

# Sites, truths and the logics of worlds: Alain Badiou and human geography

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This paper argues for the political importance of Alain Badiou's 'site' in human geography. A site is a place of radical politics capable of destroying old worlds and creating new ones. Badiou's recently published *Logics of worlds* (2009, Continuum, London) is an account of how worlds come to exist. Critical to understanding this work is Badiou's critique of 'democratic materialism', an umbrella term used for Deleuzian and post-modern philosophies, defined by the phrase: 'there are only bodies and languages'. Badiou counters this with his 'materialist dialectic', which emphasises the intervention truth can make in a world: 'there are only bodies and languages, *except that there are truths*'. The subversion of the appearance of a world by the infinite potential of the site is cast as the emergence of a truth. Current theorisations of the site in human geography do not take into account truth as a political category. The paper is thus a defence of the site as an exceptional place of politics, where the materialist dialectic conviction: '*except that there are truths*' is rendered visible.<sup>1</sup>

**key words** site world truth event Badiou Deleuze

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## Introduction

Alain Badiou's theorisation of the site has profound implications for the way human geographers theorise sites, worlds and politics. Badiou's *Logics of worlds* (2009) transforms philosophical keystones such as subject and object to construct a unique phenomenology of how worlds come to exist. This paper is driven by understanding the politics of the site; the singular and revolutionary force capable of destroying and remaking worlds. As Badiou insists in a recent interview 'Everything depends on the world...' (Constantinou and Madarasz 2009, 789).

There is already a productive Deleuzian strand of thought that tackles the ontology of the site, introduced most comprehensively by Marston *et al.* (2005). Badiou upturns these poststructural formulations by presenting a philosophy guided by the category of 'truth'. Indeed, what is at stake in this paper are two opposing political philosophies of the site: Deleuzian immanence and Badiouian

transcendence. While outlining the contours of this debate early on, the paper argues that Badiou's site embodies a more politically important architecture, one capable of explaining how worlds are radically altered.

The engagement with Badiou is gaining momentum in human geography, examining 'the submerged spatialities operating in his work, which is only beginning to have an impact in social theory' (Constantinou 2009, 771; see also Madarasz 2009). Scholars have also critically engaged Badiouian subjectivity (Dewsbury 2007), topology (MacCannell 2009) and evental politics (Bassett 2008). Noting Badiou's arrival, Elden (2008) warns that his philosophy is part of a wider attendance to mathematical argument that carries the risk of earlier disciplinary aspirations of becoming a science. Certainly, Badiou's Platonism may be off-putting to some, particularly the category of truth and his attack on modern 'sophists' such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard (Badiou 2008a, 1–32). Bundled in with these concerns are Badiou's ambiguous

connections to Kant (Johnston 2008), Heidegger (Marchart 2007), and Lacan (Kaufman 2002), as well as his dismissal of minitorian politics in favour of Communism (Badiou 2008b) and his repeated indifference to contemporary ethics (Badiou 2002). Notwithstanding these criticisms, I am in agreement Quentin Meillassoux (2008, 103), who argues that his former mentor 'uses mathematics itself to effect a liberation from the limits of calculatory reason'. Certainly, Badiou's use of set theory is criticised for being an arbitrary and *prima facie* limitation (Clemens 2001; Osborne 2007), yet his ontological and phenomenological axioms are anything but inflexible, and actually provide a language for radical change in the world.

Badiou's philosophical project is split between an analysis of 'being-qua-being' (Badiou 2005a) and of 'being-there' (Badiou 2009), or between ontology and appearance. On the side of being-qua-being, many of us will be accustomed to Badiou's arsenal of axioms and concepts. These include events, truths, subjects, infinity, the void, multiplicities, the 'count-as-one', ethics, situations and the State. Taken together, they announce the eternal dialectic between being and event, which is to say, between containment and excess. One of the limitations of Badiou's ontology was its account of how multiplicities were sutured into place. The 'situation' was a notoriously vague and space-less concept. Addressing this, Badiou's (2009a) blueprint of being-there is nothing short of a full-blown phenomenological account of what makes a world appear. New concepts include atonic and tensed worlds, transcendentals, envelopes, objects, subjects (faithful, reactive, obscure), bodies, points, organs and a new theory of the site. This logic of a world details what it means for multiplicities to appear. Certainly, there is overlap between the two texts but *Being and event* (Badiou 2005a) is now an incomplete work to the extent that multiplicities can now only be thought of with reference to their worldly appearing.

Badiou is scathing of the contemporary world's fascination with corporeality and discourse. For him, bio-politics, Deleuzian minitorianism and post-modernism reduce political potential to the circulation of bodies and words. Badiou labels these philosophies under the term 'democratic materialism' which holds: 'there are only bodies and languages' (2009, 1). He counters this with his 'materialist dialectic' that adds a third term: 'there are only bodies and languages, *except that there*

*are truths'* (2009, 4). Truths are transcendent exceptions to the circulations of bodies and languages, and every world is capable of producing its own truth. Building from the set-theory ontology of *Being and event*, Badiou argues that the finite appearances of every world mask an underlying and infinite void: the source of political change that erupts at a site. This paper argues that a site is the place of an eventual rupture capable of creating new worlds by presenting a previously 'inexistent' multiple. By inexistent, Badiou means that a multiple has ontological status but is banned from appearing in the world. The site thus needs to be thought of not just in terms of the co-mingling of bodies and languages but in terms of the appearance of a fundamental *truth*. In this sense, the universality of the political procedure is maintained, as well as the status of multiply dispersed sites. Through critically investigating the philosophy of Alain Badiou, this paper defends the notion that sites are exceptional (exceptions) places of politics – not reducible to democratic materialism and Deleuzian ontologies.

The paper is structured around three interrelated arguments, each of which is a development of the previous. In the first case Badiou's critique of Deleuze's philosophy is presented. Denouncing the 'vitalist' for celebrating a foundational philosophy, the critique, while perhaps overstated, clears the ground for Badiou's own project. Second, I argue that Badiou's ontological analysis of being-qua-being is most appropriately understood as a dialectical relationship between containment and excess. Fundamental to *Being and event* is the political paradox of the State's far-reaching grasp and concomitant inability to represent everything. The third section of the paper is the critical juncture, and puts to work Badiou's (2009) *Logics of worlds*. No longer is being-qua-being 'all there is'. Instead, the philosopher argues for the simultaneous importance of being-there. Multiples are re-cast as phenomenological 'objects' indexed to a transcendental that regulates their worldly appearance. A *site* is understood as the appearance of an inexistent multiple capable of realigning this transcendental constellation. The political consequences are as following: it is through sites that change is brought to a world.

## Overturing Deleuze

Understanding Badiou's philosophy is no easy task, especially to those accustomed to the language and rhythms of poststructural philosophy.

Badiou is a classical philosopher, unabashedly so, and is better placed with Plato and Descartes than Foucault and Derrida. The introduction of Deleuze into human geography provided an experimental agar from which a multitude of non-representational geographies mushroomed (e.g. Dewsbury 2003; McCormack 2003; Lorimer 2005; Wylie 2005; Thrift 2008; Shaw and Warf 2009). These non-representational studies share a commitment to undoing the certainty of our everyday cartographies through attending to the excessive forces of life. By no means is Deleuze the sovereign of non-representation – he is, of course, accompanied by a range of philosophers from Heidegger (1962) to Latour (2005), the latter of whom is important to constructing hybrid and more-than-human geographies (Whatmore 2002). And by no means were ideas of political vitalism and pluralism (e.g. Amin and Thrift 2005) ushered into the discipline to a chorus of consensus, with Harvey (2006, 411–12) critical of what he saw as (using one of Badiou's turn of phrases) a wider political Thermidorian retreat. The wager in this article is that non-representation is itself a political gesture, naming not an *élan vital* or Deleuzian virtual but the State's deliberate relegation of people to the invisibility of non-appearance. And it is precisely non-representation that names the eternal providence of political change, erupting at the site. In order to construct this argument, attention is first turned to Badiou's critique of Deleuze.

Badiou's (1999a 2004, 68–82) argument is an attack on the simplistic and clichéd celebration of Deleuze as a harbinger of potentiality, desire and anarchy (a reading that also fails to give these terms philosophical nuance). According to his critique, the supreme destination for Deleuzian thought is not in wild becomings or liberatory lines of flight, but in a metaphysical, almost theological, 'One'. Deleuze is a champion of the univocity of being – that is, the underlying and primordial connectivity of being. Univocal being has no divisions or dualisms – what is said of One is said of All:

A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all Beings. (Deleuze 1994, 304)

Badiou believes that Deleuze's philosophy is a Platonism of the virtual: the virtual comes to occupy the transcendent totality of all productions; it is the ground that precedes all thought and

actualisations; and it is the being of all beings. That is, actualisations should be discerned as virtualisations – shifting modalities of being – and while Deleuze has successfully toppled the verticality of categorical thinking, he only reinstates it in the horizontal transcendence wrought by the virtual. For Badiou, in order to save the actual from plunging into the depths of the virtual he must deny the One and declare that 'the ground is void' (Badiou 1999a, 52).

The ontological spar between the philosophers extends to their competing theories of multiplicity and event. In the first case, Deleuze deploys his ontology around the status of *intensive* and differential multiplicities. A multiplicity is the rhizomatic expression of life, unfolding, connecting and (de)territorialising: it is an assemblage of intensive relations (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 3–25). The concept is fundamental to his transcendental empiricism (Colebrook 2001, 69–90), which he constructs from the philosophies of Bergson, Spinoza and Hume (Due 2007, 11). This has political consequences – with Deleuze's mistrust of molar organisation in favour of anarchic desiring production. For Badiou, this 'difference thinking' leads to a lack of conceptual rigour and promotes sense above thought. Badiou sides with *extensive* multiplicities that are both discrete and quantitative. This allows for the ontological relationship between 'belonging and inclusion' to be meticulously analysed (Norris 2009, 79–88). Set-theory mathematics can provide operative and logical axioms to think past sense to the ontological relations between the State and the situation. In terms of the event, Badiou reinforces his earlier critique of Deleuze's virtual as a 'poor man's Spinozism', devoting a whole section of *Logics of worlds* (Badiou 2009, 381–7; see also Gillespie (2001) for Badiou's critique of Spinoza). Here, the Deleuzian event is folded into a vitalist logic of becoming that submits the event beneath the virtual 'One-All': events are the inflections of Life, the always-already becomings of the virtual. For Badiou however, events are never co-extensive with becoming or sense – they are 'cuts' or 'disruptions' with what is; they are truths subtracted from doxa:

To break with empiricism is to think the event as the advent of what subtracts itself from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and the transcendently discontinuous ... It is to subtract it from Life in order to deliver it to the stars. (Badiou 2009, 387)

But to what extent is this critique of Deleuze a caricature? Ansell-Pearson (2004, 97–114) argues that Badiou doesn't properly understand the role of the virtual, choosing to reify it as a neo-Platonic One, when instead the virtual is confused, chaotic and undetermined. The actual is not a simulacrum of the virtual, but strictly asymmetrical. Actualisation is irreducibly pluralistic, given that the virtual differs from itself upon actualisation: the virtual's realisation is a power of differentiation. Similarly for May (2004), Badiou overstates the case, and the univocity of being is not put forward to gain unity and the One, but in order to prevent transcendence. If the virtual is distinct from the actual, transcendence arises and the One becomes the Two, Being from its Many. Yet univocity is precisely what prevents the 'archetype and copy' relationship from becoming established in Deleuze's philosophy. Univocity affirms the pure and unrepeatable difference of each and every 'simulacra'. As Widder concludes: 'Badiou's entire critique rests upon a conflation of the univocity of being with a Platonist conception of the One. It is through this move that he interprets the "single voice" in Platonist terms' (2001, 438).

Mathematics is also a major point of disagreement between the two philosophers – even if it is seldom touched upon by Badiou. This difference is based on their choice of mathematical theory. While Deleuze opts for differential calculus and Riemannian manifolds, Badiou sides with algebra and post-Cantorian set theory (Smith 2004). These decisions are part of their wider ontological projects, particularly the role that *becoming* plays. For Deleuze, mathematics is in a constant state of becoming that produces 'problems' that require creative solutions. Given that axiomatic set theory codifies mathematical problems, it is necessarily a secondary enterprise. All becoming takes place at the level of problematics and not axiomatics. For Deleuze, axiomatics are thus part of a 'royal science' incapable of attending to the problematic (and virtual) pole of mathematics. The consequence of Badiou opting for axiomatics is thus the necessity of transcendence in his work, given that the only way to explain change is through 'supernumerary elements' that lay outside of ontology and are supplemental to being-qua-being.

While Badiou's efforts to enrol Deleuze as a neo-Platonist are unsurprising given his own avid Platonism, the necessity of mathematical transcendence in Badiou's project has major political

purchase. Badiou's caricature of Deleuze as a philosopher of the One is overstated, but his critique of immanence (Badiou 1999a) remains powerful. For Badiou, transcendence is not the death of thought, but the space from which thought escapes from the immanence of capitalist doxa. An extensionalist approach symbolises relations of political membership – in particular between belonging and inclusion. This allows Badiou to articulate a radical democratic voice for those who do not 'belong' yet are nevertheless structured by the State. Furthermore, post-Cantorian set theory furnishes a language for the infinite. It stipulates one of the central paradoxes of being – that the infinite is itself non-totalisable (there is no 'more' or 'less' to infinity). This is important since the finite is cast as a special 'mode' of the infinite. Set theory confronts this dialectic between consistency and inconsistency and this torsion is Badiou's 'motor engine' of politics. Finally, axiomatics takes philosophy and praxis beyond sense (which is always distributed by what *is* and not what is to come) to a realm of infinite truths. It is with Badiou, and not Deleuze, that one is able to subtract from contemporary ideological situations and Wittgenstein-esque 'language games'. If immanence is ultimately an intimate engagement with what *is*, it is only through transcendence that politics can support new worlds.

## The void

In this section I outline the ontological blueprint for change in Badiou's philosophy, which is a necessary precursor to understanding *Logics of worlds*. The starting point to Badiou's ontology is the void, an endless and inconsistent multiple that Badiou names 'being-qua-being'. It is not, in the Democritus' sense of the word, the absolute nothingness that exists between beings. The void is best thought alongside the Lacanian Real – unthinkable and un-symbolisable as such, yet nevertheless active. There is one language, argues Badiou, which is capable of furnishing a discourse for the infinite multiple, and that is the set theory of Zermelo–Fraenkel. Mathematics then, not philosophy, offers us an ontology of difference by formalising the void as the starting point for all finite multiples. Finitude is thus always an *outcome* of a dominant ontological operation, the result which is unavoidably founded on the very infinity it is unable to fully capture. This is the dialectic between being and event.

An event is simply an opportunity for some members of a situation, if they so decide, to affirm that which they can never experience or observe, namely the inconsistency that they and all other members of the situation indifferently and indiscernibly are. If these members take up this implication in a consequential way (and thus become 'subjects' in its wake), it will entail fundamental transformation of the way a situation discerns its elements: such a transformation, of course, is what Badiou calls a truth. (Hallward 2005, 14)

The relationship between belonging and inclusion is pivotal to Badiou's ontology. The former ontological relationship indicates that a multiple belongs to another, i.e. ' $\alpha$  belongs to  $\beta$ ', the latter that a multiple is included as a sub-multiple of another, i.e. ' $\in$  belongs to  $\alpha$  which belongs to  $\beta$ '. In other words, there is simple presentation and there is second-order representation. What belongs and what does not belong is mandated by the 'count-as-one', the operator that gathers multiples together. There is a necessary point of excess between belonging and inclusion, and this disjuncture is a perennial source of disruption. This ontological gap is illustrated most forcefully through the 'power-set axiom', the mathematical procedure that symbolises why all multiples possess an uncountable number of sub-multiples. In this sense, the power-set axiom illustrates the set-theoretical conditions for events, and however alien to politics it seems, remains fundamental to understanding Badiou's later theses on the *Logics of worlds*. Take the following set as an example:  $\{\alpha, \beta, \in\}$ . The power-set axiom states that all the subsets of an initial set, once expanded and then grouped back together, form an additional set termed the power-set. There is thus an ontological disjuncture between the sets that belong and the sets that are included. Each set includes an additional power-set, a point of excess, which it cannot itself present. The set  $\{\alpha, \beta, \in\}$  can be expanded into the following subsets:  $\{\alpha\}$ ,  $\{\beta\}$ ,  $\{\in\}$ ,  $\{\alpha, \beta\}$ ,  $\{\alpha, \in\}$ ,  $\{\beta, \in\}$ , and also the maximal subset that presents all the elements  $\{\alpha, \beta, \in\}$ . Thus, the power-set of  $\{\alpha, \beta, \in\}$  is written as follows:  $\{\{\alpha\}, \{\beta\}, \{\in\}, \{\alpha, \beta\}, \{\alpha, \in\}, \{\beta, \in\}, \{\alpha, \beta, \in\}\}$ . Badiou is keen to point out that this excess of subsets over sets, or inclusion over belonging, is essentially infinite and inconsistent. This means that within any situation the void is an unassignable point of excess.

Badiou illustrates this with the case of the '*sans papiers*' (Norris 2009, 65), the undocumented immigrants from Africa who were included within the

French state and fell under the jurisdiction of the French government, yet did not have any political belonging and were subjected to deportation. Indeed, within France today, legislation from Chirac to Sarkozy has increasingly criminalised those 'without papers'. Put simply, some of us belong and some of us do not, and occasionally the 'nots' announce themselves in events. This unknown point of excess emerges in an event, baptised by militant subjects that name it as a truth. Stability is thus only guaranteed to the extent that the State can silence the void and suppress the salient truth about a situation's genesis:

It is not for nothing that governments, when an emblem of their void wanders about – generally an inconsistent or rioting crowd – prohibit 'gatherings of more than three people', which is to say they explicitly declare their non-tolerance of the one of such 'parts', thus proclaiming that the function of the State is to number the inclusions such that consistent belongings be preserved. (Badiou 2005a, 109)

The above quotation strikes at the heart of the politics that underwrite *Being and event*. Badiou's project can be placed within a group of post-foundational political thinkers that share the common belief in the *absent* ground of society and totalising metaphysical figures (Mouffe 2005; Marchart 2007). Curiously, Badiou's focus on belonging and inclusion also touches on the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben (1998 2005), particularly his theories on sovereignty and the state of exception – the latter of which is always-already spatialised (Gregory 2006). Take for example, the figure of the refugee who is once outside of any political belonging yet whose 'bare life' is simultaneously included by the power of the nation state. Of course, Badiou (2009, 558–9) is aware of the connection, and is in turn critical of Agamben's affirmation of life above truth. The political issue for Badiou is always one of truth and never of biopolitics – the latter of which he believes reduces people to 'human animals' and not the immortal subjects they are capable of being (Badiou 2002). And truths can disrupt everything, upturning a situation's seemingly intractable foundation. It is little wonder that Badiou's *l'Organisation Politique* is involved in activism around the issue of *sans papiers* – the immigrants who are included in the French nation state but do not belong and thus present a problem for the stability of French sovereignty. As Hemel summarises:

So, even though for both Agamben and Badiou there exists a figure that is inside the situation, yet that does not enjoy the rights of belonging to the situation, the figure is inherently different. For Agamben the refugee signals the power of the political power over bare life, and thus generates, at best, a critical awareness of the grim situation. For Badiou, the figure of the *sans-papiers* should bring about a new situation, based on the name of a truth ('everyone who is here is from here'). (2008, 25)

It is precisely this eternal possibility of the new, based on the name of a truth, that this paper articulates through a detailed analysis of the site. In order to do this, the paper fleshes out the general body of Badiou's innovative philosophy of being-there, the central pillar of *Logics of worlds*.

### What is a world?

At the start of this paper I mentioned the concept of democratic materialism, defined by the statement: 'there are only bodies and languages'. Badiou (2009) uses it as a stand-in for everything he stands against: postmodernism, Foucaultian biopolitics, Deleuzian minoritarianism and a general leftist pluralism. He opposes it with his materialist dialectic, which adds a third term to the above formula: 'there are only bodies and languages, *except that there are truths*'. Existing as a radical cut from the circulation of bodies and languages, or what 'is', Badiou's materialist dialectic constructs a place for truth in the world, subtracted from empirical givenness and encyclopaedic knowledges. Erupting at sites, truths present the inexistence of a world. But what is a world?

A world is the local presentation of being. Unlike the situations of being-qua-being, which only speak of the multiple-qua-multiple, a world is a constellation of multiples that are *transformed* through their appearance. This theory of being-there is operationalised not through set-theory, but a 'Greater Logic' of objects and relations. Perhaps the most important concept of this logic is the role given to the 'transcendental'. This names, like the count-as-one of being-qua-being, the regulation of appearance. Appearance is not chaotic for the simple fact that it is organised by a transcendental index, which imposes on every multiple a logic of appearance. It is immanent to the extent that, unlike its Kantian namesake, there are as many transcendentals as there are worlds. This means that there is no 'universe' or 'whole', and worlds

must be constituted immanently according to the cohesion of multiples around a transcendental order structure.

The existence of a maximum is a worldly principle of stability. Appearing is never endlessly amendable; there is no infinite ascension towards the light of being-there. The maximum of appearance distributes, unto the beings indexed to it, the calm and equitable certainty of their worldliness. This is also because there is no Universe, only worlds. In each and every world, the immanent existence of a maximal value for the transcendental signals that this world is never the world. (Badiou 2009, 139)

The identity of each multiple, once worlded, is therefore a matter of a differentiation from itself (as a pure multiple) and other multiples. This distribution of difference follows degrees of appearance of 'less' or 'more' with respect to the transcendental. Badiou names three different types of worldly relations – from the minimal value of appearance called *disjunction*, through *conjunction*, to the maximal *envelope* of a world. Disjoined multiples have a degree of appearance that is only slightly above the minimum of non-existence. Conjoined multiples appear in a world and depend on each for their identity – no multiples exist in a world without being related to each other. Finally, the envelope is the worldly multiple that guarantees the regional stability of all beings, whether conjoined or disjoined, through its maximal value of appearance that subsumes all others. This has an underlying politics to it. The closer a multiple relates to the (hegemonic) transcendental, the greater its appearance. The disenfranchised, the poor, or any other multiples that exist on the edge of the void will have a minimum of appearance. They exist in the shadows of the transcendental of the world.

In addition, Badiou argues that he has 'solved' the divide between the phenomenal and the noumenal (the classical Kantian (2005) problematic) with his theory of the 'object' that is independent of any subject. The pure multiple, on the side of being-qua-being or the noumenal, is transformed by the being-there of its phenomenal appearing. Yet this transformation is never an idealist invention, according to Badiou's pivotal 'postulate of materialism', which states that *every atom is real*, which is to say, there is a correlation between the 'count-as-one' of being-qua-being and the transcendental of appearing. Referring to this 'ontico-transcendental synthesis', Johnston affirms:

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). (2008, 361)

To exist is therefore to appear, and to appear is to be indexed to a world. Existence is therefore belonging to a world. This means that an object never exists 'in-itself', but in terms of its localised being-there. As a multiple enters a world, certain elements will be conjoined, some will receive a minimum of appearing, and others may become the transcendental envelope:

it is very important to emphasize once again that localization is a relation between elements ... and therefore a relation that directly structures the being of the multiple. (Badiou 2009, 225)

In summary, a world is the spatialised appearance of being, and this localisation is a constellation of objects indexed to a transcendental regime that regulates their degrees of appearing. Each world has its own envelope, and this is an immanent guarantee that there is never a total 'universe' but an infinite amount of worlds. It thus follows that political action needs to be specific, but with the acknowledgement that each world has universal procedures of appearance. With terms like envelopes, real atoms, transcendental functors and onto-transcendental syntheses, the stability of each world seems almost certain: an impenetrable logical completeness. But this is not so, because appearance is always threatened by a point of excess.

To recall Badiou's postulate of materialism, all appearance is 'real', and its objects are not idealistic inventions but elements of the pure multiple. This local law of being-qua-being is developed in the 'second constitutive thesis of materialism' (Badiou 2009, 317), which states that *logical completeness is always subordinate to ontological closure*. Put simply, what appears in the world is not all that there is: every world contains an inaccessible amount of objects that cannot all be rendered visible. Appearing is subsumed by the deep and infinite determinations of being-qua-being. And this means, quite necessarily, that somewhere in a world, beneath the certainty of appearance and the intensity of being-there, there inexists an element that is not indexed to the transcendental. Clandestine, autonomous and forbidden from the world: the site.

## Theorising the site

The site's arrival in human geography was deployed as a critique of scalar and vertical conceits (Marston *et al.* 2005; Jones *et al.* 2007; Woodward *et al.* 2007) and caused quite a stir (Collinge 2006; Hoefle 2006; Jonas 2006; Escobar 2007; Leitner and Miller 2007). I cannot hope to capture the complexity of that site, nor its diverse philosophical influences; I mention it here instead to signal the productive tensions that Badiou has with Marston *et al.*'s work. Deploying a 'flat ontology' worked together from the philosophies of Deleuze, DeLanda and Schatzki, the blueprint consisted of

selforganizing systems ... where the dynamic properties of matter produce a multiplicity of complex relations and singularities that sometimes lead to the creation of new, unique events and entities, but more often to relatively redundant orders and practices. (Marston *et al.* 2005, 424)

Internal to the logic of this site is this apparent dualism between, on the one hand, monotony, repetition and stability, and on the other hand, emergence, potentiality and disorder. This ontological mixture requires a site-specific attendance to pure difference that is similar to 'a game of pick-up sticks' (Woodward *et al.* 2007). The site-qua-manifold is thus geared towards a Deleuzian and minoritarian politics 'with the intent of producing mobile, mutable aggregates' (Jones *et al.* 2007, 275). The usage of the Deleuzian virtual-actual couplet is employed to free the site from the conceits of causal inevitability and retroactive certainty. That is, the virtual is a game of chance, a role of the dice that can actualise new forms and practices that unfold from intensive relations, strange attractors and 'event-spaces'. In sum, these sites are conceptualised 'as immanent (self-organizing) event-spaces dynamically composed of bodies, doings and sayings' (Jones *et al.* 2007, 265).

'Composed of bodies, doings and sayings': this neo-Deleuzian definition of the site is similar to the definition that Badiou (2009, 1) gives to democratic materialism: 'there are only bodies and languages'. He is, of course, critical of this ontological formula, adding the phrase *'except that there are truths'* in order to announce his own materialist dialectic. The Badiouian site therefore adds to current theorisations of the site in human geography this third term. One should also note at this juncture how the earlier critiques made in this paper of Deleuze's

virtual (Badiou 1999a 2004, 68–82) and events (Badiou 2009, 381–7) are appropriate to the neo-Deleuzian site. Of course, I don't want to usher the reader into a 'Deleuze or Badiou' binary. The difference between democratic materialism and the materialist dialectic is by no means unbridgeable. Badiou needs the former just as much as he needs Deleuze to demarcate his own project. Likewise, in order to be able to get the most out of understanding Badiou's site, it is helpful to begin with Marston *et al.*'s (2005) work. In what follows in this final section of the paper then, I argue for the site as an exceptional place of politics where a truth emerges in a world. Not wholly reducible to the becomings and congealments of flat Deleuzian ontologies, a site is the presentation of an inexistent multiple that is capable of transforming the transcendental logic of a world.

Badiou's ontological analyses already contain an explicit explanation of an 'event-site' (Badiou 2004, 99–104 2005a, 173–90 2005b, 141–52), the philosophical conditions for what makes an event an event (Badiou 1999b 2008a), and the ethics of evental fidelity (Badiou 2002 2003a). It is only post *Logics of worlds* (Badiou 2003b 2004, 167–226 2009, 355–80) that he drops the 'event-site' in favour of the 'site', defining the latter in terms of appearance and non-appearance. Previously, the event-site was confined to the complexities of set theory, and was a kind of ontological 'halting point' that puts the State at 'arms-length'. The event-site is a multiple *not* caught (or represented) by the State, and therefore reveals the gap between belonging and inclusion through manifesting the void of the situation. Outcast from acknowledged conditions, the name 'illegal' is used to mark the deprived legitimate status of the evental-site; the place that would close the gap between those that belong and those that do not. It is therefore inherently destabilising to the dominant count-as-one and a perennial source of political intervention.

Here, it is worth noting that there are two components to Badiou's ontological reading of an event. First, there is the event-site, the singular multiple on the edge of the void, none of whose elements are represented by the State. Second, Badiou requires that subjects name the event as an event – otherwise it will be forgotten. There is thus a two-fold schema of void and subject that provides a cumbersome definition of an event. Bassett (2008) is critical of Badiou's simplistic over-reliance on the void of a situation to cause change.

Commenting on the Paris Commune, he argues that many subjects were heavily politicised, and there was indeed more organisation from the Central Committee than Badiou's spontaneous reading would admit, suggesting that critical realism (Sayer 2000) is perhaps better placed to furnish the complex relations between situations and events. Is Badiou therefore wrong to insist that 'Thus, with workers' revolutions, there is a brutal presentation of the central void of bourgeois societies, which is precisely the political existence of workers' (Badiou 2006, 211)? The problem is caused by the gap between event-site and event – a schism that must be bridged by a mysterious subjective naming. This essentially ontological problem is dissolved in *Logics of worlds*. Badiou, aware of this pitfall, states:

As we shall see, I am now able fundamentally to equate 'site' and 'evental multiplicity' – thus avoiding all the banal aporias of the dialectic between structure and historicity – and that I do so without recourse to a mysterious naming. (2009, 261)

Badiou is now in a position to enunciate a definition of the site that does not require a subjective phenomenology. Indeed, even the distinction between situation and event has been muddled. There are 'nuances of transformation' that name different types of change. It is important to distinguish between these, given that there are types of change that the State can absorb, and types that threaten its very existence. The former type of change is called *modification* and that is change authorised by the transcendental of a world. A world is constantly modifying its objects and relations without any serious threat to its stability or being-there; indeed, it absorbs change as part of its very constitution of appearance. This definition incorporates the more prosaic nature of the site as theorised in human geography (Marston *et al.* 2005), and for Badiou, Deleuzian 'becoming'. Badiou is critical of this concept, since:

Deleuze cannot really manage to account for the transcendental change of worlds. It remains impossible to subsume such a change under the sign of Life, whether it is renamed as Power, Élan or Immanence. It is necessary to think discontinuity as such, a discontinuity that cannot be reduced to any creative univocity, as indistinct or chaotic as the concept of univocity may be. (Badiou 2009, 362)

If becoming is an untenable philosophical source of change for Badiou, it is because it cannot fully

account for what *inexists* in the situation, which, to recall, are those multiples with ontological status but do not appear in a world. Non-representational theories can only name the modifications of appearing, and not the radical subversion of appearing by the infinity of the void. Radical change comes from an exception: a subtraction from the transcendental logic of a world. This requires a site that is autonomous, that is, has the peculiar characteristic of its own transcendental indexing:

A site is an object of the world that globally falls under the laws of differentiation and identity that it locally assigns to its own elements. It *makes itself appear* ... Broadly speaking, an event is a site which is capable of making exist in a world the proper in-existent of the object that underlies the site. This tipping-over of the inapparent into appearing singularizes – in the retroaction of its logical implications – the event site. (Badiou 2009, 452)

Badiou defines the site as being the ontological support of its own appearance. Unlike other objects that are indexed by the transcendental of a world, sites are autonomous and singular. They are the being-there of their own being, and thus create their own intensity of existence. Given that they escape the count-as-one of appearing and are invisible to the transcendental order of that world, sites must *inexist* within a world as clandestine multiples that belong only to themselves. A site's eventual manifestation in a world is therefore a violation of the transcendental order: the non-represented reveal their existence from the desert of inexistence. Since they transgress the laws of appearance (every object and relation is visible), sites must accordingly appear only to disappear in an instant. As a vanished point, the site's political efficacy can only be measured in terms of the *consequences* that it authorises.

Badiou thus complicates this definition of change through his framing of the site in terms of *intensity of existence* and *consequences*. A site differs little from modification if it does not have a maximal intensity of existence and thus exists as a 'fact'. If a site possesses a maximal intensity of existence it is said to be a 'singularity'. There are thus three distinct degrees of change: modification (ontologically neutral and transcendently ordered), fact (ontologically supernumerary and existentially weak) and singularity (ontologically supernumerary and with maximal appearance). Singularities, in turn, can either be weak or strong. This spectrum defines the consequences that the singularity of the site

authorises. Only strong singularities or events are capable of making consequences exist maximally:

For what counts is not only the exceptional intensity of its surging up – the fact that we are dealing with a violent episode that creates appearing – but the glorious and uncertain consequences that this upsurge, despite its vanishing, sets out. (Badiou 2009a, 375)

And there is no greater transcendental consequence than the appearance of an in-existent: which is to say the subversion of appearing by the void. This is why Badiou repeatedly places his faith in the workers of the 1871 Paris Commune, since these women and men not only brought to the contemporary world their previously in-existent political appearance, but also the permanent possibility of a new society. This vanished appearance ended the logic of subjective incapacity and created in its place an eternal truth of *another* world.

Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators' history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priest will not avail to redeem them. (Marx 1871, np)

What is at stake with the site is the possibility of a new world; not the modification of an old one. Through reshuffling and warping the transcendental coordinates of a world, the site quite literally creates a new space of existence in which objects and their relations are redrawn: 'The opening of a space of creation requires destruction' (Badiou 2009, 396). Autonomous, self-belonging and responsible for their appearing, sites pose a perennial political problem to the status quo. Stability can never be fully furnished by the State given that the finitude of appearance is forever overrun by the infinitude of being. The appearance of an in-existent in a world, if its existence and consequences are maximal, forces the logic of being-there to shift: the cohesion of a world is distorted, its order subverted and the transcendental reconstitutes a new index of appearance. What exists and what does not exist in a world can no longer be thought of as an ontological matter – it is also a matter of appearance. The difference between the represented and the non-represented is not mandated by the inflections of a Deleuzian virtual and its actualisations. It is a political procedure engineered by the dominant transcendental of a world.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to make a sustained argument for the political necessity of Badiou's site in human geography. It began by presenting Badiou's critiques of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. This was centred upon conflicting ontological definitions of multiplicity and event, as well as Badiou's characterisation of him as a foundational philosopher. From this engagement the choice of post-Cantorian set theory was made, given its capacity for articulating the infinite. This is critical for a sustained political attack on the gap between those that are included but do not belong to a world. Requiring a theorisation of what exactly a world was, I briefly sketched Badiou's *Logics of worlds*, introducing the critical operator named the transcendental which regulates who and what gets to appear. From this, a fully fledged blueprint for the site was available. Moving against the grain of Deleuzian descriptions of the site, I argued that radical change could only be manifested by the appearance of a previously inexistent site. This radical subversion of the finitude of being-there by the infinity of being-qua-being was cast as the emergence of a truth: a new world wagered by the site.

The meta-argument here is the necessity of truth as a political category. For many this will seem as a dangerous fundamentalism, a reversion to scientific certainty, and little more than a restrictive geometric matrix that is ignorant to difference and hostile to pluralism. But a defence of truth is a defence of those who resist the terms of (capitalist) political doxa (Žižek 2008; see also Badiou and Žižek 2009). Truth is invisible to the transcendental law of a world and it is this essentially inexistent topography that makes it a perennial threat to the State. The eventual declaration of existence at the site 'we exist!' requires a politics based on supporting the consequences wrought by worldly dislocation. It demands a political cartography that pays just as much attention to gaps, fissures and *subtraction* as it does rhizomes, plateaus and *connection*. But Badiou's project is not a negative enterprise. It is simultaneously an affirmation of the always existing potential for a new world. It is this dialectic between 'what is' and 'what is to come' that Badiou's politics are contingently poised:

When the world is violently enchanted by the absolute consequences of a paradox of being, all of appearing, threatened by the local destruction of a customary

evaluation, must reconstitute a different distribution of what exists and what does not. Under the pressure that being exerts on its own appearing, the world may be accorded the chance – mixing existence and destruction – of an other world. (Badiou 2009, 380)

There is much that I have left out of Badiou's extensive array of concepts, such as his theorisation of points, bodies, organs as well as the difference between tensed and atonic worlds. All of these are networked together around a new account of subjectivity – a constellation of ideas I explore elsewhere (Shaw 2010). I want to end by flagging the main contribution *Logics of worlds* is likely to make in human geography. Badiou offers a novel philosophy in which worlds and objects are woven together in a Möbius strip that defies either ontological or phenomenological reduction. This synthesis between being and appearance is the dialectic that produces political possibility. Within any world, radical change is never found in those relations that are most visible, hence Badiou's repeated indifference to parliamentary politics. Instead, change is found in the shadows of the transcendental. There are interesting methodological consequences to this: each world is overrun by an excess of being over appearing, and to fully embrace this infinite excess is to reconsider what counts as important sources of change for politics. It means investigating what transcendental logic authorises the inexistent of a world. It is this dialectic between being and appearing that is most politically exciting, since it offers fresh possibilities for rethinking those worlds that appear total. Their very stability is always haunted by the deep murmuring of the site.

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## Note

- 1 Correction added after online publication: The abstract as originally published online contained an error – the penultimate line made reference to 'the

democratic materialist conviction' when 'the materialist dialectic conviction' had been intended. This was corrected online on 4th April 2010.

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