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## BAD U . . . ?

Pierre Legrand\*

[Alain] Badiou a détérré la Heidegger.

—A Pseudonymous Writer<sup>1</sup>

On 28 June 1996, a 300-strong group of so-called “*sans-papiers*”—“paperless” or “undocumented” aliens—mostly of African provenance, many of them from Mali and Senegal, occupied the Saint-Bernard-de-la-Chapelle church located in Paris’s “Goutte d’Or,” a cosmopolitan working-class neighbourhood featuring a high concentration of African immigrants mostly of the Muslim faith. The *sans-papiers*, who comprised almost 70 children, were protesting 1993 amendments to French law which they claimed had the effect of depriving them of the opportunity to obtain the documents that would have entitled them to reside and work in France legally. The new

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\* Professor of Law and Director of Postgraduate Comparative Legal Studies at the Sorbonne (Paris); Visiting Professor, University of San Diego Law School; Senior Fellow, University of Melbourne Law School; Visiting Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen. I refer to original texts and supply my own translations. I owe Simone Glanert for reading a draft and making suggestions which improved the argument.

<sup>1</sup> This comment was posted by “padepanique” on 28 November 2007 at 19h59 in response to an entry entitled “De quoi Badiou est-il le nom?” itself posted on 28 November 2007 by French literary critic Pierre Assouline on his blog, “La république des livres,” a feature of the electronic edition of the daily French newspaper, *Le Monde*, <http://www.passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/> (last visited Dec. 1, 2007). The ascription of English meaning to this sentence requires a few moves. The starting-point is a common French expression, “*détérrer la hache de guerre*,” which refers to the unearthing of the hatchet and roughly means “to go on the warpath.” Phonetically, the words “*hache de guerre*” track very closely the surname “Heidegger” (especially as pronounced *à la française*), Martin Heidegger being, as shall become clear, the philosopher whom Alain Badiou [hereinafter AB] is most primordially confronting in his work. The homophonic allusion is technically known as a “paronomasia,” although in this instance the paronomasia is implicit only since instead of expressly featuring two expressions side by side, as paronomasias usually do, one (“Heidegger”) is substituted for the other (“*hache de guerre*”), which remains silent. The implicit paronomasia combines with a further pun around the idea of “war” to connote the militant character of AB’s thought. There is possibly another sense at work. In France, where AB is writing, reference to Heidegger has come to assume a polemical, or warlike, character. See e.g. EMMANUEL FAYE, *HEIDEGGER: L’INTRODUCTION DU NAZISME DANS LA PHILOSOPHIE* (2005); HEIDEGGER, *À PLUS FORTE RAISON* (François Fédier ed., 2007). By “unearthing” Heidegger, even if to contradict him, AB would be exciting this controversy and, if you will, taking part in the “Heidegger wars.” Unfortunately, these explanations detract from the subtle richness of the comment, which in my francophone opinion is best appreciated on its own terms.

legislative texts featured a toughening of visa requirements, a reduction in the number of visas issued, an expansion of police enforcement powers, an extension of the permitted detention period, and a narrowing of the administrative review scheme.<sup>2</sup> The occupation lasted nearly two months and attracted considerable media attention, not least on account of a number of protesters having gone on hunger strike for six weeks or so and because of the fact that the *sans-papiers* were represented by a "college of mediators" composed of eminent French academics, jurists, ecclesiastics, human rights activists, and celebrities whose task was to negotiate their position with the French authorities. Under pressure from the "college" and from a significant strand of public opinion relayed by the media, the government agreed to examine the files of the protesters. It granted visas to nearly 50 of them. Out of the rest, some were deemed subject to removal from the country while others, whose children were entitled to French citizenship, were caught in the legislative gap. In the early morning hours of 23 August 1996, over 1,000 officers from the French anti-riot squad launched a raid on the church. Sweeping aside a crowd of protesters and breaking down the church doors, the officers arrested and evacuated the *sans-papiers*. Their supporters, who had cared for the *sans-papiers* during their protest, condemned the French police for the brutality of the expulsion. They emphasized that several of the protesters expelled from the church had been severely weakened by their prolonged hunger strike. French citizens who were inside the church at the time of the assault claimed to have been lumped with the protesters strictly on account of the colour of their skin as the police undertook to separate "blacks" from "whites." On the night of the expulsion, a hastily-organized march was held in Paris in support of the *sans-papiers*, which attracted over 10,000 demonstrators. An even larger procession walked through the streets of Paris two days later. As for the Saint-Bernard protesters themselves, a number of them were immediately put on a military plane and returned to Africa. In some cases, visas were granted by the French government on humanitarian grounds. Other *sans-papiers* prevailed in the legal proceedings instituted against them. Many of those who lost in court were eventually removed from France. The Saint-Bernard occupation has since become a *cause célèbre* and a commemorative demonstration has been held in Paris in August of every year since 1996.<sup>3</sup> According

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<sup>2</sup> Law No. 93-1027 of Aug. 24, 1993, Journal officiel de la République française, Aug. 29, 1993 (Concerning the Regulation of Immigration and the Conditions of Entry, of Reception, and of Residence for Foreigners in France); Law No. 93-1417 of Dec. 30, 1993, Journal officiel de la République française, Jan. 1, 1994 (Formulating Various Provisions Concerning the Regulation of Immigration and Modifying the Civil Code).

<sup>3</sup> For news reports in English, see Craig R. Whitney, *Paris Fight Over Aliens Is Waged in a Church*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 11, 1996, § 1, at 13; Craig R. Whitney, *French Aide Talks With Immigrants But Hunger Strike Goes On*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 22, 1996, at A11; Craig R. Whitney,

to available statistical reports, between 200,000 and 400,000 *sans-papiers* lived in France in 2005. The annual increment is estimated to stand at 80,000.<sup>4</sup>

The Saint-Bernard protest has not failed to elicit the interventionist attention of Alain Badiou, *philosophe* and intrepid observer of French politics whose acerbic comments on current affairs have come to play a prominent part on the Parisian intellectual scene.<sup>5</sup> In an essay published in 2000,<sup>6</sup> AB weaves the Saint-Bernard occupation into his philosophy in a way that allows for a helpful introduction to salient aspects of his thought. But an appreciation of the philosopher's discussion of "Saint-Bernard" requires a thorough exordium.

The son of a famous local politician and professor of mathematics (there is an "avenue Raymond-Badiou" in Toulouse), formally trained as a philosopher (and self-educated as a mathematician),<sup>7</sup> no doubt inspired by the influential group of mathematicians having operated in France since 1935 under the pseudonym "Nicholas Bourbaki,"<sup>8</sup> AB, in

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*Police in Paris Smash Immigrants' Sit-In*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 24, 1996, §1, at 6; Craig R. Whitney, *Aliens Seized in Paris Church Are Released from Detention*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 27, 1996, at A8. For scholarly discussion of the *sans-papiers* in France, see THIERRY BLIN, *LES SANS-PAPIERS DE SAINT-BERNARD* (2005); Gérard Noiriel, *Réfugiés et sans-papiers* (2006); Etienne Balibar et al., *SANS-PAPIERS: L'ARCHAÏSME FATAL* (1999); A LA LUMIÈRE DES SANS-PAPIERS (Antoine Pickels ed., 2001); JOHANNA SIMÉANT, *LA CAUSE DES SANS-PAPIERS* (1998); UTE LINDEMANN, *SANS-PAPIERS-PROTESTE UND EINWANDERUNGSPOLITIK IN FRANKREICH* (2001); JANE FREEDMAN, *IMMIGRATION AND INSECURITY IN FRANCE* 71-88 (2004); James F. Hollifield, *Ideas, Institutions and Civil Society: On the Limits of Immigration Control in France*, in *MECHANISMS OF IMMIGRATION CONTROL* 59-96 (Grete Brochmann & Tomas Hammar eds., 1999); James F. Hollifield, *France: Republicanism and the Limits of Immigration Control*, in *CONTROLLING IMMIGRATION* 183-214 (Wayne A. Cornelius et al. eds., 2d ed. 2004); Anne McNevin, *Political Belonging in a Neoliberal Era: The Struggle of the Sans-Papiers*, 10 *CITIZENSHIP STUD.* 135 (2006); Catherine Lloyd, *Anti-Racism, Racism, and Asylum-Seekers in France*, 37 *PATTERNS OF PREJUDICE* 323 (2003); Jonathan Benthall, *Repercussions from the Eglise Saint-Bernard*, 13/4 *ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY* 1 (1997).

<sup>4</sup> This data was released by the French newspaper *Libération* on 22 August 2006: [www.liberation.fr/dossiers/sanspapiers/comprendre/198253.FR.php](http://www.liberation.fr/dossiers/sanspapiers/comprendre/198253.FR.php) (last visited on Nov. 15, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. ALAIN BADIOU, *CIRCONSTANCES*, 1 (2003) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Circonstances*, 1]; ALAIN BADIOU, *CIRCONSTANCES*, 2 (2004); ALAIN BADIOU, *CIRCONSTANCES*, 3 (2005) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Circonstances*, 3]; ALAIN BADIOU, *DE QUOI SARKOZY EST-IL LE NOM?* *CIRCONSTANCES*, 4 (2007). For an argument with specific reference to the *sans-papiers*, see Alain Badiou, Sylvain Lazarus & Natacha Michel, *Une France pour tous*, LE MONDE, Dec. 19, 1997. These polemical essays have prompted heated debates amongst French intellectuals. For example, see Eric Marty, *Une querelle avec Alain Badiou, philosophe* (2007). See also Assouline, *supra* note 1; Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, *De quoi Badiou est-il le symptôme?*, LIBÉRATION, Jan. 10, 2008; Bruno Chaouat, *Chiens, rats, anticommuniste . . .*, LIBÉRATION, Jan. 10, 2008. For AB's reply to these two newspaper articles, see Alain Badiou, *Badiou répond aux "tontons flingueurs"*, LIBÉRATION, Jan. 14, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Alain Badiou, *Huit thèses sur l'universel*, in *UNIVERSEL, SINGULIER, SUJET* 11-20 (Jelica Sumic ed., 2000) [hereinafter Badiou, *Huit thèses*].

<sup>7</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'aveu du philosophe*, in *LA VOCATION PHILOSOPHIQUE* 138 (Marianne Alphant ed., 2004).

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent introduction to "Bourbaki," see David Aubin, *The Withering Immortality*

what could be regarded as his foundational act of choice (although he himself would argue that he is compelled by the logical impasse generated by alternative points of departure), happily affirms the central role of mathematics both in epistemology and, more controversially, in the formulation of ontology (one of his principal aims being to distinguish ontology from any form of phenomenological consciousness). Specifically, AB has in mind “that part of mathematics where it is stated historically that any ‘object’ is reducible to a pure multiplicity, itself built on the non-presentation of the void (set theory).”<sup>9</sup> Observe immediately that because AB *equates* mathematics with ontology (for him, “mathematics *is* ontology, in the strict sense, that is, the infinite development of what can be said of [B]eing as [B]eing”),<sup>10</sup> his theory, which is a discourse on mathematical-discourse-*qua*-ontology, is best understood as meta-ontological.<sup>11</sup> Having said this, AB’s conferment of philosophical primacy to mathematics—his positioning of mathematics as an “anthology of ontology”<sup>12</sup>—is a far-reaching intellectual move. For example, rather than ask how mathematics is possible and answer that it is so because of the subject, AB asks how a subject is possible given mathematics-as-the-science-of-Being.<sup>13</sup>

What consistently animates AB’s thought is his ambition to rescue philosophy—to which he attaches great value<sup>14</sup>—from the condition of epistemological fallenness in which he perceives it to be mired. In order to return philosophy to its proper place, AB argues in favour of a “purifying” strategy.<sup>15</sup> Thus, he aims to contest the way in which

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*of Nicholas Bourbaki: A Cultural Connector at the Confluence of Mathematics, Structuralism, and the Oulipo in France*, 10 SCIENCE IN CONTEXT 297 (1997). Note that “Bourbaki” continues to hold regular seminars and still has an office at the Paris *Ecole Normale Supérieure* where AB studied from 1956 to 1961 and taught from 1998 until his retirement in 2002. For a brief biographical note on AB, see Christian Delacampagne, *Alain Badiou*, in THE COLUMBIA HISTORY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRENCH THOUGHT 401-02 (Lawrence D. Kritzman ed., 2006).

<sup>9</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, *L’ÊTRE ET L’ÉVÈNEMENT* 20 (1988) [hereinafter BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*].

<sup>10</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, *CONDITIONS* 177 (1992) (emphasis original) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Conditions*].

<sup>11</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 20. Jacques Derrida might have observed—preemptively, so to speak—that the meta-ontological character of a theory does not allow it to act as a neutral shelter for philosophers. See JACQUES DERRIDA, *1 DONNER LE TEMPS: LA FAUSSE MONNAIE* 76 (1991) (“the essential link of thought [. . .] to language [. . .] will never dispense with idioms.” He might have added further reflections on the “impossib[ility] [of] bring[ing] out a concept of essence [. . .] that would transcend idiomatic difference”).

<sup>12</sup> Lauren Sedofsky, *Matters of Appearance*, 45 ART FORUM 247 (2006).

<sup>13</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 12.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. ALAIN BADIOU, *MANIFESTE POUR LA PHILOSOPHIE* (1989) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Manifeste*].

<sup>15</sup> Alain Badiou, *L’entretien de Bruxelles*, in 526 LES TEMPS MODERNES 1, 11 (1990). The French word is “épuration.”

philosophy has undergone a “delocalization” by “graft[ing] itself onto established activities [such as] art, poetry, science, political action, psychoanalysis.”<sup>16</sup> Specifically, he wants to offer a philosophical alternative to the reduction of the world to textuality. One of AB’s clearly stated goals is therefore to guard us from every establishment of “an anthropology of finitude.”<sup>17</sup> Against Martin Heidegger’s “reactionary nostalgia,”<sup>18</sup> also against the battalions of post-Heideggerian philosophers consisting of thinkers as diverse as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty,<sup>19</sup> AB purports to “break with hermeneutics,”<sup>20</sup> and indeed with anything claiming to submit Being to the supremacy of language.<sup>21</sup> For AB, it simply cannot be the case that there would only be interpretations.<sup>22</sup> In his words, “language is not the absolute horizon of thought.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, he writes: “[M]y goal is not a phenomenology, but a Great Logic.”<sup>24</sup> AB seeks to restore the sovereignty of “philosophy *itself*, in its singular delimitation, [. . .] of philosophy as it has been instituted by Plato.”<sup>25</sup>

One of AB’s emphatic postulates is that philosophy, proceeding

<sup>16</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 57.

<sup>17</sup> Alain Badiou, *Afterword: Some Replies to a Demanding Friend*, in THINK AGAIN 237 (Peter Hallward ed. & Alberto Toscano trans., 2004).

<sup>18</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 33.

<sup>19</sup> As AB makes his case, he mentions Heidegger thirteen times, Wittgenstein thrice, and Lyotard and Rorty once each. BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 57-78. With specific reference to Heidegger, AB states as follows: “My whole point is to break with [his] diagnosis.” *Id.* at 58. Points of agreement nonetheless subsist. *E.g.* ALAIN BADIOU, COURT TRAITÉ D’ONTOLOGIE TRANSITOIRE 190 (1998) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Court traité*]. Elsewhere, he reminds his readership of his stance: “Philosophically, I have from the beginning been totally opposed to Foucault.” Sedofsky, *supra* note 12, at 249. He adds: “In the end, I’m opposed to the totality of Derrida’s conceptions.” *Id.* This disagreement did not prevent AB from warmly acknowledging Derrida after his death. Alain Badiou, *Homage to Jacques Derrida*, in ADIEU DERRIDA 34-46 (Costas Douzinas ed., 2007). *See also* ALAIN BADIOU, LOGIQUES DES MONDES 570-71 (2006) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Logiques*]; ALAIN BADIOU, PETIT PANTHÉON PORTATIF 117-33 (2008). For a study purporting to assess divergences and convergences between AB’s and Derrida’s philosophies, see ANTONIO CALCAGNO, BADIOU AND DERRIDA (2007).

<sup>20</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 69.

<sup>21</sup> *See* BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 60.

<sup>22</sup> *See* BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 469. An argument to the effect that “there are no truth-claims but only interpretations” cannot be dismissed on the ground that it would itself constitute a truth-claim (not that this is AB’s stated position), for it can be said that it constitutes an interpretation.

<sup>23</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, MONDE CONTEMPORAIN ET DÉSIR DE PHILOSOPHIE 23 (1992) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Monde contemporain*].

<sup>24</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 364. Much of BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19—AB’s substantial sequel to *L’être et l’événement*—is devoted to the articulation of a “Great Logic.” BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 101-374.

<sup>25</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 76-77 (emphasis original). AB’s earliest book of philosophy is ALAIN BADIOU, LE CONCEPT DE MODÈLE (1969). This text has been reissued with a new foreword in which AB repeatedly claims allegiance to Platonism. Alain Badiou, *Préface de la nouvelle édition*, in LE CONCEPT DE MODÈLE 13, 21, 23-24 (2007) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Modèle*].

universally, should once again concern itself strictly with the apprehension of truth—or more accurately, of truths subsumed under the philosophical category of Truth, which is the central category of all possible philosophy.<sup>26</sup> For AB, philosophical inquiry must be guided by an unwavering quest for that which lies beyond variability and difference as immediately given. Being a philosopher must signify, first and foremost, affirming an idea of truth as timeless and universal and fashioning the conceptual framework that will allow for the apprehension of the conditions in which truth manifests itself (philosophy, then, is in a subordinate position vis-à-vis Truth or truths: neither does it generate Truth or truths nor is it Truth or truths).<sup>27</sup>

According to AB, mathematics is “the *only* discourse that ‘knows’ absolutely what it is talking about: [B]eing as such”; and “it is also the only one [. . .] where we have the full guarantee and the criterion of the truth of what is being said so that this truth is the only one ever found to be fully transmissible.”<sup>28</sup> It is the only discourse that can think “directly,” “without resorting to interpretation,” that can produce a conclusion “stripped of all meaning.”<sup>29</sup> To put the matter in Lacanian terms—Jacques Lacan, one of AB’s predecessors at *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, having consistently acted as one of AB’s main sources of intellectual inspiration, an influence which AB repeatedly acknowledges<sup>30</sup>—“[m]athematics [. . .] use a language of pure signifier.”<sup>31</sup> Mathematical quotations are, ultimately, “more universally accessible and univocal than those of poets.”<sup>32</sup> They also provide for an “integrally secularised thought”—hardly an insignificant fact from the point of view of AB, a committed atheist.<sup>33</sup>

It is not that the world is inherently mathematical or that mathematical ideas are immanent in the sensible world. AB’s point is that the world must be *thought* mathematically so that thought can generate actively universal forms of affirmation isolated from the

<sup>26</sup> See BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 62-78.

<sup>27</sup> For an emphatic statement to the effect that philosophy does not produce truths, see ALAIN BADIOU, *Preface to the English Edition*, in *METAPOLITICS*, at xxxi (Jason Barker trans., 2005).

<sup>28</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 15 (emphasis original).

<sup>29</sup> JASON BARKER, ALAIN BADIOU 4-5 (2002). See also *id.* at 4 (“Truth has no interest in interpretation; instead, truth exposes the gaps in our understanding.”).

<sup>30</sup> E.g. BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 85, where there is a reference to “my teacher Jacques Lacan.” The French word is “*maître*,” which also translates as “master.” The text on that page suggests that AB regards himself as Lacan’s disciple.

<sup>31</sup> JACQUES LACAN, LE SÉMINAIRE III 258 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., 1981) (1956) [hereinafter LACAN, *Séminaire III*].

<sup>32</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 25.

<sup>33</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 159. The French word is “*laïcisée*.” To use “secularised” as translation seems to be the best one can do. But this move is inadequate as shown by the fact that the French language also has the word “*sécularisée*.” In France, “*laïcité*” carries a local cultural colour which “secularism” fails to convey. There is, in other terms, a specifically French version of secularism.

negotiation of existential contingencies—which is all that ought to matter to philosophy. According to AB, the quest for the indifferently invariant can only involve a process of mathematization of the existing world. While the world is perhaps not, as things stand, the realization of an infinite mathematical equation, all that humankind has come to know and experience can, and must, emerge as an epiphenomenon or a consequence of mathematics envisaged as a deeper reality, independent of space and time. In other words, AB chooses to affirm that Being in its endless multiplicity—“infinity is another name for multiplicity as such”<sup>34</sup>—is capable of an orderly, systematic, and formalized delineation. In the words of Jacques Lacan, “[m]athematical formalization is our goal, our ideal.”<sup>35</sup> This is because “[o]nly mathematization reaches reality.”<sup>36</sup> According to AB, “mathemes” of Being—a recurring Lacanian motif that connects with the notion of “universal transmissibility”—can, and must, be traced.<sup>37</sup> And because mathematical ideas do not operate transcendently vis-à-vis the world—mathematization is, to use AB’s own formulation, “a gesture in [B]eing,”<sup>38</sup> a kind of tracing in Being—no material situation offers significant resistance to its mathematization. It is noteworthy that Samuel Beckett—a pivotal writer for AB, to whom he has in fact devoted a book<sup>39</sup>—also took mathematics very seriously and dedicated considerable attention to it. “Extraordinary how mathematics help you

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<sup>34</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 34.

<sup>35</sup> JACQUES LACAN, LE SÉMINAIRE XX 108 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., 1975) (1973) [hereinafter LACAN, *Séminaire XX*]. AB quotes this statement in BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 322. In a more recent text, he distances himself from it and refers to mathematical formalization as “a source of inspiration and a support.” Badiou, *Modèle*, *supra* note 25, at 35. He goes so far as to write as follows: “I seek to harness mathematical might in the service of a conceptual development that *could* do without this harnessing.” *Id.* (emphasis original). None of this ought to suggest, though, that AB purports to refute Lacan. On the contrary, he emphasizes that “[his] trajectory remains parallel to that of Lacan.” *Id.* at 31.

<sup>36</sup> LACAN, *Séminaire XX*, *supra* note 35, at 118 (1973). This passage is quoted in BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 322.

<sup>37</sup> BADIOU, *Monde contemporain*, *supra* note 23, at 23. The “matheme” offers an example of the strong influence of Lacan’s mathematical discourse on AB. For an examination of the “matheme” in Lacan’s own work, see the electronic *Encyclopedia of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*: <http://www.nosubject.com/matheme> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005). The reference to the “matheme” takes one back to AB’s basic ambition, which is precisely to substitute a “philosophy of the matheme” to a (Heideggerian) “philosophy of the poem.” BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9 (I refer to the back cover).

<sup>38</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 149.

<sup>39</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, BECKETT (1995) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Beckett*]. For an excellent study tracking the impact of Beckett on Badiou, see ANDREW GIBSON, BECKETT AND BADIOU (2006). One of Gibson’s theses is that AB’s “Beckett” is the product of an idiosyncratic interpretation on his part, which on occasion fails to do justice to Beckett especially in the light of contemporary Beckett studies. *E.g. id.* at 117-253. Although AB very largely approves of Beckett, his loyalty is not uncritical. *See e.g.* ALAIN BADIOU, RHAPSODIE POUR LE THÉÂTRE 73-74 (1990) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Rhapsodie*].

to know yourself,” Molloy exclaims.<sup>40</sup>

Being, for AB, cannot be allowed to be held captive to being-there, that is, to constraints (including language) associated with a particular localization or place. Mathematical thought is needed precisely because it permits, uniquely, a systematic and definitive break with “sensory immediacy.”<sup>41</sup> Since it is “a thought that is intransitive to sensory and linguistic experience,”<sup>42</sup> it enables Being to be formal, axiomatic, and egalitarian. Correlatively, it permits it to be dissociated from any cultural embeddedness, what AB calls “inconsistent multiplicity.”<sup>43</sup> Through mathematics, the factual configuration’s Being can be articulated as what it simply is without regard to being-this or being-that. Heideggerian philosophy notwithstanding, Being, then, is not a matter of unveiling the world: Being is not accessible through direct experience, Being is not present. Rather, Being is subtraction from relationality. To claim that a factual configuration must be subtracted from the uncertain domain of its wordly existence entails that there can be no constitutive mediation between facticity and Being—thus AB’s determined resistance to any broadly dialectical articulation of the relation between world and truth. Being-as-subtraction means that Being is, literally, ultimately grounded on nothing, that it emerges as the without-place of every place. Given these postulates, the attraction of mathematics for AB has to do with the fact that it is “the most obviously indifferent to the identity of whoever comes to share in its articulation.”<sup>44</sup>

While acknowledging its mathematical limits, yet giving effect to the way in which these constraints operate as philosophical virtues,<sup>45</sup> AB posits that set theory in particular enables an enumeration not only of material nature, which is usually as far as science is prepared to go, but also of social formations, political institutions, artistic configurations, and analogous domains of human endeavour.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (1951), reprinted in 2 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 26 (Paul Auster ed., 2006). The re-writing from the French is Beckett’s own. See also Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* (1961), reprinted in 2 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 438 (Paul Auster ed., 2006) [hereinafter Beckett, *How It Is*] (“[I]t’s not said where on earth I can have received my education acquired my notions of mathematics astronomy and even physics they have marked me that’s the main thing”). The re-writing from the French is Beckett’s own. For a discussion of Beckett and mathematics, see C. J. ACKERLEY & S. E. GONTARSKI, THE GROVE COMPANION TO SAMUEL BECKETT 347-58 (2004); Gibson, *supra* note 39, at 30-31 (including the various references on p. 31, nn.115 & 117).

<sup>41</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 97.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 98.

<sup>43</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 33.

<sup>44</sup> See Peter Hallward, *Introduction: Consequences of Abstraction*, in THINK AGAIN 3 (Peter Hallward ed., 2004) [hereinafter Hallward, *Consequences of Abstraction*].

<sup>45</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 22-23.

<sup>46</sup> Even as AB resorts to category theory in BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, set theory keeps its “ontological priority” within his philosophy. PETER HALLWARD, BADIOU 303 (2003).

According to AB, the groupings and orderings (and groupings of groupings and orderings of orderings) that take shape in these areas not only admit of “mathematization” but *require* to be mathematized. Note that for AB, sets are not simply constructible objects but objects that already exist—hence his opposition to mathematical constructivism.<sup>47</sup> Given AB’s firm commitment to mathematics, it is hardly surprising that he should peg his “antirelational ontology” to set theory.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, modern philosophy of mathematics takes set theory [. . .] as “central to mathematics.”<sup>49</sup> “[T]he standard system among working mathematicians,”<sup>50</sup> set theory is “a ‘big’ theory,” “a founding discipline” into whose language “[on]e can translate other mathematical theories—such as group theory, analysis, calculus, arithmetic, geometry and so on.”<sup>51</sup> Set theory is thus known to mathematicians as “the primary mechanism for ideological and theoretical unification in modern mathematics.”<sup>52</sup> It is “a powerful glue helping to keep mathematics together as a single science in the face of powerful tendencies toward disintegration,” “a mathematical adhesive.”<sup>53</sup>

Set theory operates on the basis of a single primitive ontological notion, that of the set, and a single ontological assumption, namely that all individuals in the world of discourse (that is, all mathematical objects) are sets. Now, it has been said that “the universe of sets [. . .] is peculiarly a mathematician’s universe. There are no individual objects, stones or trees, or collections of them in this universe.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to imagine an understanding of Being that would be more rigorously ideational, relentlessly conceptual, and remorselessly rational than AB’s.

For AB, set theory is not a device that he uses in order to illustrate a philosophical argument. Nor does he resort to set theory so as to elicit some new information about the world. AB’s reference to set theory

Indeed, “[AB]’s commitment to a set-theoretic or axiomatic orientation is no less strong today than it was when he wrote [. . .] *L’Etre et l’événement*.” *Id.* at 312.

<sup>47</sup> In his closing remarks at the Cardozo Law School conference on “Law and Event” held on November 11-12, 2007, AB rebuked constructivism as being “too repressive.” His basic objection is that more things exist in mathematics than what rules can say and that to subordinate mathematical existence to a rule of construction would therefore be to take a narrow view of mathematical existence and, ultimately, to prohibit the emergence of newness. *Cf.* Gibson, *supra* note 39, at 65-66. Again, the underlying idea is that, *pace* Heidegger, thought must not be reduced to what can be expressed in language. *See supra* text accompanying note 23.

<sup>48</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 276.

<sup>49</sup> MICHÈLE FRIEND, INTRODUCING PHILOSOPHY OF MATHEMATICS 32 (2007).

<sup>50</sup> JOHN BIGELOW, THE REALITY OF NUMBERS 108 (1988).

<sup>51</sup> FRIEND, *supra* note 49, at 33. *See also* STEPHEN POLLARD, PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO SET THEORY 1 (1990) (“In contemporary mathematics, set theory reigns supreme. Testimonials to this effect can be cited *ad nauseam*.”).

<sup>52</sup> POLLARD, *supra* note 51, at xi.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 1, 4.

<sup>54</sup> MARY TILES, THE PHILOSOPHY OF SET THEORY 124 (1989).

harbours a much more radical goal, for he purports to establish the connectedness of Being with, say, society, history, economics, politics, and “God.” Specifically, AB operates on the basis of the axioms of set theory initially stated by Ernst Zermelo in 1908 to which were appended further axioms formulated by Abraham Fraenkel in 1922, which together constitute the celebrated “Zermelo-Fraenkel” or “ZF” formulation of axiomatic set theory, simply known as “ZF.”<sup>55</sup> It is those axioms which AB claims offer “the supporting proofs of his philosophical system.”<sup>56</sup>

AB’s philosophy draws at least two major implications from ZF.

A first significant attraction of set theory for AB is that it secures the inexistence of the “one” and thus allows him to solve a conundrum which philosophy has repeatedly faced and yet never satisfactorily addressed beyond thinking that although beings themselves are plural and can be thought as multiplicity, Being itself is singular and must be apprehended in terms of the one. While Aristotle and Kant’s categories are of no use,<sup>57</sup> set theory allows AB to conceive of what he styles “a pure theory of the Multiple,” to state that the one is not<sup>58</sup>, and thus to emancipate us from “any titulary figure of the One.”<sup>59</sup> “Set theory lets us think Being without resorting to the concept of one. Sets are multiples of multiples which are themselves multiples, and so on with no stopping point. If we need the number one at all, it will be strictly for practical or ‘operational’ reasons. One is just a number, nothing more.”<sup>60</sup> A set is thus understood as a plurality of objects *envisaged* as a single object (the set keeps the objects distinct, but is a further entity over them: consider a swarm of bees).

A key aspect of AB’s reasoning involves one of the ZF axioms pursuant to which there is an infinite set (which means in effect, every element of a set being itself a set, that there is an infinity of infinities). AB values the opportunity offered by set theory to escape finitude, for as long as the finite world continues as humankind’s ultimate determination, human beings will remain prey to the nostalgia of “God.” Since “[t]here is *no* infra-mathematical concept of infinity,”<sup>61</sup> AB insists that only mathematics provides one with the possibility to

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<sup>55</sup> For AB’s argument on the relevance of ZF, see BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 49-59. A statement of ZF axiomatic set theory is available at <http://www.mathworld.wolfram.com/Zermelo-FraenkelAxioms.html> (last visited Nov. 30, 2007). Matters are in fact slightly more complicated. Zermelo developed the so-called “axiom of choice” in 1904. If it is added to ZF, we get “ZFC.” For the axiom of choice, see [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/axiom\\_of\\_choice](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/axiom_of_choice) (last visited on Nov. 30, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> BARKER, *supra* note 29, at 11.

<sup>57</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 95.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 12.

<sup>59</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 176.

<sup>60</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 46 (reference omitted).

<sup>61</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 164 (emphasis original).

overcome finitude and to relinquish “God”—an idea which AB, as a committed atheist, deems philosophically objectionable.<sup>62</sup> “If we find it difficult to break with God, that is because we remain deaf to mathematics and in thrall to [. . .] romantic historicism.”<sup>63</sup>

To assert the existence of an infinite set entails that whatever set there is, a set featuring a higher cardinality also exists (I leave to one side the ordinal notion of infinity.<sup>64</sup>) In its turn, this fact implies that there cannot be a comprehensive or all-embracing or “universal” set—as does the further fact, captured by another ZF axiom, that for any set its power set also exists. (Incidentally, the innumerability of numbers, that is, the incessant move to “more-than” that ultimately takes one beyond the threshold of any sense is precisely what prompts AB to apprehend Being and Number as “*co-extensive*.”<sup>65</sup>) One can reach the same conclusion as regards “universality” through another axiom of set theory to the effect that no set can belong to itself. For a set to be universal, it would have to belong to itself, something that cannot be done according to ZF (on account of the so-called “axiom of foundation,” which states that every set is disjoint from one of its elements). Since it cannot contain itself as a member, the purportedly “universal” set cannot contain all there is. Thus, it cannot be universal. In other words, in terms of the world as it exists, there is no object that can have a claim to universality, there is no object that can be the “one-all.”<sup>66</sup> And because set theory shows that “there are infinite multiples that are differentiable between them, and this *infinitely* so,” even the “unicity of infinity” is “abolished.”<sup>67</sup> In sum, “[w]hat set theory calls ‘one’ is merely defined by the symbol  $\in$ , which designates belonging, a relationship between multiples.”<sup>68</sup> Like AB, one can see “in the impossibility of any set of all sets [. . .] non-being pure and simple.”<sup>69</sup> The one-all, then, is not.<sup>70</sup> For AB, in a situation, any situation—the situation being “the place of the taking-place,”<sup>71</sup> the location of what manifests itself, a concept “designed to accommodate anything which

<sup>62</sup> One of Jacques Derrida’s principal claims is that humankind is unable to escape its nostalgia for metaphysics.

<sup>63</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 51.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. FRIEND, *supra* note 49, at 12-13. See also GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 13-14, 48-49.

<sup>65</sup> See ALAIN BADIOU, LE NOMBRE ET LES NOMBRES 175 (1990) (emphasis original) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Le nombre*].

<sup>66</sup> The “one-all” is an expression coined by Gilles Deleuze. See ALAIN BADIOU, *DELEUZE* 12 (1997).

<sup>67</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 164-65 (emphasis original).

<sup>68</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 49.

<sup>69</sup> Hallward, Consequences of Abstraction, *supra* note 44, at 6.

<sup>70</sup> For an alternative set theory featuring a universal set, see W. V. Quine, *New Foundations for Mathematical Logic*, 44 AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL MONTHLY 70 (1937). Quine does not so much contradict ZF as address topics about which ZF has nothing to say.

<sup>71</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 32.

is, regardless of its modality; that is, regardless of whether it is necessary, contingent, possible, actual, potential, or virtual[:] a whim, a supermarket, a work of art, a dream, a playground fight, a fleet of trucks, a mine, a stock prediction, a game of chess, or a set of waves”<sup>72</sup>—“*there are differences*. One can even assert that this is all there is.”<sup>73</sup>

According to AB, these observations are compatible with another assertion to the effect that there “is” oneness.<sup>74</sup> His point is that oneness is only ever, in effect, a multiplicity of multiplicities that are envisaged or *counted* as one—the “one” thus being but “the nominal seal of the multiple.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, oneness is more accurately understood as what is “counted-as-one.”<sup>76</sup> AB thereby refers to the *staging* of oneness, to what he calls the “putting-into-one.”<sup>77</sup> What we have, thus, and all that we have, is infinite multiplicity, the sheer proliferation of confusion and chaos, a consequence of the abundance of things, both in kind and in degree, or, if you will, the not-one.<sup>78</sup> It is therefore erroneous to speak of anything that would *be* one, for example, to refer to a Supreme Being.

These conclusions explain why when Georg Cantor (1845-1918) created set theory, a number of theologians saw his work as “a direct challenge to the unique and absolute infinite nature of God.”<sup>79</sup> Their principal objection was that “[a]ny attempt to correlate God’s infinity with a concrete, temporal infinity suggested Pantheism.”<sup>80</sup> But Cantor actually held strong religious convictions and believed that he had been chosen by “God” to disseminate set theory.<sup>81</sup> In his correspondence with the Vatican, he argued that his theory did not jeopardize “God’s

<sup>72</sup> Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens, *An introduction to Alain Badiou’s philosophy*, in ALAIN BADIOU, *INFINITE THOUGHT: TRUTH AND THE RETURN TO PHILOSOPHY* 7 (Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens eds. & trans., 2005) (emphasis in original).

<sup>73</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, *SAINT PAUL: LA FONDATION DE L’UNIVERSALISME* 105 (1997) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Saint Paul*].

<sup>74</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 31-32. AB emphasizes that the verb “is” is inadequate to the situation as it posits more fixity for oneness than there actually is.

<sup>75</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 104.

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.* at 105. The French compound word is “*mise-en-un*.” For a francophone, “*mise-en-un*” immediately draws to mind “*mise en scène*,” that is, “staging.”

<sup>78</sup> For an illustration concerning what he styles “Quebec-world,” see BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 322-26. The French compound word is “*monde-Québec*.”

<sup>79</sup> Joseph W. Dauben, *Georg Cantor and Pope Leo XIII: Mathematics, Theology, and the Infinite*, 38 *JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY OF IDEAS* 85, 86 (1977).

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at 102.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph W. Dauben, *Georg Cantor and the Battle for Transfinite Set Theory*, *JOURNAL OF THE ACMS*, at 11 (2004), available at [www.acmsonline.org/Dauben-Cantor.pdf](http://www.acmsonline.org/Dauben-Cantor.pdf) (This paper was originally published in the Proceedings of the 9th ACMS Conference held in 1993 at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California and reproduced as part of the *Journal of the ACMS 2004 Inaugural Issue*.)

exclusive claim to supreme infinity.”<sup>82</sup> Although he draws heavily from Cantor who, in his view, is able to offer a “*Platonism of the multiple*” (Plato himself never having been able to overcome oneness),<sup>83</sup> AB’s resolute atheism prompts him to reverse the Cantorian structure pointing toward transcendence and emphasize actual, concrete, secularized infinity.

There is one key point to be made at this juncture regarding the endless multiplicity that AB ascertains as being ineluctably constitutive of what exists in the world, which is that, pursuant to AB, these differences are insignificant—he refers to their “febrile sterility”<sup>84</sup>—and deservedly relegated to the domain of mere contingency. In line with AB’s pugnacious celebration of philosophical thought, nothing less than the “honour of philosophy” is at stake.<sup>85</sup> For AB, “infinite alterity is simply *what there is*” and “any experience is the infinite deployment of infinite differences.”<sup>86</sup> As “the evident infinite multiplicity of humankind,” “differences hold no interest whatsoever for thought.”<sup>87</sup> They partake in “neutral banality.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, AB states that “there is as much difference between, let us say, a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian executive as between [him]self and anybody at all—including [him]self.”<sup>89</sup> And he writes that difference is “just as glaring between [him] and [his] Lyon cousin as between the Iraqi Shiite ‘community’ and the fat cow-boys from Texas.”<sup>90</sup> AB therefore dismisses what he styles “a genuinely touristic fascination for the multiplicity of mores, customs, and beliefs,”<sup>91</sup> or, worse, “vulgar sociology directly inherited from colonial astonishment in the face of savages.”<sup>92</sup>

Any representation of anything under the name of “community” or, “culture”—or, for that matter, any representation of oneself—is but “the fictitious imposition of a unity to an infinity of multiplicities,”<sup>93</sup> something like “a dog’s dinner.”<sup>94</sup> What there is between these endless differences is discontinuity, which means that all there is within a

<sup>82</sup> Anne A. Davenport, *The Catholics, the Cathars, and the Concept of Infinity in the Thirteenth Century*, 88 *ISIS* 263, 264 (1997).

<sup>83</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 85 (emphasis in original).

<sup>84</sup> BADIOU, *Circonstances, 1*, *supra* note 5, at 53.

<sup>85</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, *L’ÉTHIQUE* 37 (2003) [hereinafter BADIOU, *L’éthique*].

<sup>86</sup> *Id.* at 43.

<sup>87</sup> *Id.* at 44.

<sup>88</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 164.

<sup>89</sup> BADIOU, *L’éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 44.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> *Id.* at 45.

<sup>93</sup> *Id.* at 77.

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* at 41. The French phrase is “*de la bouillie pour les chats*.” Yet, AB appears to open the door to a completely revamped idea of “culture.” See Alain Badiou, *Can Change Be Thought?*, in ALAIN BADIOU 259-60 (Gabriel Riera ed., 2005) [hereinafter Badiou, *Change*].

situation or across situations is endless difference. One can draw a compelling parallel between differences' "dull monotony,"<sup>95</sup> on the one hand, and numbers' "sterile formal identity,"<sup>96</sup> on the other, such that the constellation of multiplicities which AB associates with actual infinity resonates with the idea of virtual indistinguishability within "the bleached world of mathematics."<sup>97</sup> AB's reasoning ultimately suggests a principle of sameness made possible by "the rectifying and pacifying function of mathematics."<sup>98</sup> Indeed, for set theory "an element is not algebraically distinguished through its localization in the set" and "algebraic designation is conducted against the presupposition of homogeneity."<sup>99</sup> The fact that any element may find itself amongst others is, strictly speaking, irrelevant since set theory defines a set in terms of its elements alone and does not recognize anything in the elements that forms the basis of some kind of relationship between them. In the words of Peter Hallward, "[e]lements are as indifferent to each other as are different slices of empty space."<sup>100</sup>

Differences—"[a]ll these demented particulars"<sup>101</sup>—are then precisely what truth must "show as insignificant,"<sup>102</sup> what it must "depose."<sup>103</sup> For AB, "any invocation of the soil, of blood, of race, of custom, or of community works directly against truths."<sup>104</sup> "This is what [AB] means when he calls his a 'subtractive' ontology: what can be said of [B]eing as be-ing can be said only insofar as [B]eing is held to be inaccessible to the categories of presence, perception, intuition, or experience."<sup>105</sup> It follows that, according to AB, "Being can be articulated only insofar as we can assume, very literally, that nothing is all we can say about the substance of [B]eing. [. . .] [O]ntology must be arranged in such a way that all the elements it presents are 'made' pure and simply of nothing."<sup>106</sup> This argument accounts for ontology as mathematics as set theory—sets, as will emerge, consisting of multiples

<sup>95</sup> BADIOU, *Le nombre*, *supra* note 65, at 227. The French expression is "*sourde monotonie*."

<sup>96</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 271.

<sup>97</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 32.

<sup>98</sup> BADIOU, *Modèle*, *supra* note 25, at 17.

<sup>99</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, THÉORIE DU SUJET 226 (1982) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Théorie du sujet*].

<sup>100</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 276.

<sup>101</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (1957), reprinted in 1 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 11 (Paul Auster ed., 2006).

<sup>102</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 45.

<sup>103</sup> *Id.* (emphasis in original).

<sup>104</sup> *Id.* at 102.

<sup>105</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 65. Note that Beckett also advocated subtraction from knowledge: "I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding." JAMES KNOWLSON, DAMNED TO FAME: THE LIFE OF SAMUEL BECKETT 352 (Grove Press 1996) (1989).

<sup>106</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 65.

of nothing. Along staunchly Cartesian lines,<sup>107</sup> AB's ontology therefore defends "the radical cut of symbolic representation from the nebulous cosmos of things and experiences."<sup>108</sup> AB's philosophical assertion of the ontological primacy of mathematics, which entails the primacy of mathematical reality over physical reality, leads him to reject "any cosmological-anthropological reconciliation, any comforting delusion that there is some deep connection [. . .] between our ideas or images and the material world we inhabit."<sup>109</sup>

A subtractive ontology according to which the role of the empty set is key thus appears as the second basic inference that AB draws from set theory. Having posited that all mathematical objects are sets, "[s]et theory [. . .] makes a very simple initial ontological claim: that, independent of us, there exists the empty set," a set without extension, a set where cardinality equals 0.<sup>110</sup> The empty set is apprehended as a building block such that the whole set-theoretic hierarchy of finite and infinite sets is developed following upon this basic ontological commitment—"a wholly abstract universe generated, as it were, out of nothing."<sup>111</sup> According to ZF, the empty set—the only set that does not possess any elements—is a member of all sets (which means, incidentally, that even emptiness is multiple). Denoted symbolically by Bourbaki in 1939 as " $\emptyset$ ,"<sup>112</sup> the empty set is, so to speak, absolutely immanent, what is inevitably left in any set once one has subtracted all the sub-sets from the set—this remainder however not being understood negatively as detritus or excrement. (It could be tempting to say that since the empty set is included in all sets, it is universal—which would mean that what is universal is nothing. But the empty set cannot lay claim to universality since, pursuant to ZF, it cannot belong to itself.) Because it is the element-less, uncountable empty set that establishes the condition of possibility for all that is countable—thus, the number one exists at the edge of emptiness—the empty set can be said to act as a ground, albeit a groundless ground, for multiplicity. Mathematical objects, irrespective of their variety, can *all* be designated as multiplicities built on the basis of the empty set. While one may

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<sup>107</sup> BADIOU, *Monde contemporain*, *supra* note 23, at 23 ("My proposal is thus to break with [a] framework of thought, to recover or to constitute in renewed configurations a philosophical style or path that would not be that of interpretation or that of grammatical analysis or that of edges, ambiguities, and deconstruction; that is, to recover a foundational philosophical style, [a] decisive [style], schooled by what was the foundational philosophical and classical style of Descartes, for instance"). See also BADIOU, *Modèle*, *supra* note 25, at 22-24, where AB asserts his Frenchness and his Cartesianism.

<sup>108</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 53.

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

<sup>110</sup> FRIEND, *supra* note 49, at 32.

<sup>111</sup> TILES, *supra* note 54, at 124.

<sup>112</sup> The credit is specifically André Weil's. See [http://www.fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/André\\_Weil](http://www.fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/André_Weil) (last visited Nov. 23, 2007).

initially find it strange that set theory should want to account for absence, the idea can be shown to make sense if one bears in mind that an empty set is not the same thing as nothing, but is rather a set with nothing in it.

Consider a bowl of cherries. The fact is that there is no cat in the bowl. More accurately, there *is* no-cat in the bowl. And there is no weathervane either—which means that there *is* also no-weathervane. And there *is* also no-Casimir and there *is* also no-submarine. Indeed, one could think of a number of other no-things that *are* in the bowl. To speak generically, one could confidently say that “no-thing” *is* in the bowl of cherries understood as set. In the same way, one could say that “no-thing,” in the sense of not-anything and certainly in the sense of not-one, *is* in any set whatsoever—which is precisely the idea that the empty-set-that-is-included-in-every-set is meant to capture. Note that if the empty set is “a sort of black hole in the fabric of Reality itself,”<sup>113</sup> if the empty set is a singular entity that refers to all things that are absent or a collection whose members are no-things, if, in other words, the empty set is the collection of all things that are not quantified as one, that are not-one, and given that it is established that whatever Being there would be could only be not-one, it follows that Being can only belong to the empty set or, if you will, that Being partakes in non-being (which is another way of establishing the impossibility of universality or the “one-all”).

Because the empty set is included in every set—AB refers to it as a “specter”<sup>114</sup>—, the “entirely new” is excluded on account of this necessary commonality. Whatever purportedly “new” thing materialized, it would also be a set and as such would also contain the empty set. It would therefore have something in common with everything else. In other words, mathematics cannot envisage the “new.” It has *nothing* (or *no-thing!*) to say about it. And since, for AB, ontology is mathematics, this entails that ontology has nothing to say about the new. For philosophy to integrate the new—which it must evidently do—it will therefore be necessary to speak outside of ontology. This is where the notion of “event”—which is seen as a rupture in ontology, which is that which “ensures that everything is not mathematizable”<sup>115</sup>—becomes relevant. In AB’s own words, “if real ontology sets itself out as mathematics by eluding the norm of the one, it is also necessary, lest one re-establishes this norm globally, that there be a point at which the ontological, and therefore mathematical, field is

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<sup>113</sup> DAVID LEWIS, PARTS OF CLASSES 13 (1991).

<sup>114</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 111. The veiled reference to the tension between presence and absence inevitably reminds one of the work of Jacques Derrida for whom “spectrality” is a central motif.

<sup>115</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 57.

detotalized or remains in an impasse.”<sup>116</sup> It is precisely this *point* that AB calls an “event.”

Since there is no set that could cover all-of-Being or Being-in-all-of-its-infinitely-multiple-manifestations, there is the necessary incompleteness of any set, all of which is to say that “setting” is always partial or, if you will, that there is always an excess to any set, something that the arrangement of the set cannot capture. To transpose this idea to ideological discourse, one could say that the terms in which it takes place always feature “something” that is not fixed by the arrangement of the situation, “something uncountable or non-one-ifiable, a sort of ‘ultra-one’, which disrupts the normal counting operations that structure the situation,”<sup>117</sup> an element which the situation has decided/decides is undecidable, at least in terms of the terms of the situation.<sup>118</sup> It is because of this “ultra-one”—this event—that the stasis of the situation can *eventually* be modified, that change can come about through what has been excluded from the situation, that the “new” can materialize.

It is necessary at this stage to introduce the crucial distinction that AB draws between “belonging” (being an element or a member of the set, that is, being a matter of presentation or existence) and “inclusion” (being a part of the set, that is, being a matter of re-presentation or symbolism).<sup>119</sup> According to ZF, it is formally impossible that everything that is included within the set should also belong to it. There are always multiplicities that, although they are included within the set, although they are re-presentable as part of the set, are not countable as members of the set and therefore do not exist as far as the set is concerned.<sup>120</sup> These multiplicities are in excess of the set.<sup>121</sup> Specifically, the empty set is included within the set although it does not belong to it. Since it is not part of the set of knowledge, of what AB

<sup>116</sup> *Id.* at 56-57.

<sup>117</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 64.

<sup>118</sup> In his recent work, AB refers to situations as “worlds.” E.g. BADIOU, *Circonstances*, 3, *supra* note 5, at 91-92; BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, *passim*.

<sup>119</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 113.

<sup>120</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 100. This claim is best illustrated through an example, which I borrow from GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 76-77 (who himself derives it from HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 82-86). Consider a national population such as the French and think of it as a set. The elements *belonging* ( $\in$ ) to the set will be the individuals counted in the most recent census. These elements, however, can be grouped as subsets of the set. These subsets will be *included* ( $\subset$ ) as part of the set. Subsets could involve combinations according to civil status, levels of education, hair colour, age, number of years of residence in the same building, etc. The key point is that “[s]elf-evidently, the number of subsets that can be produced out of a set is always much larger than the number of elements comprised in it.” GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 77.

<sup>121</sup> There is an excess to any situation, even to an infinite one. Because no situation ever covers the whole—not even an infinite situation—, because there is no set of all sets, there is always an excess.

calls “the state of the situation,”<sup>122</sup> that is, the collection of singularities that are organized according to the logic of domination that governs the situation, the excess is, literally, what cannot *be* (given that it is that which is subtracted from what there is); its non-Being (which is all the Being that there is to it) is therefore unthinkable.<sup>123</sup> It cannot be presented. Nor can it be quantified for not only does “inclusion” “fatally” exceed “belonging,” but it does so to an errant degree such that the point of excess cannot be calculated.<sup>124</sup> (As shall emerge, the subject will seek to eliminate the excess of inclusion over belonging by making the two coincide.<sup>125</sup>) Because it is unrepresentable in terms of the set, because it is irreducible to it, to the actual situation, because it escapes the guarantee of consistency of the count-as-one, *and* because, although not part of the set, that is, although not comprehended in terms of the set’s own terms, the excess is integral to the set—to use Lacanian terminology along with AB, it is *sutured* to the set—in the sense that one cannot have a set without also having the “notness” of the set (recall the idea of the empty set being integral to any set), AB locates the excess at the edge of the situation, which it therefore borders. The excess is what AB calls the “*vide*” or the “void” of a situation, which he symbolizes as “*u*.”<sup>126</sup> For Peter Hallward, “[i]t is the orientation of [AB]’s project toward the void [. . .] that will eventually come to be seen as its most fundamental, most distinctive, most rigorous—and no doubt most enigmatic—aspect.”<sup>127</sup> In the way—as shall become clear—in which it “allows” the void and through the void the event and through the event the truth (not one of these three notions being understandable without the other two), the situation proves itself not to be hopelessly sterile. To quote a passage from Samuel Beckett’s prose which AB emphasizes repeatedly: “Stony ground but not entirely.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The use of the word “state” is not in the least innocent for AB, especially if one bears in mind that in terms of his politics the State is AB’s “sole and exclusive adversary.” HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 279 (an orientation which, incidentally, distinguishes AB’s work from Michel Foucault’s “nuanced appreciation of the technologies of power”). Explaining his reference to “state,” AB mentions a “metaphorical accommodation with politics.” BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 111. For AB, the State is “the necessary metastructure of any historico-social situation.” *Id.* at 122. It guarantees an “effect-of-one.” *Id.* For example, AB holds that the State is the State of the bourgeoisie, which means that it re-presents what the situation already presents, which is the domination of the bourgeoisie. AB adds: “[W]hatever be the particular form of the count-as-one of the parties with which the State is entrusted, it employs itself in re-presenting presentation.” *Id.* at 123. This fact, says AB, explains what he calls “the management or administrative function of the State [. . .] in its diligent uniformity.” *Id.*

<sup>123</sup> It is important to emphasize the claim that I have already indicated through the example of the bowl of cherries: the nothing’s non-Being *is*. See HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 64-65.

<sup>124</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, *ABRÉGÉ DE MÉTAPOLITIQUE* 158-59 (1998) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Abrégé*].

<sup>125</sup> See GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 80.

<sup>126</sup> AB’s French designation is “*le vide*,” which neatly correlates with the empty set known as “*l’ensemble vide*.” This resonance is lost in English.

<sup>127</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 272.

<sup>128</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Enough* (1966), reprinted in 4 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 366

From the point of view of the situation, the void is but indiscernible, wandering inconsistency.<sup>129</sup> Since, from the perspective of the situation, the void exists independently of the situation and of any interconnection with the situation, since it features no element relating to the situation, since it is indeed impervious to the very idea of relation to the situation, the void appears, at least from the vantage point of the situation, to be the place where nothing is presented, to be simply empty.<sup>130</sup> The situation, then, has nothing to say about the void except that it counts as nothing. But the void of a situation—at least, the void of a situation that is not strictly ontological so, for example, the void of any situation that is at least in part, say, substantial, material, or historical—is never pure emptiness (Samuel Beckett thus refers to “the so-said void,” “[t]he so-missaid”).<sup>131</sup> It has being, like anything else (the no-thing *is*, the empty set *exists*). Although the void is scattered everywhere and yet is nowhere in particular—“[t]here’s no lack of void,” says Estragon<sup>132</sup>—, and thus does not belong to any existing set within the situation or to the situation-as-set, once again it has an *edge* which is locatable and which *sutures* it to the situation at a point of juncture that one could, after Samuel Beckett, call the “most mere minimum” or the “[m]ere-most minimum.”<sup>133</sup>

The void, if you will, acts as the existential fountainhead or, to return to the language of set theory, that to which nothing belongs, which by this very fact is included in everything, the initial multiple from which any multiple re-presentation is woven and numbered. Thus, the event, which is another mode of discernment than knowledge (although nonetheless also a multiple)<sup>134</sup>, which is “what happens” rather than “what is,”<sup>135</sup> “the incalculable and disconcerting adjunction,”<sup>136</sup> “purely fortuitous, uninferable from the situation,”<sup>137</sup> is operating “out of knowledge.”<sup>138</sup> While Being designates everything which can be said to exist as part of an infinite multiplicity of

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(Paul Auster ed., 2006). The re-writing from the French is Beckett’s own.

<sup>129</sup> AB refers to the “wandering of the void.” BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 109.

<sup>130</sup> See HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 272-73.

<sup>131</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (1983), reprinted in 4 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 477 (Paul Auster ed., 2006) [hereinafter Beckett, *Worstward Ho*].

<sup>132</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1952), reprinted in 3 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 58 (Paul Auster ed., 2006) [hereinafter Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*]. The re-writing from the French is Beckett’s own.

<sup>133</sup> Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, *supra* note 131, at 472.

<sup>134</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 364.

<sup>135</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Event as Trans-Being*, in THEORETICAL WRITINGS 98 (Ray Brassier & Alberto Toscano eds. & trans., 2004) [hereinafter Badiou, *The Event as Trans-Being*]. This part of the text has not previously appeared in French.

<sup>136</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 189.

<sup>137</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 215.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.* at 363.

numerable sets, the event cannot be “counted” as an integrated part of the extant field of Being.

Yet, according to set theory, to exist is to belong to a set. For the event to exist, therefore, it must belong to a set. And since the event does exist, it does belong to a set. But its very nature is such that it cannot belong to any pre-existing set. The only set to which the event can belong is itself: “[T]he content [of the event] is the eventality of the event.”<sup>139</sup> However, this means that the event violates the axiom of foundation to the effect that a set cannot belong to itself—which explains why mathematical ontology does not admit of a doctrine of the event and forces it to stay outside of its ambit.<sup>140</sup> AB’s philosophical “event” is irreducible to any Being, that is, to any logic or intuition. As a gap in Being, the event always registers an impact, disturbs an equilibrium of whatever kind, or ruptures the prevailing (scientific, artistic, political, or amorous) norms of a situation. The event blows a hole in the “encyclopedia” (that is, in the sum of existing knowledge),<sup>141</sup> “in the field of the namable,”<sup>142</sup> and ignites something like a chain reaction reorganizing everything previously known through a process of subtraction from the authority of existing language and knowledge.<sup>143</sup> The break, however, is never total since the event is, and must be, in a particular situation. It is important to emphasize that while the event emerges as sheer contingency, as pure singularity, it nonetheless manifests itself in a particular situation and as part of a particular situation. It originates “*in a point,*” at the border between a given set and the void, at the very edge of the situation, and thus at the edge of the void.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the event always requires a site as a condition of its manifestation since it can only arise relatively to a singular historical situation.<sup>145</sup> In AB’s words, “[t]here is an event only in so far as there exists a site for it.”<sup>146</sup> But while, strictly speaking, the “evental” site is to be found within the situation,<sup>147</sup> it stands “at the limits of currently

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<sup>139</sup> *Id.* at 215.

<sup>140</sup> *Id.* at 205. I draw on HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 116.

<sup>141</sup> AB conceives of knowledge as being realized “encyclopedically.” See Badiou, *Huit thèses*, *supra* note 6, at 15.

<sup>142</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 87.

<sup>143</sup> The “hole in knowledge” (or “*trou dans le savoir*”) is a well-known Lacanian motif. E.g. JACQUES LACAN, *LE SÉMINAIRE XVIII* 117 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., 2006) (1971). For Badiou’s use of the expression, see BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 361.

<sup>144</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 197 (emphasis in original).

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* at 200.

<sup>146</sup> See Badiou, *The Event as Trans-Being*, *supra* note 135, at 98. But, for AB, there is no relation between the event and its site. BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 230. In the language of set theory, the event belongs to itself. See *supra* text accompanying note 139.

<sup>147</sup> The neologism “evental” purports to render the French “*événementiel*.” In preferring it to, say, “eventmental” or “eventual,” I follow Peter Hallward, *Notes on the Translation*, in ALAIN BADIOU, *ETHICS: AN ESSAY ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF EVIL*, at xii (Peter Hallward trans., Verso 2001) (1998) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Ethics*]; Oliver Feltham, *Translator’s Preface*, in

available formal resources.”<sup>148</sup> In other words, “[t]he relation between the site and [the event] is one of disjunction; that is, [the] site contains [the event] without having anything in common with it.”<sup>149</sup> Although the name of the event is taken from the situation, it is therefore “surplus” to the situation. The site is part of the situation, then, but is not evidently included (or re-presented) in it—which is why it can be said that “[t]he site is the material base of the indiscernible, and provides the conditions of its intelligibility” *and also* that “[t]he site of an event comprises a radical Other.”<sup>150</sup> And it is precisely this eventual alterity which, while it is supernumerary vis-à-vis the situation, is not *simply* supernumerary “but an intrinsic factor in the deregulation of the previous situation as given.”<sup>151</sup>

The state of the situation features a “general system of predicative knowledge internal to [it]” organized through discernment and classification.<sup>152</sup> Within the situation, knowledge consists of “opinions,” that is, of “representations without truth, the anarchic debris of circulating knowledges,”<sup>153</sup> of “opinions concerning the full range of the multiplicities upon which that special multiplicity, the human animal, experiments in the opinionated determination of his interests,”<sup>154</sup> of opinions which indeed exist beneath truthfulness and falsehood and whose only role is to be communicable.<sup>155</sup> But while the structure of the situation yields incessant and reassuring repetition within the confines of its encyclopedic determination,<sup>156</sup> it can only feel threatened by what, if anything, can happen on its margins. Because it evades the count of the situation, because it is, literally, “over the count” or supernumerary vis-à-vis the situation, the void is, so to speak, out of control from the point of view of the situation. And, out of reach of the situation, anything can happen. Out of the conceptual abyss that is the non-situation, out of the empty set, out of that ground zero of philosophy, at the very edge of the void, there is the site—the eventual site—from which the unexpected, the event, might emerge (if, of course, it ever does). Think of the event as a “hazardous supplement” to

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ALAIN BADIOU, BEING AND EVENT, at xxxii (Oliver Feltham trans., Continuum 2006) (1988) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Being and Event*]. Note that not all situations have an eventual site. AB distinguishes between “natural” and “historical” situations, only the latter being able to feature an eventual site. Natural situations, for their part, are impervious to change. *See generally* HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 119-20.

<sup>148</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 117.

<sup>149</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 134.

<sup>150</sup> *Id.* at 135 & 134, respectively.

<sup>151</sup> Badiou, *Change*, *supra* note 94, at 249.

<sup>152</sup> *See* BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 362.

<sup>153</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 72.

<sup>154</sup> *Id.* at 73.

<sup>155</sup> *Id.*

<sup>156</sup> *See* BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 189.

the indifferent multiplicity of Being,<sup>157</sup> as an unforeseeable and disconcerting addition to the state of the situation which, for its part, features “no receivable ontological matrix” allowing for the management of it.<sup>158</sup> (It is precisely on account of the incalculability of the event which reaches beyond anything that any agent or collection of agents could ever calculate that an *event* is needed to change the state of the situation, that the work of an agent or collection of agents cannot be enough to achieve change.)

Although, when the event manifests itself it is undecidable as far as the state of the situation is concerned in the sense that the situation is unable to decide whether it is included in it or not, it makes the partiality of the situation visible by drawing attention to the void, by making it clear that the state of the situation depends on an exclusion. In the process, the event, most importantly, shows that things need not be the way they are. There, then, lies the “peril of the void.”<sup>159</sup> What if the event were now to fixate itself, present itself as the figure of chaos, and ruin the situation? Hence, “the situational anguish of the void.”<sup>160</sup>

So as to consider the event in its extreme particularity as it manifests itself (if it ever does) at the edge of the void in a way that does not relate to the state of the situation, that remains indiscernible to the situation, that the situation cannot accommodate, in order to apprehend the event in a manner other than that which is “mediated by the prevailing mechanisms of distinction, relation, or representation that define the state of the situation,”<sup>161</sup> in order to attest to all that the event presents in the way of “affirmative singularity,”<sup>162</sup> it is necessary to acknowledge its existence independently of any relational mechanism, that is, to approach it non-relationally. Any examination of the event thus postulates extirpation from relation, “separation and isolation,”<sup>163</sup> its goal being to apprehend the event as singularity “subtracted from knowledge,”<sup>164</sup> “subtracted from the gaze of the State.”<sup>165</sup>

In the absence of any relation, all that can be said of the event is that it occurs.<sup>166</sup> Because thought-without-relation is true thought,<sup>167</sup> in

<sup>157</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 89. It is almost trite to recall the centrality of the notion of “supplement” to Jacques Derrida’s work.

<sup>158</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 212. Cf. LACAN, *Séminaire XX*, *supra* note 35, at 109 (1973) (“This discordance[. . .], this is what our topic consists of”).

<sup>159</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 112.

<sup>160</sup> *Id.* at 109.

<sup>161</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 273.

<sup>162</sup> BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 83.

<sup>163</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 129.

<sup>164</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 375.

<sup>165</sup> BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 83.

<sup>166</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 373.

<sup>167</sup> See ALAIN BADIOU, PETIT MANUEL D’INESTHÉTIQUE 105 (1998) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Petit manuel*].

the sense of thought that is “pure” by no longer being retained in any relation,<sup>168</sup> “[t]o consider [the event] *in truth* is the only way of considering [it].”<sup>169</sup> (One must appreciate that although the truth builds *from* the void, that is, from the edge of the void, although it is articulated from the edge of the void, it is not in the void, such that it is not empty.) In its “breaching” capacity, the event partakes in a truth-process that is at once local and global. Thus, truth, according to AB, does not exist in opposition to either particularity or universality: it is “a universal singularity.”<sup>170</sup> Rather, it exists astride the two ideas, “both punctual in its origin and for all in its implication,”<sup>171</sup> at once “ephemeral in its occasion [and] generic in its substance.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed, the result, which is in the form of a complete truth, is something which is addressed to everyone. Importantly, truth is constructed with reference to inexistence: the event, which exists in the world, is the in-existent. Recall that what AB calls an “event” is a decision about something that would have been undecidable within the objective normality enforced by the state of the situation. “Basically, an event is what decides about a zone of encyclopedic indiscernibility.”<sup>173</sup> An event is the naming of something for which the encyclopedia (of knowledge) had no language; it is the calling into existence of what the state of the situation (the encyclopedia) did not allow. It is the calling of *something* out of an elsewhere-than-the-encyclopedia, that is, out of the *nothing*.

The process whereby “something” emerges out of “nothing” can be illustrated by reference to love, “which engages two people, the smallest possible plurality.”<sup>174</sup> As man and woman love one another, AB posits that they are two singular entities, completely separated or disjointed, sharing no experience, such that between them is a disjunction, that is, a non-relation or a void (“*u*”). But the void intersects with the two singular positions simultaneously. On that account, there is a “node” (if an atomic one) “connecting” the lovers after all. However, what enters into that relation is strictly the void. The relation-within-the-non-relation is thus made of nothing. As such, it cannot be the object of any analytical description. Thus, although there is a relation between the two singularities there is nothing that enters into that relation except the void. For AB, the virtue of the relation-within-the-non-relation is that it permits the emergence of “*one* subject of love, which *exceeds* both

<sup>168</sup> See BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 120.

<sup>169</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 273 (emphasis added).

<sup>170</sup> Badiou, Huit thèses, *supra* note 6, at 13. The gist of *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, is precisely to explore how the “incorporation [of a truth] in a world unfolds the true in its logical consistency.” *Id.* at 47.

<sup>171</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 107.

<sup>172</sup> *Id.*

<sup>173</sup> Badiou, Huit thèses, *supra* note 6, at 15.

<sup>174</sup> Alain Badiou, *Politics and Philosophy*, in BADIOU, *Ethics*, *supra* note 147, at 118 (1997).

[lovers],”<sup>175</sup> while allowing for the elimination of difference (if what separates or differentiates the two positions is “nothing,” then it is not) and the assertion of sameness (if “nothing” connects the two positions, they cannot be different).<sup>176</sup> AB’s seemingly aporetic conclusion follows: “[T]he two sexes differ, radically, *but* there is exactly nothing of substance in this difference.”<sup>177</sup> He also refers to “the substantial void of what marks the difference between the sexes, of the purely *logical* character [. . .] of this marking.”<sup>178</sup> “[T]he eventual energy of a [love] encounter” disturbs the state of the situation.<sup>179</sup> As it surpasses the particularity of its point of departure, as it overcomes the insular logics that are defined by irreconcilable, position-specific sets of knowledge, love assumes a “transpositional” character.<sup>180</sup>

A further illustration of an event thus perturbing the “established language,”<sup>181</sup> escaping from “the ordinary train of things,”<sup>182</sup> is the psychoanalytical encounter. As it breaks into the situation and fractures its language, it allows an insight that had been repressed, that had been outlawed by the knowledge in place, that the knowledge in place would not recognize or could not accommodate.<sup>183</sup> Yet another example involves Copernicus calling the solar system “heliocentric” against the knowledge claiming that the sun circled the earth.

An event, then, moves us away from the view that “nothing has taken place but the place.”<sup>184</sup> In the process, it composes a truth—“any truth originates from an event”<sup>185</sup>—which, as a matter of conviction, renders what there was before, the anterior body of knowledge, devoid of interest. Note that the event does not supply the Truth, but opens a path towards a certain truth which requires more for its edification than the situation itself can offer.<sup>186</sup> AB’s committed immanentism ties him to the view that truth, initially circumscribed as an indiscernible part of the situation, is (or, at least, appears to be) specific, that it is collected as a local subset.<sup>187</sup> In his own words, “there is not *the* truth; there are

<sup>175</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 64 (emphasis original).

<sup>176</sup> See Alain Badiou, *La scène du Deux*, in DE L'AMOUR 177-90 (L'école de la cause freudienne ed., 1999); BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 82-83.

<sup>177</sup> BADIOU, *Rhapsodie*, *supra* note 39, at 86 (emphasis in original).

<sup>178</sup> *Id.* at 87 (emphasis in original).

<sup>179</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 41.

<sup>180</sup> Tracy McNulty, *Feminine Love and the Pauline Universal*, in ALAIN BADIOU 185 (Gabriel Riera ed., 2005). For a critical examination of AB’s treatment of love, see *id.* at 185-212.

<sup>181</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 78.

<sup>182</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 257.

<sup>183</sup> Gibson disputes the view that the psychoanalytical encounter can constitute an event in terms of AB’s philosophy as currently structured. See GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 55 n.41.

<sup>184</sup> BADIOU, *Petit manuel*, *supra* note 167, at 24.

<sup>185</sup> *Id.* Truth is indeed what unfolds from the event “as a system of consequences” and is *not* the name of the event. Badiou, *Change*, *supra* note 94, at 252.

<sup>186</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 107.

<sup>187</sup> *Id.* at 319.

only truths, non-totalizable.”<sup>188</sup> For AB, then, truth generates a “typical multiplicity” or, as he puts it after set-theorist Paul Cohen, a “generic singularity.”<sup>189</sup> In AB’s formulation, “[t]he being of a truth, proving itself an exception to any pre-constituted predicate of the situation in which that truth is deployed, is to be called ‘generic.’ In other words, although it is situated in a world, a truth does not retain anything expressible from that situation. A truth concerns everyone inasmuch as it is a multiplicity that no particular predicate can circumscribe. The infinite work of a truth is thus that of a ‘generic procedure.’”<sup>190</sup> While the radiology of a truth would show it to be rooted in a particular situation (or world), composed of the elements of a situation, and submitted to the laws of a situation—that is, thoroughly “assigned” to a situation—a truth does not dissolve completely in the situation in which it appears. The advent of a particular “truth” linked to a particular “event” keeps us focused on the reality that truths emerge through a dynamic process, rather than being merely found as ready-made objects. “A truth becomes in its novelty—and every truth is a novelty—because [the event] interrupts repetition. Indistinct, a truth begins by surging forth.”<sup>191</sup> Thus, it lays claim, once instituted, to be “trans-linguistical” (“[a]lthough generally inscribed in a particular language”),<sup>192</sup> to be available “transtemporally,”<sup>193</sup> that is, beyond the singular confines of its genesis, *ad infinitum* (which allows one, apart from claiming the immortality that befits a truth-holder,<sup>194</sup> to say that actual infinity is underwritten by the void).<sup>195</sup>

But truth can only be intermittent (AB refers to “the rare existence of truth-processes”) since the event can only be irreducibly sporadic.<sup>196</sup> In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett has one of his characters utter: “Nothing happens.”<sup>197</sup> For AB, the inertia that characterizes any situation, which he describes as “the enemy of thought,”<sup>198</sup> is properly formidable: “always the same old thing the same old things possible and impossible.”<sup>199</sup> In the way in which it exercises vigilance and repression, the situation—and, specifically, the state of the situation,

<sup>188</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 59 (emphasis in original).

<sup>189</sup> *Id.*

<sup>190</sup> Alain Badiou, *Author’s Preface*, in BADIOU, *Being and Event*, *supra* note 147, at xiii [hereinafter Badiou, Preface].

<sup>191</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 189.

<sup>192</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 42.

<sup>193</sup> Sedofsky, *supra* note 12, at 249.

<sup>194</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 80.

<sup>195</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 46. Recall that the void is in excess of any situation, even an infinite one.

<sup>196</sup> BADIOU, *L’éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 82.

<sup>197</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, *supra* note 132, at 34.

<sup>198</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 54.

<sup>199</sup> Beckett, *How It Is*, *supra* note 40, at 489.

that is, the State—absorbs and re-absorbs the individual as he continues in the obstinate pursuit of his self-interest, in his “perseverance in being,”<sup>200</sup> into the matrix of normality where “closure and assurance” govern,<sup>201</sup> into the blandness that Samuel Beckett’s Winnie stigmatizes as she exclaims: “Ah earth you old extinguisher.”<sup>202</sup> The reach of the situation as it implements its function of subsumption is made apparent through a typically Beckettian irony: “nothing to be done in any case we [are] in justice I have never heard anything to the contrary.”<sup>203</sup>

Note that for AB, there are four Platonic conditions of philosophy, that is, four “order[s]” or generic procedures pursuant to which an event may take place,<sup>204</sup> or, if you will, there are “four types of truth,” that is, to borrow from mathematical language, four “truth-domains”: scientific, artistic, political, and amorous.<sup>205</sup> To quote Jason Barker, “philosophy as politics, science, art, and love explores its spontaneous capacity for self-expression without becoming a philosophy of politics, science, art, and love—and therefore without being captured by an already named discourse (which would be associated with the re-presentation of the State or, adopting [AB]’s terminology, the “state of the situation”).”<sup>206</sup> The absence of economics on AB’s list can be explained by the fact that, in his view, capitalism prevails triumphantly everywhere—he refers to the “objective logic of [c]apital”<sup>207</sup>—to the point where “what is, under the name of ‘one policy only’, merges miserably with what can be,” such that there is no opportunity for an event to manifest itself in this respect.<sup>208</sup> Across the four domains that AB identifies, truths remain heterogeneous to one another, which is to say that they cannot be rendered in one another’s terms.<sup>209</sup> They are, in AB’s language, simultaneously possible or “compossible.”<sup>210</sup> AB earnestly calls for philosophy to renounce identification or “saturation” with a particular kind of truth.<sup>211</sup> Again, philosophy cannot speak the truth for it is not a

<sup>200</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 70.

<sup>201</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 114.

<sup>202</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (1961), *reprinted in* 3 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 291 (Paul Auster ed., 2006).

<sup>203</sup> Beckett, *How It Is*, *supra* note 40, at 503. I have modified the English text by reference to the French “original.” AB quotes this passage on more than one occasion. *E.g.* BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 113.

<sup>204</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 62.

<sup>205</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 188. *See also id.* at 69. AB acknowledges that other types of truths are possible beyond the four domains that he has upheld, but says that “we [...] know only four.” BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 80.

<sup>206</sup> BARKER, *supra* note 29, at 7 (emphasis original).

<sup>207</sup> BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 113.

<sup>208</sup> *Cf.* BARKER, *supra* note 29, at 7. The quotation is from BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 115.

<sup>209</sup> *See* BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 69.

<sup>210</sup> *Id.* at 41.

<sup>211</sup> *See id.* at 41–48.

truth-procedure. What it can—and must—do is show the truths, distinguish them from the doxa, and arrange them compossibly. Incidentally, AB asserts that “[t]here is no doubt whatsoever concerning the existence of truths [. . .]. In our worlds, such as they are, truths set forth.”<sup>212</sup>

In order to get a better grasp of AB’s conception of “event,” consider the air strikes that took place in New York on 11 September 2001, Peter Hallward’s illustration of what he claims AB would regard as a non-event.<sup>213</sup> Rather than inaugurate an alternative way of undifferentiating individuals, these attacks proceeded to intensify the differentiations that had routinely prevailed up until then, for example between (the object) “American” and (the object) “non-American.” But “truth,” according to AB, is precisely that which would suspend the state of the situation rather than simply sustain the existent objectivities. For the air strikes on New York to qualify as an “event” and be the occasion for truth to proceed, there would have to have emerged a challenge to the habitual presentation of the situation so that the various individuals present in the situation would now be “indiscerned,” that is, re-presented as indistinguishable elements of the site, as elements all counting in the same way. In other words, there would have been an event if the stable ordering of the situation had found itself undermined through the materialization of hitherto unimaginable combinations of elements. Normality—say, the distinction between “American” and “non-American”—would be subverted and a new re-presentation, inconsistent with the state of the situation, would manifest itself. But, in this instance the air strikes did nothing to disturb the logical completeness of the situation in which they took place. Ultimately, the situation continued *as before*.

One crucial question arising can be formulated thus: “Is truth what comes to [B]eing or what unfolds [B]eing?”<sup>214</sup> For Jacques Lacan—not only a committed advocate of pure mathematization, but also the defender of a conception of truth which continues to be very influential on AB—“all scientific progress consists in making the object as such vanish.”<sup>215</sup> In other words, a truth is the undoing of the object of which it is the truth. The truth, then, obscures the objectivity of knowledge (which is precisely what did not happen in New York). There is at work a process of “disobjectification, [of] disjoining truth from knowledge,”<sup>216</sup> which accounts for the fact that AB’s philosophy should

<sup>212</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 12.

<sup>213</sup> See Hallward, *Consequences of Abstraction*, *supra* note 44, at 7.

<sup>214</sup> BADIOU, *Court traité*, *supra* note 19, at 59.

<sup>215</sup> JACQUES LACAN, *LE SÉMINAIRE II* 130 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., 1978) (1955) [hereinafter LACAN, *Séminaire II*]; see also *id.* at 165 (1955) (“Nothing fruitful takes place for man other than through the intermediary of the loss of an object”).

<sup>216</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 75.

primarily concern itself with subjectification and the subject.

Note that AB's conception of the subject is specific to his philosophy. As Peter Hallward observes, "[AB's] subject must be firmly distinguished from an ordinary individual," who is but "an indifferently infinite element already presented in a situation" (knowledge, then, featuring a "subjectless" procedure).<sup>217</sup> Nor is AB interested in "the psychological subject," "the reflexive subject (in Descartes's sense)," or "the transcendental subject (in Kant's sense)."<sup>218</sup> Indeed, AB is "wholly refractory to any analysis of the subject's particularistic attachments," and the "theory of the subject" that he has in mind is unabashedly "purified, formal."<sup>219</sup> In his own words, "[the] individual is thus, in his very essence, the nothing that must be dissipated in a we-subject."<sup>220</sup>

Most significantly, "[the subject] is absolutely inexistent in the situation 'before' the event."<sup>221</sup> He is out of the situation, a "*horlieu*."<sup>222</sup> Rather, the process of truth "*induces*" a subject.<sup>223</sup> It is through the event that the subject, as "exemplary 'non-objec[t]',"<sup>224</sup> thus breaks with routine perseverance in Being, that it effectuates a "pure cut in the becoming of an object of the world,"<sup>225</sup> in order to find his realization and reconciliation with truth. A subject does not produce truth (this conclusion would lead precisely to the brand of subjectivism that AB is trying to avoid); rather a truth produces a subject. Indeed, AB asserts that "it is abusive to say that a truth is a subjective production"; it is rather that a subject is "*caught* in the fidelity to the event and is *dependent* on the truth."<sup>226</sup> For AB, the truth of an event is manifest through one subjected to the event, through a faithful subject. Subjectification is that through which a truth is made possible, which means that truth is not an object either (for then it would be knowledge), that it does not have this kind of Being-ness, that it is not a question of exactitude between an object and a subject either,<sup>227</sup> that it rather comes into being through a subject "*without vis-à-vis*."<sup>228</sup> A truth always works its way through particular subjects, faithful to a singular event,

<sup>217</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 142.

<sup>218</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 64.

<sup>219</sup> Alberto Toscano, *The Bourgeois and the Islamist, or, The Other Subjects of Politics*, in THE PRAXIS OF ALAIN BADIOU 340 (Paul Ashton, A. J. Bartlett & Justin Clemens eds., 2006).

<sup>220</sup> ALAIN BADIOU, LE SIÈCLE 144 (2005) [hereinafter BADIOU, *Le siècle*].

<sup>221</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 63.

<sup>222</sup> BADIOU, *Théorie du sujet*, *supra* note 99, at 28. The French neologism translates literally as "outplace."

<sup>223</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 63 (emphasis in original).

<sup>224</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 205.

<sup>225</sup> *Id.* at 406.

<sup>226</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 444 (emphasis in original).

<sup>227</sup> See BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 74.

<sup>228</sup> *Id.* (emphasis in original).

investigating its results and connections—the “material support” of the subject being the body.<sup>229</sup>

For AB, “subjective thought [is to be established] strictly from the subjective itself, without passing through any kind of objective mediation,”<sup>230</sup> which means that “[t]he affirmation or commitment that carries a truth along is no more caught up in dialectical interaction with the circumstances of the situation than it is supervised by general criteria of judgment or procedure; it is not bound up in relations of proof or argumentation, and it is not a negotiation or an interpretation in any sense of the word. It is purely a matter of decision and conversion.”<sup>231</sup>

To mention one of AB’s favourite illustrations, St. Paul did not produce the truth of Christianity on a subjective whim, but rather he was himself “produced” (that is, converted) by the truth of Christianity at a time after the event (the Resurrection) had taken place. St. Paul was faithful to the truth of the event and in his affirmation of this truth—through his intervention seeking to impose the truth in the situation—became more and more subjected to it. One would say that the truth made St. Paul, rather than that St. Paul made the truth.<sup>232</sup> Hence, AB’s definition of “subject,” which means “any local configuration of a generic procedure on which a truth is resting.”<sup>233</sup> This point is key for AB. The subject is “rigorously singular.”<sup>234</sup> He is a “finite moment in the trajectory of any truth that is born of an event.”<sup>235</sup> Thus, there is the subject of a particular scientific discovery or of a particular art.<sup>236</sup> Like the event from which it cannot be separated, “[t]he subject is *rare*.”<sup>237</sup> Moreover, “[s]ubjects declare themselves as such, without ground or foundation, on the edge of the void, because an event has ‘seized’ them.”<sup>238</sup>

The singular connection between the subject and truth is one of confidence. This is, if you will, the subject’s “wager.”<sup>239</sup> The subject is confident that there is a truth, indeed the subject is “confidence in itself,”<sup>240</sup> which nonetheless can only lead to the discernment of an

<sup>229</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 55. AB explains that *Logiques*’s “most significant challenge [. . .] is certainly to produce a new definition of [. . .] subjectivable bodies.” *Id.* at 44.

<sup>230</sup> BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 36.

<sup>231</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 286-87.

<sup>232</sup> This summary encapsulates important aspects of the argument in BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, *supra* note 73.

<sup>233</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 429.

<sup>234</sup> *Id.*

<sup>235</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 58.

<sup>236</sup> *Id.*

<sup>237</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 429 (emphasis original).

<sup>238</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 63. See BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 469 (“a decision without a concept”); *id.* at 444 (“[s]eized in his [B]eing”).

<sup>239</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 60.

<sup>240</sup> Alain Badiou, *D’un sujet enfin sans objet*, in 20 Cahiers Confrontation 13, 20 (1989) [hereinafter Badiou, *D’un sujet enfin sans objet*].

“*approximate truth*.”<sup>241</sup> Because the subject acts as a local configuration of the truth-process, the truth is indiscernible for him on account of its global character. In other words, there is incommensurability between a finite subject (there is no free-standing, transcendental subject) and an infinite truth. The subject, being within a situation, can only encounter multiplicities as presented within that situation. A truth, however, is the un-presented part of the situation. For example, it is not at all clear that the language of the situation can discern a truth which, by definition so to speak, is indiscernible through the resources of the situation including its language. It is therefore necessary to renounce any definition of the subject which would assume that he knows the truth. Being the local moment of the truth, a finite point of the truth-as-infinite accumulation, the subject can only fail in sustaining its globality. Jacques Lacan pithily captures key features of this dynamics as he asserts that “the truth speaks I.”<sup>242</sup> Consider Schoenberg, the composer, or Cantor, the mathematician. “The inventive truth that is tonal music or transfinite mathematics infinitely exceeds the finite investigations (musical works, theorems) made by those subjects called Schoenberg or Cantor, even though what this truth amounts to at any finite stage of its accumulation will be made up solely of the collection of these works or theorems.”<sup>243</sup>

The void, then, can assume a meaningful name within the concrete limits of the situation only through “the militant subjective composition of a truth.”<sup>244</sup> Militantly, what appears as needing to be counted (literally, “to be taken into a count”) is shown as properly included in the situation. It is important to appreciate that the process of truth-construction from the void is far from instantaneous. Rather, it is a step-by-step activity—a “restricted action,” after AB borrowing from Mallarmé<sup>245</sup>—involving much effort, “a constant and delicate labour,”<sup>246</sup> a “wait,”<sup>247</sup> calm, meticulous, and protracted. As AB puts it—he who conceives of the subject as a “patient watchman of the void”<sup>248</sup>—“[b]eware [ . . . ] of [the subject] who is never bored.”<sup>249</sup> In this respect, apagogic reasoning,<sup>250</sup> a form of “adventurous

<sup>241</sup> I draw closely on BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 434-35 (emphasis in original). The quotation is on page 435.

<sup>242</sup> Jacques Lacan, *LE SÉMINAIRE XVIII* 71 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., 2006) (1971).

<sup>243</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 142.

<sup>244</sup> *Id.* at 121.

<sup>245</sup> BADIOU, *Abrégé*, *supra* note 124, at 117-18. See generally GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 63-64.

<sup>246</sup> BADIOU, *Beckett*, *supra* note 39, at 5.

<sup>247</sup> BADIOU, *Le siècle*, *supra* note 220, at 39.

<sup>248</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 127.

<sup>249</sup> Alain Badiou, *Six propriétés de la vérité*, 33 *ORNICAR?* 120, 121 (1985).

<sup>250</sup> See GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 63 (“In apagogic reason, I suppose the truth of *A*, not because it is self-evidently right or I can prove it, but because supposing the truth of non-*A* leads

peregrination,”<sup>251</sup> is called upon to play a crucial role.

Within these strictures, the challenge for the subject is therefore to harness the event into a practice that is faithful to the void, that makes the void visible as void, that is, that makes it clear that the state of the situation depends on its exclusion. (It is important to appreciate that this practice of fidelity is not a response to the situation as such but to the break with the situation, that is, to the void, to the event. And because the event is necessarily invisible, the practice that aims to show fidelity to the event is backward-looking.) Not being part of the situation and not being visible from within the situation, the event makes visible what was invisible from the perspective of the situation. But it disappears rapidly, for the event is but “the lighting of a supplementation,” “[i]ts empiricity being that of an eclipse.”<sup>252</sup> All that it will ever be possible to say about an event is that it happened. The only being of the event, ultimately, lies in its disappearance.<sup>253</sup> The matter of temporality is also addressed by AB as regards the evental site, or the site of the event, which, he says, “only appears in order to disappear,”<sup>254</sup> and can only be seen to be “evental” retroactively, that is, once the event has materialized.<sup>255</sup>

At this juncture, the matter of “the relation—which is rather a non-relation—between, on the one hand, a post-evental fidelity and, on the other hand, a fixed state of knowledge” requires to be addressed in more detail.<sup>256</sup> While the event manifests itself as a sudden appearance, while it is the abrupt intensification of what had been invisible, it appears with a greater or lesser force, that is, it has more or less presence. But, at one level or other, the event creates an opening for change by making the undecidable part of the situation decidable. In other words, fidelity is shown not to be trapped within the status quo. There can be fidelity to the event which can exploit the opportunity generated by the event and seek to de-normalize the distance between the situation and the void, thus, foster an alternative manner of “inhabiting” the situation.<sup>257</sup> However, knowledge must first classify the truth. As Andrew Gibson underlines, “one consequence of undecidability is that decisions become imperative.”<sup>258</sup> Since the state of the situation will not recognize the existence of the event, only a subjective intervention can foster a determination as to whether the event is included in the situation or not.

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to a palpable absurdity.”) (emphasis in original).

<sup>251</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 279.

<sup>252</sup> BADIOU, *Conditions*, *supra* note 10, at 189.

<sup>253</sup> *Id.* at 190.

<sup>254</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 389.

<sup>255</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 200.

<sup>256</sup> *Id.* at 361.

<sup>257</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 62.

<sup>258</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 44.

Although this intervention requires one to engage in a nomination of the event, that is, in an “evental statement,” it is necessary to see that, according to AB, the name being ascribed to the event is not properly the name of the event since, in the absence of any ontological remnant of the event, what we have left is only the implication from the event that is detached from the event itself.<sup>259</sup>

The truth that the subject seeks to integrate into the situation through an extension of the situation is not to be understood as a critique of the situation. It exists supernumerically vis-à-vis any particularity within the situation—as an “ultra-one”<sup>260</sup>—and sustains *itself* as the starting-point from which the subject will be operating on the situation.<sup>261</sup> Yet, truth inevitably stands for rupture. Indeed, for AB, “[a] truth is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order.”<sup>262</sup> AB emphasizes how “[i]t is absolutely indispensable that there be a breaking of the rule,” that “there must be something that [. . .], in the way in which the situation is simply given, no longer remains within the bounds of the analysis, not even in terms of its immanent excess, something that no longer is of the same order as before.”<sup>263</sup> Otherwise, AB says, “there is nothing more than a recognition” (which, he adds, is “equivalent to misrecognition” and, for him, is thus devoid of intrinsic merit).<sup>264</sup> The process is one of “subsumption of the Other under the Same.”<sup>265</sup> Consider a situation as St. Paul might have known it. Imagine the “mundane proliferation of alterities” featuring the Jew, the Greek, women, men, slaves, and the free.<sup>266</sup> And picture the way in which the truth-as-universal-thought (the Resurrection) produced Sameness and Equality (there was no longer the Jew, the Greek, and so on). The truth thus acts as “production of the Same,”<sup>267</sup> sameness in all its exceptionality requiring to be radically distinguished from the uneventfulness of heterogeneous flux. AB’s point reminds us how he requires the philosopher to overlook anthropological differentiation and to reverse any “postmodern” prioritization—whether ethical or otherwise—in favour of otherness over sameness.<sup>268</sup> For him, *pace* Emmanuel Levinas, whom he regards along with the rest of

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<sup>259</sup> See HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 124-25.

<sup>260</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'évènement*, *supra* note 9, at 191. The French compound word is “*ultra-un*.”

<sup>261</sup> See BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, *supra* note 73, at 117.

<sup>262</sup> Badiou, Preface, *supra* note 190, at xii.

<sup>263</sup> Badiou, Change, *supra* note 94, at 248-49.

<sup>264</sup> *Id.* at 249.

<sup>265</sup> BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, *supra* note 73, at 117.

<sup>266</sup> *Id.*

<sup>267</sup> *Id.*

<sup>268</sup> *Supra* text accompanying notes 85-109.

phenomenology as being “always too pious,”<sup>269</sup> “the true question [literally!], an extraordinarily difficult one, is much rather that of the [acknowledgment] of the Same.”<sup>270</sup> According to AB, “[w]hat is capital, for the destiny of the universalist effort, is to subtract it from the conflict of opinions and from the confrontation of customary differences.”<sup>271</sup> To return to St. Paul, “Christian militancy must be an indifferent crossing of mundane differences and avoid any casuistry of customs.”<sup>272</sup>

For AB, the expression of the evental statement can take the form of an “irruption” akin to a “hysterical” figure or adopt a more methodical approach.<sup>273</sup> To be sure, though, “[t]he initial affirmation of the [evental] statement is [. . .] a matter of anguished confusion.”<sup>274</sup> The subject’s naming of the event, or rather the subject’s affirmation of the implication of the event, is, from the point of view of the situation, characterized by “illegality and anonymity.”<sup>275</sup> After all, the event violates the state of the situation: it is an “exceptio[n] to what there is,”<sup>276</sup> it is the negation of the world-as-it-exists, it is the transgression of the Law of the World. Indeed, “what comes to be added to the situation, though declared closed and incapable of being added to,” is the “out-of-the-law.”<sup>277</sup> The evental statement thus consists in an act of decision that is implemented in advance of any “approval” on the part of the situation as it stands, which, at this stage at least, finds no sense in it and only sees “the necessity to counter it.”<sup>278</sup> To be sure, the situation—let us think of it as a structure—is not enough, on its own terms, to circumvent the event. In order to prohibit the event from presenting itself, it will be necessary to structure the structure, that is, to call upon a metastructure that ascribes to the structure an “effect of one.”<sup>279</sup> Only this “fictionalization,”<sup>280</sup> this narrativization, can ever make it possible to “conjure” the event. To proclaim that “structural completeness is complete,”<sup>281</sup> to foster “normality” or “security of the

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<sup>269</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 15.

<sup>270</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 43. Without wanting to change the import of AB’s text, I have entered a slight (and defeasible!) modification in order to avoid a possible misunderstanding in the context of this paragraph.

<sup>271</sup> BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, *supra* note 73, at 107.

<sup>272</sup> *Id.*

<sup>273</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 145-46.

<sup>274</sup> *Id.* at 125.

<sup>275</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 254.

<sup>276</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 12.

<sup>277</sup> BADIOU, *Beckett*, *supra* note 39, at 41. The French expression is “*hors loi*.”

<sup>278</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 109.

<sup>279</sup> *Id.* at 110. The French expression is “*un effet d'un*.”

<sup>280</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 111. The French expression is “*mise en fiction*.”

<sup>281</sup> *Id.*

one,"<sup>282</sup> is the point of what AB terms the "anti-void" function.<sup>283</sup> Only later will the anguish diminish "as the truthful consequences of the [evental] statement begin to transform the existing rules of logic, so as to force explicit acknowledgment of the statement."<sup>284</sup>

Most of the time, the doubling of the structure will succeed in holding the event at bay, will "keep the void from pouring in."<sup>285</sup> But no count can exhaust all possible combinations.<sup>286</sup> For AB, "forcing"—another term which he borrows from the work of set theorist Paul Cohen, who uses it to deal with the virtual existence of a set using the resources of an existing set—is the mechanism whereby the idea that the state of the situation is the whole can effectively be challenged. Specifically, "forcing" is the process whereby the truth that was initially collected as indiscernible from the standpoint of the situation (this is, if you will, the way in which the truth can be regarded as a "virtual" part of the situation) comes to be included in the situation as a sub-set of it through the situation being compelled, or 'forced', to organize itself such that this truth "be finally recognized as a term [of it], internally."<sup>287</sup> Thus, "there is not only what there is" and the truth comes as an "interpolation within the continuity of the 'there is.'"<sup>288</sup> Accordingly, "[f]orcing" changes the ontological status of truth and situation together."<sup>289</sup> In AB's language, the subject—in application of "the fundamental law of the subject,"<sup>290</sup> which is "to force a veridicity [onto the situation], according to a suspended truth"<sup>291</sup>—articulates the indiscernible to the situation, such that what was for the situation undecidable is decided upon.<sup>292</sup> Through "forcing," a new situation comes to exist but as a "generic extension" of the old one.<sup>293</sup> As AB refers to this process of "normaliz[ation]," he notes the way in which a fidelity procedure "immanentizes the indiscernible."<sup>294</sup> Thus, science, art, politics, and love change the world not by what they discern in it but rather through a process of indiscernment.<sup>295</sup> In Jacques Lacan's words, "what is refused in the symbolic order resurfaces in reality."<sup>296</sup>

<sup>282</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 115.

<sup>283</sup> *Id.* at 117.

<sup>284</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 125.

<sup>285</sup> Samuel Beckett, *That Time* (1976), *reprinted in* 3 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 419 (Paul Auster ed., 2006).

<sup>286</sup> *See* BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 99-100.

<sup>287</sup> *Id.* at 377.

<sup>288</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 13.

<sup>289</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 66.

<sup>290</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 441.

<sup>291</sup> *Id.* at 445.

<sup>292</sup> *Id.* at 456.

<sup>293</sup> *Id.* at 449.

<sup>294</sup> *Id.* at 377.

<sup>295</sup> *Id.*

<sup>296</sup> LACAN, *Séminaire III*, *supra* note 31, at 22 (1955).

Now, forcing is not about modifying the state of the situation so much as the *language* of the situation, so that the situation is put in a position to name the elements of the proposed generic extension which, from its point of view, remain hypothetical at this early stage. If the event is not to vanish into the “delusive cornucopia of extant knowledge,”<sup>297</sup> into the penumbra of unnoticeability, it must be “held,” it must be “stabilized in a trace.”<sup>298</sup> In other words, it must be named. To interpret the event would not do, since it would be “to thrust it back into an established regime of sense [. . .] which has always already supplied its reasons beforehand” (hence, pursuant to AB’s logic, the need for a distanciation from hermeneutics).<sup>299</sup> Only the naming of the event can favour the emergence of a truth in its newness, allow the assertion of a new allegiance. Inevitably, since the event can only be named with reference to the familiar lexicon, that which exists within the situation (this is all the language *there is*), its name will be “ill seen” and “ill said.”<sup>300</sup> But because the goal of the subject is to refashion the situation, an initial step must be to recast its terminology, to have thought move away from established significations. Only in this manner will it be feasible for the situation to get a sense of what the extension purports to achieve. Specifically, “[i]t will then become possible for an inhabitant of [the situation] to say: ‘If there were to be a generic extension of our situation [. . .], then such-and-such a name that exists in [the situation] will come to designate this particular part of the extension.’”<sup>301</sup> Consider the reworking of names such as “sexuality,” “superego,” and “drive” by Freud-as-subject. After an initial recalcitrance of the situation to the re-naming process, these words become recognizable within the state of the situation. Yet, there is “a surprise in language,”<sup>302</sup> for in their capacity as “new” names, the words no longer have discernible referents in the situation. In this sense, then, those names are “empty.” But, in another sense, they are “full,” and what they are filled with is “[their] own possibility.”<sup>303</sup> This is to say that the name may yet create the thing.<sup>304</sup> In a context where multiples of the old situation will be present in the new since they merely disappear according to the old state of affairs “in that the new one effectively redefines or ‘disqualifies’ them, as Schoenberg disqualifies

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<sup>297</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 122.

<sup>298</sup> *Id.* at 126.

<sup>299</sup> *Id.* at 128.

<sup>300</sup> *Id.* at 127. The obvious reference is to Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), repinted in 4 THE GROVE CENTENARY EDITION 451-70 (Paul Auster ed., 2006). The re-writing from the French is Beckett’s own.

<sup>301</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 136.

<sup>302</sup> BADIOU, *Beckett*, *supra* note 39, at 45.

<sup>303</sup> Badiou, D’un sujet enfin sans objet, *supra* note 240, at 22.

<sup>304</sup> See BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 415.

the statement ‘[. . .] music is essentially tonal’,<sup>305</sup> the aim of the subject is precisely that elements of the extension should become the referential value of a redesigned name within the situation.

In the wake of the event, subjectification operates through “investigations” in order for the subject to determine how, if at all, the event can be internalized within the situation,<sup>306</sup> how “the supplementation that [the event] operates is adequate to the laws of the situation.”<sup>307</sup> Again, this process is more militant than it is scholarly; the subject does not apprehend the truth as an object of knowledge so much as declare it (to be sure, the process of investigation “resembles” the acquisition of knowledge, but it differs from it).<sup>308</sup> In the words of AB, it is a matter of “conviction,” “enthusiasm,” or “admiration,”<sup>309</sup> with the subject identifying himself in universal terms (as militants of truth do).<sup>310</sup> While the subject considers various elements of the situation, while he “put[s] into play an *added* signifier,”<sup>311</sup> he must conclude whether a particular element can or cannot integrate the event, in AB’s language whether there is a “connection” or “disconnection,” which, for AB, are the only two options open to the subject.<sup>312</sup> Ultimately, “[t]he truth is an all-or-nothing deal.”<sup>313</sup> (Along similar lines, AB says that “to be nothing and to become everything, that is the event.”<sup>314</sup>) The eruption of the event, then, leads the subject to divide the elements of the situation in two subsets: “those that are connected to the event and those that are not” (to return to St. Paul, say, “Christian” or “not Christian”).<sup>315</sup> The “Two” is, if you will, a category of the subject alone: it comes to exist as a result of a decision on his part. It is,

<sup>305</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 136. The reference to Schoenberg is in BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 443. I have modified Gibson’s translation.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Étienne Balibar, *Histoire de la vérité: Alain Badiou dans la philosophie française*, in PENSER LE MULTIPLE 513 n.25 (Charles Ramond ed., 2002) (“Perhaps nothing better attests to the profoundly opposed philosophical orientations of Badiou and Foucault than this terminological reversal regarding the utterance in its reference to knowledge: for Foucault, ‘veridicity’ or ‘truth-telling’ is the active mode of truth which, at the heart of knowledges, unmask and shakes their power-function; for Badiou, ‘veridicity’ is a linguistic inscription that is inseparable from knowledges (in discursive ‘encyclopedias’), with which the eventual truth breaks.”).

<sup>307</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 456.

<sup>308</sup> See *id.* at 365.

<sup>309</sup> *Id.* at 364.

<sup>310</sup> BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, *supra* note 73, at 117.

<sup>311</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 17 (emphasis in original).

<sup>312</sup> BADIOU, *L’être et l’événement*, *supra* note 9, at 364.

<sup>313</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 127.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with television presenter Frédéric Taddéi for the programme “Ce soir ou jamais” broadcast on French television channel “France 3” (Oct. 25, 2007), available at [http://www.dailymotion.com/relevance/search/badiou/video/x3g4kl\\_csoj-alain-badiou\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/relevance/search/badiou/video/x3g4kl_csoj-alain-badiou_news) (last visited Dec. 2, 2007). A full transcript is available at [http://www.reseaudesbahuts.lautre.net/article.php3?id\\_article=573](http://www.reseaudesbahuts.lautre.net/article.php3?id_article=573) (last visited on Dec. 2, 2007). The original words are as follows: “*n’être rien et devenir tout, c’est cela l’événement.*”

<sup>315</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 46.

then, the outcome of an eventual production. Because the “Two” entails the excluded middle (in the sense that there can only be  $p$  or  $\sim p$ ), the struggle thus occurs between relation-less opposites.

Whether the truth which began strictly as an “anonymous excrescence” vis-à-vis the situation,<sup>316</sup> which was not decidedly included within the situation (recall “sexuality,” “superego,” and “drive” before Freud), will henceforth be recognized as part of the situation—as harbouring “an enduring, eventually institutional, stability or solidity, without yielding to an internal objectification”<sup>317</sup>—very much depends on the subject and on his fidelity, which is the virtue required to sustain the investigation. Perseverance is at issue—something like the Beckettian “on”<sup>318</sup>—, for lack of fidelity will entail the waning or the death of the truth, which will become lost in historical, sociological, and other specific forms of knowledge (according to AB, this is precisely what happened to Marxism, subjects having ceased to show fidelity to the event of Marx).<sup>319</sup> To quote one of Jacques Lacan’s most famous injunctions, often recalled by AB, the subject’s ambition must be *not to yield on his desire*.<sup>320</sup> “To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented while *thinking* [. . .] the situation ‘according’ to the event.”<sup>321</sup> There are, of course, many ways of attesting to fidelity to the event, but they all compel the subject “to *invent* a new way of being and of acting within the situation.”<sup>322</sup> “[T]he event is founding historicity. [. . .] History is external to the State. Revolutions, new artistic inventions, and new scientific discoveries plunge us into historicity, but history is solely a trajectory in the wake of an event.”<sup>323</sup> What is also common to the different modalities of fidelity is that in each case the subject is indifferent to anything like personal values. It is not that the subject is not himself. Indeed, he is very much himself. But he is also, so to speak, “*in excess of himself*,”<sup>324</sup> “[he] is imperceptibly and internally *broken* [. . .] by this truth which ‘passes’ through this *known* multiple that he is.”<sup>325</sup> While the individual had existed as “someone unable to *know himself* capable of [becoming-a-subject],” he now exists

<sup>316</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 377.

<sup>317</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 128.

<sup>318</sup> The preposition “on” is a central motif in Beckett’s work. For an exploration of this theme, see ACKERLEY & GONTARSKI, *supra* note 40, at 421.

<sup>319</sup> See GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 69-70.

<sup>320</sup> JACQUES LACAN, LE SÉMINAIRE VII 359-75 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., 1986) (1960). According to Lacan, “[t]he only thing that one can be guilty of, is to have yielded on one’s desire.” *Id.* at 370.

<sup>321</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 62 (emphasis in original).

<sup>322</sup> *Id.* (emphasis in original).

<sup>323</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 17.

<sup>324</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 66 (emphasis in original).

<sup>325</sup> *Id.* at 67 (emphasis in original).

in that heretofore “*unbeknowst* to him” capacity.<sup>326</sup> “*In truth*, ‘I’ matter only insofar as I am subsumed by the impersonal vector of truth.”<sup>327</sup>

Within the situation, from the point of view of the encyclopedia (that is, with respect to the system of knowledge extant at any given time), prior to the event, what counts for truth, what is established as truth is what AB terms “veridicity.”<sup>328</sup> Veridicity is the condition or the state of knowledge. Truth, however, is subtracted from knowledge. Yet, it is important to see that subtraction is not contradiction.<sup>329</sup> And this is why an investigation can determine that a term of the situation is positively connected to the event, such as will make it possible for an eventual statement uttered with a re-signifying name to be included, through forcing, in the situation to which it already belongs. As is clear from the established existence of words like “sexuality,” “superego,” and “drive,” even before Freud came along truth was already, if indiscernibly, lodged in the encyclopedia. For the promise of change to become something more substantial, for the truth-claim to move from being an indiscernible part of the situation to being a part of it, for a new situation to exist, a reorganization of the encyclopedia is required. This re-arrangement can operate, for example, through encounters between the subject and terms within the situation, indeed through “an infinite sequence of chance encounters.”<sup>330</sup> In the language of set theory, always helpfully at hand for AB, the subject must be in a position to show through forcing—which he will conduct from the standpoint of what is least stable about Being<sup>331</sup>—that an aspect of the truth-claim that he is making also exists as a feature within the state of the situation. If such an element exists, the veridicity of the claim will impose itself in the new situation.<sup>332</sup> Of course, “[p]ending the investigation and connection of such a ‘forcing’ or validating term, however, the [veridicity] of the [evental] declaration is suspended: its verification can be anticipated but not confirmed.”<sup>333</sup> What the event will eventually show itself to have been—any newness is only readable *after* the event—is very much a question of time.<sup>334</sup> Once the statement has been forced into the situation, it will be possible to know the veridicity of it in the transformed, post-evental situation, that is, to confirm it. “Forcing is a relation that is *verifiable by knowledge*.”<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> *Id.*

<sup>327</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 129 (emphasis in original).

<sup>328</sup> BADIOU, *Manifeste*, *supra* note 14, at 17.

<sup>329</sup> See BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 445.

<sup>330</sup> Badiou, D'un sujet enfin sans objet, *supra* note 240, at 21.

<sup>331</sup> See BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 422.

<sup>332</sup> See *id.* at 439–40.

<sup>333</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 137–38.

<sup>334</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 232.

<sup>335</sup> *Id.* at 441 (emphasis in original).

Consider investigations undertaken in fidelity to the event of Freud's discovery of the unconscious (to track the same illustration) and imagine that these were able to "connect" a hitherto invisible and undecidable term of the situation (here, the unconscious) with the implications of this event. If the unconscious can be shown to "exist," the eventual statement "will have been" veridical in the new extended situation that will become, say, psychology supplemented by psychoanalysis. The new situation will then contain all of the former one and the generic truth-procedure which will have come to be included in it. Note that the word "and" should not be taken to indicate that the extension of the situation contains a new ordinal, for it does not: it had belonged all along, that is, the "new" order had been hidden within the situation. Because it must cope with elements of the situation—the "belonging" of the situation, such as language—as doxically given, no newness is ever absolutely new,<sup>336</sup> no beginning ever *begins*.<sup>337</sup> Thus, the coming-to-inclusiveness of the truth will not alter the profound being of the situation; it cannot cancel "the great principles of consistency" of the situation, for it is after all "the truth of the situation and not the absolute beginning of another."<sup>338</sup> "The subject [. . .] cannot destroy [the situation]. What he can do is to generate veridical enunciations that were previously undecidable."<sup>339</sup> For all the distortion to knowledge or doxa characteristic of a truth-procedure, truth never exhausts the whole of the situation in which it appears: there is always at least one point within the situation, the situation's "[u]nlessenable least,"<sup>340</sup> that the truth cannot force.<sup>341</sup> The most a truth can ever accomplish vis-à-vis existing knowledge is therefore to "traverse and fracture" it.<sup>342</sup> As AB puts it, the state of the situation is insuperable: ontologically, the State is never defeated and always endures.<sup>343</sup> Indeed, AB refers to the "obscene permanence of the State."<sup>344</sup>

From mere indiscernibility, truth thus accedes to inclusiveness (which now coincides with belongingness and no longer features an excess vis-à-vis it, such that inclusiveness and belongingness are indistinguished). The situation must change the way things are named in order to reveal the unnameable being which, truly, is the being of

<sup>336</sup> See GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 134.

<sup>337</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 232. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *SPECTRES DE MARX* 255-56 (1993) ("Everything begins before it begins").

<sup>338</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 456.

<sup>339</sup> *Id.*

<sup>340</sup> Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, *supra* note 131, at 479.

<sup>341</sup> See BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 114.

<sup>342</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 121.

<sup>343</sup> *Id.* at 99.

<sup>344</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 127.

what is, of what will have been, in the situation, but that the situation had been unable to name;<sup>345</sup> in Jacques Lacan's words, "behind what is named, what there is is unnameable."<sup>346</sup> It is important to emphasize a key feature of the evental time for AB: "Not only does a truth set a new beginning for time, but its validity exceeds chronological time as such. Once it has been declared, it will always *have been* true (scientific statements provide the most obvious examples)."<sup>347</sup> French conjugation features a tense—the "*futur antérieur*," literally the "future anterior" or the "future perfect"—which epitomizes AB's conception of the dynamics between the event and the state of the situation.<sup>348</sup> Indeed, he refers to "the law of the future past."<sup>349</sup> Recall that as the truth makes its way into the situation, it divides it into two. There will now be the truth-of-the-situation, on the one hand, and that part of the situation where truth is unable to hold sway, where it has been unable to avoid determination by the encyclopedia, on the other. This remainder—this "anarchic debris"<sup>350</sup>—is what the truth is incapable of transforming, what will have resisted the event/subject/truth sequence.<sup>351</sup>

Indeed, truths labour "in the face of protracted and vicious obloquy."<sup>352</sup> There will be, then, those who say "no to the event," who are "operators of negation."<sup>353</sup> Some—the reactionaries—are not strict negators of the event. Rather, they attenuate the truth that the event called into being by actively denying its novelty. They advocate what AB terms "an extinguished present,"<sup>354</sup> that is, a present which they claim could have been had anyway without the event. Others—the obscurantists—do more than contest the creative force of the event. They challenge the very existence of the truth through the invocation of a transcendence—a Tradition or a Law—which can silence the event.<sup>355</sup> "While the [reactive subject] may be repressive, [he] is also aimed at persuading the faithful that 'it's just not worth it', that they should

<sup>345</sup> *Id.* at 377. For an examination of "unnamability" at the intersection of AB's philosophy and Beckett's literature, see GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 172-97.

<sup>346</sup> LACAN, *Séminaire II*, *supra* note 215, at 247 (1955).

<sup>347</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 157 (emphasis added). In this respect, AB's conceptualization can be contrasted with Jacques Derrida's idea of "*différance*" as it encapsulates the unceasing deferral of presence.

<sup>348</sup> For an extensive discussion of this French tense, see [http://www.fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/futur\\_antérieur](http://www.fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/futur_antérieur) (last visited Dec. 3, 2007).

<sup>349</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 439. Cf. JACQUES LACAN, *ÉCRITS* 300 (1966) (1953) ("What realizes itself in my history is not the definite past of what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.").

<sup>350</sup> BADIOU, *L'éthique*, *supra* note 85, at 72.

<sup>351</sup> See GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 22-23.

<sup>352</sup> *Id.* at 114.

<sup>353</sup> BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 63.

<sup>354</sup> *Id.* at 64 (emphasis omitted).

<sup>355</sup> *Id.* at 68.

resign themselves to a 'lesser present' and enjoy its diminished but secure rewards. The transcendent body conjured up by the obscure subject is instead a kind of 'atemporal fetish' [. . .] under whose weight novelty must be thoroughly crushed and silenced."<sup>356</sup> Envisage examples such as "an obscurantist resistance to scientific discoveries, an iconoclastic hostility to art, a conservative political traditionalism, and, in the realm of love, a morbidly possessive jealousy."<sup>357</sup> Both reactionaries and obscurantists purport to thwart the event's coming-into-inclusion within the situation.

Ultimately, then, there are "two decisive operations that dominate [AB]'s system: state-driven operations of inclusion or classification, and truth-driven operations of separation or subtraction."<sup>358</sup> By way of recapitulation, it can be said that the manner in which AB articulates the interaction between these two dimensions of his theoretical construction revolves around four clusters of adumbrations.

First, philosophical thought must be conceptualized as formal and axiomatic (and, accordingly, as formally and axiomatically egalitarian). It must, therefore, be dissociated from any cultural embeddedness.

Second, philosophical thought matters to the extent that it generates actively universal forms of affirmation isolated from the negotiation of cultural differences.

Third, it is possible for individuals and for the situations that they inhabit to be radically and indeed infinitely transformed irrespective of anything like enabling conditions or horizons, this transformation being triggered by an event that happens beyond the situation and that proceeds through the individual constituting himself as a subject of the event, showing fidelity to the event, and, through the affirmation of the implications of the event, making it impossible for the state of knowledge to continue as before. This radical transformation or discontinuous innovation can only operate on the basis of encounters with terms in the situation that will progressively incorporate the implications of the event.

Fourth, truth exists as a consequence of the event and as carried by the subject. Specifically, it emerges in four fields (that is, there are four domains in which truth can occur independently of any procedure of interpretation and verification): science, art, politics, and love. Because truth needs to be articulated in a manner that is indifferent to the identity of whoever comes to share in its articulation, mathematics, according to AB, is the only discourse that allows the truth to be envisaged as the result of an operation and correlatively compels us to accept that what

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<sup>356</sup> Toscano, *supra* note 219, at 354. The words "atemporal fetish" are in BADIOU, *Logiques*, *supra* note 19, at 69.

<sup>357</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 146-47.

<sup>358</sup> *Id.* at 274.

was thus counted is itself not-one, that is, multiple (this is AB's crucial anti-transcendental move). Only mathematics as grounded in set theory is capable of such thought. Along the way, AB distinguishes radically between knowledge (which is ambivalent and embedded) and truth (which is unequivocal and eternal). In this regard, AB can be said to be renewing a Platonic conception of philosophy.

Now, AB's mathemes cannot be separated from his revolutionary politics. Indeed, it has been said that AB's *tour de force* is precisely "to affix the truths of a particular politics to the thoroughly demonstrable ones of mathematics."<sup>359</sup> It is precisely AB's idiosyncratic politics—a blend of Maoism, Marxism, and Neo-marxism—that prompted him to take an interest in the Saint-Bernard *sans-papiers*. Applying the lineaments of AB's philosophical framework to the *sans-papiers* might, I suggest, resemble the following outline.

An incontrovertible point of departure would appear to be the State, which is primarily concerned with policing its borders (understood here both literally and metaphorically).<sup>360</sup> In order to achieve this goal, the State aims to foster obedience on the part of all individuals within those borders—whom it counts, for example, through a counting apparatus such as the census (the State being the ultimate counting machine). The State wishes all counted individuals to recognize it as the unique Law, as the "one-all." In order to favour this result, the State readily engages in an array of (fictional) discursive representations purporting to feature internal consistency (that is, to showcase the idea of "oneness") whether from a moral, linguistic, ethnic, geographic, or other perspective. Ultimately, "the function of the State is to number inclusions so that consistent memberships be preserved."<sup>361</sup> Along the way, the State incessantly seeks to block any point of flight that would lead to the emergence of an alternative to the "*modèle unique*" that it is sponsoring. Because it does not tolerate "the supernumerary part, that which distorts the count,"<sup>362</sup> the State prohibits "un-linking."<sup>363</sup> The fashioning of another configuration would make for "more-than-one" framework, which, from the State's point of view, would thwart its endeavours to stabilize and fixate the "oneness" that it

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<sup>359</sup> Sedofsky, *supra* note 12, at 247.

<sup>360</sup> For a key reflection on the relationship between "politics" and "policing," see JACQUES RANCIÈRE, *LA MÉSENTENTE* 43-67 (1995). Rancière features prominently on the far left of the French contemporary philosophical spectrum. His thought closely resonates with that of AB in a number of important respects. At Université de Paris-Vincennes and later at Université de Paris-Saint-Denis, Rancière and AB were teaching colleagues over many years. For a biographical note on Rancière, see James Swenson, *Jacques Rancière*, in *THE COLUMBIA HISTORY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRENCH THOUGHT* 641-43 (Lawrence D. Kritzman ed., 2006).

<sup>361</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 126.

<sup>362</sup> RANCIÈRE, *supra* note 360, at 169.

<sup>363</sup> BADIOU, *L'être et l'événement*, *supra* note 9, at 125. The French compound word is "*dé-liaison*."

harnesses in the service of its authority. For the State, the “*one-more*” is the “*one-too-many*.”<sup>364</sup> Because it fears that the growth of a figure that is in excess of the situation would promote the disintegration of “oneness” and the dissolution of its authority, the State thus regards the “one-more,” or the multiple, as antagonistic and treats it as unlawful or illegal. This is why even if it comes to materialize itself, the alternative figure, although located within the situation (thus, properly speaking, belonging to the situation), will not decidedly be included as part of the situation. It will not be taken by the State of the situation to exist as one of its parts. But there are individuals who refuse to be relegated to the role of “number,” who do not accept simply being counted or not counted by the State, who cannot resign themselves to the fact that the Law is all there is, who cannot be persuaded that the State is the whole, who decide to operate beyond the system. Such individuals may come into being as subjects with a view to transforming the State of the situation in the name of a truth which has seized them.<sup>365</sup>

In France, vis-à-vis the French State, that is, from the point of view of the situation, the *sans-papiers*, while they belong to the situation in the sense that they exist within it (they are *in France*), are not decidedly included as a part of the situation. They are what Jacques Rancière calls the “without-part.”<sup>366</sup> The sub-set that they constitute—say, the sub-set of all individuals residing in France without holding immigration documents duly recognized by the French State—is not decidedly included as a part of the situation. Because they are asituational, the *sans-papiers* do not enjoy any re-presentational status in terms of the situation. Despite being physically present as members of the situation, the *sans-papiers* are denied any symbolic re-presentation as a part of the situation. In terms of the orderly criteria that emanate from the State’s knowledge and that define the groups populating the situation (whether as regards legal status, accredited diplomas, or recognized skills), the *sans-papiers* are deemed to have no ascertainable qualities. From the perspective of the situation, they are but “an indistinct gap in the normal social fabric.”<sup>367</sup> Whatever being they have does not partake in the Being of the situation and is not recognizable from the vantage point of the situation.

Picture Paris in the summer of 1996. Clearly, the Saint-Bernard *sans-papiers* belong to the situation. They are in France. But they are not from France. In AB’s words, written in France, they are “[p]eople

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<sup>364</sup> RANCIÈRE, *supra* note 360, at 161 (emphasis original). The French compound words are “*un-de-plus*” and “*un-en-trop*.”

<sup>365</sup> In a number of respects, this introductory passage tracks BARKER, *supra* note 29, at 68-69.

<sup>366</sup> RANCIÈRE, *supra* note 360, *passim*. The French compound word is “*sans-part*.”

<sup>367</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 118.

who are here, but not really from here.”<sup>368</sup> From the point of view of the situation, it is thus undecidable, at least originally, whether the *sans-papiers* are included as part of the situation so that they can benefit from the kind of re-presentational visibility that comes with recognition and legitimization within the State of the situation. The *sans-papiers* cannot readily be recognized from the point of view of the situation. They have but “a minimal or invisible existence according to the rules that regulate how things appear in [that] world, and thus entertain no observable relationship with the other elements of that world. The dominant logical structure of [the] situation ensures that the appearing or ‘being-there’ of such elements is indistinguishable from mere ‘non-being.’”<sup>369</sup> From the situation’s standpoint, then, the *sans-papiers* are *prima facie* illegal. But a subjective intervention may yet force the *sans-papiers* to be included into the situation so that they are made to be a part of it after all.

Initially, the subject who wishes to have the *sans-papiers* recognized as part of the situation must show that they have their site within the situation, that is to say, that they are located in a specific point of the situation. Given the marginal character of the *sans-papiers* vis-à-vis the situation, it can only be possible for a subject to locate them at the very edge of the situation, that is, at the point where Frenchness ceases and non-Frenchness commences. It is important to emphasize that to be at the edge of the situation, to be located where the situation ends, means to be located within the situation (the *sans-papiers* are in France) *and*, simultaneously, to be located at the very point where the non-situation, or the situation’s void (the beyond-Frenchness), begins (the *sans-papiers* are not from France). As the *sans-papiers* reveal the void of the situation, what the situation has excluded, the goal for the subject is to establish for the situation to see that the *sans-papiers*, standing precariously at the very edge of the situation, are nonetheless a part of the situation. His ambition must be to fracture the extant knowledge, to make a hole in it, and to supplement it by incorporating into it the supernumerary name of the “*sans-papiers*.” The subject who takes the necessary steps to achieve this inclusion—who purports to challenge the count by inscribing the part of the without-part<sup>370</sup>—is acting in a way that is radically heterogeneous to the established Law.

Inspired by the revelation of the void, of the exclusion, of what the situation has negated, of what the situation has refused to count, the subject constitutes himself as the vector of a truth-process and proceeds to investigate the situation with a view to connecting the *sans-papiers*

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<sup>368</sup> Badiou, Huit thèses, *supra* note 6, at 15.

<sup>369</sup> HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 372, n.26.

<sup>370</sup> See RANCIÈRE, *supra* note 360, at 31, 169.

with the situation (for example, the subject may insist that the *sans-papiers* have children attending French schools, in a context where the “French school,” very much an established figure of the situation, can serve as a nexus with the *sans-papiers*). The claim, then, is that even though the *sans-papiers* are not French, they are a part of France. This assertion throws the established understanding of the situation into serious question. Ultimately, the subject’s investigations will challenge the very identity of the State-as-One by disputing the cardinal principle that underlies political normality. But the idea that the *sans-papiers* should be included within the situation will, at least initially, be regarded as sinister and threatening from within the situation itself. For the inhabitants of the situation, the State of the situation is secure only as long as the *sans-papiers* can be dismissed as illegal migrants. The fact is that the knowledge available within the situation is unable to analyze the *sans-papiers* in any other terms. In order to protect the stability of the situation, the State, using predictable tactics such as the rhetoric of fear or military expulsions, will strive to block any attempt to ensure the recognition of the *sans-papiers* within the situation.

To break with established knowledge, the subject will have to display “exceptional, faithful, patient labour.”<sup>371</sup> Only confidence in the truth, only the militant edification of a truth (which, being infinite as truths are, will escape in all its ramifications the reach of the finite subject), only the perseverant answer to the call which is lived as an absolute necessity, can expose what has been hidden within the situation all along, that is, can show that the *sans-papiers* have belonged to the situation all along, that they have existed as genuine street cleaners, concierges, and dishwashers despite the fact that, as a sub-set (“the *sans-papiers*”) they have not decidedly been included within the situation.

Animated by the truth that has taken hold of him and that has made him into its standard-bearer, the subject must force a decision from within the situation that will attest to the positive presence of the *sans-papiers* who have heretofore remained indiscernible within the situation, but who have now “publicly declare[d] the existence and the value of the without-value.”<sup>372</sup> Yet, in order for an heretofore indistinguishable sub-set of the situation to be included within the State of the situation, the entire situation must change. The idea, then, is to force a new knowledge onto the situation through a re-working of the language of the situation, through a process of naming. To be sure, the subject will construct his vocabulary out of the situation (that is, out of the language at his disposal). But as he circulates his idiom within the

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<sup>371</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 74.

<sup>372</sup> Badiou, *Huit thèses*, *supra* note 6, at 15.

situation, even if he retains the self-same signifier, he will aim to strip the word "*sans-papiers*" of the negative—ascertainably "persecutory and oppressive"<sup>373</sup>—connotations that it has been carrying in the situation. The subject's goal is to make the word evade the recognized principle of classification that has prevailed in the situation pursuant to which the *sans-papiers* not being French citizens, European Union migrants, holders of a valid immigration document such as a "*titre de résident*" or "*titre de séjour*," have not been entitled to any representation. The idea is to clear a new signifying space within the situation where the *sans-papiers* hold legal or official status and identity. Importantly, the word "*sans-papiers*" as employed by the subject does not duplicate the word "*sans-papiers*" that has been used within the situation for a long time. The word as marshalled by the subject has no referent within the established situation for there is occurring a shift away from the established meaning. Indeed, the signifying space that the subject's word seeks to mark will materialize out of the subtraction of a truth-of-the-situation from the established situation itself. It is the subject's ambition "to subtract a truth from all extant forms of knowledge and law,"<sup>374</sup> that is, to liberate a truth from the obstacles that the State of the situation has relentlessly deployed in order to negate it.

From the point of view of the subject, truth simply cannot be allowed to continue to dissolve "into opinion, into the perspectival world of historicity and 'culturalism.'"<sup>375</sup> "Historical consciousness cannot be a substitute for truth."<sup>376</sup> Through the confident pursuit of his investigations, through his fidelity to the *sans-papiers*, the subject surmises that he can name a principle ("the *sans-papiers* are entitled to rights") that can be verified in the situation. Emerging from the penumbra at the edge of the void, the subject wishes to dispel uncertainty and confusion in order to impose sureness and clarity with a view to getting the subset "*sans-papiers*" to transform the situation from within. The subject's aim is to effect a "radical dehistoricization."<sup>377</sup> For now, the trajectory of the truth as it seeks to make its way into the situation remains unfinished. For one thing, it awaits the series of random encounters with the terms of the situation that will eventually normalize it, make it a part of the situation, a stabilized outcome that will be verifiable through the ascertainment of an effective recognition of the *sans-papiers* by the French State. At that point, being no longer in excess of the situation, the *sans-papiers* will be shown to have been

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<sup>373</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 73.

<sup>374</sup> *Id.*

<sup>375</sup> *Id.*

<sup>376</sup> *Id.*

<sup>377</sup> *Id.*

*entitled to rights.*<sup>378</sup>

For the subject, then, the truth-process is about marking the “obsolescence” of the situation, about “dramatically redraw[ing] the dividing line between the possible and impossible.”<sup>379</sup> The *sans-papiers* have been excluded from the count: they must now be included so that they can become politically significant. Of course, this means changing the principle of the count itself, which would no longer be based on French nationality or nationality from another European Union country or whatever. Everyone in France (and indeed elsewhere) being concerned, the subject’s truth-message, although stemming from the Saint-Bernard occupation as such, although emerging locally, is addressed to all. In this sense, it can be said to be generic. It is an example, in AB’s language, of the singularity of the universal.<sup>380</sup> Beyond the people within the situation who have elected to extend the truth-process’s trajectory in the wake of the subject, there will be those who, although they will recognize the name used by the subject because it is fabricated out of the vocabulary of the situation, will take the view that this name is lacking in comforting reference. They will accordingly greet it with skepticism or hostility.

On account of the significant transformation that the Saint-Bernard occupation will have made to the State of the situation, it will be possible to see it, retroactively, as having constituted an *event*.

It remains *not* to conclude—and I mean this statement literally and emphatically.

I have found it important to allow AB to speak in his own voice and, also, to permit some of his main sources of inspiration—such as Jacques Lacan, Samuel Beckett, and fellow-traveller Jacques Rancière—to be heard.<sup>381</sup> Although I have sought to be scrupulously loyal to AB’s thought, to heed “the law of the [. . .] text, its injunction, its signature,”<sup>382</sup> it is clear to me that the AB who is featured in this text is, inevitably, “my” AB and a “provisional” AB at that. In other words, this argument is not, could not have been, and indeed was never meant to be the kind of strictly “duplicating” commentary that Jacques Derrida famously distinguishes from critique.<sup>383</sup> All the same, my critique—in the sense of a reading which, from an irredeemably contingent standpoint, probes the implications of AB’s epistemic choices—is yet to come. As regards the numerous questions that it will raise, that it is

<sup>378</sup> I draw, at times closely and at other times more loosely on HALLWARD, *supra* note 46, at 116-22, 141-43.

<sup>379</sup> GIBSON, *supra* note 39, at 72.

<sup>380</sup> Badiou, Huit thèses, *supra* note 6, at 12-13.

<sup>381</sup> Amongst the names not mentioned in this article, Louis Althusser is arguably of particular significance.

<sup>382</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Fidélité à plus d'un*, in 13 CAHIERS INTERSIGNÉS 221, 262 (1998).

<sup>383</sup> JACQUES DERRIDA, DE LA GRAMMATOLOGIE 227 (1967).

compelled to address, at least five issues deserve to be broadly identified immediately, if in the briefest of terms.

Is the commitment to a totalizing philosophical scheme defensible?

Is the loss attendant upon the reduction of ontology to mathematics acceptable?

Is there any warrant, other than a personal predilection, justifying the deeming of culture, or aspects of culture such as language, to be unworthy of philosophy's attention?

Is it problematic for the standing of a philosophical system that upon being applied to various historical, political, and social issues it should be found repeatedly to lead to conclusions at considerable variance with educated common sense?<sup>384</sup>

Is it appropriate for law—the discipline into which I was socialized and which I continue to research and teach with specific reference to comparative studies—to internalize philosophical formalism and attendant references to notions such as “purity,” “truth,” and “universalism”?

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<sup>384</sup> I should make it clear that I do not have in mind the matter of the Saint-Bernard *sans-papiers*.