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Original Article

# The strange temporality of the subject: Badiou and Deleuze between the finite and the infinite

**Simon O'Sullivan**

Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK.

E-mail: s.o'sullivan@gold.ac.uk

**Abstract** This paper stages an encounter between the philosophical systems of Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze specifically as these relate to the production of subjectivity, or what I call the finite/infinite relation. I attempt to demonstrate that for Badiou a bar of sorts between the finite and the infinite remains determining, whereas for Deleuze – and specifically with his actual/virtual couplet – this bar no longer operates. The paper is at times quite technical in its excavation of the systems in question; however, the introduction and conclusion foreground what is at stake in this confrontation: a certain militant orientation to that which is beyond the world versus an ethical and experimental attitude that is located firmly within the world. *Subjectivity* (2009) 27, 155–171. doi:10.1057/sub.2009.5

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If the doors of perception were  
cleansed everything would appear  
to man as it is, infinite.  
William Blake

## Introduction

In this paper I want to work through Alain Badiou's theory of the subject as mapped out in his major philosophical work, *Being and Event*. Specifically, I am interested in the way in which the subject, as a figure of finitude, interacts, or does not, with the infinite, which, in Badiou's system determines them *as* subject. I want to then go on to explore this issue by briefly comparing Badiou with Gilles Deleuze, specifically in relation to the latter's major philosophical statement, *Difference and Repetition*. In general then,

this paper is concerned with what we might say is one of the oldest philosophical issues: is it possible for a finite subject to access the infinite? Or simply, is it possible to be in the world but not entirely of it?<sup>1</sup>

Before embarking, however, on what is at times a quite technical discussion, I want first to briefly introduce Badiou's (and, even more briefly, Deleuze's) philosophical systems, especially as they pertain to subjectivity, and say a word or two about what is at stake in the following encounter. There are dangers in such an undertaking: giving broad brushstrokes inevitably drastically reduces the complexity of the systems in question and threatens to introduce omissions and inaccuracies. Nevertheless, and especially for those readers more unfamiliar with the writings of these two philosophers, some kind of conceptual contextualization is required as a backdrop to the more detailed discussion that follows (and is intended to build on the introduction to Badiou's theory of the subject laid out in the editorial of the launch issue of *Subjectivity*). First then, Badiou. In *Being and Event* what we are offered is a radical and polemical account of the event's extra-ontological nature and the implications this has in producing a militant subjectivity. An event arrives unbidden from an 'elsewhere', impacting on a given situation that it is at odds with and in so doing producing a subject who thus seeks to transform the situation in terms of that which the event has, we might say, announced. This situation might be of a political nature (a society), an art world, a scientific paradigm – or simply an individual life. In each case there are a number of elements that are counted as belonging to specific situation. They are presented in the situation as it were. A further term, the encyclopaedia, names the set of knowledges about these elements. The subject – although this will be complexified below – is then that to whom an event happens and who crucially recognizes the importance of this event and consequently organizes their life differently and in fidelity to it, testing the different elements of their particular situation (through enquiries) against what this event has revealed. In fact, a subject only comes into existence as such through an event and through this fidelity (the subject, in Badiou's system, is then not the individual as such, nor, strictly speaking, the subject as constituted through language, discourse or even the symbolic). We have then three important terms here: the situation (or Being), the event (extra-Being) and the subject. A further crucial term, truth, names what we might call the impact of the event on the situation, in fact the way in which the event calls attention to that which is generic within the situation (what Badiou also calls the void). Hence the subject of fidelity can also be called a 'truth procedure', or a 'generic procedure', or even, to quote Badiou, 'any local configuration of a generic procedure from which a truth is supported' (Badiou, 2005a, p. 391). It might then be said that Badiou's system is specifically concerned with the relationship (or indeed non-relation) between a situation, an event, truth – and a subject. This involves a thinking through of ontology in terms of set theory, which alone, according to Badiou, is able to articulate accurately the relationship between the

four terms, crucially, with the work of Cantor and Cohen, allowing for proof of the ‘existence’ of a place outside ontology (from where, as it were, the event ‘arrives’). This ‘inconsistent multiplicity’, or simply the infinite, that always goes beyond any given situation, is in fact paradoxically also part of any given situation. Again, it is that which is generic to the situation, what Badiou calls the ‘generic set’ or the void (albeit the latter is necessarily effaced in the very constitution of any given situation).

Deleuze’s project, which again is difficult to sum up away from the details, might be characterized as an attempt to rethink ontology – Being – in terms of difference in itself or an ‘anoriginal’ multiplicity. In fact, we might say, more accurately, that Deleuze is interested in the relationship of the One and the Many, of univocity *and* multiplicity. In his book on Deleuze, Badiou himself situates Deleuze as *not* a true thinker of multiplicity but rather simply of the One, thus drastically reducing the complexity of Deleuze’s own position in order to set himself, Badiou, apart as *the* philosopher of multiplicity. Here is not the place to go into this debate fully, but what can be said is that Deleuze does indeed posit something he calls *the* plane of immanence – the plane of life as it were – although this is characterized by difference, by endless becomings or simply affect. Indeed, Deleuze’s ontology is one in which life is in constant movement, characterized by connections and disjunctions, or simply flows.

The implications of each of the two systems are a different attitude towards what an event is, where it ‘comes’ from and thus what a situation or world might be – and what being an active and creative subject in that world entails (although, as we shall see, Deleuze’s philosophy is less concerned with instigating a subject as such, but might be thought rather as an attempt to dismantle any given subjectivity). For Deleuze, we might say that events are very much in the world (there is, as it were, nowhere else). Events name, to be reductive, the passage from that which merely has potential to that which has a full presence. In Deleuzian terms this is the passage from the virtual to the actual. Crucially, and as is often pointed out, the virtual does not lack existence for Deleuze, but only needs to be actualized. Again, put very simply, for Deleuze, everything is already here. There is no ‘other’ place from which an event arrives. Deleuze’s virtual might appear similar to Badiou’s inconsistent multiplicity, but, as I hope to demonstrate below, the latter, despite Badiou’s own words, is tied to a transcendent schema of sorts whereas Deleuze’s virtual names a pure immanence. The implications for the subject are important in all this. For Badiou, to pre-empt some of the argument below, the subject is always a subject of an event that essentially is irreducible and outside their world as subject. Such events are very rare and only happen in specific realms. For Deleuze, events might be thought of as common, there being a constant reciprocal relationship between the virtual and the actual. In fact, this relationship, or movement, means a subject, if this is still a useful term, is always in a state of becoming.

As I hope will also be clear from my discussion below this implies two different relationships of the finite (the subject) to the infinite (that which is 'outside' the subject). Again, to pre-empt somewhat my conclusions, Badiou's system, it seems to me, produces a subject forever barred from the very truth that the event announces. Such a subject is then constituted by faith (and a logic of deferral). For Deleuze by contrast, and as I suggested above, it is those events that dismantle subjectivity that are important. Those molecular becomings Guattari might call them, which allow an 'individual' to 'become-world' as it . A brief word about the political implications of this difference. For Badiou the subject is always that which is in militant fidelity to an event that has constituted them, but from which they are, to a certain extent, distant; hence, the importance of confidence or faith in Badiou's account of the subject (Badiou's typical example being his own subjectivity produced in the crucible of 1968 and in a continuing fidelity to that event). For Deleuze the question of a politics is more subtle, but what we can say, bearing the collaborations with Guattari particularly in mind, is that Deleuze's system has the ethical aim of producing a non fascist state of being, when the latter is thought as one that escapes fixity, hierarchy, and, to a certain extent, the categories and coordinates (and habits) of 'being human'. Hence, the project of schizoanalysis – and the crucial concepts of becoming and the 'Body without Organs' – in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which precisely diagram the different kinds of relations an individual might have with the virtual, or simply the 'Outside' to themselves.<sup>2</sup> Enough of an introduction, which, although violently reductive, has, I hope, provided at least some context and rationale for the more philosophical and technical discussion that follows.

## Badiou

In Meditation 35 of *Being and Event*, on the 'Theory of the Subject', Badiou outlines what, for him, the subject is not (see pp. 391–392). First, a subject is not a substance, or not 'counted as one in a situation' (a subject is not part of what Badiou calls the encyclopaedia (the system of knowledges concerned with any given situation)); second, a subject is not a void point (this being the name reserved for Being and thus, as such, strictly speaking, an ontological concept (the subject is not ontological)); third, a subject is not 'the organization of a sense of experience' (which would necessarily designate presentation, which the subject is not involved in); fourth, a subject is 'rare' (inasmuch as it is at a 'diagonal of the situation'); fifth, a subject is what Badiou calls 'qualified' (meaning that its particular and singular nature depends on the regime it operates within); and sixth, perhaps most crucially, a subject is not a result or an origin (but again, precisely, 'the *local* status of a procedure').

The subject, for Badiou, might then be better thought of as an intention or an orientation and movement of sorts. A state of being (or non-being) that is always in process. Subjectivization, in a nod to Lacan, is the name Badiou gives for what we might call this ‘becoming subject’. In Badiou’s system, subjectivization faces in two directions: towards the intervention, or event, that calls the subject into being, and towards the situation within which the subject is at least partially located. The event, crucially, is irreducible (and, as we shall see, in some senses irreconcilable) to the situation as is, whereas the subject, although ‘of’ the event is also very much ‘of’ the situation. In fact, although a subject is not a ‘count-as-one’ in a given situation, it *is* a form of counting in that it counts that which is connected to the name of the event (that is, its counting is fidelity) (Badiou, 2005a, p. 393). Subjectivization is then a rule of sorts that ‘subsumes the Two’ (that is, the event and the situation) under a proper name, which, strictly speaking, is ‘in-significant’ (or, simply, lacks signification in the situation as is) (Badiou, 2005a, p. 393). Subjectivization is, in this sense, the ‘occurrence of the void’ within any given situation (Badiou, 2005a, p. 393). We might also understand subjectivization as a resolution of a problem (that of the events eruption within a situation). A resolution in process as it were.

Subjectivization might also be thought as a test. Starting from the evental site (that is, the place in the situation where the event ‘occurred’), subjectivization tests each essentially random encounter that comes after the event to enquire whether it is faithfully connected to the name of the event (Badiou, 2005a, p. 394). (In *Being and Event*, this naming of the event is constitutive of it inasmuch as it is a declaration that an event ‘has happened’). Subjectivization is then this moving through, and judging of, the situation from the perspective of the event. This procedure, that involves the production of a further situation that contains those elements of the previous situation that are positively connected to the event, is fidelity.

Crucially, inasmuch as every subject is the local configuration of a generic procedure, the former is necessarily finite and thus, as I have already mentioned, a part of the situation it finds itself within (that is to say the subject *is* a part of the encyclopaedia, a part of knowledge, at least in one sense). The object of the enquiries, on the other hand, is infinite (the enquiries being directed towards the generic, or simply, truth). Hence, we get the odd temporality of subjectivization in that it never knows in advance what might count as being connected to the event. In fact, there is no end to this not knowing; the enquiries are themselves potentially infinite in number. There can be no conclusion to the process. This subjectivization, or truth procedure, is opposed to the retroactive, or properly historical function of knowledge that counts the enquiries after they have happened (them now being of a finite number). Put simply, knowledge involves no genuine encounters. It is in this sense that the subject’s trajectory is ‘militant and aleatoric’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 395). The subject then is separated from

knowledge 'by chance' (or, simply by the random encounters of a life post event) (Badiou, 2005a, p. 396).

A further strange relationship to truth also defines the subject, for as a 'local moment of the truth' the subject does not coincide with truth in general that is infinite. The subject is, in fact, barred from this truth that works as motivation for that very subject (the truth is always 'to come' in this sense). As such, the subject's relation to truth is invariably one of belief, a belief that occurs in the form of a kind of knowledge, although one that is distinct from the encyclopaedia itself (or, even, presumably, from the future knowledge of positive encounters post event). Badiou names this 'knowing belief', '*confidence*' (2005a, p. 397). Confidence, which is really the confidence of the subject in itself (that is, in its own trajectory and so on), sustains the enquiries, or, in Badiou's terms, is the idea that the gathering of the chance encounters under the banner of fidelity is not made in vain (Badiou, 2005a, p. 397). Faith, we might say, is the very *modus operandi* of the subject.

A paradox of sorts then occurs here, for the subject is plainly a part of the situation *and* a part of the encyclopaedia of the situation (after all, we might say, we are all *known* beings – at least to some extent – in the world). How then to access this 'newness' that the event heralds? How to discern that which, by its very definition, is indiscernible within a situation? Nomination, or naming is for Badiou, in *Being and Event*, the means or method by which the subject marks out this new territory. However, these names are necessarily also names within a situation (how could they be otherwise?). As such, the crucial matter here is what a name *refers* to, again, precisely, an indiscernible part of the situation. As such the veracity of such names, or of this 'subject-language', can only be said to have been proved once the truth that they name has come about. These names have no reference in the situation as is, but in fact 'designate terms which "will have been" presented in a *new* situation' that comes about through the very operation of the subject and their fidelity (Badiou, 2005a, p. 398). Hence Badiou's remark, echoing Lacan: 'A subject always declares meaning in the future anterior' (2005a, p. 400). It is in this sense that the subject 'uses names to make hypotheses about the truth' (of which it is itself a local moment) (Badiou, 2005a, p. 399). The subject then is both the real, in the sense of being an active, militant enquirer *and* the hypothesis that the enquiry in question will bring about a new situation or 'some newness into presentation' (Badiou, 2005a, p. 399).

'Forcing' is Badiou's term (taken from Cantor) for this peculiar future-orientated gesture. Forcing is the making of a statement that can only be verified in a future situation, one which the forcing itself helps bring about. As the end of Meditation 31 demonstrates, it is a truth (in the guise of a local operator of fidelity, that is to say, a subject) that 'forces the situation to accommodate it' (Badiou, 2005a, p. 342). Such a generic truth however, inasmuch as it is indiscernible within a situation can, as I mentioned above, only be *believed* in by

the subject in question: ‘insofar as if it exists, it is outside the world’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 373). Hence, again, the importance of faith, *but also* of the creative practice of naming that which has not yet come to pass (it is in this sense that all subject-languages are necessarily poetic, or simply, that the name creates the thing). The subject is then the very operator of truth inasmuch as they produce the latter albeit without ever knowing it.

In fact, although the forcing statements are indeed hypotheses about a yet-to-come, nevertheless the subject can decide which statements at least ‘have a chance of being veridical’ in the situation from those that do not (Badiou, 2005a, p. 406). This can be proved mathematically (and Badiou does this in the difficult Meditation 36), but in non-mathematical language it is simply because of the subject’s privileged relation to the truth, or the indiscernible (via the event that has ‘happened’ to, and thus produced, the subject in question). As Badiou remarks, a subject ‘*knows* – with regard to the situation to come, thus from the standpoint of the indiscernible – that these statements are either certainly wrong, or possibly veridical but suspended from the will-have-taken-place of *one* positive enquiry’ (2005a, p. 404). In fact, this ability to tell the difference between those statements that can be decided upon from those that cannot is the very definition of the subject as ‘that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of the indiscernible. Or, that which forces a veracity, according to the suspense of a truth’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 407).

A subject then ‘is at the intersection, via its language, of knowledge and truth’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 406). It is suspended from the indiscernible inasmuch as it is finite (on this side of the bar as it were), *but* through forcing is able to ascertain the ‘veracity of a statement of its language for a situation to-come’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 406). A subject, suspended as they are from the very truth of which they are the enquirer, nevertheless, through forcing, can ‘authorize partial descriptions of the universe to come in which a truth supplements a situation’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 406). We might say that the subject, as somehow part of the truth that is to come, can evaluate statements about this future (again, a subject is ‘that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of an indiscernible’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 407)). Put simply, the subject is a knot of sorts between the present within which it is situated and a future to come (that in fact the subject will have contributed to bringing about). Or, put another way, the subject – in its function of forcing – is a fragment of a future hurled back in order to bring that future into being. Forcing, we might say, is a peculiar future orientation within the present; a technology of prophecy.

In Badiou’s work post *Being and Event* this notion of a single subject to truth is extended and complexified somewhat, replaced by a subjective space or matrix with five different kinds of subject, or five different reactions/responses to the event: the hysteric, the master, the reactionary, the figure of obscurity, and the figure of a second, or returned fidelity (Hallward, 2003, pp. 144–148). Despite this complexification the fundamental question of the subject’s

relationship to truth remains: is there fidelity to the event or not? In terms of the strange temporality of the subject the future orientation also remains in place. The subject remains a figure that lives a problem, namely, how to be both in the present, but also produce the new. Forcing, like faith, is then the name of the subject's very *modus operandi*, its function in relation to the situation to come.

I mentioned above that this technique of forcing can be proved mathematically. In fact, crucially for Badiou's whole system, the very existence of a generic set, that is, truth, can also be proved. As Badiou remarks in Meditation 33, Cohen's 'revolution' in 1963 demonstrates that 'there exists an ontological concept of the indiscernible multiple', and 'Consequently, ontology is compatible with the philosophy of truth (Badiou, 2005a, p. 355). It *authorizes* the existence of the result-multiple of the generic procedure suspended from the event, despite it being indiscernible within the situation within which it is inscribed' (Badiou, 2005a, p. 355). As such, for the ontologist (read mathematician) it is a matter of fact (at least, if one follows the maths). For an inhabitant of a given situation however, the existence of such a generic set, that is, of truth, can, again, only be a matter of faith. Indeed, it is the *decision* to *believe* (and in fact, faith would always seem to be the result of a decision) in the latter's existence that brings it about (and defines the subject's own existence). The crucial issue, again, is that the subject cannot know this truth that they themselves are producing. The subject, as finite being, as 'captured' in knowledge/ the encyclopaedia, that is, the situation, is barred from the infinite that nevertheless has moved and motivates them. The series of investigations – the truth procedure – is in this sense, and as I mentioned above, infinite. There is no arrival at the truth, only the production of it as it were. The subject is then inevitably defined by a certain tenacity in this respect and truth is characterized by its very deferral, which is to say, again, a bar is in place between the finite and the infinite.

It is perhaps worth making a brief digression from *Being and Event* at this point to some other – we might say more minor – writings of Badiou in which he tracks through the various truth procedures as they occur in the four realms or 'conditions' (of philosophy): art, politics, love and science. In each case this strange temporal predicament, or logic of a bar between finitude and the infinite remains. Thus, in the realm of art, we have Badiou's assertion that:

the essence of the question [*what is the pertinent unity of what is called 'art'*] has to do with the problem of the relation between the infinite and the finite. A truth is an infinite multiplicity ... A work of art is essentially finite. (Badiou, 2005b, p. 10)

Art then is 'the production of an infinite subjective series through the finite means of a material subtraction' (Badiou, 2004). Art's domain, properly speaking, and its first term, is the finite. Politics, on the other hand begins with



the infinite inasmuch as it is directed to the all, to the universal. The figure of this equality is the 1. Hence, the political procedure ‘proceeds from the infinite to the 1’ (Badiou, 2005c, p. 151). We might say, again, that the infinite – the generic – is the background, the cause, *but also* the goal (ever receding) of the political intervention. As Badiou remarks in the same essay the ‘amorous procedure’, or love, ‘proceeds from the 1 to the infinite through the mediation of the two’ (and this is why, ‘love begins where politics ends’) (Badiou, 2005c, p. 151). Here, again, the infinite is the target, although it is the two that allows for progression towards this (and, crucially, the amorous couple are barred from that very infinite truth that they are in a sense blindly producing). As Badiou remarks in his major statement on love as an event: ‘the experience of the loving subject, which is the matter of love, does not constitute any knowledge (*savoir*) of love’ (Badiou, 1996, p. 40). Finally, science, or the ‘matheme’, as paradigmatically the case with Cantor, demonstrates that infinity, or the generic, does indeed exist – and further, that there are different sizes of infinity. Nevertheless, this knowledge is necessarily abstract, not available to the subject itself. To end this digression, it is worth noting, as the essay from *Metapolitics* reminds us, that although truths are indeed produced within different regimes (by specific kinds of subjects), truth is itself universal: ‘... truth as such is subtracted from every position. A truth is *transpositional*. It is, moreover, the only thing which is, and this is why a truth will be called generic’ (Badiou, 2005c, p. 42). Truth then, as generic, and by Badiou’s definition, although producing a subject is also forever barred from that subject.

We are not so far from Jacques Derrida here. Certainly, in the subject’s experience, truth might be positioned as an absent presence, having an effect on the subject but effectively barred from it. (In passing, it is also worth remarking that Badiou’s ‘concept’ of inconsistent multiplicity seems to have much in common with Derrida’s *différance*, understood as that system of differences and deferrals which is the condition for knowledge but not ‘of’ it as it were.) Forcing is Badiou’s bridge to this ‘other place’, *but*, and this seems to me crucial, the subject is always inevitably going to be barred from the latter – the new/the truth – that they in some sense summon into being. When ‘it’ ‘arrives’, ‘it’ will, by definition, be ‘of’ the situation (that is to say will have become knowledge). The truth procedure will have had to move on as it were. We might say that this is the strange temporal predicament of the subject within Badiou’s system; they are destined to a certain restlessness, and, I think, to a certain tragedy – forever barred from the very thing they have faith in.

In a sense then there are two key figures here: the ontologist (and here the last condition of philosophy mentioned above, science, seems to merge with philosophy *per se*, at least insofar as philosophy is, according to Badiou, mathematics) who *knows* (post Cantor) that the indiscernible exists and the subject who can only *believe* in its existence. The first is barred from

experiencing this truth (the operation of proof is necessarily abstracted from the situation). The second is also barred from direct experience because of their very situatedness within that situation, their very finiteness. If the first is too far removed from the situation, the second is too much within it. In Badiou's system it is philosophy that ontologizes and the scientist, activist, lover or artist that believes (although it would seem logical and pragmatic that the former subjects might read the philosophy in order to 'prop' up their faith as it were). At any rate, the problem seems to be an either/or: either in the world and thus no vantage point on it or outside the world and thus no experience of it.

In fact, in the seminar 'The Subject of Art', and in anticipation of *The Logic of Worlds*, Badiou introduces the notion of a 'world' (of existing, or appearing), it seems to me, as a way of dealing with this problem. A subject is now 'between an event and the world', or more precisely, is the 'consequence of an event in a world' (Badiou, 2005d). Two further terms are introduced to complexify this further: the 'trace' (of the event – what the latter 'leaves behind' as it were after its appearance/disappearance) and the 'body' (Badiou, 2005d). A subject, even more specifically, is the 'distance' between a trace and a body. Crucially, a subject is not reducible to the body (that is, part of the world) or separable from it (that is, identified solely with the event). In fact, these two latter positions, Badiou argues, result in the two dominant subjective paradigms of today: 'enjoyment' (or, death in life) and 'sacrifice' (or, life in death) (Badiou, 2005d). Badiou, of course, is interested in mapping out a third paradigm between these two. We might say that this third way involves being somehow in the world but not entirely of it. Importantly, in this seminar at any rate, it is towards art that Badiou turns for the exploration of this subject. Art is specifically involved in the invention of new forms or, we might say, and as we saw above, in the invention of new relations between the infinite and the finite. (Hence, we might point out in passing, the crucial importance of art for any politics today). In the seminar, as elsewhere, Badiou claims, that this infinite is not necessarily transcendent but can be thought of as a plenitude of the world albeit a world that is mostly indiscernible. More crucial, I would argue, is deciding what this relation between the finite and the infinite actually involves. Is it in fact a relation at all? Or, following my reading of *Being and Event*, is it a non-relation – a place of non-passage (destining the subject to be forever cut off, forsaken and so on)?

In fact, in an interview with Peter Hallward, Badiou himself specifies that it is this relation – that he hitherto positioned as a non-relation – between the finite and the infinite that he is interested in revisiting in his sequel to *Being and Event* (Badiou, 2003a). In the latter work, essentially, there is a bar. As we have seen the subject is closed off from the infinite that it is the operator of. *The Logic of Worlds*, Badiou remarks, will be concerned with attempting to figure a 'new' dialectic (following Hegel's idea of 'absolute knowledge') between the

two, played out in the notion of consequences (Badiou, 2003a, p. 132).  
To quote Badiou:

I demonstrate that the subject is identified by a type of marking, a post-evental effect, whose system of operation is infinite. In other words, subjective capacity really is infinite, once the subject is constituted under the mark of the event. Why? Because subjective capacity amounts to drawing the consequences of a change, of a new situation, and if this change is evental [*evenemential*] then its consequences are infinite.  
(Badiou, 2003a, p. 132)

It is not entirely clear how this notion of consequences differs from fidelity, and thus how, exactly, the bar has been negotiated. In fact, the bar seems an inevitable element of Badiou's system, which captures the subject in the temporal predicament that we might name here, post Kant, as 'modernity'.

## Deleuze

We are now in a position to think the differences between Badiou and Deleuze in terms of the infinite/finite relation, that is, the subject. Put simply, Badiou, in the formulation of his thesis on the subject, remains tied to a Lacanian schema. His inconsistent multiplicity or 'generic set' that moves the subject, and indeed produces the latter (via an event) is nonetheless barred from that very subject. It is the real, inaccessible by definition from within a situation (the symbolic), but exerting a pressure (that is, the appearing/disappearing event) on that situation.

It seems to me that Deleuze's actual/virtual couplet, borrowed from Henri Bergson, is, among other things, an attempt to remove this bar, which, we might say really goes back to Kant (noumena/phenomena) and haunts most post-Kantian thought, paradigmatically with Lacan, and especially with those that follow in his wake. In fact, for Deleuze there is not a bar so much as a continuum of sorts between his virtual and actual. It is not that these two are not distinct realms, indeed they are different in kind, but rather that the line between them is flexible and porous. Virtualities are actualized depending on the technologies involved, from bodies to cinema, and further, there is a relation of reciprocity between the two. The crucial point here is that the virtual is as real as the actual (lacking only its actualization).

In *Difference and Repetition*, in the chapter on 'Repetition in Itself' and following Bergson, this virtuality is figured as time and specifically the second passive synthesis of a 'pure past' that coexists with the present. In fact, the present moment (or, experience) is 'of' this past, which is really a sort of primary ontological material, the background to the first passive synthesis (the

contracting habits that define the organism). To quote Deleuze: 'The present exists, but the past alone insists and provides the element in which the present passes and successive presents are telescoped' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 85). Following Bergson's thesis in *Matter and Memory*, it is through the gap between stimulus and reaction that this past – or virtuality – becomes, as it were, accessible. Put simply this gap, and the virtuality it implies, defines our ability to creatively respond to a situation rather than simply habitually react. It is not so much that man, as located with a present, is barred from the infinite – the pure past – of which they are part, more that they are subtracted from the latter (in Bergson's terms, man is a centre of indetermination, a kind of hole in the universe). The stakes then become altered: it is no longer a question of how to overcome a certain barrier or bar (or indeed how to heal a split) but rather how to open up to the world, or to a certain virtuality.<sup>3</sup>

The crucial factor here is difference. Difference unites the Bergsonian schema in both *Creative Evolution* and *Matter and Memory*. As Deleuze remarks, commenting on Bergson's famous cone of memory, both involve:

the account of a gigantic memory, a multiplicity formed by the virtual co-existence of all the sections of the 'cone', each section being the repetition of all the others ... the actualisation of this mnemonic virtual appears to take the form of the creation of divergent lines, each of which corresponds to a virtual section, and represents a manner of solving a problem ... Difference and repetition in the virtual ground the movement of actualisation, of differentiation as creation.

(Deleuze, 1995, p. 212)

The actualization of the virtual, whether in evolution as a whole or in a single organism such as man, involves differentiation or the production of difference through repetition. We can then further nail the difference between Deleuze and Badiou. Whereas Deleuze's system allows for the actualization of the virtual via differentiation (the production of newness) for Badiou, despite the positing of inconsistent multiplicity as a kind of ground, we are necessarily barred from the latter. Or rather, it remains not a virtual to be actualized but a possible that needs to be realized. A possible, which, in as much as it is defined in the concept, remains merely a mirror image of the real that it doubles. In the case of Badiou, this possible is posited and 'proved' by the ontologist but deferred in the subject's experience.

Here is Deleuze on this crucial difference:

The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a 'realisation'. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is

actualisation. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 211)

The difference between Deleuze's virtual and Badiou's inconsistent multiplicity is indeed not just a verbal dispute – but a question of existence itself, or, we might say, of the different subjects they imply. For Deleuze, the subject – or simply the human brain body configuration – is a subtraction from the plenitude of the world, a veritable centre of action/indetermination. Crucially, such a body can, via various technologies, open up further to the world – or actualize further virtualities via difference. For Badiou, on the other hand, the subject is caught, limited, within a situation that defines them as subject. Certainly, the situation itself is premised on the generic, the indiscernible, or simply, the void *but* the subject is barred from this by definition. Crucially, whereas it is the body that operates as Deleuze's privileged actualizing machine, that allows passage 'into' the virtual as it were, for Badiou the body, as finite matter, is the very name of this bar to the infinite (hence Badiou's interest in a specifically non-corporeal system on which to base his philosophy on, that is, mathematics).

Badiou's recourse to forcing is, it seems to me, a response of sorts to Deleuze's theory of actualization and perhaps inevitably it involves a nominalism; language, following Lacan, being that which defines a subject but also strictly speaking being that by which a subject 'frees' themselves (the substitution of signifiers releasing the neurotic from their impasse). Language, for Badiou, becomes the privileged medium of the subject just as mathematics is the privileged medium of the ontologist. For Deleuze on the other hand it is not just a question of nominalism and language but also, as his last essay reminds us, of 'a life' (see Deleuze, 2001). We might say, simply of affect. Within Badiou's system it is difficult to see how a body might experience this life, or, if they do, what relevance this might have. Indeed, the body, as part of the situation by definition, is that which must be left behind – evacuated – in order that an individual *becomes* subject. Put bluntly, affect has no place in Badiou's system and is the lynch pin of Deleuze's.

Deleuze continues in *Difference and Repetition*:

Every time we pose the question in terms of the real and the possible, we are forced to conceive of existence as a brute eruption, a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing. What difference can there be between the existent and the non-existent if the non-existent is already possible, already included in the concept and having all the characteristics that the concept confers upon it as a possibility? Existence is *the same* as but outside the concept. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 211)

Badiou's existence – any given 'situation' – is precisely the result of an eruption, a leap. There is a barrier between it and inconsistent multiplicity that can only

be negotiated by a jump, or, problematically, by forcing. In fact, this inconsistent multiplicity, the generic, is merely the double of the situation that posits it as possible (it is only lacking reality). There is a kind of sleight of hand here, a reversal, in that the very thing posited as outside the real is produced by the real. Inconsistent multiplicity, we might say, is a projection of and from existing multiplicity.

As Deleuze goes on to remark, a key implication of this is that the logic of the possible refers to 'the form of identity in the concept' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 211); it doubles 'like with like' (it is precisely a logic of the same) (Deleuze, 1995, p. 212). 'The actualization of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 212). Importantly, the virtual then is itself a realm of difference in itself, difference undefined by the concept as it were: chaosmosis, pure multiplicity. Further, this ground is not really a ground but more an *ungrounding*. As Deleuze remarks in the chapter on 'Difference in Itself': 'By "ungrounding" we should understand the freedom of the non-mediated ground, the discovery of a ground behind every other ground, the immediate reflection of the formless ...' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 67). Importantly, Nietzsche's eternal return (in its 'superior, and secret form') is invoked here as the very – *bodily* – means of this discovery (Deleuze, 1995, p. 67).

It is then, finally, the body – however this is thought – that becomes, for Deleuze, the very means of experimentation and transformation for a given 'subject'. Deleuze's identification of Spinoza as the prince of immanence and himself as a Spinozist before anything else is an affirmation of this corporeality (to recall the oft quoted phrase of Spinoza: 'For no one has thus far determined the power of the body, that is, no one has yet been taught by experience what the body can do merely by the laws of nature ... .' (Spinoza, 1989, p. 87)). For Deleuze, it is this bodily adventure, this passage from the virtual to the actual (and from the actual to the virtual) that defines life in general, and any specific life when it is truly lived. There is no bar in this schema, although there might be an edge, or several, where the processes of actualization actually take place (this edge being the very place of the 'individual'). As I suggested in my introduction this philosophical schema is given flesh in the collaborations with Guattari, where it is also given a political urgency of sorts and a pragmatics; to always live part of one's life away from the strata that constitutes one as a 'subject', to always be open to the non-human becomings that populate the world. In such a mapping of the world the 'subject' can in fact be figured as yet one more fetter placed on a creative and vital existence. The 'subject' can become, in fact, the very bar to this non-organic life.

## Conclusion

In conclusion then we might map out two diagrams of the subject/non-subject, or of the relationship of the finite with the infinite. (1) Badiou's couple of the

ontologist and the subject; the first, too far removed from the world is necessarily barred from experiencing the infinite although able to prove its existence, the second, very firmly in the world as finite being, is barred from the infinite though in fact producing it. (2) Deleuze's actual/virtual couplet that allows us a way in to think the co-presence of the finite and the infinite (in as much as they can be reconfigured as the actual and the virtual) and, crucially, demonstrates the continuous passage between the two, their reciprocal determination.

We might care to situate these two philosophical attitudes to the subject, or the finite/infinite relationship, in a more straightforward, if reductive way (if only to counter balance the rather more abstract thinking through of the same terrain above). Whereas for Badiou the subject is that which goes beyond what we might call the animal state of our being in the world, for Deleuze it is precisely this animal state – or becoming with the world – that is foregrounded. This is a privileging of a certain horizontality (becoming-animal) as opposed to Badiou's verticality (becoming-subject). In fact, it is this transversality, with an attendant emphasis on experimentation, which, for, Deleuze, defines a creative and ethical life. At a more rarefied level the difference might be summed up by the attitude each philosopher has to the Christian mystic St Paul. For Badiou, the latter, in his fidelity and faith to an event beyond the world, Christ's resurrection, is Badiou's pre-eminent model of a militant subject (see Badiou, 2003b). For Deleuze on the other hand, and following Nietzsche, it is St Paul who erects a transcendent schema of judgement on the back of Christ's crucifixion/resurrection, instigating and managing a priesthood and the production of 'Christian subjects' (see Deleuze, 1998). For Badiou then it is St Paul's appeal to something beyond the world that marks his importance; for Deleuze it is precisely the same orientation that marks a betrayal of immanence.

## About the Author

Simon O'Sullivan is Senior Lecturer in Art History/Visual Culture at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He is the author of various articles and essays on Deleuze, Modern/Contemporary art and aesthetics, and the book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation* (Palgrave, 2005). He is also the editor, with Stephen Zepke, of both *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New* (Continuum, 2008) and *Contemporary Art* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009). He is currently working on a second monograph on *The Production of Subjectivity*.

## Notes

- 1 The present paper is part of a larger project concerned with what Felix Guattari calls 'the production of subjectivity' in which I explore various theorizations of the subject specifically in relation to time. Alongside the present Badiou/Deleuze encounter and a more general Guattarian trajectory, the

intended book will examine the writings on aesthetics and ethics of Michel Foucault (technologies of the self) and Jacques Lacan (the ethics of psychoanalysis). It is perhaps worth mentioning here that the urgency of such a project follows from what Antonio Negri, following Marx, names the 'total subsumption of capital', or simply capitalism's colonization of all the spaces of being and increasingly of lived-time itself (see Negri, 2003).

- 2 My paper, 'Pragmatics for the Production of Subjectivity: Time for Probe-heads' (2006) involves a thinking through of one such concept in these terms.
- 3 It is to Deleuze's other key precursor, Spinoza, that we can look for just such a programme (precisely the *Ethics*). This will be the subject of a further essay but it is perhaps worth noting here two important differences to Badiou. First, with Spinoza, the infinite can indeed be prepared for (the conditions of its arising can be put in place albeit the arising itself is fundamentally 'other' to any efforts of the subject). This preparation, the Second Kind of Knowledge, being the key material of the *Ethics*. Second, the infinite can itself be experienced directly – this being Spinoza's Third Kind of Knowledge, an experience of beatitude, of 'becoming-world', that takes place outside space-time under the species of eternity. It seems to me that Badiou misses both these points in his reading of Spinoza in *Being and Event*. We might also look once more to Bergson here, and to his account of mystical experience, for although in *Matter and Memory* Bergson only posits, as a demonstrative technique, the existence of a someone who 'experiences' the pure image and the pure past (that is, a pure virtuality), in *The Two Sources of Religion and Magic* he describes the mystic as precisely someone who inhabits the gap (in this case in-between the fixed rituals of society) and thus accesses the infinite. This insight might only be temporary but nevertheless it can transform the subject who experiences it and indeed the world in which such a mystic actualizes. The important point here – as it is with Spinoza – is that the subject, as finite being, can experience the infinite *directly* even if only temporarily. Finally, in relation to the notion of preparation or a programme of ethics, we might also look to the late writings of Michel Foucault on 'the care of the self' in which Foucault explicates the ancient Greek understanding of the relationship between truth and subjectivity, namely that the former is only accessible to a subject who has worked on and *transformed* themselves – which is to say truth must very definitely be prepared for (see Foucault's *The Hermeneutic of the Subject*). For more on Foucault, Spinoza and Bergson in relation to the production of subjectivity, see my essay, 'The Production of the New and the Care of the Self' (2008).

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