

## "It is Only Watching, Waiting, Attention": Rethinking Love with Alain Badiou and Simone Weil

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No theme requires more pure *logic* than that of love

– Alain Badiou, "What is Love?"

**Abstract.** Love has traditionally been thought in conjunction with emotion, affect, passion and feelings. The work of Alain Badiou, however, challenges such an "anti-philosophical" position, and posits that the truly philosophical way to approach love is through logic, which also underscores love's close kinship to thought and to truth. In this essay, the author draws on Badiou's thoughts on love to theorise an amorous politics. Responding to critiques on Badiou's evental politics as essentially passive, the author suggests that the thought of Simone Weil offers a way to think of waiting as a pre-evental form of political agency. The author argues that positioning Badiou's thought with Weil's makes even more legible the political utility of his radical philosophy of love.

**Keywords and phrases:** Alain Badiou, Simone Weil, love, continental philosophy, waiting

### Introduction

Alain Badiou's project of reorienting Philosophy back towards the truth has received a critically warm reception from radicals within academia and beyond. Animated by a strong sense of urgency, Badiou's thought appears to transcend the putatively political paralysis of what he calls "ethical ideology", the dominant mode of thinking about relations to the Other that is grounded on Kantian universalism and Levinasian respect for difference (Badiou 2002, 20). He positions his thought against the three main orientations of contemporary philosophy: Hermeneutic, Poststructuralist/ Postmodern/ Deconstructionist, and Analytic because those orientations elevate language as the site of philosophical thought and consequently makes issues of meaning central to Philosophy rather than the "classical question of truth" (Badiou 2005a, 35). Rejecting the idea of the endless and perpetual deferral of the truth, he posits that not only are truths "out there" but that they are immanent to every situation<sup>1</sup> and always singular. However, it is crucial to note that Badiou also redefines the concept of truth as a production, manufactured by subjects through their fidelity to Events.<sup>2</sup> Further,

unique to his concept of truth is the claim that Truth-Events occur only within four fields: science, art, politics and love.<sup>3</sup> Thus, an individual may only experience true agency—that is, become a Subject—when he or she is properly subjectivised by an Event that occurs within one of the aforementioned domains.

Admirable as Badiou's return to truth might be, the main critique against his thought has to do with the ontological status of the human being yet to be seized by an Event. Events seem elitist, available only to the select few that it randomly chooses to subjectivise. It also seems disturbingly haphazard, suggesting that agency is a result of chance. Indeed, critics have accused Badiou of endorsing a politics of passivity, a "politics without politics", to use the words of Bensaid (quoted in Callinicos 2006, 111). In this paper, the author explores both the supposed elitism of Events and the apparent passive politics of Badiou while paying particular attention to the amorous event that is love.<sup>4</sup> Does the pre-evental being remain in a state of "uselessness" until it wins the transcendental lottery of the Truth-Event? The author's intervention is an exploration of the political utility of the pre-evental amorous individual. How does the pre-evental being participate in "love"? Is he or she left to simply avail of the simulacra of an Event which takes the form of the structure of desire, and enjoy only illusions of love composed purely within the order of Being and thus by definition non-transformative? Responding to those questions, the author suggests that a form of non-transitive waiting might be the only ethical option for such a pre-evental being, and the turn to the reflections of French philosopher Simone Weil, who equates pure love to waiting and attention, to suggest that waiting might be the closest form of agency that a pre-evental amorous individual can experience.

### **Why to Love is to Think**

"Love" rarely receives a rigorous and systematic analysis as an object of philosophical inquiry because of the almost universal consensus that love is that which lies beyond the domain of the thinkable. This antiphilosophical position often maintains that the metaphorical language of poetry and art is paradoxically the most "direct" way to render concrete the contours of love.<sup>5</sup> Badiou is against the almost universal consensus that love is:

... what is subtracted from theory, that it is the intensity of existence itself, and that it is only captured through art, in the musical ejaculation of novelistic subtleties, where it oscillates, as we know, between *love forever* and *love never* while passing through love, alas, stopping, more seriously, at the heart-breaking statement of Jacques Brel, "don't leave me!" (2003, 44).

Badiou challenges established ways of understanding love because he insists that love is a site of universal truth, so much so that it lends itself to the precise and rigorous formulae of mathematics. He writes, "No theme requires more pure logic than love" (Badiou 2008, 183). In this section, the author seeks to give a critical exposition of Badiou's account of love as a truth-procedure.

Directly challenging the antiphilosophical thesis that love is an amorphous concept that always exceeds the restrictive conceptual borders of definitions and theorisations, Badiou ends his meditation on love in "The Scene of Two" by saying, "I am pleased to conclude that to love is to think" (2003, 261). Considering Badiou's passion for transpositional, universal truths—a mark of his clear fidelity to Platonism—his all too straightforward conclusion, which is also nothing short of a definition of love, comes as no surprise. However, is not love, as countless poets, philosophers, and psychoanalysts have observed, a kind of paradoxical self-regulating madness, a beautifully irrational perturbation of the normal state of things, a space where thinking is of minimal value if not potentially harmful to the smooth functioning of the amorous process itself? Does not our own experience confirm that thinking has little to do with love? How then are we to understand Badiou's claim that "to love is to think"?<sup>6</sup>

Suffice it to say, for Badiou, "thinking", in the context of love, does not mean that calculation and strategising are tactical necessities for the success of amorous relationships. "Thinking" is the characteristic of truth-procedures (science, politics, art, and love), which Badiou defines as the "non-dialectical or inseparable unity of a theory and a practice" (2005a, 79). And the structure and function of "thinking" depend on the particular truth-procedure where it is occasioned. For example, in *Infinite Thought*, he outlines the difference between scientific thinking and political thinking: the former "writes down a necessity and constructs apparatuses for a repetition" while the latter "declares an irreducible and unrepeatable possibility" (Badiou 2005a, 81). That is, scientific thinking seeks to chart the conditions that would ensure that the results of experiments are repeatable while political thinking attempts to find new ways to imagine new political futures that are not homogenous with the existing structure of social organisation. Although it may seem, at first blush, that those two modes of thinking are diametrically opposed, they in fact share the crucial characteristic of desiring to engender the new, to manufacture an authentically fresh mode of understanding and experiencing—that is, both seek an immanent break in or rupture from the current order of things.

But what about love as a mode "thinking"? What does love aim to think? At this point, it is crucial to establish that Badiou's understanding of love is aligned with (Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory rather than the more widely accepted

understanding of love as a desire for "transcendence and merging", to use the words of philosopher Irving Singer (2009, 16). Indeed, Badiou often refers to Lacan as his "master", and even goes so far as to say that only those who have the courage to engage systematically with Lacanian thought "deserve to be called contemporary philosophers" (Badiou 2004, 121). In what is perhaps his most important, and certainly most focused, essay on the subject entitled "What is Love?", Badiou begins by rejecting several persisting definitions of love, justifying this gesture by asserting that Philosophy "finds its place of thought in rejections and declarations" (2008, 181). In particular, he rejects "the fusional conception of love" (for love cannot be a procedure that suppresses the multiple in favour of a One), "the ablative concept of love" (for love is not an experience of the other but an experience of the world/situation), and "the superstructural or illusory conception of love" (for love is not just an ornament to make smooth the clumsy procedure of sexual relations) (2008, 181). For Badiou, love has to be a "production of truth", and all the aforementioned definitions of love sacrifice the production of truth in favour of the rule of the One: the "fusional" conception of love seeks to make a One out of Two; the "ablative", though attempting to produce an authentic knowledge of the other, is only able to apprehend the other as an object within the coordinates of the subject's own fantasy (and thus is also caught in the logic of the One); and the "illusory" makes love a mere pawn in sexuality's regime.<sup>7</sup>

But if love is a "production of truth", what "truth" does it strive to articulate? Badiou asserts that love produces the truth that "the Two, not only the One, proceeds in the situation" (Badiou 2008, 182); it is the "advent of the Two as such, the scene of Two" (188). Thus, "far from 'naturally' regulating the supposed relation between the sexes", love stands as testament to the truth of their absolute disjunction. To be clear, Badiou distinguishes the Two from the "couple", which is a "phenomenal appearance" visible to a third position that counts the Two as One. The Two is not the combination of "one" and "one" but rather is an immanent Two, a "process" which signals that "there is one position and another position... totally disjunct from the other" (187). This process is, of course, set in motion by an Event, which in Badiou's amatory vocabulary is designated as an "encounter" or "event-encounter" (188). And love emerges in the world via the declaration (naming or nomination) of the event within the Situation as "love" by the agents whom that very event subjectivises/hails into existence.

Badiou arrives at his conclusions through the highly formal process of an "axiomatics of love", which he formulates on the basis of nothing but an "essential conviction" (Badiou 2008, 182). He claims that it is folly to proceed with an analysis of love using "psychology or a theory of passions", for the "experience of the loving subject... does not constitute any knowledge of love"; "love does not think itself" (182–183). He invites us to imagine love subtracted of

the things one is predisposed to spontaneously associate with it, for only when those distractions are jettisoned can a highly formal analysis of love properly take place: "All the pathos of passion, of error, or jealousy, of sex and death must... be held at a distance" (183). Thus, when Badiou posits that the analysis of love requires pure logic, he invites us to think of love not in terms of affect, emotions or passions, but via axioms.

In "What is Love?" Badiou begins by providing three preliminary axioms: (1) "There are two positions of the experience of love" (Man and Woman); (2) "The two positions are totally disjunct"; and (3) "There is no third position" (Badiou 2008, 183). It is instructive to point out that there is a clear homology between his "axioms" and Lacan's theories on the relation of the two sexualised positions. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory similarly claims that there are two sexualised positions designated as "Man" and "Woman". These two positions are purely symbolic and have no biological, empirical or social basis, but are so termed depending on the subject's relation to the phallic signifier (of wanting *to have* or *to be* the phallus). Those two positions constitute two wholly separate realms of experience, and no real connection between the two positions can be successfully established. This is because the laws of the Symbolic and the deceptive images of the Imaginary always mediate sexual relations; thus, subjects cannot transcend the perimeters defined by their respective fantasies. However, although Badiou accepts the Lacanian thesis that the two positions are *absolutely* disjunct, he rejects the conventional reading of Lacan when it comes to the role of love in addressing the disjunction. Numerous Lacanian commentators have interpreted Lacan's famous "Love is that which comes to *supplement* for the lack of a real connection" (2008) to mean that love is merely this illusion that functions to make amorous subjects misrecognise their fundamental non-connection. Badiou unpacks Lacan's formula by first interrogating the function of the supplement. He argues that if one accepts the thesis that the two sexualised positions are separated by a non-rapport then this non-rapport *cannot* be written, and if it cannot be written, "if it is non-existent as an effect of a structure", it follows that "love itself as supplement can only arrive by chance" (Badiou 2003). This absolute contingency is crucial in Badiou's project to re-think "love" as a truth-procedure. Love, therefore, is not a relation (in fact, it is born precisely at the point of non-relation), but is a *process* that is "the advent of the Two as such, the scene of Two" (Badiou 2008, 188). Love is the "hypothetical operator" of the accidental collision of two trajectories that is the "event-encounter" (188).

"There is no third position", Badiou's third axiom, has to do with "the announcement of the disjunction" (Badiou 2008, 184). The announcement of the disjunction cannot be made from the vantage point of a third position because it will necessarily entail the activation of an external law of count, a totalising gesture governed by the rule of One. But what kind of interpreting intervention

then is necessary to render love discernible within a socio-symbolic system? How can love be inscribed in a Situation as a "Scene of Two" if no position is available from which that love can be witnessed? Badiou posits that love is "fixed only through a naming, and this naming constitutes a declaration, the declaration of love" (188). For Badiou, this declaration puts in circulation within the Situation the truth of the gap that separates the two sexualised positions: "A Two that proceeds amorously is specifically the name of the disjunct as apprehended in its disjunction" (189). And in this gesture of amorous nomination, the truth of the love-event necessarily marks itself onto the bodies of the subjects of love.

However, Badiou's objective is not simply to assert the fundamental disjunction of the sexes, but also to locate the site of a transpositional truth that does not fall within the two positions—that is, a "truth" that is not limited to being exclusively located within the masculine or feminine positions. Thus, Badiou's fourth axiom: "There is only one humanity". Badiou makes it clear, however, that he wants the concept subtracted of its humanist associations. He defines humanity as "that which provides support to the generic or truth procedures... [It] is the historical body of truths (Badiou 2008, 184). He derives the existence of a humanity through the rather self-proving logic that if beings could be subjectivised then it "attests that the humanity function exists" (184). Note that Badiou establishes the existence of a singular humanity not by enumerating positive characteristics that transcend the sexual disjunction but by the very process of subjectivisation itself. For Badiou, although the "humanity function" is shared by the Two positions it cannot be an object of knowledge. It is "present" but not presented, a "subtraction". Badiou's fourth axiom of thought in conjunction with the first three creates a paradox that is precisely what love as a form of thinking seeks to address. The first three axioms suggest that truths are sexuated while the fourth axiom suggests that love is truly a *generic* procedure for it addresses only one humanity.

### **Love and Politics: Disjunction versus Castration**

The idea that a "politics of subtraction" can miraculously emerge out of the amorous encounter is one that is easy to fall in love with, so to speak. The idea neatly converges with the dominant concept of love as that which seizes the amorous subject, and as a consequence that the subject acts in ways beyond the expectations of normative social regulations. Yet, the beauty of an Event (its aleatory and contingent nature) is also, according to some critics, its very weakness. The Event seems elitist, available to the select few it randomly chooses to subjectivise. It also seems disturbingly haphazard, suggesting that emancipation is a result of fate, decided by the hand that throws the dice rather than the hand that holds the weapon for armed struggle.<sup>8</sup>

Badiou's philosophy could also be accused of being imprudently arbitrary, for it lacks an error theory: if the occurrence of an Event is verified only on the basis of a pure conviction by the agents it subjectivises, how is one able to determine whether or not an Event is an authentic one? Is not any occurrence possibly an Event depending on the calibration of the adjudicator's mode of discernment? In *The Resources of Critique*, a book whose central project is to determine "the conditions under which social critique... is possible today", Alex Callinicos lists Badiou's ontology as one of what he identifies as "Four Kinds of Impasse" (2006, 5). Speaking to the issue of distinguishing between authentic Events and their mere simulacra, Callinicos writes:

It is hard not to suspect that a vicious circularity is involved here: events are distinguished by appeal to normatively charged conceptions of universality, but when we try to unpack this conception it turns out to bear all the hallmarks of the event (Badiou 2006, 110).

Events, by virtue of being proofs of themselves, are axiomatic and cannot be subject to laws of definition. Subjects who sustain a fidelity to an Event may, through the process of *nomination* or of *forcing*, mark the event within their existing socio-symbolic reality, but the resulting symbolic life of the Event says nothing about that Event itself. And it is this "subtractive" quality of Events that Callinicos precisely sees as debilitating especially when applied within the sphere of the political. Citing Bensaid, Callinicos sees Badiou's philosophy as legitimising a "politics without politics... The Preoccupation with [the Event's] purity reduces politics to a great refusal and forbids it from producing durable effects" (Badiou 2006, 111).

For Badiou, the key to distinguishing authentic Events from false ones is a single structural criterion: authentic Events emerge from the "void" of the Situation.<sup>9</sup> An Event is part of the Situation and is not some external intrusion; it is the Truth, the "central void", of the Situation rendered indiscernible by being beyond the "law of Count". Žižek provides a helpful example:

[T]he Leninist October Revolution remains an Event, since it relates to the "class struggle" as the symptomatic torsion of the Situation, while the Nazi movement is a simulacrum, a disavowal of the trauma of class struggle... The difference lies not in the inherent qualities of the Event itself, but in its place—in the way it relates to the Situation out of which it emerged (1999, 140).

One cannot help but feel short-changed by Badiou's criterion for discernment. Rather than satisfying the burden of the question, "How does one distinguish real Events from their simulacra?", it raises even more problems. Can the Situation's void be identified? And if so, does it mean there are privileged areas where one could wait for an Event?<sup>10</sup> If the void is present in the Situation as "subtraction", how can one determine if a void is really part of the Situation and not external to it? Who or what defines the parameters of a Situation? Are Situations always singular, as Badiou suggests, or are there points of overlap?

Further, is not Badiou's idea of chance, like all other concepts that circulate in a Situation, also a discursive construction? John Mullarkey astutely points out that words like "'chance', 'luck' and 'accident' are names that already indicate an anthropomorphisation of events reflecting our interests and allowing us a possible influence on the future" (2010, 123). Indeed, when in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou writes, "[I]t is only philosophically constructible today, after a *new thinking* of politics has made it thinkable and practicable to situate oneself, in order to think action, from the interior of a politics for which state power is neither an objective nor a norm", is not his idea of the "new" already conspicuously predetermined both in scope and objective? (2009, 521) So, Badiou's indulgent use of words like "chance", "accident" and "new" if anything only raises one's suspicion of the possibility that there are already (unacknowledged) procedures in place to determine what counts as "new", as an Event.

If Badiou's philosophy finally fails to impress, it is probably because—like the contingency of an Event—he provides a response to current problems that lie beyond the horizon of our expectations. We expect Badiou, the mathematician, to provide a watertight formula for emancipation, but instead he gives us self-proving axioms and a highly speculative theory. We spontaneously *know* that the world is highly complex, just as we are spontaneously sceptical of the idea that all it takes to understand the world and solve its problems are a few axioms, a miracle, and a subject willing to believe. Peter Sloterdijk was right when he defined this age as the age of cynical reason, truer perhaps for progressives and radicals more than any other group (1987). Michael Hardt, in an interview with Astra Taylor, suggests that the Left is often left with "only half a politics" because it seems to have jettisoned proposing alternatives and is too invested in critique. He says: "[T]here's even a feeling—or at least this is the sense I have—that there's a great dignity in criticizing things and that you're kind of stupid if you actually propose something... if you propose something on the Left today... you get critiqued by everybody because they are great at critiquing things" (Taylor 2009, 135). If we dismiss Badiou just because his theory does not neatly fit into our established ways of thinking or because we are adept at critique, it makes one wonder how many potential Events we have thrown away or missed just because we were not able to properly appraise their value.



Even if one fully accepts Badiou's notion of authentic Events, does change always have to register itself as an earth-shaking revolution? Will it be possible to conceive of Events as minor disturbances that will later on set in motion a much more significant transformation? The irony of it all is that Badiou seems to adopt grand symbolic ruptures because he pits his philosophy against the soft subversions of deconstructionist/postmodern politics. Badiou, it seems, is guilty of the idea of "negation" that he desires to jettison in favour of "subtraction". This problem is even more pronounced in the truth-procedure that is Love. Unlike the other Truth-Procedures, love seems to be a "microcosmic version of the event", for it is witnessed by only the one and the one that together form the amorous Two (Bartlett and Clemens 2010, 77). The amorous encounter is a very localised encounter and only likely to affect the two subjects who haphazardly stumble into the truth of the sexual disjunction. Their "revolutions" are thus too particular and local to be able to conceive or coordinate a larger ethico-political collective movement. But this is also the reason why love may be effective in reformulating a politics and ethics of the everyday. The immanent Two that form the operation that is love are given a unique opportunity to "construct the world as a scene of enquiry through which they investigate that world through the perspective of the Two" (76).

### **Badiou and the Problem of the Pre-evental**

Some of the most forceful criticisms against Badiou's ontology are directed toward the seemingly miraculous properties of Events. It is indeed difficult to imagine a politics that will be based on something that just randomly occurs. For Daniel Bensaid, a new danger looms in Badiou's reconfiguration of philosophy: "that of a philosophy haunted by the sacralization of the evental miracle... Politics can only flirt with a theology or aesthetics of the event" (Hallward 2004, 97). For Bensaid, such a "preoccupation with purity reduces politics to a great refusal and forbids it from producing durable effects". If the event is a pure transcendental break, free from any structuring principle of Situations, then, it forecloses the possibility of any form of pre-evental agency. As Bensaid points out, for Badiou the subject is "rare like the event, rare like truth, and as intermittent as politics" (98). Such an ontology, notes Nick Srnicek, prevents "any possibility of working *toward* an event", and consequently suggests a "political pacifism in the absence of an event" (113).

The miraculous nature of the event extends to its power to subjectivise individuals, transforming them from mere human elements in the set that is the situation to subjects to truth. But what occurs in such a transformation? What makes a pre-evental being abandon its place within the situation to ground its being in a miraculous encounter whose reality is guaranteed only by the declaration of that very subject which it hails into existence? If agency is a

property only of subjects (to truth), what is the "contribution" of the pre-evental being to its own transformation as a subject? In *Badiou, Žizek, and Political Transformation*, Adrian Johnston argues that there has to be an "affective connection" (Johnston 2009) between the pre-evental individual and the event. He criticises Badiou for being unable to fully theorise "affects of truth": "As with so much else in Badiou's thinking, the affects that come to be entangled in event-driven truth trajectories are, more often than not, conceived of solely as post-evental" (73). Although Badiou does outline affects that correspond to his four conditions (happiness for love, joy for science, enthusiasm for politics, and pleasure for art), he seems to discuss them as post-evental consequences. Johnston suggests that "courage and conviction" are requirements "before (and not merely after) evental occurrences transpire" (75). He suggests that Badiou's philosophy needs a "notion of a state *between two-lives*" (author's emphasis):

Namely, a space within which a human being struggles to exceed his or her status as an all-too-human individual... while not (at least not yet) being clearly identifiable as a proper subject vis-à-vis a distinct event-level happening (Johnston 2009, 78).

The author thinks that what Johnston demands of Badiou is to provide a pre-evental form of agency, an agency before subjectivisation proper. However, if there is agency before an event it precisely undermines the novelty of Badiou's ontology. Once an individual has been subjected to the "Law of count" (counted as One) it is already structured and determined by the Situation. If it possesses agency, this has to be either provided by the Situation itself (suggesting that the Situation has a self-destructive impulse) or Situations do not fully determine the individual (that part of the individual escapes the "Law of count", an inassimilable excess). Further, Johnston's project, it seems to me, is to try to render Badiou's philosophy more "realistic", using dominant presuppositions about what is politically workable, which for me suffers from an unforgivable irony. Johnston writes:

Badiou's quick dismissal of apparently gradualist measures of seemingly minor political adjustments and reforms (i.e., not-quite-evental-gestures) in the spheres of legislation and socio-economics while awaiting quasi-divine intervention of the system-shattering evental rupture ushering in an uncompromisingly "perfect" revolution. But, the preceding analyses call into question whether he can be entirely confident and sure that what appears to be gradual and minor really is so, or rather simply seems this way solely under the shadow of statist ideology's assignation of change-category statuses" (2009, 389).

What the above commentary seems to overlook is the idea that waiting itself could be the condition that prepares the individual for the eventual encounter. In the next section, the author suggests that, within Badiou's ontology, waiting is the only form of agency available to the pre-evental individual. Badiou himself does not specifically single out waiting as a privileged condition, and this is why he turns to the work of philosopher Simone Weil. Weil's philosophy, which operates in the intersections and interconnections among waiting, love, and attention, provides us with rich conceptual terrain to think about the responsibility of the individual in its own eventual subjectivisation.

### On Love and Waiting

It is only watching, waiting, attention  
– Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

The doubts that Alain Badiou's critics raise about the radical potential of eventual politics are certainly valid concerns. That which is beyond Being—and it goes by various names: the Real, the Event, the absolute alterity of the other—has now achieved a privileged status in critical theory. Since it is that which is subtracted from the socio-symbolic situation, it is outside the jurisdiction and control of the hegemonic order, of any order (in both senses of the term) for that matter. The appeal of radical thought that grounds its opposition in a space beyond Being is understandable: it keeps alive the idea that an authentic break from the dominant order is possible (as opposed to minor structural modifications). However, this hope is accompanied by a gnawing suspicion that such a mode of thought is merely, to use Bensaid's words again, a "politics without politics" (quoted in Callinicos 2006, 111), nothing more than sugarcoated admissions that real change is impossible, barring some external unpredictable catastrophe. Risking *reductio ad absurdum*, it seems that the hope for revolutionary change now has to be pinned on some natural calamity (perhaps some asteroid hitting the earth or a new ice age that will force us to reconfigure social relations) rather than collective action or armed struggle. This problem raises the question of how the pre-evental Being should reconstruct an ethics-of-the-everyday. Should the subject just willingly participate in the oppressive game of the system until the arrival of some system-shattering accident that he or she had no hand in calling forth? Badiou's critics are, to some extent, justified in accusing his philosophy of promoting a politics of passivity.

Yet, what the author also hope is clear by this point is that much of the criticism against Badiou's philosophy draws its rhetorical strength from a rather humdrum understanding of the concept of waiting. If waiting is simply conceived in terms of *thought* time rather than *lived* time, to apply a Bergsonian distinction, then one might tend to conclude that it is nothing more than a useless and passive condition of being.<sup>11</sup> What the critics of Badiou miss perhaps is that the idea of

waiting for an Event changes the very meaning of what it means to wait, reconfiguring it as an active rather than a passive mode of being. The crucial difference of course lies in the object that is being waited on. Whereas waiting in the more general sense is the passive enduring of the flow of time as one anticipates and expects the arrival of an object or a "shift" in condition, a transitive waiting, waiting for an Event, the author claims, is an *intransitive* mode of waiting. It is one that requires a different orientation of the self, for it means having to "deprive all that I call 'I' of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived" (Weil 2005, 233).

The meditations of philosopher and mystic Simone Weil on waiting, and her move to link waiting with attention, love and affliction offer conceptual resources to think about what it means to wait for an Event, which is a thoroughly engaged and active mode of existence. In Badiou's ontology, the pre-evental being, unattached to any Truth-Event, is without agency, a mere element in the order of Being and subject/ed to the count of the State of the Situation. Weil's work suggests that the only legitimate act of agency available to such a being is the act of effacing the self, a strategic subjective abandonment, which for Weil entails a specific condition of waiting, one that is marked by affliction. It is "through love", she writes, that we "renounce this apparent existence and [are] annihilated by the plenitude of being" (Blanchot 1993,115). Love is the name she gives to "intense, pure, disinterested, gratuitous, generous attention" (Weil 2005, 92). And if "God" is the name Weil gives to her particular experience of a Truth-Event, all our energies should be oriented towards desiring God, which could only take the form of "waiting for God". Waiting, for Weil, is nothing more than a pure form of attention, a "reception of what escapes attention, an opening upon the unexpected, a waiting that is the unwaited of all waiting" (Blanchot 1993, 121). She conceives of waiting as "the greatest of all efforts" (Weil 2009, 61), and suggests that there is something "connected with evil" in our souls that violently resists being in a state of pure attention. To inhabit a pure state of attention then is to actively "destroy the evil in ourselves" (2009, 62).

Further, using Weil's reflections, the author suggests that waiting for an Event already constitutes a form of love, albeit pre-evental. Following Maurice Blanchot who wrote that for Weil love is the "perfection of attention" (Blanchot 1993, 122) the author adds that this move towards attentive perfection is simultaneously a kind of working-towards-an-Event. This is not to suggest that beings could actively summon a Truth-Event, for it is an Event that creates a subject (to Truth) and not a subject that manufactures a Truth-Event. Rather, the author claims that a particular mode of being is necessary to recognise and be receptive to the arrival of an Event, a preemptive gesture that ensures that an Event is identified within the order of Being and given a name (what Badiou calls *forcing* and *naming*, respectively). Waiting, thus, is to adopt a highly perceptive

and receptive philosophical attitude. Also, she further suggests that adopting the mode of waiting for an Event could already forge ethico-political transformations in the order of Being. Waiting, as conceived by Weil, is a rigorous attempt to penetrate what she calls the "impersonal" dimension of being. Her conception of waiting presents us with a proper way of orienting the self towards the Event that is to come. This intense attention raises the status of the pre-evental being to that which equals the post-evental subject. She writes:

I suddenly had the everlasting *conviction* that any human being, even though practically devoid of natural faculties, can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius, if only he longs for truth and perpetually concentrates all his attention upon its attainment (Weil 2009, 23).

It is by convictions that Weil is able to persevere and not by the guarantee of an Event's inevitable coming. To expect the arrival of a revolution, scientific discovery, artistic creativity, amorous relations is to divert energy that should be invested in sustaining the condition of intense attention. Waiting for an Event should not presuppose its eventual arrival. Consequently, the potential political implications of waiting are not reaped at the end of waiting, but take effect as soon as it is practiced. It is "an opening upon the unexpected, a waiting that is the unwaited of all waiting" (Blanchot 1993,121).

### **The Politics of Love and Waiting**

Given the dire condition of the world, "passively" waiting for an Event seems unforgivably irresponsible. How can we do nothing amid the ever-increasing cacophony of cries from the wretched of the earth? Mass media continually features stories that bombard us with humanitarian ethical demands, and, overwhelmed by images of war, poverty, violence, discrimination and exploitation, how can we not *act now*? Something must be done *immediately* lest we find ourselves living in a terrifying future, neck-deep in the problems of the past. Needless to say, capitalist ideology benefits from this "false" sense of urgency (Klein 2008).

It should be said that this supposedly ethical pressure to "act now" is inherently anti-theoretical. Speed is opposed to thought. It is no wonder that Badiou in proposing "a new style of philosophy" oddly posits that both thinking and revolt "require leisureliness and not speed" (2005b, 58). For Badiou, thinking has to be, in a way, off beat with the mad dance of capitalism:

Our world is marked by speed: the speed of historical change; the speed of technical change; the speed of communications; of transmissions; and even the speed in which human beings establish connections with one another... Speed is the mask of inconsistency. Philosophy must propose a retardation process (2005b, 51).

Thinking then must proceed at a tempo that would allow it to properly unfold. It should not be limited to producing knowledge about the structure of the situation (and thus synchronised with the pulse of world); rather, it should prepare us to "receive and accept the drama of the Event without anxiety", and is "open to the irreducible singularity of what happens... fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected" (2005b, 55–56). A new form of thinking is required to prepare the mind for the arrival of the Event.

Rather than allowing one's self to be carried away to action by the surge of stories and images of suffering depicted by mass media, the work of philosopher Simone Weil offers a counter-intuitive response. She suggests that the only ethical thing to do is to *attentively wait*. For Weil, a genuine understanding of affliction could be achieved only when the observer's mind is properly oriented toward a state of pure attention, of pure waiting. Rather than impulsively acting she suggests that the proper response to the cries of the oppressed is "only watching, waiting, attention" (Weil 2009, 64). She asserts that true affliction "is by nature inarticulate", and if the afflicted happen to find the words to encode their suffering those words are often "ill-chosen ones"; that is, they operate within a notion of rights (which conceives of the human being as nothing but part of a collectivity) rather than within the "impersonal", the "sacred", in human beings (Weil 2005, 84, 74).<sup>12</sup> In an experience homologous with the Levinasian ethical encounter, the mute articulations of affliction demand from the observer sympathy, closeness, patience, attention, a kind of waiting that is obsequious to the other's suffering. For Weil, this "intense, pure, disinterested, gratuitous, generous attention is love" itself (92). In this section, the author hopes to be able to show how the reflections of Simone Weil on waiting as a form of attention may be put into productive conversation with Badiou's notion of waiting for an Event.

The author finds it odd that there exists no study that puts Badiou's philosophy in conjunction with Weil's. Granted that Badiou's rigorous and systematic style of thinking stands in stark contrast to Weil's more impressionistic and aphoristic method, but beyond this apparent difference there is an intimate proximity in their thought. Philosophically, both Badiou and Weil could be called Platonists, interested in Truth that is located outside the domain of knowledge, beyond the order of Being. Politically, both are sceptical of the notion of human rights and

collectivities. When it comes to Ethics, both, in a way, elevate the practice of unwavering faith as the ethical act *par excellence*. And, if Badiou is the philosopher of the Event, Simone Weil from 1937 till her death was subjectivised by an Event. Because of these significant intersections it almost comes as no surprise that part of Weil's work could be read as a meditation on the status of agency of Badiou's yet-to-be-subjectivised human being. In response to Badiou's commentators who are critical of the radical status of a pre-evental (pre-) subject waiting for a (secular) miracle, Weil suggests that waiting should become the very orientation of existence, an orientation of *being* that traverses the pre- and post-evental experience. To quote Maurice Blanchot, taken from his reflections on Weil's concept of waiting and attention: "Deprived of ourselves, deprived of the I upon which we naturally lean, deprived of the world that in normal times exists in our place and disburdens us of ourselves, we are time, indefinitely endured" (1993, 121).

### **"The Letter Always Arrives at its Destination"; Although, it Might Take Some Time**

Simone Weil's "fearfully long" (2009, 22) letter to the Catholic priest Jean-Marie Perrin makes its reader wait. Reading the letter is in itself a lesson on waiting. Composed around mid-May of 1942, just before her departure from Marseilles, the letter is referred to as her "Spiritual Autobiography" in the collection of her writings on spirituality which were grouped together under the appropriate title *Waiting for God*. When one reads Weil's "Spiritual Autobiography", one cannot help but think that it falls short of being an extraordinary text. For someone who has lived a life that approximates sainthood, her "autobiography" is hardly inspiring. For a post-evental text, one expects it to be spectacularly epiphanic and universal in scope. However, what one encounters is seemingly nothing more than a dry, somewhat impressionistic account of her experiences with occasional philosophical aphorisms, and seemingly directly relevant only to those individuals personally close to her, experiences that led her to the unique form of Christian spirituality that she embraced. The most forceful moments in her letters are times when she jumps to rather extreme conclusions with very scant exposition to explain how she got there. Even for her most important claims, she says very little. "I suddenly had the everlasting conviction that any human being... can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius", she writes, without telling us how she came by this "everlasting conviction". Another: "The most beautiful life possible has always seemed to me to be the one where everything is determined... where there is never any room for choice" (23). She does not explain what she means by "beauty", by "choice", by a life that is determined. Her tendency to jump to abrupt conclusions seems to be a fundamental flaw in her writing. Speaking of Simone Weil's "disquieting rapidity", Maurice Blanchot rightly asks "Where does [her] certitude come

from?" (1993, 114). So sparse is Weil with words during moments when they seem to be needed most that even when it comes to what is arguably her most important spiritual milestone she mentions it as if it were incidental, a brief two-sentence paragraph, nothing more:

In 1937 I had two marvelous days at Assisi. There, alone in the little twelfth-century Romanesque chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, an incomparable marvel of purity where Saint Francis often used to pray, something stronger than I was compelled me for the first time in my life to go down on my knees (Weil 2009, 26).

Weil makes no direct reference to her encounter with that Event henceforth. Surely, more can be said about such a life-altering Event than name it a "marvel of purity".

Perhaps Weil merely confirms Badiou's thesis that the authentic Event is present in the Situation as subtraction—that is, the Event proper is not any positive form of symbolisable knowledge. However, as a post-evental account Weil's text should be able to challenge the unacknowledged laws that govern the Symbolic and regulate the Situation. Again, to use Badiou's vocabulary, it has to direct the reader to the disavowed void of the Situation. What are we to make of this letter?

The letter oddly begins with a postscript, and seemingly aware of its breach of the norm, starts off with the instruction "TO BE READ FIRST", then the following:

This letter is fearfully long—but as there is no question of an answer—especially as I shall doubtless have gone before it reaches you—you have years ahead of you in which to read it if you care to. Read it all the same, one day or another (Weil 2009, 21).

Those who are familiar with Weil's personality would be aware that despite the polite and unassertive appearance of that request it contains a very strong ethical demand. The text demands nothing less than its reader's full and undivided attention. It will not allow itself to be read in the same manner as one would read, say, a novel or a novella—that is, in smaller, manageable, episodic chunks. In demanding a particular kind of attention, the text makes the reader wait for a moment when the constraints of time will not dictate how the text should be received.



The postscript also exhibits the patience it demands from its reader: "You have years ahead of you in which to read it if you care to" (Weil 2009). It too waits. Describing her letter to Father Perrin, Weil writes: "It is very long and contains nothing that cannot wait indefinitely" (39). It is a text that rethinks urgency: requiring not one's immediate but one's *full* attention. Thus, as Blanchot notes, for Weil, waiting as a form of attention is not "average, personal attention" (1993, 121). It is not a slave to the object of attention, not a means to an end; rather, it is impersonal. There is no agent that endures the tension of traversing time, time that feels thick and heavy. It is the experience of "pure time" that does not anticipate an event nor a revelation, "a kind of empty perpetuity that must be borne infinitely" (121). This highlights the crucial difference between a critical reader and Weil's attentive reader. Whereas the critical reader is involved in a meaning-full enterprise, actively engaged with the text that is the object of his study, Weil's attentive reader waits, his or her thought "empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it" (Weil 2009, 62).

But Weil does not strike the observer as an attentive reader, at least not in the conventional sense. In her "Spiritual Autobiography", she mentions a poem that had a great significance in her life, George Herbert's "Love". Weil's forceful mobilisation of words is a hallmark of her writing, yet one feels that her personal authority wanes somewhat when she comments on literary works. Rather than trying to win her reader over with convincing textual interpretation, her moments of literary exegesis are disconcerting because they are so uncomfortably personal. Relating her thoughts on George Herbert's "Love" to Father Perrin, Weil writes:

I learned it by heart. Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you, Christ himself came down and took possession of me (2009, 27).

Weil prefers attention to analysis, heartfelt recitation to critical reading. She does not discuss the particular literary merits of the poem, nor does she seem interested to do so. Her remarks do not even seem to constitute a proper affective response. It is hard to ascertain if the poem gave her comfort when she recited it in the grip of "a violent headache"; if anything, she seems to be suggesting that the intense effort she invested to sustain a state of attention did not flag despite her affliction. But what perhaps catches the eye the most in that passage is the abrupt transition from poem to prayer. Weil only realised that the recitation of the poem had the "virtue of prayer" when she felt an overwhelming divine presence

during one of her recitations. She does not, as one might expect, suggest a causal relation between attention and Event. It was not the intense attention she gave the poem that elevated it to the status of prayer. Rather, it was in a state of attention, which Weil consistently emphasised is a state most receptive to truth, that the Event could be properly given its due recognition (in both senses of the term). For Weil, prayer, a direct channel to the divine, is not an act of will, but the by-product of an evental experience. What is important for her is that one perpetually sustains this arduous level of pure attention despite the absence of a guarantee of an eventual evental encounter. Weil claims to have "persevered for ten years in an effort of concentrated attention that was practically unsupported by any hope of result" (Weil 2009, 23).

Some might consider it irresponsible of the author to bracket the spiritual dimension from Weil's thought as the author discusses the relevance of the poem to her thought—especially since she is very clear that it was during one of her recitations of it that "Christ himself came down and took possession of [her]" (2009, 27). But by not situating Weil's work within an overtly Christian framework, the author brings attention to the universalising impulse in her thought. In thinking Truth with Christianity, Weil was able to come to the conclusion that "Plato was a mystic, that all the *Iliad* is bathed in Christian light, and that Dionysus and Osiris are in a certain sense Christ himself; and my love was thereby redoubled" (28). She is convinced that the Catholic Church—or any organised religion, for that matter—is "guilty of an abuse of power... This abuse of power is not of God. It comes from a natural tendency of every form of collectivism, without exception, to abuse power" (36). Thus, for Weil, one can only encounter Truth within the singularity of a work of art, if one has the courage to abandon the language of the collective, and to reinvent one's own vocabulary, which, in the author's reading, Weil calls "prayer". Prayer is the method used by the attentive reader. Prayer for Weil is an act of decreation, of emptying the subject of the "I", of all that one might consider to make up his or her personality. As Sian Miles notes, decreation is "based on the idea of a voluntary, unsolicited, unreasonable, unnecessary and absurd act" (quoted in Weil 2000, 51). To endlessly recite a poem till it is emptied of meaning is for Weil, a way to elevate its status to that of prayer. Needless to say, this is not because the poem becomes a rather formulaic chant, but because it is a way to transform it into a legitimate challenge to one's attention. It also transforms the reader from a being oriented towards meaning to one of pure waiting, and, as Harold Schweizer notes, it is "not activity but substance—not an activity of the self but the substance of the self" (2008, 88).

Judging from Weil's responses to works of literature, one is tempted to conclude crudely that for Weil, the difference between an attentive reader and a literary critic is that the former's relationship to a text is thoroughly subjective and

personal while the latter's is objective and impersonal. This is certainly not the case. Weil's curious approach to literature is precisely to be able to "cleanse" the subject of the "I", so that it might encounter the impersonal that may be encountered through the text. And this could be achieved through intense concentration, through attention. To be clear, attention for Weil is not something that someone does; in fact, a state of pure attention signals the successful "decreation" of the subject of attention. Speaking to Weil's notion of waiting, Maurice Blanchot comments that "Attention is waiting: not the effort, the tension, or the mobilisation of knowledge around something which one might concern oneself". Rather, "...attention has always already detached me from myself, freeing me for the attention that I for an instant become" (Blanchot 1993, 121). For Weil, all education, be it mathematical, philosophical, or literary, is a form of "exercise" that aids in increasing the power of attention (2009, 57). The point of wrestling with a literary work is not to arrive at its "true" meaning, nor is it to unpack its potential multiplicity of significations; it is to develop attention. "Never in any case whatever is a genuine effort of the attention wasted... Even if our efforts of attention seem for several years to be producing no result, one day a light that is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul. Every little effort adds a little gold to a treasure that no power on earth can take away" (58–59).

An eventual encounter may or may not occur when one wrestles with an artistic, mathematic, or scientific work, but at the very least it develops the kind of attention that prepares one for an actual encounter if and when it happens. For Weil, the mistake is to think that what is of ultimate value resides in the content of the work:

[O]ur deep purpose should aim solely at increasing the power of attention with a view to prayer; as, when we write, we draw the shape of the letter on paper, not with a view to the shape, but with a view to the idea we want to express. To make this the sole and exclusive purpose of our studies is the first condition to be observed if we are to put them to the right use (2009, 59).

Literary texts function as a "training ground" for attention, but they do not contain anything instructive about how pure attention could be attained. "There is a way of giving our attention to the data of a problem in geometry without trying to find the solution or to the words of a Latin or Greek text without trying to arrive at the meaning, a way of waiting..." (2009, 63).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Badiou's philosophy of the event liberates love from its stagnant place in anti-philosophy, enabling new ways of thinking (about) love. His radical

interpretation of the psychoanalytic theory of sexual differentiation as an axiom rather than as a paralysing deadlock, moves the thinking of love in new productive directions. However, because love appears by chance, (randomly) selecting beings to subjectivise, his philosophy sounds alarmingly elitist. Is love beyond access to the pre-evental being? Turning, therefore, to the meditations of the philosopher most prone to humility and self-divestiture hence opposed to elitism, Simone Weil, the author argued that waiting (as attention) is a form of love, grace, and power to which a pre-evental being surrenders as he or she prepares for the arrival of the evental encounter. Weil teaches us that it is in the condition of waiting that we could give our full attention to the other, and "the name of this intense, pure, disinterested, gratuitous, generous attention is love" (2005, 92). Thus, waiting does not necessarily speak of one's passive deficiency; rather, it speaks of one's ability to endure, to love, to become *empty personae*, to use the words of Theodor Adorno, "through which the world can truly resonate" (quoted in Schweizer 2008, 21).

### Notes

1. A situation is a "structured presentation" of pure multiplicity. Being emerges when pure multiplicity has undergone the operation Badiou calls the "count-as-one" and is thus made accessible to knowledge via categorisation/grouping based on its properties, characteristics and so on. Only elements of the situation are accessible to knowledge because for Badiou "all thought supposes a situation of the thinkable... a structure, a counting for one, whereby the presented multiple is consistent, numerable" (Badiou 2005a, 34).
2. An event is "that-which-is-not-being"; it is an encounter with "the void of the situation..." (Hallward 2003, 114). Since the Event occurs beyond the domain of established knowledge, there is no way to predict where and when an Event will take place; it is an "emergence of the New which cannot be reduced to its causes and conditions" (ibid., 386). Events thus occur as chance. Because it is not discernable in the Situation, the existence of an Event cannot be proven but can only be asserted by a human being who by the very act of fidelity to an Event becomes subjectivised by it.
3. To the question "Why only these four domains?", Badiou's foremost explicator Peter Hallward writes:  
 Because they mark out the possible instances of the subject as variously individual or collective.... Love affects only "the individuals concerned... and it is thus for them [alone] that the one truth produced by their love is an indiscernible part of their existence". Politics, on the other hand, concerns only the collective dimension... And in "mixed situations"—situations with an individual vehicle but collective import—art and science qualify as generic to the degree that they effect a pure invention or discovery beyond the pure transmission of knowledge (2003, 181).
4. Badiou's approach to love is unique. He posits that it is folly to proceed with an analysis of love using psychology or a theory of passions (2003). Instead, he invites us to imagine love subtracted of the things one is predisposed to spontaneously associate with it, for only when those distractions are jettisoned can a highly formal analysis of love properly take place. He is thus a formal structure of love rather than what that structure might

contain. Indeed, for such a method of approaching the topic of love, Terry Eagleton says, "Badiou speaks of love as though it is a self-evident experience, which may be true for Parisians but not for the rest of us" (2003, 252).

5. In an essay entitled "The Scene of Two", Badiou reflects on what is possibly lost when art is used as the primary vehicle to give symbolic body to love. He argues that art always tends to represent love as a rapport rather than a non-rapport.
6. Despite Badiou's insistence that literature cannot be a proper scene of representation for love, he nevertheless credits the poet Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa) for the line "To love is to think":

I spent the whole night without sleeping, seeing her form without a break,  
And seeing her always in a different way from meeting her...

I make thoughts with the memory of what she is when she talks to me,  
And in each thought she changes according to her likeness.

*To love is to think.*

And I almost forget to feel only from thinking about her.

I don't know what I want at all, even from her, and I don't think about anything but her.

I have a great animated distraction.

When I want to meet her,

I almost feel like not meeting her,

So I don't have to leave her afterwards.

And I prefer thinking about her, because it's like I'm afraid of her.

I don't know what I want at all, and I don't want to know what I want. All I want to do is think about her.

I'm asking nothing of nobody, not even her, except to think.

7. For Badiou, in the beginning there is only the inconsistent multiple. There is no order or structure in the pure multiple, it is not an assemblage of singular objects because there is yet no concept of "One" for the process of counting has not yet taken place, an operation that Badiou calls the "count-as-one" (2005a, 504). And, as pure multiplicity, it has no other predicate but its own multiplicity, founded on nothing (a void) rather than on a "one". This is because, as Slavoj Žižek points out, the pure multiple is not a collection of Ones since "to have One the pure multiple must already be 'counted as One'". It can thus only appear as nothing, a void: "*nothing* is the name of Being prior to its symbolization" (Žižek 1999, 129). For something *to be*, that is, for something to exist as an object in reality, it has to be counted as part of what Badiou calls a "situation", counted as an element of a set, for "all presentation is under the law of the count" (2005a, 52).
8. Badiou does in fact consider the "dice-throw" as emblematic of the Event. See, for example, "Meditation 19: Mallarmé" in *Being and Event* and also "Mathematics and Philosophy" in *Theoretical Writings*.
9. Although the void "belongs" to the situation it is not presented as one of its elements; it is present but not presented and consequently not represented. It is what Badiou refers to as the "phantom remainder", (Badiou 2005a, 53) and is that which wanders in the situation in the form of a subtraction of the count. But this "phantom remainder" is not merely an indifferent collection of noumenal elements passively waiting to be subjected to the structuring operation of the situation. The void, as conceived within Badiou's subtractive ontology is the negative identity of the situation, and "every situation is founded on the void"; it is "what is not there, but what is necessary for anything to be there" (Feltham and Clemens quoted in Badiou 2005b, 16). Badiou's use of the term "phantom remainder" does not only describe the uncanny spectral existence of the void in the situation—the void being "the non-place of every place", that is "neither local nor global, but scattered everywhere, in no place and in every place" (Hallward 102). The term also calls attention

to the way that the non-countable void perpetually haunts the situation, challenging the regime of structured presentation.

10. In *Being and Event*, Badiou says that an evental site "merely opens up the possibility of an event" (179, emphasis the author's).
11. Henri Bergson, Duration and Simultaneity, in *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, ed. Pearson, K. A and Mullarkey, J. London: Continuum, 2002.
12. "Everything which is impersonal in man is sacred, and nothing else" (Weil 2005, 74).

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