The background of the cover features a red flag, possibly the flag of the French Revolution, waving in the foreground. Behind the flag is a grid of white window frames, each looking out onto a different view of a city at night, with lights and buildings visible.

THEORY  
OF THE  
SUBJECT

ALAIN BADIOU

TRANSLATED BY BRUNO BOSTEELS



## THEORY OF THE SUBJECT

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# THEORY OF THE SUBJECT

*Alain Badiou*

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Translated, and with an introduction, by Bruno Bosteels



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## Translator's Introduction

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### 1

*Théorie du sujet*, which hereby at last becomes available in English translation, is Alain Badiou's most passionate and experimental book. In terms of sheer personal engagement, it is perhaps comparable only to his early novels, *Almagestes* (1964) and *Portulans* (1967), or to his writings for the theatre such as the opera-novel *L'Écharpe rouge*, which dates from the same period (1979), or *Ahmed le subtil*, a hilarious farce composed in 1984 during a brief period of isolation and calm shortly after the present book was first published in French. In my eyes, *Théorie du sujet* is also Badiou's most daring, hermetic, and bewildering work of philosophy, and the time that has passed since its original appearance only seems to have added to the effect of bewilderment. Some introductory remarks may therefore be in order so as to situate the book in its wider context.

Presented in the form of a seminar between January 1975 and June 1979, which is to say during the closure of the so-called 'red years' (1966–76) and in a time that would witness the deplorable rise to fame of the 'new philosophers' (1976) as well as the false hopes surrounding the creation of the 'common programme' (signed in 1972) uniting Communists, Socialists, and radical Leftists in France; written in the midst of what can only be called an active campaign of ostracism against its author because of his undying Maoism, with some going so far as to call him a 'Maoist pit-bull'; and published in 1982 in the aftermath of the widely celebrated electoral victory in 1981 of François Mitterrand to the Presidency, the book makes no concessions to the dominant wisdom and post-political

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

euphoria of its time. To the contrary, solitude only seems to have had an emboldening effect. In this sense, we could apply Badiou's own words, taken from *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, to the author of the present book: 'Everything indicates that he refused any compromise when it came to fidelity to principles.' Or again: 'His discourse is one of pure fidelity to the possibility opened by the event.'<sup>1</sup> The pivotal event in this case being not so much the outburst of May '68, whose remarkable intensity and short-lived experience—the two usually going hand in hand within the tradition of ultra-leftism—the book otherwise also seeks to diagnose, so much as the patient action needed to work out the consequences of this uprising, during the first half of the 1970s, in the guise of French Maoism.

The upshot of this principled, not to say stubborn, approach is a work whose legendary difficulty until recently turned away many more readers than it attracted lasting admirers, even from among Badiou's most ardent followers. As Peter Hallward admits: '*Théorie du sujet* is by any criteria the most difficult to approach of Badiou's works.'<sup>2</sup> Rumour has it that for a long time, in student circles around the University of Paris-VIII at Vincennes, where Badiou taught for thirty years before occupying the post of his former teacher Louis Althusser as head of the Philosophy Department at the École Normale Supérieure in rue d'Ulm, to point a finger at someone and whisper that he or she was in the process of reading *Théorie du sujet* was tantamount to declaring this person either insane or fanatical, if not both at once. This rumour goes a long way toward explaining the belated arrival of the book's translation in any language and, even more so, the relative scarcity of sustained critical engagements with its central theses.<sup>3</sup>

Today, however, there can be no doubt that *Theory of the Subject* stands as an indispensable building block in the overarching system of Badiou's philosophy, on a par with his two other 'big' books, *Being and Event* and its recent follow-up, *Logics of Worlds*. To illustrate this centrality perhaps I may be allowed to invoke my personal experience as someone who, after reading Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy* out of a shared interest in a notion of the 'generic' that would be compatible with Platonism, for political reasons turned to the Maoist pamphlets from the mid-1970s, *Theory of Contradiction* and *Of Ideology*, and then decided to tackle *Theory of the Subject*: I distinctly remember having sat down almost non-stop—this was before the birth of my two sons—for an incredibly long weekend, frantically making my way through the entire book as though it were

a novel of intrigue, frequently bursting out in laughter—it is also an extremely funny book—and, in general, sensing as though the whole field of contemporary theory and philosophy opened up freshly before my eyes along the sharpest lines of demarcation to have been traced in the sand since Althusser's *For Marx*. All of this happened long before I mustered the courage and dared to take on *Being and Event*, intimidated as I was—never mind that for Badiou this is a cultural prejudice that is as vacuous as it is stubborn—by the formalization of its extensive mathematical apparatus. Reading *Theory of the Subject* before *Being and Event*, though, is not merely a matter of personal preference or anecdotal happenstance. After years of actively following the worldwide reception of Badiou's thought, in fact, I have come to the conclusion that this order of reading, which somewhat conventionally corresponds to the chronological order of the books' publication and thus to their author's trajectory as a philosopher and militant, even though it runs counter to the more common practice among English-speaking readers who tend to start with one or other of the books published and translated after *Being and Event*, makes all the difference in the world in terms of the image of thought that can be attributed to Badiou's philosophy as a whole. Above all, there where a privileged focus on *Being and Event* frequently leads to the conclusion that this thinker's trajectory involves a clean and irreversible break away from the tradition of the dialectic, *Theory of the Subject* allows the reader both to nuance, if not exactly refute, this conclusion as far as the idea of the break itself is concerned and to uncover subtle dialectical threads even in the overall metaontological argumentation which, grounded in a solid command of set theory, is supposed to come after this break.

## 2

For sure, in hindsight it is not difficult to enumerate the possible limitations and shortcomings of *Theory of the Subject*. In *Being and Event*, first of all, Badiou himself indicates that the earlier book remains limited insofar as it presupposes from the start that there is such a thing as subjectivity, without giving this presupposition much ontological support in mathematics. Perhaps this self-criticism is unnecessarily harsh since *Theory of the Subject*, even though this is often forgotten, already introduces the whole question of Cantorian set theory, all the way to the point of locating the emergence or 'pass' of the subject in the immeasurable excess of

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

inclusion over belonging, or of parts over elements—an excess which will constitute the central ‘impasse’ in the conceptual arrangement of *Being and Event*. Even so, it is true that only the later work will systematically elaborate the underpinnings of this thesis from a metaontological, that is to say metamathematical, point of view. As Badiou writes in the Preface: ‘The (philosophical) statement that mathematics *is* ontology—the science of being *qua* being—is the stroke of light that illuminates the speculative scene which I had restricted, in my *Theory of the Subject*, by presupposing purely and simply that ‘there was some’ subjectivization.’<sup>4</sup> The new task in *Being and Event* then consists in articulating, by way of the impasse of being, a coherent ontology together with an interventionist theory of the subject—a task which dialectical materialism in the old days would have accomplished by means of an homology between the dialectics of nature and the dialectics of spirit, and which today requires a careful reformulation of both poles of nature and spirit, or of substance and subject—this time, in *Being and Event*, above all in an oblique polemic with Heidegger and not only or not primarily with Lacan, as is the case in *Theory of the Subject*.

Philosophy itself, secondly, still appears to be sutured onto the sole condition of politics. The other three truth procedures of art (poetry and tragedy), science (mathematics), and love (psychoanalysis)—as well as the eternal shadow condition of religion (Christianity)—certainly are all already present, but not only are they implicit and mixed, they also do not seem to operate quite yet as conditions of philosophy in the strict sense, since the subject of truth is defined exclusively in terms of politics: ‘Every subject is political. Which is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics.’<sup>5</sup> Later, in *Conditions*, a collection of essays which builds on the new foundations of *Being and Event*, Badiou would correct this statement from *Theory of the Subject*: ‘Today, I would no longer say “every subject is political”, which is still a maxim of suturing. I would rather say: “Every subject is induced by a generic procedure, and thus depends on an event. Which is why the subject is rare.”’<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou states the principle that the four domains of truth, once they are unsutured and separated out, are all equally capable of bringing into existence a subject: ‘Every subject is artistic, scientific, political, or amorous. Besides, this is something everyone knows from experience, for out of these registers, there is only existence, or individuality, but no subject.’<sup>7</sup> What will remain unchanged, in any case, is the conviction that subject and truth necessarily co-implicate one another so that a theory of the

subject, at the farthest remove from any purely experiential or moral account, is always the theory of the formal conditions for the emergence of a universalizable truth.

Thirdly, within the condition of politics, the book still considers the party the only effective organizational structure, albeit with an eye toward a 'party of a new type', that is, a form of post-Leninism whose task is here openly ascribed to Maoism.<sup>8</sup> Going one step further than merely acknowledging the uncertainties of this task given the undeniable crisis of Marxism, Badiou has since then abandoned this strict identification of the political subject with the party, which in all its incarnations over the past century—whether as a single party or as part of the parliamentary-electoral multi-party system—has remained overly bound to the form of the State: 'The balance sheet of the nineteenth century is the withering away of the category of class as the sole bearer of politics, and the balance sheet of the twentieth century is the withering away of the party-form, which knows only the form of the party-State.'<sup>9</sup> Philosophically, moreover, this search for a new figure of militantism without a party is precisely what will bring Badiou back to an old acquaintance, in *Saint Paul*, as though almost thirty years had to pass before he could finally come to terms with his personal road to Damascus that was May '68 or, rather, its Maoist aftermath: 'For me, Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practises and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure.'<sup>10</sup> Even the self-criticism implied in this move from party-politics to a form of militantism without a party, however, should not let us forget that another crucial point that has remained intact is the idea that any emancipatory politics must take an organized form: 'Must we argue that organization alone can make an event into an origin? Yes, insofar as a political subject requires the historical underpinning of an apparatus and insofar as there is no origin except for a determinate politics.'<sup>11</sup> Eventually, this emphasis on the need for any truth, whether political or otherwise, to become incorporated in some organized form or apparatus will lead to a new theory of the body—a new physics to buttress the metaphysics of the subject—in *Logics of Worlds*.

Another point of self-criticism, finally, concerns the violent language of destruction with which Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* seeks to counter what he calls the structural dialectic of lack in Mallarmé or Lacan. Toward the end of *Being and Event*, the author admits: 'I went a bit astray, I must say, in *Theory of the Subject* concerning the theme of destruction. I still maintained, back then, the idea of an essential link between destruction

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and novelty.<sup>12</sup> The idea was that every new truth would necessarily involve a destruction of the old order. From a strict ontological view, however, the part of loss in novelty must be rephrased in terms not of destruction but of subtraction and disqualification. A new truth cannot suppress any existence, but by extending a given situation from the point of its supplementation that is an event, an engaged enquiry into the truthfulness or veridicality of this event can disqualify, or subtract, certain terms or multiples—namely, those inegalitarian ones that are incompatible with the generic and universal nature of all truth. Destruction, then, would be only a reactive name for the fate of that part of knowledge that no longer will have qualified as truthful or veridical in the extended situation in which an event has taken place.

However, this last self-criticism too may have to be tempered in the extent that the distinction between the two paths of destruction and subtraction remains a key topic of the author's ongoing enquiries. Much of Badiou's *Ethics*, for instance, deals with the specific restraints that must apply to any truth procedure in order to avoid the 'disaster' of forcing an entire situation in the name of truth, to the point of completely destroying the old order of things, while the opposite operation of subtraction, which proceeds by way of a principle of 'minimal difference', is the topic of several of Badiou's lectures in *The Century*.<sup>13</sup> What is more, whereas *Being and Event* seems to point to the notion of destruction as the principal misgiving in Badiou's own earlier thought, which is still very much sutured onto politics under the influence of Maoism, in *Logics of Worlds* a new balance is struck between destruction and subtraction. A truth, then, involves *both* a disqualification or subtraction (of being) *and* a destruction or loss (of appearing): 'The opening of a space of creation requires destruction.'<sup>14</sup> In fact, this is just one of many regards in which the second volume of *Being and Event* is once more closer to *Theory of the Subject*. The point is certainly not to move in a self-righteous and linear fashion from the ravaging blindness of destruction, associated with the dialectical work, to the cool insights of subtraction, afforded by the turn to mathematics.

Indeed, though this remains somewhat of a bone of contention among critics and commentators, Badiou's subsequent trajectory suggests that there are certainly as many intriguing lines of continuity and resurrection between the earlier and the later writings as there have been points of acute self-criticism and discontinuity. This becomes nowhere more evident than in the Preface to *Logics of Worlds* where Badiou gladly adopts the name 'materialist dialectic' to describe his lifelong endeavour, in sharp

contrast to *Being and Event* where the orthodox tradition of 'dialectical materialism', as I mentioned above, is considered beyond salvage as the 'stillborn' attempt to render homologous the dialectic of nature and that of spirit. After nearly two decades of expressly anti-dialectical fervour, particularly in texts such as *Metapolitics* and *The Century*, Badiou's work in recent years thus seems, if not exactly to have come full circle, then at least to be spiralling back to some of its original premises, since already one of his earliest philosophical texts, a review of Althusser's canonical *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, received the programmatic title 'The (Re) commencement of Dialectical Materialism'. But then to provide Marxism with a materialist and dialectical philosophy compatible with its strictly political definition is precisely the ambitious overall programme behind *Theory of the Subject*, a programme which Badiou now argues—against the canonical teachings of Althusser and with the unexpected help of Lacan—cannot be accomplished without the very concept of the subject that materialism previously had the purpose of debunking as sheer idealist humbug.

3

Lenin once famously described Marx's teaching as 'the legitimate successor to the best that humanity produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism'.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, we could sum up the 'three sources' or 'component parts' of *Theory of the Subject* by saying that Badiou's teaching in this work draws its strength from a unique articulation of French poetry and psychoanalysis (Mallarmé and Lacan), German philosophy (Hegel and, to a lesser degree, Hölderlin), and Greek tragedy (Aeschylus and Sophocles). If the ultimate goal of this triangulation is a redefinition of Marxism, understood as a periodized mode of doing politics rather than as an established body of doctrines to be saved from crisis and kept pure against all odds, then we should add that the medium of this operation—or the general ideological atmosphere in which it is able to redraw the lines of demarcation between dialectical materialism and rivalling philosophies—is an original investigation into the contemporary role of Maoism, well beyond its specific site in China: 'That which we name 'Maoism' is less a final result than a task, a historical guideline. It is a question of thinking and practising post-Leninism.'<sup>16</sup>

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In Part One, Badiou first of all redefines the Hegelian dialectic in terms of a logic of scission, instead of the typical textbook notions of alienation, negation, the negation of negation, and so on. To be more precise, he distinguishes two matrices of the dialectic in Hegel: an idealist one, defined by the externalization and return to self, and a properly materialist one, in which every term is split without unity either at the origin or in the end. Badiou examines this distinction in a remarkable reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, especially those parts on determination and limit which, as is often the case with early moments in Hegel's presentation, are not yet contaminated by the idealist pressures of the Absolute. Badiou's reliance on Hegel's *Logic*, moreover, provides a refreshing and much-needed contrast to the heavy influence of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the tradition of French Hegelianism from Alexandre Kojève to Georges Bataille, aside from obviously running counter to the general anti-Hegelianism of the Althusserian school.<sup>17</sup> A bold reading of Christianity in light of this dialectic of scission, furthermore, allows Badiou not only to circumscribe the twin 'heresies' or 'deviations' of 'left-wing' Gnosticism (for which, if we may simplify matters of doctrine to an extreme, Christ is purely divine or infinite) and 'right-wing' Arianism (for which Christ is purely human or finite), but also to specify the point where Hegel's dialectic remains after all idealist in terms of the historical periodization that it allows or, rather, disallows, insofar as it moves in circles and ultimately leads back to the split term that was always already present from the origin (God as Father/Son or infinity/finitude). 'Hegel, on this point, must be divided once again' so as to break out of the 'circle of circles' of the Absolute, Badiou concludes: 'To be brief, we will oppose (materialist) *periodization* to (idealist) *circularity*.'<sup>18</sup> The reading of Hegel thus lays the groundwork for a theory of what we might call 'historicity without History', which throughout the remainder of the book will continue to inform the periodization of Marxism.

Part Two, after a discussion of ancient atomism as a limited or failed attempt by way of pure chance or the clinamen to inject some measure of dialecticity into the stark contradiction of void and atoms, offers Badiou's longest and most detailed engagement with the writings of Mallarmé, considered to be one of the two great modern French dialecticians, together with Lacan. Like the atomism of Democritus or Lucretius, Mallarmé's dialectic is unpacked into a limited number of formal operations, three to be exact: vanishing, annulment, and foreclosure. Of these operations, the efficacy of a vanishing cause is without a doubt the most important,

insofar as it also implies an unspoken critique of the whole Althusserian concept of structural causality, that is, of a cause that vanishes into the totality of its effects.<sup>19</sup> Badiou highlights the extraordinary power of this concept while at the same time revealing its weakness, namely, the place where the notion of a causality of lack, even or especially when it is raised to the level of a formal concept thanks to the anxiety-inducing operation of annulment whereby lack itself comes to lack, turns into a forbidding obstacle or stopping point, prohibiting the actual transformation of the totality put in place by the effects of the vanishing cause itself. Mallarmé's writing, though eminently dialectical, in this sense would remain idealist, presenting what Badiou calls a structural—though not structuralist—dialectic. 'All this forms a precious legacy,' Badiou concludes, even though there is a need to dialecticize the structural dialectic beyond itself: 'No, I find no fault with all this, except that I am not swayed by an order of things in which all thought is devoted to the inspection of that which subordinates it to the placement of an absence, and which brings salvation for the subject only in the already-thereness of a star.'<sup>20</sup>

In Part Three, the exploration of the promises and deadlocks of this structural dialectic is extended and taken into the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Of all Badiou's works, in fact, *Theory of the Subject* contains his most thoroughgoing discussion of Lacan's *Écrits* and the few seminars published at the time, especially Seminar XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* and Seminar XX: *Encore*, together with scattered texts published in the Lacanian journals *Ornicar?* and *Scilicet*. Long before Slavoj Žižek would popularize such readings in a similarly political key, Badiou thus distinguishes between the earlier Lacan, for whom the dominant term is the symbolic that dissolves the imaginary, and the later Lacan, whose mathematical obsessions revolve around the real that absolutely resists symbolization. Or, rather, there would be two different conceptions of the real itself: the first, which Badiou calls 'algebraic', follows closely in Mallarmé's footsteps by defining the real as a vanishing cause, whereas the other, called 'topological', relies on notions such as the Borromean knot in order to give the real a minimum of consistency. 'There are, broadly speaking, two successive Lacans, the one of the lack of being and the one of the ontology of the hole, of the nodal *topos*, and, consequently, of the being of lack', Badiou writes: 'Beginning in the seventies, which one can mark by the primacy of the knot over the chain, or of consistency over causality, it is the historical aspect that gains the upper hand over the structural one.'<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the goal of this delimitation of the structural

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dialectic is to find the formal means—for the most part absent or dissimulated in Hegel and Mallarmé yet obliquely hinted at by Lacan—by which to exceed the boundaries of the causality of lack so as to change the coordinates of the entire order put in place by its efficacy. Otherwise, there still would be no novelty, no event, and no historicity, but only the repetition of the totality of assigned places under the effects of the vanishing cause.

Destruction is the name for this process by which the structural dialectic of lack is exceeded and opened up to the historicity of change. Badiou is thus able to sum up the stakes of his polemic with psychoanalysis: 'Our entire dispute with Lacan lies in the division, which he restricts, of the process of lack from that of destruction.'<sup>22</sup> The real, then, no longer returns always to the same place. Or, put otherwise, that which will have taken place is not just the place itself. Instead, it becomes possible for a certain coefficient of force to interrupt and work back upon the place that determines it, just as history no longer automatically moves in circles but opens up the minimal gap necessary for conceiving of a spiralling and asymmetrical process of periodization. 'Destruction divides the effect of lack into its part of oblivion—of automatism—and its part of possible interruption—of excess over the place, of the overheating of the automatisms,' Badiou concludes: 'By this thin gap, another mastery can be said to come into being, together with an asymmetrical balancing of loss and gain.'<sup>23</sup>

Badiou then takes an enormous step back in time so as to illustrate and expand on the disjunction between lack and destruction through the example of Greek tragedy. In particular, he wonders not just why psychoanalysis, as George Steiner and Judith Butler also ask, has been so exclusively focused on the figure of Oedipus instead of taking into consideration Antigone but also, more generally, why it is Sophocles, and not Aeschylus, who has provided Freud and Lacan with their most illustrious tragic myths: 'The whole purpose of our critical delimitation with regard to the psychoanalytic contribution to the theory of the subject can be evaluated by asking the following question: why is its theory of the subject essentially based on Sophocles, that is, predicated on the Oedipus complex?'<sup>24</sup> Picking up on a brief suggestion from Lacan's very first seminar, Badiou proposes that if the Sophoclean model of tragedy and, by extension, of psychoanalysis can be concentrated in the twin subjective figures of anxiety (Antigone) and the superego (Creon), then the Aeschylean model supplements these with the great dialectical figures of courage (Orestes) and justice (Athena): 'Thus we see that there exist indeed two Greek tragic

modes: the Aeschylean one, the direction of which is the contradictory advent of justice by the courage of the new; and the Sophoclean one, the anguished sense of which is the quest, through a reversal, for the super-egoic origin.<sup>25</sup> Anxiety, superego, courage, and justice hereby come to name the four fundamental concepts in any theory of the subject. What is more, this return to ancient tragedy gives Badiou the occasion both to address Hölderlin's remarks on Sophocles and to elaborate his own unique theory of justice, of the force of law, and of its ferocious underside of violence and nonlaw, with which he may be said to have anticipated more recent debates from the likes of Jacques Derrida or Žižek.<sup>26</sup>

The original seminars for Part Four coincide with the media uproar caused by the various attacks coming from the hands of self-proclaimed 'new philosophers'—many of them, like André Glucksmann, ex-Maoist renegades—against the 'master discourse' of Marxism that with Stalinist necessity would have led from *diamat* to the Gulag. In response to this media event, Badiou tactically shifts the terrain so as to answer the charges of the anti-Marxist war machine with reference not to the much-maligned 'totalitarianism' of the dialectic but to a contemporary definition of the 'black sheep' of materialism. Here, too, a principle of periodization applies, based on the fact that any materialism is defined by its immanent scission from a rivalling idealism: 'There are three materialisms, for the excellent reason that there are three idealisms: religious idealism, humanist idealism, and then—the fruit of this historical cul-de-sac in which imperialism casts its last rays of languishing modernity—linguistic idealism.'<sup>27</sup> Insofar as there is no point in denying the constituent role of symbolic structures such as language, the idealism that results from the linguistic turn also cannot be overcome merely by reaffirming matter as some hard prelinguistic fact. Instead, materialism itself must be split in terms of a double determination: to the thesis of identity, according to which all being is matter, we thus must add the thesis of primacy, according to which there are two regions of being, matter and thought, with the first ruling over the second: 'We can say, in short, that the thesis of identity names the place (of being), and the thesis of primacy the process (of knowledge) under the rule of the place.'<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the theory of knowledge, this double determination of materialism can be summarized in the 'mirror' that functions as the metaphor for knowledge in the notorious reflection theory, and the 'asymptote', which metaphorizes knowledge from the point of view of the remainder left behind by all exact reflection. 'Let us say that for

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materialism reflection is the metaphor of the thesis of identity', Badiou concludes: 'The second metaphor mathematizes the thesis of primacy into an asymptote.'<sup>29</sup> Both of these theses must be maintained at the same time, lest the dialecticity of the dialectic that traverses materialism through and through is allowed to lapse back into a 'rightist' or 'leftist' exaggeration, which would reduce knowledge, respectively, to being a simple mirroring reduplication of the existing structure of things or to following an infinite line of flight caused by some indivisible leftover. Given the current theoretical panorama, which bathes in the obscure light projected by notions such as difference, the remainder, or the asymptotic approach of the real in the night of non-knowledge, there is thus something refreshingly counterintuitive in this return to materialism in the bright mirror of reflection theory.

Parts Five and Six, finally, move the argument with increasing speed and concision in the direction of an overview of the entire theory of the subject in order to elucidate a possible 'ethics of Marxism'. This is accomplished by mapping out the four fundamental concepts, on one hand, into two analytical temporalities respectively of 'subjectivization' (based on the hasty time of interruption, itself split into anxiety and courage) and of the 'subjective process' (based on the durable time of recomposition, itself in turn split into the superego and justice); and, on the other, into two synthetic modes or trajectories, one which Badiou dubs the mode  $\psi$  (from anxiety to the superego) and the other, the mode  $\alpha$  (from courage to justice). The theory of the subject thus becomes a complex topological space or network, ordered around the four basic concepts and their articulations. In fact, in addition to the vertical and horizontal pairings, there are also diagonal correlations that mark the trajectories of ideology in the theory of the subject, that is, the great imaginary functions of dogmatism (along the courage-superego axis) and scepticism (along the justice-anxiety axis). Badiou furthermore includes a brief phenomenological account of the different figures and trajectories in this overview, in which he once again returns to Hegel and Hölderlin.<sup>30</sup>

Ethics comes into the picture in this context as the name for different subjective formations that constitute so-called discourses, rather than either concepts or trajectories. Badiou distinguishes two extreme cases: the discourse of praise, based on belief in an essential wisdom of the world, and the openly Promethean discourse of rebellious confidence. Between these two extremes of belief and confidence, there lie the discourses of what Badiou calls the ethics of the impasse, whether nihilist or

dissident, insofar as they reject all linkages between the supposed wisdom of the existing world and the subject's evaluation of what is to be done. The book's final propositions, which argue in favour of an ethics that would refuse to give up on the subject's confidence, in this sense can be considered an early anticipation of Badiou's *Ethics* as well as a welcome counterpart to the latter's all too polemical overtones.

4

Implicit in the notion of an 'ethics of Marxism', as opposed to a 'Marxist ethics', is a strictly political understanding of Marxism. This matter of principle guides the selection of texts from the tradition: 'We can never repeat enough that the texts of Marxism are first and foremost those of militant politics.'<sup>31</sup> The reader thus will search in vain for Badiou's personal interpretation of Marx's *Capital* ('the elephant *Capital*', Badiou says) or even of the *Grundrisse* (which play such a central role, around the same time in the late 1970s, in Antonio Negri's recasting of Marxism). Instead, it is with reference to interventionist texts such as *The Communist Manifesto* or Lenin's 'The Crisis Has Matured' that the present work claims to be standing in the lineage of political Marxism. Likewise, Badiou repeatedly rejects any notion of a 'science of history' that would be embodied in Marx's own study and critique of the political economy of advanced capitalism, in favour of a militant definition of the reference to texts by Marx, Lenin, and Mao in concrete political experiments: 'Science of history? *Marxism is the discourse with which the proletariat sustains itself as subject. We must never let go of this idea.*'<sup>32</sup> If ethics has any role at all to play in this context, it is only in order to serve as a practical principle, or maxim, for sustaining the rational and partisan calculations of politics.

Scattered throughout *Theory of the Subject* the reader will thus be able to find Badiou's reflections on the role of masses, classes, and the State; on the party of a new type as the body of politics; and on communism, revolution, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Anyone interested in probing the exact nature of Badiou's Marxism, in this sense, should pay close attention to the present book. Perhaps above all, the reader will come to appreciate a side of Badiou's work that usually is not as visible as it is in *Theory of the Subject* or, once again, in *Logics of Worlds*, that is, his flair for historical periodization. Not only does he present what I earlier called a

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materialist theory of historicity without History; but he also steps into the trenches in order to intervene in the actual historicization of Marxism, as the discourse of reference in at least three crucial sequences of events: the popular riots from the time of the *Communist Manifesto* all the way to the experiment of the Paris Commune; the victory of the October Revolution and the constitution of socialist States throughout the Soviet bloc; and the Cultural Revolution in Maoist China. The reasons for this otherwise fairly orthodox effort at periodization are consistent with the principle of a militant—as opposed to a scientific, not to mention purely academic—understanding of the discourse founded by Marx: ‘For Marxism, seized from any point that is not its effective operation which is entirely of the order of politics within the masses, does not deserve one hour of our troubles.’<sup>33</sup>

This does not mean neglecting the crisis of Marxism: ‘Yes, let us admit it without detours: Marxism is in crisis; Marxism is atomized.’<sup>34</sup> However, unlike what happens in the anti-Marxist war machine of the discourse against totalitarianism, this crisis must be understood immanently, from within the weakness or the exhaustion of the referential value of the Marxist discourse in actual political and militant processes: ‘Past the impulse and creative scission of the 1960s, after the national liberation struggles and the cultural revolution, what we inherit in times of crisis and the imminent threat of war is a narrow and fragmentary assemblage of thought and action, caught in a labyrinth of ruins and survivals.’<sup>35</sup> If Marxism, in addition to its undeniable historical crisis, must also undergo an active conceptual destruction, then it is always with an eye on its possible recomposition as a political discourse. This is why, several years after *Theory of the Subject*, it can come to function as one of the two fundamental ‘intervening doctrines of the subject’, the other one being psychoanalysis, that from the outside condition the philosophy of the event, as Badiou will state explicitly in the Preface to *Being and Event*: ‘A post-Cartesian doctrine of the subject is unfolding: its origin can be traced to non-philosophical practices (whether those practices be political, or relating to ‘mental illness’); and its regime of interpretation, marked by the names of Marx and Lenin, Freud and Lacan, is intricately linked to clinical or militant operations which go beyond transmissible discourse.’<sup>36</sup> Besides, the double historical stamping of these doctrines of the subject, with Marx/Lenin—aside from recalling Jesus/Paul at the origin of Christianity—being strictly homologous to Freud/Lacan, leads Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* to raise an intriguing question: ‘Where is, yet to come and making three,

the Mao of psychoanalysis?'<sup>37</sup> This question is not rhetorical and to a large extent remains open to this day—with Lacan himself still having important lessons to teach, as Badiou shows, regarding a theory of the subject that would be compatible with the destruction and recomposition of Marxism.

In other words, while it is certainly true that in *Theory of the Subject* Badiou acknowledges to be speaking from defeat, as when he says: 'To defend Marxism today means to defend a weakness', we should not neglect the fact that this acknowledgement is immediately followed by a statement in which the weakness of the indefensible at once prescribes the task of a new duty: 'We must *practise* Marxism.'<sup>38</sup>

At least two major interrogations admittedly still remain open with regard to the Marxist inscription of *Theory of the Subject*. The first concerns the place of (the critique of) political economy. As Žižek frequently insists, this dimension appears to be completely absent from Badiou's work after *Being and Event*. Through the concept of the absent cause itself, though, there is certainly a good case to be made for the argument that *Theory of the Subject* both includes and problematizes the role of the economy in a strictly political understanding of Marxism. Between Althusser and Badiou, in fact, we might say that a decisive reversal of perspective takes place whereby the absent cause, instead of providing us with the master key to unlock the structural causality of overdetermination, becomes synonymous with the transformative potential of an event. The economical instance, which for Althusser serves as the principal example of a cause that vanishes into the totality of its effects, thus continues to be present as it were virtually in Badiou's doctrine of the event, except that the emphasis now shifts away from the structural dimension towards the rarity of a subjective intervention. There can be no doubt, however, that much more work needs to be done in order to follow the destiny of this concept of the economy *qua* absent cause in the wake of Althusserian Marxism. Jacques-Alain Miller's early writings from the time of his participation in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, especially 'Matrix' and 'Action of the Structure', even more so than his widely known 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)', should prove particularly relevant in this context, and they already receive much attention in Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*.<sup>39</sup>

In the end, though, even a return to the concept of the absent cause along the path that leads from structural to post-structural forms of thought is unlikely to convince the die-hard Marxist who is in search of an account of political economy in this thinker's work. For in the eyes of Badiou, the

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fact of the matter remains that Marx's *Capital*, while essentially true in its diagnostic, and perhaps even truer today than a century and a half ago, nonetheless puts us on the wrong track if our aim is to define a political rather than an analytical Marxism. This is because the critique of political economy has been unable to perform its own critique, as Badiou will write in *Can Politics Be Thought?* In this sense, the economical instance marks the fixation, or the becoming-fiction, of Marxism:

What was supposed to be a strategy of the event, a hypothesis regarding the hysterias of the social, an organ of interpretation-interruption, a courage of fortune, has finally been presented, by way of the economy, as giving a convenient measure to social relations. Thus, Marxism has been destroyed by its own history, which is that of the fixation, with an x, the history of its fixation by the philosopheme of the political.<sup>40</sup>

Marxism can be freed from this fixation only if the crises and hysterias, to which the critique of political economy was supposed to provide access, are seen neither as social facts nor as empirical illustrations of antagonism as the metaphysical essence of 'the political', *le politique*, but as the retroactive outcome of 'politics', *la politique*, or rather, of *une politique*, that is, of 'a (specific mode of doing) politics'. *Theory of the Subject* aims to come to grips precisely with the logic of such retroactive interventions, as described almost on the spot in the feverishly militant writings of Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

A second interrogation concerns the historical nature of the theory of the subject as such. For Badiou, this question never even poses itself insofar as his theory is purely formal or axiomatic. What is more, as he recently reiterates, over time not much has changed at all either in the configuration of being, truth, and subject, which constitutes the matrix for philosophy, or in the types and figures of truth to which a subject can be faithful: 'The fact is that today—and in this regard things haven't budged much since Plato—we know only four types of truth: science (mathematics and physics), love, politics, and the arts.'<sup>41</sup> From a Marxist perspective, though, we might want to ask whether there are not also important historical breaks that need to be taken into account within the formal conditions of existence that are constitutive of such processes of subjectivization, particularly in politics. Does not capitalism introduce a major cut into these processes? Or does the formal apparatus remain fundamentally unchanged, even if any given truth procedure, like any political intervention, must appear in a specific historical world?

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Clearly, Badiou's insistence on the eternal, transhistorical, or transtemporal nature of all truths is meant in the first place to avoid the relativistic consequences of a thoroughly historicized account of the subject. This is precisely the gist of his outspoken attack in *Logics of Worlds* against the historicism that he associates with so-called 'democratic materialism', as opposed to the 'materialist dialectic'. The real issue, however, concerns the compatibility, or not, between a formal and a historical theory of the subject. In Marxist terms, this would bring us back to the familiar stumbling block of defining the relations between dialectical materialism and historical materialism. Along these lines, aside from a return to Étienne Balibar's discussion of periodization and other basic concepts of historical materialism in his contribution to *Reading Capital*, future investigations based on a thorough grasp of *Theory of the Subject* might want to revisit not only the role of capitalism but also, in a possible dialogue with Michel Foucault's contemporary work in *The History of Sexuality* or in his seminar on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the role of religion and psychoanalysis in the changing faces of ancient, medieval, and modern subjectivity.<sup>42</sup>

### 5

At this point, we might actually turn around our initial question and ask whether, even from such a cursory overview of *Theory of the Subject* as the one I have just outlined, Badiou's other major books, *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, do not also appear in a different and perhaps even critical light. In any case, while I do not wish to suggest something that Badiou jokingly has come to attribute to my reading of *Theory of the Subject*, namely, that after this book it all goes steeply downhill, with only a brief flaring up of hope with *Logics of Worlds*, we are far removed from the common prejudice according to which the work of philosophers, in an ongoing series of self-criticisms and emendations, is supposed to follow a steady path of linear progression.

The very relation between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* (subtitled *Being and Event, 2*), to begin with, can best be understood in terms of the articulation of algebra and topology. But then it soon appears that this comparison with one of the pivotal conceptual divisions from *Theory of the Subject* at once implies an anticipatory critique of the work to come. From within the strictly metaontological parameters proper to *Being and Event*,

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indeed, the event can only emerge as a vanishing cause whose entire being lies in disappearing. Now from the older work, we know that such an 'algebraic' viewpoint, for which the salient feature of the event—a feature forbidden in axiomatic set theory—would be its self-referentiality or its self-belonging, must be supplemented with a 'topological' orientation, which, on the basis of category theory or the theory of *topoi*, investigates the event in terms of its consequences and the consistency of its implicative structure, as happens in the sequel to *Being and Event*. In this sense, we might conclude, an astute reader of *Theory of the Subject* could have predicted a long time ago that *Being and Event* was to remain one-sided—triggering the hackneyed objections against Badiou as a dogmatist if not a downright mystic of the punctual event—until its extension that would take almost twenty years to come to fruition in *Logics of Worlds*.

*Theory of the Subject* not only provides us with a key to understand the dialectic between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*—especially if 'by "dialectic", in a direct lineage from Hegel, we are to understand the idea that the essence of all difference lies in the third term that marks the gap between the two others'.<sup>43</sup> But the earlier book also is capable of reorienting our reading of each of the later two volumes taken on its own. As I suggested above, this constitutes one of Badiou's major virtues as a philosopher in general, namely, his capacity to draw up a sharp picture of the stakes involved in the most burning polemics of our time so as to confront the reader with the obligation of a decision in favour of one line of thought or the other. What needs to be added here is that this capacity for giving thought a decisive orientation obviously can be extended to include Badiou's own work as well.

Thus, when read in light of *Theory of the Subject*, the project of *Being and Event* no longer appears to fall so easily in the traps of a rigid, undialectical or even anti-dialectical dualism. Nor does the event appear only as a punctual instance of self-belonging, wholly delinked or cut off from the existing situation. Instead, or rather in addition, the emphasis also falls on the fact that the event is always an event *for* a specific situation, by virtue of the evental site that only a concrete analysis of the concrete situation can circumscribe. Furthermore, rather than a relapse into the inert binaries of being/event, knowledge/truth, and so on, commonly associated with Badiou's thought, what a careful understanding of *Theory of the Subject* brings out in *Being and Event* is not only the extent to which each founding concept is internally split (in other words, the bar separating two terms of a binary must be transposed onto each term, so that being itself is split into

consistent and inconsistent being; consistent being into presentation and representation; the event into itself and its site; the subject into the mortal individual and the immortal participant of a truth process, and so on), but also the role of a whole series of intermediary or intercalated concepts and operations (such as the concept of the evental site, which symptomatically links the event to a given situation and for which, significantly, no mathematical formula is available since with this concept we enter the realm of thick historical analysis; or the operation of forcing, which in a backward torsion makes a truth operative so as to produce new forms of knowledge within the situation of departure). Finally, even though the next to last meditation of *Being and Event* is titled 'Theory of the Subject', this newer version actually appears to be rather one-dimensional in comparison to the earlier book of the same title, in the sense that the subject is defined exclusively in terms of fidelity or not to the event. Unlike what happens with the dialectical interplay among the four fundamental concepts of anxiety, courage, justice, and the superego, there thus seems to be little or no space for internal strife within the subject as such. This, too, will be corrected in the first 'book' of *Logics of Worlds*, titled 'Formal Theory of the Subject (Metaphysics)'.

I have already pointed out some of the other topics, such as the role of destruction, by means of which Badiou in this recent book seems to be hearkening back to *Theory of the Subject*. But there are many more points of recurrence. For instance, contrary to the narrow definition of the subject that we find in *Being and Event* in terms of fidelity or the lack thereof, *Logics of Worlds* once again opens up a complex subjective space, structured around two other figures, the reactive one (which denies that any event actually has taken place) and the obscure one (which further obfuscates the very need for an event to happen at all insofar as there would exist a 'full' body in the guise of a race, nation, or God). What is more, the book explicitly resumes the formalization of the space of subjectivity by returning to what are now called the four 'affects' of anxiety, courage, justice, and terror: 'Four affects signal the incorporation of a human animal into the subjective process of a truth', Badiou writes, all the while insisting on the equal importance of all four. 'They are not be hierarchically ordered. War can have as much value as peace, negotiation as much as struggle, violence as much as gentleness.'<sup>44</sup> Finally, given this for many perhaps unexpected line of continuity between *Theory of the Subject* and *Logics of Worlds*, it really should not come as a surprise anymore that Badiou also returns to some of his old favourites for references: Hegel, more

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specifically his *Science of Logic*, thus appears once again as a key interlocutor in *Logics of Worlds*, and the book opens and closes with examples drawn from the history of Maoism.

All this obviously is not to say that there are no ruptures or discontinuities in Badiou's work. To say so, moreover, would be highly paradoxical, given the centrality for this work of the category of the event as a radical cut or break, albeit an immanent one. Even such discontinuities, though, must be placed against the backdrop of a larger articulation whose complex and divided nature can be grasped with special clarity from the vantage point of Badiou's first and most experimental attempt at formulating a materialist dialectic, in *Theory of the Subject*. From this point of view, not only *Being and Event* but *Logics of Worlds*, too, appears to be traversed by a divided orientation, comparable to the split between the algebra of a vanishing cause and the topology of a newly consistent world. On one hand, that which in the new book is called a 'site', which is not to be confused with the older notion of an 'evental site', is marked precisely by the punctuality of what disappears no sooner than it appears, as if in a lightning flash. On the other hand, however, there is a truth of this disappearing only thanks to the elaboration of a series of consequences, that is, a new mode or regime of appearing: 'Self-belonging annuls itself as soon as it is forced, as soon as it happens. A site is a vanishing term: it appears only in order to disappear. The problem is to register its consequences in appearing.'<sup>45</sup> Both of these aspects, the site as vanishing term and the regime of its consequences, can be separated only at the level of conceptual exposition, whereas in actual fact one cannot exist without the other. Badiou highlights this dilemma, for instance, in his periodization of the Paris Commune, a talk reworked and included in *Logics of Worlds*: 'For what counts is not only the exceptional intensity of its surging up—the fact that we are dealing with a violent and creative episode in the realm of appearing—but what this upsurge, despite its vanishing, sets out in its duration in terms of glorious and uncertain consequences.'<sup>46</sup> To ignore one of these aspects to the detriment of the other will lead to a radically different image of the philosophy of the event, either as an absolute but empty discontinuity or as a lasting but predictable continuity. As Badiou insists over and over again in *Theory of the Subject*, however, the whole trick consists in combining these two orientations in an open-ended dialectic of beginnings and rebeginnings. In fact, a subject is precisely such an articulation, as is confirmed in *Logics of Worlds*: 'A subject is a sequence involving continuities and discontinuities, openings and points. The "and" incarnates itself as subject.'<sup>47</sup>

Stylistically, *Theory of the Subject* adopts the format of a seminar inspired by Lacan's example. Badiou's fidelity to this model is actually quite extensive, ranging from the use of idiosyncratic wordplay, syntactic ambiguities, funny asides, and bold provocations of the audience, all the way to the disposition of the written text with numbered sections and a list of subtitles at the start of each chapter, as in Jacques-Alain Miller's edition of Lacan's original seminars.

In fact, the style of Badiou's three 'major' books could not be more different. Thus, while the ludic and dense quality of *Theory of the Subject* could be attributed to an almost complete indifference to an actual readership, the seminar-format nonetheless allows Badiou to rely on a generous 'we' that is truly collective and acknowledges the participation of his audience. I therefore frequently render the French *nous* as 'we' instead of seeing it merely as a polite form of the 'I', as is customary in English translations. Besides, *Theory of the Subject* still shows confidence in the possibility of speaking in the name of 'we Marxists', whereas this collective 'we' is precisely part of the tradition that collapses together with Soviet-style Communism and the Berlin Wall: 'Communism named the effective history of "we"' now dead: 'There is no longer a "we", there hasn't been for a long time.'<sup>48</sup> *Being and Event*, on the other hand, is written with an almost classical or, some would say, neoclassic impersonality, whose calm serenity does not exclude a monumental ambition. *Logics of Worlds*, finally, is written from a self-confident position of international fame, with an 'I' who does not hesitate to refer to 'Badiou' in the third person, side by side with Plato and Kant. Each of these three works, furthermore, adopts a unique generic format, following three different models in the history of philosophy: *Theory of the Subject* is a Lacanian-inspired seminar; *Being and Event* is made up of 37 Cartesian or post-Cartesian meditations; and *Logics of Worlds* adopts a structure vaguely reminiscent of Spinoza's *Ethics*, ordered into seven 'books', including several 'scholia' and a list of 'propositions' at the end.

Aside from certain technical terms, which I will list and explain in the next section, two stylistic idiosyncrasies deserve a brief comment here, as they also necessarily require a decision on the part of the translator. The first concerns Badiou's reliance on the fluency and ambiguity of certain constructions in French which, while by no means being obscure or out of the ordinary, resist easy translation into English. These are instances of

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almost colloquial speech that in translation may turn out to be awkward or simply unidiomatic. Some of these instances, especially those borrowed from Lacan, receive an extensive commentary from Badiou himself. For others, I have tried to give a literal translation, all the while explaining the ambiguity in the translator's notes included at the end of this volume.

The second idiosyncrasy, which Badiou also seems to have adopted from Lacan even though a similar trend is typical of a certain French style of writing in general, consists in using single-sentence paragraphs whose bold and compact syntax gives them the feel of gnomic or oracular statements. While in English it would have made sense to produce a smoother rhythm by incorporating such sentences into the flow of longer paragraphs, I have opted instead for a faithful rendering, respectful of the graphic effect with which these one-liners punctuate, in a well-nigh clinical sense, the gradual process of analysis undertaken by Badiou in *Theory of the Subject*.

\* \* \*

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## Notes on the translation

A number of recurrent technical terms used in *Theory of the Subject* merit a brief explanation. Especially when combined with the author's own 'Thematic Repertoire', included at the end of this volume, this list may simultaneously serve as a basic glossary. The four fundamental concepts of the theory of the subject—courage, anxiety, justice, and the superego—do not receive a separate entry in this glossary, since Badiou himself in the course of the book amply defines them. Certain grammatical ambiguities and occasional technicalities, on the other hand, will be annotated together with additional bibliographical references in the final section of 'Translator's Endnotes and References'.

**Annulation ('annulment' or 'annulation')**: This is one of the three basic operations associated with Mallarmé's poetry in terms of the structural dialectic, together with the chain effect caused by a vanishing term and the null effect of foreclosure. By annulling a vanishing term, this operation so to speak carries out a lack of lack, which raises lack to the level of a concept all the while producing anxiety. Alternative translations would be 'rescission', 'nullification', 'cancellation', or 'revocation'.

**Basculement ('tipping over' or 'toppling', occasionally 'changeover' or 'turnabout')**: A term used in the present context to refer to the sudden transformation whereby a structural or algebraic orientation tips over and opens out onto a historical or eventual orientation. From the very beginning of *Theory of the Subject*, there are clear hints of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic, as in the 'passing-over', or *übergehen*, of quantity into quality, especially when the whole process of contradictory transformation takes on a more abrupt, leap-like aspect of a sudden overthrow or inversion, as in the German *Umschlag*. Jason Barker, in the English translation of Badiou's *Metapolitics*, renders this term as 'overbalancing', for example, of what exists into what *can* exist, or from the known towards the unknown, as the result of a political intervention.

**Battement ('oscillation' or 'vacillation', occasionally 'batting')**: A term used to describe the movement around an empty place, as part of what Badiou defines as the structural dialectic. Alan Sheridan, in his translation of Lacan's Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, opts for 'pulsation', which is perhaps all-too-physical for the purely structural function that Badiou has in mind, even though Lacan's own explanation is wholly to the point for the term's use in *Theory of the Subject*. 'I have constantly stressed in my preceding statements', Lacan says, 'the *pulsative* function, as it were, of the unconscious, the need to disappear that seems to be in some sense inherent

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in it—everything that, for a moment, appears in its slit seems to be destined, by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself, as Freud himself used this metaphor, to vanish, to disappear' (S XI, 43). Still in the same seminar, Lacan also uses the term to refer to the 'fluttering' wings of Chuang Tzu when he imagines he is a butterfly, while Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* refers to a 'batting' of eyelashes to name the appearing-disappearing of Mallarmé's vanishing cause. The term also evokes the role of the 'signifying battery', *la batterie signifiante*, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and, insofar as Badiou seeks to go beyond the idealism of this structural model, there is nothing wrong with hearing echoes of 'beating' in *battement*, including in the pejorative sense of 'beating around the bushes'.

**Brin ('strand')**: This term refers to the sections, strands, or bits that are knotted or braided together in a subject, especially the strand- $\alpha$  (combining courage and justice) and the strand- $\psi$  (combining anxiety and the superego). Badiou thus relies on the concept-image of a cord or a piece of textile weaving together multiple strands or filaments.

**Coupure ('cut', occasionally 'break' or 'rupture')**: In *Theory of the Subject*, this term most often retains the meaning of 'cut' that Lacan invokes, for example, in his topological discussions regarding the tying, untying, and cutting of a knot. The other connotation, which via Althusser would refer us back to the concept of an epistemological 'break' or 'rupture', *coupure épistémologique*, in the work of Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Michel Foucault, seems less meaningful in the context of *Theory of the Subject*.

**Déviance and déviation ('deviation')**: A term used in *Theory of the Subject* to translate *clinamen*, i.e. the slight 'deviation', 'swerve', or 'inclination' of atoms falling in the void whereby a world is formed according to the ancient atomism of Lucretius. While *déviance* has the same sexual and/or criminal connotations in French as 'deviance' or 'deviancy' in English, I have opted for the more neutral 'deviation' instead. The term then openly begins to resonate with the religious and political debates regarding *déviances* or 'deviations' from orthodoxy or from the correct line, debates that Badiou constantly has in mind throughout *Theory of the Subject*. Another possible translation for *clinamen*, used in certain English versions of Marx's doctoral dissertation on Democritean and Epicurean atomism, is 'declination'.

**Épuration ('purification', sometimes 'purging')**: A term used to describe the process by which force—and the subject more generally—works back upon the system of places that otherwise determines its identity as this or that force: this or that subject. The term could obviously be translated as 'purge' or 'purging', but the Stalinist overtones of this expression, while never wholly absent, should not be allowed to dominate the term's interpretation in *Theory of the Subject*. In *The Century*, Badiou will discuss the path of destruction and purification, including in its Stalinist excesses, in opposition to the path of

subtraction and minimal difference. Even here, in any case, he insists that purification and purges, including the excommunication of traitors and the sectarian defence against deviations and heresies of all kinds, are common practices throughout the twentieth century in many artistic avant-garde groups, from surrealism under André Breton to the situationists under Guy Debord, as well as in psychoanalytical groups, from Freud to Lacan.

**Esplace ('splace')**: This is a neologism or portemanteau word based on a contraction of *espace de placement*, 'space of placement'. It can be understood as a near-synonym for 'structure' or even 'symbolic order', even though there is no strict parallelism with either Althusser or Lacan. That which Badiou calls 'state of a situation' in *Being and Event* and 'world' in *Logics of Worlds* also roughly corresponds to 'splace' in *Theory of the Subject*. The dialectical counterpart to the 'splace' is the 'outplace', just as 'place' in general functions in a dialectical opposition with 'force' starting as early as in Badiou's *Theory of Contradiction*.

**Étatique and étatisme ('statist' and 'statism')**: While in *Theory of the Subject* Badiou has not yet fully developed the notion of 'state of the situation', which will be pivotal in *Being and Event*, he does rely on a series of terms to describe the static, statist, or state-like nature of certain historico-political phenomena. In English, these terms cannot easily be separated from the ones that translate the French *statique*, which Badiou uses both as an adjective ('static') and a noun, *une statique* (a 'static', or 'statics', perhaps even a 'statistics' in the etymological sense of the term as a science of the state, *Statistik* in German) as opposed to *une dynamique* (a 'dynamic' or 'dynamics'). A related expression is *faire état*, 'to draw up an overview', 'to inventory', or, for the present context, 'to define a state of affairs', for example, regarding the being of the working class.

**Evanouissement and terme évanouissant ('vanishing' and 'vanishing term')**: The basic operation of the structural dialectic, whereby a totality or whole is constituted as the effect of an absent or vanishing cause. *S'évanouir* also means 'to faint', 'to fade (away or out)', 'to pass out' or 'to die away'. In this sense, the term is not without recalling the role of *aphanasis* or 'fading' in Lacanian psychoanalysis. The main implied reference, however, is to the Althusserian conceptualization of 'structural causality' in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*—unless Jacques-Alain Miller is right, against Althusser, in claiming paternity for this concept under the name of 'metonymical causality'. A third genealogical line, finally, would take us from Spinoza's 'absent' or 'immanent cause' to Deleuze's 'quasi-cause' as discussed in *The Logic of Sense*, all the way to Žižek's recent return to the same structuring principle. What should become clear from this network of references surrounding the concept of the 'vanishing term' is the extent to which Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* is giving form to a unique type of 'post-structural' thinking that takes to task the entire tradition of the 'structural dialectic' without ignoring its fundamental insights.

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**Force ('force')**: The counterpart of history to the structure of assigned places, force is a term first borrowed from Hegel's *Science of Logic* that in the course of the argument developed in *Theory of the Subject* will come to designate what Badiou will later systematically discuss in terms of 'event'. Already in *Theory of Contradiction*, force stands in opposition to place, while readers of Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference* may be more familiar with the opposition of force and form. Three other idiomatic expressions are related to this concept in *Theory of the Subject*: *coup de force* ('stroke of force', 'violent overthrow', 'strike', 'trick', or sudden 'blow'), *passer en force* ('forcing one's way through' or 'pushing through') and *forcément* ('by force', 'per force'). Wherever possible, I have tried to retain the conceptual link with 'force' in English, while in the case of *coup de force* I have most often left the expression in French. Finally, I have already mentioned that Badiou uses the expression *force de loi* ('force of law') long before Derrida would make this into a topic for deconstruction. Derrida, too, discusses how there is no *force de loi* without some intrinsic and violent *coup de force*. This is also by far the most significant connotation that the reader should keep in mind for *Theory of the Subject*.

**Forclusion and forclos ('foreclosure' and 'foreclosed')**: A term used to describe the effect of the *points d'arrêt* or 'halting points' in Mallarmé's poetry, that is, terms such as the meaningless 'ptyx', which put an abrupt stop to the infinitely sliding metonymical and metaphorical chains. In French, *forclusion* also serves as the official translation of Freud's *Verwerfung*, which together with *Verneinung* ('denial') and *Verleugnung* ('disavowal') constitutes one of the many forms of negation considered in the practice and theory of psychoanalysis. By rejecting the existence of 'halting points' (there are no unknowables), at least in *Theory of the Subject* and once again in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou could thus be said to be negating foreclosure. Whether this negation, in turn, takes the form of a denial, a disavowal, or a foreclosure remains to be decided.

**Horlieu ('outplace')**: This is a neologism or portemanteau word based on a contraction of *hors-lieu*, 'out of place' or 'out of site', as when someone is *hors-jeu*, 'off-side', in soccer. An alternative translation might have been 'outside', or 'offsite', which is the term preferred by Oliver Feltham in his introduction to Badiou, but in my eyes this creates unwarranted confusions with the use of '(evental) site' in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. Badiou sometimes uses the full grammatical expressions *hors-lieu* and *hors du lieu*, which I have rendered accordingly as 'out-of-place' and 'out of place' in English. An interesting analogy could be established with the expression *hors-sexe*, 'outside (of) sex', in Book XX of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Encore*, which Lacan relates to Guy de Maupassant's fantastic short story 'Le Horla', itself often read as a contraction of *le hors-là*, 'that which remains outside (of what is) there'. More generally, Badiou's *horlieu* echoes the logic of the 'nonplace' or *non-lieu* in its interplay with the *lieux* or 'places' of a given structure, which is pivotal in

the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism for French thinkers as diverse as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Rancière and Michel de Certeau, before its depoliticization in the anthropological work of Marc Augé.

**Idéalinguisterie ('idealinguistry')**: A portemanteau word to the second degree, which Badiou creates by contracting *idéalisme*, 'idealism', and Lacan's own portemanteau word *linguisterie*, based on *linguistique*, 'linguistics', and the mostly pejorative suffix *-erie*, which suggests a 'fake' or 'false' version. François Raffoul and Bruce Fink respectively propose 'linguistrickery' and 'linguistricks' for Lacan's *linguisterie*. This would give us 'idealinguistrickery' or 'idealinguistricks' for Badiou's *idéalinguisterie*, to which I have preferred the less cumbersome 'idealinguistry'.

**Lalangue ('llanguage' or 'lalangue')**: A term Badiou directly borrows from Lacan to refer to the unique, slippery, and playful dimension of language taken into account by psychoanalysis, as in the possibilities opened up in puns or homonyms. While Bruce Fink in his English edition of Book XX of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* proposes 'llanguage' as a translation, I have chosen to leave the term in French.

**Lieu ('place', occasionally 'locus')**: The structural element determining the nature and identity of anything whatsoever, as defined by the general space of assigned places. To distinguish *lieu* from *place*, one could have relied on 'locus' or 'site' for the former and 'place' for the latter. In *Theory of the Subject*, however, I see no strong reasons to differentiate the two except in the context of the four mathemes of anxiety, courage, justice, and the superego, where *lieu* and *place* are kept separate. The use of 'site' to translate *lieu* not only would have caused misunderstandings in suggesting an early anticipation of the terms *site* ('site') and *site événementiel* ('evental site') as used in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, but the reader would also have missed out on the play in *Theory of the Subject* between *lieu* and *horlieu*, whose internal rhyme is best rendered as 'place' and 'outplace'. English-speaking readers of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan may be familiar with 'locus' as a common translation for *lieu*.

**Manque and manque à être ('lack' and 'lack of being')**: This is without a doubt the most central concept of the structural dialectic, which Badiou attributes to both Mallarmé and Lacan. Other French terms, such as *défaut* ('defect', 'fault', 'lack') and *défaillance* ('shortcoming', 'failure', 'miss', 'faint'), are parts of the same conceptual constellation in *Theory of the Subject*. For this reason, I sometimes render them as 'lack' as well, even though this comes at the price of missing out on the terminological diversity. Lacan proposed 'want-to-be' as the official English translation for *manque-à-être*. Badiou, however, does not use the dashes that would make *le manque à être* into a more stable technical term, and, insofar as he also plays on the inverted expression *l'être du manque*,

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'the being of lack', I consistently stick to 'lack of being' instead of 'want-to-be'.

**Passé ('pass' or 'passing')**: Badiou frequently has recourse to this term both in its common sense and in its technical meaning in the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis. For Lacan, who instated the procedure in 1967 as part of his *École Freudienne de Paris*, the *passé* provides an institutional structure for the 'passage' from analysand to analyst, that is, the end of analysis testified by the *passant* to a committee of *passeurs* or 'passers', who in turn relay the account to a jury who decides whether or not to award the 'pass'. In *Theory of the Subject* Badiou refers to the heated debates provoked by this procedure up to ten years after its introduction by Lacan (who, upon listening in silence to the formal complaints raised at a meeting in 1978, went so far as to call it a 'complete failure'). Insofar as the procedure involves the possibility of transmitting knowledge (*savoir*) about the analytical practice, Badiou takes an interest in *la passe* similar to the role of the universal transmission of mathematics in the scientific community. Among the many common meanings, the noun *la passe* and the verb *passer* can refer to 'passage', 'pass', 'patch', 'passing (for, over, by)', 'crossing', 'going through', 'skipping', 'lending', and so on. Relevant expressions include *passer un examen*, 'to pass an exam', *faire une passe*, 'to make a pass', *passer en force*, 'push through', and *mot de passe*, 'password'. In addition, Badiou systematically plays on the dialectic between *passé* and *impasse* (sometimes spelt *im-passe*, with a dash, so as to highlight the pun), in a key argument that will reappear in *Being and Event*.

**Place ('place')**: Throughout *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou exploits the tension between that which can be mapped topologically in terms of spaces, places, and splace, on one hand, and, on the other, that which is a-topological, that is, force or the event. I did not find a significant difference between *place* and *lieu* that would warrant a solid distinction between 'place' and 'locus' or 'site'. Badiou frequently insists on the deadening effect of that which remains *sur place*, 'in its place' or 'on the same spot', most often as the result of an overly structural emphasis in which place and splace take precedence over force and the outplace. *Faire du surplace* is also a colloquial expression that refers to the quasi-immobile gesture by which a cyclist at a stoplight or at the start of a race tries to remain still with both feet strapped on the pedals. Interestingly, in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze describes an ethics of willing the event in terms of 'a sort of leaping in place', *saut sur place*.

**Point d'arrêt ('halting point' or 'stopping point')**: A term used in *Theory of the Subject* to refer to those signifiers that put an end to the sliding of metaphors and metonymies in Mallarmé's poetry. Badiou refers especially to the amphora, the master, and the ptyx in the famous 'Sonnet allegorical of itself', and proposes to read these three signifiers in terms of death, the poet, and the pure signifier of the signifier as such. Invoking a quotation from Chairman

Mao ('We will come to know everything we did not know before'), a quotation that will be reused in *Logics of Worlds* against the dogma of finitude, Badiou denies the existence of insuperable halting points and affirms the open-ended nature of the periodized dialectical process. *Point d'arrêt* in *Theory of the Subject* thus has a completely different meaning from the one it has in *Being and Event*, where the void or empty set is said to be the only 'halting point' of multiplicity, that is, multiplicity goes all the way down, *qua* multiple of multiples, until the void. In *Ethics*, finally, aside from its ontological meaning, *point d'arrêt* also refers to the 'unnameable' that must not be 'forced' in the name of truth, lest one falls into the evil of a disaster. This concept of the unnameable, with its connotation of an insuperable limit-point calling out for an ethics of respect, is purely and simply abandoned in *Logics of Worlds*, where Badiou once again—consistent with his return to the quotation from Mao—affirms that there are always consequences, and no unknowables. In this last sense, it is worth keeping in mind, for *Theory of the Subject* as well, that *point d'arrêt* can be understood not only as 'halting point' or 'stopping point' but also as 'no halting' or 'no stopping at all'. Derrida, in his reading of Maurice Blanchot's *Arrêt de mort* (*Death Sentence*), has exhaustively deconstructed the linguistic possibilities afforded by the signifier *arrêt*.

**Processus subjectif ('subjective process')**: A term directly and explicitly borrowed from Lacan's *Écrits* to designate one of the two aspects or temporalities of the subject, namely, the durable, ongoing, and most often laborious time of recomposition that gives a subject consistency, either in the guise of a new form of justice or in the guise of the superego's terrorizing call to order. The other moment or time of the subject is called subjectivization.

**Réel ('real')**: Badiou tends to use this term in a way that is reminiscent of Lacan's use without ever fully coinciding with its technical meaning or meanings in the triad of the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary. I have chosen not to use a large capital when translating the term as '(the) real', in an effort both to leave intact the fluidity of Badiou's use of the term and to avoid associations with New Age terminology, as in English discussions of Badiou's work that render all his key concepts with large capitals: Being, Event, Truth, and so on. Badiou also plays on the French expressions *point du réel* ('point of the real' but also 'not real' or 'not of the real at all') and *point réel* ('real point' with *point* as a noun but also 'not at all real' with *point* as an adverb).

**Retournement ('reversal', occasionally 'return')**: This term, used in the title of Part IV in order to propose a 'materialist reversal of materialism', is reminiscent of, but also somewhat different from, the usual 'inversion' (*Umkehrung* in German, or *renversement*, in the typical French translations) by which Marx, for example, claims to put the Hegelian dialectic 'back on its feet'. The difference stems from the fact that *retournement*, aside from a 'turning (over, upside down, inside out)', also evokes a 'return' (*retour*) and a 'turning back'

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or 'sending back' (*retourner*). Finally, the French term also serves to translate Hölderlin's notion of a 'return' or 'reversal' (*Umkehr* in German) in his 'Remarks on "Antigone"', in a figure amply commented upon in Part III of Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*.

**Subjectivation ('subjectivization')**: A term directly and explicitly borrowed from Lacan to designate one of the two aspects or temporalities of the subject, namely the hasty, slightly hysterical, and most often short-lived time of interruption and destruction, which according to *Theory of the Subject* takes the form of either anxiety or courage. Bruce Fink, in his translation of Lacan's *Ecrits*, and Oliver Feltham, in his translation of *Being and Event*, opt for the spelling 'subjectivization', which I have adopted as well, while Slavoj Žižek and Alberto Toscano usually prefer the more literal 'subjectivation'.

**Topique ('topology', occasionally 'topic')**: A term used in *Theory of the Subject*, first, to designate Marx and Freud's respective 'topologies' or 'topographies' of the subject of class and of the unconscious and, then, to map out the various discourses of 'ethics', in the book's final part, titled *Topiques de l'éthique*, which I have translated as 'Topics of Ethics' so as to maintain something of the worldplay that would be lost if I had chosen 'Topologies of Ethics' or 'Ethical Topologies'. Badiou also has in mind and openly discusses Lacan's topological investigations from his final seminars. There may even be a faint echo of Claude Lévi-Strauss' great work of structural anthropology, *Tristes Tropiques*.

**Torsion and torsade ('torsion' and 'twist')**: This is one of the pivotal and most obscure concepts of *Theory of the Subject*. In part conditioned by mathematics, whose algebraic 'torsion groups' Badiou discusses at some length in the book, the concept of 'torsion' at the same time functions in a much broader sense to refer to the way in which a subject works back upon the structure that determines it in the first place. In this sense, *torsion* is related to *forçage*, another concept borrowed from mathematics and discussed in *Theory of the Subject* that will become even more central in *Being and Event*. *Torsade*, like *tresse* ('interlacing'), designates the twisted unity of the subject itself, that is, the divided articulation of courage, anxiety, justice, and the superego into two basic trajectories: the so-called mode- $\alpha$  (from courage to justice) and mode- $\psi$  (from anxiety to the superego); and according to two temporalities: the time of interruption or destruction (anxiety and courage) and the time of recomposition (justice and the superego). Interestingly, Jacques Rancière also defines politics in terms of a constitutive 'torsion' that treats a specific *tort* or 'wrong', in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*.

**(Le) Tout ('Whole', 'Totality', or 'the All')**: Again, a term used with a combination of Hegelian and Lacanian connotations to designate both the effect of a vanishing cause, namely, the resulting Whole, and that which, like any space, by force must include-exclude something, namely, the outplace, in order to

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come into being *qua* totality, so that the Whole is also always not-Whole or not-All.

**Tresse ('interlacing')**: A term used, in the same topological vein as *brin*, *nœud*, and *torsade*, to designate the subject's divided articulation. Other translations could have been 'braid', 'plait', 'weave' or '(inter)weaving'.

**Unité de contraires ('unity of opposites' or 'unity of contraries')**: This basic concept of the dialectic, which is as old as philosophy, is usually translated as 'unity of opposites' in English. Whenever Badiou insists on the role of 'contraries' or 'contrariness' in relation to the principle of *unité de contraires*, I retain the more literal translation as 'unity of contraries'.

**Versant ('aspect', 'strand', 'side', 'tendency', or 'slope')**: A term most often used to designate the two 'sides' or 'aspects' of the dialectic according to *Theory of the Subject*—its structural side and its historical side, the side of place and the side of force, its algebraic side and its topological side, the idealist aspect and the materialist aspect.

**Voie ('path' or 'road')**: A common noun that Badiou further associates with the Marxist and more specifically Maoist discussions about the struggle between two 'paths' or two 'roads', the bourgeois and the proletarian, the revisionist and the socialist. More generally speaking, the term is part of the topological orientation behind *Theory of the Subject*.

## Preface

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'To introduce myself into *your* story':<sup>1</sup> my reader, this is really the aim of pre-faces, so aptly named in that they must furnish a profile of what they precede.

I have nothing to profile, if not the certainty that I have, and to which the whole labour of this book testifies, namely, that the modern philosopher is—as Auguste Comte said already so long ago—a systematic proletarian.<sup>2</sup>

### 1

Philosophy today is deserted.

Never expecting anything from the State, I hardly expect that the recent libations in honour of the rose (I'm writing this in July 1981<sup>3</sup>) will make our largely disaffected national province flourish.

The inevitable result of the lack of ambitious thoughts is a mediocre politics and a devalued ethics.

In actual fact, it is probably the other way around. From the practical renunciation of egalitarian universalism, the inevitable inference is that the few forms of specialized knowledge to which thought is relegated, at least beyond the walls of journalistic idiocy, assure only the returns of the 'functionariat'.

Is it presumptuous to claim to ward off the inconveniences of the void on one's own? I object that any enterprise of this type has its emblems, and that moreover I am the least alone of persons.

Of all those for whom I am testifying, and who know that I know it—militants, friends, students, difficult interlocutors, provisional or returning enemies—I wish to inscribe here the name of only one: Paul Sandevince.

Hundreds of meetings with him, on which depended a thousand thoughts put into practice against our surroundings, make it impossible for me to mark the limits of my indebtedness to him.

Even though, as a consequence of his purely political conception of the truth, Sandevince always makes the oral take precedence over the written, the directive over analysis, in what follows the reader will find the few public traces of what the *real* world, so rarely noticed, has found in him of unparalleled significance, without even knowing it.

2

The form. It is that of a seminar, a genre to which Lacan has given a definitive dignity.

Who will say whether the lessons that make up this work were really pronounced on the date that punctuates them?

This ideal seminar—a mixture of an effective succession, some retroactions, supposed interpolations, and written compositions—certainly did take place. The present book is its second occurrence.

The easiest method is no doubt to go from the opening, January 1975, to the final suspension, June 1979. While it is hardly ever admitted, I know that this is not the common practice in philosophy. Thus, it is legitimate to suppose, and to support, an acute wandering on behalf of the reader.

At the end can be found:

- A thematic index with seven headings: art and literature, historical circumstances, God, logic and mathematics, traditional philosophy, psychoanalysis *stricto sensu*, and political theory. Of course, none of these headings concerns the central theme of the book, which I hope cannot be placed under any heading, since it is omnipresent.
- An index of proper names, which is so useful for knowing, by bouncing off the Other, where I can be located: a tactic of the drawer of which I do not at all disapprove.

I point out—and in so doing I already begin to put my cards on the table—that this index does not include those names whose usage is so permanent that listing them would be unwieldy. Namely:

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- a) The two great classical German dialecticians, Hegel and Hölderlin. The entire beginning of the book is devoted to the first. The second is treated at the end of Part III, and in Part VI. But both can be found elsewhere, too.
- b) The two great modern French dialecticians: Mallarmé and Lacan. There is an exhaustive treatment of the first in Part II, and of the second principally in Parts III and V. The two great classical French dialecticians, Pascal and Rousseau, for their part do end up in the list.
- c) Four of the five great Marxists: Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao Zedong. The fifth, Stalin, is on the index.<sup>4</sup>

### 3

It is no doubt more instructive to write with respect to what one does not want to be at any price than under the suspicious image of what one wishes to become.

I am strongly attached to my country, France, even more so today since here people are becoming multinational—an advantage of internal internationalism indirectly provoked by the imperialist pillaging of goods and peoples.

In a little less than a century this country has had only three claims to greatness, three moments of real existence, three figures of a possible universalism: the Paris Commune in 1871, the Resistance between 1941 and 1945, and the uprising of youths and workers in May–June 1968.

I know they are of unequal importance. It is not clear that my hierarchy is the one in which they should be given. The present book is also written to shed some light on this matter.

In the same period there has been no shortage of abject moments. They sometimes followed their explosive contraries—the triumph of Versailles after the Commune, the colonial wars after the Liberation, and, minuscule, the ‘new philosophers’ after the establishment of revolutionary intellectuals in the factory.

The two World Wars were disastrous. The people fought when they should not have (1914–18) and they did not fight when they should have (1939–40). The sinister signifier ‘Pétain’ covers both debasements.

I could say right away that I do not want to be a part of any of these

abjections. Philosophy is not worth a single effort if it does not shed light on the commitment that, even if it is restricted, seeks to prohibit the return of the five catastrophes, or of whatever resembles them, by carrying the memory and lesson of the three moments of existence.

More profoundly, I know that the essence of what has happened to us, in forcefulness as in humiliation, bears the mark of a deficiency *in the long term*. It is for this reason that the irruption, while certainly thunderous, is also fragile, without making the moral disorientation, which is predictable from afar, any less inevitable.

This deficiency is essentially subjective. It touches on the manner in which the potential forces, at the heart of the people, are kept at a distance from their proper concept.

Those French intellectuals who have not stopped spitting on themselves, on 'ideologies', on Marxism, on the Masters, on their most incontestable experience, and who have given credibility to the formless and the multiple, to spontaneity and scattered memory, to rights and enjoyments, to works and days, have a painful responsibility in all of this—that of irresponsibility.

I write and I act, but it is hard to distinguish between the two, in order not to be, if possible, explicitly mixed up in these phenomena of failure and bitterness. The fact that it has taken fifty years does not matter to me, because all the rest will be a futile shipwreck in a world henceforth headed for war, if there is not at least the fixed will, collectively submitted to the high level of its stakes, to go against the current and imprint if only a gesture of *direction* to that which might get us out of the slump.

## 4

In Julien Gracq's *Lettrines* there is a terrible passage, a fascinating portrait of the French intellectual—lost and useless when he is asked, when *the workers* ask him, simply to be someone enlightened, a realist leader. It concerns once again this inexhaustible analyser, the Commune:

Bohemians of the pen, journalists paid by the line, greying tutors, over-aged students, half-licensed graduates in search of private lessons: it is indeed in part the small world from *Scenes of Bohemian Life* turned sour, which has made such a pretty burial for Victor Noir and which with such incapacity has governed the Commune among the casks, the

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glasses, the *Glorias*, the smoke and the gab sessions of the board room of a 'small newspaper'. Marx was forgiving of the officers in command of the Commune, whose insufficiency he otherwise was well aware of. The revolution also has its Trochus and its Gamelins. The frankness of Vallès is consternating and would horrify this self-proclaimed government, these wannabe revolutionaries who were spit upon by the insurgents on the barricades when they passed through Belleville during the Commune's final bloody week. There is no excuse for leading even a good fight when it is led so half-heartedly.

A type of atrocious nausea arises while following the ubuesque and pathetic chaos of the last pages, wherein the unfortunate delegate of the Commune, his sash—which he does not dare to show—hidden in a newspaper under his arm, a sort of neighbourhood irrepresentative, a fire-starting Charlot hopping among the exploding shells, wanders around like a lost dog from one barricade to the other, unable to do anything at all, bullied by the teeth-baring rebels, distributing in disorderly fashion vouchers for herrings, bullets, and fire, and imploring the spiteful crowd—which was hard on his heels because of the fix into which he had plunged them: 'Leave me alone, please. I need to think alone.'

In his exile as a courageous incompetent, he must have awoken sometimes at night, still hearing the—after all quite serious—voices of all those people who were to be massacred a few minutes later, and who cried so furiously at him from the barricade: 'Where are the orders? Where is the plan?'<sup>5</sup>.

Of all the possible nightmares, that of being exposed one day to such a figure is for me the most unbearable. It is clear to me that to ward off this risk supposes a thorough reshuffling that certainly touches upon the intellectuals but also upon the workers, for what is at stake is the advent between them of an unheard of type of vicinity, of a previously unthinkable political topology.

I write here so that neither I nor my interlocutors—intellectuals or not—ever become the one who, all told, can only meet the great dates of history by distributing herring vouchers.

## References and Abbreviations

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As far as the major authors are concerned, the following abbreviations and editions have been used:

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969). Hereafter SW followed by volume and page number.

Vladimir I. Lenin, *Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970). Hereafter SW, followed by volume and page number.

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As for Paul Sandevince's writings, the reader may want to consult the following, all published by Potemkine editions:

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- *Un bilan de Mai 68* (1978)
- *Notes de travail sur le post-léninisme* (1980)

# Jewellery for the sacred of any subtraction of existence

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February 8, 1976

Mallarmé and the class struggle—Sonnet in *ix* and *or*—Foreclosure—The subject as delay—Logic of the trajectory—Everything is true, but we must move on and go beyond

## 1

The heterogeneous exists as subject. This is what Mallarmé supports by way of the forced exception. There is also the fact that the rarification of the decor, driven by the insistence of the vanishing terms, enters into conflict with the poem's brutal concluding intensity.

'Conflict' is the dialectical title of a rarely quoted prose text, originally published with another title: 'A Case of Conscience'.<sup>34</sup> A case of the intellectual's conscience in the class struggle. Yes indeed! The latter is mentioned by its very name in the text.

Mallarmé is in the countryside. In front of his retreat, as an annex of industrialization, a 'mess hall for railroad workers' is being constructed. Four lines give us the equivalent of *Germinal* in order to present the working class of this building, that violent, trade unionist 'labour squad', full of alcohol and rage. Translation of the insults against property and exploitation. The hostility turns against the villa occupied by our witness: "Piece of crap!" Accompanied by the sound of feet kicking the grate, suddenly bursts out.' He is hurt, irritated. His restrictive soliloquy, which at first attempted to exempt itself from the workers' hatred, is interrupted by a whim: the other class, unforgettably quarrelsome.

Pulling himself erect, he examines me with animosity. It is impossible to wipe him out mentally: I want to complete the work of alcohol and lay him in advance in the dust so that he will cease to be this vulgar and mean colossus; without my having to lose to him first in a fistfight that would illustrate, on the lawn, the class struggle. In the meantime, he overflows with new insults. (D 44)

Mallarmé finds no help in his opponent's obvious drunkenness. Rather, he sees in the latter's muteness a dubious destructive complicity. At this point he is 'racked with contradictory states, pointless, distorted, and affected by the contagion, the shiver, of some imbecilic ebriety' (*ibid.*).

What could be the structural artifice to which the shady intoxication of the class struggle pertains?

Only Sunday offers a controversial escape. After the political discussions ('Sadness', says Mallarmé 'that what I produce remains, to people like this, essentially, like the clouds at dusk or the stars in the sky, vain', this time it is the star which, tried by antagonism, comes up against its limit and is unable to conclude except with vanity), floored by the alcohol, the workers fall asleep.

Tempted to return to his daydreaming beyond the confusion of bodies, Mallarmé cannot make up his mind to do so. A powerful respect, which literally has come from elsewhere, renders him immobile.

In the alcohol-sleepiness, this 'momentary suicide' (45), he deciphers first 'the dimension of the sacred in their existence' (46), the provisory substitute of an interruption for the workers in which we should recognize, for lack of its higher form which would be the revolt, a derivative form of this access to the concept that is the annulment.

Then, 'constellations begin to shine'. Are we once more going to end on the note of their cold disuse? No. The experience of antagonism forces the intellectual to link his endeavour to the concept of this experience. You will say that they are irreducibly real, these workers 'whose mystery and duty', as Mallarmé declares, he in his capacity 'should understand' (45).

The body of workers, that is, class in its nocturnal detachment, presents an opacity far stronger than the stars. Rather than representing an obstacle for the poetic endgame, it becomes the latter's substance, rejoining centuries of creativity of the people all the way to the infinity of a social idea:

Keeping watch over these artisans of elementary tasks, I have occasion, beside a limpid, continuous river, to meditate on these symbols of the People—some robust intelligence bends their spines every day

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in order to extract, without the intermediary of wheat, the miracle of life which grounds presence: others in the past have built aqueducts or cleared fields for some implement, wielded by the same Louis-Pierre, Martin, Poitou or the Norman. When they are not asleep, they thus invoke one another according to their mothers or their provinces. But in fact their births fall into anonymity, and their mothers into the deep sleep that prostrates them, while the weight of centuries presses down on them, eternity reduced to social proportions. (46)

Given the limits of its time, what integrity is there, in addition to the beauty of the tribute, in submitting his intellectual task to the tenuous chance encounter of the real of classes, without conceding anything to populism, through the inner consent given to the idea that here the violent source of a different kind of concept must be grasped!

### 2

A second flattening of which the syntactical guarantee is the law of the splace:

Her pure nails on high displaying their onyx,  
The lampbearer, Anxiety, at midnight sustains  
Those vesperal dreams that are burnt by the Phoenix  
And which no funeral amphora contains

On the credenzas in the empty room: no ptyx,  
Abolished shell whose resonance remains  
(For the Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx  
With this sole object that Nothingness attains).

But in the vacant north, adjacent to the window panes,  
A dying shaft of gold illumines as it wanes  
A nix sheathed in sparks that a unicorn kicks.

Though she in the oblivion that the mirror frames  
Lies nude and defunct, there rains  
The scintillations of the one-and-six.<sup>35</sup>

*In any empty room, at midnight, only Anxiety reigns, supported by the disappearance of the light. Like a torch in the form of raised hands which would hold only an extinguished flame, this anxiety of the void cannot be cured with any*

*trace of the setting sun, not even with the ashes that one could have collected in a funerary urn.*

*The poet, master of the places, has gone to the river of death, taking with him a signifier (the ptyx) which refers to no existing object.*

*However, near the open window on the north side, there faintly sparkles the gilt frame of a mirror on which are sculpted some unicorns chasing after a nymph.*

*All of this is going to disappear, it is as if the nymph drowned in the water of the mirror, where nevertheless rises the reflection of the seven stars of the Great Bear.*

Mallarmé was rather proud of this poem, which he qualified as ‘null-sonnet reflecting itself in all manners’.<sup>36</sup> He considered that in this sonnet he had pushed self-sufficiency to the extreme in making a whole out of nothing. Think of the title of the first version: ‘Sonnet allegorical of itself’.

The text appears to empty itself out non-stop. The burden of lack, so to speak, is at a maximum:

- a) The ‘vesperal dream’, an allusion, classical for Mallarmé, to the setting sun, already burnt by the ending day—though called upon to be reborn, whence its metaphorization by the bird Phoenix, which always rises up again from its ashes—has not even left behind a trace: there is a lack of trace of that which has disappeared.
- b) The decor (a salon) is absolutely empty.
  - The master is at ‘the Styx’. The poet, subject of the chain, always occupies the place of the dead. He sacrifices himself so that the text may come into being as a closed totality, strictly governed by the law: ‘The right to accomplish anything exceptional, or beyond the reach of the vulgar, is paid for by the omission of the doer, and of his death as so-and-so’ (‘Restricted Action’, D 216).
  - He has taken with him the ‘ptyx’. So many glosses have been written about this word that no dictionary consigns! Mallarmé, though, has said twice that it is a matter of a pure signifier, un-inscribable otherwise than as the attribute of the dead poet. ‘*Aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore*’, null-object reducible to the sonorous void of the signifier; ‘sole object that Nothingness attains’, object withdrawn from being, subtractive object.
  - If it is subtractive—minus one—this is because the ptyx stands in excess over the treasure of the signifier. Guardian of the possibility

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of meaning, it does not fall under this possibility. The *ptyx* is the plus-one of the signifier, whose denotation, no matter how long the chain may well be, never arrives.

- The master is absent, under the emblem of this perfect signifier of lack, which is also, much to the torment of copyists, the lack of a signifier, unattested for outside this poem, in which moreover it enters only in order to designate its exit.
- c) The gilt frame of the mirror agonizes, it can barely ('perhaps') be deciphered.
- d) The *nix* is defunct, buried in the mirror.

Aside from these effects of absence, we could rightly say that this time the splitting traverses—atomism taught us to recognize this necessity—all the elements of the poem.

The vesperal divides day from night. The Phoenix divides itself by fire into ashes and rebirth. Midnight is the supreme Mallarméan hour: last hour of the day that ends, or first one of the day to come? Divisible, split. Atemporal hour. It is at midnight that *Igitur* must realize its act (to throw the dice): 'This returned Midnight evokes its shadow, finite and null, with these words: I was the hour which is to make me pure' (*Igitur*, chapter 'Midnight'). The funeral amphora, which moreover is absent, like the tomb—another exemplary Mallarméan sign—would signal presence, but of that which is no more. The master exists, guarantor of the place, but he is dead. The *ptyx*, key to all meaning, has none. The gold of the mirror shows itself, like the setting sun, only in its disappearing. The aleatory *nix* is pursued, but defunct. The mirror contains both the waters of oblivion and the fixation of the seven stars.

Note also that nothing exists except in the form of a Greek tale, nocturnal mythology, fabrication of a dream. The Phoenix, legendary bird. The *ptyx*, signifying stamp tantamount to the Phallus for Lacan. The Styx, dead metaphor of death. The unicorns, medieval relays of the Phoenix. The *nix*, exclusive femininity for the faun.

We would never be done stating the annulment of inexistence, the nothing of nothing that this incredible machine makes into its subject matter.

This includes even the sonorities, to the point where we cannot believe our ears. How can one possibly construct a sonnet within the closure of rhymes in *yx* and *ore* (quatrains) and then, by inversion of the musical gender, in *ixe* and *or* (tercets)?

Jewellery for the sacred of any subtraction of existence.

All that is passed down to us is a single exception of certainty, the seven stars of the constellation which all of a sudden comes to pull us out of anxiety, brought forth in the mirror of our oblivion by the 'though' to which is linked, salvific, an impeccably delayed subject.

3

To those of you who have already been instructed by 'A la nue accablante tu', I propose that you hunt down the vanishing terms that sustain the function of causality. We obtained a good return when we found two, the ship and the siren.

Now here we get into a snag.

The nix is a good candidate. Her drowning restores her to the mirror. She is a ~~nix~~. And this judicious vanishing term is subsequently annulled ('though') so that the constellation may be put in place, as always, with the value of a halting point.

If we stick to the tercets, the affair is easy enough.

The presupposition of the setting sun (the vespereal dream), the 'natural' vanishing term for the pair day/night (writing/page), is metaphorized in the empty room by the division of the mirror: gilt frame with unicorns, on one hand, dark glass, on the other. The waning of the frame's gold, horizon for a salon's setting sun, induces the nix as vanishing divisibility: pursued by the fire of the frame's unicorns, she plunges into the mirror's night. Her revocation ('defunct') would not leave any trace—it would generate only 'the oblivion that the mirror frames'—if the constellation did not come to relay her in terms of annulment ('though').

The annulling connection is all the more firm and affirmative in that, according to the legend, it is after all the nymph Callisto who was cast into the sky so that she would draw the Great Bear. Dying from its own vanishing, she is reborn, eternal and cold.

What is a good metaphor for the vanishing term in general? The (setting) ~~sun~~? It is ~~day~~ + night.

What is the ~~nix~~ (defunct)? The same thing, restricted to the living room ('restricted action'): ~~gold~~ (waning) + mirror (dark).

Now, what is a good metaphor, in the night completed by the lacking sun, for the Idea of this lack (hence, of the lack of lack)? The stars, whose brightness revokes the vanishing term by producing its concept. By way of

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the star, the sun certainly comes to be lacking twice. The star presupposes the night, hence the causal vanishing of the sun, and yet, by bringing brightness, it annuls it.

The idea of the (setting) *sun*, which the (defunct) *nix* re-names, is the reflection of the seven stars in the mirror's night (in 'the oblivion that the mirror frames'). There we have the concept, the lack of lack, from which all anxiety is lifted, *since it is anxiety*.

It is the absence of sun that led to anxiety. The seven-star constellation is born from the annulment of the supposed trace of this absence: the *nix*. It thus grasps anxiety, not as effect but as essence.

Yes, but is there then only one vanishing term, the *nix*? And what about the quatrains?

### 4

There is first of all the poem's retroaction upon its conditions. What is it that takes place before the empty salon?

The inaugural pair is clearly that of day and night. It is given twice, in its vanishing juncture. The 'vesperal dream', scarlet illumination of the evening, and the Phoenix (the sun), consumed by its inherent fire in the promise of being reborn at dawn.

It is in the middle of the night that the poem proposes its wager, by way of the concept-star of the dead fire, on the solar promise. Between two presences, only the lack of the absence of any present, which has the value of an idea, saves the world from chance.

Between two imaginaries, only the symbolic guards us from the real.

Between two mass uprisings, only the politics of the party preserve the class.

Beware: though they can be stated at the same point, these three statements, the Mallarméan, the Lacanian, and the Maoist, are not isomorphous.

Does the empty and nightly room keep the trace of the golden promise? This is the question that commands the inspection of the places, according to the poetic regime of anxiety.

Something a bit strange happens. We can certainly see that, in their succession, the (funeral) amphora, the master (at the Styx) and the (inexistent) *ptyx* constitute the triple ban of nonbeing. The first one contains the ashes, the second is dead, the third is this word that says nothing.

But in addition, *none of them is there*.

These ghostly beings for sure would be vanishing terms, since they have no other being except to designate nonbeing, if we did not have to admit that to vanish is something they cannot do, affected as they are, in the decor, by a radical absence without any effect (contrary to the supposed ship, which could be inferred from the visible foam, or contrary to the divisible mirror, which we can discern).

Should we say that these terms are annulled? No, since for the annulment of a hypothetical term, its vanishing must be the cause of a trace with regard to which, as exception, another term is made to appear, such as the siren after the ship, or the constellation of seven stars after the nix.

The amphora, the master, and the ptyx have all the attributes of the vanishing term, except the vanishing, from which a trace of the lack should be evinced. They lack without a trace. On this account, they are irreplaceable.

Here, we have a new kind of absence: one that no longer operates within any representation, and on which the concept, the lack of lack, has no grip. Picking up a notion from Lacan, we should say that these terms are foreclosed.

I must distinguish three operations that work on absence:

- the vanishing, with causal value;
- the annulment, with conceptual value;
- the foreclosure, with null value.

We owe it to Mallarmé's genius to have posited, with regard to the ptyx, that the pure signifier of lack tolerates to be evoked only when struck by foreclosure. It is not that it disappears: it *is not there*.

Unalterable support of the 'there is not', it makes for a tangency of the real, of which is said only the 'there is'.

That is why the word itself had to be carried to the shores of death.

There is something unconceptualizable. That is what, based on the foreclosures, this sonnet's quatrains declare. What is this unconceptualizable? The pure fact of there being some concept—which is the reality to which the tercets are devoted. What makes that there is some concept is the master, death, and the pure signifier: the poet, the amphora, and the ptyx.

This is something you will never be able to deduce: this triangle of the subject, death, and language. For all deduction happens from there.

To deduce means to substitute. The 'rules of substitution' lie at the basis

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of mathematical logic. The amphora, the master, and the ptyx are unsubstitutable, held as they forever are in the ‘there is not’, symbolic correlate of the ‘there is’ of the real. The symbolic trinity as such.

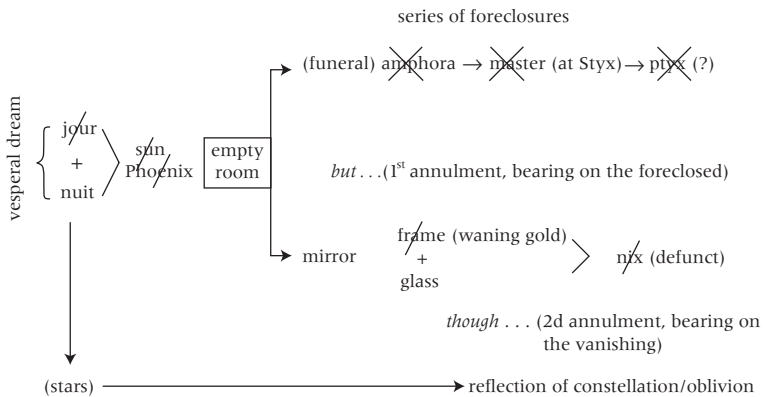
Is this true? I mean, that there is some unconceptualizable? Mao did not seem to believe so. He said: ‘We will come to know everything that we did not know before’ (SW IV, 374, trans. modified).

In this regard, the Marxist axiom: ‘It is right to revolt’ is ambiguous. Is it meant to indicate that the revolt has its reason, its concept? I don’t think so. The revolt is what founds rationality, and it concentrates a thousand reasons to revolt. As popular subjectivization, however, neither can it be reduced to its reasons (which belong to the structure or to the event), nor does it wholly abolish itself in the positivity of its political future. Here there is a factor of historical fortune, of illuminating chance, which is not that of language and of death, but that of courage and justice.

Of the revolt, the State can only say that ‘there is not’ any. Political revolutionaries, for their part, stick to the ‘there is’. Exquisite chance to intoxicate the revolutionary, the revolt is the ptyx of the State.

5

We are almost at the end of our troubles. Let us mark x the foreclosure, and / the vanishing. The annulment is punctuated with ‘but’ or ‘though’. We thus obtain the following constructed schema:



Where then is the lightning strike of the subject in this case? The two annulments do not have the status of a *coup de force* that elsewhere we recognized in them (and that one can discern in the majority of Mallarmé's poems: practise yourselves!).

The 'but' in the first tercet is opposed only to the nullity of foreclosure. It opens a line of totalization onto the gilded frame, without breaking up any other, since the amphora, the master, and the ptyx give consistency only to the radical lack of existence, to the nonplace.

The 'though' eternalizes the nymph Callisto, rather than destroying her. Defunct and naked, she is a new Herodias: 'Mirror, cold water frozen in your frame' (CP 30), which the stellar exception stops on the edges of the nothing.

This poem is more subtly structural than many others. Leaving aside the foreclosures, which have no effect other than to intensify the void, the heterogeneous is almost unreadable in it. What slides under the 'though', sutured onto a legend (Callisto) which bridges the nymph and the star, is only a subject of diminished force, almost folded back—finally!—onto the even surface of the metonymical operations.

Except for this singular delay of perception that saves the day within the night only in the final instance, when obviously the sky's reflection in the mirror was present from the start.

The construction's detour via the waning gold and the generation of the revocable vanishing term (the nix) only serve the purpose of differing the time to conclude.

The foam in 'A la nue accablante . . .' was traced for us from the start. Hence, the leap of the hypothesis, the 'or else' of the subject, imposed itself without any possibility of escape. Here the ruse, which justifies Mallarmé's basking in it, consists in postponing the stellar trace as if it could *result* from the nix, whereas it is actually consistent, or coexistent, with it.

What is the function of anxiety? To divide the night. The opposition day/night is in and of itself an antidialectical metaphor, a pure strong difference. Day and night succeed one another without releasing the movement of the unity of opposites. They are disjointed alternating entities: metaphysical, as is their invocation in the devastating mythology of amorous fusion—the most radical attempt at disavowing sexual difference—in Wagner's *Tristan*.

The first dialectical step consists in grasping the succession of two terms in strong difference from the vanishing of the causal term that articulates them, here the (setting) *σύν*. If, however, the restricted night in which

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one operates—that of the empty salon—is indivisible, this step is only a semblance. What matters is to salvage the trace of the day as internal scission of the nocturnal void. That is why anxiety is said to be a ‘lamp-bearer’, carrier of light. This is not so much its reality as much as its *duty*. Its dialectical duty, which requires that at the point of anxiety the other subjectivizing figure comes in, the one which breaks up the order of things and tolerates its scission: courage.

The poem’s energy corresponds to what Hölderlin names ‘the poet’s courage’, to which the following is prescribed:

Is not all that’s alive close and akin to you,  
Does the Fate not herself keep you to serve her ends?  
Well, then, travel defenceless  
On through life, and fear nothing there!

All that happens there be welcome, be blessed to you,  
Be an adept in joy, or is there anything  
That could harm you there, heart, that  
Could offend you, where you must go? (PF 201)

For Mallarmé, though, there is no temporal advent of the new. Courage, for the structural dialectic, is devoid of historicity. Whence the great difficulty in distinguishing it from anxiety.

For a militant Marxist, there is the anxiety of the night of imperialist societies, the anxiety of the ashy Phoenix of May ’68, or of the Cultural Revolution—can we not ask whether even the amphora remains? The last Master is so old! As for ‘communism’, that *ptyx*, who takes hold of it, for what purpose? It is also a duty to divide what is obscure, to hold fast to the worker’s promise even at the heart of its deepest denial.

We are lamp-bearers. Just as the poem does with the deserted salon, we inspect the political place in order to discern therein the staking out of antagonism that will relay the promise and organize the future.

Wherein then lies the difference? In that, a structural sectarian of weak differences who rejects the aspect of historical force in the scissions, Mallarmé can only deliver anxiety over to a logic of trajectories.

Time is extinguished by space. The solution to the lamp-bearing problem (here, the reflection of the Great Bear) must be there from the start. Only the poet’s dead eye spins the subtle threads that link one object to another so that, in a tricked perspective, the illusion of a surprise may come about.

See what Mallarmé writes to Cazalis to guide the possible illustration of the sonnet (he is referring to the first version, from 1867):

For instance, there is a window open, at night, the two shutters fastened; a room with no one in it, despite the stable appearance provided by the fastened shutters, and in a night made of absence and questioning, without furniture apart from the vague outline of what appear to be tables, a warlike and dying frame of a mirror hung up at the back of the room, with its reflection, a stellar and incomprehensible reflection, of Ursa Major, which links to heaven alone this dwelling abandoned by the world.<sup>37</sup>

The composition of the whole is prior to the operations, and the poem does not have recourse to anything other than what it latently presupposes.

To the logic of the trajectory, which the structural dialectic comes up against and which announces the new only in the retroactive operation of its *mise-en-scène*, we oppose the logic of tendencies, of currents, of vanguards, wherein that which is barely at its birth, though placed and subjected, links up with the most terrible force of the future.

The Mallarméan subject who is given over to the space does not exceed anxiety. He formulates its law of exception, which he deduces from the place.

Here whatever amounts to the subject of anxiety is nothing but the delay of perception.<sup>38</sup> Had the constellation been initial, it would subjugate the subject. Coming in the conclusion, it saves it. Nothing new occurs, except in terms of position in the language.

6

We find no fault with the Mallarméan operations. The chain effect is taken to its peak by the unprecedented use of metonymical sequences. The vanishing term is the centre of gravity of the whole mechanism of the poems. The causality of lack is reduplicated, as lack of lack, into its concept. Thus, a new operator is introduced: the annulment. The splitting affects all the terms of a given poetic space. The terms that are foreclosed convey the theory of the unconceptualizable.

Here the complete structural dialectic is present, active, displayed in the vibrating marvel of language, submitted to the unifying touch of verse. Lacan will not add to it.

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Dialectic, yes indeed! For the other (historical) aspect, which is here subservient and devoted to the sheer lightning flash, by force frees the subject from the chains that keep it *in the same place*.

All this forms a precious legacy: the articulation of the subject-effect under the signifiers of the exception; the cunning use of the signifying forces of poetry that leave us wide open as to a time to conclude; and, finally, the delay in the trajectory, by which the subject of anxiety throws the dice.

The exception in the signifier, the word that shines, the delay: Lacan will go very far along these same trails.

No, I find no fault with all this, except that I am not swayed by an order of things in which all thought is devoted to the inspection of that which subordinates it to the placement of an absence and which brings salvation for the subject only in the already-thereness of a star.

The fact that in this famous and fatally unknown author everything is true only commits us to scrutinize the welcome de-emphasizing to which we should treat him.

This will lead us to Lacan, and, I hope, to some assurance from Marxism as to its lamp-bearing powers for the theory of the subject, which will determine whether it, and it alone, can carry the light of courage into the adventure of this century, in which it is claimed to have provoked only anxiety.

# The inexistent

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May 8, 1978

Cumulative definitions of the subject—Cantor's theorem and the regulation of nationalities—Prescription of the empty place

1

A subject is such that, subservient to the rule that determines a place, it nevertheless punctuates the latter with the interruption of its effect.

Its subjectivizing essence lies in this very interruption, by which the place, where the rule is deregulated, consists in destruction.

A subject is equally the process of recomposing, from the point of the interruption, another place and other rules.

The subject is subjected, insofar as nothing is thinkable under this name except a regulated place—a splace. And also inasmuch as what the subject destroys is at the same time that which determines it in its being placed.

The fact that the subjective process occurs from the point of the interruption indicates the law of the subject as the dialectical division of destruction and recomposition.

This is what guarantees that the subjective process in part escapes repetition. The effect of the Same is destroyed, and what this destruction institutes is an *other Same*.

The topology alone is capable of measuring the fact that one consistency comes after another, in the causal ordering of the interruption.

The subject materializes the division of materialism, insofar as it cannot be conceived without the support of an algorithm overdetermined and

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confounded by the subjectivizing anticipations and the retroactions of the subjective process.

### 2

A subject is that element of an algebra from which the law of composition that determines it becomes open to chance.

As the power of the rabble always asserts: ‘We can never know what these people are thinking.’

I know some ex-colonialists who were haunted by the regulated calmness of their servant, his perfect and smooth belonging to the racist system of servitude. They could not stop—and rightly so—being convinced that, at the first signal, that is at the first effect of vicinity, this affable man, this excellent cook, this child-lover, would unload right on their chest the scrap metal of an old gun usually reserved for Mister’s morning hunt (besides, the little devil was diligent enough to bring the game and the snack to the occasion).

This is the old colonial subjective theorem of the impassiveness of the Chinese.

The topological disturbance of an algebra is the precise name for these fears whose roots lie in the extreme algebraicization of the splace.

All this still gives you only the *causal* location. The subject exists only insofar as that which perturbs comes to put its own order on another place.

‘Great disorder under heaven creates great order under heaven’: Mao was very fond of this proverb.<sup>7</sup> The support of this engendering is the subject-effect as such. A subject is engendered when the uprising gains access to the consistency of the war of liberation, and the aleatory of the place becomes articulated upon the differential of force.

You have four lemmas:

1. A subject stands in the algebraic position of internal exclusion. Even though it can be assigned to the law, it focalizes the interruption of the latter’s effect.
2. A subject stands in a position of topological excess over the place. Even though it belongs, as a singular term, to the splace, it co-adheres, as a collectivizing term, to a series of neighbourhoods that blur the places.

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3. A subject is destruction/recomposition, for there is never a nonplace.<sup>8</sup> The excess over the place dictates a re-placement.
4. Subjectivization designates the subject in the principal dimension of the interruption; the subjective process, in the dimension of the recomposition.

### 3

The crucial point is to understand the topological concept of excess. As far as the (algebraic) internal exclusion is concerned, we owe its concept to Lacan.

Both concepts present themselves at the same spot. Therein lies precisely the difficulty.

The theory of the subject is complete when it manages to think the structural law of the empty place as the punctual anchoring of the excess over the place.

The secret of this anchoring lies in the materialist-dialectical division of the very in-existent whose product is the existence of a whole.

Two concepts, and not one: this makes all the difference between the dialectical logic and the logic of the signifier.

Let us return, if you please, to the central example of the disjunction between algebra and topology: the excess of parts over elements, that is, Cantor's theorem.

A set  $E$ , considered as a whole, belongs to a type of multiplicity that the operations of set theory allow us to specify and that they call the cardinality of this same set,  $\text{Card}(E)$ . Grosso modo, 'a set  $F$  has "more" elements than a set  $E$ ' is written as follows:  $\text{Card}(E) < \text{Card}(F)$ .

Cantor's theorem comes down to this: The cardinality of the set of parts of  $E$  is always superior to the cardinality of  $E$  itself.

Let us consider the type of multiplicity of  $E$ ,  $\text{Card}(E)$ , as a law of the multiple. Let us say for instance that it is forbidden that a multiplicity be greater than the one that results from belonging to  $E$ :

$$\sim (\exists F) [\text{Card}(E) < \text{Card}(F)]$$

By the effects of pure logic,  $\sim (\exists F) [\text{Card}(E) < \text{Card}(F)]$  can also be written as follows:  $(\forall F) [\text{Card}(F) \leq \text{Card}(E)]$ , which is the inscription of the fact that all cardinality is limited by that of  $E$ .

What you have here is the dialectical division of the whole, *depending*

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on whether you link it onto the universal ( $\forall F$ ) or onto the inexistential ( $\sim (\exists F)$ ).

If, in formal logic, ( $\forall x$ ) ( $P(x)$ ), all  $x$  is  $P$ , and  $\sim (\exists x) \sim P(x)$ , no  $x$  is not  $P$ , are equivalent, then the logic of the signifier establishes itself in the gap in writing this equivalence, which is where the dialectical logic follows it most willingly.

Lacan draws from this double linkage the formal logic of the sexes. Man on the side of 'for all  $x$ , this'; women on the side of 'there exists no  $x$  such that not this'. Which implies that 'the' woman, indeed, inexists in the whole.<sup>9</sup>

Hegel already declared this: Woman is the irony of the community.

On all this, read Lacan's 'L'étourdit' (*Scilicet* 4) and the crucial exegesis by Jean-Claude Milner (*L'Amour de la langue*, Le Seuil).

Notice, as is only fitting, that the universality of the proletariat postulates both and at the same time that a certain form of politics is valid *for all* (the emancipation from class will be the emancipation of all of humanity) and that this politics, which is communist, is the in-existent that is proper to the political *Whole*, which has meaning only from the point of the State.

'The' communist politics does not exist. There will only ever exist communist parties.

There was something irreducibly masculine about the Third International.

By positing that ( $\forall F$ ) [ $\text{Card}(F) \leq \text{Card}(E)$ ], we make  $E$  into a space.

Consider that this is what a State decides through its regulations regarding nationality. The fact of belonging to the nation-state, which is algebraically codified by these regulations, fixes the type of multiplicity of the French: prohibited to designate as 'French' any superior multiplicity. The immigrant workers, for example, though empirically internal to this essential component of the whole that is the productive class, remain those without-rights in the national multiple. By holding them to be politically internal to this multiple, through the concept of 'the international proletariat of France',

- you interrupt the national law;
- you destroy a stronghold in the imperialist consensus, which knows only 'immigrants';
- you recompose a different rule for the multiplicity; for instance, whoever works, or whoever practises the politics of revolution, has the rights that are attached to being a member of the nation.

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From this it follows that the immigrated workers are at the centre of the current process of political subjectivity, and that the political unity of the French and the immigrants, in its enactment, is its crucial point of subjectivization.

The immigrant proletarians are the inexistent proper to the national totality.

Our abstract space E also has its inexistent: the type of multiplicity that is immediately superior, the set F which would contain E and which would nevertheless be its *successor* in the ascending order of cardinalities. This superior limit is properly speaking that of which the law forbids the existence: it is the immediate null-object of the law.

Among us, this is taken care of by the laws and practices of expulsion against immigrants, which remind the latter at all times of the prohibition of interiority within the national multiple, and thus of the impossibility, with regards to the whole, of a multinational composition of the nation.

How should we conceive of the legal inexistent that limits the whole? It is, in the first place, the place of the empty cardinality prescribed by the law that distributes and closes the places of possible cardinalities. Beyond Card (E), the rule states, there is *nothing*. This nothing is placed by the space as the clause of its closure. It is the conceptless limit point that guarantees the space its firmness in terms of the multiple.

Lacan and Milner are very clear about this. All totality requires that there in-exists at least one term which is not of the Whole, which does not belong to it. This impossible belonging sets the empty frontier of the Whole. It in-exists with regard to the Whole, but it also ex-sists, in the extent that it is designated as the impossibility from which the possibility of every being of the Whole derives its rule.

Our society—imperialist society—is defined as a whole by the declaration that immigrant workers are not of this society, that it is impossible that they ever be.

This existential marking of the boundary by way of the empty place organizes the algebraic place of the out-place.

The rebellious demand of the immigrants, at this stage, has a name: 'Equal rights'.

It is a matter of occupying *the* unoccupyable place.

Here we have the first concept of the inexistent as the subjective polarity for the interruption of the law and the destruction of the whole. It is the *forced* occupation of the unoccupyable place.

A protest struggle in which the immigrants, represented as a particular

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social force, demand the same political rights as the French, forces the inexistent whose national multiplicity determines its closure as imperialist, that is, it forces the immanent popular internationalism.

Similarly, if I posit that there exists a cardinal immediately superior to Card (E), I detotalize, by occupying the empty place, the cardinality of E splaced as the maximum cardinality. Henceforth, it is only one cardinality among others, in the new closure marked by Card \* (E), the cardinality that *succeeds* Card (E).

Whatever the  $\sim (\exists F)$  of the law created in terms of the void now finds itself filled.

In all cases, the subject proceeds from a subjectivization by forcing the empty place, which a new order grounds retroactively *qua* place, by having occupied it. Multinational people and cardinal successor are the process anticipated by the forced existence of the inexistent.

Any splace is thus the after-effect or *après-coup* of the destruction of another.

Subjectivization is the anticipation whose structure is the empty place; the subjective process, the retroaction that places the forcing.

The subject *is* the splace, as that which has become, through the inexistent, from what has been destroyed.

## Logic of the excess

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May 15, 1978

That the immigrants, aside from the empty place, induce neighbourhoods everywhere—Cantor once more—The continuum hypothesis as desire for algebra—The constructible (Gödel) and the generic (Cohen)—The incalculable impact of the gesture of the dice thrower

1

Is this all? In matters of the subject, is the inexistent all that exists?

What we have neglected is considerable. Are those immigrant workers determined in their being by the recourse to the empty place alone? If we want to define the angle by which they touch upon the political subject, does it suffice to say that they stand in internal exclusion to French society? On that account, the unity of the French and immigrants would be limited to the show of solidarity granted by a few reasonable have-rights to the rebellious without-rights. It is the feeble unionist politics of 'support' for a social force.

From the point of their practical immanence within the class struggle, there is more, much more. The topology of the revolt of immigrant workers qualitatively disrupts all the political neighbourhoods. Those who undergo the most important modification are not so much the immigrant workers themselves, even if they snatch up the right to vote, so much as the French: the French workers for whom the subversion of their national identity, provided they are swept up

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in the process, subjectivizes another vision and another practice of politics.

The political construction of a multinational class unity defines a topology that exceeds from within the law of imperialist society and that by no means can be reduced to the forcing of the empty place, or to provoking the failure of the laws of prohibition and the practices of expulsion that are part of the nation's regulations concerning citizenship, even if this forcing and this failure mark an obligatory tactical scansion.

There exists a recourse of excess which is immanent to the whole, and of which the occupation of the unoccupyable place is only the structural constraint, or the prescribed occasion.

Set theory gives us the abstract scheme of this scission of force.

If you posit that  $\text{Card}(E)$  is the maximum cardinality, you will certainly obtain the structural resources to pinpoint the empty place of its successor. But already  $E$  holds within itself the excess over this prohibition, since Cantor demonstrates that the set of the parts of  $E$  has a cardinality that is superior to that of  $E$ .

Conceived topologically, by the inclusion of its parts,  $E$  destroys the totalizing law of the maximum of multiplicity that it is supposed to be.

Now it so happens that the desire of the mathematician—and Cantor's desire to begin with—can guide us toward the recognition of the dialectical stakes that are involved in this.

Those who want to *limit* the revolt of the immigrants to the subjective element of trade unionism declare that the equality of rights, that is, the occupation of the unoccupyable place, is all that the action is about. They neglect the real of the neighbourhoods; they restrict the alterity of the Same to its algebraic filiations.

Mathematicians, though often mad, feel the pressure of the sword of order against their back. They would like to be able to posit that the immanent excess of multiplicity, which is that of the set of parts of a set, falls squarely in the empty place of its upper limit. In short, they would like to posit that the cardinality of the partitioned is exactly the successor of the elementary cardinality. That is, if  $P(E)$  indicates the set of the parts of  $E$ , and  $\text{Card}^*(E)$ , the first type of multiplicity superior to  $E$ , they would like to posit the following:  $\text{Card } P(E) = \text{Card}^*(E)$ .

This is the famous generalized continuum hypothesis, the primordial concern of specialists in set theory, for whose impossible demonstration Cantor used up his final years.

What is at issue is nothing less than the fusion of algebra (ordered

succession of cardinals) and topology (excess of the partial over the elementary). The truth of the continuum hypothesis would make it a law that the excess within the multiple have no allocation other than the occupation of the empty place, or the existence of the inexistent proper to the initial multiple. This would maintain the filiations of coherence, in the sense that what exceeds the whole from within goes no further than to name the limit point of this whole.

But the continuum hypothesis cannot be demonstrated.

Mathematical triumph of politics over the unionist logic of realism.

2

Where do we stand?

In 1939, Gödel demonstrates that the continuum hypothesis is consistent with the axioms of set theory. If we want, we can add it to these axioms.

For the sake of this reassuring demonstration, Gödel uses a model that is internal to set theory, the class of *constructible* sets. This signifier is exemplary. It indicates to what point the aim is to obtain an operational mastery over the resources of multiplicity, to infer through procedures of ordered expansion the stage-by-stage construction of ever more complex sets. The potential anarchy of the excess of the parts is thus subdued, at the cost, it is true, of an extreme limitation of the set-theoretical resources. Gödel's model is characterized by an extreme narrowness of the multiple.

Logicians show great lucidity about this. Consider K. J. Devlin (in *Handbook of Mathematical Logic*):

(. . .) the notion of the power set of an infinite set is too vague; we know that  $P(x)$ , the power set of  $x$ , consists of *all* subsets of  $x$ —but what does *all* mean here? The axioms of ZF [Zermelo-Fraenkel] and ZFC [Zermelo-Fraenkel plus the axiom of choice] do not help us much. The *constructible universe* is obtained when this looseness is removed by taking the power set of any set as small as possible, without contradicting the ZF axioms. More precisely, we notice that any subset of a given set which is first-order definable (. . .) from other given sets must 'exist' (in any 'universe') if the given sets 'exist,' and define the constructible hierarchy (with the constructible universe as its limit) by taking, at stage  $\alpha$ , not *all* (?) subsets of what we have so far, but only those subsets

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which are first-order definable from what we have so far. This *minimality* of the constructible universe has the result that for any cardinal  $k$ ,  $2^k$  [the cardinality of the set of parts of  $k$ ] is as small as possible (hence the GCH [Generalized Continuum Hypothesis] holds in the constructible universe). (HML 454, version adapted in accordance with Badiou's translation)

This text clearly proposes to put some order in the partitioning of the multiple. The fact that, for Devlin, the notion of 'all' the subsets of  $E$  is 'too vague' denotes his perplexity in the face of the unassignable resources of excess. The proposed path consists in keeping in existence only that whose definition, from within the whole, is explicit according to this whole itself.

The fact that one ends up in minimality shows what it is that he turns away from.

Long before the ecologists with their flourishing beards, the logicians posit that, in the face of the 'vague' spillages of topology, it is appropriate to proclaim: '*Small is beautiful*'.

Smallness is hierarchy: the constructible universe is built in strata in such a way that each stratum contains only objects that can be defined canonically on the basis of the preceding strata. Of course, the object to watch over is the one in which the excess is rooted, that is, the part carved out in the whole. Gödel's construction entails a veritable domestication of admissible parts—or of admissible parties. . . . One proceeds by way of an algebraic rarefaction of what is tolerated in terms of the subsets of a given multiplicity.

Let us simplify, so as to penetrate the antidialectical essence of the proof in question.

Given a set of sets,  $M$ , a part of  $M$ , say  $X$ , is declared definable in  $M$  if there exists a statement with a single variable,  $\varphi(x, a, b, c \dots)$ , where  $a, b, c \dots$  are sets of  $M$  that are already defined, a statement such that the elements of  $X$  are the only ones to satisfy, in  $M$ , this statement.

Put differently,  $X$  is that subset of  $M$  such that an explicit statement, built according to the parameters that belong only to  $M$ , describes a property common to all its elements and to these alone. Such a statement characterizes  $X$ .  $M$ , so to speak, controls linguistically its part  $X$ . It detains its *formula*.

From there, you will pass from one set-theoretical stratum to another through an ordinal enumeration in a recurrent structure.

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Broadly speaking, each stratum will allow all the parts from the preceding stratum that are definable according to the latter ('definable' in the rigorous sense used before). We can phrase this point in a definition of transfinite recurrence whose first term is the empty or null set.

Subsequently, you will accept only those sets that belong to a determinate stratum.

The constructible universe that is built in this way proceeds by stages in imposing the self-limitation of immanent multiplicities, whose formula must be able to be given according to the parameters of the whole.

One could for example demand that any political organization be definable based on the exclusive parameters of parliamentarism (participation in elections, clear classification 'on the right' and 'on the left', and so on) and that any worker's group be able to inscribe itself in a unionist formula. Besides, this is exactly what tends to be done. The notions of the extraparliamentary and of autonomy are quickly criminalized. The dominant political universe that is our own, no doubt, seeks to remain constructible.

In this universe, the excess of the multiple is ultimately reduced to whatever the algebra of it tolerates: it fits *just* under the concept of the inexistent that delimits the whole. In this way, the continuum hypothesis is satisfied.

The price to be paid for this is an extraordinary poverty of the multiple, as shown in the dismal spectacle of parliamentary elections and of asthmatic crowds that bless us with the gift of their personality during the 'meetings' of the major unions.

Indeed, the algebraic encoding of the excess, which submits it to an ordered enumeration, reduces what is subjectively too-much to what for this order is too-little.

Whatever a place holds virtually in terms of subjectivization, once it is realigned exclusively onto the empty point of its boundary, falls back on the equilibrium between place and excess, which does nothing more than repeat the fact that a place has the power of being the place of the subjective, without the qualitative break by which the subject-effect in a torsion escapes the local measure.

A truly astonishing theorem (Rowbottom) stages the force of interdiction by which constructibility mutilates the multiple.

In order to grasp its significance, we must understand that Gödel's outcome does not at all satisfy the regular mathematician. What the latter wants is for the doctrine of multiplicities to prescribe the continuum hypothesis as a necessary result, and not as an allowable supplement.

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His or her goal is not the hollow freedom to add or not the continuum hypothesis to the axioms of set theory.

The underlying idea is that it is not possible to make an axiom of the identity between the excess and the occupation of the empty place. What is needed is for the real to impose on us *the impossibility for it to be otherwise*. If not, the integral dialectic prevails: there is some heterogeneity between the logic of succession among the empty places and the interior excess of the multiple.

Similarly, the trade unionists who defend the idea of ‘supporting’ the social force of immigrants, in order somehow to regularize the latter’s status within imperialist society, want history to impose their solution as the only political solution imaginable. For them what is at stake is the simple, metaphysical, and atemporal nature of class, whose status defines their ideology of belonging.

One therefore searches for a way to curb the continuum hypothesis by reshuffling the axioms. For example, by formulating hypotheses regarding the plausible existence of gigantic cardinalities. It is a question of somehow bringing the excess in line, no longer from below, through inferior strata as in the constructible universe, but from above, by admitting straightaway certain pre-eminent multiplicities that are expected to order everything that precedes them.

Along this path, comparable to the nationalist, war-mongering, imperialist ‘grand designs’ by which the bourgeoisies seek to light the backfire of crises and popular upsurges, nothing worthwhile has been found.

Rather, it became possible to measure in what sense the control ‘from below’, the Gödelian constructibility, supported none of the vast existential hypotheses, due to the intrinsic poverty of its resources in terms of multiplicities.

If there exist ‘very large’ cardinalities (the technical definition of which I cannot get into here), there necessarily exist innumerable sets that are not constructible.

The pressure from above and that from below are incompatible. You cannot both and at the same time show off the syndicalist euphoria for negotiating the imperialist expansion in times of peace and indoctrinate the people in the risk of war and the shady appeal of conquests.

Rowbottom demonstrates that if there exists a certain species of cardinality—a ‘very large’ type of multiplicity—then there are, among the parts of the modest set of whole numbers (the smallest infinite set) many more that are nonconstructible than constructible.<sup>10</sup>

This goes to show the extent to which to posit any set as constructible, which is Gödel's path to establish the consistency of the continuum hypothesis, means to castrate the immanent power of the multiple and to strike those multiplicities that are too ambitious with the stamp of interdiction.

3

In 1963, Cohen demonstrates that the negation of the continuum hypothesis is as consistent with the axioms of set theory as its affirmation.

The 'disorder on earth' installs itself by way of demonstration.

Most amazingly, in order to build his model in which the algebraic regulation of excess comes to falter, Cohen uses a technique to which he gives the name of 'forcing': blind intuition of the fact that, at the point where the rule of succession no longer applies, what is at issue is the subjectivizing force.

Cohen's model is built along paths that are diametrically opposed to those of Gödel. We can hardly provide an idea of it, if for no other reason than that no intuition matches this model. This is a symptom of the fact that it bespeaks the excess.

In order to explore its detours, the reader will refer to the chapter by J. P. Burgess on *forcing* in *Handbook of Mathematical Logic* (404–52).

It is by the 'imaginary' extension of a stable primitive model (*ground model*) that we obtain the wherewithal to unlimit the partitive resources of the multiple.

The function of the excess of this added 'imaginary' set as an inductor can be glanced from its name: generic set.

And, certainly, any subject brings about the divided unity of the generic and the constructible.

The generic supplement is only *minimally* described. This is key: the weakest possible mastery of the language of the whole over that which is expected to make it proliferate. As Cohen himself says: 'In the present case we are starting with a single symbol for the set  $a$  and wish, in some sense, to give the least possible information about it.'<sup>11</sup>

Gödel, by contrast, requires at each stage the *maximum* descriptive capacity, since he retains only those parts of which an explicit formula provides a singular property.

In order to keep the information as scarce as possible, Cohen replaces

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the properties of implication (if p, then q) with the more evasive property of *forcing*: if there is such or such a condition, then the statement q is 'forced' to be the case.

A condition is in fact only an element of the generic set. The information that allows us to situate the extension as the theory's model can be summed up by saying that the belonging of an element to the added 'imaginary' set forces such or such a property of this extension.

A typical example of this evasive logic, or of the systematic under-information sought after by Cohen, can be found in the preferential treatment given to the universal quantifier over the existential one.

Why? Because if I have a statement of the type  $(\exists x) (P(x))$ , its truth according to the model requires that I designate a precise element a of this model such that  $P(a)$  is satisfied in it. This precision runs counter to the generic inspiration, which aims to distinguish as little as possible within the resources of the excess.

In this regard the generic essentially resembles the topological, which, as we established, disidentifies the element in favour of its neighbourhoods.

It follows that 'when faced with  $\exists x B(x)$ , we should choose to have it false, unless we have already a symbol x for which we have strong reason to insist that  $B(x)$  be true'.<sup>12</sup>

Sartre has many times over asserted that the relation of the intellectual to the revolution lies in his or her universalizing function. He is right about this. The excess, which is the topological law of subjectivization, induces a primacy of the universal over that which, from the existential, produced whatever was distinguishable in the old world.

Political force, once it is let loose, no longer distinguishes *as before*. Therein lies its communitarian virtue—its generic virtue.

Likewise, it no longer prescribes the same negative space. It transmutes the old law of oppositions (parliamentary ones, for example). It teaches us to say 'no' differently.

At this point we still have to break with the deterministic effects of implication.

That p implies non-q means purely and simply, in the classical logic of propositions, that p and q cannot be true at the same time. If p is true, then q must be false. The implication of a negation denotes the incompatibility of two statements. In this sense, the truth of p strictly determines that q not be true.

By contrast, in the logic of forcing, that p forces non-q means that there exists no condition that is stronger than p and that forces q. It is from the

point of an inexistent relative to the statement  $p$  that the forcing of non- $q$  is determined.

What is a 'stronger' condition? Even if Cohen defines it strictly in terms of a relation of order, we can interpret it as a condition that gives 'more information' than the initial one, or again, a condition that is more restrictive as to the characteristics of the generic model.

We will thus hold that  $p$  forces the negation of  $q$  if there is no condition, known to contain more information than  $p$ , which forces  $q$  itself. The statement  $q$  finds itself, so to speak, freed with regard to the conditions that are stronger than  $p$ .

Thus, the forcing of the negative—of non- $q$ —as opposed to the incompatibility induced by its implication, is the result of the fact that nothing in that which locates and encompasses the condition  $p$  forces the truth of  $q$ .

Conceived of as a break, subjectivization certainly operates within a logic of forcing. The 'No!' of the revolt is not implied by the local conditions. It is forced by the inexistence of an absolute constraint that would force submission to the immediate conditions in a transcendent way.

Between formal implication and forcing there lies all the ambivalence that the dialectic introduces in the old problem of determinism.

The subject's surrection is the effect of force within the place. *This does not mean that the place implies it.*

The generic extension obtained by way of forcing, to which the added imaginary set subjects everything that can be stated about it, allows the production of an impressive quantity of new sets.

In fact, we can produce as many sets as we like. The resources of the topological turn out to be unlimited.

We thus demonstrate that the cardinality of the set of parts of a set is literally free-floating. It surpasses the cardinality of the initial set with an arbitrary quantity. It can be the successor (as Gödel shows), the successor of the successor, or it can find itself further down still in the series of cardinalities, and finally (this is the theorem of Easton), more or less as far down as one wants.

Thus, the inner resource of a set, taken in its parts, is not regulated by any numerical legitimacy. It can go past everything that one purports to assign to it as its boundary. The logic of the excess is *real*, insofar as it is impossible to limit it.

This is the reason why a minor nation, provided it counts on its own forces, can vanquish a great power (Mao). Except that it still needs the political concentration of its social parts, that is, a party.

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Of such a party, the cardinality—the force: mathematicians have had the foresight to name ‘power’ the cardinality of a set—surpasses everything that one thinks might be expected from it.

Notice that Cohen, breaking with the old ordinal chain of the mathematician’s desire, ends up converting to the superpower of immanent excess:

A point of view which the author feels may eventually come to be accepted is that CH [the continuum hypothesis] is *obviously* false. [. . .] Now  $\aleph_1$  is the set of countable ordinals and this is merely a special and the simplest way of generating a higher cardinal. The set  $C$  [the continuum] is, in contrast, generated by a totally new and more powerful principle, namely the Power Set Axiom. [. . .] This point of view regards  $C$  [the continuum] as an incredibly rich set given to us by one bold new axiom, which can never be approached by any piecemeal process of construction.<sup>13</sup>

What Cohen here recognizes is that between the logic of places and that of excess, there is a dialectical break.

Thus, the excess finds itself removed from any numeral allegiance. The subject, in its double register of algorithm and neighbourhood, effectuates an irreconcilable scission of its own process. We welcome those ‘vicinities of the vague’ in which the partitive multiplicity is dissolved, considering them to be the proof, administered by those who would desire the exact opposite, that there is a wager on the real. If, in this wager, the number inscribed on the dice is the result of a consecution, it cannot link up into a chain that which, in the thrower’s gesture, produces the incalculability of its reach.<sup>14</sup>