Riot, Movement, Organization: Alain Badiou and the Critique of Historical Reason

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Abstract: Throughout his prolific trajectory as a militant philosopher, Alain Badiou has proposed different articulations of history and politics. After a self-proclaimed orthodox Marxist period, in which politics is said to be anchored in history without being reducible to it, he is at his most anti-historicist and anti-dialectical in the period immediately before and after *Being and Event*. With *The Rebirth of History*, however, Badiou maintains the separation of politics and history while also historicizing politics. Through a typology of different forms of riot, history becomes immanent to a specific mode of insurrectionary politics in the form of the historical riot. Finally, between *The Rebirth of History* and the first volume of his memoirs, *A Political Life: 1937-1985*, Badiou is also able to make generous use of the idea of History in a sense that would escape the long shadow of Hegelianism.

Keywords: history, historicism, dialectic, riot, historical mode of politics, Hegel, Plato

1

What are the relations between history and politics established in Alain Badiou's work in the wake of *Being and Event*, most notably in *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* and *The Communist Hypothesis*, up to the recent *In Praise of Politics* and the first volume of his memoirs, *A Political Life: 1937-1985*?[1] What, if anything, has changed over the past two decades that would justify the reintroduction of a category of history, and even of History, when at the same time the critique of historicism constitutes one of the methodological principles that Badiou inherits practically unchanged from his teacher Louis Althusser?[2] This is not just a question of textual exegesis so much as a demand for critical analysis of our changing times—with philosophy providing one possible point of access among others for such an analysis and in my view, in spite or because of its centuries-old prestige, not necessarily the most effective one. The goal in what follows therefore is not just to differentiate various stages or turns in a philosopher's system of thought but rather to subject philosophy itself to the ordeals of our time, even if this means bringing philosophy down from its pedestal as the queen of the theoretical sciences, traditionally charged with providing the fundamental concepts for all other disciplines and fields of knowledge.

Concepts, to borrow a view from the late Argentine philosopher, painter, and poet Oscar del Barco, are "social forms" or "forms of the real."[3] Whether philosophical or otherwise, they function as both responses to and interventions in the present, which they willfully or unwittingly whip into shape as much as try to comprehend: willfully, when the terms used include notions such as capture, critique, or transformation; or unwittingly, when the preferred vocabulary involves receptivity, interpretation, or

abandonment to the things themselves. From a methodological point of view, the most difficult task consists in following the thread of events in conjunction with the conceptual apparatuses through which they become identifiable in the first place as a string of interconnected singularities rather than as a random series of disjointed facts. As a result, the double risk that looms large in this process lies in giving absolute priority to either raw facts (empiricism) or pure concepts (dogmatism). Yet even this familiar alternative may be a false one, since as soon as we lapse into one of these twin extremes, the ensuing result too will have to be seen as an intervention in the present moment, which therefore is still entwined with its opposite. Empiricism to some degree always implies a dogmatic rejection of its own conceptual scaffolding, just as dogmatism always involves a blinkered response to the recalcitrance of its own empirical underpinning. Finally, the articulation between concepts and events can be disjunctive as well as conjunctive, rugged as well as smooth; most often, there will be varying degrees of unevenness, lagging, or precipitous anticipation, degrees which furthermore change over time, with the ideal of identity, adequation or correspondence being just one variable among others.

Nowadays, to be sure, the pendulum may have swung to the other extreme, so that the privileging of difference, inadequacy or incommensurability between practice and thought, between the thing in itself and its concept, or between the real and its representation has reached the status of a new standard, invested with nearly irrefutable peremptory powers and insuperable heights of pathos—a shift in which, incidentally, the so-called affective turn, understood as the privileging of affect over concept or of pathos over logos, appears as both symptom and accomplice.

Today, to use a striking expression from Henri Bergson cherished by Gilles Deleuze, concepts are no longer supposed to fit their contents like a glove or a tailor-made outfit, as opposed to clothes that are either too baggy or too tight.[4] Such a desire for an exact fit is now seen as belying a dogmatic, if not authoritarian tendency. By contrast, after the likes of Theodor W. Adorno, Jacques Derrida, or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we have learned to feel anxious, melancholic, awed, or even sublimely enthusiastic—to mention just a few of the affects that have become dominant in the process of this paradigm shift—about the possibilities opened up in the inevitable gap or distance between language and the real, or between logic and history.

In Spivak's quasi-aphoristic formulation, the subaltern comes to be redefined as one possible name for this gap or distance, which in the process of redefinition becomes strangely absolutized: "The historian must persist in *his* efforts in this awareness that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic."[5] As witnessed in this formulation, non-identity has taken over from identity as the unspoken standard for contemporary critical thought.

The only ones not to have received the memo regarding the inevitable gap between being and thinking or between history and logic are, for this reason, looked upon with a mixture of bewilderment and disbelief, before unceremoniously being brushed aside and relegated to what now seems to have become a truly bottomless dustbin of the history of Western metaphysics. Even Badiou, who more often serves as a target than as a source of reference for such philosophical tribunals routinely set up against the old metaphysicians (one of the few categories in which the author of *Being and Event* can be lumped together with his long-time rival Deleuze), occasionally seems to flirt with the new standard in *The Rebirth of History*, as when he writes that "it is no longer identity that counts, but non-identity."[6] But this swing of the pendulum, from the ideal of identity between the order of things and the order of ideas to the positing of their irreducible non-identity as a newly anointed absolute limit, does not take away the need to reflect on these different articulations of event and concept themselves as part and parcel of the historical and methodological problem they are trying to solve. After all, if nowadays we no longer believe in the possibility of narrativizing history into logic according to a scheme vaguely associated with Hegelian panlogicism and its avatars in the tradition of teleological historiography, does this new dogmatism disguised as skepticism not also claim to come in response to unprecedented historical developments, such as the liberation struggles and popular uprisings of the subaltern against colonialism in South Asia and other areas of what until recently was known as the Third World and now is called the Global South? If so, is this too not still, or once again, a form of narrativizing history into logic—only this time around according to the deconstructive logic of the subaltern with which to rewrite history from below? Similarly, even in strictly theoretical terms, is the Adornian notion of non-identity not dependent on the presupposition of a second-order identity between the concept and the kernel of its non-conceptual content?

2

In any case, we should begin by acknowledging the extent to which *The Rebirth of History* openly seeks to put philosophy to the test of our time. This also means a direct engagement with the question of method just elaborated. As Jasper Bernes and the late Joshua Clover remark in the conclusion to their critical review of Badiou's book: "At stake in the foregoing critique are not just ideas about how social change emerges, but ideas about the role of ideas, and the various intellectuals who might shepherd them, within emergent struggles."[7] Just as the concept of shepherding an idea into the mass of urban rioters for these reviewers already should be taken in a violently pejorative sense, reeking of pastoral-authoritarian tendencies in the style of Martin Heidegger, in the case of Badiou the authors argue that the philosopher tends to use

the riots as empirical validation for his own conceptual abstractions, or worse, as a foil to endow his philosophical system with the historical prestige and street-credibility of the riots. The result finds the philosopher perched on high, at the farthest remove from the rough ground of history. "The solution he imagines emerges from beyond history, from the rational process of the Idea and its faithful adherents, who translate the truth of present struggles into winning organizational structures and disciplines," Bernes and Clover claim. Faced with the riot as a Sphinx-like enigma, Badiou should be commended for rightly underlining the fact that the problem before us is tactical and strategic, instead of being either moral or theoretical, but he fails to locate the solution to this problem in the actual struggles and practices of our time: "Rather than seeing theory as a lesson we must teach to the participants of today's uprising, we might see it as something immanent within what they do. We might adopt a listening posture with regard to the world we live in. The answer to the riddle of the Sphinx is always another question."[8] Elsewhere in his work, though, Badiou had similarly raised the riddle of the Sphinx in ways that would seem to preempt, or at least complicate, much of this criticism.

When, in *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou emphasizes that "[h]istory does not contain within itself a solution to the problems it places on the agenda," first and foremost among them "the problem of politics par excellence—namely, organization," he is, according to his reviewers, standing on its head Marx's famous statement from the 1859 Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, according to which "humankind only poses those problems that it is capable of solving."[9] By way of reply, the reviewers turn this original insight from Marx back upon Badiou: "Though we find good reasons to balk at Marx's optimism, we nonetheless cannot see any place from which the solutions might emerge if not from the practices of the riots and uprisings and struggles of today."[10] For Bernes and Clover, in other words, the ongoing history of concrete struggles and uprisings would be the sole ground on which we can ever hope to solve any problem at all, whether political or other. Above all, there is no need to resort to any speculative beyond or aftermath, typical of a philosopher's Idea.

Now, in his earlier *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou too had explicitly addressed Marx's famous statement, all the while drawing a subtle connection with the riddle of the Sphinx. Instead of positing history as a single plane of immanence for the solution of all human problems, though, he argues there is always a remainder in the movement from the posing of a problem to its solution. This is because the problematic nature of a problem is not in turn posited by humankind. "For it does not depend on man, insofar as the animal named 'man' exists, that a problem befalls him *qua* problem. Problematization is how the real makes a hole for the truth. It is the remainder proper to the solution, the indissoluble salt of truth," Badiou claims. The relation between a problem and its solution, therefore,

demands the metaphor of an asymptotic approach, based on such an indissoluble remainder or minimal gap. Not only do we not freely posit the problematic nature of the problems before us, but our solutions also tend to generate new problems. This would seem to undermine Marx's historical optimism. "However," Badiou adds, "the fact that man can solve a problem, inasmuch as in the retroaction of the solution it turns out that this problem posed itself to him, and that he can solve it *entirely*, guarantees the metaphor of reflection."[11] For Badiou, in other words, the process of truth requires not only the asymptotic approach to the point of the real of a problem, but also the exact reflection of its solution. Both metaphors—the asymptotic remainder and the mirroring reflection—must be considered at the same time in trying to understand how humanity produces new knowledge in the process of solving its old problems, even as it poses only those problems that it is capable of solving. This combination of the reflection theory of truth with an asymptotic approach, due to the presence of a stubborn remainder, can be considered Badiou's attempt to reconcile the principles of identity and non-identity in the articulation of events and concepts, or action and thought.

Thus, whereas Bernes and Clover, in the final line of their review, may be justified in writing that "the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx is always another question," Badiou in the end balks less than they do at Marx's optimism when he adds, still in *Theory of the Subject*, that the riddle is both nameable and fully answerable. In fact, Badiou concludes, "I hold that the sphinx is nameable, once the questioning limit from where Oedipus's answer provisorily appeared to be well adapted, through a forced event, comes into the light of history."[12] Almost the entire debate to be had with Badiou over the relation or nonrelation between history and politics is encapsulated in this seemingly scholastic explanation of the riddle of Marx and the Sphinx.

What is this "forced event" without which the limit of our posing and solving of problems does not come into the light of history? What is the relation or nonrelation between history and politics, if indeed politics constitutes one of the places (according to *Theory of the Subject* still the one and only place) where such a "forced event" sheds new light on the problems of history?

We could also rephrase the fundamental question before us as follows: Can we or can we not understand politics "*through* history, *in* and *with* history," as the early Marx proposed in *The Holy Family* about the development of religion (referring not just to Judaism, which he was discussing in the fragment in question, but also by extension to Christianity), in a phrase often repeated by the likes of Daniel Bensaïd?[13] Or, alternatively, should we rather question the "adaptation" of politics to history in light of the "forced event" that the former adds onto the latter?

Even as over the years he will differently come to interpret the sense or meaning of the term "history," with or without a capital H, Badiou will

always defend the thesis that, for its part, politics—while necessarily *anchored* or *rooted* in history—cannot be *inferred* or *deduced* from history alone. This is why all events of politics (like those events that the later Badiou, beginning with *Being and Event*, will come to locate in art, science, or love as well as in politics) are necessarily forced events. The potential drawbacks rightly or wrongly associated with this position should be obvious enough: a seemingly ethereal aloofness, a privileging of the philosopher-intellectual to the detriment of the masses in revolt, and in general a separation of praxis and Idea under the openly accepted guardianship of Plato rather than Marx.[14] Conversely, the potential risks involved in the opposite position should be no less evident: an anti-intellectual disdain for theory in favor of the pedagogy of the deed, a tendency to explain away the emergence of autonomous political tactics on the basis of the historical cycles and crises of the capitalist world system, and in general a reduction of the political or interventionist Marx of *The Communist Manifesto* or *The Civil War in France* to the more analytical or systemic Marx of *Capital* or the *Grundrisse*.[15]

For Badiou, no matter how accurate Marx's diagnosis may turn out to be in retrospect, the analytical and systemic aspects cannot substitute the tactical and strategic aspects of his interventionist thinking without causing a deeply conservative effect on the autonomy of politics. This is why, in *Theory of the Subject*, he insists that the articulation of history and politics should not lead to the mistake of conflating the two altogether. "At bottom, it is always in the interests of the powerful that history is mistaken for politics, that is, the objective is taken for the subjective," Badiou argues. "This is the natural element for the maintenance of their own subjective activity, which is applied so that no unaligned quality may come to concentrate itself to confront them."[16] Only politics (or later, after *Theory of the Subject*, art, science, and love) can concentrate such an "unaligned quality," which will serve as leverage for the possibility of a "forced event," without which the writing of history risks being little more than a glorified transfiguration of the status quo, to paraphrase Marx's famous view of the Hegelian dialectic in *Capital*.[17] And yet, just as he calls for a separation of politics from history, Badiou also calls for a certain historicization of politics. In *The Century*, for example, he writes: "The word 'politics' has a history and we must postulate that the century has reinvented its meaning."[18] With important nuances that will have to be teased out in what follows, both these calls—to historicize politics while also separating politics from history—resonate in *The Rebirth of History*.

3

Going back to this last book, a further irony ignored by his reviewers is that Badiou also uses the language of listening right from the start to describe his approach to the so-called "immediate" riots and "spontaneous"

lootings from 2005 in Paris or 2011 in London. For sure, in Badiou's eyes, this type of outburst is "violent, anarchic, and ultimately without enduring truth," leading the French philosopher to announce early on that, "if riots are to signal a reawakening of History, they must indeed accord with an Idea."[19] The enduring political truth of the riots, therefore, will depend on the presence of an agreement or accord—similar to the once-vaunted but now much-maligned fusion of practice and theory in the history of Marxism—between event and concept or, as the case may be, between riot and Idea. At the same time, we should also pay close attention to the way in which Badiou immediately follows up on this early rehearsal of his book's overarching argument with a caveat: "For now, though, the philosopher will be allowed to lend an ear to the signal, rather than rushing to the police station."[20] Is this not also a plea for adopting a listening posture with regard to the world we live in? The book's opening question is after all indicative of an attempt to listen invitingly to the rumble of recent happenings: "What is going on?" And again: "What is happening to us in the early years of the century—something that would appear not to have any clear name in any accepted language?"[21] Or else—Badiou's skeptical readers might come back with another question—does this listening attitude hold only "for now" and, if so, will it fatally end when the signal in question gets named, recapitulated and rebroadcast on the loudspeakers of the philosopher's giant sound system, in a final section that is not for nothing titled "Récapitulation doctrinale" ("Doctrinal Summary")?[22]

For Badiou, the philosopher should avoid at all costs becoming the police or judge of history or, worse, helping the existing cops or judges by becoming a snitch. Philosophy (or what I prefer to describe as theory) is neither a waiting room in the police station nor a world-historical tribunal from which to judge everything and nothing, but an immanent and ongoing activity of thought under the condition of events that are partially beyond its control. Throughout *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou in this sense repeats a few expressions to make sure that philosophy both lets itself be conditioned by and learns from the riots as the immediate political events happening in our time. Thus, in French, he most often uses the expression être à l'école de, meaning "to learn from" or literally "to be schooled by," the riots and uprisings of the 2000s—exactly in the same way (or so it seems) in which, in the 1970s, it was common usage among French Maoists to rely on this expression to refer to the task of theory (the reference to philosophy, in my eyes significantly, being far less common at the time) in the face of the events of the "red years" that took their inspiration from the Cultural Revolution in China.

In any case, we in turn should not rush to judgment by imputing to the philosopher a desire for teaching a lesson to the participants in the riots. Doing so would mean turning oneself into an ironic mirror image of the philosopher who rushes to the police station: instead of blaming the rioters for their lack of an Idea, we would quickly and somewhat

predictably blame the philosopher for his excessive confidence or pride in possessing the Idea. Any day now, I picture somebody along these lines writing a polemical book called *Badiou's Lesson*, echoing and extending Jacques Rancière's harsh attack on the master-thinker who was their mutual mentor in *Althusser's Lesson*.[23] But, while in *The Rebirth of History* Badiou does indeed speak of "lessons," the fact of the matter remains that these are lessons to be *learned from* the rioters and not magisterially *taught to* them by the philosopher, very much in the same way that in an earlier book, *The Century*, Badiou presents a series of thirteen "lessons" taught *by* rather than *to* the artistic, political, and psychoanalytic experimenters of the twentieth century. "In the condition of political misery that has been ours for three decades, is it not obvious that it is we who have everything to learn from the current popular uprisings?" Badiou also asks in an article written for the French newspaper *Le Monde* with regard the events of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt and reprinted in *The Rebirth of History*. "Yes, we must be the pupils of these movements, not their stupid teachers."[24] Finally, almost each chapter in Badiou's recent memoirs ends with an enumeration of the lessons the author learned during a life full of political apprenticeships, from the time of the war in Algeria up to the dissolution in 1981 of his Maoist (Group for the Foundation of the) Union of French Communists (Marxist-Leninist), replaced in 1985 by the formation with the generic and slightly tautological name Organisation Politique (Political Organization).

Accusations against the philosopher's overreaching ambition with regard to the cycle of riots and uprisings at the start of the new millennium depend very much on an unspoken presupposition that also may seem implicit in Badiou's work from the last two decades on communism, namely, the presupposition that it belongs to the philosopher and to him alone to formulate, develop, and propagate what he calls the Idea, without which there could be no reawakening of History. This would place the rioters in the position of impatient schoolchildren with a likely attention deficit disorder, having to wait for the teacher's master class about the role of the Idea. The latter would be the philosopher's brainchild with which to shepherd the rioters and looters around a resurgence of the communist hypothesis.

Similarly, some readers may have concluded from the title of another of Badiou's books, *Philosophy for Militants*, that political militancy depends on the prior development of a theoretical framework, which the philosopher would have to bring to fruition. This, too, would take us back to a form of speculative idealism along the lines of how Marx, in his 1873 Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, reproaches Hegel for placing the driving motor of history in the realm of the Idea: "For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of 'the Idea,' is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea."[25] However,

while there is certainly no shortage of vagueness surrounding the notion of the Idea as brandished about by Badiou, neither *The Communist Hypothesis* nor *The Rebirth of History* bear out the presupposition that elaborating this notion of the Idea would be the exclusive purview of the professional philosopher. To the contrary, if there is one presupposition consistently at work in all Badiou's writings on the political condition, it is the notion that politics is an active form of thought, with its own ideas, statements, watchwords, and scripts. This explains, incidentally, the proximity between politics and theater, which in turn is part of the reason why throughout modern history theater so often has been the target of vicious political censorship and repression. As Badiou observes in *Rhapsody for the Theater*: "In fact, we could argue that there is politics when three things form a knot: the masses who all of a sudden are gathered in an unexpected consistency (events); the points of view incarnated in organic and enumerable actors (subject-effects); a reference in thought that authorizes the elaboration of discourse based upon the mode in which the specific actors in question are held together, even at a distance, by the popular consistency to which chance summons them."[26] Like the staging of a theater play, politics is a collective *pensée-faire*, a "thought-practice" or "thinking-action," which is not in need of the philosopher to know either what it is or what it does. "If politics is the practice of a thought in an absolutely self-sufficient register," as Badiou argues in *Metapolitics*, "then we can say that philosophy's tasks is to seize the conditions for the practice of thought within this singular register known as politics."[27]

Even the call to ensure that an Idea become rooted in the historical events that mark the age of riots and uprisings so as to give them greater durability and expansiveness should not necessarily be treated as the symptom of a philosopher's unpalatable desire for hegemony over the future of politics. Aside from the fact that it is philosophy that is conditioned by politics and not the other way around, part of this call stems very much from the opposite desire, namely, the wish for politics to bring about a situation in which everyone can be a philosopher. "Of course, you will recognize in this a Platonic desire, though expanded from the aristocracy of the guardians to the popular collective in its entirety," Badiou proposes in *Philosophy for Militants*. "This wish could be expressed as follows: wherever a human collective is working in the direction of equality, the conditions are met for everyone to be a philosopher."[28] And so, not only are ideas and thoughts immanent to the political struggles that are happening in real time, but even the communist Idea, for all its seemingly glacial Platonism or speculative Hegelianism, can be translated as the wish for politics to create a place in which rioters and philosophers—like the hunter, fisherman, herdsman and critic in the (still overly masculine) version of communist society famously prefigured in *The German Ideology*—become gathered into

a single polymorphous figure, perhaps even without having to split its time into morning, afternoon, evening, and after-dinner activities, as was still the case for Marx and Engels. "In this sense," writes Badiou, "all emancipatory politics contains for philosophy, whether visible or invisible, the watchword that brings about the actuality of universality—namely: if all are together, then all are communists! And if all are communists, then all are philosophers!"[29] It is true that, even according to this formulation, the time may not be ripe for the universal sharing of philosophy to become a reality. Still, instead of setting our expectant eyes on the distant future of a situation that always would be yet to come, we could also read this desire for everyone to become a philosopher as something that already becomes actualized in every instance of collective decision-making, no matter how local or short-lived. In this sense, once again, the argument would be in favor of politics as a thought-practice or a thinking-doing in which theoretical ideas are not transcendent but immanent to the actions and initiatives that are their sole practical existence. What remains to be seen is the extent to which Badiou himself, in works like *The Rebirth of History* and *The Communist Hypothesis*, facilitates such an understanding of politics as an immanent thought-practice.

In fact, we can easily see how the notion of thoughts or ideas appears as if redoubled in these reflections. There are, first, the ideas and thoughts inherent in any political practice; and then, second, there are the ideas and thoughts that would belong to theory or philosophy, conditioned by existing politics. In the words of the two reviewers mentioned earlier: at stake are not only ideas but also ideas about the role of ideas in contemporary struggles and events. This redoubling of the category of thought not only goes to the heart of the problem about the relation between events and concepts: where, or on which level, should we locate the category of what Badiou calls the Idea—on the first or on the second level? If the latter is the case, then ideas would be to the Idea as politics is to philosophy. If the former, then the Idea would be a category that belongs already to the field of operation of politics itself. What is more, the same redoubling of thoughts and ideas also begs the question of the place of our third category, namely history, in the articulation between philosophy and politics.

In this last regard, we face a decision between two basic positions: either we maintain the necessity of a double occurrence of thought, first within politics and then within philosophy, or else we strive as much as possible to dissipate such reduplication in the name of historical immanence, with the likely result of a gradual or axiomatic withering away of philosophy as a separate activity.

On the one hand, for reasons that should become clear in what follows, Badiou tends to be reluctant to accept the second position as a simple given or as a self-evident point of departure, even though it may well correspond to the final aim of his entire philosophy, which for this

reason always harbors certain anti-philosophical elements as well. After all, the third volume of his philosophical system, following in the wake of *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, is not for nothing titled *The Immanence of Truths*. Like the Idea, truths are immanent to the situation in which they are worked out. "A truth is something that exists in its active process, which manifests itself, as truth, in different circumstances marked by this process," Badiou also writes in *The Rebirth of History*. He explains: "Truths are not prior to political processes; there is no question of confirming or applying them. Truths are reality itself, as a process of production of political novelties, political sequences, political revolutions, and so forth."[30] Ideas, too, would be part of ongoing political processes. Rather than operating at a theoretically superior level, they would be active on the ground, or at the grassroots level, in the militant rationality of the interventions themselves. In other words, to borrow an expression from Badiou's fellow militant of many years Sylvain Lazarus, emancipatory modes of politics subjectively, or in interiority, produce their own "political intelligence" or "intellect."[31]

On the other hand, just as truths in the systematic elaboration of this philosophy always seem to exceed the circumstantial grip of the worlds in which they are stated and embodied, Badiou is equally adamant about always drawing a clear line of demarcation between philosophy and the various non-philosophical processes or procedures—among them politics—in which events can take place and truths can be produced. And, while such a line of demarcation is meant as a lesson in restraint to keep philosophy from making the disastrous anti-philosophical claim that it can be a politics (or a science or an art) in its own right, and even a great politics or a great art (as Friedrich Nietzsche increasingly came to argue toward the end of his life as he was sliding into madness), it is also true that this insistence runs counter to the wish to dissolve the heterogeneity between politics and philosophy into a single thought-practice, whose unity would be guaranteed by the mediating term of history as the sole realm of all human activities.

4

Part of the problem before us concerns the fact that in the case of politics, unlike what happens in other truth procedures such as science or art, history itself has been an integral element of the way in which truths are supposed to happen. History has been a central component part of the conceptual apparatus with which certain forms of politics in the past have tried to think of themselves. Just as politics has a history, there is also a history to the uses of history (and, with all the more reason, of History, the idea of History, which since at least Hegel has presented itself simultaneously as the history of the Idea) within politics—most notably though not exclusively (another tradition would be positivism) under the

aegis of Marxism. However, this is emphatically not or no longer the way in which history and politics are to be articulated in the eyes of Badiou. How, then, does the articulation in question work according to *The Rebirth of History* and in what way is this view different from what we have become accustomed to after a century and a half of experiments in political Marxism, up to and including Badiou's own earlier *Theory of the Subject*?

Two helpful indications in this regard can be culled from the French title of Badiou's riot book, *Le Réveil de l'histoire*. To begin with, we are dealing less with a "rebirth" than with an "awakening" or a "wake-up call" of history. The problem with translating *réveil* as "rebirth" stems from the misleading suggestion of a natural birthing process, whereby history would have died or come to an end at some point in the past, only to return or be reborn today. Now, Badiou may not be averse to the suggestion of history as a Sphinx coming back to harass us with its riddles or a Phoenix rising up from its own ashes, and he certainly aims to refute the ideologues who, following Francis Fukuyama among others in the 1990s, would claim that the period of the "restoration" (roughly from the 1980s onward until the worldwide uprisings at the start of the twenty-first century) coincides with the "end of history" tout court. Nevertheless, perhaps the more appropriate metaphorical connection would be with Walter Benjamin's famous quip that, if history is a train in motion, the task of the revolution is to pull the emergency brake: "Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely, the human race—to activate the emergency brake."[32] Besides, the French *réveil* can also mean alarm clock. You put an alarm clock so as not to sleep in too late and miss a rendezvous. History, Badiou suggests, is waking us up from our post-historical slumber. Emergency bells are ringing, and alarm clocks are going off everywhere. Can we at least listen to them and awaken ourselves to the truth of their possible lessons? How would the new cycle of riots and uprisings fit into the process of making history when the task is also to think of the future of politics? Does the truth of politics derive from, produce, or contradict the sense or meaning of history?

Badiou's original title contains another suggestion that might help us if we want to begin answering some of these questions. *Le Réveil de l'histoire* indeed presents us with a genitive that can be read either in the subjective or in the objective sense. Either, when read as a subjective genitive, history is waking up all by itself or, when read as an objective genitive, it is woken from its slumber by a force other than history. As anticipated above in the discussion of Marx and the riddle of the Sphinx in *Theory of the Subject*, this ambiguity is also central to the articulation of history and politics throughout *The Rebirth of History*. Even if, in the guise of the so-called "historical riot," the current struggles prove themselves capable of moving beyond the first, "immediate" form of the riot, such an

upsurge of history by itself is not enough for there to be a form of politics properly speaking according to Badiou. Politics must furthermore include the organization of the historical riot, which in turn entails an expansion of the immediate or spontaneous riot.

Spontaneous riot, mass movement, and political organization, in this way, name the three fundamental terms of politics in the present insurrectionary situation. To be more precise, we will see that only the third moment—still underdetermined for now, if not lacking altogether—counts as political for Badiou. Therein lies precisely the problem.

5

The bulk of *The Rebirth of History*, then, is devoted to a typology of contemporary riots, with Badiou dividing them into "immediate," "latent," and "historical" riots. Bernes and Clover, in a coinage worthy of the poets and critics they otherwise also are, call this a "grammar of the riot."[33] Just as in the case of the composition of a sentence, the fundamental question concerns the way in which the elements of the riot-form are articulated and combined into a larger sequence. Specifically, the topics to be addressed in the grammar of the riot concern, first, the basic *types* of riot and, second, the problem of the *transitions* from one type to another. How can the immediate riot, as a punctual flaring up of anti-repressive violence most often provoked by an act of police brutality or murder, become part of a larger process capable of spreading to other territories and sustaining a longer temporal sequence? How does an immediate riot, instead of stagnating and fizzling out in the face of suppression, surpass itself and veer into a historical riot? And how can a historical riot turn into a broader mass movement capable of marking the beginning of a properly political sequence?

In his discussion of the various types of riot and the passages or transitions between them, Badiou does not shy away from suggesting a linear, if also discontinuous, process for which he returns to a vocabulary that to my knowledge he had not used since the mid-1980s, in *Can Politics Be Thought?*, namely, the vocabulary of the pre-political and politics proper: "I call *politics* that which establishes the consistency of the event in the regime of the intervention and propagates it beyond the pre-political situation. This propagation is never a repetition. It is an effect of the subject, a consistency."[34] Immediate riots, however, are too wrapped up in the obscure joy of destruction to be considered even pre-political: "The subject of immediate riots is always impure. That is why they are neither political nor even pre-political."[35] The first transition to be grasped, therefore, is the one between immediate and historical riots. The latter receive their definition from the exemplary events of the Arab Spring: "Learning from the striking novelty of the riots in the Arab countries—especially their endurance, their determination, their unarmed tenacity,

their unforeseen independence—we can, I believe, first of all propose a simple definition of an historical riot: it is the result of the transformation of an immediate riot, more nihilistic than political, into a pre-political riot."[36] Given this definition of the second type of riot, how do we pass from one to the other, that is, from the immediate to the historical type, which would also mean from that which is not-even-pre-political to the pre-political? Badiou proposes three criteria for this passage, having to do with the spatial expansion, the social composition, and the affirmative intensity of the riots. Still drawing upon the lessons learned from the Arab Spring, he writes that "a riot becomes historical when its localization ceases to be limited, but grounds in the occupied space the promise of a new, long-term temporality; when its composition stops being uniform, but gradually outlines a unified representation in mosaic form of all the people; when, finally, the negative growling of pure rebellion is succeeded by the assertion of a shared demand, whose satisfaction confers an initial meaning on the word 'victory.'"[37] Finally, the passage from the pre-political to the political proper will require new forms of organization, based upon a common set of principles or watchwords around a central Idea.

Badiou's grammar of the riot thus brings him to the point where he must posit a second major passage or transition, which corresponds to the passage from history (as historical riot) to politics (as political organization of a new type) and takes us beyond the logic of anti-repressive uprisings and rebellions alone. "The force of rebellions, even when they assume an historical significance, remains essentially negative," Badiou also observes. "It does not deploy a slogan in the affirmative element of the Idea. That is why collective mass action can only take the form of a riot, at best directed towards its historical form, which is also called 'mass movement.'"[38] Beyond the spontaneous riot and the mass movement, the onset of a new political sequence will mark the reawakening of history or even of History only if and when it leads to the universal sharing of a set of guiding principles or watchwords organized around a central affirmative Idea. For Badiou, this is a law of politics discovered or rediscovered during the Arab Spring but similarly at work, for example, during the French Revolution. "That the awakening of History, in the form of a riot and its possible immediate victory, is not generally contemporaneous with the revival of the Idea, which would give the riot a real political future, is a very old observation," Badiou says, referring to the revolts of the sans-culottes in France: "They presupposed an ideological hereafter, which had not taken shape. Consequently, in the absence of any real subjective sharing of an Idea, it was impossible for them to resolve the problem of the transition from riot, albeit historical, to the consistency of organized politics."[39] Even the example of Marx and Engels over half a century later shows the inevitable delay or lagging between the defeated uprisings of the 1840s in Europe and the victorious proposal of a new Idea in *The Communist Manifesto*.

The core proposal in *The Rebirth of History* thus amounts to a peculiar dialectic between history and politics, as the articulation between the (historical) riot as mass movement and the new forms of (political) organization outside of the saturated framework of party and State—with "saturation" being another category borrowed from Lazarus: "The method of saturation allows us to constitute the intellectuality of a closed form of politics on the basis of its foundational categories, that is to say, by studying what the thought of the sequence was and by taking its singular historicity into account."[40] Before we compare this proposal to the way history and politics had been articulated in *Theory of the Subject*, let us derive a few provisory conclusions from the preceding synopsis of the grammar of riots, since this will also allow us to answer several of the questions raised earlier.

A first conclusion begins to answer the question: What exactly is an Idea? In *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou defines an Idea in the broadest possible sense as the name for a core set of ideological principles and watchwords that transcend the circumstances of a local situation and can be universally shared. Admittedly, this is still a definition by default, insofar as today's world is precisely lacking such an Idea: "An open, shared and universally practicable figure of emancipation is wanting. The historical time is defined, at least for all those unamenable to selling out to domination, by a sort of uncertain interval of the Idea."[41] However, albeit only in passing, Badiou subsequently fleshes out this minimal definition by invoking the example of three such Ideas from the past and anticipating the possibility of a fourth currently in the making: "The Idea was republican for decades, 'naively' communist in the nineteenth century, and state communist in the twentieth century. Let us provisionally suggest that it is dialectically communist in the twenty-first century. Its true name will arrive in the margins of the rebirth of History."[42] Republicanism, utopian communism, state socialism, and dialectical communism would name the four modern kinds of Idea.

For Badiou, to define such an Idea would be the task for a new and unpredictable type of organization, which for now is still lacking. "At the same time, all this cannot find its political form, in the first instance because it cannot *draw its force from the sharing of an Idea*."[43] We would find ourselves today, in the first decades of the new millennium, in a situation analogous to the period around 1830-1850, when the emancipatory political ideal shifted from republicanism to communism. The uprisings of workers and artisans from the time when the young Marx was cutting his teeth as a journalist among the Young Hegelians in Prussia, before arriving in Paris to discover the unprecedented political force of the proletariat, would be symptomatic of an intervallic period similar to the one we are currently traversing: "These were precisely the riots, sometimes immediate, sometimes more historical, characteristic of an intervallic period: after

1850 the republican idea, now insufficient for demarcation from bourgeois reaction, would have to be succeeded by the communist Idea."[44] If over the past two decades, from Oaxaca to Athens and from Santiago de Chile to Tehran, the world similarly has been witnessing a steady stream of riots, uprisings, and occupations of the squares, in many cases accompanied by still tentative proposals for a new ideological framing with which to make sense of them or not, from leaderless horizontalism to networked neo-Leninism, this is also due, according to Badiou, to the ongoing search for a novel Idea. The latter, then, functions as a shorthand annotation for the question of adequate forms of organization for the events of our time: "What I call the question of *organization*, or the *discipline of the event*, is the possibility of an efficacious fragmentation of the Idea into actions, proclamations and inventions attesting to a *fidelity to the event*. All in all, an organization is something that declares itself collectively adequate to the event and the Idea alike, in a duration which has once again become that of the world."[45] Here, incidentally, we also can appreciate how, contrary to the dominant critique or deconstruction of Western metaphysics, Badiou revalorizes the notion of truth as adequation—only now made immanent to the world and not external or transcendent—between discourse and reality or between Idea and event.

In a third provisory conclusion, we can confirm that as the shorthand concentration of the ideological and organizational work involved in any political sequence, an Idea by no means is a creation of the philosopher. To the contrary, it belongs to the political actors themselves to devise an Idea that can be conjoined with the events that historically mark the age of riots and uprisings. As Badiou stipulates: "An organization lies at the intersection between an Idea and an event. However, this intersection only exists as process, whose immediate subject is the political militant. The militant is a hybrid being, since it is that which a riotous movement can give birth to once it has been seized hold of by an Idea."[46] What the metaphor of childbirth, also dear to Marx, once again risks naturalizing is the tension inherent in the hybrid nature of the militant subject, situated in the gap between history and politics and broaching the distance between event and Idea. In any case, contrary to the impression created in Bernes and Clover's review of *The Rebirth of History*, the Idea does not arise in the philosopher's head outside or prior to the events themselves taking place. "That is why the Idea does not precede the riot, but is intertwined with its real effects in the construction of a duration. Likewise, the Idea will later presuppose the reality of popular political organization."[47] And yet, it is also true that Badiou will not hesitate to affirm in his memoirs that "even as a mere project, politics cannot exist without leaders," something he describes as a "law," which motivates him to explain at some length why the choice of leadership in the case of his Maoist group did not depend on male domination: "The two men of the group, Lazarus and myself, formed the organization's 'provisional directorate.'"[48]

Finally, and most importantly, the militant hybridization of event and Idea brings us back to our opening question about the dialectic between history and politics. Badiou now reformulates this question as follows: "How is militant hybridization accomplished as fidelity to the event? That the *historical* value of the Idea is *first of all* attested by the riot is certain. That the *political* value of the riot is attested by the organization which is faithful to it, and faithful to it because for it the riot affirms the Idea, is no less certain."[49] To go from history to politics in this sense would be tantamount to moving from the spontaneous riots, by way of a mass movement, to new forms of organization in the wake of the exhausted party-form. This is what Badiou means when at the start of the new millennium he translates the dialectic of history and politics into his own philosophical language as the hybridization of event and Idea.

The triangulation between history and politics, or between event and Idea, by way of a disciplined fidelity can also be formalized in the lexicon of Lacanian psychoanalysis. "It might be said that with this formalization a transition is in a sense made from the real to the symbolic, or from desire to the law," Badiou remarks. "But in Lacan too—and I take this profound view from him—formalization refers to a mediation between desire and law whose name is: the Subject."[50] The result is a complete redefinition of the task of politics as a process of collective subjectivization, the production of a subject capable of sustaining an event's consequences as a new truth made immanent to the existing world: "A political organization is the Subject of a discipline of the event, an order in the service of disorder, the constant guardianship of an exception. It is a mediation between the world and changing the world; it is, in a sense, the worldly element of changing the world, because organization deals with the subjective question: 'How are we to be faithful to changing the world *within the world itself*?'"[51] Badiou's version of the eleventh of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" thus involves a triangulation of history and politics, event and truth, or the real and the symbolic, by way of a subject capable of changing the world from within the immanence of this world itself.

7

Though phrased in the vocabulary of the trilogy of *Being and Event*, this whole dialectic of history and politics by no means is a recent invention. Badiou had offered a nearly identical articulation in *Theory of the Subject*, a book based on his seminar from 1975-1979 and published in 1982, when he was still in the habit of speaking in the name of "we Marxists" or "we orthodox Marxists," with one section of the "Thematic Repertoire" at the end of the book reserved for "Historical Circumstances" and another, under the final subheading "Political Theory," for a discussion of "History and Politics."[52] So what, if anything, has changed in the last few decades?

This is the point where exegetical attention to the twists and turns in a thinker's individual trajectory does matter, not just out of loyalty to the internal consistency of his conceptual system but rather with an eye on grasping how these concepts have changed over time in response to shifting demands of the moment. In the case of a systematic thinker such as Badiou, however, the task of exegesis as a test of the time becomes increasingly difficult as his thinking progresses, insofar as he frequently papers over the gaps, breaks, and leaps of faith in this trajectory as if to insinuate in retrospect the existence of an eternal order of reasons that would have suffered no more significant changes in his own lifetime than over the two millennia and a half since the beginning of philosophy, which he consistently associates with Plato.

In *A Political Life: 1937-1985*, especially, Badiou revisits his formative years as a child, student, teacher, and militant, based on the quasi-Nietzschean "breaking in two of the history of the world" that for him meant the events of May 1968. But this cataclysm, which would "split in two" his political existence and accordingly divides the two halves of this first volume of his memoirs, at the same time lays bare some of the laws and processes whereby *any* political subject whatsoever comes into existence, to the point where Badiou will speak of a Subject with a capital S:

> That, right there, is the question. And its general scope consists in understanding that, in politics, we must succeed in thinking not only how the event, or more abstractly the situation (as the Bolsheviks said, it all comes down to attaining unity on "the current situation and our tasks"), determines the critical and collective aim of any collective, but also how this aim can take hold of Subjects in such a way that their rallying to the collective becomes as one with the local invention of means adequate to the realization of that collective's aim.[53]

Here, I would argue, two operations are simultaneously at work and mutually reinforce one another: the first is a form of *philosophical essentialization*, similar to the gesture of doctrinal recapitulation found at the end of *The Rebirth of History*; and the second, a form of *transhistorical absolutization*, whereby philosophical thinking raises the lessons of particular circumstances and situations to the dignity of the concept, valid for all times and therefore deserving of entrance into the realm of Platonic Ideas such as the Subject, which is how Badiou will transpose for instance the Greek *psychè* in his hypertranslation of *Plato's Republic*. The result is a baseline sense of continuity underneath the dramatic appearance of discontinuity or, vice-versa, the backward projection of an invariant structure where previously there had been the affirmation of a radical break.

On the one hand, a short book like *The Rebirth of History* appears to show Badiou almost as confident in claiming his Marxist credentials as at the time of his *Theory of the Subject*: "I would like to say that I too

am a Marxist—naively, completely and so naturally that there is no need to reiterate it."[54] This may seem a far cry from the double gesture of destruction and recomposition in *Can Politics Be Thought?*, which Badiou also describes as a deconstruction of Marxism as a metaphysics of the subject, inspired by Heidegger and prompted by the invitation from Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy to speak at their Center for Philosophical Research on the Political. On this occasion, Badiou emphasizes the need for introducing a radical discontinuity, including it seems with his own previous work, before proposing to redo the gesture of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*. "That of which the true political forms today are contemporary is no longer the Marxification but a historical-political 'there is' whose emancipatory dimension—its heterogeneity with regard to the figures (including Marxist ones) of domination—must be thought anew."[55] And recent statements such as the one in *The Rebirth of History* stand in an even starker contrast compared to the way in which, almost a decade after *Can Politics Be Thought*?, Badiou opens his chapter on Althusser in his *Metapolitics* with the blunt statement: "Marxism doesn't exist."[56]

On the other hand, Badiou's affirmation of his spontaneous Marxism in *The Rebirth of History* is by and large limited to praise for the analytical strengths of Marx's original diagnosis in *Capital*. Today, this diagnosis is perhaps truer than it was a century and a half ago: "The part of Marxism that consists of the scientific analysis of capital remains an absolutely valid background," he says in an interview with Peter Hallward. But from this analysis no direct political lessons can be drawn: "We don't simply fall, by successive representations, from the economy into politics."[57] For Badiou, the essence of Marxism is not analytical but political. "It is neither a branch of economics (theory of the relations of production), nor a branch of sociology (objective description of 'social reality'), nor a philosophy (a dialectical conceptualization of contradictions)," he explains in *The Rebirth of History*. "It is, let us reiterate, the organized knowledge of the political means required to undo existing society and finally realize an egalitarian, rational figure of collective organization for which the name is 'communism.'"[58] Thus, over the course of the past two or three decades, Badiou has increasingly come to disjoin the analytical from the political role of Marxism, without a simple transitive relation between the two. The critique of political economy may well be more valid today than a century and a half ago, but according to the philosopher this does not help today's militant subjects to devise the appropriate tactics and strategies for intervening in the current situation. Something has entered a profound crisis in the articulation—whether as expression, derivation, application, or concentration—between these two component parts of Marxism, which I have called the analytical and the political and which others may prefer to label the scientific and the interventionist Marx, supposedly held together only by the imaginary glue of communism.[59]

Already in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou had acknowledged the depths of the crisis of Marxism. "Yes, let us admit it without detours: Marxism is in crisis; Marxism is atomized," he states. "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."[60] One way in which this crisis reveals itself is precisely through the withering away of the Hegelian-inspired belief in History as a meaningful totality, whose science would be Marxism.

In the Marxist tradition, history is presumed to make sense or have an underlying sense, as both meaning and direction. If the metaphor of the train is so apt in this context, it is because history presents us with a motion of a special kind. Revolutions may speed up the process but at bottom history is a train in steady motion with a base or chassis and a driving force or locomotive moving the wagons along a fixed set of tracks with the machine-like precision of a science. Marxism claims to be this science, the one and only science there is, according to a famous pronouncement in *The German Ideology*: "We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist."[61] Yet Marx and Engels equally famously crossed out this passage from the original manuscript of *The German Ideology*. And, as if to follow their example as early as in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou, too, proposes to cross out or—as he would later say—subtract the science of history from Marxism in order to construct an active, militant or political Marxism without the pretenses of a scientific Marxism: "Science of history? *Marxism is the discourse with which the proletariat sustains itself as subject*. We must never let go of this idea."[62] What, then, is left of Marxism, once the science of history is crossed out? Should we perhaps read this as an attempt *avant la lettre* to put the science of history under erasure, so that at the same time there is and there is not a single science of history? Marxism as the science of history which is not one?

For *Theory of the Subject*, the fundamental reason why Marxism cannot be the science of history is because history as such cannot be reduced to a meaningful totality and, therefore, does not constitute the possible object of a science:

> For the mathematics of set theory as much as for the true materialist, all totality is particular. That which belongs to the whole requires the position of the other, which is not of the whole. From this, one concludes among other admirable modesties that universal history, conceived as the actual totality of political

> events, for example, is an inconsistent notion. There is an inevitable historical dispersion. This is one of the reasons that invalidate the definition of Marxism as "science of history," since history is not an object.[63]

When Mao, for instance, asserted that in the future communism would still be defined by further qualitative changes and divided into stages, for Badiou this meant that history could no longer be totalized:

> This type of statement amounts to the following, which is crucial for Marxism: history does not exist (it would be a figure of the whole). Only historical periods or historicizations (figures of the One-of-the-two) exist. This is why we communists postulate no halting point. When we determine the current stage, it is with regard to the preceding one and the coming one. We do not count further than three. Four at the most: an uncertain four is needed in order to obtain three certainties.[64]

And, three years after the publication of his *Theory of the Subject*, in *Can Politics Be Thought?* Badiou would conclude from this that politics must be freed from history rather than deriving one from the other according to the epistemic paradigm of Marxism as a science: "We will also say that politics must be freed of the tyranny of history so as to be rendered onto the event. We must dare to posit that, from the point of politics, history as meaning does not exist. What exists is only the periodized occurrence of the *a prioris* of chance."[65]

As I have argued elsewhere, in the period immediately preceding and following *Being and Event*, roughly from *Can Politics Be Thought?* to *Metapolitics*, Badiou is at his most anti-historicist, seemingly anti-dialectical, and potentially post-Marxist. This is also the period during which his thought is most closely aligned with that of Lazarus, who had similarly argued in his *Anthropology of the Name* that history does not exist. Or, to put the argument even more paradoxically: "Time does not exist."[66]

Before they would part ways both personally and theoretically with the dissolution of their militant group Political Organization, Badiou and Lazarus for much of the 1990s and early 2000s agree that politics must be separated from history, at least in the sense that the latter no longer supports the former in the same way in which, for orthodox Marxism, the objective factors are supposed to support the subjective factors, social being determines consciousness, and practice alone defines the truth of theory. Insofar as time serves as a polysemous circulating category enabling the compatibility between history and politics, a truly emancipatory politics must be grasped in strictly subjective terms, or in interiority, as Lazarus would say, which requires the evacuation or removal of the category of time: "Separated from history, politics no longer has

to do with time but, rather, with the prescriptive. The evacuation of time and the removal of time as a category effects the separation of history and politics, thereby breaking with an age-old tradition that saw a given politics as bound up with a given history and a given history as bound up with a given politics."[67] This demand to abolish time and history as given, but in order to restore them as categories immanent to unique political sequences, also explains why, in *Being and Event*, Badiou considers the official tradition of "old" Marxism or dialectical materialism, which since at least Engels posits an isomorphy between the dialectic of nature and the dialectic of history, to have been "still-born."[68] And why, in his contribution to the collection *Who Comes After the Subject?* Badiou's answer to the title's question involves the anti-dialectical concept of "On A Finally Objectless Subject."[69] That is, a subject defined not *in relation to* any objective given such as history or the economy but purely and strictly *from within* its own prescriptive fidelity to an event.

9

If Badiou, like Benjamin, proposes to pull the emergency brake on the high-speed train of history, this is because a certain Marxist or Marxist-Leninist vision of history has entered a decisive crisis, namely, the vision in which any given society or social formation must be studied scientifically starting from its material base, just as the young Marx in his original statement about revolutions as the locomotives of history takes our material life to be the base and driving motor of history. "There you have, the classics say in one voice, what constitutes the base of the social history of humanity. All the rest is superstructure," as Badiou will summarize in an early seminar session of his *Theory of the Subject*. "Base and motor. Two contradictions, two definitions, a single object—capitalism—and a single doctrine—Marxism."[70] In the mid-to-late 1970s, contrary to what a decade later would become the doctrine of politics as a purely prescriptive, immanent, and self-authorized mode of subjectivization, this dialectic of base and motor, or of the objective and the subjective, though no longer immediately given, would still be the difficult aim of any political subject. "Any subject whatsoever and first of all we ourselves, when it occurs to us to come into being as subjects—which, fortunately, is quite rare—require the stumbling encounter of the base and the motor," Badiou concludes. "As for knowing which one of the two is principal, the principal or the fundamental, the motor or the base, we can orient our thinking by meditating on this sentence from Lenin: 'Politics is the concentration of the economy.'"[71]

And yet, upon an even closer inspection, *Theory of the Subject* can also be seen as laying the ground for what will become the grammar of the riot in Badiou's politics according to more recent texts of his such as *The Rebirth of History*. The terms may change, so that instead of

masses, classes, party, and the State, we will obtain a dialectic of events, truths, subject-effects, and Ideas. But underneath the paradigm shift or epistemological break, we can perceive a metaphorical, if not also conceptual, permanence. In the opening seminar sessions of *Theory of the Subject*, the metaphor involves the act of anchoring politics, not in history as a social given but in historicity as mass action. This act is the work of the party as the organization of masses into classes:

> Class, apprehended according to the dialectical division of its dialecticity, means partisan political action anchored in the productive historicity of the masses.
> I repeat: it is fitting to think of class as antagonistic party and as productive mass in revolt.
> The whole point is to know how all this works together, because it is this working-together that *is* class. This entails nothing less than to make the rectifiable singularity of politics rise up in the real movement of history.[72]

Already in *Theory of the Subject*, moreover, Badiou rejects the notion that politics can be deduced from the simple analysis of class contradictions at the level of the economy. In other words, we need not wait for *Can Politics Be Thought?* to see him break with the doctrines of economism or class reductionism:

> The simple class contradiction is a permanent structural fact, which can be mapped economically (weak correlation); the class struggle is a process under particular conditions, entirely political in essence, which is not deducible from the simple weak correlation. To confuse the class contradiction with the class struggle, to practise the correlative indistinction of the contradiction, is the philosophical tendency of economism, of workerism, of somniferous Marxism for the lecture hall.[73]

And so, politics according to *Theory of the Subject* involves turning a structural contradiction into a historical contradiction, which in the later language from *Being and Event* means turning a fact into an event as much as making a historical circumstance into the condition for a new political sequence: "Every real dialectical process entangles a structural contradiction and a historical contradiction, *affecting the same terms*. The second is anchored in the first. This anchorage (purely metaphorical, at the point where we are now) is the nodal point of the question of the subject."[74]

Now, let us go back to the way in which Badiou formulates the grammar of the riot in *The Rebirth of History*. We will see that this grammar at least formally appears to be homologous to the one encountered in *Theory of the Subject*. In the latter, he had summarized

the complete process of political subjectivation as the partisan effort "to make the rectifiable singularity of politics rise up in the real movement of history"; in the former, the question that sums up Badiou's argument is the following: "How are we to inscribe politically, as active materiality under the sign of the Idea, a reawakening of History?"[75]

Everything appears to be different and yet so much remains the same! Metaphorically, the historicity of mass action no longer provides the ground in which to anchor the partisan action of the class struggle against the State. Instead, now it is politics that comes down to the ability of an Idea to root itself in the popular initiative of the historical riots and uprisings so that there may be a reawakening of History: "The only possible reawakening is the popular initiative in which the power of an Idea will take root"; and the latter must be communist: "The sole Idea capable of challenging the corrupt, lifeless version of 'democracy,' which has become the banner of the legionaries of Capital, as well as the racial and national prophecies of a petty fascism given its opportunity locally by the crisis, is the idea of Communism, revisited and nourished by what the spirited diversity of these riots, however fragile, teaches us."[76]

With this shift from anchor to root, we move metaphorically from water to land and from technology to a seemingly spontaneous process of growth and nourishment. But at the same time, in one case as in the other, we know that the politics of communism in its third stage or sequence requires a disciplined effort at organization.

In this last regard, too, there are striking similarities in the grammar used to describe the mutual presupposition between riot and the Idea or between the mass line and partisan action. Thus, in the "Doctrinal Summary" of *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou writes: "A non-localized Idea is impotent; a site without an Idea is merely an immediate riot, a nihilistic spurt."[77] But, in *Theory of the Subject*, he similarly had written: "Without the mass line, the party is null and void. Not to include the party disarms the masses in questions of politics."[78]

Finally, in *Theory of the Subject*, we had read that "the class struggle is a process under particular conditions, entirely political in essence, which is not deducible from the simple weak correlation" of class contradiction as a structural fact; and now, in *The Rebirth of History*:

> Let us simply note that if every political truth is rooted in a massive popular event, it nevertheless cannot be said that it is reducible to it. A political truth is not a simple moment of uprising. Certainly, the statement for which we are indebted to Sylvain Lazarus—namely, politics is rare—does indeed derive from the fact that the conjunction of an event and an Idea is rare. But this historical rarity does not *define* political truth.[79]

Or, in the words of Badiou's recent interviews with Aude Lancelin:

> It's absolutely necessary to take part in big mass movements by trying to establish a *political* subjectivity within the *historical* uprising. This involves *putting something affirmative, something positive, on the agenda, the discussion of which will prove to be a special case of the struggle between two alternatives* [capitalism and communism].[80]

Thus, despite the change in metaphors, many of the terms and even the grammar of the dialectic of history and politics remain the same for Badiou.

10

In the end, we can say that Badiou uses history throughout his work in at least three different senses:

> 1. There is the sense of history, or History, which does not exist. This is the notion based on the dialectics of subject and object, theory and practice, social being and consciousness, or the situation and our tasks, associated with the tradition of orthodox Marxism, which for this reason also does not exist, at least not as a single homogeneous whole, but instead proceeds by way of a series of radical leaps and discontinuities between Marx and Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and so on.
>
> 2. There is history in the sense of the historicity immanent to rare and contingent sequences of politics, or what Lazarus calls historical modes of politics. This is the notion of history associated today with what I would call the insurrectionary mode of politics, in which the historical riot is one type of uprising among others. This is history internal to politics, not politics transitive to or deduced from the movement of history. Though this is lost in translation, Badiou announces such an understanding in *The Rebirth of History*, when he speaks of *une nouvelle donne de l'histoire des politiques*, which we might translate as "a new dealing of the cards in the history of forms of politics in the plural" but which Gregory Elliott renders as follows: "The *historical* riots of recent times [...] indicate the possibility of a new situation in the history of politics, without for now being in a position to realize that possibility."[81]
>
> 3. Once an Idea such as the communist hypothesis of a new type succeeds in taking root in the popular uprisings, there is also the possibility of a return to the idea of History: "Here the Idea refers to a kind of historical projection of what the historical becoming of a politics *is going to be*—a becoming originally validated by the riot."[82]

> This third sense would no longer correspond to the Hegelian notion of a meaningful whole or totality, which still determined the entire tradition of historical materialism. Instead, it would be an imaginary or ideological place of inscription for the stumbling encounter between event and Idea, between desire and law, or between the real and the symbolic, without the presupposition of a meaning-giving totality or final halting point in the Absolute.

This last sense is how the generous use of the category of History can be understood in *The Rebirth of History*, in *The Communist Hypothesis*, and throughout Badiou's memoirs in *A Political Life*. For instance:

> In short, guardians of the history of emancipation in an intervallic period, historical riots point to the urgency of a reformulated ideological proposal, a powerful Idea, a pivotal hypothesis, so that the energy they release and the individuals they engage can give rise, in and beyond the mass movement and the reawakening of History it signals, to a new figure of organization and hence of politics. So that the political day which follows he reawakening of History is likewise a new day. So that tomorrow is genuinely different from today.[83]

Or, again, in Badiou's short book with Aude Lancelin, *In Praise of Politics*, even though in this case the English translation fails to respect the large capital in History:

> The encounter of politics and History constitutes a major question. Politics only becomes historical, properly speaking, in exceptional circumstances, during what I would call political events, events that create unprecedented possibilities for peoples on a large scale.[84]

Finally, in the autobiographical recollections of *A Political Life*, Badiou writes about his militant work with workers at the chemical plant in Vitry, part of the Rhône-Poulenc group, after May '68:

> I can still remember early mornings at that truly symbolic gate, when the stream of workers would arrive and we would hand to them, in the form of a beautiful little book, the general lessons that could be drawn from their strike, and in particular from the collectivism of the decisions taken at the assembly. We experienced a kind of unprecedented joy, as if the morning of going back to work had become the dawn of a new History.[85]

To measure the fragility of this combination in the uses of history, suffice it to contrast Badiou's widespread recourse to the category of History in his latest writings with the radical consequences that his longtime comrade Lazarus draws in his most recent work from the need to de-historicize politics, in the understanding that time does not exist or at least ought not operate as an ideological circulating term between history and politics.

11

In writings from after his break with Badiou and since the dissolution of Organisation Politique, Lazarus has gone to ever further extremes in insisting on the strictly subjective, anti-dialectical, and anti- or anhistorical character of emancipatory politics, which requires that we break with time and History. Let us recall: "To break with time and with History amounts to a major rupture. I experience this as a break in the intellectuality of sense."[86] The result is a surprising and insurmountable disjunction between Badiou's philosophy, which reclaims both History and the Idea of communism, and the non- or anti-philosophical thinking of his one-time fellow militants Lazarus and Natacha Michel. To conclude, then, let us summarize this polemic in three doctrinal points on which Lazarus and Michel, beyond the pettier personal issues that sadly might be explained by the narcissism of small differences, take a stance that is resolutely and diametrically opposed to Badiou's.

First of all, if History does not exist, according to Lazarus and Michel this necessarily sweeps up the communist Idea as well. Communism is not just a hypothesis for which we may invent a third experimental stage, after its foundational stage with Marx and Engels and its statist phase from Lenin to Mao. Evidently referring to the Comité invisible (Invisible Committee) and to Badiou, but without mentioning their names, Lazarus admits:

> Today, certain committees and certain philosophers, clinging to the term "communism," continue undeterred to look for its signs, to search for indications of revolution, and to announce for tomorrow what the revolutions of the 20th century sought but did not find, and therefore to announce for tomorrow what should have happened yesterday or the day before yesterday, without, however, explaining why it did not happen, or even saying what did happen instead of what was supposed to happen.[87]

Yet, for Lazarus, "communism," together with such categories as the class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, or the withering away of the State, belongs to a conceptual framework that has long been saturated. "In my view these are *conclusive experiences*: why conclusive? What is at stake is not the experiment that took place but the utopian idea that we would have to reiterate the attempt with the same statements. It is the

reiteration that is utopian," Lazarus suggests, proposing that we assume instead the lapsing or expiration of communism altogether: "We must assume the political expiration of communism and advance its saturation by relying on the political processes actually taking place." [88]

Second, contrary to Badiou's insistence on the Idea as a shorthand notation for the need for organization, Lazarus now affirms that to think politics in strictly subjective and prescriptive terms, or in interiority, means to think the subjective without organization. At stake is a radically different balance sheet of the dissolution of the Organisation Politique in which all three, Badiou, Lazarus, and Michel had been militants together for almost forty years. Even the category of the subject, according to Lazarus, would be part and parcel of an external way of thinking, subordinated to the State:

> The problem today is that it is not possible to take what I call *people* (*les gens*) as a subject nor politics in terms of organization. That way of thinking is entirely and exclusively parliamentary: it sees subjects as electors, and every parliamentary party as the essential and inevitable venue for forms of organization. In the current conjuncture, I don't think that there is much to be gained from non-Statist forms of organization. Organization nowadays only takes places in spaces of the State.[89]

Third and finally, Lazarus and Michel, like their Italian comrade Alessandro Russo, are convinced that the rebirth of the Idea of communism in response to the 2008 crisis has to do not only with Badiou's personal success in America (by which they mean the USA but the same could be said for Latin America, where Badiou's presence has been uninterrupted since his Althusserian days) but also with his self-definition as a philosopher. As Michel explains in the preface to her edition of several of Lazarus's writings in the volume *L'Intelligence de la politique*:

> There is a principal reason for this: in Lazarus' doctrine politics must be thought by itself through the categories it produces or invents; it is singular and singular each time it exists: this is the theory of *historical modes of politics*. Any subservience to another way of thinking, even if it were that of history or of philosophy, strips it of its uniqueness and misses its singularity.[90]

History, communism, organization, and philosophy: in the end, all these notions according to Lazarus and Michel mutually reinforce each other in such a way as to miss out on the singularity of emancipatory politics today. In ignoring their historical expiration date, Badiou would have lapsed into sheer ideology, old-school Marxism, or craziness ("he went crazy, not, thank God, clinically speaking, but crazy about himself"[91]).

As for Badiou's response: other than a long endnote in *Logics of Worlds* devoted to Lazarus and other than a personal letter to Michel on the occasion of her then-forthcoming edition of *L'Intelligence de la politique*, a letter in which he suggests that their quasi-anarchist tendencies of late remind him that both originally started out in the ranks of the ultraleftist Gauche Prolétarienne, which now would come back with a vengeance to exact its devastating cost, we will have to wait for the second volume of Badiou's *Mémoires d'Outre-politique* (*Memoirs from Beyond Politics*), which will pick up the thread in 1985, the year when Organisation Politique was formed, which is where the first volume of *A Political Life* ends.[92]

1 See Badiou, 2011a and 2012b. In what follows, I will refer to both the French and the English versions, occasionally marking aspects of the text lost in translation. See also Badiou, 2010. I already addressed other aspects of this last book in Bosteels, 2011a. And see Badiou 2019 and 2026a.
2 For a study of this aspect of Badiou's philosophy, see Peden 2018. In what follows, I will partially pick up and further develop my analysis initiated in Bosteels 2014.
3 See, for example, Del Barco 2008, p. 183; and for further analysis, see Bosteels 2018.
4 Deleuze, 1991, p. 45.
5 Spivak 1988, p. 16 (emphasis in the original).
6 Badiou 2011a, p. 137; Badiou 2012b, pp. 93-94. Put back into its proper context, this affirmation confirms the identity between thinking and being. Non-identity here certainly demands a move away from the particular identities imposed by the state of a given situation and toward the generic stuff of the being of this situation, but the being of genericity is perfectly thinkable, in set-theoretical terms, according to Badiou.
7 Bernes and Clover 2012. See also the slightly more sympathetic review by another Californian friend in Smith 2012; and, in the same issue, Brown 2012.
8 Bernes and Clover 2012.
9 Badiou 2011a, p. 65; Badiou 2012b, p. 42. Compare with the original formulation of this principle: "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation," in Marx 1970, p. 21. Deleuze also invokes this famous line from Marx to contextualize a similar formulation from Bergson: "The truly great problems are set forth only when they are solved" (p. 16).
10 Bernes and Clover 2012.
11 Badiou 2009, pp. 198-199.
12 Badiou 2009, p. 202.
13 Marx and Engels 1975, p. 109. See also Bensaïd 2006 as well as the criticisms of Badiou's supposed disdain for this-worldly history and strategy in Bensaïd 2004; and the fascinating debate between the two in Badiou and Bensaïd 2006.
14 On the privileged role of militant intellectuals and leaders known by their proper names, Badiou writes: "A singular point of politics, as fiercely debated as it is flagrantly obvious, is the following: the more that political action is collective and can be claimed to be based on the popular masses, the more it has need of proper names, leaders, heroes and martyrs"; and, about the role of philosophers as teachers, beginning in his own case at a high school in Reims: "Basically, what I learnt from teaching was the nature of a genuine meeting, whether political or not: the discovery, collective and directed by a leader, of the solution to a problem, it being understood that, first of all, the problem must be constituted, and as such discovered, by all those present," in Badiou, 2026a, pp. 92 and 134. Statements like these could be invoked to justify the kind of criticisms of Badiou's philosophy coming from Bernes and Clover and, earlier, from Bensaïd.
15 On this last distinction and its uneven geopolitical impact, see also Bosteels 2025.
16 Badiou 2009, p. 44. While the targets of such anti-historicism in *Theory of the Subject* include above all Michel Foucault, in *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou turns a variation on this critical insight against the work of Jacques Rancière: "It sometimes seems to me that Jacques Rancière is too quick to accept a reduction of politics to history, when he defines genuine equality by a kind of active, momentary break in the continuous inequality instilled by the state," in Badiou 2011a, p. 132; Badiou 2012b, pp. 89-90.
17 In the Postface to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx writes: "In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists" (Marx 1976, p. 103).
18 Badiou 2007, p. 150.
19 Badiou 2011a, p. 36; Badiou 2012b, p. 21. In *A Political Life*, looking back upon the early 1960s, Badiou is even more blunt in his negative judgment of the age of riots and uprisings: "Much later, I would show that contemporary youth is essentially disoriented, particularly by the contemporary weakness of the communist hypothesis, and that from this stems the fact that its goal is either to 'succeed' in life or to burn it all down. This is the secret of its own sadness, which often pushes it onto the side of inconsequential satisfactions, from drugs to chimerical 'uprisings' whose aim is strictly *dégagiste* (let's get this guy—whether Mubarak or Macron—out of the way!), but the content of whose thought is strictly conservative (give us back the happy days of easy consumption)" (Badiou 2026a, p. 167).
20 Badiou 2011a, p. 37. In French this sentence reads as follows: "Dans l'instant toutefois, on permettra au philosophe de prêter l'oreille au signal, plutôt que de se précipiter au commissariat." Gregory Elliot's translation, while certainly adequate, is less evocative of the philosopher as a tattletale who hastens to tell on the rioters in the police station: "For now, however, a philosopher will be permitted to lend an ear to the signal rather than rushing to judgement." See Badiou 2012b, p. 21. In *A Political Life,* Badiou sums up the principles to be followed by members of the political organizations in which he participated, in case they were arrested: "Don't say a word to the cops"; and: "Absolute silence, the repetition

of 'no comment,' and the consistent refusal to cooperate, even on the smallest details, are the best weapons" (Badiou 2026a, p. 206).
21 Badiou 2011a, p. 9; Badiou 2012b, p. 1.
22 Badiou 2011a, pp. 141-147; Badiou 2012b, pp. 85-95. At least twice before in the same text, the author had anticipated the gesture of speculative recapitulation, which might well be inherent in philosophy as such, due to its transcendental turn after Kant: "I can summarize this in a language at once more abstract and simpler," he writes at one point (p. 86; p. 55); and at another: "Perhaps, to clarify all this, we must repeat it according to the order of reasons" (p. 102; p. 67). While in the opening pages the reader can almost smell the teargas and burning cars, these later moments prepare the slippage into the speculative-doctrinal order of a self-contained philosophical system.
23 Candidates already vying for this dubious honor include Belhaj Kacem 2011, which was sold with the publisher's wrapper proclaiming *Ni Badiou ni maître* (*Neither Badiou nor Master*), a clever subversion of the anarchist slogan *Ni Dieu ni maître* (*Neither God nor Master*); and Laruelle 2013.
24 Badiou 2011a, p. 154; Badiou 2012b, p. 106 (the word used in French for "pupils" is *écoliers*, those who literally are *à l'école*). On the "immanent method" to learn the necessary lessons from the twentieth-century experiments in art, politics, and so on, see the Sartrean-titled first chapter, "Search for a Method," in Badiou 2007, pp. 1-10.
25 Marx 1976, p. 102.
26 Badiou 2013, pp. 7-8.
27 Badiou 2005, pp. 86-7.
28 Badiou 2012a, p. 37. Badiou does not elaborate on the Gramscian undertones of this formulation. In fact, Gramsci is conspicuously absent from all Badiou's writings. Ironically, one of the few philosophers who might legitimately claim to have accomplished part of this desire is the rabid anti-Platonist Nietzsche. Thus, in his 1992-93 seminar, Badiou expresses his fondness for one of Nietzsche's last letters from the time of his supposed madness in Turin, in which the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* envisions the realization of philosophy's universal address in the figure of the street vendor as the quintessential everyman or everywoman who picks out the best grapes for him: "How wonderful! It is at this point of extreme tension, in this moment of creative elation, just before he falls down and collapses, and, on January 3, 1889, enters the abyss of nothingness, that Nietzsche extols the genericity of philosophy," in Badiou 2026b (session of November 18, 1992).
29 Badiou 2012a, p. 38. Compare with Marx and Engels: "In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic," in Marx and Engels 1976, p. 47.
30 Badiou 2011a, pp. 129-30; Badiou 2012b, p. 87.
31 See Lazarus 2013. Lazarus in turn borrows the expression in a clever *détournement* from Marx, who had used it pejoratively among other places in his 1844 "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform.' By a Prussian," in a passage which in the French translation reads: "Si l'intelligence *politique* est précisément intelligence *politique*, c'est qu'elle pense *à l'intérieur* de la politique... La période classique de l'intelligence politique, c'est la Révolution française" (quoted in Lazarus, 2013, p. 172, emphasis added to reflect Marx's original). In English, the passage reads as follows: "The *political* mind is a *political* mind precisely because it thinks *within* the framework of politics. [The keener and more lively it is, the *more incapable* is it of understanding social ills.] The *classic* period of political intellect is the *French Revolution*," in Marx 1975a, p. 199 (emphasis in original; the bracketed passage, which betrays Marx's critique, has been omitted by Lazarus). For a different interpretation of the same notion, which highlights the extent to which Marx already in 1843 moves away from its Hegelian presuppositions, see Abensour 2011, pp. 24-30.
32 Benjamin 2003, p. 402.
33 Bernes and Clover 2012.
34 Badiou 2018, p. 78.
35 Badiou 2011a, pp. 42-43; Badiou 2012b, p. 26. It is worth noting that, in addition to the play between the pre-political and the political, Badiou also returns to another notion used in *Can Politics Be Thought?*, namely, the presence of *la pègre*, or the criminal element, in the midst of the riots: "The presence of organized crime in an immediate riot, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the circumstances, is inevitable. It should certainly be recognized by the rioters as a form of complicity with the dominant order: after all, capitalism is merely the social power of an 'honourable' organized crime" (Badiou 2012b, pp. 25-6). For Badiou, this goes to show the extent to which in each case the transitions from immediate to historical riots and from a historical mass movement to a political organization will be a question of subjective discipline and purification. Compare with the comments on the role of *la pègre*, which I translate as "the criminal world," in Varlam Shalamov's fictions about the Gulag, in Badiou 2018, pp. 45-53.
36 Badiou 2011a, p. 55; Badiou, 2012b, p. 33.
37 Ibid., p. 57; p. 35.
38 Ibid., p. 63; p. 40.
39 Ibid., pp. 64-65; pp. 41-42 (the French

expression translated as "an ideological hereafter" is *un au-delà idéologique*, which defeats the stated goal of immanence with the invocation of the "beyond" of an Idea). In his memoirs, Badiou also discovers "a general dialectical law" in the reluctance among the organizational structures of the UCFml to adopt the epithet "communist," namely: "negation, in politics, is never decisive in itself. It must be linked in one way or another to the creative novelty of a political process that is underway, and to the clear determination of its current stage, a stage which is a moment, undoubtedly experimental, that can be situated affirmatively within the third stage of communism," in Badiou 2026a, p. 226. Lazarus, without speaking of a law, let alone a dialectical one, agrees with the principle: "The work to be done is a labor of inquiry into the new, into those moments when people are not content to analyze the malfeasance of which they are the victims and to list all the promises not kept, but when they formulate something positive, a thinking of their own," in Lazarus 2022a, p. 36.
40 See Lazarus 2015, p. xxii.
41 Badiou 2011a, pp. 61-62; Badiou, 2012b, p. 39.
42 Ibid., p. 98; p. 63.
43 Ibid., p. 63; p. 40 (translation modified).
44 Ibid., p. 64; p. 41.
45 Ibid., p. 105; pp. 69-70. In Lazarus' most recent texts there is a similar tension at work, which harkens back to our opening discussion of the identity and non-identity between action and thought. On the one hand, he writes: "A major question is that of the adequation of thought with the order of the real"; on the other, "In the proposition: *thought is a rapport of the real* (among people), the problematic proposition is not that thought thinks the real: the real is unthinkable. Here, there is a rupture with the theme of a possible adequation of thought and the real," in Lazarus 2022a, p. 34 (I prefer to translate *rapport du reel* as "rapport of the real" rather than "relation of the real" not only because of the double meaning of the French term as "relation" and "report," but also because Lazarus resolutely rejects defining politics in dialectical relation to some objective outside).
46 Badiou 2011a, p. 98; Badiou 2012b, p. 63 (translation modified).
47 Ibid., p. 99; p. 64.
48 Badiou 2026a, p. 204.
49 Badiou 2011a, p. 98; Badiou, 2012b, p. 63 (emphasis in the original).
50 Badiou, 2011a, pp. 101-102; Badiou 2012b, p. 66. In the opening issue (numbered 00) of one of the periodicals of Organisation Politique, *Le Perroquet*, Badiou similarly writes in an homage to Jacques Lacan, who had just passed away: "Lacan establishes that the cause of desire is a lost, missing object, and that desire, articulated under the symbolic law, has neither substance nor nature. It has only truth," self-quoted in Badiou 2026a, p. 280.
51 Badiou 2011a, p. 102; Badiou 2012b, pp. 66-67.
52 Badiou 2009, pp. 360-362.
53 Badiou 2026a, p. 172.
54 Badiou 2011a, p. 18; Badiou 2012b, p. 8.
55 Badiou 2018, p. 67.
56 Badiou 2005, p. 58. See also Toscano 2008.
57 Badiou 2001, pp. 105-106. See also Bosteels 2019.
58 Badiou, 2011a, pp. 18-19; Badiou 2012b, pp. 8-9. For this type of statement, we can find numerous precedents in Badiou's writings of his "red years," from the 1970s to the early 1980s. For instance: "We must conceive of Marxism as the accumulated wisdom of popular revolutions, the reason they engender, and the fixation and precision of their target," in Badiou 1975, p. 16. Or, again: "Marxism-Leninism is that which avers that the proletariat, heir to a secular ideological struggle surrounding the communist program, is also the realizer of this heritage. Marxism-Leninism not only accumulates the ideological resistance but also transforms it into knowledge and project," in Badiou and Balmès 1976, p. 75. For an analysis of how such statements rearticulate the dialectic of Marxism and communism, see Bosteels 2005.
59 See Dardot and Laval 2012.
60 Badiou 2009, p. 182.
61 Marx and Engels 1976, p. 28. Earlier, in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx had written: "Natural science will in time incorporate into itself the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate into itself natural science: there will be *one* science," in Marx 1975b, p. 304 (emphasis in the original).
62 Badiou 2009, p. 44 (emphasis in the original).
63 Ibid., p. 217.
64 Ibid., p. 92.
65 Badiou 2018, pp. 36-37. As I write elsewhere: "If there is a shift in this regard in Badiou's ongoing work, it is the slight but significant displacement from the idea of *politicizing history*, which still assumes a relatively external anchoring of politics in history understood at the level of social and economic being, to that of *historicizing politics*, which remits a purely sequential understanding of politics to its own intrinsic historicity," in Bosteels 2011b, p. 120.
66 In his own words: "In *Anthropology of the Name*, I argued that time does not exist. What exists, for the investigation, are sequences, each of which inscribed with a date," in Lazarus 2022a, p. 15.
67 Lazarus 2015, p. xxvi.
68 Badiou 2005, p. 4.
69 Badiou, 1991.
70 Badiou 2009, p. 26.
71 Badiou 2009, pp. 27-28.
72 Badiou 2009, p. 27.
73 Badiou 2009, p. 24.

74 Ibid., p. 25.
75 Badiou, 2011a, p. 102; Badiou 2012b, p. 67.
76 Ibid., pp. 27 and 14; pp. 15 and 6.
77 Ibid, p. 135; p. 92.
78 Badiou 2009, p. 91.
79 Badiou 2011a, p. 132; Badiou 2012b, p. 89.
80 Badiou 2019, p. 66 (translation modified).
81 Badiou 2011a, p. 47; Badiou 2012b, p. 27.
82 Badiou 2011a, p. 99; Badiou 2012b, p. 64.
83 Badiou 2011a, p. 66; Badiou 2012b, p. 42.
84 Badiou 2019, p. 13 (translation modified).
85 Badiou 2026a, p, 200. In the same volume, Badiou also remembers the impact on him and fellow militants like the Belgian Pierre Verstraeten of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: "This theory founded the *possibility* of History, but did not yet broach History itself. It only described the movement opened up by certain types of practical ensembles in the direction of an inventive historicity—and, in particular, in Sartre's book, in the direction of communism. And yet up to and including the final page of its almost maniacal descriptions, History remained disappointingly enigmatic" (ibid., p. 85).
86 Lazarus 2022, p. 20.
87 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
88 Ibid., pp. 52 and 54.
89 Lazarus, ibid., p. 115. This chapter is translated in Lazarus 2022b, quoted p. 242 (translation modified).
90 Michel, 'Préface,' in Lazarus 2022a, p. 15.
91 Michel 2020, p. 102.
92 See also Michel 2020, pp. 105-106, where Badiou's letter is partially quoted.

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