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Alain Badiou's transitory theatre

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ALAIN BADIOU'S TRANSITORY THEATRE

A Doctoral Thesis

by

FRÉDÉRIC DALMASSO

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

October 2011

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgments or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a degree.

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Alain Badiou's Transitory Theatre

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The following abbreviations have been used to refer to Badiou's work:

AS = *Ahmed le subtil*¹

AP = *Ahmed philosophe*

ASF = *Ahmed se fâche*

BE = *Being and Event*

CN = *Conditions*

CCBT = 'Can Change be Thought'

DIA = 'A Discussion of and around Incident at Antioch'

DO = *D'un Désastre obscur sur la fin de la vérité d'état*

DPAP = 'De la philosophie à l'art et à la politique'

ER = *L'Écharpe rouge*

ET = *Ethics, an Essay on the Understanding of Evil*

CH = *The Communist Hypothesis*

IA = *Incident at Antioch*

ID = *De l'Idéologie*

IN = *Handbook of Inaesthetics*

IT = *Infinite Thought*

LC = *Les Citrouilles*

LW = *Logics of Worlds*

MT = *Metapolitics*

MFP = *Manifesto for Philosophy*

OB = *On Beckett*

OS = 'On a Finally Objectless Subject'

OT = 'Un opérateur théâtral' (interview)

PkP = *Pocket Pantheon*

PPP = *Peut-on Penser la Politique ?*

¹ The titles in French refer to texts which have not been translated into English when this thesis went to print. Unless otherwise stated, the quotes from these texts are my translation.

QPP = 'Que pense le poème?'

RT = *Rhapsody for the Theatre*

RT2 = *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre (suite)*

SMP = *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*

SP = *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*

STTO = *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*

ThC = *Théorie de la contradiction*

TC = *The Century*

TP = 'Théâtre et Philosophie'

TS = *Theory of the Subject*

TO = 'A Theatre of Operations'

Introduction

In an addendum to his *Rhapsody for the Theatre* ([1990] 2008), contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou declares, “the playwright is the philosopher’s lieutenant.” (RT2, 16) Mostly known for his theory of the event, Badiou is also a playwright, a theoretician of theatre, and an active militant in politics. When it comes to the relationship between theatre and philosophy, as a playwright, one might say that Badiou is therefore his own lieutenant. Also, while Badiou rejects the term ‘political philosopher’ - the reasons for this will be explored in due course, his philosophy is permeated by his militancy, which is in turn intrinsically linked to his involvement in theatre since for Badiou, as I will demonstrate, theatre is political by essence.

To build on Badiou’s analogy, his philosophy, theatre and politics can be described as forming a triumvirate of which he is at once the strategist, lieutenant and foot soldier. This thesis addresses the relationship between philosophy and theatre through Badiou’s theory of theatre and engages with Badiou’s theatre practice to reflect upon the relationship between theatre and politics in his work. Ultimately, it provides answers to two main underlying questions: how does Badiou’s reflection upon theatre amount to a philosophical operation eluding aesthetics? How does theatre, as a thinking process, amount to politics as defined by Badiou as ‘thinking in action’?

Before going further, it is fair to delineate Badiou’s work as an attempt to renew Marxism by developing a new theory of the subject. In his *Theory of the Subject* ([1982] 2009), Badiou is clear on this point: “We demand of *materialism* that it include what we need and which Marxism, even without knowing it, has always made into its guiding thread: a theory of the subject.” (TS, 182) So far, studies of Badiou’s philosophy have largely focused upon his theory of the event as developed

in *Being and Event* ([1988] 2005), but instead his work could be described as a theory of the subject.¹ Following Badiou, the notion of subject will be a guiding thread throughout the whole thesis. As a preliminary remark, it is important to note that Badiou's conception of the subject departs from other philosophers' theory of the subject to date. Nonetheless, Badiou has undoubtedly been influenced by the philosophy of Louis Althusser and the writings of Jacques Lacan (besides others, including Jean-Paul Sartre) and he refers to both thinkers as his masters.² However, Badiou's theory of the subject greatly differs from Althusser's conception of the subject. Not only does Badiou refute Althusser's views on ideology and history as a process without a subject, but he also distances his theory from Althusser's concept of interpellation. For Badiou, subjectivation is rather based on a proposition. He argues that "[there] is an event, an encounter with something, something which is outside the individual and which is like a proposition." (DIA, 4) Yet, to an extent, Badiou draws from Althusser the idea that the subject is not a given but a process and perhaps also the notion of the subject of politics as marked by inexistence.³

¹ This is, in particular, the point of view of Bruno Bosteels who emphasises the notion of subject in his work on Badiou's philosophy. See, for example, 'On the Subject of the Dialectic', in P. Hallward (ed.), *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 150-164; 'Alain Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*: The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism? Part II', *PLI: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2002), pp. 173-208; 'Alain Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*: Part I. The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?', *PLI: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2001), pp. 200-229.

² Despite being labelled an antiphilosopher by Badiou, Lacan has exerted a strong influence on his work. See for example, the section "Anti-antiphilosophy" in Peter Hallward's *A Subject to Truth* (2003, 20-24). Hallward analyses the differences between Badiou and Lacan's theory of the subject in a section on Badiou's subject and explains in particular that Badiou and Lacan share the notion of the subject as decentred in relation to the individual but diverge on the nature of this ex-centricity. (Hallward: 2003, 139-151) Badiou's *Rhapsody for the Theatre* broaches the question of the relationship between spectatorship and desire. However, to an extent, evoking the role imparted to desire in theatre serves as a foil for the spectator's connection to thought, which remains the focus of Badiou's essay and consequently of this thesis. Therefore, I will not engage with Lacan here.

³ In *Metapolitics*, Badiou analyses Althusser's position towards the subject in a chapter entitled "Althusser : Subjectivity without a Subject": "For Althusser, all theory proceeds by way of concepts. But 'subject' is not a concept. [...] For example: the concept 'process' is scientific, the notion 'subject' is ideological. 'Subject' is not the name of a concept, but that of a notion, that is, the mark of an inexistence. There is no subject since there are only processes." (MT, 59) Against Althusser, Badiou precisely conceptualises the subject as a process.

When it comes to theatre, Althusser's concept of interpellation evokes Bertold Brecht's play *Man Equals Man*. In the play, the character Galy Gay sums up his human condition by repeatedly declaring: "One man equals no man, until some one calls him." (Brecht: 1979 [1926]: 60, 62)⁴ However, for Badiou there is no calling of the subject as such and it would be erroneous to describe Badiou's theatre as a subjectivisation process on the grounds that for him, theatre would interpellate subject into being. There are several reasons for this objection. First, rather than a calling, Badiou's subjectivisation process is based upon a decision to join (or not) a subjectivisable body. After the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Brecht is probably the second most privileged interlocutor of Badiou in his philosophical work and his theory of theatre, and Badiou refers to Brecht's *Lehrstücke* *The Decision* throughout his work to illustrate his own concept of decision.⁵ To an extent, the importance given to decision in Badiou's theory of the subject draws from Sartre's notion of intentionality. Badiou acknowledges Sartre as one of his masters in philosophy and to an extent, Badiou's engagement with theatre is a barely disguised attempt to emulate Sartre, who is as known for his philosophy as for his playwriting.⁶ As Badiou puts it in the preface of the theatre adaptation of his novel

⁴ However, the Althusserian concept of interpellation would be the positive reverse to *Man Equals Man*, since by answering the calling the character of Galy Gay abandons in fact any subjective agency. In her analysis of Brecht's play *Man Equals Man*, Astrid Oesman remarks that "Galy Gay's change is an act that comes out of experience, an experience that literally leaves no space for the freedom of subjectivity. Galy Gay's wisdom is founded on his inability to say no, which guarantees him continuous participation." She quotes Walter Benjamin's remark about the play: "Only the 'consenting' man has any chance of changing the world." (Oesman: 2005, 96) On the contrary, for Badiou, the ability for the individual to join in the subjectivisation process lies with the ability to say yes or no. "Consenting" cannot change the world, but "deciding" and taking position can. See Oesman, Astrid, *Staging history: Brecht's social concepts of ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Benjamin's quote is from Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre? (First Version)," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1973), 8–9.

⁵ See for example, the chapter "Cruelties" in Badiou's *The Century*, pp. 112-115. Among Badiou's numerous comments on Brecht feature, in particular, an analysis of Brecht's *Verfremdung* concept in *The Century* and a discussion of Brecht's play *Galileo* in the second instalment of *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. Bertold Brecht is also a character in Badiou's play *Les Citrouilles*.

⁶ See the section on Sartre in Badiou's *Pocket Pantheon* (2009), pp. 14-35, and also *Jean-Paul Sartre*, Badiou's tribute to Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Éditions Potemkine, 1980).

L'Écharpe rouge (1979): "Following Sartre, it is the certainty that theatre was the most political art which, in 1972, pushed [him] to undertake the writing of *l'Écharpe rouge* using Claudel's *The Satin Slipper* as a blue-print. (ER, 3) However, Badiou's theatre and theory of the subject differ greatly from that of Sartre. To put it briefly, Badiou's subject bears little resemblance to Sartre's conscious subject. More importantly, Badiou opposes Sartre's notion of the collective subject as a mere psychological experience. Nevertheless, as with Althusser and Lacan, Sartre is part of the constellation which forms Badiou's lineage.

The specificity of Badiou's theory of the subject is that there is no individual subject for Badiou. In a recent interview, Badiou has described subjectivation as follows: "I name subject not the individual but what the individual is capable of, so the new possibility which can open the individual to a new subjectivity." (DIA, 4) Therefore in Badiou's theory of the subject, 'subject' does not refer to a psychological subject, a Cartesian reflexive subject nor a Kantian transcendental subject. Badiou stresses "every truth procedure prescribes a Subject of this truth, a Subject who – even empirically – cannot be reduced to an individual." (HC, 232) Therefore, he reinvents a theory of the subject which departs from what is classically defined as subject in philosophy. Nina Power remarks that for Badiou, it is clear that some subjects are not conscious (the subject of a truth in art is an artwork, for example), some are collective (the political subject) and some are dyadic (the truth of the amorous couple is their separate two-ness, not the romantic 'fusion' itself). (Power: 2006, 190) In brief, this is because firstly, Badiou's subject does not pre-exist the event and secondly, as part of the evental truth, the nature of Badiou's subject is to be in excess, since the subject of the event always exceeds the individual. Badiou gives the example of the lovers who form the subject of the event of love which not only eludes individuality, but which is also more than the sum of the two. He also explains that neither the individual militant nor the class-

subject can be the subject of the event of politics. The militant can only be part of this subject. (ET, 43) Badiou rejects the existence of a class-subject, in other words, the idea that the working class would be the subject of revolutionary politics, because any predetermined subject does not fit in with his theory of subjectivisation induced by the event. In this light, addressing Badiou's theatre provides an investigation field in order to understand how the subjective manifests itself, how subjectivisation is performed.

This thesis addresses Badiou's playwriting as a way of engaging with the subjectivisation process, via the staging of the collective subject in *L'Echarpe rouge* to the presentation of the inexistent subject of politics in the *Ahmed* tetralogy. Also, the analysis of subjective discourses in Badiou's second play *Incident at Antioch* will demonstrate that for Badiou, the subjectivisation implies a declaration rather than an interpellation. From *Theory of the Subject* to *Logics of Worlds* ([2006] 2009), the second volume of *Being and Event*, Badiou's subject evolves from being conditioned by a logic of naming to being tied to a logic of consequence: in the theory of the event, the subject becomes subject by naming a disappeared event a posteriori, while in *Logics of Worlds*, the subjectivisation process consists of abiding to the traces of the event. This thesis argues that Badiou's theory of theatre provides a fertile soil for this evolution to take place. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou's prime concern is the collective subject of politics. Badiou's theory of theatre addresses Badiou's notion of being as multiple and engages with the collective subject via the Mallarméan concept of *la Foule*.⁷

⁷ However, for Badiou collective subjectivation is not limited to theatre. Theatre serves somehow to illustrate the potential for collective emancipation, rather than being the only place where it could happen. Interestingly, to limit subjectivation to theatre alone is precisely the critique made by Peter Hallward against Jacques Rancière in his article entitled 'Jacques Rancière et la théâtrocratie ou les limites de l'égalité improvisée'. Hallward questions Rancière's statement that "any subject is a sort of provisory and local theatrical instance." (Hallward: 2006, 481) In the case of Badiou, theatre can be considered as a condition for collective subjectivation to happen as, for him, theatre demonstrates the

As far as practice is concerned, the question 'Who is we?' is a leitmotif of Badiou's first play *L'Écharpe rouge* and the same question applies to the 'we' in Badiou's request from materialism to include a theory of the subject quoted above. In *Théorie de la contradiction*, Badiou describes his own experience of May 68 as being "in the order of philosophy as well as in all the rest, an authentic road to Damascus." (ThC, 9) Badiou's position towards May 68 largely explains the specificity of his philosophical system, but the individual nature of this experience should not disguise the fact that what May 68 means, first and foremost for Badiou, is the power of the collective and the capacity for individuals to join in. Despite the singularity of his philosophical position, Badiou always positions himself as part of a movement, as part of a collective. This ranges from his involvement in L'Organisation Politique to his experience of collective creation in the theatre.

When it comes to philosophy, although Badiou rejects the notion of 'political philosophy', there is a thin line between politics and philosophy in his work as the titles of his last two books indicate, *The Communist Hypothesis* ([2009] 2010) and *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* ([2009] 2011). His first *Manifesto for Philosophy* ([1989] 1999) was a direct reference to Marx and Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, but it also evokes the theatricality of philosophical discourse. However, this thesis is first and foremost concerned with the role of theatre in Badiou's philosophy, more precisely with the way in which his theory of theatre and plays shape his philosophical concepts. I will investigate how Badiou's engagement with theatre rehearses the evolution of his theory of the subject. It is interesting to note that Badiou has not entitled his main essay on theatre *Manifesto for the Theatre* but *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. From the Greek *rhapsôdia*, in French, "rhapsodie" means an instrumental composition irregular in form, suggestive of

possibility of communism as defined by Badiou. (TO, 26)

improvisation and based on popular themes, or an epic poem. One could argue that Badiou's main essay on theatre combines both the improvisational and epic dimensions of a rhapsody, while the deployment of recurrent themes that resonate throughout the text evokes a musical composition. Although *Rhapsody for the Theatre* weaves an intricate analogy between theatre and politics, the speculative nature of most propositions differ from that of a manifesto: it is an account of a thinking process rather than a clear conceptualisation of the art of theatre.

From *Theory of the Subject* to *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou's theory of the subject has evolved along with his theory of the event and its different phases. Throughout this evolution, theatre has remained for Badiou the site of a subjectivisation process and it informs Badiou's recent theories of incorporation and ideation as detailed in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. My hypothesis is that theatre has provided Badiou with a thinking space to develop his theory of the subject. It is not a question here of following the evolution of Badiou's philosophical system step by step, but rather his train of thought through theatre. I will demonstrate that, compared to his philosophical system, Badiou's theatre proposes a similar yet non-identical articulation of the three concepts that he considers fundamental in philosophy: being, truth and subject. (MFP, 12) Badiou's theatre engages with the whole subjectivisation process. Its underlying question is not only "what is a subject?" but also "what is before and after the subject?", hence the title of this thesis, 'Alain Badiou's Transitory Theatre' as theatre somehow provides a transitory space for subjectivisation.

In Badiou's philosophical system, mathematics provide a way of articulating ontology with set theory axioms, which he defines as the science of being-qua-being, as part of his theory of the subject. It is my understanding that, to an extent, theatre also provides a site where the relationship between ontology and theory of

the subject is exposed, if not resolved. To an extent, Badiou substitutes mathematics to ontology declaring against Heidegger that the “age of poets” is closed.⁸ Yet, *Rhapsody for the Theatre* invites every contemporary theatre practitioner to reflect upon Mallarmé’s preparatory notes for his dramatic poem *Igitur*. Badiou’s use of Mallarmé in his theory of theatre has to be put in relation to other Mallarméan references throughout Badiou’s work, from his *Theory of the Subject* to his theory of the event.⁹ To an extent, the work of the symbolist poet can serve as a bridge between Badiou’s philosophy and his theory of theatre. I consider Badiou’s engagement with the question of the *evental site* in Mallarmé as key to understanding the following three-pronged problematic: how can theatre be defined as a site crossed by an idea; how can the materiality of theatre in all its components be mobilised by the premise of a truth procedure; how can the disparate elements which form the matrix of theatre be put in tension by Badiou’s dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject. From there, it is possible to define to which extent theatre could function like an evental site, as defined in *Being and Event* and redefined in *Logics of Worlds*. Then, to which extent, theatre can be considered an *ideation* site, in light of Badiou’s recent *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. Through its evolution from *Theory of the Subject* onwards via *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou defines his philosophical system as a

⁸ See the chapter entitled “The Age of Poets” in Badiou’s *Manifesto for Philosophy* (MP, 69-77)

⁹ The work of Stéphane Mallarmé is a sort of *passage obligé* in French theory. See among others: Maurice Blanchot, “Le silence de Mallarmé” in *Faux Pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), “Le mythe de Mallarmé” in *La Part du Feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), “L’expérience de Mallarmé” and “L’Expérience d’Igitur” in *L’Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), *L’Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971); Jacques Derrida, “La double séance” in *Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), Jean-Paul Sartre, Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre (ed.), *Mallarmé: la lucidité et sa face d’ombre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) and Jacques Rancière, *La Politique de la sirène* (Paris: Hachette, 1996). Georges Steiner, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault can also be added to the list. For an overview of the use of Mallarmé in philosophy, see Yves Delègue’s article, “Mallarmé, les philosophes et les gestes de la philosophie” in *Romantisme* No. 124 (2004-2).

materialist dialectics.¹⁰ (LW, 3) *Rhapsody for the Theatre* is articulated upon the dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject. To assert the materiality of theatre and how it is activated by Badiou's dialectic of theatre, implicitly challenges what could be called a miraculous reading of Badiou's event.¹¹ By this, I mean a reading of the theory failing to address fully how event and site are related. This failure consists of giving prevalence to the event to the detriment of being in *Being and Event*, rather than considering them as dialectical terms according to what Badiou defines as materialist dialectics, in other words as intrinsically related. It is important to note that according to Badiou, his main philosophical contribution does not consist of opposing *Being and Event*. What interests him is "the situational unfolding of the event, and not the transcendence or the entrenchment of the event itself." (CCBT, 252) His work as a philosopher is to

¹⁰ I will not give an historical account of the concept of dialectics here. Although I refer to Hegel, I am not directly addressing dialectics from a Hegelian, Benjaminian or Adornian point of view as such. There is undoubtedly a case for a comparison between Badiou's work and that of the aforementioned philosophers, but in the present thesis, what I am exclusively interested in is the recurrent dialectical motive in Badiou's work or what could be described as Badiou's own creative engagement with dialectics throughout his theatre theory and philosophy.

¹¹ For example, see Daniel Bensaïd, "Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event" and Peter Dews, "States of Grace : the Excess of Demand in Badiou's Ethics of Truths" in *Think again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), 94-105 and 106-119. I also refer here to reactions to conference papers I have given on Badiou's theatre: Badiou's event seems to be, at times, considered, not only in isolation from the rest of his philosophy, but also as appearing out of nowhere, as opposed, say, to what occurs in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy. In *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Badiou presents Deleuze's philosophy as diametrically opposed to his own. However, according to Hallward, "both Deleuze and Badiou are philosophers of the radically new, of the as yet unrepresentable, of experiences that call for genuinely creative thought - [...] But whereas Badiou pinpoints every location of the new in an eventual break and thereby ensures the radical discontinuity between truth and the situation in which it comes to pass, Deleuze conceives the new as in some sense folded within the infinite complexity of what is there so as to prepare the way for all that is not yet." (Hallward: 2003, 175) For Deleuze, the situation intercedes on behalf of the event, whilst, for Badiou the event ruptures the situation. However, as I will demonstrate, in Badiou's most recent work, the event is not as radically unrelated to the eventual site. Similarly, when it comes to theatre, for Badiou, there is no radical discontinuity between the truths that theatre is able to transit and the theatre site. In this respect, Badiou's theatre could perhaps be envisaged as bridging the divide between Badiou and Deleuze's philosophy. Badiou's writings on theatre could also be analysed against those of Jacques Rancière. However, this would lead to speculations that the clarity aimed at in the present thesis prevents to unfold. My feeling is that, as far as possible, the relationship between Badiou's theory of theatre and his philosophy need to be examined in a controlled environment before adding external factors to the experiment. For a clear comparative study of the philosophies of Badiou, Deleuze and Jacques Rancière in relation to art, see Bruno Besana, "Art et philosophie (Badiou, Deleuze, Rancière) : le problème du sensible à l'âge de l'ontologie de l'événement" in *Les Cahiers de l'ATP* (Nice: ATP, July 2005). See also, the interesting parallel between Badiou, Rancière and Paolo Virno in relation to the theatre audience established by Simon Bayly in his article, 'Theatre and the public - Badiou, Rancière, Virno', *Radical Philosophy* (Sept./Oct. 2009).

investigate what can be deduced, or inferred, from the point of view of the situation itself. To explain his complex engagement with the materiality of theatre seems like the perfect antidote to prevent a misreading of his philosophy as transcendent or even nihilistic, whether the notion of event or that of void is given primacy over the whole system. Whilst, according to Badiou, it is mathematics that ensures the materialist nature of his philosophical approach, it can be argued that the art of theatre equally contributes to grounding philosophy in the here and now. By investigating the materiality of Badiou's theatre it also paves the way for a reflection upon the relationship between theatre and politics and a possible definition of political theatre according to Badiou.

In order to analyse how the material and the ideal are articulated within Badiou's theory of theatre, I will examine how Mallarmé's idealism influences Badiou in the dialectics of theatre in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*: the dialectics of the Theatrical State, that of the Ethics of play and that of the Spectator-subject. The analysis of these complex concepts and of their interaction will lead me to examine the materiality of the *theatre-idea*, a syntagm coined by Badiou which seems to indicate the dual nature of theatre as material and ideal. My hypothesis is that Badiou's theatre-idea announces his concept of ideation developed in his latest *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. To verify my hypothesis, I will reflect upon, in particular, the third term of Badiou's theatre dialectic, the Spectator-subject. As explained earlier, the notion of subject will provide the thread of this thesis. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou does not elaborate on the possible links between his theory of theatre and his theory of the subject, which remain open for speculation. I believe Badiou's latest concept of incorporation to the subjectivisable body developed alongside that of ideation is contained in the very term spectator-subject. Like theatre-idea, spectator-subject is a syntagm of a lapidary nature. The

hyphen in both cases signifies a movement towards the idea or towards the subject, which I propose to investigate.

The last section will focus on Badiou's theatre practice as a playwright and examine how the Collective subject unfolds in Badiou's first play *L'Echarpe rouge*, then how the notion of the collective and politics are put at a distance in his second play *Incident at Antioch*. Bruno Bosteels concludes one of his articles on Badiou's work by stressing that "for reasons that are at least in part due to the complexity of the major texts, this philosopher has been the subject mainly of studies of an explanatory kind. The difficult task that seems to me to lie ahead involves taking up the transformative and critical kind by way of separate and localised interventions in the present that would attempt to think through our actuality in the terms provided by Badiou." (Bosteels: 2004, 164) Unearthing Badiou's proposals for theatre and in turn proposing articulations between his philosophy and theatre which supplement and, at times, elaborate upon his theory of theatre, is a first step in the direction highlighted by Bosteels when it comes to theatre studies.¹² This is what I am aiming to do in this thesis. Looking for the traces of Badiou's latest philosophical concepts by excavating his theatre theory and practice amounts to analysing, and at times, turning Badiou against Badiou. Undeniably, there is a risk of amalgamating Badiou's theatre and philosophy. However, with his concepts of *condition* and *suture*, Badiou provides a way out. For him, arts, science, politics and love condition philosophy. In brief, and I will return to this further on, they make philosophy possible, yet they cannot stand in for philosophy and are strictly dissociated from its procedures. When the distinction is erased, Badiou talks of a suturing of philosophy to one of its

¹² At a conference in 2007, Badiou explained that the bird and the spade symbolise the two possible attitudes towards the event, that of *Being and Event* and that of *Logics of Worlds*, whether the search for the event consists of staring at the sky or of turning the earth over. ('Autour de *Logiques des Mondes* d'Alain Badiou', 24th November 2006, video recording last accessed on 20/11/2010: <http://www.diffusion.ens.fr/index.php?res=conf&idconf=1596#>)

conditions. The concepts of condition and suture provide a sufficient safeguard ensuring that a critical position is tenable between Badiou's philosophy and Badiou's theatre. Before turning to his theory of theatre, I will therefore acknowledge the risks of suturing philosophy and theatre.

In his article entitled 'Théâtre et Philosophie' (2000), Badiou stresses that the art of theatre has never occupied a privileged status among philosophers and that among contemporary philosophers, theatre is less reflected upon than other art forms and states that men of theatre, insiders such as Constantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Brecht, and Antoine Vitez among others have in fact authored modern texts on theatre. However, Badiou states that from Plato onwards, the position of the philosopher towards theatre has always been equivocal. To illustrate his point, he mentions the case of: Nietzsche, who denounces theatre as plebeian simulacra, but meditates upon Aeschylus or that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who writes an opera while opposing the building of a theatre in Geneva. Badiou concludes, "the link between theatre and philosophy is tense, paradoxical, probably as much decisive as obscure." (TP, 134-135) In the lineage of Sartre, Badiou does not seem to partake in the equivocalness at play in the relationship between theatre and philosophy. On the contrary he appears to embrace the art of theatre without restraint as a wholesome object of speculative thinking.

In the preface to his translation of *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Bosteels writes: "one of the most intriguing aspects of this treatise is the way in which it moves between philosophy and theatre to the point of opening up a space of indiscernibility between the two. (RT, 183) I agree with Bosteels, but would rather say that Badiou's speculation upon theatre opens a transitory space filtering his philosophical concepts. This is true for Badiou's theory of theatre, but also for his plays. As pointed out by Bosteels, some of the dialogue between 'Me' and the

'Empiricist' could well be part of the *Ahmed* tetralogy. Likewise, some scenes from *Ahmed se fâche* (1995) or *Les Citrouilles* (1996) would not be out of place among Badiou's theoretical writings on theatre. While Badiou meditates on other arts, in particular, poetry, music, architecture and painting, theatre is granted a privileged status within his work. However, while Badiou resorts to theatre at times to explain his theory throughout his work, examples from poetry appears more often in his work and analyses of architecture, music and painting are also largely contributing to his philosophy. Political examples - which abound in Badiou's writing, for example his analysis of the Paris Commune (1871), have to be set apart as although Badiou rejects the notion of political philosophy, politics remains the strongest condition of his political system, despite Badiou often claiming that mathematics occupies such a role.¹³ Theatre is also given a particular place to the point that Badiou has developed a separate theory of theatre. Besides his six plays, *L'Écharpe rouge*, *Incident at Antioch* and the *Ahmed* tetralogy, Badiou has extensively written on theatre, as attested to in his *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, his 'Theses on Theater' (IN, 72-77), the aforementioned essay 'Théâtre et Philosophie', a preface to an anthology of French anarchist theatre (2001), several essays, interviews and discussions on theatre and part of his work on Beckett which focuses mainly on prose and not theatre.¹⁴

¹³ On Badiou's analysis of The Paris Commune, see for example "The Paris Commune: A Political Declaration on Politics" in *Polemics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London-New-York: Verso, 2006) 281-2; see also his recent essay *The Communist Hypothesis* (London-New-York: Verso, 2010)

¹⁴ Badiou's romanopéra *L'Écharpe rouge* (1979) was adapted for the stage in collaboration with the director Antoine Vitez, the composer Georges Aperghis and the scenographer Yannis Kokkos and premiered it at the Opéra de Lyon in 1984. The play *L'Incident d'Antioche* written by Badiou in 1984 is unpublished and has not been staged to this day. I am very grateful to Alain Badiou to have granted me access to it. The *Ahmed* tetralogy is composed of *Ahmed le subtil : farce en trois actes*, written in 1984 and created in 1994 (Arles: Actes Sud, 1994); *Ahmed philosophe : vingt-deux petites pièces pour les enfants et pour les autres*, followed by *Ahmed se fâche : comédie en quatre mouvements*, both written and created in 1995 (Arles: Actes Sud, 1997); *Les Citrouilles*, written and created in 1996 (Arles: Actes Sud, 1996). *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* is subtitled 'Court traité philosophique' and has been translated by Bruno Bosteels in *Theatre Survey* (2008). It is a collection of short paragraphs

Badiou reiterates his love for the theatre throughout his writing from advocating tax rebates for regular theatre-goers in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* to proclaiming in *Les Citrouilles* via his character Ahmed "One must love theatre. One must desire theatre."¹⁵ (LC, 107) Tellingly, his essay, *L'Éloge de l'amour*, includes a chapter on the love of theatre. Badiou's playwriting draws largely from theatre tradition: *L'Écharpe rouge* and *Incident at Antioch* are adaptations of Claudel's *Le Soulier de satin* and *La Ville*, *Ahmed le subtil* is adapted from Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, while his last play, *Les Citrouilles* is based on Aristophanes' *The Frogs* and consists of a collage of more or less distorted quotes from Brecht, Claudel and Pirandello.¹⁶ Badiou's theatre reasserts the validity of the most traditional form of theatre and to an extent, the last opus of his *Ahmed* tetralogy is close to a saturation of the theatre form with Ahmed visiting theatre's inferno desperately seeking Molière's character Scapin. It is legitimate to wonder why the philosopher of the event whose work revolves around the notion of change, does not experiment with new forms of theatre. However, whilst the dramatic structures are borrowed from Claudel, Molière or Aristophanes, the dramatic content is utterly different. His plays are not re-readings of canonical plays, but rather new trajectories. His playwriting consists of exploring existing forms of theatre, rather than experimenting with new ones.¹⁷ Despite his trust in the theatre form, Badiou

mainly addressing the relationship between theatre and the State, through the dialectics of the State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator; Badiou has also published a short essay which focuses on Brecht as a sequel to the treatise in the review *Théâtre Public* (1992). Three interviews of Badiou on theatre have been published: 'Un Opérateur théâtral' with Chantal Boiron (1996), 'Du Côté d'une didactique lisible' with Olivier Neveux (2007) and 'A Theatre of Operations' with Elie During as a preamble to the performance art exhibition *Theater Without Theater* catalogue (2007). Badiou has also published an essay on Sartre's *The Condemned of Altona* (2005).

¹⁵ "Il faut aimer le théâtre. Il faut vouloir le théâtre" (LC, 107)

¹⁶ In French, the title of Aristophanes' play is *Les Grenouilles*, of which Badiou's play *Les Citrouilles* is an approximate homonym.

¹⁷ This is in line with his philosophy which is rather classical in its form. Bruno Bosteels notices that each of Badiou's main philosophical opuses adopt an old-seasoned format in the history of philosophy: *Theory of the Subject* takes the form of a Lacanian-inspired seminar, *Being and Event* of 37 Cartesian

claims to have a certain detachment towards theatre as a solitary amateur, a spectator who doesn't belong to the *milieu*. (Neveux: 2007, 179-180) Badiou has only worked in close collaboration with the directors Antoine Vitez and Christian Schiaretti. His work with Vitez in 1984 has inspired him to write *Ahmed Le Subtil* during that same year and rewrite *Incident at Antioch*. Also most texts assembled in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* were previously published between 1985-1989 in the review *L'Art du théâtre*, edited by Antoine Vitez and George Banu, which according to Badiou has "fostered [his] taste for writing, as a spectator and as a playwright, about the strangeness of theatre." (RT, 235)¹⁸ In 1996, Badiou reflects upon his engagement with theatre:

I had the conviction that theatre was the most appropriate artistic form to address the notion of conflict, through dialogue, confrontations... But my encounter with Vitez has been of prime importance to convince me that theatre had very little to do with a solitary act of writing. With him, I discovered true theatricality: the question of the actor, the direction, the acting, etc. And I must admit that I cannot but conceive my theatrical activity in this connection with the real of theatre. (OT, 52)

By 'real of theatre', Badiou means the fabric of theatre, what is specific to theatre, the presence of the actor, acting and directing. Before Vitez's decision to adapt *L'Écharpe rouge* for the stage in 1984, Badiou engaged with theatre solely from the outside. It is not the complexity of the art and craft of theatre which interests him,

or post-Cartesian meditations, while *Logics of Worlds* recalls Spinoza's *Ethics*, with its seven 'books', several 'scholia' and a list of 'propositions' at the end (Bosteels: 2009, xxvii)

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that it was Schiaretti's collaborator, Jean-Pierre Jourdain who suggested staging the play at the Comédie de Reims in 1994 because he was working with Vitez at the Théâtre National de Chaillot when Vitez gave a reading of *Ahmed Le Subtil* in 1987. (OT, 52)

but what it might have in common with politics. Hence, he rejects the novelistic form for *L'Écharpe rouge* to retrieve the immanence of politics through dialogue.¹⁹ *L'Écharpe rouge* is a *romanopéra*, all in dialogue as an attempt to capture the intensity of militantism in a written form. However, Badiou is well aware that trying to address political issues through theatre can become dogmatic and he soon realises that the 'real of theatre' and consequently, the immanence of politics lies rather with the fabric of theatre and the question it raises regarding representation.

To an extent, since the writing of *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou's involvement with theatre is the result of a dialogue with a theatre director: his work with Vitez encouraged Badiou to rewrite *Incident at Antioch* and to write *Ahmed le subtil*; his collaboration with Christian Schiaretti who directed *Ahmed le subtil* led to the writing of the three other plays of the *Ahmed* tetralogy. In an interview with Chantal Boiron, Badiou explains that apart from the first play, the rest of the tetralogy has been written for a predetermined theatrical situation, with a group of actors, a director and a specific theatre configuration based on the Comedia Dell'Arte. (OT, 54) Thus Badiou's involvement with theatre has become a collaborative process more driven by the components of theatre than those of politics.

Before collaborating with Vitez from the early 1980s, Badiou's involvement with theatre was of a different nature, more in keeping with the idea of theatre as a political event. In the 1970s, Badiou was an active member of Groupe Foudre, a group of political activists advocating direct intervention to denounce reactionary

¹⁹ Badiou undertook the writing of *L'Écharpe rouge* in 1972 after he had abandoned his third novel *Bestiaires*, which was part of a trilogy comprising *Almagestes* (1964) and *Portulans* (1967). For his last novel, *Calme bloc, ici bas*, published in 1997, he has also resorted at length to dialogue, which are theatrical in their nature. Part of this novel has been published in *Polemics* (182-187). For a presentation of Badiou's novels, see Emily Apter's article "Laws of the 70's: Badiou's Revolutionary Untimeliness" in *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 29 (2008), 1885-1904.

tendencies in the arts.²⁰ Badiou was one of the anonymous redactors of *Feuille Foudre*, 'a journal for Marxist-Leninist interventions in the arts and culture'. The collective aimed to flay the films and plays they deemed to be revisionist. This action consisted of interrupting plays or films to provoke a live debate among the spectators. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou mentions the *Green Berets* starring John Wayne as an obvious target for the collective. (RT, 188) However, in relation to his distinction between theatre audience and individual cinema-goer, Badiou states that "[c]ultural-political intervention, which was what the Groupe Foudre dreamed of, has only one possible destination: the theatre." (RT, 188-89) One intervention of the Groupe Foudre is particularly relevant here as the play targeted was *L'Âge d'Or* directed by Ariane Mnouchkine in 1975. This pamphlet published in *Feuille Foudre* announces the complex relationship in Badiou's theory of theatre between theatre and history on one hand and theatre and politics on the other. Badiou's theory of theatre is shaped by his involvement in Groupe Foudre's political actions upon theatre which is combined with a more theoretical approach to theatre via French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé.

Mallarmé's symbolism cannot eclipse the political nature of his writings and it seems that via Mallarmé, Badiou is able, at least theoretically, to reconcile his militancy and his ideal theatre. In *Theory of the Subject* and *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Mallarmé provides Badiou with a series of axioms to address the links between politics and theatre. Also, Mallarmé provides the strongest link between

²⁰ An extract of *Feuille Foudre* describes the impact on performances of the Groupe Foudre's actions: "When it comes to the intervention in itself, the audience divides in two. The way of the right, fiercely opposed to the interruption of the show and to the havoc thus caused, consists of refusing that an active, in certain cases offensive, position could be taken towards a show in general. This attitude is individualist and implies a certain conception of art and of theatre: each spectator is free to keep its opinion to himself; any organised, elaborated point of view cannot be but dogmatic or terrorist. The other way recognises our right to express our point of view: 'If you have an opinion, we accept that you express it, on the condition that you do not prevent the show from happening and that you intervene only when the audience will have seen it' (a position which does not address the legitimacy of antagonist intervention during a show.)" (Groupe Foudre: 1975, 20)

Badiou's theory of theatre and his theory of the event, mostly because Badiou turns to Mallarmé to address the irrepresentability of the event. Militantism and what I would call Mallarméism are two poles of Badiou's theatre: Badiou's political involvement pulls theatre towards immanence, the here and now, and the materialist dialectic, while his reflection upon Mallarmé pulls theatre towards the incomplete, the to-come, the ideal. Unlike Mallarmé, Badiou does not postpone theatre indefinitely, but nevertheless considers Theatre to have "almost vanished, so that it is extremely difficult to discover it and to sustain it." (RT, 198) However, as early as *Theory of the Subject*, superseding Mallarmé, Badiou comments upon the superiority of theatre among the arts. (TS, 84) Throughout *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou explains that theatre is the superior art form because it engages most directly with politics. Badiou appropriates Mallarmé's remark that theatre creates a collective present, which is what Badiou considers to be the sole aim of true politics. This is something recurrent in his writing about theatre.

In Badiou's case, the intricate relationship between theatre and politics adds to the complexity of the interaction between philosophy and theatre. While the other arts provide examples to reinforce the arguments, Badiou's theory of theatre provides him with a fertile ground where he can explore philosophical concepts. However, unlike the aforementioned philosophers, theatre's status within Badiou's theory is far from equivocal. Not only is there a sustained porosity throughout his work between philosophy, politics and theatre, but also because Badiou is at once a theoretician of theatre and a playwright, his work sustains a rift between theory and practice. If there is tension between theatre and philosophy within Badiou's work, it is because of the three-way dialogue in his plays between theatre, philosophy and politics, which makes any analysis of his theatre irrelevant without considering it in relation to his philosophy and politics.

This thesis is not an attempt to reconcile Badiou's theory of theatre and his philosophy nor his practice of theatre with his theory of theatre, but an attempt to understand how theatre could inform his philosophy and how, in return, the art of theatre could perhaps be redefined by sections of Badiou's philosophical system not explicitly related to theatre in the first place. This thesis is not about the theatricality of Badiou's philosophy. For theatre and performance critics, and more generally for the Anglo-Saxon world, Badiou is first and foremost the philosopher of the event. However, I will not dwell on the performative nature of the event, but instead focus on the intricate link between theatre and politics, which Badiou insists upon throughout his work, and I will address theatre as materialist dialectics. Two theories developed in Badiou's writings on theatre inform this reading: the dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject on one hand and the theatre-idea on the other. Badiou's overarching theory of the subject is central to understanding how his theory of theatre engages with the taking place and subjective embodiment of truths before he addresses this question in *Logics of Worlds*. Badiou's theatre is transitory on two levels, hence the title of this thesis: firstly, it serves as a guiding thread for Badiou's thinking and secondly, it somehow rehearses political change.

Methodology

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou's series of provocations is interrupted at regular intervals by a fictional dialogue between 'Me' and 'The Empiricist.' Throughout, Badiou resists the Empiricist's pressing demands for illustrations and examples. It is only reluctantly that Badiou gives a number of actors' names and of theatre productions, which more or less correspond to what Badiou expects from theatre. The examples are all taken from state-funded theatre productions in France in the 1980s. Badiou's self-confessed difficulty in illustrating his theory of theatre comes mainly from the fact that *Rhapsody for the Theatre* is more of a manifesto than a theoretical treatise.

From paragraph to paragraph, his jotted down reflections delineate Badiou's proposals for theatre. There are recurrent themes organised around the three dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject, but there are also many points which he does not elaborate upon. As I will demonstrate, for Badiou, theatre serves as a canvas upon which he can pin down premises of notions he will later develop in his philosophy. To an extent, this is also true for Badiou's 'Theses on Theater' written after Badiou's major opus *Being and Event*. Moreover, rather than being based upon close analysis of existing forms of theatre, Badiou's theory of theatre largely addresses a theatre-to-come. In this respect, his theory is very difficult to illustrate with examples drawn from past or contemporary theatre. Also, for reasons which will soon be pin pointed and explored, it is problematic when engaging with Badiou's thought to apply philosophical concepts to theatre.

I am placed in the same situation as Badiou when confronted with highly abstract questions: while my engagement with his theories calls for examples, the

nature of my work has to resist, to an extent, the empiricist's call because of the risk of merely illustrating complex concepts and thus somehow disengaging from the task at hand rather than explaining those concepts thoroughly. More importantly it has to resist because of the danger of effecting what Badiou calls a suture of art and philosophy, that is, forcing philosophical concepts upon theatre or performance. Therefore, this thesis focuses on how theatre informs philosophy in the case of Badiou and not on how Badiou's theories can be applied to theatre. Consequently, the field of investigation is restricted to the role occupied by Badiou's theory of theatre and playwriting within his philosophical system. This means that I will not engage with contemporary theatre or performance examples to illustrate Badiou's theory of theatre other than the rare examples Badiou refers to himself, except when I challenge other Badiouan readings and the illustrations they provide.

Badiou does not come from within the world of theatre, his involvement in theatre is occasional and sporadic, mainly the result of an encounter with French director Antoine Vitez. As a result, his theory of theatre remains philosophical rather than practical. His suggestions about acting, through his notion of an ethics of play, do not engage with acting techniques as such, but rather propose a philosophical frame to the art of acting. It would be very interesting to supplement Badiou's proposals with a technical framework. It is striking that Badiou's notion of the actor as deprived of interiority resonates with Meyerhold's theatre theory of biomechanics or with Beckett dramatic work among others. However, the aim of this thesis is not to link Badiou theory of theatre to other theatre theories, but to remain as much as possible within Badiou's philosophy and his own work for the theatre. To map Badiou's theatre within his own work seems a necessary step prior to considering a dialogue between Badiou and other thinkers of theatre. However, I will only point out similarities or differences with other theories when it is necessary for the clarity

of my argument but will refrain from doing so when such correspondence might take away the focus from Badiou's own work.

As far as Badiou's plays are concerned, I am focusing on Badiou's role as a playwright. My approach to the plays is exegetical and it relies upon close analytical readings of his texts. Because my investigation is precisely to analyse how Badiou's theatre and his theory of theatre can inform his theory of the subject, my thinking operates from Badiou's theatre towards his philosophy and not from philosophy towards theatre. As a result, when looking at Badiou's plays, I do not provide analyses of performances nor dramaturgical readings of the text and only provide textual analyses insofar as they inform processes of subjectivisation in both *L'Écharpe Rouge* and *Incident at Antioch*. For these two case-studies, I do not provide an analysis of the mise-en-scène nor of the acting. One of the reasons for this is that there has only been one production of *L'Écharpe Rouge* since 1984, which I could only access on video, while *Incident at Antioch* has never been staged. Therefore, I am looking at these two plays as theatrical poems in order to trace Badiou's premises for his theory of the subject as exposed in the plays, while being aware of other questions that might arise regarding their form.

Badiou's last four plays form the *Ahmed* tetralogy, which can be described as a vast theatrical mise-en-abîme. As mentioned earlier, in the same way that the dialogue between "Me" and "the Empiricist" in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* could be part of the *Ahmed* tetralogy, the four plays serve as additions to Badiou's theory of theatre. Therefore, while Badiou's first two plays are the objects of separate case studies in order to highlight the intricate links between theatre, philosophy and politics in Badiou's work, I analyse the four plays of the Ahmed cycle, in parallel with Badiou's theory of theatre.

Apart from *Incident at Antioch*, Badiou's plays have not been translated into English. I have provided my own translation for the extracts from *L'Écharpe Rouge* and the *Ahmed* tetralogy I am referring to. For *Incident at Antioch*, I am grateful to Susan Spitzer to have shared her translation with me before publication (Columbia University Press, forthcoming) I have also provided the original texts in notes because the translations, including Spitzer's, might at times seem obscure. This is due to the hermetic nature of the original text which draws from Mallarmé's symbolism and betrays Badiou's attempt to reinvent a dramatic language.

In *The Century*, Badiou uses Brecht as a paradigm to describe the overarching role of dialectics in the shaping of twentieth-century politics. However, in Badiou's theory of theatre Brecht's place is restricted to a brief analysis of Galileo in an addendum to *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. While in his theory of theatre, Badiou does not form a dialogue with Brecht as such, in his last play to date, *Les Citrouilles*, Brecht becomes a character and Badiou quotes and distorts quotes from numerous plays by Brecht. Brecht's presence is at once imposing and elusive in Badiou's theatre and calls for a critical comparison of the two theatre theoreticians. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. The same is true with Claudel's influence upon Badiou. Claudel also appears as a character in *Les Citrouilles* where Badiou quotes at length or distorts quotes from his plays. I will not establish an exegetical comparison between Claudel's texts and Badiou's. Instead, I have focused on Claudel's influence upon Badiou in terms of the symbolic treatment of space in *Le Soulier de Satin*, which Badiou adapts for *L'Echarpe rouge*. As for Claudel's *La Ville*, Badiou himself has acknowledged Claudel's influence in his own staging of a subjectivisation process in *Incident at Antioch*. However, in my analysis of this play, I focus on how *Incident at Antioch* is part Badiou's work on Saint Paul. Therefore, I am not comparing Claudel's plays and Badiou's adaptations, but simply tracing the idea of subjectivisation in them both.

Badiou has published extensively to clarify his philosophical position vis-à-vis other philosophies. In particular, he has addressed the differences between his work and that of Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière whilst acknowledging at the same time, or with hindsight, that his work bore some resemblance with that of other thinkers.²¹ Attempting to isolate Badiou from the rest of continental philosophy is an impossible task. However, to demonstrate how Badiou's work is radically different or strangely similar to that of other thinkers is not the aim of this thesis. This is the reason why I have limited the incursions into other philosophical systems when engaging with Badiou's thinking. Such comparisons might be the object of further studies, but what follows can be described simply as a stepping stone which lays down the role of theatre in the shaping of Badiou's philosophy. However, I have made two exceptions: Badiou's acknowledgement that it was Sartre who pushed him to write for theatre in the first place and my analysis of Badiou's play *L'Écharpe rouge* as myth calls for a brief use of some elements of Sartre's theory of theatre. Similarly my reading of *L'Écharpe rouge* as a materialist transposition of Claudel's Baroque aesthetics calls for an engagement with Walter Benjamin's notion of the Baroque allegory. Nevertheless, as I will explain in more detail further on, these parallels are limited: Sartre has very little influence upon Badiou when it comes to the latter's theory of the subject even when articulated or rehearsed by theatre. Despite what some deconstructive readings of Badiou's theory of the event might argue, his materialist dialectics resists, if not rebukes, Benjamin's notion of the messianic.

Finally, I would like to stress that I am aware given its philosophical focus, that my approach deviates from the seeming trend in Theatre or Performance

²¹ See for example, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. (Paris: Hachette, 1997) or Badiou's critique of Rancière's *La Politique de la sirène* in *Logics of Worlds*, 562-4.

Studies, which consists rather of the building of argument upon the application of philosophical concepts to theatre, and where arguably the forcing of philosophy upon theatre remains the norm. In these circumstances, it is necessary to start my engagement with Badiou's thinking with his notions of suture, condition and inaesthetics in the following section.

I - Risks of suture between theatre and philosophy

The notion of *suture* is key in Badiou's philosophy, in particular in order to understand Badiou's articulation of philosophy and its conditions.²² In *Conditions*, Badiou argues that art, politics, love and mathematics operate as the four generic 'conditions' of philosophy itself because they generate events, which in turn induce thinking. According to Badiou, true politics is rare and a matter of spontaneous collective mobilisation; the mobility of politics is diametrically opposed to the staticity of parliamentary political systems. True love is the consequence of an unpredictable encounter, which does not abide by the conventional representation of sexual roles. True art is the result of innovation and breaks away from tradition. Finally, mathematics is where thought is confronted to pure form and can therefore reveal being per se. The four generic conditions of philosophy create sites for the production of truths.

In *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou explains that a suture occurs when "philosophy *delegates* its functions to one or other of its conditions, handing over the whole of thought to *one* generic procedure." (MFP, 61) This means that when philosophy is sutured to one of the four truth procedures, or conditions, it loses its independence and therefore its ability to distinguish, extract and categorise the truths produced by art, politics, love or mathematics. To put it simply, when philosophy loses its distance from its object, it surrenders its analytical power. The consequences of such a suture can be disastrous as much for philosophy as for its

²² Badiou discusses this notion at length in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 61-7. The term 'suture' evokes Lacanian terminology. Jacques Alain Miller points out that although Lacan does not name the concept of suture explicitly, it is recurring in his system. See Miller, Jacques-Alain Miller, "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)" in *Screen* 18, Winter 1977-78, 24-34. However, for Lacan, the suturing occurs between the subject and its discourse. Nevertheless, there is a link to Badiou's notion of suture which refers to philosophy becoming a mere discourse on art, politics, science or love. For a critical engagement with this notion, see for example Gabriel Riera, 'For an Ethics of Mystery' especially the section "On wounds, sutures, and stitches (points): a relation to the fourth type?" (Riera: 2005, 72-85)

condition. Without any critical distance, rather than having the potential to produce something new, which can be considered as an event by philosophy and thus pointing to some truths, the conditions become atrophied, too anchored in self-referentiality to regenerate.

Bosteels describes the notion of 'suture' as "the process whereby philosophy abdicates its autonomous task and delegates the pursuit of truth to a single one of the four truth procedures that serve as its conditions." (Bosteels: 2009, 334) The role of philosophy is independent from its conditions, art, science, politics or love. These processes create events, which are endorsed by philosophy to extract truths from them. To ensure that truth does not become totalitarian, philosophy must ensure that a single condition does not hold the truth, but that truths circulate among the different truth procedures. As pointed out by Justin Clemens, for Badiou, a suture is "the principal way in which philosophy forecloses its own possibilities, forgetting its own proper limits and functions". (Clemens: 2001, 213) Philosophy does not hold truths but only reveals them and it cannot either dictate to its conditions how to create events without becoming dogmatic. The danger for the conditions of philosophy to become subjugated by philosophy is greater for politics and art since, unlike love and mathematics, they are generally in closer proximity in terms of language to philosophy.²³ For example, Badiou sees in Stalinist dialectical materialism a complete suture of philosophy to politics. (DO, 98) The identification of politics and philosophy leads to a self-justified dogma, which results in a criminal police State.²⁴ Similarly, in art, the suture would lead to a normative discourse; philosophy would establish a norm rather than looking to identify a truth produced by art. The artistic and philosophical discourses would merge into that norm or

²³ Bruno Bosteels provides an example of suture for each condition and mentions the Marxist suture of philosophy and politics, the Positivist suture for science, the cases of Nietzsche and Heidegger for poetry, and suggests Levinas for love. (Bosteels: 2009, 334)

²⁴ In *D'un Désastre obscur*, Badiou notices that Plato warns of the same danger in superimposing politics and philosophy in book 10 of *Laws*. (DO, 43).

ideal, and ultimately philosophy would perish as a result of the fusion. According to Badiou, this is how philosophy is proclaimed dead after Nietzsche and Heidegger because of the suture of philosophy and poetry.²⁵ Also, philosophy cannot attach itself to one condition in particular, but always looks for new possibilities to engage with truths through its conditions, in order to define what a truth is. This role assigned to philosophy by Badiou is reiterated in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, where Badiou declares that the essence of philosophy is to construct a new concept of truth, or truths. (SMP, 117-123) This is the reason why in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou investigates many heterogeneous domains in support of his theory: for example, the rebellion of slaves led by Spartacus, prehistoric painting, serial music or the work of architect Toni Costa for Brasilia. According to Gabriel Riera, by suture, Badiou means “an interruption of philosophy’s ability to assure the compossibility (*compossibilité*) of the truths produced by the four generic procedures.” (Riera: 2005, 68)²⁶ That means that philosophy must ensure that a plurality of truths can coexist.

To denounce the risk of suturing philosophy to one of its conditions, Badiou has written two treatises: *Metapolitics* to try to de-suture politics and philosophy and *Handbook of Inaesthetics* in an attempt to de-suture art and philosophy.²⁷ In the latter, Badiou defines ‘in-aesthetics’ as follows:

By “inaesthetics”, I understand a relationship of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation,

²⁵ See the chapter “Philosophy’s Existence” in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. (SMP, 64-72)

²⁶ Riera defines *compossibility* as “a term that indicates the quality of being compossible; a classic philosophical concept that refers to one thing’s possibility of existing alongside others at the same time. In Leibniz, the term expresses a relation in which two possible terms or events can coexist without the opposition of one of the terms entailing the suppression of the other.” (Riera : 2005, 69)

²⁷ Regarding the risk of suturing philosophy to politics, see especially the chapter ‘Against ‘Political philosophy’ in *Metapolitics*. (MT, 10-25)

inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art. (IN, XIV)

Here, Badiou posits that art produces events with truths that can be worked out by philosophy. However, philosophy cannot dictate to art what truth to produce. Philosophy cannot interfere with art apart from extracting truths from works of art in order to put them into perspective. For Badiou, the aesthetic position is to consider that art is blind to the truth it can produce and that philosophy is able to restore art's integral truth.²⁸ For Badiou, not only is there no such thing as an integral truth, but also truths are produced by particular means. There are no artistic truths in an absolute sense, but theatre-truth, cinema-truth, painting-truth that can only be produced by theatre, cinema or painting. In other words, for Badiou, art is an independent domain of thought, which produces truths that philosophy borrows in order to conceptualise, that is, in order to produce philosophical concepts or ideas.

Emblematic of Badiou's position vis-à-vis aesthetics is the problematic relationship between his philosophy and language. There is a paradox in his way of proceeding: Badiou opposes philosophy's 'linguistic turn', which can be described as the affirmation of the importance of language for philosophy.²⁹ This is clear in *Conditions*, where he rejects the 'linguistic turn' and proclaims to uphold the position of truth against what he deems poststructuralist and postmodernist sophistry. (CN, 129-144) However, his position seems untenable, for a resistance to the importance of language for philosophy is at odds with his work as a novelist and playwright, and also as a commentator of Mallarmé. As Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues, Badiou

²⁸ This conception of aesthetics is based upon Hegelian aesthetics, which for Badiou remains the uncontested paradigm for aesthetics. For a clear account of the relationship between Badiou and Hegel, see Bruno Bosteels' article, 'Badiou and Hegel' in Justin Clemens and A. J. Barlett (eds) *Badiou: Key Concepts* (London: Acumen, 2010).

²⁹ In brief, there are two versions of the 'turn': in its Wittgensteinian dimension, any philosophical problem is a grammatical problem; in its Heideggerian dimension, it is language that speaks, not (or not primordially) man. Badiou reiterates his position towards the linguistic turn in philosophy throughout his work. For an explanation of Badiou's position towards the linguistic turn see Peter Hallward, *Badiou, a Subject to Truth* (Hallward: 2003, 159)

somehow transcends this paradox since, for Badiou, “philosophy operates by subtraction, and what the subtraction mainly achieves is a breaking of the surface of language, the surface upon which the Sophist has established himself.” (Lecerclé: 2004, 208) The operation of subtraction amounts to extracting philosophical discourse from the poem. In the case of Badiou, ‘breaking the surface of language’ consists also in transposing Mallarmé’s poems into prose. The unfolding of Mallarmé’s complex syntax allows Badiou to see through the seeming opacity of language. Badiou calls modern sophistry the relativist stance towards language, which consists, in the case of Mallarmé, of declaring his poetry opaque and thus endlessly open to partial interpretation. On the contrary, for Badiou, there is no polysemy in Mallarmé. (TS, 74) Thus rather than leaving the poem unturned, philosophy’s role is to dig up traces of truth’s passage through it. To an extent, the operation of subtraction amounts to a clearing of the words, once their meaning is established, to distinguish truths’ imprints in the poem. Could a similar Mallarméan operation take place in the case of theatre? Could theatre’s truth procedures also amount to a breaking of the surface of signs, of theatre components (set, actors, spectators...)? Could the materiality of theatre be subtracted for philosophy to contemplate the truths theatre might produce? Ultimately, how can theatre escape being ascribed how to produce truths in the play written by a philosopher?

In the case of Badiou, this last question seems even more problematic since besides being a playwright, Badiou is also a theoretician of theatre. To an extent, Badiou’s theatre theory and practice are concomitant: whilst *Rhapsody for the Theatre* stems from Badiou’s collaboration with Vitez during the 1980s, it is interesting to note that Badiou’s ‘Theses on Theater’ are published in 1995 just after the first production, of Badiou’s play *Ahmed le subtil* (ten years after its writing) and at the same time as *Ahmed philosophe*.³⁰ Badiou has declared that he undertook

³⁰ Badiou’s ‘Theses on Theater’ were first published in the review *Cahiers – Comédie Française*

the writing of the second part of the *Ahmed* tetralogy because he was encouraged by the success of *Ahmed le subtil*. However, *Ahmed philosophe* stands out compared to the other plays of the tetralogy by its format and its content. The play looks like an exhaustive program for a course in philosophy and covers what Badiou engages with in his philosophical treatises. In the play's preface, Badiou explains the play's subtitle as 'twenty-two little plays for children and others' by stating that "To equip children with all the resources of language and thought, to do so with laughter, is yet another way of tricking the powers that be."³¹ (AP, 7) Badiou poses as a new Socrates who aims to subvert youth through theatre and philosophy.

The 34 sequences of *Ahmed philosophe* unfold as follows: The Nothing, The Event, The Language, The Site, Cause and Effect, Politics, The Multiple, Chance, Poetry, The Subject, Macro and Micro, The Infinite, Time, Truth, The Nation, Death, The Subject (2), Ethics, The Society, God, Truth (2), Philosophy, The Decision, The Same and the Other, The Family, The Terror, The Finality, Mathematics, Nature, The Idea, The Absurd, The Repetition, The Origin, The Contradiction. Each sequence is either a monologue or a dialogue with caricatured representatives of French society such as an illegal migrant-worker, the communist mayor of a suburban town, an extreme right-wing sympathiser, a local centrist MP. While Badiou's authorial presence is omnipresent, Ahmed's approach is systematically empirical in his attempt to teach the other characters and the audience philosophy. Ahmed engages with some key philosophical questions by resorting to burlesque, farcical and incongruous situations or anecdotes before reaching a level of conceptualisation. For example, sequence 30 entitled '*The idea*' stages Ahmed and a character called the urban demon. The demon has found a dog collar with a name

(1995), then reproduced in *Petit Manuel d'inesthétique*. (Paris: Seuil, 1998), translated as *Handbook Of Inaesthetics* by Alberto Toscano (Stanford Uni. Press, 2004) 72-77.

³¹ Apart from *Incident at Antioch*, Badiou's plays have not been translated to date. The translations of the quotes from the plays are all mine. I indicate the original text in notes. "Armer les enfants de toutes les ressources de la langue et de la pensée, le faire dans la puissance du rire, c'est jouer un bon tour supplémentaire aux puissants et aux installés." (AP, 7)

and address in the rubbish bin of Ahmed's neighbour whose old dog has died. The demon's idea is to lure his neighbour's new dog into his flat, bash it to death with a hammer, then replace its collar with the one previously found in the bin and place the dead dog on his neighbour's doormat. This would be carried out so that the neighbour would be under the impression (upon discovering the carcass and checking the collar) that he has the spectre of his old dog he just buried in front of him under the semblance of his new dog. Against all expectation, the scene literally operates *a reductio ad absurdum* to engage with Plato's theory of Ideas: the demon argues that Plato is wrong in saying that ideas are 'floating in the air', celestial and invisible, whilst in fact they can be found in rubbish bins.

In another sequence entitled 'Subject 1', Ahmed resorts to Descartes and improvises on Descartes' *Larvatus prodeo* and the subject's use of masks.³² Kant is again summoned in sequence 27 where Ahmed and Camille, his despondent love interest, experiment with the concept of *finality*. Ahmed asks Camille to cross the stage diagonally back and forth while both characters argue about the finality of her movement. Their demonstration leads them to reflect upon Kant's notion of the beautiful. Ahmed provides the example of a sunset that seems to be purposefully beautiful, but which is in fact deprived of any purpose, and concludes that Camille's finality is to have no finality at all, hence her beauty. Ahmed's definition of the beautiful is a take on Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and his definition of beauty.³³

The demonstrative quality of the scenes evokes Plato's dialogues. The Socratic approach to teaching philosophy developed in the dialogues consisted of questioning young disciples in order to make them find the truth by themselves. For instance, in *Meno*, Socrates sets the slave boy the problem of doubling the area of

³² "Larvatus prodeo refers to Descartes' declaration in the Preamble of his *Cogitationes Privatae* (1619) "...sic ego hoc mundi theatrum consensurus, in quo hactenus spectator exstisti, larvatus prodeo." (...as I step out onto this stage of the world, where I have so far been a spectator, I come forward with a mask on.), (*Œuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (eds.), X 213, 4-6.).

³³ See Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

a square. Despite the boy's lack of mathematical proficiency, Socrates leads him through a few simple questions to the Pythagorean Theorem. In *Ahmed Philosophe*, the same happens in the sequence entitled 'Mathematics' which stages Ahmed along with two understudies; each Ahmed claims he is the only one, until they physically perform a demonstration proving that they are triplicated and also that the number eight is contained in the number three, since by arranging the elements which are parts of three, the possible combinations amount to eight.³⁴ In 'The Same and the Other', Ahmed also appears with two understudies, and the three of them experiment with the notions of identity, otherness, unity and multiplicity. Ahmed suggests that in order to determine which of the three Ahmeds is the real one, each copycat should cross the stage by trying his best to move like Ahmed and to sound like him whilst saying, "I am Ahmed the philosopher, and I am able to distinguish who is the same as Ahmed and who is different from him." Then, he suggests they proceed to vote, which leads to a lengthy *qui pro quo* as each Ahmed wants to vote for himself. These scenes lead to reflect upon the one and the multiple, the self and the other but they remain an introduction to philosophy primarily addressed to a young audience. Despite the irony of the scenes, the play manages to offer convincing demonstrations by resorting to the mechanics of theatre, mainly the body of the actor and its movements on stage. The aim here is not to deliver exhaustive philosophy 'lessons' about such and such a notion, but to explore the process of philosophical reasoning through the dramatisation of concepts. However, the empirical quest for truth initiated on stage also attests to the limitations imposed by theatre when it comes to staging philosophy. Ahmed's strenuous and at times, facetious efforts to grasp philosophical concepts through the material components of theatre highlights the difficulty to address philosophy through concrete cases.

³⁴ With A for Ahmed, the eight combinations are as follows: A1, A2, A3, A1+A2+A3, A1+A2, A2+A3, A3+A1 and 0.

Ahmed philosophe remains Badiou's most direct attempt to stage philosophy. The content of the play dictates a format, mainly monologues, which differ from the other part of the tetralogy and depart from a Molièresque comedy of intrigue. For the two plays written afterwards, theatre per se regains prevalence and after incurring the risk of suturing philosophy and theatre, Badiou incurs the risk of theatre being sutured upon itself as the plays stage a reflection upon the art of theatre from within. However, self-referentiality belongs to theatre Classical repertoire and its network of plays within the plays. Adapting dramatic structures from Aristophanes, Molière, the Comedia Dell'Arte or Claudel betray a certain formalism in Badiou's theatre which is at odds with a philosophy aiming to articulate radical change especially through the theory of the event. In a recent interview with Olivier Neveux, when asked why his theatre was not more innovative, Badiou replies:

There are moments when innovation has the appearance of neo-classicism. [...] Today, it is towards a legible didactics, even towards a dogmatic stubbornness, that critical power and true subversion have to be sought. To deconstruct does not bear any interest anymore. The expectation, in the theatre, is that of a new constructivism. (Neveux: 2007, 184)

Badiou advocates intelligible forms of theatre and considers that being faithful to the Classical forms can be subversive at a time when deconstruction has become irrelevant. However, it is fair to ponder whether there is a limit beyond which didactic theatre ceases to be theatrical art. Similarly, it is perhaps also fair to consider Badiou's dogmatic stubbornness as a prime example of suture, if not directly of theatre and philosophy, but of theatre being sutured upon itself to the point that it becomes sterile as art – if art is to be defined in a Badiouan way as a new configuration of truths. For Badiou, theatre seems to remain at the stage of a

Brechtian *Lehrstück*, not only for the benefit of the actors, but a didactic play for actors and spectators alike. However, like the *Lehrstücke*, Badiou's plays remain theatre exercises - thinking exercises in the case of the spectators, but perhaps not theatre as such. The formalism of Badiou's plays is in line with his rejection of deconstruction and also goes against the idea that the opacity of art holds a truth. For Badiou, if theatre can be a truth process, it has to be a process of simplification and has to allow truths to come through it rather than indefinitely holding them in its recesses. To an extent, like a Mallarméan poem read by Badiou, it has to avoid polysemy. Prior to exploring how Badiou's theatre is indebted towards Mallarmé, I will now investigate further why, despite its intricate links with philosophy, Badiou's conception of theatre resists his theory of the event as developed in *Being and Event*.

I will start by analysing the use of Badiou's theory of the event in theatre and performance studies and assess whether it might amount to a suturing process. I want to do this by taking heed of the important work which has been done so far towards deciphering Badiou's complex proposals for performing art. Despite the fact that some scholars have stressed the importance of Badiou's own writing upon theatre, especially Adrian Kear following Simon Bayly, most writings or comments at conferences about theatre or performance involving Badiou rest upon his theory of the event and an implicit collusion of theatre and event. Despite the interesting content of these studies, they either do not engage with Badiou's theoretical writing about theatre, or if they do, they fail to take into account Badiou's own playwriting. Theatre and performance studies have focused on Badiou's theory of the event rather than his theory of theatre. This is due to the fact that Badiou's main treatise on theatre has only been recently translated into English compared to his other books, but also precisely to the fact that it does not directly address the notion of the event as developed by Badiou in *Being and Event*. his work was well known in

France before it reached Anglo-Saxon audiences.³⁵ This somewhat sudden interest in his work stems from *Being and Event* and it is noticeable that his *Theory of the Subject*, one of the pillars of his philosophy along with *Being and Event* and the recent *Logics of Worlds*, has only been recently translated. As a result, Badiou is above all considered the philosopher of the event.³⁶

This focus upon Badiou's theory of the event at the expense of his extensive work on theatre might explain the relative scarcity of thorough engagement with Badiou in Theatre or Performance Studies. Since 2003, when Badiou's work was made accessible mainly through the publication of Peter Hallward's books on Badiou, *Think Again* and *A Subject to Truth*, there have been a series of articles in and around 2005 following the *Performance Research* issue on civility, but not much ever since. I believe this is due to the fact that not only Badiou's theory of the event has taken prevalence in the perception of his work to the detriment of "being", when in fact, *Being and Event* are inseparable for Badiou. In this thesis, I will focus precisely on how being and event are articulated within Badiou's materialist dialectics as it seems to provide a much more tangible link with theatre than an event, more often than not misread as coming out of the blue, with no regards to the evental site.

³⁵ As a measure of this, it is noticeable that *Being and Event* was published in translation in 2006, so 18 years after its first publication in French, when only three years separate *Logics of Worlds* (2009), first published in French in 2006 and its translation. It was only relatively recently, that Justin Clemens wrote: "The work of Alain Badiou is still almost unknown in English-speaking countries" and noted that only two of Badiou's books, *Manifesto for Philosophy* and *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, and a handful of articles had been translated. (Clemens: 2001, 200) To my knowledge, theatre and performance critics Janelle Reinelt and Adrian Kear were among the first to engage with Badiou's philosophy in the *Performance Research* volume *On Civility* (vol. 9 - no.4, 2004). At the time, Badiou's theory of the event was mainly accessible through secondary sources, mostly Jason Barker's *An Introduction to Alain Badiou* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) and Peter Hallward's *Badiou, A Subject To Truth* (University of Minnesota Press: 2003).

³⁶ At the *Logics of Worlds* conference (Paris, 2007), Badiou publicly regretted entitling his main philosophical opus *L'Être et l'événement* as his philosophical system was almost solely regarded as a philosophy of the event. For other aspects of Badiou's work and the importance of *Theory of the Subject*, see in particular Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (2011) on the importance of dialectics.

I would distinguish two main tendencies among Badiou's commentators in theatre and performance studies.³⁷ The first, mainly represented by the work of Janelle Reinelt and Adrian Kear, draws from Badiou's notion of the event to investigate the link between theatre and politics in an attempt to define a Badiouan ethics of theatre or performing arts. Reinelt's approach mainly consists of investigating the concept of 'evental' fidelity, while Kear mainly deals with the notion of time and community theatre.³⁸ The second tendency consists of focusing on another component of Badiou's event, and reflecting upon the notion of void towards what pertains to theatre metaphysics. For example, Matthew Causey explores theatre as void.³⁹ The void is also central to Andrew Gibson's work on Beckett and Badiou and his notion of the pathos of intermittency. However, Gibson stresses the different nature of the Badiouan and Beckettian void and points out that for Badiou, the void is a positive notion, which does not lead to nihilism since the situation, declared as void becomes a blank canvas for the unexpected to occur. Similarly, according to Gibson, "Badiou vigorously celebrates the intermittency of truth, [while] for Beckett, it is a source above all of pathos and laughter." (Gibson: 2006, 27)⁴⁰

³⁷ Two theatre scholars elude this broad categorisation: the work of Amanda Stuart Fischer on the possible use of Badiou's philosophy in applied theatre and the work of Oliver Feltham on Badiou's theory and political theatre, in particular in relation to the work of Meyerhold. See Amanda Stuart Fischer, 'Developing an Ethics of Practice in Applied Theatre: Badiou and Fidelity to the Truth of the Event', *Research in Drama Education*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2005, 247-52 and Oliver Feltham, 'An Explosive Genealogy: Theatre, Philosophy and the Art of Presentation', *Cosmos and History*, vol. 1, no. 1-2, 2006, pp. 226-40.

³⁸ See Janelle Reinelt, 'Theatre and Politics: Encountering Badiou', *Performance Research*, vol. 9, no.4, On Civility, 2004, pp. 87-94; also in the same volume, Adrian Kear, 'Thinking out of time - theatre and the ethics of interruption', pp. 99-110 and Amanda Stuart Fisher, who also investigates the potentiality of Badiou's philosophy for community theatre in her article 'Developing an Ethics of Practice in Applied Theatre: Badiou and Fidelity to the Truth of the Event' mentioned in note 48 above.

³⁹ See Causey, Matthew. *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture From Simulation to Embeddedness* (London: Routledge, 2006), especially chapter 9: 'The Theatre and Its Negative: Event, Truth, Void', pp.180-195.

⁴⁰ Gibson argues that despite Badiou's affirmative philosophy, "a universe structured in terms of actual infinity and event cannot be immune to a pathos of its own." This is what he calls the 'pathos of intermittency'. (Gibson: 2006, 27)

Interruption and intermittency are pivotal terms in readings of Badiou's theory of the event. This is linked to the fact that for Badiou, event and theatre only happen intermittently. For him, the event is a rare occurrence. The event has this in common with a theatre performance, which is only truly exceptional, once out of fifty times, according to Reinelt. (Reinelt: 2004, 89) Theatre's performative nature and the rarity of exceptional life-changing performances call for a comparison with the event. The performative nature of the event is precisely what Martin Püchner bases his reading of Badiou upon. In his article, he stresses that the event is central to Badiou's conception of philosophy as act and as truth.

Despite being five years apart, Reinelt's 'Theatre and Politics: Encountering Badiou' and Püchner's 'The Theatre of Alain Badiou' are particularly representative of the tendency to primarily consider Badiou as "the philosopher of the event." Both articles provide fertile ground to investigate potential sutures of theatre to philosophy when theatre becomes an analogy for the event.⁴¹ I will come back to the notion of void and interruption in the following section when addressing the ontological nature of Badiou's theatre. In her article, Reinelt points out that Badiou's plays and theory of theatre are not "the most accessible points of entry" for theatre scholars and that the theory Badiou developed in *Being and Event* seems to offer a useful paradigm for an art form like theatre. (Reinelt: 2004, 87) On the contrary, Püchner suggests that theatre offers a useful paradigm for a conception of philosophy as an act. The analysis of Reinelt's article will be useful to explore the aspects of the theory of the event which seem the most relevant to theatre, while the analysis of Püchner's article will point out the complex relationship between theatre and philosophy and, in particular, how theatre could be a truth procedure as

⁴¹ To my knowledge, Reinelt is one of the first theatre scholars to work on Badiou and Püchner's article is the most recent study on Badiou's theatre to date. The recent translations of *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, *Logics of Worlds* and *Theory of the Subject* will probably change this general point of view as only a cross-examination of Badiou's philosophy and theatre, but also radical militancy can reveal the rich complexity of his work.

defined by Badiou. The two analyses will illustrate the notion of suture and ultimately point out that Badiou's theory of theatre and plays are necessary points of entry for theatre scholars willing to understand the complex relationship between philosophy and theatre in Badiou. Tellingly, Reinelt does not engage with Badiou's event with an analysis of performance as such or theatre, but resorts to a concert by the American music band, The Dixie Chicks. In Reinelt's example, the event is circumscribed to the sudden political awareness of the singers, who pledge to be faithful to their awakening. Reinelt writes,

Getting close to that situation [the crackdown on freedom of speech that has produced support for the war] and naming it, Maines was able to trigger an event, even without originally conceptualising her action as directly political. Once it became clear, she decided to be faithful to the event and follow out its implications. (Reinelt: 2004, 93)

In the context of Badiou's event, by saying that Maines names the situation here, Reinelt implies here that Maines' naming of the situation is in itself an event. Since everybody seems to tacitly agree, the situation validates the free hand given to the US government to go to war. In this, the situation does not represent the reality of the opinion. In fact, there is an important opposition to the war but it is silenced by the powers-that-be. However, in Badiou's theory of the event as developed in *Being and Event*, a subject does not name a situation, but the event names the void underlying the situation. In Reinelt's example, the silence of the war opponents could be described as the void underlying what is given as the situation: a support to the war by default as the opposition is silenced or precisely a-voided. For Badiou, it is only a posteriori that the subject acknowledges the void revealed by the event. However, according to Reinelt, the event amounts to a naming. Yet, in an interview in 1991, Badiou insists: "I've never said: you have to name [the event]. There is no purity of decision," but only the laborious preservation of a fidelity to its

consequences" (Hallward: 2003, 412)⁴² Here Badiou underlines the fact that the subject cannot be forceful towards the event. By pledging fidelity to the truth that the event has released, set on its way, the subject acknowledges the event, but cannot decide whether an event has occurred or not. The subject can only decide whether or not to abide by the event.

Somehow event and subject meet half way. On one hand, the subject cannot entirely decide upon an event, otherwise he could not be surprised by the event and it is precisely the event which generates the subject. On the other hand, the event cannot entirely choose its subject, otherwise this will be a return of the antique *fatum*. Nevertheless, this raises the question of what is before the subject? Looking more closely at Badiou's description of the event process, the question of naming is far more complex than it seems, to the point that in *Being and Event*, it takes over that of the subjectivisation process.⁴³ Ten years later, in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou reiterates how subjectivisation is hinged on the naming of the void: "The subject is what chooses to persevere in this self-distance aroused by the revelation of the void. The void that is the very being of the place. [...] a truth always begins by naming the void." (IN, 55) For the truth to surge forth, the void has to be revealed first, that is, the void underlying the situation, what is not apparent within a situation. The event points out the void to the subject, and this is the first step of the truth process. The truth process is not instantaneous but enduring and partaking to a subjectivisation process amounts to accepting to work the truth out.

In Reinelt's example, there is some truth in the fact that 'a crackdown on the freedom of speech has produced support for the war', in other words that because there was nobody to alert public consciousness about the war, this produced a tacit

⁴² This was in response to Jean François Lyotard's critique of Badiou as decisionist ('L'Être, l'événement et la militance' [interview with Nicole-Edith Thévenin] in *Futur antérieur*, vol. 8 (1991), 13-23

⁴³ This is argued, for example, by Gabriel Riera in "Fidelity and the Law: Politics and Ethics In Badiou's *Logiques des Mondes*," *The Cardozo Law Review*, 29: 5, 2008. 100-114

support for it. In Badiou's terms, this tacit support could be described as a representation of the situation (the state of the situation), that is, a situation of imposed consensus that nothing interrupts until the event occurs to reveal what was being avoided. Maines, in her political unawareness prior to the 'event' could be considered as partaking to the consensus before she realises that there is no truth in the given situation and consequently that truths are to be found elsewhere. However, realising there is no truth in a situation does not amount to finding a truth, which would, for Badiou, in any case, be incomplete, plural and infinite by definition. Maines can only partake in a subjectivisation process as defined by Badiou, if she embarks on a process of distancing herself from who she was, in other words from the situation she was in. However, the subject does not hold any truth but partakes in their never ending completion process. In *Handbook Of Inaesthetics*, Badiou insists upon this to clarify the role of the subject in the theory of the event, and prevent any mystification or understanding of the evental truth as totalitarian, as something someone can hold on to.

For Badiou, truth cannot be enunciated; truth is not something that merely happens: it needs to be worked out over time. Each truth is a process and neither a judgement nor a state and this process is infinite or unachievable, and the subject is a mere fragment of the truth process. (IN, 55) For Badiou, truth is something to be decided upon, to be adhered to and something to which the subject has to bear witness. While it is clearer in Badiou's latest *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* that the subject is not an individual but a process, what Badiou means by subject in *Being and Event* remains indexed on the figure of the 'militant of a truth'. Hence the need to pledge fidelity to a truth whose status is infinite and unachievable. The subjectivisation occurs when the subject embraces the truth revealed by the event and is bound to it by a fidelity process. The event can only stem from the void to disrupt the consensus, what is given as 'what there is'. It is the event that clears the

way for a truth when surging forth and reveals or names the void underlying the situation. This void is revealed to the subject when acknowledging the passage of a truth and following in its trail. The subject does not name the void, but on the contrary, is extracted from it. Like the event, the subjectivisation process cannot originate from within the given situation. Consequently, the subject is born out of the void.

Identifying the situation as a representation imposed by the powers-that-be (in the case of Maines, the tacit support for the war in the seeming absence of opposition to it) might create a subjective space which allows for what is unrepresented within the situation to come to the fore. In the case of Maines, her position as a public figure can help to release the so far unheard opposition to the war. In her example, Reinelt suggests that it is the naming of the situation which triggers the event. Whilst for Badiou, naming is part of the evental process, it is only *a posteriori* as 'the subject gets hold of the event's name in order to make it intervene in a given situation. (BE, 264) In the theory of the event, uttering the name of the event amount to action; the name acts in a situation. The subject can refer to the event to attest to the passage of a truth and thus multiply its consequences, but this is not an appropriation of the truth in order to subsequently share it out. In this respect, Reinelt's example provides a good illustration of the possible use of the event's name. After their public opposition to George Bush, which Reinelt considers to be an event, The Dixie Chicks included video footage of civil rights protests during their ensuing concerts (Reinelt: 2004, 93). This reference to the civil rights protest in the United States is a good example of how an event can be summoned. However, strictly speaking, Maines does not trigger an event despite pointing to what eludes the given situation and acknowledging what seems like a universal truth: the fact that in times of war, the belligerent powers-that-be silence the opponents to the war.

In Reinelt's example, there is a collusion of terms, of components of the Badiouan event, but what Maines goes through is not an event as such but rather a subjectivisation process. In the case of the Dixie Chicks, their fidelity to what happened (to what they said, in fact) is the most valid point in Reinelt's reading of Badiou's event. For Badiou, fidelity is not to be understood as faithfulness in the sense of adhering firmly and devotedly, as to a person, cause, or idea but as "a situated operation which depends on the examination of situations, [...] a functional relation to the event" (BE, 233). Through their public confession, 'we are ashamed the American president is from Texas' and the projection during their concerts of film footage of civil rights protests, Nazi book burning and of their records being crushed by a steamroller, the Dixie Chicks' accepted to become a symbol of the oppression exerted by the Bush government upon war protesters. Although they might not have foreseen the implications of their allegedly spontaneous declaration, they did not unexpectedly encounter an event as defined by Badiou, but rather provoked a series of consequences. Reinelt's example remains a perfect example of a subject's perseverance in abiding to the new law dictated by the 'event', in other words the subject's decision to adhere to new principles.

In all fairness, Reinelt is aware of the arguable nature of the 'event' in her case study and she somehow foresees Badiou's redefinition of the event in *Logics of Worlds* by suggesting that "there are little events of merit as well as big Events of huge historical consequence" and states that her case concerns both art and politics although she confesses Badiou may shudder at this statement. (Reinelt: 2004, 92) It is noticeable that in Badiou's last opus, he questions the notion of the event itself and divides it into four types of change: the modification, the fact, the weak singularity and the strong singularity or event. (LW, 374) Each type of change corresponds to a different intensity. What happened to the Dixie Chicks might be located between the fact - which requires that something truly shifts locally, but

which, neither in its own power nor in its consequences, requires a general transformation of the laws – and the weak singularity, which powerfully manifests itself, but whose consequences are canonically regulated. (LW, 374) The Dixie Chicks abide by the consequences of what they consider to be an event. It might represent a life changing experience for them and possibly for some of their fans. However, it remains difficult to strictly classify what happened to them within Badiou's topology of event.

While Reinelt's example does not directly concern theatre, it remains of relevance to theatre because for Badiou, theatre is always a declaration upon the situation, upon the state of things. (RT, 206) Like the Dixie Chicks' case, theatre can also be described as a public declaration pointing to a universal truth or at least questioning the lack of truth in what there is. However, the cross-examination of Reinelt's example and Badiou's event highlights the difficulty in applying Badiou's theory of the event and forcing philosophical concepts upon other domains. The Dixie Chicks' case provides a clear example of a subjective positioning within a situation, which has suddenly been made explicit. For Badiou, it is precisely the role of theatre to render a situation explicit, disentangled so that the void underlying the situation might emerge. Because of the irrepresentability of the event, theatre might not create an event *ex nihilo*, but the consequences of the event: a subjective positioning. This will be the focus of my analysis of Badiou's theory of theatre and plays.

I will now turn to Martin Püchner's description of Badiou's philosophy as truth and as act to delineate further the risk of suturing philosophy to theatre. In his recent article entitled 'Alain Badiou's Theatre', Püchner explains that Badiou's theory of the event, especially in the way it is articulated upon the reading of Mallarmé's poetry, supports Badiou's "understanding of philosophy as (dramatic) act". Commenting upon Badiou's reading of Mallarmé and the theatricality of

Mallarmé's poem 'A Throw of Dice', Püchner underlines the theatricality of the event. The title of Püchner's article is rather puzzling as he does not engage with Badiou's theatre as such but rather with the theatricality of his philosophy. Although this title might evoke Foucault's essay entitled *Theatrum Philosophicum*, and uses the term theatre as a generic notion encompassing theatricality, it is misleading in the case of Badiou as it only partially engages with Badiou's theory of theatre and scarcely deals with his playwriting if at all. I would like to point out that while, to an extent, Püchner captures the relationship between philosophy and theatre in Badiou, in his essay there are numerous collusions of terms which I find problematic. These occur between philosophy and truth, truth and event and most importantly, theatre and event. What seems like a suturing here is ineluctable, precisely because Püchner sees in Badiou "twin conceptions of philosophy as act and as truth in the service of a new Platonism" (Püchner: 2009, 260).⁴⁴ It is essential to retrace Püchner's steps to understand where the suturing occurs in his reasoning. Surprisingly, despite its constant recurrence in Badiou's writing, Püchner does not use the term dialectic to address either Badiou's theory of theatre or philosophical system. Püchner quotes the axiom, 'There are only bodies and languages except that there are truths', and remarks that since 'truths exist as exceptions to what there is', truths interrupt the continuity of bodies and languages. (Püchner: 2009, 260) Püchner explains that when "Badiou speaks of truth as an exception, he has in mind his definition of the event, which is always an exceptional occurrence" (Püchner: 2009, 261). This might not be incorrect per se, but this shortcut binds together truth and event, as both are presented as interruptions, and consequently reasserts philosophy as act and as truth by strengthening the performative aspect of philosophy. This becomes problematic when theatre is thrown into the mix, as Püchner insists that theatre can be called an event and can

⁴⁴ On Badiou's platonism, see also A. J. Bartlett, "Badiou and Plato: An education by truths" (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

thus conclude that “[since] philosophical truth has the character of the event, it is the theatre, the most eventful of the arts, that plays a central role in its formulation” (Püchner: 2009, 263). While Badiou writes that “when it really is theatre, the art of the theatre – is an event of thought” he does not directly refer here to the theory of the event as such (IN, 72). This precisely means that theatre induces thinking, that the assemblage of components directly produces ideas, not necessarily that it delivers truths.

Püchner's use of the syntagm ‘philosophical truth’ is also problematic, since for Badiou, like theatre, philosophy cannot hold the truth; this is why he has developed the notion of ‘conditions’ examined earlier. Truths are created by events in mathematics, arts, love and politics not by philosophy. The four conditions are in fact named “truth conditions” and philosophy is defined by Badiou as the process of leading truths from their appearing form to their eternal form (SMP, 85).⁴⁵ Therefore, for Badiou, there are artistic, mathematical or political truths but no philosophical truths per se. In the Platonic tradition, philosophy is presented by Badiou as the arch explainer. However, the main ‘forcing’ operated by Püchner resides in his explanation of the axiom for Badiou's materialist dialectic. Püchner argues that truths interrupt what there is, that is, the continuity of bodies and languages. However, Badiou does not speak of interruption but uses the grammatical term interpolation, ‘incise’ in French. Alberto Toscano translates “en incise de la continuité du « il y a. »” by “what interpolates itself into the continuity of the ‘there is’ and not as “what interrupts the continuity of the ‘there is’”. (LW, 5) The nuance is small but particularly relevant here. Truths come as interpolations into the ‘there is’. For Badiou, truths are material: whilst the event interrupts the situation, a truth

⁴⁵ Badiou remarks that this process is entirely Platonic. (SMP, 85). For the influence of Plato on Badiou, see Justin Clemens, “Platonic Meditations: The Work of Alain Badiou” in *PLI*, vol. 11 (2001), 200-229. See also Püchner's article mentioned above.

necessarily inscribes itself upon 'what there is'. Truths do not supplement 'what there is' but reconfigure it from within as they precisely partake in its materiality.

Suturing truth and event would not be too problematic, if in the process truths were not presented as unique, or even providential, like the event - with the risk of returning to oneness and transcendence, and if the subject who has to work out the truth was not occulted. Badiou insists throughout his work that there is not one truth but truths. While it is true that the event interrupts 'what there is', the emergence of truths is not simply concomitant to the declaration of the situation as void. The event clears the place for truths to be revealed, but truth processes need to be endorsed by a subject. It is philosophy's role to help extract truths from events created by the four 'conditions': art, science, politics and love. This is why for Badiou, theatre is a truth process, inasmuch as it is a thinking process: first, based upon the dialectics of theatre which when figured out by the spectators extract ideas from the materiality of theatre, from the assembling of its material components (text, place, bodies, voices, costumes, lights, audience), then upon the notion of theatre-idea whose operation mode resembles that of the event, but which functions like Badiou's theatre dialectics. Despite Püchner not referring here to the theatre-idea as such but to Badiou's philosophical system, Badiou's notion of theatre-idea can indeed be described as a return "to a Platonist conception of the idea, albeit an idea understood as event and therefore as something that must be understood dramatically" (Püchner: 2009, 263). Apart from the analogy between idea and event, this is in line with the fact that the theatre-idea can only emerge during and through the performance and is irreducibly theatrical and not pre-existent to its staging. (IN, 72) However, here Püchner refers to the theatricality rather than the materiality of theatre. The materiality of the idea, especially that of the theatre-idea, is precisely what is at stake in Badiou's materialist reversal of Plato.

However Badiou complicates the matter when he recently used the syntagm 'theatre-truth', rather than theatre-idea. (TP, 137) In any case, like truths, theatre-ideas are bound to be incomplete. In the same way philosophy does not hold any truth, theatre does not hold any either. For Badiou, the truths theatre is able to produce can only be released through theatre dialectics. For Badiou, theatre can initiate a truth-process insofar as it forces spectators to think. The spectator is precisely the missing link in Püchner's demonstration. Püchner acknowledges that theatre is an event of thought, but in order to demonstrate the link between theatre and philosophy or thought, he stresses that Badiou places the director at the centre of theatre. This is an interesting point, very much in keeping with the role of director in France in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. However, as I will demonstrate further, Badiou assigns the director a role which is different from interpreting, or thinking the theatre-idea through. In fact, Badiou places the spectator at the centre of his theatre and this is how theatre encounters politics, as I will demonstrate when explaining the dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject and the notion of theatre-idea. Püchner acknowledges "the essential relation between theatre and the state posited by Badiou has a relevance for us [in the United States] as well, since it identifies the assembled public, the liveness of the theatre event and the history of theatre as crucial political categories." (Püchner: 2009, 263) However, Püchner does not elaborate on this, but also fails to point out that it is not the "history of theatre" which Badiou considers part of politics but the fact that because theatre is irreducibly linked to politics, it can challenge and re-articulate history.

For Badiou, the relationship between the theatre and the state is not hinged on the particular history of a national theatre, as in the way the art of theatre has been shaped throughout history in a particular country. The relationship between theatre and history is complex in Badiou's *Rhapsody for the Theatre* and attests that

history cannot simply be categorised as political. I will argue that the relationship between theatre and history can only point to what amounts to politics for Badiou if, as I will demonstrate, theatre transforms history into politics and to an extent, eradicates history. As for the relationship between theatre and the state developed by Badiou in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Püchner is right to point out the particularity of French public theatre, which is “generously” subsidised by the State in comparison with theatre in the United States. (Püchner: 2009, 263) However, and perhaps tellingly, Püchner’s very brief summary of *Rhapsody for the Theatre* does not address the fact that the treatise is organised around the dialectics of the State, the Spectator-subject and the Ethics of play. It will appear that what Badiou’s treatise asserts is not just that, “theatre is the art form most closely tied to the state” as Püchner argues, but that the State is intrinsically theatrical. However, Badiou’s notion of the Theatrical State stems from the special relationship between theatre and the State in France, attested to by the high numbers of national theatres.

To an extent, Püchner’s conception of philosophy as act is verified by Badiou’s play *Ahmed philosophe*, where philosophy takes to the stage. As for Püchner’s second conception of philosophy as truth, and its underlying analogy between theatre and event, I have raised some issues whose relevance will be verified by the detailed analysis of Badiou’s theory of theatre in the following section. What is the most problematic is Püchner’s assertion that “[Since] philosophical truth has the character of the event, it is the theatre, the most eventful of the arts, that plays a central role in its formulation.” (Püchner: 2009, 263) Delegating the formulation of philosophy to theatre is precisely what Badiou calls a suturing of philosophy to theatre. Far from giving theatre the same place given to the poem by what Badiou rejects as modern sophistry, that is, far from defining art both as truth repository and sole possible discourse upon truth, Badiou establishes a complex relationship between theatre and truth which is articulated at first upon

dialectics, then upon the notion of theatre-idea. For Badiou, theatre does not formulate truth but creates the conditions for a truth procedure which philosophy can make manifest. (IN, 15)

Badiou's theory of conditions allows him to free philosophy and its conditions (art, science, love, politics) from objectifying one another as Badiou does not want philosophy to be sutured to politics, art, science or love. To an extent, theatre also risks losing its independence, and being assimilated to politics or philosophy. In the case of the relationship between art and philosophy, Badiou is circumspect towards what he calls the "age of the poets," when philosophy was sutured to art as the only possible "body of truth" (IN, 12). Yet, despite his critique of Heidegger, poetry remains essential to Badiou's thinking of truth as Mallarmé's place in Badiou's philosophy attests. When it comes to theatre, Mallarmé is also Badiou's main interlocutor in his *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. In this treatise, Badiou insists upon the isomorphism between theatre and politics without suturing one to the other. Mallarmé provides him with axioms to reflect upon theatre and ensure the compossibility of theatre and politics and the compossibility of theatre and philosophy.

II - Badiou's theatre dialectics

1 - Badiou's Mallarméan subtractive path

Mallarmé's poem "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard..." appears in Badiou's writing not as a simple metaphor for the event, but as a condition for the philosopher to think the event.⁴⁶ Badiou thinks his theory of the event through Mallarmé in *Being and Event* and also in the chapter "a Dialectic Poetic" in *Inaesthetics*, where he compares the poetry of Labîd ben Rabi'a and that of Mallarmé. In *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou establishes a direct relation between his reading of Mallarmé's poetry and his conception of theatre when he declares:

Everyone can say: "No, there is not only what there is. There is also what has happened, of whose persistence – here and now – I am the bearer."

Persistence? The poem, forever inscribed and lying stellar upon the page, is its exemplary guardian. But are there not other arts devoting themselves to the fugacity of the event, to its allusive disappearance, to what is unfixed in the becoming of the true? [...] What are we to say of theater, in which, night after night, a piece is played, always different but always the same, a piece of which one day – the actors vanished, the sets burned, the director omitted – nothing will remain? (IN, 56)

The poem is presented by Badiou as the event's repository; it holds the potential of truth revealed by the event, in other words, it is the indelible mark of the possibility of change in what there is. As opposed to the poem, Badiou presents theatre as an art of mobility and of the "just once". (IN, 56) Nevertheless, Badiou's reading of

⁴⁶ The title of Mallarmé as been translated as "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Eliminate Chance". Hereafter, "Coup de dés".

Mallarmé is the ineluctable link between Badiou's theory of the event and his theory of theatre.

According to Badiou, poetry ensures that an indelible trace of the event is kept on the page. This does not mean that the event stops being a process and is forever contained. However, the truth released by the event not only eludes but also disrupts any fixed order. This is perfectly illustrated by the page layout of Mallarmé's "Coup de dés", which disrupts the usual layout of a poem, with different font sizes and sentences spread in a staggered fashion. In *Being and Event*, Badiou places his theory of the event under the condition of the poem in order to reflect upon the notion of evental site. Badiou's analysis of Mallarmé's poetry reveals how the *event* emerges from the very fabric of Mallarmé's language. Initially, Badiou shows how Mallarmé's poem "Coup de dés" deploys multiple metaphors pointing to the fact that any notion of space in the poem is attached to the *void*.

From the "flat incline" of the sky and the "gaping depth" of the waves, emerges the image of a ship, sail and hull, dismissed as soon as it is presented, so that the desert of the site sums up a ship which however does not exist, but of which the scene presents the probable absence. (BE 192)

In his evocation of what seems like a shipwreck, Mallarmé manages to describe the disappearance of what presents itself, in other words, he captures the ephemeral emergence of the *event*. This is done by staging the undecidable upon a site which vanishes as soon as it materialises. The staging of *undecidability* in Mallarmé's poem, is the starting point for Badiou's conception of the *void* as a trigger of truth.

In Mallarmé's poem, all movement is suspended and, as a result, any notion of 'place' is blurred to the point that the site is abolished or presented as *void*. According to Badiou, Mallarmé has developed a method, 'a subtractive method',

that transforms the poem into 'a negative device that utters the being or idea at the very point where the object disappears.' (QPP, 11) In the case of "Coup de dés", it is when the image of the shipwreck is the most pregnant that it starts to unravel because of the prevalence of the site presented as *void*, but also because any action is cancelled out by the syntax as only hypotheses regarding what happened are uttered by the poem. As Badiou points out, since the ocean alone is presented, this authorises the announcement in the poem that the action will take place 'from the bottom of a shipwreck'. (BE, 192) In other words, what happened can only be suggested a posteriori by the poem and the truth is to be sought elsewhere or off-site.

In *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou explains further how the poem can be a thinking process. For example, Badiou writes that Fernando Pessoa's poetry a "syntactical machination" is at work beneath the images and the metaphors and stresses that "Pessoa resembles Mallarmé: Often the phrase must be reconstructed and reread for the Idea to traverse and transcend the apparent image" (IN, 42). Rather than focusing on deciphering the poem, the reader has to accept the invitation of the poem to delay its interpretation in order to be touched by the way the images it conveys are structured and by the complexity of their reverberation. By forcing the conflagration of echoing images, the syntax creates undecidability. To an extent, the echoing images cancel themselves out because of their divided recompositions: the foam upon the surface of the ocean is said to be either the trace of a shipwreck or of the passage of a siren, but because it can be either of them, it is neither of them. This is the reason why Badiou describes Mallarmé's poetry as a "syntactic machination" (IN, 70). There is a resemblance between the idea that 'the poem disturbs the natural flow of reading and delays interpretation' and the Derridean notion of *différance*, according to which meaning is perpetually

deferred.⁴⁷ However, for Badiou, in Mallarmé's poetry, the revelation of the meaning is not obstructed or eternally deferred. The syntax only creates pockets of time. The truth does not reside in the fact that the syntax defers the meaning. By frustrating the desire to make sense of the words, it creates the time for the idea to emerge. Badiou does not do away with meaning, but for him, the truth or idea generated by the poem is irreducible to its meaning. Against deconstruction, Badiou claims that,

Mallarmé's poetic machine, though opaque when looked at from the outside, nevertheless, possesses only a single meaning.

We must put an end to the laziness that has so many readers bypass the obstacle in order to claim that the enigma's virtue consist in allowing a hundred underlying answers. This absolute dialectician does not present any polysemy. One should not take for an erratic chaos whatever is given multiple echoes [...] (TS, 74-75)

While Mallarmé's poetry is often deemed obscure, endlessly enigmatic and open to interpretation, for Badiou, the meaning of the poem is clear for whoever wants to read. The meaning of the poem is retrievable and to reveal it, Badiou operates a simple translation of the verse into prose. Badiou disentangles Mallarmé's syntax in

⁴⁷ In *Pocket Pantheon*, Badiou explains his divergence from Derrida from the start. Referring to the "red" years of 1968 to 1976, Badiou writes: "What we desired, in poetic terms, was the metaphysics of radical conflict, and not the patient deconstruction of oppositions." For Badiou, Derrida's deconstruction was not compatible with radical engagement with politics. Badiou also declared in an interview that he was "opposed to the totality of Derrida's conceptions." (Sedofsky: 2006, 249) Nevertheless, in *Pocket Pantheon*, Badiou admits "You must demonstrate the vanishing point by making language free. You must have a language of flight. You can only organise a monstration of the non-existent if you use a language that can stand non-existing." He thus recognises the validity of Derrida's approach to language and explains that what is at stake in Derrida's work is "the inscription of the non-existent" and the recognition that such an inscription is impossible. According to Badiou, Derrida's problem is "grasping a fleeing," the location of a "vanishing point." As it will become clear further on, both thinkers assert that the non-existent does not amount to nothingness. This is what Derrida's notion of *différance* ultimately supports. From Derrida's *différance*, Badiou derives the notion of 'inexistence', that is a "worldly way of non-existing." (PkP, 125-144) For a comparison of Badiou and Derrida's philosophical systems, in particular around the notion of the to-come, see Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida* (2007). See also Badiou's "Homage to Jacques Derrida" in Costas Douzinas (ed.), *Adieu Derrida* (2007), pp. 34-46 and *Logics of Worlds* (LW, 570-71).

order to render it directly intelligible and thus produces a new text: “a first reconstruction in which the poem is withdrawn from poetry and rendered in its latent prose, enabling philosophy to *return* to it from prose for its own ends” (CN, 50-51). For Badiou, a poem is not a bearer or vector of meaning but a trigger of truth. However he insists on the correlation between the meaning and the action of the poem. There is an intimate relationship between what the poem says and what it does, namely, the carving of the void to point to the truth.⁴⁸ For Badiou, philosophy's role is to seek the truth which is not concealed by the poem but which the poem points towards. Once the meaning of the poem is unfolded, the way the syntax is articulated reveals that there is more than the meaning, that there is more than ‘what there is’: truths. Acknowledging what the poem “does” to language generates thinking and points towards the truth. For Badiou, this is precisely because there is only one meaning, that the poem can be a truth process. Mallarmé uses the syntax to veil what is being said to the point that the reader cannot know what has happened for sure but can only be certain that something has happened. As Mallarmé writes and Badiou cites: “We need a guarantee. - syntax” (CN, 49). This is the reason why in Badiou's reading of Mallarmé, the main idea is that syntax is central to the composition and formation of the poem. Syntax is something tangible which can be relied upon, something which can serve as a guarantor in the challenge proposed by the poem.⁴⁹ For Badiou, the poem takes the risk of a truth:

⁴⁸ This is developed in *Theory of the Subject*, where Badiou writes “What the poem says, it does.” (TS, 81) This evokes the work of Stanley Fish, who argues that what is more relevant for criticism is not what a text ‘means’ but what it “does” - the meaning of a text being what it does to its reader. See Fish, Stanley. *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (University of California Press: 1972)

⁴⁹ According to Jean-Jacques Lecercle, in his treatment of syntax, Badiou mistakes syntax for semantics when transposing the poem into prose as a single interpretation is forced upon the poem. Yet, Lecercle argues that Badiou's concept of forage, that is ‘forcing language by the advent of “another” language, a language both immanent and created’ could lead on the contrary to the opening of “vistas of a truly syntactic analysis of the poem”, which would bring Badiou closer to Gilles Deleuze's broad concept of a-grammaticality or what he calls the ‘intensive lines of syntax’. See Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Deleuze and language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) chapter 6 and his article entitled “Badiou's Poetics” in Peter Hallward (ed.) *Think again* (London: Continuum, 2004) 208-217.

whether a truth is present or absent needs time to be thought out. However, the only way to ascertain that an event has released a truth is to examine whether the evental site appears as void after the passage of the truth. Badiou writes,

There is no possible truth save under the condition of a crossing of the place of truth, conceived here as a null, absented, and deserted place. Every truth is imperiled by the possibility that there may be nothing besides the indifferent place, the sand, the rain, the ocean, the abyss. (IN, 50)

The sole indicator of the occurrence of the event is a deserted site. Thus, it might well be that nothing happened at all, but truth can only come to existence if there is precisely a risk of nothing remaining except the indifferent site. In the case of Mallarmé, the desertification of the site is produced in the space of language by the syntax. The syntax of the poem confronts the reader with the void. It is only by refusing to hold on to the meaning of the poem, in other words to a linearity or a plot ensured by the presence of objects that the reader can envisage the truth, or more precisely, think the passage of a truth. The materiality expressed by the Mallarméan text withdraws under the pressure of a truth surging forth. For Mallarmé, the truth remains elusive and, to an extent, beyond reach. In Mallarmé's poem, as such, the event is intangible, irrepresentable and in this respect, provides Badiou with a paradigm for the event, or of the surging forth of a truth. The meaning of the poem does not hold the truth; the passage of the truth has to be worked out from the clues left behind. Badiou extracts from his reading of Mallarmé, the following axiom: "a truth always begins by naming the void, by voicing the poem of the abandoned place" (IN, 55).⁵⁰ By leaving its imprints upon the site, a truth signals that the site

⁵⁰ As previously, I would prefer to use the term "site" instead of "place" here as a translation for "lieu" in reference to the notion of "evental site".

became desolated after its passing through, and that, since it has vacated the site, it has to be found elsewhere.

At this stage, it is still difficult to draw an analogy between the poem and theatre. Nevertheless, going back to the quote at the beginning of this section, Badiou's parallel between the poem and theatre as arts both devoted to the "fugacity of the event, to its allusive disappearance, to what is *unfixed* in the becoming of the true" is becoming discernable (IN, 56). The risk of nothing remaining of the passage of the truth in the poem is the same as that incurred by a theatre play "of which one day – the actors vanished, the set burned, the director omitted – nothing will remain" (IN, 56). Mallarmé's aborted texts for the stage have ultimately been absorbed into his poetical work. Similarly for Badiou, poetry and theatre seem to be in close proximity. In practice, Badiou's playwriting draws from symbolist poetry as this extract from his second play, *Incident at Antioch* attests.⁵¹

PAULA: I came over here reluctantly from the other side of a river. The city is breaking apart underfoot. There are only big buildings belching yellow sulphurous smoke now, and at night the lighting comes from the torches.

I'll speak only to you. What I have to say is that the world is starting today, from scratch, and that all you have to do is go after the dispersion of being, the way the big white dog of verse does in the fog-shrouded grass. That's how I'll proceed now, until the sole heir appears among you, owing to my doggedness.

MADAME PINTRE: Get going, Paula! You're not our enemy. The

⁵¹ This play is unpublished in French and has not been staged to this day. I am very grateful to Alain Badiou to have granted me access to it. There are three versions of the play, a draft finished in 1982, and a draft for the first public reading of the play by Vitez in 1989. (DIA, 1) Susan Spitzer has recently undertaken an English translation of the play which will be published shortly.

poem of the place is written for a thousand voices. (IA, 16)⁵²

It is interesting to note that collective political subjectivisation here starts with a thousand voices making a poem of the site, more precisely, like in Mallarmé, a poem of the site vacated by truth. In the passage above, Paula's decision to come forward and lead the political movement is represented as a crossing of the site which dematerialises under her unwilling steps. Also, the image of the white dog of poetry following a trace in the grass whitened by the fog strikingly renders the idea of the truth crossing a dematerialised site with the subject on its track. *Incident at Antioch* is by far the most poetical of Badiou's plays and tellingly perhaps, the only one which has never been staged to this day. Nevertheless, Badiou establishes a clear relationship between theatre and poetry by declaring that "the theatre text, or the theatrical poem, is only virtual, or open. It is only attested to as a theatre text by the theatre performance" (TP, 137).⁵³ In other words, in its latent state, the theatre text is a poem. This poem encapsulates what is to come on stage.

Reflecting upon the paradoxical nature of the evental site as explained by Badiou in *Being and Event's* Meditation 19, I would like to suggest that theatre functions like an evental site. Badiou writes:

The paradox of an evental-site is that it can only be recognised on the basis of what it does not present in the situation in which it is presented. [...] The event will thus not only happen *within* the site, but

⁵² "Paule : [...] Je me suis portée malgré moi de l'autre côté d'un fleuve. La ville se démembré sous les pas. Les seuls monuments crachent la fumée jaune du sulfure, et l'éclairage, la nuit, vient des torchères. Je m'adresserai seule à vous. Je vous dirai que le monde commence aujourd'hui, partant de rien, et qu'il n'est que de suivre le dispersé de l'être, comme fait dans l'herbe sous la brume le grand chien blanc des poésies. C'est ainsi que je m'avancerai, jusqu'à ce que parmi vous l'unique héritier se lève à la faveur de mon entêtement. / Mme Pintre: Va, Paule ! Tu ne nous es pas ennemie. Le poème du lieu se fait à mille voix." (IA, 16)

⁵³ "Le texte de théâtre, ou si l'on veut le poème théâtral, est seulement virtuel, ou ouvert. Il n'est attesté que comme texte de théâtre que par la représentation." (TP, 137)

on the basis of the provocation of whatever unrepresentability is contained in the site. (BE, 192)

Badiou illustrates this by pointing out that in Mallarmé's "Coup de dés", the action will have taken place 'from the bottom of a shipwreck' while the ocean alone is represented. The paradoxical nature of the evental site needs to be explained in detail. I propose to do so by examining in parallel the relationship between theatre and the State. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, he writes that "of all the arts, theatre is the one that most insistently stands next to (or supposes) politics" (RT, 200). In his essay, Badiou draws a lengthy analogy between theatre and politics and insists upon the entanglement of theatre and State. He distinguishes theatre and Theatre in their relationship to the State by stressing that Theatre (capital T) distorts the analogy. By this, Badiou means that through the dialectics of the theatrical State, Theatre challenges the representation orchestrated by the State. Like the evental site, theatre as defined by Badiou is of a paradoxical nature: while theatre is of the State, it also puts the State at a distance. In the following section, I will assess to which extent theatre as defined by Badiou can be understood as an evental site. This will be achieved by engaging with Badiou's ontology based upon his own conception of materialist dialectics.

2 - Theatrical State

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou asks the following question: “Unable to show the revolution, caught in the habit of the State, is theatre not the only art to establish a certain visibility of the State? The only art to show the State?” (RT, 206) The State becomes visible as theatre exposes the representation of the situation imposed by the powers-that-be: what is given as what there is. The State organises the way the situation is perceived, in other words, the State makes an exclusive statement about the situation. This statement is in fact a representation of what there is. It is this order of representation which the event comes to disrupt when revealing the void of the situation. In this respect, one might argue that theatre is not by any means the only art challenging representation and that, to an extent, Badiou's definition of theatre might apply to art in general. However, Badiou argues that theatre is the only art which exposes the State because any iteration or discourse made in the theatre is official. He explains that the circumstances within which Theatre unfolds are of little importance and that even with an audience of ten people, theatre represents the whole French Ministry of Culture. (RT, 201) This is very specific to the French system of subsidised theatre. Tellingly, *Rhapsody for the Theatre* is a collage of small essays or pamphlets originally published by the Théâtre National de Chaillot. However, despite the particular circumstances of his reflection upon theatre, Badiou's remarks on the relationship between theatre and State in France are particularly relevant here as they announce and provide a good point of entry to the development of his ontological system in his philosophy. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou establishes an analogy between the State and the state of the situation. However, this analogy cannot be fully understood without engaging with Badiou's conception of ontology. This will in turn shed some light upon what Badiou means by the dialectic of the Theatrical State.

Badiou's ontology is propped against a conception of materialist dialectics specific to his philosophical system drawing from Cantor's set theory.⁵⁴ Developed in *Being and Event*, which was written and published at approximately the same time as *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou's Cantorian materialist dialectics provides the link between Badiou's theatre dialectics and his use of Mallarmé's poetry for the theory of the event.⁵⁵ For Badiou, ontology is mathematics. In *Being and Event*, Badiou declares that mathematics "pronounces what is expressible of being qua being" (BE, 8). In other words, set theory provides philosophy with an ontological discourse. Badiou deduces from set theory that Being is multiple and that the One does not exist. In Badiou's words:

There is no God. Which also means: the One is not. The multiple 'without-one' — every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples — is the law of being. The only stopping point is the void. (ET, 25)

For Badiou, being is a pure multiple without oneness. It is important to note that Badiou's assertion does not solely apply to the god of religion. Badiou deplores the fact that there are three holds of the One upon thought, not only the god of monotheist religions, but also the god of metaphysics, or "great principle" and the god of the poets. The former is the very idea of a principle of totality, the idea that something, which is one, animates the totality. The latter being the god of nostalgia, that is, the god whose mode of existence is to have disappeared, rather than its being per se.⁵⁶ (DPAP, unpaginated) The fact that a multiple, is by definition always

⁵⁴ Georg Cantor is known as the inventor of set theory.

⁵⁵ The expression "Cantorian materialist dialectics" is how Bruno Bosteels describes Badiou's new conception of dialectics conditioned by Set theory. (Bosteels: 2009, 115)

⁵⁶ Badiou stresses that the problem of an atheist philosophy, that is, of an ontology which would not concede any ground to the nostalgia of the divine, is to think outside of these three figures of divinity. Thus, it is not simply a question of keeping your distance from religion, but also from totality and the

a multiple of multiples, implies that Being is in constant movement and never fixed upon the One and as such points to the infinite. In set theory, there are only sets and nothing exists outside of a set. Because the elements of a set are not units but other sets, Being is not a multiple of stable and absolute units but a multiple of multiples. Since a multiple can always be part of another multiple, being is said to be inconsistent as opposed to the consistency of what surrounds us. For Badiou, ontology has to go beyond the consistency of situations to reach the inconsistency of being as multiple. For this ontology in movement, the sole conceivable halting point of being in its rootless and roaming infinity, is the void. This is based on the fact that according to set theory, no elements belong to the empty set, but the empty set is included in every other set. As such the empty set serves as a basis for any other set. The empty set can be described as the place-holder for the void. In other words, what exists is propped against the void, with the void unable to provide any substance to it. Thus, for Badiou, the only name assignable to Being is the void.⁵⁷ This is the reason why I stressed earlier that the situation is named as void.

To exist means to belong to a multiple - or a set, to be counted as one of its elements. Any given multiple, or set, can only consist through the basic operation of the count-for-one, which counts every element belonging to a multiple, that this multiple presents as ones. For example, in the set A composed of the elements a, b, c, d, the elements a, b, c, d can be counted as ones. Yet, they only exist as part of the set A, which presents them as ones. By definition, they cannot exist outside of the set. Nothing can exist outside of a set, since even the empty set is contained

one of metaphysics and from the poets' disenchantment with the world (la figure désenchantée du monde). Therefore, it implies an acceptance of the fact that we are here, and that being here is not an assignation to a pathetic finitude nor a condemnation to nostalgia or disenchantment, but simply the foundation of thought itself. (DPAP, unpaginated). See also the prologue of *Briefings on Existence: a Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* entitled 'God is dead'. (STTO, 21-32)

⁵⁷ This can be intuitively deduced from the following set theory axioms. For any set A: the empty set is a subset of A; the union of A with the empty set is A; the intersection of A with the empty set is the empty set.

in any other set, including itself. Although there is no One, it is said of a multiple that it exists, if it is counted as one in a situation. This is why Badiou refers to “inconsistent multiplicities” since a multiple exists but does not consist, as it does not draw any consistency from a predetermined origin, principle or God. From this, it can be deducted that a situation is a structure which presents its elements as ones, bearing in mind that every element is in itself a multiple or a set.

Although it is unrepresented, the void, or empty set, stands alongside the other multiples, or sets, counted as ones. By definition, the void is invisible and unrepresented in a normal situation and yet it underlies it. As explained earlier, the void is the origin of truths. The main difficulty is to conceive the void as tangible, yet assubstantial. Theatre provides a good illustration: to an extent, the void is similar to the wings framing the stage and from which originates everything that happens on stage. Within the theory of the event, the void is the source of change, that is of the new configuration of the situation under the pressure of the event which ruptures what is given as “what there is.” It is therefore easy to understand that acknowledging the presence of the void and thus the possibility of change is not in the interest of the powers that be.

To prevent any coming through of the void, or in Badiou's words, of an inexistent part which would ruin the structure, it is necessary to supplement the situation with a state of the situation. The situation can be described as a structure grid and the state of the situation as a dense meshing which covers it. Returning to Set theory, what Badiou calls the state of a situation is precisely the set of all the possible sets derived from the elements presented within the situation. In other words, the state of the situation is a re-presentation.⁵⁸ The presentation as ‘ones’ of the elements of the

⁵⁸ The fact that *representation* in French also means theatre performance cannot be ignored. In *Rhapsody for Theatre*, Badiou seems to implicitly play on the closeness between *representation* and re-presentation.

situation is supplemented by the counting of all the subsets created from the elements previously counted as ones. The structure is thus supplemented by a metastructure. The English expression “to put a lid on it” is particularly evocative in this context to describe the fact that the possibility of change is occulted by a regimented, cemented representation of ‘what there is’.

In set theory, the number of subsets or multiples which can be created from the elements of a given set always exceeds the number of these elements. Badiou gives an example of this in his play *Ahmed philosophe*, in the sequence entitled ‘Mathematics’ which stages Ahmed directing two understudies in order to empirically demonstrate that the number eight is contained in the number three, since by arranging the elements which are parts of three, the possible combinations amount to eight.⁵⁹ Representation is always in excess over presentation since there are always more ways to group the elements of the set together than there are elements in that set. Thus, the state of a situation never coincides with the situation itself. When the gap between ‘what there is’ and ‘what we are compelled to believe there is’ is flattened out, the excess of representation over presentation is kept as undiscernible. In other words, when presentation and representation are hermetically superimposed, it is difficult to see things for what they are. For Badiou, representation is first and foremost orchestrated by the State, which imposes its conception upon the situation. Bosteels remarks that what Badiou calls the state of a situation is nothing other than a defense mechanism against the perils of the void. (Bosteels: 2009, 110) He explains that “the foreclosure of the void is the operation which guarantees the homogenous functioning of established order, when

⁵⁹ With A for Ahmed, the eight combinations are as follows: A1, A2, A3, A1+A2+A3, A1+A2, A2+A3, A3+A1 and 0. Within set theory, the same idea that a given set always exceeds the number of these elements, would be demonstrated by considering the possible subsets of the set A {1, 2} are {}, {1}, {2}, {1,2}. This is how the infinite can be demonstrated by set theory, since if we consider a set with an incalculable number of elements, there will always be a set containing all of the subsets of this given set, and thus outnumbering it.

everybody does what it happens to be doing by nature, the state of the situation taking by definition the appearances of a second nature" (Bosteels: 2009, 111). In other words, to maintain order, the State imposes a representation which seals the situation by multiplying the connections of the elements within it by multiplying subsets, categories, minorities, and thus assigning a place to everything and everyone and ensuring that everything and everyone stays in its place.

Cementing the reality ensures that nothing new can come to disrupt it. If the presentation of elements belonging to the situation is concealed by the overpowering and overshadowing representation, it becomes even harder for what is un-presented to occur, that is, for the void to be revealed. Only a seismic event can shatter the fabric of what is perceived as 'what there is' to allow a truth to come through. Unless an event surges forth in the gap between the structure and the metastructure, the excess of the state of the situation upon the situation remains intangible. The event is said to be revealing the void of a situation, because the void which forms the basis of the situation remains capped unless presentation and representation are disjointed. However, for Badiou, there cannot be an event without a subject of the event. The whole system implies that a subject decides upon the gap between structure and metastructure and reveals the underlying void. Ultimately, the degree to which the state of the situation coincides with the situation cannot be decided upon but subjectively.

Badiou's dialectic of theatre has to be understood in the light of the above. The diagram provided in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* only makes sense when read against Badiou's use of set theory, especially the interaction of the three terms of the dialectic at-play: State (situation of representation), Ethics of play (provocation of the presentation) and Spectator (possible support of Truth). (RT, 194) Badiou's dialectic of theatre is described precisely as a dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity. Badiou distinguishes between the objective theatrical dialectic (the State of theatre)

and its subjective dialectic (the Ethics of play). (RT, 227) Against representation, Badiou proposes dialectics:

Dialectical thinking is recognised by its conflict with representation. Such thought tracks down in its field the point of unrepresentability, which attests that we are in contact with the real. (PPP, 86)⁶⁰

The fact that dialectical thinking is in rupture with the order of representation points to the paradoxical nature of Badiou's theatre dialectics: the theatrical representation conflicting with the order of representation. For Badiou, does theatre has for function to bring the collapse of representation? In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou writes:

What does the theatre talk about if not the state of the State, the state of society, the state of the revolution, the state of consciousness relative to the State, to society, to the revolution, to politics? [...] (RT, 206)

This means that theatre comments upon the way representation supersedes presentation, upon the way the state of the situation hermetically caps the situation. How does theatre operate in order to denounce the representation of the real orchestrated by the State? Badiou writes:

Theatre, indeed, represents: it represents the representation, not the presentation. The State, not the emergence of its place. It is the ceremony of all ceremonies. It does not begin until the (political, Greek) freedom to judge the representation is immanent to the conditions of art. It authorises itself by representing representations.

⁶⁰ "On reconnaîtra d'abord une pensée dialectique à son conflit avec la représentation. Une pareille pensée traque dans son champ le point irréprésentable, d'où s'avère qu'on touche au réel." (PPP, 86)

(RT, 206)⁶¹

From the Greeks onwards, theatre has always been of the State. Badiou himself advocates a theatre funded by a system of tax rebates or penalties.⁶² For Badiou, the art of theatre is irrevocably tied to the State. He distinguishes theatre and Theatre in their different relationship to the State. Whilst Theatre (capital T) challenges the State and its imposed representation of the situation, theatre (without a capital) supports the State by ensuring that the assignation of places in society remains unquestioned. In order to achieve this, theatre - its easiest illustration would be a conventional Boulevard play, does not reveal the state of the situation as a representation, but as a natural order. Despite staging superficial crises, for example, in the form of marital affairs, order is always maintained or ultimately retrieved. However, for Badiou, theatre is not limited to Boulevard plays, but defines any theatrical enterprise which duplicates the consensual views of the situation. Therefore, theatre (without a capital) would pertain to what Badiou defines in *Logics of Worlds* as democratic materialism, that is, to the axiom "there are only bodies and languages," as opposed to Theatre (capital T) which would abide to the materialist dialectic's axiom, "there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths" (LW, 4).

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou does not give any clear example of theatre productions which contribute to the state of the situation instead of denouncing it.

⁶¹ I have slightly altered Bruno Bosteels' translation of *Rhapsody for the Theatre* by opting for English UK spelling in the quotes instead of American English for consistency reason.

⁶² "Every resident aged 7 and up, except in cases of force majeure, would be expected to attend at least four representations per year. Theatre would obviously be free. [...] Control at the entrance would be limited to putting the official stamp in the theatre card that every resident receives at the start of each year. The compensations and the punishments must always be of the essence: the theatre card will be joined to the tax declaration. Spectators who are particularly zealous, whose card offers a constellation of stamps, would be entitled to substantial deductions. By contrast, the recalcitrant ones, those who fall short of their legal theatre obligations, would pay a painful fine of a fixed amount, whose profits would go entirely to the theatre budget. (RT 232)

An analysis of Groupe Foudre's direct interventions during the staging of plays it deemed reactionary, might provide us with some clues as to what group member Badiou means by a theatre of consensus, which was precisely the type of theatre Groupe Foudre publicly rejected.⁶³ An article in *Feuille Foudre* announces Badiou's differentiation between theatre and Theatre in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. In a pamphlet entitled "L'Âge d'Or: image of the present reality or political disarray," the Groupe Foudre criticises Mnouchkine's *L'Âge d'Or* for not fulfilling the objectives set out in the play's programme: "We desire a theatre in direct contact with social reality, not a mere assessment but an urging to change our living conditions." Mnouchkine's production is a collective creation evoking the life of migrant workers in France in 1975. However, for Groupe Foudre, the play stays at the surface of the social reality by sociologically describing different classes or social forces almost exclusively subjected to "grinding, oppression and exhaustion." What is deplored is the lack of political project in Mnouchkine's questioning of social reality.

In *Feuille Foudre*, Mnouchkine's production is described as polarising oppressors and victims and falling into an ideology of denunciation, while Groupe Foudre advocates a "revolutionary theatre which even if it shows oppression, must grasp and reflect the contradiction inherent to any situation and reflect a process" (Groupe Foudre: 1976, 10). This critique raises not only political but also representational issues and the underlying is how can a contemporary social situation be staged. The main objection to Mnouchkine's production is that in the play, individuals are portrayed at the place they are assigned to by society, in other words, by what the Groupe Foudre describes as the bourgeois order: the immigrant as oppressed, the estate agent as corrupt, etc. Groupe Foudre argues that when theatre addresses undifferentiated living experiences from a point of view which differs from the

⁶³ See earlier note 21

people's point of view, then what is conveyed is merely dominant ideas, that is, the ideas of bourgeoisie domination. (Groupe Foudre: 1976, 9)

Feuille Foudre's critic of Mnouchkine's staging of workers and particularly migrant workers in *L'Âge d'Or*, announces Badiou's *Ahmed* tetralogy, which could be summarised as an attempt to refuse to assign any predetermined place to the migrant worker. With the *Ahmed* tetralogy, Badiou's theatre is confronted with the difficulty of representing a political subject, the Arab migrant living in France, whose presence on the political scene is negated. In fact, the collapse of political representation in France in the 80s is due to the incapacity of the existing political parties to represent the Arab worker, who paradoxically plays an increasing role in the economy. According to Olivier Neveux, the play's subtitle *Scapin 84* alludes to the "Talbot 1984" event. (Neveux: 2005, 185) In *Peut-on penser la politique ?*, Badiou explains that what happened at the Talbot car factory was the sudden emergence of a silent minority, the immigrant workers, who claimed their rights and disturbed the traditional opposition between the State and the unions. The voicing of the outcasts' demands challenged the hold that the State and unions had upon the situation.⁶⁴ (PPP, 75) According to Neveux, because of its date and its aim, the play *Ahmed le subtil* takes place within the process of fidelity towards the Talbot event, which consisted of the immigrant workers having the floor. (Neveux: 2005, 185)

The context of the play *Ahmed le subtil* provides a perfect illustration of the effects of the categorization imposed by the State explained earlier. Badiou writes in *La Distance politique* that 'the hatred of immigrants was established massively, consensually, at the level of the state, from the moment when we began, in our representations of the world, to omit the workers, the figure of the workers.' (LDP,

⁶⁴ Badiou mentions in particular the CGT (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs) paradoxically unable, according to Badiou, to represent the workers and the racist anti-workers Confédération des Syndicats Libres (CSL). (PPP, 75) The "Talbot event" is also referred to in 1987 in OP's militant periodical *Le Perroquet*: "What happened at Talbot was for us an epoch-making event. We felt that it was putting an end to the workers' era we had known since 68." (quoted in Neveux: 2005, 187)

1.12.91: 3)⁶⁵ As a result of the orchestrated failure to represent the workers within a new global economic system which emerged in the 1980s, the term workers was substituted by pseudo-political labels such 'immigrant', 'foreigner' '*étranger*', '*clandestin*'. As far as France is concerned, this shift in the representation of labour forces can be traced back to the strike movement which culminated at the Talbot factory in 1984: one of Mitterrand's first prime ministers, Pierre Mauroy, justified the repression of a strike at Renault-Flins in 1983 on the basis that the striking workers were 'foreign to the social reality of France' (LDP, 3.05.92: 12). To an extent, Badiou's *Ahmed* tetralogy is an attempt to challenge this categorisation by staging Ahmed as eluding any social prejudice. The character of Ahmed renders any pinpointing of the migrant impossible.

For Badiou, politics has to elude any categorisation dictated by the State. He also considers parliamentary politics as a tragically flawed representational system. In theory, the State, political parties or unions cannot represent all the elements they are supposed to represent as a set containing these elements, because of their intrinsic inability to make provision for the empty set, or unrepresented group, they nevertheless contain. In practice, not only does the Talbot event illustrate perfectly the failure of the workers' union to represent all of the workers it claims to stand for, but also the contradiction attached to the creation of yet another subset, that of the migrant workers, while in fact, the elements of this group, if group there is, simply claim to have the same rights as all the other workers. Assigning yet another label to this non-category by designating the "migrant-worker" as victim cannot but reinforce the staticity of the State's assignation of places. This is the reason why Badiou calls for the victim to declare themselves and somehow bypass the

⁶⁵ *La Distance politique* is the bulletin published by *L'Organisation politique*. This and the following extracts of LDP are translated and published by Hallward (Hallward: 2003, 232)

representation orchestrated by the State. Badiou comments upon the Talbot event thus:

Politics starts when the aim is not to represent the victims - a system of representation the old Marxist doctrine remained tied to – but to be faithful to the events where the victims declare themselves. (PPP, 75)⁶⁶

When it comes to theatre, this is in line with the Groupe Foudre's objections to Mnouchkine's staging of the migrant as a victim. In Badiou's tetralogy, whilst Ahmed is described as an Algerian worker who has had problems with the authorities, he is not presented as a victim. This is expressed by *Ahmed le subtil's* subtitle, *Scapin 84*, and made explicit at the end of the last part of the tetralogy, *Les Citrouilles*, when staring at Ahmed, another character declares: "Scapin? But you are Scapin! There are no more immortal Scapin except you, today, here and now. The immortal Scapin passes into the mortal Ahmed. Scapin, but he is in the wood of your mask!" (LC, 107) Instead of being presented as a victim, the character Ahmed is a modern adaptation of the resourceful valet of Classical comedy. From *Feuille Foudre's* critic and Badiou's comments upon the Talbot event, it can be deduced that Badiou rejects the type of theatre produced by Mnouchkine as having little to do with political theatre, or at least with politics.⁶⁷ It seems that it is with Mnouchkine's production in mind that Badiou writes: this kind of theatre "perpetuates and organises the easygoing and grumpy subjectivity that is needed for the State" (RT, 200). The empathy required from the audience might induce catharsis, but in any

⁶⁶ "La politique commence quand on se propose non pas de représenter les victimes, projet dans lequel la vieille doctrine marxiste restait prisonnière du schéma expressif, mais d'être fidèle aux événements où les victimes se prononcent." (PPP, 75)

⁶⁷ Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil more recent production of *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (2003), would probably be criticised by Feuille Foudre on the same ground as her production of *L'Âge d'Or*. See for example, William McEvoy, 'Finding the Balance: Writing and Performing Ethics in Théâtre du Soleil's *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (2003)', *New Theatre Quarterly* (2006), 22: 211-226

case, spectators remain comforted in “their” views and opinions. If there is catharsis, it only serves to perpetuate the order of things, or the State’s attribution of places. On the other hand, for Badiou Theatre (capital T) “always says something about the State, and finally about the state (of the situation)” (RT, 200). For Badiou, Theatre (capital T) addresses the state of the situation, or state of things, by showing how it is orchestrated by the State, while theatre simply reproduces the representation imposed by the State.

What I would like to explain now is that by representing representations, theatre installs a dialectic, what Badiou calls the objective theatrical dialectic, that is the first part of theatre’s three-pronged dialectics: the State of theatre or theatrical State. It is important to note that for Badiou, dialectics here is not to be understood in terms of thesis, antithesis and synthesis nor in terms of negation and then negation of this very negation. The dialectical principle which applies to most of Badiou’s philosophical system is “one divides into two”.⁶⁸ For Badiou, “[the] question of novelty immediately becomes that of a creative scission within the singularity of the situation” (TC, 60). This is in line with Marxist rhetoric, as Marxist dialectics is first and foremost a process of internal division. However, in his work, Badiou has come to systematise the Marxist notion of division. In an article written in 1983, Badiou announces his theory of the event to come in terms of scission: “At stake are the criteria of dialectical thinking – general thinking of scission, of rupture, of the *event*

⁶⁸ In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou writes: “In concrete, militant philosophy, [...] there is only one law of the dialectic: One divides into two. Such is the principle of observable facts and of action.” (TS, 14) Badiou also stresses that “dialectics states that there is the Two, and intends to infer the One from it as a moving division. Metaphysics posits the One, and forever gets tangled up in deriving from it the Two.” (TS, 22) In *The Century*, Badiou explains that two conceptions of the essence of dialectics oppose the Chinese revolutionaries in 1965, whether dialectics is thought of as the genesis of antagonism or as a desire for fusion, unity and peace. The latter position, considered to be that of the right, supports the desire for the One, for synthesis. However, Badiou explains that under the guise of thinking ahead, that is, thinking about the unity at the end of the class war, this position is in fact reactionary, as it cannot but desire the unity from the past. On the other hand, one must accept the division “one divides into two” to effect change in the present. (TC, 60)

and of recomposition.”⁶⁹ For Badiou, dialectics has to be understood in terms of scission. For example, he argues that Maoism has introduced an internal divide into Marxism-Leninism. In *Théorie de la contradiction*, Badiou explains that Mao's logic of scission is a prime example of dialectical thinking: “Rebel thinking if there ever was one, revolted thinking of the revolt: dialectical thinking” (ThC, 50-51). According to Bosteels, Maoism will come to signify for Badiou “an understanding of the dialectic as precisely such a thinking through inner splits and divided recompositions” (Bosteels: 2005, 576).⁷⁰ The principle “one divides into two” has to be understood in terms of “inner splits” and “divided recomposition”.⁷¹ It is important to understand the articulation of Badiou's ontology upon dialectics. The dialectical principle « one divides into two » applies to Badiou's ontological system based upon set theory. Being is divided between inconsistency, that of the pure multiple, and

⁶⁹ Badiou, Alain. “Les 4 dialecticiens français: Pascal, Rousseau, Mallarmé, Lacan,” *Le Perroquet : Quinzomadaire d'opinion* 22 (March-April 1983), 11. This is quoted by Bosteels (2005: 576)

⁷⁰ In an article entitled ‘Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics’, Bruno Bosteels argues that when Badiou, in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (1997), refers to his red years back in 1968, he writes in the present tense which suggests that Badiou was and is still a Maoist. Bosteels points out that “[r]ather than having become a self-confessed post-Marxist, following a career path parallel to that of authors such as Ernesto Laclau, Badiou is indeed better described as a post-Maoist.” (Bosteels: 2005, 581) The path of Laclau and Badiou are however distinct. Peter Hallward, quoting from a conversation with Badiou (12.03.08), writes that Badiou firmly refuses the term ‘post-Marxist’ in Laclau's sense as a description of his work. Hallward sees in the OP's practice and priorities a proof of how far Badiou is from joining Laclau in giving up on the working class. (Hallward: 2002, 15)

⁷¹ In Badiou's dialectical system, change is sought out within a situation through a relentless process of internal division. Yet, constant resorting to the old-seasoned concept of dialectical materialism, even when renamed as materialist dialectics, could seem at odds in what could be called a philosophy of the new. Both expressions ‘dialectical materialism’ and ‘materialist dialectics’ have a long history within Marxist theory. See Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Penguin, 1969), especially section VI, “On the Materialist Dialectic”. However, Badiou redefines the concept at the beginning of *Logics of Worlds* and focuses upon the agent of the cut rather than on the result of the division. Thus materialist dialectics is not simply applied but questioned. To an extent, Badiou's philosophy can be considered as renewing dialectical materialism, yet rather than prescribing pure beginnings, his materialist dialectics calls for infinite recompositions. As such, it is a philosophy of change rather than a philosophy of the new. Badiou has written a review of Althusser's *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, entitled “Le (Re)commencement de la dialectique materialiste” in *Critique*, XXIII, Nr 240, 1967. 438-67. This review is commented upon in Bosteels' article “Alain Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*. Part I. The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?”, which provides a clear analysis of the relationship between Badiou and his master Althusser in their respective definitions of materialist philosophy. Dialectics seems also to be making a return in the domain of thought. For example, see a summary of the evolution of dialectics and an account of where the concept stands nowadays in Bertell Ollman and Tony Smith (eds.), *Dialectics For The New Century* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2008)

consistency, that of the multiples counted for ones; the latter being in turn split between presentation, that is the counting for ones of the elements, and representation, that is the counting as ones of the subsets of the set containing the elements counted as ones. By representing representations, theatre in fact divides representation in two, between the representation of the State and its own.

The result of the divided recomposition effected by theatre dialectics in what seems like an escalation of representation amounts, in fact, to a disentanglement of situation and state of the situation. Badiou writes,

Theater is an art of ideal simplicity obtained via a *typical* attack. This simplicity is itself caught up in the illumination of the vital entanglement. Theater is an experiment – simultaneously textual and material – in simplification. Theater separates what is mixed and confused, and this separation guides the truths of which theater is capable. (IN, 73)

For Badiou, theatre is an art of simplification. This is in direct relation with his reading of Mallarmé and his appropriation of the Mallarméan concept of *déliaison*.⁷² For Badiou, Mallarmé's poetry leaves out reality in its massivity as merely imaginary, the result of false relations which employs language for commercial tasks alone. (BE, 192) This echoes Badiou's dialectics of the situation and the state of the situation. The state of the situation wraps the situation in a tissue of false relations by multiplying categorisations into subsets. While Mallarmé deplores the use of language for commerce, Badiou denounces representation as the State's

⁷² In *Conditions*, Badiou explains that he has abandoned his project for a book on Mallarmé, provisionally entitled *Déliaison*, which would have combined and pushed further his reflection on Mallarmé in *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event*. However, he stresses that *Logics of Worlds* covers what the book on Mallarmé would have dealt with. (CN, 292) Therefore, Mallarmé has remained Badiou's prime interlocutor to this day as Badiou's work on the 'déliaison' in *Logics of Worlds* and its rearticulation of the notions of space and object attest. See in particular *Logics of Worlds* Book III *Greater Logic*, 2. *The Object*, 191-229.

tool for control and oppression. Badiou's theory of theatre reiterates Mallarmé's denunciation of reality as a result of false relations denouncing the state of the situation as a tissue of fake relations which theatre has to disentangle. For Badiou, theatre provides the audience with clear ideas or rather surprises the audience with their own sudden clarity of thought. The complexity of the situation they believe themselves to be in, in other words the representation of what there is they are made to believe in, is exposed as invalid. The illusion of a homogeneous order is undone by theatre. By staging the illusion of a homogeneous order bound to be ultimately unveiled as the curtain falls, theatre denounces the apparent tangibility of the state of the situation. When dialectically configured, the text and the other components of Theatre clear the space for thinking. Their layout reconfigures the representation of the situation, thus challenging its adequation with the situation and the wholeness, or opacity, of the structure-metastructure system; only then can ideas and truths permeate its logic.

To an extent, the art of theatre disentangles life's syntax like the philosopher exposes the syntactic machination of a poem by Mallarmé. When Badiou redistributes the poem into prose, he creates the space for the traces of the event to become visible. Badiou describes theatre as proceeding, like the event, by typical *strikes*. However, in the case of theatre it is the strike of the idea which comes to shed some light upon the complexity of sexual desire and socio-political representation. According to Badiou's third thesis on theatre, desire and politics interweave to form the material of comedy and tragedy which gets disentangled by the theatre-idea. (IN, 73) However, this does not mean that the theatre-idea elucidates the situation with a truth. It merely exposes the situation, clarifies the problem. According to Badiou, this clarification only provides rails for the truths theatre is capable of producing. (IN, 73) For Badiou, the truths produced by Theatre are of a political nature since "they crystallize the dialectics of existence and aim to

elucidate our temporal site" (RT, 200). The passage from the dialectics of theatre to the dialectics of existence is made possible by elucidating the temporal site. That is denouncing the state of representation and unbinding the forced relation among the elements of the situation, that is, the foreclosing of the void imposed by the State. Badiou writes,

What true theatre presents is not represented, and the word "representation" is misplaced. A theatrical spectacle is every evening an inauguration of meaning. When the text and the staging know how to solicit the virtual ethics of play, the actor or actress is the pure courage of this inauguration. (RT, 221)

What "true theatre," or Theatre (capital T) presents is the possibility of a truth, which might arise by looking at the situation from a new angle. It is because theatre is an *unbinding* process that each performance can create a new meaning. More precisely, Theatre recreates meaning from a given situation. As explained earlier, rather than focusing on deciphering the poem, the reader has to accept the invitation of the poem to delay its interpretation in order to be touched by the way the images conveyed by the poem are structured and by the complexity of their reverberation. However, Theatre seems to operate the other way around. For Badiou, in the case of theatre it is the contrary: in the same way the philosopher disentangles Mallarmé's syntax to 'return' to the poem from prose for philosophy's own ends, theatre disentangles the inextricable knots of politics and desire to make room for the idea to emerge. In other words, theatre clarifies the situation so that it can be thought through. However, one might object that every spectator perceives a given situation differently. This is the reason why Badiou's theory of theatre implicitly and explicitly presupposes throughout that theatre pertains to a thinking in common and relates to the audience as a whole in the same way the State relates to its citizens as a nation. Yet, although Badiou considers the gathering of *la Foule*

as a prerequisite to theatre, for him, theatre addresses spectators individually and urges them to partake in collective thinking. However this does not mean that theatre unites the audience around one single thought, but that spectators have in common to partake in a dialectical thinking process, which for Badiou, is by definition based upon infinite divisions.

By representing the state of the situation, theatre points to what seems to be part of the situation when, in fact, it is an imposed political representation. In this light, tragedy and comedy broadly defined by Badiou as mixing politics and desire in different measures can be further understood as confrontations of the disorder of phantasm, a representation dictated by desire, and the order of representation, that orchestrated by the State. By operating a *deliaison* or unbinding, theatre points to the space in-between where a subjective instance can come to question what would have defined the domain of objectivity – knowing that this objectivity is fabricated. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou stresses that the stage director is the regent of objectivity and the actor is the body of subjectivity. (RT, 227) The theatre director orchestrates what is given as objective on stage. A system of representation accepted as 'what there is' for the time of the performance. In the theory of the event, the subject occupies the space in-between situation and state of the situation, presentation and representation, and somehow signals the presence of the void which the event has come through. Similarly, the actor operates within the gap between the state of the situation and the representation of the state of the situation. It is important to note that the actor is not a subject, but rather a marker of the subjective.

According to the dialectic of the Theatrical State, within the theatrical mise-en-abyme of the situation-state of the situation system, acting somehow mirrors the subjectivisation process. In *Being and Event*, Badiou writes,

It is as though, between the structure [...] and the metastructure, [...] a chasm opens, whose filling in depends solely upon a conceptless choice. (BE, 280)

Badiou's ontology implies that a subjective instance decides upon the gap between situation and state of the situation and thus points to the underlying void. Therefore, the degree to which the state of the situation coincides with the situation cannot be decided upon but subjectively. In the next section, I will investigate how Badiou's ethics of play ascribes a place to the actor which is similar to that of a subjective instance.

3 - Ethics of play

Badiou states in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* that the ethics of play forces the actor to occupy a place on the verge of the void. This is also the place assigned to the subject in *Being and Event*. The ethics of play consists of marking the gap between presentation and representation. In the case of the actor, the ethics of play consists of creating an opening between representation - or state of the situation, and representation of representation, that is, theatre staging of the state of the situation. Ultimately, the ethics of play makes an opening possible for what was unrepresented or irrepresentable within the state of the situation to come to the fore. How is this effected? Badiou describes the ethics of play as

[...] an ethical availability that is directed against all substantialism, against all fixed conceptions of the roles, the people, or the representations. The actor exhibits onstage the evaporation of every stable essence. The decisiveness of the bodily and vocal gestures in which he or she presents himself or herself serves above all to establish, in delight and surprise, that nothing coincides with itself.

The ethics of play is that of an escape [...] (RT, 221)

The imperative for the subject as well as for the actor is to be a-substantial, deprived of essence. The ethics of play eludes the trap of representation by allowing the void to come to the surface; this is the reason why it points to the irrepresentable.⁷³ The evaporation of every stable essence means that the actor

⁷³ It is important to underline that for Badiou ethics does not equate to a notion of general morality. As pointed out by Badiou, his definition of 'ethics' follows Lacan's in his discussion of the Ethics of psychoanalysis as opposed to Kant's notion of morality. (ET, 28) To my understanding, ethics is a disposition, a configuration, perhaps a distanciation, which makes possible the quest for truths. Thus, I would not have translated "éthique" by "morality" throughout *Rhapsody for the Theatre* and especially in the following quote: "Let's call dialectic of theatre the singular need for a spectator to be summoned to appear in the tribunal of a morality under the watchful eye of the State". (RT, 194) Here the spectator is summoned to a tribunal in the sense of the juridic exposition, or rather, the reopening of a

shows the inconsistency of being as opposed to the consistency of appearing and thus challenges what is given as reality. As explained earlier, the inconsistency of being is due to the pure multiplicity of being not founded upon the one, but upon the void. Somehow, the presentation of actors as multiples corresponds to an escalation of representation which disrupts the connections weaving the fabric of representation. Yet, the ethics of play is paradoxically an escape from representation as it points to the unrepresentable, that is, the infinite multiplicity of being and the void underlying it.

While it is fair to describe the opposition between being and appearing as the implicit material of theatre, it remains difficult to tangibly describe the ethics of play in terms of acting technique. Badiou is the first to say that the ethics of play does not rely upon virtuosity. As with Theatre (capital T) defined against theatre, in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou explains what the ethics of play is not rather than what it is. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou writes that what he considers to be bad theatre “gives up on the ethics of play insofar as it distributes substances” (RT, 220). Badiou refuses any substantialism in theatre. As pointed out by Bosteels, Badiou following Mallarmé draws a parallel throughout *Rhapsody for the Theatre* between theatre and the Catholic mass. (RT, 185)⁷⁴ As opposed to theatre, Theatre (capital T) is presented as the antithesis of the Catholic mass because it is not ruled by substantialism. In other words, Badiou rejects a pseudo-religious theatre, which would, through a process akin to transubstantiation, bring a hidden or sacred essence to the fore. Badiou's words are lapidary on this: “The Mass is worn out, the theatre of Presence is obliterated” (RT, 217). Against Grotowskian practices, the ethics of play consists precisely in the actor's ability to present existence as

case, a thorough reexamination of the situation under a new light, made possible by the transparency of the site and that effected by the actors. Ethics here means a discipline of openness.

⁷⁴ See in particular *Rhapsody for the Theatre's* paragraph LIV.

deprived of essence, of nature.⁷⁵ Badiou's main point is that unlike "theatre", which is a descendant of the Mass, with its established and substantial roles, its natural differences, its repetitions, its falsified event", Theatre (capital T) does not give substance to differences (RT, 220). Badiou differentiates between "bad theatre", with its caricatured predetermined roles such as "the virgin, the ageing hysteric, the tragic actor with the loud voice, the virtuoso of lamentations, the shivering beloved, the poetic young man", and Theatre, which "turns every representation, every actor's gesture, into a generic vacillation so as to put differences to the test without any supporting base." (RT, 219) This evokes the notion of 'minimal difference' developed by Badiou in *The Century*.⁷⁶ For Badiou, differentiation somehow operates within the domain of the same. Minimal difference does not designate an absolute other, but instead operates for the sole sake, one might say, of dialectical scission. No absolute reference is required to effect a differentiation, to install a distance. This is the reason why the actor does not need an object to imitate, but needs to present a constant minimal self-distanciation. The expression "generic vacillation" also points to the idea of *being* as multiple. It implies the explosion of any notion of being as referring to a totality, of being as one, of the nostalgia for the lost essence of being conveyed by what Badiou calls the Age of the poets.⁷⁷ Being

⁷⁵ To an extent, Badiou's ethics of play bears some distant resemblance to Sergy Grotowski via *negativa*, described by James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta as "a 'technique of elimination,' ridding the organism of its resistance to the psychophysical process of playing a role." (Slowiak and Jairo: 2007, 15) However, Badiou's ethics of play could not be more remote from Grotowski's notion of the "holy actor" aiming for individual transcendence, or that of the "total act", which calls for the revealing of the actor's "real substance". See Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* ([1968] 2002)

⁷⁶ See "The passion of the real and the montage of semblance" in *The Century*. (TC, 48-57)

⁷⁷ Although Badiou resorts to the work of a symbolic poet, he resists what he calls poetic ontology: "To the seduction of poetic proximity [...] I will oppose the radically subtractive dimension of being, foreclosed not only from representation but from all presentation. I will say that being qua being does not in any manner let itself be approached, but solely allows itself to be *sutured* in its void to the brutality of a deductive consistency without aura. Being does not diffuse itself in rhythm and image, it does not reign over metaphor, it is the null sovereign of inference. For poetic ontology, which -like History- finds itself in an impasse of an excess of presence, one in which being conceals itself, it is necessary to substitute mathematical ontology, in which dis-qualification and un-presentation are realised through writing." (BE, 10)

vacillates like a candle on stage and Badiou's use of a quote from Mallarmé's *Igitur* to conclude his *Rhapsody for the Theatre* is rather appropriate in this sense: "Nothing else, the breath remained, the end of word and gesture united—blow out the candle of being, by which all has been. Proof." (RT, 234)

For Badiou, Theatre (capital T) "presents differences as objectless transparencies" and "does not exist except in the act itself." (RT, 220) There is no ground for differences, they just appear as such in action. This is what Badiou means when he writes that "theatre [(without a capital)] proposes to us a signification of supposed substances, and Theatre [(capital T)], a procedure exhibiting generic humanity, that is to say, indiscernible differences that take place on stage for the first time." (RT, 220) Acting becomes ethical not by erasing all differences but by pointing out the arbitrary nature of any marker of difference. By showing on stage the "evaporation of every stable essence", the actor ruins the established distribution of roles in society. Actors have to literally engage in a play. Like the English term "play", the French "jeu" refers as much to a game as to acting. For Badiou, there is "a cogito of the actor [...]: I am not where one thinks that I am, being there where I think that one thinks that the Other is" (RT, 216). The ethics of play consists for the actors in playing an endless hide and seek game as much with themselves as with the audience. It is important at this stage to remark that Badiou's theatre does not propose a perpetually deferred encounter with the other. There is no Other as such, only a semblance of Other as Badiou's theatre as much as his philosophy are instead under the aegis of the *same*, which does not mean or tend towards the One. In the same way, there is no One (capital O), there is no Other (capital O), but simply Theatre (capital T). For Badiou, there are only different degrees of appearing, of being there and his conception of Theatre supports this. Badiou's reflection upon theatre feeds the whole argument of *Logics of Worlds*,

where he defines the different modes of existing, that is, the different modes of appearing in a world.

Theatre's play of differences is not the main reason why Badiou speaks of ethics. The most important aspect of the ethics of play is the provocation of presentation. As explained earlier, Theatre operates a *mise-en-abyme* of the structure-metastructure system. Theatre's scission of representation induces a split between situation and state of the situation. Hence theatre provokes presentation insofar as the ethics of play challenges the hermetic and homogeneous of the order of representation, thus ensuring that the gap allowing the void to come to the fore is left open. In order to provoke presentation, the ethics of play demands that actors resort to decisive bodily and vocal gestures. However, Badiou insists that "the central virtue of the actor is not technical but ethical" (RT, 219). Badiou explains that actors cannot rely upon effects – as these would equate acting to a straight imitation of an object, but upon gestures clearly signifying a availability, an opening. (RT, 219) Actors have to resist resorting to effects which could objectify their roles and retain their subjective quality. Badiou stresses that the ethics of play is only possible from the edge of the void, in other words, at the threshold of the absence of an object to imitate. The actor's provocation of presentation has to point to the out of joint nature of a world where "nothing coincides with itself". (RT, 221) The actors literally take a stand to reveal that the articulation of the different elements within the situation is forced and forged, when the site should present an objectless transparency which allows for the void to come to the surface. As such, actors themselves have to be transparent. The seeming paradox of the actor as defined by Badiou is to stand firm in an equivocal position, as if within the black hole of representation. The decisiveness of the actor's gestures can only be fully understood if Badiou's ethics of play is read in parallel with his theory of the subject. Badiou establishes the following link between subject and actor by declaring,

without elaborating further, that “the actor could very well show a subject without substance”. (RT, 216) This does not mean that Badiou deplores the fact that the actor is deprived of substance nor that the subject has a substance, but that the actor who abides by the ethics of play and does not seek to give a substance to his character could be a paradigm for the subject also deprived of substance in Badiou's theory of the subject.

Badiou's article entitled ‘On a Finally Objectless Subject’ written at the same time as *Rhapsody for the Theatre* provides a much needed theoretical background to understanding the importance of the above suggestion within Badiou's philosophical system.

A subject is not a substance. If the word substance has a meaning, it designates a multiple which is counted as one in a situation. The intrinsic indiscernibility into which a generic procedure resolves excludes a subject's being substantial. (OS, 26)

As mentioned earlier, the concept of generic is central to Badiou's philosophy.⁷⁸ A generic procedure is resolved when a truth about a given situation is rendered visible by the emergence of an event. This event, or unnamed multiple reveals the true nature or being of the situation within which it unfolds. In a sense, the true being of a situation lies with the part of infinity inherent to any situation, its part of imprevisibility. Badiou defines the generic as “the aleatory being of a singularity without predicate, of an infinity with no immanent hierarchy or determination.” (DO, 13)⁷⁹ Because of its intrinsic indiscernibility, a generic procedure reveals the imprevisibility of a situation, that is, its underlying void. The subject is a finite aspect

⁷⁸ See note 79 above.

⁷⁹ This is quoted by Alberto Toscano in his article entitled “Communism as separation” (Hallward: 2004, 139)

of the infinity held by the situation. Yet, because it partakes in this infinity, it cannot be counted as one. In the system formed by the structure and the metastructure, or situation and state of the situation, the subject occupies the space in-between. To an extent, the void is the place-holder for the subject. In this, the subject eludes both presentation - since the subject cannot be counted as one, and representation - as the subject ruptures the state of the situation. When it comes to theatre, the ethics of play seems to consist of occupying the space in-between assigned to the subject in Badiou's theory.

Badiou argues that the subject is a finite fragment of a truth process and calls 'subject' the local or finite status of a truth.

A subject is what is *locally born out*. The 'subject' thus ceases to be the inaugural or conditioning point of legitimate statements. He is no longer -- and here we see the cancellation of the object, as objective this time -- *that for which* there is truth [...] A truth always precedes him. Not that a truth exists "before" him, for a truth is forever suspended upon an indiscernible future. The subject is *woven* out of a truth, he is what exists of truth in limited fragments. A subject is what a truth transits, or this finite point through which, in its infinite being, truth itself passes or transits. This transit excludes every interior moment. (OS, 25)

This quote is essential to understand the relationship between subject and site, and consequently how the ethics of play can unfold in the space created by theatre, the theatre site. Badiou's ethics of play is hinged upon the notion of a subject without substance, in other words, a subject without interiority. Badiou's theory of the subject pertains to a positioning vis-à-vis the interior and the exterior. This is reiterated in *Theory of the Subject, Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* and

resonates throughout Badiou's theory of theatre. Acting, which for Badiou has to occur on the verge of the void is also conditioned by a logistics of borders. For Badiou truths do not originate in the subject's thought nor are truths addressed to the subject; there is no introspection possible on the part of the subject and ultimately, truths are not subjective.

Unlike Hegel, for Badiou, truths do not exist in an integral form, but, as stated earlier, present a part of uncertainty, a porosity, an incompleteness. (TS, 120) Truths are always in movement, in transit. Truths are indiscernible for knowledge, this is why Badiou states in the quote above that "a truth is forever suspended upon an indiscernible future." (OS, 25) A truth is referred to as a truth in retrospect and a subject somehow localises the future anterior dimension of a truth on a discernible timescale. Within Badiou's materialist dialectics, truths can only be assessed by the effects they have upon situations, by the way the elements of a site, including subjects, relate to the truths or not. Their magnitude can only be revealed *a posteriori*. Thus, truths are always in transit as their operating mode is the future anterior: it will have been true. By asserting that "the subject is locally born out," Badiou means that the subject is born out of the truth. This is because the subject is the result of the passage of the truth throughout the evental site. However, for Badiou, "[a] subject emptily names the universe yet-to-come which is obtained from the fact that an indiscernible truth supplements the situation. He is concurrently the finite real, the local stage of this supplementation." (OS, 32) Thus, the subject occupies a place in between: by giving a name to the potential outcome of truths and the subject is revealed as subject by truths.

To sum up, a subject becomes a subject by acting in reference to truths whose effectualisation is to come. For Badiou, the subjectivation process requires subjects to persevere on an uncertain path between open reference and potential outcome. Somehow, the subject serves as a prism through which the infinity of a

truth is effected in the naming of the change of situation it provokes. As the point of contact between a truth and its effect, the subject is irremediably finite and local. As such, the subject cannot account for the infinity of truths. Badiou stresses that “this infinity only comes into being through a succession of finite evaluations, and is thus never presented.” (OS, 26) Should we conclude from this that subjects represent truths? Would that be the meaning of the assertion that “A subject emptily names the universe yet-to-come”? In the same way the ethics of play kept the actor away from substantialism, the subject gives an empty name to the universe yet-to-come, in order to keep everything possible. Thus, rather than representing truths, subjects point in their direction. As vectors of truths and not truth-holders, subjects are unable to figure out nor acknowledge the infinity of truths. Moreover, subjects are not fragments of a whole, as there is no such thing for Badiou, as an integral truth. Thus subjects are deprived of substance and rather seem like a localised expression of the malleable border between the infinity of truths and that of their effects to-come. As pointed out by Badiou, his rearticulation of the relationship between subject and truth in his theory of the subject is indebted towards Lacan:

One must come to conceive of truth as making a hole in knowledge. Lacan is paradigmatic on this point. The subject is thus convoked as a border effect or a delimiting fragment of such a hole-piercing. (OS, 25)

Presented as a process, truth is no longer a qualification of knowledge nor an intuition of the intelligible. The subject cannot have any previous knowledge of the truth. The image of a hole pierced by the truth in the situation with the subject acting as a “delimiting fragment” echoes the position of the actor on the edge of the void.

The redeployment of Badiou's theory of the subject in *Logics of Worlds*, in particular the relationship between subjects and truths reinforce the analogy I am

stressing here between the ethics of play and the subjectivisation process. Badiou writes that “[a] subject is an indirect and creative relation between an event and a world” (LW, 79). In this respect, the ethics of play could also be described in these terms: the actors become a nodal point where the truths transited by theatre cross the dialectically divided representation system. In Badiou’s recent writings, the notion of world has replaced that of situation; world and situation mean the same thing. The relationship between situation and state of the situation explained earlier in relation to the dialectic of the Theatrical State is still valid but in terms of world and objective region. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou reformulates but does not redefine the place assigned to the subject:

There exist two kinds of consequences, and therefore two modalities of the subject. The first takes the form of continuous adjustments within the old world, of local adaptations of the new subject to the objects and relations of that world. The second deals with closures imposed by the world; situations where the complexity of identities and differences brutally comes down, for the subject, to the exigency of a choice between two possibilities and two alone. The first modality is an opening: it continually opens up a new possible closest to the possibilities of the old world. The second modality [...] is a point. In the first case, the subject presents itself as an infinite negotiation with the world, whose structures it stretches and opens. In the second case, it presents itself both as a decision—whose localization is imposed by the impossibility of the open—and as the obligatory forcing of the possible. (LW, 82)

The notion of point is crucial to Badiou’s enterprise and has been given a new dimension in his last opus *Logics of Worlds*. In this, Badiou finalises his concept and develops the notion of ‘holding the point’ (tenir le point), in other words, to take a

stand.⁸⁰ For Badiou, not only acting seems to amount to holding the point, but also to combine both modalities of the subject above. As an opening, the actor loosens up the structures of the world by showing nothing coincides with itself. The local appropriation of relations and objects of a world evokes the *unbinding* process mentioned earlier. My hypothesis is that the position of the actor is similar to that of the subject. Insofar as Theatre is able to produce some truths, the actor could be considered as a point through which truth transits, a local point through which the possible forces the situation. To an extent, the actor on stage physically marks the possibility of holding such a point. In Badiou's play *Ahmed philosophe*, Ahmed declares in the sequence entitled "Philosophy":

No matter how detestable the world is, and it is, there is always a point, obscure and personal, unexpected almost stupefying in your eyes, which is the point of departure where to think what there is from. Holding this point! To find and to hold it! Philosophy has no other aim! Anyone should find this point and hold it! The point in yourself where you can draw the resources to think and the joy attached to it. The point which is the point of view allowing anyone to invent and not simply repeat, as to repeat is the way to imposture and pain. No repeat, no simmering in one's own juice. To be irreplaceable, not because you are yourself, but because you have found, within yourself, the active point, which takes you away from your tiredness and intimate monotony.[...] Philosophy is what help us interrupt the repetition. Separate yourself! Separate yourself from yourself. Then with the real cutting through you, there will be thought

⁸⁰ See in particular the section entitled "The point as Choice and Place" in *Logics of Worlds*, where Badiou refers to Sartre's play *Dirty Hands*. (LW, 403-423)

and joy. (AhP, 101)⁸¹

These lines reiterate what Badiou writes in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* about the need for actors to be “capable of unfolding the real point of departure that they and they alone constitute rather than showing off the rhetorics of body and voice.” (RT, 198) Through the ethics of play, theatre serves as a condition for philosophy. To an extent, Theatre deploys actors as points, which transit the possibilities of truths towards the audience. However, Ahmed’s exhortation above leads to consider actors in their singularity as paradoxically presenting an introspective process without introspection, which can be emulated by spectators. The theory of the point somehow allows Badiou to present a subjectivisation process which does not resort to the inner self - as this would be in contradiction with the notion of subject deprived of substance. However a degree of introspection is retained in the quest for the singular point, which will redistribute one’s existence like a homothetic transformation: this is how the separation from oneself is effected. In the lines above, Ahmed enjoins spectators to project themselves upon a new grid of existence as in geometry, when a figure is projected through a point to form a new figure upon a different plane. The actor on stage could thus be perceived as the exteriorisation of what spectators could find within themselves. This is what is expressed by Ahmed in *Ahmed se fâche*:

[...] everyone has the possibility to meet one circumstance in life
when he can discover his interior Ahmed. Everyone, if he welcomes

⁸¹ Si détestable soit le monde, et il l'est, il y a toujours un point, en vous-mêmes, un point obscur et personnel, inattendu presque pour vous-mêmes stupéfiant, qui est le point de départ pour penser ce qu'il y a. Tenir ce point ! Le trouver et le tenir ! La philosophie n'a pas d'autre but ! Que chacun trouve son point et le tienne ! Le point d'où vient en vous la ressource de la pensée et de sa joie. Le point qui est le point de vue, le point qui fait que chacun peut inventer, et non pas répéter. Car répéter est le chemin de l'imposture et de la douleur. Ne plus répéter, ne plus cuire dans son jus. Être irremplaçable, non parce qu'on est soi-même, mais parce qu'on a trouvé, en soi-même, le point actif, celui qui nous sépare de notre fatigue et de notre monotonie intime. [...] La philosophie est ce qui nous aide à interrompre la répétition. Séparez-vous ! Séparez-vous de vous-mêmes. Alors avec ce réel en vous qui vous fend, il y a la pensée et la joie. (AhP, 101)

the uprooting circumstance, can allow the clandestine Arab he is under the carapace of convenience to come in full light. Since the inner Arab of everyone is the inalterable possibility everyone has to become, suddenly, one day, a nomad conquering an inner desert.⁸² (ASF, 207)

While these lines call for an introspective motion, it somehow functions in reverse. Rather than a quest for a stable inner self, the interiorisation is exteriorized and opens onto the void. Rather than pointing to being as substance, as an inner self, the name Ahmed here comes to symbolise the nomadic point within the inner void of the potential subject deprived of substance, like a dot upon a deserted landscape in the distance.

In view of the above, it is fair to say that the ethics of play amounts to “holding the point”, thus joining the dots between Badiou’s theory of theatre and the most recent development of his philosophy. While Theatre, like philosophy, interrupts the repetition, Badiou’s ethics of play is an ethics of perseverance rather than interruption. This is also how Hallward describes what “ethical” means for Badiou:

Understood in terms of a philosophy of truth, ‘ethical’ should simply describe what helps to preserve or *encourage* a subjective fidelity as such. The ethical prescription can be summarized by the single imperative: ‘Keep going!’ or ‘Continue!’ (Hallward 2001: xi)

⁸² [...] il existe pour chacun une circonstance de la vie où il peut découvrir, déclarer son Ahmed intérieur. Chacun, s’il accueille la circonstance déracinante, peut laisser venir au jour l’Arabe clandestin qu’il est, sous la carapace de la convenance. Car l’Arabe intérieur de chacun est la possibilité inaltérable qu’il détient de devenir, un jour, soudain, le nomade conquérant de son propre désert. (ASF, 207)

From this definition of the term 'ethical', it can be deduced that the ethics of play is an ethics of truths. It consists of channelling truths through a point. As pointed out by Sam Gillespie, Badiou proposes his ethics of truth "in opposition to the established ethics (of human rights, obligation to the alterity of the other, the disputed rights of animals and the unborn, etc.), it is because ethics must presuppose universality. There are no ethics of particularity." (Gillespie: 2001, 260) This is in line with what Badiou writes about the ethics of play, which tends towards the generic precisely because of the actor's singularity. Badiou makes the distinction between singularity and originality. An actor can be original but will ultimately re-enact this originality. Badiou stresses that "Given [his] principles, they cannot be actresses in the sense of a proper name or a supposed subjective substance. They can only be actresses in the evental singularity of a spectacle." (RT, 219) This is because, actors and actresses merely act and cannot exist but through acting.

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou opposes singularity to originality as it is not based upon substantiated difference but upon the presentation of the generic through the singular. Therefore the ethics of play does not support particularism and has nothing to do with ethically staging such and such minority or species. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou stresses, "[one] must at all times be singular. Singularity is much harder than originality, for a mere original ends up playing itself, becoming the nature that supports the differences. Singularity is a composition without a concept." (RT, 220-221) This is where the theory of the point proves useful, since for Badiou, the actor's function or role is to hold a point. Hallward explains that "[the] actors' task is to evacuate themselves of all specificity (however "original" or "unique") so as to reveal an invariably singular genericity." (Hallward, 2003: 205) As a result, there are no good or bad actors for Badiou since an actor cannot rely upon technique but has to be *singular* to meet the ethical requirements of Theatre (capital T). However, in the case of theatre, singularity evokes the idea of

holding the point, taking a stand. The subject's conceptless choice and the actor's conceptless composition seem very close ideas: like the subjective decision making, acting takes place in the here and now. In the same way, Badiou's subjective process keeps ideology at bay, acting does not seem to rely upon technique. This is a move away from virtuosic acting which seems to make training obsolete. How can singularity according to Badiou happen on stage? How do actors cultivate their disponibility? In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou remains theoretical on this point and does not elaborate upon the theatre practice as such. However, Badiou's play *Ahmed se fâche* is somehow a practical complement to *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. The lack of interiority of acting and the actor's position on the verge of the void stipulated by the ethics of play are demonstrated by Ahmed in the play. Ahmed reenacts a theatre rehearsal playing both the actor and the director roles and explains that the body of the actor is an "argument" in itself and not the envelope of an interior conviction (certitude) and that, especially in tragedy, everything is external, there is no interior. In other words, in practice, the actor does not have to be convinced in order to convince the audience. (ASF, 190) Ahmed, as director, stresses that:

In tragedy, there is a need for a great void between the poem and the voice; the voice has to be on the verge of the void, always. Your man, here, he precisely speaks of the void, he speaks of tragedy, of the moment when you have to decide. It is always tragic to decide...
(ASF, 191)⁸³

The absence of interiority required here echoes the topology of the subject exposed earlier. The tragic actor at the moment of decision, speaks the language of the truth

⁸³ "Dans la tragédie, il doit y avoir un grand vide entre le poème et la voix, la voix doit être au bord du vide, toujours. Ton bonhomme, là, il parle du vide justement, il parle de la tragédie, du moment où on décide. C'est toujours tragique de décider..." (ASF, 191)

or truth speaks through his voice. The voice has to be on the verge of the void so that truth can speak through it. The voice cannot stem from the inside, as the character utters his revelation as it dawns on him. Hence the comments of another character when Ahmed as director speaks the lines again to show the actor: "it's a bit dry, a bit distant." (ASF: 192) Ahmed as director explains that Ahmed as actor has to speak "as if a prompter was behind him and told him the text bit by bit."⁸⁴ (ASF, 192) However, it is not a case of the voice being simply disembodied since the focus is precisely on its channelling through the actor's body. The singularity required from the actor evokes the localised point held by the subject, but also evokes the function ascribed to art by Badiou in *On Beckett*,

It happens that something happens. That something happens to us. Art's mission is to shelter these points of exception from which truth proceeds, to make them shine and retain them – stellar – in the reconstituted fabric of our patience. (OB, 77)

To an extent, the ethics of play shelter these singular points, which allow for the passage of truths and their dissemination throughout the audience. It is as if instead of watching the light emanating from long-dead stars, one could contemplate through the luminous point of subjectivity on stage, the light of unborn stars, that is, the truths to come. In the quote, exception has to be understood both as exceptional but also in its etymological meaning of excepted from. As a result, the expression "points of exception" could almost be perceived as an oxymoron: what presents and subtracts itself at once. This is in line with the shift in Badiou's theory of the subject from a political subject identified as 'We' or 'I' to a subjective instance which is precisely what is not supposed to exist and which bears the mark of the exception, that is, a subject whose affirmation takes the form of a hiatus, a void, a

⁸⁴ « Comme si un souffleur derrière toi qui te dit le texte au fur et à mesure. »

grammatical incision. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou explains that the subject resides in

the “aside from”, the “except that”, the “but for”, through which the fragile scintillation of what has no place to be makes its incision in the unbroken phrasing of a world.

‘What has no place to be’ should be taken in both possible senses: as that which, according to the transcendental law of the world (or of the appearing of beings), should not be; but also as that which subtracts itself (out of place) from the worldly localization of multiplicities, from the place of being, in other words, from being-there. (LW, 45)

Badiou's theatre articulates the subject in such a manner that it follows the theoretical shift from a named subject to a subject marked by inexistence. This is the paradox of the actor as defined by Badiou to point to what subtracts itself, to present the void. To an extent, theatre could be defined as staging the pure multiple, that is, the appearing of being as eluding substance, thus, as infinite. This is probably the meaning of the *Igitur* axiom used by Badiou in the guise of a conclusion in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*:

“This was to take place in the combinations of the Infinite face to face with the Absolute. [...] There one of the acts of the universe was just committed. Nothing else, the breath remained, the end of word and gesture united—blow Out the candle of being, by which all has been.” (RT, 234)

In other words, on stage, being can only vacillate through gestures clearly signifying a disponibility, an opening. Through singularity, the ethics of play amounts to

'holding the point' against all fixed conceptions of the roles, the people, or the representations. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou writes:

A point of the world [...] is the appearance of the infinite totality of the world [...] before the instance of the decision, that is the duality of 'yes' and 'no'. 'To hold a point' means to hold this instance in the face of the world. Or, to have the subjective (that is, corporeal and formal) wherewithal to submit the situation to the decisional pressure of the Two (I say 'yes' or I say 'no', I find and declare a point of the situation) (LW, 591)

In the play *Ahmed se fâche*, Camille is Ahmed's main interlocutor. He tries to woo her by explaining the art of theatre. She can be described as a counterpoint of Ahmed. After Ahmed's explanation of the intrinsic link between tragedy and decision, she declares: "To decide, to decide... everything is already decided upon in theatre. In the long run, to always pretend that we decide what is already decided upon, is such a drag! (ASF, 192)⁸⁵ To an extent, for Badiou, theatre is an arduous learning process of decision making.⁸⁶ Within Badiou's system, eventual fidelity pertains to a decision-making process, which is based upon a radical concept of choice. However, as pointed out by Etienne Balibar, for Badiou, decision-making does not take place within the order of action or of pure practice but within the order of thought. (Balibar: 2004, 29)⁸⁷ Yet, theatre might provide Badiou with a site where

⁸⁵ CAMILLE: [...] Décider, décider... tout est toujours déjà décidé, au théâtre. Faire croire qu'on décide ce qui est déjà décidé, c'est d'un chiant, à la longue ! (ASF, 192)

⁸⁶ See also Badiou discussion of Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, *The Decision*, in *The Century*. (TC, 113-130)

⁸⁷ Balibar suggests that in a German philosophical tradition going from Kant to Fichte and from Fichte to Carl Schmitt or even Heidegger, decision-making might pertain to action rather than thought as it is the case for Pascal, Descartes, Mallarmé and even perhaps Sartre. (Balibar: 2004, 29) Noticeably, Badiou has been accused of leaning towards Schmittian decisionism and his fascist vision of the political act as a single supreme *act of will*. Badiou fended off this accusation by declaring: "In the current form of my work I don't attribute the decision to the name of the event, but to the event directly, and, finally, to the logical consequences of the event...It is not exactly the same as in *L'Être et l'Événement*. So I am not a decisionist...now." (IT, 172-173) See Colin Wright, "Event or Exception?"

thought becomes action, where thought is embodied, where thought materialises. In other words, actors would provide nodal points to think the situation anew. By rejecting both the all-encompassing One of metaphysics and the absent One of poetic disillusion, Badiou's ontology implies that being here is not an assignation to finitude, nor a condemnation to nostalgia, but the ground of thought itself. This is how the ethics of play pertains to thought, as actors are required to purely and simply be there. For this they need to present decisive bodily and vocal gestures solely grounded in the here and now. In *Being & Event*, Badiou defines the ethics of the subject thus: "Ethics [...] comes down to the following imperative: 'Decide from the standpoint of the undecidable'." (BE, 197) For actors, holding the point consists of ensuring that chance is taken into consideration, that chance is allowed to disrupt the system of representation. In this respect, the ethics of play can be understood as the obligation for actors to hold the point where a decision has to be made upon the undecidable. Badiou's play *Ahmed se fâche* here again bridges his theory of theatre and his theory of the subject. In the play, Ahmed declares in the name of all the actors:

We, people of the shadow and of the reversal of places [...] call upon a hidden prediction, which leads each one, within the statutory void, to the crossroad-point of all or nothing. Of course, many are held by the anxiety of seated places and prone to reptilian temperature. But others, whose number is suddenly enough, call upon themselves, [...] to enact the gesture of the redoubtable gambler. (ASF, 191)⁸⁸

Disentangling Badiou from Schmitt, or, Towards a Politics of the Void" in *Theory & Event*, Volume 11, Issue 2, 2008.

⁸⁸ "Nous, gens de l'ombre et du renversement des places, nous ne sommes pas de l'espèce ordinaire. Nous ne désirons plus le bonheur. Nous en appelons en chacun à une prédiction cachée : celle qui le porte, dans le vide statuaire, à la croix du tout ou du rien. Certes, chez beaucoup, que domine l'anxiété des places assises, il n'y a qu'une température de reptile. Mais en d'autres, dont le nombre est soudain suffisant, [...] se fait le geste du parieur redoutable. (ASF, 191)

It is interesting to note that Ahmed quotes word for word from Badiou's play *Incident at Antioch*. In this play, it is Cephas, the leader of the insurrection who pronounces the same harangue. (IA, 32) Actors stand here at the point where to decide upon a truth to-come, a truth which can only be revealed a posteriori. This is how "hidden prediction" has to be understood here. There is no messianic prediction beforehand, only the decision on the part of the subject to decide upon the future existence of a truth, which, as pointed out earlier, cannot be but incomplete. This is the meaning of deciding upon the undecidable, the all or nothing wager. Badiou's reflection upon the notion of Chance in "Coup de dés", relative to the decision of the subject to act or refrain from acting (not in a theatrical sense), sheds some light upon the articulation of decision and chance and the role assigned to chance in Badiou's theory of theatre. In *Being and Event*, Badiou writes:

Since it is the very essence of the event to be a multiple whose belonging to the situation is undecidable, deciding that it belongs to the situation is a wager: one can only hope that this wager never becomes legitimate, inasmuch as any legitimacy refers back to the structure of the situation. No doubt, the consequences of the decision will become known, but it will not be possible to return back prior to the event in order to tie those consequences to some founded origin. As Mallarmé says, wagering that something has taken place cannot abolish the chance of it having taken-place. (BE, 201)

The event is described here as a multiple which belongs to the situation, in so far as a subjective instance decides upon this belonging. As explained earlier this means that the subject has to manage a space between situation and state of the situation for the event to stem from the void and come to the fore. Yet the decision in itself is not an ultimate guarantee that an event has occurred. Thus, deciding upon an event does not obliterate the chance factor in the eventual occurrence, but on the contrary,

posits undecidability as the new law. To an extent, since the consequences of the event are deprived of an origin other than the event itself, chance becomes the origin of the truth to-come. It is in this scope that Badiou's assertion that "A theatrical representation will never abolish chance" has to be understood. (IN, 74)

This Mallarméan declaration erected as a theatre axiom by Badiou in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* convokes his reading of Mallarmé in relation to his theory of the event as developed in *Being and Event* to his theory of theatre. Badiou explains that a poem devoted to its own consumption or disparition, lights the path for philosophy to tend towards the welcoming of the unpredictable. For Badiou, this pertains to an ethics of thought: while philosophy is able to structure the 'there is', its difficulty, or tension, consists of systematically remaining able to welcome the unpredictable. (TP, 74)

In this role, poetry has to ensure that language is put under pressure to reconstitute a singular experience of the world. This applies to theatre, and the importance of the notion of chance in Badiou's theory of theatre also attests to the necessity for theatre to remain in tension so as to welcome the unpredictable. This tension is ensured by the dialectics of the theatrical State, the Ethics of Play and the Spectator-subject. Each performance is an event in itself and the repetition of the performance is not an obstacle to the singularity of performance. The arrangement of components has to ensure that, despite the repetitive nature of theatre performances, the performance remains night after night evental. As a live art, theatre offers a different performance every night, but this is not only what Badiou implies here. The evental nature of theatre is due to the chance factor attached to any performance. It is not simply a question here of the eventuality that the performance might be different because of such and such mishaps or happy coincidences on stage. Badiou stipulates the necessity for theatre to have a referent and dismisses pure non-repeatable improvisation as theatre exercises or ingredients but not theatre as such. (RT, 190)

This seems to leave very little to chance in theatre compared with the occurrence of an event.

Given the importance Badiou attaches to the materiality of the theatre process, the chance element at the core of the event is of a far greater intensity than that at work in theatre as conceived by Badiou. For him, even if the surrounding situation might be propitious for such or such thing to happen, as for May 68, by definition an event is extraordinary. On the contrary, Badiou does not seem to consider theatre as something that just happens to happen. Instead, he describes theatre as a carefully planned and crafted art, yet, he insists on the fact that theatre also contains the part of chance common to any temporal activity. In Badiou's theory of theatre, the director's reading and assembling of the seven components is largely attributed to chance. Paradoxically, while the theatre director is the "regent of objectivity", he also introduces the chance factor. (RT 227) Badiou refers to the theatre director's input as a haphazard thought who resorts to the theatre text as "the filter of a divination". (RT, 198) For Badiou, "the art of theatre lies in a choice at once very informed and blind". (IN, 74) In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou writes: "The paradox of theatre [...] lies in the fact that it presents itself as a figurative luxury, a solid chain, a cultural temple, but [...] it is actually made of flight and chance," and describes theatre as a "sensible arrangement of bodies, voices, and images that takes on meaning by fugaciously giving brilliance to the unassignable cause of a truth." (RT, 199) However, chance is not only constitutive of theatre because of its live nature. Besides its incidental nature providing the possibility of the new, the importance attached to chance in Badiou's writings about theatre lies with the fact that truths are articulated upon chance.

Badiou defines the subject of the event thus: "A subject is much rather 'taken up' in fidelity to the *event*, and suspended from truth; from which it is forever separated by chance." (BE, 406) In the theory of the event, fidelity names a process that separates and discerns "the becoming legal of chance." (Riera: 2005, 257) Chance becomes the rule when the subject has decided upon the undecidable to

choose a new law to abide to. As mentioned earlier, the state of the situation appears as the sole legitimate structure. It is not a question of the decision becoming legitimate under the condition of the structure situation-state of the situation, hence the need to erect a new law of chance to found the decision. To an extent, the ethics of play similarly ensures the becoming legal of chance. As Ray Brassier puts it, “[chance] provides the aleatory substance of subjectivisation because the subject of the truth procedure forces the generic extension through a series of entirely random choices.” (Brassier: 2004, 54) To an extent, the actor’s ethical availability that Badiou insists upon, amounts to an ethical opening to chance. In relation to chance, the ethics of play would function like the fidelity to the event. In this respect, the chance factor in theatre mainly lies with the audience. Whether the spectator will be struck by an idea and follow this injunction to think or not depends on the agency of the components but also on the spectator, ready or not to follow on the trail of truth. Spectating seems to amount to a fidelity, which would consist of discerning the becoming legal of chance, but also maintaining the desire for the chance encounter of an idea, or rather the encounter of chance. For Badiou, chance is an integral part of any truth process. By truth process, Badiou means the articulation as a continuum of an event’s consequences in a given situation, or world. Badiou stresses that “a fundamental randomness, that of its evental origins, partakes in every truth.” (HC, 244) This is the reason why in the ‘Theses on Theater’, Badiou insists that chance partakes in the theatre-idea.

In conclusion, Badiou’s ethics of play consists of holding the place of the subjective. However, this does not imply that the actor stands in for the political subject, but that the actor is a place-holder. To an extent, acting pertains to the two subjective modalities, that of opening and that of point. It points to the possibility that a subjectivisation process can occur. Badiou declares that “every subject stands at a crossing between a lack of being and a destruction, a repetition and an

interruption, a placement and an excess.” (TS, 139) Acting according to the ethics of play can also be summed up in the same terms. The a-substantial actor signals the presence of the void underlying the situation and thus initiates the ruin of representation by challenging what is presented as a homogeneous objective order. The actor's performance is by nature repetitive and yet it has to remain singular for each performance. The singularity of the actor interrupts the repetition order, that is, the perpetuation of the representation orchestrated by the State. This is what Badiou suggests when declaring that a theatre performance interrupts the repetition, with a double-entendre, as *répétition* also means theatre rehearsal in French. Finally, the actor assigns a local check-point to the possible truth theatre is capable of transiting.

According to the ethics of play, the actor occupies the gap between presentation and representation. Between the two, there is what Badiou calls an 'ethical disponibility' standing against any kind of substantialism or any preconceived ideas of society's roles and representations. The actor exhibits on stage the evaporation of any stable essence as the display of tangible corporal or vocal signs serves only to demonstrate that nothing coincides with itself. Actors operate against any natural differentiation, even when it comes to the 'given as natural' differences between the sexes. The actor assembles what seemed forever separated and disjoins what seemed irremediably united. For Badiou, acting is always interstitial and serves as a wedge driven between representation and presentation, order and disorder. The ethics of play unfolds between the inconsistency of the pure multiple based upon the void and the consistency of the state of the situation foreclosing the void. As defined by Badiou in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, the ethics of play seems to support a philosophical system which posits that “every being is being there” and that consequently, “appearing is an intrinsic determination of being.” (STTO, 162) The ontological nature of Badiou's theatre has

to be understood in these terms. Also, very simply, theatre is the place where to be is to appear. The parallel between a subject devoid of substance and asubstantial acting fends off the question of being as essence, as one, and rejects theatre in the Grotowskian vein. To an extent, the ethics of play supports Badiou's notion of transitory ontology. Badiou defines this as "the ontology unfolding between the science of Being qua Being, that is the theory of the pure manifold, and the science of appearing, that is the logic of the consistency of actually presented universes." (STTO, vi)⁸⁹ In this respect, to conceive the ethics of play in relation to Badiou's theory of point also allows for an update of his *Rhapsody for the Theatre* according to his *Logics of Worlds*. Adrian Johnston sums up Badiou's theory of the transcendental thus:

A Badiouian object is a transcendently indexed multiple (i.e., a constellation of being localised as being-there by virtue of its being situated within the coordinates of a given world) . . . It consists of a synthesis of pure multiple-being(s) and the relations prescribed by the transcendental regime of a world (with its other thus constituted objects). (Johnston: 2008, 361)

According to Badiou's logics, to exist is therefore to appear, and to appear is to be indexed to a world. Existence amounts therefore to belonging to a world. This means that an object never exists 'in-itself', but in terms of its localised being-there. According to this, the actor would be at once place-holder for the subjectivisation process and an object of the world "theatre". This was already in germ in Badiou's listing of theatre components in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* where the actor stood

⁸⁹ Badiou's ontological treatise has been translated by Norman Madarasz as *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* (2006). Unless otherwise stated, the quotes from this book are excerpts of this translation. For this quote, I have modified the translation because the accepted translation for the expression "multiple pur" in *Logics of Worlds*, is "pure multiple", rather than "pure manifold" as translated by Madarasz.

alongside set, lighting, audience, etc. The fact that appearing in a world means to exist in that world gives theatre, the art of appearing, a privileged status within Badiou's work. In an article entitled "Dialectiques de la fable" (2003), Badiou writes:

It is not by shunning appearing, or by singing the praises of the virtual, that you have a chance to access the Idea. It is by thinking appearing as appearing, and thus as this part of being, which happens to appear, and offers itself to thought as a deceit of seeing.⁹⁰ (Badiou: 2003, 129)

Despite the fact that Badiou has written this in relation to cinema in a book about the film *The Matrix*, this extract encapsulates the importance of theatre illusion within his philosophical system, as it is a sure means to access ideas. In the following section, I will investigate the relationship between theatre and thought through the notion of theatre-idea which is central to Badiou's theory of theatre. As pointed out earlier, the ethics of play amounts to an escape. To an extent, the ethics of play rehearses a subjectivisation process conceived by Badiou with the subjective instance eluding both presentation and representation. The ethics of play supports the notion of the subjective eluding presentation, eluding the counting-as-one as much as the One (Capital O). However, it is only when addressing the third term of Badiou's dialectics of theatre, the dialectic of the Spectator-subject, that the reasons why the subject eludes representation will become clear. Also, the analysis of Badiou's play in the last section will highlight the difficulty of staging a political subject that is supposed to elude a political representation orchestrated by the State then represented by theatre.

⁹⁰ "Ce n'est pas en se détournant de l'apparaître, ou en encensant le virtuel, que vous avez chance d'accéder à l'Idée. C'est en pensant l'apparaître comme apparaître, et donc comme ce qui, de l'être, venant à apparaître, se donne à penser en tant que déception du voir." (Badiou: 2007, 129) My translation.

4 - Theatre-idea⁹¹

Now that Badiou's ontological system has been explained and how the dialectics of the State of theatre and the ethics of play fit in with Badiou's theory of the event, as developed in *Being and Event* and redefined in *Logics of Worlds*, it is possible to engage with Badiou's notion of theatre-idea. This is a necessary step before finally explaining where the third term of Badiou's theatre dialectics, the spectator-subject, stands in relation to the whole system and how it announces Badiou's latest notion of *incorporation* and *ideation* as developed in his latest *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. The notion of theatre-idea developed in Badiou's 'Theses on Theater' is conditioned by the dialectic of the theatrical State, the ethics of play, and the subject-spectator developed in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. Also, in the same way that Badiou's theory of the event is strongly anchored in what Badiou describes as Mallarmé's subtractive path, Badiou's notion of theatre-idea draws from Mallarmé's subtractive method and stems from a Mallarméan *déliation* process. I will now examine the relationship between the ideal and material components of theatre and how the materiality of theatre can release the theatre-idea.

First of all, it is important to note that in the 'Theses on Theater', it is the theatre-idea which gives the impulsion to the dialectic movement of theatre.⁹² For Badiou, "The theatrical act is a singular *complementation* of the theatre-idea. (IN, 73) Badiou's theory of theatre is precisely hinged on the staging, or rather the materialisation on stage, of an "idea", the theatre-idea which is by nature

⁹¹ I have slightly altered Alberto Toscano's translation of the term 'idée-théâtre' in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* and use the term 'theatre-idea' rather than the American English spelling, 'theater-idea'.

⁹² To an extent, in Badiou's vocabulary, 'theatre-idea' comes to replace 'theatre dialectic'. Similarly, between *Logics of Worlds* and *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, the term 'dialectics' becomes rarer to the profit of that of 'ideation'. Nevertheless, his philosophy remains a materialist dialectic.

incomplete. Within Badiou's system, as a safeguard against ideology, ideas and truths are infinite processes. Similarly, a theatre-idea is an operation which ultimately cannot be completed as such. To an extent, theatre-ideas transit through theatre like truths transit through the subjective space. Like a poem by Mallarmé, theatre could be described as the vanishing site of a truth process: nothing remains of theatre at the end of the performance but an abandoned site. Badiou writes,

a spectacle is itself perishable by nature. It can certainly be repeated a good number of times. However, everything in it, or almost everything, is mortal. The seven elements are destined to disperse themselves, and in the end all that is left is the textual referent, which is not theatre in and of itself but at best an exhortation to give it existence. (RT, 193)

The text is not the essence of theatre but solely an incitation to make theatre exist. More precisely, the text encapsulates a potential theatre-idea. Theatre is a combination of material and ideal components which produces theatre-ideas. However, Badiou insists that no isolated component of theatre can by itself produce a theatre-idea. (IN, 72) While the theatre text might be considered a recipe for a theatre-idea, for want of a better word, it does not hold the essence of that theatre-idea as such. The process cannot be encapsulated and can only unfold in the here and now of theatre. Unlike the Mallarméan eventual crossing of the site which cancelled out the materiality of the site, in the case of the theatre-idea, the ensurance that something else than place has precisely taken place lies with the relationship among theatre components. The theatre-idea reinforces thus the materiality of theatre as the site of its emergence. However, Badiou distinguishes theatre, a mere arrangement of components, from Theatre (capital T), which is a singular orchestration of text, place, bodies, voices, costumes, lights and public. Every component of the theatrical situation bears a relation to the surging forth of

the theatre-idea. In other words, the theatre-idea emerges when the different material components of theatre are set in tension.

It is fair to describe the theatre-idea as the result of a relationship among stage objects. In Badiou's play, *Ahmed se fâche*, Ahmed explains the theatre-idea and ultimately takes his mask off. In an extremely didactic scene, Ahmed explains that the theatre-idea comes true through theatre falsification. Stage directions stipulate that each of Ahmed's theatrical commands of theatre elements has to be effected simply and visually as he enumerates artifices, crafts and tricks. Ahmed also needs to improvise on each aforementioned element. The improvisation can be based upon the component's material (for example, Ahmed can hit the wooden stage with his stick, or running loudly upon it, etc.), upon play-on-words on the component's name or upon the body of the actor, treated as an object within the perspective of the stage. (ASF, 182) Ahmed exposes theatre artifices one after the other and how they depend upon theatre's material components. When it comes to the lights, a technical problem occurs and Ahmed is forced to help the lighting technician. For this, the actor playing Ahmed lifts his mask up. This is the only time in the tetralogy that the actor playing Ahmed appears unmasked. (ASF, 184) This scene highlights the fact that for Badiou, not only Ahmed is a theatre character, but that he solely exists in the theatre. This is also the case for the theatre-idea, although the scene described above points to the impossibility to pin down the theatre-idea, by merely enumerating its components. This is the meaning behind the occurrence of a technical problem. Only the spectator can grasp the elusive theatre-idea, because its process combines both materialisation and abstraction. As explained earlier, for Badiou, the poem is "a negative device that utters the being or idea at the very point where the object disappears." (QPP, 11) Despite the fact that the emergence of the theatre-idea proceeds as a strike upon representation, it does not seem to go as far as dematerializing the theatre site, but could be defined, albeit

oxymorically as a materialist abstraction. Although Badiou's analysis of Mallarmé's poems points out the irrepresentability of the event, it also clearly shows how Badiou's event might mobilise the elements of the site. (CCBT, 254) In fact, one of the main difficulties in the theory of the event, is to understand that the event is not simply self-referential but also part of the set of elements of its site. (CCBT, 253)⁹³ Badiou's notion of theatre-idea can be enlightening on this point. Badiou stresses that "[by] causing the place to prevail over the idea that an event could be calculated therein, the poem realizes the essence of the event, which is precisely that of being, from this point of view, incalculable." (BE, 197) While, to an extent, as the curtain falls, Theatre seems to abide to the Mallarméan seeming aphorism "nothing took place but place", the notion of theatre-idea seems to indicate that the idea ultimately prevails upon the site. Yet, unlike the event which induces a subtraction of the site, the theatre-idea is supplemented by the theatre site. Unlike the event, the essence of the theatre-idea is not to be incalculable, but on the contrary, to be made possible by the materiality of the theatre site. The theatre-idea stems from whatever potential for truths theatre might hold. Badiou writes,

The idea arises in and by the performance, through the act of theatrical representation. The idea is irreducibly theatrical and does not preexist before its arrival "on stage." (IN, 72)

The theatre-idea can only emerge during and through the theatrical performance and cannot occur via other means but its staging. For Badiou, the theatre-idea is incomplete, it is suspended in the text in a sort of eternal form until it is fully revealed during the performance. Bodies, voices and lights participate to achieve

⁹³ In his interview with Badiou, Bosteels stresses that charges of dogmatism and absolutism are often leveled against Badiou's work. Bosteels points out that the theory of the event has been labeled dogmatic because the event is wrongly understood as purely referring to nothing else than itself. He explains that oppositions such as *Being and Event*, opinion and truth, history and politics in Badiou's work are often perceived as absolute when in fact if Badiou opposes terms thus, it is because he wants to explore what lies in between. (CCBT, 253)

the theatre-idea or, and this is an important point of Badiou's theory, the combination of the different components can leave the theatre-idea even more unfinished than it is in the text, if the director fails in his task. Directing is therefore not an interpretation but a complementation of the theatre-idea. For Badiou, the ephemeral character of theatre is not due to the fact that a performance starts, ends and leaves obscure traces of its occurrence but to the fact that theatre is "an eternal and incomplete idea caught in the instantaneous ordeal of its own completion." (IN, 74) The theatre-idea can only be complete by being put to the momentary test of its performance. It is the ephemerality of the process, which in itself attests that something has taken place. However, Badiou remarks that the theatrical act is a singular complementation of the theatre-idea. Every performance or representation is thus a possible completion of this idea. (IN, 73) In other words, theatre makes the advent of the ideal possible in the here and now; but this ideal filters through a singular configuration.

In a recent interview, Badiou clarifies what he means by theatre-idea and describes theatre as "a complex ordering system whose material series is not set in stone: texts of course, but also bodies, costumes, the set, the site, music, light... this set is neither closed nor for that matter infinite. But it is in this set that the [theatre-idea] must pass; that is, what theatre makes truth out of in the pure present of the material ordering itself." (TO, 22) The notion of theatre-idea is deeply rooted within Badiou's theatre dialectics. Badiou's theatre can be described as a materialist dialectic as defined in *Logics of Worlds*: "there are only bodies and languages except that there are truths." (LW, 4) Theatre operates an unbinding of 'what there is' by managing a space for truths to potentially interpolate themselves into the continuity of the 'there is', that is a mixture of bodies and languages. However, theatre's materiality is not ruptured by an idea which would emerge from the disappearance of its components. Instead, the emergence of thought in theatre

occurs through the *unbinding* effected by theatre. The theatre-idea is the result of a sudden reorganising of materiality, a reshuffling of what there is orchestrated by theatre. The theatre-idea operation does not pertain to a Mallarméan subtractive method which would cancel out its site. Far from abolishing theatre in its materiality, the theatre-idea affirms thinking as material; it affirms theatre's materialist dialectics.

The relationship between the theatre-idea and the theatre site calls for a comparison with the way the event relates to the evental site. Badiou explains that the theatre components “are gathered together in an event, the performance” and “that this event - when it really is theater, the art of theater – is an event of thought.” (IN, 72) The theatre-idea process differs from that of the event because theatre is an event of thought. While the event is an advent of truth which somehow annihilates the situation, the theatre-idea is an embracing of the situation, a coming to grips with it. In the same way, the theory of the event is hinged upon Badiou's Cantorian materialist dialectics, the theatre-idea remains tied to or conditioned by the dialectics of theatre. While to an extent, the event occurs in spite of the situation, the theatre-idea fully mobilises the theatre site in all its materiality. Although Theatre is assimilated here to an event, Badiou distinguishes the event *per se* from the theatre event, and defines Theatre as an event of thought, as opposed to an event of truth. Nevertheless, the theatre-idea process is similar to that of the event, because it is an incitation to think, and thus, ultimately, a quest for truths. For Badiou, the completion of a theatre-idea is similar to an evental truth process. However, while the event is the surging forth of truth, the theatre-idea extracts thought. The theatre-idea has to be endorsed by the spectator, in other words the spectator has to accept to think. It is similar to what the subject agrees to, since pledging fidelity to the event means resolutely attempting to work out the truth pointed out by it. The event confers a truth upon the subject by putting the subject to the test of the void, pulling the rug from under the subject's feet, so to speak, as the

site is nullified in order for truth to emerge. However, in the case of theatre, the emergence of the theatre-idea does not cancel the site until the end of the performance - once the situation clarified and life disentangled - in order to make some space for the potential of a truth in the mind of the spectator. It is the theatre-idea as a process that induces the spectator to think. What triggers thinking is precisely the incomplete nature of the theatre-idea.

In this respect, Theatre also provides the perfect site to demonstrate the incompleteness of truth. As mentioned earlier, in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou stresses that truth is a mathematical function, a variety, a surface, a space, in other words, something which presents a part of uncertainty, a porosity, an incompleteness. (TS, 120) Badiou's notion of truth is diametrically opposed to an understanding of truth as a whole, a totalitarian truth. It is important to stress here the relationship between truth and change in Badiou's philosophy. For Badiou, each truth is new and follows the movement of a spiral, which is not simply a repetition but the result of a *torsion*.⁹⁴ Similarly each performance or theatre-idea is unique, is new. To an extent, the theatre-idea is to theatre what truth is to the event. It is part of theatre's ideation process, of theatre as an event of thought. It is interesting to note that in his article 'Théâtre et Philosophie', Badiou does not use the term theatre-idea but the syntagm *vérité-théâtre* (theatre-truth) to designate the same notion: "Theatre produces in itself, and by itself, a singular and irreducible effect of truth. There is a theatre-truth, which cannot occur, but on the stage. (TP, 137)⁹⁵ This assertion seems to indicate that the theatre-idea or theatre-truth produces the effect

⁹⁴ Here Badiou resorts to Lacan: "The true, then, of course, is that. Except that it is never reached except by twisted pathways." *On Feminine Sexuality the Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX Encore* (edited by Jacques-Alain Miller), New York: Norton, 1998, p. 95 "Le vrai, alors, bien sûr, c'est cela. A ceci près que ça ne s'atteint jamais que par des voies tordues." (Lacan: S XX, 20 March 1973, 87-88).

⁹⁵ Le théâtre produit en lui-même, et par lui-même un effet de vérité singulier, irréductible. Il y a de la vérité-théâtre, qui ne se donne en nul autre lieu que la scène. (TP, 137)

of truth. In light of what was explained about the transiting nature of truth, I would add that the theatre-idea or theatre-truth rehearses the passage of truths.⁹⁶

One of Badiou's essays on theatre presented as an addendum to *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, announces Badiou's concept of theatre-idea. This essay also links together the notion of theatre-idea and Badiou's theatre dialectics. Badiou writes: Brecht's biggest project was perhaps not theatre, nor a theory of theatre, but the creation of what he called the society of the "friends of dialectics". Badiou sums up Brechtian dialectics as an 'in-between ideas' under the aegis of the Idea, which induces collective discussion. Badiou adds that "dialectics means: thinking a situation through to shed some light upon the multiple ideas supported by the situation. In other words, thinking the situation at case level. (RT2, 17)"⁹⁷ The constant resort to dialectics in his theory of theatre seems to indicate that Badiou has endorsed Brecht's project. However, Badiou considers theatre to be the privileged site for a collective engagement with dialectics. For him, the main objective of theatre is to lead spectators to abstraction. For this, theatre presents the spectators with concrete cases, which are as many occasions to think.

Badiou writes: "Theatre presents the case of the Idea as a discontinuous multiplicity of ideas. Brecht subjects theatre to the multiple, in order to present a

⁹⁶ Badiou thoroughly addressed the relationship between idea and truth only recently and that it is another sign that theatre partakes in Badiou's philosophy process. One of the reason why the link between idea and truth has not been made explicit earlier in Badiou's philosophy is the problematic notion of ideology, which Badiou highlighted in *De l'Idéologie* (1976), but literally only comes to terms with in *The Communist Hypothesis* (2009). Badiou mentions that the term has been worn out by theory and suggests to simply revert to its prime definition: ideology refers to what pertains to an idea. (HC, 189)

⁹⁷ "Le plus grand projet de Brecht, ce n'était peut-être pas le théâtre, ni même la théorie du théâtre, mais la fondation de ce qu'il appelait la société des "amis de la dialectique". Le projet d'un lieu établi de la discussion. L'entre-idées en capacité de l'Idée, par une situation organisée, quoique purement intellectuelle, dans la forme du collectif. "Dialectique" veut dire: toute pensée d'une situation veut éclaircir le multiple d'idées que la situation supporte. Donc penser la situation dans l'instance du cas." (RT2, 17)

concrete case and trigger abstraction" (RT2, 16) Epic theatre is philosophically based upon the concept of case. A case differs from a situation, in the sense that a case is the exposition of the fact that a situation can generate many ideas. Badiou explains that what Brecht manages to do is to present the 'in-between ideas' (entre-idées). For abstraction to be possible, in other words to reach the Idea, it is necessary to gather the multitude of ideas relative to a situation, to bind them together. Badiou's proposal regarding Brecht's theatre as a theatre of the 'in-between ideas' (entre-idées) is complex. Like the first collection of thoughts on theatre, the sequel of *Rhapsody for the Theatre* elliptically jumps from one proposition to the next and delivers them in an axiomatic manner. Similarly, the reflection upon the Idea in relation to Brecht is a stepping stone towards the concept of theatre-idea.

Badiou's main point regarding Brecht's theatre is to corroborate what his own notion of theatre dialectics achieves, that is: "Non-identity under the law of the same." (RT2, 17) Badiou explains that Brechtian dialectics is to show that what separates offers more to thought, to abstraction, than what identifies. Yet, for Badiou, as explained earlier, it is not a question here of the cult of the Other, or the cult of difference. The multiple is egalitarian and placed under the law of the Same: each situation presents itself in the equality among ideas, thus giving a chance to the spectator to cling to the Idea. The 'between-idea' reveals the Idea. The lucidity of the show resides in the multiplicity of play, in the dissolution of the identical. (RT2, 17) This has to be put in relation to what I explained earlier about the concept of *unbinding* but also the ethics of play's rejection of substantialism. The nurturing of many possible thought directions on stage encourages the audience to question, that is, to dialectically separate what is given as undivisible and rethink the situation. Somehow, from the unbinding of the representation, the theatre-idea induces the binding of the multiplicities of ideas that are provoked by theatre as thought is set in

motion. This reflection upon Brecht as an addition to *Rhapsody for the Theatre* becomes clearly significant when put in relation to the Mallarméan notion of *La Foule* on the one hand, and on the other, Badiou's concept of incorporation and ideation as developed in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*.

As explained earlier, the theatre-idea is an event of thought. However, Badiou refrains from using the term 'event-theatre'. He explains that "if we say 'event', we are going to fall back upon a logic of theatrical act and we would not have clarified what is [his] initial aim: that is, the acknowledgement that at the theatre, there is a physical, material and organic deployment of a thought." (DPAP, unpag.)⁹⁸ Although Badiou considers that thinking is always evental, his reluctance to use the term event-theatre instead of theatre-idea is a means of insisting upon the relationship between thought and theatre. Within Badiou's system, the notions of idea and event similarly pertain to a truth process and in many respects, theatre is in itself a truth procedure. However, by refusing the syntagm "event-theatre", Badiou wants to draw the attention to the fact that for him, no matter how physical, the theatrical act remains subordinated to thought. Badiou defines the theatre-idea as a thought encounter: it is what the spectator experiences in terms of thinking when at the theatre. The theatre-idea is distinct from the ideas developed in a play; it refers to the spectator's sudden realisation during a theatre performance that theatre is taking place there and then. Badiou explains that "[something] suddenly shifts towards the absolute presence of theatre. Here, something is said, shared and dispersed at the same time (because theatre is a complicated assortment of material ingredients) and we are struck, we are thoughtful. This is caused by the

⁹⁸ "Je ne voudrais pas non plus qu'en disant "événement-théâtre" on dissimule en partie ce que je voudrais qu'on reconnaisse, à savoir que l'acte théâtral lui-même est, si physique qu'il soit, de l'ordre de la pensée. C'est pour ça que je prends "idée". Ce n'est pas contradictoire à "événement" mais j'ai le sentiment que si on dit "événement" on va retomber dans une logique de l'acte théâtral et qu'on n'aura pas complètement clarifié ce qui, en tant que philosophe, est mon premier geste : c'est-à-dire justement la reconnaissance qu'y compris au théâtre il y a déploiement physique, matériel et organique d'une pensée." (DPAP, unpag.)

passing through of the theatre-idea.” (DPAP, unpag.)⁹⁹ Whilst the spectator has a strong sense that something has happened, the theatre-idea is just passing through, it remains elusive. Because it is produced by the arrangement of the various components of theatre, and cannot be produced anywhere else than theatre, the theatre-idea is said to be material. Yet, it produces a rare effect on both thought and emotion. The theatre-idea thus combines the tangible and the intangible.

As explained earlier, despite the difference of degree in their materialization, the theatre-idea relates to theatre as a site in a similar way to how the event relates to the evental site. In a process similar to that of the event, the theatre-idea is the crossing of the materiality of theatre by an idea, which thus paradoxically remains irrepresentable. Nevertheless, the passage of the theatre-idea is marked by a sudden change. The shift occurs between the mere arrangement of components which forms theatre and Theatre (capital T), which sets in tension the said components. Badiou's reference to the absolute presence of theatre does not imply a U-turn in Badiou's theory towards a theatre of presence, but rather describes the nature of Theatre, which is governed by 'being here', or present to the world, so to speak. The absolute presence of theatre also refers to the absolute dialectics of theatre mentioned in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, where Badiou articulates the three dialectics at play, thus: “the objective theatrical dialectic (the State of theatre), its subjective dialectic (the ethics of play), and its absolute dialectic (the putting into place either of a desire or of an Idea).” (RT, 227) Having explored Badiou's objective and subjective dialectics of theatre in the previous sections, it is now time to turn to what Badiou terms “the absolute dialectics” of theatre.

⁹⁹ “Quelque chose bascule du côté de la présence absolue du théâtre et que là quelque chose est dit, est partagé, est dispersé en même temps (parce que le théâtre est un ensemble compliqué d'ingrédients matériels) et nous sommes frappés, nous sommes songeurs. C'est qu'est passée l'idée-théâtre.” (DPAP, unpag.)

I suspect that Badiou's use of the term theatre-idea in the 'Theses on Theater' signals future developments in Badiou's thinking in the same way the Mallarméan notion of "*déliaison*" appeared in *Conditions* only to be developed much later in *Logics of Worlds*. My hypothesis is that Badiou's concept of theatre-idea announces his latest notion of *ideation* and, in turn, that the theories developed by Badiou in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* and the *Communist Hypothesis* shed some light on the concept of theatre-idea. The same is true of the notion of Spectator-subject developed in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, which is left almost unexplained, especially when it comes to the actual subjectivisation of the spectator, that is, the relationship between spectator and thought. While the theatre-idea can intuitively be understood as the trigger of the dialectics of the Theatrical State, The Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject, it is only when formulated as an ideation process, as defined in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, that Badiou's theatre system makes sense. This means looking back at Badiou's theory of theatre from the vantage point of his latest philosophical work.

5 – Spectator-subject and ideation process

In this section, I will focus upon the third term of Badiou's dialectics of theatre, the Spectator-subject. Although the notion of theatre-idea is developed by Badiou much later, that of the spectator-subject cannot be fully understood unless one analyses how the audience processes or is processed by the theatre-idea. This is the reason why I have explored this notion before investigating further the place of the spectator within Badiou's theatre theory. As in the previous sections, I will not restrict my analysis to what Badiou says about the spectator, but will also suggest possible articulations between theatre and Badiou's philosophy in order to analyse how the notion of spectator-subject informs Badiou's latest theory of subjectivisation. This will lead to a demonstration that, when put in relation to Badiou's dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject, the notion of the theatre-idea anticipates Badiou's concept of *ideation* which originates in his *Logics of Worlds* and is developed in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*.

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou confesses that although the dialectics of the worlds and truths-induced subjects was valid in *Theory of the Subject*, this theory ignored the fact that truths have to be embodied to appear. (LW, 46)¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou develops the notion of the "subjectivated body" and consequently redefines the notions of "evental present" and that of "truth". Ultimately, this leads to a redefinition of the subject. I propose to consider these definitions in the context of theatre. In turn, this will present Badiou's theory of theatre as having mediated the reshuffling of his theory of the subject since theatre precisely attests – although this remains to be explained - that truths have to be embodied to appear. In *Logics of*

¹⁰⁰ In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou plays on the homophony between *en-corps* (em-bodied) et *encore* (over again) and states that truths are not only bound to appear em-bodied but also to deploy themselves potentially ad infinitum. (LW, 46, 83)

Worlds, Badiou defines the notion of *body* in relation to other interrelated notions thus:

Body: in general, a multiple-being which, on condition of an event, is the bearer of a subjective formalism and makes this formalism appear in a world. In a more rigorous sense, a body is composed of the elements of a site which incorporate themselves to an evental present. (LW, 580-581)

Present, evental present: A present is the set of consequences in a world of an evental trace. These consequences only unfold to the extent that a body is capable of holding some points. (LW, 592)

Subjective formalism: "We call subjective formalism the different combinations through which a body enters in relation with a present (and hence with the post-evental stages of truth. (LW, 595)

Truth: "The set – which is assumed to be complete – of all the productions of a faithfully subjectivated body (of a body seized by a subjective formalism of the faithful type). Ontologically, this set results from a generic procedure. Logically, it unfolds a present in the world by holding to a series of points. (LW, 597)

This definition of truth is different from that given in *Theory of the Subject*, which described truth as incomplete, porous and the result of a torsion. (TS, 120) In *Logics of Worlds*, rather than truths, the worlds present a porosity enabling truth to transit from one to another. By presenting truth as a set, Badiou re-establishes his Cantorian materialist dialectic. A truth is said to be complete, that is counted as one in the situation, when in fact, the definition implies that as a set, a truth is infinite and intrinsically incomplete. Therefore, the definition of truth remains unchanged. To an extent, the productions of the faithfully subjectivated body can also still be described

as a result of a torsion exerted by the subjectivated body upon the world to create knots, or points, in the structure. Holding to these points maps out a present. This present can only unfold in the wake of the event, in the same way that the subject could only be the result of a post-evental fidelity in *Being and Event*. There cannot be a present without a subject as in Mallarmé, there cannot be a present without *la Foule* declaring itself. However, it is not a question of the subject as a tangible entity anymore, but of a form of subjectivisation. This is the meaning of subjectivated body, since the subjectivisation process only makes sense in relation to a world. To an extent, this is what is already expressed in *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event* which described the subject as a process. Nevertheless, the main difference lies with the fact that, in *Logics of Worlds*, it is no longer a question of naming the event, but of tracing its consequences. Precisely, what are the consequences of Badiou's rearticulation of event, truth and subject within his philosophical system upon theatre?

Firstly, I would like to explain how theatre, according to Badiou, unfolds an evental present. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou resorts to the Mallarméan axiom "There is no such thing as a present, for lack of a Crowd's declaring itself" to stress that theatre creates a present. (RT, 189) What Badiou has in mind when resorting to Mallarmé's reflection about the lack of present, except at the theatre for lack of a revendicating crowd, is the political potential held in the randomness of the gathering of the crowd.¹⁰¹ In other words, the gathering of the theatre audience creates a present in which politics can occur. In *Ahmed se fâche*, Ahmed declares:

¹⁰¹ For Badiou, theatre does not create an audience, since, on the contrary it is the gathering of an audience that induces theatre. To an extent, Badiou's statement that the gathering of a Mallarméan foule is a condition of Theatre (capital T) prevents a comparison between Badiou's conception of the theatre audience and that of other thinkers. By way of contextualisation of Badiou's thinking in terms of theatre audience, see Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). As pointed out by Freshwater, referring to the audience as a homogenous entity is problematic, since it ignores the variety of reaction among the different audience members. (Freshwater: 2009, 5-6)

The audience is demonstrating. Audience from everywhere, gathered by chance, fragmentary representatives of the dissimilar humanity! You are made of the demonstrators of truth which our lie manifests (ASF, 189)¹⁰²

In French, *manifestester* means 'to demonstrate' and 'to manifest'. In these lines, collective political activism and spectating conflagrate through this word play. This comparison is also drawn in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* where Badiou states:

a representation is an event, those who do not muster within themselves, for the exact moment of its duration, the resources to implicate themselves in that from which a truth proceeds, are for all intents and purposes in the same position as the one who remains quiet in his room while below his window a revolution or a resistance is playing itself out. (RT, 209-210)

The play *Ahmed se fâche* stresses that by attending the show, spectators become demonstrators as they endorse, in other words revendicate, the truth they extract from the illusion fabricated by the actors. This is the meaning of Badiou's definition of the spectators in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* as "[points] of the real by which a spectacle comes into being." (RT, 189) However, this definition remains elusive, unless it is put in parallel with Badiou's use of Mallarmé's concept of *la Foule* in

However, in the case of Badiou, as explained earlier, it is the thinking in common which designates the audience as a collective subject which draws its homogeneity or consistency from being confronted to the theatre-idea and accepting to think it through. This is how Badiou defines communism: an elucidating of the truth done in common. This does not mean that the truth ever gets elucidated but rather points to a common desire to think the present as a shared experience. According to Badiou, theatre provides a paradigm of this communal thinking process which he calls communism. This is the reason why he insists throughout his recent work, not on communism as a practical reality but as an ideal to contemplate. For Badiou, the theatre audience is a generic community and, as such, differ from sectarian communities which Badiou's system strongly opposes as subsets created by the State to nurture its power.

¹⁰² Il est manifestant le public. Public de toutes parts venu, rassemblé au hasard, représentant fragmentaire de l'humanité dissemblable ! Tu es fait des manifestants de la vérité que notre mensonge manifeste ! (ASF, 189)

Theory of the Subject prior to referring to it in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. According to Badiou's new definition of an evental present, the unfolding of a present lies with the crowd's capacity to hold points. As explained earlier, the ethics of play amounts precisely to creating points through which truth can transit. It has also been suggested that to an extent, actors summon the infinite totality of the world to appear before the instance of the decision, and unfold a present on stage by holding such points.¹⁰³ To an extent, it is fair to suggest that the abilities of actors and spectators to hold points, that is, enabling a truth's passage or endorsing it, are part of the set of all the productions of a faithfully subjectivated body. This section will attempt to demonstrate precisely that actors and spectators are part of the subjectivated body of theatre.

How does the theatre audience constitute a body able to hold points? In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou states that unlike cinema, theatre is a public space. In one of his signature lapidary assertions, Badiou sums up the antinomy between the two arts: theatre "oversees the Crowd," while cinema "disperses individuals." (RT, 188-9) For Badiou, cinema does not bear any collective significance in the sense that it gathers an inconsistent group, a serial collection of private individuals.¹⁰⁴ On the contrary, theatre summons '*la Foule*'. For Badiou, what distinguishes Theatre, with a capital T, from a theatre of consensus and conventions is precisely the nature of the audience. The true audience of the true Theatre is generic and consists of a random cross-section of the crowd - precisely what Mallarmé calls *la Foule*. In this respect, the generic nature of theatre explained earlier largely depends upon the random gathering of *la Foule*. This notion is difficult to translate as it refers to a certain Mallarméan idea of the masses: a random cross-

¹⁰³ See the explanation of Badiou's definition of 'point' in *Logics of Worlds* earlier page 103 (LW, 591)

¹⁰⁴ Badiou also points out that cinema is a private industry ("Cinema belongs only to Capital") unlike theatre which is publicly funded, since Badiou mostly considers theatre from the private sector, especially 'Boulevard', as theatre (without a capital T). (RT, 188, 196)

section of society.¹⁰⁵ The main reason why a generic audience is one of the conditions of Theatre (capital T) lies with the fact that Badiou considers theatre (without capital T) as closed upon itself: “a ‘theatre’ of established meanings, a ‘theatre’ from which nothing is lacking and which, abolishing chance, induces a convivial satisfaction in those who hate truth.” (RT, 198) On the contrary, a random section of society eludes any consensus and ensures the presence of a chance element.¹⁰⁶

This distinction between theatre and Theatre emphasises the salutary incompleteness of the latter, discussed earlier in relation to the notion of theatre-idea, and the part of chance at work in its completion. As a result, it is only those who are unwilling to encounter truths, that seek refuge in a theatre which does not seek to alter, or at least denounce, the state of the situation. What Badiou means by stating “theatre oversees the Crowd” is explained towards the end of his treatise: “As a temporal elucidation, [Theatre] could serve as an intimate analyser of whatever meaning the crowd holds and as a projection of the conflict that constitutes it.” (RT, 231) By this, Badiou means that a real crowd is animated by internal discord and that theatre can sound the legitimacy of its randomness as opposed to being a predetermined group. Incidentally, Badiou refuses to see politics as stemming from an opposition of classes but considers that true politics calls for universality and should not consider citizens as divided into categories of class, gender or any other group or subset.

¹⁰⁵ Although ‘Crowd’ is Bosteels’ translation for the French *Foule*, I prefer to keep the French expression *la Foule* in my analysis to underline the Mallarméan origin of the concept and the fact that the term does not refer to the crowd in general, but a particular representative section of the public that only theatre can mysteriously gather.

¹⁰⁶ This remains largely theoretical since it depends upon Badiou’s prerequisite that theatre become free and open to all.

Badiou is conscious of the fact that a politically educated crowd might yet have to come into existence. He describes theatre as “the very type of communist fiction”, but suggests that in the meantime, theatre could still gather a representative section of the crowd by becoming free and compulsory. Citizens would have to go to the theatre a minimum of four times a year to attend “three plays from the repertoire and one new creation”, and enclose their stamped theatre card with their tax declaration. (RT, 231) The lack of such provision and the existence to-come of the “real crowd” imply that the collective gathered by theatre is necessarily idealised in Badiou’s theory. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou writes in his notes that for Mallarmé, “theatre simultaneously touches upon the mystery of letters and the mystery of the collectivity, or of the Crowd.” (RT 235, note 6) For Mallarmé, as much as for Badiou, the ‘mystery of the collective’ lies within the undecidability at work in the raising of the masses, in other words, what provokes collective political action. When addressing the theatricality of politics in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou enumerates three conditions for politics to occur:

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. (RT, 190)

It is clear from this quote that for Badiou, theatre and politics have a lot in common. The three conditions for politics to occur are the same as the conditions for theatre to occur: a crowd gathered for a singular performance with disparate elements all of a sudden falling into place; actors adopting different stances and roles; an

overarching idea which is conveyed to an audience randomly assembled, at once multiple and one which projects its potential upon the stage and thus somehow accredits the actors with representative powers. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou remarks that “Mallarmé claims that in his time (but ours is worth as little as his) there is nothing historically real, for lack of a self-declared political collective, and, consequently, that it is theatre that gathers whatever is available to us in terms of action.” (RT, 189) This means that for Mallarmé, history does not exist unless there is a collective uprising and theatre encapsulates this action, which otherwise is inexistent. Badiou declares that our time is also deprived of a historical reality for the same reason, that is, the lack of collective political projects in the present. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou writes that any contemporary thinking of theatre should meditate on the two following Mallarméan axioms: “There is no such thing as a present, for lack of a Crowd’s declaring itself” and “[a]ction does not go beyond the Theatre.” (RT, 189) Following on the definition of *la Foule* as commented upon earlier, the first assertion can be understood as saying that it is the gathering of *la Foule* which ensures Theatre (capital T) happens. This evokes the Marxist notion that masses make history; without *la Foule*, no present is possible. Badiou also refers to the first axiom in *Theory of the Subject* and explains that “There’s no such thing as a Present means that there is no clinamen, no creative disappearance of the crowd standing up in rebellion.” (TS, 68) This resonates in Badiou’s theory of theatre as for Badiou, Theatre precisely invites spectators to challenge the State’s assignation of places. Badiou writes,

[...] there is Theatre (and not “theatre”) only in the conjunction of the following elements: the text it elicits and thus makes contemporary; the division it effects; the haphazard thought of a stage director [...]; actors capable of unfolding the real point of departure that they and they alone constitute rather than showing off the rhetorics of body and voice; and at least one spectator. Under these conditions, it is

possible that we come upon the process of a truth, of an elucidation whose spectacle would be the event. Consequently, hatred will manifest itself for sure, due to the fact that it is properly impossible simply to watch what happens there. Because under these conditions, theatre makes it known to you that you will not be able innocently to remain in your place. (RT, 198-199)

Theatre (capital T) makes it impossible for the spectator to simply look at what is happening without partaking in it. This is the reason why it generates hatred in the spectators who refuse the challenge of the hermetic order of representation. As explained earlier, this challenge is effected by the division of situation and state of the situation, the disruption created by the chance factor at play, the ability of actors to hold transit points for truths or ideas to reach the spectator.

Badiou adds to the two axioms drawn from Mallarmé, a third regarding the spectator: “in him, the Spectator, reside the self-declared Crowd and the untranscendable Action. To him everything is devoted.” (RT, 189) That means that each spectator represents the multiplicity of *la Foule* – the spectator being a multiple of multiple - and has the potential for political action.¹⁰⁷ Since theatre has to address the spectator in this capacity, one spectator is enough for theatre to exist: “as soon as she enters the place of theatre and takes her seat, constitutes a gathering unto herself.” (RT, 190) However, Mallarmé’s second point remains problematic. Following Mallarmé, for Badiou, theatre concentrates what we can

¹⁰⁷ See earlier the explanation of Badiou’s conception of being as multiple, page 72. Also, in the light of Badiou’s use of set theory explained earlier and in relation to Badiou’s definition of representation as always in excess and pertaining to the infinite, it would be interesting to compare Badiou’s conception of the Mallarméan *Foule* with Derrida’s notion of the ‘innumerable’ as defined in *Dissemination* as “a force that cannot be numbered, classed, represented, ruled, a force that always surpasses the speculation or the order of the ruling class, and even exceeds its own representation.” (Derrida: 1981, 363) Also, it is interesting to note that Badiou’s notion of the ‘unaccounted for’ seems to bear some resemblance with Derrida’s notion of the ‘innumerable’. As the analysis of *L’Écharpe rouge* will show, the collective resist representation in Badiou’s play.

access of the action. This has to be put in relation to what Badiou refers to as restricted action (*l'action restreinte*). "L'Action restreinte" is the title of one of Mallarmé's essays published in *Divagations* (1897); for the poet, this expression refers to the limits but also to the concentrated essence of the poetical action. Badiou has made his the concept of restricted action and applied it to politics, with theatre as a privileged place for restricted political action; hence Badiou's Mallarméan axiom: "Action does not go beyond the Theatre." (RT, 189) For Mallarmé the paradigm for politics against which he measures the absence of political action outside of the theatre is the Paris Commune. For Badiou, it is May 68. Like Mallarmé, Badiou turns to theatre to capture the essence of an evanescent political action, but also to track the evanescent subject of politics.¹⁰⁸

In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou resorts to a Mallarméan image to explain the political potential of *la Foule*. Mallarmé refers to the 14th July commemoration of the 1789 French Revolution thus: "[...] a multitude under the night sky does not constitute the spectacle, but in front of it, suddenly, there rises the multiple and illuminating spray in mid-air, which in a considerable emblem represents its gold, its annual wealth and the harvest of its grains, and leads the explosions of the gaze to normal heights." (TS, 66)¹⁰⁹ For Mallarmé, the gathering of the crowd is not a political event in itself. The crowd has to literally be enlightened. This is the meaning of the image of the crowd watching fireworks. The action of the crowd has to reach higher purposes, hence the gaze fixed upon the sky, which is set as the normal limit. Mallarmé also likens the crowd to "the nocturnal ground" of "the foundational riot" (*'le sol de nuit de l'émeute fondatrice'*). (TS, 66) Reflecting upon the fact that,

¹⁰⁸ However, for Badiou, unlike Mallarmé, theatre is not the sole available political arena, but it offers a privileged site for the collective to manifest itself. Badiou is deeply engaged with politics, especially since his involvement in the creation of the OP (Organisation Politique) in 1985. Restricted action takes the form of a distancing from the State advocated by OP's journal *La Distance Politique* - rather than a call for the demise of the State.

¹⁰⁹ This quote is from Mallarmé's "Conference sur Villiers", *Œuvres complètes*, 499.

for Mallarmé, the crowd in the dark holds the potential for subjective politicization, Badiou stresses that it is precisely when the masses are abolished, inexistent because they are unnamed and non-represented, that they have the potential to become a political subject, or in Mallarméan terms, a fireworks constellation.

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou stresses that for Mallarmé, the mystery of letters and the mystery of the collective are intrinsically linked (RT 235, note 6) For Mallarmé, theatre is an alchemy drawing from the arcana of literature and of the collective, or of *la Foule*. Mallarmé's project for *Le Livre* pertains to an ideal of absolute theatre, the ceremony of all ceremonies he projected *Le Livre* to be, which would mysteriously turn the crowd into an educated political force.¹¹⁰ The reason why Mallarmé turns to theatre as the only potential space for subjectivisation perhaps lies with the fact that he has witnessed the aftermath of the Paris Commune: the execution, imprisonment or banishment of the Communards. This thorough annihilation of the rioting forces by the powers in place might have led him to consider the Paris Commune as a failure, hence his desire, as Badiou puts it, "to empower the city with a book and a theatre in which the infinite and mute capacity of the masses – which he names the crowd – would finally find what it takes to produce, by withdrawing from it, its complete emblem." (TS, 66) For Mallarmé aesthetics becomes politics and it is fair to ask whether the same applies to Badiou.

In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou remarks that Mallarmé's defines the crowd as "the vanishing term for art." (TS, 66) When it comes to theatre, Badiou believes that it can create the relevant conditions for the vanishing of *la Foule*. This vanishing is emblematic of the political capacity of *la Foule*. This is what Badiou means when

¹¹⁰ Mallarmé's project for *Le Livre* has to be put in relation with Mallarmé's view that "a riot [is not] sufficiently tumultuous to make a character into the steaming, confounding, struggling-again-into-life hero" (TS, 67). In this light, Mallarmé's project cannot be understood as a defusing but rather as an amplification of politics by aesthetics.

he writes that *la Foule* can produce its emblem from Mallarmé's Book and theatre. To an extent, what is recorded in Mallarmé's aesthetics when it comes to *Le Livre* is the vanishing of politics in the same way the event was inscribed in the poem as a disappearance. For Badiou, the vanishing of *la Foule* ensures that it does not become a symbolic political force. By eluding symbolisation, or avoiding being assigned a place, *la Foule* can remain a political force in motion. For Badiou, the theatre site is as potent an image to describe the political potential of *la Foule* as Mallarmé's fireworks allegory. It is fair to suggest that through theatre, the audience experiences what Badiou calls the *horlieu* ('outplace'). To an extent, this is what being a vanishing term means: to refuse to remain in the place one has been assigned. This also evokes the ethics of play which as explained earlier, Badiou presents as an escape. (RT, 221) Referring to Mallarmé's image of the crowd watching fireworks, Badiou stresses that the 'stellar emblematic inscription' points to a 'compact absence' and "lights up only the self-estranged amazement" of the crowd. (TS, 67) The fireworks express the potential of the people symbolically point by point. The subjectivisation process which the spectator-subject partakes in, induces a stupefying alienation of the self. To an extent, like the indistinct mass of onlookers realising its potential by watching fireworks at night, the theatre audience is abolished in the dark and contemplates its luminous reflection on stage. Or, in the words of Mallarmé quoted by Badiou, "[*la Foule*] compares its rich muteness to the orchestra, wherein lies the collective greatness." (TS, 66) While theatre highlights the potential of *la Foule*, this potential does not seem to ever be fulfilled.

In *Les Citrouilles*, Badiou stresses the dual role of theatre as emancipation and control of *La Foule*. At the beginning of the play, Ahmed thus declares in Mallarméan terms: "It is a question of theatre like this place right in the middle of the city where the State allows the crowd to applaud or to heckle the ephemereal dream of its own grandeur." (LC, 9)¹¹¹ This explains Badiou's assertion in *Rhapsody*

for the Theatre that theatre oversees the crowd. (RT, 188) Nevertheless, Badiou refers to the crowd as a vanishing term, which can cause the restructuring of time itself, that is, the creation of a present. (TS, 67) The present Badiou refers to is a reshuffling of what is represented as a present.

The notion of clinamen or what Badiou calls the “vanishing term” in his *Theory of the Subject*, sheds some light on the concept of incorporation. Badiou's early ontology, which would then become the theory of *Being and Event*, draws from the Greek atom theory which Hallward summarises in Badiouan terms as follows:

Atoms – objective reality in general – exist in and according to their place, while the void exists as “outside-place” (hors-lieu). Force, then, is what displaces the placed. It draws place toward the void. [...] The clinamen [...] relates static atoms and the fixity of place to the void [...] Were it not for the clinamen, the atoms would remain forever suspended in absolute stasis, forever in their place (TS, 74, 81). Self constituent, self-propelling, the clinamen is the sole condition of change and innovation, the exclusive source of energy as such. “the clinamen is aspecific, beyond necessity, absolutely out of place [hors-lieu], unplaceable [inesplaçable], unfigurable: chance [le hasard]. (Hallward: 2003, 33)

To an extent, Badiou's use of set theory axioms in *Being and Event* which I explained earlier, is a transposition in mathematical terms of the Greek atom theory. What is placed corresponds to the state of the situation, that is, what is assigned a fixed place in the representation orchestrated by the State. Consequently, the void is what is out of place. The void is negated by the system of attribution of places. Therefore, the event which comes to disrupt the homogeneous and static

superimposed structure of the situation and the state of the situation can be compared to the action of the clinamen. The event allows for the void to come to the fore and thus induces a movement as the fixity of places is upset. Hallward points out that “as soon as it has acted, the clinamen vanishes – in this sense, at least, it anticipates the later concept of event. (Hallward: 2003, 34) It is true that the elusiveness of the clinamen is a perfect paradigm for the irrepresentability of the event. Also, both phenomena rely upon chance as their launching force seems to come out of nowhere. However, for Badiou, as explained earlier, the event is not strictly self-referential and stems from the situation. It is important to note that prior to developing the theory of the event, Badiou firmly anchors the force which “displaces the placed” within the socio-political reality. In an article entitled “Custos, quid noctis?”, Badiou writes:

The proletariat is not that class which seeks an improvement of its place and, still less, that aims to usurp the place of the bourgeoisie, it is that force beyond class whose coming into existence destroys the very concept of place in general. The proletariat is the unique historical subject that overcomes and destroys its objective basis. (Badiou: 1984, 862)¹¹²

For Badiou, the proletariat is precisely the force that induces the clinamen.¹¹³ Yet, it is not a question of musical chairs, where places remain occupied. Here Badiou

¹¹² This is quoted by Hallward. (2003, 35)

¹¹³ The notion of the collective as a vanishing term of politics is in direct connection with Marxism. Peter Hallward points out that for Badiou, Marxism “calls not simply for the establishment of a society without classes or a destruction of the state, but for the destruction of the agent of this first destruction, the consummation of the organised proletariat itself in its own ongoing “fading away [*évanouissement*].” (Hallward: 2003, 31) To an extent, Badiou's latest concept of incorporation eludes destruction. For Badiou, subjectivisation is a process that components of the world can partake in, or incorporate themselves to, but through which these components cannot materialise as a subject or agent nor as a category or a class. This is the reason why Badiou refers to a subjectivisable body and not the body of the subject. Therefore, there is no need for the destruction of the agent of the first destruction (that of the State).

stresses that the subject is that instance which disrupts the system of assignation of places, but also destroys the state of the situation. Badiou's use of the notion of clinamen in *Theory of the Subject* sheds some light on his theory of the event as developed in *Being and Event* and on his theory of incorporation. More importantly, as far as theatre is concerned, the concept of the vanishing term highlights what is at stake when Badiou declares in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* that theatre organises its own defeat to ultimately "blow out the candle of being by which all has been." (RT, 193 and 234) It is fair to describe Badiou's theatre as the art of vanishing. For him, "a representation is [...] the enquiry into the truth of which the spectator is the vanishing subject." (RT, 194) Therefore, the notion of clinamen is particularly relevant to describe the process of spectating in the context of Badiou's theatre.

In *Inaesthetics*, Badiou states that "[the] subject is what chooses to persevere in this self-distance aroused by the revelation of the void." (IN, 55) Badiou similarly describes the Spectator (capital S) as "someone who exposes him or herself, in the distance of a representation, to the torment of a truth." (RT, 198) Spectators are exposed to the void and subjected to the torment of a gap, similar to that between the fireworks constellation and the grounded crowd, or that of the orchestra dividing the stage and the auditorium. Therefore, for Badiou, spectating is a motion process, as spectators embrace the transitory nature of the theatre-idea. Spectators are tormented by the truths pointed at by the unbinding of the situation effected by the theatre-idea in the sense that they accept to think them through. To an extent, spectators are tantalised by truths that theatre can only point at. However, this is why the notion of *restricted action* is particularly relevant, since partaking in a subjectivation processing does not necessarily imply launching an action, but rather thinking the situation through or setting one's thoughts in motion. The notion of clinamen implies the constant motion of atoms assembling themselves. To an extent, Badiou's latest notion of incorporation is indebted to this

atomist conception of subjectivisation. The transformation from individual to collective is precisely what Badiou explores with the concept of incorporation.

In *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou writes:

a truth process is the construction of a new body that appears gradually in the world as all the multiples having an authentic affinity with a primordial statement are drawn together around the latter. And as the primordial statement is the trace of an event's power, we can also say that a body of truth results from the incorporation within the consequences of an event of everything within the world, that has been maximally impacted by its power. (SMP, 90)

Badiou redefines here the truth process as an *incorporation*, that is, a rallying to an embodied truth which has the event at its origin. Badiou names the result of this *incorporation*, a body of truth. This body is the result of an incorporation of all the multiples of a world sharing the same relation, or intensity of belonging, to the situation than the trace of the event. Earlier in his manifesto, Badiou uses the word *stigmata* to refer to the evental trace. (SMP, 89) In the same way the passage of the event has left a trace within the situation, or world, the body of truth bears the *stigmata* of the event. It is interesting to note that trace and *stigmata* are interchangeable here. This evokes the event's future anterior mode; a *stigmata* can be defined as a trace left a posteriori or retroactively. The body of truth is formed of all the elements of the world which are connected to the evental trace, that is, those elements which have been transformed by the event, including what Badiou previously refers to as faithful subjects in the wake of the event. To an extent, the body of truth is a body of evidence of the event.

The incorporation is a process and, as such, offers infinite possibilities of combinations. It is not a question here of a fixed order or a fixated body, as this

would contradict truth's unpredictability and incompleteness. To incorporate oneself to the becoming of a truth is precisely to accept to embark on a transitory journey. However, truth procedures are anchored to the evental trace. The fleeting nature of the process does not affect the firmness of conviction required by the incorporation to the becoming of a truth. This is the reason why the evental trace is referred to here as a primordial statement. This evokes the theatre text and the latent theatre-idea it conceals, especially as *énoncé* in French means also the 'wording of'. It is tempting to draw from this a possible new definition of the theatre-idea following Badiou's redefinition of truth in relation to the notion of incorporation:

A truth is, then, an event having vanished whose unforeseeable body the world causes to appear little by little in appearing's disparate materials. (SMP, 90)

To an extent, if truths are embodied disappeared events, theatre-ideas could be disappeared primordial statements, whose unpredictable bodies theatre makes gradually appear, as performances unfold, in the disparate materiality of the theatre illusion. These include all the components of theatre, since, whilst the theatre-idea is concealed in the text, it is more than the text. Badiou also mentions in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* the possibility of a non-textual referent. In this respect, the notion of *primordial statement* is quite fitting for the theatre-idea. To an extent, the audience's adhesion to the theatre-idea whose body remains imprevisible because of its intricate connection to chance, can be described in terms of *incorporation*. In *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou stresses that thinking is a violent process and that the incorporation to a body of truth implies a double constraint: first that of the brutal contingency of the event, then the rigorous discipline required to build point by point the body of truth. (SMP, 110) This directly evokes the emphasis placed in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* on the necessary violence exerted upon the spectator summoned to think. While Badiou does not rule out pleasure from the act

of thinking, he stresses that the Spectator is summoned, not to a pleasurable experience, but to a thinking session. (RT 220) For the spectator, thinking amounts to a rallying to the theatre-idea. For Badiou, Theatre [...] conjures the seven constitutive elements of every analytic of Theatre [...] in such a way as to pronounce itself about itself and about the world, and such that the knot of this double examination interpellates the spectator at the impasse of a form of thought.” (RT, 197) This means that the spectator has her back to the wall and is forced to think.

Badiou's plays are as many attempts to urge spectators to think, that is, for Badiou, to separate, to dialectically divide, including themselves. In *L'Écharpe rouge*, *Incident at Antioch* and in the *Ahmed* tetralogy, Badiou presents the migrant worker as a possible support for collective subjectivisation. In *L'Écharpe rouge*, the success of the emancipatory movement in the city lies with the ability of the unionised workers and the students to embrace the migrant workers' cause. As explained earlier, in Badiou's plays, instead of than being presented as victims, migrant workers have the ability to formulate the world in different terms.¹¹⁴ This is highlighted by the invented incomprehensible patois they speak which is ultimately used to devise collective political slogans. In *Incident at Antioch*, Badiou also pins the hope for change upon a figure of the migrant worker, which given the reduced number of characters compared to *L'Écharpe rouge* becomes a symbol. However, Badiou does not invent a new language, yet, compared to other characters in the play, Mokhtar's speech is more poetic:

MOKHTAR: Natural science delivered the world over to the financiers; now the science of history is delivering it over to us.
Around the dark-skinned worker the whole human race is

¹¹⁴ See earlier page 80.

configured like a body. The composition of its limbs must lift the heavy club as a symbol and bring it down with both hands on the fly of State. (IA, 46)

For Badiou, politics which has for sole aim the demise of the State can only happen if a collective gathers around an idea. Here, it is the idea that the workers emancipation amounts to emancipation from slavery and colonialism, since both are based upon conceptually flawed discriminatory natural science laws establishing racial differences. Badiou does not invite the audience to cathartically embrace the cause of the dark-skinned worker, but to organise itself around the idea which the dark-skinned worker comes to represent. With references to the whole human race being organised as a body, the notion of incorporation starts to take shape in Badiou's playwriting. In the *Ahmed* tetralogy, Badiou points to subjectivisation as a process which unfolds from the point held by the character of the migrant worker. As explained earlier, unlike the other characters, Ahmed cannot exist as a representation of what is given as a socio-political reality by the State. Ahmed cannot but inexist within the caricatural mode of representation. To an extent, rather than an escalation of representation, the mask worn by the actor playing Ahmed is a withdrawal from representation. The mask serves to point out Ahmed's inexistence as a subject of politics. While the other characters are all in excess, Ahmed's character is marked by a lack. Consequently, Ahmed is the paradigm for the subject, a subjective multiplicity in the sense that, as a mark of a lack, he presents subjectivisation as a process which is, by definition, incomplete. This is what he asserts in *Ahmed se fâche* when directly addressing the audience:

Thus, solitary, on the world's stage, I come forward wearing a mask. I look at you. Since without you, I am incomplete. And you too, without me, without Ahmed, without everything which is Ahmed in your own eyes, without what occurs to you of real or true under this very name,

which you often avoid when it presents itself, yes, without Ahmed, without your inner Ahmed, you are incomplete, mutilated, kept at distance from your own free potential. (ASF, 207)¹¹⁵

The masked Ahmed points to the incomplete subject which can only become a whole when supplemented by the audience's engagement, but which also provide the audience with the knowledge that political subjectivisation starts from a lack and is an infinite process. In the terms of Badiou's theory of incorporation, it is fair to suggest that the mask provides a primordial statement, an incision upon the world around which the incorporation to a subjectivisable body can happen. In the play, rather than a social reality, Ahmed is in fact presented as an idea, the idea which can rally and trigger the subjectivisation process. This is what Ahmed declares in *Ahmed se fâche*:

Who am I? Xanthias or Scapin? Sganarelle and Harlequin? Figaro? I am Ahmed. Do you think I am going to die? Never here, in any case... Because I am, here, the immortal body of successive truths [...] Theatre, with Ahmed, will eternally take place. [...] Eternity of Xanthias... and of Scapin... and of Harlequin... (*this must be accompanied with improvisations on the canonical figures of comedy.*) Eternity of Ahmed, active scion of all these masks, of all these sacred bodies. (ASF, 213)¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ AHMED. Ainsi solitaire, sur la scène du monde, je m'avance masqué. Je vous regarde. Car sans vous, je suis incomplet. Et vous aussi, sans moi, sans Ahmed, sans tout ce qui pour vous est Ahmed, sans ce qui sous ce nom vous arrive de réel et de vrai, et dont souvent vous esquiviez la venue, oui sans Ahmed, sans votre Ahmed intérieur, vous êtes incomplets, mutilés, écartés de votre propre et libre puissance. (ASF, 207)

¹¹⁶ Qui suis-je ? Xanthias ou Scapin ? Sganarelle et Arlequin ? Figaro ? Je suis Ahmed. Et vous croyez que je vais mourir ? Jamais ici, en tout cas... Car je suis, ici, le corps immortel des vérités successives. [...] Le théâtre, avec Ahmed, éternellement aura lieu. [...] Éternité de Xanthias... et de Scapin... et d'Arlequin... (Tout ceci avec des improvisations sur les figures canoniques de la comédie.) Éternité de Ahmed, actif descendant de tous les masques, de tous les corps sacrés. (ASF, 213)

Theatre is here presented as an ideation process in the sense that it provides a space where truths can be ephemerally embodied. Hence the importance of theatre within Badiou's philosophy between *Theory of the Subject* which notion of truths-induced subjects did not address the fact that truths have to be embodied to appear, and *Logics of Worlds*, which completes Badiou's theory with the notions of incorporation and ideation. Theatre does not provide Badiou with a mere illustration, but instead challenges Badiou's theory of the subject by forcing traces of truths to materialise. However, the primordial statement or evental trace upon which the incorporation can unfold is precisely the body or mask of a migrant worker, a migrant body which points to transitory nature of truths and calls for a displacement.

To an extent, spectating can be described in terms of incorporation. When applied to theatre, Badiou's notion of incorporation resonates with his concept of "vanishing term" as explained earlier. The incorporation to a subjectivisable body is a movement, when the spectator accepts to join in, he or she cannot stay in his or her place, that is, the place assigned to the spectator by the State. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou exhorts spectators to leave their place through the power of their thinking. This invitation to wander through the power of the imagination at the theatre could seem like a cliché, if it did not announce Badiou's latest concept of ideation. In *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou states that while the aim of his first manifesto for philosophy was to reinstate the theme of Truth at the core of philosophy, his second manifesto seeks to establish a materialism of the Idea. (SMP, 56) To an extent, theatre which conjures thinking through its materiality presents Badiou with a perfect paradigm for a materialism of the idea.

In his 'Theses on Theater', Badiou argues that theatre is a physical encounter with an idea. (IN, 77) As pointed out earlier, for Badiou, the spectator encounters an idea on an intellectual level but also on a physical level. I would like now to demonstrate how in Badiou's theatre, the audience literally partakes in the

“physical, material and organic deployment of a thought” to the point that thought becomes embodied in the audience, or more precisely, that spectators somehow incorporate themselves to the theatre-idea. (DPAP, unpag.) In his theory of theatre, Badiou does not go as far as proposing this incorporation, but my hypothesis is that everything is laid out in his *Rhapsody for the Theatre* and in his ‘Theses on Theater’ to reflect upon theatre in the terms of Badiou’s ideation process as developed in his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* some twenty years later.

Although Badiou does not evoke the notion of theatre-idea when reflecting upon the concept of ideation in his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* and *Communist Hypothesis*, the following assertion describes the notion of theatre-idea quite well: “The Idea exposes a truth in a fictional structure.” (HC, 239) Badiou explains that in the case of the communist Idea, a subjective instance projects a fragment of political real upon the narrative construction of History. (HC, 239) In the same way and as explained earlier, the subject occupied a space between situation and state of the situation, between what there is and what is given as what there is, there the subject is also described as an interface: a sequence of emancipatory politics. What Badiou sees as the real of politics, is revealed or recognised by a subject and, as such inserted into History. For Badiou, the subject is the filter through which what happens becomes History, rather than History being what is given as what happened. Yet, Badiou stresses that this projection of the real of a truth procedure upon the symbolic order of History cannot be but imaginary.¹¹⁷ (HC, 239) He evokes the perils of short-circuiting reality and Idea and stresses that ‘communist’ cannot be used anymore as an adjective qualifying a given politics. (HC, 240) For our purpose, what needs to be retained is the fact that it is through the imaginary operation of the

¹¹⁷ Badiou’s conception of history draws here upon what Lacan means by imaginary and symbolic as explained earlier. Adrian Johnston provides an interesting insight into the influence of Lacan upon Badiou in his article entitled “This Philosophy Which Is Not One: Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian Antiphilosophy” in *S: Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, vol. 3 (2010), 137-158

Idea that an individual can find the resources to enter the subjectivisation process, and so to speak, to make History. This explains further how theatre for Vitez and Badiou can be a machine to elucidate time.

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou proceeds intuitively. The dialogue between 'Me' and the Empiricist points to the tentative nature of the demonstration, which in many aspects remains open. Badiou's texts on theatre trace some lines of thought which can be followed up in his most recent philosophical writings. In this respect, establishing a connection between the notion of theatre-idea and Badiou's latest concept of *ideation* appears useful to understand the notion of the spectator-subject further. The difficulty is to conceive the subject as both a possible point where truths can come into effect or become somehow tangible but also a movement in line with the transitory nature of truths. As explained earlier, the spectator-subject cannot remain in place through the subjectivisation process. In *The Communist Hypothesis*, Badiou insists on the fact "that every truth prescribes a Subject of this truth, a Subject who – even empirically – cannot be reduced to an individual." (HC, 232) This is also the case of the spectator who "as soon as she enters the place of theatre and takes her seat, constitutes a gathering unto herself. (RT, 190) What is at stake in the notion of spectator-subject is an *incorporation* of the spectator to a subject. The hyphen between spectator and subject can somehow be seen as a mark of this process.

As stated earlier, Badiou describes his philosophical system as a materialist transposition of Plato.¹¹⁸ In *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou explains that like Plato, his problem is to extract eternal truths from the experience of knowledge, that is, from what we know of a given situation. (SMP, 106) An object of the world

¹¹⁸ In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou describes his position as a materialist reversal of materialism. See in particular the chapter entitled "The indissoluble salt of truth" where Badiou distinguishes his approach from idealism. (TS, 190-200)

can only be grasped as a concept because each particular object of the same kind, say a table, contains a part of truth which can be conceptualised. More precisely, a truth common to all the objects of the same kind can be conceptualised. Badiou stresses that this is the point where the being of an object and what is thought about the being of this object collude. He adds that the point of indiscernability between the particularity of an object and the universal thought of this object is precisely what Plato calls the Idea. (SMP, 107) Traditionally, theatre has always relied upon the indiscernability between what is presented as particular on stage and its universal relevance. Thus, in a Platonician sense, theatre is always a theatre of ideas. In *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou writes:

the Idea is nothing other than that by which individuals discover within themselves the action of thought as immanence to the True. This discovery immediately indicates both that the individual is not the author of this thought, but merely that through which it passes, and that this thought would, nevertheless, not have existed without all the incorporations which make up its materiality.” (SMP, 109)

While for Plato reaching the Idea implies an ascendant movement from the sensible, for Badiou, the Idea spreads horizontally and spreads like wildfire from one world into another. In this sense, Badiou's ideation process is, if not a reversal at least a materialist transposition of Plato. The body of truth amalgamates individual lives as it spreads, yet the material of the universal truth retains its singularity. The process is akin to a clustering rather than an assimilation. The individual experiences the universal by incorporating a subjectivisable body, knowing that what the individual partakes in is valid for all. However, Badiou stresses that the ideation is also “the representation of the universal power of something whose immediate particularity is very often perilous, unstable and a source of anguish by dint of being guaranteed by nothing at all.” (SMP, 111) Like

the eventual truth process, to an extent, the ideation process unfolds upon the background of void. The violent immanence of the event forces the individual to face an undesirable choice and make a decision akin to a throw of a dice. It is the same for the spectator, who can endorse, ignore or reject the theatre-idea. This is no trivial matter for those choosing to follow in the trail of the idea, even at the theatre, as the harshness of the process does not stop there. Badiou concludes his chapter on the ideation process by declaring that “[the] Idea is the severity of the meaning of existence.” The body of truth has then to be constructed point by point by subjecting thought to the unknown, be it a new art form, new political ways or even new love configurations. Each point requires, from the individual who has embarked on the subjectivisation process, to decide on a balancing act on the line of thought.

The analogy between the theatre-idea and Ideation processes is reinforced by the fact that Badiou conceives the Ideation process as what binds together the different steps of an individual's path to incorporate a truth process. (SMP, 115) This echoes the re-binding of reality effected by theatre after the unbinding of the representation orchestrated by the State. Yet, the Idea cannot be perceived as totalitarian or as unifying. For Badiou, “[the] Idea is a historical anchoring of everything elusive, slippery, evanescent in the becoming of a truth. But it can only be so if it admits as its own real this aleatory, elusive, slippery, evanescent dimension.” (HC, 247) This is exactly the case for the theatre-idea which is intrinsically linked to chance and bound to vanish. To an extent, the art of theatre in Mallarmé's lineage can, for Badiou, be summed up as the staging of such disappearance.

When applied to theatre, Badiou's concept of 'world' renews the threadbare “All the world's a stage” maxim. According to Badiou's theory, the stage can be

considered a world. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou explains that the event ruptures the presentational logic of a world and defines the subject thus:

The subjective form is [...] assigned for a localisation in being which is ambiguous. On the one hand, the subject is only a set of the world's elements, and therefore an object in the scene on which the world presents multiplicities; on the other, the subject orients this object – in terms of the effects it is capable of producing – in a direction that stems from an event. The subject can therefore be said to be the only known form of a conceivable “compromise” between the phenomenal persistence of a world and its eventual rearrangement. (LW, 79)

This quote would not be at odds in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, if the subject is replaced by the actor and event by theatre-idea. To an extent, theatre represents “the phenomenal persistence of a world and its eventual rearrangement” via the ordering of its material components by the theatre-idea, the actor being one of these components. Similarly, the ethics of play can be further defined by resorting to *Logics of Worlds*' notions of ‘body’ and ‘trace’:

We will call ‘body’ the wordly dimension of the subject and ‘trace’ that, which, on the basis of the event, determines the active orientation of the body. A subject is therefore a formal synthesis between the statics of the body and its dynamics, between its composition and its effectuation. (LW, 79)

Badiou defines the subject as a compromise between phenomenal persistence and eventual reshuffling, that is, as something in between, an intermediary between staticity and movement. Somehow the subject seems to be a ‘go-between’ between ‘what is’ and ‘what occurs’. Let's posit that the spectator, or the audience as a

whole, is a subjective form in theatre. After all, the spectator is one object of the world 'theatre', one of the seven components. The spectator could be the worldly dimension of the subject, its 'body'. Also the audience can be considered as the 'phenomenal persistence' of the world outside of the theatre. Theatre itself could be described as a reshuffling of the world, in the sense that it redistributes the reality of the world outside, presents it under a new guise. Thus, if applying Badiou's definition of the subject, it could be deduced that the actor is the "evental trace" which determines the active orientation of the otherwise passive body of the spectators. In other words, the audience would be the static dimension of the subject, while the actor would be its dynamic. This is where theatre meets Mallarmé's analogy of the crowd watching fireworks to express the politicisation, or subjectification, of the dark masses by the contemplation of the moving constellations traced upon the sky.

Theatre thus presents the subjectivisation process, which is made possible by the meeting, or conflagration of the staticity of the audience and the tracing out of a theatre-idea on stage. This evokes the role of orientation assigned to theatre by Vitez. As explained by Badiou, for Vitez, theatre summons eternity in the moment to provide the audience with temporal landmarks in order to confront the future. (RT, 229) By many aspects the concept of ideation in relation to that of the theatre-idea informs the relationship between theatre and history, which Badiou develops in the background of his theory of theatre. In *The Communist Hypothesis*, Badiou defines the Idea as:

"an abstract totalisation of the three basic elements: a truth procedure, a belonging to history, and an individual subjectivisation. [...] an Idea is the subjectivisation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History. [...] an Idea is the possibility for an individual to understand that his or her

participation in a singular political process (his or her entry into a body-of-truth) is also, in a certain way, a *historical* decision. Thanks to the Idea, the individual, as an element of the new Subject, realises his or her belonging to the movement of History. (HC, 235)

For Badiou, History is the history of the State. (HC, 245) To an extent, as a representation, history is an expression of the state of the situation. In terms of set theory, history could be conceived as a set containing all of the subsets forming a succession of states of situation. The definition of the idea above resonates with the relationship between theatre and history exposed by Badiou in his theory of theatre. The analysis of this important articulation in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* will shed some light on the quote above and explain in particular how Badiou's theory of theatre addresses the trans-temporal nature of truths. As explained earlier, a truth is a vanished event which reappears through the disparate materials of a world. (SMP, 90) This implies that truths can be reactivated. Therefore truths link temporal segments across centuries. In other words, they transit through points which are far apart in history. Truths are not simply repeated but renew their impact according to the situation they rupture. The recurrence of truths creates a discontinuous historicity, as periods of activity alternate with periods during which truths are inert. This segmented continuity is the only possible historical form acceptable for Badiou, as he rejects the existence of History throughout his work. Badiou rejects the latent subordination of truths to their historical meaning based upon Hegel's assertion that 'The True is the process of its own becoming'.¹¹⁹ In the *Communist Hypothesis*, he writes,

I have many times had to insist that History does not exist, which is in keeping with my conception of truths, namely that they have no

¹¹⁹ This is a crucial axiom of Hegel's dialectic.

meaning, and especially not the meaning of History. (HC, 241)

For Badiou, it is not because discontinuous sequences of truths are inscribed upon history that they are revealed as bearing truths, but on the contrary, it is the discontinuity of the truths' sequences which forms history. Truths elude the relative meaning the historical context could give them as they are always in excess upon the situation. This has to be put in relation to the articulation of eternity and moment in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. In addressing the relationship between theatre and history, Badiou develops a dialectics of time. Throughout *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou insists upon the 'precarious temporality of theatre', while at the same time, he describes theatre as "a machine to create a topological relationship with time." (RT, 229) However, theatre is at once in command of time but also subjected to it. This is perfectly illustrated in *Ahmed se fâche* by what the character "Le Spectateur" declares:

Yet, what can be less eternal than a theatre performance? I always simply struggle to remember it. It leaves only inexact or imperceptible traces behind. (ASF, 213)¹²⁰

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou explains at length how theatre articulates three temporal dimensions: eternity, moment and time. Concealed in the text, the eternity of theatrical figures can come into existence at any time. This is similar to what is being said of the theatre-idea encapsulated in a referent, be it textual or mythical, and can be revived by the orchestration of the compulsory components of theatre. Commenting upon the work of the theatre directors Klaus Michael Grüber and Antoine Vitez and their different stagings of Racine's *Bérénice*, Badiou remarks that the spectator does not see an image of Titus, who remains inimitable, but

¹²⁰ Pourtant, quoi de moins éternel qu'une représentation de théâtre ? J'ai toujours du mal à simplement m'en souvenir. Ça ne laisse que des traces inexactes, ou imperceptibles. (ASF, 213)

encounters an actor as Titus. This does not seem particularly groundbreaking at first, but it becomes interesting when Badiou argues that different stagings of the same play organise an encounter between the spectator and the character at different moments of its 'eternity'. Badiou argues that while a novel character is immortal, a theatre character is eternal; it can be encountered as it has been released from the boundaries of time, but able to be 'actualised' under the spectator's gaze. (RT, 227)

According to Badiou,

[A] representation makes an encounter, in the moment, of that which the text holds in the eternal. That is to say, a good representation does so (a bad one is a missed encounter: there is neither eternity nor the moment, there is only the painful duration of the spectacle). This encounter functions for the spectator as an elucidation of the present. (RT, 229)

For example, in the case of Racine's *Bérénice*, the different stagings of the play might resonate differently with present times. In other words, directors present the eternity of Titus in the instant of the performance which remains ineluctably anchored in the now and as such constitutes a comment upon the present. Badiou quotes Antoine Vitez, for whom, as mentioned earlier, "the real function of theatre consists of orientating us in time, in telling us where we are in history. Theatre as a machine for answering the question "where?," a localising machine, a machine for a topological relation to time." (RT, 229) However, in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou leaves the following question hanging: "Of this encounter of the eternal in the elucidation of the instant, what is the effect on the spectator who endures it? Catharsis? Moral, intellectual, political education?" (RT 229) The answer is to be found in the link between the theatre-idea and the eternal truths it can convey,

which suggests that the articulation of politics and deployment of change rest upon the possibility of thought, that is, upon the spectator's ability to think the moment while encountering the eternal. In fact, with the example of the encounter with Racine's character, Badiou tries to empirically explain that truths have to be embodied to appear, hence Badiou's reference to Titus and the truths he embodies.

It is important to note that Badiou speaks of a personal experience here. In other words, the truths he sees unfolding on stage as a spectator are validated as truths by him alone. He subjectively declares the truths as universal and thus partakes, as a spectator, in what he deems to be a collective subjectivisation process. To an extent, the decision to extract the aforementioned truths and not others remains highly subjective, but this is not in contradiction with Badiou's theory of the subject which, as explained earlier, is precisely based upon a decision. Arguably, Badiou's demonstration can be seen as flawed since as a spectator, Badiou is far from being impartial or free of preconceived ideas. This is the reason why, when it comes to explaining theatre as a universal subjectivisation process, the notion of the theatre-idea is more potent than the theory developed in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. What is effected by the theatre-idea is the impression upon the spectator that a truth has crossed the theatre site. The spectator feels that there is more than what there is and is emotionally incited to seek the truth which, by definition, remains uncertain and incomplete. This is why the theatre-idea is an incitation to think. To an extent theatre rehearses the seizing of the subject by a truth, or more precisely, sets in motion the process of incorporation to a subjectivisable body of truth.

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou's *tour de force* is to articulate a complex notion of time from this somewhat classical approach to theatre and characterisation. Badiou writes:

This encounter functions for the spectator as an elucidation of the present. Or again: because one encounters in it that which a proper name (Titus) designates in its eternity, the instant of theatre can be understood after the fact as an instant of thought. Theatre would be the perception of the instant as an instant of thought. (RT, 229)

Somehow thinking implies invoking a name in order to reach an eternal truth. The same logics of naming is at work in the theory of the event when, as stated before, summoning the event makes it intervene in the present to shed some light upon the situation. Thought occurs because theatre manages a suspended dialectical time, in other words, our time is put to the test through the encounter with eternity. Within the time restrictions of the performance, the spectator is forced to think. Crossing paths with eternal figures might shed some light on the present time, but to be elucidated, time has to be stopped, suspended. The encounter of eternity and instant provokes thinking, a cut in time. The spectator can look back at the suspended instant and sustain a thought which supports a re-orientation in time. Emphatically reduced to these few essential lines, *Rhapsody for the Theatre's* chapter 37 expresses the same idea:

Theatre, which is a form of the State, says what this State will have been by lending it the fable of a past. Unable to come back to the present it activates, theatre establishes the future anterior of a state of affairs by putting it at the distance that is required for the present of its operation. Thinking in terms of time, theatre executes this thinking in the past tense. (RT 207)

Time is not reset, but perceived differently. In the same way a moment is redefined by theatre as a moment of thought, time is redefined. The future becomes a future anterior, a time looking into the past for a purpose. Badiou remarks that theatre by

nature cannot be in a position of simultaneity with the present and very often resorts to historical periods to address contemporary issues. (RT, 207) However, in the same way the theory of the event shifts from a logic of naming to a logic of consequences, Badiou has recently reflected upon the summoning of history in theatre in a different way.

In an essay entitled 'Théâtre et philosophie', Badiou reiterates theatre's role in relation to history: "Theatre signals where we stand in historical time, by producing a readable amplification which is specific to it. It clarifies our situation." (TP, 138) Badiou refers to a staging of Jean Genet's text *Quatre heures à Chatila* to explain this point and remarks that the director had managed to create a theatrical time, which addressed the Palestinian situation, according to a scale which evoked The Iliad.¹²¹ The spectator thus encountered a situation drawn towards intemporality without being denied existence in the present, but on the contrary, "Palestine" invoked for the spectator a contemporary urgency coming from the eternal recesses of time. This stretching of temporality is what Badiou calls the amplifying function of theatre. For Badiou, the singularity of the theatre-truth, which cannot happen but on stage, amounts to "an experimental event quasi political, which amplifies our situation in history". (TP, 138) For him, theatre's conflagration of time does not only bring forward eternal figures of the past for an encounter in the present, it also inserts the present into a mythical past.

Bosteels suggests that Badiou's reflection upon the conceptual pair, time and eternity in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, revolves around the idea that theatre produces as it were a history of eternity all of its own. (RT, 185) However, eternity for Badiou does not bear any relation to transcendence. On the contrary, he defines

¹²¹ Badiou refers here to an adaptation of Jean Genet's *Four Hours in Shatila* (1982) adapted and directed by French director Alain Milianti at the Grande Halle de la Villette during Paris Festival d'automne (Nov-Dec 1995).

it as a capacity to be revived in the present. This bears some resemblance with the laicised way he defines immortality in *Logics of Worlds*: being immortal meaning to live for an idea in the here and now.¹²² As explained earlier, it is the same with the notion of infinity, which, following Cantor's set theory, Badiou manages to think as immanent and thus free from any notion of transcendence. The eternity of theatre figures, in other words characters elevated to archetypal status, amounts to the fact they are preserved in the text and can indefinitely be re-presented on stage during the performance. The "cut in time" operated by theatre, which amounts to experiencing the moment as thought, has to be put in relation to the notion of 'cut' analysed above. The 'cut' is a thinking configuration, a frame of mind, a tool to think. As explained earlier, the way dialectics is described as amounting for Badiou to 'inner splits and divided recompositions' is the crux to understanding Badiou's idea of the subject. Likewise the cut operated by the event within the situation or by the theatre-idea in the materiality of theatre induces thinking because it splits the situation and forces the subject or the spectator to dissect the situation then to reconfigure or recompose it, in order to make sense of it. This is the process behind the diagonal crossing of the analytics of theatre by the dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject: a constant splitting and recomposing of representation in order to extract truth. In this, theatre induces thinking by creating a dialectical time. Badiou writes,

We are all the more capable of orienting ourselves in time, the more we have experienced the instant as thought (should we say: just as the instant of insurrection sheds a lasting light on our tasks in our time? And is this not its only function? But in this analogy what is it that would represent the eternal? What is historically eternal?

¹²² Badiou elaborates on this in *Logics of Worlds*' conclusion entitled "What is it to live ?" (LW 507-514)

Perhaps, precisely, politics itself? (RT, 230)

This is very close to what happens for the event, which can also be described as a cut in time which founds the future actions of the subject. The subject of the event pledges fidelity to the truth released by the event, while spectators reorientate themselves in time after the encounter with an idea. Badiou insists that it is easier to orientate ourselves in time once we have experienced the instant as thought. Theatre is somehow a thinking workshop where one can think in isolated time sequences. This enables the spectator to realise that what is given as the uninterrupted sequence of History is a representation and that political sequences have to be isolated first then projected upon history, thus recomposing it. Badiou suggests that perhaps the insurrectional instant, the time of the revolution, similarly elucidates the moment in order to clarify what action needs to be undertaken for the long term, but would not have any other function other than this elucidation. Badiou defines theatre as a "localised fiction of an image of politics that combines, in the effort of becoming a spectator, the instant, time, and eternity." (RT, 230) Badiou somehow places thinking through theatre and revolution on a par, at least in theory. To an extent, the effort of the spectator amounts to an insurrection, if only in thinking. Badiou concludes his reflection on eternity, moment and time by suggesting that if insurrection is momentaneous, then politics is perhaps what is 'historically eternal'. In the instant of the insurrection, politics is the eternal figure which is convoked in the briefness of the instant. The instant of thought is akin to an instant of insurrection. This is the reason why, despite the fact that "theatre avoids the revolution as the point of the real of politics," theatre as moment of insurrectional thought remains utterly political. (RT, 205) As Badiou conceives it, "a political thought is topologically collective, meaning that it cannot exist otherwise than as the thought of all." (MT, 142) This is precisely what theatre induces, politics is thought through theatre by the gathered cross-section of *la Foule* which stands for all.

The complex articulation of time in Badiou's work, especially in *Being and Event* and *Rhapsody for the Theatre* sustains an analogy between theatre and event. They both share the same relation with time as both encapsulate eternity, moment and time. While the event is the sudden surging forth of an eternal truth which is endorsed by the subject in a long-term fidelity process after being forced to rethink the situation, theatre is the ephemeral staging of an idea that provokes an enduring thought on the part of the spectator and thus somehow re-engineers time. While in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou uses theatre archetypal figures such as Titus in Racine's *Bérénice* to support his demonstration; in his more recent theory of theatre, the eternity of figures is replaced by the eternity of the theatre-idea. It is the advent of the theatre-idea, which elucidate the instant. Badiou's vocabulary shift from theatre-idea to theatre-truth reinforces the link between theatre's relation to time and that of the event. In his theory of theatre, Badiou combines a definition of time impregnated by politics and a more philosophical notion of time. There is in Badiou what I would call a materialist approach to time and an idealist approach to time which stems from his reading of Mallarmé. The relationship between theatre and history is part of a bigger reflection upon the relationship between theatre, time and atemporality or eternity.

My analysis of Badiou's notion of theatre-idea has led to the hypothesis that theatre is an ideation site. This has been corroborated by the way the three dialectics of theatre unfold, since the theatre-idea can be conceived as the product of the dialectics of the State of Theatre, the Ethics of Play and the Spectator-subject. To conceive Theatre as an ideation site is in line with Badiou's theory of the evental site, but it also allows for a recentering of the theory of the event upon Badiou's materialist dialectics, which has become again the focus of Badiou's revised theory of the event in *Logics of Worlds*. To use one of Badiou's analogies, the first volume of *Being and Event* corresponds to the subjective capacity of the

bird watcher, while the second volume to that of somebody digging the earth with a spade. As a result, the notion of undecidability has been toned down in the latter opus to the benefit of a more proactive attitude towards the event. Rather than scrutinizing the sky in the hope of an event flying across, it is a question of leaving no stone unturned when looking for the traces of an event. In this respect, it is fair to conceive Badiou's theatre as combining the two approaches since theatre deployment of the materialist dialectics of the Theatrical State, the Ethics of play and the Spectator-subject remains ineluctably liable to chance. For Badiou, Theatre is therefore a materialist excavation liable to the occurrence of the unexpected.

Drawing from the metaphysical role assigned to chance by Mallarmé, the notion of theatre-idea is articulated upon chance since, for Badiou, no theatre performance can abolish chance. Badiou considers chance as the possibility for the impossible to occur. For Badiou, what makes theatre above all political by essence is precisely the random gathering of the audience, which in *Rhapsody for the theatre*, is referred to as "the masses of chance". Applying Badiou's concept of incorporation and ideation to his theory of theatre allows a conception of Theatre as rehearsing the possibility for a collective subjectivisation. This occurs when the audience incorporates through thinking the truth processes theatre is potentially able to initiate. Sustaining a myriad of alienating thoughts places the audience in the same position as the Mallarméan *Foule* who rejoices in the fireworks display and which, for the duration of a moment, inhabits a constellation. In this light, Badiou's theatre demonstrates that the individual can only be part of a subjectivable body in the making. Consequently, his theatre also fends off any notion of a predetermined subject of politics, such as the militant or the class subject. Although he specifically refers to specific periods, such as the French Revolution between 1792 and 1794 or the People's War of Liberation in China between 1927 and 1949, Badiou's definition of a political truth could be applied to theatre: "[It] is a concrete, time-specific

sequence in which new thought and a new practice of collective emancipation arise, exist, and eventually disappear.” (HC, 231) This is precisely Badiou's definition of theatre, which materially anchors “an eternal and incomplete idea caught in the instantaneous ordeal of its own completion.” (IN, 74) For each performance, Theatre organises the gathering of a collective that is urged to think under the pressure of an evanescent theatre-idea. This thinking ordeal is an emancipatory process and the success of the enterprise lies with its ephemerality.

According to Badiou, “[each] faithful truth-process is an entirely invented immanent break with the situation.” (ET, 44) However, for Badiou, while theatre is a truth process in its own right, it does not strictly imply an immanent break with the situation, but rather an unbinding of the situation. In light of what was explained above, for Badiou, theatre functions like an evental site which would not be cancelled out in the process. This reflects Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* where there is no need for the situation to be cancelled, but rather a need to resort to the infinite potential of the site, which contains discernible traces of the event. When reformulating the theory of the event, Badiou pushes the notion of naming aside, but returns to the notion of trace, which was central to his reading of Mallarmé. However, in Badiou's new system, “[it] is not enough to identify a trace. One must incorporate oneself into what the trace authorises in terms of consequences”. (LW, 508) In Badiou's revised theory of the event, the evental traces make the event transferable into another world. The ethics of play would consist of tracing the proposal of the theatre-idea. The transmission of the dynamics of the theatre-idea depends upon the way actors, spectators and all the other components of theatre relate to one another. In the same way the subject was previously conceived by Badiou as a truth fragment, it could be said of actors that they mark the possibility of the passage of a truth, whilst spectating consists of incorporating the subjectivable body constituted around the trace of a truth. In this respect, the art of theatre could

be described as a disseminating of traces of truth and theatre-idea process as an activation of those traces within the theatrical situation (or in the terms of *Logics of Worlds*, the world “theatre”), whilst spectating consists of incorporating their consequences, that is, following the ideas through in the search of truths which might traverse other worlds outside the theatre.

In agreement with Mallarmé, for Badiou, theatre points to the absence of revolution, to the lack of present because of the lack of political action. Theatre as much for Mallarmé as for Badiou amounts to restricted action in politics because in the absence of gathering of *la Foule* in an emancipating capacity outside of the theatre, theatre is the sole arena where a present is created. However, when examining in parallel Badiou's latest notion of incorporation, although for Badiou, theatre amounts to restricted action, the present created by theatre is not a restricted present. Badiou's notion of evental trace is essential to understand this point. In *Logics of Worlds* Badiou stresses that “[the] only real relation to the present is that of incorporation: the incorporation into this immanent cohesion of the world which springs from the becoming of the evental trace, as a new birth beyond all the facts and markers of time.” (LW, 508) Whilst the event in *Being and Event* reinstated the void underlying the situation, in *Logics of Worlds*, the elements of the world, or situation, are redistributed around the evental trace to establish an immanent cohesion. This is the same process as the unbinding effected by theatre, which ensures that an immanent cohesion of the situation is re-established, by challenging the false cohesion of the state of the situation. Immanent cohesion refers here to the presentation of the elements of the situation, including the inexistent or empty set as opposed to the representation orchestrated by the State. In light of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou's articulation of eternity, time and instant in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* gathers momentum here, so to speak, as the eternity of the theatre present gives birth to something new in the immanence of each

performance “beyond all the facts and markers of time.” As demonstrated in the analysis of Badiou’s theatre dialectics, the ability to restore immanent cohesion to ‘the world of being there’ diametrically opposes Badiou’s theatre to a theatre of presence, which would rely upon being as transcendent. Consequently, within Badiou’s system, theatre reasserts the connection between event and evental site. Installing theatre at the core of Badiou’s philosophy thus provides a means to fend off criticisms of Badiou’s event as absolutely self-referential and anchors Badiou’s philosophy more firmly in materialist dialectics (as defined by Badiou). However, because of the transitory nature of the theatre-idea, Badiou’s theatre cannot simply be described as a theatre of immanence. Alongside mathematics, theatre is central to Badiou’s materialist dialectics, since it deploys a material idea while providing Badiou with the means to materially address the fragmentary and elusive nature of truths within his philosophical system. From the standpoint of *Logics of Worlds*, it is fair to suggest that traces of transitory truths left in the ‘world’ theatre might signal the possibility of change in a ‘world’ coalescent to that of theatre. This is the reason why for Badiou, theatre is by essence linked to politics. For Badiou, like truths, politics is always in transit. It is what inexists within the representation orchestrated by the State. Rather than a theatre of immanence, Badiou’s theatre theory and plays point towards a theatre of inexistence. The next section will investigate this in Badiou’s practice. I will demonstrate how in their own ways, *L’Écharpe rouge* and *Incident at Antioch* stage the collapse of the political state of the situation to present the traces of politics in the recesses of representation.

III – Badiou's militant theatre

1 - Collective subject in *L'Écharpe rouge*

Badiou's first play *L'Écharpe rouge*, is probably the most straight forward reengagement, through the thinking enabled by theatre, with a sequence of emancipatory politics. In the afterword of *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou states,

L'Écharpe rouge is rooted in the powerful political will which has shaken the world, especially at the beginning, between 1965 and 1975. Contrary to many others, for whom this period was only an illusion, I declare that it was the random beginning of a new circulation of truth. The fact that this experience had the power of art, as demonstrated, I hope, by *L'Écharpe rouge*, can confirm this point of view and set loose what was emerging as universal from the pedestal of bitterness and disparagement. To stage *L'Écharpe rouge* in 1984 has the strength of a sting of light through a threadbare piece of material. (ER, 60)

For Badiou, the political will that inaugurates a new truth process from 1965 onwards, that is, the launch of the Cultural Revolution in China, has long faded by 1984 by being smothered by the fibres of disillusion.¹²³ If Badiou mentions a worn piece of material, it is because he believes that the movement which culminated in May 68 has seriously frayed. For Badiou, only art has the power to shatter the stratified disavowal of the possibility for a universal truth-process stemming from a

¹²³ Badiou is implicitly referring here to Lin Biao's speech, "Long Live the Victory of People's War!" delivered on 3rd September 1965, in other words, the launch of the Cultural Revolution in China. Lin Biao especially exhorted school pupils to return to the basic principles of the revolutionary movement and question their masters. Richard Wolin's *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* provides a good, if at times partial, insight into French Maoism. (Princeton University Press, 2010) See in particular the excursus "On the Sectarian Maoism of Alain Badiou", pp. 155-176.

decade of political upheavals with May 1968 at their apex. For the author of *L'Écharpe rouge* theatre, somehow paradoxically, serves to reveal that the political sequence that culminated in May 68 was no illusion. Badiou's main target in his political writings and to an extent in his theatre, are those he calls the 'renegades': the 'new philosophers' who have relinquished Marxism to embrace 'liberal democracy'.¹²⁴ Badiou's first play is the radical expression of his fidelity to the decade of emancipatory politics described above. In the preface to the theatre adaptation of his novel *L'Écharpe rouge* (1984), Badiou states that "Following Sartre, it is the certainty that theatre was the most political art form which, in 1972, pushed [him] to undertake the writing of *L'Écharpe rouge* using *The Satin Slipper* as a blue-print." (ER, 3)¹²⁵ In French, Badiou uses the expression *en décalque* to refer to his adaptation of *The Satin Slipper*. He sees his play as the result of a transfer by the means of tracing paper. Although Badiou see his play as a kind of re-transcription of that of Claudel, *L'Écharpe rouge* departs largely from the original. Plot, characters and setting are radically different and only the structure of the original in days and sequences and the symbolic treatment of the space are retained. Rather than a re-transcription, it is fair to describe Badiou's attempt as an emulation of Claudel's intentions. Written between 1919-1924, Claudel's play *The Satin Slipper* was published in four volumes in 1928 and 1929, while Claudel was French ambassador in Tokyo. After the First World War and the emergence of a 'new' world, Claudel investigated the possibilities of mending the fabric of universality and revisited the world of the Conquista driven by Catholic faith. As mentioned earlier, Badiou's aim is to encapsulate within his theatre the "political will

¹²⁴ French philosopher André Glucksmann is among those who, according to Badiou, have betrayed what May 68 was about. According to Hallward, Glucksmann's *Les Maîtres penseurs* (1977) was the inaugural text of the subsequent "intellectual counter-revolution and "set the tone for the post-totalitarian repentance and liberal respect for human rights that came to define *la nouvelle philosophie*. (Hallward: 2003, 40)

¹²⁵ "C'est la certitude que le théâtre était le lien artistique le plus fort politiquement qui m'a décidé, en 1972, à entreprendre, en décalque du *Soulier de Satin*, l'écriture de *L'Écharpe Rouge*."

which has shaken the world” between 1965 and 1975. Therefore, Badiou’s project is in many ways similar to Claudel’s intentions. However, both authors could not be further apart: Claudel dedicated the last stage of his life and career to exegesis of the Bible, and is considered by some to be a literary champion of Catholicism. Given that Badiou is a self-proclaimed atheist, his decision to use the structures of Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper* and *La Ville* for his first two plays, *L'Écharpe rouge* and *Incident at Antioch*, could seem incongruous.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, Badiou’s reworking of Claudel is neither a simple case of laicisation of religious material nor an iconoclast parody but rather, as I will demonstrate, an adaptation of Claudel’s Baroque aesthetics.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ In the introduction to *Saint Paul and the foundation of Universalism*, Badiou states that he is ‘hereditarily irreligious, verily, through [his] four grand-parents who were all teachers, rather trained in the desire to crush clerical infamy’. (SP, 1) As pointed out earlier, adapting Claudel might point, as far as the French repertoire is concerned, to a displacement of theatre, similar to that advocated by Althusser. However, this does not account for the replacement of religious narrative in Claudel by politics in *L'Écharpe rouge*. Rather than concealing them, the shift at work in the idea of displacement discussed above implies the transmission of elements that survive the adaptation process. In the case of Badiou adapting Claudel, it could be argued that in the process, politics might get impregnated by religion. Instead of attempting to deconstruct Badiou’s conception of politics as staged in the play by pointing to the degree to which it might amount to ideology through contamination by religion, I am exploring here how Badiou reworks for its own purpose the dramatic structure Claudel resorts to with religion in mind. Despite seeing how religion could be seen as a torsion of Badiou’s system, I agree with Andrew Gibson that ‘deconstructing Badiou is a project of negligible interest and value, certainly at the current time: there are other, much more important things that we can be doing with his thought.’ (Gibson: 2005, 141) This is not the case of Slavoj Žižek, who explores how religion operates as a fifth column in Badiou’s theory. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek argues that “[i]f we take Badiou’s thought itself as a ‘situation’ of Being, subdivided in four *génériques* [the four generic *conditions* of the event: love, art, science, politics], (Christian) religion itself is his ‘symptomal torsion’, the element that belongs to the domain of Truth without being one of its acknowledged parts or subspecies.” (Žižek: 1999, 145)

¹²⁷ Badiou’s reworking of Claudel’s play is also to be considered through the links between theatre and State in France and Badiou’s particular take on this relationship in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. More than a theatre text, Claudel’s play has come to symbolise French theatre, perhaps even the entire nation. In 1940, during the German occupation, the theatre director and actor Jean-Louis Barrault asked Claudel to write a shorter version of the play. A five hour-long version was premiered at the Comédie Française on 27 November 1943 and enjoyed huge success over that winter, despite the show being regularly interrupted by bomb alerts and curfews.¹²⁷ The erection of the play as the paragon of French theatre and perhaps of French cultural resistance is not without its problems, especially because it propagates the Catholic ideals of beauty and asceticism drawing upon Baroque religious aesthetics. In 1987, the integral version of *The Satin Slipper* was for the first time directed by Antoine Vitez, who had three years earlier directed the stage version of Badiou’s ‘romanopéra’ *L'Écharpe rouge* (1979).¹²⁷ For this production, Badiou adapted his own novel for the stage in collaboration with Vitez, the composer Georges Aperghis and the scenographer Yannis Kokkos and premiered it at the Opéra de Lyon in 1984. *L'Écharpe rouge* was performed at the Opéra de Lyon on

Claudiel's *The Satin Slipper* is divided into four days that, according to the first lines of stage direction, unfold 'upon the world', that is a fantasized Spain and its colonial empire during the Spanish Golden Age.¹²⁸ In *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou's aim is not entirely dissimilar as he attempts to pick up the pieces of the Communist world to examine on stage the multiple aspects of political conquest and the deal of a new hand in terms of politics. The play is an attempt to explore communism throughout its worldly dimensions, or more precisely to map out how the idea of communism filters through the different worlds that are unfolded by the play. In *D'un Désastre obscur sur la fin de la vérité d'état*, the play is described by Badiou as being "faithful to the October 1917 event." (DO, 7) Although he does not elaborate on this point, the play can be described thus, because it shows politics in movement and resisting the sedimentation of layers of emancipatory struggles back into the stasis of the State. To an extent, *L'Écharpe rouge* announces Badiou's treatment of communism as an hypothesis or a philosophical idea in his latest opuses discussed above. Preambling *The Century* written by Badiou twenty years later, *L'Écharpe rouge* could be read as a summary of the last century from a communist perspective, which starts with the First World War and ends in 1976 with the death of Mao Zedong. The play stages the persistence of the 1917 revolution throughout the 20th Century and follows the different traces of this event. The imprint of *The Satin Slipper* has to be found in the scale of *L'Écharpe rouge*'s story that crosses a vast territory, just like the original. In the novelistic version, Badiou provided a map for a world, which has been described in notes for the stage adaptation, as a

the 4th, 7th, 12th, 15th and 17th June 1984, then at the Festival d'Avignon (15-18 July 1984), and finally at the Théâtre National de Chaillot (18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26th October 1984). Apart from these fifteen performances, the play has never been staged since.

¹²⁸ Claudiel describes the setting for the *Satin Slipper* thus: "The Scene of this play is the world, and more especially Spain at the close of the sixteenth century, unless it be the opening of the seventeenth century. The author has taken the liberty of compendiating countries and periods, just as at a given distance several separate mountain chains make but one horizon." (*The Satin Slipper*, Preamble to the First Day, 1937 [1931], unpaginated)

country which could encompass the reality of a certain hexagon or a certain European federation. (ER, 55)

The story is that of territorial conquest opposing several factions. The capital city is the base of a government that is semi-liberal and semi-dictatorial and influenced by the military and industrial groups. The communist party and the red army administer two liberated zones, one in the South and one in the Centre. Between the two zones, the governmental army holds the Eastern corridor. The communist party plans to launch a major offensive, but its members disagree on the tactics to follow. On one hand, the party president and his deputy project to encircle the governmental forces in the Eastern corridor, to occupy the rest of the island as a diversion and to rally Raoul Vestral, a guerrilla leader modelled on Che Guevara. On the other hand, Antoine, the island governor, who resorts to 'classic' Bolshevik methods, would like to declare an insurrectional strike in the working class areas and to march the red army stationed in the centre towards the north and the capital. While *L'Écharpe rouge* is set in an imaginary European continent, there is mention of the Americans, the Russians, the Chinese and other real countries or people in the play. Writing about the novel version of *L'Écharpe rouge* (1979), Emily Apter remarks that "Like *Almagestes* [Badiou's first novel published in 1964], *The Red Scarf* maps a world of post-historical revolutionary time that, in the tradition of Atlantis or More's utopia, is both here and nowhere."¹²⁹ (Apter: 2008, 1902) For example, Antoine wants the support of the Russian, while the president of the party refuses any outside help. The tactical debate stages in fact two different conceptions of politics and war. Antoine's position is closer to Marxism-Leninism, based on the economy, power, a dislike of peasantry, the systematic use of artifice

¹²⁹ In her article, Emily Apter offers a very interesting comparison between Badiou's novelistic style and that of Natacha Michel, a co-founder with Badiou of Organisation Politique. See Emily Apter, "Laws of the 70's: Badiou's Revolutionary Untimeliness" in *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol. 29, 2008, 1885-1904.

and repression for the benefits of efficiency. The other position, defended by the President or Rachel, is unstable and suspicious towards provoked insurrections, looking for a gradual consolidation of political results rather than a quick victory. As a result, despite being widely spread among the peasants, this position is slower in its attempt to rally partisans. Rachel only manages to lay the foundations of a new type of rural society at the very end of the play. Throughout, the conflict opposing the different political conceptions fuels a struggle for power within the party.¹³⁰ To an extent, the play stages various forms of emancipatory movements which have occurred between 1917 and 1976. Whilst being an imaginary situation, the play refers to the Cold War and the Chinese third way and presents clear, easily identifiable political positions. In the play, these different takes on the idea of communism are each assigned a different territory instead of being treated as different periods in time. Rather than an epic narrative unfolding within an extended time-span, Badiou's play unfolds upon a dilated geography. While in Claudel, it was the inner beliefs of the characters which were projected upon the diegetic space, to an extent in Badiou, it is the characters which encapsulate the different fragments of space upon which the story unfolds. This is particularly true of Raoul Vestral who in his undefined jungle territory refused any notion of a party. The world presented by *L'Écharpe rouge* is therefore diffracted and Claire, a character who in the play is

¹³⁰ The play combines the power struggles within the communist party with a more intimate story of a sister and her brother, children of the industry tycoon Joseph. Claire is an active member of the clandestine communist party in the city, while Simon, a former member of the party, has recently joined a group of youths with anarchist tendencies. Joseph wants to submit his daughter and sends her into exile to the part of the island still in the hands of the government. During her journey, she is freed by a few members of the local party cell and Antoine, who is in love with her. She goes into hiding but is found by the police and her father. The party convinces her to feign acceptance at being exiled to the island, where it promises to free her again. She is to represent the political bureau locally and thus to see to Antoine's obedience to the party. The political bureau decides to follow the president and chooses Simon, who returns to the party, to lead the invasion of the south-west. In the meantime, Antoine instigates strikes in the City and in the North-East and is victorious on the island. The governmental forces strike back in the Centre which should lead to an offensive of the party towards the North as Antoine initially planned. However the President sticks to his initial plan and political methods and launches an offensive on the Eastern corridor. The strikes fail and are harshly repressed. The war lasts longer than planned but is ultimately won by the red army. Antoine's dissident movement is crushed in the island as the majority rallies the victorious side and the realist Russians let him down.

constantly sent from one place to the next, regrets “a time before when a transparent world existed that fused discipline with revolt.” (ER, 33) However, as I will now demonstrate, it is precisely the notion of a transparent world which Badiou refutes with a complex system of overlapping worlds in *L'Écharpe rouge*. Moreover, the transitory nature of the politics of the play informs the relationships between theatre and history in Badiou's theory of theatre and announces Badiou's *Logics of Worlds*.

The myth of the red scarf

Antoine Vitez, who co-adapted and directed the play, refers to the novel *L'Écharpe rouge* in these terms:

I read Alain Badiou's big red book four years ago. It gave me the impression that, for the first time, there was an attempt to speak the great passion of the 20th Century which is communism. This book is a kind of cosmogony of the communist revolutionary movement. It is not a work of propaganda, but a work of mythology.¹³¹ (Ubersfeld: 1994, 85)

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou mentions the reaction of some members of the audience, who, after having attended a performance of *L'Écharpe rouge*, described the characters as Greek gods. (RhT, 203) He acknowledges the reference to myth and declares that:

For the spectator who simply accepts to be one, this story of the

¹³¹ This is part of an interview of Antoine Vitez by *Le Provençal* newspaper on 1st July 1984 during a run of performances of *L'Écharpe rouge* at the Festival d'Avignon. This is quoted by Anne Ubersfeld in *Antoine Vitez. Metteur en scène et poète* (Paris: Éditions des Quatre-Vents, 1994).

communist epic is inscribed in the great categories of myth where theatre, since the beginning, has articulated the effects of politics. (RT, 203)

With *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou's aim is to offer a glimpse of the universal truth he attaches to the idea of communism by staging communism in the twentieth century as a founding myth. The category of myth is useful not to represent politics but the effect of politics upon the present. For Badiou, Theatre has the function of articulating the eternal; the mythical as present. This is in line with what was explained earlier about Theatre's relationship with history.¹³² Noticeably, Badiou refrains here from using the term history but refers rather to the effects of politics. Since, as explained earlier, for him history does not exist and is a representation. For Badiou, Theatre, which represents representation, can only deploy a political sequence as a myth, which then needs to be endorsed by a subjectivisable body in order to become history in the present, that is, true politics. Badiou describes the play *L'Écharpe rouge* as "an imaginary assessment of the situation, the staging of an epic story which never took place, fragments of history, sediments of our memory and imagination, myths of this history" (ER, 56). To an extent, Badiou's play tells the story of what could have happened if most sequences of emancipatory politics throughout the world in the twentieth century had co-existed and taken hold. At the same time, the play also denounces the myth of seeing the history of communism in the twentieth century as a whole rather than as juxtaposed fragments.

Rather than reinforcing the illusionary nature of the play, Badiou's mention of myths expresses the possibility of the imaginary situation to serve as a founding myth for the politics to come. References to the category of myth are recurrent in comments made about the play not only by Badiou but also by his collaborators. In light of

¹³² See earlier page 144

Badiou denouncing the disillusion vis-à-vis the 1965-1975 political sequence, describing the play in terms of myth cannot be understood as highlighting an illusion, but as referring to a founding truth - albeit not a truth to extract from the past, but a truth to-come. This is very different to Barthes' treatment of the myth as Badiou's, but also Vitez's references to the myth point to a rearticulation of the links between theatre and myth.¹³³ *L'Écharpe rouge* is in fact a prime illustration of what Badiou declares in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* about the relationship between theatre and revolution: "Theatre has always treated the revolution as a myth. Let me add in passing that this does not prove that it was a myth but only that, in theatre, that part of the revolution that was not a myth cannot be represented." (RT, 206) For Badiou, politics is irrepresentable but can nevertheless be represented as myth, albeit not in order to discard politics as mere illusion, but on the contrary to erect its irrepresentability as a founding myth.

While *L'Écharpe rouge* is set in an imaginary European continent, the action supposedly takes place in the present. The textual treatment of space is realist and articulated around factories, harbours, political party headquarters. As mentioned earlier, although the play is set in an imaginary world, there is mention of the world outside the theatre: Americans, Russians, Chinese. However, Badiou states in a postscript to the stage adaptation:

From my point of view, *L'Écharpe rouge* is no more of a utopia than the Romans in Racine's tragedies, the Spaniards in Claudel or the

¹³³ The work of Roland Barthes comes to mind and the demystification process he engages with in *Mythologies*. Barthes declares that "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie or a confession: it is an inflexion" (Barthes: 1957, 140) To an extent, this definition of the myth resonates with Badiou's definition of truth as a torsion, which stems from Lacan's seeming aphorism: "The true, then, of course, is that. Except that it is never reached except by twisted pathways." (Lacan: [1975] 1998, 95). This is quoted by Badiou in *Theory of the Subject*. (TS, 122) To an extent, the textual treatment of space in the play which projects a chronology of events upon an imagined geography can be described as torsion. For Badiou, Theatre would operate an inflexion upon what is given as the history of the Communist movement in the twentieth century to unfold whichever truth it might hold.

Chinese in Brecht. Delocalisation, here, is only a theatrical truth process. Instead of a tool to reflect upon our time, it serves to explore the dead-end situation of our time. (ER, 56)

For him, the setting of the play in a fictitious world that resembles a Communist Europe serves to delocalise the action and to install a distance, not unlike Racine's use of the Romans in his tragedies. However, the aim of the stage adaptation of *L'Écharpe rouge* is to install a minimal distance between the imaginary and the historical. Vitez describes it as "a fiction of which each moment duplicates a memory of what surrounds us" (Vitez: 1997, 40)¹³⁴ Badiou's aim is to articulate a revolution in the present, in his own words, "*au ras du monde*" (at 'world level'). (ER, back cover) This seems to be in contradiction with the operatic form of the novel and of its stage adaptation. Georges Aperghis describes his work as composer on *L'Écharpe rouge* as follows:

I tried to retrieve the roots of opera and the simplicity of music in relation to a story: to reach the form purity of the beginning of the opera – recitatives, arias – to tell a political utopia close to us in the form of a myth. I wanted to avoid emphatic militant music in order to mould the political speech into the opera imagery [...] I wanted to extract a poetics from the political action. (ER, 82).

As a result, in Vitez's production the actors on stage chant rather than speak their lines and each scene is punctuated by sung arias. Nevertheless, although Aperghis resorts to operatic forms, his contribution remains in line with the minimal displacement sought by Badiou. At the time of the production, Aperghis worked in close proximity with social reality. Since 1978, he had been working within a

¹³⁴ Quoted by Neveux (2007: 191)

community of workers in a Parisian suburb with the aim of experimenting with the relationship between theatre and music. This mainly consisted of collecting day-to-day sounds in the streets or in factories and transferring them into music. This is the approach he followed for *L'Écharpe rouge* in 1984. (ER, 76-77) With *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou's aim is to represent "the sediments of our memory and imagination" of what he calls the Red Years in order to recreate a present. By proposing to revisit memories of emancipatory movements through a theatre aesthetics slightly subverted by operatic forms, the play induces a scission in the form of a minimal difference which disturbs the fossilised perception of the twentieth century emancipatory movements. Badiou's aim is to transform the myth of the revolution into live material through theatre.

As mentioned earlier, it is Sartre who has influenced Badiou in choosing the theatre medium as the most in line with politics. Sartre's notion of myth as the substratum of theatre might have had an influence upon Badiou. For Sartre, theatre should not be limited to the presentation of political ideas, which can be better exposed by political meetings, newspapers, agitation or propaganda. (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 127) Therefore, theatre cannot directly engage with political events but transpose them into a mythical form. For example he suggests resorting to the myth of Alcest in order to write a play about the history of feminine emancipation. (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 132)¹³⁵ Regarding his play *The Condemned of Altona* (1959), he posits that only a mythical form can address the real subject of the play: "the whole evolution of Europe since 1945, as much with the Soviet concentration camps as with the war in Algeria." (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 127) For Sartre, theatre serves to transform history into myths in order to question history through the category of myth. However, it is

¹³⁵ As pointed out by Sartre, this myth is the story of Alcest who accepts to die instead of her husband the king Admete who upon the visit of Death argues that he is too busy to die as he has a war to lead. Death accepts the compromise but then pities Alceste and sends her back to her husband, whom she has now all power upon. (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 132-33)

in the relationship between myth and the masses in Sartre's theatre theory that a traceable influence of Sartre upon Badiou's theatre might be sought. According to Sartre,

Theatre ought to be a great collective, [a] religious phenomenon. [...] [the playwright] must create his public, he must fuse all the disparate elements in the auditorium into a single unity by awakening in the recesses of their spirits the things which all men of a given epoch and community care about. (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 38-39)

For Sartre, theatre is a ceremony, a probing tool to exhume a common vision of the world. However, Sartre stresses that while theatre must retain its social function in a way similar to a religious rite, it needs to maintain a distance between representation and audience. (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 41) However, Sartre rejects symbolist theatre, and the "use of symbols in the sense that symbols are the expression either indirect or poetic of a reality one either cannot or will not grasp directly". (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 39-40)¹³⁶ Unlike Sartre, Badiou does not provide the audience with a cathartic tool, but, embraces Sartre's notion of theatre as a ceremony while resorting to symbolism in order to confront the audience with the elusiveness of representation. In *L'Écharpe rouge*, he combines the directness of political addresses with Mallarméan symbolism, realistic scenes with operatic interludes. Although, Badiou's theatre is also an experience of simplification, it falls upon the audience to work out if not the truth about the situation, at least the falsity of the state of the situation.

Badiou's conception of the theatre audience is very different from Sartre's idea of unifying the audience through the myth. According to Sartre, theatre unites the

¹³⁶ For example in his essay "Forger des mythes", Sartre mentions his "distate for representing happiness as an elusive bluebird, as Maeterlinck did." (Sartre: 1976 [1973], 40)

disparate audience by pointing to what its members have in common, a shared morality; the myth exhumes the collective dormant truth; truth lies in the recess of a given epoch. For Badiou, the gathering of *la Foule* is one of the conditions of theatre, not its aim or effect. For Badiou, *la Foule* is disparate by essence and following Mallarmé, he advocates a theatre which points to the mystery of the collective.

Theatre does not reveal a hidden truth but points to a truth whose very disappearance induces thinking. For Badiou, Theatre confronts the spectators with the political potential of the randomly gathered theatre audience. The political potential of *la Foule* lies precisely with theatre's ability to induce a thinking in common. However, unlike Sartre, the aim of theatre is not to restore communal values or common sense, but to unify thinking around what is effectively lacking, around elusive truths-to-come. Badiou's Theatre dialectically challenges representation in order to create gaps to allow truths to pass through. This is the reason why for Badiou, this experience of thought among the audience questions the notion of myth as a collective construction of the mind, as representation. Despite acknowledging a Sartrean lineage in his playwriting when it comes to the intrinsic relationship between theatre and politics, Badiou does not work upon the myth in the way advocated by Sartre. Unlike Sartre, Badiou does not forge a myth as such. For Badiou, the relationship between theatre and myth is a given. Commenting upon how he reacted to the performances of *L'Écharpe rouge* in 1984, Badiou writes:

I was already quite surprised that Antoine—the character in my play who, tied to the Russians, or “revisionist” as we used to say at the time, and enamored only with Europe, was in my eyes, in 1972–3, the incarnation of everything bad—reemerges on stage with a tragic consistency that is only further amplified by its irony. This shows that

ideological intentions, even if they govern the lateral construction of consciousness, cannot pretend to control what theatre, as myth or rather mythification whose being is the State, will *discover* in the textual proposition. (RT, 203)

Neveux points out that something obsolete has been revealed in the gap between the writing of the play – Badiou started in 1972 – and its staging (1984), hence Vitez's reference to mythology. (Neveux: 2007, 191) The anteriority of the text is similar to that of the myth and to an extent, the novel version of *L'Écharpe rouge* can be described as the founding myth of the play written a decade later. In the case of *L'Écharpe rouge*, it is precisely the staging of the play in front of an audience and the audience's reactions to it which endow the narrative with a mythical dimension. In any case, a myth can be defined as a narrative deformed by collective imagination. As explained earlier, for Badiou, theatre represents the representation orchestrated by the State. It is also fair to say that for Badiou, Theatre is an escalation of the mystification operated by the State, a process of collective mythification which the theatre-idea dialectically cuts through. While myth is the material of theatre, its primeval reference so to speak, theatre articulates the reactivation of the part of truth the myth contains. To an extent, the myth put truths at a distance. While for Sartre, theatre produces through the myth a truth which the audience can recognize, for Badiou, theatre extracts from the myth truths which elude the audience. For Badiou, as a myth process propped against the State, theatre problematises its premise and splits itself by denouncing the mythification it operates. In the case of *L'Écharpe rouge*, what theatre, as a mythification/demystification process reveals, is precisely the mythical nature of the collective. For Badiou, the question remains the same throughout his theory of the subject and his theory of theatre: how can the collective elude representation?

The representation of the collective

In *The Century*, Badiou remarks that in the twentieth century, from Brecht onwards theatre has become “a question of collective historical elucidation.” (TC, 42) As explained earlier, for Badiou, ‘collective’ is diametrically opposed to the idea of a general consensus. Badiou sees a trend in contemporary theatre which comforts moral and democratic consensus and deploys “no hero, no conflict of types, no thought – nothing but only unanimous bodily emotion.” (TC, 42) Against what he describes as a ‘morose chorus,’ Badiou proposes to return to a Brechtian theatre seen as a play of forces which questions the relationship between the individual trajectory of a character and the irruption of mass movements. By describing theatre as a play of forces, Badiou rejects psychology, ‘language games’ or the ‘Parousia of the body.’ And simply defines theatre as “a device for the construction of truths.” (TC, 42) Badiou sees in theatre the immediacy of what he considered true politics. In the preface to an anthology of anarchist theatre between 1880-1914, he stresses that theatre during this period was at least the immediate auxiliary of the revolted workers’ awareness, if not of their political organisation, in the limit of what remains acceptable for anarchism in terms of organisation, that is an “immediate syndicalism”. (Badiou: 2001, 8) Therefore, theatre provides Badiou with a direct access to politics without the mediation of representative political bodies such as the party, the class, etc. The representation of the relationships between the individual and the collective in *L'Écharpe rouge* mirrors that between the individual spectator and the gathered assembly in the auditorium. Theatre’s elucidation of history necessitates the solving of the collective puzzle and vice-versa.

In the play, the collective staged by Badiou is of a mythical dimension: the chorus speaks in the name of Spartacus and Rosa Luxembourg among others. The constant reference to Mallarmé in Badiou’s theory of theatre has some bearing on

Badiou's practice. For Mallarmé, as much as for Badiou, the 'mystery of the collective' lies within the undecidability at work in the raising of the masses, in other words, what provokes collective political action. Following Mallarmé, for Badiou, in the absence of a present of politics, that is, a popular insurrection, theatre offers a replacement site for the collective to manifest itself. In a sort of *mise en abîme*, *L'Écharpe rouge* articulates the emergence of *la Foule* and the intricate relationship between the collective and the individual, the singular and the universal. In *The Century*, Badiou argues that 'as soon as it's a matter of creative action, the real is only accessible through the subsumption of an "I" by a "we."' (TC, 122) For Badiou, as demonstrated earlier, theatre is a privileged site for the inclusion of the individual within a group; the presence of one spectator constitutes in itself already a gathered assembly. (RT, 190) Although politics and theatre are collective experiences for Badiou, *L'Écharpe rouge* seems to ratify the end of political mass movements. While Badiou does not disown the masses, the play points to the exhaustion of traditional party politics. Nevertheless, does the play salvage the collective not as a reality of politics but as an ultimate reference, as a myth?

L'Écharpe rouge is not a mere historical account of 20th Century emancipatory movements, but rather an attempt to articulate the collective political subject. What is at stake in the play is not the revival of a communist credo via the enclosed political arena of the stage but the rethinking of subjectivisation in its different forms. However, the play seems to point to the impossibility of conceptualising the subject and the collective. In Act III scene 7, the chorus is composed of male and female workers from all nationalities and eras, nineteenth century workers in blouses, capped workers of the October revolution, Chinese workers from Shanghai, Black workers from American cities, etc. They encircle the poet Alban who appears "younger and paler than ever; quasi transparent". (ER, 45) Collective and individual confront each other: the isolated voice of the poet lost in

the tumult of the Chorus's political agenda. The scene ends with the Chorus suggesting that, "in order to definitively solve the problematic relationship between the individual and the masses, we should take two verses from the Chinese poet Lou Sin as a motto:

With a defying highbrow, I look coldly at the dignitary pointing his
finger at me.

Head down, I willingly become the buffalo for the child. (ER, 46)

This could mean that the masses accept the role assigned to them, masquerading violence rather than holding any real power. However, the relationship between the individual and the masses is left unexplained, hanging on these two obscure verses. The rising as one of the masses does not seem to amount to a subjectivisation process but rather a sudden impulse, similar to that of a charging buffalo. The masses seem to be the product of a dissolution of subjectivity, rather than that of subjectivisation. The scene gives rise to the following question: How can the unpredictable energy of the masses be channeled into a collective subjectivisation? As explained earlier, for Badiou, it is when the masses are abolished, inexistent because they are unnamed and non-represented, that they have the potential to generate subjectivisation: the fireworks constellation. As pointed out earlier, for Badiou the individual has to merge into the collective, in order to be reborn as a hero. (TS, 67) Badiou refers to the rebirth of the self as a hero, not isolated but within the collective. This classic view, perhaps influenced by Badiou's readings of Sophocles and Aeschylus in his *Theory of the Subject*, is rephrased in Badiou's later work where it is a question of man's capacity for immortality and infinity as a

collective political subject.¹³⁷ At the beginning of *L'Écharpe rouge* (Act 1 scene 10), a character questions the reality of the collective:

MARIA [...] All? Where the 'all'? (*to the two groups, postmen and immigrants*) Are you all?

Silence

YOUTH [...] One stands for all, one stands for all! Weigh and decide upon this theatre act! (ER, 17-18)

The silence following her question marks a caesura in the representation as if the question was in fact addressed to the audience. The answer, proclaimed as a motto, is openly theatrical; the assimilation of the one and the all is deemed a theatrical act. This seems to indicate that, following Mallarmé, collective political action is circumscribed to theatre's restricted action in the absence of other arena. Further on in the play, the motto is reiterated, in order this time to understand the nature of the individual: "To grasp what is one, you have to count it two. And to seize what is two, not be yourself one, but all." (ER, 50) This direct reference to dialectics and the motto "one divides into two" also points to a dialectic which can only be resolved or rather performed as a collective process. It also refers to the necessary multiplicity of being in Badiou's ontology.¹³⁸ This "one for all" is slightly different from a dissolving of the one into *la Foule* but illustrates the fact that the self remains accounted for in the numerous all.

The equation of the individual and the collective amounts to a theatre act because the collective represents the individual and *vice versa*. Traditional political representation does not allow for the persistence of the one in the multitude, for the

¹³⁷ For example, see *Logics of Worlds*' conclusion entitled "What is it to live ?". (LW, 507-514)

¹³⁸ See earlier page 72

individual existence of the tree within the forest. One of the challenges Badiou faces when staging the collective, is to maintain a strong sense of disparity as opposed to a crowd too easily acting as one with one voice or one motive. In *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou resorts to the Chorus form as the adapted play draws from the structure and staging of an opera. However, while using traditional ways to represent the collective on stage, he does not seem to necessarily reduce the multitude to a collective character like in the Greek chorus, or to a Chorypheus, which would merge collective and individual identities into one.

For Badiou, the essence of the collective is to be made of intrinsic tensions. According to Hallward, Badiou's politics have always been about "collective emancipation, or the problem of the reign of liberty in infinite situations" (Hallward: 2002, 16). In other words, the collective action cannot impede the freedom of the individual within it. *L'Écharpe rouge* stages precisely the problematic establishment of the reign of liberty at various degrees of collective action. The divisions within the country and the party are embodied by the main characters' inner struggles to balance their individual actions and partaking in the collective movement. Collective and singular actions are both enhanced by the operatic structure Badiou drew from:

I called *L'Écharpe rouge* a "roman opera" (novel opera), because there was a fluvial narrative slowness (roman), of characters emerged in the conflict of the world. But there was also moments of lyrical interruption (opera), when such and such, sometimes several, even masses at times, like in a sudden cut in time, move forward and voice their position or their imposition. Time for the ornamental settling of scores, always complex, contradictory, even, perhaps especially, when it is collective. (ER, 61)

Lyrical interruptions in the play highlight the spontaneity of politics with its emancipatory movements proceeding as cuts in time. The interruption provides a

dialectical moment when contradictions can be revealed and worked out before the narrative can resume only to be interrupted again. The collective is not a given but is at once the result of an acting as one and of internal divisions.

For Badiou, true politics is a matter of collective mobilisation guided by a 'general will' and pertains to a spontaneous phenomenon rather than an orchestrated movement. Badiou sums up the singularity of Lenin's political invention, in other words the political event containing a universal truth, as the uncovering of the infinite mobility of politics. (TC, 103) In *L'Écharpe rouge*, the mobility of politics is presented as a counterpoint to the representation of the political stasis. For example, Gombault, the head of government in *L'Écharpe rouge* declares, "Here we are the guarantors, against the reds discordant pretension, of this nourishing immobility." (ER, 28) In the play, the notion of State is presented as sterile and its representative as dead organs. However, the inertia of the State and of political parties remains the reference from which the movement of politics unfold. This points to the paradoxical desire for the demise of the State whose representation is for Badiou, the very fabric of theatre. (RT, 206) This reflects the paradox pinpointed by Sthathis Kouvélakis in Badiou's politics: while advocating a radical distancing from the State, Badiou's conception of politics cannot do away with it. (Kouvélakis: 2007, 6) To an extent, the same applies to theatre and the collective. In this respect, how can theatre avoid (mis)representing the collective, especially in a play about emancipatory movements? In other words, how can theatre present the collective as an interruption of the representation?

In *The Century*, Badiou does not question the possibilities of a collective subject, but questions the common representation of the *nous-sujet* (a subjective us):

Even in the midst of the challenge posed by state control, why should one

not rest content with the real 'we', the 'we' that envelops the 'I' in the effective becoming of an invention of thought? Why has the determination of active singularity so often been obliged to represent itself as the consciousness or experience of objective entities, of mythical hypostases? Why endow the action with a passive body? (TC, 104)

Badiou here rejects just as much the crystallising of an idea into a party's political agenda as concepts such as class war. He deplores the fact that political action seems ineluctably predetermined. This goes against the infinite mobility of politics and against the political event's intrinsic spontaneity. To an extent, for Badiou, acting in the name of something, be it a conscience, a name (objective entities) or a narrative (mythical hypostases) amounts to inaction. Hence, he refuses to give a name to the collective. The real 'we' is deprived of a name because it does not need to be referred to: it is determined by action only and immanent to its acting in the present. Consequently, naming the collective somehow amounts to stowing action into an inactive, hollow body. Rather than describing the raising of the collective, *L'Écharpe rouge* emphasizing the moment preceding the emancipatory movement – the coming into being.

CLAIRE - I feel immersed in the moment before the storm.

Where light dessicates under the troubled shadow in daylight, and
where the wind rises without direction.

What is politics?

Here we are within an unarmoured truth. (ER, 47)

What is implied here is that defining politics would mean assigning the weight of a heavy carcass upon it. Politics here is not encased in a hollow reference, but open to truths unpredictability. In *The Century*, Badiou meditates on the consequences of

defining the collective by referring to the one-dimensional rather than to the randomly multiple:

The risk that is involved in always articulating the constitution of the subject onto a collective and thus universalisable transcendence is that of transferring to the collective those 'natural', or at least objective, properties that liberals presume, to be the prerogative of the human individual. (TC, 102)

In the same way actors could be described as objectless transparencies, the collective is deprived of essence. Like actors who do not preexist their acting, the collective becomes such by gathering itself. Badiou thus advocates a performative politics. However, like politics, the collective as conceived by Badiou resists the seeming ineluctability of a definition. Badiou is referring here to the risk of the collective becoming one, of collective transcendence becoming a collective reference, a dead name, similar to that of an obsolete political party and consequently of bringing politics to a halt.

In *The Century*, Badiou describes Fascism and Stalinism as collective forms which have substituted the 'subjective universality of truth procedures' by the determinism of collective references such as the nation or the race on one hand, and on the other, the working class, the Party and the Socialist Camp. For Badiou, Fascism advocates the submission to totalitarian national or racial references against any emancipatory politics, while Stalinism reified real political processes which Lenin had thought. In the case of Stalinism, what should have been an infinite motion came crashing down against the finitude of the State. (TC, 102) Personifying the collective, in Badiou's terms ascribing objective individual features to the collective, either leads to reducing the multiple to the one, the infinite to the finitude of an alleged substance, a race for example, which comes to represent the collective, or

(but the end result is similar) to substantiate an idea, a process into fixated entities. That is, to place the infinite possibilities of political truth into the finitude of the State. As Hallward points out:

A certain self-restraint is [...] the condition politics must fulfill if it is to respect its own 'unnameable' limit. Since 'true politics is the collective brought to its immanent truth', the 'collective as commensurable with thought' (Badiou: 'Philosophie et poésie', 1993: 88), so politics must never try to *define* or institutionalise what this collectivity might be. (Hallward: 2002, 16)

For Badiou, any notion of the collective is a thought process and, as such, cannot be categorised. No place can be assigned to the collective, which, instead partakes in the movement of politics.

In *Ethics*, Badiou explains that assigning the weight of a name to a community leads to "disastrous Evil." (ET, 77) By disastrous evil, Badiou means here Nazism or the National Front in France. For Badiou, the notions of collective referred to by Fascism and Stalinism are inert and he describes them as passive bodies of subjectivisation. (TC, 103) This passivity betrays these notions of collective as falsely universal and their references not as infinitely mobile but fixated in the State. Badiou suggests that in the case of Communism, names such as proletarian politics, bourgeois art, socialist camp, imperialist camp, etc. falsely universalise a process at the very moment it becomes sterile or fixated in the State. Fixed universality and passive subjectivisation are oxymorons that contradict the very mobility of politics as defined by Badiou. The process of naming would also counterfeit universality, which for Badiou is intrinsic to true politics. Paradoxically, a name enhances a singularity, and, as such, could establish its universal value, but this historicising process perversely destroys what was singular or universal and

transforms it into something objectifiable, and useable to the worst ends. Replacing the collective as a thought process by a predetermined notion amounts, in fact, to pre-emptying an idea of its potential or denying the necessarily fragmentary nature of truth. To an extent, the identity nature of a name, means that naming refers to the 'one.' Badiou's dilemma is to find a way of naming which does not contradict his ontology based on the multiplicity guaranteed by the void against the uniqueness of representation or categorisation. The problematic is very similar to that attached to the naming of the event explained earlier. In *Being and Event*, the subject of the event could invoke the event's name to make it locally intervene in a situation insofar as, and this is a clarification Badiou made in *Logics of Worlds*, the name given to the event was only temporarily invoked and bore a degree of porosity so as to let an incomplete rather than a fixated truth pass through. Thus, the subject could make an event out of the event. Naming the collective is a complicated affair, and this is the main question raised in *L'Écharpe rouge*. In the same way, as explained earlier, *La Foule* was the vanishing term of politics, Badiou's difficulty in the play is to represent the collective through a vanishing name.

In *D'un Désastre obscur*, Badiou is opposed to a reductive naming "the multiple name of what is still to come". (DO, 16) To illustrate this in his essay on politics, Badiou refers to the long chorus in *L'Écharpe rouge* Act II scene 5. Sung by all the characters of the play, this chant is entitled 'the chorus of the divisible defeat'. The text hails 'the legendary defeated' (*les vaincus légendaires*) from Spartacus to Rosa Luxembourg and questions the apparent failure of the movement their names converge to represent:

Who talks of failure? [...] our reign was to invent what separates, not to establish the rule of any duration.

The infinity of situations, who will exhaust it? The event where to throw the dices, who will appease it?

Follow your imperative. Reject power. Be indifferent to the verdict,
and make sure nothing within you ever consents. (ER, 30)

Badiou proves his point by multiplying the references; the emancipatory movement cannot be encapsulated in one name but in a constellation of names. The play serves as an echo chamber and the multiple name to-come stems from the multiple name that precedes. Also, as opposed to the fixity of one name, the multiple name to-come refers to a movement which never comes to a halt. What could be seen as a failure of a movement to gel or materialise in the form of a victorious State attests, in fact, to the successful transit of the idea of communism. In the play, names such as Spartacus or Rosa Luxembourg refer to never consenting agents of the incessant dialectical division, of the emancipatory movement internal split which guarantees against totalitarian fossilization. The names correspond to trajectories or traces. For Badiou, the only conceivable immanence of truth takes the form of a passing through. This is the reason why the formation of a subjectivisable body is described by Badiou in *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* as a collective incorporation to the eventual trace. To an extent, a subjectivisable body of truth is the collective embodiment of an idea insofar as this remains a process in constant motion. This is guaranteed in Badiou's system by the fleeting nature of ideas and the transitory nature of truths. This is the reason why, by confronting *la Foule* to the fugacity of the theatre-idea, theatre provides Badiou with the perfect paradigm for communism as an idea.

According to Brecht, "if communism is this simple thing which is difficult to enact, the same could probably be said of its theatre." (Brecht: 2000 [1955], 465) *L'Écharpe rouge* is a good illustration of this. Despite the fact that for Badiou, theatre cannot represent the revolution, with *L'Écharpe rouge*, he seems to admit that theatre can represent the idea of the revolution. However, as soon as it is a question of Platonic ideas and their representation, the category of myth comes

to the fore. Plato resorts to the myth when dialectics is inoperative. Jean-Pierre Vernant points out that despite the fact that in the *Phaedo*, Plato leaves the muthos to the poets, he resorts to the myth in his writings every time he wants to express what is beyond the logos, more precisely what is beyond philosophical language. Hence the myth becomes the means to speak about the *to-come*, which is too irrational for a rigorous reasoning to apply and which can only be perceived through a *eikota muthon*, or veridic tale. (Vernant: 1974, 213) It seems that for Badiou, the myth could also serve to announce the future, to create an opening towards it. Thus the past is not represented as past, but as an indeterminate present. By staging the revolution in a sublimated present in *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou seems to negate the revolution as tradition, but to present it as a possible. For Badiou, the myth would not reveal an origin, but on the contrary, point to the future. This is perhaps why, with hindsight, Badiou refers to *L'Écharpe rouge* as a myth. In the following pages, I would like to suggest that presenting the revolution as a myth in *L'Écharpe rouge* while resorting to Claudel's reworking of the baroque theatre, is a way of dialecticising the myth.

The baroque allegory of space

The idea that in *L'Écharpe rouge* the past is not represented as past, but as a myth to-come is very close to the Benjaminian notion that the past is open.¹³⁹ With this play, Badiou's aim is to revive the communist precepts of the collective at a time of political disillusion. In the following section, my aim is to demonstrate that Badiou resorts to baroque allegory as a method to extract truth from the myth in a manner which evokes Walter Benjamin's work on the baroque. In *The Satin Slipper*, which structure serves as a blue print for *L'Écharpe rouge*, Claudel framed the action within the Spanish Golden Age and baroque imagery. According to French Director Olivier Py, Claudel uses the political geography of the Spanish Golden Age, to embody his own spiritual quest and that of his characters:

Africa is the desert of the atheist; America, the bitterness of earthy belongings and the torture of insatiable desire; the Mediterranean, the water of baptism and final misericord; Japan, the purgatorium and a path open by Rodrigue between the two worlds, the potential reunion of faith and desire, the world of the dead and that of the living, past and future, promised land and motherland; the Panama canal, the unimaginable path between the most insurmountable contradictions: art itself. (Py: 2003, unpaginated)¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ To an extent, Badiou's adaptation of Claudel's Baroque aesthetics calls for Benjaminian reading of *L'Écharpe rouge*, especially because, as pointed out by Susan Buck-Morss, for Benjamin, "[that] which is eternally true can thus only be captured in the transitory, material images of history itself." (Buck-Morss: 1989, 20) From this possible parallel, I have narrowed my focus on Benjamin's work on the allegory in *The Origin of German Drama* (1963). It would also be interesting to draw a parallel between my reading of the baroque allegory in *L'Écharpe rouge* and the notion of *fold* developed by Deleuze from Leibniz and the baroque. For Deleuze, rather than an essence, the baroque also refers to an operation. More precisely it would be interesting to oppose Deleuze's operation of *brouillage* (blurring) to Badiou's *Conditions* in an analysis of how art relates to philosophy. Nevertheless, to do justice to the complex philosophical divide between Deleuze and Badiou is **beyond the scope of this thesis**.

¹⁴⁰ Olivier Py directed the integral version of *The Satin Slipper* in 2003, this quote is part of his intention notes. (<http://www.cdn-orleans.com/Soulier.htm> accessed 10/10/08). His production was also presented at the 2004 Edinburgh Festival.

Heinrich Wölfflin, the first theoretician of Baroque art, states that Baroque “art is exclusively concerned with the representation of the animated.” (Wölfflin: 1971 [1888], 80) The picturesque rests upon an impression of movement. The architectonic feeling is affected in its integrity as soon as beauty is not to be found in well established forms, in the quiet orders of the architecture, but in the movement of masses. By their surging forth, by their flux and reflux, forms seem to “create dissolution, an impression of having been poured, of yielding, of amorphousness, yet leaving certain parts in violent movement” (Wölfflin: 1971 [1888], 81)¹⁴¹ What makes Baroque art relevant to a discussion of Badiou's theatre is the textual treatment of space and movement Badiou draws from Claudel's Baroque aesthetics. Since Badiou's raw material is politics, it is also tempting to draw an analogy between the political bodies and the architectural bodies described by Wölfflin as subject to change through the impetuous movement of masses. Following Wölfflin, baroque art can be described as being opposed to classic art. While the classic vision projects the spectacle at the surface, the baroque vision penetrates space in depth. While classic art proceeds from analysis, the baroque is synthetic, only the global effect matters. My hypothesis is that *L'Écharpe rouge* proposes a renewal of Marxism along the same lines, albeit through a materialist version of the baroque. There are two conceptions of baroque art, one which privileges the universality of the Baroque aesthetics, the other which historically situates the Baroque between the end of the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth century. When Claudel wrote *The Satin Slipper*, the relatively new notion of Baroque was influential in the arts. Claudette Sarlet points out that in accordance with Eugenio d'Ors, numerous art historians of the time emphasized the

¹⁴¹ Heinrich Wölfflin is considered the first theoretician of Baroque art. He is the first art historian to strictly distinguish the Baroque from Renaissance art in his book *Renaissance and Baroque* (Paris: Montfort, 1988) As far as theatre is concerned, it is interesting to notice that Wölfflin was influenced by Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in the *Birth of Tragedy*.

universal aspect of the concept: the baroque is given a mystical primitive essence, placed within the realm of the Dionisian and to an extent reflects pangermanist and perhaps fascist ideals. (Sarlet: 2001, 16) *The Satin Slipper* is set in a sublimated Spanish Golden Age, which refers to the seventeenth Century and thus to a historical notion of Baroque art. However, whilst Claudel seeks to emulate seventeenth century Spanish playwright, such as Félix Arturo Lope de Vega or Pedro Calderón de la Barca, his work also embraces the idea of the Baroque as a transhistorical aesthetics.¹⁴² It is not a question of insinuating here that Claudel's dramatic work is influenced by fascist ideals, even less so Badiou's. Nevertheless, what can be retained from Baroque aesthetics, sublimated or not, is the blurring of forms, more precisely a dynamic questioning of space.

In *La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France*, Jean Rousset draws from architecture and painting, criteria of the baroque aesthetics, which apply to poetry and theatre: the instability of an equilibrium about to collapse and then be rebuilt, of surfaces that swell or break, of evanescent forms, of curves and spirals; the mobility of works requiring of spectators that they set themselves in motion and multiply the points of view; the moving unity of a multiform group about to be metamorphosed; the domination of the set, that is the submission of the function to the set, the replacement of structures by networks of fleeing appearances or illusions; a general attitude, that of *ostentation*. (Rousset: 1953, 181-184) This definition of Baroque aesthetics fits the treatment of space and the movement of politics in *L'Écharpe rouge*.¹⁴³ In the play, Badiou has invented a whole world with different environments

¹⁴² See for example *The New World Discovered by Christopher Columbus* by Lope de Vega or *The Great Theater of the World* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca.

¹⁴³ The fact that Badiou adapts aesthetic principles from Claudel's conception of the Baroque as universal and encompassing all the arts, prevents a comparison between Badiou's 'neo-baroquism' and Walter Benjamin's work on the *Trauerspiel*, which is based on a historical conception of the Baroque and particularly on Baroque theatre "mourning-plays". Neither Claudel nor Badiou's Baroque aesthetics rely upon mortification and *L'Écharpe rouge* is far from a mourning play. The world depicted by Badiou in *L'Écharpe rouge* is not the desolate death-driven world of the *Trauerspiel* described by

adapted to each character. Each area demands a particular attitude and action from the characters. For example, the guerilla leader in the south-eastern forest zone declares to an imprisoned soldier of the red army:

Many places for as many red! You cancerous and disciplined communists! In our sylvan depth, our pile of caressing alluvial muds and gloaming tracks with flock of flies, leave us chisel and sow our own phosphorescence. [...] Here, ideology is not what political vigour can rest on, it stands squarely on the tireless thighs of the tracker.
(Act II, scene 11) (ER, 38)¹⁴⁴

As for Claudel, the world projected upon the stage serves to spatially imagine the different characters' evolution throughout the play. The dialectics weaved in by Badiou spatially unfolds by multiplying the points of view upon the revolution, but also by deploying movements, often mass movements in a space impregnated by baroque aesthetics. The guerilla leader's territory can indeed be described as drawing equilibrium from constant metamorphosis. While politics is a question of territories, it is not static but evolves in a spatial instability. For example, the divisions within the party can be summed up in geographical terms: "in the party, some, led by Antoine, want that we attack first and march towards the North. In the party, others, led by David, want that we attack later and that we march towards the

Benjamin. If melancholia there is in Badiou, it is not negative abandonment, but a trigger of thoughts. Yet, Benjamin's work on the Baroque provides a tool to understand how Badiou's allegorical treatment of the dramaturgical space enables the transmissibility of the truth concealed by the myth. It is interesting to notice that the depiction of the world in Badiou's play evokes Badiou's description of coalescent worlds in *Logics of Worlds*, especially his melancholic reflection upon the topological space of the city of Brasilia. (LW, 411-419) On melancholia in the work of Alain Badiou, see Maël Renouart's article entitled "Les mondes crépusculaires : Alain Badiou et la mélancolie" in *Critique*, 2007, vol. 63, no719, pp. 295-308

¹⁴⁴ Autant de lieux, autant de rouges ! Vous communistes cancéreux et disciplinés ! Notre profondeur forestière, notre amoncellement de boues caressantes et de pistes d'ombres sous la volière des mouches, laissez-nous y définir et semer notre phosphorescence. [...] Ce n'est pas sur l'idéologie que peut ici s'asseoir la vigueur politique, mais elle se campe sur les cuisses infatigables du coureur de piste. (Act II scene 11)

South.” (ER, 39)¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the conflict between the party continental forces led by Simon and that of the besieged island commanded by the seditious Antoine are formulated in terms of spatial metaphors. At times the worlds of the forest and the sea merge into one another, as in the call to arms for the defense of the island.

Soldiers, fishermen, workers! Is it indispensable that our island, our rainy glade under the branched tree of the sea, our starry people and seaweed shambles, become this inert treasure coveted by the first knife wielding pirate regurgitated by a convulsive continent? (ER, 49)¹⁴⁶

To the party's decision to isolate him, Antoine opposes a rhetoric which positions his partisans alongside the rebels fighting in the forest. Throughout the play, the forest symbolizes a collective of singularities. This is the meaning of the last lines of the play. To the enthusiasm of Maria, the ex-migrant worker now a red army officer, who believes she has seen on her way the tree of socialism with its roots deep in the centre of the earth as if it had grown overnight, Rachel, the red army commandant who has given up the armed struggle, replies: “What is a tree, a single tree? Now the era of the forests has begun.” (ER, 53)¹⁴⁷ The examples above combine the criteria of baroque aesthetics according to Rousset: instability, multiple viewpoints and metamorphoses. Unlike for Claudel, where the spatial immensity of the play highlights the omnipresence of God, in *L'Écharpe rouge*, the geography of the play serves first and foremost to unfold a vast fan of Communism: from

¹⁴⁵ [...] dans le parti, certains, dirigés par le camarade Antoine, veulent des choses. Premièrement, que nous attaquions tout de suite. Deuxièmement, que nous marchions vers le nord. Dans le parti, d'autres, dirigés par le camarade Antoine, veulent des choses différentes. Premièrement que nous attaquions plus tard. Deuxièmement, que nous marchions vers le sud. Il y a une lutte terrible. (ER, 39)

¹⁴⁶ Soldats, pêcheurs, ouvriers ! Est-il indispensable que notre île, notre clairière pluvieuse sous l'arbre ramifié de la mer, notre peuple stellaire et notre fouillis d'algues, deviennent ce trésor inerte convoité au couteau par le premier pirate que dégorge un continent convulsif ? (ER, 49)

¹⁴⁷ Qu'est-ce qu'un arbre, un seul arbre ? Maintenant commence l'époque des forêts. (ER, 53)

anarchist tendencies, whether libertarian or agrarian, to totalitarian tendencies, whether of the masses or individual. At times movement is minimal yet significant, for example, in the case of Rachel, the leader of the red army in the South-West, it is not the movement of the sea which carries the revolutionary struggle but the seeming motionlessness of the forest:

The leaves of a tree stream in the wind like a suspended meadow.
But does its internal substance not consist in keeping compact the
tightening of branches and fruits around the old black turf where its
foundation is? [...] Let the wind quarter me ! like the leaves riveted on
branches, I abandon myself to it through my mobile resistance, my
serene and conniving resistance! (ER, 35)¹⁴⁸

The tree, at once rooted and mobile, is an archetypal figure of Badiou's Mallarméan political *restricted action* in the play. As geography maps out the evolution of the characters and is somehow interiorised, *L'Écharpe rouge* displays a baroque sense of theatre in the representation of the world. From a historical perspective, the baroque is the art of the Counter-Reformation; it denounces the power of representation in order to reaffirm the unity of the world, the beauty, the meaning of the divine creation and the relationship between man and nature. Claudel's Baroque aesthetics provides Badiou with a means to inscribe politics upon the materiality of the world. The baroque is the art of the oscillation between revealing and hiding, between the ostentation which conceals and the ostention which presents. The baroque treatment of space in the play, which unfolds or encapsulates politics, seems to allow for ostention through ostentation, in other words, for the presentation of politics through representation.

¹⁴⁸ Les feuilles d'un arbre ruissellent sous le vent comme une prairie suspendue. Mais sa substance interne, n'est-ce pas de maintenir compact le resserrement des branches et des fruits autour de la vieille terre noire où il tient ses assises. [...] Que le vent m'écartèle ! Comme les feuilles rivées aux branches, je m'offre à lui par ma résistance mobile, ma sereine résistance complice ! (ER, 35)

In *L'Écharpe rouge*, the revolution is not treated as an event but examined in its process. What is questioned is not the legitimacy of the movement but its effectualisation. This is effected in the allegorical space. Allegory grants a mythical dimension to the story through the allegorical treatment of space while at the same time, as I will demonstrate, it provides a means to question the myth. Most importantly, allegory challenges the seeming natural transmission of tradition as ideology. This is this last point on the transmissibility of history, which I would like to discuss in relation to the reading of *L'Écharpe rouge* as a myth whose truth is revealed by a baroque allegorical treatment of space, which amounts to dialectics in motion.

Allegory as dialectics

In an article entitled '*L'allégorie : une politique de la transmission*', Catherine Perret analyses the reasons behind Walter Benjamin's reworking of the baroque allegory. Perret points out that the fictitious nature of allegory is that of a method. She explains that before being a form, antique allegory is a method of authentication and legitimisation of myth: the allegory ensures plausibility and purpose to the seeming erratic and indecent behaviour of the gods in the Greek mythology. To an extent, since allegory implies subjective interpretation, it ignores the idea that tradition is the product of sedimentation and can be passed on like a genetic pool. Perret argues that allegories contest tradition and reveal its artificiality. (Perret: 1996, 101) She refers to allegory as a method because it is a means of interpreting the myth and not accepting it as an unquestioned inherited truth. In this sense, to adopt Badiou's terminology, allegory could be defined as operating a cut in the situation, disrupting the state of things as they are inherited from tradition. As mentioned earlier, historically, the baroque is the art of the Counter-Reformation

and emerges at a period when the Catholic Church questions itself while reasserting the transmissibility of its message. Perret points out that for Benjamin, the antinomic nature of baroque allegory perverts its figurability, and thus elaborates the transmissibility of Christian faith upon the dead-end of its transmission. (Perret: 1996, 103) In other words, because of its obsessive intensity, the imagery of death undermines itself instead of ultimately conveying the idea of salvation. As transmission fails, transmissibility is paradoxically made possible, as an opening occurs through the failure of the doctrine to transmit its message. Isn't this what Badiou means when he addresses the death of Marxism? While refusing the consensual death of Marxism, Badiou accepts a new modality of subjectivisation as a result:

Marxism is the consistency of a political subject, of a heterogeneous political capacity. It is the life of a hypothesis. This consistency is in extreme peril, this peril cannot be but experienced subjectively. Putting to the test this capacity, at the extremes of inexistence, requires that one *inexists* with it. (PPP, 54)¹⁴⁹

Inexistence somehow receives a political status, the death of Marxism requires of the subject to take a stand on the verge of *inexisting*. In *Metapolitics*, Badiou even declares "quite bluntly, that Marxism doesn't exist." (MT, 58). By saying that 'Marxism is the life of an hypothesis', Badiou reasserts the subjectivity of the political subject. Marxism appears here as ephemeral, a hypothesis which does not survive the subjective experience. Marxism cannot be transmitted, this is what Badiou means by 'Marxism does not exist'. By itself the notion is inert, it only comes to life when endorsed by the subject. The alleged death of Marxism is only the

¹⁴⁹ "Le marxisme est la consistance d'un sujet politique, d'une capacité politique hétérogène. Il est la vie d'une hypothèse. L'extrême péril où est cette consistance s'éprouve dans l'expérience subjective de ce péril. L'épreuve de cette capacité, aux confins de l'inexistence, exige qu'on inexist avec elle." (PPP, 54)

dead-end of its transmission; the same thing happened to Christian faith at the time of the Counter-Reformation. The transmissibility of Marxism is rendered possible by the impossibility of its transmission. In other words it is in the defeat of revolutionary movements based on Marxism as a doctrine that communism might survive. This would explain the emphasis on defeat in *L'Écharpe rouge*:

Here we are again, us, the workers, hunched and vanquished in the bloodless city. [...] All of you! Brothers of the immense history! You judge our failure and say: Why not renouncing here? Haven't we renounced ourselves beyond any word could say? (ER, 30)¹⁵⁰

This eulogy of renunciation points to the questionable ability of theatre, and art in general, to pass on political messages. In the play, a soldier declares: "Lenin said that art, in other words, what is beautiful, is a small screw of the revolution. If you take it out, the mechanism ceases to function." (ER, 26)¹⁵¹ In the dead-end of transmission, the allegorical treatment of space seems to unlock some truths from the myth. Geography represents the political rifts between the different factions, but also the interior journey of the characters. Also, the natural elements in the play are personified and journeys are often presented as conquests of those natural elements. For example, it is often a question of taming the sea as in Act II scene 6:

Soldier: So our jolting road will open out onto large stars and above the spruce and the grey folds of dunes, the sea will answer our assault with the mere submission of its salt. (ER, 31)¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Nous voici une fois encore, nous ouvriers, dans la ville exsangue, courbés et vaincus. [...] Vous tous ! Frères de l'immense histoire ! Vous jugez notre échec et vous dites : Que renoncez-vous là ? N'avons-nous pas échoué nous-mêmes au delà de tout mot ? (ER, 30)

¹⁵¹ Lénine a dit que l'art, le beau, quoi, c'est une petite vis de la révolution. Tu l'enlèves, la mécanique se dérègle. (ER, 26)

¹⁵² Ainsi notre route cahotante va s'ouvrir à de vastes étoiles, / et par-dessus l'épicéa et le froissement gris des dunes, / la mer à notre assault n'offrira plus / Que la soumission de son sel ! (ER, 31) This

Since the world is in constant motion, in constant disequilibrium, the allegory of space challenges the narrative of the myth and obliges the spectator to subjectively reappropriate the communist ideal which is thus not transmitted but reinvented. The red scarf is not passed on but falls into the water where it sinks: "It felt like it was a scarf made of lead." (ER, 47)¹⁵³ To an extent, the play fixates the revolution in a myth in order to unleash its imaginary.

The constant metamorphosis at work in the textual treatment of space echoes the incessant movement at the core of dialectics, which creates 'cuts', 'faults', distancing. To an extent, operatic arias can be perceived as effecting recurrent chiasms in the text. Their function is to formulate questions about the position of such or character in the different given situations exposed by the play. In *L'Écharpe rouge*, characters refer to dialectics as incessant divisions:

Worker: In a word, the more united we are, the more divided. To be really united, we had to have been divided to the core. [...] More united and divided than the whole world, and more violently burrowed under the quiet surface than the entire world, right by the marine undercurrents of history, the carnivorous fish and the continental drift.

Another worker: And what's the name of this kind of method of doing the things for the struggle? It is not what you call restful, what you're telling us here.

Worker: It is called the dialectics. Keep that in mind: the dialectics. (ER, 36)¹⁵⁴

evokes the epic tone of Saint John Perse's *Anabase*, whose text Badiou largely refers to in *The Century*.

¹⁵³ On aurait dit une écharpe en plomb. (ER, 47)

¹⁵⁴ Ouvrier : En un mot, plus on est unis, plus on est divisés. Pour être vraiment unis, il faut avoir été divisés à fond. [...] Plus unis et plus divisés que tout le monde, et plus violemment enfoncés sous la

In other words, workers are united only when divided like the continents on the surface of the globe which are united because they constantly drift apart. While the myth unites, it also provides a surface, a materiality upon which “faults” or “break lines” can be created by the dialectical movement. The play does not transmit the revolution as sedimentation; it excavates it, exhausts it in erratic dialectical movements via the allegory of space. The opposition between sedimented revolution and politics in movement is illustrated in the play by the opposition between Antoine, the ‘bolshevik’ leader riveted to his island and Simon, who travels the world over:

Antoine: Dialectics unites opposites

Simon: It ruins equilibriums.

Antoine: The revolution is a labour for specialists. It is auto-sufficient.

Simon: And I think nothing suffices the revolution. Revolution must provide you with the keys to the world, not take them away from us.

(ER, 35)¹⁵⁵

L'Écharpe rouge is a call to leave no stones unturned in de-sedimentating the revolution. Vitez defines the myth as a message which once heard cannot be forgotten. For him, this is the case for socialism: once heard, the idea of universal fraternity cannot be forgotten; it can be betrayed but never forgotten. (Vitez: 1982,

surface tranquille que tout le monde, tout près de là où il y a les courants marins de l'histoire et les poissons carnivores et la dérive des continents.

Un autre ouvrier : Eh bien ! Ça s'appelle comment, cette espèce de méthode de faire les choses de la lutte ? Parce que ce n'est pas de tout repos, ce que tu racontes.

Ouvrier : Ça s'appelle a dialectique. Retiens bien ça : la dialectique. (ER, 36)

¹⁵⁵ Antoine : La dialectique unit les contraires / Simon : Elle rompt les équilibres. / Antoine : La révolution est un labeur de spécialistes. Elle se suffit à elle-même. / Simon : Et moi je pense que rien ne suffit à la révolution. La révolution doit te donner les clefs du monde, et non pas nous les retirer. (ER, 35)

40)¹⁵⁶ The challenge of *L'Écharpe rouge* is to keep the desire for the revolution free from the sedimentation of history.

L'Écharpe rouge stages a fictional revolution movement across a fictional world. Yet, the allegorical treatment of space in the text dialectically challenges the representation of politics in the play. With the constant movement of political scission among the different factions combined to the incessant divided recomposition of space, Badiou's aim is to induce dialectical thinking, in other words, to extract a truth from representation. As explained earlier, for Badiou, "The Idea exposes a truth in a fictional structure." (HC, 239) In the case of *L'Écharpe rouge*, the subjective instance which projects a fragment of political real upon the mythical construction of History, is none but the body of spectators. This ability to project the real of a truth procedure upon the myth is precisely the imaginary power of theatre. Following Badiou's (re)definition of ideology in *The Communist Hypothesis*, it is also fair to conclude that theatre, according to Badiou, is inherently ideological, not in the sense of an imposed conceptual frame but simply because "it has to do with an Idea." (HC, 239)

While Badiou refers to *L'Écharpe rouge* as a myth, his second play, *Incident at Antioch*, stems from Badiou's work on what he considers to be a fable. In the opening pages of *Saint Paul and the Foundation of Universalism*, Badiou stresses that he is treating the story of Christ resurrection as a fable. Like in *L'Écharpe rouge*, politics provides a structure of fiction in *Incident at Antioch*, and as the insurrection movement comes to a standstill, it seems unable to resist legitimisation

¹⁵⁶ According to Vitez, Claudel's intertwines the gospel with its own life in a mythological way. For Claudel, each character needs the other as any human being needs Christ. The relationships between the characters rest upon that myth. (Vitez: 1982, 41) Since Vitez refers to *L'Écharpe rouge* also as a myth, it would be interesting to consider whether, in adapting Claudel, Badiou bases the relationship between its characters, not upon the Christian myth but upon what seems to replace it in the play as the ultimate reference, the revolution. In other words, how are the characters in Badiou's play moved by the universal fraternity mentioned by Vitez?

in the form of State representation. However, the plays' political material combines with the story of Saint Paul, as read by Badiou, to create an even greater divide or cut between the representation of politics and the emergence of the idea of politics.

2 - Withdrawn politics in *Incident at Antioch*

Incident at Antioch (1984) is based on Claudel's *La Ville* (1893, 1901), it stages a radical revolution and depicts how a woman, a female version of Saint-Paul, joined the insurrection movement initially but who finally opposes the post-revolution terror and launches a new political credo. Inspired by the events of The Paris Commune, *La Ville* experiments with symbolist theatre and stages the movement of the crowd within a city which is destroyed by a revolution and is then rebuilt. After his conversion, Claudel entirely rewrote the play and departed from the symbolic characterisation of the first version to focus the story on a single female character, Lâla. Liturgy and theological debate became essential and somehow reinforced the dramatic quality of the whole. Badiou's adaptation is based on Claudel's second version of *La Ville*. It follows the political peregrination of the character Paula whose absence haunts the scenes where she does not appear.¹⁵⁷

In comparing *Incident at Antioch* to *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou remarks that both plays deal with the relationship between personal subjectivity and revolutionary movement, but while *L'Écharpe rouge* stages a "Classical revolutionary subject,

¹⁵⁷ Badiou seems to have followed the first version of Claudel's *La Ville* for the 1982 version : "the second draft is less explicitly referred to the French situation, it is much more metaphorical [...] much less explicitly referred to Marxism and all political conception of the 60s and the 70s in France. It's more general, more lyrical, more poetic [...] the construction is simpler, the first version was with many characters, with a number of voices and so on." (DIA,1) Focusing on the second version is more relevant to the purpose of this thesis as it leads to questioning the ability of symbolist theatre in the vein of Mallarmé to represent (to present would be more accurate in this case) politics as defined by Badiou. Badiou's collaborative work on the scenic adaptation of *L'Écharpe rouge* has undoubtedly influenced his rewriting of *Incident at Antioch*. The more poetical and lyrical approach to the playwriting is a step further from what Vitez and Badiou devised with opera composer Aperghis in their adaptation of the romanopera *L'Écharpe rouge*. For this production, the main challenge was to render political speeches lyrically, while for *Incident at Antioch*, Badiou's text already addresses politics in a far more metaphorical fashion. Also being confronted with the reality of a theatre production with the staging of his first play in 1984 might have encouraged Badiou to reduce the number of characters. It is interesting to remark that the first play of the Ahmed tetralogy is also from the same year, as if Badiou wanted to challenge theatre from within by adapting Molière, rather than inventing a new form of theatre or interrupting plays with Groupe Foudre. Despite a seeming momentum in Badiou's career as a playwright, *Incident at Antioch* has yet to be staged and Badiou had to wait ten years before *Ahmed se fâche* was premiered.

with organisation, heroism, sacrifice and so on”, the form of political subjectivity in *Incident at Antioch* is far more problematic. (DIA, 2) This play can in fact be summed up as a question: what could be a new political subjectivisation away from any known form of political organisation? Badiou points towards a possible response which draws from his reading of Saint Paul. However Badiou also remarks that the change of sex has prevented a clear identification between the play's main character Paula and the Saint. (SP, 1) Although more than twenty years separate the play and the publication of *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (1997), both works belong to the same line of thought. It is also important to note that Badiou quotes at length from *Incident at Antioch* in his recent *Communist Hypothesis* to illustrate his attempt to define a new Communist subjectivity.¹⁵⁸

For Badiou, “Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practises and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure.” (SP, 2) Badiou is primarily interested in Paul not as a saint or an apostle but as a subjective figure. Incidentally, Badiou likens his experience of May 68 to Paul's conversion:

I admit without any reticence that May 68 was for me, in the order of philosophy as in everything else, a genuine road-to-Damascus experience. (ThC, 9)

Badiou refers here to the famous episode in the life of Paul when on his way to prosecute Christians, he is struck by a divine revelation. In the case of Badiou, May 68 initiated his long-standing engagement with politics theoretically but also on a practical level as an active member of *l'Organisation Politique*. The first two acts of *Incident at Antioch*, are entitled ‘The Road to Damascus’ and ‘Incident at Antioch’ and refer to episodes of the life of Saint Paul, respectively Paul's experience on the

¹⁵⁸ A long extract of *Incident at Antioch* Act III scene 5 is quoted by Badiou in *The Communist Hypothesis*. When quoting from this extract, I have indicated the page number and used the translation provided in that book, which is also by Susan Spitzer.

Road to Damascus which resulted in his conversion and the incident at Antioch which exacerbated the divide between the followers of Saint Peter and that of Saint Paul. The last act of the play, 'The Council of Nicaea', namely refers to the first council of the Christian church convoked by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in 325. This First Council marks the foundation of the Church as a political body. It is highly significant that this episode of Christianity clearly combines politics and religion. As explained earlier, Badiou's adaptation of Claudel can be described as a laicisation of religious motives. Badiou's references to the life of Saint Paul in *Incident at Antioch* are part of the same secularisation drive on Badiou's part. This is also Badiou's aim in his essay where he resorts to the figure of Saint Paul in order to restore "the universal to its pure secularity, here and now." (SP, 5) In Badiou's adaptation, the aspiration for a new politics comes to replace the characters' religious quest in Claudel.

Badiou stresses that from *L'Écharpe rouge* to *Incident at Antioch*, there is a gradation "from the foundation of the church as the representation of the working class, of the revolutionary movement and so on, to the question of the church as maybe not only a new means for revolution, but a new obstacle, a new difficulty." (DIA, 3) In *L'Écharpe rouge*, the well-established party is presented as the church of the revolution and the political divisions remain within the party, while in *Incident at Antioch*, the revolutionary movement has not yet formed as a party as such, the play addresses the genesis of the political body. In the terms of *Logics of Worlds*, the whole question would be whether the insurrection will lead to a passive political body, subjected to the representation of the State, which would ultimately be rebuilt, or to a universal body of truth that challenges that representation. In defying the revolutionary organisation, Paula follows in the steps of Paul. She emulates the seditious attitude of Paul, who was a breakaway element of the main Christian group based in Jerusalem led by Simon Peter. In the play, references to the New Testament and Saint Paul operate on two levels: not only the play and its three acts

are named after episodes of the life of Saint Paul and the main characters of the play, Cephas and Paula after Saint Peter and Saint Paul, but the characters themselves refer also to the Christian religion.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless Badiou's secularisation attempt is constantly reiterated in the text. For example, Paula declares, 'Like circumcision for Saint Paul, revolution is nothing, non-revolution is nothing.' (45) This refers to the incident which occurred at Antioch between Paul and Cephas. Paul accused Cephas of hypocrisy because the latter, upon seeing members of the Church of Jerusalem join their gathering, refused to sit among gentiles, that is, non-circumsised (non-jew) converts, although he did not mind doing so previously. In Badiou's play, Paula refers to this incident to stress that having or not actively taken part in the revolution is of no importance, since what matters is to abide to the new non-order.

In a short essay entitled 'La Politique dans l'Être et l'événement', Emmanuel Terray writes that in Badiou's analysis that is aiming to define generic politics, "religion does not appear as a metaphor or a sub-specie of politics but is politics per se." (Terray: 1990, 74) Terray remarks that although Badiou resorts to the French Revolution to provide an 'intuitive' conception of the *event*, it is religion which provides an explanatory context for the notion of *intervention*.¹⁶⁰ (Terray: 1990, 73) In *Being and Event*, Badiou explains that it is the *intervention* of the apostles which makes an event of the execution of an unknown agitator in first century AC. (BE, 213) When it comes to the Badiouan event, not only is the apostles' intervention a

¹⁵⁹ There are ten characters in the play: Jean and Pierre Maury, two brothers of whom one is a right-wing politician and the second a left-wing politician; a prophet figure called Cephas, the Aramaic name rather than the Greek name Paul uses to refer to Simon Peter when he writes to the churches in Galatia and Corinth; Claude Villembray, a figure reminiscent of De Gaulle, who actually has a dog named after the French general; Paula, his sister, a feminine figure of the apostle Paul; Mokhtar a fifty year old Arab worker; Camille a female suburban hoodlum; René, a peasant; Mme Pintre, a female worker and David, the son of Paula and Mokhtar.

¹⁶⁰ Terray remarks that Pascal is the perfect Badiouan militant figure since Pascal restores the Christ-event at the core of Christian religion in order to base faith upon a decision, and not upon evidence that science could too easily dismantle. Pascal thus places the believer in the position of the apostle faced with risks and doubts, who had to intervene, to decide. (Terray: 1990, 73)

paradigm for the subject's decision upon the undecidable, but also for the seeing through of the consequences of making an event's name intervene within a situation. The intervention consists of calling upon the event to irremediably change the situation. In *Saint Paul and the Foundation of Universalism*, Badiou develops a theory of discourses in support of his notion of intervention. Badiou insists on the fact that the resurrection is, for Saint Paul, a pure event that forever changes the relationship between the possible and the impossible. The apostle is consequently the figure of the possible; his discourse phrases the possible. (SP, 45) In Badiou's terms, Paul's discourse enacts the fidelity to the possibility of change revealed by the event.

To an extent, the presentation of different subjective formalisms in the play *Incident at Antioch* supports a comparison with Badiou's theory of discourses developed in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. In his analysis of the conditions for Saint Paul's Christian discourse to emerge, Badiou writes:

[Paul] reveals the entirely human connection [...] between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is the rupture's subjective materiality. (SP, 2)¹⁶¹

As explained earlier in relation to dialectics, rupture is a keyword in Badiou's theory and this notion is given a preponderant role in his reading of Saint Paul. Paul's discourse is a discourse of rupture. The rupture in Saint Paul is the event of the resurrection, which thus becomes the sole justification for faith. Badiou sees in Paul the perfect illustration of the event and the ensuing subjectivation. However, more than simply proclaiming his fidelity to the event, Paul develops a discourse of rupture which sustains the fidelity towards the event. This discourse which structures the relation to the event is what Badiou calls a practical thought or a

¹⁶¹ [Paul] fait surgir la connexion, intégralement humaine [...] entre l'idée générale d'une rupture, d'un basculement, et celle d'une pensée pratique, qui est la matérialité subjective de cette rupture.

material subjectivity of the rupture. As explained earlier, thinking for Badiou has to be understood in terms of dialectical scission. In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Badiou retraces the conditions of emergence of Paul's discourse and argues that when Paul theorises upon the figure of the Jew and of the Greek, these entities do not represent the ethnic multiplicity of the Roman Empire at the time, nor the opposition between polytheist pagans, of which Greek is often a synonym in the context, and monotheist Jews, but refer to the two intellectual figures of the world as known by Paul. Badiou interprets the use of Greek and Jew by Saint Paul not as referring to a specific human group nor a particular religion, but to two subjective dispositions, or regimes of discourse:

[...] the two discourses share the presupposition that the key to salvation is given to us within the universe, whether it be through direct mastery of the totality (Greek wisdom), or through mastery of a literal tradition and the deciphering of signs (Jewish ritualism and prophetism). (SP, 42)

This distinction mirrors Badiou's description of the god of metaphysics and that of the disappeared gods of the poets mentioned in the previous section.¹⁶² On the one hand, the Greek discourse's subjective figure is that of the wise, on the other hand is the Jewish discourse's subjective figure of the prophet. The Greek discourse is cosmic and encloses the subject in the totality of the world's fixed order. The Jewish discourse is the discourse of the sign, of the exception; the election of the Jewish people transcends the natural cosmic order and is the sign of the divine. According to Badiou, Paul founds the Christian discourse by simply distinguishing its operations from those of the Jewish discourse and of the Greek discourse. (SP, 42) To put it simply, Paul's aim is to map the world in terms of discourse in order to

¹⁶² See earlier page 71

introduce a third discourse in rupture with the other two. This resonates with the system presentation-representation unsealed by the creation of a subjective space.

For Badiou, Greek and Jewish discourses are the two aspects of the same figure of mastery. Mastery could be understood here in terms of homogeneous order which the third discourse, that of the apostle, comes to disrupt. Between the figures of wisdom and prophecy, Paul creates a subjective space occupied by the figure of the apostle. However, in a similar way the subject was placed on the verge of the nothing void, the figure of the apostle is propped against that of the mystic.¹⁶³ Thus, the third discourse implicitly refers to the unsaid. Yet the fourth discourse of the mystic is rather a non-discourse. Rather than a declaration about the event, whether prophetic or affirmative, the 'discourse' of the mystic is self-referential; it operates in a closed-circuit, like an internal voice. However, according to Badiou, Paul "refuses to let addressed discourse, which is that of a declaration of faith, justify itself through unaddressed discourse, whose substance consists in unutterable utterances." (SP, 52) The fourth discourse founds the discourse of the apostle but has to remain silent; its substance is that of the *unsayable*. This is very close in fact to the notion of the subject occupying a position on the verge of the void. In the same way the void somehow grounded the truth process in the theory developed in *Being and Event*, "the private resource of a miraculous communication with truth" provides the basis for the discourse of the apostle. (SP, 52)¹⁶⁴ Badiou stresses that truth should be left to its "subjective 'voicelessness,' for only the work of its

¹⁶³ Badiou remarks that this quadrangularity of discourse is necessary to any reflection upon discourses following Hegel in *Logic*, who demonstrates that absolute knowledge of a ternary dialectics requires a fourth term. (SP, 41)

¹⁶⁴ To an extent, this might explain misreading of Badiou's event as messianic, which in fact spring from the misunderstanding of the void as pertaining to the mystical instead of accepting Badiou's notion of a materialist void.

declaration constitutes it." (SP, 52) This means that a truth can only become immanent when locally worked out by the subject.

The self-referentiality of the mystic discourse evokes the seeming self-referentiality of the event. However, in its reshuffling of the theory of the event, Badiou insists on the relationship between event and situation. The role of the militant of the truth is to inscribe this truth upon the situation, to make its passage visible among the disparate materials of a *world*. This is the reason why the discourse of the mystic cannot found the militant discourse by turning it inwards when, on the contrary, the militant discourse is by definition an outward movement towards the world. Nevertheless, the mystic discourse, which Paul keeps silent, remains constitutive in negative of the discourse of the apostle. However, like a subject, whose fidelity consists of making an event out of the event, the apostle's mystical relationship with truth does not validate the truth he proclaims, only his actions do. These actions necessarily rupture the situation since they are the consequences of the passage of a truth which disrupted the order of things. In the case of Paul, a consequence of his endorsement of the resurrection event, is the promulgation of the new law of universalism against that of the Roman Empire. Badiou stresses that for Saint Paul, the resurrection marks the clear-cut beginning of universalism against the law of the father or that of the empire. Hence, Paul declares: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female." (SP, 9)¹⁶⁵

The main question that is raised by *Incident at Antioch* is precisely how can the militant subject develop a discourse of rupture. Throughout the play, Badiou builds up his notion of a political subject by mainly opposing the discourses, or subjectivities, of the prophet, the politician and the militant. The different characters' connections to the state of the situation, or State and to the insurrection materialise

¹⁶⁵ This is a quote from Saint Paul: Galatians, 3.28.

in different discourses which resonate with the theory of discourses Badiou develops in his reading of Saint Paul. In the play, Paula can be described as an apostle in recess. From her reserve or subtracted position vis-à-vis the insurrection, she nevertheless comes to declare a political truth near the end of the play: "true politics consist in refusing to rebuild the State after its demise by the insurrection." (IA, 61) The difficulty for Paula is precisely to resist backing her discourse with a mysticism of truth.

Incident at Antioch questions the adequacy of the militant's language. Badiou attempts to show how the subjective emerges at the expense of representation. This consists on the part of characters of reorganising language as a poem. However, this is not a means to expose a subject, which would emerge in the inadequacy of utterance and enunciation, in other words, in the difference between what the subject wants to say and what is actually said. Contrary to Lacan, the mark of the subjective is not the irreducibility of what is said to what is intended to be said, but precisely the ability to reformulate the world.¹⁶⁶ Regarding *Incident at Antioch*, Badiou identifies his dilemma as having to write something concerning the becoming-subject of individuals in a new framework, without being completely abstract. (DIA, 4) In adapting Claudel and emulating his style, Badiou seems to have found a way to avoid his theatre text becoming a political manifesto. Badiou explains that Claudel provides some poetical means "to write something which is really a piece of writing and not a proof, not an abstract text" and stresses that Claudel's texts establish a new relationship between poetical language and

¹⁶⁶ See Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses, 1955-56*. Trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 274 - Badiou addresses the complex notion of the subject of language in his writings on Beckett, whose investigation exceeds the scope of this thesis for the main reason that, as far as theatre is concerned, Badiou emulates Claudel more so than Beckett. Also Badiou's writings on Beckett largely concern Beckett's novels rather than his theatre. On Badiou's analysis of the subject of language in Beckett, see Alberto Toscano and Nina Power's introduction to *On Beckett* (2003, xix-xxiii)

abstraction. (DIA, 4) In *Incident at Antioch*, the two main characters, Cephas and Paula share a desire for the use of a new language. At the beginning of the play, Cephas explains how he has incorporated a collective subject:

I felt an urge to put an end to the eye's solitude.

And I did, because there's a language! It shows you where ordinary law leaves off. Follow its rules and there you are in the bustling heart of all the absence contained in the city. Life is anonymous, no one's aware of your actions, which are no longer your own but the actions arising from the very failure to respect the local proprieties. Companions who are hard to place seek you out, people of no particular distinction, with no close friends or relations. With them you live in the folds of the new language, you name what you are and are becoming as heirs to a century and a half of innocence. (IA, 6)¹⁶⁷

For Cephas, it is through language, that is, in the act of profferation that the world or situation can be literally turned inside out. In the reverse of the situation, the city is experienced as absence, the law which regiments the system of representation does not apply. Subjectivisation occurs through experiencing the non-place of being. Rather than being assigned a place in the representation orchestrated by the State, the collective subject presents itself through an act of naming. The oxymoric expression "a century and a half of innocence" evokes a constantly renewed engagement with the world. According to Badiou's reading of Mallarmé, the folds of language would refer to the void created by the poem to redistribute 'what there is'.

¹⁶⁷ "L'envie me prit d'en finir avec la solitude de l'œil. Et je l'ai fait car une langue existe ! Elle vous indique où s'interrompt la loi commune. Si vous suivez son ordre, vous voici dans l'appareillage de tout ce que la cité contient d'absence. La vie est anonyme, on ne connaît plus vos actes, qui ne sont plus les vôtres, mais ceux du manquement lui-même à tout le convenable du lieu. Vous viennent des compagnons malaisément identifiables, gens sans décoration ni entours. Avec eux vous existez dans les pliures de la langue, vous nommez ce que vous êtes et devenez dans la filiation d'un siècle et demi d'innocence." (IA, 6)

"Companions who are hard to place" elude any categorisation into subsets; they elude representation.

Paula's attitude towards language is similar to Cephas' quest for a new language. She resists a language which has become the common rhetoric of the workers. To two workers' invective duet - they complete each other's sentence -, Paula replies:

While I, a woman from a distant shore, am here among you seeking
the language in which each word now has the stench of a dead
State.

If anyone from here is my friend, he'll have to accept that I'm only an
ambivalent friend. Because anyone who gets involved in politics no
longer writes poetry, and if he has any spare time, he devotes it to
getting ready for the evening meeting. Then when it's held, he takes
his turn speaking and is gratified if he hasn't said a single thing that
someone else couldn't have said. (IA, 15)¹⁶⁸

Paula's denunciation of syndicalist speech resonates with Mallarmé's denunciation of language as a commercial task. In *Incident at Antioch*, the characters' questioning of language points to a refusal of consensus political representation. The staging of politics in the play illustrates Badiou's definition of a political situation in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. Badiou explains that "organisations, textual referents, thinkers, proper names, the State, contrasting points of view, and eventual masses are the obligatory ingredients of a political situation." (RT, 192) According to this definition, the play seems a perfect paradigm for a political situation. It is articulated

¹⁶⁸ "Paule : [Moi] femme du grand rivage, je cherche parmi vous la langue où chaque mot désormais a la puanteur d'un État mort. Si quelqu'un d'ici est mon ami, qu'il tolère que je ne sois qu'une amie ambiguë. Car celui qui s'organise ne fait plus de poème, et s'il a du temps, il le consacre à préparer la réunion du soir. Quand elle a lieu, il parle à son tour, et trouve sa satisfaction s'il n'a pas dit un mot que l'autre n'aurait pu dire." (IA, 16)

upon a combination of the seven components of politics as conceived by Badiou: Organisations (Parti du Rassemblement/Parti Socialiste Démocratique, the insurrection movement organised around Cephas); textual references (The New Testament including the writings by Saint Paul); thinkers (Saint Paul); proper nouns (Cephas/ Saint Peter, Paula and even De Gaulle used as a dog's name); State (with its representatives, Jean and Pierre Maury); contrasted points of view (opposition between Cephas and Paula, the two leaders of the insurgents; Paula and her brother Villembray, a military figure whom the politicians want to entrust with governing the State); masses raised for an event (*La Foule* is symbolised by the fact that every sector of the society is symbolically represented: the Arab worker, the female hoodlum from the suburbs, the peasant, the female factory worker). In the same way the analytic of theatre has to be challenged by the dialectics of theatre, the combination of the political components listed above becomes effective politics only if it is dialectically activated by political truths or axioms. The sole presence of political components does not suppose in any way politics as a permanency. For example, in the play, the character Paula utters an axiom, or truth of politics as defined by Badiou, when she declares "[politics] means uniting around a political vision that escapes the mental hold of the State." (IA, 79 - CH, 29) The main issue of *Incident at Antioch* is precisely how can politics elude the State. "The mental hold of the State" refers to the representation orchestrated by the State. In Act III, scene 5, Paula declares:

I am confident that this politics is, thanks to me, real, escapes capture by the state, cannot be represented and is for ever being decoded. (IA, 80 - CH, 30-31)

Paula's words directly echo Badiou's theory of politics as a rare process eluding representation or representativeness by a party, a syndicate or a class. Not only does the play object to the representation of power in the form of the State, but it

goes further by challenging the very idea of power. In the third act, Paula urges her son David, the new leader of the revolution, to abandon power:

Power is not the mark of the human race's greatness. The featherless biped must get a grip on himself and unlikely as it seems, go against all the laws of nature and all the laws of history, and follow the path that means that anyone will be the equal of everyone. Not only in law, but in their material truth. (IA, 78 - CH, 28)

The play's dilemma is to challenge representation by staging the irrepresentability of politics which echoes that of the event. To an extent, staging politics in absentia consists of showing the vacuity of the political situation. This can be very theatrical and is conveyed in the play by the absurd dialogue between the two brothers Jean and Pierre Maury who represent the alleged left and the right of the political spectrum when, in fact, there is no such divide.

Alongside the failure of political representation, the play also stages the irrepresentability of the event. For this Badiou resorts to what could be described as Mallarméan symbolism. Set on the road to Damascus (in the play), the following scene is an attempt to formulate the irrepresentability of the event:

PAULA (*falling to the ground with her arms outstretched*): Chance,
 illusion of meaning, whereby I know what it knows!
 The pebbles in my mouth are turning into clear words.
 Oh, I was proceeding, dangerously, under the influence
 Of a burning zeal wherein the obstacle and the shrinking of desire
 both give way; now here I am in the fragile morning light.
 See, the full extension of a body, like a lake bedazzled
 By the fir trees of heaven, and the imperceptible transparency into
 which I am being dissolved!

Where is the haven, the goodness of evening, the welcoming
twilight?

The light opens wide its splendour! The goldfish spurt out onto the
filament of the waters!

O obsolete road, rectitude suddenly shattered! I placed my own fall
on the scales of justice.

Inwardly illuminated, I had both the sensible and the scattered.

Who is overpowering me, then? Who is telling me about a strategist?

The image of the helmet and the owl, coming back to life as none
other than the ethereal goddess! I bow down, and the light turns my
body into a shield.

The name for a process that has been taking far too long.

Unemotionally, I define the thought that founds you.

Here I am! (IA, 19)¹⁶⁹

To an extent, like in Mallarmé's language, the syntax at work here delays the interpretation of meaning; what unfolds is a series of images blurring any notion of spatiality. Badiou uses light metaphors to express the revealing of a site as void by the truth. While a translation might, albeit partially, render the eventful syntax of the original, following Badiou when he transcribes Mallarmé into prose, a prose commentary in English seems pertinent to convey the meaning of the scene: Paula falls to the ground with her arms extended; the extension of the arms ready to

¹⁶⁹ Paula (tombe à terre les bras en croix) / Hasard, fiction du sens, d'où je sais ce qu'il sait !

/ Les cailloux de ma bouche se changent en mots clairs. / Ô j'avais, périlleuse, et sous l'acte / D'un embrasement où s'effondre l'obstacle et la rétraction du désir, me voici dans la / minceur du matin. / Voyez, toute l'extension d'un corps, tel un lac en la surprise / Des sapins du ciel, la transparence infime où je me résous ! / Où donc l'abri, vertu du soir, accueil de la pénombre ? / La lumière écarquille sa gloire ! Les poissons d'or giclent sur le cil des eaux ! / Ô route obsolète, droiture soudain sciée ! J'ai mis ma propre chute au plateau des justices. / J'avais, illuminée, le sensible et l'épars. / Qui donc me plie ? Qui m'instruit du stratège ? / Forme du casque et de la chouette, renaissante à rien qu'à la déesse impalpable ! Je me courbe, et la lumière fait bouclier de mes genoux. / Mot d'un acte par trop durable. / Je définis, inémoive, la pensée qui vous fonde. / C'est moi !

embrace the sky shows the entire availability of the subject towards the event. Paula insists on her stretched availability as she compares herself to a lake which to the surprise of the pine trees hanging in the sky does not reflect them upon its surface because of its minimal transparency. Everything evokes thinness in her text: the thinness of the morning, the filament of the waters, the flat depthless surface of the lake. The image of Paula spread flat and thin, then folded by the light like a sheet of paper points towards the void, but also to the position of the subject at world level. Paula is fully exposed to the encompassing light of the truth. This is emphasised by a metaphor: literally the light spreads its glory, but the use of the verb 'écarquiller' (to open one's eyes wide) here implies that the light forces someone to open her eyes. We literally participate in an eye opening experience.

This scene illustrates what Badiou means when he defines the subject as a fragment of the truth process. While it points to the irrepresentability of the event, it nevertheless stages Paula's incorporation to a body of truth. Somehow Paula becomes a personification of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and justice; she mentions the two emblems of Athena that are the helmet and the owl. There is mention in the text of the owl, Athena's emblematic bird and by extension, the emblem of philosophy. Somehow, through her transformation, Paula becomes the body of Athena; the most pregnant image is that of Paula's knees bent by the light to become a shield.¹⁷⁰ This scene is particularly interesting because it creates a link

¹⁷⁰ To an extent, the antagonism between Cephas and Paula in *Incident at Antioch* echoes Badiou's opposition between Sophokles and Aeschylus in *Theory of the Subject*. Badiou opposes the two Greek tragedians thus: "There exist indeed two Greek tragic modes: the Aeschylean one, the direction of which is the contradictory advent of justice by the courage of the new; and the Sophoclean one, the anguished sense of which is the quest, through a reversal, for the superegoic origin." (TS, 165) In Badiou's play, while Cephas is a character drawn by anxiety and a destructive rage, Paula endorses the Aeschylean couple of courage and justice, that is, the courage to pledge herself to a new law, that of politics to-come against the old law of the State. This is conveyed in the play by her appropriation of Athena's attributes and symbols. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Athena erects a new law to put an end to the destructive cycle of vengeance. Similarly, Paula convinces her son David at the end of *Incident at Antioch* to renounce the revolutionary terror and to embrace the idea of politics being only possible at a distance from the State. See Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin Classic, 1977)

between on the one hand, an eventual process or a subjectivisation in the terms of *Being and Event*, with the passage of the truth revealing the void of the situation and thus creating a place the subject can inhabit, and on the other hand, an ideation process consisting of an incorporation to an idea. This is the meaning of the last line “I define the thought that founds you. Here I am.” (IA, 19) Paula is in the process of becoming the thought for a new politics. She literally personifies the idea, hence her transformation into a figure of Athena. Tellingly, when, after her long absence, Paula returns, she is hailed by Mohktar as a personified Idea: ‘Visitation of the pure Idea!’ (IA, 68).

In this scene, Paula is exposed to the illumination of an idea but also to the void brought to the fore. This is conveyed by the strenuous syntax of the original with numerous interpolated clauses and antepositions. Rather than delineating a site, the syntax neutralises spatial dimensions to create a time for the event to occur. The text cannot take hold of space because, so to speak, the event does not take place. This is a good illustration of the eventual site which for Badiou, amounts to a void within which truth can unfold. Badiou points rather to the absence of depth, to a minimal transparency, to a ‘thinness’, which brings the void to the fore. Whether via the images it summons which, because of their possibilities of meaning, fade as soon as they materialise, or via the syntax which conceals some pockets of time, the text reveals the void. In the play, this scene is set in a beetroot field described as ‘a place of absolutely nondescript chance’. (IA, 18) This evokes Mallarmé’s carving of the void in the chance that the event might or not have taken place in his poem *Coup de dés*.¹⁷¹ This is taking the Mallarméan notion of an indifferent site quite far, but the very incongruity of this choice emphasises the notion of chance and undecidability attached to the void cropping up at the surface of the site.

¹⁷¹ See the section on the Mallarméan site, page 59.

Consequently, in the play, like “The place of Choices” set on a road crossing the beetroot field, the other places are also symbolically significant: “The Official Place of Politics” is a vast empty room; “The Place of War Reserves”, a disused military harbour; “The place of Truths”, at the gates of a factory. Finally, the site chosen by Badiou for the resolution act is not a mere set, it supports the rhetoric of the political denouement. In the list of places provided by Badiou along with the list of characters, this place is named as ‘the place of foundations’ and described as a city in ruins. This points to the void as foundation. The third act of the play takes place in fact in a city whose construction was significantly still pending while its towers were being destroyed. Somehow, this points to the necessity for a new politics to-come to operate from a *tabula rasa*, but more importantly, to the *void* as the sole possible foundation for the subject. It is precisely because Paula withdraws from the representation of politics that she becomes a militant of true politics according to Badiou.

Badiou describes *Incident at Antioch* as a quest for a radically new engagement with politics which is neither based on obsession nor hope. He argues that this is the position of Paula in the last scene of the play which puts an end to the previous political sequence and opens onto a renewed politics which remains largely unpredictable. Badiou stresses that although there is a cut, there is also a certain “nostalgia or melancholy concerning the end of the last sequence.” (DIA, 2) By “last sequence”, Badiou refers to what he calls the Red Years, in other words, the emancipatory politics sequence culminating at the end of the 60s according to a conception of Marxism valid in the 60s and part of the 70s. The play is almost contemporary to Badiou's essay *Peut-on penser la politique?* As explained earlier, in this essay published in 1985, Badiou writes that Marxism as the political subject's consistency is on the verge of inexistence and pushes the subject to the same confines. (PPP, 54) This is the reason why the play proposes a radical cut from the

political situation, that is, the revolution at a standstill and the threat of reconstruction of a State. However, the play does not define a clear line of action but rather sketches a line of thinking, hence the character Paula being personified as the Idea. For Badiou, melancholy does not imply passive abandonment, but rather a trigger of thoughts.¹⁷² His play is in fact a meditation concerning the aims of the Red Years. To an extent, *Incident at Antioch* can be described as opposing destruction and subtraction as defined by Badiou in *The Century*.

For Badiou, the twentieth century is governed by the passion for the real in politics as much as in the arts.¹⁷³ This passion for the real can be effected through two modalities of engagement with 'what there is'. It can be a passion for authenticity and in that sense it is *identitaire* since what matters is to unmask copies, expose *faux-semblants*. For this reason, Badiou assimilates it to destruction, since in this search for the real, all simulacras cannot be but destroyed. The other modality is that of a differentiation in order to conceive the minimal difference between semblance and real. (TC, 56) In the search for the minimal difference, the real becomes something to reach, what is initiated is a movement, a shift. In the search for authenticity, if movement there is, it is inward, towards an origin as the destruction of the copies induced a search for the original. In the search for the minimal difference, what is induced is the promise of the new, the promise of the impossible, that is, the real made possible.¹⁷⁴ This is the approach which

¹⁷² See note 171 above.

¹⁷³ Incidentally, in his remarks on the translation of *The Century*, Alberto Toscano points out the translation of *la passion du réel* as 'the passion for the real' should not mislead the reader to think of this passion as a "purely intentional affair" but to "a passion that inhabits subjects as what is in themselves more than themselves." Toscano also points out that the 'passion for the real' is a term introduced by Lacan in his seminar IX [1961-2] on identification. (Toscano: 2007, 220)

¹⁷⁴ For a clear analysis of the difference between Lacan and Badiou when it comes to the real, see Bosteels's article, "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject: The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism" in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Lacan: His Silent Partners* (London: Verso, 2006), 115-168. While Badiou follows Lacan's definition in his Seminar XI of the real as the impossible, for Badiou, the impossibility of the real can be transformed into a consistent truth.

corresponds to the restricted action advocated by Badiou, which is based upon the minimal difference between action and non-action.

The opposition between the two characters Cephas and Paula in *Incident at Antioch* reflects the two modalities of the passion for the real in Badiou's terms: destruction and minimal difference in the form of a subtraction from the repetition of the same. While Cephas is the agent of destruction, Paula subtracts herself from the action to make room for the politics to come. Towards the end of the play she tells her son David, the new rebel leader:

The decision you've got to make has to be an unemotional one. To anyone who gives in to the passion for images it's incomprehensible. Let go of your obsession with conquest and totality. Take hold of the thread of multiplicity. (IA, 78)¹⁷⁵

The passion for images she refers to here corresponds to the passion for the real seeking to retrieve in this case, the authenticity of the origin of the insurrection. What Paula suggests is to locally see the consequences of the insurrection through, that is, to invent a new politics rather than to reify the idea of the revolution. However, according to Badiou, the real is also intrinsically imbued with semblance as soon as it is question of figuring it out. In *The Century*, Badiou explains the revolutionary *Terror* - and the cleansing it never fails to perpetrate in order to remain faithful to the origin of the revolution, through the relationship between real and semblance.

[The] real, conceived in its contingent absoluteness, is never real

¹⁷⁵ David : comme tu es exaltée ! / Paule : Tu te trompes. Je t'exhorte au contraire à abandonner toute exaltation. La décision que tu dois prendre est froide. Elle est, pour qui s'abandonne à la passion des images, incompréhensible. Laisse choir l'obsession de la conquête et de la totalité. Tiens le fil de la multiplicité.

enough not to be suspected of semblance. The passion for the real is also, of necessity, suspicion. Nothing can attest that the real is the real, nothing but the system of fictions wherein it plays the role of the real. (TC, 52)

From this, it is plausible to conceive the relationship between real and semblance as a problem of presentation versus representation. The destruction mode cannot escape representation. The destruction of the State leads ultimately to its rebuilding. On the other hand, like the allegorical mode discussed earlier, the subtraction mode based on dialectical separation or distancing in the form of minimal differentiation as an unbinding process, is a means to escape the dead-end of representation. In *Incident at Antioch*, both modalities of emancipatory politics, destruction and subtraction induce a positioning towards representation.

To an extent, Cephas is the guardian of the authenticity of the revolution. In Act III scene 2, Cephas visits the rebels guarding the fallen walls of the city and renounces his command as leader of the insurrection. He decides to leave the action behind and declares: "Adieu, I do not want to belong anymore to anything to do with History. [...] I will not bear decision anymore. I long for the motionless." (IA, 62)¹⁷⁶ Cephas had been a vector of decision in the second act by starting the insurrection with the execution of Villembrey, the former military whom right and left politicians had hoped would save the Nation. In the last act, Cephas leaves the decision to others and does not want to partake in the rebuilding of the State.

CEPHAS: We've accomplished what I joined you for in the command jurisdiction. We've given a jump start to the decline of this country, reduced by us to its terrifying embryonic origins.

¹⁷⁶ "Adieu avec rien de l'Histoire je ne veux plus d'appartenance [...] je ne supporterai plus la décision. J'aspire à l'immobile." (IA, 62)

Beyond victory there's only defeat. No, no--not the sudden reversal kind of defeat! The slow, irreversible kind, the defeat of those who have to come to terms with the way things are. [...]

Owing to my way of thinking about the chaos, I'm getting in the way now of the obligation to rebuild. (IA, 61)¹⁷⁷

Deprived of a leader, the insurrection movement falters, torn between peace aspirations and a will to destroy, between national reconstruction and the infinitely suspended movement of the terror. The characters argue about how to end the insurrection: shall they encourage the urban population to return from their exodus in the campaigns? Shall they restore a regular administration, the legitimacy of justice, shall they start controlling the cleansing committees, disarm local militia groups, declare a general amnesty, restore commercial exchanges and money, reorganise schooling systems, set up an industrial plan? Were they to identically rebuild the world, in its durability and security, what would be the legacy of their revolution? (IA, 65) It seems that the debate and the play at the end of Act III scene 3 has come to a standstill:

DAVID: [...] But here's where I just don't know. The State is hateful, but anarchy is even more so. Politics goes around in circles, because neither order, which governs it, nor disorder, which corrupts it, can be its aim. (IA, 67)¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ "Ce pour quoi j'étais lié à vous dans la juridiction du commandement, nous l'avons accompli. Le coup d'accélérateur sur le déclin de ce pays, par nous ramené à sa terrorisante origine, nous l'avons donné. Au-delà de la victoire, il n'y a que la défaite. Non, non ! pas la défaite dans le soudain et le renversement ! la défaite lente, irrémédiable, de ce qui doit composer avec ce qui est. [...] J'encombre aujourd'hui, par l'ordre de ma pensée du désordre, l'impératif de l'édification." (IA, 61)

¹⁷⁸ "Mais c'est ici que je ne sais plus. L'Etat est haïssable, et l'anarchie plus encore. / La politique est au rouet de n'avoir pour but ni l'ordre, qui l'administre, ni le désordre qui la corrompt." (IA, 67)

According to Badiou, the first condition for politics to exist is the sudden summoning of the masses to the unexpected (the events). (RT, 190) This implies that the simple play of institutions and the passive administration of the State do not amount to politics.¹⁷⁹ Order cannot thus be the goal of politics since the disorder of the unexpected, as opposed to the disorder of anarchy, comes into play. What ensures the existence of politics is a process of fidelity towards the unexpected, which takes the form of a rigorous discipline of seeing the consequences of its emergence through. In this respect, Badiou posits that his adaptation of Claudel's *La Ville* is in reverse of the original.

For Claudel, violence is a result of disorder and I'm forced to say that for me violence is the result of order and not disorder. But the play organised an understanding of the difficulties of this movement, and in Claudel too, in Claudel we have the difficulty of the movement which goes from disorder to order and in a sense in my play the difficulty is the difficulty of the movement which goes from order to disorder. (DIA, 5-6)

Incident at Antioch is a search for a disorder or non-order which would not equate to anarchy. While Claudel wants to give a signification to the revolt in the city by turning to a transcendent authority, Badiou's play suggests that the return to order, and ultimately the rebuilding of the State after the revolution is avoidable. Paula offers an alternative by urging her son David, the new leader of the insurrection to renounce power as a way to exit from the dead-end of a choice between the stasis

¹⁷⁹ Badiou's opposition between State and politics is very similar to Rancière's opposition between "police" and politics as developed by Rancière in his *Eleven Theses on Politics* (lecture given on 4 December 1996 in Ljubljana, source: <http://www.zrc-sazu.si/www/fi/aktual96/ranciere.htm> - last accessed 03/10/2007). However, Badiou is highly critical of Rancière's approach and in *Metapolitics*, analyses what he considers to be stark differences in their work regarding politics and also the relationship between philosophy and politics. See in particular *Metapolitics*, chapter 8: 'Rancière and Apolitics'.

of a perpetual terror or the fake movement of a reconstruction which would cancel out the insurrection. To the absence of movement, Paula opposes a stepping away from the violence of order as well as that of political chaos. The following lines encapsulate her vision:

PAULA: [...] The liberationist organisation everywhere merged with the State. [...] Thus, the desire for emancipation became deflected from its own origins. It needs to be *restituted*.

DAVID: What do you mean?

PAULA: I mean it needs to be *substituted*.

No correct politics today can claim to be carrying on the work done previously. Our task is to detach consciousness, which ensures justice, equality, the end of States or the illicit dealings of Empire, once and for all from this residual base wherein the lust for power alone absorbs all our energy.

What an enormous impact it could have if you were to proclaim a fidelity that would take the concrete form of your returning to the path of the consciousness of the masses and its subjectivation! (IA, 76)¹⁸⁰

It is interesting to remark that some of these lines duplicate word-for-word some of the poet's lines in Claudel's *La Ville* Act III. (Claudel: [1901] 1967, 484)¹⁸¹ In

¹⁸⁰ I have modified Spitzer's translation to render the Claudelian play on word on restituted/substituted. "Paule : L'organisation libératrice a partout fusionné avec l'Etat. [...] Ainsi la volonté émancipatrice s'est-elle soustraite à sa propre origine. Elle doit être restituée. / David : Que veux-tu dire ? / Paule : Je veux dire substituée. Aucune politique juste ne peut aujourd'hui soutenir qu'elle continue le travail antérieur. Il nous est imparti de desceller une fois pour toutes la conscience, qui organise la justice, l'égalité, la fin des États ou des trafics impériaux, de ce socle résiduel où le souci du pouvoir capte à lui seul toutes les énergies. Quelle immense portée peut avoir, faite par vous, la proclamation d'une fidélité dont la forme pratique serait que vous repreniez le chemin de la conscience collective et de sa mise en sujet." (IA, 76)

¹⁸¹ Claudel's *La Ville* is articulated upon three acts without any subdivision into scenes. This passage is towards the end of the play like in Badiou's adaptation who follows Claudel's structure but adds subdivision into scenes as unlike Claudel's, his acts unfold in several places.

Claudel's play, the poet Cœuvre first declares that man should be restituted to God then correcting himself that because of his inability to retrieve its origin, that is, a man made in the image of god, man should be substituted, hence God becoming man as Jesus Christ. Badiou adapts the complex argument of *La Ville*'s poet in terms of politics. This is the meaning of Paula's lines: the insurrection has lost its origin, that is, the desire for collective emancipation, but instead of retrieving it, it has to be replaced by collective subjectivisation. In other words, the insurrection has to lead to a new collective subject of politics and not to the rebuilding of the State in the guise of a transfer of power to a collective in control of the State. The struggle for power has to be replaced by a refusal of power, which enables a collective subjectivation. Ultimately, only a subtraction from power can lead back to the essence of the insurrection.

In *Incident at Antioch*, Paula, the main character disappears for most of the play while the revolution unfolds. She refuses to partake in a movement she rejects: "I have confidence that a politics is real through myself alone, free from the State's grasp, unrepresentable, and endlessly decoded." (IA, 80)¹⁸² Here Paula refers to the fact that politics has to operate a constant unbinding to avoid being trapped in the order of representation. The acknowledgement that ultimately, the revolution can only lead to a reconstruction of the State it aimed to abolish, calls for a different kind of political activism. Paula's restricted action is the only possible engagement with true politics. In the wake of her confrontation with truth, rendered symbolically in the play in the incident in the beetroot field, Paula not only changes her discourse but also her appearance and her modality of existence. She is in fact altogether present and withdrawn from the plot. In the play, Badiou experiments with withdrawn

¹⁸² "J'ai confiance qu'une politique est par moi-même réelle, soustraite à la capture de l'État, irréprésentable et incessamment décodée. J'ai confiance que suivre dans l'intelligence du vouloir ce qui est là désigné oriente lentement la force d'un Sujet à s'excepter du règne de la domination." (IA, 80)

presence. When she disappears for good near the end of the play, her brief return is a posteriori described thus: "No matter where Paula is. Consider she was but a dream, a visitation." (IA, 81)¹⁸³ To an extent, Paula embodies the notion of transitory truth explained earlier.¹⁸⁴

In *Metapolitics*, Badiou writes that "real politics holds itself at a distance from the State and constructs this distance." (MT, 119)¹⁸⁵ In the play, Paula argues that this distancing from the State can only be effected from the starting point of the insurrection. She urges her son David, the leader of the rebellion to return to the origin of the emancipatory movement: "What an enormous impact it could have if you were to proclaim a fidelity that would take the concrete form of your returning to the path of the consciousness of the masses and its subjectivation!" (IA, 76) Although Paula calls for a proclamation, she remains a figure of the apostle in recess. Unlike Saint Paul and, according to Badiou, his foundation of universalism, Paula does not found a new non-order by formulating a new law derived from her axiom for politics, but encourages her son to do so. To an extent, Paula is placed in a similar position to that of a prophet announcing the coming of the son. *Incident at Antioch* raises in fact the question of how the militant of a truth might avoid becoming a prophet figure? This announces Badiou's meditation upon the political activist in *Being and Event*:

Rather than a warrior beneath the walls of the State, a political activist is a patient watchman of the void instructed by the event [...]
There the activist constructs the means to sound, if only for an

¹⁸³ "Et peu importe où est Paule. Considérez qu'elle n'a été qu'un songe. Une visitation." (IA, 81)

¹⁸⁴ See earlier page 160.

¹⁸⁵ In recent texts, Badiou has clarified his position towards the State and does not seem to call for its disappearance but for a strict control of its citizens over it. According to Hallward, for Badiou politics is "a matter of making the most of the few opportunities that do open up, of exploiting the few chinks in the established armor, without yielding to the temptations of political rearmament. (Hallward: 2003, 45)

instant, the site of the unrepresentable, and the means to be thenceforth faithful to the proper name that, afterwards, he or she will have been able to give to – or hear, one cannot decide – this non-place of place, the void. (BE, 111)

This opposition between the warrior and the watcher reflect the antinomy between the destruction and subtraction modes embodied by the two characters Cephas and Paula in the play. The figure of the watchman is in fact that of the militant of a truth who contemplates the trajectory of truth from the hypothetical standpoint of the truth back towards the void from which it sprung from. This is the reason why the militant looks back to the event in the future anterior. The militant seems somehow deprived of a place to inhabit the present. Paula's position in recess in the play is a perfect illustration for this. However, in Badiou's thought, the militant of politics does not await a messianic truth nor its return, since the truth inherenced in fragments suffice to act upon them. This position cannot be that of a prophet. This is where Badiou's rewriting of the theory of the event and his insistence upon the eventual trace in *Logics of Worlds* is illuminating. To be faithful to the passage of the truth consists of activating its traces. It is a question of finding the eventual traces which force the situation to be encapsulated into nodal points where the militant has to decide upon the undecidable, that is, to opt for a possible radical transformation of 'what there is'. Nevertheless, the militant's engagement amounts to what Badiou after Mallarmé calls restricted action. The difference between action and non-action remains minimal, yet it is primordial. Returning to *Incident at Antioch*, this is why Paula's modality of militancy is a search for a minimal difference as opposed to Cephas' destruction mode.

In the play, the character Cephas oscillates between the figure of the prophet and that of the revolutionary. In the first scene of the play, he declares:

We see the star of power shining in the night sky. How far away it seems! But close, too, so close that we, the unknowable ones, are required to reach out and grab it the way you do the moon when a child asks you to.

And this time, rest assured, it won't be about capturing a reflection in some old wash boiler painted red ! (IA, 7)¹⁸⁶

At the beginning of the play, Cephas watches the surface of the world for a sign that the time is ripe, then he acts out of necessity rather than by being driven by the stars. On the contrary, Paula evolves from being involved in the revolution to being a watchman figure, therefore a militant according to Badiou's definition. Instead of justifying the measures taken by the rebels in the name of the revolution, Paula merely proposes to work out the consequences of the insurrection from its origin, that is, from the event of the insurrection. To this extent, the play announces the shift in Badiou's theory of the event from a logic of naming to a logic of consequences. However, Paula does not have the answer to what the new politics should be. Hers is an act of decision, in the form of a Mallarméan wager, that is, a deliberate act of faith towards an uncertain to-come.

Through the intrinsic link between Badiou's reading of Saint Paul and *Incident at Antioch*, religion provides Badiou with a mindframe to define the militant subject of politics. Drawing a parallel between Althusser's notion of (ideological) interpellation and Badiou's notion of the Truth-Event, Slavoj Žižek points out that Badiou's use of religion as a condition to think the subject connection to the event of politics seems to point to subjectivation as the result of an interpellation. (Žižek: 2000, 145) Badiou

¹⁸⁶ "Nous voyons briller dans la nuit l'étoile du pouvoir. Comme elle paraît lointaine ! Mais proche aussi, si proche qu'il nous est enjoint, à nous, les inconnaisables, de la saisir comme on fait de la lune à la demande d'un enfant. Et cette fois, soyez-en sûrs : il ne s'agira plus de la captivité d'un reflet dans quelque lessiveuse peinte en rouge !" (IA, 7)

stresses that in the case of Saint Paul, the truth or reality of the resurrection event is of no relevance – he himself does not believe in it, but what matters is the relation of the subject to that ‘event’ and the process of universality it generates. For the atheist Badiou, the fabulous event of the Resurrection is merely a semblance of the Truth-Event. This is the reason why Žižek raises the following question: “[what] if what Badiou calls the Truth-Event is, at its most radical, a purely formal act of decision, not only not based on an actual truth, but ultimately *indifferent* to the precise status (actual or fictitious) of the Truth-Event it refers to?” (Žižek: 2000, 144) *Incident at Antioch* clearly emphasises the militant’s decision upon a truth. From the previous analysis of Badiou’s theory of the point, it is fair to say that, for Badiou, subjectivation is articulated upon decision rather than interpellation. This is the reason why theatre is key to Badiou’s work, in the sense that it clearly articulates the truth-procedure, or rather its semblance, upon decision.

Not only is decision central to Badiou’s theory of theatre, in particular as far as the ethics of play is concerned, but his plays also stage the decision. However, in contrast with Brecht’s *The Decision* or Sartre’s *Dirty Hands*, the outcome remains unknown. One of the reasons for this openness is that Badiou’s plays challenge the need for a political party which militants have to answer to. To an extent, in Badiou’s plays, the militant of politics has only to answer to what is erected as a political truth. However, Badiou’s decision does not pertain to a purely ideological gesture. To an extent, the notion of primordial statement in Badiou’s recent theory, that is, the trace of the passage of truth whose subjective activation individuals can decide or not to partake in, provides a way of fending off accusations of dogmatism. It is also fair to say that theatre can provide a clear illustration of the definition of subjectivation as a decision upon the undecidable. This is because, according to Badiou, “if theatre distinguishes what mythifies from what is in decline in the name of the State, it is not in a position to draw any conclusions. It is the state of affairs

put in abeyance.” (RT, 204) In the case of *L'Écharpe rouge*, it is the theatre event mainly through spectators' comments which assigned a mythical dimension to the collective. The play dealt with the representation orchestrated by the State and presented the State as a dead organ. However, Badiou's attempt to stage the multiplicity of the communist emancipatory movement highlighted the impossibility of representing the process of politics, apart from representing it in the recess of productive failures, like in *L'Écharpe rouge*, as a 'chorus of the defeated'. Similarly, *Incident at Antioch* is an attempt to represent politics almost *in absentia*, as a restricted action. This explains why for Badiou, theatre is precisely an art of suspension which perfectly mirrors the hovering elusiveness of politics. Through the allegorical method deployed in *L'Écharpe rouge* or the subtractive method at work in *Incident at Antioch*, Badiou presents politics as theatre's vanishing point.

This thesis is a reactivation of the traces of thought left by the passage of Badiou's philosophy through his theatre. For Badiou, theatre amounts to a materialist dialectic, and therefore, theatre is central to his philosophical work and his reflections on politics. To an extent, Badiou's theory of theatre anticipates or, in Badiouan terms, 'conditions' the latest development of his philosophy. With the notion of theatre-idea, Badiou establishes theatre as a realm of ideas, yet his theory of theatre addresses theatre in its encompassing materiality. As a materialisation of the idea, Badiou's theatre pertains to the reversal of Platonism which he operates in his philosophy, especially in his latest *Communist Hypothesis* and *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. To an extent, Badiou's theory of theatre anticipates his concept of ideation anchored in his materialist dialectic. It is fair to define theatre, for Badiou, as an ideation process, that is, an immanent thinking through of the possibility of theatre delivering some truths. Whilst, for Badiou, the art of theatre consists of organising a crossing of its site by the theatre-idea, it does not in fact pertain to abstraction as such since the materiality of theatre is constantly reaffirmed.

Nevertheless, Badiou's theory of theatre draws from Mallarmé's subtraction method and the related Mallarméan notion of unbinding. However, whilst Badiou props his theory of the event in *Being and Event* against Mallarmé's method of subtraction, Badiou's theory of theatre resonates more so with Mallarmé's notion of unbinding (*déliaison*). However, despite the fact that Badiou calls the theatre text in its latent state a theatre poem, for him, a theatre performance functions in the opposite way to a poem. Whilst, in Badiou's reading of Mallarmé, the poem captured the disappearance of the truth revealed by the event, theatre forces the idea to take place in order to point towards the truths that theatre might be capable of. While the poem records the passage of a truth, in hindsight theatre stages the transit of theatre-idea which might lead to truths. Badiou's theory of theatre

reinforces the conception that theatre is about a radical passage and the most transitory of all arts.

Rancière stresses that “ultimately only two arts are required in Badiou’s system of the arts: the poem as affirmation, as inscription of a disappearance, and theatre as the site wherein this affirmation turns into mobilization.” (Rancière: 2004, 225) It is true that theatre-ideas point to truths which according to Badiou’s definition, cannot be but in transit. Yet, theatre does not register a disappearance and to the nostalgia of the disappeared unity, that of the ‘Age of the Poets’, Badiou opposes theatre’s gathering of a multiplicity in the effort to work out truths, if only by fragments. To an extent, this is the prime didactic dimension of theatre for Badiou: to attest to the possibility of truths in the here and now. Theatre prepares the ground for the potential passage of truths by disentangling what is given as ‘what there is’, by ultimately challenging the order of representation imposed by the State.

Badiou’s assertion that theatre represents representation could not be fully understood without delving into Badiou’s ontological system based upon a Cantorian materialist dialectics. Putting in parallel Badiou’s use of set-theory in *Being and Event* and *Rhapsody for the Theatre* has revealed the theatre dialectics of the Theatrical State, or situation of representation, and the ethics of play, or provocation of the presentation, as deriving directly from the same line of thought in Badiou’s philosophy. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, the confrontation of the situation of representation to the provocation of presentation informs the interaction between evental site, event and subject. In Badiou’s theory of theatre, this is summed up as a dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity, which opposes the theatre director as regent of objectivity, to the actor, who occupies the place of the subjective instance. As defined by Badiou in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, the ethics of play provides a paradigm for the subjectivisation process. While the theatre director represents the representation orchestrated by the State, the actor abiding to the ethics of play

provokes the presentation of what is unrepresented within the system of representation. As an objectless transparency, the actor holds a point, that is, a hole open onto the void through which truth might transit. The actor occupies a space between the representation orchestrated by the State and theatre's representation of that representation. Therefore, the place occupied by the actor mirrors the place assigned by Badiou to the subjective instance as a place-holder for the void between 'what there is' and 'what is given as what there is', between situation and state of situation. For Badiou, in the same way the term 'subject' does not refer to a substance but a process, acting is asubstantial, interstitial and is a hole-piercing process. Badiou's ethics of play calls for a breach of the order of representation.

Within Badiou's philosophical work, theatre offers a thread between Badiou's three main opuses: *Theory of the Subject*, *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. Badiou's theory of theatre and plays can be described as rehearsing the subjectivisation process throughout its evolution in Badiou's system. While *Being and Event* was above all hinged upon a naming – that of the event, *Logics of Worlds* calls more explicitly upon a mobilising of the site which was already central to Badiou's theory of theatre and his *Theory of the Subject*. Anticipating the shift from a logic of naming to a logic of consequences in his philosophy, Badiou's theatre is a theatre of perseverance in search of truths. Therefore, rather than an evental interruption, it is more relevant in this case to describe Badiou's theatre in Mallarméan terms as a strenuous unbinding in order to enable the possible transit of truths. Theatre's ideation process and possible incorporation to a subjectivable body imposes a strain on the individual spectator who is subjected to a thinking ordeal. When it comes to theatre's connection to thought, the analyses of Badiou's theatre dialectics and of his concept of theatre-idea prompting collective thinking have demonstrated that Badiou places the spectator at the centre of theatre. With Badiou's notion of *la Foule*, the crucial point is how theatre can transform a random

theatre audience into a thinking body. This evokes Herbert Blau's definition of the theatre audience 'not so much as a mere congregation of people as a body of thought and desire' (Blau: 1990, 25) However, Badiou is elusive when it comes to the transfer of desire onto the simulacra of the stage and does not address collective desire as such, but instead focuses on collective engagement with the idea, in which the individual spectator is absorbed. This is the reason why, although Badiou does not express this, theatre provides a perfect paradigm for the incorporation process. However, when it comes to the theatre audience, Badiou is not interested in the collective experience's limitations.

The necessary random gathering of *la Foule* eludes any question of the legitimacy of "we" as audience. To an extent, for Badiou, Theatre (capital T) exerts violence upon "we" as spectators in order to force a communal thinking. For Badiou, the function of theatre is to set up the conditions of thought. For Badiou, like politics, theatre is the thought of all. However, *la Foule* gathered by theatre moves into a collective insofar as individual spectators partake in the subjectivable body of theatre. This is made possible by Theatre's ability to shock the spectators into thinking, while Theatre becomes a body of truths insofar as it becomes an ideation site. Reaching this conclusion brings Badiou's theory of theatre up to date with his latest *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. Badiou advocates a theatre of ideas rather than a theatre of bodies and his theatre could not be more distant from Simon Shepherd's definition of theatre as "an art of bodies witnessed by bodies" (Shepherd: 2006, 73) However, whilst radically opposed to a theatre of bodies, Badiou's theatre remains a site which bears the traces of the passage of truths and points to a possible subjective embodiment of, or incorporation to, truths.

The paradox of the evental site, which "can only be recognised on the basis of what it does not present in the situation in which it is presented," evokes the paradoxical relationship between theatre and revolution. (BE, 192) For Badiou,

despite its political nature, the art of theatre is unable to show the revolution. While, for Badiou, theatre can only represent the State and operates only in its relation to the State, the paradox of theatre is to be at pains to show the demise of the State. According to Badiou, what is shown on stage in absentia is what the State fails or refuses to represent. It is in the recess of theatre, in the void bordering representation that politics occurs. For Badiou, what theatre shows is not the end of the State but on the contrary, its overwhelming presence. Badiou's theatre is in essence Brechtian: by showing its mode of operation, it points to an emptiness, a void, beyond it. For Badiou, Theatre operates an escalation of the representation orchestrated by the State in order to point to what is unrepresented within that representation, and consequently, what is voiceless or inexistant within representational politics. Thus, for Badiou, theatre points to politics as what eludes the omnipresent staticity of the State and aims to present the rare subject of politics. Theatre separates the political from true politics or unbinds politics from the State. This is what Badiou attempts to express in his plays. However, he firmly believes in the didactic nature of theatre and is thus confronted to the dilemma of having to represent the subjectivisable body of politics. In *L'Écharpe rouge*, Badiou represents the collective as a chorus of the defeated in order to present politics as movement from the standpoint of defeat, from the death of Marxism. For this he develops what I have described as a Baroque allegorical treatment of space in the text to attempt to transmit the precepts of emancipatory politics beyond the dead-end of their transmission. Badiou therefore avoids representing the political subject by giving centre stage to the anamorphic material site upon which politics unfold and confining the subjectivisable body of politics to the recess of representation. He goes even further in *Incident at Antioch* by staging the disappearance of Paula, the character who embodies the idea of true politics, that is, for Badiou, politics at a distance from the State. This play affirms thinking and restricted action as privileged modes of engaging with politics.

The allegorical and subtractive methods developed by Badiou in his playwriting to account for the movement of politics, follow the same trajectory of thought as Badiou's notion of the theatre-idea and pertain to the transitory nature of his theatre. In the same way, that his theatre theory insists upon the ephemeral nature of theatre, the fragility of thought and the elusive nature of truths, his plays attest to the rarity, indeed quasi inexistence, of politics. Badiou's theatre not only allows one to experience the restricted action, but also to experience inexistence, to inexist as a political subject of the inexistent revolution, in other words to experience the existence of what inexists within a given political situation, of what inexists for the State. However, theatre has the means to inscribe this inexistence upon the world. For example, as explained in chapter II, section 5, the use of the mask in the staging of the *Ahmed* tetralogy allows one to materially address the inexistence of Ahmed within the representation orchestrated by the State. At the same time, the mask provides a support, a hiatus, a trace upon which the incorporation process can occur. This is only possible if the mask is an opening towards the void, that is, if the actor wearing the mask abides to the ethics of play and leaves the mask hollow and deprived of substance. Through the mask as object, theatre provides a materiality to the idea of the migrant worker as the symbolic body of collective emancipation, which Badiou first mentioned in *Incident at Antioch*, then explored in the *Ahmed* tetralogy, and finally conceptualised as the theory of incorporation in his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*.

Against a theatre of presence and departing from a theatre of immanence, Badiou's theory of theatre and philosophy lays the groundwork for a theatre of inexistence.¹⁸⁷ This theatre already inexists and this thesis is a point of departure to follow its traces.

¹⁸⁷ Badiou derives the notion of 'inexistence' from Derrida's notion of *différance*. For Badiou, 'inexistence' is a materialist "worldly way of non-existing." (PkP, 125-144) See earlier note 71.

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