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The Event Divides Into Two Or The Parallax Of Change - Badiou, Žižek, Bosteels, and Johnston

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Abstract

This paper takes off from a growing preoccupation in Western political-social philosophy on the thinkability of the materiality of change, that became most pronounced in Alain Badiou's philosophy of the event. It traces the development of the discourse of radical change tied to a materialist theory of subjectivity beginning from Badiou, down to the strong criticism posed against it by Slavoj Žižek. This is then followed by the discussion of Bruno Bosteels' potent defense of Badiou's philosophy. Finally, the last part takes off from this debate and highlights how this tension in Badiou's philosophy was possible in the first place. Using Adrian Johnston's key insight on pre-evental and post-evental time, this paper argues that Žižek and Bosteels respectively employ pre-evental and post-evental lenses in reading the relation of event to being. Furthermore, these two lenses are themselves the effect of the split readability of the event at the moment of its rupture: the parallax-effect that divides the event into two. This paper asserts that neither of the two is sufficient. Both are fundamental in outlining what sort of sustained disciplines are necessary before and after events take place.

Keywords

Alain Badiou; Slavoj Žižek; Bruno Bosteels; Adrian Johnston; Change; Event; Ontology; Theory of Subjectivity

I seek simply to account for the possibility of change—how it's possible to go from a given regime of the laws of that which is to another such regime—by the mediation of the protocol of a truth and its subject. I am, therefore, in dialectical thought. But as my dialectical thought includes a figure of chance, it's non-deterministic.

(Badiou 2013: 127-128)

Introduction: The Event Divides into Two?

Adrian Johnston, in the Preface to his book *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, makes the optimistic remark that “the Badiouian-Žižekian engagement with politics gives a strong reason for hoping that thinking can in fact generate change.” (Johnston 2009: xxiv) This is echoed by Ed Pluth who describes Badiou’s philosophy as one that promotes and “intelligence of change.” (Pluth 2010) Meanwhile, in contrast to an optimistic tone, Bruno Bosteels uses the interrogative title “Can Change Be Thought?” in his interview article with Badiou appended at the end of his book, *Badiou and Politics*. These three works attest to the growing intellectual orientation in Western political-social philosophy that explores the possibility of a renewed materialist theory of radical change, tied to a reconstructed theory of subjectivity that became most pronounced in the philosophy of Badiou. Since the said idea’s articulation in Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject*, down to its elaboration in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, flood gates of debate have been opened up, and this idea lured a lot of leftist thinkers like Žižek, Bosteels, and Johnston.

In tracing the development of the discourse surrounding Badiou’s account of change as anchored in his philosophy of the event, this paper examines the [in]consistency of Badiou’s thought. It asks the question: After all the promises of Badiou’s philosophy, is it consistent?

This paper draws motivation from the debate that surrounds Badiou's interpretation of the connection between an event and a situation. In Meditation Seventeen of *Being and Event* Badiou remarks that an event's belonging to a situation is "undecidable." (Badiou 2005: 181) It means, either it belongs to the situation, or it does not. What is crucial in this claim is that it is as if Badiou is caught in the deadlock of being unable to account for the immanent emergence of events. If the event belongs to the situation, then it violates the character of an event being 'subtractive' (Badiou 2005: 10, 16, 27, 54, 67, 69) and 'aleatory' (Badiou 2005: 209, 345, 399, 433 and Badiou 2009: 376, 390, 513), and hence, ceasing to be 'evental'. On the other hand, if it does not belong to the situation, then it violates the character of an event being an 'immanent' break (Badiou 2005: 14, 85, 175-180) and that the event could be interpreted to come instead from a transcendent or unknown cause.

Slavoj Žižek recognized this ambiguity lurking in Badiou's description of the event. Žižek strongly criticized Badiou's thought to be regressing to a "naïve undialectical, or even pre-critical" Kantian dualism. (Badiou 2000: 42-43) From the point of view of Žižek, Badiou was still unable to answer the fundamental question: how or why does an event come about? (Žižek 1999: 163)

Meanwhile, in a series of correspondences with Žižek, Bruno Bosteels brings to the fore lapses in Žižek's reading, and offers a thoroughly dialectical Badiouian thought "without Žižek". Bosteels notes that in some sense Žižek is responsible for the popularization of Badiou's thought. As a consequence, one of the basic approaches to Badiou is through the works of Žižek on Badiou. And this is what propelled him to offer a more nuanced interpretation of Badiou's philosophy "without Žižek". (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) The level-headed critique of Žižek which constitutes the first part of this paper will therefore be followed by the elucidation of Bosteels's reconstructive reading and defense of Badiou's philosophy.

Finally, the last part will take off from this debate and highlight how this tension in Badiou's philosophy is possible in the first place. Using Adrian Johnston's key insight about pre-evental time and post-evental time, this work argues that Žižek and

Bosteels respectively employ pre-evental and post-evental lenses in reading the relation of event to being, and these two lenses are themselves the effect of the split readability of the event at the moment of its rupture: the parallax-effect that divides the event into two. In this paper, I assert that neither of the two accounts is sufficient in fully understanding the nature of an event. Both are fundamental in outlining what sort of sustained disciplines are necessary before and after events take place. Finally, instead of highlighting an inherent inconsistency in Badiou's philosophy of the event, I maintain that this very tension asserted the key feature of an event for Badiou. Where and when it happens, it always produces a parallax gap between two ways of being in a situation: continuity or transformation—two decisions bordered by the interpretative intervention of the subject.

I: Badiou as Kantian: Žižek's interpretation

The problem with Badiou's account of the event is that if the event is considered a term of the situation, it ceases to be an event, by virtue of the fact that it is again inscribed into the order of being. But if it is not a term of the situation, then where did the event come from? This is one of the subject matters of Slavoj Žižek's commentary on Badiou's philosophy in his *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology* and a further elaboration in his article "From Purification to Subtraction: Badiou and the Real," in *Think Again*, edited by Peter Hallward.

Although Žižek recognizes the brilliance of Badiou's idea, he sees in the latter's splitting of being into double structures of presented multiplicity or situation, and represented multiplicity or state of the situation, an unexpected trace of Kantianism. (Žižek 2004: 174) He zeroes in on the "exact status" of the "gap between the pure multiplicity of presentation and its representation by state(s)" (Žižek 2004: 174) where the inconsistency of being could manifest. He writes that a hidden Kantian reference is crucial in this distinction:

...the gap which separates the pure multiplicity of the Real from the appearing of a 'world' whose coordinates are given in a set of categories which predetermine its horizon is the very gap which, in Kant, separates

the Thing-in-itself from our phenomenal reality, i.e. from the way things appear to us as objects of our experience. (Žižek 2004: 174)

He stresses that this problem remains unsolved by Kant as well as by Badiou. (Žižek 2004: 175) In his discussion, Žižek forwards a number of fundamental questions: “How does the gap open up within the absolute closure of the Real?” (Žižek 2004: 175) Why is there a need to guard the emergence of the void? “Why are we not able simply to dwell in the void?” (Žižek 2004: 175) And finally he adds: “Is it not that there already has to be some tension/antagonism operative within the pure multiplicity of Being itself?” (Žižek 2004: 175)

Žižek notes that “both Lacan and Badiou share the notion of a radical cut/rupture, ‘event’, encounter of the Real, which opens up the space for the work of sublimation, of the creating of the new order.” (Žižek 2004: 172) However, they differ in their ways of confronting specifically this rupture. On the one hand Badiou considers that there must be a forceful transformation of the real into a consistent truth. (Žižek 2004: 171) This is in contrast to Lacan who on the other hand accepts this negativity as the positive existence of reality. (Žižek 2004: 167)

Žižek points out that the authentic experience for Lacan consists in “fully confronting the fundamental impasse of the symbolic order” by sustaining it. (Žižek 2004: 171) Žižek writes that “while Lacan enables us to gain an insight into the falsity of the existing state, this insight is already ‘it’, there is no way to pass through it, every attempt to impose a new order is denounced as illusory.” (Žižek 2004: 171) For Lacan, “Truth” is already “the shattering experience of the Void.” (Žižek 2004: 171)

On the other hand, Žižek explains that for Badiou, “when we are confronted with this remainder, we must either name it, transpose it into the master’s discourse, ignore it, or stare at it in mystified awe.” (Žižek 2004: 177) And in the transformation of the inconsistency into the master’s discourse, the new order will sublimate the negativity into a new consistent truth. This is where Badiou departs from the ontological consequences of psychoanalysis in so far as the encounter with the Real is

concerned. For Badiou, what psychoanalysis fails to think is the possibility of a truth-process that could give consistency to the antagonism that opened its possibility.

In response to this Badiouian conviction, Žižek notes that Badiou's "resistance to psychoanalysis is part of his hidden Kantianism." (Žižek 1999: 166) He lists a series of concepts involved in Badiou's account of an ethic of truths, which are in close affinity to Kant's account on ethics. This includes (1) the visibility of the event only to the subject/s, (2) the inconsistent multiple that lies at the bottom of the organization of being, (3) being's supplementation by the event that opens the possibility of a new way of being, and (4) the concept of the 'unnameable' in truth-process that renders the bringing about of truth an incessant effort. Žižek parallels these four to Kant's (1) notion of signs that announce the noumenal fact of freedom without positively proving it, (2) account of the noumena that precedes the transcendental synthesis, (3) the opening of the space of freedom by the excess and inconsistency of the ontological order, and (4) the infinite effort involved in the ethical process. (Žižek 1999: 166) For Žižek, despite Badiou's anti-Kantian political stances, his philosophy largely resembles Kant's, and this is what prevents Badiou from fully pursuing the consequence of his theory: the realization that against the backdrop of the event, a new consistent truth will henceforth be impossible. He goes even further:

....when Badiou dismisses the topic of human finitude, from Heideggerian 'being-towards death' to Freudian 'death drive', as the morbid obsession with what makes man equal to and thus reduced to a mere animal—as the blindness to that properly meta-physical dimension that elevates man beyond the animal kingdom and allows him to 'gain immortality' by participating in a Truth-Event—his theoretical gesture involves a 'regression' to 'nonthought', to a naive traditional (pre-critical, pre-Kantian) opposition of two orders (the finitude of positive Being; the immortality of the Truth-Event) that remains blind to how the very space for the specific 'immortality' in which human beings can participate in the Truth-Event is opened up by man's unique relationship to his finitude and the possibility of death. (Žižek 1999: 163)

For Žižek, Badiou still cannot account for the immanent emergence of the subject or for what compels the subject to be a subject—which is connected to the

question of why there is a need to transform the abyss of being to a consistent truth in the first place, or why we can not dwell in the void?

In the interpretation of Žižek, Badiou, in contrast to Lacan, avoids “identifying the subject with the constitutive Void of the structure” and opposes this instead with the “‘rarity’, the local-contingent-fragile-passing emergence of subjectivity,” that happens only when “in a contingent and unpredictable way, a Truth-Event takes place.” (Žižek 1999: 159) It is because of this idea that Žižek judges Badiou to have regressed to ‘nonthought’. For Žižek, Badiou cannot account for why there is a gap within the order of being, and why there is a need to conceal this gap when it becomes visible. He can only talk about the seemingly miraculous dawning of an event, which a potentially militant subject should be on the lookout for. But for Žižek, Badiou does not explain what exactly draws the human animal towards the process of subjectivization at the irruption of an event.

Žižek’s answer to this is simple: “the gap, the opening, the Void which precedes the gesture of subjectivization,” is the subject itself—the subject, whose core is the death drive. The death drive, Žižek explains, is “the irreducible/constitutive condition of the (im)possibility of the creative act of embracing a Truth-Event.” (Žižek 1999: 161) It is the “constitutive obverse of every emphatic assertion of Truth irreducible to the positive order of Being: the negative gesture that clears a space for creative sublimation.” (Žižek 1999: 159) For Žižek the subject, is what endeavours to fill in the gap within the order of being but, and because it, is also this gap. (Žižek 1999: 159) It is “the vanishing mediator between Being and Event.” (Žižek 1999: 160)

Žižek stresses that within the order of being, there is no beyond that always resists our grasp—a thing-in-itself which constitutes reality on account of which every symbolization is partial and inappropriate. (Žižek 2004: 168) Instead, the so called thing-in-itself is already the “invisible obstacle, that distorting screen which always ‘falsifies’ our access to external reality, that ‘bone in the throat’ which gives a pathological twist to every symbolization, on account of which every symbolization misses its object.” (Žižek 2004: 168) He adds that “multiple perspectival inconsistencies

between phenomena are not an effect of the impact of the transcendent Thing. On the contrary, the Thing is nothing but the ontologization of the inconsistency between phenomena.” (Žižek 2004: 167) This inconsistency, the radical antagonism at the heart of the phenomena, in Žižek’s analysis, is embodied by the subject itself as constituted by the vortex of the death drive. An event therefore, the occurrence of the void of a situation, is not the effect of the irruption of some primordial ground beyond the realm of appearances. Instead, it is the subjective realization of the void of being as the void of subjectivity, that is, the void of subjectivity is at the same time the incompleteness of reality. (Žižek 2012: 905) Inasmuch as the subject is always already part of reality, to think about the possibility of the event is to think about the possibility of the subject within reality—the becoming manifest of the void of reality not *through* the subject but as the subject:

The key point is that the ‘immortality’ of which Lacan speaks [...] can emerge only within the horizon of human finitude, as a formation that stands for and fills the ontological Void, the hole in the texture of reality opened up by the fact that reality is transcendently constituted by the finite transcendental subject. (Žižek 1999: 163)

Meanwhile, it must be noted that this void which opens up and sustains the space for the “Truth-Event” in its absolute irreconcilability to any form of consistency, is always in excess of the “Truth-Event”. (Žižek 1999: 161)ⁱ Thus, it is also what “always threatens to undermine it.” (Žižek 1999: 161) Again, it is the irreducible/constitutive condition of the (im)possibility of the creative act of embracing a Truth-Event. (Žižek 1999: 161)

Žižek points out that the ethico-political lesson of psychoanalysis ‘consists in the insight into how the great calamities of our century (from the Holocaust to the Stalinist desastre) are not the result of our succumbing to the morbid attraction of the Beyond.’ (Žižek 1999: 161) Rather, it is the result of the avoidance to confront the effacing truth about the inconsistency of reality itself and impose upon it “the direct rule of the Truth and/or Goodness.” (Žižek 1999: 161) Žižek follows Lacan in this, and argues that “in a Truth-Event the void of the death drive, of radical negativity, a gap that momentarily suspends the Order of Being, continues to resonate.” (Žižek 1999: 162-

163) He remarks that Badiou himself saw this that is why Badiou's ethic of truths is "an ethics of the respect for the unnameable Real which cannot be forced." (Žižek 2004: 173) He interprets that Badiou does not want to admit this because it would entail the abandonment of his two orders of reality and will force him to make the move from Kant to Hegel. (Žižek 2004: 167) In Žižek's interpretation, Badiou resists the ontologization of the subject because if this is the case, it will make the subject consubstantial with the structure (Žižek 1999: 159) and would thus lose its rarity, its finite contingent emergence. To ontologize the subject by making it the very principle that accounts for the pure multiplicity of being would make the appearance of the subject no longer an event.

II: Badiou "without Žižek": Bosteels's defense

In trying to provide a nuanced understanding of Badiou's philosophy in the light of the interpretation and attack of Žižek, Bruno Bosteels writes an article entitled "Badiou without Žižek" published by *Polygraph*. This article constitutes Bosteels's more refined understanding and response to Žižek's reading of Badiou, which had been compiled and included in his book *Badiou and Politics*. Bosteels states in this article how instrumental Žižek has been to the reception of Badiou's philosophy in the English speaking world. He notes that Žižek is one of the first thinkers to devote a long commentary on Badiou's philosophy in *The Ticklish Subject* and was responsible two years later for publishing the translation of Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* by Peter Hallward, as well as the endorsement of Hallward's exhaustive introductory guide to Badiou's philosophy. (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated)

Žižek's mediation to Badiou's work for Bosteels refracted Badiou's thought. He stresses that "many insights from Badiou, before being allowed to stand on their own," have already been "appropriated and transcoded in Žižekian and/or Lacanian language." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) In certain occasions, he notes that the allegedly neutral summary of Žižek "paints an almost unrecognizable portrait of Badiou's philosophy", while in other cases, the thoughts being attacked by Žižek seem to resemble Žižek's own viewpoints from his earlier works. Furthermore, Bosteels

interprets that many of Žižek's counter-arguments, instead of "signaling an authentic blind spot" on the part of Badiou, actually seem to be faithful paraphrases of Badiou's philosophy, only written in Lacanese or Hegelese terms. (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) This "forced reception" (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) as Bosteels put it, for him needs a more nuanced analysis where Badiou's thought can be drawn in distinction to Žižek's interpretation of it, i.e., an interpretation of Badiou without Žižek.ⁱⁱ

In his article "Badiou without Žižek", Bosteels classifies Žižek's criticisms to Badiou's philosophy into three: philosophical, political, and psychoanalytical. The philosophical criticism, pertains to Žižek's accusation that Badiou is "more profoundly Kantian than Badiou himself is willing to admit." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) To this first criticism, Bosteels reads that Žižek proposes a thoroughly Hegelianized Badiou: "Instead of setting up an insurmountable gap between the positive order of Being and the radically heterogenous order of the Truth-Event", Žižek proposes "to transpose this split onto the order of Being itself." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) Bosteels quotes Žižek for whom the "unnameable Real" must be asserted not as "an external limitation but an absolutely inherent limitation." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) And adds that "The true materialist solution is [...] that the Event is nothing but its own inscription into the order of Being, a cut/rupture in the order of Being on account of which Being cannot ever form a consistent All." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated)

The political criticism meanwhile refers to Žižek's "plea for a strict fidelity to the violently self-destructive fury of the twentieth century and the need resolutely to move on from a politics of purification to a politics of subtraction." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) Bosteels notes that this is in consistency to Žižek's proposal for a Hegelianized Badiou. In this proposal, Žižek argues that if Badiou fully follows the logic of subtraction, this would force Badiou "to abandon the very frame of the opposition between Being and Event," or of "taking the next step in the obligatory passage from Kant to Hegel." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) Here, the "Event will no longer be 'external' to the order of Being." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated. Emphasis added.) Instead, it will be "located in the 'minimal difference' 'inherent' to the order of Being itself." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated. Emphasis added.)

Finally, the psychoanalytical criticism of Žižek is how Badiou regresses to non-thought with the latter's opposition of two orders "that remains blind to how the very space for the specific 'immortality' in which human beings can participate in the Truth-Event is opened up by man's unique relationship to his finitude and the possibility of death." (Žižek 1999:163) Bosteels explains, that here, "using Lacan's discourse as an instrument of subversion, much in the same way that Lacan himself used Sade to give us the tormented 'truth' of Kant, Žižek [...] boldly lays bare that which cannot but remain obfuscated in Badiou's philosophy." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) The point in this move is "to unveil the dark and repressed underside of philosophy's grandest claims to truth" (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated):

From the radical point of view of the preceding void, or the empty place, indeed, every consequent inscription of a new mark must seem utterly naïve in comparison—at best, it is the age-old lure of truth as a symbolic fiction and, at worst, the banality of pure non-thought. [...] "God not only is but always-already was dead [...] after Freud, one cannot directly have faith in a Truth-Event; every such Event ultimately remains a semblance obfuscating a preceding Void whose Freudian name is death drive." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated)

Bosteels interprets that for Žižek, "Badiou's fundamental weakness can be overcome only by radically acknowledging the role of the death drive as a missing third term, or a 'vanishing mediator,' between Being and Event." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated)

In response to the first criticism of Žižek, Bosteels argues that "Žižek's claim about Badiou's hidden Kantianism breaks down an open door." (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) The insight about the immanent deadlock or impasse of the ontological discourse of being, he notes, is actually a basic feature of Badiou's thought, (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) and that this impasse, or inconsistency of being, becomes retroactively visible via the assertion of the occurrence of an event. Bosteels stresses the Maoist principle "one divides into two" recognizable in Badiou's philosophy. In his book *Badiou and Politics*, he quotes Badiou's text taken from the latter's *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic*: "But, in fact, we can and we must conceive of the split exterior / interior correlation as a process, whereby the fact that the real is

simultaneously at its place and in excess over this place, both inside *and* outside, is due to its unfolding as a qualitative force.” (Bosteels 2011:140) These references to dialectics, in Bosteels’s point of view are manifestations of the Hegelian trace in Badiou’s philosophy to which Žižek turns a blind eye.

Bosteels continues to use the Maoist feature of Badiou’s thought to respond to Žižek’s political criticism. He writes that if Žižek were ‘to follow the logic of Badiou’s Maoism, it would have forced Žižek to abandon the allegation of a purely ‘external’ opposition between Being and Event.’ⁱⁱⁱ If being and event work under the principle of “one divides into two”, this would mean that being and event are not two separable or independent things, external to one another. The event under this principle is not something external or even transcendent ‘that belongs to a wholly different dimension’ which disrupts being every now and then. Rather, the event, the occurrence of the void is the ‘dividing’ of being, not ‘what divides’ being, as a situation into two, such that: “the event is being, absolutely.” (Badiou 2011: 307) However, this must not be interpreted in the sense of what Žižek calls minimal difference, because such logic, Bosteels reiterates is completely unable to conceive “the transformative power of an event other than as the effect of a structural reiteration.”^{iv} (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) He argues in his article “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: Part II. The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?” that whenever Badiou establishes a divide between truth and knowledge or between being and event, the notions must not be taken as separate dimensions or spheres, but “as the extremes of an ongoing process of detachment and scission” interpreted from the point of view of subjective intervention. (Bosteels 2002: 203)

Lastly, to Žižek’s psychoanalytical attack, Bosteels defends that the recognition of the death drive as the absent cause of political ontology “undermines in advance the possibility of identifying with a leftist Cause—other than a lost one!” (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) This is precisely what Badiou’s philosophy is combating: the pessimism towards the possibility of truth/s. To push it further, Bosteels asks, “what causes are there to be kept alive from a psychoanalytical perspective, if for the latter the most radical act consists in the subject’s defining gesture of pure negativity that

precedes and undermines every one of the possible candidates?” (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated)

In his article on Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*, Bosteels remarks that the recognition of the structural impasse as the starting point for the possibility of the subject “at best gives us only half of the process.” (Bosteels 2002: 181) He adds that “true change, or a change in what counts as true,” “comes about not merely by occupying but by exceeding the empty place of the existing structure.” (Bosteels 2002: 182-183) He stresses that, “for a truth to take place, [...] something has to pass through the impasse.” (Bosteels 2002: 182-183) Without a truth procedure, or the process of subjectivization—the principle of which lies in the militant faith on the possibility of truth/s—the structural impasse will not even be visible. (Bosteels 2002: 195) Bosteels notes that unless the constitutive outside of a situation, “the evanescent point of the real” is “forced, distorted, and extended, in order to give consistency to the real as a new generic truth,” (Bosteels 2002: 183) it will never be able “to think the real as that which gives way to a new consistency.” (Bosteels 2011: 188) Even if Žižek repeatedly maintains that it is what opens the possibility of the creative act of sublimation, it will still be “incapable of giving consistency to the actual making of a new truth” (Bosteels 2002: 199) precisely because for Žižek following Lacan, one cannot force a pass through it, one can only sustain it. This doctrine, Bosteels interprets, only delivers the “repetition of the law and the lack that overdetermines it.” (Bosteels 2011: 188)

Furthermore, Bosteels stresses that Žižek fails to draw the line between the moment when the inconsistency of being becomes manifest, and the actual process of truth making which is a very crucial distinction for Badiou. Bosteels infers this from Žižek's expression “Truth-Event” and his interpretation of the event as “the Truth of the situation that makes visible/legible what the ‘official’ situation had to ‘repress’”, “the *lie*, of the *ancien regime*,” and “the Truth of the *ancien regime* situation, localized, attached to it.” (Žižek 1999:130) He writes:

Whereas for Žižek, the empty place of the real that is impossible to symbolize is somehow already the act of truth itself, for Badiou a truth comes about only by forcing the real and by displacing the empty place,

so as to make the impossible possible. “Every truth is post-evental,” Badiou writes in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, so that the event which in a sudden flash reveals the void of a given situation cannot itself already be the truth of this situation—hence the need for a militant figure of fidelity such as the one studied in *Saint Paul*: “Fidelity to the declaration is crucial, because truth is a process, and not an illumination.” (Bosteels 2002:197)

To summarize Bosteels’s interpretation of Badiou without Žižek, Bosteels saves Badiou’s philosophy from the philosophical and political criticisms of Žižek by first bringing out the already Hegelian dimension of Badiou’s thought. Secondly, Bosteels, in response to Žižek’s psychoanalytical criticism, highlights how the recognition of structural lack is only half of the process. Bosteels clarifies that the project of Badiou consists in providing the structural formalism involved in the discussion of the void that opens the possibility of the subject, as well as the militant process of subjectivization necessary to give being to the structural lack through its transformation to a new consistent truth. Lastly, these two, the occurrence of the void, and the process of subjectivization should not be lumped together in a seemingly miraculous sudden illumination called Truth-Event, but as separate moments constitutive of one another, which Badiou would refer to as double event (the event of rupture and event of interpretative intervention).

III: The Parallax of Change

In the first part of this paper, I have discussed Žižek’s take on Badiou’s philosophy which I narrowed down to his criticism that Badiou’s thought insofar as the division of being and event is concerned is profoundly Kantian. This feature of Badiou’s thinking for Žižek is an effect of Badiou’s refusal to equate the void of subjectivity with the incompleteness of reality. Next to this is Bosteels’s defense that a Kantian reading of Badiou’s philosophy is possible only if one ignores the Maoist principle ‘one divides into two’, working in Badiou’s thought. For Bosteels, being and event should not be seen as two separate things, but as extremes of an ongoing process of discontinuous continuity or continuous discontinuity.

Against the backdrop of the criticisms of Žižek and Bosteels’s interpretation, the question to be asked is how it was even possible for Badiou’s

philosophy to give birth to these divergent viewpoints? Or, how can these two divergent viewpoints be reconciled with Badiou's philosophy? This problem is linked primarily to the puzzling status of the relation of event to being. The issue here is that if the event is subtracted from being, inasmuch as it is aleatory, contingent, and irruptive, how can it be an 'immanent' break? Meanwhile, if the event is in dialectical relation to being, inasmuch as the event is the constitutive outside of being, an outside within, how will it still be 'evental'? The difficulty here lies in providing an ontology that can account for an evental occurrence that is still, immanent to a situation for which it is an event.

The first case, in which the event is separate from being, appears to be Žižek's stand—the basis of his criticism of Badiou being Kantian. In his *The Ticklish Subject* he uses the expression Truth-Event and interprets it as “a radically New Beginning,” (Žižek 1999: 146) “the violent, traumatic contingent intrusion of another dimension.” (Žižek 1999: 146) He also interprets it as “the occurrence of something which, from within the horizon of the predominant order of Knowledge, appears impossible,” (Žižek 1999: 142) it is the “intrusion of the traumatic Real,” (Žižek 1999: 142) which “does not possess any ontological guarantee,” (Žižek 1999: 136) and “cannot be reduced to (or deduced, generated from) a (previous) Situation,” (Žižek 1999: 136) for “it emerges ‘out of nothing’.” (Žižek 1999: 136) In so far as the interpretation of Žižek is concerned, the ‘self-referentiality’ (Žižek 1999: 137) of the event is an indication that it is of a different order than being. He emphasizes how for Badiou, prior to the decision that asserts the belongingness of the event to the situation, “we inhabit a Situation which is ‘enclosed’ in its horizon.” (Žižek 1999: 138. Emphasis added.) From within it, the arrival of an event can never be anticipated. He notes thus that the event, from this point of view, appears as a “marginal disturbance of the global System,” a “skandalon,” “an undecidable, chaotic intrusion that has no place in the State of the Situation.” (Žižek 1999: 138. Emphasis added.) The event, in Žižek's view is “the Void of an invisible line separating one closure from another,” (Žižek 1999: 138) which divides the situation into the old and the new.

The second perspective meanwhile seems to resemble that of Bosteels: the event is the constitutive outside of being, and its relation to it is one of discontinuous

continuity. Bosteels in *Badiou and Politics* asks the question, “How, then, can we relate the break of the new to the situation at hand if we cannot rely on the fulfillment of a hidden potential nor opt for the opposite extreme of cutting the link between being and event altogether?” (Bosteels 2011: 232) As has been presented above, Bosteels goes against interpreting the event as a hidden potential of being waiting to be realized. He notes that the recognition of a structural lack undermines in advance the possibility of identifying with a leftist cause other than a lost one. (Bosteels 2005: unpaginated) He argues that for Badiou, “the articulation of being and event does not, or no longer, require that the new be present as a potential within the bosom of the old,” (Bosteels 2011: 232) and proceeds further that insofar as the theory of politics is concerned, it has already broken away with the principle of historical necessity. Bosteels explains that “There are no longer (if ever there were) any structural or historical guarantees for politics.” (Bosteels 2011: 232) “Such guarantees,” he says, “are not *given* but must be *produced*.” (Bosteels 2011: 232) Thus, the question of the event is no longer a question of historical knowledge, but a question of political truth. (Bosteels 2011: 233)

Appended in his book is his interview with Badiou where Badiou remarks that:

It is not at all the same thing to say that there is a site of an event and to say that there is an event. It is not at all the same thing to say that every situation contains a point of excess, a blank space, a blind spot, or an unrepresented point, and to say that this already amounts to the event's effectuation properly speaking. In that case the event becomes structuralized, and it is shown simply to be the intimate point of breakage of the situation, that is, in fact, something like its being, or its point of the real. But then there is no politics, no fidelity, only a kind of blockage. All this in the end produces conceptions that in terms of politics are inevitably pessimist, in a Lacanian sense. (Badiou 2011: 301)

However, Bosteels is also against cutting altogether the tie between being and event as manifested in his reiteration of Badiou's references to dialectics. In resolving the problem of not treating the event as a potentiality within being, neither as something separate from it, he forwards the idea that Badiou's solution to this is to “replace the category of potentiality with that of impossibility.” (Bosteels 2011: 239) That is, even when Badiou asserts that the real as made visible by the event, ‘is not the

potential within the bosom of the old', he actually still recognizes the real in its structural articulation (its 'internal exclusion' within the structure). The difference is that it is no longer a 'structural potentiality', but rather, a 'practical impossibility' within a situation. But then the recognition of this, Bosteels notes, is even only 'half of the process,' (Bosteels 2002: 181) as impossibility for Badiou only becomes apparent "as the backwards effect of a subject," (Bosteels 2011: 239) as "the retroactive effect of a subjective intervention." (Bosteels 2011: 239)

What these two interpretations give us are two readabilities of the event within the situation. On the one hand, the event is the 'abnormal disruptive occurrence' (Badiou 2005: 175) within the normal order of a situation as viewed from the perspective of the 'existing structure.' On the other hand, the event is that which opens the possibility of what is declared practically impossible by the current structure which becomes visible only via 'the interpretative intervention of the subject'. As Žižek pointed out, before the point of decision, before the human animal becomes a subject, the abnormal occurrence's belonging to the situation will remain undecidable. However, after the moment of decision the pure contingency of the occurrence shall be interpreted as an 'event' that opened the necessity of transformation—the nodal point for the introduction of change.

This could be further understood using Adrian Johnston's important insight in his reading of Peter Hallward and Bruno Bosteels's debate on the same issue. In his article "The Split Speeds of Transformation," that is included in his book *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, he remarks that Bosteels and Hallward are both right. Bosteels argues that:

the 'and' in the title of Badiou's *magnum opus* indicates that, instead of inflexibly partitioning the trans-ontological realm of the event from the ontological domain of being *qua* being, Badiou is interested in formally articulating the paradoxical conjunction-in-disjunction, the tension-ridden relation-that-is-not-a-relation, operative between being and event (Bosteels 2004a: 153-154). (Johnston 2007: 9)

Hallward meanwhile states that:

the post-1988 Badiou, with his emphases on event-prompted subtraction and separation, is pushed into promoting “a politics of the ‘flash,’ a politics grounded in the revolutionary but ephemeral moment in which a serial inertia can be suspended with only minimal recourse to an institutional stability of any kind.” (Hallward 2003: 43). (Johnston 2007: 10)

Regarding this, Johnston notes:

although Bosteels is quite correct that the temporally abrupt evental flash catalyzes a thereafter enduring and protracted labor of a subject’s faithful and militant forcing of the event’s truth(s) back into the being of a world with its situations, Hallward is equally correct in maintaining that, regardless of whether being and event are drawn into relational structures following an event, the moment of this evental flash itself is deliberately treated as inexplicable and without identifiable preconditions paving the way for its happening. (Johnston 2007: 3)

What Johnston defends is that “the event outlines in the situation—in the ‘there is’—both a before and an after.” (Johnston 2007: 6) For Johnston, Bosteels and Hallward’s views reflect “the cleaving of time in two by the event into the pre-evental ‘before’ and the post-evental ‘after.’” (Johnston 2007: 12-13) Badiou himself talks about this. When referring to the event, he notes that it causes a break, and this break produces “a before and an after.” (Badiou 2013: 126)

Following this line of argumentation, I argue that Žižek and Bosteels correspondingly employ pre-evental and post-evental readabilities of the relation of the event to the situation, and this is possible because Badiou’s text provide avenues for both these interpretations. In relation to these two readabilities, I argue that the question is not about which of them is right, because both of them are. These two readabilities, I interpret, are the two ways of relating to a situation at the moment of an event’s rupture. At the irruption of the event, the question is between continuity *or* transformation. In the upsurge of an event these two possible ways of relating with the situation, which corresponds precisely to two ways of relating with the event, is what gives birth to “a contradictory present.” (Bosteels 2011: 236) What this implies is not the ontological division of a situation into two but instead the division of ways of relating to the same situation into two. As Badiou stresses, “This break doesn’t cause a transmission from an inferior world to a superior world. We’re still in the same world.” (Badiou 2013: 126)

However, the breaking of a world into a before and an after, or the event into two readabilities, and the situation into two orders, the old and the new, is what I call the parallax effect of the event. In a situation, how one interprets the event, corresponds precisely with how one interprets the situation, only that the possibility of this is only so because of the parallax nature of change itself.

Žižek interprets being and event as separate because certain passages in Badiou's philosophy that refer to the sudden emergence of the event give this impression. But this particular way of interpreting and relating to the event is possible only in one's pre-evental lens. Before acknowledging the event as an actual event, it does appear as a 'skandalon', an 'abnormal' occurrence that disrupts the continuity of things. However, once one decides that the event is an event to a situation, one sees through the post-evental lens, and it will no longer be interpreted as an intrusive occurrence but rather as something that opens up the possibility of change within the situation. This change entails a new way of being, a new way of doing things that takes the event as its guide. The event under the gaze of the subject, the human animal that interprets it as the becoming visible of the inconsistency of a world that dictates what is possible and impossible, is now seen as the constitutive outside of this world. The event is what provides a peek to the condition for the possibility of a reordering of the world's (im)possibilities. Badiou writes:

This is perhaps what Lacan meant by 'extimate': both intimate and exterior to the intimate. Here, we're well and truly in the core of the dialectic. In Hegel, for example, the negation of a thing is immanent to this thing but at the same time, it goes beyond this thing. The core of the dialectic is this status of negation as an operator that at once separates and includes. (Badiou 2013: 127)

Such different interpretations are, using Žižek's expression, divided by a parallax gap bordered by an interpretative intervention. (Badiou 2005: 181) Change, has always this effect: it divides worlds into two. It must be reiterated however that the point of parallax is possible only from the moment of decision. It is only when an event is acknowledged that the parallax happens. Without it, no situation or event will be seen as divided. The gap, the divide will only be possible 'after' the existence of a new

subjective body. It is through this that the parallax effect of the event that gives birth to a new transcendental ordering of a situation is argued as materially produced. In this material production of the transcendental therefore the subject becomes the material guarantee, the introducer, of a new ordering of a situation. In this act, the subject retroactively opens up or makes the void visible, while at the same time, closing it in its introduction of the new readability of the situation.

This last statement refers to what Badiou points out about the two implications of intervention. The first one is that the procedure of intervention recognizes the multiple as an event. While the second one implies that the intervention decides that the multiple is a term of the situation which meant that it belongs to it. (Badiou 2005: 202) This second sense, he notes, cancels out the first. By declaring that the evental multiple belongs to the situation, then its evental character is already annulled. (Badiou 2005: 202) In the second sense, the subject is already interpreting the situation according to the consequences of the event, initially considered evental.

But let me add more, it is not simply that the two views are both right, but that they are necessary. Despite Bosteels's claim that Žižek refracted Badiou's philosophy, Žižek's analysis is in fact fundamental. Without Žižek's criticism, the parallax that divides the relation of the event to being into two would have not been visible. Bosteels's stand is powerful because it was able to potently explain the dialectical relation of being and event. But Žižek's stand is insightful because it was able to highlight the seeming limit of Badiou's conception of the event. These divergent views however, should not be seen as a weakness of Badiouian thought, but rather, its power. Thanks to the antagonistic readings of Žižek and Bosteels, the core of what an event meant emerged, that is, it is neither just an anomaly OR a practical impossibility now declared possible, but that it is always and already both the anomaly AND the practical impossibility now declared possible. Without these two interpretative positions, there is *no event*. The problem about the interpretation of Badiou's philosophy, which seems to have brought to the fore an inherent inconsistency, is its own solution. This point of inconsistency is what brought to light the very consistency of Badiou's philosophy of the event. Under this sense, one can say, that change, here rendered as something opened

up by an event, where and when it happens always produces the question of choice between continuity or transformation, and for Badiou, when confronted with this question, the only next valid move is to decide. As he writes: “This would be one of the paradoxes of action, and its key resides in decision.” (Badiou 2005: 202)

It is in the question of decision that Badiou’s discussion of the event as something that opens up a possibility within a situation becomes most relevant. Badiou notes that “an event is something that brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable.” (Badiou 2013: 9) However, it “is not by itself the creation of a reality; it is the creation of a possibility, it opens up a possibility. It indicates to us that a possibility exists that has been ignored.” (Badiou 2013: 9) He maintains that the event then is merely a proposition. (Badiou 2013: 9) It proposes a possibility, but it still entirely depends on the effort, the truth procedure, to grasp, elaborate, incorporate, and set it out to the world. (Badiou 2013: 10) “Events” Badiou explains, “are the creation in the world of the possibility of a truth procedure and not that which create this procedure itself.” (Badiou 2013: 10) “The event is only there as a source of possibilities” (Badiou 2013: 12) and therefore it is yet in the hands of human subjects to decide whether to pursue a new set of possibilities and impossibilities or to remain in the given world, as if nothing happened.

As regards the question of the separation of being and event, drawing from what has been discussed, there is only being absolutely. Being and event are not separate. Event is also being. But, being is ‘only’ accessible as a situation or as a world with a specific logic, and an event is the disruption of this situation or logic or transcendental regime. This is the reason why from the point of the existing situation, the event is outside it. However, once the truth-process, from the point of view of the situation ‘after’ the event, begins and transforms the situation, it will interpret the event as that which gave insight to the possibility of a new way of being which is always and already a part of this new situation, since every new possibility is pursued only with the assumption that it is possible. What has to be pointed out further, is the crucial idea that from the post-evental situation, the idea of the ‘outside’ imposing a limit to a situation, does *not* exist.

What this analysis provides is the conception that you have the same being, but with contradictory situations or structures. This is what gives insight to the inconsistency of being: the contradictory present. However, being, as Badiou points out, is not only inconsistent, it is also consistent, that is why you have situations in the first place. Before the event, you only have consistency, after the event, you have 'another' consistency, and this 'retroactively' 'not directly', provides an insight to the inconsistency of being. This is the point of parallax: the event can be an outside 'or' an inside depending on the situation you are in. Before the event: it is outside the situation; after the event: it is inside the situation;—since you can 'only' inhabit 'a' situation, 'a' consistency, you cannot dwell in the void per se, because it is 'void', it is nothing. There is no in-between, either one inhabits the new situation or the old. When change happens, there are always two contradictory positions within the same situation. Since you can only inhabit 'one' situation, a second situation is an impossibility. You cannot withdraw to a neutral zone and then choose. You always only inhabit a choice, a decision. You either decide that an event is an anomaly or, in a retroactive manner, decided that it is a point for transformation. What you have then, is the same being formed or structured differently, or the same being with two possibilities: one divides into two.

With this elucidation, the next challenge is to determine what kind of disciplines are necessary before and after events take place? To this question, Johnston provides us a very good response. Badiou's thought, Johnston maintains, has compellingly laid out the militant discipline necessary in the post-evental time. This is the content of his ethic of truth-process. However, he stresses that Badiou, when referring to pre-evental time, is sometimes in danger of licensing a version of quietist patience that resigns to the current state of affairs, "drifting along interminable and/or awaiting the unpredictable arrival of a not-to-be-actively-precipitated 'x' sparking genuine change." (Johnston 2007: 29) To the pre-evental time then, Johnston proposes a 'communist patience':

the calm contemplation of the details of situations, states, and worlds with an eye to the discerning of ideologically veiled weak points in the structural architecture of the statist system. (Johnston 2007: 29)

He further adds:

Given the theoretical validity of assuming that these camouflaged Achilles' heels (as hidden evental sites) can and do exist in one's worldly context, one should be patiently hopeful that one's apparently minor gestures, carried out under the guidance of a pre-evental surveillance of the situation in search of its concealed kernels of real transformation, might come to unleash major repercussions for the state-of-the-situation and/or transcendental regime of the world. [...] In temporal terms, this is to place hope in the non-miraculous possibility that the abrupt, punctuating shifts inaugurating new times could immanently emerge out of the subterranean internal flows of currently unfurling histories. (Johnston 2007: 29-30)

This communist discipline, I think, is consistent with Badiou's project. As Badiou writes:

It's not a matter of desperately awaiting a miraculous event but, rather, of following through to the very end, to the utmost degree, what you've been able to extract from the previous event and of being as prepared as possible, therefore, to take in subjectively what will inevitably come about. (Badiou 2013: 12)

Badiou in discussing political events notes that they are not miraculous occurrences. Within the pre-evental time, Badiou stresses that there is a need 'to be prepared for an event' which means "being subjectively disposed to recognizing new possibilities." (Badiou 2013: 12) Badiou adds that "since the event is necessarily unforeseeable given that it doesn't fall under the law of prevailing possibilities, preparing for the event consists in being disposed to welcome it." (Badiou 2013: 12) For him it is a matter of being convinced or of having a state of mind that the existing possibilities determined by the state of the situation, are not absolute, and an event is exactly what provides a peek to this idea. Something unsettles the determined sets of possibilities and impossibilities and it introduces, opens an opportunity for reorganization or redetermination. But once one shifts to the post-evental time, this random occurrence, or event, or exception, is no longer thought of as a miracle, but a negation of a previous situation. In the post-evental time or lens, it is already "thought as internal to the process

of—non-miraculous—truth, but thought nonetheless, as an exception.” (Badiou 2013: 127)

After Badiou’s theory of the event, concept of the generic, and call for militant subjects to truths, it is already impossible to forget the possibility of change. That is, after Badiou, to remain simply in the enclosed horizon of being is henceforth impossible. Badiou has gifted us the courage to take risk, and the reminder that we ‘can’ decide, and the fundamental insight that there is a probability that risk will be better than continuity. In addition to this, after Badiou, after knowing the parallax effect of change, any form of ontological guarantee pertaining to a subjective decision has been removed. The subject is left to fully affirm the contingency of his/her decision/s. Decisions, become fully absolute. If this is the case, subjectivity is always militant subjectivity. The subject fights for what it holds true. However, what is crucial here is that an opposing interpretative position would have equal valence. Thus, the subject is caught in the deadlock of the lack of justification. No position becomes more valid or more wrong, what is left is only pure subjective intervention. In this case, Badiou’s philosophy provides a response to Žižek’s question of why we cannot dwell in the void? To be consistent to what has been laid out in this paper, to dwell in the void, there has first to be two positions (the positions of continuity and transformation), and second, these positions are decided upon. Without these, the void will not even be visible. Hence, the Badiouian response is this: one can only sustain and dwell in the void by overcoming it, and by overcoming, this refers to the decision that asserts the existence of a new situation which in the first place will give being to the void.

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NOTES

ⁱ He furthers: "For Lacan, negativity, a negative gesture of withdrawal, precedes any positive gesture of enthusiastic identification with a Cause: negativity functions as the condition of (im)possibility of the enthusiastic identification that is to say, it lays the ground, opens up space for it, but is simultaneously obfuscated by it and undermines it." (Žižek 1999: 153-154)

ⁱⁱ It must be noted however, that Bosteels recognizes the difficulty of this task, considering how much an interpretation of Badiou's thinking has already been influenced by Žižek's interpretation. At the same time, some of Žižek's philosophy resemble or are also sympathetic to Badiou's thought.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bruno Bosteels, “Badiou without Žižek,” unpaginated. Bosteels adds, if Žižek were to do this however, I would entail his abandonment of the notion of Badiou being a pre or proto Kantian. And he would “have lost the perfect opportunity to present himself as the Hegel or Sade of this closet Kantian.”

^{iv} Also, in his book *Badiou and Politics*, he writes that “In the end, what this criticism confirms is the need for a symptomatic torsion that would not remain on the structural level of the recognition of an outside within but that instead passes over into the disqualification or destruction of the old inside the new.” Bosteels 2011: 140)