NOTHINGNESS & EVENT

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> Against all odds, I have always been concerned in a privileged way by the question of how something could still be called 'subject' within the most rigorous conditions possible of the investigation of structures. This question had an echo for me of an even older question, which I had posed at the time that I was fully Sartrean, namely, the question of how to make Sartre compatible with the intelligibility of mathematics.
>
> – Alain Badiou[i]

> Les gerbes refusent mes liens. Dans cette infinie dissonance unanime, chaque épi, chaque goutte de sang parle sa langue et va son chemin. La torche, qui éclaire et ferme le gouffre, est elle-même un gouffre.
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> — Jacques Dupin, *Lichens*, verse 4.[ii]

The conceptual bestiary of *Being and Event* catalogues no creature stranger than the void. Any hope to extract a 'first clear thought' from this abyss, a thought transparent and stable enough to truly ground the ambitious 'metaontology' -- the philosophical interpretation of mathematics as ontology – that Badiou's opus articulates, finds itself assaulted from the outset by a swarm of equivocations.[iii] Attempting to reduce this cacophony into a single, essential concept of the void, or temper it into a soothing harmony, is, I think, unlikely to be either useful or successful. What I will to do, instead, is single out a few of the stranger and more significant uses that Badiou makes of 'the void' in order to better articulate their meaning. The real objective of all this will be to explain what *should* be understood by Badiou's claim that, in an *event*, the void is 'localized', and localized in such a way as to provoke the emergence of a *subject*. Armed with *Being and Event*'s explicit conceptual machinery, this explanation can only go so far. We will strike its limits when we come to examine the *'immediate structures'* of the event, the precise mechanisms by which it 'localizes the void', provokes a subject, and so on. There is a gulf between the bare scheme of the event as a reflexive multiplicity, the localisation of the void (itself understood in a rather strange sense), and the peculiar temporality of subject and truth procedure. To cross it, I turn to what I take to be *Being and Event*'s most significant predecessor, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. What I wish to extract from that text is the formal kernel of that 'absolute event which is [...] the upsurge of the for-

itself' (EN 118/82) – a kernel to be 'liberated from its anthropological dross,' as Hilbert liked to say of his own formalistic Kantianism.[iv] I will then splice together the two structures, event and for-itself, while demonstrating that this surgery is not an *ad hoc* procedure, but expressive of an essential structural compatibility which lets us repair certain shortcomings and remove certain stopgaps in Badiou's theory of the subject. We will see how the Sartrean structures of the for-itself emerge from and animate the Badiousian chords joining event, being and void, on which the subject plays its tune.

§1: The Equivocal Void

Before beginning with this reconstruction of the theory of the event (and its prerequisite distillation of Sartrean ontology), it is necessary to analyse the ambiguous role played by 'the void' in Badiou's philosophy.[v] In the swarm of equivocations that greets the reader of *Being and Event*, the first voice to emerge from the racket speaks of the void as *the ultimate foundation* or *ground of presentation*, as that which tethers every occurrence of the *there is* to its ontological identity. This tethering relies on Badiou's interpretation of set as *presentation* (i.e. as the 'there is' of a situation), and the empty set as the *void*. Briefly, the way this works is that the identity of each set is fixed by a recursion (governed by the Axiom of Extensionality) that *necessarily* (that is, in virtue of the Axiom of Foundation) terminates in the immediate self-identity (or in-difference) of the empty set, Ø (cf. EE 82/68).[vi] The void-as-ground-of-identity is further accompanied by a rough synthesis of two Platonic concepts: the $\pi\lambda\eta\theta o\varsigma$ of others-without-the-One, illustrated at the end of the *Parmenides* (EE 41-47/31-37), and the *receptacle* or $\chi\omega\rho\alpha$ into which the Ideas are inscribed and thereby affected by the $\alpha\nu\alpha\gamma\kappa\eta$ of an 'errant cause', as recounted in the *Timaeus* (EE 68/55).[vii] Echoes of the Sartrean notion of *inertia* are also brought into this ensemble of philosophemes, to much the same effect as the Platonic notion of 'errant cause'(EE 33/25). The void, according to this view, is something like the inexhaustible prime matter from which every presentation is composed, so that every presentational multiplicity is conceived as 'a modality-according-to-the-one [*selon-de-l'un*] of the void itself' (EE 70/57). Often, in *Being and Event*, the expression 'inconsistent

multiplicity' -- an expression that Cantor invokes to describe what we now call 'proper classes', or multiples that cannot be consistently treated as unities in their own right – is summoned up to evoke this sense of 'the void'. The idea here finds its motivation in the Leibnizian decree, that 'ce qui n'est pas *un* être n'est pas un *être*' (EE 31/23),[viii] which is to say: to be without unity is to be *nothing* – which is not to say that the non-unitary simply *is not*, a distinction upon which Badiou insists (EE 66/53). Now, the void thus conceived is not uniquely located at the root of the tree of presentation, but rather, without losing its basic unicity, infiltrates the tree's every branch: it is that aspect of multiplicity that is still-uncounted, that evades the occurrence of unification that makes each multiplicity the multiplicity that it is, and which still inheres in every presentation. The void, now, is the faceless but unexpungable residuum of sheer inconsistency. Badiou's explanation for this is that

> [i]nsofar as the one is a result, by necessity 'something' of the multiple does not absolutely coincide with the result. To be sure, there is no antecedence of the multiple which would give rise to presentation because the latter is always already-structured such that there is only oneness or consistent multiples. But this 'there is' leaves a remainder […] a must-be counted […] which causes the structured presentation to waver towards the phantom of inconsistency. (BE, m4, 53/66)

Badiou expresses this inherence with an image well frequented by Sartre: the void, we are told, 'haunts' every situation (EE 110/94). Mimicking the errancy of the Platonic $\chi\omega\rho\alpha$, this nothingness has the mysterious capacity to 'cause the structured presentation [i.e. the situation] to waver towards the phantom of inconsistency' (EE 66/53). This vision of the void as haunting or inhering in every situation without presenting itself as such does admit of a clear set theoretic formalization, in the form of the theorem that the empty set is a subset of every set. The Platonic dimension of $\alpha\nu\alpha\gamma\kappa\eta$ -- that which challenges the consistency of any presentation informed by the count-as-one (the operation that gives a purely extrinsic aspect of unity and consistency to every thinkable multiplicity, which is to say, the operation of set-formation) -- proves more elusive to formalization.

It is by way of an esoteric doctrine of 'suture' that Badiou binds these two or three senses of the void into a choir.[ix] 'For me,' Badiou remarks,

> suture designates a juncture between ontology and its 'object'. To hold mathematics as ontology, the very limits of being as such will be touched by the void. [...] The void is the point on which we found the constructible sets which allow us to unfold the characteristics of pure being. In this sense

> the void also represents inconsistency. [...] With the inconsistency of the void, we are at the point whre it is equivocally consistent and inconsistent. [...] Suture carries its importance in my work in this way, in relation to this difference in meaning.[x]

To the 'grounding', 'abyssal' and 'haunting' voices of the void that are forcibly synthesized by the notion of suture, Badiou adjoins another: this time, the void is thought in terms of the nothingness of the count-as-one itself, its sheerly non-self-sufficient and relative mode of being. If there is dissonance here, it is unheard by Badiou, for whom

> it comes down to exactly the same thing to say that the nothing [*sc.* the void] is the operation of the count—which, as source of the one, is not itself counted—and to say that the nothing is the pure multiple upon which the count operates—which 'in itself', as non-counted, is quite distinct from how it turns out according to the count.
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> The nothing [*sc.* the void] names that undecidable of presentation which is its unpresentable, distributed *between* the pure inertia of the domain of the multiple, and the pure transparency of the operation thanks to which there is oneness [*d'où procède qu'il y ait de l'un*]. The nothing is as much that of structure, thus of consistency, as that of the pure multiple, thus of inconsistency. (EE 68/55; emphasis added)

Here, yet another thought of the void, playing on the equivocity of this '*between*', emerges from this cacophany, as the count's emptiness slips into the abstract interval between operation and effect. The void is, now, 'the imperceptible *gap*, cancelled then renewed, between presentation as structure and presentation as structured-presentation, between the one as result and the one as operation, between presented consistency and inconsistency as what-will-have-been-presented' (EE 67/54*). It is not immediately evident how this conception of the void is related to the void as empty set, to say nothing of the other variations we have mentioned. It is nevertheless this notion of the void that proves central for the theory of the event that is the fulcrum of Badiou's masterpiece. It is, indeed, the only conception of the void that allows us to make productive and non-trivial sense of Badiou's thesis that

> for the void to become localisable at the level of presentation, and thus for a certain type of intrasituational assumption of being qua being to occur, there must be a dysfunction of the count, resulting from an excess-of-one. The event will be this ultra-one of chance, on the basis of which he void of a situation may be retroactively discerned (EE 69/56*).

It is this sense of the void that will occupy the bulk of our attention in what follows, as we turn to the concept of event.

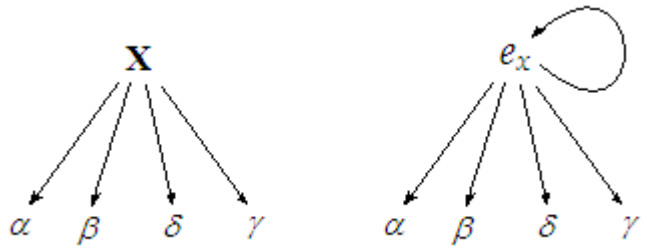
§2: The Immediate Structures of the Event

Events, for Badiou, are essentially situated, folding into their existential structure the very situations into which they erupt. The existence of sites at which events may or may not occur is, for Badiou, secured by a particular axiom of the set theory that Badiou adopts as his ontology, the axiom of foundation, which assures us that every non-empty set—every situation—contains at least one element with which it has nothing in common.[xi] When this element is itself non-empty (which is common enough), we have what Badiou calls an *evental site*. Through the lenses of metaontology, every such site is grasped as 'that which is *almost* withdrawn from the situation's regulation by an immanent norm, or its state. In a situation (in a set), it is like a point of exile where *it is possible* that something, finally, might happen.'[xii]

What is odd about this placement of the event is that the event itself violates the very axiom that assures the existence of its site. An event has the form of a reflexive multiplicity, consisting of the elements of the site on the one hand, and itself on the other. A well-known consequence of the axiom of foundation, however, is that such multiplicities *cannot* exist. As Badiou has it,

> as multiple, the event's figure mobilizes the elements of the site, delivering them from the axiom of foundation. Subtracted from this axiom, and thus unfounded, the multiple of the elements of the site is going to act in a peculiar manner, namely, by immanentizing its own multiplicity.[xiii]

Formally, if the site where the event occurs is X, then the event e_x is described by the multiple, $(\{e_x\} \cup X)$. The structure in question readily lends itself to a visual illustration, in the form of a directed graph rather than a formula. We will designate the relation, 'presents' (the metaontological equivalent of the set-theoretic relation 'contains', the inverse of the 'belongs to' relation, which set-theorists mark with an '$\in$'), by an arrow. Suppose that the elements of X are α, β, γ and δ; the respective graphs for X and e_x would then look like this:



Here, one may ask why such an ontologically illegitimate construction is called for. One

possible, but ultimately unwarranted, explanation is that the reflexive structure of the event is motivated by empirical observations pertaining to the nature of what Badiou wishes to call 'events'. The ontological illegitimacy would then be the inconvenient but ultimately necessary price that must be paid in order to save the phenomena in question. Neither assumption is justifiable. For one, Badiou clearly asserts that an event is not legible as such on the basis of empirical data alone, but 'can only be *thought* by anticipating its abstract form, and can only be *revealed* in the retroaction of an interventional practice which is itself entirely reflective [*réfléchie*]' (EE 199/178*). The judgment as to whether or not an event has taken place is held to be essentially *undecidable* with respect to what lends itself to empirical observation, which is Badiou's way of saying that it can *only* be a matter of decision.

However, even if we allow that certain situations or occurrences empirically motivate a mathematical formulation that violates the axiom of foundation, there is still no obvious justification for the resulting inconsistency with ontology, since there exist alternative set theories that allow for such constructions without producing a contradiction. One such set theory, Peter Aczel's ZF^{-}+AFA,[xiv] has, in fact, been taken up at length by the philosopher and logician, Jon Barwise, for the sake of elaborating a *mathematical theory of situations.* This fact is one of which Badiou was himself aware; in an endnote to *Being and Event* we read that,

> It is quite remarkable that the Anglo-Saxon school of logic has recently used the word 'situation' to attempt the 'real world' application of certain results which have been confined, up till the present moment, within the 'formal sciences'. A confrontation with set theory then became necessary. A positivist version of my enterprise can be found in the work of J. Barwise and J. Perry. There is a good summary of their work in J. Barwise, 'Situations, sets and the Axiom of Foundation', *Logic Colloquium '84* (North Holland: 1986). (EE 523/484)

As the title indicates, the work cited here directly challenges the restrictions imposed by the Axiom of Foundation and, without positing any suspension of the laws of being, proposes a theory of situations (a 'metaontology' in Badiou's sense) rooted in a different axiomatic (a different 'ontology'). Badiou's decision to theorise the event as an exception from the laws of being should not, therefore, be considered either an accident or an unstable compromise between mathematics and empirical data. What needs to be explained is not just the decision to schematize events as

reflexive multiplicities, but the decision to refuse to admit such a schematization into the province of ontology – something which could be done simply by shifting from one set theory to another.

If we wish to understand the driving reason for *both* the event's schematization as a self-belonging multiplicity *and* the stubborn inconsistency of such a schema with the axioms of ZF, then, rather than trying to justify that schema empirically, we ought to look towards the *intra-theoretical* consequences of positioning a reflexive multiplicity within a universe whose ontological structure is governed by the Zermelo-Frankel axioms. In doing so, we see that the group of axioms whose operation is most directly affected by the reflexivity of the event are those that we may call the set-theoretical 'regime of identity'. This is the group consisting of (1) the Axiom of the Empty Set, (2) the Axiom of Foundation, and (3) the Axiom of Extensionality. I call them this for the simple reason that these three axioms act as the necessary and sufficient conditions for insuring that every existent set has a univocally determinable identity for set theory. The effects with respect to the axiom of foundation are obvious enough to spare further analysis – this axiom is simply contradicted, or suspended. The effects with respect to the axiom of extensionality are more interesting: The event, being subtracted from foundation, cannot be identified by the axiom of extensionality. This state of affairs is nicely expressed by Badiou in the Eighteenth Meditation of *Being and Event*, where he considers that

> [i]f there existed an ontological formalization of the event it would therefore be necessary, within the framework of set theory, to allow the existence, which is to say the count-as-one, of a set such that it belonged to itself: $\alpha \in \alpha$.
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> It is in this manner, moreover, that one would formalize the idea that the event results from an excess-of-one, an ultra-one. In fact, the *difference* of set, α, after the axiom of extensionality, must be established via the examination of its elements, therefore, if α belongs to itself, via the examination of a itself. As such α's identity can only be specified on the basis of α itself. The set a can only be recognized inasmuch as it has already been recognized. This type of self-antecedence in identification indicates the effect of the ultra-one in that the set α, such that $\alpha \in \alpha$, is solely identical to itself inasmuch as it *will have been* identical to itself. (EE 211/189-190)

The event, in virtue of its existential structure, cannot be placed by the ontological regime of identity. This is not a glitch in Badiou's doctrine, which *requires* events to be placed outside the limits of the ontological regime of identity.

There is nothing wrong with your sets. [NOTE TO TRANSLATOR: THIS LAST SENTENCE SHOULD PROBABLY BE KEPT IN ENGLISH, UNLESS THE TURKISH WORD FOR 'SET' AS IN 'TV SET' IS THE SAME AS THE WORD FOR MATHEMATICAL SET. IT'S A SILLY REFERENCE TO *THE OUTER LIMITS*, WHICH YOU PROBABLY WILL HAVE NOTICED.]

For Badiou, the individuation of an event demands an act of *intervention*, which, he tells us, is necessary in order to lastingly bind the ephemeral and inconsistent occurrence of the event to the situation in which it takes place, in order, that is, to affirm the *belonging* of e_x to its situation. Intervention, for Badiou, thus has two aspects: the recognition of the evental form of e_x (the recognition that it is in fact e_x *itself* that is presented in e_x) and the decision on the belonging of e_x to the situation. This recognition, however, has no basis in anything but its own operation. As Badiou remarks,

> An event of the site X belongs to itself, $e_x \in e_x$. Recognizing it as a multiple supposes that it has *already* been named—for this supernumerary signifier e_x to be considered as an element of the one-multiple that it is. The act of nomination of the event is what constitutes it, not as real—we will always posit that this multiple has occurred—but as susceptible to a decision concerning its belonging to the situation. (EE 225/203)

This 'reality' that is supposed to *precede* the subjective act of nomination is, in fact, quite difficult to specify, and there is reason to suspect that it is without content. If the act of nomination is what effects the reflexivity of the event, then the only reality prior to this act would be the bare 'being-in-itself' of the event – the existence of the event abstracted from its dimension of self-belonging – and this is nothing other than the site itself. But this is clearly not what Badiou wishes to say; to 'always posit that this multiple has occurred,' is to *deny* that 'nothing will have taken place but place.'[xv] As it stands, it appears as if the affirmation of the 'prior reality' of the event is little more theoretical stopgap, or a wholly abstract ward against 'decisionism' with respect to the event.[xvi] This conceptual insufficiency vanishes if we attend to things more carefully, but first let us turn our attention to another deficiency with which this one is closely connected.

Badiou notes early on in the meditation on intervention that 'the procedure of decision,' with respect to which the event is recognised, 'requires a certain degree of preliminary separation

from the situation, a coefficient of unpresentability' (EE 223/201), since the event is by its very definition not something that can be ratified by the laws of presentation. At first glance, it seems that the preliminary separation that will permit the intervention to occur could be nothing other than the very event that is at issue – while by the same measure, '[i]t seems that the event, as interventional placement-in-circulation of its name, can only be authorised on the basis of that other event, equally void for structure, which is the intervention itself' (EE 231/209). For Badiou, this constitutes a vicious circle, which must be broken. 'There is actually no other recourse against this circle,' he writes,

> than that of splitting the point at which it rejoins itself. It is certain that the event alone, aleatory figure of non-being, founds the possibility of intervention. It is just as certain that if no intervention puts it into circulation within the situation on the basis of an extraction of elements from the site, then, lacking any being, radically subtracted from the count-as-one, the event does not exist. In order to avoid this curious mirroring of the event and the intervention—of the fact and the interpretation—*the possibility of the intervention must be assigned to the consequences of another event*. It is evental recurrence which founds intervention. In other words, there is no interventional capacity, constitutive for the belonging of an evental multiple to a situation, save within the network of consequences of a previously decided belonging. An intervention is what presents an event for the occurrence of another. It is an evental between-two. (EE 231-2/209)

Badiou is correct to see a 'curious mirroring' in this phenomenon of event and intervention, and he is right to crystallise this mirroring into an irreducible 'between-two', but his solution to the problem is a false one. Aside from the lack of any account of *how* does a event should establish the interventional capacity, we face the obvious problem of regress. Badiou's proposal leads us to either an eternal and infinite string of events, each legitimating the intervention for the next (a solution that becomes puzzling as the requisite string of events extends beyond the history of life on earth, or even the existence of this universe) or else to a prehistoric, absolute and original event, an *Ur-event* in which the circularity of event and intervention would be consummated. But this just shifts the bump in the rug in a way no less shabby than the cosmological sophism for the existence of God, which takes as its premise that every occurrence have a cause and concludes with the affirmation of an Uncaused Cause or *ens causa sui*!

I have already mentioned that Badiou sees, in the event, the invocation of the void itself. As his theory of the event stands, however, this powerful intuition admits of only the most trivial and

insignificant interpretations. For instance, Badiou at one point says that the evental invocation of the void is discernible in the fact that the name of the event is a "pure proper name", and can be attributed to nothing counted as one in the situation, except, perhaps, the ephemeral nomination of the event itself (EE 203/182). If this were the case, then

'*this utterance*'[xvii]

succeeds as well as 'convoking the void' as any event. But if we accept this, and take the trivial phenomenon of semantic or indexical self-reference to exhaust the dynamics of the event, then we have diluted the concept of event to the point so far as to rid it of all its original flavour.

If we are to make any progress here, it is necessary to follow Badiou's guiding intuition that there is, in event and intervention, a sort of circularity that does not resolve itself into identity (making the event a pure and arbitrary decision), and a duality that does not dissolve into unity. It is especially necessary to follow this intuition in a way that avoids the traps to which Badiou's own account has fallen prey: an endless recursion of events and intervention explains nothing, and the mere affirmation of a reality independent of nomination says nothing. What is required is a theory of evental individuation by which a multiplicity comes into being both contingently (rather than by the decree or decision of a pre-existent subject) and *for itself*, and by which it maintains an original and non-decomposable duality within its structure – a duality, moreover, that presents itself as a localization or convocation of the void.

§3: The Immediate Structures of the For-itself

The concepts necessary for such a theory are already at hand, having been forged by Sartre in his analysis of the 'Immediate Structures of the For-itself' in *Being and Nothingness*. In order to employ these concepts, we must clearly recognise the structural congruencies between event and consciousness that are already in place. We must grasp impersonal consciousness and presentation to be of fundamentally similar forms, each being a determination of the 'there is' insofar as the 'there is' is not reducible to *what* there is. Both, moreover, exhibit a form which can be identified as being that of *multiplicity* – a key point, whose demonstration and clarification will be presented

below. *Consciousness* markedly distinguishes itself from presentation by virtue of its reflexivity, its non-identity and its purely 'interior' mode of individuation. *Presentation*, in its normal state, can always be assigned an identity (at least in principle), which is stable and fixed 'in exteriority' by the axiomatic regime of identity. This regime requires, however, that presentation not be reflexive. The formal distinction between the structure of consciousness and the structure of presentation breaks down, however, when presentation is affected by a 'dysfunction of the count', and 'immanentizes its own multiplicity' in presenting itself. This dysfunction is what takes place in the event. Accordingly, the event cannot be assigned an ontological identity, and can individuate itself (and thus have some semblance of identity, however unstable) only in the 'curious mirroring' of intervention. This mirroring, at first glance, is indissociable from the reflexive structure of the event itself, even if Badiou goes on to dissociate the two by means of an impossible myth of evental historicity. What I wish to emphasise here is that during this brief moment where Badiou's concept of the event is in alignment with the Sartrean concept of the for-itself, it is possible to discern a different solution to Badiou's problem. This solution requires that we take seriously the differentiating 'gap' between *any* multiplicity and its elements, and therefore the gap that the event establishes within its own existence. Operating outside the field of mathematical ontology, this gap cannot be closed by appeal to the ontological identity of e_x and e_x (qua event and qua element of the event), since this identity can no longer be secured. The intervening subject, who enters into being at the same moment, can alone establish (a certain non-ontological mode of) identity between the event and the event that the event presents. The curious mirroring between intervention and event, properly understood, is strictly analogous to the duality of *consciousness of x* and *consciousness of consciousness of x* that stands at the centre of Sartre's analysis of non-thetic reflexivity. Of course, for any of these suggestions to be of any use, a precise analysis of Sartre's concepts is in order.

I propose a detour. We will set aside, for a moment, *Being and Event*, which tells us distressingly little about the immediate structures of the event and so seems unable to answer these questions, for the sake of its nearest and (I would argue) most brilliant predecessor, *Being and*

Nothingness. Let me begin this excursus by saying that my treatment of Sartre's ontology will be a brutally formalistic one. I will extract a structural kernel from which will germinate a rudimentary theory of non-self-identical evental determination, an interpretation of the final and most problematic formulation of Badiou's concept of the void, and a skeletal theory the subject common to both Badiou and Sartre. What I will present here, in short, is a distilled existentialism.

We must begin with intentionality, and with the rigid and absolute character that Husserl's literal formulation of the principle of intentionality has for Sartre. This principle is absolute in the sense that it is taken to express the very *being* of consciousness, and not just one of its properties, essential or otherwise. Kirkpatrick and Williams are on the right track when they write, in their Translator's Introduction to *The Transcendence of the Ego*, that 'whereas for Husserl intentionality is *one* essential feature of any consciousness, for Sartre intentionality *is* consciousness.'[xviii] 'Consciousness is consciousness *of* something,' is less a predication than it is the antepredicative schema defining the only possible form of predication that consciousness can support: Whatever consciousness may be, 'it is this in the mode of consciousness of being' (EN 118/82). As we will see, this stipulation has something of a regressive effect on the formula itself, so that it becomes equivalent to the proposition, 'consciousness is consciousness of consciousness of something,' and so on. Sartre's way of handling this regress in a way that does not lead to an infinite series of meta-consciousnesses is novel, and we will see that it has direct applications in the Badiousian theory of the event.

The *'of'* in the formula demands clarification. Intuitively, to say that a consciousness is consciousness of *x* is to say that it *intends x*, or is aware of *x*, etc. Precise abstraction, however, will be more useful than concrete description here, so let us attend to the structure of the matter. The *'of'* in the formula designates a relation that is both determinative and differentiating. The differentiating function of the '*of*' is what prevents the statement 'consciousness is consciousness of something' from collapsing into 'consciousness is something,' which, by Sartrean lights, is false. Consciousness' mode of being is such that it *cannot* simply 'be' something; as already mentioned, it

can only be something in the mode of *consciousness of being*. To put this another way, and in one which is quite important for Sartre, 'consciousness is consciousness of something' means that consciousness is consciousness of something *that it is not*; as Sartre has it, '[i]t is consciousness of _____ as the internal negation of _____' (EN 158/123).

It would seem that we are headed towards a rather startling consequence: in all rigour, it is *false to say that consciousness* is *itself*, or is identical to itself. Insofar as the Axiom of Intentionality is the schema of all possible predication for consciousness, we cannot simply assert that consciousness *is* itself, but only that consciousness is a *consciousness of* itself. Insofar as the *'of'* implies an internal negation, consciousness is of itself only to the extent that it is not itself. Sartre does not back away from this consequence, but makes it the focal point of his ontology. The *'of'* marks a difference that insinuates itself once between the *consciousness* and the *something*, and again between the consciousness and itself; hence consciousness 'doubly escapes being, by an internal disintegration and by express negation' (BN 158/123). It is here, and not in a theory of temporality, as is commonly assumed, that that famous Sartrean slogan, that consciousness is *that being which is what it is not and is not what it is*, has its root and justification. The manifest violence that the Sartrean theory of temporality wreaks on the principle of identity, in fact, *derives entirely* from this conception of intentionality. *Existential temporality is a* consequence *of the internal self-differing of non-thetically reflexive intentionality.*

So much for differentiation. Let us examine what is meant by speaking of the *of* as a determinative relation. This can be put quite simply: consciousness, which is nothing in itself, and which is not identical to itself any more than it differs from itself, it entirely determined by what it is *of*, by what it intends. Just as a set is determined by its elements, so consciousness is determined by what it is 'present' to. If we agree to call the presentational field of a given consciousness its *extension*, we may express this by saying that as a consequence of the axiom of intentionality, consciousness is, in the strict sense, *extensionally determined*. Thus radicalized, intentionality voids consciousness of all intensional determination.

Consciousness is extensionally determined, like a set. But what does this 'determination' amount to? How does it serve to extensionally individuate consciousness? For the set theorist, the answer is simple: by virtue of the Axiom of Extensionality, two sets are *identical* when their elements are the same. But it clearly cannot work for us here. Identity, for Sartre, can *never* be predicated of consciousness. The existential structure of consciousness implies that consciousness cannot but be extensionally determined, and yet ungrounds the most obvious interpretation of extensional determination, the Axiom of Extensionality, just as readily as does the Badiousian event. We seem to be at a bit of an impasse, here… and yet there is no doubt that Sartre himself advances this very thesis – that the determination of consciousness is strictly extensional. It is a recurrent theme in his work that consciousness can be specified only by reference to its (perpetually unstable) extensionality. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre asserts the extensionalist thesis explicitly, writing that 'it is by means of that of which it is consciousness that consciousness distinguishes itself in its own eyes and that it can be self-consciousness […]. What defines the reflection for the reflecting is always *that to which it is presence*' (EN 209/173).

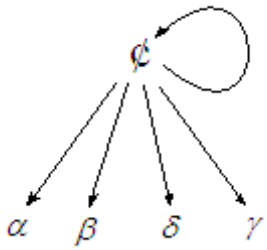
It is here that we hit on our answer. The principle of extensional determination for consciousness is not identity but *presence*. This reflexive presence is not an identity, and it does not individuate consciousness as a unity that can be identified from the outside. It nevertheless serves to individuate consciousness insofar as it perpetually captures itself in its own extension. The presence which individuates a consciousness is nothing other than a non-positional reflection of consciousness upon itself, a torsion by which a consciousness enters into its own extension. Due to the nature of intentionality, however, consciousness cannot intend itself without differentiating itself from itself. The extensionally determined individuality of consciousness is thus seized as non-decomposable duality, a duality whose terms never existed as distinct unities and can only be thought of as such through abstraction. 'Presence-to always implies duality,' Sartre writes, 'at least a virtual separation' (EN 113/77). It must be emphasized that this unstable cohesion of consciousness cannot sustain itself without reference to the extension that it presents to itself:

> if the reflecting [consciousness] is nothing other than the reflecting of *this* reflection, and if the reflection can be characterized only by its 'being-in-order-to-be reflected in *this* reflecting,' then the

> two terms of the quasi-dyad support their two nothingnesses on each other, conjointly annihilating themselves. It is necessary that the reflecting reflect *something* in order that the ensemble should not dissolve into nothing. (EN 173/209)

There is perhaps no clearer statement of the extensional determination of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness*. If consciousness is to effect an *ensemble* (or set) that is not empty, if it is to be anything distinct from a pure and simple void, it must be a consciousness of something other than itself, even if it cannot but find itself in every case folded (non-thetically) into this 'something other'.

The structure of consciousness that emerges from this analysis, I argue, is precisely the one that we find in the Badiousian doctrine of the event, in which the dysfunction of the count transmutes presentation into what Sartre calls 'presence'[xix]. This can be seen quite clearly if we return to the happy formalism of directed graphs. Putting $\not\in$ for a given consciousness, and $(\not\in \rightarrow \alpha)$ for '$\not\in$ is present to/conscious of α', or 'α belongs to the extension of $\not\in$', we have:



Reliance on elegant (and brutally simplifying) diagrams for a comparison as seemingly ambitious as this one might seem rather spurious were it not underwritten by a fundamental structural unity relating *consciousness*, *presentation* and *event*. These three concepts, as they occur in Badiou and Sartre's philosophies, spring from a single formal root: the structure of *mulitplicity*.

§4: Definition of Multiplicity

What is it for something to be a multiplicity? The concept can be defined, I would argue, by means of two structural constraints:

1. To be determined by its extension.
2. To differ from its extension.

The first criterion is given, in Sartrean ontology, by the Axiom of Intentionality (the determinative dimension of the *'of'*), and, in set theory (and, hence, in Badiou's metaontology), by the Axiom of Extensionality. The second criterion finds its Sartrean lodgings in the differentiating (or nihilating) dimension of intentionality. In set theory, it operates quietly in the form of the difference between a set and its elements, the difference that forces us to deny the identity between X and {X} for any set X (an identity that common sense, along with Russell, is tempted to affirm), and which compels us to see the difference between saying 'X is a subset of Y' and saying that 'X is an element of Y'. This latter difference, of course, is the gap between inclusion and belonging, between $\in$ and $\subset$, that Badiou designates as the *real* and whose rigourous unfolding heralds set theory's ontological vocation. Finally, I propose that this difference is the essential meaning of that most problematic formulation of the concept of void: the void as '*the imperceptible gap, cancelled then renewed, between presentation as structure and presentation as structured-presentation, between the one as result and the one as operation, between presented consistency and inconsistency as what-will-have-been-presented*' (EE 67/54*; italics added).

§5: The Localization of the Void in the Irruption of Nothingness

Identifying this conception of the void with the dimension of differentiation inherent in every manifestation of multiplicity, whether it be in the form of a mathematical set or an existent consciousness, allows us to finally make sense of Badiou's statement that

> for the void to become localizable at the level of presentation, and thus for a certain type of intrasituational assumption of being qua being to occur, there must be a dysfunction of the count, resulting from an excess-of-one. The event will be this ultra-one of chance, on the basis of which he void of a situation may be retroactively discerned (EE 69/56*).

In order to do this, we must take up the Sartrean analysis of non-thetic reflexivity, whilst grasping the structure under analysis to be rigorously homologous to the structure exhibited by the event-intervention dyad.

The unitary duality of consciousness marks one of the most difficult points in Sartre's doctrine, and a great deal of caution must be taken here. This duality must be understood in such a way that no recourse is made to intensional, substantial or qualitative difference. Under no

circumstances is it legitimate to posit intrinsic differentia by which the dual aspects of consciousness (*e.g.* belief and consciousness (of) belief) would positively differ. To do so here would be to fall back on the notion of the immanent contents of consciousness, which Sartre absolutely, and rightfully, rejects. Neither aspect of the reflection-reflecting pair is *in and of itself* different than the other; the difference emerges only in the unity of the two, the unity which can only form by making itself two. To secure the duality of self-consciousness by introducing positive differentia into the immanence of consciousness would be in contradiction with the axiom of intentionality, and manifestly incompatible with a strictly extensional conception of consciousness. As Sartre has it,

> To introduce into the unity of a pre-reflective *cogito* a qualified element external to this *cogito* would be to shatter its unity, to destroy its translucency; there would then be in consciousness something of which it would not be conscious and which would not exist in itself [*en soi-même*] as consciousness. The separation which separates belief from itself can not be grasped or even conceived in isolation. If we seek to reveal it, it vanishes. (EN 114/78)

If there is nothing positive by which the 'instantaneous nucleus' (EN 106/70) of consciousness differs from itself, and if this difference is nevertheless real, then only one option remains:

> The fissure then is the pure negative. Distance, lapse of time, psychological difference can be apprehended in themselves and include such elements of positivity; they have a simple negative *function*. But the fissure within consciousness [*la fissure intraconscientielle*] is nothing except for the fact that it denies and that it can have being only as we do not see it.
>
> This negative which is the nothingness of being and the nihilating power both together, is *nothingness*. Nowhere else can we grasp it in such purity. […T]he nothingness which arises in the heart of consciousness *is not*. It *is made-to-be* [*Il* est été]. (EN 114/78)

This last qualification is crucial. If Sartre were to say that consciousness differs from itself by a 'a nothingness' that *is*, then he would be doing nothing less than violating the principle of intentionality with an absurdly chimerical entity, dishonestly pretending to side-step the problem of positive differentiation by dressing a mysterious 'something' in the sheepskin of nothingness. Fortunately, this is not the case. Nothingness is neither 'in' consciousness nor is it a being-in-itself. It is a mere *effect* of the negative dimension of intentionality, the dimension whereby a consciousness differs from its extension by virtue of the act of intentionality alone. When consciousness enters into its own extension, as it must necessarily do if it is to attain any degree of consistency, this negative dimension takes the form of a gap between consciousness and itself.

'Nothingness' is no more than the negative dimension of consciousness – its 'nihilating power' – bent back upon itself. By means of its position, the negative dimension takes on a certain form, which can be sensed only by its effects in the field of consciousness, such as the irreducibly dualistic (even if integral) structure of non-thetic reflexivity. It cannot be seized as an object; any attempt to do so would grasp only a mock-nothingness, or a symbol of nothingness, and relocate the original gap between the consciousness of this symbol and the consciousness (of) the consciousness of this symbol. Hence,

> [o]ne does not *find*, one does not *disclose* nothingness in the manner in which one can find, disclose a being. Nothingness is always an *elsewhere*. It is the obligation of the for-itself never to exist except in the form of an elsewhere in relation to itself, to exist as a being which perpetually effects in itself an inconsistency of being [*inconsistance d'être*]. (EN 114/78*)

Insofar as it is inseparable from the act of consciousness, the production of a nothingness is not the appearance of an independent entity but 'an absolute event which comes to being by means of being and which without having being, is perpetually sustained by being' (EN 115/79). This is the sense in which one should understand Sartre's assertion that 'nothingness is not, nothingness 'is made-to-be,' nothingness does not nihilate itself; nothingness 'is nihilated'' (EN 57/22*). Pace Heidegger, *nothing doesn't nothing – it* is *nothinged!* The perpetual nothinger, of course, is being-for-itself.

It is precisely in this sense that I say that the void is convoked in the Badiousian event; it is convoked *as nothingness,* in the Sartrean sense. The void thus produced is a localization of the immanent negativity proper to multiplicity, and therefore presentation, in general. It is 'the imperceptible *gap*, cancelled then renewed, between presentation as structure and presentation as structured-presentation, between the one as result and the one as operation, between presented consistency and inconsistency as what-will-have-been-presented' (EE 67/54*). It becomes manifest in the event by virtue of the latter's reflexivity, by its act of placing, *on the same level*, presentation and what is presented (*ce qui **se** presente, et **ce** qui se presente*),[xx] and thus maintaining the dimension of presentational withdrawal within the sphere of the presented in the form of the event's self-differentiation – or, to put it another way, in the form of the difference between event and intervention.

§6: Towards a Mathematical Existentialism

To explain the paradoxical duality of event and intervention, and the mysterious invocation of the void that this coupling is said to effect, by reference to the 'immediate structures of the for-itself' at work in the structure of the event is, at the same time, to mobilize the Sartrean dynamic of lack – formalized and abstracted from its anthropological finery – at the heart of the Badiousian theory of the subject. The formal structure of *Being and Nothingness* is too often overlooked by commentators too happy to restrict themselves to cafe waiters and peeping toms, and it by and large goes unnoticed that the text articulates a strict series of derivations, leading from the localization of nothingness in non-thetic reflexivity, through a remarkable theory of lack and possibility, to robust reconstructions of temporality, value and freedom. Once the kernel of these derivations is sown in the furrows of *Being and Event*, a detailed unfolding of the dimension of temporality and projection that Badiou attributes to the subject of a truth procedure, but which remains curiously black-boxed in his own work, becomes possible. The same operation sheds light on the imperative, or normative force with which the subject experiences the event. By splicing certain Sartrean structures into homoplastic sections of the Badiousian genome, these formal existentialia – lack, temporality, possibilization, value – have the virtue of emerging organically from the (suitably mutated) conceptual body of the latter.

First, however, we need to see where there is a deficiency in the theoretical organism of *Being and Event*. Badiou's theory of subjective truth procedures has two parts: a complex mathematical apparatus inherited from the work (itself truth-procedural, by Badiou's lights) of Paul Cohen, which includes the concepts of a *generic subset* in a transitive, countable, but otherwise standard, model for the ZF axioms of set theory, and the technique of *forcing* which lets the mathematician articulate the outlines of such generic subsets and by means of them construct a new model in which certain controlled collections of statements – like the *continuum hypothesis* or its negation – hold true. The philosophical effect of Badiou's use of these concepts is to carve out the channels in being through which a truth may pass, pieced together by the patient and militant work

of subjects born through evental intervention. The concept of the generic – that which is subtracted from any predicative or intensional (note the 's') determination – gives us the structure of truths' multiple-presentation, and the concept of forcing gives us the form of the logical operations through which a subject of truth is capable of transforming the essential structure of the situation and anticipating the new world to come. These channels mark out the operational domain of the subject, which, as Sartre once said, "lives in the truth like a fish in the water" (VE, 3). For Sartre, however, this assertion is grounded in the thesis that "the essence of truth is the 'there is' [*il y a*] of 'there is being" (VE, 4), an assertion which makes truth the medium of *every* situation. For Sartre, truth is ultimately indistinct from presentation, or, more exactly, from consciousness; of course, truth may afterwards be suppressed in 'bad faith', but it is precisely the original identity of consciousness and truth that lets us see the suppression of the latter as self-deception. For Badiou, on the contrary, truth is an anomalous occurrence with which we are all too rarely graced, and there must be an intrinsic breakdown in the normal form of presentation in order for a new truth to become possible.

One aspect of the exceptional character of truths lies in the exclusive disjunction that Badiou establishes between truths and knowledge (a distinction absent in Sartre), the latter being the subordination of multiplicity to predication, the former being the process of subtraction from predication through the tracing of a diagonal across the totality of legible predicates (the 'encyclopaedia of the situation'), leaving no domination untouched. But genericity is not, in itself, a sufficient condition for the existence of a truth. *To elevate the generic to the true, a supplement is needed.* In order for a subjective truth procedure to begin, there must be a modification of presentation that effectively reproduces the structure of impersonal consciousness disclosed in Sartre's analyses. This is, of course, the *event*, in which presentation subtracts itself from the regime of ontological identity in the play of mirrors that constitutes an intervention. The effect of the intervention-event is a reflexive presentational multiplicity to which identity cannot be assigned, but

which whose existence can be averred only in the immanence of its own occurrence, in the "phantom dyad" of event and intervening subject.

Following its initial irruption, it becomes necessary for the intervening subject to inscribe the event in the material reality of the situation in which it has occurred. The recognition of this necessity cannot be separated from the recognition of the event itself, for "the event is only possible if special procedures conserve the evental nature of its consequences" (BE, m20, 211/231). The subjectivating moment thus includes two aspects, one being the act of intervention, the other being the emergence of an *operator of fidelity*; this operator is what controls the inscription of the event's having-taken-place into the surface of the situation, by means of linking together a subset of the latter's elements in truth-procedure.[xxi] In Badiou's notation, this operator is designated by the sign □, such that an expression of the form (α □ e_x) indicates that the element α has been found to be positively connected to the event, and conversely, ~(α □ e_x) indicates that α has been found to be unconnected to the event. At the limiting point of the completed truth procedure, (α □ e_x) translates more or less directly into ($\alpha \in$ ♀), where ♀ is the name Badiou has chosen to denote truth-sets, the generic sets that forcing techniques construct and from which they grows their new model. A necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition for a subset being generic is that it be infinite, otherwise its contents could be captured by simple (even if awkward and ad hoc) list-like predicates. However, during the actual truth procedure, as lived through by subjects, the "the enquiries in which the provisional result of a fidelity is inscribed form a finite set" (BE, m23, 235/260); ontologically (with respect to its *being*), this is a finite subset of ♀, and being finite, is perfectly discernible in situation (or model) it traverses. Badiou nevertheless insists that "the instantaneous state[xxii] projection—which groups multiples *already* discerned as connected to the event into a part of the situation—is only a gross approximation of what the fidelity is capable of; in truth it is quite useless" (BE, m23, 235/260).

It is the subject's relationship to the event and its impetus to inscription that causes the fidelity operator to have a subtly but fundamentally different structure than the set-theoretic epsilon.

As Badiou points out, the finite set in which the provisional results of a fidelity are arrested by the state is insufficient to grasp its specific temporality—the procedural and futural dimension of the fidelity, by which it is compelled to range over the entire expanse of the situation, which, as a rule, is infinite (BE, m23, 235/260).[xxiii] This infinite expanse constitutes the factical support of the subject's field of possibility, and is a necessary condition for the future genericity and truthfulness of the subject's procedure. Nothing in this expanse's *being*, however, entitles us to recognise it as anything other than the neutral facticity of the situation. Nothing on the ontological level establishes a significant connection between the subject and its uncertain future. "By consequence," Badiou writes, "this infinite capacity is not effective, since at any moment its result allows itself to be projected by the state as a finite part" (BE, m23, 235/261). This gap between what the subject is (insofar as it *is*) and what it *has to be* (insofar as it is the subject of a truth) leads Badiou to characterise the subject's fidelity in terms that are dramatically reminiscent of *Being and Nothingness*:

> thought in its being—or according to being—a fidelity is a finite element of the state, a representation; thought in its non-being—as operation—a fidelity is an infinite procedure adjacent to presentation. A fidelity is thus always in non-existent excess over its being. Beneath itself, it exists; beyond itself, it inexists. (BE, m23, 235/261)

The distinctly Sartrean tenor of this passage is difficult to miss, even if it remains rather superficial at this point: the subject's project—or procedure—necessarily outstrips its momentary facticity towards an infinite field of possibilities. This resonance becomes more compelling, however, once Badiou eliminates any recourse to intensional determination or potentiality that could otherwise have been used to explain this excess. Echoing the Sartrean precepts that "[b]ehind the act there is neither potency nor 'hexis' nor virtue" (BN, in.I, xlvi/12), and that "[t]he freedom of the for-itself is always *engaged*; there is no question here of a freedom which could be undetermined and which would pre-exist its choice" (BN, IV.I.I, 479/524), Badiou insists that "[f]idelity must not be understood in any way as a capacity, a subjective quality, or a virtue. Fidelity is a situated operation which depends on the examination of situations. Fidelity is a functional relation to the event" (BE,

m23, 233/258). Nor is it legitimate, for those fidelities which are in the service of truths, to suppose that an intensional determination comes to a fidelity *after* the event and in the midst of the situation, for as soon as a procedure submits itself to a discernible intension or essence, it abandons genericity.

What Badiou calls the faithful subject's "non-existent excess" over its finite facticity is an effect not of predication or essence, but of an "interior transcendence" (LS, 244) immanent to the subject's existence. There is a certain dimension of what Sartre calls *ekstasis* or *ek-sistence* in the Badiousian subject. The subject, which is a finite subset of a truth, *is outside what it is*: "The subject is 'between' the terms that the procedure groups together" (BE, m35, 396/434). The outstripping of *essentia* by *existentia* is anticipated by its evasion through *ek-sistence*. *Being and Event*, however, gives us little in the way of a theory of this existential dimension of the subject.[xxiv] It remains for us to determine things more precisely. To do this, we return to Sartre.

§6: The Fixed Point of Nihilation

The main engine of Sartre's derivation of the structure of subjectivity – freedom, temporality, projectedness, being-for-others, and so on – is his characterization of the auto-nihilating character of non-thetic (self)-consciousness as the irruption of *lack* into being. '[T]he pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world is apprehended by itself as *its own lack*' (BN 89/125), which is, he argues,

> [o]f all internal negations, the one which penetrates most deeply into being, the one which constitutes *in its being* the being concerning which it makes the denial along with the being which it denies (BN 86/122)

This is a critical theoretical move on Sartre's part, because it allows him to introduce into the 'phantom dyad' of consciousness as (non-thetically) reflection-reflecting (the structure we have deployed to capture the dyad event-intervening), the more complex triadic structure of *lack*. 'A lack,' Sartre writes,

> presupposes a trinity: that which is missing or 'the lacking' [*le manquant*], that which misses what is lacking or 'the extant' [*l'existant*], and a totality which ahs been broken by the lack and which would be restored by the synthesis of 'the lacking' and 'the extant' – this is 'the lacked' [*le manqué*]. (BN 86/122)

The reflexivity of being-for-itself pinches together the lacking and the extant as it grasps itself as *its own lack,* but the irruption of negativity at the heart of the for-itself prevents these terms from coinciding and collapsing the triad. The for-itself *lacks itself*: this is the mode by which it sustains itself in a pure semblance of being solely through being's negation, and by which it identifies itself through sheer differentiating intention. This lack is the price it pays for seizing unity through nihilation. It is an absolute lack, and not a lack merely relative to an observer (bite marks in a cake do not diminish the cake's ontological positivity or sheer self-identity, but only serve to signify a lack for the nihilating caterer).

Being-for-itself *lacks itself* – more precisely, to the extent that it exists only as nihilation, it lacks itself *as being*. It lacks the self-identity of the in-itself. It lacks according to the 'I am *that*', where the 'am' marks a self-differing that is incompatible the self-identity 'that' at which it aims. In the 'phantom dyad' of reflection-reflecting, the ontological nucleus of the for-itself and the degree-zero (or the minimum) of its temporal extension, there is a constant vacillation between extant and lacking, but never a coincidence.

This schema of consciousness as self-lack becomes interesting when we turn to its third term, the keystone sustaining the arch of extant and lacking, the *lacked*. Consciousness lacks itself as being-in-itself, but it does not lack this lacking for the lacking's own sake. The point to be grasped here is best illustrated in Sartre's analyses of *desire*, which he interprets as an instance of ontological lack. A desire – sexual desire, thirst, etc. – is an *extant* aimed, on the most basic level, at a *lacking* – sex, water, etc. – that would sate, quench and extinguish it as such. This dyadic caricature of desire is, of course, absurd. Desire, as *extant* desire, must orient itself according not only to what is *lacking*, but to the synthesis that is *lacked*:

> Thirst – for example – is never sufficiently thirst inasmuch as it makes itself thirst; it is haunted by the presence of the Self of Thirst-itself. But in so far as it is haunted by this concrete value, it puts itself in question in its being as lacking a certain For-itself which would realize it as *satisfied* thirst and which would confer on it being-in-itself. This lacking For-itself is the Possible. Actually *it is not exact to say that a Thirst tends toward its own annihilation as thirst*; there is no consciousness which aims at its own suppression as such. [...] Quite the contrary the aim is the thirst passed on to the plenitude of being, the thirst which grasps and incorporates repletion into itself as the Aristotelian form grasps and transforms matter; it becomes eternal thirst. Thirst, sexual desire, in the unreflective and naive state

> want to enjoy themselves; they seek that coincidence with self which is satisfaction, where thirst knows itself as thirst at the same time that the drinking satisfies it, when by the very fact of its fulfillment it loses its character as lack while making itself be thirst in and through the satisfaction. Thus Epicurus is right and wrong at the same time; in itself indeed desire is an emptiness. But no non-reflective project aims simply at suppressing this void. Desire by itself tends to perpetuate itself; man clings ferociously to his desires. [...] Hence the constant disappointment which ac- companies repletion, the famous: "Is it only this?" which is not directed at the concrete pleasure which satisfaction gives but at the evanescence of the coincidence with self. (BN 101)

The *lacked*, in its most fundamental form, is the *for-itself-in-itself*, the 'impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself' that 'would preserve within it the necessary translucency of consciousness along with the coincidence with itself of being-in-itself' (BN 90/126). It was John Bova who, to my knowledge, first seized the structure of the lacked in its most abstract and formal sense as *the impossible fixed point of nihilation* – the sublime X that would be such that $n(X) = X$. The impossibility of this point – of a being that would, godlike, be what it is in perfect self-identity and yet enjoy the absolute freedom of self-nihilation – interrupts and shatters the consistency of the for-itself's reflexivity.

Around this absent fixed point pivots the entire diagonal of subjectivity,[xxv] for though it is ontologically inconsistent, the for-itself-in-itself is not altogether unreal. The existence of the lacked is a strict impossibility, but this very impossibility *inflicts* itself on the ontological structure of the extant and its courtship with the lacking. It is no square circle, no merely logical impossibility, but a painfully insistent unoccupiable place, whose uninhabitability is a necessary condition for the existence of the for-itself that chalks it out and gives it its semblance of being as the cavity around which the situation is structured and which gives it its normative curvature, a cavity it wouldn't be misleading to call the *Real* of the situation, in the sense Lacan – that other great predecessor of Badiou's theory of the subject – gives to this term. For Sartre, this cavity is the ontological support for the category of *value*.

The impossibility of the lacked synthesis, the radical unsatisfiability of value, poses a clear problem for our understanding of the relation between the *extant* and the *lacking* – the *actual* and the *possible* – that it is supposed to orient. How can we be asked to find the missing term that must be added to the extant in order to yield an impossible being? The equation is insoluble in principle,

and the demand to plot a line describing it appears absurd. As the relation between the extant and the lacked admits of 'no common measure' (BN 626/674), nothing lets us decide, for instance, whether 'man makes himself man in order to be God,' or that 'man loses himself in order that the self-cause may exist' (BN 626/674). Sartre will seize upon this impasse as very site where the subject may come into its own, and as the cornerstone of his ethics. It removes value from both God and Nature as sharply as it cuts it free from the crowd extant whims and their lacking objects. Without ever letting itself be delivered into the real plane where extant actuality and lacking possibility inscribe themselves, value must nevertheless be decided upon the way one decides upon the complex plane or the quaternions in the face of a need to solve $x^2 = -1$ – or, closer to home, the way one decides upon a supplement to a model.

The inscription of the impossible *lacked* is enough to distend the incessant vacillation of reflection-reflecting into a genuine modal projection, spreading the non-self-identity of the subject across a field of possibilities claimed as the subject's own. The organization of the situation of the for-itself in terms of this self-possibilization oriented by an incalculable decision on the impossible is what is meant by the Sartrean term 'project'. It is exactly here that the question of freedom surfaces. In the anxious vacillation of the 'absolute event of the for-itself', we do not find freedom, but sheer *spontaneity*, a spontaneity that is, as Sartre observes in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 'beyond freedom' (TE 100). Freedom comes into existence only in the setting of a *project* that coordinates the extant and the lacking under the impossible bearings of the lacked – an arrangement which, by Sartre's eyes, is pretty much ubiquitous in human experience, one to which every consciousness is 'condemned' by ontological law. For a philosopher that takes the nuclear structure of subjectivity to be a rare, ontological anomaly – one which, far from being implied in the very structure of phenomenality, depends on the latter's dysfunction – such verdicts are far less common.

§ 7: The Torch, which Lights the Abyss

The Badiousian name for freedom is '*fidelity*'. Understanding its structure, only adumbrated in *Being and Event*, requires us to locate the dynamics of the former within the boundaries of the

latter. Doing so will let us to elucidate Badiou's theory of the event without falling into the pitfalls we encountered in his meditations on event and intervention. The isomorphism that we found between intervention/event and the structure of non-thetic (self)-consciousness led us to conjecture that the event, which falls outside of the ontological regime of identity, is individuated only by means of the intervention from which it cannot dissociate itself and yet into which it cannot be collapsed.[xxvi] If Badiou's statement that the event convokes the void follows from this, then it is because the difference that takes place between event and intervention, without positive extensional or intensional differentia, is perfectly analogous to the nothingness that Sartre finds at the heart of consciousness. If this analogy is rigorous, then we should expect that there would emerge from the event certain structures bearing a strong similarity to those uncovered by Sartre. We should expect, for example, that the nothingness at the heart of the event and its intervention would be apprehended as *lack*, and that the event would thereby exhibit an *imperative force* on the subject to which the intervention gives birth.[xxvii] In other words, we should expect to find, among the metaphysical consequences of the event, both value and possibility *qua* possibility (as opposed to possibilities determined merely in terms of their factical support – the 'capacities, subjective qualities or virtues' that fidelity *is not*).

My hypothesis is that the invocation of lack is precisely what we should understand by Badiou's statement that "the event is only possible if special procedures conserve the evental nature of its consequences" (BE, m20, 211/233). The possibility of the event is referred to procedures that may be carried out only after it has occurred. One cannot claim that the event has taken place without pledging oneself to the project that will enable the event *to have taken place*. To intervene in the existence of an event is therefore to apprehend the event itself as having the form of a promise, a mandate yet to be fulfilled, or an *existing* standing in relation to a *lacking,* and under the sidereal gravity of the *lacked.* We find precisely this triadic structure invoked in Badiou's text itself—in the final meditation, for instance, where he writes that "[t]he 'there is' of the subject is the coming-to-being of the event, via the ideal occurrence of a truth, in its finite modalities" (BE, m37,

434/474). The subject is a local configuration of a triad of lack, with the event as existing ("coming-to-be"), the "ideal occurrence of a truth" as lacked, and the "finite modalities" that make up the future facticity of the subject and the adumbrated series of its *lacking*.

Pursuing this analogy, the relation of fidelity ($\alpha \square e_x$) may be read as "α is lacking to e_x." The *extant-lacking* axis would be the character of the transcendence by which fidelity is in non-existent excess over its results. It is the *reason* why the set $\{\alpha \mid \alpha \square e_x \text{ at time } t\}$ is inadequate to the fidelity that it arrests, and why it is true that a subject exists "between the terms" that it gathers into its procedure: Insofar as fidelity is a relation of lack, the subject exists "at a distance from itself" (BN, II.I.IV, 96/133). This analogy also permits us to make sense of Badiou's intuition that the structure of the event ought to release to us a singular dimension temporality, insofar as the latter is "not coextensive with structure, not the *sensible form of the Law*" (BE, m20, 210/232), and to do so without having recourse to the mythical underworld of evental duplicity. The form of a unique temporality specific to the event is rendered intelligible, not by positing a *second event* that would antedate the first—we would have to *presuppose* temporality in order to establish this—but by following the consequences of the duality that is already immanent to the single event under consideration. Insofar as the event-subject constitutes a phantom dyad, and constitutes itself as lack, it effectively 'possibilizes' a future: the elements of the situation seen anew as elements that may or may not be positively connected to the event. The event as lack constitutes itself in determining its generic trajectory as a project, bearing a dimension of futuricity, which is "not coextensive with structure, not the *sensible form of the Law*," insofar as its composition escapes both law and structure in virtue of genericity.[xxviii] In this way existence, in excess of being, supplements and supplants essence. The futural dimension of the subject, for its part, can then be given stricter determination through the ontological operation of forcing, by which the potential consequences of the subject's procedure in the *new situation* are linked to the generic trajectory that it is capable of anticipating (the truth the subject seeks to construct).

If we ask what the lacking is lacking *for*, then we are first led to the conclusion that this

could only be the being of the event ("if the event is to be possible…"), or the event *as* being—a structure which never comes to pass insofar as the event *qua* event is outside ontology: the only ontologically acceptable portion of the event is its site. On the other hand, it would seem reasonable to say that that for which the lacking is lacking is the complete generic set which Badiou uses the sign ♀ to designate.[xxix] This is not enough, however. What is attested to as lacked in the event is the *truth*, which cannot be simply identified with ♀ insofar as ♀ is only the *being of the truth*. Truth, qua truth, cannot be adequately conceived on the sheer basis of its generic support, but must at the same time be seized in its post-evental character.[xxx] The truth is the (lacked) point at which being and event converge, and the subject is the bearer of this convergence.

The convergence of being and event in truth may be understood as the meaning of Badiou's remark that the signifier '♀', "to which, in the beginning, nothing which is presented in the fundamental situation corresponds—is the ontological transcription of the supernumerary nomination of the event" (BE, m33, 356/392), which was earlier marked by the symbol 'e_x'. One of the interesting rhetorical aspects of Badiou's discussion of the generic consists of a subtle metonymy that he draws between genericity (*i.e.* indiscernibility) and being *qua* being:

> What could this 'one' be which—subtracted from language and constituted from the point of the evental ultra-one—is indiscernible? Since this part has no particular expressible property, its entire being resides in this: it is a part, which is to say it is composed of multiples effectively presented in the situation. An indiscernible *inclusion*—and such, in short, is a truth—has no other 'property' than that of referring to *belonging*. This part is anonymously that which has no other mark apart from arising from presentation, apart from being composed of terms which have nothing in common that could be remarked, save belonging to *this* situation; which, strictly speaking, is its being, qua being. But as for this 'property'—*being*; quite simply—it is clear that it is shared by *all* the terms of the situation, and that it is coexistent with every part which groups together terms. Consequently, the indiscernible part, by definition, solely possesses the 'properties' of any part whatsoever. It is rightfully declared *generic*, because, if one wishes to qualify it, all one can say is that its elements *are*. The part thus belongs to the supreme genre, the genre of the being of the situation as such—since *in* a situation 'being' and 'being-counted-as-one-in-the-situation' are one and the same thing. (BE, m31, 338-9/373-4)[xxxi]

This metonymy, which carries us through genericity to the idea of being qua being, in turn opens onto a metaphorical invocation of the void, as both being-in-itself and as that to which the nothingness of the event is joined in suture. The event's lack of being qua being can be answered by

the generic insofar as the generic as a whole expresses nothing other than the being-in-situation of the elements it assembles. By way of the generic invocation of pure multiplicity, the void indirectly answers to the nothingness produced in the event, insofar as the former is the proper name of that which finds its truth in a procedure commanded by latter. It is through this figurative detour that we can see truth taking the position of the lacked, and the subject becoming the bearer of the conjunction between being and event. In the unbinding of presentation from structure, which comes about in the generic splintering of language's domination over thought, and which occasions the infinite task of closing the impasse of being (the indeterminate gap between the size of an infinite set and that of its power set, between $\aleph_n$ and $|\wp(\aleph_n)|$, which is at stake in the *continuum problem* that Cohen proved to be insoluble), the event – "incandescent non-being of an existence" (BE, m17, 183/204) – becomes a symbol of the void itself. The event ignites a metonymic cascade through the crevices of ontology, and I can do no better than to replace the lurching and awkward account of it I've given here with the far more beautiful words cribbed from Dupin:

> The sheaves refuse my bonds. In this infinite, unanimous dissonance, each ear of corn, each drop of blood, speaks its language and goes its way. The torch, which lights the abyss, which seals it up, is itself an abyss.[xxxii]

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[i] Alain Badiou and Bruno Bosteels, "Can Change be Thought? An Interview with Alain Badiou," in Gabriel Riera, ed., *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 242.

[ii] "The sheaves refuse my bonds. In this infinite, unanimous dissonance, each ear of corn, each drop of blood, speaks its language and goes its way. The torch, which lights the abyss, which seals it up, is itself an abyss." (Jacques Dupin, *Lichens*, trans. Paul Auster, in Auster, ed. *Jacques Dupin: Selected Poems*, (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), verse 4, p.5).

[iii] 'La première pensée claire c'est la pensée du néant,' writes Gaston Bachelard. *La Dialectique de la Durée,* Paris, P.U.F., 1963, p. 9.

[iv] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique,* Gallimard, Paris, 1943, p. 118; *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel Barnes, Philosophical Library, New York, 1956, p. 82. Henceforth cited EN, with the page of the French edition followed by the page in Barnes' translation (e.g. EN 118/82). An asterisk indicates that the translation has been modified.

[v] For a more concise treatment of the various senses of 'void' in *Being and Event*, see my entry on the term in Steve Corcoran, ed., *Badiou Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

[vi] Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, Seuil, Paris, 1988, p. 82; *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, London, 2005, p.68. Henceforth cited EE, with the page of the French edition followed by the page in Feltham's translation (e.g. EE 68/82). An asterisk indicates that the translation has been modified.

[vii] In Meditation 4 of *Being and Event*, in which Badiou introduces his concept of the void, we read:

> For an indeterminate situation, there is thus an equivalent to what Plato named, with respect to the great cosmological construction of the *Timaeus*—an almost carnivalesque metaphor of universal presentation—the 'errant cause', recognizing its extreme difficulty for thought. What is at stake is an unpresentable yet necessary figure which designates the gap between the result-one of presentation and that 'on the basis of which' there is presentation; that is, the non-term of any totality, the non-one of any count-as-

one, the nothing particular to the situation, the unlocalizable void point in which it is manifest both that the situation is sutured to being and that the *that-which*-presents-itself wanders in the presentation in the form of a subtraction from the count. (BE, m4, 55/68)

[viii] 'To be brief, I hold as axiomatic the identical proposition which varies only in emphasis: that what is not truly *one* entity is not truly one *entity* either. It has always been thought that 'one' and 'entity' are interchangeable. Entity is one thing, entities another; but the plural presupposes the singular, and where there is no entity, still less will there be many entities.' Gottfried Wilhem Leibniz, 'Letter to Arnauld, Göttingen, April 30th, 1687,' in Leibniz & Antoine Arnauld, *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, Machester University Press, Manchester, 1967, p. 121.

[ix] For a more detailed account of the role this term plays in Badiou's writings, see my entry on "Suture" in Steve Corcoran, ed., *Badiou Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

[x] Alain Badiou & Tzuchien Tho, 'The Concept of Model, Forty Years Later: An Interview with Alain Badiou,' in *The Concept of Model*, trans. & ed. Zachary Luke Fraser & Tzuchien Tho, re.press, Melbourne, 2007, p. 99.

[xi] In formal notation: $(\forall\alpha)[(\alpha \neq \emptyset) \rightarrow (\exists\beta)(\beta \subset \alpha \,\&\, \beta \cap \alpha = \emptyset)]$.

[xii] Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000, p. 85.

[xiii] Badiou (in interview with Bruno Bosteels), 'Can Change be Thought?' in Gabriel Riera, ed. *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2005, p. 254.

[xiv] The acronym stands for, "**Z**ermelo-**F**rankel **without** the axiom of foundation, **plus** the **a**nti-**f**oundation **a**xiom." An elaboration of this axiomatic can be found in Peter Aczel, *Non-well-founded Sets*, CSLI, Stanford, 1988.

[xv] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Dice Thrown Never Will Annul Chance,' trans. Brian Coffey, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, New Directions, New York, 1982, p. 125.

[xvi] The apparent proximity of Badiou's theory of the event to the Schmittian theory of sovereignty has been a popular site of critique amongst Badiou's critics. See, for example, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998, pp. 24-26. Lyotard, too, noticed this proximity, and called the theory of the event given in *Being and Event* 'a pure decisionism' and Badiou 'a sort of new Carl Schmitt' at a colloquium addressing the publication of Badiou's book. Badiou responds to these interpretations in 'Ontology and Politics', in *Infinite Thought*, ed. & trans. Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens, Continuum, London, 2003, pp. 172-3.

[xvii] Or better yet: 'I'. For those who would like to deepen this particular channel of interpretation, Giorgio Agamben's *Language and Death*, read perhaps in conjunction with Agamben's brief commentary on Badiou in *Homo Sacer*, is a good place to start.

[xviii] Forest Williams & Robert Kirkpatrick, 'Translator's Introduction', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Williams & Kirkpatrick, Noonday Press, New York, 1957, p. 22.

[xix] If it is objected that Badiou *explicitly* states, in Meditation 1 of *Being and Event*, that 'presence is the exact contrary of presentation' (BE 27/35), this presents no obstacle. Presentation has the structure of non-reflexive multiplicity while presence has the structure of reflexive multiplicity. That 'X is a non-reflexive multiplicity' cannot be true at the same time as 'X is a reflexive multiplicity' – that the two claims are contraries – is too obvious to be stated outside of a footnote.

[xx] The event ' "mobilizes" the elements of its site, but it adds its own presentation to the mix.' (EE, 203/182)

[xxi] "I term *subjectivization* the emergence of an operator [*sc*. of fidelity], consecutive to an interventional nomination." (BE, m35, 393/430)

[xxii] If a situation is a set, then, by Badiou's terminology, the 'state of a situation' is that set's power set, the set of its subsets.

[xxiii] "Almost all situations are infinite" (BE, m23, 235/260).

[xxiv] There is some mention, in *Being and Event*, of the essential role that is to be played by *temporality* in the existence of a subject. Badiou unfortunately burdens this undoubtedly essential notion with the theory of evental regress that we have already tried to dispose of (EE 232), though some provocative hints that time, 'if it is not the *sensible form of the Law*,' is to be understood through the split lens of event and intervention, can still be extracted from the dross of the regress theory; there is also an interesting notion of the *future anterior* which is connected to the subject's relation to the infinite truth it articulates, but Badiou's remarks on the matter are ultimately quite sparse. Beyond this, however, we are left with little. The materials needed for an elaboration of the theory of the subject, however, are already there, in the 'curious mirroring' of the event and its intervening subject.

[xxv] It should not escape notice that the *forcing procedure* is itself a form of diagonal argument. There are connections still to be drawn between the Sartrean and Badiousian theories of subjectivity which I will not get to here. For a systematic reflection on diagonalization and subjectivity, a reflection which seeks to apprehend diagonalization – the form underlying the entire Badiousian canon of significant metalogical results, including Russell's paradox, Gödel's incompleteness theorems, Turing's undecidability theorem, Cohen's forcing technique, and more – as *the Idea of the Good* in a Platonic sense, I can only direct the reader to Bova's forthcoming text, which I am told will bear the title *The Idea of the Good*.

[xxvi] This duality is both the reason for and the effect of the event's reflexivity; that a 'causal' description of the event should be circular is of a piece with this very reflexivity, and with the 'miraculous' nature of the event (Badiou does in fact compare events to miracles (See Meditation 21 of *Being and Event*, in which Badiou reads Pascal).

[xxvii] Sartre's assertion that "the pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world is apprehended by itself as *its own lack*" (BN, II.I.I, 89/125), would thus receive a valid interpretation in both philosophies, even if in slightly different senses.

[xxviii] "Structure" here is to be taken in its technical sense, as "what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one" (BE, m1, 24/32). The count-as-one of the generic truth is not prescribed by the situation, and does not take place within it ($♀ \notin S$).

[xxix] Why this sign? It's a reference to Lacan's (constructivist) explanation of his infamous remark that 'Woman does not exist': 'in order to say 'it exists', it is also necessary to be able to construct it, that is to say, to know how to find where this existence is.' (Lacan, quoted in Joan Copjec, 'Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,' in Joan Copjec, ed., *Supposing the Subject*, (London: Verso), p. 32. Since a generic subset is eminently non-constructible, Badiou, antagonistic

[xxx] "It is impossible for mathematical ontology to dispose of a concept of truth, because any truth is post-evental, and the paradoxical multiple that is the event is prohibited from being by that ontology. The process of a truth thus entirely escapes ontology." (BE, m33, 355/391)

[xxxi] In the same vein, Badiou elsewhere writes:

> such a subset is a truth of the situation as such, an immanent production of its pure multiple being, a truth of its being qua being—as opposed to a knowledge of this or that regional particularity of the situation. ("Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable," in TW, 124)

[xxxii] Jacques Dupin, *Lichens*, trans. Paul Auster, in Auster, ed. *Jacques Dupin: Selected Poems*, (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), verse 4, p.5.