

Peter Hallward: I thought we might begin with questions about politics – the place of the state, the relation between politics and economics on the one hand, and politics and culture on the other – and then go on to broader, more strictly philosophical questions – the relations between your mathematical ontology and material reality, between knowledge and truth, and among a plurality of subjects. To start then with the most pressing question of the moment: how has your understanding of politics changed since the late 1970s, that is, since the end of the Maoist intervention in France?

Alain Badiou: I think the first thing to change was our position concerning the status of the political party. Up to the end of the 1970s, my friends and I defended the idea that an emancipatory politics presumed some kind of political party. Today we are developing a completely different idea, which we call “politics without party.” This doesn’t mean “unorganised politics.” All politics is collective, and so organised one way or another. “Politics without party” means that politics does not spring from or originate in the party. It does not stem from that synthesis of theory and practice that represented, for Lenin, the Party. Politics springs from real situations, from what we can say and do in these situations. And so in reality there are political sequences, political processes, but these are not totalised by a party that would be simultaneously the representation of certain social forces and the source of politics itself.

P.H.: And when you say: “it is especially necessary to hold firmly to the prescriptions of *L’Organisation Politique*, whether it is a matter of the public services, of the factories, of the *sans-papiers* [unregistered immigrants without residence papers], of the *foyers ouvriers* [workers’ hostels]...”? How to resist an eventual institutionalisation?

A.B.: I think it’s possible to conceive and practice a discipline that is the discipline of the particular process itself. When we say, “hold to the prescriptions,” these prescriptions are

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always relative to a concrete situation. They are singular prescriptions; they are neither ideological nor expressive of a party line. To give an example: if today we are grappling with the question of the *sans-papiers*, then what we call a prescription is so with regard to this precise question, itself caught up with the process of mobilisation, of building a movement, etc. There is certainly an element of discipline here. But it is not so much an organisational discipline, which we have neither the means nor the intention of consolidating, but simply a discipline of *thought*. If we are engaged in a process, engaged in the name of a certain number of statements, then the very existence of politics depends on a certain tenacity, a certain consistency.

The second thing that has changed over these last twenty years concerns the status of class. We were for a long time faithful to the idea of a class politics, a class state, etc. Today we think that political initiatives that present themselves as representations of a class have

given everything they had to give. The Marxist analysis of classes remains a fully reliable tool. I think that global trends have essentially confirmed some of Marx's fundamental intuitions. There is no going back on this; there is no need for a revision of Marxism itself. It is a matter of going beyond the idea that politics *represents* objective groups that can be designated as classes. This idea has had its power and importance. But in our opinion, we cannot today begin from or set out from this idea. We can begin from political processes, from political oppositions, from conflicts and contradictions, obviously. But it is no longer possible to code these phenomena in terms of representations of classes. In other words, there may exist emancipatory politics or reactionary politics, but these cannot be rendered immediately transitive to a scientific, objective study of how class functions in society.

The third and final point of change concerns the state. We used to be convinced that a new political stage [*scène*] had to be built, a stage for the masses, that would be radically external or foreign to the mechanism of the state. We tended to leave the state outside of the field of politics in the strict sense. Politics unfolded according to the interests of the masses, and the state was the adversary outside. This was our way of being faithful to the old communist idea of the withering away of the state, and of the state's necessarily bourgeois and reactionary character. Today our point of view is quite different. It is clear that there are two opposed forms of antistatism. There is the communist heritage of the withering of the state on the one hand; and on the other, there is ultra liberalism, which also calls for the suppression of the state, or at least its reduction to its military and police functions. What we would say now, is that there are a certain number of questions regarding which we cannot posit the absolute exteriority of the state. It is rather a matter of requiring something from the state, of formulating with respect to the state a certain number of prescriptions or statements. I'll take up the same example I gave a moment ago, because it is an example of mili-

tant urgency. Considering the fate of the *sans-papiers* in this country, a first orientation might have been: they should revolt against the state. Today we would say that the singular form of their struggle is rather to create the conditions in which the state is led to change this or that thing concerning them, to repeal the laws that should be appealed, to take the measures of naturalisation [*regularisation*] that should be taken, etc. This is what we mean by *prescriptions against the state*. This is not to say that we participate in the state. We remain outside the electoral system, outside any party representation. But we include the state within our political field, to the degree that, on a number of essential points, we have to work more through prescriptions against the state than in an radical exteriority to the state.

P.H.: Is there a risk that such nonparticipant prescription might condemn itself to a marginal irresponsibility? Why is the party option so obviously obsolete? Why not support a party whose principles include, for example, the immediate legalisation or naturalisation of workers without residence papers?

A.B.: Because parties are today internal to the parliamentary state. It's simply not true that you can participate in a system as powerful and as ramified as parliamentarism without a real subjective commitment to it. In any case, the facts speak for themselves. *None* of the parties which have engaged in the parliamentary system and won governing power, have escaped what I would call the subjective law of "democracy," which is, when all is said and done, what Marx called an "authorised representative" of capital. And I think that this is because, in order to participate in electoral or governmental representation, you have to conform to the subjectivity it demands, that is, a principle of continuity, the principle of the *politique unique*² – the principle of "this is the way it is, there is nothing to be done," the principle of Maastricht, of a Europe in conformity with the financial markets, and so on. In France we've known this for a long time, for

again and again, when left-wing parties come to power, they bring with them the themes of disappointment, broken promises, etc. I think we need to see this as an inflexible law, and not as a matter of corruption. I don't think it happens because people change their minds, but because parliamentary subjectivity compels it.

So we must keep our distance from this subjective figure of politics. For us this means, concretely: don't stand for election, don't vote, don't expect anything from any political party. Which in no way excludes the creation of those conditions that might compel those within the parliamentary system to take a particular decision. Even regarding the question of the *sans-papiers*, if we consider the great movement to occupy the Saint Bernard church, well, as far as the occupants are concerned, they have by and large received their residence papers. After being told no, they were told yes – without, as today's discussions show, any real change in the laws or the legal perspective. It was done because the new conditions required it to be done.

P.H.: Before moving to the question of how then we might engage with capital directly, I'd like to ask you about L'Organisation Politique, which is still pretty unknown in Britain. Very briefly, what is it, and what does it do?

A.B.: The core of the L'Organisation Politique is made up of militants who have had a long history together, beginning with the events of May 1968 – in particular, Natacha Michel, Sylvain Lazarus, and myself. At the time, our engagement was organised around a very particular Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thematics. The story of French Maoism is very complicated and I won't tell it here. L'Organisation Politique was created when we began to see things in a different way, regarding the questions of party, class, and state. The main orientations of L'Organisation Politique were established from around 1984-85, and we've now been publishing our journal, *La Distance politique*, for five or six years. Our work has focused on two principal sets of questions. The

first concerns the realm of prescriptions against the state, which today turn on the issues of the *foyers ouvriers*, the set of questions relating to nationality and the status of foreigners: how do we count foreign workers in this country, do we count them for nothing or for something, etc.? This question is linked to the struggle against the [French] Front National. This domain of militant intervention has also concerned questions of equality in education and health, and so on.

Our second major focus concerns the status of factories, the possibility that politics takes root in or becomes stable through factories and places of work. We continue to see this as a decisive question, because it provides a kind of stable foundation to popular organisation. So on the one hand we are working to establish directly political groups of workers in the factory, promoting a new figure of the worker, and on the other, to create new conditions concerning prescription against the state.

P.H.: You are how many, roughly?

A.B.: Very few. A few dozen genuine militants, capable of leading a political process. Personally, given the conditions of the moment, this doesn't much bother me. To know what people do is more important than knowing how many they are. In some situations, two people can do quite a lot where forty others might do very little. And it is true that in our own eyes, our political activity has something experimental about it. Unlike the political parties, we're not looking for institutional power. We are experimenting with what we can do in particular processes, which is a matter for meticulously detailed work. It is a matter of developing a different figure of politics than the figure of the revolutionary Party, as it has dominated things since October 1917. The experimental dimension is inevitable.

P.H.: What is your relation to democracy as such? Your group maintains that "the principle of democracy [is] that every-one counts as one."³ But you don't vote, you don't participate.

A.B.: Democracy doesn't exactly mean that all individuals are counted as one in their own right. It's a matter of knowing how we are counted by the state. It's not the same thing. This question of democracy is profoundly linked to the state in general. Lenin used to say that ultimately, democracy is a kind of state. The question is how people are counted by the state. Are they counted equally? Are some counted less than others, or hardly counted at all? And what is counted needn't only be individuals. We can describe perfectly well how the state today counts workers without residence papers. In the case of factory organisation, how does the employer count the workers' time, the time spent in the factory? It is a matter of asking how things in society are counted, or go uncounted. It is through this kind of question that, in our opinion, democracy exists as a real and active figure, and not merely as a juridical, constitutional mechanism.

P.H.: One of the obvious virtues of your position regarding the sans-papiers is that it separates very clearly the question of immigration from the very different question of unemployment. But by preserving the figure of the worker as the essential figure of immigration, is there a risk of reconnecting these two questions? And how to avoid the directly economic pressure that has come to bear on the organisation and location of factories over the last few decades? How to maintain a political prescription on this point, without organising a massive and specifically economic intervention?

A.B.: The figure of work and the figure of the worker are not at all the same. When we speak of a figure of the worker, it is not at all an economic figure, but a political one. In France, this question has a long history. We maintain that, over the last twenty years, there has been a systematic campaign to eliminate any figure of the worker from political space. "Immigrant" is a word that came to be used at a certain moment in this campaign. For example, one of the first Mitterand governments, the Mauroy government, during major workers'

strikes at Flins, at Citroën, at Talbot, said that these workers were in fact immigrants, who were not really integrated into French social reality. The category "immigrant" has been systematically substituted for the category "worker," only to be supplanted in its turn by the category of the "clandestine" or illegal alien. First workers, then immigrants, finally illegal aliens. If we insist that we are actually talking about workers – and whether they have worked, are working, or no longer work, doesn't represent a subjective difference – it is to struggle against this unceasing effort to erase any political reference to the figure of the worker. It is essential to ask whether, in politics, we count the figure of the worker for something, or for nothing. To count it for nothing means that we count nothing but capital. What is counted is the level of the stock market, the Euro, financial investment, competition, etc.; the figure of the worker, on the other hand, counts for nothing.

The question is all the more important in that it touches on much of the meaning of the December 1995 strikes in France. People protested: "we don't count, the figure of work that we represent counts for nothing." That's why we maintain that a figure of the worker – which does not mean a working class, or a charismatic proletariat – must be upheld as alive and active in the field of politics. And I think that this has nothing to do with those arguments that try to link the question of immigrants to a purely economic understanding of the amount of available work.

P.H.: One last question about immigration. You describe it as a "problem of internal politics," and distance yourselves from those who "brandish pseudoprescriptions, like the suppression of frontiers."⁴ But doesn't a politics of unconditional naturalisation [regularisation] remain pretty abstract, as long as borders remain intact?

A.B.: I would say of the abolition of frontiers what I said a moment ago about the withering away of the state. I'm for it, I'm absolutely for it! But to be for something yields no active

political principle in the situation. In reality, politics must always find its point of departure in the concrete situation. The question of knowing what happens to people who are in France is already a huge question. To refer this question back to a debate about the opening or the closing of borders, to the question of whether labour belongs to a global market or not, etc., seems to forbid thinking about the situation itself and intervening in it so as to transform it.

The guiding principle concerning these questions should be as follows. We still belong to a historical era dominated by states and borders. There is nothing to suggest that this situation is going to change completely in the near future. The real question is whether the regulations [*reglementation*] at issue are more or less consistent with egalitarian aspirations. We should first tackle the question of how, concretely, we treat the people who are here; then, how we deal with those who would like to be here; and finally, what it is about the situation of their original countries, that makes them want to leave. All three questions must be addressed, but in that order. To proclaim the slogan, "an end to frontiers," defines no real policy, because no one knows exactly what it means. Whereas, by addressing the questions of how we treat the people who are here, who want to be here, or who find themselves obliged to leave their homes, we can initiate a genuine political process.

P.H.: Let's move on to the more general question of the relation between the political and the economic. It's a little strange to run into a Marxist philosopher who rarely refers to the mode of production and some kind of economic determinism, however attenuated. Is there any danger that your relative silence on this score condemns you to what Lucien Goldmann used to call a "tragic" condition — that is, a condition cut off from the real mechanisms of power that shape society?

A.B.: The part of Marxism that consists of the scientific analysis of capital remains an absolutely valid background. After all, the

realisation of the world as global market, the undivided reign of great financial conglomerates, etc., all this is an indisputable reality and one that conforms, essentially, to Marx's analysis. The question is, where does politics fit in with all this? I think what is Marxist, and also Leninist, and in any case *true*, is the idea that any viable campaign against capitalism can only be political. There can be no economic battle against the economy. We have economist friends who analyse and criticise very well the existing systems of domination. But everything suggests that on this point, such knowledge is useful, but by itself provides no answer. The position of politics relative to the economy must be rethought, in a dimension that isn't really transitive. We don't simply fall, by successive representations, from the economy into politics. What kind of politics is *really* heterogeneous to what capital demands? — that is today's question. Our politics is situated at the heart of things, in the factories, in a direct relation with employers and with capital. But it remains a matter of politics, that is to say, of thought, of statements, of practices. All the efforts to construct an alternative economy strike me as pure and simple abstractions, if not simply driven by the unconscious vector of capital's own reorganisation. We can see for example, and will see more and more, how so many environmentalist demands simply provide capital with new fields of investment, new inflections and new deployments. Why? Because every proposition that directly concerns the economy can be assimilated by capital. This is so by definition, since capital is indifferent to the qualitative configuration of things. So long as it can be transformed or aligned in terms of market value, everything's fine.

The only strategy worth the name is a political struggle, that is to say, a singular, active subjectivity, a thought-praxis [*pensée-pratique*]. We are in the phase of experimentation.

P.H.: And the Cuban situation, for instance?

A.B.: I respect Cuba as a figure of resistance, for we should respect all the forms of resis-

tance to the hegemony of the global market, and to its principal organiser: American imperialism. But Cuba provides singular testimony of an outmoded conception of politics. And so Cuba will have, unavoidably, very serious problems, internal problems, because it bears witness, with incontestable grandeur, to a figure of the Party-State that belongs to another political age. Everything that exists is born, develops and comes to an end. After which we move on to something else.

P.H.: What about the relation of politics and culture? One of the most immediately striking things about your work, perhaps especially for Anglophone readers, is your hostility to the contemporary consensus on questions of liberal-democratic procedure, human rights, and our much vaunted respect for cultural difference. We might cite the recent works of Habermas, Rorty, and Charles Taylor, as much as Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut – but even in the French domain, we would have to relate the questions raised by the so-called nouvelle philosophie back to the apparent “ethical turn” of Lyotard (through Kant) and Derrida (through Levinas), as much as of the last works of Foucault. Where do you stand in relation to the contemporary obsession with the “other,” with the valorisation of difference as such? How do you avoid this question, once it’s been admitted that it is not a matter of claiming a particular essence (sexual, racial or religious), but of developing a critical position that takes account of the fact that where people are oppressed, they are oppressed as women, as black, as Jewish or Arab...

A.B.: When I hear people say “we are oppressed as blacks, as women,” I have only one problem: what exactly is meant by “black” or “women”? If this or that particular identity is put into play in the struggle against oppression, against the state, my only problem is with the exact political meaning of the identity being promoted. Can this identity, in itself, function in a progressive fashion, that is, other than as a property invented by the oppressors themselves? In his preface to *Les nègres*, Jean

Genet said that everything turns around the question: what are black people, and for starters, what colour are they? You can answer then that black people are black. But what does “black” mean to those who, in the name of the oppression they suffer, make it a political category? I understand very well what black means for those who use that predicate in a logic of differentiation, oppression, and separation. Just as I understand very well what “French” means when Le Pen uses the word, when he champions national preference, France for the French, exclusion of Arabs, etc. If someone wants to use the words “French” or “Arab” in another way, to inscribe them in a progressive political affirmation, everything depends on what this determination then means for the person who uses it. And what it means for everyone, what it means universally.

“Négritude,” for example, as incarnated by Césaire and Senghor, consisted essentially of reworking exactly those traditional predicates once used to designate black people: as intuitive, as natural, as primitive, as living by rhythm rather than by concepts, etc. It’s no accident that it was a primarily poetic operation, a matter of turning these predicates upside down, of claiming them as affirmative and liberating. I understand why this kind of movement took place, why it was necessary. It was a very strong, very beautiful, and very necessary movement. But having said that, it is not something that can be inscribed as such in politics. I think it is a matter of poetics, of culture, of turning the subjective situation upside down. It doesn’t provide a possible framework for political initiative.

The progressive formulation of a cause which engages cultural or communal predicates, linked to incontestable situations of oppression and humiliation, presumes that we propose these predicates, these particularities, these singularities, these communal qualities, in such a way that they be situated in another space and become heterogeneous to their ordinary oppressive operation. I never know in advance what quality, what particularity, is capable of becoming political or not; I have no

preconceptions on that score. What I do know is that there must be a progressive meaning to these particularities, a meaning that is intelligible to all. Otherwise, we have something which has its *raison d'être*, but which is necessarily of the order of a demand for integration, that is, of a demand that one's particularity be valued in the existing state of things. This is something commendable, even necessary, but it is not in my opinion something to be inscribed directly in politics. Rather, it inscribes itself in what I would generally call "syndicalism" [trade unionism], that is to say, *particular* claims, claims that seek to be recognised and valued in a determinate relation of forces. I would call "political" something that, in the categories, the slogans, the statements it puts forward, is less the demand of a social fraction or community to be integrated into the existing order, than something which touches on a transformation of that order as a whole.

A last example on this point: what is the legitimate political usage of the category "Jew"? It is very hard to ask this question in France, without instantly being labelled an anti-Semite. I think though that it is absolutely necessary, if this word is to have a progressive political signification, that it be something different than what, for instance, Hitler designated by that name. It can't be the same thing *turned on its head*. And if it is something else, we have to ask what it might be – what relation it has or doesn't have with the state of Israel and its practices, what relation it has or doesn't have with religion, with the matrilineal character of Judaism, or with the revolutionary engagement of so many Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, etc.

P.H.: But surely most of the historical answers to this question have included an element of irreducible particularity, a constitutive particularisation, we might say; how to describe what the word "Jew" means without referring to the theme of the chosen?

A.B.: That there is a remnant, or a support [support], of irreducible particularity, is in fact

something I would acknowledge for any kind of reality. To take up again the most urgent example in France today, it is perfectly obvious that the *sans-papiers* of the *foyers* [workers' hostels] are very particular – they are not simply Africans, but mainly from Mali, and often from a particular area in Mali. They practice a whole series of transpositions of village customs in their way of living in the *foyers*. They maintain a strong relation to their traditional hierarchy. When you attend a *foyer* meeting, you immediately notice that the meeting takes place in a particular way. But in the end, between this particularity present in the practical, concrete support of any political process, and the statements in the name of which the political process unfolds, I think there is only a relation of support, but not a relation of transitivity. It's a bit like the relation with the economy. You can't go from the one to the other, even if one seems to be "carried" by the other.

So to take up the question of the meaning of the word "Jew," it follows the same logic. Of course I recognise the consistency of the historical particularity covered by this word. But it in no way settles the question of in what sense the term can become a political category. I don't say that it can't happen, or that it shouldn't happen. But something more than this particularity would be necessary for it to happen. Because I know very well that people try to legitimate things in the name of this particularity that I condemn absolutely, like supporting the action of the state of Israel, as well as things that I support, like the effort of some Israelis to develop positive relations with the Palestinians. In each case we have to work to make a category pass from what I called its identitarian or syndical status, to a political status.

P.H.: Most of the verbs you usually use to describe the passage from particular to universal, however, are verbs like *subtract*, *extract*, *depose*... Can we progress, by essentially negative or subtractive means, to a point where once despised particularities can

attain a universal signification? You suggest that things like “the language we choose to speak, the things we eat, the people we marry and love, our customs and habits, all this changes, without strictly speaking anyone’s intervention”:⁵ the history of colonisation, however, to mention only it, suggests otherwise.

A.B.: As I said, I think the moment of turning things upside down is inevitable. And obviously, for example, the question of language, of history, of national singularity, are genuinely political questions for countries struggling against a coloniser or who have recently emerged from colonisation. But we have to recognise that they are ultimately political only because the historical movement for popular and national liberation against imperialism carried a certain universality. In the 1960s it was, especially for the youth of the world, a major cause. Today we see clearly that everything depends on the clarity of the categories put into play; their political character is not obvious. I think for example that the demonisation of the figure of Islam by the Western powers, and especially in France, is certainly reactionary. But this doesn’t mean, unlike the case of the people’s struggle in Vietnam, or the national struggle in Algeria, that the political and universalisable character of what is at stake on this point is fully transparent. It isn’t. It may become so, as everything begins in confusion and obscurity, but it isn’t yet. My feeling is that we are at the beginning of a new era. At the level of world history, this new era has been massively marked by the collapse of the USSR – a major historical settling of accounts [*une échéance historique majeure*] – and consequently, a new period of American hegemony. As so often happens, progressive thought has fallen behind all this.

To conclude on this point, and to make sure that there is no ambiguity, I want to underline the fact that no category is *in itself* blocked from its possible politicisation. Even “Arab,” even “Islam,” even “Jew,” even “French,” can, at a given moment, have a progressive political

signification. When de Gaulle addressed the French from London – the French meaning for him the resisters – “French” had a progressive signification, that of anti-Nazi resistance. This proves that these things can change. On the other hand, I would say that it is never given in advance; it is not because a term is a communal predicate, nor even because there is a victim in a particular situation, that it is automatically, or even easily, transformed into a political category.

P.H.: A final question on this issue: in your latest book, you distinguish between the logic of capital on the one hand, taking cultural identities and differences as its currency, and on the other, the logic of a truth which “deposes differences,” which “seeks new differences, new particularities in which to expose the universality” of the truth.⁶ Isn’t this second logic, the logic of deposing and exposing, as close as the first to what Marx describes as the process of reification, the investing of the dead matter of obsolete differences with the exclusively animating force of capital itself?

A.B.: Emancipatory politics, as I say somewhere in my *Manifesto for Philosophy*, must be at least equal to the challenge of capital. That is Marx’s idea. When Marx says that capital destroys all the old ties, all the ancient sacred figures, that it dissolves everything in the frozen waters of selfish calculation, he says it with a certain admiration.⁷ Marx had already distinguished himself from those who dreamed nostalgically of a resistance to capital rooted in the ancient customs and territories. He called this reactive phenomenon “feudal socialism.” Marx was radically critical of this idea, and this is because he accepted that there were formal similarities between the ambitions of emancipatory politics and the workings of capital. Because we can never go back on universalism. There is no earlier territoriality calling for protection or recovery. The whole point is that differences be traversed, conserved and deposed simultaneously, somewhere other than in the frozen waters of selfish calculation. Obviously

it's a formidably complex problem, which can sometimes expose us, I admit, to the risk of being the unconscious agents of capital itself. I remember the days when the French progressive movement – and Deleuze was very engaged in this – supported the creation of free [i.e., private sector] radio stations. At the time French radio was still entirely state-run. The creation of free radio stations was to be the conquest of a fragmentation, multiform territoriality. And Deleuze was partly right. But for the most part, what took place, overwhelmingly, was the conquest of radio by capital. This is always the danger. We can't avoid it. Because on this point we are rivals to capital, rather than merely reacting against it. It is a struggle of universalism against universalism, and not particularism against universalism.

P.H.: Following André Gorz, lots of people have said farewell to the working class, so as to support, perhaps with a certain idealism, the category of "new social movements." I'm thinking of Touraine, of Laclau and Mouffe, even of Foucault. What do you make of this trend?

A.B.: We are entirely opposed to it. Certainly, the great critique of "classicism" undertaken by my friend Sylvain Lazarus demonstrates that we know how a certain vision of class politics has been saturated. We don't say that it has failed. It has given what it had to give. It has been a great enterprise [*expérience*], with its darkness, its terrors, but also with its extraordinary creative enthusiasms and its ability, after all, here and there, to strike real blows against imperialism. This time has come to an end, and so we can say, if you like, that the category of the proletariat, as a political category, can no longer play much of a role.

But in terms of what they propose, I think that in camouflaged form, the abandon promoted by Gorz and others in fact shows that they have been won over, politically, to the established order. It leaves the properly political sphere untouched. It represents a kind of idealisation of a self-regulating social movement of capital itself. It is a vision of the afflu-

ent. The rich societies' dream of a maximum possible comfort. And so we are to busy ourselves with the environment, with development, with the reduction of the working week, with recreation, with education [*formation*] for all. I'd accept your characterisation of this trend: I see in it a fairly feeble idealism, and a veritable renunciation of politics as independent thought-praxis.

P.H.: And the figure of Hannah Arendt, the great renewal of interest in her work over the last few years? For not unlike you, she insists on the strict demarcation of the political from the cultural or economic, and insists in particular on the importance of "deliberate beginnings" in politics.⁸ But I wonder if she might find in your work traces of a kind of totalitarianism, of the belief that in some sense "everything is possible."

A.B.: The conception of politics that we defend is far from the idea that "everything is possible." In fact, it's an immense task to try to propose a few possibles, in the plural, a few possibilities other than what we are told is possible. It is a matter of showing how the space of the possible is larger than the one we are assigned – that something else is possible, but not that everything is possible. It is in any case essential that politics renounce the category of totality, which is perhaps another change with respect to the previous period.

The real difference with Hannah Arendt should rather be located in her definition of politics itself. For Arendt, politics concerns "living together," the regulation of being together as a republic, or as public space. It's not an adequate definition. It reduces politics to the sole instance of judgement, and eventually to opinion, rather than recognising that the essence of politics concerns thought and action, as connected through the practical consequences of a prescription. For any one prescription is opposed to others. There can be no homogeneous public space other than that of consensus – the consensus we are all familiar with, the consensus of *la pensée unique* [i.e., global liberalism]. I've always been struck by

the fact that Hannah Arendt prefers the American Constitution to the French Revolution. I don't say this out of chauvinism, but because I think these are two important historical images. On the one hand, the constitutional creation of a complex, ramified public space, elaborated in detail down to the finer points concerning the election of judges. On the other hand, something sequential, something more antagonistic, and more principled. I stand resolutely for the second option.

P.H.: This brings me to one of my main questions, the question of the plurality of subjects – if to be subject means to be the subject of (or to) a truth. In your Saint Paul, for example, you generally speak of “the Christian subject.” How to preserve the militant unity of a group of subjects, other than in the Jacobin manner, other than through the imposition of an eventual orthodoxy? How can the saint avoid eventually becoming a priest? What sort of space is there in your philosophy for subjective disagreement?

A.B.: Let's not forget that I conceive of a truth not as a pre-given transcendent norm, in the name of which we are supposed to act, but as a *production*. At a certain moment, the set of actors of a generic procedure, of a truth procedure, are clearly ignorant, unknowing, of what it is. This is an essential point. So nobody is in a position to say, that since he *knows* the truth, he is the one who will norm how it is to be known. Since the truth itself depends on its own production.

The only thing we have to question are the conditions of this production. I'm convinced that in politics for example, it is very largely deliberative. There is no reason why it should be Jacobin or terrorist. The Jacobin terror had its roots not in internal disagreement, but in the situation of crisis, the war and the counter-revolution. As a general rule, every generic procedure is in reality a process that can perfectly well be deliberative, as long as we understand that it invents its rule of deliberation at the same time as it invents itself. And it is no more constrained by a pre-established norm

that follows from the rule of deliberation. You only have to look at how the rule of deliberation in different organisations, in different political sequences, and in different political modes, is entirely variable. For example, to take only one story and only a couple of sequences in this story, it is entirely different under Lenin and under Stalin. Under Lenin, there were some absolutely dramatic disagreements. On a question as essential as that of whether or not to launch the insurrection, Lenin was in radical opposition to Zinoviev, Kamenev, and many others. In the end, a protocol of decision-making was found that didn't involve the extermination of opposing views. Under Stalin, by contrast, such extermination practically becomes the rule. Every time a plurality of individuals, a plurality of human subjects, is engaged in a process of truth, the construction of this process induces the construction of a deliberative and collective figure of this production, which is itself variable.

P.H.: If subjects exist only in the fidelity to the truth they proclaim, how to avoid the eventual and potentially oppressive measurement of the relative authenticity or intensity of this fidelity – the judgement of subjects as more or less close to the pure truth? That this truth is in a sense unknowable doesn't simplify the question.

A.B.: There is no difficulty of *principle* in accepting the fact that within a plurality of human subjects, there exist differences of more and less. It's inevitable. The only problem is in knowing how these differences are normed, ruled, and above all, how this is related to the production of the successive stages of the sequence in question. To take the restricted example of love, which engages two people, the smallest possible plurality: everyone knows that every disagreement needn't lead automatically to a break-up. At the same time, each figure of love invents and elaborates, over the course of its development, the regime of its disputes. Obviously, in some cases, there are break-ups. But in others there aren't. And the way in which the productive or

creative positivity of this love is articulated with the internal regulation of disagreement, simply defines *one* of the singularities of its trajectory.

The same goes for politics. The dialectic of “more or less” regulates a certain form of collective deliberation or collective engagement, but needn’t drive things toward a binary logic. I would say, to use an algebraic metaphor, that it needn’t present itself as a logic with two values. Everyone can accept the existence of intermediary nuances. Mao himself – and God knows there was a great deal of violence in the Chinese Revolution – developed a fairly complicated doctrine regarding the difference between contradictions among the people and antagonistic contradictions, and the existence in any process of left, centre, and right wings. He never stopped insisting that in the movement of a process there is always a considerable plurality of nuances, and that if we don’t grant some space to this plurality, we are finally driven back to the break-up of the process, more than anything else. It is true that some political sequences did adopt as the internal rule of their development a very severe bivalent logic, but we need to ask in each case how this bivalence was linked to the singularity of the sequence. It is not a general problem of truth processes.

II

P.H.: I’d like to turn now to more strictly philosophical questions, beginning with Plato. Along with a few others, Guy Lardreau and Christian Jambet in particular, you declare a fairly unusual fidelity to Plato. Why? What does Platonism mean, once you have renounced its transcendent aspect?

A.B.: I wouldn’t say that there is no transcendent dimension in Plato, but it’s not what interests me, it’s not why I align myself with him, in slightly provocative fashion – since all the major philosophical figures of the past century, from Nietzsche through Heidegger, have been anti-Platonists.

In fact, three things about Plato interest me. First, the sharp, inaugural awareness he has of what I call the “conditions” of philosophy. Philosophy is to be found in obligatory dialogue with mathematics, with art and poetry – even if this dialogue is strained and difficult –, with politics, and also with love, as demonstrated in the *Symposium* and other dialogues. This is far from the idea that philosophy is a total knowledge or system. For Plato, philosophy doesn’t begin thinking in relation to itself, but in relation to something else, to the people you meet and what they say (Socrates), but also, in relation to the discoveries of the mathematicians, to the work of those who write poetry and tragedy, to political situations and debates, to the existence and intensity of the feeling of love.

The second thing that interests me is Plato’s conviction that philosophy doesn’t add up to very much without the category of truth. This is my antimodern or anticontemporary aspect – for this category is suspected, criticised, i.e., denied, by most contemporary trends. I would even say that philosophy means little without the idea that there can be eternal truths... Of course this idea is present in the whole of classical metaphysics, but in Plato, it remains somewhat questioning and fragmentary. The question animates most of the dialogues, but it is nevertheless very hard to find in them a closed theory of truth, because it is always taken up again, in new conditions, with regard to something else. This suits me as a philosopher, this rhythm, in which we place ourselves under the sign of the question of truth even as we recognise that it cannot ever be the object of a self-sufficient or complete demonstration.

Finally, I think there is a Plato who is interested not at all by the transcendence of the Ideas, but by what we might call, to use one of Heidegger’s titles, the question “what is thinking?” We will naturally name Idea what is thinkable, what there is in thought. But, especially in the later dialogues, the *Sophist*, the *Parmenides*, the *Philebus*, Plato doesn’t at all pose the question “what is thought?” so as to privilege a transcendence, but rather to ask:

what is an internal articulation between Ideas, what is the movement of thought, what is its internal alterity, its impasse, etc.? For me, this is Plato.

P.H.: And "your master Lacan"? What do you retain from his teaching today? Did you attend his seminar?

A.B.: I've actually always kept myself at quite a distance from Lacan. I never attended his seminar, but at the same time, I was the first, with Althusser, to present reports on his work at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (1958-1959). I have never had any relation to the practice of psychoanalysis. I am neither analyst nor analysand, nor analysed, nor am I a member of any Lacanian school. My relation to Lacan is internal to philosophy.

That said, I've learned from Lacan a number of important things, and that's why I consider him to be one of my masters. To put it briefly, what long fascinated me about Lacan was his very strange effort to link the question of the subject to investigations or models of a logico-mathematical kind. This effort is totally absent from Freud. What especially interested me about Lacan was his conception of the real. First, the distinction he makes between the real and reality, which is not the same as the classical metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality, or between phenomenon and noumenon. And in particular, this conception of the real as being, in a situation, in any given symbolic field, the point of impasse, or the point of impossibility, which precisely allows us to think the situation as a whole, according to its real. Part of what I said a moment ago could be resaid as follows: emancipatory politics always consists in making seem possible precisely that which, from within the situation, is declared to be impossible.

Another thing that grabbed my attention: Lacan declared himself to be an "antiphilosopher." It is partly thanks to him that I began to ask myself, in a fairly systematic way, what might be declared antiphilosophical, what was it that characterised antiphilosophical thought, why certain kinds of thought constitute them-

selves as hostility to philosophy. In the end, my theory is that philosophy should always think as closely as possible to antiphilosophy. For all these reasons, I owe Lacan a real debt, despite having had no relation to the question of analytic therapy as such.

P.H.: You are careful to distinguish philosophical truth from all that might claim an affinity with the ineffable, the unsayable, or the mystical. At the same time, you defend, in Saint Paul and elsewhere, a striking doctrine of "laicised grace," purged of any religious reference or thematics. The question is: doesn't the truly religious begin precisely there where all thematics comes to an end? What can the idea of grace mean, if it doesn't connote the idea of another, properly creative power, a pure beyond?

A.B.: For me, every singular truth has its origin in an event. Something must happen, in order for there to be something new. Even in our personal lives, there must be an encounter, there must be something which cannot be calculated, predicted or managed, there must be a break based only on chance. And it's to the degree that there is an essential link between the infinite development or construction of a truth, and this element of rupture that is an event, that I understand what Christian writers have called grace. Which is not to say that for them the term has exactly this meaning. In effect, if every grace is a divine gift, we cannot absolutely avoid the idea of an ultimate, divine calculation, even if that calculation exceeds our understanding. That would be the difference that subsists between the properly religious understanding of grace, and what I call laicised grace.

At bottom, what I call laicised grace describes the fact that, to the degree that we are given a chance of truth, a chance of being a little bit more than living individuals, pursuing our ordinary interests, this chance is always given to us through an event. This eventmental giving, based absolutely on chance, and beyond any principle of the management or calculation of existence – why not call it a

grace? Simply, it is a grace that requires no all-powerful, no divine transcendence. What interests me in Saint Paul is the idea – very explicit in his writings – that the becoming of a truth, the becoming of a subject, depend entirely on a pure event, which is itself beyond all the predictions and calculations that our understanding is capable of.

P.H.: What then to make, with Paul, of that second and no less fundamental event, his personal confirmation, on the road to Damascus, of the truth of the first event? Is there room, in your philosophy, for this second and irreducibly private supplement? In other words, is the truth not always split between a truth “in general” or “for all,” and a truth reserved especially for its avant-garde? Or again, what is gained by distinguishing so sharply, in politics as much as in love, what happens to us from what we do, or make happen?

A.B.: What is important about Paul is that we can read the texts he left behind, quite independently of the story of his personal grace and of the way this grace itself did or did not depend on the resurrection. Paul’s thought is a thought of the event, a thought of the truth as consecutive to an event, a thought of fidelity, and also a certain thought of the universal, and what interested me was to examine it as such. That there are serious problems within Christian doctrine, concerning whether the event was sufficient or not, concerning who is chosen, is something that goes back to what we were saying, that it is very difficult to detach the Christian doctrine of grace from the idea of a transcendent plan that governs the world. Which is where my atheism interrupts the parallel, as I point out on several occasions in my book.

On the other hand, I don’t see any major problem as regards the collective extension of an event, if only because I’ve lived through something like it myself. A philosophy is also a personal experience. Concerning May 1968 and after, you have to remember just what the established Gaullist regime was like, in the early 1960s. You have to remember its oppres-

siveness, and the extraordinarily minoritarian character – in a way we can scarcely imagine today – of the protest movements, of radical or critical currents, confronted with the triumphalism of Pompidolian propertied capitalism. You have to have lived through that society, a society which had no more problems – the terrible question of Algeria having been resolved –, a society of full employment, of uninterrupted development... As regards what then took place, yes we were the genuine actors, but actors absolutely seized by what was happening to them, as by something extraordinary, something properly incalculable. Without a doubt I was personally marked by this irruption. Of course, if we add up the anecdotes one by one, we can always say that at any given moment there were certain actors, certain people who provoked this or that result. But the crystallisation of all these moments, their generalisation, and then the way in which everyone was caught up in it, well beyond what any one person might have thought possible – that’s what I call an eventmental dimension. *None* of the little processes that led to the event was equal to what actually took place.

P.H.: It’s a matter of scale?

A.B.: There was an extraordinary change of scale, as there always is in every significant event. For example, between the French Revolution and the financial crisis that prompted the calling of the Estates General, there was another change of scale. Of course we can always invoke the meeting of the Estates General, the question of the representation of the different orders, the king’s attempts to block all that. I’ve never argued that the event, when we examine it in its facticity, presents irrational characteristics. I simply think that none of the calculations internal to the situation can account for its irruption, and cannot, in particular, elucidate this kind of break in scale that happens at a certain moment, such that the actors themselves are seized by something of which they no longer know if they are its actors or its vehicle [*sup-*

ports], or what it carries away. Lin Piao – someone rarely mentioned these days – once said, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, that the essential thing was to be, at a revolutionary conjunction, both its actor and its target. I quite like this formula. Yes, we are actors, but in such a way that we are targeted by, carried away by, and struck by [*atteint par*] the event. In this sense there can undoubtedly be collective events.

You raise the example of Castro, who is dear to me because he's part of my youth. I followed what happened in Cuba very closely, and there again, it's obvious that the little group of partisans in the Sierra Maestra were voluntarists. But with the collapse of Batista, the seizure of power, and that extraordinary, very slow march of Castro towards Havana, the Cuban people as a whole were seized by something that, in a certain way, was no doubt legible in its successive stages, but which marked an absolute change of scale with respect to the disembarkation of some twenty people in the hills of the Sierra Maestra...

P.H.: You once said that you were no longer sure if there was an event in May 1968.⁹ By what criteria can we decide such things after the fact, especially if the event itself only persists, strictly speaking, through its retrospective declaration?

A.B.: I said something a little more complicated. I said that perhaps we didn't know the name of this event, and that, consequently, it was an eventuality still suspended from its name, what Sylvain Lazarus calls an "obscure eventuality." There are such eventualities, that is, eventualities such that the statements that can be detached from them, or the names used to refer to them, never manage to justify the practice of the sequence, never manage to stabilise it. For example, in the French Revolutionary sequence, the name "revolution" was very soon a matter of consensus, as the appropriate name for what was going on. When Saint-Just said, "the revolution is frozen," he pointed to something about the Revolution and the name "revolution," as

a capacity that was truly internal to what was going on at the time.

As regards May 1968, we've drifted this way and that, perhaps because it is an event belonging to precisely that time when we were passing from the old conception of politics to something else, so that, as a result, the name "revolution" wasn't the good name. There have been all sorts of proposals. I'm very struck by the fact that today everyone says "the events of May 1968," but if we say that the event has "event" as its name, it means that we haven't yet found its name. I expect that I will probably stick with this appreciation of May 1968: it is an event – part of my subjectivation was forged in it, so I will remain faithful to it –, but one whose name is obscure.

P.H.: One of the first questions to strike me as I read *L'Être et l'événement* was that of the relation between your mathematical ontology, and the nature of material reality in general. You treat material situations as particular sorts of mathematical sets. What relation is there between your ontology, that is, the presentation of presentation, what you call "being-as-being," and that which is presented?

A.B.: If we accept that there exists a situation in which what is at stake for thought is being-as-being – and for me this is simply one situation of thought, among others – then I would say that this situation is the situation defined by mathematics. Mathematics, because, if we abstract little by little all presentative predicates, we are left with the multiple, pure and simple. The "that which is presented" can be absolutely anything. Pure presentation as such, abstracting all reference to "that which," – which is to say, then, being-as-being, being as pure multiplicity – can only be thought through mathematics.

To the degree that we abstract the "that which is presented" in the diversity of situations, to consider the presentation of presentation itself, which is to say in the end, pure multiplicity, then the real and the possible are rendered necessarily indistinct. What I call

ontology is the generic form of presentation as such, considered independently of the question as to whether what is presented is real or possible. It is the reason why people have always debated the status of mathematical idealities, the status of their reality. Are they real, do they exist somewhere, are they merely possible, are they linguistic products...? I think we have to abandon these questions, simply because it is of the essence of ontology, as I conceive it, to be beneath the distinction of the real and the possible. What we will necessarily be left with is a science of the multiple in general, such that the question of knowing what is effectively presented in a particular situation remains suspended. *A contrario*, each time we examine something that is presented, from the strict point of view of its objective presentation, we will have a horizon of mathematicity, which is in my opinion the only thing that can be clear. In the final analysis, physics, which is to say the theory of matter, is mathematical. It is mathematical because, as the theory of the most objectified strata of the presented as such, it necessarily catches hold of being-as-being through its mathematicity.

The relation between “what is presented,” for example, matter, and the theory of being-as-being can be described, empirically, as the relation between physics and mathematics. But it might be described more profoundly, as the relation between, on the one hand, a generic theory of the multiple in itself – that is, of a multiple indifferent to what it is the multiple of, and thus of the multiple as pure multiple of the multiple – and, on the other hand, the “that which is multiply presented as such,” about which ontology says nothing.

P.H.: It seems however that your most basic concept, the concept of a situation, oscillates somewhat between an essentially mathematical order and what appears to be a no less essentially eclectic order, combining heterogeneous elements of actuality.

A.B.: You're quite right. The category of situation, from this point of view – and this is why I'm going substantially to rework it – is a biva-

lent category, a category we can access in two different ways [*à double entrée*]. In one sense you can take it to mean situation as effectivity, that is, as the effective realisation of an ontological possibility, and so as a figure of multiplicity. This would be how it is characterised from within the ontological situation. We could then say that every situation is a multiple. We could further add that every situation is an infinite multiple, or a multiple of such and such a cardinality, or a multiple of such and such complexity, and that would be about as far as we could go. In a second sense, the “that which composes this multiplicity,” the qualitative determination internal to this multiplicity, will be a matter for the investigation of *this* singular situation. We could say then for instance that it is a politico-historical situation, made up of gestures, actions of the masses, figures of the state, etc. If by contrast it is a strictly physical or material situation, it will be made up of experimental mechanisms highlighting particular sets [*ensembles*].

All this simply confirms a very old and somewhat inevitable ontological programme, which is that ontology always gathers up what remains to thought once we abandon the predicative, particular determinations of “that which is presented.” We might conclude that there remains nothing at all. This was the idea that dominated the whole nineteenth century, the whole post-Kantian theory, according to which, in this case, there would remain only the unknowable, and eventually nothing. Or we might conclude that there actually remains everything, which was after all Heidegger's guiding inspiration; that is, if we put to one side the diverse singularity of the existence of the existent [*étant*], we come to a thought of being that is itself suspended or deferred [*suspendue*] in fairly problematic fashion. As for me, I conclude that what remains is mathematics. I think it's a fairly strong thesis.

It is moreover a fully materialist thesis, because everyone can see that the investigation of matter, the very concept of matter, is a concept whose history shows it to be at the edge of mathematicity. It is not mathematical in the

order of experience, but it is mathematised by rational thought. Such that it is on the border of the mathematical, since the more you decompose the concept of matter into its most elementary constituents, the more you move into a field of reality which can only be named or identified with increasingly complex mathematical operations. "Matter" would simply be, immediately after being, the most general possible name of the presented (of "what is presented"). Being-as-being would be that point of indistinction between the possible and the real that only mathematics apprehends in the exploration of the general configurations of the purely multiple. Matter, in the sense in which it is at stake in physics, is matter as enveloping any particular presentation – and I am a materialist in the sense that I think that any presentation is material. If we consider the word "matter," the content of the word "matter," matter comes immediately after being. It is the degree of generality immediately co-present to ontology. The physical situation will then be a very powerfully mathematised situation and, in a certain sense, more and more so, the closer it comes to apprehending the smallest, most primordial elements of reality.

P.H.: One of the consequences – or perhaps one of the conditions – of your position is to bracket the distinction which has so often inspired ontological inquiry, the distinction of the animate and inanimate, or of the living and the more-than-living, the distinction of the created and the Creator. Does your recourse to mathematics allow you to sidestep the old problems associated with our attempt to make sense of a reality that is not of the same order as our own experience?

A.B.: I'm convinced of the importance of the situational field concerning the theory of living beings. I think that the theory of the living as living, like the theory of matter as matter, is a matter for science. And God knows that I recognise the eminent dignity and singular importance of science among the conditions of philosophy. If I haven't yet said much about the field of the living, it's not at all because I

think it's unnecessary. I have in any case always said that we have to accept the fact that human beings are animals.

P.H.: You're sometimes a little hard on animals...

A.B.: No! Why do you say that?

P.H.: This effort to distinguish an immortal truth from the corruption of the flesh, of temptation, of desires and interests that are "no more, no less worthy than those of moles..."¹⁰

A.B.: But let's make some distinctions. I do think there is a real difference between the human and the animal. This doesn't mean that I deny that, for the essential part of our existence, we are animals. I've often said as much. A major part of human existence is *grasped*, seized, within animal existence. This is not a value judgement, it just means that, if we're going to speak of truth procedures, we're going to speak of something else. This something else is what constitutes the singularly human, within the animal universe. Personally, I'm quite fascinated by everything that reminds me to what degree human beings are animals. I have a certain tenderness for this. I'm not at all the kind of classical moralist for whom the animality within the human is always the object of an initial prejudice. It's a part of my materialism.

I think that human beings are animals, animals which have at their disposal a singular ability, a singular, aleatory, and partial ability, which identifies them philosophically as human, within the animal sphere. The animal sphere is itself internal to the material sphere. From the point of view of the pure presented, it ends there. But where a thought of being is concerned – and it is precisely one of the singular human capacities – we have the use of mathematics.

You once accused me of being pre-Darwinian; this was an important objection in your eyes. It struck me, that remark, and I've thought about it. I have the greatest admiration for Darwin. His revolutionary discovery was a major creation in human thought.

Bearing in mind the conditions of the day, his theory was very powerful, with remarkable subversive potential. It's not for nothing that it has always been the target of reactionary attacks. I don't think I am pre-Darwinian. I accept absolutely that man is an animal, and in a certain sense, nothing else. From the point of view of what composes us, there is nothing except matter. Even a procedure of truth is never anything other than the seizing of materiality.

Having said that, I do think that, *by grace*, this particular animal is sometimes seized by something that thought cannot manage to reduce strictly to the thought of animality as such. It is not a very different claim from the one a physicist will make by saying that, however mathematised physics becomes, there remains nevertheless a moment where it is experience or the experiment [*l'expérience*] which decides an issue, where everything is not reducible to that sole space exhaustively thought by pure mathematicity. As regards truth, it's the same thing, i.e., it is only thinkable by that mortal animal which human beings happen to be.

P.H.: What then, exactly, is the relation between the immortality of the truth and the "animality" of the knowledges it transcends? In the first place, we know that according to your ontology, the elements of a situation exist as "counted-for-one" by the situation. Are they thus intrinsically individuated or self-individuated, and then selected by the situation? Or are they distinguished solely by their belonging to the situation? What distinguishes an element?

A.B.: Your question puts you in a position of indiscernibility. We cannot immediately distinguish between the fact that an element is counted as one in the situation, and the one that it is "in itself." What can happen is that, in a manner that is itself unavoidably eventmental, some elements come to appear as needing to be counted in the situation, that were not previously counted. It is only through this discovery that there irrupts a gap between

what is counted as one in the situation, and the intrinsic one that the element is. Retroactively, we will have to declare that this something which appears, eventmentally, as needing to be counted, did indeed belong to the situation. And if you admit retroactively that it belonged to the situation, you will have to say that it had an intrinsic identity. Which is why every intrinsic identity which affirms itself as an objection to the counting-as-one – that is, as uncounted in the situation in which it should be counted – comes to light only in the eventmental discovery. It is the eventmental discovery which constitutes the gap between counted for one by the situation, and intrinsic identity.

If we were in a position, from the strict point of view of the situation itself, to distinguish between what is counted for one in the situation, and the intrinsic identity of what is so counted, then this position would not be immanent to the situation. We would need to be an external observer, capable of saying: here is an identity, here is what is counted for one, and we can see that this identity is outside the count. But since we are always immanent to a situation, we are necessarily incapable of distinguishing between what is counted and an intrinsic, uncounted, identity.

What any event reveals – and I think it's particularly striking in politics – is that there was something which had its own identity beyond the count, which was not taken account of. It's why I've always said that an event was, one way or another, a breakdown of the count. It's also why – and here we come back to what I was saying about Lacan – we can equally say, of an event, that it is what demonstrates what is impossible for the count, as its real, such that the law of the count is made apparent, as being such that this thing, which wasn't counted, should have been counted.

P.H.: How would you qualify this fact of always being internal to a situation? Isn't it a kind of transcendental condition, an enabling condition of our existence, that we must always be specific to a situation?

A.B.: I take it to be an ontological principle, that's the only difference. I've no need to call it transcendental. What ontology tells us, in the theory of the purely multiple, is that, inasmuch as a multiple exists, we can only declare its existence inasmuch as it belongs to another multiple. To exist as a multiple is always to belong to a multiplicity. To exist is to be an element *of*. There is no other possible predicate of existence as such. The immediate consequence is that to exist is to be in a situation, without needing to fall back on the transcendental, since it is a law of being. I try to limit the use of the word "transcendental" to its Kantian meaning. "Transcendental" refers back to the subjective conditions of experience, and Kant never stops telling us that it is precisely not a law of being. It is a law of the unity of the phenomenon, not a law of being. If you want to extend the meaning of the word "transcendental" to the point that you call, in the end, transcendental the first or ultimate condition of thought in general, of existence in general, then at that point I'd agree, yes, it's transcendental.

P.H.: I know that you are in the middle of reformulating your conception of relationship, and in particular of the relationship between truth and knowledge. How do things stand as of now?

A.B.: In *L'Être et l'événement*, I suggest that in every situation, there is an encyclopaedia of knowledges, linked to a language of the situation. It's true – and you yourself have made the objection – that unlike the multiplicity of the situation, which is accounted for in ontology and mathematics, this particular point remains largely ungrounded, or affirmed in an uncritical way. If we assume it, then truth can appear as boring a hole in this encyclopaedia, as subtracting itself from it, or as a diagonal of novelty with respect to it. Both language and knowledge are very important, and they are related, since it is only because there is a language of the situation that there can be predicates, particularities, and thus knowledges.

The reworking I'm engaged in at the

moment consists of giving both a legitimacy and a much greater consistency to this double question of the language of the situation and the existence of knowledges. This has naturally led me to rethink the most basic concept of my thinking, which is precisely the notion of situation. In reality, the concept of situation is reduced, in *L'Être et l'événement*, to the purely multiple, to which is added, slightly from the outside, the language of the situation and its predicates. Setting out from a study of what determines the particularity of a situation, I hope to show that there is necessarily in every situation a predicative universe, which I will call its being-there [*être-là*]. I will try to distinguish the being of the situation, which refers back to ontology, from its being-there, that is, the necessity for every situation to be not simply a being but, coextensive with that being, an appearing [*apparaître*]. It is a doctrine of appearing, but of a nonphenomenal appearing. It's not a matter of an appearing for a subject, but of an appearing as such, as localisation. It is a localisation that doesn't itself refer back to any particular space or geography, but is rather an intrinsic localisation. It is a supplementary ontological property, in addition to pure multiplicity.

In other words, I'm going to tackle the problem of the distinction between a possible and an effective situation, between possible situation and real situation, since I'll go back over the fact that ontology doesn't settle this question, that it is beneath this point of distinction. Hence the effectivity of a situation, its appearing, can't be deduced from its configuration of multiplicity. There is no transitivity between the one and the other.

At this point we'll have to ask about the laws of appearing. I think that we can maintain the idea that mathematics still explains some of what happens, that we aren't absolutely obliged to leave the realm of the mathematical. Simply, we'll need a slightly new form of mathematicity, one that requires a minimal theory of relation, a *logic*. I call "logic" that which is a theory of relation as relation, relation between elements, between parts, etc. I will

argue that being-as-being, that is as beneath the relation between being and being-there, is a pure multiplicity. But I will show how this pure multiplicity is always attached to, distorted by, or reworked by, a universe of relations, which will define the logic peculiar to the situation, and not merely its being displayed in its multiplicity, or its network of belongings.

This is going to require, on the mathematical side of things, different operators, both logical and topological, and on the philosophical side, an elucidation of the relation between being and being-there. I think I'll be able to draw most of the argument from the relation of order, from the elementary relation of order, order being defined simply as the first dissymmetrical relation – of course the didactics of the thing, the way of presenting it, is very important to me, and as long as I haven't fully discovered it I'm not entirely at ease. I'm going to try to solve the problem – and you see that I've read your work and am sensitive to what you've said – by injecting something like dissymmetry into the general edifice, without in any way renouncing it. This means that it will mean something to say that *a* is in relation with *b*, in a relation which is something other than the strict relation of equivalence or equality. I'll take up the relation of order because it is, in the end, mathematically, the most primordial, most abstract, nonsymmetric relation.

*P.H.: My last questions concern the autonomy of truth, its status in relation to the world it exceeds or transcends. What kind of relationship is there, for example, between the truth of a scientific or artistic discovery and the technical means of its formulation and distribution? What relation is there between an artistic, let's say musical, truth, and the (culturally specific) system of tonality which ensures that the truths of Haydn and Schoenberg, to take examples from your *Ethique*, are always truths for certain listeners?*

A.B.: I think we have to accept that, between the effective or real character of any procedure of truth, and the protocol of identification,

recognition, designation, or propagation of that truth, there are only individual cases, and no general relationship. We can give very simple examples. Take for example Arabo-Andalusian music, which has its own space of development, of creation, of historicity. For a long time it couldn't be identified as such. And then conditions were created in which it became identifiable. It's really an individual case.

This touches on two problems, which I'm currently working on. First problem. Does the universalising identification of a truth have as its condition *sine qua non* something like philosophy? After all, I have myself defended the thesis according to which philosophy does not create truths, but plays a certain role – I didn't say the only role – in their identification and in their compatibility, their compossibility, the evaluation of their time. For me this is still an open question. Is there always something of the order of philosophy – but how are we to recognise philosophy? – in the universalising identification of a procedure of truth, regardless of its origin or destination?

This poses the question of the degree of philosophy's own universality. If we admit that philosophy has a capacity – not an exclusive capacity, but one proper to it – to identify something as universal, then it's obvious that philosophy has played a major role in the identification of science as such. We know that the identification of art itself, *as art*, as distinct from anything else, is the achievement of philosophy. To generalise: does the identification of procedures of truth always pass through philosophy, necessarily or unnecessarily, or is it a question of situation, of culture? It's an open question, and a fairly complicated one.

The second, still more complicated problem, concerns what I call the interconnected juxtaposition [*juxtaposition en réseau*] of truth procedures. Truth procedures do not exist as unilaterally unconnected, as entirely independent of each other, each following their own path. They are constituted in a network, they cross each other. Part of the problem is a matter of knowing, for example, the

points of connection between scientific procedure, its successive breaks, its discoveries, and the rules of political protocol. It's a very real question. You yourself have said that there is in science something which is hidden beneath machinery or equipment that are not entirely its own, but which nevertheless largely contain it. In the same way, I've always been fascinated by the network of relations between love and art. We know very well that there is something within the development of love itself which is certainly marked, signed [*signé*] from within, by the novel, by the whole history of this question and the way it's been handled artistically, over successive strata. To such a degree that, where the artistic situation is quite obviously different – I'm thinking of China, for example – I've often thought that love itself must be different. These are questions of interconnection [*réseau*]; the truth procedures resonate with each other, in their connections and crossings.

Thus far I've been very analytical in working on this question, very Cartesian. I've separated the procedures from each other, examined their type, their numericity, etc., but I'm perfectly aware that in situation, in the realm of singularity, this is not exactly how things look. There are always several procedures working through entangled, or interconnected situations. It's what I hope to explain, once I've deciphered and symbolised the problem, probably according to my own concept of culture. In the end, a culture, to the degree that it can be thought or identified by philosophy, is a singular interconnected configuration of truth procedures.

I think there are truth procedures everywhere, and that they are always universal; that a Chinese novel, Arabic algebra, Iranian music..., that all this is, in the end, universal by right. Simply, the conditions of their concrete universalisation have followed a complicated history. On the other hand, I would admit that there is an element of the cultural site, which I would see in a system of interconnection, in which there is always something contingent, and also an aspect of sedimenta-

tion, of conservation, which is irreducibly particular. Here I'm speaking prospectively, slightly feeling my way forward, but I hope to be able to say how I conceive of a culture, in something other than empirical fashion. I'm perfectly aware that there are cultural universes, linguistic universes. But I'd like to be able to cross through this empirical reality in a slightly different way.

P.H.: Just what is culturally specific here? How to measure the immanent universality of an artistic truth, to limit the question only to that? Can it really be anything other than, on the one hand, a kind of pure or living (and therefore ephemeral) creativity – such that Schoenberg's truth, say, persisted or will persist as long as it continues to inspire new creations that remain faithful in some way to this inspiration? Or, on the other hand, a variant of the assertion of its own universal truth? This would limit literary truth, for instance, to the confines of what Bourdieu describes as the "literary field" – the field established by the proclamation, from Flaubert through Mallarmé, Blanchot and beyond, of an intransitive literary sovereignty, a word purified of worldly knowledge and communication.¹¹ Most of your poetic examples seem to conform to this idea.

A.B.: No doubt it's only because I am of this era. Perhaps my own taste, my own site, my own set of interconnections [*réseau*], have been drawn mainly from this. But I certainly wouldn't make of it a universal maxim. I don't at all think the affirmation of sovereignty to be essential to an artistic configuration. I try to name artistic sequences not so much with proper names, nor through the regime of works of art, but through what I call configurations. In Rosen's book on Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, what is revealed is a configuration, which he calls the classical style.¹² Obviously, most of my preferred poetic examples – I'm perfectly aware of it – belong to such a configuration.



Paris, 17 November 1997

notes

1 *La Distance politique* 22 (June 1997): 3. Both terms, *sans-papiers* and *foyers ouvriers*, are difficult to translate without shifting the frame of cultural reference entirely. The long government campaign against the mostly West African and Algerian *sans-papiers* is comparable in its intensity to that waged in the United States against mostly Latin American "illegal immigrants." Badiou's militant commitment to the full naturalisation of all immigrants living and working in France dates back more than twenty years.

Foyers ouvriers are collective residences, mainly occupied by single working men (or men whose families remain in their country of origin); often made up of inhabitants from the same place of origin, they are generally marked by a high degree of social cohesion and mutual support. In the last couple of years, the *foyers* in certain Paris suburbs have come under attack from reformist mayors; several have been destroyed. Badiou and the L'Organisation Politique he cofounded in 1984-85 have been instrumental in promoting the campaign for their protection and reconstruction.

2 The term connotes something like the expression "the new world order," a kind of ubiquitous, "pragmatic" free-market liberalism.

3 *La Distance politique* 25 (Nov. 1997): 3.

4 L'Organisation Politique, *Cahier No. 4, Ni statut spécial, ni intégration: On est tous ici, on est tous d'ici* (May 1997): 4.

5 L'Organisation Politique, *Cahier No. 4*, 3.

6 Badiou, *Saint Paul ou la fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997) 106.

7 Cf. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 82.

8 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* [1963] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 206.

9 "It's entirely possible that there was no event at all. I really don't know" (Badiou, "Being by Numbers," *Artforum* 33.2 (Oct. 1994): 123).

10 Badiou, *L'Éthique. Essai sur la conscience du mal* (Paris: Hatier, 1993) 52.

11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: Structure et génèse du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

12 Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* [1976] (New York: Norton, 1997).

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