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Alain Badiou, the Communist Horizon Beyond Violence: An Exploratory Look at the 21st Century

*Alain Badiou, el horizonte comunista más allá de la violencia:
una mirada exploratoria al siglo XXI*

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Abstract

This research paper examines the work of philosopher Alain Badiou and his analysis of 20th-century violence. The author argues that the last century was marked by violence and destruction, from world wars to extermination camps and state crimes. Badiou claims that this violence stems from a passion for the real, a quest to transform existing reality and create a new world. However, this passion clashes with reality itself, creating an irreducible difference between the real and constructed reality. This difference is what allows us to understand the phenomenon of violence. The passion for the real seeks to purify it and unmask the superficiality of reality, but it can never fully achieve its goal. Furthermore, this passion for the real creates constant mistrust of semblances, leading to suspicion and persecution. The totalitarian violence of the 20th century arises from this infinite suspicion directed towards semblances. The article explores in detail the relationship between the passion for the real, violence, and the distance between the real and semblances.

Keywords: violence, 20th century, destruction, totalitarianism, reality.

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Resumen

Este artículo examina el trabajo del filósofo Alain Badiou y su análisis sobre la violencia del siglo XX. El autor argumenta que el siglo pasado estuvo marcado por la violencia y la destrucción, desde las guerras mundiales hasta los campos de exterminio y los crímenes estatales. Badiou sostiene que esta violencia se debe a la pasión por lo real, una búsqueda de transformar la realidad existente y crear un nuevo mundo. Sin embargo, esta pasión choca con la realidad misma, lo que genera una diferencia irreducible entre lo real y la realidad construida. Esta diferencia es lo que permite comprender el fenómeno de la violencia. La pasión por lo real busca purificarlo y desenmascarar la superficialidad de la realidad, pero nunca puede alcanzar completamente su objetivo. Además, esta pasión por lo real crea una desconfianza constante hacia los semblantes, generando sospechas y persecuciones. La violencia totalitaria del siglo XX surge de esta infinita sospecha dirigida hacia los semblantes. El artículo explora en detalle la relación entre la pasión por lo real, la violencia y la distancia entre el real y los semblantes.

Palabras clave: violencia, siglo XX, destrucción, totalitarismo, realidad.

By Way of Introduction

In the 20th century, what [Eric Hobsbawm \(1998\)](#) calls the “short 20th century” qualitatively expanded from 1914 to 1990 and it develops in three stages. The first of these stages is the fall of the civilizational hegemony of 19th-century Europe, which began catastrophically in 1914 and lasted until the end of the Second World War. The second stage comprises a period of 25 to 30 years characterized by an accelerated improvement in the living conditions for a large part of the population. And the third stage is marked by the progressive defeat of the socialist project leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991.

The 20th century—the “European 20th century” as some Latin American decolonial thinkers would perhaps rightly object, since the 20th century can be read from another lens for our continent ([Grosfoguel, 2013](#); [Vitale, 1998](#); [Zanatta, 2012](#))—was a century loaded with violence, as [Badiou \(2005\)](#) will rightly affirm, whose perspective we will adopt. A short century which, for [Enzo Traverso \(2012, 2018a\)](#), culminated with the defeat of the socialist camp as well as the new liberal hegemony which, upon gazing at its own ruinous past in Auschwitz, could not avoid a heartbreaking skepticism reminding itself of the gulag in the face of utopian irruptions.

For [Bernhard Giesen \(2001\)](#), the new liberal hegemony generated a new protagonist for historical facts in the West and its zone of influence, which displaced the heroic narration of national deeds and put in its place the victims-victimizers dyad that generates at least three effects in our opinion. First, all political projects were equated by the (real) suffering of those who were victims of those projects, so that Stalin became the same as Hitler ([Zhurzhenko, 2012](#)).

Secondly, the people’s resistance tended to be erased in favor of the new protagonists, giving more value to, for example, the concentration camps than to the resistance of the Warsaw ghetto in Poland; displacing and erasing partisan militancy in Italy by anonymous deaths; or, in the case of Chile, giving greater relevance to the violations of human rights than to the experiences of popular resistance as in the instance of Pinochet’s dictatorship ([Goicovic, 2004, 2006](#)).

Thirdly, the new liberal hegemony dealt a substantial defeat against the political currents within the socialist horizon that once opposed liberalism. And as



Maurizio Lazzarato (2022; Alliez & Lazzarato, 2021) states the identification with the victims and the aversion to any possibility of being identified as victimizers were such that war ceased to be an object of reflection as an instrument for social transformations, thus becoming the exclusive subject of study for the high commands of states, most of them liberal.

However, it is no less true that turning the gaze on the victims also made possible other types of reflection on social processes and on the brutality that befell humanity in that short and bloody European 20th century (Traverso, 2018b).

It is within these reflections—which far from making an elegy of the victim-victimizer dyad as a historical frame, instead seeks to understand it—that we can situate part of Badiou's work, which will be analyzed above all in the first section that proceeds from the concept of *passion du réel* as its object, its forms, and its limits will be scrutinized to show the contribution that the author makes to address this problem.

But the short (European) 20th century—which gave in to the liberal project that today is decidedly deployed in its neoliberal stage—did not overcome the contradictions that engendered the violence that characterized it and the violence did not end despite of the fall of the socialist bloc which hastily led Francis Fukuyama (2015) to declare the victory of neoliberalism in his thesis on the end of history.

This statement that today, more than 30 years later, seems a truism is also illuminated by Badiou and is the subject of the second section of this paper, insofar as the failure of the utopian horizons of the 20th century does not imply the obsolescence of the needs that engendered them. Hence, communism remains a necessary perspective, whose conceptualization must be disidentified from the totalitarian violence of the last century.

The last section can also serve as a good prelude to understanding Badiou's later works, such as *Le réveil de l'histoire* (2012a), where he delves into how this historical need that could not be overcome takes shape in the mobilization of subaltern groups.

In this work, Badiou distinguishes between immediate revolt, as a form of reactive mobilization in the face of the perception of state injustice; latent revolt, which he exemplifies above all in the strike, whose main characteristic is the accelerated re-articulation of social sectors' antagonistic to capital which otherwise remain indifferent to each other on an everyday basis; and the historical revolt, which is the result of the transition from an immediate revolt, which asserts itself more in discontent than in politics, to a pre-political revolt that opens up the possibility of an organized dispute of the capitalist state.

In what follows, we will delve into the concepts of violence generated by this French philosopher who today stands as canonical within contemporary thought, always taking into consideration that it is a moment in his work whose emancipatory content should not be dismissed, for we would run the risk getting lost in terminological pedantic since what they really intend to achieve is to nurture the movement of reality. We should specifically take into consideration that these paragraphs are being written in the autumn of the southern hemisphere in 2023, as France is threatening the advent of a new historic May.

Alain Badiou: The Passion for the Real and the Object of Violence

Alain Badiou's seminal text, *The Century* (2005), not only brings to light the consciousness or self-consciousness that the 20th century held of itself. A close examination also shows that what Badiou invites us to think about the violence of the century—ranging from world wars to revolutionary terror, passing through extermination camps, gas

chambers, fascism, state crimes, etc.—may be worth seeing as one of his contributions to the intelligibility of the phenomenon of violence.

One might suspect that this contribution to the history of ideas refers to the *passion du réel*, which Badiou makes the key to understanding all of the 20th century. And he has reasons to claim this: “The nineteenth century announced, dreamed, and promised; the twentieth century declared it would make man, here and now” (Badiou, 2005, p. 52).

To completely transform the given reality, to destroy everything that is not essential there to clear the way to a new world, to the “new man,” to the “new society,” to the “new greatness.” This was the passion of the 20th century. As a consequence: “This why our century, aroused by the passion for the real, has in all sorts of ways—and not just in politics—been the century of destruction” (Badiou, 2005, p. 77).

But this destruction cannot be understood without noting that the initiatives of the century collided with the real as the limit point of reality. The real gained expression as the “minimal difference,” irreducible, between what the century showed itself capable of modifying and what remained immutable. And this difference of the real concerning the reality that the century wanted to construct, this difference that the century thought of as an identity, as a “fragment of the real” that could be eliminated from reality—as the uninterrupted succession of massacres and bloodbaths proves—this difference between the real and reality, he said, is what allows us to appreciate what Badiou brings to the core question of violence.

Let us ask: what kind of violence is designated by the expression *la passion du réel*? Where does this violence begin and where does it end? How can we distinguish the species of passion for the real from the rest of the genre of violence? If any form of violence can be called *passion du réel*, it is evident that the *passion du réel* is emptied of its substance, it ceases to have a meaning of its own.

To determine the specificity of the *passion du réel*, both about the century and to violence, we must turn our attention to the object of the passion for the real.

If this passion is exercised on the real, if the reality is, properly speaking, its object, it must be said that this object on which the passion falls is not of this world. “The real is not of the world. There is not the least hope of attaining the real by representation” (Lacan, 1988, p. 82). The object of the passion for the real is unrepresentable in the world, it is an “un-worldly” object. But what violence is capable of this un-worldly object? And what must this violence be in order to destroy an object that is not of the world? Can this violence take place without destroying everything? If this object is not a part of the world, the violence of the passion for the real no longer has an end or a fulfillment. It becomes unlimited. But it is not solely a matter of victims by the millions.

The *passion du réel* wants what reality cannot offer it. That is why it is not satisfied with reality, which it treats as a superficial being. The passion for the real seeks the depth, the unfathomable inside of the world. “Whence the violent taste for surface and transparency” (Badiou, 2005, p. 90).

Reality is the proper name of the semblance, of the appearance interposed between man and the real. *La passion du réel* advances by breaking the semblants, removing the veils, destroying the illusions, and unmasking the last face of reality. In specifying that this passion to see the real naked is not something different from the lack of modesty, Nietzsche (2016) put in the mouth of Dionysus: “I – I have no reason for covering my nakedness!” (p. 434). This is how Badiou’s statement should be understood: “The century conceived of itself as nihilism, but equally as Dionysian affirmation” (Badiou, 2005, p. 90).



In this sense, the will that animates the century is always a will to purify the real at every instant. “What I would like to underscore today is that to purify the real is to extract it from the reality that envelops and conceals it” (Badiou, 2005, p. 90). Now, this metaphysical desire for a real in its pure state will only interest me here as a means of capturing a mode of being of violence.

This violence responds to a problem of principle, namely that it is only possible to approach the real through the semblance of reality. The distance between the real and the semblant, the distance that seems to separate us from the real, is—in fact—the real. Badiou (2005) conceives of it in no other way: “The question of the real/semblance relation will not be resolved by a purification that would isolate the real, but by understanding that the gap is itself real” (p. 79).

If the distance that prevents me from accessing the real is the real, the absence of distance is simply equivalent to violence. The violence of the *passion du réel* is a struggle against the distance that separates the real from the semblant. Adding that no matter how many semblants are destroyed or sacrificed, the distance to the real remains. Violence drags with it the distance to the real, slides it away from the semblant and thereby chronically nourishes the suspicion that the real must-have remained hidden. “The passion for the real is also, of necessity, suspicion” (Badiou, 2005, p. 75). The distance that defines the real also makes the real itself into an unstable, uncertain, suspicious domain, badly enough contained in any reality that pretends to identify it without being confused with it, without falsifying the real. Badiou (2005) puts it in these words: “Nothing can attest that the real is the real, nothing but the system of fictions wherein it plays the role of the real” (p. 75). Thus, whoever says that the real is suspect also says that the semblant is, because there are no criteria to distinguish one from the other. “What matters for us is the following: we are in the realm of suspicion when a formal criterion is lacking to distinguish the real from semblance” (p. 77).

Hence, anyone is suspected of betraying or distorting the truly real. “It seems that the ultimately solemn conviction that one is in the process of touching on the real leads to a form of extreme subjective feverishness, one of whose manifestations is the incessant designation of heretics and suspects” (Badiou, 2005, p. 188).

To be thought of as suspicious is to give a human appearance to the distance towards the real. It is to sublimate the real, “to raise an object to the dignity of a Thing” (Lacan, 1990, p. 138),¹ to take from the human family a semblance that fills the very distance that distances me from the real. The century became obsessed with the idea of imputing this distance to a human face, of attributing the untouchability of the real to an agent, who for that reason was revealed as suspect or impure, exposed to purification. The great crimes of the century—the Stalinist crimes and the Nazi crimes—sought to eliminate the distance to the real, to remove this distance from the world, by eliminating these agents: both are programs of execution of all human beings considered impure or suspicious.

The paradox and the horror of this violence reside in the fact that distance hides the real but also reveals it. The distance of the semblant from the real is what excludes me from the real, as much as what includes me in it. It follows from this that the more real a subject appears to be, the more necessary it becomes to suspect it as semblant.

All the subjective categories of revolutionary, or absolute, politics—“conviction”, “loyalty”, “virtue”, “class position”, “obeying the Party”, “revolutionary zeal”, and so on—are tainted by the suspicion that the supposedly real point of the category is actually nothing but semblance. (Badiou, 2005, p. 77)

1. Cf. Lacan (1990): “Thus, the most general formula that I can give you of sublimation is the following: it raises an object—and here I don’t mind the suggestion of a play on words in the term I use—to the dignity of the Thing” (p. 138).

This unending suspicion is what makes the 20th century into the totalitarian century. Totalitarianism has no *raison d'être* other than the infinite suspicion directed at the semblant. In the well-known text *1984*, George Orwell (2002) gives us one of the best descriptions of totalitarian suspicion: “Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed—no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull” (p. 35).

These cubic centimeters are the object of the *passion du réel*, the object that is subjected to the violent purification of the real. Better still: the object of the *passion du réel* is the untraceable distance between one centimeter and another, the unending distance of suspicion; in short, that which time and again lacks the *passion du réel* to destroy completely the semblant—forcing, as Sade says, one more effort.

It can be understood that, in the extreme of the passion for the real, the only thing that cannot be doubted is nothingness: “In these conditions, what is the only certainty? Nothingness” (Badiou, 2005, p. 188). Nothingness is not suspect insofar as it does not pretend to be real, it does not give the appearance of something that it is not.

Thus, in the logic of purification, what is involved is to produce the advent of nothingness, of destructive violence, and death, since it is difficult to make a semblance of the act of dying.

What then is the object of the passion for the real? A nothing-of-the-real, which is what remains after absolute purification. This implies that there is nothing behind the semblant. The distance of the semblant from the real is empty. The thought that Badiou consecrates to the violence of the *passion du réel* is a thought that thinks this: the real is destined to distance, to a distance that begins but does not end. No matter how much violence stretches, it cannot touch the real, even when it can no longer continue to destroy the semblant, or when there is no longer anything to destroy.

Precisely because it is not an appropriable object, the real, as distance from, is impossible to destroy: the object of the passion for the real is an indestructible object.

In the purification of the real, that is to say, in the violence that has the real as its object, it is the real that pushes violence to go even further. “Herein lies its strength—after all, many things deserve to be destroyed. But this is also its limit because purification is a process doomed to incompleteness, a figure of the bad infinite [*mauvais infini*]” (Badiou, 2005, p. 79).²

It is not by chance that Badiou borrows the concept of “bad infinity” (*die schlechte Unendlichkeit*) from Hegel (2011). It so happens that infinite evil is first and foremost an evil infinity:

The surpassing of the quantum is the negation of it, the infinite; but a new quantum is put in place: this is the negation of the infinite, of this infinite evil, which for representation has the value of absolute, of something ultimate that does not assume itself again and that can no longer be surpassed. The truth of infinite progress is, then, that the quantum and its beyond are set, but set as assumed. (Hegel, 2011, p. 340)³

2. Translator's note: The Spanish original of this text as well as Duque's translation of Hegel's *Science of Logic* uses the term “*mal infinito*” or “*infinito malo*” which can be also translated as “evil infinite.” Both the French *mauvais* and the German *schlechte* have a semantic ambiguity whereby they can be translated as both bad and evil.

3. Translator's note: This text cannot be found in the English translations of *Science of Logic* by George di Giovanni and A. V. Miller since they rely on the second edition from 1832 of the text as opposed to Duque who translates from the first edition from 1812 which can also be found in the 1978 *Gesammelte Werke* volume 11. Thanks to Félix Duque for providing clarification on this matter.



This infinite evil is nothing more than the negation of all numerical magnitude, of all quantum. Infinite evil is that which, infinitely, is not finite. In short: it is an endless progression. And as far as the violence of the passion for the real is concerned, this infinite evil will entail a violence that aspires to an unattainable infinitude, to be understood here as the real as distance.

The extraordinary violence of the century offers us an image of violence tending towards infinity. An inordinate violence because its object, the distance of the real, is that which has been ceaselessly stolen from destruction, that which has been infinitely subtracted from violence. Thus, affirming the indestructible character of the object of this violence, what we must think with Badiou is, at the same time, that the distance to the real is the object of violence, and that which can never be the object of violence.

Politics, Violence, and Communism: Where is the Real?

To clarify the status of this violence whose object is a non-object, it would be useful to recall some other elements of the Badiouian corpus. To begin with, it is in *L'Être et l'Événement* that Badiou (1999) puts forward an ontological theory of the event. That which happens is not simply something that passes without leaving consequences, something that is guessed and mechanically predictable, something that passes away without, in turn, killing something of us and making us live something new. What happens is, by principle, the undecidable: that which we cannot decide beforehand whether it will happen or not; and, for this very reason, it is supernumerary, that is, it brings elements, unsuspected and brand new, to the world. It will be the axiomatic theory of sets, especially that configured by the notation of Zermelo-Fraenkel, which will make this discourse on the event (*événement*) intelligible. Thus, Badiou (1999) states: “The initial thesis of my enterprise (...) is the following: the science of being qua being has existed since the Greeks—such is the sense and status of mathematics” (p. 11). This means, moreover, that philosophy is no longer competent to speak of being. Ontology is not the property of philosophical discourse. Philosophizing is thus an excrescence, an extra-ontological or meta-ontological remainder:

The contemporary complex of the conditions of philosophy includes everything referred to in my first three statements: the history of “Western” thought, post-Cantorian mathematics, psychoanalysis, contemporary art, and politics. Philosophy does not coincide with any of these conditions; nor does it map out the totality to which they belong. What philosophy must do is propose a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibility of these conditions can be grasped. (Badiou, 1999, p. 12)

For this reason, he will clarify in *Conditions* (2012b) that the category truth is not proper to philosophy. At most, it “is the place of thought where the ‘there is’ [*il y a*] of these truths, and their compossibility, is stated” (p. 72). Truths, if they exist, only occur because of events. Where then does this occurrence take place?

Badiou starts from the notion of situation. Here it is the concept of an ensemble that allows us to specify it. An ensemble refers to a double multiplicity. First, an inconsistent multiplicity where everything is multiple of multiple. As this cannot be presented, it requires, secondly, a re-presentation mediated by the One. Thus, one can speak of certain sets with their respective elements. A consistent multiplicity then takes place. We have not only the situation but a reduplication that we can call the “state of the situation” (*l'état de la situation*).

Now, strictly speaking, there is no definition of a set, since in the axiomatic mentioned above only one relation is presented, the membership ($\in$), so that the axioms, rather than explicitly defining what a set would be, are limited to giving certain rules of construction of the sets. Among all these axioms, it is worth paying attention to one: the axiom of foundation. This axiom states that for any nonempty set, there exists an element included in that set whose intersection with the set is empty. In formal terms: $(\forall \alpha) [(\alpha \neq \emptyset) \rightarrow (\exists \beta) [(\beta \in \alpha) \& (\beta \cap \alpha = \emptyset)]]$.

This axiom is reinterpreted by Badiou in the terms of a “site of event” (*site événementiel*), *i.e.*, that instance where an event can arise in a given situation. However, we know that it is possible *de jure*, according to the axiomatics explained above, for an event to arise, this is understood as that set which precisely constitutes that element whose intersection with the set is null—that is to say that its elements, concerning the original set, are radically new and unsuspected: the event is the set of the subsets of β of that set α so that its structure would be $ax = \{x \in X, ax\}$. In fact, we do not know anything nevertheless. We find ourselves, then, with the undecidable character of the event: “If there exists an event, its belonging to the situation of its site is undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself” (Badiou, 1999, p. 204).

Therefore, the relationship that one establishes with the event is never a sapient bond: it is, on the contrary, a *militant* act. One militates for the event, that is, one acts as if something new, something radically different, were really happening in the stagnant order of things. To exemplify this in the case of politics, to militate for the event would be to act as if that which is impossible, that which appears as radically denied in capitalist realism, had an effective facticity that leads us to rethink all our social ties and political structures in use. Depending on chance, however, the event requires an intervention: “I term intervention any procedure by which a multiple is recognized as an event” (Badiou, 1999, p. 226). The axiom that makes this scheme intelligible is that of choice, where the existence of a function F is postulated, which makes it possible to select a set, belonging to an element of the set, as representative of that element in the set at hand. And insofar as the event breaks with the logic and the law of the state of the situation, where only the presented and represented sets are present, any intervention is necessarily *illegal*. It is in this perspective that one can affirm that there are only subjects in relation to the event. In *Logique des mondes*, Badiou (2008) recognizes the existence of three types of subjects according to the type of relationship they maintain with events: faithful subjects who unfold the consequences of the event, obscure subjects who want to destroy all traces of the event, and reactive subjects who refuse to accept that the event has taken place.

Finally, the event—where Badiou indicates in passing that they only occur in four conditions: politics, science, art, and love—gives rise to the category of truth. This is no longer the correspondence between the statement and the thing, or the unveiling of the entity, but a “generic” set containing all the manifolds that are connected to the situation thanks to the event.

How can one think of violence in such a scenario? In the first place, the real of the event is always violent. It bursts into reality; it tears us away from everyday life; it disturbs the established and the given. It would be, then, an ontological violence. Secondly, we have a factual violence: that which comes from the subjects. The obscure subjects, above all, are the typical fascistic, conservative, and old-fashioned ones who, in the face of any novelty in art, politics, or science, try to destroy any vestige of innovation (Ayala-Colqui, 2022, 2023a). Thirdly, there is an aprioristic violence, that is to say, that which tries to impose the existence of an event by any means necessary without anything necessarily happening. In the case of politics, this suture is called “disaster” by Badiou (2012b) in *Conditions* as



it is in this manner that the USSR project attempted to simulate the communist event, ending in a totalitarian project.

However, the failure of communist political practices—or the violent aspect they may have had—does not mean that the real of communism should be abandoned. After all, “a politics of emancipation draws itself from the void that an event brings forth [*fait advenir*] as the latent inconsistency of the given world” (Badiou, 2012b, p. 210). We can then remove both an aprioristic and a factual violence from communism, if we cease to think of it as a sort of utopia to be imposed, or as a program to be developed, or worse still as an event to be induced (Ayala-Colqui, 2023b), if we suppose it, expressing it in the anterior future as that which will have been: “In philosophy, the name of the community, for example, expresses that this thinking, or this truth, will have been, if it is pursued faithfully” (Badiou, 2012b, p. 211). Communism is, therefore, a hypothesis where one can anticipate what will have been, but never what is to be. It is in this fine difference that real violence ceases in order to bring forth, properly speaking, the violence of the real, that is, the event in politics:

We must reach an agreement on the claim that equality has nothing to do with the social, or social justice, but with the regime of statements and prescriptions (...). Yes, there can be, there is, here and now, a politics of equality, one which isn't simply a matter of realizing but, having postulated its existence, of creating here or there, through the rigorous pursuit of consequences, the conditions for universalization of its postulate. (Badiou, 2009, p. 88)

Of the event, therefore, one does not say a violence according to the rhetoric around the use of human rights, but rather of that true life that makes us the subjects of a truth.

Conclusions

The 20th century was a century full of violence, a violence that led to an unlimited illusion with millions of deaths in wars and concentration camps, and which continues to persist in the 21st century. Why? This is the question that we have tried to address in this article, and to begin to maintain this questioning edge we have needed to refer to what Badiou has brought to light with respect to “*passion du réel*.” The first thing that Badiou tells us about this passion for the real is that it allows us to think about the 20th century but also what happened in that century to ask ourselves:

To clarify this issue of method, allow me to raise what nowadays is a provocative, or even forbidden, question: What was the thought of the Nazis? What did the Nazis think? There is a way of always leading everything back to what the Nazis did (they undertook the extermination of the European Jews in gas chambers) that completely precludes any access to what they thought, or imagined they were thinking, in doing what they did. But refusing to think through what the Nazis themselves thought also prevents us from thinking through what they did, and consequently forbids the formulation of any real politics that would prohibit the return of their actions. As long as Nazi thinking is not itself thought through it will continue to dwell among us, unthought and therefore indestructible. (Badiou, 2005, p. 15)

So, we must continue to think not only about what the Nazis did, but all authoritarianism, and every instance that wants to implant barbarism and destruction. Barbarism thinks so we are left on the other hand to think something different than that barbarism, but for that, we have to think what that barbarism thinks. How Badiou has thought to approach this whole question by thinking about the real.

What interests Badiou are the subjectivities of the century, or to inquire about the place of the subject in that passion for the real in the 20th century. This proceeds from the basis that the syntagm “20th century” is not an objective datum, but it is rather the

place where the subject is positioned. The place where the subject can question, and at the same time the place where one can also doubt the same century as a given reality:

In contrast to the nineteenth century of utopian or “scientific” projects and ideals, and plans for the future, the twentieth century aimed at delivering the thing itself—at directly realizing the longed-for New Order. The ultimate and defining moment of the twentieth century was the direct experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality—the Real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality. (Žižek, 2008, p. 11)

While there is a price to be paid for knowing about that real beyond reality, a price that concerns the subject, not knowing that it also brings back to us the worst of that real in the best Freudian way. So, to confront that real, as it has been well-stated here, is not always without consequences, but not to confront that real, not to contend with that real is the worst. But in order to confront that real, we cannot do it directly, for that, we have to constitute and constitute ourselves through reality.

This direct experience with the real brought with it the worst, just as pornography can break with the erotic, bringing the horror of that totalized object, will this pornographic experience not be a way of confronting the real without truly confronting it? Just as in love, which Badiou (2012c) also addresses: “The aim is to avoid any immediate challenge, any deep and genuine experience of the otherness from which love is woven” (p. 18).

It is important here to say that Badiou’s approaches help us think about what remains when we draw the veil of the erotic when we draw the veil of reality and we find that real, for it is there where that experience can bring about the horror of nothingness, for no matter how much we want to find “that” more real we will only find nothingness behind the veil. Thus, in the face of nothingness, it is better to build something, a distance before the real that in the end for Badiou is the same real.

The courage of the subject is the courage over that passion for the real, where it is not denied or sought to achieve it in the face of the obscenity of the pornographic everything seen, an ethics of good-saying is raised: “Against the obscenity of ‘everything seen’ and ‘everything said,’ the presentation, the calculation, the commentary of everything, the poem is the guardian of the decency of saying. Or what Jacques Lacan called the ethics of well-saying” (Badiou, 2014, p. 25).

Faced with the hopeless resignation of which everything can be achieved or nothing can be achieved from the real, Badiou proposes the poem, art as that “something” that can be done with that real, there is a potential in art, and it is possible to do something from art with the real that is not barbarism, destruction or negation from the real.

Art is subtraction, and this act is a way to account for that real, a way of not resigning oneself to the nothingness that makes us impotent to that passion for the real, art is placed as a creative possibility, the one where we have to bet on the supplement, to be able to welcome the event. This event is a rupture with the illusion of totality, which is one of the ways of this passion for the real. The event is the advent of emptiness in front of this totality, and the possibility of nominating this event is what allows the emergence of a truth, which is why Badiou (2008) tells us: “There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths” (p. 20). The only way to make us subjects is with a truth.

The place of the event marks an empty place. It is there where a subject is played out from a truth, which, in the face of the real, one cannot do anything but place a distance, a veil, which leads to the worst things when we go behind that real to show everything, thereby inadvertently denying that real as well. Badiou’s proposal is directed to a two that is not One, and it is there that the event emerges:



The event is ultra-One-apart from it interposing itself between itself and the void because the maxim “there is Twoness” is founded upon it. The Two thereby invoked is not the reduplication of the one of the count, the repetition of the effects of the law. It is an original Two, an interval of suspense, the divided effect of a decisión. (Badiou, 1999, p. 231)

To make a hole in this totality of the One is what turns the event into a possibility for a passion for the real that is not destructively violent: “A truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge” (Badiou, 1999, p. 363). And it is there that the subject can emerge, from that hole, from that truth, from that becoming a subject.

To conclude, the subject in Badiou’s theory would be how one can make a good saying out of that passion for the real. The 20th century could be summarized here as the failed attempts to do something with that passion, which led to the worst barbarities, the horror of a violence that not only left us naked, but at the mercy of that passion. It is time to come back to creating ways to put distances from that real, to create conditions so that the subject can emerge with the event, a subject that remains militant and can sustain fidelity to that event-truth. Militancy and fidelity are nothing other than the uncertain insistence of a possibility of transformation of the world, of the becoming-subject, of a possibility of multiple possibilities.

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