be kept out of the concepts and basic propositions of arithmetic'.[57] To conceive of infinity as a temporal or spatial question is to ignore the fact that neither time nor space 'comes first'. For both presuppose an independent concept of continuity. Time and space are constructed with the help of a continuum conceptually fashioned and already available. We should rather use a mathematical theory of the continuum to clarify our concepts of time and space. The concept of set alone is finally adequate to the infinitely complex structure of the continuum. Mathematical attention to the structure of the continuum makes an appropriate concept of infinity possible. Alas for the romantically and the theologically inclined, gazing up at the night sky does not. Beckett knows this, too: '*the stars are undoubtedly superb*', he notes, 'as Freud remarked on reading Kant's cosmological proof of the existence of God' (*DI*, 141).

INTERMITTENCY

The concept of actual infinity is one pole of Badiou's philosophical universe. The other is a specific theory of the event. In essence, Badiou seeks to replace the Hegelian and romantic dyad of potential infinity and human finitude with the dyad of actual infinity and event. The event is 'the other side or the reverse of mathematics'.[58] It is a 'hazardous supplement' to 'the indifferent multiplicity of Being' (*MP*, 89; *CS*, 177). It is an aleatory fragment, the chance occurrence of something that had no existence beforehand, could not be predicted or foreseen, and had no prior name. The event is the means by which the truth of newness enters the world. If the logic of the event puts it at the opposite pole to actual infinity, the two are also intimately bound up with one another. There is always the possibility of an 'explosive' movement, an 'irruption of inconsistency' into a given situation, and its propagation (*EE*, 89–90). This movement destroys any illusion that the limits of the situation are the limits of the world. But such movements do not happen often. This is cardinal: in Badiou's philosophical system, the event has only 'a *rare* existence' (*ES*, 60; italics mine).[59]

[57] Hallett, *Cantorian Set Theory*, 121.

[58] 'L'Ontologie implicite de Spinoza', in Myriam Revault d'Allonnes and Hadi Rizk (eds.), *Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie* (Paris: Kimé, 1994), 54–70, p. 69. What Badiou takes to be Spinoza's implicit (as opposed to his professed) ontology involves an apprehension of the event.

[59] In René Pesson's phrase, the event is as rare for Badiou as the psychoanalyst is for Lacan, or authenticity for Heidegger. See review of *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, in *Annuaire philosophique 1988–1990* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 243–51, p. 250.

The concept of a universe structured in terms of actual infinity and event has an undeniable descriptive power. Badiou himself becomes progressively more convinced of the persuasiveness of his model. In 'Philosophie et mathématique' (1989), he restricted himself to calling for the spread of modern mathematical concepts beyond mathematics itself. By the time he writes *Le Siècle* (2005), however, he is effectively claiming that certain aspects of twentieth-century culture, particularly its art, are best described in terms of actual infinity and the event.[60] He suggests that, in much modern art and music—Schoenberg, Malevich, and Duchamp, for example—'the infinite is nothing other than the finite itself' (*LS*, 219). It would not be hard to find literary equivalents of this; indeed, it would not be hard to construct a tradition of literary versions of actual infinity running from Mallarmé, Kafka, and *Finnegans Wake* through Roussel, Borges, and the *nouveau roman* to Perec and Ashbery. Modern art has also turned towards the event, or the possibility of the event. Modern art knows that it has no objective status. It knows that it does not incarnate any prior idea in its supposed wholeness and unity. In its resistance to objectification and its practice of 'disincarnation', modern art becomes increasingly concerned with 'précarités événementielles'. The most radical examples of this are installations, happenings, and jazz (ibid.). Here, again, it would not be hard to describe a many-sided modern literature of the event, including Mallarmé, Kafka, Joyce and Woolf, Pound and Imagism, William Carlos Williams and various traditions in post-war American poetry.

There is, however, a problem, here. I shall pursue its implications throughout this book. If Badiou decides emphatically in favour of his model, the cost, at least in principle, is a decisive evacuation of history from thought (of a kind that, significantly, has often been associated with Beckett). For Badiou sees the event as founding historicity. It is the very principle of history.[61] History is external to the State. Revolutions, new artistic inventions, and new scientific discoveries plunge us into historicity, but history is solely a trajectory in the wake of an event. Otherwise, philosophy must forget both history and the

[60] More precisely, this is true of art before what *Le Siècle* refers to as the Restoration, that is, the period of political reaction that begins around 1980.

[61] Interestingly, Badiou's fellow-philosopher Françoise Proust gets a very similar definition of history from Kant. See *Kant: Le Ton de l'histoire* (Paris: Payot, 1991), 26–7. The similarity is the more striking once set alongside Žižek's account of Badiou's 'marginalist' revolutionary purism as Kantian and anti-Hegelian. See Slavov Žižek, 'Le Malaise dans la subjectivation politique', *Actuel Marx*, 28 (2000), 137–52, pp. 151–2. Badiou is expressly scathing about the contemporary '"return to Kant"' (*ES*, 8).

supposed 'forgetting' of the history of philosophy, and choose autonomous legislation (*CS*, 59). That is, it must assume responsibility for certain axioms of thought. There is no historical tale to be told; or rather, the narration of the historical tale is always a function of the State. In this respect, Badiou is critical of Marxist historiography: through its narrative and its philosophy of history, Marxism became a form of knowledge, rather than an innovative praxis.

But if the event is the rare source of truth, value, even history, what of the commonplace 'terre ingrate'? In Badiou's philosophy, the world of events is the sole source of value. From its point of view, the situations to which events are counterposed and into which they break constitute a negligible historical residue. I shall call this residue 'the remainder'. The term is my translation of 'le reste', a word that appears specifically in 'Six propriétés de la vérité', a long and difficult essay that Badiou published in two parts in 1985.[62] Keeping Beckett in mind makes me attach far more significance to the term than Badiou himself would wish to. Ontological discourse must separate itself from temporal or spatial reference, so the remainder cannot strictly be characterized as a 'dead time' or space. But we can none the less give it an empirical identity. Indeed, we can do so with reference precisely to the events that are significant for Badiou (artistic, political, scientific, the event of love. These constitute what for Badiou are the four truth-domains). Here the remainder is the psychic deprivation of lovelessness; political oppression or reaction; the triumph of conservatism in the arts and of obscurantism over the sciences. By implication, since events are rare, the remainder comprises and must comprise the larger part of historical experience.

Badiou does not theorize the remainder as such. It is antithetical to a purely affirmative philosophy.[63] My argument is that, however liberated from 'the pathos of finitude', a universe structured in terms of actual infinity and event

[62] 'Six propriétés de la vérité', *Ornicar? Revue du camp freudien*, 32 (Jan.–Mar. 1985), 39–67, and 33 (Apr.–June 1985), 120–49. The term in the original French has a history and a specific meaning, particularly in Lacanian discourse, in which 'le reste' is the remainder of language (that which falls outside it). Since psychoanalysis is the central theme in 'Six propriétés', Badiou is clearly aware of the Lacanian derivation of the term. However, as my references to 'Six propriétés' throughout the book will make clear, he also gives it a different sense. In a recent short piece on Lacan, Badiou actually uses the term 'remainder' itself: 'To act is to tear out anxiety's certitude. To act is to accomplish a transference of anxiety! And yes! Our anxiety [as political activists between 1968 and 1978] was only the remainder of a massive affect transferred to action.' See 'Lacan, Seminar, Book X: Anxiety', *lacanian ink*, 26 (Fall 2005), 70–2.

[63] Cf. Peter Hallward, 'Depending on Inconsistency: Badiou's Answer to the "Guiding Question of All Contemporary Philosophy" ', in Wilkens (ed.), *Philosophy*, 11–25, p. 23, p. 25 n. 20. On the 'precise point' he specifies, Hallward is exactly right to oppose Badiou to Agamben. His argument is obviously relevant to my own, particularly in my Conclusion.

cannot be immune to a pathos of its own. I call this the 'pathos of intermittency', borrowing my second term from Daniel Bensaïd.[64] According to Badiou's *Ethics*, the ordinary situation 'of the human animal' is determined by self-interest on the one hand and opinion on the other (*ES*, 46). Its behaviour 'is a matter of what Spinoza calls "perseverance in being", which is nothing other than the pursuit of interest, or the conservation of self. This perseverance is the law that governs some-one insofar as he knows himself. . . . To belong to the situation is everyone's natural destiny . . . ' (ibid.). Within the situation, opinion ('presentations without truth', 'the anarchic debris of circulating knowledge', *ES*, 50) will prevail. The event is 'an immanent break [in a situation] in which the human animal finds its principle of survival—its interest [and its attachment to opinion]—disorganized' (ibid.). But the inertia of any given situation is properly formidable.

This is perhaps most obvious in the case of politics, though it is not the only possible example and I no more want to privilege the political instance than Badiou himself does.[65] Badiou explicitly accepts Rousseau's argument that 'politics is rare' (*EE*, 379). Politics is born of an allegiance to an event. But such an allegiance is not common. Furthermore, it is precarious. As Rousseau puts matters, 'there is an inherent and inevitable vice which, from the birth of the body politic, tends unrelentingly to destroy it' (ibid.).[66] Politics is also inherently 'fragile' (*EE*, 380). It is not necessary, does not have to be at all, and does not usually happen. We should stress the delicacy and complexity of the event in Badiou's account of it. The event is characteristically 'vulnerable' (*EE*, 241). It may expire in the very instant of its appearance. Its origins are enigmatic, and it may pass unnoticed or fail to have consequences. Events can be smothered, obliterated, misconstrued, abandoned, and betrayed.

[64] Bensaïd characterizes Badiou's (and Rancière's) concept of truth, politics, and the subject as 'intermittent'. See 'Alain Badiou et le miracle de l'événement', in *Résistances: Essai de taupologie générale* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 143–70, pp. 154–5.

[65] This is a misgiving I would have about Jason Barker's otherwise helpful *Alain Badiou: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2002). But it also applies to much current writing on Badiou in the UK and USA, even, in some measure, Hallward's. Contrast Badiou's critique of suture as practised by Althusser in 'Qu'est-ce que Louis Althusser entend par "philosophie"?', in Sylvain Lazarus (ed.), *Politique et philosophie dans l'œuvre de Louis Althusser* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), 29–45, p. 42.

[66] See book III, chapter x of the *Social Contract*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy* and *The Social Contract*, tr. with introd. and notes by Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 118–20, especially at p. 118. Cf. Žižek's critique of Badiou and Rancière as caught 'in the snare of "marginalist" politics' in which 'momentary explosions of an "impossible" radical politicization contain the seeds of their own failure' and abruptly retreat 'before the existing Order'. Žižek, 'Le Malaise', 145.

Badiou's conception of events is therefore characteristically austere. He summarily kills off the contemporary prestige of both a post-Heideggerian romance of *Ereignis* and a post-Deleuzean romance of becoming.[67] That events are rare and frail, however, does not mean that Being is not inherently unstable. The crucial issue, here, is what Badiou calls the State. Within the structure of the State, a part functions or appears, reductively, as the whole of Being. Thus, for example, as Badiou so brilliantly and scathingly argues in *Le Nombre et les nombres*, contemporary economism functions according to a pitifully narrow reduction of the infinity of number.[68] This prevents any manifestation of the principle of the whole, which is inconsistency. It makes for 'closure and assurance' (*EE*, 114), and protects the supposed 'normality' of a specific, given situation from the destabilizing force of the event. The State masks or represses or holds at bay the instability of Being. Badiou's grim realism on this point is refreshing and persuasive: in any ordinary situation, the weight of the State is likely to be overpowering. The event is unlikely and, if it takes place, is unlikely to have effects.

Badiou's emphasis on the rarity of the event, however, dates only from the late 1980s. The Maoist and dialectical materialist of the 1970s and early 1980s held a different view, and here we must give priority to politics since, throughout the 1970s, Badiou did so. For a decade or so after 1968, politics constitutes the very stuff of his thought. Badiou was always inclined to give short shrift to historical materialism and its assumption of the explanatory power of historical contexts. His scepticism went far enough for him to question the theory of historical causality in Marx's *Capital*.[69] Even as early as 1967, he was managing to reconcile what he was calling dialectical with historical materialism only by means of a rather awkward resort to set theory. However, at this point, he merely understood dialectical materialism Althusserianly, as a Marxist 'science of science'.[70]

[67] Badiou takes Deleuze to task precisely for putting the event everywhere. See for instance his review of Deleuze's *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* in *Annuaire philosophique 1988–1989* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 161–84, p. 171. Cf. Eric Alliez, 'Que la vérité soit', in *De l'impossibilité de la phénoménologie: Sur la philosophie française contemporaine* (Paris: Vrin, 1997), 81–7, p. 83.

[68] See *EE*, 112–13. [69] See for instance *TC*, 21–2.

[70] See 'Le (Re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique', *Critique*, 240 (1967), 23/240: 438–67. For all the carefulness of the young Badiou's account of Althusserian thought, he is patently already uncomfortable with the 'scientificity' of Althusserian discourse.

His 'road-to-Damascus experience' (*TC*, 9)—Paris, May 1968—brusquely released him from this dead-end.[71] As a result of it, he turned to a clarification of what he calls 'the rational kernel [noyau rationel] of the dialectic' (*NR*, 17). From Hegel's 'reactionary' and 'idealist' system, he sought 'materialistically' to excavate a core concept, which is that of a universe whose principle is one of incessant movement, transformation, and development.[72] Beginning with Mao as opposed to, say, Engels, Badiou produces what might be called an expanded as opposed to a restricted theory of contradiction.[73] The world is grasped as an immense and interminable hubbub of contradictions which know neither resolution nor the peace of synthesis. Any given synthesis is merely the localized point at which a 'new scission is engendered' (*TC*, 65). The contradictions latent in 'concrete forces' are themselves split and fissured (*DL*, 34). Ideologies, classes, histories, subjects, consciousnesses, paradigms (like base/superstructure): all are inhabited by ramifying processes of division and splinter incessantly. In effect, for the Badiou of the 1970s, the law of Being is pure fission, 'affirmative scission' (*NR*, 38), dialectics in its 'Heraclitean affiliation' (*TC*, 51). It is a law precisely conveyed by Mao in his assertion that 'one ineluctably divides into two' (*DL*, 117). The law in question is the 'rational kernel' itself (*TC*, 48). Badiou stresses its 'ineluctability'. In accordance with this law of Being, events appear in 'untold wealth'.[74]

Alas, from the late 1970s onwards, a range of different factors—Mao's death, the rise to power of Deng Hsiao-Ping, the increasing hegemony of neo-liberalism, the sordid treacheries of communist and socialist parties, the failure and breakdown of the French left, the emergence of the 'nouveaux philosophes'—all appeared to sabotage or disprove the dialectical materialist thesis. Badiou's faith in it accordingly waned and was drastically modified. The younger Badiou thought that inertia or dialectical 'negativity' merely served as a stimulus to another phase of dynamic intervention: 'every halt

[71] He will soon be stigmatizing Althusser's thought as anti-dialectical. See *DI*, 34. Just how stark Badiou's reversion from the Althusserian dead-end was can be gauged from the vituperations against Althusser in *De l'idéologie*.

[72] For Badiou's specific account of Hegelian idealism as reactionary, see *NR*, 23.

[73] See *TC*, 36–48 on the two ways of thinking contradiction, with Mao and (to some extent) Lenin on one side, Engels and Stalin on the other.

[74] The phrase—'richesses inouïes'—is specifically applied to working-class uprisings in Badiou's most notorious essay, 'Deleuze en plein', in *Cahiers Yenan*, 4: *La Situation actuelle sur le front de la philosophie* (Paris: Maspéro, 1977), 40.

in the building of socialism', he declared, 'demands a new ideological regeneration' (*DL*, 70). Throughout the 1980s, however, the robust faith implicit in this assertion steadily leaked away. The key moment comes with 'Six propriétés de la vérité'. This essay clearly marks a very important stage in his thought. In the first instance, it is here that, for the first time since 1968, he explicitly proposes to dispense with 'a "dialectical materialist" philosophical referent'.[75] Here, too, he also provides an early, elaborated theory of truth before he has fully developed his mathematical ontology.

In 'Six propriétés', the truth in question is above all that of the analytic cure. Badiou understands the cure in terms of events or 'coupures' which break into a given analytic situation and fracture its language (ibid. 42). These 'coupures' produce a subject who in turn breaks with established knowledge and embarks on a series of 'investigations'. A truth divides a situation into two. The division in question separates the truth from its remainder or *déchet*. (*Déchet* means waste matter, though also 'down and out' or 'outcast', which makes it eminently appropriate to Beckett.) Truths expose 'negativity', rather than reactively transmuting it. They reveal what appears to be 'a prodigious inertia . . . in the bowels of reality'.[76] The subject of a truth must endure this inertia—and the *ennui* that it involves—with 'suppleness' and tenacity (ibid. 121, 134).

We should remember, here, that inertia is a Beckettian word.[77] But Badiou is probably thinking chiefly of its significance in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Badiou had once taken issue with what he had called the 'broken dialectic' of Sartre's *Critique*.[78] In the Sartrean version of it, dialectics is neither pervasive nor caught up in a progressive, forward movement. Sartre asserts that, as existential subjects, we sporadically flare into authenticity, calling ourselves and the world in question. But we are also always bound to lapse back into the 'massive indifference' of Being.[79] The young Badiou found this altogether too gloomy a philosophical construction. By the end of the 1980s, however, he was himself presenting the fissile or explosive process as 'broken' or intermittent. Something of the spirit of Sartre's *Critique* increasingly hangs over him.[80] 'What I call politics', he asserts, 'can only be discerned in brief

[75] 'Six propriétés' I, p. 41. [76] Ibid., II, p. 121.
[77] See for instance Beckett to Lawrence Shainberg, 7 Jan. 1983. Quoted Knowlson, *DF*, 685.
[78] 'Le (Re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique', 445.
[79] See 'L'Entretien de Bruxelles', *Les Temps modernes*, 526 (May 1990), 1–26; and 'Saisissement, dessaisie, fidélité', *Les Temps modernes*, 531–3 (Oct.–Dec. 1990), 1: *Témoins de Sartre*, 14–22.
[80] For Badiou's own view of his later faithfulness to Sartre, see 'L'Entretien de Bruxelles', especially at pp. 19–26.

sequences, often quickly closed, dissolved in a return to business as usual.'[81] As Hallward aptly suggests, 'whilst struggling to maintain his strictly political principles', Badiou increasingly adopts 'a perspective similar to Sartre's historical-ephemeral pessimism' (*AB*, 43).[82] Badiou himself evokes this pessimism near the end of *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1981): 'Man exists only in flashes, in a savage discontinuity that is always finally reabsorbed into inertia.'[83] This judgement on the *Critique* seems to anticipate much of his own development. Indeed, the very phrasing of the judgement echoes on at least as far as *Le Siècle* (2005), where 'fraternity' in particular is announced as a 'discontinuous passion' which 'exists only as "moments" ', whether within political movements, avant-gardes, or mathematical circles (*LS*, 155).[84]

After 1985, Badiou mainly formulates the remainder mathematically, in terms of actual infinity, situations, and the State. This neutral formulation reflects his strictly philosophical perspective. However, it does not enter into his accounts of the four truth-domains. Badiou repeatedly asserts the imperative of philosophical modesty in the face of truths.[85] But his philosophical perspective on the remainder is usually superior and detached. From the perspective of both the 'terre ingrate' itself and the events that traverse it, however, the remainder is not neutral. The transforming power of the event casts a bleak light into the shadows that it does not transform. What I call the pathos of intermittency is generated in the gap between events and their remainder. Badiou expressly repudiates any 'pathétique transcendentale'.[86] It implies a passivity that is antithetical to his own insistence on 'active force'.[87] Yet, as we'll see, the pathos of intermittency repeatedly shows itself at the edges or just

[81] Quoted Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou', 163.
[82] Cf. Eustache Kouvélakis, 'La Politique dans ses limites, ou les paradoxes d'Alain Badiou', *Actuel Marx*, 28 (2000), 39–54, p. 47.
[83] *Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris: Potemkine, 1981), 14. This work is part obituary, part critical pamphlet, and part meditation on an early influence to whom, however unconsciously, Badiou himself will increasingly be drawn back. For another use of the same metaphor, see 'Saisissement, dessaisie, fidélité', 22.
[84] The same point is evident, in a different fashion, in the gulf that yawns between Badiou's early optimism and his later pessimism regarding the political will of the masses. The young Badiou asserts that 'les masses pensent . . . et les masses pensent juste' (*DL*, 100). More recently, however, he has asked, 'Where is this "creative" capacity of the multitudes?' The question is followed by a critique of 'the repertoire of movements belonging to the petit-bourgeois masses'. See 'Beyond Formalization: An Interview with Alain Badiou' (typescript), conducted by Peter Hallward and Bruno Bosteels (Paris, July 2002), tr. Bruno Bosteels and Alberto Toscano.
[85] See for instance 'Art et philosophie', *PM*, 9–29, pp. 21–9.
[86] 'Sur le livre de Françoise Proust, *Le Ton de l'histoire*', *Les Temps modernes*, 565–6 (Aug.–Sept. 1993), 238–48, p. 246.
[87] 'Depuis longtemps, depuis si peu de temps', *Rue Descartes*, 33 (Oct. 2001), 101–4, p. 103.

under the surface of his work. He registers it in a political context: adopting a phrase with which Mallarmé summed up the years after 1880, for example, he writes of counter-revolutionary epochs, like the one that followed the defeat of the Commune, as times in which 'a present is lacking'. Such epochs are 'captive to the idea that nothing begins or is going to begin' (*LS*, 197).[88]

Intermittency also affects cultural history, as Badiou notes with regard to the vanished (socialist and anarchist) 'théâtre de combat' 1880–1914.[89] Commenting on Breton's *Arcane 17*, he writes very strikingly of a negativity in modern love whereby 'the weight of suffering endured seems bound to engulf everything'.[90] In the case of Sartre, as we've seen, he recognizes the pathos of intermittency in a philosopher to whom he has been close, but whom he is also concerned to hold at a certain distance. In the case of Lyotard, by contrast, it is precisely a thought of intermittency that he conjures up to leaven what he sees as Lyotard's later pessimism. Badiou profoundly agrees with Lyotard on the crucial importance of thinking multiplicity, events, and singularities. But Lyotard increasingly despairs of politics. He ends up believing that Capital is 'the nocturnal name of Being' itself, that we cannot escape 'the night' in which we find ourselves ('la nuit où nous sommes') and which is the consequence of 'the obsolescence and deletion [rature] of politics'. Badiou agrees that it is no longer possible to believe in politically transformative action. But politics is not of this order: 'It is of the order of thought. It aims, not at transformation, but at the creation of possibilities that could not previously be formulated.'[91] However, these will be 'disparate' and disjoined.[92] They occur as interruptions of 'the melancholy drift [dérive] of capital itself'.[93]

[88] Cf. Badiou's presentation of Joan of Arc as an exception to a 'miserable epoch', 'L'Insoumission de Jeanne', *Esprit*, 238 (Dec. 1997), 26–33, p. 28.

[89] See 'Preface: Destin politique du théâtre, hier, maintenant', in Johny Ebstein, Philippe Ivernel, Monique Surel-Tupin, and Sylvie Thomas (eds.), *Au temps de l'anarchie: Un théâtre de combat 1880–1914*, 3 vols. (Paris: Séguier, 2001), i. 7–14.

[90] André Breton, *Arcane 17* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1971), 115, translation mine. Cf. *LS*, 197–207.

[91] That politics is 'intellectuality' in the first and determining instance is for Badiou an Althusserian principle. See 'Qu'est-ce que Louis Althusser entend par "philosophie"?', 29. This is his best and most sympathetic essay on Althusser.

[92] 'Le Gardiennage du matin', in Dolorès Lyotard, Jean-Claude Milner, and Gérald Sfez, *Jean-François Lyotard: L'Exercice du différend* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), 101–11, pp. 104–5.

[93] Ibid. 101. Interestingly, this emphasis is already apparent in Badiou's 1984 essay on Lyotard. See 'Custos, quid noctis?', *Critique*, 40/450 (Nov. 1984), 851–63, p. 862. However, the point is missing in his contribution to the debate on *The Différend* at the Collège Internationale de Philosophie in 1989, where he was mainly concerned to accuse Lyotard of reducing the multiple to the unitary principle. See 'Débat général', in Francis Guibal and Jacob Rogozinski (eds.), *Témoigner le différend: Quand phraser ne peut: Autour de Jean-François Lyotard* (Paris: Osiris, 1989), 87–126. For Badiou's contribution, see pp. 109–13.

As this quotation suggests, in fact, Badiou cannot wholly escape a sense of the pathos of intermittency. Science is the only domain that concerns him in which no such pathos seems perceptible, specifically in the case of mathematics. Art stands at the opposite pole. The pathos of intermittency is chiefly evident in art, and notably in literature. Above all, it flickers insistently in Badiou's accounts of the modern poets who most grip him. Indeed, it is reflected in his very choice of poets: however sedulous the effort to pick a way round their melancholy, it would hardly have been possible to write about Mandelstam, Pessoa, and Celan without also evoking it. But it is not only modern poets in whom, in spite of himself, Badiou detects a particular form of pathos. The great comparison of Corneille with Racine in *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* (*RT*, 58–61) provides a more out-of-the-way example. The contrast Badiou establishes is between Jansenist fatalism on the one hand and the pathos of intermittency on the other. For Racine, politics does not exist (remembering, here, that what Badiou calls politics always begins with an event). The State is all-powerful in its vigilance and cruelty. Victims are hapless, weak. Love is evanescent and finally inane. Furthermore, and crucially in the context of my argument, Racine does not mourn the loss of politics ('il n'en porte nul deuil'). A Racine play is an infernal machine, 'un montage de diamantaire'. By contrast, Corneille 'knows the torment of the Idea'. He was schooled by the events of Richelieu and the Fronde.[94] His struggle is to keep politics alive, to believe in its persistence in inauspicious times. When he recognizes, presumably after the defeat of the Frondeurs' challenge to the supremacy of the monarchy, that, for the foreseeable future, politics is finished—'that nothing is happening any longer' ('que plus rien se passe', writes Badiou, Beckettianly)—Corneille chooses to sustain an 'anguished memory' of it in the creation of great 'melancholics' and 'suicidal figures'. These are his 'sentimentaux de la politique'. Corneille transcends Racine's inexorable reality precisely in the desolate magnificence of his later protagonists.

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Beckett's preference was the exact reverse of Badiou's. According to Knowlson, he shared both Thomas Rudmose-Brown's 'deep love for Racine's plays' and

[94] I take it that Badiou is thinking of Richelieu's inclusion of Corneille among the group of *les cinq auteurs*, for which Richelieu provided the inspiration himself.