claiming the existence of one prime undividable element, restraining that a set can be element of itself. The “axiom of choice” eventually provides the formal scheme for the subject-constituted concepts for eventful, initially logically indescribable interventions in situations. Cf. Kamecke 2010, p. 168-70.
does [and does not] appear within that world.”

Does this mean that the different language-levels ultimately express different states of affairs and thus make it necessary to ‘translate’ from one level to the other for the purpose of an intellectual appropriation of the object? When political reasoning is described as a truth procedure that can only exist outside the state, as the latter annihilates events and subject formations in their moment of offspring, then this is related to the ontological and thereby set-theoretical meaning of the “state of the situation.” When, however, the expression “state of the situation” is understood in the technical sense as a power set, in what way does one grasp more then just the “set of subsets,” which mathematicians can use in their calculations? Badiou answers this question as follows:

“The crucial point is how philosophy, within itself, can enable the circulation of ontological categories. The mathematician formalizes ontology in his own language. The philosopher comes along and says: This is ontology, – something the mathematician does not say and does not even want to know. But if it is ontology, then it is a thinking of being, and when it is a thinking of being, then it is a thinking of the being of all things. To this extent, it is true that the philosopher makes an extension or transference of the subject-matter. He will thus test his own reading of mathematics as an ontology in figures which are no longer ontological but belong to the world. If one says that the state, in the political sense of the word, must be removed from politics, one no longer speaks on the level of pure ontology but on the ontological level of something that exists in a particular world.”

The state is what it is ontologically, in its own way. Therefore, the state develops a language that is located far from ontology. And for its part this language is integrated into a distinct theory, which can then become a science in political or constitutional discourses. But this theory’s epistemology is not the subject-matter of Badiou’s philosophy, as the description of political truth procedures cannot orient itself to forms of state-representation that inevitably lose sight of all genericity. Nonetheless, it is the notion of the state in particular that provides in this predicament an indication for a specific methodical direction of Badiou’s edifice of ideas on the proportionality of phenomenological (political) and ontological (mathematical) conceptualuality, which very generally touches on the problem of the philosophical language.

In Badiou’s work, philosophical language does not have a prescriptive, but a didactical function and therefore is dedicated to focusing on intuitive comprehensibility. At the same time, however, philosophy inevitably enters into the language of the situations it studies. The language of a philosophical work is diverse and a constructed “hybrid.” It is based on the “circulating approximation” of existing realities – elements, situations, subjects including their own language –, which are imaginable without the translation effort of a superior language, and can yet be derived from el-

42 Ibid., p. 113, p. 122.
ements of the situations’ languages themselves. The hybrid language of philosophy is dependent on statements – words and phrases – from subjective fidelity procedures and does not have, besides its didactic ideal, its own essence. Nor does it have any particular linguistically or hermeneutically derived purpose. The fidelity procedures in love, science, art, and politics are based on founding speech acts, insofar as Badiou’s subjects are constituted by “naming” events in the first place.\textsuperscript{44}

The names and terms that subjects use to interconnect themselves with reference to the meaning and method of the fundamental elements of a fidelity procedure – in the laboratory, in the studio, in a partnership, in a political assembly etc. – cannot be predicated philosophically, since these names and terms are ‘drawn from the void’.

An example of extreme discrepancy between languages that affects the language of philosophy is the contrast between poetry and mathematics. In poetry (as it represents a certain type of truth condition within the arts), language itself, and only language, is object of the truth procedure. In mathematics (as it is a type of truth condition in science), the singular and distinctive language does not matter at all, since essential things are expressed in a universally translatable symbolic language:

“Thus the problems of universality are opposed. The universality of mathematics is supported in a certain way by its own linguistic code, whereas the universality of poetry is based on the search for the particularities of a language that goes beyond these peculiarities. But it has no other material than these peculiarities. As I like to say, philosophy speaks a language of mediation between mathematics and poetry. This is its precaution and its safety. Thus philosophy avoids the positivistic temptation to cling to science, and the romantic temptation to arise into pure poetry.”\textsuperscript{45}

On the one hand a truth procedure in its factual way of performance must always be uncovered from within its particularity. On the other hand, however, philosophy must always be released from particularity, philosophy however must be placed under the “totality of the conditions of truth.” This leads to “a necessary philosophical therapeutics,” to speak a language that accepts to move constantly in the dialectics of the so-called “bipolarity of the matheme and the poem.” For “the matheme allows philosophy to take note of the conditions of the strict universality inherent in the thinking of being, and the poem allows her to know the special conditions under which universality must be established.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Badiou 2005a, p. 396-400.
\textsuperscript{45} Badiou / Kamecke 2015, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{46} Badiou / Kamecke 2015, p. 109-10.
4. Implications for the notion of ‘state’. Conclusion

Strictly speaking, the term ‘state’ (État) – in its political, state-theoretical or constitutional sense – does not have any meaning in Badiou’s philosophy.

Since philosophical language finds itself in a circular movement of truth procedures, no terms – coming from the forms or representational structures of government organizations – can be assigned to it in relation to truth. Thus, the state does not constitute a category in Badiou’s extensive and very complex political reasoning. It does not provide names for political events, but rather places obstacles in the way of forming generic structures of organized political subjects. When it comes however to the phenomenological interpretation of a state-like arrangement of historical social situations, the ontological concept of the constitution (or ‘state of the situation’) still creates a significant predetermined breaking point in the universal framework of conditions that can lead to subjective truth procedures. Generally, every situation in the world in which human beings appear is to be assessed by the parties involved in the subject formation, in view of possible representations and their power, in order to allow for interventions, decisions or enforcements in terms of subjective fidelity procedures. Accordingly, the model of a modern constitutional democracy – incriminated from a Marxist-communist perspective – can just as well be considered a structural entity, with its historical development of the existing political formations as traceable from the 19th up to the 21st century. Even though from Badiou’s standpoint the state mainly exists to politically persecute non-compliant events and deviating subjective organizations, it nonetheless constitutes a real entity for philosophy, whose purpose has been, at least since Plato, to establish the optimal idea for a “political order” – say as a ‘controllable’ power set – and to enshrine it in reality.

A rather playful but also literary example of Badiou’s philosophical interaction with the overall situation of state-structures is the “project of a political fusion between the states of France and Germany” from 2003. This project aims at the conceptualization of “the option of a new political commonwealth” that is supranational.

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47 In place of the state the actual challenge for Badiou’s philosophy is posed by the term ‘politics’. Politics is a “generic” situation in which truth can occur. The event of a political truth is the experience of a collective subject whose thought can philosophically be identified as a universal singularity. Next to the principal philosophical works of Badiou and their ‘manifestos’ he tries also in Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism (Badiou 2003), Metapolitics (Badiou 2005b), and Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil (Badiou 2012a) as well as through the series Circonstances (from which the current work on the retrieval of the concept of communism originated) to answer a question that he posed himself in 1985: “Can politics be thought?” (Badiou 1985).

48 The a priori of state theory that is being put into Socrates mouth by Plato according to Badiou’s strictly consistent ‘interpretation,’ reads that “the political order” must be the best: “the best of all the ones that we can extract by thought from the field of possibilities.” Badiou 2012b, p. 316.
and open and whose borders – in reference to Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* – are painted with chalk and not guarded by walls and camera detectors. The original cause for this deliberation was the speech Dominique de Villepin, Prime Minister of France, gave at the UN on February 14th, 2003. He reflected on the “European axis” that Germany and France had formed against the second Iraq War as well as their philosophical swearing-in on the joint declaration on the “renaissance of Europe” by Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas. From today’s perspective, this project, whose realization has receded into the distance due to the political forces currently at work in France and Germany, can be associated with the debate on Great Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union. More serious, however, are Badiou’s recent reflections on the development of Western nations in the wake of a global increase of terrorist and fundamentalist violence, which according to the French philosopher are consequences of increasing poverty and the lack of ideas.

The political slogan for weakening the state, which was the true objective of Marxist politics in the 19th and 20th century, could become obsolete in the context of the 21st century, as the actions of domestic policy, such as the backing of the “social-” or “welfare-state” become less and less quantifiable. In Badiou’s speech about the terrorist attacks that occurred in Paris on November 13th, 2015 the state appears so weakened that its authority is reduced to the relevance of being the non-authorized representative of pure, ‘unleashed’ capitalism. In the year of 2015 the modern, democratic constitutional state seems pitifully weakened by forces operating on the opposite side of the communist idea:

“For thirty years now we have been witnessing, with paralyzed arms, the liberation of Liberalism. Globalization [...] and the concentration of capital [...] progressively create power centers that are comparable to nation-states, or even more powerful than many of them. These are financial centers. They are productive, sometimes speculative, have a lot of staff, often with strong militia. They spread everywhere, often with violence, and always with corruption. These centers of power are transnational, with the effect that they have a diagonal relation to the nation-states. Given these massive and transnational powers, state sovereignty is not taken for granted anymore.”

These moves to “weaken” the state are not good news for the communists either.

In comparison to the ‘transnational’ structures forming beyond the states, the Marxist concept of a ‘bureaucratically timbered military despotism guarded by the police’ appears to be like a ghost haunting children’s rooms. Therefore it is all the more important – when considering the relations between objects of philosophical reasoning and the characteristics of their conceptual correspondence – that the current balance of power among political truth procedures occurring sporadically in the

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49 *Badiou* 2004, p. 57-78.
51 *Badiou* 2016, p. 21-2.
context of an increasingly complex globalization, is assessed according to the forces in place and the principle of universality. This is a practical question for the political subject. Faced with the situation the world is currently in, a reduction of a democratic nation’s power seems to seek compensation through the return of an authoritarian state, especially in the wake of major refugee flows, which are forming postmodern areas of concentrated poverty on the peripheries of global capitalism.

(Translated by Georgia Olympia Brikis and Dominik Finkelde)

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I take two short quotations from Badiou’s book *Peut-on penser la politique? (Can Politics be Thought?)*\(^1\) as the point of departure for my paper. Both make affirmative reference to Kant, an exception to the rule, to be sure, given Badiou’s usual critical stance vis-a-vis Kant.

The first quotation reads: “An evacuation of the thing-in-itself in fact equals a dissolution of the subjective constitution of experience, and not, as Hegel believed, to its passage to the limit. This is because experience is the Subject only by virtue of being linked (topologically) to a real which it lacks.”\(^2\) While this statement may well appear to be casual, Badiou’s justification of the Kantian thing-in-itself has to be taken seriously. There are two reasons for this. First, Badiou’s justification is based on a formal operation that could be designated as the passage from Two to Three, a passage that is at the heart of Badiou’s materialist dialectic. In light of this passage, Kant’s philosophy presents itself as follows: there is only the transcendental and the empirical, except that there is also present the absence of the thing-in-itself.

This brings us to the second reason for taking Badiou’s justification of Kant seriously. Badiou’s defense of Kant’s position implies namely a positive affirmation of the two central premises of Kant’s revolution in the way of thinking. These premises are grounded, in turn, in Kant’s controversial “ontological difference” between appearance and the thing-in-itself, i.e., between *phenomenon* and *noumenon*. According to Kant, the only objective reality to which the human being as a finite rational being has access is the phenomenal reality, a reality constituted by means of the joined activity of two powers of cognition: understanding and sensibility. And yet, Kant stubbornly insists that our phenomenal world is not the world as it is in itself. True, the constituted phenomenal world is the only world and, as such, it is all we have, but it is never all there is, since it always already contains something that doesn’t belong to it, or better still, it is always already supplemented by something that is not-constituted, *das Ding an sich*, the thing-in-itself. Put differently, the excess of the present, the being-there of the absence of the thing-in-itself is inseparable from the phenomenal world. Or, to use Badiou’s formulation quoted above for our

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1  Badiou 1985.
2  Ibid., p. 80.
purposes: the phenomenal reality is all or whole “only by virtue of being linked (topologically) to a real which it lacks.”

When referring to Kant’s phenomenal world, we need to be quite precise in our wording: the phenomenal world is not only marked by a negative reference to the absent World, it is also marked by this negative reference in its affirmative form. In other words, it is marked by the present absence of the thing-in-itself. It is the present absence of the World-in-itself that confers consistency on the phenomenal world and in this way ensures that our world is not merely, to borrow Kant’s words, “a blind play of representations, i.e., less than a dream,”³ but something that exists independently of cognition. For the consistency of the phenomenal world it is therefore crucial that, in one way or another, the moment of this being-there of the absence of the thing-in-itself is also presentified within this world.

The question that Kant’s philosophy unavoidably poses to itself in the context of the first premise is of course as follows: what is the ontological status of this present absence, of this separateness of the “thing itself,” of the real, from reality? This question contains another: what logical operations could we make use of to conceptualize the ontological status of the “thing in itself,” which functions in objective reality as an element that is excluded from it? Which logical operations could we bring to bear to make visible, in objective reality, this excess of objective reality – and make it visible as just that, as excess?

In my reading of Kant, this question represents the second basic premise of Kant’s revolution in thinking. If the first premise could be called ontological, this second one could be designated as logical. Both premises are tightly interconnected, but it was only in his third Critique, the Critique of the Power of Judgment, that Kant tied them together into a unified onto-logical premise. For the time being, however, I am only concerned with the articulation of the second basic premise of Kant’s revolution in thinking with the second quotation from Badiou’s Peut-on penser la politique?

But first, a quick remark on the first quotation: it provides a background against which I can briefly sketch out what it is that interests me about “Badiou and the State,” the topic of this book. The task that Kant’s philosophy attributes to the phenomenal world, namely to articulate in its very realm the excess of the absent World in itself, is comparable to the task that politics as a truth process, i.e. the politics of emancipation, must take on. As we know, the State is characterized by the unmeasurable, erring excess in its representative relationship to a given situation. Politics as a process of truth, a politics of emancipation, works by interrupting the errance of the excess, thus interrupting the logic of the State’s domination. However, interrupting the errance does not amount to domesticating the excess. On the contrary: the

³ Kant 1992, A 112.
politics of emancipation exists as a process of truth only to the extent to which it
itself emphasizes, in a given world, its excessive structuring The State, which, ac-
cording to Badiou, produces the inexistent, and it does so by means of the figure of
identitarian normality. But the politics of emancipation is likewise interested in the
inexistent. Not only in the sense of attempting to bring to existence what the State
has produced as the inexistent – which, of course, also implies a change in the given
transcendental order. Rather, it is the politics of emancipation itself that creates
something that is the inexistent of the given transcendental framework – inexistent
in the sense that it potentially transcends the transcendental framework of its spatio-
temporal location.

Against the background of this remark, I can formulate the main thesis of this pa-
per as follows: the excess which the politics of emancipation articulates in a given
world and which for this world is inexistent is the specific materialism of this polit-
ics. To elaborate my thesis a bit further, I will maintain that three features character-
ize the specificity of the materialism of the politics of emancipation, the first of
which is a materialism of an irreducible multiplicity of the singular. Second, the
multiplicity of the singular of this materialism requires as its condition of possibility
the possibility of universalization. The affirmation of singularity is inseparable from
the idea of the universal. And third, the linking of the singular and the universal, as
is well-known, is a crucial element in the reflecting judgment, a logical operation
elaborated by Kant in his Critique of the Power of Judgment. This brings us to the
third feature that characterizes the materialism of emancipatory politics: the exces-
siveness or too-muchness of this materialism is both the presupposition and the
product of the activity of the reflecting judgment. Indeed, the materialism of the po-
litics of emancipation is a logical materialism.

2. Logical materialism

This notion of a logical materialism of the politics of emancipation requires some
additional elucidation and grounding. I will start by basing it on the second quota-
tion from Badiou’s Peut-on penser la politique?. This passage is shorter and reads as
follows: “[T]he political engagement has the same reflecting universality as the
judgment of taste in Kant.”

The passage, in which Badiou insists on the relevance of Kant’s reflecting judg-
ment to politics, is compatible with the present argument to the extent in which Ba-
diou points to the second basic premise of Kant’s revolution in the way of thinking.
As has already been noted, this is a logical premise. It allows Kant to elaborate on
the question concerning the logical operation that would make the excessiveness of the “thing in itself” visible within objective reality, an excessiveness which functions as an element that is excluded from objective reality. The way in which Kant solves this problem, as I will attempt to show in what follows, is fundamental for the elaboration of my thesis on the logical materialism of politics as a truth procedure.

I will attempt to sketch out the logical basis of Kant’s premise in a somewhat roundabout way. In this, I will follow Badiou, who in his essay “The Caesura of Nihilism” commented on Lacan’s well-known claim that philosophy doesn’t want to know anything about the inherent connection between thought and enjoyment. It is my hypothesis however that Kant’s critical philosophy – which seems to exemplify the domination of “pure reason,” i.e. of reason cleansed of all non-rational contamination – cannot be captured by the definition of philosophy as proposed by Lacan. This indefinability manifests itself most clearly in the Kantian concept of the reflecting power of judgment. For what is at the core of an act of reflecting judgment, or of an aesthetic judgment of taste or a judgment of the sublime, is an encounter between reason and its desire, an encounter that leads us to the implicit materialism in Kant’s notion of reason. While I cannot fully develop this point, I will nevertheless attempt to explain it in more detail.

If we read Kant’s philosophy as a system consisting of the three Critiques, we are justified in claiming that the third Critique, which completes the critical system, also completes the task that Kant outlined in the “Transcendental Dialectic” in the Critique of Pure Reason. This is the task of the self-critique of reason. At its core, it demands a solution to the following problem: Pure reason, according to Kant, “is in fact concerned with nothing but itself” and is entirely focused on seeking the point of the Unconditioned. The Unconditioned, towards which reason is driven, as Kant puts it, by “its unquenchable desire,” “die nicht zu dämpfende Begierde,” is that which affects reason from within and which “makes reason think.” This “thought-entity” or “thing of thought” is the absolute condition of reason. Hence, the self-critique of reason in the first Critique is a complex undertaking intended to demonstrate that it is only when reason truly focuses exclusively on itself that it can thereby go beyond the limits of the universe of mere thoughts. By this act of transcending, the ideas of reason gain visibility in phenomenal reality as something inexistent in reality, and yet included in it.

In a nutshell, the fundamental demand of the self critique of reason can be summed up as follows: it is only once reason has renounced taking its ideas as something objectively given, and focuses instead entirely on itself and the object of

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5 Badiou 2012, p. 53.
7 Kant 1992, B 708/A 680.
8 Ibid., B 824/A 796.
its unquenchable desire, that it can break out of the closed universe of mere creations of thought and reach something that is real. The paradoxical demand imposed by Kant’s self-critique of reason then, is that within itself, reason is already outside of itself. This demand implies an irreducible externality determining the thought from within.

I will argue that this point of internal externality of reason is what characterizes both the materialism of the Kantian Idea and that of Badiou’s concept of the Idea. What we are dealing with here is the Idea as the inseparability of thought and act. The Idea is not a thought to be realized, but a thought that arises and exists only in the process of being realized. In short, this is a materialism that characterizes all processes of truth. It is the materialism of a world which, to borrow Badiou’s words, has no “beneath” external to it, no pre-world matter, so to speak. Neither does it have any heterogeneous “above.” It is precisely because of its strong dependence on logical operations that this materialism could be called logical materialism.

However, Kant’s philosophy can succeed in fully realizing this paradoxical demand implied in the self-critique of reason, the demand that reason, while being concerned with itself is outside of itself, only with the invention of the reflecting power of judgment in the Critique of the Power of Judgment. Only then can Kant demonstrate that the ideas of reason possess a material existence precisely as the inexistent of the given world. What exactly does the materialism of Kant’s invention consist of? My answer will obviously have to go beyond the framework of Kant’s philosophy, while intending to maintain faithful to its fundamental premises.

3. The reflecting power of judgment

I will proceed in two steps. First, let us recall, very briefly and in broad strokes, what Kant’s concept of reflecting judgment entails. Kant distinguishes between two kinds of power of judgment. Generally speaking, the power of judgment is the faculty of thinking the particular as subsumed under the universal – i.e. the law, the principle, the rule. Thus, – and this is where Kant’s distinction makes sense – the universal can be given, in which case the power of judgment is a determining one. As far as determining judgments about the world are concerned, there are only the particular and the universal: we gain knowledge about the world by subsuming a particularity under a universal category that contains other, similar particulars.

The other kind of power of judgment is the (aesthetic) reflecting one. Its distinctive feature is that only the representation of something is available, but no universal whereby that something might be determined. This is precisely what the reflecting

10  See Kant 2000, p. 15.
power of judgment is about: its task is to invent, in its own process of judging, a universal concept for something for which no cognitive category is available.

Let me add two footnotes to this rough sketch as to determining and reflecting judgments. The first is about the status of the universal utilized in forming a reflecting judgment. The second concerns the specific referent of a reflecting judgment. The reason that the universal is not available in the act of the reflecting power of judgment does not lie in our inability to find the universal or in our simple ignorance of it. The universal is not available to us because, strictly speaking, there simply is no universal for what we see before us. The universal of the reflecting power of judgment is predicatively undeterminable: in a word, it is generic. It can only be clearly established in the act of determining what it refers to in each specific case.

As for the referent of a reflecting judgment, it is what Kant calls “a case,” der Fall. A case of an aesthetic judgment, of a judgment of taste or of the sublime, is that which represents the irreducible particularity of each particular instance of such a judgment: that is, a singularity. It is therefore that what this particularity itself is as an irreducible singularity. The singular is that which, in a particularity, is more than that particularity itself – without being truly – empirically or objectively – something more. On the one hand, the singular cannot be separated from its particularity, that is to say, from its situational, empiric particular location. On the other hand, this singular becomes a case due to its immediate connection to the universal of the Idea. It is something that can be immediately universalized, something which could hold, as Kant would have put it, for “all times and peoples.”11 In a word, the singularity of a case is that in a given particularity, say in Antigone, which, irrespective of the variety of its interpretations in concrete cultural and historical contexts, remains the same. Hence, it only exists under the guise of an always-renewed decision: “This is a case.” Thus it could be said that the universal too only exists to the extent that it is possible to affirm it under the guise of a potentially infinite series of its universally valid cases. And conversely, the particular givens of the world can attain their true multiplicity only in that which, in their givenness, is a case of an irreducible Same-ness. The reflecting power of judgment is a thought protocol that is based on the decision or declaration that there exists in the objective reality, constructed by means of the universal and the particular, also that which does not exist in it, namely, the singular, an example of the inexistent. Indeed, what we are dealing with here, is a declaration and affirmation of the existence of the inexistent.

My second step in trying to specify the materialism of the reflecting power of judgment could be summed up as the following claim. Reason’s focusing on nothing but itself, which allows it to transcend the closed universe of thought’s hallucinations, involves an operation that can be compared to a passage, in Lacanian psycho-

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11 Ibid., p. 116.
analysis, from the object of desire to the object-cause of desire, i.e. an object that sets desire in motion. It is precisely this passage which allows one to find out if one wants what one desires. Here I draw on Lacan’s conclusive note in his Écrits “Remarks on the relation of Daniel Lagache” in which Lacan insists on the fact that “the subject is called to be reborn [as desire’s object a] – in order to know if he wants what he desires.”12 Where, exactly, can we identify such a passage in Kant’s self-critique of reason and his elaboration on the aesthetic reflecting judgment? Let us note once more, the role of the object as the cause of the reason’s desire is the point of the unconditioned.

Reason’s self-critique would thus seem to be a process that unfolds on two distinct but interdependent levels. On the first level of self-critique we are dealing with a reason that has a savoir faire with the unconditioned as object-cause of its desire. To want its desire highlights here an interruption between the immediate identification of reason and the object-cause of its desire. In this regard, reason’s self-critique presents itself as an act that introduces a minimal distance between thought and the thing that affects it: the unconditioned. In short, reason learns to transform the unconditioned into an absolute condition of pure reason but one which is as such detachable from reason. To cite Lacan: “desire reverses the unconditionality of the demand of love in which the subject remains subjected to the Other, in order to raise to the power of an absolute condition (in which the ‘absolute’ implies ‘detachment’).”13

4. The transformation of reality into material of the Idea

The distance between thought and the thing which affects it is minimal, however it is this distance that opens up the possibility for reason to materialize itself or, rather, to materialize the object of its desire in the world. This brings us to the second level of reason’s self-critique, a level at which reason’s desire manifests itself as its desire to see. A desire to see what exactly? A desire to see the object-cause of desire as materialized in the world. What the expression “a desire to see” indicates is that at issue here is less what reason desires than how it desires. What is crucial here is namely that what reason desires, i.e., the object of its desire, is that which it wants to realize in the world. Reason’s desire is inseparable from its course of action in the world. In short, the notion of reason we are dealing here with according to Kant is the reason that renders its object of thought visible in the world, under the guise of the idea of reason. The presence of the ideas of reason in experience thus requires an altogether special ontological status: the ideas are not elements of objective reality

13 Ibid., p. 689.
but are no longer a purely hallucinatory realization of the subjective desire of reason. One could thus say that the ideas of reason exist under the form of cases of the Idea. That is, they exist as a given or a particularity of the world, but a given or particularity which is, at the same time, in its immediate givenness de-realized. As a case of the Idea, this particularity has become the inexistent of the world; it only counts as a point of absolute singularity that as such, immediately takes part in the universal. Thus, Kant’s comments on the French Revolution in *The Conflict of the Faculties* indicate that derealization is nothing other than the operation by which the givens of objective reality are transformed into potential material of the Idea — in a word, the givens become part of cases of the Idea. From the perspective of the self-critique of reason, the world of experience presents itself as something objective only to the extent that it has already lost its objectivity, or again, to the extent that it can be transformed into the world in which the self-critique of reason realizes its consequences.

The objectivity of the empirical world only exists to the extent that the particular givens of the world are transformed into the body of the “thing of thought,” i.e. into a material presence that testifies, in various ways, that the Idea exists in the world under the guise of the singular case, namely that which is the inexistent of a given world. In this sense it could be said that the self-critique of reason anticipates the materialism of the Idea that is realized through a connection of the singular to the universal in Kant’s reflecting judgment. To reiterate, the idea is the point of inseparability between thought and act, an act that consists in the construction of a double minimal difference. The act at issue here is first determined as an act that constructs a minimal difference between thought and the “thing of thought” that affects thought. In a second moment, the act constructs reality as the case of the Idea, that is, as a minimal difference between reality itself and reality as the existence of a case of the Idea. One could also say: as the minimal difference between facts that are, in reality, the case of the Idea and this case itself.

It is here that one could refer to the famous painting by Malevich, *White Square on a White Background, White on White*, as it has been commented on by Badiou in *The Century*. Where precisely is the white square found on this painting? It is precisely nowhere, except in the minimal, null, yet absolute, difference between the white and the white, as Badiou points out. This minimal difference, is, so to speak, the case of the white square. It is only in this difference that the white square finds its material existence, visible in the painting. In the same way, the idea of reason only exists in the world in the form of one of its cases. The case of the idea itself is

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14 As an example of such an inexistent of a given world, we could use what Badiou calls the figure of Paul. “Let us to say that, for Paul, it is a matter of investigating which law is capable of structuring a subject devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only ‘proof’ lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject.” (*Badiou* 2003, p. 5). I owe this suggestion to Dominik Finkelde.

only the minimal difference between what is in reality the case and the case itself. It is a particular given of the world whose particularity is submitted to that in it which points towards its proper singularity, that is, the singularity of the case of the Idea. That universal singularity that is included in the elementary formula of the reflecting power of judgment: “This is the case.” It is a formula that opens up the possibility for the articulation of the multiplicity of the world in the creation of its specific materiality. The “case” of the reflecting judgment is reason that is materialized in something that belongs to the world without being included in it. It is an excess of a given world itself. Under the guise of the singular universality of the case, reason thus participates in the constitution of reality by simultaneously derealizing it. The reflecting judgment, strictly speaking, is not a logical operation. It is a practical process of the nonobjective constitution of objective reality. It is a process of a derealization of reality, in the sense that the particular givens of the world are transformed into a body or a case of the Idea. In the same way that the enthusiasm of the spectators of the French Revolution derealized empirical and historical reality in order to transform this same reality into an instance of the Idea, into an “historical sign (signum rememaritativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon)” of the “progress toward the better.”

To conclude, one might object that I have outlined the materialist core of emancipatory politics only in abstract terms. I will argue however, that, in the wordless world in which we live today, it is precisely this abstract dimension that constitutes one of the points of the unconditioned for a politics of emancipation. The condition of its possibility is also the struggle for those truth processes. That is to say, the struggle for the creation of that specific materiality – the materiality of the multiplicity of singular cases – is the effect of the realization of these processes.

Bibliography


16 Kant 1996, p. 301/02.
One question to which this essay attempts to give a preliminary framing is that of the contemporary possibility of a *critique of ideology* that operates substantially as a *renewal* of the classical Marxist critique of political economy. Such a critique would, as I argue here, necessarily function, at least in part, by discerning the specific problematic *reality* constituted by political economy in the contemporary global situation, and distinguishing this from the ideological effects it causes, which, in turn, support the ongoing reproduction of its structure. Without diminishing the complexity of this structure or the typological diversity of means and relations of production present within it, I shall argue that a privileged critical path to this discernment can be found through a consideration of the internal form of *information technology* as founding what Althusser called a “structure in dominance” within the complex contemporary situation of global capitalism as a whole. The critique of the ideological functioning of this whole further passes necessarily, as I shall argue, through a consideration of the essential support it gives to what we may understand as this situation’s *state*. This is the overdetermined image of the global whole that is produced within this situation’s self-representation and thereby essentially supports the existence and continuance of its characteristic modes of production and socio-economic relations. Furthermore, I will argue, the basis for such a critical discernment of the ideological formation of the contemporary state can be found through a rigorous consideration of the structure and essential boundaries of computational formalization. This consideration points to the real unfoundedness of the values of *completeness, consistency, and decidability* whose recurrent re-inscription is, as I shall argue, symptomatic of ideological practice today.

From the perspective suggested by this analysis, it is striking that what is undoubtedly the deepest contemporary Marxist consideration of formalism and its political implications, namely the mathematical ontology of Alain Badiou, contains no clearly identifiable theory of political economy or its critique. This absence has been noted by several commentators, who have also sometimes pointed out another internal question it raises: the question of the relationship between Badiou’s militant theory of the event and the central sustaining opposition of Althusser’s critical project, namely that between ideology and “science,” in the sense of knowledge of what is
More specifically, Badiou’s mature theory in *Being and Event* effectively disjoins knowledge from truth, identifying the former with the internal inventory of an existing situation’s classificatory categories. He thus sees the possibility of a transformational break with these categories as ultimately only possible through the agency of a subject faithful to an event. But it is not clear whether or how such a possibility of transformation is sustained by what can still be understood as an intra-scientific knowledge of the situation’s real, material, or formal structure. Instead, for the mature Badiou, science becomes just one of four generic “truth procedures,” while the ultimate possibility of situational change is referred rather to the subject’s intra-situational tracing of a situationally exigent truth. Thus the imaginary reduplication characteristic of ideology is here effectively identified with that of received and positive knowledge, while the possibility of break and transformation is referred instead to the subject’s agency and the genericity of truths, rather than to any specific critical category of reflection, interrogation, or self-problematization of the actually existing structure.

In contrast with this, Althusser’s rigorous effort to characterize ideological production, as the imaginary reduplication of agents’ real relationships with the means of production, promises a critical orientation, and theoretical practice, which is thoroughly rooted in the formal and “scientific” knowledge of the political-economic structure of a situation and its particularly sustaining ideological effects. As we shall see, this orientation comes only, though, at what will seem to some to be a significant cost: that of Althusser’s increasingly categorical dismissal of any non-ideological role for the position or agency of a subject. In the context of the sharply maintained ideology/science disjunction, this dismissal leads to his somewhat famous declaration in his 1970 essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus” that “…all scientific discourse is by definition a subject-less discourse; there is no ‘Subject of science’ except in an ideology of science…” Indeed, it would not be mistaken to see here the difference, highly relevant to contemporary critical thought and action, between, on the one hand, an interventionist militancy of subjective praxis, and on the other, an exemplary development of the internal critical resources of a scientificity wholly without subject or agency. But as I shall argue, what is at issue, between the Althusser of the late 1960s and early 1970s and Badiou’s mature position, can also be understood as the difference between two ways of addressing the

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1 For the absence of the critique of political economy in Badiou, see, e.g., Bosteels 2009, pp. xxii-xxiii; Žižek 2010, pp. 181-5; Livingston 2012, pp. 300-2. For some of Badiou’s own reasons for rejecting the classical Marxist project of the critique of political economy as involving a “fixation by the philosopheme of the political,” see Badiou 1985, p. 14 (quoted in Bosteels 2009, p. xxii).

2 For the question of the fate of the Althusserian science/ideology contrast in Badiou’s later work, see Žižek 1999, p. 128; Hallward 2003, pp. 148-51; Fraser 2007, pp. liii-lv; and Bosteels 2011, pp. 64-5.

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question of what ultimately supports the real or ideological production of the *unity, consistency, and totality* of a complex social whole.

On the level of contemporary theory, this difference produces the deadlock between (on the one hand) an objective “scientific” formalism that can appear incapable of bearing the potential of any actual transformation of the political-economic conditions it theorizes, and (on the other) a decisionist appeal to subjective agency that loses contact with any real critical foundation in a knowledge of these real conditions themselves. But it is then notable that, as I shall argue, essential elements for a contemporary resolution of this theoretical deadlock are to be found in the internal formalization of the structure and history of scientific discourse that is proposed by a younger, still “Althusserian” Badiou, in the 1967 article “Mark and Lack.” Here, in particular, the intra-scientific formalization of the discontinuously stratified conditions for the production of information provides the essential basis, as I shall argue, for a renewed and structurally grounded theoretical critique of the political-economic conditions of the global situation, which is determined by the dominance of information technology today. At the same time, the formalization of the specific potential of this discontinuous productivity, to break with its recurrent ideological reprise, indicates the possibility, actually inscribed these real structural conditions themselves, of the radical disruption of their ongoing ideological support.

I. Althusser, and the conditions of political economy

One of the central tasks of the “symptomatic reading” of Marx that Althusser attempts, along with his collaborators, in *Reading Capital* is to discern the *specific object* that is there constituted as the central object of critique, under the name of “political economy.” Although the consideration of political economy, of course, predates Marx himself, what is crucial to its functioning in *Capital’s* critique is, according to Althusser, the new conceptuality by which Marx articulates, with respect to it, the complex specificity of *thought* and its process with respect to the *real* involved in it.3 This distinction between the real and *thought about* the real, along with the distinction it implies between 1) the *knowledge relation between* knowledge and the real and 2) any *really existing* relationship, are for Althusser the most basic methodological determinants of Marx’s positional materialism. In particular, this distinction serves to distinguish Marx’s methodological orientation essentially from either a speculative idealism, which would treat the knowledge-reality relationship essential-

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3 Althusser 1965, p. 95. “Real” may be taken here as more or less synonymous with “actual,” so that a structure’s “real,” as Althusser here uses the term, refers to the totality of its *actually existing* relations and processes that constitute it — including, crucially, those real processes and relations that are brought about or maintained *by means of* ideological motivations and practices.
ly as internal to thought, and hence recurrently capable of being determined and re-
capitulated there, or an empiricism, which would locate it entirely within the real, 
thereby reducing it to the representational or mimetic relationships between knowl-
edge and its empirical object.

Cleaving to this crucial distinction between relations in thought and relations in 
the real, Marx emphasizes, as Althusser notes, that any whole, as it is conceived “in 
the mind as a thought-whole,” can indeed be referred only to the mind and never, in 
the manner of speculative idealism, to a position of ultimate and exclusive effective-
ness in determining the real itself.4 But this does not preclude the possibility of a 
complex articulation, in line with Marx’s crucial materialist distinction, of the ways 
in which a totality, constituted in thought and one articulated in the real, may relate 
to one another, or indeed of the complex and problematic new totality in the real that 
is constituted by and through these complex relations. Indeed, when Althusser turns 
to the detailed analysis of the new critical object of political economy which Marx 
has constructed, it is its ontologically and temporally complex whole which is to or-
ient the most significant tasks of critical consideration and reflection. Such a whole 
of political economy, though determined in each instance by a socially dominant 
means of production, is further, and irreducibly, structured: not only by those means 
but also by the relations of production, as well as, equally crucially, the redoubled 
relations between the means and the relations themselves. It is to such a complex 
and redoubled whole of political economy that Marx refers, in a quotation which Al-
thusser reproduces, the ultimate reality of the total social structure or state:

“The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labor is pumped out of direct pro-
ducers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of produc-
tion itself and, in turn reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is 
founded the entire formation (Gestaltung) of the economic community which grows out 
of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form 
(Gestalt). It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of produc-
tion to the direct producers – a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage 
in the development of the methods (Art und Weise) of labour and thereby its social pro-
ductivity – which reveals the innermost secret (innerste Geheimnis), the hidden basis 
(Grundlage) of the entire social structure (Konstruktion), and with it the political form of 
the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of 
the State.”5

Here, as Althusser explains, Marx replaces the traditional concepts of classical polit-
ical economy – most importantly, the classical distinction between means, objects, 
and human “agents” of production – with a more complex relational totality, which 
is irreducibly positional, structural, and irreducible both as a whole and with respect

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4 Althusser 1965, p. 96.
to each of its elements. Here, the relationships between means and agents, determinative of the forms of production, are no longer simple and unidirectional, but are rather redoubled in a wide variety of differing and specific modes of combination, including (in Althusser’s words) those of “property, possession, disposition, enjoyment, community, etc.” It is the complexity of this redoubled and irreducible structure, which Althusser refers to (borrowing a term first used in psychoanalysis) as its “overdetermination,” that is itself seen as determining, as its own condition of possibility for continued existence, the structure of the political state and its distinctive forms of ideology. In particular, the material repressive force and the “moral power” of ideology jointly operate, in all but a truly classless society, both to hold in place and to cloak in obscurity the really determining whole of complex and redoubled relations of production, arising ultimately from the determinate modes of production in each case. For this reason, Althusser emphasizes, it is impossible to conceive clearly of the relations of production themselves without also bringing into view the ideological and superstructural forms of their structural support, themselves always to be reached only “via the definition of the concept of the totality of the distinct levels of society and their particular type of articulation (i.e. effectivity).”

This thesis of the concrete role of ideology in providing, as a real condition of possibility, the essential support for the maintenance and reproduction of the existing structural relationships of political economy is repeated and consolidated, five years later, in Althusser’s unfinished 1969 text, On the Reproduction of Capitalism. It is this text from which the shorter essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” was drawn. Many readers will be familiar with the account Althusser gives there, of subject identities as essentially produced, in the order of recognition, by means of the function of interpellation, and thereby as both responding to and maintaining ideologically regularizing state functions through the practical effects of their activity. This thesis of the twofold mutual constitution of ideology and the subject – such that the “subject is constitutive of all ideology,” but only in that, and to the extent that, every ideology functions by “‘constituting’ concrete subjects” which then can be expected to behave according to it – then yields Althusser’s clear and un-equivocal statement of the disjunction of subjectivity from the positive and wholly a-subjective field of science. This is his claim that “all scientific discourse is by definition a discourse without a subject,” and that there can accordingly be no “subject of Science” except an ideological one, produced within a correspondingly distorted ideological representation of scientific knowledge itself.

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6 Althusser 1965, p. 195.
7 Ibid., pp. 195-6.
8 Ibid., p. 196.
9 Althusser 1969, p. 188.
10 Ibid., p. 188.
What is, perhaps, less familiar today is Althusser’s account of the manner in which this ideological constitution and functioning of subjects is essentially tied back to the real conditions of political economy, to which it can be connected by means of a structural account itself exhibiting the form of positive knowledge. According to this account, though, it is indeed essential to realize that since subjectivity and all of its ideological effects are produced in the representational order of the imaginary, rather than finding any direct basis in the real, it is equally essential to its functioning that ideology is never simply a direct representation, however distorted and falsified, of the real conditions of existence and production. Rather, on Althusser’s thesis, ideology functions irreducibly as a distorted and redoubled representation of individuals’ relations to these conditions, conditions which are themselves irreducibly relational with respect to the real means of production which provide the ultimately determining structural conditions of their concrete lives. Ideology is thus, according to Althusser, “an imaginary ‘representation’ of individuals’ imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence.”¹¹

Integrating this with the theory of subject formation: the individual’s constitutive (mis-)recognition in the order of ideology, which produces it as a subject, is therefore, for Althusser, relational in an irreducibly twofold way. First, like all “social” relationships, it is determined by the individual’s relationship to the means and relations of production characteristic of the political economy at a time. But second, the individual’s “recognition” of herself as a subject is determined by the falsified representation of those real relationships. It is this falsified and redoubled representation which serves as the basis for the establishment and maintenance of the familiar practices, which then characterize that subject’s normal mode of functioning in social and ordinary life. It is these practices which, in turn, ensure the continuance and functioning of the various ideological state apparatuses (including the “Scholastic Apparatus,” the “Familial Apparatus,” the “Religious Apparatus,” the “Political Apparatus,” and the “Cultural Apparatus,” among others).¹² Finally, though, it is once more these ordinary modes of practice themselves which serve, in all but a truly classless society, to replicate, perpetuate, and maintain in existence the real economic relationships, obscuring them and protecting them from critique by hiding their real structure but also thereby satisfying an essential condition for their continued existence.¹³ In this way, according to Althusser, “every social formation ‘functions on ideology’ in the sense in which one says that a gasoline engine ‘runs on gasoline’;” through the ideological redoubling of the real relations of production in the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 181.
¹² Ibid., p. 75.
¹³ Ibid., p. 201.
consciousness of subjects, the actual replication of those real relations is practically ensured in such a way that those relations can seem to go on “all by themselves.”

How, though, is this reflexive structurality which serves, according to Althusser, both as the essential condition for the maintenance of existing economic relations and also – in the mode of its exposure and the disruption that follows – as the condition for their radical change, itself to be known, by means of a critical conceptualization of it as a whole? As Althusser emphasizes, given the essential structural support provided by the redoubling of the system of economic relations in the internal form of ideology, any attempt to grasp the total system of relations simply by reducing them to the “real” or “concrete” underlying conditions and relationships, prior to or independently of their reflexive ideological redoubling, will fail to grasp what is in fact an essential and necessary structural precondition for the functioning of the system itself. On the other hand, an idealized account of the systematic whole, in terms of its smooth, organic and consistent functioning, will fall into the opposite error, that of itself replicating the form of its falsified ideological support, in the course of the attempt to describe it. Indeed, here the challenge of finding a scientific way to think the paradoxical whole, given the necessity of the ideological redoubling to its structurality, essentially recapitulates the problem already posed by Marx’s materialist insistence on the distinction between thought and the real itself: that the relationship of knowledge to its object cannot be theorized either as simply a relationship in thought or as a relationship in the real. Here, this problem becomes that of capturing the redoubled relationship, internal to the complex and overdetermined social totality itself, between its “real” structural determinants and the equally determinative “thought” relations of ideology. This relationship, moreover, cannot itself be understood simply as one wholly within thought, for such a conception would simply replicate the ideological determination of the whole rather than challenge it. But neither can it be understood as one simply within the real; for then the “thought” relations of ideology can only appear as inessential to the determination of processes and identities themselves, and their real and material role in supporting the actually existing structure is thereby missed.

Since either of these options will fail – the first by falling into a speculative idealism that attempts directly to produce the problematic whole entirely by means of thought, and the second by falling into an empiricism that fails to grasp the specific causality of the ideological redoubling in the maintenance of the existing structure –

14 Ibid., pp. 200-1. I believe it would be possible, and relevant, to insert here a consideration of the question of the effectivity of the rule, understood as what is involved in a subject or agent’s “knowing how to go on,” and specified relative to the (constitutively mis-recognized) structure of what is taken as a subject’s “private” interiority, as both are critically treated by the late Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations. I do not develop that connection in detail here; but see Livingston (2012), pp. 172-6, for some related considerations about the possibility of a contemporary Wittgensteinian critique of ideology.
what is apparently needed is the more radical alternative of a *formalization* of the *real structure* of just this structural causality itself.

Returning to *Reading Capital*, this alternative is to be found, according to Althusser, not in the elaboration of knowledge relationships or in the development of speculative thought, but rather in the *construction of a new concept*: a proper concept, that is, of political economy capable of capturing the structural determination of a totality by partial means of its own internally reflected and falsified image. As Althusser emphasizes, the development of this concept will involve breaking, at a fundamental epistemological level, with the whole traditional problematic of subject and object, and with all of the forms of dyadic relationality it proposes, whether in empiricist or idealist modes. The development of this new proper concept will thus involve a radical *break* with existing epistemological procedures and forms of rationalization; but this does not mean, Althusser emphasizes, that it is in this respect “unscientific.” Rather, the moment of the break, whereby an existing epistemology or conceptuality is radically and discontinuously transformed by means of the formally motivated invention of a new concept, is characteristic of all positively constituted sciences, at least at the moment of the historical origin of their self-sufficiency.

“If, *formally*, the task which Marx has allotted to us in forcing us to produce the concept of the economic in order to be able to constitute a theory of political economy, in obliging us to define *by its concept* the domain, limits and conditions of validity of a mathematization of that object, if it does break with all the empiricist-idealist traditions of Western critical philosophy, then it is in no sense in rupture with effective scientific practice. On the contrary, Marx’s requirements restate in a new domain the requirements that have long been imposed on the practices of those sciences which have achieved autonomy.”

It is in such a formally motivated break at the basic moment of the constitution of a positive theory, Althusser goes on to suggest, that there is produced in philosophy a kind of ‘reprise’ of a “basic scientific discovery;” as science discovers a fundamentally new kind of object, and philosophy comprehends the possibility of a new kind of theory, what comes into view is nothing less than “the production by philosophy of a *new form of rationality*.” The history of these discontinuous moments is nothing other than the history of the “great breaks in the History of the Theoretical,” whereby philosophy, reflecting the necessary alteration in theoretical conditions produced by the positive scientific discovery of a new kind of object, provides a kind of historically decisive articulation or “punctuation” in this history itself.

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15 Althusser 1965, p. 204.
16 Ibid., p. 204.
17 Ibid., p. 205.
18 Ibid., p. 205.
This “metonymic” or “structural” causality, by which both the reality and the relations of the elements of the structure are determined, both in their static functioning and in their possible transformation, by means of that total structure itself, does not lend itself to straightforward or direct representation. But as we have seen, it appears requisite to thinking the essentially structurally supporting role of ideology in ensuring the reproduction of the existing means and relations of production. In particular, such a concept – which formulates the causal action of the whole on the part – appears necessary to illuminate how the *ideological* image of the whole, which functions directly in the motivation of “ordinary” practices and subjective action, is able to support the whole *actual* political-economic structure in its continuation and reproduction. If, then, it is to be possible critically to theorize the essential structural and meta-structural relationships that constitutively link political economy, ideology, and the state, this thinking will necessarily proceed by means of a reflexive formalization of structure of the kind we have considered. It is to be sought specifically, Althusser suggests, in a further development of Marx’s elliptic concept of *Darstellung*, the concept Marx used to represent the “general illumination” or the “ether” of a political-economic situation determined by a particular mode and set of relations of production; or (as Althusser understands it), the particular mode of presence of a structure in its effects, and therefore the summative concept in which Marx actually thinks the effectivity of structure as such.19

Althusser thus proposes, as requisite to an adequate theoretical conceptualization of political economy, the unavoidability of a reflexive formalization of the effectivity of structure. Admittedly, Althusser does not actually give such a formalism; and it is also not immediately evident, for all he says in general terms about the structural conditions for the reproduction of existent means and relations of production, how such a formalism might be applied to theorize the ideological support of the specific modes and relations of production that characterize global capitalism today. Without diminishing the theoretical difficulties here, however, it is useful, as I shall argue, to compare Althusser’s formalizing suggestion with the project of a more recent prominent attempt to draw on formalization in thinking the dynamics of structure and ideology which reaches quite different conclusions, that of Alain Badiou in *Being and Event*.

II. Representation and the state

As we have seen, Althusser’s account of the functioning of political economy and its constitutive relationship to ideology depends crucially on the concept (still to be

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19 Ibid., p. 208.
constructed) of the causality of a *total articulated structure*: a structure, that is, conceived as all-inclusive with respect to the sources and relations of production, commerce, consumption, and subjective practice, and *thereby* articulated essentially in terms of just that totality. Indeed, it is, on Althusser’s suggestion, impossible to understand or criticize the specific functioning of ideology within such a structure without conceiving of the constitutive way in which ideology redoubles this totality of relations within itself, actively producing on the level of subjective consciousness the falsified image of societal functioning without fundamental antagonism and contradiction. From its programmatic beginning, Badiou’s project of set-theoretical ontology announces what may be seen with some justification as a quite differently determined orientation with respect to the question of totality: the inaugural and “axiomatic” decision of the “non-being of the one.”

This theory of presentational consistency then also forms the axiomatic basis of Badiou’s account of *representation*, or of what is for him the redoubled “count of the count” of the initially presented structure, and of the correlative and necessary existence of what he terms the “state.” Badiou defines the “state” of a situation, in general terms, as the set containing all the subsets of the initially presented situation, or the set containing as *elements* – hence as presented multiples – all the possible *combinations* of the initial, situationally presented multiples. With respect to “historico-social” situations, it follows that the State is the “necessary metastructure” of any such situation. On the other hand, because of the excessiveness of its necessary and structurally inscribed function of re-grouping, the State necessarily operates at some distance from the original structure of the (mere) consistency of presentation, which Badiou also terms the “immediate social bond.”

It is in this distance, between the “immediate” bond of the initially presented situation and the State representation, that, according to Badiou, the socio-historical State operates both in its “coercive” functioning to ensure that individuals are treated only under the representational form of their state-structured regrouping and in its “management” function of re-organizing of the existing situation by means of rules, labels and administrative norms. At the same time, this necessary reduplicative function of the State means that it cannot allow to be presented anything that is not composed wholly of multiples presented in the initial situation: anything, that is, that has the situational significance of (what Badiou terms) the “void.” Indeed, Badiou considers the meta-structural function of the state as essentially that of prohibiting the possible presentation of such a void, which (in the general presentational case) would amount to the presentation of inconsistency itself and hence to the “ruin” of

20 Badiou 1988, p. 31.
21 Ibid., pp. 96-7.
22 Ibid., p. 107.
its “One.” It is in this respect that, according to Badiou, “the State is not founded upon the social bond, which it would express, but rather upon un-binding, which it prohibits.” Specifically, the “state” redoubling performs the essential function of verifying the completeness of the initial count, but also (and by the same token) ensures the consistency of presentation by guaranteeing the non-presentation of the void of the situation, what would otherwise pose the “disaster” of the presentation of the inconsistent multiplicity of being-qua-being that ontologically surrounds, but always escapes from, presentational unity.

If the State thus operates essentially to re-secure unity in the representational recount, then it is, on Badiou’s account, the singular significance of what he terms the Event and its subjective operator of fidelity to be capable of presenting a situationally characteristic but transformative multiple that essentially escapes this re-securing guarantee. It is then the subject’s faithful procedure, in connection with this name, that traces out throughout a situation the consequences of the event’s having occurred by laboriously forging, from within the presented multiples, a presentation of what can never be re-counted by the state of the situation. It thereby poses the possibility, in being thus presented, of a fundamental structural transformation. Because of its generic character, which requires that it be “subtracted” from any of the already designated names or “encyclopedic determinants” of the situation through which its knowledge ordinarily operates, the generic multiple also presents as a unity which can never be discerned by means of the situation’s existing terms of description and positive knowledge. In this respect, the event’s “truth” is both fundamentally disjoined from existing knowledge and indeed fundamentally threatening to its classificatory order. It is in this way that, presentatively forcing the indiscernible at the point of a situational truth, the subject’s fidelity intervenes on the structure of the existing situation, leading to the possibility of its basic transformation.

If we now consider Badiou’s theory as a whole with respect to the fundamental issues of structural unity, the bases of regulative situational functioning, and the structural role of ideology in relation to these, it is clear that the overall picture differs from Althusser’s on a number of decisive points. First, if ideology is to be identified with “state”-representation (Badiou does not say this explicitly, but it is at least strongly suggested by what he does say about the state and its encyclopedic determination), then it does not operate primarily internal to the original situational structure – as, we have seen, it does essentially for Althusser – but rather only at the secondary level of its representational reduplication and in the “re-securing” of its original count-as-one. Second, and correlatively, this original “count-as-one” of the

23 Ibid., pp. 93-4.
24 Ibid., p. 109.
25 Ibid., p. 94.
initial situation is here assumed already to possess an essential presentational *consistency*, since it is only by being presented as a “consistent” one that any multiple, according to Badiou, can be presented as *being* at all. There is thus no room for the possibility of a theorization of this situation itself, *including* its reduplicative ideological elements, as basically structurally *inconsistent*, or as bearing the structure of an essentially antagonistic and inconsistent *totality* that Althusser understands as the “overdetermination” of all really existing social formations. Third, and as a consequence of both of these, in identifying the state representation of the situation’s existing encyclopedic determinants as the totality of its existing knowledge, thereby disjoining it from the situational “truth” of the event (which is instead constitutively indiscernible within the situation), Badiou effectively precludes any subjective or agentive knowledge of the situation’s structure that would itself be capable of operating *critically* with respect to it. Indeed, for Badiou explicitly, “it is absolutely necessary to abandon any definition of the [evental] subject which supposes that it knows the truth, or that it is adjusted to the truth.”

The result is that, whereas, on the one hand, the structural knowledge which presents, in the register of philosophy’s interpretation of mathematical results (preeminently the technique of forcing developed by Cohen), the omnipresent possibility of the structural transformation of existing situations is disjoined from any particular intra-situational subject’s own fidelity to a truth, on the other hand, this fidelity no longer operates, or can operate, for that subject as anything like a genuinely *critical* practice with respect to the large-scale determinants and limits of the situation itself.

All of this may indeed be requisite, as Badiou argues, to the development in our time of a genuinely *effective* doctrine of the subject: a doctrine, that is, capable of recapitulating today the classical theme of the subject/agent of a historical process of transformative change as irreducible to any incremental modification or planned instrumentality. Be that as it may, what is to be noted in the current context is just its debilitating consequence for the equally classical theme of a situational transformation grounded in a knowing theoretical practice of critique. Moreover, as we already have reason to suspect through the example of Althusser’s positive conceptualization of the exigent critical demand of Marx’s new construction of the object of political economy, it is by no means clear that a formalization of the categories of situational consistency, totality, and the representative redoubling of situational structure in ideology cannot function as the foundation for just such a critical practice. And in this connection, it is striking that a suggestive and far-reaching critical formalization of the phenomena of structural consistency, completeness, and their necessary redoubling in the form of ideology – one bearing decisive consequences, as I shall argue, for a critical thinking of the “global” structure capitalism today, through its rad-

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26 Ibid., p. 396.
ical formalization of that structure’s “dominant instance” of information technology – is indeed given, in 1967, by none other than the young Badiou himself.

III. Formalism, knowledge, and ideology: Badiou’s “Mark and Lack”

Badiou’s 1967 “Mark and Lack,” written at a time when the young author’s theoretical efforts were still wholly determined, according to a later description, by “Althusserian” commitments, polemically targets Jacques-Alain Miller’s effort, in the earlier article “Suture,” to develop a general “logic of the signifier” by way of what he described as the essential relationship of a “subject” to the chain of its discourse.

Following certain suggestions of Lacan, Miller had argued that the place of this relationship, at which the subject is “sutured,” – or linked in the form of determinate exclusion – to scientific discourse, can nevertheless be identified therein by the appearance of a certain lack, definitive in the construction and mobilization of the signifying chain itself. Analyzing Frege’s construction of number in *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, Miller focuses on the moment of Frege’s construction of the number ‘0’ through the invocation of the predicate of non-self-identity: according to Frege, the 0 can be defined as the number of the concept “not identical to itself.” For Miller, this invocation of non-self-identity at the point of the inauguration of the serial chain of numbers, which then sustains its infinite continuation, can itself be seen as “the most elementary articulation of the subject’s relation to the signifying chain.”

In particular, according to Miller, in Frege’s determining construction, logic summons the “impossible object” that is the non-self-identical and, in the same gesture, decisively rejects it in order to constitute itself as what it is. This object is, Miller suggests, nothing other than the “subject” and this determinate mode of its “sutured” (non-)presence then subsequently marks the trace, within the serial discourse that thereafter unfolds, of the subject’s relationship to truth, albeit only in the form of the constitutive lack that henceforth orders the signifying system itself and as a whole.

To this account of the structurally inaugural gesture of the “preservation of the True” in the scientific field by means of the “convocation and marking of lack,” Badiou contrasts the diametrically opposed thesis of a “stratification of the scientific signifier,” whereby the totality of signification in its productive functioning is wholly *without* lack, *automatic* in its “mechanical” production of the new, and wholly and definitively without a subject. The production or attempted inscription (even in

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27 Miller 1966, p. 92. For Badiou’s description of his own trajectory from his early “Althusserian” commitments in “Mark and Lack” to the later view that “every philosophy that eliminates the category of the subject becomes unable to serve a political process,” see Badiou / Tho (2007), pp. 87-8.

the form of absence, foreclosure, and substitution) can then only be seen as a wholly ideological function. From this perspective, the project of a logic of the Signifier of the type that Miller (and indeed, Badiou suggests, also Lacan) have proposed in order to articulate the “scientific” place of the subject itself appears rather as an ideological one, the representation of a representation in fact and essentially exterior to scientific practice:

“In our view, both Frege’s ideological representation of his own enterprise and the recapture of this representation in the lexicon of Signifier, lack, and the place-of-lack, mask the pure productive essence, the positional process through which logic, as machine, lacks nothing it does not produce elsewhere. The logic of the Signifier is a metaphysics: a representation of representation, an intra-ideological process and progression.”

To this, Badiou opposes the concept of a “mechanism of production” internal to scientific signification as such and capable also, through its pure productivity and the progressive stratification this produces, of supporting an “epistemology of logic” in its historical development that owes nothing to the constitutive category of the subject or what he sees as the ideology of its foreclosed mark. Here, all that is necessary, as Badiou argues, is to examine the actual effectivity of a logical mechanism: how it produces the articulations or distinctions that it is capable of. But to gain a closer understanding of this effectivity, it is sufficient to consider the internal implications of two of the decisive metalogical or metaformal results that, whatever their possible ideological misreadings or displacements, certainly belong in themselves to formal scientificity: namely, Gödel’s celebrated incompleteness theorems. These results are in particular indicative in that they stage the question of the effectivity of articulation itself, wholly internal to the scientific field in which they intervene.

On a familiar reading, the proof of Gödel’s first theorem consists in the production, in a particular formal system assumed to be consistent, of a sentence which “says” of “itself” that it cannot be “proven;” the sentence is then said to be unprovable – since a proof would be a proof of its unprovability and would lead to a contradiction – and thus “true” (though unprovable). This is said as well to bear general witness to the possibility of inscribing such a sentence in any (sufficiently strong and consistent) formal system, and thus to the incompleteness of all such systems insofar as there are always truths beyond their capacity to demonstrate.

Without disputing the theorem itself, Badiou proposes to reconsider both its production and its sense from a position that challenges all of the significant terms of this familiar reading, since none of the values of “truth,” “proof,” semantic meaning, self-reference, or even consistency and completeness as properties of formal systems can simply be presupposed from a position that does not already interpose ideool-

29 Badiou 1967, p. 159.
logical signifiers into the scientific field. What is to be treated at the outset, according to Badiou, is rather simply the mechanisms of the production of formulas, and the internally demonstrated dynamics of the effectivity of their production. Here, moreover, effective production is understood as nothing other than the production, within a totality of significations seen as produced, of an effective division of them, or a cut.

Badiou articulates the various purely syntactical systems involved in Gödel’s result and notes their stratified relationships of succession, each considered purely in term of its formal operation of producing signs or sign combinations, and each following from the last as a consequence of the effectiveness of the particular cut it operates. First, any logical syntax whatsoever involves a mechanism of concatenation: a vocabulary of marks, each separate and integral, must be presupposed, and they must be able to be concatenated into linear sequences of variable length.\(^{31}\) Second, proceeding from this and subsequent to it, there must be a mechanism for formation, or for the distinction of the “well-formed” from the “non-well-formed” sequences.\(^{32}\) This mechanism essentially operates a cut or distinction, among the total field of mere concatenations, between those that will be treated as “formulas” and those that will be rejected from any possible further articulation. It is in fact, as Badiou notes, absolutely essential for what is to come that this second mechanism be both complete and effective: it must always be possible to decide of a given string whether it is, or is not, a well-formed formula, and every string must be one or the other: “Only on the condition of a perfect syntax can we summon derivation’s aporiae.”\(^{33}\)

Finally, the third system or mechanism, which again presupposes the total output and effectiveness of the second, is the one intuitively designated as that of “derivation,” corresponding to the dynamics of what is treated as “proof” in the standard – ideologically colored – descriptions of Gödel’s theorem (as well as in the description above). As Badiou emphasizes, it is essential to this mechanism, however, that its operation can be described wholly in syntactical terms, without any reference to the “semantic” categories of truth and proof. In particular, the third mechanism is again the operator of a perfect dichotomy or cut, within the field of well-formed sentences. This time, the classes that are to be distinguished are those “derivable” from the axioms and those that are not: we can call these classes T (intuitively, for “theorem”) and NT (intuitively, for “non-theorem”). Further, the separation should be so effect ed that a certain functional relationship exists between these separated halves: in particular, it should be the case that there is an operator (its usual symbol is ~, and its usual name is “negation,” but neither of these is essential, as Badiou emphasizes) such that, if any sentence, A, falls in T, then ~T falls in NT, and vice-versa. But then

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 161.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 162.
the content of Gödel’s theorem can be stated exactly as the result that there can be no such effective cut: no cut, that is, that both partitions the field exhaustively, and does so in a way corresponding to the reversibility of negation.\(^{34}\) Or equivalently: given any such cut between T and NT, there will be some sentence G such that both G and \(\neg G\) fall within NT – both, that is (returning to the more intuitive, but ideologically loaded, language of proof), being among the class of sentences that cannot be demonstrated by means of the system’s deductive operation.

The sole content of Gödel’s first theorem is then that – for a system of a certain degree of strength – there cannot be a total partition of the well-formed formulas that also obeys the constraint expressed in the dynamics of negation: namely that pairs of the form A, \(\neg A\) should always be separated by it. Given that there will always be pairs that cannot be thus separated, we can hope only to exclude them from T; this condition is that of the consistency of the system (since if both A and \(\neg A\) appeared within T, the system would produce a contradiction as a theorem). But then we cannot hope also to exclude them from NT, the class of non-theorems. The result is the purely syntactic location, within the system, of the “limitation” that, on the ideological readings, demonstrates its incapacity with respect to the complete demonstration of truth. But the analysis in terms of the pure mechanism of symbolic production has meanwhile revealed the inscription of this limitation, rather than needing any essential reference to an external semantic value or correlate, is itself nothing other than the production of this pure mechanism, in paradoxical torsion with itself:

“The key to the limitation [limitation] follows paradoxically from the fact that the separating mechanism is forced not to be perfect, and thus forced to preserve the concept of a reversible relation between the two halves. As a result, this limitation, far from attesting that the space produced by the division bears the trace of the tear that caused it, shows rather that one cannot indefinitely produce the sign of the latter within it; that in certain places the trace is effaced; that a strong mechanism necessitates a complete division in rejection it effects, in each of its parts, of certain marks of the old Whole [Tout]. The undecidable is not the saturation of lack but the foreclosure of what is lacking through the failure to produce, within what is derivable, the whole of the non-derivable as negated. The limitation means: that there exists at some point, between the parts T and NT, a distance without concept: one that delineates, in the space of non-theses, a statement whose negation cannot be inscribed within the space of theses, and which is therefore unrelated to this space. Gödel’s theorem is not the site of separation’s failure, but of its greatest efficacy.”\(^{35}\)

If Gödel’s results do then, as Badiou suggests, exhibit the pure productivity of science as a sequential stratification of the signifier, whereby “no lack is marked in it

\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 164.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 164.
that does not refer to another mark in a subjacent order differentiated from the first,” then it is essential to its functioning that (quite to the contrary of Miller’s thesis), it never as such presupposes the reference to the pure externality of a subject, or even tolerates the support that such a figure would propose (even one marked in the privative categories of denegation, suture, and lack). Rather, if the scientific signifier is sutured, it is sutured “only to itself.” Wholly capable of marking its own lacks without departing from itself, it organizes even the constitutive gaps, lacks, and breaks of its own field wholly by means of its own productive procedures.

Badiou draws in unequivocal terms the moral of this for the question of the structural relationships of science, ideology and the subject, anticipating here (though in even stronger terms and by way of a more specific demonstrative argument) Althusser’s statement from four years later of the non-existence of a subject of science. The argument results from Badiou’s recognition in the scientific field of the point in which the positive instance of knowledge at the basis of the “epistemological break” operates precisely as a break with existing signification and thus with any possible formulation of its logic, while nevertheless remaining within its own proper field of science itself:

“Science does not fall under the concept of the logic of the signifier. In truth, it is the fact that it does not fall under this logic that constitutes it: the epistemological break must be thought under the un-representable auspices of de-suturation. Accordingly, there is no subject of science. Infinitely stratified, regulating its passages, science is pure space [l’espace pure], without inverse or mark or place of that which it excludes. Foreclosure, but of nothing, science may be called the psychosis of no subject, and hence of all: universal by right, shared delirium, one has only to maintain oneself within it in order to be no-one, anonymously dispersed in the hierarchy of orders. Science is the Outside without a blind-spot. Conversely, the signifying structure defined by suturation can be designated in its particularity (as that which places lack) primarily as non-science. Thus the concept of suture is not a concept of the signifier in general, but rather the characteristic property of the signifying order wherein the subject comes to be barred – namely, ideology.”

If there is thus never a subject of science, nevertheless there is always, Badiou suggests, a subject of ideology; for it is by the very structure of the mark proposed for such a subject – that is, the mark of a constitutive barring, absence, external presence, foreclosure or lack – that we can recognize ideological discourse as such. From this perspective, philosophy is itself an “ideological” discourse: indeed, Badiou suggests, the one that specializes in the treatment of science itself. In particular, philosophy is recurrently charged with effacing the radicality of the scientific epistemological break, and the stratification to which it leads within its own order, by means of its own presentation of a logic of the signifier conceived as total. Thus,

36 Ibid., p. 171.
37 Ibid., pp. 171-2.
“philosophy is compelled to mark, within its own order, the scientific signifier as a total space,” presenting the scientific signifier as only in fact a “regional paradigm” of the signifier-in-itself. But this effort will always again fail, as science recurrently produces the conditions of its own break with any such ideological enclosure, forever resisting the “schemes of closure that philosophy has sought to impose upon [mathematical inscription] for the sake of its own salvation.”

But if philosophy as ideology thus can never complete itself except through the falsifying detour of the ideological imposition of a signifying totality which is always again subsequently disrupted by the positive productivity of scientific knowledge itself, it nevertheless does not follow that philosophy does not have an important and indeed essential critical function relative to that very production. Indeed, Badiou goes on to sketch such an integral function, whereby philosophy itself can be understood as recurrently posing, precisely through its “false” imposition of the ideology of the signifying whole, the essential critical impetus for the failed recapture which again and again drives scientific discourse to produce itself. In particular, since science at any historical moment in its development has, as a matter of principle, only ‘ideology’ to work on as its raw material, it is indeed recurrently the case that an ideological representation of science proves essential to the advent of a “crisis.” It is in, and by, such a crisis that the total order of the scientific signifier is then disrupted, only to be reconfigured at another level and according to a new conceptuality; and this recurrent movement is nothing other than the epistemological “break” itself.

Indeed, here Badiou presents Gödel’s theorem itself as resulting from just such a crisis, in particular the crisis of the ideological conception of a formal system as embodying the ideal of a trans-mathematical norm of rational closure. This conception is explicit in Hilbert’s project of the construction of formal systems, which, precisely by proposing to mathematics the question of the possibility of its own formal closure, allowed for the direct formulation of the question to which Gödel’s second incompleteness theorem (derived almost immediately from the first) directly responds in the negative: that of the possibility of an internal demonstration of consistency. Here, in the historical production of the break that Gödel’s theorem represents, the ideological proposal of closure is just as essential as the formalism that demonstrates its impossibility; or rather, the latter is in fact directly and essentially conditioned by the former as the material on which it operates, and as the false image of the consistency of the whole that it recurrently disrupts.

Such “material” of ideology is recurrently provided, Badiou suggests, not only by the existing state of scientific discourse but also, and equally, by the mass of leveled signifiers and lawfully circulating concepts of ordinary discourse, which are accord-

38 Ibid., p. 173.
39 Ibid., p. 175.
ingly equally essential to the kind of transformation that scientific knowledge then presents. Badiou notes here, in particular, that the core of Gödel’s demonstration is none other than the ancient paradox of the Liar, whose essential disposition is already provided – though it would take two thousand years for its form to be noted and put to philosophical use in the formalisms of Russell, Tarski and Gödel himself – within the inherent, even if inherently “ideological,” structure of the ordinary notion of truth as it figures in everyday language and practice. From this perspective, Gödel’s theorem is indeed intelligible as nothing other than a “kind of reprise, within the system’s architectonic transparency, of certain ambiguities produced in language by the (ideological) concept of Truth.” At the point of the attempt to capture that concept under that of the (mechanically) derivable, Gödel’s theorem produces a theoretically decisive kind of “snare at the ungraspable juncture between science and its outside.”

The scientific knowledge of formalism, recurrently presenting just such a snare, thus works its transformative effects in its ongoing critical dialectic with the ideology that, whatever its spontaneous sources, always again attempts to recapture it in the image of a consistent whole, and is always again disrupted by its formally indicated failure in this attempt.

IV. Evental subjectivity and information technology

As we have seen, then, for the early Badiou of “Mark and Lack” a scientific knowledge of the real, grounded in an indicative formalism of limits, retains the specificity of Althusser’s categorical distinction of it from ideology, and in so doing stands as the actual positive basis for the latter’s ongoing and necessary critique, up to and including the real production of its situationally and historically transformative break. This is in marked contrast with the later Badiou of Being and Event, for whom, as we have seen, “knowledge” as actually constituted works primarily within the ideological redoubling already imposed by the State, and the possibility of radical situational change is instead referred to an evental subject with no specific relation to knowledge at all. As a result, the possibility of situational change is no longer grounded in anything recognizable as a critique of ideology or of the underlying structure of the existing situation or its statist-ideological redoubling, being referred rather to the aleatory intervention of the event and the subject’s faithful agency in tracing its situational consequences. At the same time, for the later Badiou, the consequences of formalism at its specific limits – the consequences, that is, of the metalogical or metamathematical results, like Gödel’s theorems as well as Cohen’s technique of forcing, which interrogate the limits of linguistic designation and the extent

40 Ibid., p. 176.
of infinite procedures – are no longer directly referred to the actual mechanisms of production and reproduction characteristic of the existing situation with its internal ideological recapture, since they are understood rather as primarily governing the situational possibilities of naming and of the discernibility of groups. From an Althusserian perspective, it is apparently for this reason that the formalism of Badiou’s later system (whatever its other merits) does not, and cannot, sustain anything like a critique of political economy, lacking, as it does, both the specificity of a position of knowledge from which to orient such a critique and the specific critical object of political economy which is thereby interrogated. However, as I shall briefly argue in this final section, Badiou’s own picture in “Mark and Lack,” when suitably integrated with Althusser’s own critical conception and “updated” by means of a consideration of the specificity of the political-economic reality and correlative ideology of global capitalism today, can provide rigorous and far-reaching terms for the actual critique of this contemporary global configuration. This is even the case in an eminent sense with respect to the specific implications of the very metamathematical results on which Badiou focuses in “Mark and Lack,” namely Gödel’s incompleteness theorems, insofar as they bear in themselves directly on the possibilities, limits, and structural aporias of algorithmic computation. The key to these critical consequences is just the recognition of a contemporary global “situation” whose dominant mode of economic production, and thus whose characteristic type of relationality, is that which is today reflected (doubtless, again, in irreducibly ideological form) as that of the production, exchange, control and economization of “information.”

In particular, it is sufficient to add to Althusser’s picture just the recognition that not only the dominant contemporary means of production, but also the characteristic modes of relationship they engender and the ideological image in which they again appear, can today be characterized in terms of the production of information. As such, these are subject to the constraints shown in the metalogic (or metaformalism) of information technology, whereby they are laid open to a scientific knowledge of their actual determination in the real; and this is, finally, precisely the knowledge that is yielded by the metalogical inquiry which produces Gödel’s theorems themselves, along with a number of closely related formal results about completeness, consistency, and the limits of computation.

I will not argue in detail here for this thesis of the contemporary dominance of information technology, both on the level of the real means and relations of production and on that of their redoubled ideological image. But the critical utility of this thesis is probably self-evident in the context of a contemporary regime of global capitalism that, in recurrently moving to totalize itself by creating new markets and forms of monetization over the last several decades, has consolidated its grip over planetary forms of life, largely by means of its intensification of technologies of computation and of the production and handling of information. At any rate, I will
simply try to suggest a few possible consequences of the thesis, if it is accepted, on
the level of the particular critical possibilities that the development of ‘limitative’ re-
results about formalism and computation would then appear to suggest. First, it ap-
ppears that these results would directly yield: on the level of the global whole of con-
temporary capitalism itself, the suggestions of a constitutive and essential incom-
pleteness in the determination of propositional knowledge (Gödel’s first theorem);
the essential lack of internal guarantees of consistency on the level of the really ex-
sting global situation (Gödel’s second theorem); and the ultimate ineffectivity of fi-
nite technical procedures and processes of decision (Church and Turing’s demon-
stration of the unsolvability of the halting problem). Second, and on the level of
ideology, these would correspond, term for term, with the image of a completeness
of possible knowledge produced by methodical and technical means, the non-antag-
onistic and assured consistency of the (fantasized) social whole, and the “technologi-
cal” ideology of the solution of problems and the addressing of imbalances by calcul-
lative and procedural means. Third, and crucially, this critical configuration would
provide means for discerning – just as on Althusser’s conception – how this three-
fold ideological image (reduplicating the actual structural relationships articulated
by the metalogical results in the false image of relations of completeness, consisten-
cy, and decidability) itself functions within the overdetermined whole, to facilitate
the maintenance and reproduction of its existing structure, ensuring the ideological
identifications and concrete practices by means of which this structure can appear to
work “all by itself.”

The application of formalism here is not a matter of analogy or metaphor, and it
does not stand to the real social formations in the relationship of an external episte-
ological “model” to its real exemplar. Since the meta-formal knowledge that artic-
ulates the formalisms in each case is nothing other than knowledge of the logical
and metalogical dynamics of computation itself, they have evident and direct theo-
retical application to a political-economic structure which is (as I have suggested)
determined, as a matter of the real means and relations of production, by just these
dynamics. Here moreover, again just as on the Althusserian picture, it is a formal
knowledge of the internal structure, limits, and constitution of the means and rela-
tions of production themselves that yields the critical standpoint from which to un-

41 This is not to conflate these distinct results or ascribe to them a single, unarticulated signifi-
cance. As Badiou himself carefully points out, the incompleteness (or inconsistency) of a sys-
tem in the sense demonstrated by Gödel in his first theorem follows from the undecidability of
the system in the sense of Church and Turing’s proof – that of the absence of decision proce-
dures for determining whether a given sentence is derivable – but not conversely; so any posi-
tive argument for systematic undecidability (in the sense of decision procedures) would have to
be developed from a specific account of Church and Turing’s proof rather than from Gödel’s
alone. For some broader considerations about the possible application of undecidability in this
sense, see Livingston (2012), pp. 148-53 and pp. 173-7. For another suggestive development of
the consequences of Turing’s results in the context of Badiou’s project, see Brassier (2004).
derstand, also, the structurally essential redoubling of those relations in the falsified form of their ideological guarantee.

What further consequences for critical thought and action might result, if the critique of political economy is renewed, under contemporary conditions, in roughly the way I have suggested?

First, a formally based renewal of critique along the lines of a specific consideration of the *effectivity* of technological solutions would suggest the renewal and vitality of a global *critique of technology* of what might be called a broadly “Heideggerian” type. That is, the critical terms in which Heidegger himself sought to interrogate the contemporary ideological category of the “actual” or “effective” [wirklich]; and the assumption of the unlimitedness of its application, relative to a contemporary regime also ideologically determined as that of the assumed unlimitedness of possible calculation and computation, would here come back into view as bearing direct use within what is also integrally a (renewed) development of specifically Marxist criticism. However, by marked contrast with Heidegger’s own development of these themes, the critique would now be grounded in a positive *knowledge of the real* yielded directly by the formal results, which Heidegger himself did not consider (and, doubtless, could not have).

Second, it might be possible to develop from this knowledge a renewed and sharpened critique of the concrete ideological processes of *subjectivization* that today function on the level of individual and collective practice to support and further the dominant capitalist means of informational production, consumption, and social regulation. The regularity of these practices would then be visible as constituting various contemporary “Ideological State Apparatuses” of a new kind, where the relevant “state” formation is not based in any regional or state sovereignty, but rather in the ideological “state” of global capitalism itself. They would evidently include the processes by which subject identities are today formed: according to patterns of consumption; dominant forms of “communication” and networking; typical forms of mass spectatorship and entertainment; and the production and consumption of mass and “social” media.

Third and perhaps most significantly, it would thereby be possible to regain a *position in the real* – indeed, that identified by the scientific knowledge of the constitutive features of incompleteness, non-consistency, and undecidability – from which to envision new collective forms of life at some distance from the totality of contemporary capitalism and its ideological guarantees. It is of course far from apparent what these forms would be, or how they might eventually come to situate themselves *relative to* a capitalist totality which shows every sign of being capable of *unlimited* continuance. But it is at least suggestive, as I have argued, that the twentieth century’s constitutive reflection on formalism’s structure and limits ap-
pears capable of at least indicating, today, the formally grounded standpoint from which they might be positively thought, and one day actually ventured.42

Bibliography


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42 I would like to thank John Bova for conversations over many years in which many of the central ideas about formalism and its possible political application expressed here were first developed. Thanks also to John for some helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper; and thanks to Dominik Finkelde for very helpful editorial suggestions and changes.
Žižek, Slavoj, 1999: The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology. London.
Part II: Logics of the State
Although philosophy is often seen as an abstract and universal inquiry that needs to be kept aside from our everyday political experience, obviously this cannot be the case with a philosophical *oeuvre* that claims to be, first and foremost, a reflection on the event, including events operating at the level of the political. As is well-known, according to Badiou, events can take place within the registers of politics, mathematics, love and art. A reading of the Greek crisis, especially of its 2015 climax, through a dialogue with Badiou’s conceptual apparatus thus becomes conceivable; an orientation further legitimized by Badiou’s own ‘captivation’ by the political choreography triggered by the Greek crisis and his numerous public comments on its various stages. Here, of course, Badiou joins a sizeable group of internationally renowned theorists and philosophers, from Žižek and Mouffe to Balibar and Chomsky, who have also followed with their analyses the unfolding episodes.

In what follows, a short conceptual commentary on Badiou’s take on the ‘event’ and its affinities with certain insights of Gramsci and Laclau will be followed by an attempt to deploy the emerging framework in a reading of the (final) movements of the Greek crisis and its political implications throughout 2015. This is the period during which, expressing an emerging popular movement, the left-wing party of SYRIZA took power (January 2015) subsequently entering into a dramatic negotiation with EU and international institutions, which culminated in a referendum (July 2015) and, soon after, in SYRIZA’s eventual capitulation and its surprising re-election (September 2015). Confronting this sequence will hopefully benefit both our understanding of what transpired and our interrogation of Badiou’s philosophical apparatus.

* I am grateful to Alberto Moreiras, Vicky Iakovou and Dominik Finkelde for their thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this text. Many thanks are also due to the participants of the ‘Badiou and the State’ conference in Munich (18-19 January 2016) where it was first presented and debated.
1. State and event in Badiou, Gramsci and Laclau: Qualifications and affinities

Alain Badiou’s work is often presented as a philosophy of unlimited positivity, of infinity and affirmation. And yet, an inscription of limitations, a negotiation between negative and positive, lack and excess, is not absent from his work.¹

As is well-known, Badiou’s theory and the basic conceptual apparatus he puts forward is structured around his conceptualization of the event. Simply put, the event here refers to a real break, which destabilizes a given discursive articulation, a pre-existing order (a state order perhaps), the situation in Badiou’s conceptual vocabulary. The event, which always involves a “strictly incalculable emergence”², can be described in the following way: “A truth is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order. I have named this type of rupture which opens up truths ‘the event’.”³ Badiou offers many examples of events, ranging from Cantor’s invention of set theory to the French Revolution and Mallarme’s poetry.⁴ Now, to move to another pivotal category in Badiou’s conceptual constellation, ethics, in Badiou’s sense, implies a particular type of relation to this destabilizing event, a relation of fidelity: “An eventful fidelity is a real break (both thought and practiced) in the specific order within which the event took place […] I shall call ‘truth’ (a truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event.”⁵ Finally, subject, within this schema, is the bearer of such a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth – a truth procedure – and, in fact, is constituted and emerges as a subject, out of this process⁶: “A subject is nothing other than an active fidelity to the event of truth.”⁷

Now, how does negativity enter this picture? First of all, negativity is present in the beginning, that is to say before the event. No event is possible without it, without what Badiou calls the “evental site.” On the edge of the void crossing all situations (but masked within them), the evental site is presupposed in every emergence of the new: “Every radical transformational action originates in a point, which, inside a situation, is an evental site.”⁸ Badiou is not a determinist and thus the evental site does not determine or guarantee the occurrence of an event: “The site is only ever a condition of being for the event.”⁹ However, there is no event without such a historical conjuncture, even though such a “historical situation does not necessarily produce

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¹ In the next few paragraphs I am drawing on my earlier commentary on Badiou’s schema from: The Lacanian Left (Stavrakakis 2007, pp. 150-60).
² Badiou 2005, xiii.
³ Ibid., xii.
⁵ Badiou 2001, p. 42.
⁷ Badiou 2005, xiii.
⁸ Ibid., p. 176.
⁹ Ibid., p. 179.
This becomes very clear with reference to Saint Paul, one of Badiou’s favorite examples. Here Badiou is at pains to distance himself from a (Hegelian-style) dialectical linkage, with resurrection becoming the “negation of the negation” of death, elevating it thus to the position of a decisive dialectical moment. Nevertheless, he cannot completely disengage the event of resurrection from death as some sort of – albeit non-dialectical – pre-condition of possibility. Thus, death functions as an “evental site,” connecting the before the event with the event itself and making possible and relevant its occurrence: “The evental site is that datum that is immanent to a situation and enters into the composition of the event itself […]. Death is construction of the evental site insofar as it brings it about that resurrection (which cannot be inferred from it) will have been addressed to men, to their subjective situation.” In that sense, although the event is supposed to eradicate negativity – and this is Paul’s radical universal message – and is irreducible to death, nevertheless “death is required for the construction of its site.” In other words, the true positivity of a real event depends on its inextricable relation to the void of the evental site, to a registering of negativity. As Ernesto Laclau has cogently formulated it, “there would have been no resurrection without death.” This is especially the case in politics where creation is often inextricably linked to destruction.

One can discern here an almost direct analogy between Badiou’s theorization of the role of the evental site and that a crisis plays within a hegemony framework, like that of Gramsci. In the latter’s argument, we can observe the confluence between the two etymological origins of ‘crisis’ as both a critical conjuncture (emanating from Ancient Greek medical discourse) and a final judgment (originating from the juridical field) in a bid to account for political crises, crises of political meaning and orientation, beyond economic reductionism. As Gramsci points out, “It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life.” If, as we have seen, the evental site does not determine or guarantee the occurrence of an event for Badiou, likewise for Gramsci a crisis does not guarantee the production of a fundamental historical event – the conceptual analogy is indeed striking. It is in this context that Gramsci highlights the ambivalent and largely open character of the outcomes of crisis,

10 Ibid., p. 179.
12 Ibid., p. 70.
13 Ibid., p. 73.
formulating the oft-quoted phrase that crisis “consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”\textsuperscript{18} Last but not least, for Gramsci, such a crisis of hegemony, of the situation in Badiou’s terms, is explicitly presented as a crisis of the state:

“[T]he crisis of the ruling class’s hegemony, […] occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses […] or because huge masses […] have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A ‘crisis of authority’ is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State.”\textsuperscript{19}

This contingent choreography between crisis as evental site and the difficult emergence of ‘the new’ is cogently captured by Laclau in his theorization of ‘dislocation’. Indeed, Laclau introduces the concept of ‘dislocation’ as the moment of failure and subversion of a sedimented system of representation, of an established hegemonic order, a given situation. If, as Laclau puts it, on the one hand they threaten established identities, on the other, dislocations introduce a lack of meaning that constitutes the foundation on which new identities are formed.\textsuperscript{20} In other words, if dislocations destabilize existing identifications and discourses, at the same time they trigger new constructions that attempt to suture and/or reconstruct the dislocated structure, by narrating the ‘crisis’ in a way legitimizing particular solutions against others within the struggle for hegemony.\textsuperscript{21} When the new hegemonic reconstruction involves a radical redrawing of economic, social and political relations one could retroactively infer that the preceding dislocation has effectively functioned as an evental site and that it has been discursively constructed as an event producing a multitude of visible results.

The force and hegemonic potential of these results can be evaluated in terms of the fidelity effect they elicit on the subjects to which they are addressed. Depending on this degree, such narratives can, in fact, acquire short-term as well as long-term salience. In the first case, we have the emergence of what Laclau calls ‘myths’: “The ‘objective’ condition for the emergence of myth, then, is a structural dislocation. The ‘work’ of myth is to suture that dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation. Thus, the effectiveness of myth is essentially hegemonic: it involves forming a new objectivity by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements.”\textsuperscript{22} When a mythical space acquires, through its abstract generaliza-

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{18} Ibid., p. 276.
\bibitem{19} Ibid., p. 2010.
\bibitem{20} Cf. Laclau 1990, p. 39.
\bibitem{21} Cf. Laclau 1990, p. 63 and p. 65.
\bibitem{22} Ibid., p. 61.
\end{thebibliography}
tion, a salience dominating social interaction, then we can conclude that it has been transformed into an “imaginary horizon.” 23 Imaginary horizons would thus require a deep fidelity to the preceding event.

But negativity is also present after the event, as the limit of truth procedures. Although often downplaying this aspect of his work, Badiou is not unaware of the dangers posed by the fidelity to an event, by what follows an event. The ways in which he attempts to guard against these dangers are multiple, but two feature as the most important. First, Badiou does acknowledge, in a very Lacanian way, the unnameable kernel of every truth procedure. There is something unnameable in every truth procedure, which cannot be integrated into “the realm of knowledge and objectivity” 24 and has to be inscribed as such. The failure to inscribe it, opens the door to evil. Indeed, Badiou does develop a whole typology of evil, in which evil is partly revealed as an excessive positivization of the good, of the power of truth(s): “Every absolutization of the power of a truth organizes an Evil,” it entails “a disaster of the truth induced by the absolutization of its power.” 25 One such manifestation of evil involves wanting, “at all costs and under condition of a truth, to force the naming of the unnamable. Such exactly is the principle of disaster.” 26

Most important, due to this constant danger, Badiou has often accepted the need to incorporate this recognition in the truth procedure associated with an event. Thus, an aporetic void must be continuously reinscribed in the philosophical/political terrain, a move related to Badiou’s call for reserve or restraint. 27 In Hallward’s words, “Since evil is the determination to impose the total power of a truth, to name everything in its situation, ‘the ethics of a truth derive entirely from a sort of restraint [retenue] with respect to its powers’. The truth cannot and must not try to say everything. […] Only such restraint allows it to persevere in its forever ongoing self-elaboration.” 28 It is here that the inscription of limits, of negativity, acquires its full force in Badiou’s argument: “whatever your truth, Badiou adds, one should not go all the way. One should continue in such a way as to be able to continue to continue.” 29 A “Truth-Event” is always “in reality an ongoing and impure procedure” 30 and cannot be a “one-off,” it involves a passage from one to two, an openness towards evental recurrence:

“The possibility of the intervention [of a procedure through which something is recognised as an event within a situation that is changed as a result of its occurrence] must be

23 Ibid., p. 67.
24 Hallward 2003, p. 258.
26 Ibid., p. 86.
28 Hallward 2003, p. 265.
29 Ibid., p. 265, emphasis added.
30 Bosteels 2002, p. 199.

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assigned to the consequences of another event. It is evental recurrence which founds intervention [...] An intervention is what presents an event for the occurrence of another. It is an evental between-two.”  

What is the immensely important consequence of that? No intervention “can legiti-
mately operate according to the idea of a primal event, or a radical beginning.” Ba-
diou calls speculative leftism “any thought of being which bases itself upon the theme of an absolute commencement,” any thought that does not recognize evental recurrence and thus remains trapped in the fantasy of Revolution or Apocalypse, of a one-off, definitive and unique occurrence.

2. Interpreting the Greek choreography: Political dislocation and the emergence of a potential evental site

Turning now to a discussion of the Greek crisis and its political effects, I guess that most of the readers will still be familiar with the disastrous effects of implementing austerity in crisis-ridden Greece. The political instruments here have been indebted-
ness, debt, and a series of arguments that, using medical, pedagogical and other metaphors, have attempted to legitimise impoverishment and austerity in terms of a necessary punishment required to restore discipline in Greece, a state that is often represented as a ‘rogue’ or ‘failed’ one. But, as resistances against the emergence and consolidation of what we could call ‘Debt Society’ started to mount and the discipli-
ary arguments began to wane, the implementation of the imposed policies in-
creasingly relied on a type of domination devoid of argumentative support. It ac-
quired the profile of what can only be described in terms of “brutal nihilism.”

If sociologist Saskia Sassen is correct, what we have been experiencing within the South of Europe (and beyond) has been an age of “expulsion,” a process that, exactly five hundred years after the first publication of Thomas More’s Utopia, brings associations of the “enclosures” linked with early capitalism he so vividly de-
scribes. Indeed the category “expulsion” denotes a series of aggressive and brutal processes of hierarchical distribution of populations and forms of life, like the mas-

33 I am drawing here on a series of articles documenting in detail this complex choreography; see, in this respect, Stavrakakis, 2013, 2014, 2016.
34 Abolishing common rights, enclosing the land and reserving it for wool-producing sheep that benefited the emerging industries, the “nobility and gentry” and “a good many abbots” have thus ejected their tenants: “One way or another, these wretched people – men, women, husbands, wives, orphans, widows, parents with little children and entire families (poor but nu-
merous, since farming requires many hands) – [we]re forced to move out” (More 2002, p. 18-9). This process created a sizeable army of reserve labour and, eventually, what came to be
known as the ‘working class’.
sive expulsion of the middle and lower classes from jobs, welfare services, and even their homes, as well as the expulsion of the popular sectors from democratic participation and incorporation (not to mention the expulsions of refugees globally, a dramatic process also marking the Greek situation).

This novel version of enclosures/expulsions was bound to create in Greece (and elsewhere) popular reactions against austerity policies and the quasi-authoritarian turn, the ‘suspension’ of democracy in Wolfgang Streeck’s terms, that has accompanied them. Hence the emergence of movements like the Indignados in Spain and the namesake Aganaktismenoi in Greece. This popular indignation was eventually expressed, among other options at the movement level, through party formations like SYRIZA in Greece and PODEMOS in Spain. The latter promised an end to austerity and a restoration of popular sovereignty, placing priority on the popular interests against the interests of ‘la casta’ (that PODEMOS targets) or the establishment, both European and local (what SYRIZA called ‘external’ and ‘internal’ troika). Indeed, starting as a marginal coalition of radical left parties and groups and due to the crisis and the inability of established political forces to deal with it effectively, SYRIZA was catapulted from the 4.6% it received in 2009 to 26.8% in 2012 (in the second consecutive election of that year), and then has managed to come first with 36.4% of the vote in the January 2015 elections. This allowed its leader, Alexis Tsipras, to form a coalition government with the right-wing populist party ANEL (a result that was almost replicated in the 20 September 2015 elections in Greece).35

How did this happen? How can a Badiou-inspired conceptual apparatus help us make sense of the political trajectory in question? What seems to have dislocated the integrity of the system were the systemic failures associated with the 2008 global economic collapse and the way it has been administered by dominant elites. The management of these systemic failures by the established political class amounted to what Saskia Sassen has described as an “economic version of ethnic cleansing,”36 which resulted in a wider intensification of social dislocations, deepened the indignation and discontent for the dominant regime of democratic representation established after the transition to democracy (two party system), stimulating massive protest movements (including demonstrations, strikes and square occupations). What ensued was a crisis of hegemony and the slow emergence of what could be described as an ‘evental site’. We can, indeed, infer that (retroactively to the extent that one can observe it), during this period, a massive disidentification with the established party system and the creation of new political subjectivities took place.

Within this framework, for example, the Greek Aganaktismenoi constituted quite a massive but heterogeneous movement, convened on the basis of calls in the social media, inviting people to express its outrage against austerity, the established party

36 Sassen 2014, p. 36.
system and the state of democratic representation. The positions of the movement were marked by a distinct ‘proto-populist’ flavor: the people have been mis-represented or even betrayed by the elites, which are to blame for the socio-economic collapse. As a result, the elites should not represent the people anymore and ‘real’ or ‘direct’ democracy should be sought.

And yet, institutions have remained largely impervious even to these grievances and demands. At this juncture, certain social actors started searching for new vehicles of political representation that would overcome the fragmentation and the political impotence of the multitudes, organizing them and gaining access to power. Both the Greek SYRIZA and the Spanish PODEMOS thus emerged (either from the sidelines, in the first case, or from scratch, in the second) as responses to a crisis of political representation, a crisis of the *situation*, as populism often does, a crisis they partly constructed by attributing the blame for the socio-economic dislocation experienced since 2008 to the economic and political establishment (both national and European) in order to legitimize a popular/populist re-democratization.

One has to register the dual and reciprocal process of *political construction* and *trust/fidelity building* involved in the consolidation of new political subjectivities in the Greek setting. The emergence of an active popular collective subject has progressed hand in hand with the strengthening of its political vehicle, the party formation of SYRIZA. What has to be stressed here is that this contingent process involved ‘radical construction’ on two levels implicated into a mutual choreography. On the one hand, a small left-wing party with previously little hegemonic pretensions gradually accepted and assumed the task of representing an emerging popular subject. At the same time, by accepting this task, it has also permitted the emergence and consolidation of this subject, the construction of ‘the people’ as a political agent able to intervene in politics exceeding its passive, post-democratic nature (through direct participation in the squares and the various movements as well as through participation in the elections and the referendum of 5 July which resulted in the resounding victory of the No camp with 61,31%). Together with numerous other radical intellectuals, Badiou followed this sequence closely with a sympathetic eye; although not as categorical as Negri’s outright endorsement of both Tsipras and SYRIZA, his cautious expression of approval must have sounded to many as equally surprising.

Yet, we all know what has followed. Obviously, the SYRIZA experiment has failed to ‘liberate’ Greece from neoliberal austerity and to start changing Europe. How can we make sense of what many commentators have called SYRIZA’s ‘capitulation’? Or even SYRIZA’s ‘betrayal’?

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3. Badiou and the ‘No’ in the July referendum: An orphan event?

No doubt, and this has been pointed out explicitly by Badiou himself, what has been at stake was a pre-evental choreography: “In this affair, the referendum, and that alone, was creating a situation that I would call pre-evental.”\(^{38}\) However, contra Badiou, this effect cannot be reduced to the referendum “and that alone;” it was rather the climactic effect of the negotiation process at the register of charisma. I am using the word ‘charisma’ here not in the Weberian sense but in the sense developed by political anthropologist James Scott,\(^{39}\) a sense that may be able to shed light on the intricacies of pre-evental conjunctures from a discursive point of view. In Scott’s overall schema, every social order or political institution (the European edifice, for example), every process of domination, generates a hegemonic public conduct and backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken in the face of power. Thus both a public and a hidden transcript emerge. Under relatively ‘normal’ conditions, these hidden transcripts are rarely enacted. And yet, sometimes, when conditions enter the realm of the extraordinary, they storm the stage shifting the coordinates of a situation. Hence, charisma is not a quality possessed by someone; it has less to do with ‘personal magnetism’ and more with a socially produced reciprocity. Such a reciprocity is established when something hidden (foreclosed by the power bloc) – the predicament, the grievances as well as the demands of a subordinate group – suddenly becomes sayable, creating thus a charismatic bond – a relation of fidelity in other words – between this subordinate group and the agent openly voicing the ‘hidden transcript’.

Surely, the euro-zone austerity TINA (There Is No Alternative) dogma and its reliance on the need for everybody to reproduce its ‘success story’ in the face of social destruction qualifies as such a ‘public transcript’. And suddenly a new government appears that breaks this cordon sanitaire and – mainly through the speech-acts of Tsipras and Varoufakis – pledges to represent the voice of the previously excluded people, the ‘hidden transcript’.

This surely constituted a ‘charismatic act’ advancing the depth of the populist bond between SYRIZA and the electorate, something amply visible in what followed. Indeed, between the January elections and the referendum, SYRIZA had managed to almost double its popular support notwithstanding the frustrating negotiation process and the economic suffocation felt during the final week before the referendum. And yet, even though “The Government appealed to the people. [and] The people answered positively, and waited for the government to

\(^{38}\) Badiou 2015b.

\(^{39}\) Scott 1990.

\(^{40}\) For a detailed analysis see Stavrakakis 2015.
respond with a response in the register of the act,” this did not come, as Badiou concludes.  

Obviously, especially given our discussion so far on the nature of events, evental sites, crises and dislocations, it must have become clear that no automatic transition from evental site to event/act should be assumed. Everything would rely on the unpredictable dialectic between the evental site, its crystallization into a potential event (the No in the referendum) and the way the two emerging subjectivities (that of ‘the people’ and that of their political representative, SYRIZA) would proceed vis-à-vis a potential truth procedure, that is to say on the type and the degree of fidelity elicited. Already from the day of the referendum Alain Badiou had commented that “The crucial point, now, is to know whether the ‘No’ vote will expand into a powerful popular movement, supporting and/or exercising acute pressure on the government itself.” Obviously, the situation remained open and could only “be resolved by the Greeks themselves. The principle of the primacy of internal factors applies to this situation, too […] the ‘No’ in the referendum will only be a true force when it continues into very powerful independent movements.” So how can we retroactively account for what happened?

First of all, I think it is important to acknowledge that the No in the referendum constitutes a true accomplishment in itself, as it took place against all mainstream media, with capital controls imposed, under circumstances of extreme tension and insecurity (with the closed banks soon being coupled by shortages in medicines etc.). At the same time, its ‘heroic’ character should not make us disavow its formal structure. The “No” did constitute an empty signifier par excellence in Laclau’s sense. In other words, it incarnated a primarily negative gesture of Machiavellian nature, registering solely a desire “not to be dominated” anymore in the brutal, often undemocratic and undignified way experienced throughout the Greek crisis. It constituted, in essence, a radicalized, politicized Bartleby type moment of “leave me alone!,” “Enough is enough!,” “No more austerity!,” “No more measures imposed from the outside!” “I really prefer not to….!” It did not, however, include any positive indication of the way forward in terms of concrete policy directions (for example, with regards to the currency situation). The challenge was thus to transform this negative gesture into a positive course of action; this is exactly where a certain short-circuit has obviously emerged. How was the No in the referendum transformed into a new memorandum between the SYRIZA government and the troika? Into a continuation of the austerity avalanche and a consolidation of an almost protec-

41 Badiou 2015b.  
42 Badiou 2015a.  
43 Ibid.
torate-style supervision of central aspects of economic and social life by the so-called ‘institutions’?  

In 2014, commenting on the Arab Spring experience, Badiou had highlighted the “formal, searching, unclear condition of the declaration” animating social protest, that is to say the negative formulation of the popular demands: “Mubarak, resign!,” “Ben Ali, out!,” “we don’t want this government any more!.” Here, behind the unity constructed on the basis of what Laclau would call a chain of equivalence (articulating heterogeneous demands on the basis of attributing their frustration to a common enemy: the government, the elite, the establishment), what remained unseen was the division marking the oppositional camp itself, its inability to crystallize in a more or less unified hegemonic subject. In the Egyptian case, this division meant that the populist rupture that emerged in Tahrir Square failed to develop into a classical antagonistic showdown. Even if, initially, the “one divided into two,” this division was eventually overdetermined by another division that split internally the oppositional camp. Indeed, the opposition remained divided between a pro-European modernist camp and a camp attached to the Muslim Brotherhood. What seemed like a two-sided clash (establishment vs. the popular-democratic forces) was in fact a three-sided clash.

The division of the opposition remained unseen up until the point when the negative unity – the fidelity to a negative gesture – stopped being enough, i.e. up until the point when negative rejection had to give ground to positive orientation: “Their unity was a negative one (‘Mubarak, resign!’), but then, once they saw things starting to open up, they had to propose something.” It was then that division emerged where unity was previously dominant. A division between antithetical projects that ended up in an electoral process that precipitated the short-circuit leading to a ‘restoration’ of the dislocated One through military intervention. What failed, thus, in this case was the sublimation of differences within the oppositional camp into a new (mythical) political subject, what Laclau would call ‘a people,’ able to act together; a passage from negative to positive: In order to be victorious, a narrowly negative declaration presupposes the unity of those who declare it. Precisely during the process of transforming the negative declaration into a positive course of action a set of interactions ensued that favored the entrapment within the coordinates of the dislocated situation.

Obviously, the Greek case is very different from the Egyptian one. It is also difficult, with the knowledge available up to now, to know exactly how the relevant decisions were taken within the Greek and the overall European setting. And yet, some

44 Admittedly with a pinch of ‘social justice’ in attributing the tax and cut burdens.
45 Badiou 2014b.
47 Badiou 2014b.
of the insights Badiou advances vis-à-vis the latter (i.e. Egypt) may be relevant to our analysis of the former (Greece). First of all, Badiou’s commentary seems to – albeit indirectly – corroborate our intuition regarding the formal, negative character of the No in the referendum and the formidable challenge of giving it a hegemonic positive content. All sorts of things can go wrong in such a process.

It is also important to note that, like in the Egyptian case, the difficulty of this transition revealed a division within the No camp, which led into the split of the emerging SYRIZA horizon. On a first level, especially within the ranks of the party, the turn of events has produced resignation and a feeling of frustration and hopelessness. It has also gradually led a whole faction of the party to speak of betrayal and leave the organization in order to initiate a new party called ‘Popular Unity’. Indeed, Popular Unity was founded on the basis of interpreting the No in the referendum not only as a rejection of the austerity agenda imposed on Greece but also – and most crucially – as a willingness to leave the euro-zone, as a No to the euro. Like Egypt, once more, elections played a crucial role in ‘sorting out’ the complications. And yet, rather unlike Egypt, the recent elections of 20 September 2015 have shown that people still continued to support – even reluctantly and under the continuing threat of an ‘excommunication’ from the euro-zone – Tsipras’s orientation, although abstention has also increased substantially and the new ‘Popular Unity’ party has managed to get almost 3% of the vote (failing, however, to enter the new Greek Parliament). At any rate, SYRIZA lost less than 1% compared to the January 2015 elections.

Conspiratorial explanations of betrayal thus fail to account for a certain fidelity established between the supposedly betrayed people and Tsipras. Under this light, it is crucial to try to interpret the reluctance of the people themselves – the same people that had, almost heroically, voted in favor of the No – to positivize the meaning of this initially negative gesture in a radically different way – one, for example, risking an exit from the euro-zone and the feared ‘excommunication’ from the so-called European family. What if, in other words, both sides have been conscious of the ambiguous mandate that regulated their relationship: ‘Stay inside the euro-zone but without austerity’? What if, in addition, SYRIZA’s reluctance to risk a euro-zone exit mirrored the reluctance of the people themselves, at least of a substantial part of those that voted in favor of the No?

Obviously, there are many reasons that explain the inability to break out of the extremely constraining framework imposed by European and international institu-

49 In a transcribed discussion with Stathis Kouvelakis during the first months of 2015, Badiou had correctly doubted the resolve of not only Tsipras but also the people themselves with regards to their preparedness to follow an alternative root, asking Kouvelakis the following question: “So how do you think Syriza, political forces in Greece, and ultimately the Greek people as a whole, can engage with this situation in a different way from what has gone before?” (Badiou / Kouvelakis 2015).
tions – the dislocated and yet still potent One of the Greek situation. The most visible comprise the difficulties involved in leaving a currency and adopting a new one as well as breaking from a legal and institutional framework like the euro-zone and the EU that is implicated in all aspects of economic and social life in Greece and other European countries. It is clear that, at least in the short run, the situation might have been incontrollable or even chaotic. Besides, neither SYRIZA nor any other political force in Greece (including the cadres that eventually formed Popular Unity, deeply embedded in their speculative leftism) seemed to have prepared a comprehensive plan making this option remotely appetizing and credible in the eyes of the citizens. On top of that, one should also take into account that a de-stabilization of the relationship between Greece and the EU might also have repercussions on a variety of other policy dimensions, like foreign affairs, and this is something crucial in a strategic region like the one in which Greece is located.

And yet, at least in my view, such pragmatic considerations are not enough to resolve the mystery. What if the preceding crisis failed to affect a crucial identity kernel binding Greece to Europe? What if the evental site that had emerged failed to encompass strategic dimensions of the previous hegemonic order, the previous situation? The hypothesis I would like to put forward is that it failed, in particular, to destabilize and restructure/reorient a long-established relationship between modern Greek identity and the European gaze. If there is no subjectivity without a symbolic frame of reference, without a big Other, as Lacan has taught us, then the emergence of a new subjectivity and a new situation, a new symbolic/hegemonic order, would require, (1) the realization of the lack in the Other marking the previous symbolic order, stripping it of all its imaginary embellishments and thus creating a potent evental site, and (2) the ability to institute a new psycho-social frame, a new myth or horizon, allowing the establishment of both a new operational subjectivity and a new social objectivity. It seems that, within the current interregnum, the first step has not yet managed to lead to the second; the resources are missing.

Following Bob Jessop’s critical realist analysis of crisis situations, one could argue that an operational solution with hegemonic pretensions would either have to shift directly the coordinates of the environment itself (the euro-zone) or change the attachment people feel towards this environment, empowering them to imagine an alternative life and, crucially, imagine themselves, outside this constraining frame, which – as a result – could potentially loose its grip on subjects. In Jessop’s words: “In many cases what is ‘correct’ organically and chronologically (being first to resonate and/or to impose agreed reading [of a crisis]) matters more in selection than ‘scientific truth’. Indeed, a ‘correct’ reading creates its own ‘truth-effects’ and may then be retained through its capacity to shape reality.”

50 Jessop 2015, p. 255.
only has not succeeded to influence—even minimally—the way the euro-zone functions (something that should have been expected); it also failed to put forward a credible, alternative reading of the crisis able to initiate—through its truth-effects in Jessop’s jargon, through what Badiou would call a truth-procedure—a new relation of representation, to shape new types of subjectivity and sociality capable of imagining life outside the euro-zone or even the (existing) EU if the negotiations were to fail.

Most importantly, this impasse does not seem to be restricted to Greece—as well as Egypt and the (semi-)periphery. Badiou has highlighted its potentially universal character in very similar terms: “Perhaps we are at the stage where the crowd would like to declare itself, namely what I have optimistically called the ‘reawakening of history’. But this declaration does not have symbolic resources upon which to draw.”

What, then, if the emerging political subjectivity in crisis-ridden Greece has not managed to associate itself with a new frame of reference, to produce a new reliable symbolic Other shaping a new (subjective and objective) reality? What if it has failed to eliminate its dependence on the gaze of the European Other? It may have temporarily suspended it, but what if this was only done in a desperate attempt to make this same Other (institutional Europe) to lessen its suffocating grip? What if, in other words, this potent gaze of the European Other has remained operative, thus explaining the eventual capitulation and leaving no other alternative from the transubstantiation of the defiant No to a forced and dispiriting Yes? This is probably how the referendum remained, at best, an orphan event. An event that, however heroic, has not managed to establish itself as a matrix of the new and whose subjects have been forced, maybe not to betray it, but certainly to disavow it.

4. Crypto-colonial disavowal

The evidence on which such a hypothesis can be formulated takes us back to the formation of the modern Greek state in the beginning of the 19th century. Throughout

51 In this sense, SYRIZA’s failure has less to do with some sort of ‘betrayal’ of its mandate and more with its inability to reshape this same mandate.

52 Even now (these lines are written in early May 2016) very little debate is devoted within SYRIZA and in the Greek public sphere more generally to this option. It is as if the novelty of such a course remains largely unthinkable, banished from the limits of legitimate political discourse, thus bringing to mind the wider obsessive disposition Badiou describes in The Century: “The century concludes on the motif of the impossibility of subjective novelty and the comfort of repetition. This motif has a categorical name: obsession. The century ends with the obsession of security, under the dominance of the following, rather abject maxim: It's really not that bad being where you are already; it is, and has been, worse elsewhere” (Badiou 2007, p. 66). In this case, even abstractly contemplating the alternative is portrayed as a threat to the “security” offered by a (disintegrating?) European iron-cage.

53 Badiou 2014b.
this process, Europe has functioned for Greece as both a ‘model’ and an ‘observer’. We know from historical research that, being under constant observation, feeling at all times the ambivalent European gaze, both fascinated by ancient Greece and disappointed by modern Greece, increasingly shaped a type of identity oriented towards the continuous need to prove to Europe the worth of modern Greek achievement. What was continuously judged here was the required ‘progress’ of the new state following its ‘entry exams’ (the war of independence) and its generous acceptance into the ‘civilized’ European world, the EEC, the EU and, finally, the euro-zone. Consequently, to the extent that the European gaze diachronically oscillates between admiration and contempt, in Greece, likewise, guilt alternates with indignation in an unmistakably superegoic dialectic.

Even in the 19th century, a dialectic of indebtedness marked the imaginary regulation of the identifications at stake: if modern Greece owed its political independence and survival to Europe, could Europe ignore the role of (ancient) Greece as the cradle of European civilization? As becomes evident from the way this question is posed, Europe is the privileged pole here and modern Greece emerges as the dependent variable, the one demanding recognition, support and even affection from the European Other. This is clearly when the relationship of Greeks to Europe acquired the symptomatic form of an enduring and troubling ‘complex,’ as Greek historian Eli Skopetea has formulated it. Through modern Greek history this choreography often escalated into a superegoic climax, sometimes even involving debt and bankruptcy. Today it is again the European superego in ‘its revengeful, sadistic, punishing, aspect’ that seems to run the show. And debt is once again of paramount importance. How can we effect a radical change in the cultural, inter-subjective and psycho-social framework of this debilitating dialectic? Nobody has offered an answer to this question and I am afraid that without it Greece’s dependence will probably continue.

What I am stressing here is the need to take into account what has been debated as the crypto-colonial relationship between Greece and Europe in order to make sense of the recent events. “Crypto-colonialism” is a term introduced by Michael Herzfeld well before the recent European crisis to describe the “political marginality that has marked Greece’s relations with the West throughout most of its history as a

55 I am using the term fully aware of the (ambivalent) ideological baggage and the problems associated with the colonial association (especially the easy legitimation of an often simplistic de-colonial logic). Let us assume that the category of ‘crypto-colonialism’ involves a certain displacement from such simplifying logics; it refers to paradoxical forms of dependence in the semi-periphery, established – in this case – under the banner and often in the name of an idealization of the Greek ‘Golden Age’ of the past now claimed by the European gaze, under conditions of ‘national independence’ and even of supposedly equal European membership. All that will hopefully become more evident in the concluding part of this essay.
nominally independent though practically tributary nation-state’.” How exactly does Herzfeld define this crypto-colonialism? Primarily, as “the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. Such countries were and are living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence.” Recently Herzfeld has linked his theory of crypto-colonialism with the recent choreography of the crisis in Greece:

“From its declaration of independence in 1821, in reality Greece has always been highly dependent both economically and politically. It looked to the West (as well as to Russia) for support in its struggle for emancipation from Ottoman rule, in doing so carefully eliding the history by which ‘it’ became an imperfect and Athenocentric simulacrum of the West’s image of the ancient glories. Its survival has always depended on heavy infusions of economic assistance, usually in the form of loans – the very phenomenon that has prompted the present crisis. […] I have proposed the term ‘crypto-colonialism’ to describe the paradoxical condition of a national independence that was contingent on the approval and support of colonial powers. In recent years, […] neoliberal and right-wing forces inside the country seem to be intent on using the rhetoric of political correctness and the ‘audit culture’ to intensify Greece’s dependency, rather than reduce it.”

It is also crucial to highlight the role local modernizing elites played as representatives of the European Other and mediators guaranteeing recognition and acceptance. Indeed Herzfeld has stressed the uses in which internal elites employed “civilizational discourses to enhance their own power, at the cost of accepting the collective subjugation of their country to a global cultural hierarchy.” These elites have cultivated among the citizenry, the Greek people, a deep fear of loosing the European gaze, a fear of “becoming too closely identified with some vague category of barbarians,” of loosing their own sense of subjectivity as (potential) Europeans. This was the psycho-social kernel sustaining the preceding situation, the previous state (at once real, symbolic and imaginary), what no evental site has managed to dislocate, what no event has managed to displace, what no new subjectivity and no alternative forms of Otherness have managed to dislodge.

57 Ibid., pp. 900-1.
58 Herzfeld 2011, p. 25.
60 Ibid., p. 902.
To conclude: Crypto-colonialism universalized?

And yet, as we have seen, this is far from being solely a Greek problem, a failing of the Greek people. Why? In his commentary immediately following the Greek referendum, Alain Badiou had stressed the importance of “International popular support—a ceaseless one, one that demonstrates, one that catches the media’s attention.” He added that “The world capitalist oligarchy is very narrow, very concentrated, and very organized. Faced with this, dispersed peoples lacking in political unity and closed off within their national borders, will remain weak and almost impotent. Everything today is playing out at a global level. Transforming the Greek cause into an international cause of very powerful symbolic value is a necessity, and, therefore, a duty.”  

However, this broad international support has failed to materialize, making much more difficult any initiative on behalf of the Greek people. This other failure makes me think that crypto-colonialism may also have a second, more hidden and much more sinister meaning, one applying to the silent colonization of the European Lebenswelt itself by ordoliberalism. If a slight Habermasian twist is allowed, I would argue that if there is indeed some kind of colonization—a potent crypto-colonialism—going on here, then it affects the whole European lifeworld. Notice, for example, how former colonial powers, like Spain and Portugal, even France, have seen their fortunes reversed:

“for the first time, significant populations in the global north find themselves in the situation of populations in the old periphery. That is, more and more of the working class of Europe and north America and indeed, the governments of the poor countries of Europe, the old colonial masters, the Portuguese, my God—they are reduced to poverty and being dependent member states of the European Union, having to do whatever the TROIKA (International Monetary Fund, European Commission, and European Central Bank) tell them. These were the former masters of the world. So they are experiencing a kind of peripheralization within the core. And a kind of dependency, to use the word that Latin American theorists developed to talk about these relationships.”

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61 Badiou 2015a.
62 A “boomerang effect” already captured by Foucault: “It should never be forgotten that while colonization, with its techniques and its political and juridical weapons, obviously transported European models to other continents, it also had a considerable boomerang effect on the mechanisms of power in the West, and on the apparatuses, institutions, and techniques of power. A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself” (Foucault 2003, p. 103).
63 Fraser 2016.
In that sense, the claim that Greece is turned into a colony of a German Europe is clearly insufficient,64 to the extent that it fails to grasp the fact that Europe as a whole (including Germany, from where the enforcement of ordoliberal austerity has begun and to where it will eventually return),65 seems to have been turned into a ‘colony’ of the most morbid neoliberal zealotism and its post-democratic, if not antidemocratic, dynamics. All in all, the (prophetic) lyrics of the Greek electronic music band Stereo Nova from 1992 ring true today more than ever: “My country is the colony of a larger colony.”

At any rate, what the Greek example seems to have shown is the impotence of current institutions and political dynamics in changing, even minimally, in one country, the imposed policies. To reinvigorate this ‘impotent democracy’ will require pan-European if not global coordination, an approach towards global challenges that will be universally oriented, pragmatic and democratically committed, as well as a determination to start the change from ourselves, from little steps liberating us from imposed discourses, dependent identities and affective bonds that, paradoxically, even under the banner of our own idealized past, reproduce the crypto-colonial conditions of our subordination.

In his commentary accompanying the English translation of Badiou’s Century, Alberto Toscano reminds us of Frantz Fanon’s statement from the concluding pages of The Wretched of the Earth: “Come then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe.”66 Most important, he reads these lines as perfectly apt for ‘Europe’ itself, to the extent that it desperately needs to evade what Fanon calls “the stasis of Europe,” its own stasis. To heed Fanon’s call today, in the name of a Europe à venir, is then to invent new ways to deactivate the myths that, under the banner of ‘Europe,’ “still hold in place the impasses and antinomies that the century visited upon its subjects, that ‘tradition of dead generations’ which – whilst harboring the material for ‘new concepts’ – also, to put it with Marx, ‘weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living’.”67

64 Ironically, denouncing the new memorandum and the laws following from it as ‘colonial,’ as transforming Greece into a European ‘protectorate,’ a jargon that was previously used (among others) by SYRIZA as well as by international figures like Balibar, Mezzadra, Wolf, and Zielonka, is now employed by established politicians, some of them associated with the previous governments, to discredit SYRIZA itself. To explore the quasi-colonial aspects of the Greek crisis and its current management thus emerges as a crucial topic suggested by the discursive reality of both (internal) political antagonism and (external) theoretical reflection.
65 To give just one example, it seems that the way the assets of the Greek state are supposed to be privatized follows in the footsteps of the notorious Treuhand that implemented the privatization of East Germany’s assets after the German unification.
66 Fanon in Toscano 2007, p. 200.
67 Toscano in Badiou 2007, pp. 200-1; also see Young 2012.
Indeed, Fanon adds something that seems particularly important in light of the particular way crypto-colonialism has structured the relationship between modern Greek identity and the European gaze. I am quoting him here adding some qualifications: “If we wish to live up to our peoples’ expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in [existing] Europe. Moreover, if we wish to reply to the expectations of the [other] people of Europe, it is no good sending them back a reflection, even an ideal reflection, of their society and their thought with which from time to time they feel immeasurably sickened.”68 A (paradoxical) reclaiming of a Europe to come can only be attempted by all of us as creative ‘Europeans’ – not merely as aspiring ‘Europeanists,’ a category that in Greek public discourse indicates those in favor of European belonging in a way distancing us from an idealized European elsewhere. Here ‘Europeans’ means, above all else, equal inheritors of the ambivalent legacy of our dark continent, to refer to Mark Mazower’s expression; no future will be accessible without creatively working through this troubling legacy. In this sense, no easy (internal) decolonization process is available to us. Such processes are very often reduced to an ideological machine for the production of an autochthony, an autochthonous sovereignty, that is necessarily nothing but a political, fantasmatic invention of a most inauthentic kind.69 Subjectivity and Otherness can change together, can effectively renegotiate past, present and future only when the lack, the irreducible limitation, marking both of them is duly registered in its mutual constitution.

It is in such a reversal of perspective that a true evental site will have to be located, it is from here that a new truth-procedure will have to start instituting a new frame of reference and overdetermining new forms of subjectivity. Depending on the success or failure of this broader struggle, we will be able – only retroactively – to determine whether the orphan Greek referendum will eventually qualify as a failed, abandoned pseudo-event70 or as a temporary suspension of a pan-European

69 This is especially important in the Greek case where in very complex ways “colonialism and nationalism have worked in unison” (Hamilakis 2008, p. 2). Also see Gourgouris 1996 as well as Koundoura 2012.
70 Vindicating an alternative strategy Badiou was quick to suggest, if only in a rather unnecessary didactic tone: “They [SYRIZA] slowly but surely adopted a position within the terms of the problem as it was posed by the opposing camp, and day after day they continued to do so, solely to make people believe that it’s for the best that they are in power rather than the other parties (who they will soon be governing with!). In fact, if things are as they claim, then it would be more honorable for them to depart, which would be an infinitely better preparation for the future” (Badiou 2015b). At any rate, staying in power only in order to offer (a much needed, no doubt, in this ‘theatre of cruelty’) consolation for the deepening of the post-democratic austerity avalanche now implemented in the name of the Left, may have worked in the short term in its own (forced) perverse way, but it is very debatable whether it can continue to work in the absence of a sustained attempt to reintroduce some sort of meaning into a political scene that has been progressively desertified, left almost devoid of meaning, prey to distrust, cynicism and even (self-)ridicule.
crypto-colonial state of domination that marked the beginning of a long process, a sequence of recurring events, in which much more effort and time, under immensely frustrating conditions, will have extended the scope of our freedom both in Greece and in Europe at large – and, hopefully, even beyond Europe itself. Whether this is likely to happen in the foreseeable future I am not in a position to predict, or let’s just say that I prefer not to... Besides, as Jacques Derrida has formulated it, although the call “for a thinking of the event to come, of the democracy to come, of the reason to come” bears every hope, it remains, in itself, almost by necessity, “without hope.”

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71 No doubt a process of failures, but hopefully one following Beckett’s sequence: ‘Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better’.
72 Conditions that may involve the “cruelest optimism” resulting from a frustrating equilibrium between public and hidden transcript, to go back to Scott’s schema with a twist borrowed from Lauren Berlant; conditions obliging us to make a ‘creative virtue’ out of enduring even the “most terrible suffering,” as Alain Badiou has formulated it (Badiou 2007: 143). Or, to refer to Alberto Moreiras’s challenging work on a Derrida-inspired ‘marrano infrapolitics,’ conditions that may require us to “become homely in the unhomely”: ‘If marrano history, as the history of the marranos, can testify to a situation of double exclusion – the marranos are simultaneously excluded from their originary provenance, Jewish, and from their secondary provenance, Catholic —, a metonymic projection makes of the marrano a figure of displacement and homelessness. A marrano inscription is countercommunitarian and singular, cats on a roof, but also besieged and precarious, cats chased by dogs. A marrano position is never immune to politics, but it relates to politics para- or posthegemonically: hegemony kills it. It prefers not to be killed. It dwells infrapolitically, as a survivor, in its secret, which it inhabits as one inhabits an ethos, knowing there will be no protection except chance” (Moreiras 2016).


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1. Is there a subject of the “democratic emblem”? 

According to Alain Badiou, ‘democracy’ in the western world has become the “dominant emblem of contemporary political society.”¹ It structures our thoughts and actions, and allows us to think anything in political terms, with one exception: we can think and utter anything, as long as we do not criticize democracy itself. But not only can our freedom to think be understood to be democratic. Earlier, in his second volume of Being and Event, in Logics of Worlds, Badiou had already coined the formula “democratic materialism” to describe the contemporary conviction that there are only “bodies” and “languages” that exist.² Tolerance is the general rule, and all diversities of bodies and languages will be accepted under the aegis of the ‘democratic materialism.’ But there is one exception: the general exchangeability of bodies and languages itself cannot be questioned. This logic of bodies and languages and their general exchangeability is what Badiou explicitly names the contemporary “ideology” of democratic materialism.³

The ‘democratic emblem,’ the sign that organizes the logic of bodies and languages, can thus be read as a totalizing element, for not only does it relate to the sphere of politics, but rather there is no sphere, no moment in which the emblem of democracy is not inscribed, and with it the logic of bodies and languages. To speak of a totalizing element here implies two things: On the one hand, the democratic emblem stands for an endless and unbounded freedom of possibilities, but on the other hand it is a freedom within very specific boundaries. Within these boundaries, anything is possible, as long as the boundaries are not themselves questioned: You shall not touch the rules of the possible.

The order of bodies and languages is then what can be defined as the phenomenological companion to the order of the democratic emblem. Bodies and languages are the circulating currency of the invisible emblem, so to speak. An emblem, as Badiou explains, is “the ‘untouchable’ in a symbolic system,”⁴ the invisible center of a sys-

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¹ Badiou 2011, p. 6.
³ Badiou 2006.
⁴ Badiou 2011, p. 6.
tem of symbols. If we take its currency into account, we can see even more clearly that this system of symbols organized around the emblem follows a principle of finitude. Whatever can be done and thought, finds a necessary end at the limit of the body, at the point of the impossible for any given language. It is a structure that in principle is open and endless, but, as a totalized structure, it is structured by its own end. Thus the finitude, phenomenologically present in the existence of bodies and languages, is already inscribed onto the symbolically existing emblem: The emblem conditions a structure, but it can imply neither its own abolition nor a fundamental change. The emblem is an emblem of finitude not only because it marks a limitation – there are only bodies and languages –, but also because it presents an implicit imperative. The emblem as that which is ‘untouchable’ in a symbolic system structures the world of possibilities as a finite world, but it also presents an imperative not to overstep these limits. The emblem of finitude combines an externalized limitation with an internal prohibition.

If this democratic emblem, as Badiou describes it, is the reigning code of our western world today, then we might ask: Is there a subject of this emblem? Could the democratic emblem be understood to be the politics of a subject? In the Badiou-sian system, this question is not evident from the start. For Badiou, there are four possible fields in which a subject can come into being: Politics, art, science, and love. In each field, a subject will be related to what Badiou calls a truth procedure, and partaking in a truth procedure means partaking in and creating the infinity of a situation. It is the creation of something new as the active overcoming of the finitude of a given situation. Politics in particular combines infinity and collectivity, “politics,” as Badiou writes, “summons or exhibits the infinity of the situation.”

But as the democratic emblem is an emblem of finitude, it cannot be the emblem of a true subjectivity, and strictly speaking there cannot be a politics of the subject of the democratic emblem.

Nevertheless, in the context of the ‘democratic emblem,’ Badiou himself shifts the perspective toward the “constitution of the subject” in relation to the “democratic form of the state.” Badiou follows in a direction that Plato had already indicated when (in The Republic) he switched from the critical discussion of democracy as a form of government to the discussion of the democratic character. And although Badiou has not presented an exhaustive theory of the democratic subject up until now, there are different elements in his theoretical work on the contemporary ideology of the western world that might allow one to raise not only the question of an implied subjectivity in the democratic emblem, but even more the question of a specific politics of this subject. This question, then, would not address the truth procedures in themselves, but rather the form of their closure. If according to Badiou, real novel-

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5 Badiou 2005, p. 142.
6 Badiou 2011, p. 9.
ties take place within truth procedures and are the formalization of infinities, how should we understand the closure of politics as a system of finite possibilities? Is the democratic emblem – as a principle of the current closure – just a sign of decline, alienation, commodification, reification, or destruction of politics; or should we think of all these processes as also inherently organized by a specific type of subjectivity itself?

There are two symptoms that can be taken as a starting point here. Both symptoms concern the ambiguity of the notion ‘democracy;’ one concerning its scope and direction, the other the implicit voiding of its corresponding ‘politics’. The peculiar ambiguity of the notion ‘democratic,’ as Badiou uses it in ‘democratic emblem,’ combines transcendence and specificity into one term. On the one hand, ‘democratic’ or ‘Democracy’ is a political notion, a notion that Badiou has often challenged in relation to its actual political value. On the other hand, this specificity as an ambivalent term of politics is transgressed within the concept ‘democratic emblem’. Democracy, as a word that signals politics under the sign of the democratic emblem, transgresses its own sphere. We have to add the moment of transcendence to our description of the democratic emblem: It combines finitude and transgression in a specific structure, fixed in the prohibition to not transcend the laws of finitude.

To give just a short outline of the realization of the transcending aspect of the democratic emblem: If we take a look at the contemporary configurations of the four truth procedures, one can attempt to describe the contradictory knot of infinite possibilities and the prohibition of the impossible in all four forms. In contemporary art, for example, the ambivalent structure practiced as an art of democracy might be found within the notion of participation that turns art into the public exhibition of an event. Art is necessarily public, and contemporary art inscribes the public onto its own works: as the place of the equivalence. But within that process it loses its particularity; it can only follow the given rules, for there is no possibility of changing the rules of the possible. Regarding science, one might find it adapted to democracy most fundamentally in the equivalence of facts and factual results. Science as the coordination of results makes it impossible to conceive of the notion of the result as such. And finally, when it comes to love, one might say that it becomes fundamentally democratic when singular moments, acts, and utterances are replaced by the exchangeability of bodies. The aristocracy of an idiosyncratic emotion becomes an impossible stupidity. It fundamentally makes sense then to speak of a democratic art, a democratic love, and a democratic science, if we consider these to be the art, love, and science as understood within the framework of ‘democratic materialism’. We see that the notion of democracy transcends the realm of politics and places its own relation between transcendence and limitation into fields other than politics internally: It is the repetition of the democratic materialism of bodies and languages throughout the four fields of possible truth structures.
As a transcending concept, however, democracy is still a concept that belongs to politics; in a certain sense it is therefore also limited by politics. Democracy is a fundamentally political idea. It is first and foremost a concept of politics, and only thereafter a concept of art, science, or love. And from this point of view the observation that the ‘democratic emblem’ is presently reigning throughout all the spheres of our world today, of our daily lives – not only politics, but also art, science, love – raises the question as to whether all these spheres are becoming *politicized*.

This is one way to understand the omnipresence of the democratic emblem: It is an extension of an originary political process into the other spheres of life. It is an extension into spheres that are, strictly speaking and when regarded on their own, detached from politics. But according to this interpretation, these spheres would be incapable of keeping up their autonomy against the sphere of politics; they would become politicized by the strong, excessive power of the democratic paradigm. This reading, however, reduces the transgressive character of the democratic emblem to a simple imperative enacted upon the other spheres of life: In a strict sense this is not a proper transgression, rather an imposition.

Nevertheless, the slogan ‘everything is political’ can be said to describe our reality most aptly. But the decisive structure of transgression is to be found not so much in the symptom of a generalization of politics, but rather in the logic that drives this generalization. This logic is the logic of a shift that operates within the notion of politics itself in the democratic emblem. Western societies understand democracy as a fundamental structure of the state, but this understanding of politics is itself suspended within the reign of the democratic emblem. What is considered to be politics within the term’s conventional sense, i.e. governments, parties, debates, elections, is losing its impact and influence more and more. We are familiar with the debates across the major political parties in western societies that have interchangeable programs in many of their positions. Interchangeable as to their common foundational economic structure that inscribes a “class logic” onto the Western world. As Badiou puts it: “At a certain degree of inequality, to speak of democracy or of the democratic norm no longer makes any sense at all.”

Politics in the common representative understanding has to give up its place to the benefit of a more direct politicization of the different spheres of life. Thus while with respect to the first symptom the excessive transcendence of the notion of ‘democracy’ is noteworthy, we see at the same time that its original meaning, namely democracy as a politics of the state, is presently being abolished. This abolishment of politics, this inner voiding of the term politics, enables it to become a concept available for other structures, those apart from politics as well. These two symptoms may encourage us to again ask the question: What is the subject of the

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7 Badiou, 2015.
democratic emblem? For the democratic emblem presents not only a decline of politics, but rather appears in the form of an active-reactive reorganization of the idea of politics.

2. Democracy and the state

Initially we will have to speak of the democratic subject in terms of a hypothesis. This hypothesis includes the assumption that it has a politics of its own. The first thing that comes into view in the world of the democratic subject is the state. The democratic subject lives in a world that is organized in democratic states; they are its dominant political norm today. The democratic state is not only a political norm, it also bears an implicit moralistic norm: the non-democratic state will have to choose at some point whether it will orient itself towards democracy or run the risk of being considered an enemy of democracy. In the case that a particular state is not willing to follow the path to democracy, it will be threatened with intervention, and might in the end not even be a state anymore. There is an interesting variance inscribed onto this norm, as it does not imply that every non-democratic state is automatically threatened or lost. As a state, you can be a non-democratic state that will nevertheless not be threatened with intervention; China and Saudi-Arabia are examples of this type. Although they do not even pretend to develop democratic structures, they are neither threatened nor banned from the democratic circle. It is this variance that points to the fact that the main point is not a question of democracy as a political structure itself.

The difference can rather be defined via the will to cooperate. Non-democratic states that are not considered rogue states usually stand out because of their will to cooperate. The sociologist Ulrich Beck in one of his late articles called for transnational cooperation in view of the globalization of the markets as the only possible way to uphold politics against the realm of the markets.\(^8\) But isn’t it the other way around, doesn’t cooperation in the first instance mean economic cooperation, and as such, implies cooperation on all levels of international contacts, especially on the level of security? In any case, cooperation has also become a paradigm for exclusion: From this point of view we can see that Russia is much more on the verge of becoming a rogue state than for example Saudi-Arabia.\(^9\) Although Russia still displays more active democratic structures, its refusal to cooperate has been steadily increasing.

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\(^8\) See Beck 2011.

\(^9\) If we speak of a ‘rogue state’ we are reminded of Derrida’s definition: “‘rogue state,’ that is, a state that respects neither its obligations as a state before the law of the world community nor the requirements of international law, a state that flouts the law and scoffs at the constitutional state or state of law [état de droit].” Derrida 2005, p. xiii.
The democratic subject in democratic states finds itself thus in the need of a defense against those states that do not cooperate. Democratic states cooperate against those who do not cooperate. Legitimate states are organized, as Derrida reminds us, in groups like the United Nations or the G8 – groups that allow them to control the international law to which they subscribe. To revoke cooperation on a fundamental level in one of these circles can very quickly be understood as an attack on the emblem itself.

So we might say that on the level of democratic states, cooperation is a central characteristic of the emblem. Cooperation is here understood as the practical realization of the democratic imperative itself: Tolerance towards the other, as long as the other does not question the fundamental functioning of the democratic system itself. This also allows the cooperation with non-democratic partners, as long as they do not question democracy as such. In the world of democratic states and their partners, we thus find the same relation between limitation and imperative: It is a world of cooperating states, and the imperative clearly demands to not stand in the way of cooperation. That the system of cooperation is internally contradictory – because some of the states may dictate the conditions of cooperation to others – does not contradict this system as a whole. The internal hierarchy is justified by the formalized equality of states: Because they are in principle equal partners, the differences in terms of strengths, power, and influence are secondary differences. They do not invoke the structural equality. Cooperation is the language of the states as individual bodies.

The imperative of cooperation can then be taken as a characteristic of what Badiou has defined as the democratic world: A world that is built on the distinction from the non-world, from the “zone” of the outside, separated from the democratic world by fences and walls. Due to this distinction, the democratic world proves to be “not really a world,” as Badiou has argued. It is a non-world, because it is a world that is built on the separation from what is not the world. Thus, what takes itself to be the democratic world is of a highly ideological character: it is a false one. The democratic world is fundamentally marked by exclusion and by being a world not-for-all: It is, in other words, not one world. The democratic world is a world that is not for anybody, but a world only for democrats, and for those cooperating with democrats. This is more than just saying that the word of the ‘democratic world’ is pure exaggeration, in the sense that the democratic world does not include the whole world. It is more than just saying that the idea of the democratic world is just a sham. To such a reproach a democrat would answer: Well, it is an inclusive world, an open world, and any state willing to cooperate can join this world. But this is not

10 Derrida 2005, p. 68. Derrida has also shown how this system is internally contradicting itself because these organizations then again are structured via an exception – the right to veto, or the right to intervene, to start a conflict in the name of avoiding conflicts etc.
11 Badiou 2011, p. 7.
12 Ibid., p. 9.
the point; the point is rather that the democratic world is, from its beginning on, limited, determined by the form of the ‘democratic states’ it needs to implement a principle of exclusion. As the democratic world itself follows the principles of the equivalence of bodies and languages, the only thing that can appear in the “zone,” or as “zone,” is the inequivalent that is not willing to cooperate – a potential or real enemy. There is a line of separation between peace and terror, wealth and hunger, freedom and bondage that in its tendency overlaps with the line between the cooperating democratic states, and the rest, the zone. The democratic diversity thus is bound to a distinct line of exclusion.

But the democratic states that cooperate in the democratic world also do have formal criteria by which they are largely defined. If we take Germany as an example, where can we find these principles? We may find them in a brochure, published by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, entitled ‘Welcome to Germany’. Here, on page 116, “particularly important basic rights” are listed: We find the “Protection of human dignity,” the “Right to life and physical integrity,” the “Equality of all people before the law,” the “Freedom of faith” and the “Freedom of expression,” the “Freedom of assembly,” the “Freedom to choose and practice a profession,” the “Guarantee of property and the right of inheritance” and finally the “Freedom of the press.” The “basic law” guarantees these rights, and they “assure the constitutional rights of the individual in their relationship to the state.”13 Furthermore, we are informed that Germany is a democratic state, which means that “all the power of the state comes from the people,” and that the government is one form in which this democracy is “exercised.”14 This is to say, the basic rights are guaranteed by the state, which in its power relies on the people.

We could understand these rights as regulating the equal possibilities of cooperation on the individual level: Freedom of speech, individual rights, and political representation – all these moments of the democratic world find their guarantee in the democratic state. The democratic state is the one in which not only every democratic individual is represented, but also in which democracy as an operation of representation is represented, is guaranteed. It is an objective apparatus that guarantees the stability and continuity of democracy, that prevents democracy from falling into the anarchism of momentary movements, safeguards it against the fast pace of opinions, ensures that the principle of equality of individuals is not turned into the reign of the stronger.

At the same time, as such an objective guarantee it needs to be a separated mechanism i.e. a mechanism that is separated from its constituting power, that becomes a power of its own, separated from individual wills and desires. From this point of view, the perspective on the state is changed. A state is, as Badiou defines it, “a prin-

14 Ibid., p. 118.
principle of sovereignty, or coercion, functioning separately,”¹⁵ an objective mechanism of power. It is an elementary part of the self-perception of the democratic state to be a separate power that is nevertheless legitimized by the people, and thus, if these two moments are combined, then ‘democracy’ is not only the description of a form of the state, but also the name of a subjective relation to it. The democrat understands the state to be his state. But what is his state? The false one of the democratic world is not only false because it is built upon a principle of exclusion, but it is also an imaginary entity insofar as the game of states and their cooperation is more and more superseded by multinational corporations – that is, in the meaning of the word, bodies that are built upon the transcendence of states, as the imperative of cooperation has already prepared for. Transcendent bodies. In this world of false ones and imaginary entities, how does the democratic subject in its actuality refer to the state? Does it refer to the state at all?

The thesis to be articulated in the following is that the democratic subject today, instead of clinging to and identifying itself with the state, refers rather to its detachment from the state and develops as its politics an active suspension of politics. Its subjective relation is one of a specific distance from the state as a separated mechanism. But in the second step, this distance proves to be an imaginary distance that allows for different forms of the return of the state. On the one hand, the state reoccurs at its borders, on the other hand, the state reoccurs in its center, in the I am of the democratic subject. The fundamental contradiction that characterizes the democratic subject is to be found in its relation to the state, and in this contradiction it aligns itself with and creates the contradiction of the democratic world as such.

3. Two versions of distance from the state

On the basis of the division between a false world and a non-world or zone in our time, Badiou has emphasized the importance of the question of migration for quite a while. Most evidently, the question of migration has gained a specific reality in Europe since 2015. Since then, a large group of refugees from the non-democratic non-world actually has entered the democratic false world. This development has caused several types of actions and reactions, one specific significant reaction among them being the fundamental increase of right-winged and fascist parties and movements throughout Europe.

If we take a look back at the moment in which Germany opened the borders to the Syrian refugees, in September 2015, we will perhaps also recall the media-images of the mostly positive reactions by the people in Germany. The so-called ‘welcoming

¹⁵ Badiou 2005, p. 83.
culture’ (die Willkommenskultur) became a key word: Many people started private initiatives; they gathered at train stations to distribute clothes and food. Others would help refugees with the fulfillment of administrative necessities. And others again would accommodate refugees in their private homes. At the height of this development, you could find pictures of families sitting on their patio in some rural part of Germany and having coffee and a piece of cake – Bienenstich – with some refugees from Syria. A bizarre image, but nothing to be ridiculed, one should rather acknowledge that a great deal turned out to be possible which would have been considered impossible only two weeks before.

In this development, soon named the refugee crisis, two important peculiarities, two effective strands can be separated. The first line is marked by a suspension of politics, and the second is the moment of right-winged protest and an apparent repoliticization. To start with the first moment: The private humanitarian engagement with the refugees was often complemented by the appeal not to forget about the sources of the refugee crisis, by the reminder that the origins of the crisis also needed to be solved. The simple but structural and important problem that evolves with this appeal is that it displays the incapacity of private engagement: On the one hand, private engagement proves to be a private engagement because it accepts its limitation. It is only private after all, and it accepts that there are other types of problems, which other symbolic actors have to take care of. And on the other hand, private engagement as such exhibits the absence of the state: At any place at which the private engagement appears, the state could also have been there. The state could have been helping, organizing, taking care. In the further development of this private engagement following the opening of the borders, the first signs of an overload soon appeared; private engagement was incapable of solving the problem.

What needs to be seen in these media images of private engagement is the absent image, and that is the image of the absent state. There seemed to be practically no state organizations involved to organize the influx of the refugees. The overall impression the viewer necessarily would have to get, when going through the news, was the complete absence of any state organization.

We can assume that this absence was intentional, for it brings about a very clear effect: The state treated the problematic of the refugees with the utmost absence from the scene and thereby generated a media image that was predominantly an image of individual engagement. These media images had the direct effect of presenting the refugee crisis as a humanitarian crisis instead of a political problem. The private engagement of the citizens fitted very well with the image of a humanitarian crisis in which individual refugees sought help in another part of the world and are subsequently helped by other individuals. But thus, as a humanitarian crisis, its political kernel was blanked out. The state was shown to be absent, and so the crisis turned into a crisis of individuals, separated from any question of politics.
To the second aspect. The second aspect has become increasingly more worrisome, as it did not stop even after the influx of refugees had decreased. Parallel to the so-called ‘welcoming culture,’ protests against the refugees started to begin. The utterance of fear gained currency in the streets, and in weekly demonstrations, especially in Dresden and Leipzig, thousands of people uttered and utter their unease with the situation. The deepest concern of the protestors was and continues to be that they do not feel taken seriously by the politicians, but they also and even more strongly feel mis-represented by the media. The infamous words of the “lying press” came up and developed into one of the central slogans connecting all the different groups. The media are accused of more or less actively withholding crimes and offences committed by the refugees as well as other problematic aspects of the situation. Instead, the media and the politicians would blindly participate in the general consensus that could be summarized in the term ‘welcoming culture’. The media lie, and the state and politicians ignore the people. The demonstrations would then take up the famous slogan of the demonstrations at the end of the GDR: “We are the people.” Thus, the concern is expressed that the state, the politicians, and with them the media, are at a distance from the people, and the people need to re-present themselves.

The first faction, the welcoming faction, out of necessity, violently rejected the second faction, the protesters. This rejection unfortunately very often had the effect of confirming the reproaches of the protesters, as any uttered concern was taken to be a sign of racism or neo fascism or simply led to the rejection of any dialogue.16 As a reaction to this general dismissal, many statements of concern now begin with the assurance ‘not to be a racist, but…’. Of course, what follows after this assurance is then precisely racist in most cases. But the question is still whether all the concerns have been racist or fascist from the beginning.17

The complete difficulty of the situation came to the fore in the aftermath of the hundreds of sexual assaults during the night of New Year’s Eve in front of the main train station in Cologne (and in other cities). After this moment and its symbolic impact, the complete discussion underwent a further shift. Those in favor of the ‘welcoming culture’ were thrown into a deep irritation; those who did not want to be racist did not need the preceding assurance any longer. But to concentrate on the

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16 The most famous example of this is the vice-chancellor Gabriel, member of the social democratic party, calling the people on the street ‘rabble’. See Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 2015.

17 Let us add one remark, just for clarity: The protests under the slogan of the ‘lying press’ have from the beginning been strongly influenced or even organized by extreme right-winged forces. And although they officially reject violence, the number of hundreds of attacks against refugees and against refugee homes have to be recalled in this context: In 2015 there have been 924 attacks on refugee homes, including 76 cases of arson. (See Pro Asyl, 2016) 2016 continues in these scales. What we are trying to juxtapose here, however, are two variants of a self-image. This implies that many protestors at the beginning perhaps were driven rather by fear than by racist motives, but it also implies the possible exchange of these motives.
first distinction and to summarize the second point, the demonstrations against the 
refugees expressed and continue to express a disappointment of and a deception by 
the state. Thus, we find a situation in which the two sides act at a distance from the 
state: On the one side the engaged humanitarian individuals, and on the other side 
the people who feel both deceived and no longer represented.

The subjective characteristic of the latter side is clearly fear. It is the fear of being 
robbed if the state does not fulfill its duty to protect the individuals. And what about 
the subjective characteristic on the side of the humanitarian engagement? As posi-
tive as it is meant to be, one still has the impression that the caring master lurks be-
hind the individual engagement, and with it his arrogance. “Fear” and “arrogance” 
are the two sides of the contradiction of the democratic subject as Badiou has de-
scribed it mainly in the context of economic pressures on the middle class. The 
democratic subject, we can say with Badiou, exhibits the “constant fear of a privi-
leged few to lose their privilege,” it is the fear of being dragged into the mass of 
those who have nothing, and at the same time it is the heir of the colonial master, the 
one who still feels in charge of taking care of the rest.¹⁸

The protests out of fear demand a stronger presence of the state, they want the 
state to intervene, and in this regard they do not seem to act at a distance from the 
state. But behind this superficial demand, there is a more fundamental critique of the 
state: It is based on the conviction that the state, the government, is nothing more 
than an established circle of power, and that new forms of political intervention are 
needed, forms that are less oriented by this circle, and more directly connected to the 
people and their concerns. The right-winged critique of the state is not to remind the 
state of its duty, but is the expression of the old conservative doubts about the state 
as a separate function in its current form. This is not a critique of the state as such, 
but rather the old conservative-romantic desire for another, non-artificial state.

4. The democratic subject – reactive and obscure

But if the democratic subject can be understood as acting at a distance from the 
state, does this help us to understand whether there is a political stance in the demo-
cratic subject, whether we can speak of a politics of the democratic subject at all?

In his recent account of the attacks in Paris, Badiou describes the descending in-
fluence of the figure of the state as the “capitalist process of the withering away of 
states.”¹⁹ In the world of today, transnational capital and multinational corporations 
increasingly outweigh the state. Large corporate companies have become decisively 
more powerful than states. For Badiou, this is a process that has been taking place

¹⁸ Badiou 2015.
¹⁹ Ibid.
for the last thirty years, roughly from the late eighties onwards. Our world today is dominated by the unicity of the democratic emblem on the one hand and by anarchic zones of poverty and violence on the other. Badiou points out that this form of a new imperialism does not intend to colonize those countries in which it intervenes, as in former times. It turns them rather into zones in which the organization of the state is itself destroyed: what is not needed by capital will be left to war and chaos. Thus, in the democratic world the state is withering away, and in the rest of the non-democratic zones, states are being destroyed.

In the same text, “Our wound is not so recent,” Badiou characterizes what he calls “Western subjectivity” as the subjectivity of the middle class. He comments there on the subjective counterpart to the objective process of the withering away of the states: “But there is also a subjective victory that accompanies this objective victory of capitalism. It is the total eradication of the very idea of any other path. And this is of great importance, because it is the affirmation, in a certain sense a strategic one, that another global, systemic orientation for the organization of production and the social is impossible, that it is practically absent right now.”

The democratic subject conceals the possibility of an alternative to the global capital and its processes. But how does it relate then to the question of the state? Is there any relation to the state at all? Badiou’s indication on the subjective victory is helpful here. We can understand the subjective victory to be a victory, because it has overcome an older paradigm of the political world, namely that of the world divided into socialist and capitalist states. As Badiou in the course of his thoughts developed in his book on the ‘Communist hypothesis,’ when socialist states still existed, the world was divided into alternatives, and the failure of the socialist states was also the disappearance of an alternative. The point here is not a difference between an emancipatory and a repressive society, but rather that the political system as such knew the possibility of an alternative. And this difference was a difference in relation to the state; it was a difference between two forms of the state. Thus we can say that the old political paradigm was a paradigm both of the state and of the difference between two types of states. The old political paradigm was a paradigm of the state, but today we might have to acknowledge that the contemporary political paradigm for the democratic subject is no longer that of the state. On the contrary, the democratic subject might gain its form, not in an active relation to the state, but rather in the active distance from the figure of the state as such. This distance then is also a distance from the view of politics as the alternative between different forms of states, i.e. that the democratic subject believes to have overcome the game of alternatives. The subject of the democratic emblem affirms the absence of an alternative by affirming the overcoming of the game of states. But is this only another version

20 Ibid.
21 See e.g. Badiou, 2010.
of the typical story of the end of the grand narratives, at the end of which the liberal individual reigns on his own account?

We can go even one step further here. As Badiou has shown in the specific case of Nicolas Sarkozy, different attempts in contemporary ideology have been and are being made to delete the experiences of May 68 from cultural memory. In his book on Sarkozy Badiou writes: “We should understand properly what he was trying to say, that putting an end to May 68 once and for all was the supreme goal of his action, of that ‘rupture’ that he proclaimed.”22 But what is the problem that Sarkozy saw connected to the heritage of May 68? “He tells us: May 68 was the time when people stopped making a clear distinction between Good and Evil.”23 And then Badiou paraphrases what Sarkozy – whom he calls the ‘Rat Man’ in his book – supposedly is concerned about:

“Sarkozy admits that May 68 is the spectre haunting him, which he wants to shake off, he is basically speaking of one of the last real manifestations of the spectre of communism, and what he says is (permit me here to paraphrase the Rat Man): ‘We modern reactionaries no longer want to be haunted by anything at all. We are going to definitively eradicate any idea that assumes it is possible to hold on to a real point outside the law of the state, outside the constraints of the world that we dominate. […] We want, in other words, the disappearance of the spectre to be publicly and unanimously recognized. Empirical communism has disappeared, which is all well and good, but that is not enough. We want to prevent anyone mentioning communism – which is the generic name of our defeat and indeed our disappearance – even in the form of a hypothesis.’”24

The rejection of May 68 is then not simply the rejection of some hedonistic interruptions of the society as such, but is indeed the rejection of the possibility of an alternative to the reigning understanding of politics as such:

“[A]bove all it means abandoning the hypothesis that May 68 was a militant invention precisely aware of the failure of state ‘communism’. And thus that May 68, and still more so the five years that followed, inaugurated a new sequence for the genuine communist hypothesis, one that always keeps its distance from the state.”25

The democratic subject as a subject that understands itself as beyond the alternatives of states becomes thus a subject that re-acts against the attempt of May 68. But May 68, as Badiou makes clear, was the appearance of a possible political alternative to politics understood as the game of states. If the first moment of the democratic subject leads to a distance from the state as such, because the state is a symbol of differences and thus necessarily a symbol of alternatives, the second step makes it clear that this distance from the state is not the sign of a political alternative, but rather an eclipse of politics as such. It is meant to overcome politics as such. But in

22 Badiou, 2008, p. 36.
23 Ibid., p. 37.
25 Ibid., p. 102.
this precise form of overcoming politics as the alternative to the form of states, the
democratic subject still clings to the state: Not only is the state as a symbol for polit-
ics negated, but along with May 68 so is the possible alternative to this understand-
ing of politics. The democratic subject clings to the state as the object of his nega-
tion, but clings even more strongly to the state in the form of the negation of the
negation of the state. The state, as presenting political alternatives, needs to be
negated. But even worse is the alternative to the state: it needs to be negated even
more strongly. The democratic subject rejects the alternative in politics as such, and
it reacts against the state, because it believes the state to be the symbol of the possi-
bility of an alternative. But this reaction against the state is only an apparent reac-
tion. Despite the real fear of the democratic subject – which is the alternative as such
– the state will nevertheless be remembered, it will reoccur as a negated state.

It is at this place that the democratic subject constitutes himself politically. The
rejection of May 68 by the contemporary democratic subject is the affirmation of his
own depoliticizing subjectivity. It is depoliticizing, because it seeks to repress the
possibility of the impossible alternative. But it is a part of politics, because it is ori-
ented towards the question of a political alternative. Trying to delete all possibilities
of alternatives as such, and thereby depoliticizing, the democratic subject at the
same time acts politically, and acknowledges the possibility of the impossible, inso-
far as he reacts to the very possibility, takes it into account, and changes the reality
accordingly.

Badiou has baptized such a subjectivity that consists fundamentally in a reaction
to an event, the “reactive subject.”\textsuperscript{26} If May 68 has the structure of an event – and
that is in the Badiousian sense the subjective change of the set of possibilities – then
the democratic subject in its rejection of this event proves to be a reactive subject.
But reacting, the reactive subject is still concerned with the event it reacts against;
the event gains a new place in the structure, now as the unconscious object of the
subject’s reaction.

In his definition of the reactive subject in \textit{Logics of Worlds}, Badiou characterizes
the reactive subject as the one that negates the trace of the event and nevertheless
produces a different reality. She does not simply negate the new, and cling to the
old; she rather brings a different present about, although she negates the event.

“It is a measured present, a negative present, a present ‘a little less worse’ than
the past, if only because it resisted the catastrophic temptation which the reactive
subject declares is contained in the event. We will call it an \textit{extinguished present}.”\textsuperscript{27}

As such, she does not intend to bring back the world as it was before the event,
but is convinced that the consequences of the event itself are unbearable and there-
fore the change of the world has to be realized in a different manner. Acting in reac-

\textsuperscript{26} See Badiou, 2009, pp. 54-8.
\textsuperscript{27} Badiou, 2009, p. 55.
tion to the question of the event, the faithful subject – that is the one that incorpo-
rates herself into the body of the eventual procedure – is inscribed in the uncon-
scious of the reactive subject: “the form of the faithful subject nonetheless remains
the unconscious of the reactive subject.”

Besides the reactive subject, Badiou has also characterized the “obscure subject”
as the one that seeks the “abolition of the new present.” It is not simply as directed
to the past that the obscure subject is oriented, rather this subject is trying to abolish
the new present in the present, under the given circumstances. The obscure subject
will give a different form to the event, and a different form to the body of the event
– propaganda and military or police will become the decisive forms. All this is built
around the insertion of a timeless fetish, with the means of which the obscure sub-
ject abolishes the present: “the goal of the obscure subject is to make this fetish the
contemporary of the present that demands to be occulted.”

Following the two sides that we have determined in the democratic subject, we
find the side of reaction as well – against a new possibility of a politics that is not
oriented towards the state – as we also find its will to secure the borders of its being,
the will to present ‘democracy’ as the ahistorical fetish that solves all political
dilemmas and conflicts. Because democracy is understood as the overcoming of the
political conflict between states and their ideologies, democracy as an idea can be
presented as the ahistorical truth of politics: the new fetish. But then again, we also
find the reactive side, the subject trying to impose a moderate improvement, but still
afraid of the radical consequences of a new possibility. The democratic subject re-
acts against the possibility of a radical change by acknowledging that moderate
changes are to be made: This is the humanitarian engagement that has turned the po-
titical-emancipatory imperative of May 68 into a personal and private engagement.
The democratic subject is a reactive-obscure subject, and therefore it unfolds itself in
a continuous self-contradiction. It seeks to privatize and personalize, and it wants to
establish privatization and personalization as the ahistorical fetish, guarded by a
strong police.

5. Return of the state

But then, finally, we might ask, whether the state has really withered away com-
pletely into democratic subjectivity, and whether this withering away is to be under-
stood as the state’s full and fundamental disappearance. Here, we will rather suggest
that the state returns as a figure of the individual I, as a figure of the ego – close to

28 Ibid., p. 56.
29 Ibid., p. 59.
30 Ibid., p. 60.
what Lacan defined as the “ideal-I” in the mirror stage, a “form [that] situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual,” a “total form of the body.”

The state does not only return on the individual level, however, it also returns as an individual. It returns internally and externally, it returns at the borders as well as in the center.

If we again take the example of the refugee crisis, we see that the state reoccurs on its borders, or even better, on the borders of some other country. This is the only place where the state is to be seen: In its attempts to control the borders. Even better still when this task of controlling the borders can be imposed on some other country, so that it is even not the democratic subject’s own democratic country at the borders of which the state has to appear. It is then the others who have to handle the ‘problem’; it is now they who have to show the strong hand of the state. In one way or the other, the question of the state is relocated onto the margins, and here it will reappear as a strong individual in the form of the police. It becomes clear that the distance from the state, which the democratic subject claims, is a distance that it seeks only for itself individually, while it is at the same time holding on to the necessity of the state as a defense mechanism against those who do not belong to the realm of the democratic emblem. The democratic subject considers itself to be free, and at a distance from the state, while the state is needed to defend this freedom from threatening interruptions. This is the hypocrisy of the democratic subject: The realm of its individual self-reference has to be isolated and shielded from the other.

Sometimes, rather strange, bizarre ideas manifest the extreme possibility of a collapse of these two sides into one figure. A good illustration of this is a project called the “Seasteading-Institute.” Based in California, this project aims to create artificial islands in the international sea, islands that would be independent from the US, but also independent from other states as well – because they would be their own state. Every singular island would be a state of its own, and it would implement the political system that its residents have agreed upon. Thus, it would become possible to have a communist island neighboring a fascist island, a liberal or vegan-conservative island perhaps close by. This idea of course sounds a bit excessive, utopian, and perhaps it is not realizable. But it is not impossible. There is a good deal about it that is interesting for our characteristic of the gestalt of the democratic subject. The project is born out of the strands of so called liberal-anarchist theory, combining individualism with the anarchist disdain for the state. As ridiculous as the project may sound: It actually presents the essence of the democratic subject in its purity, even if it is too pure to be realized. The small island-states combine the two general traits of the

democratic subject: On the one hand the individual distance from the state – and this
distance has some quite substantial interests, because it is fed by an aversion against
the US immigration policy. In the area of the Silicon Valley, the US immigration
policy is far too slow and too difficult in its proceedings to be an appropriate partner
for a fast-growing economy. Employers cannot hire quickly enough, and if work
permission is granted, the respective person might already have been fired.\(^\text{32}\)
So there is a distance from the state, and on the other hand then, this form of distance is
presented in the – openly contradictory – form of a state, as a small, individual, pri-
ivate state. And a private state, of course, is very close to the absolute fantasy of the
democratic subject. So we can see that the Seasteading-Project matches perfectly
with the ambivalent structure of the democratic subject. Its inherent ambivalence is,
by the way, also personified in a compelling way in one of the founders of the
“Seasteading-Institute,” who is Patri Friedman, a grandchild of Milton Friedman.\(^\text{33}\)

Besides these objective, material reoccurrences of the state, as a next step we will
have to ask whether the return of the state – the state that is being abolished by the
democratic subject but returns when it comes to the question of the borders – does
not also imply a return on the subjective level, to the inside of this figure, so to
speak.

It is striking that the form of the contemporary democratic subject is accompanied
by a new understanding of the individual. The contemporary individual is shaped by
the metaphysics of the democratic materialism: It understands itself to be a speaking
body. It is therefore equal to all the other speaking bodies and tolerates the differ-
ences as long as these differences do not go too far: And going too far is precisely
understood as trespassing the sphere of privacy and individuality. But it also accepts
its own variations of the notion of individuality, as long as these variations do not
present any problems in daily life. On the level of the individual, the democratic
subject presents an equivalence between individuals in the form of small differ-
ences: Every individual is different, as long as it does not present something that
questions the form of individuality. Difference is the norm: To be a differing indi-
vidual is the proof of this general equivalence. Without a strange little allergy you
are actually nobody today, and you risk being considered an anomaly if you do not
present your private life, your idiosyncrasies, and your allergies to the community of

\(^\text{32}\) See for the question of taxation e.g. an interview with George Petrie from the Seasteading In-
stitute: http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/new_scientist/2012/09/floating_cities
_seasteaders_want_to_build_their_own_islands_.html (accessed on: November 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2016).
The Seasteading Project is of course also to be seen in the context of the economic situation of
California close to bankruptcy: http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21595005-california-
has-won-breathing-space-under-jerry-brown-now-he-should-tackle-taxes-debt-and-red,
accessed on: November 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2016.

\(^\text{33}\) I have dealt with the Seasteading-phenomenon in more detail in my text “Politik ohne Staat.
individuals with whom you share the belief in the common fetish of the democratic emblem.

As such a peculiar individual, the single democratic subject finds itself in a distance from the state. This distance is imaginary, insofar as it is precisely the state that is needed to secure this distance. But thus the democratic subject also forms its ego precisely via this distance from the state. The state is the other of the democratic subject. In allusion to Lacan’s mirror stage, we can say that the state is the mirror of the democratic subject. It is the image in which the democratic subject feels insecure and shattered, but it is also the other toward which its orients itself in becoming itself. It is what the democratic subject as its ideal wants to become: a state of its own. But as an imaginary private state of its own, the democratic I needs to defend itself against the gap that alienates him, as he can never be a state of its own. Above all, the democratic subject will defend itself against any appearance of the impossible alternative.

So, to become a state itself with all these measures and mechanisms is a necessary armor of the realm of the democratic subject, guarding its existence with its distinguishing tics and idiosyncrasies, guarding the possibility of living freely at a distance from the state. That is the normal state of things; these are the natural and necessary confines of the imaginary democratic world. These confines are on the one hand objective, in the sense that they are the natural state of things – they cannot be changed, we are what we are, little individual bodies with pain, anger, joy and happiness, and we have to cope with these bodies, we have to adapt them to the reality surrounding us. On the other hand, these confines are coercive: They prevent the individual from possibly breaking the law, overstepping the boundaries of its individuality. To watch the lines of the possible, the democratic subject needs the state – on the outside, at the borders, as well as on the inside, on the border of its individuality. The individual under the democratic emblem forms a small state apparatus. Not an apparatus of the state in Althusser’s sense, but a private state as an apparatus – a machine, that in each individual can also be said to be absolute. It is absolute precisely because it is the state without alternative. It is not the state in the form of a government, it is not the state in the form of a socialist state, it is not even a bureaucracy – it is a state of its own. Although the individual takes its shape in its reflection to the state, in its will to be a state of its own, it is absolute, and, paradoxically, without alternative. Hence the melancholy and the sadness of the democratic subject that occurs from time to time, due to the alienation in the confines of its imaginary absoluteness.

But via the necessary state it is still in contact with an other, and it will still pursue its politics, a perverted politics, the only aim of which is to privatize and to individualize, to finally extinguish politics. Everything that happens must be either private or an event of nature; this is the extension of the imperative not to cross the
confines of the possible. Cooperation is possible, even though the inner conviction of the democratic subject is that the state, as a symbol of politics, can only be totalitarian and individual. The politics of the democratic subject enters its most fundamental contradiction, as it wants to combine the absoluteness of the individual with the necessity of a state as its guard. Strangely, there is always something present that is more than the individual. Maybe, in the end, the democratic subject uses the state to fight against the state, because in the state its own fear is encapsulated – the fear of this strange something more than the individual, which is communism.

**Bibliography**


A Marxist is one who extends the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is where the profound difference lies between a Marxist and a petty (and even big) bourgeois. (Lenin, The State and Revolution)

1. The desire for the cessation of the state. Communism contra Stalinism

In Of an Obscure Disaster (1991), written shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, Badiou puts forward a very neat opposition. On the one hand, he sees the Soviet party-State as a “despotic grey totality,” which belongs to the history of States, or ontologically to the state of the situation (the One) that mortifies the multiple. On the other hand, being faithful to the event of October 1917 named “communism” entails thinking philosophically (under the conditions of politics) the “egalitarian passion, the Idea of justice, the will to end the compromises with the service of goods, the eradication of egoism, the intolerance towards oppression.” This communist hypothesis also succinctly amounts for Badiou to “the desire for the cessation of the State” tout-court. In short, the “State of Communism” as epitomized by the Stalinist and post-Stalinist USSR is a disastrous oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Badiou refers to this disaster, the death of which communists should welcome, as a “terroristic bureaucracy.”

The aim of this article is twofold. First, I intend to explore from a Badiouian perspective the oxymoronic “State of Communism.” I will do so also by comparing Of an Obscure Disaster with Badiou’s more recent writings on the “communist hypothesis” (focusing especially on his 2014 dialogue with Gauchet, Que Faire?, and his 2015 conversation with Engelmann, Quel communisme?). Second, availing myself of recent historical investigations on Stalinism and of Lenin’s own 1917 The State and Revolution, I propose to problematize Badiou’s clear-cut opposition between

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1 Badiou 2009, p. 12.
2 Ibid., p. 17.
3 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 34.
communism and the state of the USSR. To put it very bluntly, for Badiou, “Lenin” and “Mao” are signifiers that can still positively work as seminal signposts for a new “communist hypothesis.” On the contrary, the signifier “Stalin” would simply be disastrous. I think this needs to be challenged. Let me make it perfectly clear that what I will briefly outline here is neither a reactionary grouping of “Lenin,” “Stalin,” and “Mao” under the same supposedly totalitarian disaster, nor a defence of “Stalin.” Let me also make it absolutely clear that I sincerely admire Badiou’s ontological and meta-political project. I am simply dubious about his utter demonization of the signifier “Stalin.” Accepting the risk of being misunderstood – i.e. labeled a “Stalinist” (which I am not) – I would argue that it is historically, philosophically, and politically high time to deconstruct and dialectize “Stalin” as a complex signifier, especially if one still believes in the “communist hypothesis.”

In this article, I will not be able to tackle thoroughly the phrase “terroristic bureaucracy” – with which Badiou summarizes Stalin and Stalinism. While the Great Terror of 1937-38 is an undisputed matter of fact, access to Soviet archives and the work of historians such as Domenico Losurdo have exposed all the limits of the Western ideological caricature of Stalin as a terroristic paranoid monster – comparable only to Hitler. Terror needs to be contextualized within the more or less continuous civil wars Russia experienced from at least the failed revolution of 1905 to the end of World War II. This sequence culminated with and was closed by what Getty and Naumov have convincingly dubbed as the “self-destruction of the Bolsheviks,” of which – I would add – it would not be inappropriate to see Stalin himself as the last posthumous victim, following the 1956 Khrushchev Report.

Pointing out what should be obvious, we need also to bear in mind that accusations of terror were made from all sides; Stalinists themselves referred to real or presumed counter-revolutionaries and the Western powers as terrorists. Most importantly, terrorism has no doubt increasingly become over the last decades an empty concept through which parliamentarian capitalism designates its enemies as “absolute enemies,” its “opponents [as] totally criminal and inhuman, […] a total non-value.” “Terror” is thus, in my view, no longer a useful political category for thinking the superseding of capitalism through the failures of really existing socialism and the delineation of a renewed communist hypothesis. It is then perhaps the term “bureau-

6 See Losurdo 2008.
7 On the basis of hundreds of formerly top-secret Soviet documents, Getty and Naumov draw the following conclusions about the Great Terror: “We used to perceive only one road, and it was straight and simple. The main causal element for the terror has always been Stalin’s personality and culpability. In most accounts there were no other authoritative actors, no limits on his power, no politics, no discussion of society or social climate, no confusion or indecision.” “Actually the false starts, contradictions, and reversals have been evident for a long time. But they have been inconsistent with our image of Stalin as not only evil but omniscient, omnipotent, almost supernatural” (Getty / Naumov 2010, p. 231, p. 236).
cracy” that would elsewhere deserve more attention, recalling also that, for Lacan, Stalinism stood for the epitome of the “university discourse” – a discourse that equally subjected the USSR and Western capitalist democracies (and still subjects the latter) to the phantasmatic agency of the “all-knowledge.” In this regard, the question to be explored, also and especially from a psychoanalytic perspective, would be: what desire sustains bureaucratic discourse? And, conversely, how would Badiou’s communist “desire for the cessation of the State” – both Stalinist and capitalist – counter it?

Let us turn to Badiou’s arguments on the alleged incompatibility between state and communism. Why is the “State of Communism” a contradiction in terms, if not a veritable antinomy? Or also, what leads him to reject in toto the “despotic character of socialist states” in the name of what he calls “real communism”?

On the one hand, there is for Badiou a straightforward “we communists,” a “subjectivity of emancipation,” revitalized by the event of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and faithful to it, possibly up until May 1968. On the other, Stalin, the Stalinist Party, and the State of the USSR, as basically identical. The ontological-political thesis Badiou puts forward in Of an Obscure Disaster is unequivocal: communism is a matter of the presentation of an infinite multiple; the Party and the State (as, in the end, a State of police) usurp this presentation by representing it as a One. They are consequently in open conflict.

Not only that, but the suppression of communist presentation operated by pseudo-communist representation could not but lead to the elimination of this very representation. We could add: the State of Communism is nothing but the process of self-destruction of pseudo-communism through the suppression of real communism. By 1991, the particular figure of communist presentation as surfaced in 1917 had vanished, due to a large extent to the solidification of the Soviet State; yet, the breakup of the Soviet empire was by the same token inevitable and therefore amounted simply to a “second death.” For Badiou, we communists should rejoice in such a death – which is to be limited to an episode internal to the history of States (whether bourgeois or socialist), even if it should mark at the same time its final installment and the commencement of the history of politics.

The ultimate reason for rejoicing in this is that, although political subjectivity is, for Badiou, only periodical and hence lacunary (i.e. it merely enjoys “discontinuous existence”), there nonetheless persists, after the closure of the sequence initiated by the revolution of 1917 and its Stalinist betrayal, a “trans-temporal” communist sub-

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11 Cf. Ibid., p. 11, p. 16.
12 Cf. Ibid., p. 13.
13 Ibid., p. 59.
jectivity of emancipation, “an eternal concept of rebel subjectivity.” Its eternal character, which is the duty of philosophy to think as a more than hypothetical Idea given to us through breaks, evidences in particular the “eternity of the equal.”

While, for Badiou, the geopolitical “dislocations” that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall “propose[d] nothing” to communists in the 1990s in terms of thinking and carrying out a new emancipatory political sequence, in his more recent militant writings – starting at least from The Communist Hypothesis (2009) – he believes that history has, after two decades, again “reawakened,” and we live today in a conjuncture of upheavals that globally resembles in several ways that which originated with the European revolutions of 1848. What, however, has not changed in the meantime is Badiou’s uncompromising identification of the State of Communism as a disaster. In Que faire? and Quel communisme?, the two open interrogations of the titles actually underlie a more basic ontological-political schema that remains as rigid as in Of an Obscure Disaster: in short, for Badiou, “we communists” are resolutely and indiscriminately opposed to the, by now defunct, communist state, and to the State in general.

The crucial methodological questions we should ask here is: What use is there in advocating the topicality of a comparison with the political sequence, opened in 1848 and sustained historically until May 1968, if any idea of a communist state should be rejected a priori? How can we benefit from this sequence’s achievements and avoid repeating its errors without at least considering the possibility of an alternative communist state? Why should the state expression of communism, or better, its socialist phase, simply accompany the emancipatory sequence from the outside as its negative double, instead of being an integral component of it, in spite of all failures?

Let us look more closely at Badiou’s arguments in Que faire? and Quel communisme?, stressing their continuity with those he put forward twenty-five years earlier in Of an Obscure Disaster. In a nutshell, once again, the very phrase “state-communism” is an “oxymoron,” Badiou says, that runs contrary to Marx (“Marx has never imagined a Marxist State; that would not have had any sense for him; he would have been very surprised”). Marx rather postulated the withering away of the State. From this stance, for Badiou, even the requirement of a dictatorship of the proletariat that would be only transitory is nothing but an “invention” of Stalin. In other

14 Ibid., p. 16, p. 18.
15 Ibid., p. 19.
16 Ibid., p. 14.
17 It must be said that, in 1991, this seemed to apply to some communist states less than others; at the time at least, Badiou partly saved Mao’s, Tito’s, and even Hoxha’s states, for having broken with the Soviet State (cf. ibid., pp. 26-7).
words, communism – at any stage of its unfolding – is contrary to any proletarian avant-garde detached from the masses: a party of the proletariat (and its related state) stands itself as a “complete paradox.”

From a more ontological perspective, for Badiou, refusing the State of Communism amounts to a refusal of the One and the apparatus of representation. This One emerged concretely in the USSR as a “fusion” of allegedly orthodox Marxist doctrine (true Marxism) with the assumption of power, which could not do otherwise than inevitably lead to terror. More specifically, what we witnessed in the USSR is a representation of a representation of a representation, whose name was “Stalin.” According to Badiou, Marx’s idea of the proletariat as a negative universality was first transformed into a “representative substance,” i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was in turn itself represented by the Party. Finally, Stalin in person represented the Party. The movement of the universal was thus “pathologically” represented by an individual (through the mediation of and the short-circuit with the particulars of the proletarian class and then of the Party).

On the basis of this account, it is then easy to understand why Badiou’s most basic definition of communism appears to be that it exists as a “movement,” in the sense of something that literally moves towards universal emancipation. Accordingly, not only can communism not be a (static) State, but, strictly speaking, it does not even ever hold power. Rather, in its movement, communism continuously fights representation, which never disappears completely. When asked by Engelmann whether “we can imagine a society without State,” Badiou answered: “we do not need to imagine anything, the problem is fighting,” where the enemy to be fought should be identified with the One of representation, and eventually “every State possesses an intrinsically criminal dimension.” The agent of this fight against the State and, more in general, stasis, is still – in Que faire? and Quel communisme? – “we communists,” an open “collective subject,” open in the sense that it remains “vague,” Badiou says, with regard to any “concrete identity,” and certainly irreducible to any particular class. All we need for the emergence of communism as the universalism of politics is a “dimension of life where a subject can produce a universalizable relation to others, and be born himself in this relation.” Each thus defined symbolic birth is far from utopian, but concretely felt as the equality of the subjects who partake a break with the State of a situation (i.e. who partake an

20 Badiou 2015, p. 105.
21 Cf. Ibid., p. 58.
22 Cf. Ibid., pp. 90-1.
23 Cf. Ibid., p. 91.
24 Cf. Ibid., p. 60, p. 55.
27 Ibid., p. 142.
event). At the same time and for the same reason – i.e. given the requirement of a contingent event – the birth of “we communists” is never scientifically predictable.

In Que faire? and Quel communisme?, Badiou certainly does not refrain from unraveling his idea of communism at a very down-to-earth level, accessible even for readers not versed in his ontology (first and foremost, in his notions of the event, truth, and the generic – which are rarely mentioned in these conversations). To begin with, “we communists” are those for whom “the state of the contemporary world” – dominated as it is by parliamentarian capitalism and its injustices – “is absolutely pathological.” Or conversely, “we communists” are those who, following Marx, realize that “communism is too big an Idea to be confined to the State.” The Idea of communism can then be delineated through a tangible tripartite agenda: first, “de-privatization of the process of production”; second “withering away of the State” (and hence also avoidance of State-property); third, end of the division of labor in favor of its polymorphism.

How does Badiou propose to implement this agenda as an experimental hypothesis? For the time being, realistically, it is a matter of synergizing experiences and innovations of local politics with discussions of the communist idea at a global level. The ensuing result should be – and partly already is – a “worldwide place […] that would simply be a place of exchange of experiences, that is, one in which each of us would describe his own way of rendering the idea of emancipation active, the precise kind of activity he has carried out.” But if this is the case, does such a proposal revolving around localism not clash with the communist “dimension of the universalizable”? Badiou does not openly tackle this issue – which I would single out as most pressing, especially in order to prevent any confusion with Foucauldian so-called “micro-politics.” In one instance Badiou nonetheless speaks in passing of a “kind of federation of all the localized experiences that attempt to organize political processes in the light of [the] idea of communism.”

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29 Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 142.
30 The notion of “State” is far more multifaceted, even politically, in Badiou’s ontology. For instance, in Meditation Nine of Being and Event (Badiou 2005, pp. 104-11), which focuses on Marxist politics, Badiou opposes a simplistic abolition of the State to a more realistic subtraction from the State. (Surprisingly, the target of his anti-anti-statist critique is here primarily Engels...) The fact however remains that in his more political pamphlets he gives the impression of endorsing “the desire for the cessation of the State.” Such a tension should be investigated in more detail. To put it very simply, the tension might be reduced if we understand the “desire for the cessation of the State” as a desire that never ceases….
31 Badiou 2015, p. 7.
32 Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 61.
33 Ibid., p. 63.
34 Badiou 2015, p. 103.
It seems to me inevitable to ask: Is a “federate we,” really, today, our best possible option as communists? How does it de facto differ from, say, Chomsky’s call for a “federated, decentralized system of free association, incorporating economic as well as other social institutions” – which, significantly, he defines as “anarcho-syndicalism,” not “communism”?37 (Note also that in his 1971 conversation with Foucault, Chomsky’s “direct defiance” of the state, e.g. through civil disobedience, nonetheless defends universalism...38) And, more to the point: would any kind of “federate” politics, even when – in implicit agreement with Badiou – it supposedly presents without representing up to 99% of us, ever be able to temporarily de-privatize anything more than a small urban park?

2. Stalinism: Criminal objectivity or developmental dictatorship?

I would argue that there are three main ways in which to challenge Badiou’s complete condemnation of the State of Communism – without this implying a rejection of his potent account of what went wrong with the USSR and its satellites. First, from a historical perspective, highlighting the unwanted partial convergence between his dismissal of the socialist state and the doxastic portrayal of Stalin provided not only by the reigning ideology of parliamentarian capitalism, but also by vast quarters of the Left. Second, from a philosophical standpoint, spelling out what Lenin himself says about the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat, especially in The State and Revolution, on the basis of a close reading of Marx and Engels. Third, from a political angle, stressing the urgency – still felt by Badiou himself – of defending the experiment of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the potentialities of its legacy as, I would importantly specify, an immanent critique of the state carried out by what was nonetheless at the time a communist-Maoist state. I will here only focus on the first two challenges.39

With regard to Stalin, I think that Losurdo’s 2008 eponymous book should be taken seriously, i.e. not hurriedly dismissed as a revisionist – or nostalgic – ill-conceived attempt at rehabilitating an unredeemable figure of absolute evil. In spite of

37 Chomsky / Foucault 2006, p. 38.
38 Cf. Ibid., p. 45, p. 60.
39 With regard to the third challenge, let me just highlight that Badiou is obliged to acknowledge that the emergence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution presupposes, as what it puts into question and potentially eradicates, the existence of a “Chinese communist Party [that] remains Stalinist” (Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 47; my emphasis; see also p. 54). Although it is clearly meant to discredit Mao in the name of liberal democracy and “anti-totalitarianism” – and not to open a frank discussion about the achievements and much more evident limits of Stalin’s cultural revolution – one should seriously take into account, from a different political perspective, the following remark made by Gauchet in conversation with Badiou: “What [Mao] does at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution greatly echoes with what happened in Russia in 1936-38” (ibid., p. 38).
his at times excessive partisanship, Losurdo’s methodological starting point is straightforward, and in my view difficult not to agree with. He writes: “the radical contrast between the different images of Stalin should encourage the historian not to absolutize one, but rather to problematize them all.”\textsuperscript{40} Drawing on an impressive range of sources, Losurdo shows how, up until the late 1940s, Stalin was still mostly praised not only, conveniently, by the Western statesmen with whom he had defeated the Third Reich, but by intellectuals who could hardly be suspected of Stalinist (or even Marxist) sympathies. Among others, Arendt believed that Stalin’s ability to “organize different populations on the basis of national equality”\textsuperscript{41} should be taken as a universal model. Deutscher (Trotsky’s biographer) saluted the way in which Stalin had schooled a whole country by means of a veritable “cultural revolution;” Deutscher also drew attention to the fact that “in a crucial aspect Stalin continued Lenin’s work: he tried to defend the State built by Lenin,” and noted that there was an element of “psychological truth” even in the Moscow trials.\textsuperscript{42} On his part, Thomas Mann stressed that juxtaposing the Soviet regime with Nazi Germany for their alleged common totalitarianism was simply unacceptable, and went as far as claiming that those who proposed this juxtaposition should themselves be seen as accomplices of fascism.\textsuperscript{43}

According to Losurdo, the image of Stalin then changed rapidly and drastically for the worse not so much as a consequence of the beginning of the Cold War, but due to the Khrushchev Report, which, in the view of many respected historians of different political orientations, can today proved to be deliberately false – and should be understood as part of the struggles for the seizure of power following Stalin’s death. The West then cultivated for its own purposes this image of a ridiculous and sanguinary tyrant, developing an untenable “mythology.” For Losurdo, accusations of, for instance, totalitarianism, oligarchism, racism, and genocide do not stand historical scrutiny, while in most cases they could more convincingly be directed at the “liberal” West through comparative analysis.\textsuperscript{44} According to Losurdo, Soviet society under Stalin was not totalitarian but traversed by a long succession of civil wars; even in its most autocratic moments, it always promoted a very strong social mobility; opposing a racial reading of subaltern classes and subaltern populations, it functioned as a champion of and a reference for decolonization; it always admitted

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Losurdo 2008, p. 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Arendt in ibid., p. 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Deutscher in ibid., pp. 11-2, p. 326, p. 273. It must be said that Losurdo decontextualizes Deutscher’s point about the Moscow trials. The latter in fact speaks of “perverted ‘psychological truth’.” Deutscher 1966, pp. 374-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Cf. Mann in Losurdo 2008, p. 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} The comparative basis of this stance can, however, be reasonably problematized, as Balso does in her critique of Losurdo: “What is the good of a regime that presents itself as a rupture with the old world if, by its worst aspects, it renews what other States, other regimes – that affirm neither the new nor the emancipatory – produce?” Balso 2016, p. 50.
\end{itemize}
among its highest ranks Jewish people; the non-linear history of the “concentrationary universe” of the Gulag was itself, Losurdo argues, always characterized by an “obsession for development” rather than by “homicidal will.”

Acts of terror did no doubt abound during Stalin’s rule. But these need to be investigated paying attention to the “objective situation,” i.e., again, a “prolonged civil war,” and not be deemed to be the product of the paranoia of a single individual (e.g. Trotsky himself defended terrorism against the Stalinist inner circle) or of a restricted elite (e.g. terrorism was also directed from the rank-and-file against the ruling group). Given this overall context, Losurdo adds, one can understand what Khrushchev passed as “Stalin’s obsession for duplicity.” If there was in Stalin an element of paranoia, this cannot be separated from sabotage and plotting (both internal and from abroad) as concrete matters of fact.

Losurdo concludes that, all in all, the three decades of Stalin’s rule should be seen more as a continuous and, at least until the end of World War Two, failed attempt at overcoming the state of exception – whereby the long conspiratorial tradition that brought the Bolsheviks to power turned against them – than as a programmed drift of the dictatorship of the proletariat towards autocracy. One could possibly speak of autocracy starting from 1937, but even after this date the USSR remained a “developmental dictatorship” battling a lingering state of exception that Stalin and his circle had to withstand, i.e. did not deliberately choose for ideological reasons (like Nazi Germany).

Badiou himself has always refused to assimilate Stalin’s Russia with Hitler’s Germany. In spite of all its evident shortcomings, the socialist state of the USSR always operated “in the name of a universal” (even when it disastrously short-circuited it with particularity), and not in the name of a specific race – or of the superiority of white people (like Western colonialism openly did until well after the end of World War II). Badiou also doubts the validity of the category of totalitarianism when applied to a context, like that of Stalin’s USSR, that, in his opinion too, fell under “disorder, war, and impotence” (moreover, “Stalin himself has never presented Soviet society as a unified totality”). At the same time – and to a certain extent contradictorily – Badiou does not hesitate to caricature Stalin and Stalinism using a vocabulary and adopting generalizations that strongly resemble those of the ideological mythologies Losurdo convincingly disputes. Badiou speaks not only of irrationality, obscurantism, and demagogy; of “socialism of barracks” and “arrogant incapacity;”

45 Losurdo 2008, p. 146.
46 Ibid., p. 19, p. 80, see pp. 72-3, p. 155.
47 Ibid., p. 79.
48 Ibid., p. 126, see pp. 155-7.
49 Badiou 2015, p. 89.
50 Cf. Ibid.
51 Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 38, p. 47.
but also of “despotism” and “tyranny;” of a “politics both hesitant and brutal;” of a “culture of violence;” and, finally – in line with the hypocritical outrage displayed by liberal parliamentarian capitalism – of “criminal objectivity.” Stalin here is to communism what the Inquisition was to Christianity. In the end, and in contrast to Badiou’s own rejection of the category of totalitarianism, we are entitled to claim all this because Stalin “was in power in an absolute way” (whereby, as seen, the proletariat, the Party, and the State would absolutely coalesce in the person of the tyrant).

Even if we do not entirely support Losurdo’s reading, I think he can help us to historically deconstruct these simplistic epitaphs, especially on the question of the state, and precisely if we overall share the philosophical and meta-political main coordinates of Badiou’s own communist hypothesis and communist Idea yet are not persuaded by the concrete “federal” orientation he proposes. Losurdo and Badiou move from a priori philosophical views on the socialist state that remain by and large irreconcilable. As discussed, for Badiou, it is this State’s short-circuiting of universality with particularity, and, eventually, individuality through a multi-layered apparatus of representation that should be held responsible for the betrayal of Marx’s (and Lenin’s) communist Idea, and, along with it, for terror. For him, what he refers to as the “tragic source of the adventure of soviet socialisms” lies in the State’s appropriation of politics via the Party. When this happens we witness to a “complete de-politicization of society.” Against the mantra for which totalitarianism would amount to a regime in which everything becomes political, it is, on the contrary, this very eradication of politics that offers us the only definition of totalitarianism Badiou happily subscribes to. While firmly dissociating himself from both anarchism and utopian communism, Badiou believes that the socialist State is based on the fundamental repression of the main tenet of Marxism, namely, that a politics of the universal emancipation of humanity as a whole can only originate and support itself from negativity, or better, from the “universality of the negative,” which is what the proletariat stands for in Marx.

52 Badiou 2009, p. 12, p. 27, p. 53, p. 56; Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 35; Badiou 2015, p. 98. On the issue of “criminal objectivity,” Getty and Naumov take an opposite stance based on extensive historical data. They speak of “terror without planning” and specify: “It is tempting to see the mass operations as part of a Stalinist plan for population policy or social engineering on a vast scale.” Yet, “the mass operations were unplanned, ad hoc reactions to a perceived immediate political threat” (Getty / Naumov 2010, p. 189, pp. 234-5).
53 Badiou 2015, p. 93. Again, Getty and Naumov disagree: “Although by the end of the [1930s] Stalin was unquestionably the supreme leader, he was never omnipotent and always functioned within a matrix of other groups and interests” (Getty / Naumov 2010, p. 7).
54 Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 54.
55 Ibid., p. 55.
In neat opposition to this, Losurdo’s philosophical stance identifies historically the problem with the USSR in what he calls “abstract universalism.”\(^{57}\) In a nutshell, it is those Bolsheviks who “tended to forget the unity between the universal and the particular” (also and especially in not dealing with the national question in the name of an “irrealistic internationalism”), and who accused the state of having betrayed the October Revolution, that should be seen as the real traitors of this event.\(^{58}\) Likewise, while terror should initially be contextualized within the objective situation, i.e. a continuous series of civil wars, if the latter finally became internal to the former revolutionaries this was first and foremost due to the “anarchoid messianism”\(^{59}\) of the abstract universalists. In other words, the main culprit for terror was, for Losurdo, not the cult of personality but “the cult of universality and abstract utopia that jams the action of the new ruling group and ends up causing its disunity.”\(^{60}\) From this stance, Stalin would have rightly sensed the urgency of bestowing a “concrete and lasting content to the ideas of equality and universality”\(^{61}\) (particularly but not only with regard to the national question) that had made the October Revolution successful. Ultimately, for Losurdo, it is, however, not a question of absolving Stalin from his misdeeds, nor of establishing a hierarchy of actual or presumed faults among the parties involved (which Losurdo nonetheless does to a certain extent), but of acknowledging the inadequacy of a morally Manichean approach in understanding Stalin’s figure and the state of the USSR. Along the same lines, it is the very accusation of betrayal of the teaching of Marx and Lenin, ventilated by all sides, which should be, once and for all, left aside, if we do not want to play the game of the ideologues of parliamentarian capitalism.

In spite of its at times obvious pro-Stalinist bias, Losurdo’s analysis deserves sober consideration. However, I become to say the least skeptical when he claims that Stalin’s major mistake was to still cling to an excessively universalist “orthodox” politics, for instance, with respect to the way in which he backtracked on the issue of the fusion of nations and national languages (first, according to Losurdo, Stalin seems to have upheld the view that not even communism should bring “a single language for all humans”\(^{62}\); then he appears to have seconded this objective, even if postponing it to the moment when socialism would have triumphed at a global level). More importantly, I think that Losurdo conflates the question of the “universality of the negative,” rightly stressed by Badiou, with that of “abstract” or “utopian” universalism. On this point, I think we should resolutely back Badiou: they are not the same, and one should not lead to the other. If we are to remain


\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 109, p. 50.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 115.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 116.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 113.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., pp. 120-1.
Marxist, the proletariat (or any of its contemporary embodiments) should no doubt initially be thought in terms of negativity: for Marx, in fact, the proletariat is an unsubstantial and fundamentally undetermined classless class, “which is in a word the total loss of humanity.”63 But, conversely, against Badiou, the condemnation of any readymade proletarian “representative substance” should not necessarily entail the forsaking of any kind of transitory socialist representation (of socialist avant-garde, party, or even state), which would in turn be gradually dissolved with the advent of communism.

Here, again, Losurdo’s historical investigations on Stalin and the Stalinist USSR are instructive and need to be carefully pondered, particularly when we are re-thinking the communist hypothesis. They show that, in spite of many oscillations, dictated mostly by a terrible geopolitical conjuncture (the persistence of imperialism and colonialism; the rise of Hitlerian expansionism), political universalism and the question about the withering away of the state always remained more or less explicitly on the agenda, even at the height of autocracy. The USSR of the “socialism in one country” continued to promote – what were especially at the time – truly universalist values of equality, both internally and abroad. For example, Losurdo justifiably dwells on the emancipatory multi-ethnic policies put into practice in the Soviet Union and, following the Harvard historian Terry Martin, singles them out as a first instance of mass “affirmative action” programs.64 He also understandably draws our attention to the underrated fact that as early as 1924 Stalin demanded an immediate ending to colonialism and its racism, against which Leninism should, in Stalin’s words, “put blacks and whites, ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ people on the same footing.”65 Losurdo equally reminds us of Stalin’s vocal condemnation of Churchill’s 1946 sinisterly topical call for a new world-order in which the “white English-Speaking people” should be entrusted with the defense of freedom and “Christian civilization.”66 Losurdo can thus conclude that “Stalin exercised an extraordinary influence on a planetary level,” which profoundly echoed “not only in the colonies but also among the people of colonial origin living at the very heart of the West.”67

Concerning the withering away of the state, Losurdo registers how Stalin’s conflicting openings and hesitations on its possibility match Lenin’s (who, despite his previous pronouncements, in one of his latest writings, the 1923 article “Better Fewer, But Better,” bequeathed the rallying cry “improve our state apparatus”68).

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63 Marx 1975, p. 256.
65 Stalin in ibid., p. 202. One should also mention here the young Stalin’s extensive underground proselytising among Muslim unskilled workers in Batum and Baku (see Deutscher 1966, p. 65, p. 109).
67 Losurdo 2008, p. 263.
68 Ibid., p. 65.
ally speaking, Stalin seems to abide by the Leninist take on the temporary nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat, adjourning it to the historical specificity of the period between the two World Wars and the beginning of the Cold War. In short, as Stalin himself puts it, the state “will be preserved until the capitalist siege is liquidated” and “the danger of military aggressions from the outside is eliminated.”\footnote{Stalin in ibid., p. 68.} If, on the one hand, there is a certain tendency to put the prospect of the extinction of the state aside (under the cynical pretext of not dogmatizing Marx and Engels’s teaching), on the other, it is equally true that Stalin at times openly opposes the identification of the party with the state, precisely in view of the withering away of the latter through a more extensive political mobilization and the reactivation of the Soviets.\footnote{Cf. Losurdo 2008, p. 128.} This moderately anti-statist stance emerges not only in the 1920s, but also in his belief after the Second World War (but before the beginning of the Cold War) that it was possible to think a different form of socialism in the more advanced countries of Eastern Europe, one which would have not required the dictatorship of the proletariat, at least in its existing soviet form.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., pp. 134-5. In this light, see also Stalin’s initial opposition to the emergence of the GDR (cf. Canfora in Losurdo 2008, p. 321).} In conclusion, notwithstanding his indecision on the matter – and, presumably, a good amount of strategic opportunism – Stalin himself appears to have been sincerely concerned with the key question of when and how the communist dissolution of the state begins.

3. Badiou’s two Lenins

At first sight, Badiou’s stance on Lenin might appear to be quite clear-cut. Over the years, he has presented himself as a (albeit idiosyncratic) Leninist. Even the title of his recent dialogue with Gauchet, Que faire?, is certainly not coincidental. There however arises one inevitable and crucial question: What is left of Lenin in Badiou’s communist hypothesis once we subtract from it any notion (and practice) of the “state of communism,” as well as of a party that represents the proletariat? As the editors of Que faire? remind us, Lenin was after all the one who explicitly proposed and implemented the “idea of the revolutionary party as an avant-garde,”\footnote{Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 8.} and, we should add that, especially in The State and Revolution, he did so precisely by relying on Marx’s and Engels’s writings. This puts Badiou in a difficult position, both as a Leninist and as a Marxist. It is consequently not surprising that, on closer inspection, Badiou’s pronouncements on Lenin, particularly with regard to the latter’s stance on the state, become much more nuanced than is usually assumed.

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69 Stalin in ibid., p. 68.
70 Cf. Losurdo 2008, p. 128.
71 Cf. Ibid., pp. 134-5. In this light, see also Stalin’s initial opposition to the emergence of the GDR (cf. Canfora in Losurdo 2008, p. 321).
Of an Obscure Disaster opens with a blunt statement: “When I say ‘we communists,’ and even more so when I think of Lenin […] or when I think of the Russian revolution, it is not of the Party I think, the Party I always fought.” In other words, “we communists” are defined precisely in opposition to the (Bolshevik) Party (and the Stalinist State); Lenin, who is one of us, is possibly even more opposed to them than we are, in spite of the fact he was undeniably the leader and the main theoretician of this Party. I find such a line of argument hard to defend, historically and politically, but also, and perhaps above all, philosophically – i.e., as we shall shortly see, with reference to the sophisticated dialectic Lenin articulates in The State and Revolution.

There in fact emerges an inevitable tension in Badiou’s reading of Lenin and the state, which becomes especially visible if one compares the 1991 Of an Obscure Disaster with the recent Que faire? and Quel communisme? On the one hand, the former pushes the separation of Lenin from Stalin to the point of seeing the connection between the “Leninist prescriptions” and the “Stalinist State” as a mere “empirical consecution.” It is worth quoting the passage in full: “It is not because the Stalinist State was criminal that the Leninist prescriptions, crystallized in October 1917, ceased to orient communism towards its eternity in time (and for the rest, what relationship exists between these prescriptions, between this event, and the Stalinist State, if not that of pure empirical consecution?).” On the other hand, twenty-five years later, Badiou has to acknowledge that “Lenin is partly responsible, to the extent that he edifies the State in the image of the militarized party.” At the same time, Lenin would remain fundamentally anti-statist, and in this sense, unlike Stalin, a Marxist.

According to Badiou, the 1917 The State and Revolution would, first, revolve around the “inanity of communism delegated to the State.” This is a claim that, I grant, cannot easily be disputed at face value. Second, for Badiou, Lenin’s text would, however, also postulate the “destruction rather than the withering away” of the State, insofar as Lenin “would not really theorize the [withering away].” This is a contention that, as we will shortly see, must be disputed. Third, Badiou then proceeds to suggest that, towards the end of his life, Lenin became increasingly bellicerent against the “dynamic of etatization at the heart of the edification of the USSR,” and hence somehow anticipated the anti-statist stance of Mao’s Chinese Cultural Revolution. This is a suggestion that, especially in light of recent historical research, can itself cogently be problematized. Clearly, Badiou reads The State and

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73 Badiou 2009, p. 11 (my emphasis).
74 Ibid., p. 28.
75 Badiou / Gauchet 2014, p. 50.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.

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Revolution as an a priori complete demonization of the socialist state, where the latter would then historically be embodied in the obscure disaster of Stalinism. Badiou nonetheless concludes by interestingly mitigating his condemnation. He writes: “in any case, the Idea [of communism] is invariably corrupted to the extent that the transition to communism is entrusted only to the State.” Badiou does not explain this, in my view, very significant double specification. We should bear it in mind in what follows.

Elsewhere in Que faire?, Badiou provides a slightly different account, which is overall consistent with the one above, yet also returns to and takes for granted an unmitigated rejection of the socialist state. Marx would be fully opposed to the idea of the state (as “we communists” should all be), but, in parallel, he would also not have a “consistent political thought.” Why? Because Marx would remain confined to an insurrectional understanding of the proletarian revolution – and its inextricable violence – which showed all of its limits with the defeat of the Paris Commune. Lenin would compensate for this political shortfall of Marx by theorizing and successfully carrying out a revolution “led by a specialized, militarized, and extremely disciplined apparatus” – the Bolshevik party as a proletarian avant-garde. Yet, in seizing power, the October Revolution would remain “the last transformation of the insurrectionism of the nineteenth century.” Although Badiou appears to redeem the “sequence immediately posterior” to the revolution and the civil war, “the Russia of the years 1922-23” – presumably because of Lenin’s occasional interventions against the emerging state – the seizure of power would have as such, at the same time, sown the seeds of the “obscure disaster” that characterized Stalinism.

We are thus left to deduce that somehow there are implicitly, for Badiou, two Lenins – at least concerning the question of the state. The “good” Lenin who expanded and, in a sense, completed Marx by organizing the Bolshevik party as a victorious proletarian avant-garde, and who thus, importantly, belongs to an old historical-political sequence. And the “bad” Lenin, who, as it were, almost in spite of himself, involuntarily contributed to the statist edification of the USSR, including its “criminal objectivity,” by means of the same party. But Badiou seems recalcitrant to fully accept the dialectical consequences of the very process he himself delineates dialectically. In Que faire?, he in fact summarily affirms: “if the ‘realization’ of the communist project ended, in the USSR, in its complete factual abandonment, this has to do with political problems that were not solved in the stages that followed the seizure of power.” The problem no longer lies in the seizure of power itself, and in

79 Ibid., p. 51 (my emphasis).
80 Ibid., p. 32.
81 Ibid., p. 34.
82 Ibid., p. 36.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid. (my emphasis).
Lenin’s being caught in its alleged contradictions (according to Badiou), but arises later. To put it simply: the revolution, accomplished thanks to the party, was right (end of the sequence of insurrection); but then its success rendered any holding to the party, and a fortiori to the state – we communists should not hold to power – automatically wrong (beginning of the sequence of the “obscure disaster”). Or also: it was Stalin’s fault. Good old Lenin did what he could, and was overwhelmed by the monstrous Stalin. Eventually, in spite of Lenin’s “partial responsibility” (for having only tentatively grasped the role of the party as a “vanishing mediator” that must immediately vanish, we may add), the supposed abandonment of the communist project would rest with Stalin alone. This abandonment can be named by the oxymoron “State of Communism.”

4. The state and revolution

A detailed examination of Lenin’s The State and Revolution tells another story, one that, I stress – lest my general stance be completely misinterpreted – is not meant to demonize Lenin along with Stalin, or absolve Stalin from his faults, but to re-launch a new communist hypothesis that, learning from the mistakes of the USSR, takes into consideration other possible configurations of the socialist state. From this perspective, the basic issue at stake is a fundamental incompatibility, based on textual evidence, between Badiou’s dissociation of communism from power and Lenin’s arguments in The State and Revolution. In other words, this is the key issue of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” – and of its violence, if not terror – as a transitory socialist state that accomplishes only the first phase of communism. The sui generis Leninist Badiou completely rejects the dictatorship of the proletariat, yet he does not see – or grossly underestimates – that Lenin is an unequivocal supporter of it, and he is so precisely in the name of Marx and Engels.

In approaching The State and Revolution, the first methodological tenet to bear in mind is that this text primarily amounts to a close reading of Marx and Engels. Lenin is here returning to the revolutionary kernel of their teachings in order to counter the reactionary readings of the “opportunists” and “former Marxists,” as he calls them (in short, Kautsky, on the one hand, and the Mensheviks, on the other – who were in power in Russia at the time). In Lenin’s own words: “our first task is to restore the true doctrine of Marx on the state.”85 For Lenin, as opposed to Badiou, there most definitely is a Marxian doctrine of the state.

When tackled through the prism of The State and Revolution, Badiou’s communist view that the “State of Communism” is nothing else than a disastrous oxymoron

thus faces two – unsolvable, in my view – problems. First, how can one be a Leninist without the dictatorship of the proletariat? Second, how can one be a Marxist, or at the very least a Marxist-Leninist, without the dictatorship of the proletariat? (Here, we should recall that, for Badiou, “Marx has never imagined a Marxist state.”) There then also emerges, for all we communists, a third, much more general, pressing, and ticklish question. This is a question that Badiou would no doubt regard as badly posed – but in so doing he leaves it in the hands of the ideologues of parliamentary capitalism. That is, taking into account both Stalinism’s undeniable terror and historical attempts at deconstructing it against untenable “mythologies,” to what extent was the Stalinist state faithful to Lenin’s, and Marx’s, idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitory state and its related violence? Or, to put it the other way around, more constructively: how can a Leninist/Marxist state avoid the terrorist pitfalls of the Stalinist state whilst not refusing violence tout-court?

The key point to bear in mind here is that, for Lenin, the violent “destruction” or “smashing” of the bourgeois state, which he unrepentantly advocates against the revisionists, goes together with the establishment of a socialist state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) with which the “withering away” of the state in general only commences. I think Badiou misunderstands this when he claims that, as seen, Lenin would support the “destruction rather than the withering away” of the State, insofar as he “would not really theorize the latter term.” This is certainly not the case.

Let us analyse The State and Revolution’s arguments more closely. For Lenin, the state is not a necessary political formation. It is rather the product of the “irreconcilability of class antagonisms;” the conciliation of classes – and hence the elimination of antagonistic class violence – would eliminate the state. More to the point, the state is an organ of class rule (currently, of the bourgeoisie), i.e. an instrument of the exploitation of the oppressed class (currently, of the proletariat). Marxism thus aims at the destruction of the bourgeois state, which can only be achieved, following The Poverty of Philosophy and The Communist Manifesto, by means of a violent revolution (“the substitution of the proletarian state for the bourgeois state is impossible without a violent revolution”). In other words, there is a basic irreconcilability between Marxism and Western parliamentary democracy. But then the question is: how should we understand Engels’s claim that “the state is not ‘abolished,’ it withers away”?

Certainly not in the way in which the “opportunists” understand it, that is, by claiming that the state will gradually disappear once the socialist parties seize power through parliamentary elections – i.e. without a violent revolution. For Lenin – and this is a crucial citation – “Engels speaks here of the ‘abolition’ of the

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86 Ibid., p. 272.
87 Ibid., p. 285.
bourgeois state by the proletarian revolution, while the words about its withering away refer to the remnants of the proletarian state after the socialist revolution."  

The State and Revolution entirely revolves around Lenin’s dialectical explanation of the way in which the violent (as insurrectional) abolition of the bourgeois state establishes a proletarian state that as such, i.e. as a state, commences its own withering away (in this sense, it is always already a remnants), and that of the state in general. First, in violently seizing power and control over the means of production, as well as in eliminating the structural violence of the army and the police as instruments of state power, the self-acting armed organization of the population destroys the pre-existing state. Second, the proletariat nevertheless needs state power and violence to crush the resistance of the bourgeois exploiters: this is the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a state, i.e. as a state, commences its own withering away. But, third, this very state power and violence, which cannot simply hold to the ready-made bourgeois state, immediately begins to wither away. The “essence of Marx’s doctrine of the state” is therefore, for Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transition to a stateless society that will no longer know violence. This can be achieved only in “complete communism.”

Lenin then asks the question: how is the bourgeois state to be replaced with the proletarian state? What is to supersede the smashed state machine with a “new state machine”? He believes Marx himself developed a cogent answer following the Paris Commune, which he saw as a gigantic historic experiment. In addition to the substitution of the standing army with the armed people (instituted as the dictatorship of the proletariat), in The Civil War in France, Marx – and Lenin agrees with him – singles out as crucial the maintenance of political representation, which should however be made easily revocable (“all officials to be elected and subject to recall”). Marx and Lenin also single out the imposition of workmen’s wages for all public servants. In this way, what Lenin can still explicitly describe as “the socialist reconstruction of the state” amounts at the same time to “something which is no longer really a state.” Lenin initially spells this out with regard to the armed people: “it is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush its resistance. […] But the organ of suppression is now the majority of the population, and not the minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom, and wage-slavery. And since

90 Ibid., p. 282.  
91 Cf. Ibid., p. 286.  
92 Ibid., p. 294. Lenin refers here in particular to a 1852 letter to Weydemeyer.  
93 Ibid., p. 343 (my emphasis).  
94 Ibid., p. 299, p. 360.  
95 Ibid., p. 301.  
96 Ibid., p. 301, p. 303.
the majority of the people *itself* suppresses its oppressors, a ‘special force’ for suppression is *no longer necessary*. In this sense the state *begins to wither away.*”

Against what claimed by Badiou, in the rest of *The State and Revolution*, Lenin proceeds to provide a very detailed discussion of both the socialist “reconstruction of the state” as well as its parallel withering away. We can summarize here some of his main arguments and see how the same dialectic holds for all aspects of socialist society – as the first phase of communism – under the banner that socialism “simplifies” the state as an “inherited evil”:98

1.) *Administration.* The socialist revolution does not dispense with what Lenin calls “managers.”99 That is a vain “anarchist dream.”100 The function of “accounting” will be performed in the socialist state “by each in turn” and, as such, will increasingly die out as “the *special* functions of a special stratum of the population” along with its associated grandeur.101 This generalization of management is made possible by capitalism itself, which has greatly simplified administrative tasks thanks to technological innovations (Lenin speaks of the railways, the postal services, and the telephone); administration can already be reduced to “such simple operation of registration, filing, and checking” and in this way it can be carried out by “every literate person” for a workman’s wage.102 Lenin can then speak, without contradiction, of the socialist state as one in which “the whole of society will have become a single office,” yet, at the same time, in such a state no one is a bureaucrat, because of the “equality of work and equality of pay.”103 To put it simply, transitional universal bureaucracy is the only way out of bureaucracy. If the “essence of bureaucracy” lies in the fact that “privileged persons [are] divorced from the masses and *superior to* the masses,” then for the withering away of the state to take place “*all* shall become ‘bureaucrats’ for a time […] so that, therefore, *no one* can become a ‘bureaucrat’.”104

2.) *The economy.* The socialist revolution expropriates the capitalists and thus assumes control of production and distribution. In this way, the economy belongs to the whole of society; bourgeois exploitation is terminated. Lenin claims that it is

97 Ibid., p. 301. See also p. 320.
99 Ibid., p. 307.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., p. 302.
103 Ibid., p. 348.
104 Ibid., p. 355, p. 360. It is very tempting to read the recent neo-liberalist “restructuring” of labour in Western economies, especially in sectors still partly controlled by the state (e.g. education and health services), as a perversion of this Leninist (and, frankly, quite utopian) programme: *everybody* must become bureaucrats (forced to micromanage useless tasks for an increasing amount of often non-remunerated time) so that *somebody* can forever remain a bureaucrat (as “privileged persons” who economically profit from managing precisely the imposition of micromanaging).
“quite possible” to bring about such a process “immediately, overnight.” 105 But, again, it would be a great mistake to think that this will also entail an overnight abolishment of the function of the state in the economy. This is where communism differs from anarchism. To begin with, in the socialist state as the first phase of communism “all citizens are transformed into the salaried employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers.” 106 The dictatorship of the proletariat also applies to economic matters. As already outlined by Marx and Engels in The Communist Manifesto, the most urgent task for the defense of the revolution and the establishment of a truly classless society is a rapid increase in the productive forces, which is certainly possible but can be achieved only by, in Marx and Engels’s words, “centraliz[ing] all instruments of production in the hands of the state.” 107 So, for Lenin, the fact that the working-people immediately become collective owners should be matched in the transition to the abolition of the state by “the strictest control, by society and by the state, of the amount of labor and the amount of consumption.” 108

3.) Political representation and the question of democracy. As shown by the historical example of the Commune, the proletarian revolution entails a certain “reversion” to – and renewal of – “primitive,” or direct, democracy. 109 But at the same time this does not go together with an instantaneous anarchic abolition of political representation, but with its conversion into what Marx called “working bodies;” in short, Lenin writes, the parliamentarians would be “directly responsible to their constituents.” 110 Here, he adds, we should talk of “democracy without parliamentarism,” in the sense that the latter is smashed as a “special system” 111 (especially because the representatives are easily recalled). Yet – and this is crucial – democracy, including proletarian democracy, is still for Lenin undoubtedly a state, i.e., as seen, a violent organ of class rule. As he spells out, “democracy is not identical with the subordination of the minority to the majority. Democracy is a state which recognizes the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e., an organization for the systematic use of violence by one class against another.” 112 To sum up, if there is democracy – including proletarian democracy – and if democracy is necessarily a state, then democracy is in itself intrinsically violent. So much so that the proletarian democratic state (i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat as political representation) is one in which an “immense expansion of democracy” involving for the first time “the poor” – whereby the state begins in this sense to wither away – simultaneously im-

105 Ibid., p. 348.
106 Ibid.
109 Cf. Ibid., p. 302.
110 Ibid., pp. 304-6.
111 Ibid., p. 306.
112 Ibid., p. 332.

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poses a “series of restrictions” on the former capitalist exploiters aimed at crushing their resistance against the revolution.\textsuperscript{113} Lenin goes as far as recalling and endorsing Engels’s claim that “a revolution is the most authoritarian thing there is” and that “the victorious party, if it does not wish to have fought in vain, must maintain its rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries.”\textsuperscript{114}

It is here important to stress how Lenin counters the “opportunists’” accusation that, on the basis of what we have just explained, the dictatorship of the proletariat would contradict democracy\textsuperscript{115} (in spite of its expansion), and turns it against them. Both the dictatorship of the proletariat and democracy are nothing but an expression of the remnants of the state. With the withering away of the state, which is started precisely by the establishment of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, both the dictatorship of the proletariat and democracy wither away.\textsuperscript{116} What also withers away with them is, more generally, politics as such, at least as it has been conceived so far – and this in accordance with Marx’s view in The Poverty of Philosophy that “there will be no more political power properly so-called”\textsuperscript{117} in the classless society.

The other vital, and usually underestimated, aspect we should emphasize in Lenin’s overall argument is that the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat as an inevitable transition to a classless society is not only a violent – and even terroristic, if needed – limitation of the freedom of the minority (i.e. the former exploiters) but also the last remaining obstacle to the equality of the proletarian majority itself. In short, the first – socialist – phase of communism as the end of bourgeois exploitation and the establishment of “equal right” still presupposes inequality. Lenin’s draws here from Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Program and expands on it. Why would equal right equate with inequality? Because “every right is an application of the same measure to different people who, in fact, are not the same and are not equal to one another.”\textsuperscript{118} Consequently, the socialist realization of “an equal amount of labor for an equal quantity of products” is quite bluntly, as Lenin concedes, “not yet communism.”\textsuperscript{119} As Marx has it, to achieve complete communism, “right, instead of being equal, would have to be unequal.”\textsuperscript{120} In other words – and this is crucial – right as such is at bottom “bourgeois right.”\textsuperscript{121} Socialism is then simply bourgeois right without the bourgeoisie. Lenin does not speak here of a violence of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat against the proletariat itself, yet he describes this states

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 337.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 317.
\textsuperscript{115} See ibid., p. 364.
\textsuperscript{116} See ibid., p. 282, p. 338.
\textsuperscript{117} Marx in Lenin 2009, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{118} Lenin 2009, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 342.
\textsuperscript{120} Marx in Lenin 2009, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Ibid.
of affairs as a “violation”\textsuperscript{122} that basically entails injustice. To conclude, the first phase of communism – i.e. socialism – is thus necessarily violent against the former exploiters and necessarily unjust towards the proletariat who, as armed people, limit the freedom of the former exploiters.

At this stage the key question to be asked is: How does the second phase of communism (“complete communism”) differ from its socialist, and far from ideal, state-phase and its lingering violence and injustice? When can it be achieved? In terms of right and justice, which are as such inextricable from economic considerations, Lenin’s answer is straightforward: we need to move from “formal” to “real” equality.\textsuperscript{123} Following once again Marx closely, this can more practically be grasped under the banner of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”\textsuperscript{124}

For this higher phase of communism to be reached two basic interrelated preconditions must be satisfied: first, the overcoming of the division of labor, primarily in terms of the antithesis between mental and manual labor (which cannot immediately be solved by the socialist state); second, on a more anthropological-ontological level, the realization that, at the level of the life of the species, labor is not merely a means to live but a “primary necessity of life” (this is a realization that by “developing” the “individual” would also at the same time enhance the productive forces).\textsuperscript{125}

Lenin is convinced that socialism, as well as its remaining violence against the former oppressors and concomitant injustice towards the former oppressed, will eventually give way to communism. He is also adamant that, in communism, “the need for violence against people in general,” including the proletarian subjection of the minority to the majority, will “vanish.”\textsuperscript{126} However, to achieve complete communism – and the dissolution of the socialist state – people will have to “become accustomed” to observing the elementary conditions of social life \textit{without force} and \textit{without subordination}.”\textsuperscript{127} In the end, what is at stake is an “element of habit,” which may require “severe punishment.”\textsuperscript{128}

There nonetheless remains here an unsolved pressing issue – especially in the light of the subsequent failure of the soviet experiment, its “obscure disaster,” and our renewed call for a “communist hypothesis”: How long will this transitional process take? In this regard, Lenin is somehow hesitant and vague. On the one hand, he insists that complete communism is no utopia – precisely insofar as it is born out of the concrete historical existence of capitalism and the critique of it. Following Engels, he suggests that a “new generation”

\textsuperscript{122} Lenin 2009, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{123} Cf. Ibid., p. 347.
\textsuperscript{124} Marx in Lenin 2009, p. 343.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Lenin 2009, p. 333.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 333, p. 349.
will suffice. On the other hand, he speaks of a “rather lengthy,” or elsewhere “protracted,” process. We can be certain about the “gradual and spontaneous” socialist withering away of the state – for it is possible to anticipate it from within capitalism – but we are in no position to define “the exact moment” of the overcoming of socialism itself – for “no material is [yet] available.”

Bibliography


129 Ibid., p. 333.
130 Ibid., p. 334, p. 344.
131 Ibid., p. 334, p. 338, p. 344. In an early essay on Stalin, Žižek proposes an anti-Stalinist resumption of the two phases of communism, which seems to be fundamentally in line with Lenin’s original arguments. “We could nonetheless make the formula about ‘the two phases of communism’ ours, on condition of introducing a supplementary opposition. The ‘first phase’ is the negation of capitalism ‘on its own level,’ the negation of the capitalist position in the field of common presuppositions, hence its specular negation […] On the other hand, the ‘second phase’ is the ‘negation of negation’; it is not an opposition that is specular to the starting point, but the negation of the presuppositions shared by the thesis and the antithesis: not only the negation of alienated production, but the subversion of productive economy as such” (Žižek 1977).
From its beginnings, the history of philosophy is inextricably intertwined with the history of mathematics and the natural sciences. It is a popular notion that Plato had already seen geometrical knowledge as a kind of condition of philosophy, and the idea that Aristotle’s metaphysics is linked to the knowledge of living organisms and forms of life is equally common. It would be intriguing to follow the history of this interaction, which encompasses philosophical approaches claiming to apply mathematical methods as well as other approaches that defend the autonomy of philosophical reasoning from logics and mathematics. Such an examination would be challenging not only in view of the richness of the history of philosophy, but also with respect to the linkage of the development of mathematical and scientific knowledge to our changing notions of philosophy, mathematics and the natural sciences. Furthermore, such an investigation would have to take into account that the relationships between philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences themselves changed when the academic disciplines were established and differentiated in the 19th century. In fact, rather than coming to an end, these relationships took on altogether new, interdisciplinary forms, because each discipline was from this point on newly regarded as an autonomous field of research and knowledge. Although a kind of mutual ignorance may have prevailed during the 20th century, mathematics and the natural sciences were nonetheless undeniably of great relevance to philosophy – all the more so in view of the progress achieved by the natural sciences as well as mathematics and the far-reaching consequences of their applications – and they, in turn, cannot totally separate themselves from all questions considered philosophical in the broader sense, considering, for instance, the revolutions taking place at the time in nearly every discipline, whether in mathematics, physics, chemistry, or biology. Consequently, the differentiation of the disciplines did not result in a divorce between philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences, rather in an entanglement that, if one takes into account the autonomy of the different fields of research, is difficult to grasp.

This short sketch briefly indicates the historical as well as the systematic background of the questions I wish to raise concerning the role of mathematics in Alain Badiou’s philosophy and particularly in his Being and Event (1988/2006). Obviously, Badiou intertwines his thinking with reflections on mathematics like no other
French philosopher of his generation.¹ He himself regularly highlights the importance of mathematics for his thinking, especially for his most fundamental work Being and Event and its continuation in Logics of Worlds (2006/2009). Furthermore, he very often emphasizes his exceptional stance on the philosophical relevance of mathematics, compared to many other contemporary French philosophers. In contrast to those philosophers who follow Heidegger in privileging literature in general and the poem in particular in view of the investigation into being, Badiou claims that it is mathematics that is most essential for the philosophical endeavor. Mathematics is not a part of modern science that destroys thinking or hides being in difference to beings, it allows, at least in this philosopher’s eyes, our knowledge of being to unfold: “mathematics thinks.”² Mathematics is itself ontology and therefore a requisite condition of the philosophy of being.

Thus, Badiou develops a philosophy of being primarily linked to mathematics, in sharp contrast to Heidegger’s dubious criticism of science. At the same time, he partly aligns with Heidegger insofar as he emphasizes that being withdraws itself from the rule of presence, and claims to radicalize the ‘subtractive character’ of being by drawing on mathematics.³ To this end, Badiou refers to the rather recent development of set theory from its inception by Georg Cantor in the 19th century to its axiomatization in the form of ZFC (i.e. the axioms of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory plus the axiom of choice), the incompleteness theorems of Kurt Gödel, and Paul Cohen’s invention of ‘forcing’ in the 1960s. This choice of reference points makes Badiou’s approach of developing his philosophy of being in relation to selected parts of modern mathematics even more interesting. Set theory from Cantor to Cohen forms a stark contrast to the common understanding of mathematics. The mathematical knowledge traditionally regarded as the most certain turns out to be full of complicated puzzles and inextricable conundrums as mathematicians start to investigate the foundation of their discipline in a rigorously formal and logical way. Wherever they tried to lay the foundations of their research, they got trapped in a maze of reflexivity; where they wanted to establish one theoretical framework for all of mathematics, they found a variety of possible axiomatic systems and the need to choose which axioms and models to work with. These mathematical developments are widely dis-

cussed in the literature on the philosophy and history of mathematics, but they are rarely regarded or made use of as a systematic basis for a philosophy of being.

Badiou’s approach seems therefore to be exceptional as well as fascinating. Given the widely-acknowledged fact that Badiou’s philosophy develops at essential junctures in close contact with mathematics, it is astonishing that the question of how this relation is conceived and justified has not attracted much attention. François Wahl hinted at this question in the early 1990s, but so far, there is an evident lack of research concerning the connections between Badiou’s philosophy and the mathematics he deals with. Therefore, the present contribution will pose selected questions concerning this key relationship based on Badiou’s Being and Event. In the first part, I will critically discuss an understanding of the role of mathematics in Badiou’s text whereby mathematical knowledge is granted authority over ontological questions—an authority which Badiou could in turn exploit for the sake of his own philosophical argumentation. Using the example of the ‘state of the situation’ and its application to the question of the political state, I will show that this understanding is not only overly simplified, but also contradicts the fact that it is a philosophical decision to conceive of mathematics as ontology. Consequently, philosophy and mathematics seem to be inextricably interrelated from the beginning, as François Wahl has already pointed out. So, Badiou takes the liberty of “appropriat[ing] the mathematics”. He decides which axioms of set theory to draw on and how to turn them into ontological evidence, but also to repudiate other axioms based on his own philosophical reasoning. Consequently, in the second part of the present contribution I’ll try to understand in what way Badiou himself conceives of mathematics as one of the “conditions” of philosophy – a condition apparently itself conditioned by the philosophy that uses it. It is an intricate space of entanglements where Badiou’s “gesture that involves re-entwining mathematics into the innermost structure of phi-

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5 In this assessment, I follow Burhanuddin Baki, who states bluntly with reference to Badiou’s Being and Event: “Despite the significant growth in the field of Badiouian scholarship, the basic details of his proposed metaphysical framework are still not well understood. We read the secondary literature and concluded that much work still needs to be conducted on the rudimentary level of trying to grasp the book’s proposed metaphysics of Being and how it is affected by certain discoveries from mathematical set theory.” (Baki 2015, p. 2) Actually, this is the fact although the literature on Badiou’s philosophy seldom omits to mention or to discuss the importance of mathematics and set theory, cf. Barker 2002, pp. 39-82; Hallward 2003, pp. 49-106; Feltham 2008, p. 84-135; Norris 2009; or Ling 2010, and there are some worthwhile publications focusing on the mathematics Badiou draws on, cf. Mount 2005; Gillespie 2008, pp. 7-13 and 45-69; and, above all, Baki 2015. But texts discussing the philosophical basis and justification of Badiou’s use of set theory are rare, cf. Desanti 2004; Madarasz 2005; Fraser 2006; Schubbach 2008; and the criticism of Nirenberg / Nirenberg 2011 which gave rise to a harsh polemic on the part of Badiou and Badiouian scholars.
6 I will not take into account Badiou’s texts before the “mathematical turn” of Being and Event, cf. Hallward 2003, pp. 49ff., and Badiou 2006, pp. 4-6.
7 Baki 2015, p. 3.
losophy” becomes possible and worthy of discussion. In the conclusion, I will put aside the question of whether Badiou’s way of philosophically drawing on mathematics is justifiable, in order to trace back the possible fascination of Badiou’s daring attempt to ‘re-entwine’ of set theory from Cantor to Cohen ‘into the innermost structure of philosophy’.

1. The state of a situation in Being and Event and the questionable authority of mathematics

The relation of philosophy to mathematics in Badiou’s Being and Event is not easy to grasp. At first sight, the text creates the impression that mathematics plays the role of an authoritative discourse, as mathematics, according to Badiou, is itself ontology. Consequently, it seems to weigh in decisively on several conundrums linked to the philosophical question of being, and could likewise be cited as an authority within the philosophical debate as well. At least on a rhetorical and gestural level, Badiou’s text repeatedly furnishes evidence for the claim that mathematics also exercises authority in the philosophical discourse and figures as an argument that cannot be contested on philosophical grounds.

Meditation 9 (“The State of the Historico-social Situation”) is an obvious example for this claim. This “illustrative meditation” applies ‘the concept of the state of a situation’ – corresponding to the mathematical definition of the power set of a set – to the question of the political state (‘State’). Therefore, Badiou engages anew in a long-standing Marxist discussion from Marx and Engels to Lenin and Mao, and it is against this backdrop that he transfers a formal mathematical concept into the framework of an historical as well as ongoing political debate on the State. Badiou’s intervention takes the prima facie form of an assessment of certain aspects of Marxist theories of the State based on the beginnings of set theory then turned into an ontology of the situation and its state. Badiou first approves and reformulates three aspects of the Marxist conceptions of the State. First, a State relates to “classes” or

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8 Badiou 2008a, p. 94.
10 Cf. exemplary Badiou 2006, p. 4.
12 This ‘reformulation’ refers again and again to the presumably “underlying meaning” (Badiou 2006, pp. 104-5) of the Marxist topos: “the State is always the State of the ruling class.”
“collective subsets” and not to “individuals” or individual elements, because the elements of a power set are the subsets and not the elements of the original set, which in general are not subsets of the same set. Second, “the State always represents what has already been presented,” as “the immediacy of society [...] is always provided for by a non-state structure,” for the set is determined exclusively by its own elements and determines the elements of the power set, i.e. its subsets. Third, “the State is both absolutely tied to historico-social presentation and yet also separated from it,” because the power set is determined by the original set, but necessarily contains sets which are subsets, though not elements of the same set. Badiou sums up: “At base, the classical Marxist description of the State is formally correct, but not its general dialectic.”

This ‘general dialectic’ is at the center of the subsequent criticism. Badiou criticizes more precisely that the Marxist theoreticians of the state draw a fatal conclusion: because they realize that the State exceeds the historico-political situation by knowing only subsets, not the elements of the situation themselves, they conclude that “the State itself is an excrescence,” that is to say an arbitrary ‘excrescence’ of the situation of “the immediate social bond.” Thereby, Badiou is not criticizing the assumption of an ‘immediate situation’ – an assumption he rather shares –, but the idea that the State could be abolished in favor of the self-sufficient historico-political situation: “The ambivalence in the classic Marxist analysis is concentrated in one point: thinking – since it is solely from the standpoint of the State that there are excrescences – that the State itself is an excrescence. By consequence, as political pro-

13 Cf. Badiou 2006, p. 105: “Marxist thought relates the State directly to sub-multiples rather than to terms of the situation. It posits that the count-as-one ensured by the State is not originally that of the multiple of individuals, but that of the multiple of classes of individuals. Even if one abandons the terminology of classes, the formal idea that the State – which is the state of the historico-social situation – deals with collective subsets and not with individuals remains essential.” Ibid.: “This is the underlying meaning that must be conferred upon the vulgar Marxist idea that ‘the State is always the State of the ruling class.’ The interpretation I propose of this idea is that the State solely exercises its domination according to a law destined to form-one out of the parts of a situation [...].” Cf. also ibid., p. 107.

14 In the special case that every element of a set is also a subset of the same set, we speak of a transitive set.

15 Badiou 2006, p. 106.

16 Ibid., p. 105.

17 Cf. Badiou 2006, p. 106: “[...] the definition of the ruling classes is not statist, it is rather economic and social. In Marx’s work, the presentation of the bourgeoisie is not elaborated in terms of the State; the criteria for the bourgeoisie are possession of the means of production, the regime of property, the concentration of capital, etc. To say of the State that it is that of the bourgeoisie has the advantage of underlining that the State re-presents something that has already been historically and socially presented.”

18 Ibid., p. 106.


20 Ibid., p. 109.


22 Ibid., p. 107.
gram, the Marxist proposes the revolutionary suppression of the State; thus the end of representation and the universality of simple presentation.”23 In contrast, Badiou is convinced that the State is inevitable: “The State is simply the necessary metas-structure of every historico-social situation.”24 And he invokes the ontology into which he brings set theory, in order to support his claim: Engels “does not understand that the excess which it treats is ineluctable, for it is a theorem of being.”25

‘For it is a theorem of being’: formulations and wordings like this one suggest a probative force of mathematics within philosophical reasoning, and apparently introduce a quasi-mathematical argument, indisputable on philosophical grounds. Because of this, Badiou’s form of reasoning and its apparent foundation on set theory was the object of sober criticism as well as of outright polemics.26 In my view, this criticism is appropriate if we are correct in regarding Badiou’s reference to mathematical knowledge as an authoritative gesture, and it is even necessary if Badiou’s reasoning does in fact have its foundations in mathematics – which seems to be the case, since he concludes: “for it is a theorem of being.” But this impression may be misleading. The ‘theorem of being’ Badiou brings up is not to be mistakenly identified with the mathematical fact that, according to the axioms of set theory, the power set of a set exists and has at least one subset as an element that is not an element of the same set. It is this mathematical insight that is turned into an ontological claim by the philosopher. Consequently, Badiou’s argument with respect to the ‘state of the situation’ is not to be understood as drawing a philosophical conclusion directly from certain mathematical insights, such that the cited ‘theorem of being’ would invoke mathematical knowledge within the philosophical discourse. Rather, this ‘theorem of being’ is already itself the result of a philosophical operation, viz. of Badiou’s turning set theory into ontology. Therefore, this theorem does not build a philosophical argument on mathematics; it rather justifies the argument by a philosophical conception of set theory.

Consequently, the questionable probative force of a ‘theorem of being’ does not rest upon mathematics itself, but presupposes its philosophical conception as ontology. Instead of introducing knowledge independent of philosophy and therefore indisputable as knowledge within philosophical reasoning, what the ‘theorem of being’ states is not so much a relation between independent fields of knowledge and forms of reasoning, as the reciprocal entanglement of mathematics, its philosophical conception, and certain debates in philosophy. Therefore, if we conceive of set theory as

23 Ibid., p. 108. Cf. Badiou 2006, p. 107: “What it deals with – the gigantic, infinite network of the situation’s subsets – forces the State to not identify itself with the original structure which lays out the consistency of presentation, which is to say the immediate social bond.”
25 Ibid., p. 110.
26 Cf. in the first instance the debate Nirenberg / Nirenberg, 2011; Badiou 2012; Bartlett / Clemens, 2012; and Nirenberg / Nirenberg, 2012, but also Schubbach 2008.
the foundation of Badiou’s philosophical argumentation, we are led astray. Instead, we have to think of this relationship as a mutual elucidation of a philosophical problem, such as the political state, and a philosophical appropriation of models of mathematical reasoning, for example in set theory. In this way, Meditation 9 is not only to be read as an assessment of Marxist theories of the State based on set theory; it likewise aims at “the verification of the concept of the state of the situation,”27 which corresponds to the mathematical definition of the power set of a set by applying it to the political state. This can only proceed respectively beyond the formal frame of set theory and its axioms, as well as a one-sided foundation of philosophy on mathematical knowledge, by addressing the reciprocal relation between a philosophical debate about the State on the one hand, and the most basic technicalities of set theory brought into the primary features of Badiou’s ontology in the previous Meditations on the other.

2. Mathematics as a condition of philosophy

In order to elucidate Badiou’s own conception of the relationship of philosophy to mathematics, it is necessary to go beyond the exemplary case of the ‘state of the situation’ in Being and Event and to elucidate Badiou’s conception of mathematics as a ‘condition’ of philosophy, by including his more comprehensive explanations in Conditions (1992/2008) as well as in his Theoretical Writings (2004). Generally speaking, Badiou makes a strong case for conceiving of philosophy not as a stand-alone discourse justifying autonomously how it proceeds and how to constitute its notions. Rather, he understands philosophy as part of a historical situation upon which it has to simultaneously reflect. Philosophy reacts to what happens and highlights its consequences even if it does so in its own way. Accordingly, Badiou relates philosophy to its “conditions,” that is, the four conditions of science or mathematics, as well as art, politics and love.28 As already mentioned, the accentuated role of mathematics in Badiou’s two major works Being and Event and Logics of Worlds is evident and motivated by Badiou’s attempt to defy the dominant role of poetics in the philosophy of being since Heidegger, and to supplement that influence through

27 Badiou 2006, p. 104.
28 Cf. Badiou 2006, pp. 3-4 and 16-7, as well as Badiou 2008a, p. 23. I won’t discuss Badiou’s classification of exactly four conditions, nor his very traditional reduction of science to mathematics and its applications, cf. Brassier 2005 for the last question. In these two respects, Badiou’s texts are unusually taciturn, however for the present contribution these questions are not essential.
mathematics as the scientific thinking of being as such. Against this background, we have to specify how mathematics conditions philosophy, according to Badiou.\textsuperscript{29}

This notion of condition may make the uninitiated reader suspect that mathematics frames philosophy. And, in fact, this concept is essential for the crucial thesis of \textit{Being and Event}, i.e. that “mathematics is ontology,”\textsuperscript{30} because this thesis claims that the development of mathematics, and especially set theory, is not only a worthwhile object of philosophy, but also ‘delimits’ how philosophy reasons and how it forms concepts: “However radical this thesis might be, all it does is delimit the proper space of philosophy.”\textsuperscript{31} Badiou thus objects to the common view that mathematics is an autonomous discipline of great benefit to the natural sciences, but in general not of great relevance for philosophy. Instead, he aims at a “re-entwining of mathematics within philosophy,”\textsuperscript{32} thereby transcending the approach of a philosophy of the sciences taking mathematics merely as its object.\textsuperscript{33}

This approach initially suggests that mathematics functions as a condition independent of that which it conditions and that it effects an ‘outer delimitation’ of ‘the proper space of philosophy’ “necessitated by the current cumulative state of mathematics (after Cantor, Gödel and Cohen).”\textsuperscript{34} But we have to take notice that it is both the “state of mathematics […] and philosophy (after Heidegger)”\textsuperscript{35} which necessitate the delimitation of philosophy by mathematics. Therefore, it seems not only to be the ‘external reason’ and the inherent importance of the development of mathematics as such, but also an ‘inner necessity’ linked to the ‘state of philosophy’ which necessitates the ‘delimitation’ of its ‘proper space’ by relying on set theory since Cantor and turning this theory into ontology. Consequently, it is in the conjunction

\textsuperscript{29} I put aside the question how the relation of philosophy to \textit{all} its four conditions has to be understood. Badiou regularly mentions that philosophy has to draw the consequences of all of these conditions and to develop the conceptual framework to do so without contradictions: “What philosophy must do is propose a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibility of these conditions can be grasped.” (Badiou 2006, p. 4) Why this should be possible and the conditions could not contradict each other in an essential way remains unclear. Possibly, Badiou assumes that it is the entity of the epoch that justifies the ‘compossibility’ of its conditions: “Through this fourfold discursive imitation, philosophy knots into itself the system of its conditions. This is the reason that a philosophy is homogeneous to the stylistics of its epoch.” (Badiou 2008a, p. 23) In the literature, we find often the idea that it is the ‘circulation’ of the four conditions within philosophy by which their ‘compossibility’ is established, cf. for example Baki 2015, p. 17: “Philosophy, for Badiou, proposes a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibilization of its conditions can be grasped in the rupture of an eventual truth. Philosophy conceptually seizes and houses the site of heterogeneous truths by circulating between the procedures that arise from science, art, politics and love.”

\textsuperscript{30} Badiou 2006, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Badiou 2008a, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{33} Badiou describes this difference between the project of a ‘mathematical philosophy’ and a philosophy of mathematics also as the difference between the ‘little’ or the ‘grand style’ of philosophy, cf. Badiou 2004, pp. 3-14.
\textsuperscript{34} Badiou 2006, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
of mathematical thinking after Cantor and philosophy after Heidegger that we have to locate the necessity to relate philosophy to mathematics anew.

Therefore, it is first and foremost an inner, philosophical reasoning and Badiou’s assessment of the state of philosophy in general, and the strategic exigencies after Heidegger in particular, which makes it necessary to draw on set theory since Cantor. Accordingly, it is “itself a meta-ontological or philosophical thesis”\(^{36}\) that ‘mathematics is ontology’ and the same thesis is the indispensable premise for understanding mathematics as a condition of philosophy.\(^{37}\) This condition presupposes a philosophical operation and is in this respect primarily an inner condition, but this whole operation simultaneously aims to establish a condition external to philosophy: “[…] the confrontation with mathematics is an absolutely indispensable condition for philosophy as such; a condition that is at once descriptively external and prescriptively immanent for philosophy.”\(^{38}\) Accordingly, the ‘confrontation with mathematics’ is ‘prescriptively immanent’ because it is a philosophical challenge which motivates the introduction of mathematics into philosophical reasoning and turns it into a discourse on being as such. But on the other hand, mathematics seems to be ‘descriptively external’ because mathematical knowledge is independent of philosophy. Presumably, Badiou refers here to a common view regarding philosophy and mathematics as two autonomous and even ‘separated’ disciplines: “philosophy is originally separated from ontology. Not, as a vain ‘critical’ knowledge would have us believe, because ontology does not exist, but rather because it exists fully, to the degree that what is sayable – and said – of being qua being does not in any manner arise from the discourse of philosophy.”\(^{39}\) In Badiou’s view, the condition of philosophy is external because mathematical axioms, theorems and methods – conceived as an operative and procedural knowledge about being as such – define a ‘delimitation’ which is out of the reach of philosophical reasoning, but frame and oblige all philosophical investigations into being.

Consequently, any condition of philosophy presupposes a philosophical decision to place philosophy under this condition, but aims at committing philosophy to a field and a form of knowledge external to philosophy: “the statement ‘mathematics is ontology’ is the contemporary way to put philosophy under the condition of math-

\(^{36}\) Badiou 2006, p. 15.

\(^{37}\) Cf. Badiou 2006, pp. 11-4. In contrast, hardly any mathematician would see the need for risking such a philosophical and speculative bet far beyond the closed and formal frame of his or her discipline. Nevertheless, Badiou’s portrayal of the ‘working mathematicians’ and his thesis of a “reflexive foreclosure of its [the ontology’s, A.S.] identity” (ibid., p. 11) are in my opinion part of a questionable philosophical tradition to underestimate systematically the reflexive aspects of scientific practice where they do not fit to the philosophical expectations attached to them. Cf. also ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.

\(^{38}\) Badiou 2004, pp. 13-4. Badiou relates the quoted claim to “the teaching of our admirable predecessors” like Plato, Descartes, Spinoza and others. Therefore, I assume that he shares this opinion.

Therefore, Badiou’s conception of a condition of philosophy conveys a kind of self-imposed philosophical commitment to a body of knowledge like set theory as something self-sufficient and untouched by philosophical quarrels. It is internal insofar as it presupposes the philosophical decision ‘to put philosophy under the condition of mathematics,’ but it claims to be external because philosophy cannot interfere with mathematical questions. Yet, we still have to consider this “re-entwining of mathematics within philosophy” in more detail. Because not only does this re-entwining presuppose a philosophical decision, but also a “philosophical localizing of mathematics,” namely a specific translation of mathematics into an ontology that shares the question of being as such with philosophy. Even if we accept the philosophical decision to commit philosophy to mathematics, it is still up for discussion how to conceive of mathematics as a way of thinking about being, i.e. to select specific mathematical teachings and to turn them into ‘theorems of being’.

From this point of view, it is quite natural to conclude: “There is nothing ‘necessary’ about the way Badiou understands and makes use of mathematical set theory to construct a new metaphysics of Being.”

In his few explanations on this point, Badiou himself also highlights philosophy’s latitude in dealing with mathematics – in contrast to some of his readers, who argue

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40 Badiou 2008a, p. 112.
41 This double aspect of the condition – presupposing a philosophical decision and committing philosophy to an external and independent restriction – finds its expression in the somewhat ambiguous explanations of the concept in Feltham 2008, pp. 124-8, and in his “Translator’s Preface” in Badiou 2006, p. xvii-xxxi. On the one side, it is highlighted there that “[f]or Badiou, one must maintain that truth occurs outside and independently of philosophy” (ibid., p. xviii sq.) and that Badiou’s claim that mathematics is ontology “subjects philosophy to unforeseeable non-philosophical constraints” (ibid., p. xx). On the other side, it is stressed that “Badiou renders philosophy not fully but partially dependent on the occurrence of events in heterogeneous domains” (ibid., p. xix) and that “[c]onditioning is a philosophical operation that names and thinks truth procedures which occur outside philosophy” (ibid., p. xviii). It is this ambiguity of this ‘philosophical operation’ of self-commitment to an external and ‘independent’ body of knowledge which includes the necessity to select fragments of this body and to ‘name and think’ them, i.e. to adopt as well as to adapt them, which I will try to explore a little bit further in the following.
42 Badiou 2008a, p. 111.
43 Ibid., p. 103.
44 As François Wahl put it, we have to deal with “a space of decision whose status has yet to be resolved, since it already belongs as much to a philosophical operation – be it unknown – as to a choice internal to mathematics. This amounts to more than a mere remark, because the beautiful order that had so rigorously tiered truth procedures and philosophy is lost.” (Wahl 2008, p. xxxiv)
45 Baki 2015, p. 17-8. And this is true, even if we ignore two more fundamental problems: first, the question how to conceive mathematics as such; second, which mathematical theory is appropriate to be used as a model for ontology. For an illuminating discussion of Badiou’s more classical conception of set theory in comparison to an intuitionist conception cf. Fraser 2008 (primarily in view of the consequences for the theory of the subject); for an inspiring discussion of set theory or category theory as possible models for ontology cf. Madarasz 2005. The fact that Badiou 2009 draws on category theory in order to formalize a logic of appearance is not an answer to this questions, but reproduces it.
that the self-imposed delimitation of philosophy by mathematics is to be understood as the commitment to the strict consequential reasoning within the framework of set theory. In *Being and Event*, Badiou speaks of his “usage of certain mathematical fragments, yet they are commanded by philosophical rules, and not by those of contemporary mathematics.” Accordingly, Badiou takes the liberty of selecting and arranging the ‘fragments’ of set theory he wants to draw on and follows rules and aims specific to philosophy: “what is happening in meta-ontology, [is happening, A.S.] according to other rules, and towards other ends.” In his “Preface” to the English translation of *Being and Event*, Badiou extends the latitude of philosophy to redraw its delimitation by the mathematics it commits to. For this purpose, he defends and explains his method of “us[ing] mathematics and accord[ing] it a fundamental role” by “reorganizing a thorough, if not creative, knowledge of mathematics, by means of all the imaging powers of language. To know how to make thought pass through demonstrations as through plainsong, and thus to steep an unprecedented thinking in disparate springs.”

In the cryptic, but nevertheless illuminating “Definition of Philosophy,” Badiou strengthens this notion of freedom of philosophy in its confrontation with mathematics even more. He describes the relationship between philosophy and its conditions as ‘seizing’ the truths produced within science, art, politics and love: “This seizing is its act. It is this act by which philosophy declares that there are truths, and by which thought itself is seized by this ‘there are’.” Accordingly, this seizing of truths is an active procedure aiming at itself being seized by truths outside of philosophy, especially in mathematics. But this seizing involves the freedom to choose mathematical ‘fragments’ and to conceive of them as ‘theorems of being,’ i.e. the freedom of philosophy to imitate mathematics and thus to become a ‘fiction’ of scientific discourse and knowledge: “As a fiction of knowledge, philosophy imitates the matheme.”

Whereas Badiou’s *Being and Event* creates the impression that it is based on the teachings of the mathematical textbooks and on its philosophical conception as knowledge about the structures of being, it in fact ‘imitates’ and ‘fictionalizes’ set theory in order to draw the philosophical conclusions Badiou considers necessary.

Whichever is Badiou’s precise understanding of ‘fiction’ or ‘imitation,’ it seems an inevitable conclusion that any reference to a ‘theorem of being’ within the philosophical discourse has finally to be deprived of any probative force or authoritative gesture. Because this ‘theorem’ to which Badiou refers in his discussion of Marxist theories of the State not only does presuppose the philosophical decision ‘to put phi-

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49 Badiou 2008a, p. 23.
50 Ibid., p. 23.
losophy under the condition of mathematics’ (something that was barely a plausible or even conceivable possibility for the Marxist theory of the State from Marx and Engels to Mao), it is also nothing other than a philosophical ‘imitation’ of a mathematical theorem and as such, already part of a more comprehensive fictionalizing of mathematics as ontology.

In Being and Event, Badiou presents set theory as a discourse on being as such in order to commit himself to an ontology that imitates mathematics. Put differently, philosophy is here committing itself to how it imagines mathematics. This is all the more true because in its arrangement of mathematical fragments, Badiou’s philosophy pursues its own target, namely to articulate on the basis of mathematics conceived as ontology that which contradicts it – the event: “Our goal is to establish the meta-ontological thesis that mathematics is the historicity of the discourse on being qua being. And the goal of this goal is to assign philosophy to the thinkable articulation of two discourses (and practices) which are not it: mathematics, science of being, and the intervening doctrines of the event, which, precisely, designate ‘that-which-is-not-being-qua-being’.”

This motivates Badiou’s final appropriation of mathematics: As he assumes that the event has to be articulated on the basis of a mathematical ontology, although it contradicts this same ontology, he not only adopts the teachings of set theory philosophically, but also interferes with these teachings. The definition of the event in Being and Event not only presupposes a set being an element of itself, but also draws the conclusion that the axiom of foundation, which rules out such a set, has to be abolished in order to think of such an event as transforming the state of affairs, widening what is regarded as present and what is represented in a given situation. Consequently, Badiou puts into question the axiom of foundation, which he discredits as a “metaontological thesis of ontology,” that is, a philosophical claim of mathematicians – a claim which can therefore be disputed on the basis of philosophical reasoning. Badiou’s crucial bet on the event depends on drawing a distinction between mathematics as ontology that is indisputable on philosophical grounds and philosophical motivations within mathematics that can be put into question by philosophy.

Therefore, Badiou conceives of mathematics in its entirety not as truly external to philosophical reasoning and its common quarrels. Rather, he suspects mathematicians to take a specific and disputable philosophical attitude where the mathematical

52 According to Badiou, we have here a crucial difference to Deleuze’s thinking about the event, cf. Badiou 2004, pp. 99-100.
axioms and theorems do not fit with the ontology Badiou conceives. But how could we draw a line between ‘pure’ mathematics and mathematics imbued with philosophical considerations? As far as I can see, Badiou does not give an account of how we could draw this line. Without this line however, philosophy seems to be a condition of mathematics as much as mathematics is a condition of philosophy. Consequently, a ‘theorem of being’ referring to a particular mathematical insight does not provide any argument which could not be put into question on philosophical grounds. Quite the contrary, any probative force of mathematics within the proper space of philosophy vanishes into thin air if mathematics is already entangled in philosophy and its disputes. Every suggestion of such a force for the sake of philosophical argumentation therefore risks a merely rhetorical exploitation of the “particular power [of mathematics, A.S.] to both fascinate and horrify” which Badiou himself “holds to be a social construction.” Thus, it is advisable to abandon the hope of a philosophical argument by way of a mathematical proof and to avoid any potentially authoritative gesture in referring to the teachings of mathematics.

Another very simple example for this is the different mathematical approaches to numbers discussed in Badiou’s beautiful book *Number and Numbers*. Badiou refers to the history of the mathematical theory of numbers and focuses on three important and exemplary approaches, namely Frege’s, Dedekind’s and Peano’s. He does not only show, that Frege conceives of numbers on the basis of the extension of concepts, that Dedekind starts by postulating an infinite system N with specific characteristics, and that Peano’s argumentation is based on arithmetical operations with numbers and numerals. Badiou also connects each of these approaches to philosophical attitudes: Frege, the logicist, starting with a theory of concepts; Dedekind, “a true modern” (*Badiou* 2008b, p. 32), giving priority to infinity over the finite; and Peano reducing numbers to operations and calculations, which fits – in the view of Badiou – an ill-conceived “technicisation” (ibid., p. 46) amounting to a “modern sophistry” (ibid., p. 48) and the “forgetting of being” (ibid., p. 50). The different mathematical approaches seem to correlate to specific philosophical approaches and even to express tendencies of our culture in general. At this point, it seems to be highly questionable why other number theories could be pure mathematics, as Badiou seems to suggest with respect to von Neumann’s theory of ordinals. There is a simple reason to defend this claim: von Neumann’s definition of ordinals is based on an inherent characteristic of sets, namely the transitivity of sets, that is to say that every element of a set is a part of it. Therefore the whole definition of ordinals – as those transitive sets whose elements are also transitive – is, Badiou thinks, “purely immanent” (*Badiou* 2008b, p. 68). This approach can be regarded as extraordinarily elegant, because transitivity is a characteristic of sets that is as fundamental as its consequences are far-reaching. But this doesn’t seem to be a sufficient reason for arguing that von Neumann’s approach, as opposed to Peano’s, is simply pure mathematics, an ontological knowledge free of philosophical decisions and disputes. The preference of von Neumann’s approach over Peano’s seems to suppose the priority of an immanent characteristic of sets compared to the operationality of numbers – but this priority of immanence over operationality is not justified in a view taking a purely mathematical standpoint, but presupposes a philosophical decision.
3. Conclusion: ‘…if we accept to be within the effects of the mathematical condition…’

Independently of the question discussed above, i.e. whether mathematics enables the philosopher to draw on some invoked mathematical knowledge and use it as an argument within the philosophical discourse, it should be kept in mind that Badiou’s view of mathematics as a condition of philosophy is first and foremost due to his conviction that philosophy has to cope with the truly revolutionary development of set theory since Cantor. For Badiou, it is a damaging ignorance on the part of philosophy not to let itself be confronted by this development, but to enclose this development within the narrow limits of a philosophy of mathematics at best. Instead, he stresses that philosophy has to become aware of the development of mathematics and will profit from the confrontation with that development. Without doubt, it is a fascinating and intriguing experiment to draw philosophically on the revolutionary developments of mathematics since Cantor – regardless of any dubitable probative force of some ‘theorem of being.’

Badiou has good reason to be inspired by set theory from Cantor to Cohen. When mathematics became skeptical about the occasionally misleading intuitive evidence in the 19th century and started to lay its own foundations in a more rigorous form, its initial hopes were soon thwarted. Cantor’s impressive attempt to understand the objects of mathematics as sets ran into problems because of his naïve conception of the set. Soon, it became necessary to formalize the construction of the set-theoretic universe from the one set assumed to exist and some basic operations.\(^\text{57}\) This resulted in

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\(^{57}\) That modern set theory defines sets only implicitly by determining the possible operations on sets and the starting point of the existence of at least one set, is very important for Badiou’s understanding of set theory and its ontological implications, cf. Badiou 2006, pp. 38-45. Concerning the failures of the explicit definitions of sets and the operationalization of the concept by the axiomatization of set theory cf. also ibid., p. xxivsq., and Badiou 2004, p. 43: In lieu of defining the basic terms, “axiomatic terms” lay them out “in a series wherein the term subsists.”

Readers of Badiou are perhaps surprised that I speak of the existence of one set instead of the existence of the empty set, as this axiom is usually put. I just want to indicate that it is mathematically equivalent whether we assume the existence of any set or of the empty set—an issue that was at least occasionally discussed in view of the huge importance Badiou attributes to the existence of the empty set or the void, cf. Badiou 2006, pp. 52-77, esp. pp. 57-8 and 66-7, and Nirenberg / Nirenberg 2011, pp. 590-1. As Baki 2015, p. 98, also indicates, there is no mathematical difference between the two assumptions of existence because we deduce the existence of the empty set on the basis of any given set in order to follow the same constructions starting with the empty set. Yet, it remains open whether the different formulations of the axiom would or should make any difference for Badiou’s conception of set theory in terms of ontology. In general, we have to ask in what way Badiou’s conception of mathematics as set theory is compatible to the insight into the ‘conventionality’ of every formulation of set theory: “In short, the mathematical basis upon which Badiou builds is conventional, and therefore whatever ontology results will be similarly conventional, even if it be a purely mathematical ontology, let alone the more general ontology Badiou proposes.” (Nirenberg / Nirenberg 2011, p. 599)
the collection of axioms (and axiom schemata) named Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory (ZF) after the two important mathematicians Ernst Zermelo and Abraham Fraenkel. But Gödel demonstrated only a few years later that any axiomatic framework which allows arithmetic, and therefore in particular ZFC (i.e. ZF plus the axiom of choice), is either inconsistent or incomplete, that is to say that this axiomatic framework either implies contradictions or includes propositions which are no more deducible than their negation. This incompleteness theorem sets limits to deduction. On the one hand, it follows that every axiomatic framework which is in fact consistent cannot prove its own consistency; on the other, it is a consequence of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem that formal syntactic deducibility and semantic truth differ. Because within a consistent axiomatic framework we find propositions that are no more deducible than their negation, but either the proposition itself or its negation has to be true in a model of the same axiomatic framework. Therefore, one way of proving the independence of a proposition with respect to ZFC for example is to construct models in which the proposition holds and others in which it does not hold. Paul Cohen’s forcing is an intriguing technique to construct just such models; it was invented in order to prove the independence of Cantor’s continuum hypothesis with respect to ZFC.

It is this overall development of set theory from Cantor to Cohen that finally results in the insight that there can be no such thing as a single comprehensive framework of mathematics. Neither can all mathematics be founded on an axiomatic framework enabling us to deduce every true proposition or its negation; nor is there a single formal framework to work with, for example ZFC, so that every endeavor to prove a proposition is at once an examination of the axiomatic assumptions it requires. Therefore, set theory became more and more of an investigation into the probative forces of different axiomatic frameworks, generally of ZF, often including the axiom of choice or some variety of it, plus further and stronger axiomatic assumptions, for example the existence of some large cardinals. Consequently, set theory today is not primarily a knowledge well founded within one common set of axioms, but consists of research into the deductive strength of different variations and extensions of ZF.

For Badiou, this development is strong evidence for the fact that set theory unites the most rigorous aspects of formal, deductive proof on the one hand and the ineluctable necessity to decide on the other. At this point, he locates “the freedoms of thinking decision” and develops these freedoms in reference to a passage by Gödel and his Platonist understanding of mathematics: “Since every apparatus of mathematical thought, as summarized in a collection of foundational axioms, comprises an element of undecidability, intuition is never useless: mathematics must periodically

58 Badiou 2004, p. 54.
be redecided.”

It is this new situation of mathematical thought that mesmerizes Badiou because it shows that the networks of syntactic consequences and formal necessity are interrupted by irreducible elements of incompleteness and undecidability involving the necessity and the freedom to decide. This freedom is not only the freedom of the set theoretician in exploring the different variations and extensions of ZFC or the freedom of the philosopher in confronting mathematics and construing its philosophical relevance. It is also the freedom of everyone bound by the necessities of the situation he or she lives in and confronted intermittently with the necessity to decide as to the truth. That’s why Badiou temporalizes mathematical undecidability.

Whereas the mathematicians consider propositions whose truth cannot be determined deductively (i.e. neither the propositions nor their negations are deducible), Badiou regards it as a possibility and a necessity to decide as to their truth claims. What is a mathematical fact becomes the starting point for a process of decision making. At the same time, Badiou introduces an elementary narration by involving a subject and his/her possibilities to decide as to a truth of propositions, whereas the mathematician examines different variations of the axiomatic framework and the variety of their possible models. This temporal and narrative aspect of Badiou’s conception of mathematics as an ontology seems to be especially important for his understanding of Cohen’s forcing and the drawing of the consequences of the decision to be taken.

To “accept to be within the effects of the mathematical condition” means for Badiou to ontologize the interlacing of the syntactic necessity of deduction with the fundamental incompleteness constitutive of set theory after Gödel and to thereby generalize it as a description of the situations we live in and in which we are provoked to make decisions. It is this speculative transformation of mathematics that requires us to read Badiou’s Being and Event as a philosophical approach or ‘experiment’ after set theory from Cantor to Cohen. This experiment matters, not because the axioms of set theory determine the structures of being as such and certain mathematical theorems could allegedly be invoked within the philosophical dispute. Neither is it comparable to a scientific experiment that empirically demonstrates – and does not mathematically deduce – which mathematical concepts are suitable means to formalize the laws which actually apply in nature. Badiou’s experiment with...
mathematics is different. It fascinates rather as a philosophical attempt to draw the philosophical consequences of the transformation of truth resulting from set theory since Cantor up to Gödel and Cohen. Therefore, Badiou’s ‘re-entwining of mathematics within philosophy’ follows the major philosophical tradition to take mathematics as the paradigm for knowledge in general, but gives it a new twist, because the mathematical conception of truth has decisively changed in the meantime.

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Part III:
Politics, Crisis, and the Universality of Scission
In his 1991 text *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* Badiou offers a gnomic definition of theatre: “the art of the declaration of the State (the state of affairs).”¹ In this paper I develop what Harold Bloom would call a “strong interpretation” of this definition so as to lead to my own concept of a ‘common-state’. The first part of the paper sets out an interpretation of Badiou’s meta-ontological concept of the state in *Being and Event* as a form of action. In particular I focus on Badiou’s apparently teleological conception of the state whereby it comes into existence in order to ward off a danger to structure. Identifying parameters of action in Badiou’s concept of the state is the beginning of my argument as to how theatre declares the state. Central to this argument is the idea that defining the state as a kind of action also has the virtue of democratizing the state and localizing it as something a citizen can attempt to perform, rather than reifying it as a separate monolithic institution. In the second part of the paper I approach the definition of the state as a kind of action from a historical angle. I explore an episode of state-building on the part of provincial Jacobins during the French Revolution, activists who travelled out into villages and acted as spokespersons for the new laws being passed in the national parliament. In the third part of the paper I develop an alternative concept of the state as a kind of action through a remodeling of the Jacobin episode. This remodeling passes via an account of the ontological condition of politics as an ‘action-zone,’ a concept that I develop through an interpretation of John Locke’s account of action.² This alternative concept is that of a ‘common-state,’ a particular kind of articulation of political actions. It is this final development, in the fourth part of the paper, that allows us to approach a condition of theatricality, within the realm of politics, that exposes or declares such a common-state.

¹ *Badiou* 2014, § 34 p.61, § 26 p.47. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in the body of the essay and referred to as RT with a Section number.
² An interpretation presented in more detail in *Feltham*, 2013.
1. Badiou and the recurrent state

“The state of a situation is the riposte to the void obtained by the count-as-one of its parts.” (Badiou 2009, p. 98)

1.1. The state and the danger of the void

In Meditation 8 of Being and Event one finds a curious argument concerning the function of the state. It is written in the register of philosophy, not set-theory, and thus it is presented as an exercise in ‘meta-ontology’. Its premise is that there is a ‘danger of the void,’ namely the danger of a catastrophe occurring in presentation which would render it entirely dispersed, chaotic and unthinkable. This potential catastrophe is endemic to all structured presentation due to what Badiou calls the ‘errancy’ or the ‘insistence of the void,’ an unavoidable side-effect of the very count-for-one that generates a structured presentation in the first place. A count-for-one is said to unite inconsistent multiplicities into global ones made up of elemental ones. However, there are two things that a count-for-one cannot structure and render consistent: first its own operation; and second the supposition that before the count there was inconsistent multiplicity. Badiou then converts this limit or impotence of the count-for-one into an insistence of the void within the very presentation that the count-for-one structures. Another way Badiou makes the same point is to say that the original inconsistent multiplicity of a situation is nothing within that situation once the latter is rendered consistent. However, that nothing remains somehow, ‘haunting’ structured presentation. The danger lies in this nothing, or void as Badiou prefers to call it, ‘fixing itself’ in a particular locality of a presentation and thus undoing or ruining the unity of that presentation.

So, this danger must be dealt with. Badiou writes:

“The prohibition of any presentation of the void can only be immediate and constant if this vanishing point of consistent multiplicity – which is precisely its consistency as operational result – is, in turn, stopped up, or closed, by a count-as-one of the operation itself, a count of the count, a metastructure.”

He then adds an argument that the proper domain for this meta-structure, this second count, is the domain of the ‘parts’ of a situation understood as sub-multiples, as groupings of elements. He then baptizes this meta-structure the ‘state of a situation,’ and defines it, following set theory, as the count-as-one of every sub-multiple of the situation, including the ‘maximal sub-multiple’ that is the situation itself. He claims that it is appropriate that the meta-structure reside at the level of parts since the risk

3 Badiou 2009, p. 94.
of the void can be neither local nor global and hence must reside such a level. This claim is then reinforced by the set-theory theorem of the point of excess, which shows that there are sub-sets that are included in a set but do not belong to it, and thus in Badiou’s philosophical terminology, their unity is not assured by the original count-as-one. The conclusion of this argument is that “The state of a situation is the riposte to the void obtained by the count-as-one of its parts.”

1.2. The problem of teleology

In Meditation 8 there is an extreme tension between set theory and the philosophical extrapolation of set-theory as ontology. Badiou himself recognizes that his thesis on the necessity for metastructure “may appear to be completely a priori.” He then immediately follows this with an empirical argument: “what it amounts to, in the end, is something that each and everybody observes, which is philosophically astonishing: the being of presentation is inconsistent multiplicity, but despite this, it is never chaotic.” This is quite odd; since when, we may ask, has an empirical argument been valid in Badiou’s meta-ontology?

The problem with the argument for the necessity of the state from the danger of the void is that it appears to be teleological; that is to say these subjectless structures supposedly act for the sake of an end. Badiou’s argument runs as follows: there is a danger of chaos for structure in the form of the void. The void, in Badiou’s ontological interpretation of set theory, is something that is inevitably part of the coming into being of structure, since structure is woven out of the counting-for-one of the void, yet the void itself is not-one. The stability and consistency of structure is better than chaos. Action is then undertaken by structure – in the form of a second operation of unification, a second count-for-one – to prohibit and ward off the danger of the void and to secure the good of consistency. The state thus exists for the sake of reinforced
stability, and the state is brought into being from a situation of relative but vulnerable stability. The cause of the state appears to be explained by its effect: stability. Surely though, there is no room in a meta-ontology conditioned by set theory for teleological explanations; no purposes are fulfilled and no goods obtained by set theoretical structures. How could a structure ever be aware of a danger?

What is the solution to this problem? One could dismiss it as an artifice of Badiou’s exposition of his concepts in *Being and Event* and replace it with another exposition, rewriting the meta-ontology of the state in mechanistic terms whereby all causes would be efficient causes. Alternatively, one could argue that Badiou’s concept of the state is ‘conditioned’ in his terms, not just by set theory, but also by own political practice with the Organisation Politique, and the artistic praxis of theatre. Such an argument would require a rethinking of the state in terms of action and states of affairs, or relations, rather than purely in terms of multiplicity and structure. This is the route we shall take here.

1.3. Strategy via typology

The doctrine of the state in *Being and Event* is one of the key points in his oeuvre where Badiou explicitly takes his distance from Marxism, namely the thesis of the withering away of the state as declared by Engels in the *Anti-Dühring*. Engels claims that the state “became necessary to moderate [class] conflict and keep it within the bounds of order.” Consequently, once class conflict was dissolved under communism and the establishment of collective property, the need for the state as a separate coercive power would also dissolve. In contrast, Badiou develops an apology for the permanence or recurrence of the state in all situations. Even during the occurrence of an event, the intervention that names the latter, and a subsequent generic truth procedure, the state persists – indeed it is supplemented by a counter-state. This is not in any way a Hobbesian apology on Badiou’s part for the necessity of centralized repressive power or a particular form of organization. Indeed it is crucial at this point to underline the radical difference between the ontological concept of the state and any political concept of the State, as modeled in a non-ontological situation, for example in Meditation 9. At an ontological level, the state encompasses absolutely every single possible regrouping of elements of its situation. At the level of a historical situation – analyzed in ontological terms – a particular political State presents a very poor finite set of regroupings compared to the ontological potential of the situation. Consequently, Badiou’s thesis concerning the recurrence of the state in all situations can quite easily encompass the recurrence of a very different state

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8 *Engels* 1884, Chapter 9.
within the same situation, a state that is made up of a different and larger set of re-
groupings of the elements of the situation. In other words, and in complete contrast
to the perpetual anxiety of an administrator or a manager – in any situation there is
not one best way, only one way that things can work; rather the possibilities for
forms of organization are endless.

Although the thesis of the recurrence of the state is a major point of divergence
from Marxism, Badiou sources it in the Marxist conception of the state. Badiou ar-
gues that in Engel’s work, “The state is not founded upon the social bond, which it
would express, but rather upon un-binding, which it prohibits.”9 Before he identifies
Engel’s thesis as his own thesis Badiou recognizes its roots in Hobbes’s philosophy.
The state exists for otherwise there would be chaos, un-binding, undifferentiated dis-
persal, nothing consistent to be thought. The state thus exists in order to prohibit and
prevent such inconsistency from seeing the light.

It is important to note that this argument for the recurrence of the state is not
made in the terms of set theory, but in those of philosophy. For that reason a philo-
sophical objection can be brought against it, from anarchism; namely that the state is
neither a necessary nor a ubiquitous structure, that it is historically contingent, and
that consistent and lasting human collectives can form, cohere and sustain them-

selves with no centralized authority. From the anarchist standpoint, the state must
not be accepted as a recurrent and ubiquitous structure. Rather, one must smash the
state since the very state-form itself is inherently despotic.

In response to the anarchist objection, and to elucidate the astonishing resem-
blance between Badiou and Hobbes at this particular point in Badiou’s philosophy,
one must recognize the particularly political condition of Badiou’s thesis on the re-
currence of the state. Badiou himself notes it is a question of strategy. At the end of
Meditation 9 he writes:

“even if the route of political change – and I mean the route of the radical dispensation of
justice – is always bordered by the State, it cannot in anyway let itself be guided by the
latter, for the state is precisely non-political, insofar as it cannot change, save hands, and
it is well known that there is little strategic signification in such a change.”10

Whether Badiou is referring here to a change of parties due to an election in a parlia-
mentary system, or to a revolution and the construction of a socialist state through
the dictatorship of the proletariat, the alternative strategic goal remains the same;
and that is one of separating political praxis from the state – so as to reorientate it
towards the event. This is one of the most significant and dramatic consequences for
political praxis of Badiou’s ontology; this is where it makes a difference. It robs
both classic Marxist and anarchist politics of their object – the state. The state does

10 Ibid., p. 110.
not matter anymore, there is no point trying to address it never mind smash it, it will just reoccur. The thesis of the recurrence of the state also cancels out one of the most remarkable signs – however utopian – of communism’s actual efficacy and the end of history, which would have been the withering away of the state. The disappearance of the state can no longer play the role of a regulative idea for Marxist political practice.

This strategy of separating or ‘distancing’ political praxis from the state is also carried out via a theoretical choice concerning the vulnerability of structures to transformation. In simple terms, for Badiou in Being and Event, it is not the case that all structure is perpetually open to the occurrence of radical transformation. There is no ever-present weak link or potential to be unleashed.\(^{11}\) For Badiou there is a void of all structure, but this void is itself counted-as-one by the meta-structure, or the state.

If the state will never wither away, but reoccur, even within and beyond the radical transformation of a situation, then there are also obvious implications for the philosophy of history. Indeed Badiou himself underlines a commonality between Theory of the Subject and Being and Event, and that is the attempt to cancel out the category of History with a capital ‘H’ so as to replace it with plural histories.\(^{12}\) But in this multiplication of histories it is neither one ideal state form as in Plato, nor the very existence of the state per se, that provides the crucial operator of differentiation between situations. Rather, what differentiates situations is the relationship between a situation and its state at the local level of particular multiples. In short, the distinction between elements and subsets, belonging and inclusion allows multiples to be sorted into three kinds: 1.) There are normal multiples, which are counted in a set both as elements and subsets, that is to say normal multiples both belong to a situation, and are included within it at the level of the state. 2.) There are excrescent multiples, which are counted solely as subsets within the powerset, and do not originally belong to the set as elements. These multiples are solely included in the situation and they crystallize what Badiou terms the “excess” of the state over the situation. 3.) Finally there are singular multiples, which are counted solely as elements of the set, and are not included as subsets in the powerset. These multiples thus belong to

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\(^{11}\) This is in contrast to the early Derrida where one finds a certain optimism concerning the ubiquitous possibility of the dissolution of structure and of the authority of dominant interpretations in the claim that whatever is found to be a text is open to deconstruction. In particular a claim is made in Of Grammatology that “il n’y a pas de hors-texte,” that is, there was no entity outside a text that might come to serve as an anchor for its interpretation; that is to say, no transcendental signified whether it lie in history or the psychology of the author, moreover no realm that can be simply accessed outside the condition of textuality. Whether or not Derrida’s claim is misread when it is understood as an ontological claim – as Badiou would, identifying it as an instance of what he baptized ‘idealinguistery’ – it does suggest that wherever there is a text, deconstruction and thus the undoing of mastery, identity and unity, may occur. Derrida 1976, p. 158.

the situation but are not included at the level of the state. The reason for their non-inclusion is that they contain some elements which in turn do not belong to the original situation. The eventual-site is an extreme singular multiple in that all of its elements do not belong to the original situation.

It is this structural classification of three types of multiples that allows Badiou to engage in an operation of what I call ‘typology,’ he differentiates three ‘types’ of being or three grand categories of situation: the natural, the historical and the neutral.13 A natural situation is composed of normal multiples which are in turn composed of normal multiples and so on: written out in set theory terms by the transitive ordinals.14 In contrast, a situation is said to be historical if at one locality it has an eventual site, that is, if one singular multiple belongs to it. A neutral situation is composed of a mix of normal, excrescent and singular multiples.

This formalistic distribution of types of being as kinds of multiple serves to orientate the subject and its action in so far as it is solely within historical situations that radical change can occur: “The idea of an overturning whose origin would be a state of the totality is imaginary. Every radical transformational action originates in a point, which, inside a situation, is an eventual site.”15 This is the outcome of Badiou’s strategic doctrine on the state and its recurrence: an operation of typology and a re-orientation of the action of artists, lovers, activists and scientists – subjects of transformation – towards eventual-sites in particular historical situations.

1.4. The state is an affair of action

But this political conditioning of Badiou’s doctrine of the state is not sufficient to explain its curiously teleological and indeed Hobbesian format: “The state of a situation is the riposte to the void obtained by the count-as-one of its parts” – otherwise there would be chaos.16 It is at this point that Badiou’s gnomic definition of theatre as “the art of the declaration of the State (the state of affairs)” offers us a clue. In the same text, Rhapsody on the theatre, Badiou sets down an axiom inspired by Mallarmé: “Action does not go beyond (transcend) the theatre.”17 My wager is that the best interpretation of these statements is to be found by transcribing Badiou’s concept of the state into terms of action, into an affair of action. Indeed many elements of such a transcription are already in place in our exegesis.

First, in Badiou’s argument, the state has the temporality of action: it arises between the spectres of past and future chaos; the danger of the void bridges, on the

14 Ibid., pp. 127-8, pp. 130-41.
15 Ibid., p. 176.
16 Ibid., p. 98.
17 Badiou 2014, § VI.
one hand, the inaccessible past of the inconsistent multiplicity that must have been counted-for-one for there to be consistent multiplicity in the first place, and, on the other hand, the future threat of a possible fixation somewhere of this void amongst the situation’s sub-multiples. To be precise, the state’s temporality joins the preterite to the conditional perfect: the state had to have been constructed or had to emerge because otherwise there would have been chaos.

As with action, this temporality also implies some kind of choice, a decision between two possible outcomes – chaos or order – and it implies the projection of a future good to be obtained: order.

But not only that, the state also has the relationality or immanent plurality of action: every action relates to or implies another action, a reaction: the state is a ‘ri-poste’ (parade) to the action – the insisting, the wandering – of the void. Moreover the void presents the threat of chaos, and thus its activity of ‘wandering’ can be understood, like action, as orientated towards an end, precisely, the realization of chaos.

To rewrite structure in terms of action might seem like an easy trick. Indeed the mutual convertibility of being and action is a classic trope of early modern and modern philosophy: it relies on a minimal definition of action as a bare operation, a verb – such as found in every encounter between physical bodies in Hobbes or Descartes’s mechanism. However, the three elements of action that have been identified in Badiou’s doctrine of the state – temporality, choice and relationality – already go beyond the status of action as bare operation.

Badiou’s state is an action of inclusion; the state is the inclusion of a subset of multiples that belong to a situation. Of course, one can insist on the difference between the meta-ontological concept of the state, which is found in all situations, and the historical concept of the state, which is found in political situations. However this distinction does not make a difference to our argument. At a structural level, the political state for Badiou remains just one particular and thus limited counting-as-one of the parts of its situation. Within an ontological analysis of this political situation, a more complete second count-as-one may well be possible, but that just marks out the contingency and limits of the current state of that historical situation. It remains the case that the political state is an action of inclusion that intervenes in response to the past and possibly future actions of chaos.

There are advantages to conceiving of the state as a kind of action. Such a concept democratizes the state by making it into something anyone can do. To cite an ancient democrat, Jesus defined another apparently separate and authoritative institution, the church, in terms of names and actions: “for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Matt 18:20). In a similar manner, if the state is defined as kind of action that can be performed, it is no longer something separate and massive to be either obeyed or criticized. If the state
is a kind of action, it can then be appropriated and made one’s own on a local level: it can become immanent.

But we still have some way to go to understand Badiou’s definition of theatre as the art of declaring the state. One action alone – a response to the danger of the void – is not enough to constitute a theatre. In order to go further in the conceptualization of the state as a kind of action we shall explore a historical instance of the action of state-building during the French Revolution.

2. State-building on the part of the Jacobin spokespersons

On the 27th of February 1792, the Society of the Friends of the Constitution, sitting in the Jacobin Club of Paris, called upon affiliated societies to embark upon ‘patriotic missions’ after the model of Christian missionaries; that is, to carry out public instruction in the villages and the countryside, in order to act in the sphere of public opinion against the threat of civil war and sedition. Brissot named the goal of such grassroots activity as no less than that of ensuring the passage from “the state we are in” to “the republic.” Jacques Guilhaumou, a historian who has researched this activity in depth, argues that these missions represent the birth of a new type of political subject, the porte-parole, or spokesperson. Typically these spokesmen would ride out from Marseille to outlying villages and seek to put into practice the new laws that had been passed by the national parliament in Paris, thereby showing how local conflicts over the price of grain, for instance, could be mediated with the help of the new laws. This action was conceived of by its practitioners as a manner of ‘making the law speak’. Such action can also be conceived of as a manner of localizing the state, that is to say, to apply new laws to particular conflicts is to concretize within a town and a region the national and democratic republic that was being constructed in 1792.

It is at this point that we must confront contemporary scepticism with regard to such an action of state-building, especially when the latter is conceived of and presented by its agents and historians as a revolutionary praxis. The objection would run as follows: for whom do these ‘Jacobin spokesmen patriots’ actually speak? They do not speak for the people of the province but rather for the Parisian Jacobins; moreover they claim to speak in the actual place of the people, thus effectively silencing the latter. For this reason this is not a case of a popular democratic movement constructing the new state; rather it is a case of usurpation and of the extension of an ideological network over the population.

There are three historical phenomena that provide a response to such an objection. This response also helps dislodge what lies behind the objection: the all-too-contemporary dichotomy between centralized power and grassroots movements.
First, both the members of the provincial societies of friends of the constitution and the patriot-missionaries were themselves people who became active and took on political roles. As Jacques Guilhaumou shows at length, these roles were not dictated by the Parisian Jacobin clubs nor by any part of the Assemblée Nationale. When Marseillaise patriots intervened in Aix and Arles, provençale towns under royalist influence, to reestablish the constitution with the help of the national guard, they acted autonomously and were denounced by the then Minister of the Interior for acting outside the law. In response, the Girondin Jean-Louis Carra publically defended them as mobilising “the natural rights of man” and “the sovereign executive power of the people themselves.” Robespierre himself recognized that although these “patriots” were acting “beyond the letter of the law,” they were “acting for the salvation of the law itself.”

Second, local people were already speaking quite clearly for themselves when they exercised spontaneous punitive justice targeting those local officials responsible for both enforcing taxes on wheat and for the price of bread. In this case the patriot-missionaries intervened as mediators in the name of the law and argued that there was no justice without legal forms, thus translating anger at injustice into the practices of a nascent symbolic apparatus. Generally, the patriot-missionaries sought to extend the people’s right to speak by giving them a symbolic apparatus – the constitution – in which to articulate their grievances as legitimate political demands faced with illegal royalist actions.

Thirdly, when the patriot-missionaries met the local people, they recognized them as citizens, encouraged them to speak out, and noted their demands: Montbrion, the Marseillaise Jacobin, went to the Apt district in March 1792 and spoke in favour of the union of the national guard, the local friends of the constitution and the companies of armed women. He dismissed surprise at the existence of these ‘Amazons’ and transmitted their speech to the Jacobins. According to him the armed women said: “We must be armed with men’s rifles in order to watch over the existence of the public.”

Jacques Guilhaumou argues that through the “promotion of the speech acts of persuading, informing, corresponding and instructing” these spokespersons “concretised the every citizen’s capacity for judgement and translated the right of the community of citizens to make the law.” Drawing on their own analysis of their activity, he names the fundamental speech act as one of making the law speak. Evidently, this speech act and its new dual-subject of enunciation, the people and the spokesperson, opens up, as Guilhaumou notes, a new discursive and temporal space.

of reciprocity, of rights and demands. What is of interest to our analysis, however, is not so much the individual subject, but the construction of an apparatus of collective enunciation whose fundamental motor is one of translation. The original directive is attributed to the constitution. It is appropriated and modified by the Marseilles patriots who travel from Marseilles to the outlying villages and countryside. To aid their work they published a bilingual journal, the *Manuel du Laboureur et de l’Artisan* in French and Provencal in the summer of 1792. It is this apparatus – made up of the journal, the physical voyages, and the legal apparatus – that carries out an operation of translation.

What we thus have in this episode is a very particular kind of action. It is not carried out by state actors, by central or provincial authorities. It does not directly concern the state as institution and its reconceptualization as action. Rather, what we have is an action of state-building carried out by Jacobin activists, by ‘patriots,’ by friends of the constitution. As such it does further flesh out the idea that resulted from the first section of this paper, that is the idea of the democratization of the state as a kind of action that can be performed by people. What the Jacobin episode adds to this idea is any such action takes place amidst a multiplicity of other actions. In 1792 in the provinces to the North of Marseille the very future of the new republic was at stake with royalist factions in power in several municipalities. The multiplicity of actions at stake consisted in: 1.) the oppression by the municipal executives in Aix, Arles and Apt of patriots and friends of the revolutionary constitution; 2.) reports by the Marseille Jacobins of these events to their Parisian colleagues; 3.) voyages through the provinces by Marseille Jacobin ‘commissaries’ so as to create or regenerate ‘societies of patriots’ in towns and villages; 4.) local punitive expeditions against supposed aristocrats and their conspiracies; 5.) translations carried out by the commissaries of the grievances at the basis of such expeditions into the language and procedure of rights; 6.) reactions of the Minister of the Interior to such activity as anarchy; 7.) defense of such activity by departmental (regional) authorities.

These actions are neither dispersed nor atomized; they are closely related to each other, indeed some directly call for reactions. Furthermore, each of these actions can be analyzed itself as a reaction to a previous action, and thus the chain of causality continues into the past. The same holds for the future, each action having its consequences in the shape of further actions by other agents. In this historical sequence there are no natural stopping points to the sequence of actions, no point at which an actor can step back and decisively re-present to him or herself what has happened, since such stepping back and re-presenting is itself an action that, in its partiality and situatedness (think of the Minister of the Interior, or the Jacobin reports back to Paris), affects the sequence of what has happened.

At this point we could claims that the multiplicity of actions in such a situation is actually infinite. In the framework of Badiou’s meta-ontology this would require the
modeling of a global non-successor ordinal within which endless succession takes place. Here I have rather chosen to think the endlessness of action through a struggle of recognition scenario and under the heading of a negative property, incompleteness. The scenario runs as follows: each actor aims at the completion of his or her action in the sense of having the purpose of that action recognized by the community of other agents, and also in the further sense of putting an end to a political controversy by achieving a form of closure. However, each action is a reaction and itself spurs further reactions. A reaction is an interpretation of the original action to which it is a reaction. As an interpretation it assigns a purpose to the former action. Within a controversy the purpose assigned by a reaction to an adversary’s previous action will not be same as the purpose assigned to the original action by that adversary. Moreover, this conflict of attributed purposes holds for all actions. This conflict prevents any agent from completing her/his action in the sense of having its original purpose recognized by the community. It is the adversaries reactions, and precisely the attribution of alternative purposes to one’s own actions that renders the latter incomplete. It is then precisely this frustration of the completion of actions that impels still further actions attempting to secure recognition and rectify this endemic misunderstanding; and yet each action is shown to be incomplete in that it is supposedly dealt with and completed by further actions, themselves incomplete. Furthermore, any action that attempts to withdraw from the fray and simply account for what has happened by portraying the set of actions in a static image will also find itself rendered incomplete by further reactions and representations.

The first parameter of action in Badiou’s concept of the state is that of immanent plurality, but such plurality was found in fairly minimal form in Badiou: one action, the state, is a response to a past action of chaos and a potential future action of chaos. In the Jacobin spokesperson episode this multiplicity of incomplete actions provides a far thicker and complex instance of immanent plurality. Through its remodeling via the struggle for recognition scenario, it constitutes a first approximation of what I call in part three of the paper the ‘action-zone,’ that is to say, the ontological condition of politics, and of all that occurs in its realm.

The goal of part three is to further remodel the Jacobin spokesperson episode using the concept of equivocal action from my interpretation of Locke. This concept offers a second approximation of the action zone. On this basis I develop another concept, that of the ‘regionalization’ of equivocal action, and then finally a concept of what I call a ‘common-state,’ as a phenomena that can occur within the action-zone. It is in the fourth section that I show how a certain theatricality that is inherent in the action-zone itself – outside any established theatre – can declare or expose the common-state.

3. Defining the common-state

3.1. A ‘state of affairs’ as the attribution of a name to an action

In the previous section I claim that any action of portraying a set of actions in a static image is itself incomplete. But first perhaps we should understand what it is to form an image of a set of actions. Locke analyzes this operation in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding. His concern is epistemological and subsequently political: his concern is to understand how we acquire knowledge of actions and how we identify kinds of action – and this in contrast with our knowledge of substances. Subsequently, and this is an implicit concern in the Essay, Locke tries to find a solution to endemic political conflict. Here I will reconstruct his analysis in ontological terms so as to further develop the concept of the action-zone.

At the first level of action for Locke there are populations of disparate events, of transformations of sensible things. Locke speaks of “the alteration of those simple Ideas, [the Mind] observes in things without.” Of these external things, he says “we cannot help observing their sensible Qualities, nay their very Substances to be in a continual flux” (E, II, 21, § 4). This ‘continual flux’ thus consists of the alteration of the sensible qualities of external things, a flux registered by a human observer as changes in her simple ideas of those things: hence these changes make up what I call a population of events.

At the second level of the constitution of action, human understanding assembles and unifies a certain number of these events under the name of a single action; that is to say, a set of events is grasped as a single chain of causality which makes up and results in a global transformation. Another way of understanding the constitution of action for Locke is to start with his claim that an action-in-itself does not have any substantial identity:

“As to things whose Existence is in succession, such as are the Actions of finite Beings, v.g. Motion and Thought, both which consist in a continued train of Succession, concerning their Diversity there can be no question: Because each perishing the moment it begins, they cannot exist in different times, or in different places, as permanent Beings can at different times exist in different places.” (E, II, 27, § 2)

Yet if a succession of events called an action does not have any permanent identity, what is the operation that determines certain events and not others to be gathered under the name of an action? For Locke this takes place through the attribution of an agent – a starting point for the causal chain – and a recipient – the endpoint of the

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23 Locke 2008. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and indicated in the body of the text by a book number, chapter number and section number thus E, II, 8, § 7. For a full exege-isis of Locke’s enquiry into the epistemology of action see Feltham 2011, pp. 122-8.
24 Locke 2008, Bk II, Ch.21, § 1.
causal chain. It is this operation of attribution that produces the juridical category of the ‘person’. Agents of actions are persons. For the most part it is the activity of judgement that carries out these attributions and uses the category of personhood. Locke identifies three tribunals, or places of judgement, for human action: that of divine law, that of civil law, and “the law of opinion and reputation” (E, II, 28, § 7). This attribution gives orientation and finitude to the set of particular events that is gathered into a single chain of causality, but this is evidently not enough to distinguish one action from another performed by the same agent and aimed at the same recipient. A further operation of differentiation and individuation takes place at the third level of Locke’s nominalist constitution of action: the level of the ‘nature’ of actions. In agreement with Hobbes Locke claims no action in itself is good or bad: the nature of an action is rather a matter of linguistic attribution. An action is named via a stable composition of simple ideas that Locke calls a ‘mixed mode’. These mixed modes, such as ‘lie’ or ‘murder,’ distinguish a class of actions. They are complex ideas much like our ideas of substances, but unlike the latter they do not take as a model the reality of things and their properties; rather, it is the human mind that assembles together independent simple ideas to make up a mixed mode. Mixed modes are thus specific to a culture, and a product of the linguistic practices of a particular community (E, II, 22, § 6; II, 27, § 5).

Despite this pragmatist turn, Locke reemploys the concept of truth as adequation to insist on an epistemological advantage of mixed modes over ideas of substances within a community: they cannot but be adequate to the actions they name since there is no mind-independent reality to which they might not match up; in his words they are ‘archetypes’ (E, III, 9, § 7). However, there are two grand problems that do persist with these names for action: the problem of transmission and the problem of application. The problem of transmission concerns the intergenerational apprenticeship of these terms: how can a parent be sure that a child understands the same group of simple ideas when he or she repeats, for example, the word ‘lie’? Repeated attempts at the correct application of the term to diverse experiences may help adjust this usage. The second problem is more serious and it concerns the application of mixed modes to ambiguous actions. Locke recognizes that it is not always evident which name to apply to an action: “it being not so easy to determine of several Actions; whether they are to be called Justice, or Cruelty; Liberality, or Prodigality.” (E, II, 32, § 10) When an action is part of a routine, this problem does not occur; and even with exceptional actions agreement may be found over their names. Indeed Locke says that it is precisely the community of language ‘users,’ or ‘common use,’ that determines the name of an action, not a single individual (E, III, 9, § 8). When there is agreement within a community over the name for an action, then not only is a set of events unified and endowed with an agent and recipient, but it is also given a ‘nature’; that is to say, a single chain of causality is unambiguously identified as, for
example, a just act, or an act of generosity or of self-sacrifice. When, in this manner, a stable act of nomination and attribution thus separates out an action from a population of events we have what I would call a state of affairs at a local level. Conversely, to agree on the name of an action within a community of language-users is to localize the state.

However it is not always the case that such acts of nomination are stable. Locke recognizes that the use of language within a community leaves enormous semantic latitude: “the rule and measure of Propriety being nowhere established is often a matter of dispute, whether this or that way of using a word, be Propriety of Speech, or no” (E, III, 9, § 8). What is worse, this linguistic and epistemological controversy often is found at the heart of political controversy:

“Where shall one find any, either controversial Debate, or familiar Discourse, concerning Honour, Faith, Grace, Religion, Church, etc. wherein it is not easy to observe the different Notions Men have of them; which is nothing but this, that they are not agreed in the signification of those Words; nor have in their minds the same complex Ideas which they make them stand for: and so all the contests that follow thereupon, are only about the meaning of a Sound.” (E, III, 9, § 9)

Faced with these problems Locke offers a second solution to the problem of finding a stable name for controversial actions: that of turning to a recognized authority whose usage of names for action is supposed to be correct: “We have nothing else to refer these our Ideas of Mixed Modes to as a Standard, to which we would conform them, but the Ideas of those, who are thought to use those Names in their most proper significations” (E, II, 32, § 12). If such an authority can be found and recognized by all involved in the controversy, then again a state of affairs can be locally established through the stable naming of an action. Locke’s stabilizing local authority is a figure to be placed in a sequence running from Aristotle’s phronimos to Machiavelli’s prince and Rousseau’s Legislator, and eventually, unmasked, to Lacan’s supposed subject of knowledge.

However there is one remaining hurdle for Locke and that is the occurrence of actions across heterogeneous communities, that is, across different contexts of language-use. Given his work on religious toleration, and generations of political controversy from the Civil War to the revolution of 1688, it is quite probable that Locke was aware of communities that shared no ‘common use’ in the nomination of actions. In such cases different names and descriptions are given for the same actions – ‘generosity’ or ‘prodigality,’ ‘justice’ or ‘cruelty’ in Locke’s words – and no accord is reached on propriety of usage. In the case of such controversy it is evident that no appeal can be made to a common authority; moreover precisely because it is the very nature of authority that is at stake in these 17th century controversies over

25 On reference to a community authority see also E, III, 11, § 11.
“Honour, Faith, Grace, Religion, Church, etc.” Indeed disjoint communities, with no common use of language, would not even use the same terms for the agents and recipients of action.

When an action occurs across communities that are so heterogeneous in their language use that they cannot concur as to the name of such action, then we shall say that an equivocal action has occurred; that is to say, an action with more than one name, an action with contested names. At an elemental level, it is these equivocal actions with multiple names that make up what I termed ‘the action-zone’ in the previous section. The action zone is the ontological context for what is called politics. In the final sections of this paper we will explore the role of equivocal action in state-building.

3.2. Regionalization and a common-state

Within the political praxis of the Jacobin commissaries many equivocal actions occur. If the latter remain without a stable name, then they fall back to the level of populations of events, or accidents. Faced by such events nobody can offer explanations of past actions nor predictions of future actions. People may presume that there are orientations and projections of purpose beneath some of these events but neither intentions nor the nature of agents can be agreed upon as long as the actions remain without a stable name. As a result actors are disorientated, and prey to anxiety: this is what it is to inhabit the action-zone. This disorientation affects the community’s marking of time: there is no common projection of a past or a future state of affairs.

In contrast, for an action to be orientated and a state of affairs to be constructed, at least from the standpoint of one agent, two temporal elements are essential. First a punctual moment of choice must open up: the question must be posed of ‘if we do not act now then when?’, or rather, ‘if we do not act now something worse will occur’. The second element is the projection of a desirable and achievable state of affairs: a promise must occur; ‘if we act now, we could bring about a different situation’. In contrast, when actions remain equivocal and do not receive a common name, there can be neither a moment of choice nor the projection of a future.

Take the Marseille-based Jacobins. Let’s remodel their experience using the concept of equivocal action. It’s 1792 in Arles, the new constitution is not particularly effective on the ground, the royalists are in power in the town council, Jacobin commissaries visit some local villages and attempt to mediate disputes over grain prices in the language of the new constitution.

Let’s recall the nature of Badiou’s ‘recurrent state’. At a local level it is an operation of inclusion; the state is the inclusion of a subset of multiples that belong to a situation within a global situation. In Rhapsodie pour le théâtre, we find this thesis,
“Theatre inscribes discordance.” So we have an indication for conceiving of the state as an operation that carries out not a pacification of conflict, as in social contract theory, but an *inclusion*, a grouping together, of discordance. Our hypothesis shall be an equivocal action can be *regionalized*. What is at stake in this operation is the disposition of a number of regions on the basis of certain localizations of the equivocal action. This disposition of regions inscribes a discord in that it formalizes and records the differences between the receptions of the same action in diverse contexts. These differences might include not just diverse sets of consequences, diverse attributions of intention to the agent(s), but also diverse identifications of the agent(s) and recipient(s).

If a name is generated for an action that succeeds in encompassing the diverse receptions of that action, and if such a name can thus be repeated from the standpoints of these different contexts, then we will say the action *regionalizes* its diverse contexts. Through the work of the name the latter are no longer irretrievably heterogeneous but become regions of the same globality that is the action itself. Jacques Guilhaumou cites a fictive dialogue published in the *Manuel du Laboureur et de l’Artisan* in the summer of 1792. The figure ‘Anselme,’ a spokesperson is presented as explaining the constitution and the rights of man to a group of labourers. A woman interrupts him and asks “Are these rights also for us?” Anselme responds “They are for all in general, including foreigners.” The woman in this dialogue thus helps clarify and expand this new name “the language and rights of the people” from the specific context of the situation of women, from their reception of the Jacobin spokesperson’s activity. It is not only the case that the name itself “the language and rights of the people” is potentially inclusive to the point of putative universality, it is also the case that its inclusivity is expanded and made concrete through it being renamed from particular local contexts, as recorded in this published dialogue. The name gains in its semantic complexity by being repeated from this particular context. The context of women-citizens and the context of foreigners in France thus become regions of the Jacobin spokespersons’ action of making the law speak.

To clarify my use of the terms local, regional and global, they are not understood as a series of containers; that is to say, an action once regionalized does not take place from one locality to another within a specific region that in turn can be placed next to other regions within a global space. Rather what may become global is one single action that traverses different contexts once it receives a sufficiently complex name. Moreover, once that name can be repeated from the standpoints of different contexts the latter then become regions of the same action. What is local is every single repetition of that complex name.

26 Badiou 2014, §XLIX.
27 As such regionalization is the contrary of factionalism.
An operation of regionalization did not occur from the outside for the actions of the Marseille Jacobins. From the Parisian standpoint of the Montagnard Minister of the Interior in 1792 their actions were named ‘anarchy’. Later on, from the Thermidorean standpoint of the President of the Criminal Tribunal of Aix in 1795, the actions of François Isoard – commissary of the Marseille Jacobins – were also described as anarchy. The very use of the term ‘anarchy’ to name an action indicates the existence of heterogeneous contexts and the persistence of an equivocal action between the Jacobins in Marseille and the Montagnards in Paris. The incompatibility of these names “anarchy” and “making the law speak” for the same action exposed the limits of the Parisian authorities’ and also the limits of provincial municipal authorities’ understandings of Jacobin politics on the ground; that is to say, the limits of the state as an institution and an authority at those moments in time.

However, in their actions of state-building, the Jacobin spokespersons were doing nothing other than attempting to bridge heterogeneous contexts. They did this by developing the ‘language and rights of the people’ as a sufficiently complex name for the action of mediating local disputes through the rights enshrined in the new constitution. The Jacobin spokespersons found that their own political action was regionalized through local interpretations of the meaning of their names “making the law speak” and “the language and rights of the people.” The regionalization of a formerly equivocal action presents both the co-existence of localized points of discord, and the possibility of overcoming such discord between some of those localities. In other words, the name “making the law speak” allows both a precise discord to emerge between the Minister of the Interior, the Jacobin clubs in Paris, the Jacobin clubs in Marseille, villages outside Arles, and the royalist town council in Arles. And it allows a concord to emerge between villages outside Arles, and the Jacobin clubs in Marseille and Paris.

It is important to stress the difference between the simple occurrence of discord within, say, a political situation dominated by factionalism, and the inscription of discord within a common space – a common space opened up through the invention and repetition of complex names for otherwise equivocal actions. The inscription of discord involves the specification of different understandings of the same action rather than a global and general antagonism which is what occurs in factionalism. Such inscription thus opens up a space of choice; not an ‘otherwise there will be chaos,’ which implies a forced choice, but the localization of different standpoints, one in relation to another, through the naming of an action. Once these standpoints are related to each other through the regionalization of an equivocal action, further concerted actions can be initiated from those standpoints. Through the emergence of

29 Cf. Guilhaumou 1998, p. 84.
such choices for action, what appears are a plurality of possible futures, multiple parallel scenes constituted by the consequences of these imagined further actions.

Say that an equivocal action occurring across heterogeneous contexts is regionalized, that is to say, it is endowed with agents and recipients within the same complex names, and this attribution remains stable. Say that another regionalization occurs to another equivocal action that traverses the same separate contexts, but at a later point in time. If it is the case that the complex name of the second action includes a reference, within its semantic field, to the name of the first action, then we have what I would call a ‘common state’. A common-state is thus a temporal bridge between two states of affairs: it creates duration, a before and an after, and thus an orientation in time. Before the first regionalization there were dispersed separate contexts, and after it those contexts could be related around a common action: once such a regionalization occurred again those relationships became more stable, and thus agents can look forward to the possibility of increasingly stable relationships between those contexts. In short, we can say that to agree, amongst different peoples, at different times, on the names of two or more equivocal actions is to localize a common-state.

4. The common-state and its theatrical declaration

4.1. The common-state compared to Badiou’s concept of the state

When we interpreted Badiou’s concept of the state as a kind of action it was understood as a global operation that counts parts of a situation and in doing so offers a riposte to the past and possible actions of chaos. There are three key differences between it and the concept of a common-state developed through the Jacobin episode and the concept of equivocal action in the action-zone.

First, it is not the case that either there is the state or there will have been a ruin of presentation, chaos. Rather, when no common-state emerges between actions across diverse contexts there will be unresolved contests over the names of such actions, and such contexts will remain separate if not in a situation of factionalism. Agents who attempt to act across contexts will be disoriented and inhabited by anxiety. Nevertheless actions will continue to unfold and be named in multiple ways.

Second, the regionalization of an action opens up multiple choices; contra the theory of points in the construction of a ‘body of truth’ in Logics of Worlds, and contra the single operator of fidelity in the unfolding of a generic procedure of fidelity in Being and Event, there is no one exclusive line of action to be discovered or constructed.
Third, Badiou’s concept of the state is predicated on a distinction between the existence of an action qua bare operation, that is to say, a non-reflexive action that cannot count its own operation; and the reflexivity of the state which counts-for-one the operation of the original action. The state is thus transitive in that it has an object, even if that object be an operation: the state is the reflexivity of a non-reflexive situation. This distinction between bare operationality and reflexivity is too close, for my liking – and here I am having a Rancièrean moment – to Aristotle’s inaugural hierarchical distinction in the *Metaphysics* between the authoritative knowledge of the architect and the blind activity of the manual worker. In contrast, what the idea of the action-zone entails are actions that are reflexive operations without any self to be counted by some higher instance. Hence a common-state is not transitive: it has no object that it counts. A common-state emerges as an articulation between two regionalized actions, but it is still an action for all that at the same level as other actions: there is no hierarchy of levels in the action-zone.

The concept of the common-state as an articulation of action has some further advantages. Like any concept of the state as a kind of action, it democratizes the state as something that an individual can perform, and thus leads to a local and non-alienated relation to the state. But in order for the common-state to occur, one individual’s action alone is not sufficient: the common-state is necessarily a collective affair in that at least two actions have to occur across at least two different contexts at different moments in time. Furthermore the very contingency of these overlapping operations of regionalization brings home to each actor the fragility of the common-state and thus the necessity of its maintenance through the repetition of these complex names for action.

4.2. ‘Arche-theatre’ and its declaration of a common-state

This is where we finally come back to theatre as the art of declaring the state. In other research into the question of theatre in Badiou’s philosophy I develop the concept of an ‘arche-theatre’ as part of the phenomenology of the action-zone. At this point in this paper I can do no more than sketch its role through a further development of the concept of regionalization.

Let’s stipulate that an arche-theatre emerges when one and the same equivocal action is subjected to two or more contesting regionalizations; that is to say, competing complex names are generated for an equivocal action. As a complex name, each name manages to encompass different receptions and consequences of the action in separate contexts. However, the complex names are different in that they thus regionalize an overlapping but different set of previously separate contexts. The original equivocal action traverses a multiplicity of separate contexts. A regionalization
of that action only groups together a finite and particular subset of those contexts. It may appear that competing regionalizations of the same action simply constitutes a higher form of the factional antagonism over the naming of the original action but there is an important difference. Factional antagonism maintains the separation of contexts and the dispersion of the political field, and they proffer incompatible names for the same action. Different regionalizations of the same action do not present incompatibility but rather overlapping subsets of contexts, moreover they each present a synthesis of contexts, a particular cohesion of the political field.

An arche-theatre emerges within the action-zone when two or more regionalizations of the same equivocal action occur, and when those same regionalizations re-occur, over another equivocal action, at a later point in time. Like the common-state, an arche-theatre is also a temporal phenomenon, it implies a certain duration and also a possible orientation in time. Another way of understanding this disposition of action is that it allows more than one way of making sense of multiple events to enter into resonance; that is to say, it presents a tension between several orientations and explanations of what is going on in politics at large. I term this disposition of action an ‘arche-theatre’ in reference to Aristotle’s definition of theatre as the imitation of an action. The arche-theatre is an original theatricality of action that can occur within the action-zone, outside any established or institutional theatre as a specific cultural practice. When a work of theatre does actually occur in a performance for a set of spectators, it is only truly contemporary when it does manage to imitate an arche-theatre of its own city, and that is quite rare.

It may have already become evident to the perspicacious reader, but ‘arche-theatre’ is my term for the actual practice of politics amidst competing and shifting alliances, and across the different contexts in which populations of events occur. An arche-theatre can ‘declare the state’ when it encompasses a common-state as one of its constituent regionalizations. In other words, a common-state is potentially a part of a larger and more complex stabilization of equivocal action. The emergence of an arche-theatre thus exposes a common-state as solely one possible synthesis amongst others of regions around an action.

Finally, this co-implication of the definitions of arche-theatre and the common-state also implies that any activity of politics contains as one of its essential moments the non-alienated construction of a common-state. Part of engaging in politics is repeatedly bridging separate contexts through the invention of complex names for action. To find a name that people agree on, a name for what is going on amongst them, is to perform a common-state. Further enquiries are required to determine whether the Jacobin name “making the law speak” is still capable of regionalizing Europe’s separate contexts.
Bibliography

1. Introduction

Jacques Lacan adopted, in the 1960s, the topic of anamorphosis for the exposition of his ontology. He did so in reference to Hans Holbein’s famous painting *The Ambassadors*, from 1533, during several sessions of his seminar *On the Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.\(^1\) Holbein’s painting is famous for a distorted object falling out of the picture’s composition: the anamorphic stain in the lower part of the painting (figure 1)\(^2\); which, depending on the spectator’s viewpoint, transforms itself back into a skull when the observer leaves the painting’s central perspective (figure 2).

\(^1\) Lacan 1998, pp. 79-104.

Lacan interprets the painting with both an epistemological and an ontological concern and focuses especially on the skull as the painting’s distorted center of meaning. For him the observer-subject becomes, through the skull, part of the object, as – metaphorically speaking – the object gazes back and takes the subject’s presence as an observer into account. Lacan writes that, “as subjects, we are literally called into the picture.” With this comment, he underlines how the perceiving subject is unintentionally inscribed into the field of its vision, exactly from a place that he or she cannot perceive. As the mind cannot grasp the patterns of perception in its acts of perception, the representations in acts of intentionality are always hiding a lost object, so to speak: the lack of perceiving perception itself. This lack, though, is part of subjectivity itself in its relation to the world ‘out there’ as a secret missing object cause of the subject’s desire to see and understand it all: reality, truth, the world, and its own place within this world. Lacan calls this missing object in other contexts within his philosophy object small a. It is both that which – as the condition of the subject-object dichotomy – is missing in the world of the subject, and also that which ‘attaches’ the subject to all kinds of things in its world, which then serve as compensatory artifacts for this missing link (object small a) itself. In a way similar to Immanuel Kant’s concept of the “thing-in-itself,” object small a holds reality for the human mind together, even if it does not actually exist as a concrete artifact in the world as tables, houses, and mountains do, for example.

Lacan’s analysis of The Ambassadors conceptualizes an ontological question which, as I will try to show, is also of utmost importance to Hegel and Badiou: How reason, as the mind’s apparatus of veridical representation is pending on a gap, a missing link between subject and object. Questions of political philosophy become pertinent when this gap (or split) between subject and object becomes the source of a neglected point of reference, and following from here, reconfigures the subject-object-dichotomy politically anew. This insight and its consequences are of central concern in the following sections of this article. They are first to be deepened and discussed in reference to the philosophy of Badiou and Hegel (sections 2-4), and subsequently with reference to Badiou’s interest in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (section 5). With these cross-references I want to show how Badiou’s way of thinking is affected not only by the authors he mentions most (especially Plato, Cantor, Heidegger, and Lacan) but also by Hegel and Wittgenstein, even if Badiou himself does not always give them proper credit.

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2. The phantom of inconsistency

The reason why members of a community have to maintain basic belief in the shared normative inferences within the body politic is to hide the aforementioned gap between subject and object, and to share phantasmagorically one world, one political reality, and one space of reasons, which is accessible for rational agents. As normative structures themselves depend on constitutive divisions between legality and illegality, where the division is itself not part of legality, the illegality at the base of what is politically reasonable has to be suppressed. Think as an emblematic example of Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* again. The painting combines, to put it simply, truth-values of veridical perception on different levels within one frame. The effect is that conflicting focal-points of perspectives must mutually cancel one another out for every representation or “state of a situation,” as Badiou calls it, to be themselves veridical.\(^5\) Similarly, normative structures have to cancel out the illegal act of their own foundation. As Friedrich Nietzsche famously says in his *Genealogy of Morals*: “‘just’ and ‘unjust’ exist […] only after the institution of the law […]. To speak of just or unjust in itself is quite senseless.”\(^6\)

Nietzsche was not the first to uncover the constitutive scission between “just” and “unjust” within an illegal act of foundation. However, he saw with exceptional precision how the illegal origin still rooted in the law keeps on haunting the law in a way similar to the stain, which hovers ghostlike in Holbein’s painting within the established central perspective under the ambassadors Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selves. Badiou follows Nietzsche’s intuition regarding “the law,” and as a philosopher *and* a mathematician he does so in reference to set-theory. This is for him the area of research which defines with utmost clarity what ontology is about: “*inconsistent multiplicities as such;*” where “‘as such’ means that what is presented in the ontological situation is the multiple without any other predicate than its multiplicity.”\(^7\) Set theory provides for Badiou the framework of bijectively *uncountable* assertions (similar to subsets) that haunt the counting structures in mathematics through their supernumerary *in*existence and in the structures of political representation in politics through the lack of representation. Nietzsche declares that the split between “just” and “unjust” is unendingly reinscribed into legality as its own trauma. Badiou expresses this insight using his understanding of uncountable subsets and their un-representable claims within a “state of a situation.” He shows how beyond our classified beliefs, an epistemological non-representable “remainder” or “remnant” subsists, a left-over that he prominently calls, in his adaptation of Lacan’s

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5 Badiou 2005, p. 98.
6 Nietzsche 1969, p. 76.
7 Badiou 2005, p. 28.
notion of “the real,” the “phantom of inconsistency,” that is, the phantom of the void. In this context we encounter Badiou’s understanding of a political subject as a “limit of the world” (to use a prominent notion of Wittgenstein’s that will be explic- cated later on). It is a supernumerary agent with the force to reconfigure the established difference between “just” and “unjust” with an in-existent count waiting for a “suture” (i.e. the sewing up of a political gap/split) to come via subjectivation. If the act is successful Badiou talks of the coming-to-be of an “event” in the form of its generic truth-procedure. A truth, that was unheard of before, has established its claim.

It is important to understand that an event for Badiou is neither immanent in the world of appearances (since it has the properties of being illegal, phantasmatic, arbitrary, and contingent), nor can one deduce it as a pre-existing abstract entity soon to be picked out of Gottlob Frege’s so-called “third realm” of objective non-physical facts/thoughts that stand in contrast to the subjective realm (decisions, representations) and the physical realm of scientific truths. It is more appropriate to say that the “real,” politically represented through the subject as a force of scission, carries a pseudo-being. “It is,” as Badiou writes, “suspended between a pure separate act, whose supreme name is God, and sensible substances, or actually existing things.” As mathematical objects are, according to Aristotle, neither separable from the world of sensory perception, nor simply objects in the empirical world, but rather ‘fictions in the act of the intellect,’ so too is, according to Badiou, the subject of an event: a fictitious entity in moments of radical agency. As “a limit of the world,” in the moment of its performative self-proclamatory enactment, it too is a fiction. The subject as dividing scission in what is and what isn’t, bears a vision of what will have been. As the place of origin of the event, it exists “potentially in the sensible. It remains there in definitive latency of its act,” i.e. until its emergent enactment. The subject, as a dividing universal, always confronts us in the moment of its eventual demarcation with a lack of justification. What he or she proclaims does not fit in the framework allowed by the ruling doxa at least to some fundamental political degree. It may lead those who take up his or her calling to break with traditional interpretations of subjectivity itself, defined, for example, in communitarian terms, as what responsible agents of a determinate Sittlichkeit do rationally. While reasons are, according to the neo-idealist representatives of the Pittsburgh School, Robert

8 Ibid., p. 53.
9 Wittgenstein, 1974, no. 5.632.
10 Miller 1977/78.
11 Frege 1956, pp. 289-311.
12 Badiou 2006, p. 46.
13 See Aristotle 1998, Book M.
15 Badiou 2006, p. 47.
Brandom and John McDowell, accredited among speaking beings via established inferential relations of what can be thought with reference to a transcendental “scoreboard,” for Badiou there can be no scoreboard in the moment of an event. A disruption occurs by a moment of negativity.

Let us consider once again the Holbein painting as an illustrative example of this line of argument. The two perspectives inscribed in the painting cannot be harmonized in one frame. Only when the observer leaves the central-perspective, which splits between ‘being within’ the frame of the two ambassadors and ‘being out’ of this frame at the site of the skull, will he recognize that another element, the anamorphic skull, was always part of his field of vision without being represented in it. But to leave the central-perspective requires an act of scission from the central-perspective itself. Why? Because from the center of the focal point, the anamorphic skull is, as stain, nothing but a collateral damage. It has no being. In the vocabulary of Willard V.O. Quine: it cannot be veridically represented as the “value of a bound variable,” since it drifts below a coordinate-system as the necessary condition of representation.

Nevertheless, through an act of agency that Badiou calls (with reference to Paul Cohen) “forcing,” a non-representable political variable can be proclaimed by a political subject that presents his view as a new coordinate-system itself. This can have the effect that the difference, mentioned above, between “just” and “unjust” is relocated. Established as such, the count of the subject as “limit” cuts across the established rules and gives (if successful) retrospective visibility to a deficit that he/she has filled with his- or her event and its generic truth-procedure. The act of forcing displaces an established doxa through its own illegal place of occurrence from inside this doxa. It enlarges unilaterally the ‘manifest image’ of our everyday political reality.

Now, Hegel’s philosophy comes very close to Badiou’s understanding of an event especially in his ontology of negativity. This is why, in the following sections, we are going to focus on Hegel’s interpretation of subjectivity as negativity’s true source, in order to understand what the implications are when reality renders itself non-identical and warrants eventual sites of subjects to emerge through performative speech acts of almost senseless propositions.

16 Brandom 1998, see chapter 3, pp. 141-98.  
17 Quine 1948/1949, p. 36.  
Concrete universality

Hegel’s philosophy is famous for the interpretation of being as the primary structure of conceptual thought (the *Begriff*), where the world is mediated through ever new justifications in the history of science. This means for Hegel that “being,” as the “bringing-about of its own becoming,” is a “reflection into itself” through subjectivity. Being is “absolutely mediated,” insofar as it is manifested as a “substantial content” through the conceptual determinations of thought. With reference to the *Begriff* (concept) as a synonym of being, Hegel refers both to the conceptual structure of reality and to the fact that the activity of science within this reality is based on fallibility, i.e. negation and the negation of negation. The *Begriff* is as a consequence a structure that distinguishes itself from itself “in absolute disruption” and can exist only in a self-relation in contrast to other determinations in its self-relation. It consists “in grasping opposites in their unity or the positive in the negative.”

Hegel then focuses, especially in the “Subjective Logic” (i.e. in the last part of his *Science of Logic*) on subjectivity itself as the foundation of objectivity and defines it as “the reflection of the concept out of its determinateness into itself.” It is not the source of subjective opinions, but rather the source of thought struggling with itself for new justifications. Subjectivity “is the concept’s self-mediation by virtue of which, since its otherness has once more been made into another, it restores itself as self-equal, but in the determination of absolute negativity.”

I want to claim in the following that Hegel’s reference to “the determination of absolute negativity” is exactly the moment when, in the domain of justified beliefs, a new master-signifier is created, at a place of exception. Or, to say it with Badiou, when an event occurs within the “state of a situation” in which – up to now – it had no value of existence. It is characteristic for Holbein’s art (a stain becomes suddenly a thing, a skull) but even more so for Hegel’s ontology, when he famously says in the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “In my view […] everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject,” that a dialectical shift from “lack” to “excess,” from zero to one, occurs. When Hegel uses the term “Substance” he refers, within the Aristotelian tradition of

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20 Hegel 1977, p. 17.
21 Ibid., p. 21.
22 Negation through reconceptualization is the driving force for new differentiations, since each determination potentially carries its own fallibility.
23 Hegel 2010, p. 35.
24 Ibid., p. 35.
25 Ibid., p. 546.
26 Ibid., p. 549.
27 With reference to Holbein’s painting we could say that it is the moment when a subject with its force of negativity sees (metaphorically speaking) beyond the patterns of visibility.
this concept, to something that ‘stands under’ or ‘grounds’ things. Hegel’s adjacent reference to “Subject” though transforms the grounding “Substance” into a generic entity, where the ground evolves within itself “equally as Subject.” ‘Substance as subject’ does not refer primarily to the Aristotelian meaning of human beings as “substances,” where my substance of being: who I truly am, unites accidental attributes and properties of my identity, but it more importantly refers to the fact that human beings can become axiomatic sites of universal principles within space-time that ground reality for ontological purposes: repelling the unintelligible chaos of multiple multiplicities beyond the realm of phenomena. Since subject can be the embodiment of substance, substance as the universal ground of things must then particularize itself in very concrete individual minds in order to no longer be only an abstract form (a universal in the Platonic sense) but rather to become a very concrete form. Every new born child has to be educated in its rational development epistemically and morally within the normative substance (i.e. the ground of facts and state of affairs) of a community to count as a rational agent. It needs substance as the background structure of its capacity to perceive facts, state of affairs, and to realize (instatiate) moral values and legal norms via subjectivation. So the subject realizes substance but indeed it also can retotalize from time to time substance simultaneously. For Badiou this happens in an event, when the latter’s truth-procedure forces the framework of what is the “ground” to literally collapse into the eventual site of its exception. Obviously we are nevertheless confronted here with a problem within Hegel’s dichotomy of subject and substance which resurges in Badiou’s description of the event’s autopoietic self-creation. The question is the following: How can a subject carry the universal/event when the event appears to be illegal, i.e. beyond the scope of what the “reflection of the concept out of its determinateness into itself” can reflect upon as substance? Would this not imply that universality itself arises at a site of an “anti-reflection” of the Notion (Begriff), of an anti-substantial – and so purely subjective, particular, and contingent – site? Within Hegel’s understanding of a dialectical relationship between substance and subject we cannot ask the traditional question of what came first: substance or subject, chicken or the egg. This is impossible, since we cannot proclaim: “substance is first” and then comes the subject and instantiates it. Substance needs subjectivation as its cause. To be of actual importance in a world where universals of whatever kind (epistemically or morally) apply, from subjects to facts, norms and state of affairs in the world, substances must instantiate these universals. Now, can we then say the opposite: “subject is first”? No, this does not work either, since the subject presupposes substance as its cause too. Think of the aforementioned new born child again. It needs substance as the background structure of its acts of subjectivation in judgments. Nevertheless in this di-

29 Hegel 2010, p. 546.
chotomy between substance as an epitome of universality (with reference to particularity) and subject as an epitome of particularity (with reference to universality) we are confronted in exceptional cases with situations where, according to Hegel, but also according to Badiou, an X causes its own cause: a universal establishes itself at the site of its own exception. In this case the subject that realizes substance realizes that of which it is a realization. Or, put differently: an X realizes its own essence. It creates itself, formally speaking, ex nihilo. In a political space of reasons a revolution can exactly be this X that realizes its own essence. I’ll briefly repeat here an argument that I presented in the introduction to this volume in relation to the German revolution of 1989 in the last months of the German Democratic Republic. The people that gathered for the so-called “Monday-demonstrations” in Leipzig designated their lack of representation as the speaking X that realizes its own essence. As such this self-creation has the potential for universality, since through it all political organs of repression suddenly become visible. But the tension of “lack” and “excess,” of a “void” and the eruption of “we the people” is to a certain degree always inscribed into the tension of substance and subject. It is visible as the fight of a universal with itself and shows how a universal is inflicted by its own non-coincidence.

If, for example, a political upheaval or a revolution is aiming at the liberation ‘of mankind’ (take the Third International founded in 1919 as an example), the movement of liberation must cut into mankind, i.e. into its own universality. For example, by fighting the resistance to its movement of universality it can be forced at the same time to undermine its universality. (The old substance has to be literally ‘cut off’ from the new one.) This can be necessary to give the universal as concrete enactment the possibility of realization. Heiner Müller’s famous revolutionary play Mauser captures this well, pushing the conflict of a noble cause with unnoble means to a point where it becomes paradoxical. The play depicts the conflict between a revolutionary agent and the Stalinist party he himself is a member of. As devout as he is, he sheds blood for the revolution and is then pushed by the Stalinist party to will his own elimination for the sake of the noble cause. The latter still is valid and needs proof of its validity. The revolutionary chorus in the play, representing the Stalinist party, proclaims the paradox saying that “Even the grass we must tear up so that it will stay green.” In other words: The universal has to annihilate itself – “tear up the grass” – to preserve universality so “that it will stay green.”

Here we see the dilemma both important to Hegelian and Badiouian dialectics alike: If the reference to universality remains too abstract, it is (especially in times of crisis) in danger of being irrelevant and meaningless. If the universal is, on the other

30 It is astonishing that Badiou does not see his own Hegelian heritage, since he interprets Hegel often in his writings along with the outdated critique on Hegel presented by Marx, Adorno and Althusser. The three philosophers interpret Hegel repeatedly as a pre-Kantian metaphysician.
31 Müller 1978.
32 Ibid., p. 55.
hand, too concrete then it negates in its own concreteness numerous positive properties of the universal as it is “in itself.” And it thus fights, in its concreteness of subjectivation through political agents, in contradiction to its substance. Hannah Arendt detected this aporia in the context of the pronouncement of the Universal Declarations of Human Rights by the United Nation in 1948. As these rights were linked to national membership their universality proved disastrously impotent. For Arendt, just when universal rights were needed most: to protect stateless persons, their universality failed. The noble universal (Human Rights) left through its particular definition concrete and problematic consequences in the open and in fact even became a medium of life-threatening exclusion.

Hegel asserts, influenced by the Aristotelian heritage in his thought, repeatedly in different parts of his philosophy that a universal value or norm needs to be visible through its effectiveness in real lifeworlds. Only then can it be visible as an abstract ideal beyond the limited instantiations of itself in space-time. But he also says that in certain situations the universal needs to be in its particularity truly the universal in itself. In other words: the universal enacts the axiom of its value against its own embodiments in the lifeworld proper. This paradoxical relationship within a timeless and abstract universal at the site of its time-bound universality can only be understood when an incarnation of the universal transforms itself into its own exception. And that is what Hegel truly means when he speaks of “substance” that is “also subject.” This sounds, as I have said, paradoxical since we are inclined to ask, along with Badiou, in set-theoretical terms: how can a set (as a universal) throw itself into itself (as a particular) and be the set and its element at the same time? Or to put it differently: How can a dustbin throw itself into itself and remain dustbin and dustbin within the dustbin? Or how can the frame of a painting be also in the painting? The following train of thought – again very essential to Hegel and Badiou – captures this paradoxical idea of self-inclusion and self-referentiality. Translated into the vocabulary of universality and exception we can state the following: the universal is not truly concrete if it is only one among many other species in its own self-embodiment as genus. But if it is a kind of subspecies of the species, that as such negates all the positive properties of the other species inside the genus, then it is truly universal. The terms “genius” and “species” are used in this context as a reference to the Badiouan difference between sets and their sub-sets, where the species defines the extension of the genus. To put it in other words: The universal does not become truly concrete when it incorporates itself into a certain member of its instantiation, into a certain species, but rather when it becomes that singularity (that species) that negates all positive species that traditionally defined the genus as such. The following dia-

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34 This insight has been actualized by Slavoj Žižek’s outstanding publications on Hegel’s ontology. See especially his book on Hegel: Less Than Nothing, Žižek 2012.
gram (figure 3) illustrates the dialectical shift, that occurs when the genus A, with its subspecies \( a_1 \) and \( a_2 \), is reflected back onto itself via a void (Bb) within its species, which is as much a lack, as it is a surplus of meaning. In the moment when lack transform itself into surplus Bb re-totalizes – as the exception of all other species – the entire genus and becomes itself a new genus at the place of the old.\textsuperscript{35} This dialectical moment of shifting from A to B (were B is \(-A\)) is the moment when subject becomes truly substance and an event, peeking through the confinements of normative representations, occurs.

This thought can literally be fleshed out in reference to Badiou’s reading of the epistles of Saint Paul.\textsuperscript{36} When the so-called “apostle of the gentiles” begins his mission to proclaim a universality in Christ, he negates the divine substance of Yahweh as concrete universality in many of the ways ancient Judaism had until then understood it to be. Omnipotence, infallibility, etc. are traditional properties of God and they are as such lacking, roughly speaking, in Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore when, according to the newly converted Paul, God entered the world in/as Christ he empties his attributes by negating (almost) all of them. And they must be negated, since Jesus was also ‘truly a human being.’ The man from Galilee is neither depicted by the gospels as omnipotent, nor as everlasting, nor as all-knowing etc. For Paul, he is the Christ and via his particular and contingent location in space and time, he “re-totalizes” the substance of orthodox Jewish theology. Only through this enactment, the re-totalization of the genus (Judaism) from a singular exception inside of it (Christianity among other sects of Judaism), we have – for Hegel and Badiou alike – true universality as it is (and only now) at the same time substance \textit{and} subject.

\textsuperscript{35} The diagram is an adaptation made originally by Moritz Kuhlmann in an unpublished manuscript of a comment and a drawing of Žižek in his book \textit{For They Know Not What They Do. Enjoyment as a Political Factor}. Cf. Žižek 2008, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{36} Badiou 2003.
4. Acts of Subtraction

Hegel was fascinated by political-theological agents like Paul, as his comments on excessive individuals like Antigone, Socrates, Jesus, and Luther show. When an act of agency is performed by an excessive individual the well-established epistemic certainties are crisscrossed. These acts occur when a subject no longer has the means to perceive, through the normative and historically established networks of explanatory patterns, what certain normative aspects of reality are about. Think again of Lacan’s comments on *The Ambassadors*. Only a forceful scission/decision can make visible the crack in reality, and show that this reality is “non-all.” With the lyrics of Leonard Cohen: “There’s a crack in everything; that’s how the light gets in.” What these positive lyrics of course miss are catastrophe, chaos and death as possible side-effects of the cracking.

In situations like these, the subject aligns its desire to a partially normative, uncertain space. Or, to say it with Badiou: to a truly platonic idea as the only source of truth among “bodies” and “languages.” The success of individuals in these acts of subjectivation depends largely on an excess of imagination with which these individuals defend themselves against the collectively shared memes. When these acts performatively enact subjectivity, the subject often articulates hyperbolic and paradoxical propositions with a self-referential relation to the subject of enunciation. I want to mention here only two very famous ones: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jesus of Nazareth according to John 14:6) and “Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen” (Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms in 1521). The heralds of these propositions, propositions which are beyond veridicality, are not obliged to be equipped with supernatural forces. They need not see an antagonism-free reality behind seemingly false masks of political conditions in order to announce with militant self-appropriations a new world to come. They only must defend their vision of neglected but truth-apt normative facts. In both cases the proposition starts with the confirmation of an “I”: “I am,” “Here I stand,” which does not necessarily mean that the “I” already knows, with utmost scientific clarity, what it foresees as potentially truth-apt.

A figurative comparison to the Necker Cube might illuminate my argument a little bit more (figure 4). The cube shows how – under equal conditions of sensual input – two images shift from one to the other, simply by adopting a new premise of judgment: A or B. Now my intuition is to apply this gestalt theoretical shift in perception to shifts in political states of affairs, where one situation/fact might be pro-

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38 Lacan: “Is the one anterior to discontinuity? I do not think so, and everything that I have taught in recent years has tended to exclude this need for a closed one.” *Lacan* 1998, p. 26.
39 *Badiou* 2009, p. 4.
40 Many more could be found but these may be satisfactory for the sake of argument.
cessed in radically different ways, depending on how the perceiver inscribes himself into the space of reasons. Think again of Holbein’s painting: The perceiver’s inscription in a frame of reference determines what the picture is about; it literally hegemonizes one image on top of the other.

![Necker Cube](https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845275840)

Figure 4: Necker Cube

A modest change of the viewpoint changes the states of affairs considerably. Lacan confirms this in his comments on *The Ambassadors*, where he shows how reality itself depends on an anamorphic stain, an anamorphic distortion rendering the gap between subject and reality as the condition (in a Hegelian sense) of both subjectivity and objectivity. Reality always has our perception pre-inscribed and reflected back as gaze since perception as the precondition of experience shapes reality into a mirror of our projects and practices, that – as re-inverted gaze – makes us time and time again aware (especially after some kind of trauma, or disaster, or political revolt) that reality, as we perceived it, is “non-all.” Instead of attributing magical powers through divine intervention to excessive subjects mentioned above, it might be more fitting to describe their lives as based on subjective acts of subtraction. Acts that have something to do with the extraction of judgment-founding axioms or premises, in relation to the politically charged episteme of their environments. I think one can say that the object of subtraction can be thought of as an established scale of coordinates, which up to now has standardized collective information processing which is essential for the hegemonic representation of political states of affairs.\(^{41}\) Apparently

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\(^{41}\) Put differently: the subtraction of a former coordinate changes the inferential principles of giving and asking for reasons and so changes states of affairs as well. Allegorically speaking in reference to our example of the Necker cube: the subtraction of viewpoint A spontaneously

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neutral facts are dependent on perception’s underlying judgment-inflicting premises. What Heidegger calls a “world picture” emerges, not by depicting a radically new image inside the frame of reference but by a minimal displacement or shift of the referential system. As insignificant as this displacement may appear, immediately or in the long run it can cause a change in ontological and normative commitments. In these situations, a different underlying referential system comes to the foreground. Now, this change might not yet be perceived by the majority of fellow citizens or fellow believers as the aspect-change needs, literally, a Kantian transcendental “I think” of pure apperception, i.e. a formal locus where empirical reality is subjectivized and objectivized within an act that, similar to a religious conversion, opens up a coordinate-system. Only then do the premise-prevailing facts of reception and perception change. Within Badiou’s philosophy this happens in an event. The aforementioned void or empty set emerges in an event by performatively proclaiming its count-as-one and proving indirectly through the fact of its militancy that a new universal of unprecedented features strives to be accounted for.

5. The Subject as Limit

In this final section, I want to show that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is also time and time again concerned with subjectivity in a Badiouian sense, when considering questions of justified beliefs and truth-value analysis in very heterogeneous spaces of reasons. This is most obvious when Wittgenstein distinguishes between “concepts” and “concept-formation.” Wittgenstein comments on concept-formation within his analysis on rules. There he shows how rules provide the grid in which concept-inflicting judgments operate – though only in reference to an inherent limit of applicability. When someone, for example, comes to the conclusion that he applied this or that rule, or this or that concept, in his judgment of a perception, then he would in this judgment follow again another different rule. An infinite regress arises that needs to be cut in order to prevent the mind from ending up like a malfunctioning computer program. The adoption of a concept for what I am doing or thinking, cannot be an activity of a second-order-rule, insofar as this would multiply successively into the necessity of a third-, fourth-, or n-th order-rule. Every judgment would freeze in a vicious loop of applying one rule endlessly on top of the other – and so on.

forces viewpoint B into the foreground without adding new information, details or facts to the field of perception. A viewpoint that, up till now, might have held communities together over centuries vanishes while another ascends.

42 In the cases of Jesus and Luther it is the disbelief of various dogmas essential to the orthodox Jewish or Catholic way of aspect-seeing.
Only a decisive act, a “cut,” can break the cycle. It has to take the ‘risk’ of potentially not accessing the target-object of thought adequately in the frame of the ad-hoc chosen rules/concepts of perception, judgment, and predication. But beyond the predicament posed by this transcendental cut, Wittgenstein presents an even more radical one, when he says, in his Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics speaking of the relationship between concept and empiricism, that the “limit of the empirical – is concept-formation.”45 Here he implements into an established web of rule-bound justifications a free-floating surplus of potential meaning that is not yet ripe to be easily entangled.

Wittgenstein understands concept-formation as a kind of spontaneous speech act that prompts a new linguistic sign-usage opening a new horizon of understanding through its appearance. According to Wittgenstein, it is the logical purpose of concepts to clear-cut differences between facts in order to distinguish one from the other by giving the definite relationship between the two. To complete this task, a concept must be linguistically formulated and bear a historically transmitted meaning. As such, concepts enable the sapient human being to relate to an outside world of appearances. Concepts can apply or not apply, be right or wrong, depending on whether the articulated meaning proves to be correct or incorrect in relation to a fact.

Concept-formation on the contrary marks the borderline to empiricism’s facts and state of affairs, insofar as it intersects (in a similar way to Badiou’s understanding of the event and Hegel’s reference to the subjectivation of substance) the domain of established concepts. It does so through the invention of a performative spontaneity with ‘free floating rationales,’46 which are seeking to become entangled.47 So, while well-established concepts on the one hand comply as a medium of justified beliefs, concept-formations on the other hand feature a surplus of, or a scission in, the estab-

46 I owe this term to Daniel Dennett. Cf. Dennett 2012.
47 In his text Zettel Wittgenstein emphasizes how concepts must fulfill the purpose of mankind’s ability to relate to the world, so that new concepts can be built into old ones to exactly serve and constantly improve this goal. “Do I want to say, then, that certain facts are favorable to the formation of certain concepts; or again unfavorable? And does experience teach us this? It is a fact gained from experience that human beings alter their concepts, exchange them for others when they learn new facts; when in this way what was formerly important to them becomes unimportant, and vice versa.” (Wittgenstein 1970, no. 352) The real question now lies in the dialectical combination of experience and conceptual interpretation thereof. Is it the term that constitutes the experience or is it the experience that constitutes the term? Both moments come into play together again. A new concept may function in certain situation as a test-case. It opens access to a certain interpretation of the world and thereby is subject to further verification. Generally one can say with Wittgenstein that a change of concepts also changes a certain grammar of the world. It exerts influence aspects and worldview. As Wittgenstein says: “I want to say: an education quite different from ours might also be the foundation for quite different concepts.” (Wittgenstein 1970, § 387) Referring to concepts of colors, Wittgenstein claims repeatedly that he rejects investigations that try to found concepts of colors empirically (ibid, § 331). See also: Kober 1993, pp. 177-87.
lished boundaries of concepts and facts. Conceptual justifications, as they have been historically transmitted, might be obliterated by the newly installed and non-deducible concept-formation, causing a seminal transformation in justifications to take place. Take Heidegger’s theory of the “oblivion of being” (Seinsvergessenheit) as an ontological and political example of how a rich and complex concept like this one implements its truth-value in opposition to long established ‘rules’ of metaphysical thinking, which suddenly are called into question. The delimitation does not belong, in the moment of its performative demarcation, in the strict sense to the world (to classical pre-Heideggerian metaphysics), insofar as its formation is hung up between the world of appearances and the world of the noumenal itself. Only in the spontaneity of a risk does concept-formation arise. And it does so diagonally to established concepts. Wittgenstein expands on this in § 401 of his Philosophical Investigations, stating that concept-formation can be compared with the invention of a “neues Metrum” or with the invention of “eine neue Art von Gesängen.” Wilhelm Vossenkuhl sums this thought up well, writing: “The conceptual activity is a limit/frontier [Grenze] insofar as it is the drawing of a line. Where ever this activity is not carried out, there is no limit.” And a little later he writes: “The difference between empiricism and spontaneity is the activity of concept-usage [Begriffsgebrauch], not the meaning of the concept, for this meaning belongs to empiricism as all that is communicable and perceivable.” In his comments on reasons and “ways of life” (Lebensformen), Wittgenstein speaks similarly of how a “riverbed of thought may shift” (ein “Flußbett der Gedanken […] verschieb[t sich, D.F.]”). “All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system, and this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.”

Therefore, in case that propositions for the perceiving mind belong, as basic conditions of “certainty,” to some kind of “mythology” (“zu einer Art Mythologie”),

48 Vossenkuhl 1994, pp. 329-49. Joachim Schulte writes on concept-formation: “We get the impression […] that concept-formation conducts our experience into particular channels, so that one experience is now seen together with the new one in an hitherto unfamiliar way” (Schulte 2012, pp. 224-35, here: 230).
49 Wittgenstein: “Above all, you have found a new conception. As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song” (Wittgenstein 2001, § 401). Of central importance in concept-formation as a “new way of speaking” (Ibid., § 400) is that indeed a new experiential content is conveyed. As Wittgenstein sais in § 241 the transmission messages are always inherently entangled with grammars that are shared and embedded in certain life-forms.
52 Ibid., § 105.
53 Ibid., § 95.
then it is comprehensible that entire conceptual networks of inferential justifications can be altered and constitutively overwritten by other concepts in a manner similar to a riverbed being taken over, without a chance of resistance, by a stronger current. “The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thought may shift.”

The shift of a river-bed of thought is not equal to a psychotic loss of the life-world, but nevertheless it constitutes a change in the established web of reasons in which the mind perceived itself, standing entangled within recursive loops of justifications. Concept-formation is hence, strictly speaking, not truth-apt as there is no rule or axiom from which to deduce the belief. It follows that concept-formation, as spontaneously as it occurs, cannot reflexively capture its own happening, at least not in the moment of its performance.

Georg Lukács’ concept of the “proletariat” as Dialectical Materialism’s identical “subject-object [agent, D.F.] of history” is a bespeaking example of a concept-for-

54 Ibid., § 97. It is important not to interpret Wittgenstein here as a radical constructivist. The rules of justification are always already given, which does not rule out that they can leave the established “riverbed” of thought if need be.

55 Wittgenstein’s understanding of spontaneity does not express the conviction that concept-formation is an act of a community. Concept-formation is an act which extends the established terms unilaterally toward the world’s new frontier.


57 But is Wittgenstein not questioning thought’s reflexive property when he proposes a theory of spontaneous concept-formation, in which the newly formatted “free floating rational” can only be judged retrospectively, i.e. after a shift in the ‘riverbed of thought’? How can thought’s reflexivity still be accounted for since it evades conscription within the notion of spontaneity all together? Of course the meta-structural reflexivity of thought is a basic feature of thought itself. Thought can bend back and look onto itself, just as thought can represent its reasons and hold them to public scrutiny. Without reason’s representational property science would not be possible. And, of course, language’s spontaneity can be pulled back time and time again and be reintegrated into new established rules and rule-deductions for more and more scrutiny. An individual might detect a new technique as apt solution of a practical problem and with it herald a new rule that is eventually normatively implemented One can think here of the invention of a technical gadget that – as Ernst M. Lange explains – optimizes work procedures. A new technology becomes a reasonable fact and expands the space of established norms and establishes itself as this new space’s foundational claim. See Ernst M. Lange’s example of a mechanical gadget in: Lange 1997. But already in other contexts, such as that of philosophy, it is apparent that “Weltbild”-like concept-formations are not as unproblematic and innocent as Lange’s reference to the context of technical problem-solutions might suggest. For example, when Kant introduced the idea of a “thing in itself” in his theoretical writings, and the concept of a “moral will” in his practical writings, pedantic readers such as Carl G. J. Jacobi and Hermann A. Pistorius saw that these concepts not only added innovative rationales to a pre-established field of philosophical debate but even overwrote in one stroke inferential reasons established over centuries. If we take this as an exemplary case of how concepts can change world views, then the question arises as to whether one should at all accept concepts like these, because – so the argument – thinking itself might immediately be trapped in a riverbed it cannot leave again as easily as it got into it. Of course irresponsibility in the domain of philosophy as a domain of speculative thought is still harmless compared to, for example, Realpolitik. In the latter domain concept-formations risks radical disruptions of greater magnitude.

58 Lukács 1923, p. 216.
formation in a truly Badiouian and Hegelian sense. Here the concept as part of a Marxist “world picture” subverts the axiomatic frame of reference in which all existing terms and concepts have until now had their meaning. Purposeful roles of meaning (for example of semantic units referring to “work,” “liberty,” “free speech,” “the Party,” “the worker” etc.) have, insofar as they are (like in the case of Lukács) part of a Marxist world picture, from then on, in their concept-formation, different values. These new values affect science, art, and questions of legal and moral concern. “The proletariat” performativity defined as master-signifier immediately creates a normative center of gravity. With reference to Wittgenstein’s allegory of the “riverbed” we can say that a master-signifier has shifted the aforementioned “scoreboard” of Brandomian practical philosophy entirely. To suggest then, with Vossenkuhl, that thought’s reflexivity can recover, with ease, the ground lost by reason, fails to recognize that in certain (especially political) upheavals, the premises of reflexivity itself have also been converted. Or in reference to Hegel: subject has become substance. A moment of lack has re-totalized the “state of a situation” through an “excruciation of universality” (Badiou).

As our “web of belief” is according to Quine an interconnected network of collectively shared reasons, justifications in this web go back and forth in relation to experience at the web’s periphery. But concept-formations can radically change this web as they affect not only the web’s outskirts where rules can easily be revised with new empirical input, while leaving the center untouched. On the contrary: in concept-formation the center itself can be affected and so too can the ‘shrine of facts,’ comprised of the state of affairs most highly agreed about by all community members, be they of a society, nation-state, or of an avant-garde movement in philosophy. This is what the reference to the aforementioned Marxist world picture exemplifies. If concept-formation touches ground in the center of the “web of belief,” the consequences will certainly be ground-breaking, especially in politics with its justificatory substantiations for questions of sovereignty. And this is what Lukács’ concept of the proletariat shows with precision. A concept like this also reconfigures the inner logical structure of Quine’s “web of belief.” So, to simply point out, like Ernst M. Lange does in his comments on Wittgenstein, that conventions of linguistic invention precede reflexivity, is not enough to account for the most important events of radical concept-formations, which are of such central importance for Hegel and Badiou. In certain cases, like in circumstances of militant politics (Marxism), the reverse is true: spontaneous and unjustifiable intentions, provoked through free float-
ing signifiers “leashed onto the world” (Lacan)\(^6^2\) transform beyond convention and establish new conventional norms. This is possible because – as we have seen in the case of Badiou – conventions themselves contain gaps that may become nodal points of a, retrospectively established, new center of gravity of one’s beliefs. Insofar as one declares the Marxist, or the Naturalist, or the Capitalistic-Democratic, or the Christian narrative to be true, the frame of reference establishes the “web of belief.” The mind finds itself relocated at a border to a new world and crosses into it. In other words: An agent (or agents) of concrete universality has proven the existence of a gap within the self-identity of political reality.

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What does it mean to talk of communism today? In Europe? A quick survey of our dispiriting political landscape might suggest that communism is only a horizon in the sense of an infinitely receding orientation, unable even to cohere into a determinate regulative idea. Taking the writings of Badiou as occasion, provocation and prism, I want to suggest that, theoretically speaking, our predicament owes much to the aporia of the state within communist thought. To that end, I want to approach Badiou’s concept of the state by way of a twofold detour, taking up, first, what I would like to call the desire for the state in contemporary movements for systemic reform in Europe, and second, the effort to think communism outside the state in the midst of the last period of concerted and consequential discussion of the “idea of communism” in Europe, the late 1970s debate over the “crisis of Marxism” orbiting around the interventions of Louis Althusser.

1. The desire for the state

What do I mean then by the desire for the state? When Badiou – along with many others, albeit with different vocabularies and positions – greeted the surge of “historical riots” around 2011, he noted a significant pattern: the tendency of these mass occupations of “public” space to establish themselves at a distance from the representational apparatuses of the state (notably in the ban on party presence within the assemblies) and to prefigure or embody alternative ways of organizing everyday life. With commendable “Leninist” sobriety, he also indicated that the limit of this “movement communism” lay in its unpreparedness for tackling “the day after” or in its misprision about the relation between the uprising and the future of politics. As he writes in The Rebirth of History: “riots do not possess all the keys – far from it – to the nature and extent of the change to which they expose the state. What is going to happen in the state is in no wise prefigured by a riot. … a historical riot does not by itself offer any alternative to the power it intends to overthrow.”1 This, for Badiou, is also the source for the Marxian articulation between internal egalitarian

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1 Badiou 2012, pp. 45-6.
democracy and external popular dictatorship thrown up by communist movements, as well as for the entire problematic of the withering away of the state.

In Europe, or rather in the two main fulcrums of political agitation over the recent phase (Greece and Spain), the seeds of movement of communism were replanted, so to speak, on the terrain of the state, with at best ambivalent results (in the shape of Syriza and Podemos). Now, we could present this, in Badiou’s wake, as the inevitable product of the incapacity to produce a political practice of a new type, extrinsic to the state, a deficit of courage, capacity and invention. While not discounting this line of inquiry, I would suggest a different tack, one that demands we confront our collective desire for the state. To do so requires not only thinking of the state as an agency of representation (in a quotidian but also a philosophical sense, to which I’ll return presently) but as a material apparatus of social reproduction. In its bare coordinates, social mobilization after the 2007-8 crisis articulated the idea that “they do not represent us” with the quotidian experience of a crisis of social reproduction (especially in health, housing and education), whose cause was to be sought in the collusion between financial oligarchies and state-party elites (whence the fortune of the theme of corruption). Now, while the practical forms of mobilisation (direct democracy, collective organization of everyday life, generic indifferentiation of social differences) may have been tendentially communist, it seems evident that this moment was marked by the ideology of “public service” that Althusser anatomised in his critique of eurocommunism in “Marx in His Limits.”

This is so much the case that the political translation of the 15M mobilisation in Spain, Podemos, has explicitly resignified patriotism and sovereignty, so that its entire content is drawn from the notion of the state as guarantor of an egalitarian access to public goods and institutions. In the words of its secretary general, Pablo Iglesias, “being a patriot is defending the [collective] right to decide about everything and defending public services.”

Thus, rather than laying bare – except in a kind of symbolic performance – the superfluity of the state, I would argue that recent movements ultimately reveal the extent to which the state permeates everyday life and is experienced as a vital presupposition of material existence, while degradation or collapse looms up as a catalyst for social anxiety and, at its worst, for “a flight forward into the imaginary of the absolute community.” In this regard, I think Balibar’s suggestion that Marxism has not grasped the ambivalence of mass ideology during conjunctures of crisis has considerable merit, especially as it stresses the effect, on both emancipatory resistance and reactionary modalities, of neo-racism of the form of the state as a “national and social state” in which racism operates in “a conflictual relationship to the state,

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2 Althusser 2006.
which is ‘lived’ in a diffracted way, ‘projected’ as a relationship to the Other.”

Some of Balibar’s writings from the 1980s and 1990s can help us further in grasping the place of “Europe” in contemporary movements and their limits, especially with regard to the problem of the state.

Given the hegemonic form of the state as “national and social,” which is to say a state that is both identitarian in its creation of “fictive ethnicities” undergirding the “privileges” of citizenship and reproductive, the “European construction,” especially in its current “austerian” figure, is a powerful contributor to a conjuncture of crisis—something that does not require revisiting for Southern Europe today. In a powerful 1991 essay significantly entitled “Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa: Racism and Politics in Europe Today,” Balibar noted how the European “state” is neither national nor supranational, marked as it is by redundancy and competition between multiple institutions with overlapping jurisdictions, contributing to a decomposition or deficit of state capacities, and fundamentally enacting a “privatisation of the state”—in which the latter’s function, as per long-lived liberal utopias, was to institute a market. “The upshot that we see all around us,” Balibar concludes, “is what might be called the reign of statism without a true state. If we understand by statism a combination of administrative/repressive practices and contingent arbitration of particular interests, including those of each nation or the dominant classes of each nation, then that is what is taking the place of the state, while giving the impression of a proliferation of the state.”

Following the more recent work of German social theorist Wolfgang Streeck, this statism without the state could be further specified in terms of a secular implosion of capitalist democracy, giving way to a “Hayekian” international consolidation state aimed at fiscal discipline, in which the European Union and the Economic and Monetary Union represent a liberalizing machine whose purpose is to bind national politics to the dictatorship of economic reason. This is the array of institutional powers against which the likes of Syriza and Podemos have tried (and to a large extent failed) to erect a bulwark whose affective and symbolic component, crystallized around a left renascence of the syntagm “national sovereignty,” can be linked to a desire for the state.

2. Imperium

Some critical theorists, such as Frédéric Lordon, in his recent Imperium, have even tried to counter the prescriptive “Europeanism” that still clouds the thinking of much of the European left, by trying provisionally to recuperate the “stato-national
paradigm” for emancipatory uses, identifying the prohibitions on left articulations of “nation,” “identity,” and “sovereignty” as reasons for the weakness of the contemporary discourse on communism. The constructive complement to Lordon’s polemic against the political and anthropological wishful thinking of today’s “communists” involves enlisting Spinoza’s political theory of affects, as developed in the *Ethics* and the *Political Treatise*, to produce a general theory of the “state” (or a theory of the general state) grounded in a sociologically and economically informed political anthropology. Building on Lordon’s prior efforts to generate Spinozist theories of capital and the social, *Imperium* proposes that a critical anthropological realism concerning the state can instruct left-wing thought in the weakness of a “rationalist” (Badiou) or “vitalist” (Invisible Committee) optimism which would ignore the lessons of Spinozism in its effort to envisage a communism beyond our “passionate servitude.” For Lordon, such a servitude to our affects, and their contingent worldly causes, is what subtends the inescapable production of state-like institutions, which are both immanent (there are no other-worldly or immaterial sources for them beyond the multitude itself) and transcendent (they exceed, capture and alienate the powers of that multitude) – in keeping with the definition of *imperium* as the “right that defines the power of the multitude,” and as an ineluctable dimension of verticality that no anarchism, communism or insurrectionalism can ultimately circumvent. *Imperium* is an “extremely general mechanism, at work in all finite human groups, the mechanism of immanent transcendence … the power that the multitude has to auto-affect;” the “matrix of all powers in the social world.” The antagonistic potential of our *conatus* and the affects that guide it also dictates that any belonging, any identity, will always comprise an exclusion. To ignore these minimal and general traits of political anthropology is to succumb to political illusion. A Spinozist materialism, on the contrary, in a definition from Louis Althusser that Lordon likes to recall, means at the very least “not telling ourselves stories.”

It is at times uncanny, if perhaps misleading, to note how much in the current debate echoes the conjuncture of the late 1970s – not least in the spectre of euro-communism that seems to be haunting contemporary left movements, with their talk of “the sense of the state.” Balibar’s trajectory since is largely a product of a break with a French Communist Party (PCF) whose claims that the crisis was *above all national* embodied an incapacity to think critically about what communist action in a “national and social state” meant, ultimately colluding in the racism of “national preference.” This was also the period of Louis Althusser’s final political interventions on the “crisis of Marxism” – which also triggered Balibar’s first marked distancing from Althusser’s positions, precisely around the question of the state. Of course, these debates only appear analogous to our present concerns, since they were de-

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8 Cf. Lordon 2015. See also Toscano 2016.
9 Lordon 2015, p. 117.
debates about mass communist parties. And yet, Althusser’s demand that Marxism required a critique of politics to match its critique of political economy, a manner of thinking itself out of the bourgeois forms of politics towards another practice of proletarian politics, still remains suggestive. As he declared in an important article on “Marxism as a ‘Finite’ Theory,” which triggered an entire debate on the Left in Italy: “the fact that (bourgeois or proletarian) class struggle has as its stakes (hic et nunc) the state does not actually mean it must define itself in relation to the state.”

This statist circumscription of the political was linked by Althusser to what he called the “juridical illusion of politics” (an illusion which, we should note, is alive and healthy today). The party-form had to be disarticulated from the state-form, but also entirely rethought in its relation to communist movements of liberation outside the workers’ movement sensu stricto. As a “matter of principle,” the communist party had to reinvent itself on the margins of the state.

Shortly after Althusser made these pronouncements, Balibar, who would later summarize his own criticisms in terms of his opposition to the “theoretical anarchism” plaguing Marxist theories of the state (whence their blindspot especially on citizenship and the politics of human rights), argued against this “communism outside the state” that neither the masses nor the workers’ movement had ever been truly outside the state, that the latter’s separation was always at best partial and qualified, and that rather than a topology of outside and inside, communism should be thought through the internal, immanent contradictions of a system of state relations.

The irony of this criticism – for all of its applicability to other forms of communist thought – is that Althusser himself had strongly stressed how deeply the state penetrated into “civil society,” and indeed how one of the limits of Marxism (in the sense, as he ironically put it, of those signs indicating “your ticket is not valid beyond this limit”) was thinking that communism could mean an overcoming of ideology and social relations. His critique of the (eurocommunist) ideology of “public service” in “Marx in His Limits” (roughly contemporaneous with “Marxism as a ‘Finite’ Theory”) puts the question in terms that remain extremely suggestive. I would like to quote it at some length, so as then to turn to the question of a “communism outside the state” in the work of Badiou:

“there is no breaking out of the circle of the state, which has nothing of a vicious circle about it, because it simply reflects the fact that the reproduction of the material and social conditions encompasses, and implies the reproduction of, the state and its forms as well, while the state and its forms contribute, but in a ‘special’ war, to ensuring the reproduction of existing class society. [It is] the circle of the reproduction of the state in its functions as an instrument for the reproduction of the conditions of production, hence of

exploitation, hence of the conditions of existence of the domination of the exploiting class which constitutes, in and of itself, the supreme objective mystification.”

Or, in the striking expression that Althusser uses to encapsulate this state-fetishism, ça ment tout seul (it lies on its own).

3. Badiou’s metapolitics: Thinking communism outside the state

Alain Badiou's metapolitics is arguably the most concerted contemporary philosophical effort to think communism outside the state. What is its concept of the state, and how might this antagonistic nexus of communism and state speak to our current European conjuncture?

The state, or more specifically the state of the situation, is a central concept or operator in *Being and Event*. I will not attempt here to revisit the articulation of Badiou’s meta-ontology and of his socio-historical exemplification, but rather home in on the way in which his theory is oriented toward the issue of “communism outside the state.” The theory of the state put forth in Meditation 9 of *Being and Event* is perhaps above all a theory of the state’s separation and of its excessive or super-power over the situation it is re-presenting. Its replication of a classical Marxism is evident in its rejection of a theory of the state as expressive of the social bond, in favour of the notion that the state is to be related to unbinding (la déliaison), to an effort to fix the void that threatens its underlying structure. In this regard, the state is fundamentally Hobbesian, a machine to prevent stásis, tumult, chaos, plague, to snuff out the rioting crowd invariably viewed as an “emblem of inconsistency.” Illegitimately compressing a meticulous deduction, we can note that as the pre-emption of the void, the state is concerned for Badiou not with terms, individuals, or multiples as such but with collective subsets, striving to stabilise the relation between inclusion and belonging. What the State does is to re-present what has already been presented. This requires structuring the structure of presentation, counting the count. The state makes a One out of the parts of the situation (note that Badiou will argue that one-ness in the “immediacy” of the social is provided by non-state structures, hinting at the social reproduction underlying political representation). The result of this is that the state will generate “excrucient” multiples, which are re-presented or included but not presented (do not “belong” to the situation), and will only deal with individuals as “singletons,” not as multiples but as sub-sets (the voter, for instance). Hence its indifference to the lives of the putatively “represented.” The state’s identification and homogenisation of multiples is for Badiou its “elementary coercion,” its “atom of constraint.” In *Rebirth of History* this elementary coercion of “inclu-

“sive” or “representational” identity will be redoubled by the exclusivity of an identitarian operation that manufactures the inexistence of certain multiples, or terroristically stigmatises them, by creating fictions of identity – like the incoherent but dominating normative or average conception of the French citizen, “F,” an identitarian operation that functions through “separating names” (immigrant, Muslim, etc.). As Badiou observes: “The fictional F, measure of normality and matrix of suspicion, or its stand-in in any state structure, is always identitarian.”

But *Being and Event*, like Althusser’s writings of the late 1970s, also indicates the “limits” of Marxism in its theorising of the state. For Badiou, these limits have to do with the notion that the state *itself* (rather than the multiples it produces) is an *excrescence*, which could thus *wither away*, and in the related axiom that politics is first and foremost an *assault on the state*. For Badiou, such a horizon of the abolition of the state ignores its meta-ontological ineluctability: while the unpresentable errancy of the void and the excess of inclusion over belonging, may, in the rarity of evental truth procedures, give rise to dysfunctions, transformations and subtractions from the state, this cannot *abolish* the state meta-ontologically (which is to say meta-historically and meta-politically) conceived. Recognition of this, combined with a steadfast commitment to the separation of egalitarian political capacities from the operations of the state – in other words the conviction that political truths are never, as such, a matter of representation – requires a very different image of “communism outside the state” than the one provided by “classical” communism. Abolition is accordingly rethought as distance, separation, subtraction, and, more affirmatively speaking, prescription. The militant can no longer be, in Badiou’s poetic gloss, a watchman beneath the walls of the State but needs to transform herself into a patient tracker and stalker of the void and its irruptions. Accordingly, “even if the route of political change – […] the route of the radical dispensation of justice – is always bordered by the State, it cannot in any way let itself be guided by the latter, for the State is precisely non-political, insofar as it cannot change, save hands, and it is well known that there is little strategic signification in such a change.”

The persistence of this perspective on the state is evident in the positions of *The Rebirth of History*, where we read that since “the radicalized generic is incompatible with the state, which lives exclusively off identitarian fictions, any political truth presents itself as a restriction of the power of the State,” meaning that the communist militants of the generic “decide what the state must do and find means of forcing it to,” from the outside.

Returning to Balibar’s objections to the kind of “theoretical anarchism” that would all-too-easily dispense with the state, it is evident that Badiou, meta-ontologi-

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14 Badiou 2012, p. 76.
16 Ibid., p. 81.
cally speaking, is not a thinker of the abolition of the state (whether his communism envisages state forms that are not bourgeois, national, or identitarian, is a different matter, requiring us to think the difference between the withering away of the state as such, versus, in Althusser’s terms, the “reorganization, restructuring and revolutionization of an existing apparatus.”\(^{17}\) Yet he remains a thinker of “communism outside the state.” But is the model of distance and prescription an adequate one to reinvigorate the communist hypothesis? There’s little doubt that classic reformist and revolutionary hypotheses, viewing the state as the object and element of political action, are deeply damaged, and that attempts at countering “statism without a state” through an expansive conception of national and popular sovereignty in Southern Europe are uncertain at best. That said, two reasons militate against communism at a distance. The first is already evident in Balibar’s characterisation of the European non-state (which is the very opposite of the communising “barred state” of which Badiou tantalisingly speaks in “Our Contemporary Impotence”\(^{18}\)), but also in Badiou’s understanding of contemporary imperialist power as a practice of zoning that practically deconstructs states.\(^{19}\) Such zoning suggests that some of the characteristics of the meta-ontological and meta-political conception of the State from Being and Event no longer map so neatly onto our own present. Contemporary state or para-state power, including the agencies of a predatory capital, is an active producer and not just preemperor of “unbinding.” Hence the “conservative” or “defensive” character of a contemporary politics objectively lead to the reaffirmation of the national and social state with all of its aporias and ideologies (not least that of Public Service). Hence our desire for the state, our “statism without a state,” to twist Balibar’s formulation. But a communism of distance is also complicated by the fact that the state – in its materiality – is not a mere matter of representation, but, perhaps above all, one of reproduction. That, as Althusser suggested, is the objective mystification, the circle of the state, that any “communism outside the state” still needs to confront. Distance implies too much innocence, and any communist must be first and foremost his or her own enemy, realising that the transcendence of the state is materially, affectively permeated with immanence, with our needs and desires. La Boétie’s questions still haunts us:

“Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you except through you? How would he dare assail you if he had no cooperation from you? What could he do to you if you your-

\(^{17}\) Althusser 1977, p. 17.
\(^{19}\) Cf. Badiou 2004 and 2014.
selves did not connive with the thief who plunders you, if you were not accomplices of
the murderer who kills you, if you were not traitors to yourselves?"²⁰

Pace Nietzsche, perhaps we should start reckoning with the fact that the State is the
warmest of all monsters.

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²⁰ La Boétie 2015, p. 48.
My goal today is not to say something very new about my theoretical conception of the State. You can find the most important arguments regarding the ontological status of the concept of State in Being and Event. And if you are interested in the properly political level, you can read the last chapter of my Metapolitics. Ultimately, we can summarize those arguments in four sentences: 1.) The “state of a situation” (to speak the language of Being and Event) or “the state of a world” (to speak the language of Logics of Worlds) is always the compte-pour-un (the count-as-one) of the parts of the situation or of the world. That is to say the set is composed not of the elements of this situation or of this world, but of its subsets, or its parts. Mathematically, this new set is called the power-set of the situation. 2.) In a political situation, the State is the same thing: the power-set, or more precisely, the forms of the possible actions of the power-set on the initial set itself. In other words, it is the formal and concrete actions of the state power affecting any and all of the elements of the situation which makes up the state. The most important point is probably that the State has no real relation with any one individual itself, but only with the set of which an individual is the only element. The name of this set, if the individual is named John, is the singleton of John, and not John himself. 3.) The most important point is that the potency (also referred to as the cardinality) of the State, which is a measure of the State as a power-set of a given set, is always higher than the potency of the given set itself. This is Cantor’s theorem. Furthermore, in the classical context of the theory of sets, the potency of the state of a set, of its power-set, cannot be precisely determined with regard to its relationship to the potency of the set itself. This is Cohen’s theorem. So the state of a set is a potency which wanders beyond the potency of the set itself. 4.) So politics, in a situation, always begins by stopping the wandering or errancy of the state of that situation. The first decision, very often unconscious, of a true politics, is to fix the potency of the state. With the fundamental risk of a complete error.

Today, I shall be more concrete. In some sense because we are all in the midst of the subjective consequences of the horrible mass murders which are organized everywhere in the world. My goal will be to delineate, in this context, the notion of a State under the rule of law, or of a State governed by law. In other words, to delin-
eate the common idea in our Western world, that it is necessary to strengthen the state under the rule of Law. What follows will be a discussion of the relationship between four concepts: justice, democracy, human rights, and rule of law. I will start with the presentation of some difficult problems.

The first one relates to the question: After the mass murders in the streets of Paris on Friday 13 November 2015, what has the position of the French government been? The abstract question is: if something very violent and exceptional happens in the situation, what is the action of the state of this situation? In the present case, the action of the government has been to affirm that our country was at war with terrorism.

We must note that all the young men implicated in the mass murder were of French nationality. Is it possible to speak of a war and to say that the whole of the French people is at war, when the enemy is comprised of eight French citizens? Maybe it’s a civil war? Not in the least. The government speaks of the complete unity of the country against the criminals. It refuses categorically to speak of a civil war. So it’s a war against another country, and another State. This enemy, as you know, has many names: Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), Daesh… I shall simply say: Islamic State.

In regard to the international law, this “Islamic state” is neither a country nor a state. In the eyes of the great majority of Muslims, this entity not only is not really Islamic, but rather it proposes a completely perverted version of Islam as a religion. So from the point of view of the law, or the religion, and simply of the facts, what is the Islamic State? It’s an international gang. It’s a new form of ideological Mafia. Thus there is no question of victory, of negotiation, or of peace treaties, as there would be in the case of a real war. The only solution at hand is the total destruction of the gang.

But when fighting against a new form of Mafia, and of attempting the destruction of a Mafia, the question is never a question of war, but rather a question of police.

My question, my problem, is the following: why is the language of the French state a nationalist and military language around the central concept of war, when the true question is to disband and destroy an international gang, and when the killers are French citizens? The question was the same when, after the September 11 mass murder in New York, organized by the Al-Qaeda gang, President Bush spoke of a “war against terrorism” and went on to organize the bloody invasion of a country, Iraq, which was not related to the mass murder. The question is: why does the State transform a question of police into a question of war?

To answer this question, we must observe the consequences of that declaration of war of sorts. Was there a mobilization of people? A transformation of citizens into soldiers? A movement to borders of our country? Not at all. It was and remains a negative action targeted at public freedoms and civil rights. The legal form of this negative action has been the state of emergency. It includes the possibility to carry
out searches in private homes at any time, night and day. To keep citizens under ar-
rest without any safeguards for several days. To strip many people of French nation-
ality. To give to police the right to shoot without warning in far more circumstances
than before. And so on. All in all, a profound negation of the most important prin-
ciples of the rule of law.

The question becomes: why does the war against a gang based in the Middle East
take the exclusive form of a weakening of the rule of law here, a weakening that was
chosen by the State itself? By a State which is theoretically and ideologically under
the rule of law? But the paradox of all this goes deeper than everything we’ve just
mentioned. The French president has declared that the mass murder was a barbaric
attack against our democratic values. It was, said our president, an attack of barbar-
ians coming from outside against the civilized people of France.

Note that all these barbarians were French citizens (but I won’t insist on that point
for the moment). And we are a civilized people because we have democratic values.
So, the mass murder is a barbaric attack against democratic values, which are, pre-
cisely: human rights, civil liberties and the rule of law. But the effect of this attack is
in fact a restrictive conception of human rights, the negation of some civil liberties,
and many negative exceptions concerning the rule of law. So, finally, we can speak
of a victory for the barbarians, victory decided, not by their horrible action, a mass
murder, but by the democratic state itself, with its declaration of war against eight
French citizens.

I can here introduce a point which is practically never mentioned. The police, the
officers, in France, never arrest what they name “a terrorist.” They always kill him
or her. In many cases, it was absolutely possible to arrest them without shooting, and
without exposing the officers to the risk of being shot. And in practically all cases, it
was possible for the police to shoot to wound or to stop them without killing. But the
fact is, the “terrorists” have always been killed, without any consideration of the
concrete circumstances.

So they have been sentenced to death without any trial. But are not our civilized
societies precisely defined by the complete prohibition of killing somebody without
trial? And even, as is the case in France, by the suppression of death penalty?

So we have the complete paradoxical fact that to repress the barbarians who at-
tack our civilized rule of law, we must become like them: we kill them without any
trial, outside any law. And it’s once more their victory, if to resist barbarians there is
no other possibility but to become yourself a barbarian murderer.

It’s a very old story, in fact. What is the name of all this? The name for a barbaric
answer to a barbaric provocation? That name is: revenge. But the question of the
rule of law is precisely to substitute a state under the rule of law for private revenge.
It’s the contents of the famous tragedy of Aeschylus: the Oresteia. In this tragedy,
we have, first, king Agamemnon’s acceptance of the sacrifice of his daughter Iphi-
After that, we have the murder of Agamemnon by Iphigenia’s mother, Clytemnestra. And finally, we have the murder of Clytemnestra by Agamemnon’s son Orestes. For Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom and philosophy, the idea of justice demands that this infinite succession of murders under the savage law of revenge must stop. And to have justice, you must expose the case to a group of persons who are outside the story, who are neutral concerning all these private matters. So the last scene of the tragedy is the creation of a court which discusses the case of Orestes. The court, finally, acquits Orestes, and with the infinite succession of private revenges having been stopped, we have the beginning of an active idea of justice.

The fact that policemen, officers, kill somebody, is always a failure of justice. The idea “we can kill the killers” is a return to a time before Aeschylus and the Greeks. And I see this return in the concrete effects of the French president’s supposed “war against barbarians,” just as it has been the case for the “war against terrorism” of President Bush with the Patriot Act and the imprisonments and tortures taking place in Guantanamo.

That revenge creates revenge, and never justice, can be seen at the international level too. If we observe the most important armed gangs in the Middle East and in Africa, we can see that they are consequences of acts of revenge by some states of the Western world. Without the complete destruction of the Iraqi state by the troops coming from the United States and the United Kingdom, the existence of the Islamic state and of many other pseudo-Islamic gangs would be impossible. But what was the destruction of the Iraqi state? In the end, it was revenge by the United States for the mass murder of September 11. And that is why it’s impossible to find any form of justice in the Middle East today.

But my country, France, is not innocent. Why are so many pseudo-Islamic armed gangs to be found in the Sahara desert? Because the destruction of Gaddafi’s Libyan state by the French air force. And what is this destruction? President Sarkozy’s revenge against Gaddafi for some of his provocative projects, notably the idea of creating, in opposition to African French money, the CFA franc, a new purely African currency.

Finally, exactly as in private and civil conflicts, we must suppress revenge and promote neutral justice. We must on an international level, use negotiation and neutral mediation and not armed and bloody revenge.

In no part of the world have the armed actions of the Western World been a triumph of human rights. Neither in Iraq, nor in South Sudan, nor in Libya, nor in Congo. And even the long war in Afghanistan is a failure. The peace cannot be created by the kind of war that comes from outside. As the French revolutionary, Robespierre, said: “people don’t love armed missionaries.” He said that opposing the idea of exporting democracy in Europe by war and invasion. Today we cannot organize a war in distant countries to impose democracy, human rights and the rule of law on
people. To receive democracy, human rights and the rule of law, in the form of bombs, drones, parachutists and tanks, will certainly create a disastrous confusion between liberation and occupation, peace and war, and between justice and revenge.

Now I can return to the mass murder in Paris, through a philosophical point of view that will be articulated in five points. 1.) A crime must always be thought of as a singularity and not as the action of a group of people as such. We can say that the mass murder is a fascist action, but not that it’s something Arab, Muslim, or Jewish, or American, and so on. The adjective “fascist” is neutral in regard to human groups, it’s an abstract political concept, without any relationship to a definite group. So it’s possible to affirm that the mass murder in Paris was a fascist action. 2.) For that, we must have a precise definition of “fascist.” Fascism is a conception of action governed by the idea that some groups of people are inherently (and not by their position in the social organization) good and truly human, and that some other groups are by themselves bad and not really human. So if you are a member of a “good” group, you are more human than, and finally superior to, a member of the “bad” group. You have the possibility, and sometimes the duty, to kill him or her, as you would kill a rabbit. 3.) If we accept that to say, i.e. that an action is barbaric if its result is the death or the suffering of innocent people, the first conclusion is that a fascist action like the blind mass murder in Paris is barbaric, because the victims, who are killed only because they are in the “bad group” of non-Muslims individuals, are clearly innocent. But then we must also accept to say that the governments of the “democratic” Western World commit many barbaric actions with their air forces, their drones, and their blind bombings of cities. The only consistent way to act against barbaric actions is to use civilized means only. So the strategic or political vision of “civilized” people must be completely different not only from fascism, but also from the “democratic” states of the Western World. I name that sort of vision a communist vision.

4.) The communist strategy is under the law of justice, which is the negation of pure revenge. The principle “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” is in reality a fascist principle. Political justice presupposes the control of the state by a civilized people. 5.) The true way to oppose fascist acts is not by war, but through justice. The true concept is not nationalist, but internationalist. The true ideology is not democratic but communist.
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