

The Unprecedented Event: Acknowledging Badiou's Challenge to Art and Its Education

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In terms of this year's journal theme, "unprecedented," there is no other contemporary philosopher who has a more radical notion than Alain Badiou when it comes to theorizing the new; that is, the emergence of an unprecedented Event *ex nihilo*—not novel or innovative, but free of the authority of any prior example—to make a truth claim. For art educators, especially for the Social Caucus, Badiou offers a challenge to what has largely captured the theoretical writing in this journal — namely aesthetics and representation. As well intentioned as these theorizations have been concerning identity politics and critical theory stemming from Paulo Freire, who seems to be ever-present in the Caucus' fundamental imaginary, both aspects, if Badiou is taken seriously, are challenged if the "social" in "social theory" is to be rethought for future transformative directions.

The burden of this essay is to introduce Badiou's philosophy concerning art and "inaesthetics" to the Social Caucus readership since his importance to art and its education, I predict, will only continue to increase. A leftist thinker, with Maoist roots, who studied with Louis Althusser, but rejected his theories, Badiou remains a leading contemporary philosopher, slightly younger than that famous cadre of French philosophers who were politicized in the '60s and have now passed away. He has deep psychoanalytic roots, drawing on Lacan's register of the unconscious Real. This is what interests me most for art and its future education.

The State of an Educational Emergency

Before I introduce Badiou's theory of the Event (capitalized throughout) as he developed it in *Being and Event* (2005b, designated as *BE*), and why such an Event can only be theorized from an "unprecedented" position, it is necessary to begin with a detour to talk about the state of the contemporary educational Imagination. I think this is necessary because *creativity* as art educators have theorized it has been hijacked by designer capital to produce a never-ending innovative array of fantasies for consumption. It will be necessary to grasp the nature of unprecedented creativity from Badiou's perspective so as to grasp the importance of creativity *proper* for art and its education. So, let me begin with a brief sketch of the current *hegemonic position* of the educational Imagination within what Deleuze (1995) called a "society of control;" that is, an information society where global capitalism and the 'democratic state' are intimately intertwined with one another, engaged in what Foucault (1990), along with Agamben's (1998) revisionism, has called biopower. The distinction between life as *zoë* (bare life (*nuda vita*), which is the energy that is attached to the survival of every form of life) and *bios* (life lived under the protection of the sovereign state) retains its separation in control societies through what I call *choreographed modulation*, (or *choreographed padules*—patterns and schedules together constitute a 'padule'). Such seemingly random bio-flows of movement are managed as information through *complexity theory*

in designer neoliberal capitalist societies, making it appear that choice and movement within a society of the 'pass' (or signifier) is a free act. The open access to designed environments is possible if one has the institutional right to pass through its barriers—such as a passport, a PIN number, a credit card and credit rating, an educational degree, a driver's license, and so on. The panopticon of disciplinary societies has now inverted itself into what I call a *synopticon*; the many watch the few in a screen society, while surveillance is used to keep people *out* rather than *in*. Identity is *liquid* in such a neoliberal democratic capitalist state, which can assert itself as a 'universal all' by reducing all possible individual differences to a fundamental meritocratic system based on achievement alone. The *demand* by the superego in consumer capitalism is that *you* be 'counted' in the triple sense of that word—confirmed as an identity, included *in* society and evaluated *by* that society—so that you may *enjoy* the privileges and entitlements that this form of representational 'counting' in democracy brings: besides the obvious consumerism, certain rights and freedoms.

The hegemonic management of life (*bios*) for the 'good' of the citizen by such a democratic state (as biological survival that staves off death) is made possible by what Slavoj Žižek (1999, p. 185) has usefully identified as the *recognition* and *exploitation* of a population's fantasies of "authentic longing." For the ruling class, as Gramsci (1959) wrote, to present itself capable of representing 'everyone' under its own cultural and economic levels and interests, the state has to become "an educator." Rancière (1991, pp.119-143) described this as the "pedagogicizing" of society. This is the "myth of pedagogy" where there is "the general infantilization of individuals that make it up," or as Ivan Illich (1971) maintained, schooling becomes an agency that ascertains the universal educational deficiencies of its citizens as to who is and isn't educated, like in former generations where it was decided which law was sacred or profane. In a society of control, education works on the distinction between those who have 'passed' the test and those who have failed it to the point where a ceiling has been reached in terms of institutionalized competence.

To maintain the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism today and the democratic state that politically supports it as the 'general will' of its citizens, the perceived benefits of education have to appeal to the *longing desire* of the populous to assure consent; it must proffer a way out of exploitation. Its citizens must be convinced that the state's educational policies are in their best interests. In a society of control, where the production and management of knowledge and information has become primary, the hegemonic Educational Imagination has the structure of a 'learning society,' where 'learning to learn' is the master signifier that enables a *flexible subject* ready to maintain the flows of capital. The adolescent of the institutionalization of high school that eventually became institutionalized during the first quarter of the 20th century, a necessity for the emerging forms of industrial international capital, has been extended into the post-adolescence of colleges and universities, to what I refer to in my work as simply *youth* (Jagodzinski 2004). Youth refers to 1) the disappearance of any clear boundary distinctions between adolescence and adults necessary for designer capital, 2) the biopower attached to the energy of the body and the creativity of the mind that are put to 'work' for capitalist design, and 3) the sense of the ceaseless drive (*Trieb*) of production and consumption. This 'type' of citizen desired by state education for the education of 'all' is couched in the rhetoric of a democratic ideal that caters to the trope of *individualism* and *difference*. 'Learning to learn' is now extended throughout one's life (learning is living, living is learning).

Education in control societies operates on a managerial model supported by cyber-technologies where the teacher is a facilitator and mentor while the student is an *active* and responsible self-seeking learner, an agent of her own 'sense-making,' catering to

unique differences that yield new creative possibilities for growth. The student is placed in an open *environment* where time is flexible; he or she is open to new ideas, dialogue, co-operation and a community of shared judgment necessary for human survival. The quality and accountability of such education is assured through monitoring and assessment. This is an open system theorized by enactivism, constructivism and most recently, complexity theory.

To ruin this utopian idealization, in a society of control there is no opting out of such an educational Imaginary. It is a form of soft totalitarianism and fascism, the sadism of which remains unacknowledged. Youth who do not comply to the state's vision—that is citizens who *belong* to society by virtue of birth or immigration but are not as yet included *within* it— are punished for not having participated in the state's 'offer' to become a productive citizen. They find themselves subject to abandonment, falling into what Agamben (1998) has theorized as a "state of exemption." The dropouts, the at-risk kids, the kids on 'suspension,' the kids sent to boot camps, the street kids, the addicted bodies, the suicidal bodies, the self-mutilating bodies, the depressed bodies— have to survive on their own with little or no state help. This is a body-without-organs (BwO), as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), where libidinal energy finds no creative outlet. An inversion takes place from *youth to freak*. Freaks are those who must now dwell outside the legitimate institutions of support. The body of youth becomes split in two, each subjected to a different affective regime. On the one hand, there is a body that is legitimated to consume life (*bios*), as demanded by the superego of capitalism— simply *enjoy!* This satiates the body in the desired direction of *edutainment*. On the other hand, there is an illegitimate satiation of the body, the body of 'pure' enjoyment of excessive life (*zöe*). This freak body moves towards a desired inertness; the heroine addict being the apotheosis of such a BwO of complete non-productivity, reduced to bare survival.

The *obscene supplement* of this managerial system of education begins to show when differences can no longer be contained easily through well-established test procedures. The sociological experts of organization and class management come to help, reminding teachers that they should recognize the other's 'baggage' (to be more sensitive to cultural differences); or to receive extra training to provide a smoother delivery of material (the cyber-gadgets); or how to deal with inappropriate behavior by understanding different personality types; perhaps a school needs a long term business plan and a mission statement of values to get its act together?; or pastoral programs should be instituted to help with interpersonal relations—like homework clubs, anti-bullying programs, courses in anger and time management and the like. The worse the student the more 'education' is demanded. More generosity and resources are given toward 'exceptional' students where it is obvious they are unable to meet curricula requirements—the kids with disabilities (the hard of hearing, the blind), the 'slow' learners, autistic children and so on. Attempts are made to cater to their differences, not only on humanitarian grounds, but also to find a place for them in the social order. These exceptions make it appear as if the system truly cares. For those youth who do not 'pass' in the sense of not earning the master signifiers, who find themselves shutout as 'freaks,' they begin to lead zombie lives, turning to crime if need be, or prostitution, drug dealing and out of work loitering. Many end up in jail, even more depressed, addicted and hardened. It is the geeks who have benefited most. The new 'normal' is what was once considered abnormal, the full compliance as a productive citizen whose creativity is usefully capitalized. The freaks are now like the barbarity of the underclass, uncivilized and uneducated. An 'ugly' picture to be sure. Looking at it too closely turns it into an anxious object. However, our educational Imaginary that supports flexible capitalism is failing all of us.

A Decision Needs to be Made

I certainly may have overstated my case, but the educational Imagination always covers up its most 'ugly' ob-scene side. Badiou's social and political intervention into such a state of affairs of education is, quite frankly, *absolutely nothing!* He has no curriculum, no methodology, and no content that he insists on getting across. He is explicit when saying that he is not "founding" anything (*BE*, p.35). What *use* is he then to education, yet alone to art education? He has no *use* in the conventional sense; rather Badiou *first* asks us (as educators) to make a decision—a difficult one at that. What do I mean? The response to this technological educational imagination that I have outlined above by those who have tried to worry its structures—like many members of the Social Caucus—has been to point out its fallacies, and to try to mitigate its worst effects through a practice of neo-Gramscian politics, as well as forms of democratic materialism, such as Frankfurt-style ideology critique. Many have tried to do away with the distinction of high and low art, especially in the aesthetics of popular culture, and placed an emphasis on difference (even if that difference most often falls into identity politics). Others have argued for sex-gender equity, and doing away with truth with a capital T, replacing it with situational ethics bound by the operations of micropower so as to rid of grand narratives and the stench of universalism. The best that is allowed, following Ernesto Laclau (2007) is a "particular universal" (a populist-democratic impulse) with a stress on impurity and hybridity rather than any movement towards purification. The stress has also been on the equality of values through various schemas of multiculturalism. This list of critical interventions can go on as they push toward issues of relativism, heuristics and *in situ* knowledge production, and so on. *Badiou dismisses most of, if not all of these!* So the *decision* he asks critical theorists and educators to make is as radical, as it is outrageous in the impossibility of its request—which is precisely what?

There is only *one* place throughout his vast body of writings (that I am aware) where he explicitly, but cryptically addresses education, and that is found in the opening chapter, "Art and Philosophy," in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005, designated as *IN*). In his opening essay, first written in 1994, he states in no uncertain terms: "*the only education is an education by truths*" (p.14). This then is the demand of his impossible request. To make sense of what stands behind such a demand, for me at least, is an intuitive grasp that he is right, but that would mean the *dissolution of pedagogy* as we know and understand it, certainly in the way I described it above. It would be a doing away of any form of mastery of knowledge, whether human or machinic. Knowledge only emerges after the *Event*. In the end of this essay, I shall conclude that Badiou is providing us a form of "becoming-child" in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) sense where creativity proper for [art] education lies.

Introducing Badiou

One of the extraordinary difficulties with Badiou is how to get his complex ideas across in such a short paper. My remarks are directed mostly to the creativity that surrounds the Event as it relates to art and aesthetics, since it is the field of art education that interests us most. However, first some quick and obviously glossed moves that everyone knows about Badiou's philosophy; that is, anyone who has taken an interest in his position. I list four important aspects about his general theory of ontology before turning to his theory of the unprecedented Event.

1) Badiou outlines four fundamental procedures of truth: art, science, politics and love (but why not theology or economics?), which is the toil of his most comprehensive system discussed in *Being & Event*. He devotes time to each of these fields, but it is the *truth of art* that concerns me here, as developed in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*.

2) At 71 years of age (b. 1937), Badiou's Maoist and contestatory Althusserian roots (he was his student) make him a materialist dialectician of an extraordinary kind. Badiou's philosophical axiom is rather basic given that it is an attempt to retool Plato, to offer a *new Republic* as it were, along materialist lines. His first premise is to claim ontology, the science of being *qua* being, as nothing other than mathematics itself (*BE*, p.49). It is through set theory that the *pure multiple* can be thought—that is, multiplicity as pure difference as opposed to the 'one and its multiple' that plunges us into sameness and representation. Badiou follows Parmenides by maintaining that Being—thought as multiplicity—belongs to a void. This void is infinitely multiple; it bounds the inconceivable; it forecloses itself from any other relation, including its own self-identity. The paradox is that the void is infinitely multiple, yet it remains fundamentally unchanged. It becomes the paradoxical beginning/non-beginning of the system as a mathematical zero where the "negativity of the infinite" can be thought. So, Badiou's ontology is a form of "subtraction." This is to say that the Event generates an element that does not 'count' and is added to the void once its appearance is known. The primordial site of Badiou's ontology is therefore discordant, a random flux of atoms and void—multiplicity. The void can be infinitely divided and this is the way Badiou secularizes infinity—by formalizing it through the axioms of set theory. Philosophy is disconnected from Being. Being is reducible to pure multiplicity. Being *qua* being is nothing but the multiple as such that can be configured mathematically.

3) Supplementing Being is the Event. Mathematics can say *nothing* of the Event. *It is the Event that is the most interesting for it is truly unprecedented*. Few of us can follow the intricacies of set theory, but the Event feels intuitively 'right.' Being and Event are like Thought and the Unthought, so one would think that the 'true' sense of education must remain faithful to the 'unthought' that the Event brings. An Event constitutes a hole (*un trou*) in the existing forms of knowledge. Badiou associates it with the Lacanian psychic Real—the unrepresentable realm beyond both the signifier of language and imagery. The Event as *truth* forces a break with the everyday discourses of knowledge. As such, it is a supplement to the existing multiplicity as articulated by set theory. Truth, as it unfolds from an Event (from an "abolished flash") is an irreducible *singularity* that calls forth a "subject" marked by a continued *fidelity*. It is the subject who constitutes the *site* of that truth of this unprecedented event.

4) The initial Event is followed by a second moment of truth. Fidelity now becomes a continuing commitment by the subject to bear witness to the Event, to relate from the perspective of the Event, to think according to its radical truth, and finally to find a new way of being and acting in the *situation*. Truth is therefore productive, radical, creative and placed in the future anterior as "the coming-to-be of that which is not yet" (*BE*, p. 243). Thus, I would say that *truth* is directly related to *creativity proper*. It is 'that' which has 'already happened,' but must be recognized as such by the person affected by it, like the Biblical conversion of Saul to St. Paul, one of Badiou's (2003) main examples. Truth is always universal for Badiou; a truth is true for all. It is never confined to a 'single' subject, although it may begin this way. It becomes a collective subject where a particular ego is not invested in any selfish way; rather the investment is with the 'truth' of the Event. It seems to me, the uncertainty and risk that (must?) come with the 'shock' of the Event cannot be decided right away—an unfolding of its "*configurations*" (Badiou's term, *IN*, p.12) must take place. For example, the Nazis claimed an evolutionary break but this was *not* an Event. The *universality* of the void was

disavowed. The truth did not emerge for everyone. Such truth was displaced onto an exceptional set of particular elements—namely the Jews, who needed to be ‘voided’ so as to assert a plentitude for the German people. With any Event, the difficult question remains on the decidability of the judgment. When does one know of being duped by the Event? When does one know an Event has occurred? Obviously, this must remain an undecidable that is never free of risk and error—like the urgency of justice and judgment itself.

The Unprecedented Art Event

The art Event, as I grasp it, emerges from the void of an earlier *situation*. *Situation* is a key word in Badiou’s lexicon. There is a *situated* void around which everything is organized. In Lacanian terms, we can call a *situation* the symbolic order along with its obscene supplement (all those aspects of the social order that happen without being acknowledged by the Law). It becomes possible to transform (dissipate) the structure into a new principle or architonic by this unprecedented Event, at the level of structure within a particular domain. Obviously, the Copernican Revolution was an Event, as was the invention and explosion of the Atom bomb. They caused the fundamental global ontology to change, although not right away. There had to be a fidelity to both these Events. One of Badiou’s favorite examples is the music composer Joseph Haydn whose Event inaugurates a Classical style from out of the void of the Baroque. Badiou is, however, weak on visual art and admits it. Most of his examples are theatrical (Artaud, Beckett) and of course poetical—Mallarmé being his *key* figure. Badiou has been criticized for his lack of being able to deal with visual art and trashing film as an “impure” art form because it incorporates other art forms within itself.

This criticism has since changed. He has attempted to address contemporary art (Badiou, 2004b, 2005c). However, his analysis leans towards conceptual art. One possible reason is that his mathematical set theory of Being lends itself to structural abstraction. Conceptual art follows suit in this regard. Crucial for art education is that of the four truth procedures art is given the privileged place for the Event. It is the literary arts, especially poetry, that lend themselves to structuration as a pure *matheme* (formulae of symbolic ideas in Lacan’s lexicon). More complexly put, if art thinks the Event at the precise point where mathematics falters, it does so only by virtue of its relation or non-relation to the *matheme* as the mathematical form of literal transparency and the poetic norm of singularity and presence. Poetry is the art form that comes closest to being a ‘pure’ art form in Badiou’s system.

Thinking of visual art, we would say that Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907) would be an initial Event articulating a direction toward a particular truth, in the way Cubism is eventually able to grasp an aspect of the Real of the void. Badiou takes Lacan to be one of his mentors and so the Real as the psychic register of the unconscious plays a profound place in his thought. Badiou’s concept of truth procedure does not imply a denial of external reality. Following Lacan, he points to the Real to designate the space of existing but unsymbolizable reality that can only be thought retroactively through the four truth procedures. Thus, while a truth procedure is required to access the Real, the Real also serves as an external limit as to the possibility of the production of truth. Badiou’s system is virtually impossible to grasp without an understanding of Lacan’s psychic register of the Real as the unrepresentable void that co-exists with the Imaginary and Symbolic (linguistic) psychic registers.

Badiou reminds me of Kuhn’s (1962) well-known conceptualization of the structure of a scientific revolution. The Event is not unlike a paradigm shift that gets filled out by

others who are seized by the revolutionary truth. Knowledge and truth are subsequent developments by many subjects who are engaged in the Event. Badiou maintains that the subject is “immortalized” through the Event. It is the same truth for all to bear witness. The Event proper is certainly contingent and unpredictable. Harry Garfinkle (in process) has identified the political surround of the ‘history of ideas’ as Events that are *immanent* and *singular* as Badiou would identify them—unprecedented. When we think of this educationally, the bulk of what goes on in schools is simply representational knowledge, not comparable to the status of an unprecedented Event. But perhaps there are other lessons Badiou might offer art educators as we move to grasp the full implications of his challenge, especially concerning creativity and transformative change based on it?

Truth of Art

The truth of an Event implies an ethics in the way a subject must remain engaged, continuing to bear witness to the truth by remaining faithful to an Event’s impact that has long since passed. Commitment and anamnesis is involved through a series of “subject-points” (*IN*, p. 13) that are referencing back, swerving, twisting, weaving through compressed time and space—perhaps in the manner of a Deleuzian (1993) *fold*. But now, I am waxing poetically, when indeed the initial Event is *traumatic* in the sense that not only is a hole (*tou*) pierced in the order of knowledge, it also pierces all those who remain faithful to it. There is no rest when this happens, no contemplation of the beautiful. The force of the seizure generates the energy for continued exploration. Intuitively, one knows that is indeed what happens in the *becoming* of creativity when energy (*zöe*) seems to come from ‘nowhere.’

A work of art, however, is *not* an Event—a work is a *fact* of art; nor is a work of art a truth. “A truth is an artistic procedure initiated by an event. This procedure is *composed* of nothing but works.” (*IN*, p. 12, author’s emphasis). Truth, however is not manifested in any one of them. A work is only an instance, a “differential point of a truth” (*ibid.*) that forms its subject. “An artistic truth is a (infinite) generic multiple of works,” that “weave together the being of an artistic truth only by the chance of their successive occurrences” (*ibid.*). An artwork is therefore a “situated inquiry about the truth that it *locally* actualizes or of which it is a finite fragment” (*ibid.*, emphasis added). The work of art is submitted to a principle of novelty [contingency, accident]. It is retroactively validated as a “subject-point” within the trajectory of a truth. The validation after the fact identifies an articulation that something ‘further’ has been accomplished to filling out the truth. So works of art compose a truth within the dimension of the post-event, which institutes “*the constraint of an artistic configuration*” (*IN*, p. 12, author’s emphasis). A truth is an artistic configuration initiated by an Event (an Event is a group of works—a body, a “singular multiple of works”) that unfolds through chance as a series that serve as its subject points.

Thinking of Picasso again, *Demiselles d’Avignon* would be a “subject-point” of a larger truth that Cubism formed by all those who were caught by its potentiality: the French art critic Louis Vauxcelles, who coined the movement, along with Braque, Guillaume Apollinaire, Robert Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, his brothers Raymond Duchamp-Villon, and Jacques Villon, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia and so on. This would be the creative dispersion that opens up a new plane of human existence, not canceling what was already in place, but creating a new ‘line of flight.’ Perhaps Badiou would maintain that Cubism is a “subject-point” of the many –isms that radiated from a much more profound Event—the reorientation of space and time as “mechanization took command” at the turn of the 20th century in Sigfried Gideon’s (1969) terms, in leagues with

international capitalism and imperialism. I think it is useful here, pedagogically speaking, to maintain that the creativity (*Spieltrieb*) of the Event is the driving (*Trieb*) necessity to articulate the full implications of the truth to a point of possible obsession. Picasso could not 'help himself' to do otherwise.

The truth of art is therefore immanent and singular. It is not the work, nor the author, but the artistic configuration initiated by an eventual rupture that (in general) *renders a prior configuration obsolete*. So the configuration possesses neither a proper name nor a proper contour and not even a possible totalization. It cannot be exhausted—only imperfectly described. It is an artistic truth—for there is no truth of truth. Cubism's truth is a particular way of conceptualizing temporality within visual representational space. However, there emerges a point where such a truth becomes exhausted, its component works succeed less and less in bringing forth any new insights. This is a Hegelian move on Badiou's part. Like Hegel there is an "end of art," a moment when the 'spirit' has been drained away and art now becomes a caricature of itself—kitsch. Or, to moralize this process—degenerate. So, as I see it, artistic truth has three moments. The first is the moment of the unprecedented Event as a rupture in knowledge. This is followed by the subject's fidelity to this happening. Truth comes to a certain end in the third moment when its configuration has become saturated and exhausted in its own infinity. As Badiou puts it, "A truth begins with a poem of the void, continues through the choice of continuing, and comes to end only in the exhausted of its own infinity" (*IN*, p. 56).

Configurations as Truth—Confrontations with the Real

An artistic *configuration* remains crucial in Badiou's system; it seems, to grasp this unprecedented truth of art. It is not an art form, a genre, nor an 'objective' period in the history of art; nor is it a "technical" *dispositif* (device). "Rather it is an identifiable sequence, initiated by an event, comprising a virtually infinite complex of works [...] that produces [...] in a rigorous immanence to the art in question—a truth *of this art*, an art-truth" (*IN*, p.13, author's emphasis). It is not philosophy's task to think art, instead "*a configuration thinks itself in the works that compose it*" (*IN*, p.14, author's emphasis). A *configuration* is obviously an unconscious process. So, a crucial point is that *an artwork is an inventive inquiry into the configuration*. Such an inquiry works out what that configuration *will have been*; that is, when it has been completed and exhausted in the future anterior. The configuration 'thinks itself,' if I can put it this way. Again, it is as though the artist is possessed by that *configuration* and must come to terms with it. The object continues to beckon and call, to which a response is demanded. When this configuration (say Cubism at a specific historical point) ceases to 'think itself,' no new possibilities are produced; the truth has come to a standstill. Duchamp, for instance, said that *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, painted in 1912 was the end of Cubism for him. He moved away from representational space. Artists who have distinguished themselves through their oeuvre, must go through such a self-reflexive process.¹ They must identify "subject points" of becoming so that the truth emerges. Where the ego of the artist must be 'shelved,' so to speak, is when others continue to disperse the Event, if I can put it like that, so that a collectivity emerges and perhaps eventually the institutionalization of its 'life-form' takes place.

The subject that is called to truth is a collective one in Badiou's terms; the artistic configuration requires many attempts to fill out its potentialities (like a paradigm shift). I think 'potentialities' would be the right word here, and not possibilities, to keep the future anterior of the Event's trace open. Badiou maintains that the subject becomes immortal with this loss of ego. A 'disinterest' occurs. When *the object looks back* an

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excess beyond the self is felt—perhaps like at a Barak Obama rally where one feels something special is being called forth? By the ‘object looking back,’ I am thinking of Lacan’s notion of an encounter with the Real (in Seminar XI, *Four Fundamentals*, 1977) when an uncanny moment happens and ‘time is thrown out of joint.’ This is crucial for grasping the unprecedenced of such an Event. The subject is *riven* by it. “Being struck by lightning,” meaning being hit by a creative spark, would not be far off from what Badiou means by Event as creativity proper.

Unlike the Romantic interpretation where the theatre-goer/art spectator is held captive by the work in an encounter, spellbound like some religious event or ritual, caught by the awe of the work, in the encounter of an Event there is a puncture, a trauma, and a realization. The subject is ‘eclipsed.’ It appears in the flicker of a subject’s own vanishing or void (and one never knows when this happens). In the Lacanian sense, when the object ‘looks back’ this means that a *summons* has been issued—a summons to give oneself over to, dispose oneself to, or to think according to ‘its thought,’ instead of or according to the pursuit of one’s interest. So, when Badiou is writing of the “hermeticism” of Mallarmé’s poetry (*IN*, pp. 28-29) as being enigmatic of a “presence” of the world (thereby skirting Romanticism), he is calling for a Real encounter. For that to happen, art must arrange an oblique operation of capture. Such an oblique operation suggests looking at the artwork anamorphically and being open to its enigma. The encounter with the Real of the poem must take place before anything happens. We may ‘enter’ a poem, rather than being immediately seized by it. For the moment of the poem to become an Event needs not happen immediately. However, *an encounter with the Real has to happen*. Badiou follows his master, Mallarmé here. You have to find the “pure notion” as “the reflection of the pure present in itself, or the present purity” (Mallarmé, in *IN*, p. 29). That moment of pure presence dissolves the object. A poem’s “hermeticism” is its “momentary being.” This is its “point of presence” signaled by its enigma (the Real of its Being, the void within itself). This is *not* to possess the keys or to interpret the poem so as to ‘unlock’ and make sense of it. Rather, “the poem demands that we delve into its operations. The enigma lies in this very demand. The rule is simple: To enter into the poem—not in order to *know what it means, but rather to think what happens in it*” (*IN*, p.29, my emphasis).

Badiou is making a distinction between *poetry*, which is the poeticization (the arting, if you will) of what comes to pass, and the *poem* (the art object), “which is itself the place where it comes to pass, or the pass of thought” (*IN*, p. 29). This art/arting distinction is very useful to think through pedagogically. Art is representation, whereas ‘arting’ as a gerund is the creative becoming of art. Further, such ‘becoming’ cannot take place without an Event, and that Event must encounter the Real, which through a series of works, yields the truth of the *configuration*. When the object *looks* (metaphorically) back as the first instance of the truth event, it is distinctly *traumatic*. The ethics of fidelity requires a commitment by the artist to sustain a certain relation to this originary traumatic eclipse of the subject—what I call in my work the moment of self-reflexivity—the X marking the contingent moment of the encounter (Jagodzinski, 2008). The Event, then suspends, punctures, ruptures (traumatizes) the Imaginary frame of the ego, placing the body “into pieces,” in Lacan’s terms, affecting the flows of unconscious libidinal energy—that is, the body of *jouissance*. In Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) lexicon, this body-without-organs (BwO) releases a new potential into the actual world. This would be a description of an artistic encounter of “becoming” that Badiou seems to be advocating by the configured Event.

So, the encounter has to happen at the limit of the Symbolic and ‘beyond’ the Imaginary psychic registers. It is an intense experience as well as the annulment of the ego. Only then can we say it is unprecedented in the strongest sense of that term. Nevertheless, it

is a particular “I” that undergoes such trauma, an “I” that is suspended, broken, annulled and dis-interested. The particular “I” of the Imaginary is the frame of togetherness, the self-assured biography existing in a “situation” with all its complexity. This is the state of oneself—or the ‘oneness’ of all the multifarious elements that constitute the world for that person, somehow all logically combined in their contradictions to make ‘sense.’ The Event always poses the question of what lies *outside* such a seemingly closed jurisdiction. Like Lacan’s *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) of the Imaginary, this closed frame is never questioned unless it can be shaken by the Real. The Oneness of the Imaginary situation is disrupted by some unrepresentable and supplementary “thing,” that occurs within the closed-field of the *situation* but counts as ‘no-thing.’ This ‘nothing’ or ‘no thing’ of the situation lies at the very heart of the artistic configurations of the Event—as an impasse or impossibility. It is the void that conscious thought cannot grasp, a ‘beyond’ the realm of thought—where paradoxically *thinking of the unthought* happens. This would be pedagogy in the ‘truest’ sense, and why it is that—ultimately—*art cannot be taught* as is so often exclaimed in exasperation.

As Badiou further explains, “Every *situation* implies the nothing of its all. But the nothing is neither a place nor a term of the situation” (*BE*, pp. 54-55, added emphasis). This “phantom of inconsistency” existing in the Real (not transcendently, but immanently within it), which, although not ‘counted’ is, nevertheless, always found in the ‘all’ of the situation. I love everybody means that there is one person I hate. The person I hate is not ‘counted.’ Perhaps, I have repressed her or him. All is not possible without an exception that exists in the void. This void cannot be brought under positive knowledge. There is no consistency to the void of the Real—let us call it chaos or simply pure difference. So, *an [art] education based on Real encounters* already takes us outside the current educational *situation*. Even intuition lies under the rule of a *situation*, and a situation (by definition) has no laws capable of discerning (or ‘counting’) anything in excess of itself.

Romantic Misdirection

In this encounter with alterity, the poets since the Romantics have tried to present what can’t in fact be presented, to say what in fact can never be said, as if the ‘fullness’ of being might be approached through art. Transcendental fullness (holism) was somehow to be captured, a glimpse of the Real caught, banishing for a small moment the phantom of inconsistency through the face of God—calling on the sacred with all its theological trappings of Gaia, New Agism and so on. Romanticism wanted this indiscernible Real, this void, this Nothing, to assume a visible consistency. But, the question of human finitude *always* haunts art. In our field of art education, this route of post-Romanticism and its encumbered spiritualism has been paradigmatically taken up by Peter London (2007). Heidegger’s nostalgia for lost presence and the desire to incorporate that presence in art is hardly over. Romantic spirituality is a strong force in art education programs, having its champion in Kenneth Beittel right from the start of the first issue of the *Studies* journal in 1959 where he wrote on creativity.

The finitude of the self brings with it an *alienation*, *pathos* and *nostalgia* when contending with the void and the incommensurable, infinite truth. The ego-inflated Romantic fills up that void through the truth of art. The seduction of truth as *a-letheia*, as “disclosedness” (*lethe* as forgetfulness) that first appears when something is seen or revealed is the Romantic trap. The phenomenology of care (*Sorge*) follows this path educationally. It dramatizes the ego in its splendor of being able to discern the good. Badiou seems to say, “beware of the self-claimed certainty” (*Ethics*, p. 56) and the claims

to the 'good.' The aim should be otherwise: to recognize the Real of the Other, the impenetrability and unknowingness of the void that is there.

The claim that radical alterity of the Event constitutes a hole in the order of the symbolic (in language) by shattering the Imaginary is an *extimate* occurrence in Lacan's terms. The Real is an "extimate relation," situated in the traumatic nucleus governing the syntax of the subject, utterly interior and intimate to the subject, yet, at the same time, radically supplementary by being exterior and excluded from it. To use again a racial example: the Jew was the extimate object of the Nazi Socialist Party, the object of anxiety and hate. The Jew was this 'object' that was strange to them, yet it was the Jew who lay at the very heart of their differentiated identity. The ethics of this truth is the ethics of the Real, and it is certainly another aspect of pedagogy that tangles with the becoming of a knowledge not-as-yet-found, marked by a truth not-yet-certain, but releasing the affirmation of desire for such knowledge yet to come.

The Event cannot be 'named.' It remains indiscernible and hence it's not like the subject as artist 'knows' the truth or now 'adjusts' to the truth. In the local *situation* the artist can only approach the truth generically. "The subject believes that there is a truth, and this belief occurs in the form of knowledge. I term this knowing belief confidence" (*BE*, pp. 396-397). There is a confidence that something in fact "new" has happened to one's *situation*, but the subject can only speak nonsense in relation to the Event. There are no signifiers; neologisms and new images have to be created for the Event to 'show' itself. It is a kind of babble-point since one has to displace established significations. Antonomasia is perhaps the adequate description. We speak of an Einsteinian Universe now that there are equations and an imaginary in place to grasp that particular dimension of reality. In this sense Einstein's configurations were an unprecedented Event, but in the start they were just scribbles.

Badiou further explicates on this experience: "The fidelity of the subject is exposed to chance, grounded in nothing, unsupported by knowledge, and nonsensical to the eyes and ears of outsiders" (*BE*, p. 407). If this sounds like a religious event, it is not surprising since Saul/St.Paul form a paradigmatic Event in Badiou's oeuvre. It is a commitment to a chance, a risk, and a wager. *The artist always works to the fidelity of the chance event.* The subject is "that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of an indiscernible" (*BE*, p.407) with an ethics that demands: "Decide from the standpoint of the undecidable" (*BE*, p. 197). Risk means to contend to the situational anxiety of the void. It would mean a courageous artistic pedagogy, would it not? Or, "Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you" (*Ethics*, p. 47). The 'good' becomes "the internal norm of a prolonged disorganization of life" (*Ethics*, p. 60). Pedagogy along these lines asks one to suffer patiently—no?

The *subjective destitution* that the Event brings need not be horrific as Žižek (1999) maintains in his critique of Badiou. Although fidelity to the Event, as an encounter with the Real, may leave the subject babbling and riven, nevertheless it becomes possible in the ethics of that fidelity to reach something that exceeds his or her own finitude. But, it need not turn to Romantic proportions of a *Naturphilosophie*. The suffering body or victimhood can be escaped and in fact can turn to *love*. Love, as we know, is an encounter with the Real as well, and it is another place of truth for Badiou. It is perhaps here that love in the classroom can open up the solipsism of the One (the student) when meeting the teacher as the Two. This numerology is that of infinity, as Badiou maintains, opening up an infinite world of sensibility. The production of truth about the Two pertains "ultimately to difference as such" (*TW*, p. 146). "Love is a riving of the One of solipsism in an encounter with the Two of the amorous couple that pens, like a passage

upon the plethoric infinite of the sensual world so as to bring out the event as ‘the coming-to-be of that which is not yet’ “ (*Ethics*, p. 27).

My Lessons from Badiou

What does visual art do if not cause a mutation in seeing enabled by the Event? What does visual art do if not ‘steal’ back the eye from its enslavement to spectacularization of designer capitalism? What does visual art do if not preserve the place of ‘freedom’ through creativity proper? Is there creativity in “learning to learn”? Certainly, but this is not the creativity of the Event that potentially transforms—a far more dangerous proposition. An impossible one—not entirely, but certainly rare.

Art and its education as a truth Event is an encounter with the Real that cannot be measured or counted. Transformation in the ‘true’ sense takes place in the interval of becoming through what I refer to as self-reflexivity. The X marks the spot of what I take as an inhuman event, where the strangeness that breaks the frame of imaginary knowledge occurs as a contingent and accidental moment. This may be sudden, but not always. It can happen ‘after’ the traumatic exposure when another ‘world’ begins to open up. Education as self-reflexion, what Badiou refers to as the fidelity to the Event, requires an ethics of commitment, courageously allowing the Imaginary ego to fade as the struggle to define the new is followed in the trace of the Event. The counter with the Event is the dimension of ‘aesthetics proper.’ By that I mean ‘aesthetics’ in its original Greek sense of the force of affect. Properly, this should be termed *aisthesis* as opposed to aesthetics that is already at the level of the signifier. A pedagogical encounter has to ‘force’ a dis-organization of the imagined body—Lacan’s “body in pieces” or the dis-organized body of affect (BwO). This takes discipline “to pick up the pieces” after facing the Event, but it is precisely how a stylistic artistic oeuvre emerges unconsciously, which gives us access to unprecedented new ways of coming to terms with existence.

The pedagogical Event is therefore always immanent and singular. This is *difference* in-and-of itself as a particular development of an artistic sensibility through *artistic configurations* in Badiou’s terms. The curriculum is forever emergent only in the sense that it is *always after the fact*, and there needs to be always a vigilance as to when the Event happens for it remains an unpredictable occurrence. It may never come, like someone who has never experienced love. There is something of the “becoming child” in this process as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) play with it in *Thousand Plateaus*. Childhood is always marked by the limit of sense making. The outside world transforms the child through affective confrontations that are not in the realm of representational learning. As adults, we forget the risks of curiosity, and the anxieties of the unknown that must be faced. Thus, I am thinking here of the notion of *Spieltrieb* (play drive) that Friedrich Schiller (1967) developed in his *The Aesthetic Education of Man*. This concept is close to what characterizes an unprecedented artistic Event. This ‘drive to play’ is the creative force of life itself—life as *zoë* and not *bios*. The former is free of the shackles of the signifier, while the latter is not. It remains a pseudo creativity marked by the innovations of designer capitalism. There is a sense of the child about freedom that characterizes *Spieltrieb*. It is a ‘newness’ that continues to thrive and survive—not in any Romantic way of ‘growth,’ or modernist notions of progress, but in the radical questioning of the order of things, a questioning that is not caught by the dictates of “learning to learn,” but the self-reflexive questioning that an Event enables. In that Event ‘someone’ or ‘something’ calls us, makes us hesitate, frames us, ‘forces’ our ego to fade. The appearance of this Other is never in the order of representation (which is what our schools are good at), but hits us on the order of affect—*aisthesis* not aesthetics. This is why Badiou’s only explicit statement on education remains a challenge—“*the only*

education is an education by truths." We should recognize its importance, for ultimately art as an unprecedented Event *cannot be taught!*

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ⁱ The 'X' is self-refleXivity refers to the unconscious. I have developed this concept more fully elsewhere (jagodzinski 2008).